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THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



TO EVERY THING
THERE IS A
Season
AND A TIME
TO EVERY
purpose
UNDER
THE HEAVEN:

ECCLESIASTES 3:1

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HOLD FAST!

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REMEMBER PRISONERS AND
THOSE MISTREATED (3)

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HOLD FAST

*“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)”
Hebrews 10:23*

Our congregations form a federation of churches called the Free Reformed Churches of North America. As such, we are Christian churches and Reformed churches. As a Christian church, we adhere strictly to the Holy Scriptures. As Reformed churches, under the Scriptures, we also adhere to the Three Forms of Unity: The Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort.

At this time of the year, confession of faith classes are coming to an end and examinations and interviews are taking place with candidates desiring to make public confession of faith. When you become a confessing member of a congregation, you acknowledge that the doctrine taught in this church is the complete doctrine of salvation, adhering to the sacred Scriptures. According to the Belgic Confession (Article 5), you are confessing that you believe “without any doubt all things contained in them.” A true confession is not possible without the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in your soul. Being a covenant child and having reached a certain age does not make you a true believer. You need to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and repent of your sins. That is your own responsibility, yet both faith and repentance are gifts of God worked in you by the Holy Spirit: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

Thus, by God’s grace alone you can promise to live according to your profession of this doctrine, conduct yourself honorably, and live in good works. You also promise to submit to admonition, correction, and even church discipline if necessary. One of the responsibilities and privileges of church membership is that of accountability to the elders of the congregation, under whose oversight the Lord has placed you. The elders are responsible for keeping you accountable to your confession and at times bringing you biblical exhortations.

In the Bible, most exhortations begin with the words “let us.” Exhorting has a wide range of meanings: to urge, to encourage, or to request. It can also mean to comfort and cheer up. In Hebrews 10, the exhortations urge and encourage believers to do certain things, based on who they are and what they have in the Lord Jesus Christ as their High Priest over them. The call “let us draw near” (vs. 22) is an encouragement to do just that. It is the same with the exhortation in vs. 23: “Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering.” In confession, we express openly our allegiance to someone or something. The term ‘confession’ is normally used with faith, like we have our confession of faith. But here it is literally “the confession of hope.” The Greek word here, “elpis,” is translated only here as ‘faith’ and everywhere else as “hope” in the Authorized Version. The Dutch Statenvertaling also

speaks here of “the profession of hope.”

“Let us hold fast the profession of our hope without wavering.” These believers had made a profession of their hope. They made a public statement about someone or something, saying, “This is what I hope for! Here is where I place my hope.” So, what hope did Hebrew believers then and may believers today profess? Onto what are we encouraged to hold? Earlier in Hebrews, it tells us that it is:

- the hope that we are Christ’s house,
- the hope that we are assured of the end,
- that Christ is the hope to which we have fled for refuge,
- that Christ our hope has made us perfect, and
- that Christ is the better hope.

Our hope is in Christ because Christ is our hope.

The Apostle calls to hold fast this profession of hope without wavering. We can take this in two ways: hold on firmly, steadily, and unwaveringly, without bending, change, or swerving aside from it. So, hold on firmly to your profession of hope. The focus then is on our holding fast, and on how we are holding it. But the phrase “without wavering” in Greek is an adjective, and it modifies the noun “the profession of our hope.”

In this case, the Dutch Bible again has it correct when it translates it, “Let us hold fast the unwavering profession of hope.” That draws our attention off ourselves and how we are holding onto our profession, and places it on the unwavering profession of hope. Here we focus not on our holding, but on what we are holding. Only in this way can we do what 1 Peter 3:15 says, “*be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”

Let us hold fast the unwavering profession of hope. Let us hold fast not so much to the fact that we professed it. But hold fast what we professed – what is here called “the unwavering profession of hope.” Why is it unwavering? Is any hope unwavering? I can confess that I hope for a cure for cancer, but that hope wavers. I can confess that I hope for a trouble-free life, but that hope wavers. So, why is this profession of our hope unwavering? What makes it so sure? How can we be certain of this hope beyond any doubt? Because God declares that this “hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:5).

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)” The One who promised is faithful, reliable, and trustworthy. As we read in 1 Corinthians 1:9: “God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” See it again in 1 Thessalonians 5:24: “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do *it*.” Then to top it all off, Paul writes: “For all the promises of God in him (Christ Jesus) *are* yea, and in him Amen” (2 Cor. 1:20).

He who has promised is faithful! That’s why the hope we profess is indeed unwavering, and that’s why we are encouraged here to hold it fast, just as we were encouraged to draw near to God. The hope is sure not because we are so faithful, not because we are holding it fast, nor because of anything we are doing, or have done, or will do. No, dear believers, the profession of our hope is unwavering only because the Lord who has promised is faithful!

What is your hope for the future and for eternity? Is Christ your hope today and forever? Is that the cause of your joy? Do you find yourself downcast at times? O then join the Psalmist in his self-talk: “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, *who* is the health of my countenance, and my God” (Psalm 43:5).

Or to put it another way:

My hope is built on nothing less,
Than Jesus Christ, my righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

(Edward Mote – 1834) 

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REMEMBER PRISONERS & THOSE MISTREATED (3)

In this short series of editorials, we are seeking to reorient ourselves by focusing on one or other thing God's Word tells us to remember. We saw the need to remember the days of the right hand of the Lord (see Ps. 77:10-11) and Jesus Christ raised from the dead (2 Tim 2:8). Now we turn to two groups of people the Holy Spirit calls us to remember.

“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Heb. 13:3).

This exhortation to remember prisoners and mistreated ones comes at the conclusion of one of the greatest exhibitions of the majesty of Jesus Christ in all of Scripture. The whole epistle of Hebrews exalts Jesus as the one worthy of all attention, faith, and worship. Yet, the author has not lost sight of suffering saints for the simple reason that Jesus will never lose sight of them. Jesus was made like us in all things, and His people do well to be like Him, including in their care and sympathy with suffering believers.

Sometimes people wonder what Christian living means concretely. Hebrews 13 gives lots of concrete exhortations, which are the outworking of the faith that belongs to all God's children. Having mentioned brotherly love and hospitality in verses 1-2, the author proceeds to speak of fellowship with those who are in prison, presumably for their faith (see Hebrews 10:33-34). The second group mentioned in our text are those who are maltreated, misused, and mistreated. That's what the word in the original literally means. This exhortation tells us much of the heart of Jesus.

The Reality of Suffering

First, this text tells us that the Saviour does not want His people to skip over the reality of suffering. He frequently predicted it and told his disciples that those who will be His disciples must count on the cross; they must be ready for tribulations and endure a great fight of afflictions. For many, that fight involves the temptations that their three-headed enemy, the devil, the world, and their own flesh, thrust before or upon them. For some this means subtle but persistent intimidation for being believers. For many this means the threat or endurance of imprisonment or having family members in prison or in labour camps. Some are hauled off during worship and never seen again on earth. Others are visited in their homes, taken into custody, interrogated, and pressured to renounce their faith. Some are dismembered for believing the gospel, preaching Jesus, or evangelizing others. Some are humiliated by their families, married off forcibly to a man of the dominant religion, and subjected to unmentionable abuse.

Hebrews 11 lists for us the heroes of faith, some of whom received

deliverance in this life while others did not (v. 35b and following). In our English versions, Hebrews 11:35 switches mid-verse from those who saw in their lifetime the fulfillment of promises, at least partially, to those who did not, as if to say that Christians may fall into one or the other category and yet be Christians.

The so-called health and wealth gospel is not just something that takes other countries by storm or pervades generically evangelical churches in our land; this false gospel pervades our own hearts and comes out when we expect that simply because we believe in God, we should have an easy and prosperous life. The Lord wants us to remember those Christians who are suffering so that we are faced with the fact that suffering for the Christian is more to be expected than not.

The Beauty of Fellowship

Our text doesn't just press on us the need to remember prisoners, but it includes the stipulation "as bound with them." In other words, while these prisoners might have their hands and feet chained, they have fellow-Christians chained with them and to them, not literally or physically, but spiritually. They are not alone.

One of the greatest temptations and afflictions that people can suffer is to feel alone. They think no one sees and no one cares. But when Christians suffer, they are not alone. They have the Father, Son, and Spirit abiding in them and with them. When His people are persecuted, Christ is being persecuted (see Acts 9:4). He knows and remembers each of His suffering people, and what is done for them is done to Him (Matt. 25:40).

Yet, it is not just the communion between the Head of the church and some of the body who happen to be in prison or mistreated. There is union and communion between the members as well. When one member suffers, all the members do (1 Cor. 12:26a). Our mind and heart should be identified with them. We should know and feel their pain. We should pray for them, for steadfastness and the Lord's nearness with them, as Paul and Silas experienced at midnight in prison, bruised and bloodied though they were (Acts 16:25).

