

The background features a stylized orange illustration. A sword is positioned diagonally from the top left towards the center. A shield is positioned in the lower left, partially overlapping the sword's hilt. The shield is decorated with several circular patterns. The overall style is minimalist and graphic.

SWORD AND SHIELD

A REFORMED MONTHLY MAGAZINE

*Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee,
O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help,
and who is the sword of thy excellency!
and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee;
and thou shalt tread upon their high places.*

Deuteronomy 33:29

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THE SPIRIT OF THE EXALTED LORD

Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. — Acts 2:33

Pentecost! The word *Pentecost* means *fifty* and refers to fifty days. The word comes from the Old Testament feast of weeks or feast of Pentecost or feast of harvest. It was the feast that was celebrated fifty days after passover.

Pentecost was one of the three great feasts to which every male Israelite was required to come. It was a feast in which the Israelites enjoyed the beginning, or even the principle, of their harvests that they had gathered as the fruits of the passover lamb. Pentecost was the beginning of the harvest that would be fulfilled in the feast of tabernacles and the enjoyment of perfection.

In the feast of Pentecost, the Israelites looked forward to the coming of the Spirit in all his fullness as the Spirit of the risen and exalted Jesus Christ. Fifty days after Christ arose from the dead, he returned in the Pentecost Spirit. Pentecost came and was fulfilled on that day in the upper room.

Yet Pentecost is not a mere day. Pentecost is a description of the entire New Testament dispensation. We can say that we live in the dispensation of the Spirit poured out. That is really the dispensation of the whole fulfillment of the promise of God. He promised, and now he gives the Spirit in rich and full measure.

We do not remember Pentecost as a mere event in the past, but we remember that event as an ongoing reality and as that event calls us to live Pentecost every day. Pentecost is the reality of our salvation every day and especially every Lord's day. The living and exalted Lord Jesus Christ, who poured out his Spirit, also constantly and continuously pours out his Spirit and sheds abroad in our hearts his Spirit, so that we live and enjoy life in the Spirit every day. We live in the new covenant of the Spirit of the exalted Lord.

The day of the Lord!

You cannot explain Pentecost apart from an understanding of the reality of the day of the Lord. Pentecost says that the day of the Lord is at hand. Pentecost declares that the end has come, that the Lord is at hand, that the judgment of all men is near, that it is the last hour, that

the night is far spent, that the day is at hand, and that the restoration of all things is around the corner. The day of the Lord will be a great and terrible day full of signs and wonders. Think of the biggest storm you have ever witnessed. The day of the Lord will be that on a grand and universal scale when all things shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with a fervent heat.

At Pentecost Peter preached the day of the Lord.

When the multitudes were gathered together, the people were all amazed. Pentecost was an amazing event because they all heard the one hundred and twenty believers speaking in foreign languages the wonderful things of God.

Magnalia Dei!

The miracle was in the speaking. Men who did not know a language spoke that language instantly and with intelligence. And the content was the divine and heavenly things of the Spirit uttered so that the people understood those words. And being amazed, they were in doubt and wondered what that meant. That was their confused, perplexed, and even disturbed reaction to Pentecost.

The wonderful works of God always throw man into confusion. The works of God are heavenly, spiritual, miraculous deeds of God, the breaking of the perfect and the eternal into this sin-cursed and groaning creation. The wonderworks of God startle and amaze as much as if a bright light would suddenly penetrate a cave of those who had sat in darkness for thousands of years. So all men are darkness. And the light shines in darkness, but the darkness comprehends it not. At Pentecost also the bright light of the heavenly and eternal, the perfection of God's covenant in the new heaven and the new earth, the coming of the kingdom of God, burst into the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.

The darkness was ready with a convenient explanation in order to allow for an easy dismissal of the light. In the face of yet another of the wonderful works of God, the people sneered and said that those men were drunk and full of new wine. That was a very convenient, self-serving, and safe explanation of Pentecost. That was unbelieving man's explanation of Pentecost. Then he could stay

untouched by the word of God in his life and in his sin.