The realization that part of the body is suffering will help curtail our worldly-mindedness. It will increase our gratefulness for the mercies and blessings we do have, and foster contentment with what God has seen fit to send our way. It will also stoke and embolden our prayers. God will hear our prayers, and this will help all the church and bring glory to God, who is worthy that His body be one, as He is one (John 17:11).

The Frailty of the Body

The apostle adds an interesting element at the end of our verse, when he instructs us to remember those who are being maltreated. He writes: "as being yourselves also in the body." The Geneva Bible adds this note: "Being so touched, as if their misery were yours." The point is this: We are flesh and blood as these suffering saints are. Imagine you were enduring these sufferings yourself. Remember that you are not disembodied spirits, unable to feel pain. You are still in the body. You are liable to suffer the same way as they are now. Think of how you can use your hands, your mouth, your feet, your mind. Picture them unable to use theirs. Pray for them. Know yourself touched with the feeling of their infirmity, and thus be like your Lord and Saviour. He is in heaven today in His heavenly and glorified body and yet is still able to sympathize with those who are in any trouble (Heb. 4:15).

One day, the suffering of the whole church will be over and done. Then, with renewed and perfected bodies, the redeemed will glorify God and the Lamb and the Spirit forever. Then the bonds we feel now to brothers and sisters will be perfected. But let us not forget these bonds now. They have been forged by the Saviour on Calvary, where His body was broken in a way that you, Christian, will never endure. But heed His call today, to "remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." ①

"While God is pleased to give grace and courage unto some to suffer for the Gospel unto bonds, and to others to perform this duty towards them, the church will be no loser by suffering. When some are tried as unto their constancy in bonds, others are tried as unto their sincerity in the discharge of the duties required of them. Usually more fail in neglect of their duty towards sufferers, and so fall from their profession, than fail under and on the account of their sufferings." - John Owen

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THE ORDER OF SALVATION (9)

Conversion (2)

Last month, we saw that regeneration is solely the work of the Holy Spirit, without any contribution of the spiritually dead sinner who is passive in relation to regeneration. However, we also learned that this deadness needs to be qualified. Sinners are by nature dead in trespasses and sins, but this does not mean that they are like corpses lying in their graves, totally inactive and silent like dead mice. They are like the Ephesian Christians who before their conversion had “walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience... fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph. 2:2-3). The evidence that the new birth had taken place is that their lives had immediately and radically changed from serving the prince of darkness to serving the King of light.

God's Ongoing Work

Conversion to God is a vast subject which may be viewed from different perspectives. We can begin with pointing out that all true conversions not only have their origin in God, but also continue to depend on Him for energy. The new life implanted through regeneration remains essential to activate believers throughout their life of sanctification. Paul prays for the Ephesian believers that God would strengthen them with might according to the riches of His glory by his Spirit in the inner man (Eph. 3:16). The apostle is confident that God will grant him this request on behalf of the Ephesians and other converts as well. He assures the Philippians that He who has begun a good work in them will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ's return (Phil. 1:6).

Various Types of Conversions

The Bible records many examples of conversion, both general and individual. General conversions include so-called national conversions, which take place when an entire nation humbles itself and returns to the Lord, confessing its sins and seeking forgiveness. A good example is what happened under Joshua when the Israelites pledged to serve the Lord against Whom they had sinned and were resolved to obey Him again (Josh. 24). Other national conversions took place under Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29) and Josiah (2 Kings 23). However, these national conversions were usually short-lived. They were often like morning clouds and showers which vanished quickly (Hosea 6:4).

Scripture also mentions temporary conversions that may look genuine at first but turn out to be short-lived. In the parable of the Sower, Jesus speaks of the seed falling in rocky places, picturing one who hears the word and receives it with joy but because the seed has no roots his joy lasts only a little while. “When tribulation or persecution ariseth,” Jesus warns, “because of the word by and by, he is offended” (Matt.

13:21). Some names of individuals are mentioned in Scripture: Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:19); Philetus (2 Tim. 2:17); and Demas, “having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10). The apostle John had to deal with defectors “who went out from us, but they were not of us” (1 John 2:19).

The Word of God also refers to believers who experienced a second conversion. David had been a converted man for years and was called “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14), but after he fell into the sins of adultery and murder, he begged God’s forgiveness, asking Him for a renewed conversion: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10). Peter also experienced a kind of second conversion when, after his terrible denial of Christ, the Saviour told him that He had prayed for him that his faith would not fail, and that after he had turned back to Him, he would strengthen the brethren. The Authorized Version has “when thou art converted.” Jesus did not mean that Peter needed a first conversion, but a second one, since he had earlier confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16).

Dealing with believers falling into sin, The Canons of Dort point to God’s grace in granting recidivist transgressors a second conversion in the following encouraging way: “But God, who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people, even in their melancholy falls. . . By His Word and Spirit [He] certainly and effectively renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins” (Head 5, Articles 6-7).

Characteristics of Conversion

Although true conversions are always the same in essence, their manner and timing differ. Manasseh was an adult when he first came to repentance (2 Chron. 33:11-13), but Obediah feared the Lord from his youth (1 Kings 18:12). Paul was saved during a sudden traumatic confrontation with the risen Christ (Acts 9), while Timothy’s faith developed gradually and quietly (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15).

Converts often come from different backgrounds, spiritually and culturally. Paul was a well-educated and devout Pharisee (Acts 26:5). Mary Magdalene was tormented by seven demons. After Christ had cast them out, she became His ardent follower (Luke 8:2), while Zacchaeus gave up his profitable tax collector position after he underwent a radical heart change during an unexpected home visit by Jesus (Luke 19:1-10).

Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley describe these various kinds of conversion this way: “God’s method of drawing a sinner to Christ varies. Some people pass through piercing convictions of sin before coming to faith in Christ (Acts 2:37). The experience of others may be a quieter illumination combined with a less profound conviction of sin, as Lydia’s experience seems to have been (Acts 16:14-15).” Quoting the great Dutch *Second Reformation* divine, Wilhelmus a Brakel, they write: “Although the soul in a moment passes from death unto life, people often are converted in a very gradual fashion, with much vacillation between sorrow and joy. In

such people’s cases, seasons of conviction and fear may come and go over a span of years.” Beeke and Smalley emphasize, however, what is most important in conversion is not the manner or sequence of experiences, but the presence of genuine repentance and faith.

The Preparatory Work of the Law

The Scottish Puritan author, William Guthrie, in his book *The Christian’s Great Interest*, explains how the Holy Spirit prepares sinners for conversion by confronting them with God’s law. He does this in various ways and degrees. Not all sinners experience such a law-work, Guthrie says. Some, like John the Baptist, are called from the womb, or in early childhood, like Timothy. Others are drawn to Christ in a gentle way by speaking a few words of love as Zacchaeus; and of others who, upon a brief conversation with the Saviour, did leave all and follow Him, we hear nothing of a law-work before they embrace Christ by faith. Some, however, are deeply convicted of sin *after* coming to faith. But ordinarily, Guthrie says, a clear and discernable law-work of conviction and humiliation precedes faith.

Evidences of a Saving Law-work

This probing work may be violent, as in the case of Paul and the Philippian jailor. But as Guthrie explains:

Sometimes, the Lord carries on this work more calmly, softly and gradually, protracting it so that the several steps of man’s exercise under it are very discernable. He is convinced first of certain particular sins, then of more sins and of sin itself and of his own unbelief and ungodliness. He is now preoccupied with the quest for salvation. He is frightened of dying unsaved. He may be tormented with fear of having committed the unpardonable sin, but God upholds him, quietly and by infusing into his mind the possibility of his salvation. He seeks salvation by his own works; but the Lord makes a new assault upon him, convincing him even more thoroughly of the spirituality of the law and his absolutely fallen state in order to make room for Christ, the only Surety of sinners.

Critical Objections to a Preparatory Law-Work

Not everyone agrees with authors like Guthrie who teach that conversion is usually preceded by a preparatory work of the Holy Spirit. Many evangelical and Reformed theologians reject what they call “this notion of preparationism.” This criticism is not new. Guthrie and most Puritans, as well as Dutch *Second Reformation* and *Secession* leaders, were well aware of the opposition of many to what they call mystical experientialism, which focuses on subjective evidences of grace rather than objective gospel truth. Especially New England Puritans like Thomas Hooker have come under heavy criticism, even by some of their British and Dutch colleagues, for going too far, for instance, by demanding that proper conviction must include a willingness to be damned.

Most of the criticism, however, in recent years, is widely off the mark and shows a lack of understanding of what true conversion involves. Iain Murray, a respected contemporary defender of biblical,

experiential Calvinism, wrote some years ago: “Modern writers criticize the Puritans for making a ‘simple’ subject needlessly complex, but as the well-known Scottish divine Dr. John Duncan once wrote: ‘I believe that the Puritan age had a depth that we know nothing about...’”

John Bunyan on Conversion

The Puritan view of conversion is perhaps best presented by John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim’s Progress*. In his allegorical account of the journey of Pilgrim from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, Bunyan does not view conversion as a quick and easy process. The journey begins with the heart-rending cry, “What shall I do to be saved?” and ends with his glorious entrance into heaven. But to get there, he must cross “a very wide field,” wade through a “slough of despond,” go through the “wicket gate,” and even after leaving that gate behind him, the new Christian still must go further before getting a taste of the joy of assurance.

Bunyan’s description of Pilgrim’s spiritual journey reflects the consensus among Puritan preachers that conversion usually involves a thorough and often lengthy struggle before coming to assurance. They all believed in the necessity of a “law-work,” or the process whereby the Holy Spirit uses the law to convict a sinner in preparation for receiving the gospel.

Our Free Reformed Churches traditionally subscribe to preaching both law and gospel, emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting sinners of their sins, while at the same time pointing them to Christ as freely offered in the gospel. In doing so, we must use a balanced approach. We should not set standards for people to meet. No Gospel preacher is qualified to know how much “law-work” is required before he can say this or that person has experienced enough conviction of sin. But Scripture does demand that some sorrow for sin be experienced. There are those who go through great distress when they realize how great their sins and miseries are, while others are sweetly and tenderly drawn by the love of Jesus as soon as they hear the Good News that He came to seek and to save them.

Joel Beeke and Paul Smalley sum up Guthrie’s view of the Holy Spirit’s law-work this way: “Embedded in Guthrie’s view of preparation is the free offer of the gospel: indeed, he believed that one aspect of such preparation is to convince sinners of that free offer. In one of his sermons he says, wherever He comes in the word of His gospel He excludes none but those who exclude themselves. And so the promises are held out to all. God offers the promises freely to all that will take them.” ①

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WHY DO WE WORK?

GRACE AT WORK – Redeeming the Grind & the Glory of Your Job by Bryan Chapell. Published by Crossway, 1300 Crescent Street, Wheaton, Illinois, 60187, 2022. Softcover, 233 pages.

For many, the main purpose of work is to earn a paycheck to meet their daily needs and to earn enough to enjoy life to the max. If they’re ambitious, they may have their sights set on acquiring property and goods. But Christians should look deeper. “Is there any purpose in my work beyond a paycheck? Is there some mission for me beyond making money? Am I responsible before God only to put in the hours to fill up my bank account, pay the mortgage, feed my family, and not feel guilty about the size of the check in the offering plate?” (p. 11). This book answers these questions by digging into Scripture, showing that God calls us to use our skills, talents, and resources to extend His kingdom, for His glory, as we may have not understood before.

Ultimately, we do not serve a company or a boss, or live only for ourselves and our needs. There is a God-given design and dignity in what we call work, which is first revealed in Genesis 1:26-27, where God decides to make “man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea.” This is further confirmed in Genesis 2:15: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.” These truths were confirmed to Adam before he received Eve as a “helper” and before Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Chapell states: “Because you are an image bearer, you have value and dignity before you’re ever given a job assignment” whether you become president of a large corporation or a garbage collector (p. 20).

Another indication of the dignity of work is that God Himself works. “And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had made” (Gen. 2:2). God working also means that labour is not bad or evil or only a means to an end as many seem to think.

True, the Fall has made work a struggle and drudgery. But God had given mankind a mission by working. We can see this in Genesis (chapters 3-11), which is interspersed with brief snippets of how man worked to develop civilization. Man was a farmer, bred livestock, forged bronze and iron tools, made musical instruments, built an enormous ship, and used architectural knowledge to build cities. Our work “itself is an instrument of God, pushing back the corruption of the fall. God is mowing down the weeds of the world with our work” (p. 28).

It is right for Christians to work to provide for loved ones, church, and society. But work can also be a witness to unbelievers, although usually we are not hired to be Christian witnesses at work, but to put in a good day’s work (Col. 3:23). Yet, “our work is itself intended to extend the influence of God’s kingdom to every corner of creation.” “That is the message —our work is a channel of God’s grace. By work we both receive and dispense the blessing of our Lord” (p. 35). These are loaded statements, and Chapell uses the rest of the book to show how this is worked out in Scripture, including many interesting examples in the lives of believers.

In Colossians 3, the apostle Paul writes: “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (v. 17). “Everything” includes our work, as Paul continues: “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (v. 23). In our work, we profess who we are. “What that means in the workplace is that we should work as though we have the name of Christ upon us” (p. 38), and that He “should get the credit for what we do and who we are because apart from him we can do nothing (John 15:5).” This includes the products we produce, but also how we act towards others in the workplace. “We realize that our work is not just about us but about its effects on others” and that every job has a purpose, no matter how menial it is (p. 44-45).

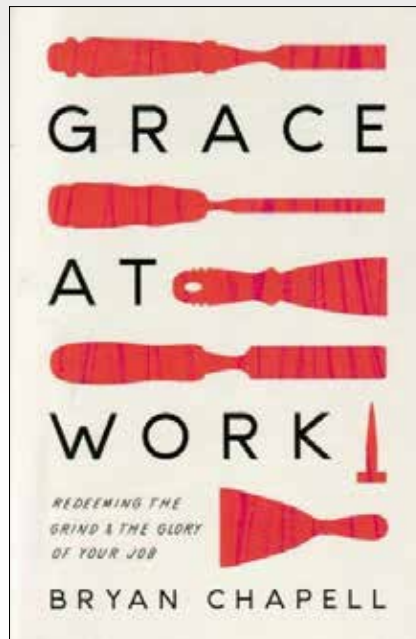
This is true for a company president, but Scripture also has something to say to the most menial worker: “Servants [or slaves], obey in all things

your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God" (Col. 3:22). In Bible times, slavery often was not as cruel as in our more recent past, but it does mean we should value the lowest status of workers in our society. In a society where it seems that many young people (and older ones) want an easy job with high pay, we should be asking, "What are my talents? What are my gifts? and how can I best serve God" (p. 47). But also, our integrity or honesty in the workplace is important, which may include self-sacrifice and suffering. Chapter 3 is an encouragement to look to the Saviour because He suffered, and God determines our status and outcome.

Very practical is the chapter dealing with "Money." The author points out that one quarter of all the parables of Jesus are about money, because He knows that where our treasure is, there our heart will be also (Matt. 6:21). The apostle Paul "identifies three good purposes of money" -- the church, family, and ministry (1 Tim 5:8-18). He also teaches us how to use it in the right way by being stewardly. In a chapter entitled "Success," Chapell shows that success is not to be measured by worldly standards. He gives examples that show that so-called successful people find out at some point that worldly success is fleeting. It's "not fat paychecks or professional accolades but using God's resources in God's opportunities for God's design," that "blesses the Lord and his people" (p. 100).

"Humility" is another helpful chapter and is based on Jesus' example working in small-town Nazareth as a carpenter and riding a donkey to enter Jerusalem rather than on a war horse. But there is "Glory" (chapter 7) in humility -- not from a sinful perspective -- but "God intends to give us zeal for our work -- whether it be dirty, difficult, or mere drudgery -- because it brings glory to him" (p. 121). How? We do so when we look back to the work mandate of Genesis 2 as the goal for expressing this character in our work. "Often the glory of God is most on display where his people are most dedicated in displaying his goodness and grace in difficult and demeaning contexts" (p. 124).

"Because we are image bearers of our Lord, our Lord brings God to our workplace and sends his blessing into the world touched by our work. Christ is present *in* us as we work, he is present *with* us as we work, and he is *made* present to others by our work..." (p. 132). "Also, by our labours, our communities thrive, lives are vitalized, earth's resources are stewarded for good, families are blessed, cultures advance, and faith is made possible and available for all whose lives flourish through the touch of God's grace dispensed by those working 'as for the Lord and not for men' (Col. 3:3)" (pp. 142-3).



Perhaps the chapter "Evil" is the most helpful in our struggles with seemingly unfulfilling, boring, or difficult work. The author acknowledges that, "Yes, there is much good that God intended to accomplish through our labours, but there is much evil in the working world that resists his intentions and opposes the good we want to accomplish" (p. 145). Many of us know how difficult it is when we have a boss or co-workers who demean us, we get bypassed in a promotion we think we deserve, or we have a workplace where God's name and perverse language is used without let-up. Scripture warns us that we will have tribulations and we are encouraged to "take up a daily cross" (Matt. 16:24-25). The author reminds us that by "striving for Christ-honouring relationships, and exhibiting godly character the Holy Spirit is forming us into followers of Jesus who are more Christlike in habits and heart" (p. 154). We must learn to forgive, and yes, we may seek justice when we are wronged. The Lord heard the cries of the Israelites in Egypt, and likewise we should not turn a blind eye to those in our society who are suffering wrongful conditions or are unable to work.

The book closes with the examples of Daniel in Babylon and the young slave girl who advised Naaman to go to Israel for healing. They respected and had understanding for our sinful leaders. More so now than ever, our government and church leaders are under heavy burdens. They are sinners like we are, placed in positions to exercise authority. That includes our church leaders. They often make difficult decisions and need our prayers for their work. Of course, "abusive behaviour and unjust treatment should be confronted and corrected, but even then, the rule of righteousness rather than revenge must be our goal" (p. 186). Scripture admonishes patience, just as the Lord is patient with us.