If those men were drunk and full of new wine, it meant that nothing had changed for the Jews of that day. It meant that the disturbance was only the meanderings of some distraught and overwrought disciples, who had drowned their sorrows in the new wine of the Pentecost harvest. Those things could not only be gawked at and ridiculed but also dismissed without any danger. It meant that the temple stayed. It meant that the veil—which God had torn and which the Jews had no doubt repaired—stayed. It meant that the altar and the table of showbread stayed. The altar of incense and the laver likewise stayed. The priesthood and the lambs, goats, oxen, and their blood stayed. Then Annas and Caiaphas and their whole regime stayed as high priests who represented God. It meant that their wicked condemnation of Jesus of Nazareth by majority vote stayed as well. Then according to the church of that day, Christ was in fact a wicked sinner who had perished justly for his sins. And it meant that all the reports of Christ's resurrection that the Jews had heard were mere fables and that Christ was still safely embalmed in some unknown and nondescript tomb as a dead Christ. Then the law was the way of salvation, just as the Jews had always taught. Salvation too remained the work of man, as the Pharisees taught; or according to the Sadducees' teachings, salvation was a vain illusion. And the axe that God had laid against the tree of Israel was withdrawn, and all was well with the people's souls. Then their lives and their houses, the houses of scorners and mockers and unbelievers, were safe from destruction. Then the calls to repent, to be baptized, and to believe were all nothing.

Those men were full of new wine. Nothing had changed!

Such is the reaction of man always to God's wonders.

That is how the Jews reacted to John when in the preaching of the gospel John came uncomfortably close to them, spoke uncomfortable things to them, and demanded of them that they repent and believe on the Lamb of God. John did not drink wine, as they well knew, so they said that John had a devil. But the effect was the same. The Jews dismissed John as no prophet, his word as man's word, his baptism as not of God. Thus John was neither of God nor spoke for God. The Jews were safe from destruction.

They did the same to our Lord during his earthly ministry. He came eating and drinking because he was not afraid of the world. Jesus would overcome the world, and so he ate and drank. When the bridegroom came, the Jews said that he was a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. He was from Nazareth, where nothing good happened and from which nothing good came. Very wickedly—blaspheming the Spirit—they said that Jesus cast out devils by the prince of devils, Beelzebub. They said that Jesus was a Sabbath-breaker,

a temple-destroyer, and a blasphemer who made himself the Son of God. Away with the man! Crucify him! And when confronted with the irrefutable testimony of the terrified guards, the Jews secured with their money the lie that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus while the keepers slept.

Like children in the marketplace, the Jews always had an excuse for why they would not hear God's word and do it.

And man still does so to this day.

Man has a word about Pentecost because Pentecost is not a mere event that happened that one time, but when Pentecost comes, the last days have come. Pentecost ushered in the New Testament. Pentecost is the ongoing reality of the New Testament. We live and eat and enjoy Pentecost because wherever the wonderful things of God are heard, wherever Christ crucified is preached, wherever the truth comes, wherever the Spirit is operating and bestowing Christ and his salvation, there is Pentecost, and there too man has a word about it. When the wonderful things of God are spoken, then man says that there is something wrong with them. Men say that today just like they said it then so that they can go on unchanged and unrepentant in their lives. Drunken babble! There is something wrong with the preacher. Let us pass on. We need not be exhorted. Do not call us to faith and to repentance. Do not speak the word to us. We are safe as we are. Our houses—the houses of mockers and drunkards—are safe from destruction.

How convenient. How easy to dismiss the wonders of God. Nothing has changed!

But this—this wonder of Pentecost—cannot be explained away by unbelieving man!

That speaking at Pentecost was not the babble of drunkards. As John did not have a devil and as Jesus was not a glutton, so the speaking at Pentecost was not the babble of drunkards.

That is what the prophet Joel spoke about: the sign, the wonder, the great work that God would work before the day of the Lord comes. Pentecost was a sign that the day of the Lord is at hand.

What is the day of the Lord?