This is a book of encouragement and balance, as related in the chapter entitled "Balance," where the author quotes a versification of Psalm 127: Unless the LORD builds the house/ those who build it labour in vain/ Unless the LORD watches over the city/ the watchman stays awake in vain. The final chapter cites the Beatitudes to be faithful witnesses in our work and an encouragement to be diligent whatever the circumstances.

Heartily recommended reading for everyone, especially for youth and young adults. Too bad there are no discussion questions. Perhaps someone can add these.

This book may be purchased in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.

Mrs. Frederika (Ricky) Pronk is a member of the Free Reformed Church of Brantford and involved in Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario.



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A TALE OF TWO GLOBALISMS

Globalization is a familiar term. It is the growing interaction and integration among peoples, organizations, and governments worldwide.

The term *globalism* is less common: it is the ideology – the thinking, beliefs, and values – that drives globalization. It denotes the underlying forces that are shaping cultures and societies everywhere. As nationalism is to nationality, so globalism is to globalization.

There are two dominant globalisms in the world today. In fact, world history is a story of these two competing globalisms. The Bible tells us this tale. Genesis 11-12 describe the start of both globalisms. We must understand this tale from the beginning and from God's perspective.

Humanistic Globalism

The first globalism is the ideology that builds the City of Man. Genesis 11:1-9 records this history: human ambitions at the Tower of Babel. World powers were united in Babel with a common desire: "let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad" (11:4).

But God had blessed Noah's children, commanding them to fill the earth. Furthermore, God perceived their ambitions as opposition: "this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them" (11:6). So God graciously intervened before humanity fell again into the same wicked society as before the Flood (Gen. 6:5).

Gospel Globalism

The second globalism is based on God's purpose for the world. Genesis 12:1-3 reveals God's better plan to bless all families of the earth. God's plan started with a special promise for Abraham's family. This family was the means by which God blesses people from all families.

Abraham believed God's covenant promise. His ideology was grounded in and shaped by faith in God's Word. Abraham lived

by this faith, and he died with a hope in a future society, the City of God (Heb. 11:8-16).

Intertwined Histories

The history of Humanistic Globalism and Gospel Globalism is told as one tale. The Bible's storyline relates how these competing ideologies were often twisted together and even confused at times.

God's Old Testament people were surrounded by the sinful nations. Sometimes international idolatry was overpowering, causing them to forget God's truth and serve other gods. Yet other times, God's people faithfully upheld God's covenant; they rejected sinful ideologies and witnessed of His truth by living separate from the nations.



The Church in the World

The line between these two globalisms is often unclear. The church is called out of the world to witness to the world. God's people must not be confused by the world's ideologies. Like Abraham, we must live by faith in God's promise and with hope in a future heavenly society.

But often the church is mixed with the world. God's people are controlled at times by wicked thinking and addicted to sinful ambitions leading to destruction. Furthermore, the world often mimics the church and parrots fake news. The world pretends to know the truth, but it has accepted Satan's lie from the beginning.

Steps in God's Story

Despite opposition in the world, God's gospel plan is being accomplished. God's Son was sent into the world to accomplish this plan of redemption. The Spirit then came to apply Christ's redemption, calling God's people out of the world and into perfect community. Now this gospel news is being proclaimed to all families globally.

We recognize both of these globalisms in world history. We cannot stop the wicked ambitions of Humanistic Globalism. Yet

we can declare and display the competing ideology of Gospel Globalism. As Christ's witnesses, we proclaim that God has a better plan for this wicked world.

Going Back to Babel

The world, however, continues to rebel against God's truth. Powerful forces are reshaping society today: big media and big tech, transnational political ambitions, and unbiblical ideologies of some global organizations. Many peoples have symbolically returned to Babel, united again by Humanistic Globalism.

While there are exceptions, many social forces are arrayed in opposition against God's truth, often subtly but increasingly without shame. Truly, the nations are raging against our sovereign God and the peoples continue to exchange God's truth for Satan's lie (Ps. 2:1-3; Rom. 1:25).

Hope in the Gospel

By faith, we look above the present turmoil on earth. We see the higher truth of God's perfect plan soon to be finalized. Our ideology is determined by the truth of Christ's kingdom that is unshakable (Heb. 12:28).

Which globalism will triumph in the end? There is no contest from God's perspective. We live within the story as it happens, but God knows the story from the beginning. All along, God allowed Satan's lie to provoke human opposition against Him. For the present time, God allows Humanist Globalism to gain power. But soon, every knee will bow before King Jesus.

Christ will soon return to judge all people. The Final Judgment will make an eternal distinction: punishment for those following Humanistic Globalism and redemption for those following Christ.

The Final Outcome

We are born sinners in sinful society, so by nature our thinking is controlled by human idolatry. But by grace, God's people are re-born in Christ. By faith, our new ideology is reshaped by God's truth in thankful obedience. We reject Satan's lie, and we worship the Triune God in Christ alone.

Which globalist vision shapes your ambitions? You must repent now if you are still trying to make a name for yourself. Rather, bow before Christ and let His truth reshape your thinking.

Most people are building collapsing towers while rushing towards eternal ruin in the City of Destruction. But by God's grace, we are traveling to a perfected society of true worship in the City of God. ①

Dr Brian A. DeVries is the Principal of Mukhanyo Theological College. He has planted three churches around Pretoria and serves as a visiting professor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.

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ORGANIC UNION OF THE FRC AND HRC? (2)

REV. J. SCHOEMAN



Last time, we reviewed some of the reasons why the FRC and HRC are pursuing organic union. We saw that there are Biblical, confessional, practical as well as other reasons for doing so. But achieving organic union between any two (or more) federations is never easy. It will not be easy for the FRC and HRC either. Several obstacles (some significant) stand in the way. What are these obstacles?

1. “Cultural” Differences

First, there are what I would call (for lack of a better term) “cultural” differences. By this I do not mean ethnic differences, for both denominations are largely of Dutch extraction. I mean differences of outlook, perspective, and ways of doing things.

This is evident at our ecclesiastical meetings (especially synods). At the risk of generalizing, it may be accurate to say that the FRC synod is more formal and “businesslike” than the HRC. There is a strong emphasis on order and procedure (which is not a bad thing!), although the HRC is becoming more like this as well. The FRC synod also tends to scrutinize and even, at times, vigorously debate matters on its agenda including recommendations of its committees. The HRC tends to pass its committee’s recommendations with little – and in many cases no – discussion at all. How this will work in a united federation remains to be seen. It will certainly require some adjustment!

Another difference has to do with the “leanings” of the churches in our respective federations. Again, this is a generalization, but it is probably fair to say that the FRC has more “breadth” than the HRC. In fact, some in our churches fear that in an effort to distance itself from its NRC roots, the pendulum in the HRC may be swinging too far in the opposite direction. At the same time, over the years the FRC congregations that once were hesitant about closer contact with the HRC because they were perceived as “too NRC” are now some of the most enthusiastic supporters of organic union.

2. Updated Forms and Confessions

Several years ago, the FRC synod appointed an ad hoc committee to revise and update the liturgical forms in the back of the Psalter and to produce a more accurate translation of the Confessions in more modern English. When invited to work with us on this project, however, the HRC declined. Would this be a reason for the HRC not to enter into a union with the FRC? Not likely as each congregation will be free to adopt the updated forms and confessions as they see fit. But it is an issue that will need to be addressed. However, the

HRC has partnered with us and the Protestant Reformed Churches in revising our current Psalter.

3. Bible Translation

From its inception, the Free Reformed Churches used only the KJV in its worship services and congregational life (Bible studies, catechism classes, Sunday Schools, etc.). However, after many years of study and discussion, the FRC Synod of 2004 allowed for the use of the NKJV in the churches, with certain restrictions (see FRC Acts of Synod, 2004, pp. 168-235). Since that time, the majority of congregations in the FRC have adopted the NKJV.

The HRC continues to use only the KJV as its official Bible version. Several years ago, and again in 2022, one of its congregations submitted an overture asking the HRC synod to study the possibility of allowing the NKJV to be used in the worship services. This overture, however, was not approved. At the same time, the HRC Synod cancelled publishing a booklet promoting the KJV. It has also approved the hiring of professors at PRTS who do not prefer the KJV and attend churches that use different versions. It is generally agreed that it is only a matter of time before the HRC will have to wrestle through this issue themselves.

In its report to both synods on this matter, the Unity Committee recommended that should there be a union of our two federations, that the KJV would continue to be used at Synod and other broader assemblies (which is our current practice). In the meantime, the FRC decisions regarding the use of the NKJV would be allowed to stand and would apply to all the churches within the united federation, meaning that each congregation would be able to decide whether to use the KJV or NKJV.

4. Headcoverings

In the FRC, up until the 1970’s and 80’s, most women covered their heads in the worship service. Today this practice is maintained in some FRC congregations, but not others. In most FRC churches, this matter is left up to the individual conscience and conviction.

Generally speaking, most women in the HRC still cover their heads in the worship service. However, on two occasions the HRC synod was asked to adopt a denominational policy requiring women to wear a head covering, but this was declined on the grounds that if it did, the synod would open the door to making extra confessional pronouncements.

Concerning this matter, the Unity Committee recommended to both syn-

ods that “the issue of whether a woman should have her head covered in the worship service is one that warrants serious consideration – both by consistories and every professing Christian – and must be decided on exegetical grounds alone.” The FRC synod adopted this recommendation. The HRC Synod amended this statement to read as follows: “the issue of whether a woman should have her head covered in the worship service warrants serious consideration by consistories and must be decided on exegetical grounds alone.” This amendment was made because the HRC Synod wanted to clarify the responsibility of church leadership in this matter.

The question remains, however, whether merging with a denomination where the majority of churches do not require women to wear a head covering will pose an obstacle for some churches in the HRC, although indications are that it would not.

5. Theological Education / PRTS

Both the FRC and HRC share the conviction that theological education ought to be carried out “for the church and by the church.” But there are differences. Following the path of our “mother church” in the Netherlands (the CGK), the FRC historically has interpreted “for the church” to mean training men for service within the FRC and “by the church” to mean that the seminary is governed by the denominational synod, staffed mainly if not exclusively by its ministers, and financially supported by its members.

The HRC agrees that the primary focus of the church should be on training students for the ministry in its own churches and that the governance of the seminary should reside with the churches (via the HRC synod) – which it does. However, it has expanded the principle of “for the church” to include the church universal, welcoming students to PRTS from all over the world from a wide variety of denominational backgrounds. It also believes that in order to provide its students with the best instruction possible, it should hire professors from a broad cross section of conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches.

In order to work more effectively within the parameters of this vision, several years ago the FRC synod adopted a recommendation of the Theological Education Committee (TEC) to broaden its mandate to include “governing with the vision of the greater good of the worldwide church in view while recognizing the primary mandate of the TEC remains the pursuit of the best training of our Free Reformed theological students.” Despite this statement, some in the HRC question whether the FRC has fully embraced the seminary’s world-wide vision.

6. Appointment of Professors

In 2021, in response to a need at PRTS for an additional professor and in order to fill a vacancy left behind by Dr. D. Murray, the FRC TEC recommended that synod appoint Dr. D. Kranendonk as Free Reformed professor with a view to offering him to PRTS. Unfortunately, this did not go over well with our brethren in the HRC, who felt that we should have followed the seminary’s approved faculty acquisition procedure which requires a qualified candidate to apply for such a position and to be interviewed by the seminary’s Faculty Acquisition Committee and its Board of Trustees. They further felt that by doing what we did, we placed them in an impossible position: hire Dr. Kranendonk and thus short circuit its own procedures or hire someone else and risk upsetting the FRC.

From the FRC perspective, however, the process of appointing a professor must begin with the church, not with the seminary and not even with the man who feels called to apply for such a position. We also assured our HRC brethren that should they not decide to hire Dr. Kranendonk, there would be no hard feelings on our part; we would simply assign him certain tasks under the oversight of the TEC.

In the end, the FRC Synod decided to proceed with this appointment, resulting in considerable tension between our two federations. Thankfully, this was lessened when the HRC synod unanimously decided to hire Dr. Kranendonk for whom they – as they themselves declared – have a deep personal regard and affection. But some tension remains.

On a positive note, the controversy surrounding Dr. Kranendonk’s appointment led both denominations to take a closer look at the seminary’s faculty acquisition procedure and to make considerable improvements. This has often been the case. Over the years, whenever the FRC has called attention to

what we perceive as a weakness in the policies and procedures governing the seminary, they have almost always been resolved to the satisfaction of both denominations for which we may be very thankful.

7. Westminster Standards

Several years ago, the HRC adopted the Westminster Standards as part of its confessional standards together with the Three Forms of Unity. However, it does not require all of its members or office bearers to subscribe to these standards, leaving this up to the local church. The FRC believes this is contrary to the nature of subscription. In our view, to adopt the Westminster Standards means to subscribe to them. Furthermore, while our denomination has great appreciation for Westminster Standards, we are not prepared at this point to subscribe to them for the simple reason that we are not as familiar with them as are some of our brethren in the HRC. That may change if we find ourselves in a united federation, but this matter has still not been resolved.

Clouds Forming

Despite the considerable progress that has been made over the years in moving towards an organic union of our two federations, some clouds are forming on the horizon.

Some of our churches have never been and still are not enthusiastic about organic union. The same comments are made at almost every synod: the time is not ripe. We don’t know each other well enough. There are too many differences between us. This must be from the bottom up, not the top down. Are we not better off just existing side by side and cooperating with each other wherever possible?

Not all these comments are without merit. But when the same comments continue to be voiced by churches who do little or nothing to address these concerns at the local level, it calls into question whether our federation is truly committed to organic union. The same may be said of the HRC.

The HRC as a whole seem even less enthusiastic about organic union. This became especially clear at their last synod (2022). At this synod, the HRC made several decisions that call into question whether they are still committed to exploring the possibility of organic union.

First, regarding the Westminster Standards, last year the Unity Committee recommended that should our two denominations merge, a united federation will “wholeheartedly and officially endorse, but not (at least not yet) subscribe to the Westminster Standards.” Practically, this means office bearers would continue to sign the current Formula of Subscription and express their agreement with the Three Forms of Unity at broader ecclesiastical assemblies (combined consistory meetings and synod meetings). Agreement with the Three Forms of Unity would also continue to be required for membership in our churches. In addition, in a united federation, each local consistory will be allowed to decide for themselves whether they wish to subscribe to the Westminster Standards in addition to the Three Forms of Unity (which is the current HRC policy). But at least at the outset, a united federation would not officially subscribe to these standards.

There was considerable push back to this proposal within the HRC even though in the past they themselves have admitted that their policy is not entirely clear. In addition, the HRC synod – whether by design or oversight - did not vote on the Unity Committee’s recommendation, meaning this whole matter remains unresolved.

Second, for several years, the Unity Committee has been urging both synods to appoint a joint study committee to arrive at a common understanding of our Lord’s words in John 17:20-23 where He prays that His church would be “one.” As mentioned in my previous article, some argue that this is solely a spiritual unity. Others argue that if that is what our Lord is praying for, such spiritual unity should manifest itself in visible, organizational unity. While our own synod was willing to embark on such a study, the HRC synod was not. Consequently, last year, in an effort to facilitate our work as a committee, the Unity Committee proposed to both synods that they endorse the following statement: “the FRC and HRC becoming one federation of churches would more clearly and visibly demonstrate to the world the unity God’s people have spiritually in Jesus Christ as our Savior prayed in John 17:20-23...etc.” But again, the HRC synod – whether by design or oversight – failed to rule on or even discuss the matter.

Third, and arguably most seriously, at this same synod there was a motion

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from the HRC of Kinnelon, New Jersey, asking that “the [Unity] committee be disbanded until such time as the HRC deems it appropriate to re-establish such a committee.” This came as quite a surprise to us on the Unity Committee as we had no indication that any of the churches (either FRC or HRC) were so opposed to the work of our committee that they wanted to disband it.

In the end, the HRC synod adopted the following substitute motion: “Synod directs the Unity Committee to continue working but only on items of a practical nature and not on items that are solely devoted to organizational unity.” What the synod meant by “items of a practical nature” was not specified. Nor did the synod consult the synod of the FRC before making such a change – which one would expect given that the committee is a joint committee of both federations. The point is, by adopting this motion, the HRC has signaled that it is not interested in talking about organic unity at this point.

Why did this happen? It is difficult to say. The appointment of Dr. Kranendonk may be a major factor. Another major factor is the fear, as mentioned, that some in the HRC have of the FRC narrowing the vision of PRTS. There is also the fact that should our two federations merge, the HRC would be “swallowed up” by the FRC which, though also small, is more than twice its size.

Whatever the case, one thing is clear: like any relationship, our relationship as churches has not always been without challenges. This is understandable. For all our similarities (which are many), we are two separate federations with different backgrounds and experiences. Over the years, this has shaped and molded us into what we are today. It has also influenced how we think and what we do and say. Nor will that change overnight. Personally, I am convinced that none of the obstacles that stand in the way are insurmountable. But this too is in the hands of the Lord.

What Next?

So, what happens next? Perhaps the best thing to do is to pause further discussions. If a union between our two churches is ever going to happen, it must come from the bottom up. The churches themselves – not a denominational committee – must desire this and work towards this. If they do not, then nothing will come of it.

One thing is certain: organic union between our two federations will not happen any time soon. Persecution (which may very well become a reality in our lifetime) may be a catalyst. But even then, it will not be easy.