The day of the Lord is a terrible storm that will break on the world, burn the world with fire, shake the world to its foundations, and blast the world with a terrible wind. In that day sinners will tremble and quake. It will be a great and terrible day. It will be a day of destruction and annihilation.

The day came once before in the world when the inhabitants were all eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage, a world and church world smug in their unrighteousness, comfortable in their wickedness, and sure in their persecution and mockery of the

church. In a moment the day of the Lord came as a flood on them and destroyed the world that then was.

Later the day of the Lord came upon a hardened Egypt when the Lord, who is God alone, swept through Egypt as an avenging angel. He strode through Egypt's towns and marched through its villages. Where there was no blood on the doorposts and lintels, the angel entered those homes and barns and killed all the firstborn of Egypt, both man and beast. And so a great cry went up throughout all Egypt.

The day of the Lord as it appears in the Old Testament is the day of Jehovah. Jehovah is the I AM THAT I AM, the unchanging, sovereign, and omnipotent God. The day of the Lord, then, is the day when God, who is God alone, will declare himself before the whole world to be God alone, to show forth his righteousness and the righteousness of all his mighty acts. In that day Jehovah God alone will be exalted. The day will come as destruction from the Almighty. That day will be a scene of carnage, a day of vengeance and fierce wrath, a day when God will cut off eating and drinking and joy and gladness—the day when God will arise and by his might put all his enemies to flight in shame and consternation. It will be a day of the revelation of Jehovah for judgment, when the heaven and earth shall pass away, the very elements shall melt with a fervent heat, the earth and all its works shall be burned up, and all men shall be brought into judgment. It will be a day when Jehovah shall utter the words, “Depart from me, ye wicked evildoers.”

When, oh, when is that day?

That day will come on the world at the end of this age. That day comes on every man at the moment of death, when God tears down a man's whole earthly existence. God cuts down the tree, and the tree lies where it falls. That day comes especially when God comes to visit his people in the gospel. Every sermon is in a sense the day of the Lord. Then every man is placed before the Lord in his heart and conscience.

And who shall abide the coming of the day of the Lord? All who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Such is the promise of the gospel in light of that day and in light of God and the judgment of God in that day. All who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Only those who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. All those who despise the Lord and who do not call on him shall not be saved but will be damned in that day.

Before that day God will show wonders in heaven and signs in the earth. It will be a day of destruction; a day of blood, fire, and vapor of smoke, when the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon into blood before that great and notable day of the Lord come.

Such was Pentecost also. It was the declaration that the day of the Lord is nigh.

Who is that Lord upon whom you must call for salvation?

Jesus. That is what Peter preached. He preached Jesus as the Lord. Let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, Lord and Christ.

This Jesus!

This Jesus, who was born of Mary. This Jesus, who was laid in a manger. This Jesus, who walked among the Jews, and whom they heard and saw and their hands handled. This Jesus, whom they heard speak, whose voice made the lame walk, whose voice raised the dead, whose voice stilled the waves of the sea, and whose voice they refused. This Jesus, upon whom they laid wicked hands and whom with those wicked hands they crucified.

This Jesus, God raised up. A living Lord! A living Lord according to the work of God. A living Lord by the resurrection of God. A resurrected Lord of whom they all were witnesses. Oh, they did not witness the resurrection. That was hid in the tomb. They witnessed the resurrected Lord. They saw that he had been changed; that he possessed the glorious body of the resurrection; that he was alive but not with the life of this earth, but he possessed immortality and life and all authority in heaven and on earth; and that he enlightened their dim hearts and minds, so that they suddenly understood what he had said and remembered the words that he had spoken to them when he was yet with them. And a resurrection, therefore, that declares about him and his cross that he is the righteousness of God, whose righteousness when it becomes ours is more than sufficient to acquit us of all our sins. A resurrection in which the long-promised kingdom of God had come.