Nor can this be man’s work. In fact, any union of churches that is engineered by man is doomed to fail. Church union is the work of God through His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit causes His people to see the need for unity and moves them to pursue it in dependence on Him. Are we praying for this? John Calvin once wrote the following:

Amongst the greatest evils of our century must be counted the fact that the churches are so divided one from another that there is scarcely even a human relationship between us; at all events there is not the shining light of that holy fellowship of the members of Christ, of which many boast in word, but which few seek sincerely indeed. In consequence, because the members are torn apart, the body of the church lies wounded and bleeding. So far as I have it in my power, if I am thought to be of any service, I shall not be afraid to cross ten seas for this purpose, if that should be necessary.

May the Lord so work in the hearts of the members of both of our federations that, with Calvin, we may be prepared to “cross ten seas” in the interest of pursuing unity with any church of like-minded faith.

In the meantime, may we, from the heart, learn to say with the psalmist: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions’ sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good” (Psalm 122: 6-9).

Rev J. Schoeman is the pastor of the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church in Abbotsford and has been involved in discussions with the HRC for the past 20 years. He also serves as co-chairman of the FRC/HRC Unity Committee. This article was submitted with the consent of the FRC members of the Unity Committee.



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of the Free Reformed Churches

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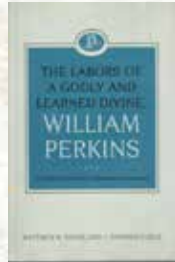
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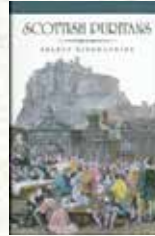
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TIMELINE SHOWING SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FRC AND HRC (1997-2022)

1997

Pursuant to the instruction of Synod 1989 to study the feasibility of establishing our own theological seminary, or else finding a seminary that would serve the FRC well, the FRC TEC approaches the HRC to discuss the feasibility of a joint venture (50/50) in theological training at PRTS.

1998

HRC decides that a 50/50 joint venture at PRTS is premature. At this time, however, they welcome the input of FRC ministers and FRC students.

FRC Synod appoints Dr. G.M. Bilkes as FRC instructor in theology and decides to offer him to PRTS. HRC classis and PRTS accepts this offer unanimously. Dr. Bilkes begins teaching at PRTS in November 1998.

1999

FRC hosts church day in September with Dr. Beeke (HRC) and Dr. G.M. Bilkes (FRC) speaking. This event is meant to stir up awareness and involvement from the churches in theological training.

2000

FRC External Relations Committee meets with delegates of the HRC for the first time. At this meeting, preaching, our histories, the three/two covenant view, and PRTS was discussed. This meeting demonstrates that the denominations share much in common and that a growing spiritual bond seems to be organically developing.

2001

HRC classis accepts the FRC offer of Limited Correspondence in part. They agree to exchange meeting acts and minutes.

HRC classis accepts FRC membership attestations but declined to send representatives to FRC synod.

FRC External Relations Committee notes that there is a relationship growing on a committee level, but it must be supplemented at a congregational and consistory level.

2002

HRC Classis approves formal correspondence with the FRC.

FRC External Relations Committee again recommends to FRC Synod that the relationship forming at the committee level be supplemented on the local level. FRC Synod notes that this recommendation may be met with apprehension at the local level.

HRC minister Rev. B. Elshout attends FRC Synod for the first time and addresses the body.

FRC Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) and delegates from the HRC complete a joint statement on Reformed Doctrines. FRC IRC had sent this to the consistories for input and they received feedback. The reason for doing this was to avoid a top-down approach to unity.

2003

FRC TEC notes that FRC involvement in teaching at PRTS is nearly up to 50%.

FRC Synod expresses concern that the IRC may be moving at a faster rate towards unity than the churches.

HRC synod expresses concern regarding the decision of FRC Synod regarding NKJV, noting that this will negatively impact our relationship.

2004

FRC IRC reports that it is "at a loss" as to what to do in regard to the HRC. They have not had any meetings or any further discussions. IRC also expresses dismay that they have not been invited to the HRC classis meetings, even though HRC delegates have been present at two previous synods. HRC has also not distributed the Reformed Doctrines document to their consistories.

HRC delegate to FRC Synod, Rev. Kelderman, indicates an invitation to classis was to be sent, but was not due to error. He pleads for patience as HRC is new and still learning about contact with other churches.

HRC invites FRC to send observers to fall classis meetings in October. Rev. G.R. Procee addresses their meeting.

FRC IRC recommends the following: (1) Organize a combined office bearer conference; (2) Invite HRC ministers to our ministerial retreat; (3) Invite Dr. Beeke and Dr. Bilkes to promote the work of PRTS in the churches.

2005

HRC circulates the Reformed Doctrine document among their consistories.

2006

HRC delegates attend the office bearer's conference of the FRC.

FRC Synod tables the recommendation of the IRC to offer Limited Correspondence to the HRC.

2007

FRC Synod approves offering Limited Correspondence to the HRC.

HRC accepts the offer from FRC regarding Limited Correspondence and offers the same back.

HRC offers FRC standing invitation to classis meetings each year.

2008

No significant updates.

2009

HRC added an additional level of correspondence similar to FRC Complete Correspondence level. Both churches remain at Limited Correspondence with each other.

2010

FRC Inter-Church Relations committee and HRC Church Correspondence Committee agree to meet annually as committees.

2011

FRC Synod declines the recommendation of the IRC to move to a relationship of complete correspondence with the HRC. Synod instead encourages further grass roots interaction. It also instructs the IRC to further inquire about the HRC's readiness to enter such a relationship.

2012

FRC Inter-Church Relations committee reports to FRC Synod that the HRC has indicated their local congregations need more grass root contact before moving to Complete Correspondence.

FRC IRC requests direction from Synod regarding the HRC relationship, and Synod suggests ways to move closer to the HRC.

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- For other inquiries check out our website or contact the principal, Mr. Hugo VanderHoek, principal@pcsmonarch.com , 403-381-4418

2012 (Continued...)

FRC Synod affirms that HRC candidates are granted permission to lead services in the FRC.

2013

No significant updates. Continuation of grass root relationship building.

2014

HRC CCC recommends to their synod that they move to level 4 contact with the FRC (similar to FRC level of complete correspondence), which was adopted.

FRC Synod adopts the recommendation of the IRC to accept the above offer and offer a relationship of complete correspondence to the HRC.

2015

FRC Synod accepts recommendation of IRC to coordinate joint and concurrent sessions of synod with the HRC.

HRC Synod accepts the recommendation of their CCC to coordinate joint synod sessions with the FRC.

2016

FRC and HRC hold first concurrent synod together at the Dundas FRC.

FRC Synod accepts recommendation of the IRC to form a joint Unity Committee with the HRC.

HRC Synod accepts the recommendation of the CCC to form a joint Unity Committee with the FRC.

2017

FRC/HRC Unity Committee meets for the first time on March 17, 2017.

2018

FRC/HRC Unity Committee submits an extensive report outlining the factors that would need to be considered before a union of our two federations could be achieved. The report addressed matters such as Bible translations, head coverings, theological education, etc.

FRC/HRC Unity Committee recommends both synods appoint a joint church order committee to propose a provisional church order. FRC and HRC Synods adopt this recommendation.

FRC Synod instructs the Unity Committee to study the desirability of officially granting permission to local churches to adopt the Westminster Standards along with the Three Forms of Unity as part of our doctrinal standards.

2019

FRC and HRC Synods hold joint sessions with each other for the first time.

2020

FRC Synod accepts the recommendation of the Unity Committee to distribute the book "Advancing Christian Unity" by Anthony Burgess to every office bearer of the FRC.

FRC Synod accepts the recommendation of the Unity Committee to distribute the booklet "Organic Unity..." at the discretion of the local consistory.

FRC Synod appoints Dr. D. Kranendonk as Professor of Theology at PRTS.

HRC objects to the process followed by the FRC Synod in appointing Dr. Kranendonk.

2021

FRC Synod delegates note that there appears to be significant hesitancy on the part of the HRC regarding union.

FRC Synod delegates note that union with the HRC may not be possible at this point.

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Listening to What is Not Said (3)

We have seen that listening to what is not said is an important exercise of discernment for elders who have oversight over the preaching and members who gather under the preaching. We observed that corrupt hearts naturally resist certain truths, including God's decree of election or man's depravity, tempting preachers to avoid these doctrines. However, they are important truths which cannot be ignored. We will now turn to some more doctrines which must be preached.