This Jesus, *therefore*, who was exalted by the right hand of the Father and received the promise of the Spirit has shed this forth. Therefore! *Therefore*, he shed this forth! What that means is that Pentecost was the conclusion, the goal, the *therefore*, of all that went before it: the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection, the ascension in which Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God and in which Jesus received the promise of the Spirit. It was all for Pentecost that Jesus might come and that his people might have the Spirit.

In Pentecost Jesus declared himself to be the Lord upon whom you must call to be saved in the day of the Lord. He declared himself to be the Lord who was set down on the right hand of the majesty on high and who was about to reveal himself in the day of the Lord.

Jesus declared himself to be Lord in the absolute sense. He declared himself to be the God of our salvation. And he declared himself to be Lord in the sense of the man to whom God gave all authority in heaven and on earth and who rules over all things until he will make all his enemies his footstool. Jesus declared himself to be the one who would bring that day of the Lord and who would be revealed in that day as the Lord to the glory of God. In Pentecost Jesus declared himself to be the Christ who

alone saves in that day. He alone has salvation because he alone has the Spirit of grace and reconciliation, the Spirit of promise. When Jesus Christ was by the right hand of God exalted, Jesus received the promise of the Spirit. He received the Spirit from God triune to be the Spirit of Jesus, the man whom God had exalted. The Spirit became Jesus' Spirit, the Spirit of the risen and exalted Lord. And by the Spirit, Jesus Christ himself comes to us to save.

Jesus, this Jesus, God raised up, exalted, and gave the promise of the Spirit.

At Pentecost the Lord Jesus Christ shed forth his Spirit.

That is what the people saw and heard. They saw and heard the Spirit of the risen and exalted Lord.

Understand what Peter preached to the people. He said that Jesus shed forth the Spirit, which the people saw and heard. So the text says that they saw and heard the Spirit. Imagine, for example, a tornado has come through your neighborhood, and someone points to downed trees and demolished houses and reminds you of the terrible noise of the mighty rushing wind and says to you, "God sent a tornado, which you saw and heard." So Peter said that they saw and heard the Spirit. They did not hear and see some strange phenomenon that Peter then linked to the Spirit and then to Christ. But Peter preached to them that they saw and heard the Spirit. He became visible and audible to them.

Peter was referring to those signs and wonders that God worked before their eyes. Peter was speaking of the sound as of the mighty rushing wind, which must have been heard not only in the room but also more widely. And Peter was speaking of those cloven tongues of fire, which must have remained on the one hundred and twenty believers as they came into the temple. And Peter was especially referring to the preaching of the one hundred and twenty believers in different languages, in which every one heard the wonderful things of God spoken in his native tongue. And Peter said that they heard not merely a wind or saw fire or witnessed the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but they saw and heard the Spirit. The Spirit made himself known; and in making himself known, he directed the people's attention to Jesus Christ the Lord. The Spirit made himself known and became visible and audible in those signs. Those signs were visible seals of the promise of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

They saw and heard and thus were witnesses of the pouring out of the Holy Ghost. The event of Pentecost was not a mere collection of signs; Pentecost was not a mere event to which signs and wonders were attached, but Pentecost was the Spirit, and the Spirit was Pentecost. He created it and made it happen. And the Spirit was made visible and audible in that event. The one whom the people saw and heard was the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost is God. The Holy Ghost is the third person of the holy Trinity. He is not a mere power of God or an

effulgence of God, but the Spirit is God himself—truly God, of the same essence as the Father and the Son, who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.

Yet the Spirit poured out is the Spirit as Jesus, the man, received the Spirit of the triune God, his Father. At the ascension of Jesus Christ, the man, God triune gave to Jesus, the man, the Holy Spirit. This is a great miracle and a great mystery. The Holy Ghost became the Spirit of Christ, so that Christ controls the Spirit and sends him out. The Holy Ghost became very really and permanently Christ's Spirit.

The Spirit testifies of Christ. The Spirit points not at himself but at Christ. The Spirit declares Christ, the Lord. The Spirit works on behalf of Christ. So whenever and wherever the Lord Jesus Christ pours out his Spirit, the Spirit, and thus Christ, Christ will be both audible and visible. Then men and women will see what cannot be seen and hear what cannot be heard and will perceive what never entered into the heart of man to conceive.

And what becomes audible and visible? What does Jesus Christ work when he sends his Spirit? The promise, I say. For that is the name of the Pentecost Spirit. The Spirit of promise. This means the Spirit, who is the promise. Where the Spirit is and where the Spirit works, there is the promise, for the Spirit is the promise—the holy oath of God to save his people from their sins and to bring them to heavenly glory. Or, to put it another way, the promise of God is to save his people in the day of the Lord!

In one sense the promise is one. The promise is the same from the beginning of time to the end of time. The promise is the one word of the Lord concerning salvation by grace alone as God's work alone. And yet the promise is so rich. It is the promise that we will be made partakers of Christ and of all his riches and his gifts, the promise that God will wash us from our sins, save us from those sins, and bring us to glory. It is the promise of righteousness, holiness, and eternal life. It is the promise that God will ever be our gracious God and Father. It is the promise that God has fully accomplished our salvation in Jesus Christ and the promise that God will surely make us partakers of that salvation.

The promise is the oath of God to be a God unto us. The promise brings the covenant of God, which is God's friendship and fellowship and life everlasting. So the promise of God is that he will never leave or forsake his people; he will wash them from their sins, forgiving them and cleansing them from the pollution and dominion of sin, and he will at last present them without spot or wrinkle in the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

The Spirit is that promise. To receive him and to have him is to have all that God promises, for the Spirit brings Christ and all Christ's riches and gifts, and the Spirit works salvation in accordance with the promise of God.

And the Spirit is seen and heard yet today. Oh, he

becomes as really visible and audible as he did at Pentecost. Wherever Christ is preached in truth and wherever that preaching of Christ transforms men and women, there the risen, exalted, and anointed Christ pours out his Spirit. This is the Spirit whom you see and hear. Jesus brings salvation in the gift of the Spirit. Salvation in the coming of the day of the Lord.

And Christ Jesus has this Spirit. And Christ Jesus went up in order to shed forth this Spirit.

Shed him forth!

Not a trickle or a drop but an abundance of the Spirit. An abundance of the Spirit to comfort us with Christ. An abundance of the Spirit to cover our guilt with Christ's righteousness, to overcome sin's terrible dominion, and to cleanse us from sin's terrible pollutions. An abundance of the Spirit to bless us with the fullness of joy, to warm us and to fill us with Christ crucified, and to comfort us with the perfection of our salvation in Christ. It is the fullness of the new covenant come, a fullness that the Spirit pours out in his church, a fullness that the Spirit gives to all who call on him. To all who repent and to all who are baptized in

his name and believe his promise. They shall receive the gift of the Spirit; of his fullness they will receive grace for grace.

To whom is the promise? To you and to your children and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. Never is the promise in the power of man. The Spirit is not in the power of man. But the Spirit sovereignly accomplishes according to his own sovereign and eternal choice that those whom God has appointed to eternal life he also calls. He calls them first, they call on him, and he saves them!

Understand, then, that Jesus Christ alone is the Lord upon whom you must call. In him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In him alone are righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Pentecost declares that the day of the Lord is at hand, the day that will burn hot as an oven and in which sinners will be consumed. Jesus Christ is the only one who has salvation. And he alone saves in the day of the Lord.

Repent! Believe! Call on him! All who do will be saved. All who do not will without a doubt perish everlastingly.

—NJL

FROM THE EDITOR

Spring is underway, summer is fast approaching, and another issue of *Sword and Shield* has found its way into your hands. This issue marks the end of the fourth volume year of *Sword and Shield* and is another witness to the faithfulness of Christ to this cause of publishing the truth. The magazine began in June 2020, and behold what God has wrought! What wonders he has worked! And our hearts rejoice and are glad. Christ has given to *Sword and Shield* its place in the world, and Christ advances his cause with every issue. It is amazing to read in the previous issues and to see how the lie has progressed. The things that are being preached and written now in the Protestant Reformed Churches are shocking in their bold denials and displacements of Jesus Christ. And *Sword and Shield* has played its part in that ongoing controversy and, the Lord willing, plans to continue to do so.