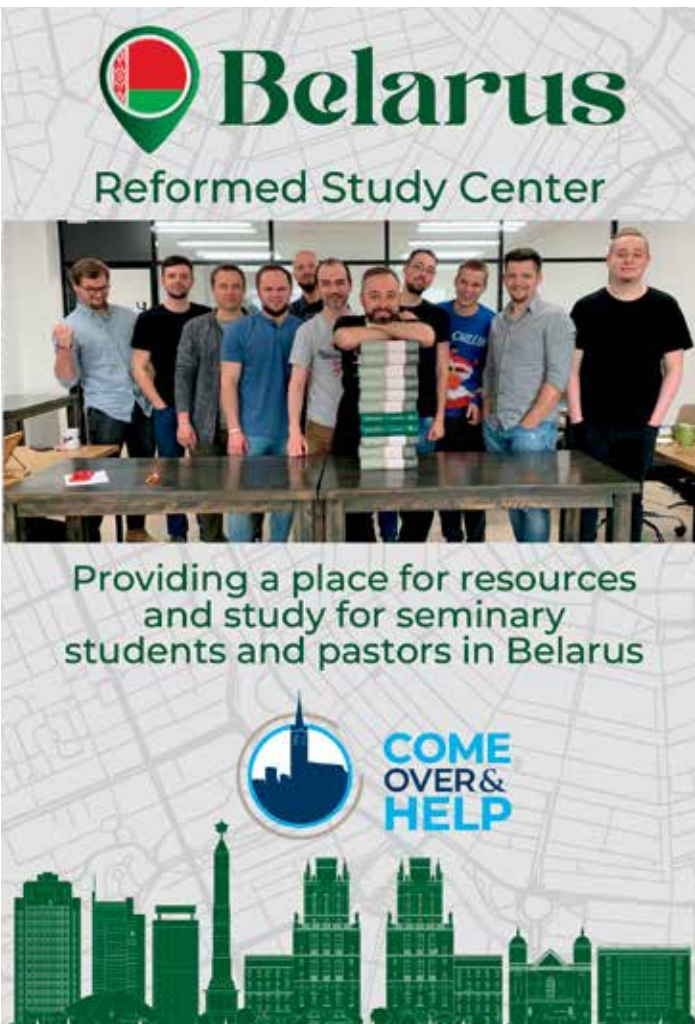
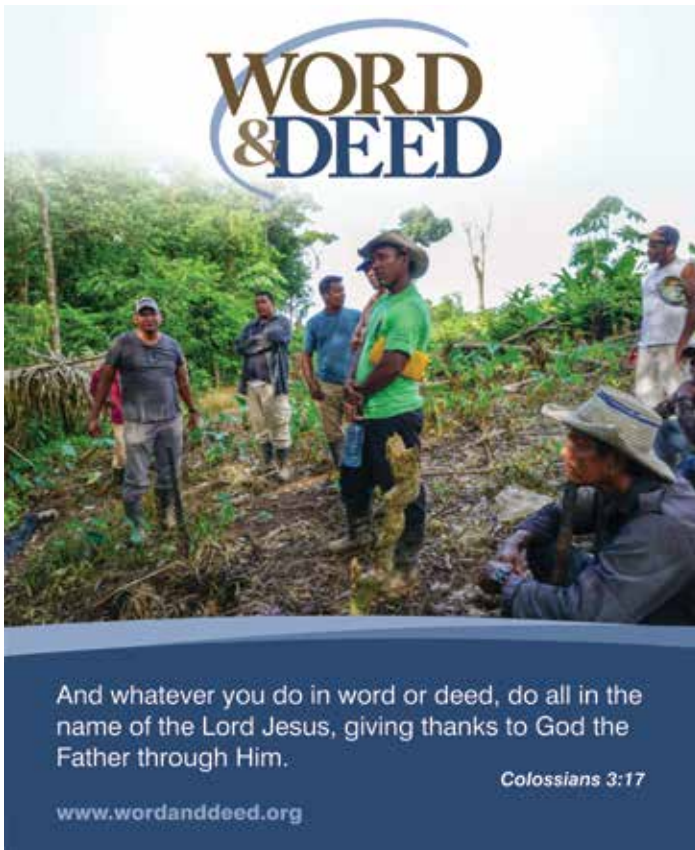
Rebirth

Closely related to God's humbling teaching of our depravity is His message concerning the necessity of regeneration. Jesus spoke to Nicodemus about this new birth in John 3. Behind Jesus' teaching are the words of the prophets concerning the circumcision of the heart and about receiving a heart of flesh (Deut. 30:6; Ezek. 36:26). If we are so radically depraved that God says we are by nature dead in sins and trespasses (Eph. 2:1), then we must be made alive spiritually. As the Lord Jesus said, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again" (John 3:7). God must make us new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17). Yes, God must do that, for He is the Only One who can do it.

What we confess in the Canons of Dordt (III/IV.12) must take place: A work of God within us, without our aid. This regeneration is "evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable; not inferior in efficacy to creation, or the resurrection from the dead, as the Scripture inspired by the author of this work declares." In the previous article (III/IV.11) we confess that "by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, [God] pervades the inmost recesses of the man; he opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised."

In whom must this miracle take place? A clear answer to that question may not be missing in the preaching. Honest, scriptural preaching will pass on Jesus' teaching: "You must be born again." This applies to all people without exception, including all within the covenant congregation. The necessity of the new birth is not removed by the covenant or its sign and seal, namely, baptism. The beginning of the Form for the Administration of Baptism states this clearly: "We cannot enter into the kingdom of God unless we are born again."

Here again, discerning ears are needed. How often is this message of the necessity of regeneration hidden behind a list of things God has already done in establishing His covenant and has promised in His covenant? How often is the sign of the covenant so strongly accentuated that at least the impression is created that those who are baptized just need to realize what



they already have or are almost where they need to be spiritually? Rebirth then seems only necessary for pagans, who were born outside the covenant and without God. Aren't covenant children already children of God? Let us encourage them to remain children of God and live as such. We don't need to teach them they must be born again, do we?

When we do not hear about the need of the new birth, we are being reassured on false grounds. What a fearful thought that, through silence about the new birth, people will think they can enter the kingdom one day as good Christians only to hear the Lord Jesus say to them: "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:23). Through this silence, people are kept from Christ and from faith in Him alone. If the covenant and baptism save me (no, no one dares to preach it so bluntly, but silence about depravity and the new birth gives people this impression), then I don't have to worry about being saved. In this way injustice is done to the gracious character of salvation.

The question can remain: why are our depravity and our need for regeneration ignored? Such ignorance goes together with a softening of the preaching of God's Law.


God's Law

Often little attention is given to God's holy law, at least in its uncovering function as the source of the knowledge of our misery, as we confess in Lord's Day 2 of the Heidelberg Catechism. As Paul shows autobiographically in Romans 7, God the Holy Spirit uses His law to convict of sin. Then that person becomes aware that he has transgressed that law, which is holy, just, and good. He has done what was forbidden and failed to do what was commanded. Such sin shows he is a guilty sinner, under God's just judgment and wrath.

If the law has this uncovering, sin-discovering function, then the preaching must be a means through which it functions this way. Must we not be unmasked as sinners? Do we not need to come to realize that we are lost and cannot save ourselves? How else will we ever come to value the salvation that is in Christ?


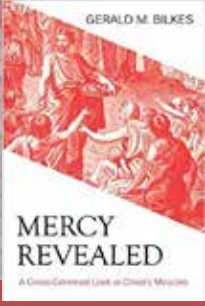

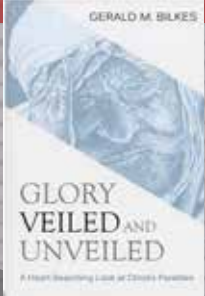
No doubt, you have heard the statement that we only really learn to know our sin at Calvary. What is meant is that only by seeing what the Saviour suffered and bore on the cross do we really see what we are sinners. I will not deny that the Gospel of Christ's suffering reveals to us the depths of our sin because they show we sin against a God of love who sent His Son to save from sin.

But why did the Lord Jesus have to suffer so much? Why was God coming to Him with His wrath? Does Golgotha not also teach us God's law? God's law is violated and broken and must be upheld. This is what God does when He causes His Son to endure His judgment. In Christ, God visits the transgressions against the law committed by His people. The cross on Calvary is surely the gracious message of the Gospel. But that cross proclaims no less the severity of the law, which demands satisfac-



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PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

tion. Therefore, to say one comes to know his sin by the cross and not by the law does not hold water. There is no contradiction between the law as we hear it proclaimed on Mount Sinai and the law as we see it enforced on Mount Calvary.

Scripture remains clear that through the law is the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20). This is both initially and in an ongoing way. As we confess in Lord's Day 44, God's law must be sharply preached that "that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavour and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in a life to come."

Too often the law is withheld from people and not wielded as a sword, but waved as a flag to encourage them to go in a certain direction. As a result, the sense of sin fades, faith in Christ Jesus becomes superficial, and sanctification becomes little more than moralism.

God's Holiness

Inseparable from the foregoing is a failure to do justice to God's holiness. God is so holy the angels cover themselves (Isa. 6) and so brilliant that none can see him and live (Ex. 33:20). This God is a consuming fire (Deut. 4:24, Heb. 12:29). This perfection of God is easily relegated to the background. As a result, preaching conveys a distorted view of God, contrary to His self-revelation in Scripture.

Ignoring His holiness, God is presented as a loving Father who will always take care of His children. He understands their weaknesses and does not get upset about their faults. They may always share in His love. The whole focus is on God's love, goodness, patience, and mercy.