In this issue you will find our regular writers. Reverend Ophoff begins an exchange in *Understanding the Times* in the form of fictional letters in the mode of C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters*. Reverend Bomers finishes his informative series on what happened in Zion Reformed Protestant Church. What happened in short was that those who did not love the truth were formed into a church; and when the truth came to them, they forsook it and will be scattered to the ecclesiastical winds. The prophet said that in reformation there is always a rotten element mixed

with God's elect remnant (Isa. 6:13), and this has certainly proved true in the reformation of 2021. It had been better for those who forsook the truth that they had never begun than having begun to turn back. Having begun, they showed that they understood the issues; and having turned back, they show that they did not love the truth that was at stake and that was recovered in the reformation.

Also in this issue, Mr. Garrett Varner continues his series on the beatitudes of our Lord. Mr. Lee Wiltjer Jr. and Mr. Andy Birkett co-author a brief article to accompany the publication of the Act of Separation and Reformation that they wrote against the wicked actions of the consistory of Crete Protestant Reformed Church to remove Christ from her pulpit and to kill Christ in her assembly. The consistory betrayed Christ, having first kissed him. May the Lord judge. Mr. Elijah Roberts fills this month's *Running Footmen* rubric with an article titled "The Antithesis in the Reformed Creeds," a very necessary subject in this age of unrighteous toleration. Included are two letters: an informative letter from the board of Reformed Believers Publishing and another from the committee that is planning the Reformed Protestant family conference to be held in August 2024. The event promises to be an edifying time of fellowship in the truth.

May the Lord bless the writing in this issue to your hearts and through it also bring down the lie.

—NJL

NECESSARY REFORMATION

Was Reformation Necessary?

In this issue is printed the Act of Separation and Reformation written by Andy Birkett and Lee Wiltjer Jr., who at the time were officebearers of Crete Protestant Reformed Church. Included with the document is printed a short introduction explaining the schism in Crete Protestant Reformed Church that gave rise to the Act of Separation and Reformation. That Act was signed by individuals and families on May 5, 2021; and by the signing of the Act, Second Reformed Protestant Church was formed. Shortly thereafter First Reformed Protestant Church—which had her own Act of Separation in January 2021—and Second signed an Act of Federation that formed the Reformed Protestant denomination.

Much has happened since then in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), especially the development of her false doctrine of conditional covenant experience by the preaching and writing of her ministers and professors. The chasm between the two denominations has widened significantly in only three years. Much has also happened in the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). Many who joined these churches at first have since left the denomination for one reason or another. They have turned back over against the serious warning of scripture in Hebrews 10:38–39:

38. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.
39. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

And their drawing back has made plain what the apostle said in 1 John 2:18–20:

18. Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.
19. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out,

that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

20. But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

The troubles that have come on us, the defections from the cause, the relentless slander and hatred, and the losses that have attended our way may make some ask, “Was reformation necessary?” Others may look at our struggles and all the defections as proof that the Lord is against us and that our cause is not righteous and that it is doomed to failure. Some have prophesied as much.

Was the reformation of 2021 that gave rise to the Reformed Protestant Churches necessary?

Was reformation necessary from the viewpoint of the counsel of God, which is the divine necessity for all things? We can say of good and evil, of reformation and schism, that they are all included in the counsel of God. For the apostle says in 1 Corinthians 11:18–19 that division must come:

18. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.
19. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

The word “heresies” is the translation of the word meaning *schisms*. The meaning of the apostle is that there are divisions in the church caused by heresies. And about those schisms and divisions, the apostle says that they must come. They must come according to the sovereign purpose and the sovereign working of God and Christ, the Lord of the church. For in those schisms—which God hates and which every believer and true minister hates—God has a good purpose. His purpose is that his elect people be made manifest and approved through the controversy over those heresies. God’s purpose is also that many be made manifest as hypocrites in the controversy over the truth by their failures to cleave to that truth and to defend that truth and finally by their attacks on the truth and their labeling those who hold to the truth as evil, careless and profane, antinomian, schismatic, mean-spirited, and wicked. From this viewpoint

the evaluation of the events of 2021 and the subsequent history of the RPC is easy: they happened because God willed them. They were necessary from that viewpoint.

But such a statement does not make a judgment on the righteousness or unrighteousness of the cause represented either by the PRC or by the RPC. Were all those events and the subsequent history necessary for the defense of the truth?

On the side of the PRC in the controversy, did she stand for the truth, and does the denomination represent the truth today? Was she sharpened in the truth, so that now the truth in her midst is at a higher state of development? Controversy always does that for the true church of Christ, for we can do nothing against the truth; and the truth, marching on unharmed through controversy, brings the true church along to know and to experience that truth in a clearer and sharper way. For the PRC to claim the truth in the controversy, she must also claim that through the controversy she now has a deeper and better understanding of the truth. She must also answer the question, is the PRC better as a denomination of churches because a rotten and incurable element—an ecclesiastical cancer of rebellion and anti-nomianism—has been excised from the denomination? And she must confess that all the writing and preaching and all the protests and appeals, which finally led to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches, were evil works, schismatic, and the promotion of a doctrine that was threatening to the existence of the truth in the PRC. Therefore, for the PRC—if these things be true—the events and separation were absolutely necessary for the very preservation of the truth in the denomination and for the advancement and development of that truth beyond the advances that had been made in 1924 and 1953.

On the part of the RPC, was the separation a matter of doctrine, and was the separation thus justified because the truth could no longer be heard in the PRC and because the PRC was showing herself to be an enemy of that truth? Some challenge whether the separation was even about doctrine. Was the separation about doctrine? Much has been written from then until now, and the answer stands out more clearly than ever. Not only was the separation about doctrine, but the separation was also about the scriptural and creedal doctrines of justification by faith alone, the unconditional covenant, the cross, election, and the very doctrine of God himself. For the RPC—if these things be truth—the separation was absolutely necessary for the preservation of the truth,

for a deeper understanding of the truth, and even for an opportunity to correct language that everyone simply took for granted, but language that disreputable men, who were intent on smuggling in Arminianism, used as a cover for their heresy.

Reformation or Schism?

In October 2021 I gave a speech in which I posed the question whether the events that gave rise to the Reformed Protestant Churches were reformation or schism.¹ Those events in particular were the appearance of *Sword and Shield* on the scene in the Protestant Reformed Churches and then the suspension of ministers and finally the signing of two Acts of Separation. In July 2021 Cornerstone Reformed Protestant Church signed its own Act of Separation. There were also speeches given around the country that precipitated the coming out of other groups and the formation of other Reformed Protestant churches as the months went along.

For years there had been censorship at the *Standard Bearer*. In the middle of the doctrinal controversy that was taking place in the PRC, the magazine's editors refused to take a lead by writing about the controversy, so the pages of the *Standard Bearer* remained silent about the doctrinal issue. The doctrinal issue in the controversy could not have been more serious. The doctrinal issue was the heart of the gospel, the truth of justification by faith alone. And the application of that doctrine was hardly any less serious—justification in the conscience and experience of the believer and thus the believer's peace with God in this life and in the final judgment.

A group of men, all supporters of the *Standard Bearer* and members of the Protestant Reformed Churches who took their memberships seriously—even their enemies cannot gainsay that—tried to make headway and to change the situation at the *Standard Bearer*. The men wrote a letter to the editors of the *Standard Bearer* and to the board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA), which owns the *Standard Bearer*. The men laid out their viewpoint of the serious state of affairs as they saw them unfolding at the magazine. The men requested, as was their right according to the constitution of the RFPA, a meeting to discuss those things as an association. After months of labor their request was lawlessly and unethically rejected by the RFPA on account of the political maneuverings of the editors of the *Standard Bearer*—Russ Dykstra, Barry Gritters, and Ken Koole. I write their names so they can rot on the pages of this magazine as enemies of the truth.