Most certainly, God is love. God is full of grace and mercy. How thankful we may be that Lord is great in mercy, and sinners are received by Him. These are precious gospel truths, which we may proclaim and hear proclaimed with great gratitude. But we should not think that that this is all God is. Scripture proclaims His other perfections as well, including His holiness, justice, and severity. Scriptural preaching must bring these out as well, else the preaching fosters a different view from how God desired to make Himself known. Our "image of God" then becomes a self-made image, which is as much a sin against the second commandment of God's law as the sin Israel committed when they danced around the golden calf.

Some have said that the view of God as a holy God of wrath against sin is an Old Testament view, but now with the coming of Christ, He is set forth as a loving, reconciled God, full of grace and truth. This claim is not biblical. Do we not read in the conclusion of Hebrews 12, that our God is a consuming fire? Is the last book of the Bible not full of His holy glory and righteous

wrath? Does it not even reveal the “wrath of the Lamb” (Rev. 6:16; 14:10)?

The preaching of the Word must present God as He makes Himself known in His Word. How else will we ever know Him rightly? If certain aspects of the being of God are concealed, how will He really be known?

God’s Judgment

If God is holy and righteous, then He must punish sin. God’s Word is so clear that God is a God of judgment (see also Lord’s Day 4 of the Heidelberg Catechism). God in Christ will condemn the guilty and set free those who are hid in Christ. Christ himself speaks of the separation of the good fish and bad fish, the sheep and goats, the wheat and tares, the heirs and hypocrites. This separation will result in eternal woe or eternal bliss. That final judgment makes our present life so serious.

This seriousness should resound in the preaching. God’s Word, if preached rightly, already places us before that judgment. The Word judges us, either condemning or acquitting us. Christ entrusts the keys of the kingdom to His office-bearers to open and shut, proclaiming pardon to believers and judgment to unbelievers (Matt. 16:19; John 20:23). Therefore, faithful preaching must be discriminating. If the Bible speaks of both wise and foolish virgins, wise and foolish builders, and fruitful and unfruitful hearers, then no preacher is entitled to pretend that his audience consists of only wise men and fruitful soil. If he does, he removes the seriousness of God’s judgment from his message and fails to exercise the key entrusted to him. God commissions him to tell the righteous that it shall be well with him and to tell the wicked that it shall go ill with him, unless he repents (Isa. 3:10-11).

Preaching God’s Word has an eternal dimension. The congregation should feel that through the preaching we are placed before God’s face and the reality of the final day of judgment. All decisive then is that question: How will you appear righteous before God? The preaching must present the two possibilities in all clarity: eternal well and eternal woe.

The question is whether this dimension characterizes preaching or falls short through silence. This silence conceals the seriousness of eternity from people.

Perhaps, having read what has been written so far in this series of articles, some are wondering: Is there not also another side? Is there not also an entirely different kind of preaching that may emphasize all these things and yet ignore important things that must be said in the preaching? There certainly is, and we will address that as well -- next time. ①

Rev. P. den Butter is an emeritus pastor in our sister churches in the Netherlands. He served the Free Reformed churches of Toronto (1975-1978) and Hamilton (1978-1982). This series is a condensed version of articles published as “Luisteren naar wat niet gezegd wordt” in Bewaar het Pand (2002).

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- meaningful day and evening programs
- respite or vacation care
- residential care

Margaret Heemskerk, mheemskerk.peacehaven@gmail.com or 519.770.8816

Contact your deacon
or Peace Haven
Director, (SEE BELOW)



Rehoboth CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Invites applications for:

COPETOWN,
ONTARIO

- Junior Kindergarten teacher (part-time, two days a week)**
- Educational Assistants (full-time and part-time options available)**
- Secondary Supply Teachers**

We are looking for qualified individuals with a vision for Christian education to join our committed, vibrant community of learners. Rehoboth Christian School is a K-12 parent-run school serving the families of four local Free Reformed Churches and beyond. Located in a beautiful rural setting between Hamilton and Brantford, Rehoboth has been blessed with a strongly supportive community, and since our inception in 1978, has grown to an enrollment of 310 students. Please send a cover letter, resume, statement of faith, and references, including a pastoral reference (teacher applicants are also asked to include a philosophy of education), to the attention of:

Adam Kloostera, Principal 198 Inksetter Road P.O. Box 70, Copetown, ON
L0R 1J0 • t. 905.627.5977 • e. principal@rehoboth.on.ca
• w. www.rehoboth.on.ca

ICRC MEETING: Windhoek, Namibia

DR. G. R. PROCEE AND REV. E. C. MOERDYK



In October 2022, our churches sent two delegates to be present at the 10th meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). These conferences are held once every 4 years and are hosted in various locations. This 10th conference was held in Windhoek, Namibia. The delegates from the FRCNA were pastors Eric Moerdyk and Gerald Procee.

The ICRC is an international organization that functions as a platform where delegates of Reformed churches throughout the world meet each other and facilitate cooperation where possible. This platform focuses on fostering theological education, supporting churches in developing countries, and assisting each other with specific challenges facing Reformed churches in general.

Member churches include the Heritage Reformed Congregations, the United Reformed Churches of North America, the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands, and federations from various African countries as well as Australia, New Zealand, and Europe, as well as India and the Far East.

At this 10th conference, three lectures were held, each followed up by a panel discussion.

The first lecture was by Prof. Dr. Mohan Chacko from Bangalore, North India on “Seminaries: A Centre for Theological Education, Ministry Training or Spiritual Development.” His thesis was that overall seminary education required more integration of practi-

cal skills development in theological instruction. He highlighted the need for academic formation, ministerial formation, spiritual formation, and the necessary integration of these three aspects of training.

The second lecture was by Rev. Dr. Douw Breed of the GKSA South Africa on “Models or Alternate Strategies for Ministry Training.” His thesis zeroed in on accreditation. Some argue that the ICRC should prepare to give our own version of accreditation for when governments no longer recognize faithful Christians. Graduation without accreditation triggers government action. In many developing nations, pastors are having to work at least part time because their congregations cannot afford to pay them.

The third lecture was by Prof. Dr. Henk van den Belt from the Netherlands on “The Authority of the Scriptures in Diverse Situations and Ethical Contexts.” His lecture sought to uphold the authority of Scripture, realizing that cultural demands may require different applications.

Reports were submitted from various subcommittees, such as Theological Education and Publications. One gripping report was from the Africa regional conference committee. A Nigerian delegate spoke on the divide between Muslims and Christians. The more extreme wings of Islam shy away from any engagement, and the Fulani herders in Nigeria are mostly Muslim and very



extreme. They move south to feed their animals and enter people's farms. They consider their animals to have the same rights as humans to eat crops etc. They are armed and extremely violent against Christians.

Suspension of the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt

Another item was the suspension of the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt (GKNv) of The Netherlands from ICRC membership due to their adoption of women in office. The background to this view within the GKNv is their implicit adoption of a new hermeneutic. The appeal of the GKNv, through the moderator of their synod, Dr. Melle Oosterhuis, was that "we all believe in Sola Scriptura and Christ, so how can we be cut off from the ICRC, which we were involved in founding?" However, these delegates redefined sola scriptura as saying that individual texts should not be used in a Biblicistic way concerning women in office, but that we should follow "the big picture story line" of the Bible. However, this view of Scripture (separating the gospel of Christ from individual texts that are considered discardable) behind the new hermeneutic will inevitably lead to other compromises on the Word of God in which our cultural context becomes a filter to dismiss certain truths as inconvenient or repugnant to our culture. Bringing individual texts to bear on the discussion is not biblicism but faithfulness. His definition of sola scriptura demonstrates we no longer agree on sola scriptura, the most important one-line summary of the Reformed faith.

The FRC delegates voted in favour of this painful necessary step; in fact, the decision of all 28 denominations was unanimous. The chairman concluded: "We are not removing you; you have removed yourself."

Visit to Mission Work in Sanveld, Namibia

On Saturday, October 15, we were invited to visit the Reformed Church of Sanveld. This church is situated about 250 km east of Windhoek, among the San-people, also known as the Bushmen. The tour took us through a beautiful part of Namibia's rural areas, through the towns of Gobabis and Drimiopsis. We saw the

church's nursery school and other projects, as well as one of the farms where people gather for church each Sunday.


It has been almost eight years since Rev. Maferika Jeremia Moletsane, a Bantu minister, has begun working among the San people, which is remarkable given the tension between these two people groups. He was convicted of the Lord to start doing mission work among the San people at Sanveld.

This mission work has challenges as 90% of their members are unemployed while 10% works at the farms. The church does not have enough funds of its own to look after the minister and his family. This makes it difficult for the minister to continue with his work and to look after the projects inside the church and in the community as efficiently as he would like.

Conclusions

It was very encouraging and instructive to meet other Reformed Christians from all over the world and to strengthen one another in the faith. Your delegates are grateful for the opportunity to have been present at this conference. ①





**I HAVE PLANTED,
APOLLOS WATERED;
BUT GOD GAVE
THE INCREASE.**

I CORINTHIANS 3:6