1 For a transcript of the speech, see Nathan J. Langerak, "Reformation, Not Schism," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 11 (December 15, 2021): 10–18.

Having been rebuffed, the concerned men pooled their resources and decided to begin a new publishing association, and thus Reformed Believers Publishing was born and *Sword and Shield* magazine was conceived. The first issue of the new magazine hit the mailboxes in the beginning of June 2020.

The appearance of the new organization and its magazine set off a firestorm in the PRC. Motions to have the magazine condemned were quickly passed by many Protestant Reformed consistories. In January 2021 Rev. Andy Lanning was deposed. In April 2021 I was suspended. And shortly thereafter the Reformed Protestant Churches were formed. The men who were members of the RFPA and their letter to its board, the formation of Reformed Believers Publishing, the printing and distribution of *Sword and Shield*, and finally the birth of a new Reformed denomination were all immediately condemned as schismatic without a trial and without evidence.

Thus was the question that I posed in my speech in October 2021: Were those events reformation or schism? I meant to apply that question to those in the RPC. Were we by our actions and writings and preaching guilty of schism? Or were those things the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for reformation?

I was serious when I posed that question, and it was not rhetorical. The question was intended to make plain that two and only two starkly different answers are possible when one evaluates the events of 2021, in the course of which the Reformed Protestant Churches were formed as a denomination. Those events were either reformation and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for the good of his truth and the good of his people; or those events were schism, the work of the devil, and thus evil was raised against the truth and against Christ, God, and the people of God.

For me it was not a question that took long to answer. I saw the unethical behavior, the lies, and the maneuverings of the editors of the *Standard Bearer* against myself personally. I was witness to their readiness to suppress the truth and to censor it so that the truth could not be heard. Men who act so unjustly cannot believe the truth and do not know the truth. When one leaves the truth, then he also leaves all ethics. I was witness to the hatred of the truth in the consistory room of Crete Protestant Reformed Church, and I saw that same loathing for the truth in other churches. When Rev. Kenneth Koole finally came out of the closet on the pages of the *Standard Bearer* and told the PRC that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do,”² it was only because the lie had already won in the PRC.

When opposition to that position of Reverend Koole was stymied and delayed with roadblocks and stipulations and finally banned from the pages of the *Standard Bearer*, that was because the Protestant Reformed ministers and professors agreed with Koole. All the people and decisions were in place to continue to develop the false doctrine for which they had condemned Rev. David Overway, but which they themselves taught in other and oftentimes more shocking words. The separation and the formation of a new denomination was reformation, not schism. The schism was perpetrated by the men who taught and defended the false doctrine of Reverend Overway and others.

A Reappraisal

Now it is time for a reappraisal of the question, reformation or schism? This editorial intends to do that.

The question is still asked in all seriousness, for it demands an answer. The question demands an answer as much as the question of Christ to his disciples demanded an answer: “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” (Matt. 16:13). No one can be confronted with Christ and with his truth and remain neutral. All men must in the end make their judgments. Those judgments may be very bold condemnations of the events as schism on the part of those who formed and joined the RPC, or those judgments can be communicated by remaining in the PRC. But the judgments are the same: the events were schism on the part of the RPC.

Neither is the question rhetorical. It is asked with a view to eliciting judgment. For the writer of this editorial, the answer is plain. The events that led to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches were reformation. The events were the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for the good of his truth and the good of his churches and also, in the sovereign purpose of God, to cut off many who will answer the question with the judgment that the events were schism.

Make no mistake, the judgment that one makes and the answer that one gives to the question are deadly serious. The question is of paramount importance. The answer one gives is of equal importance. If the events that led to the formation of a new denomination were reformation, then it was the Lord’s cause. All that transpired was the Lord’s work for the cause of reformation. It was the Lord’s work for the advancement of his covenant, his kingdom, and his church and for the preservation of his truth and in his love for his people. Then the Lord was in the vanguard, and the Lord was our rear guard. And in that reformation God worked in the same way in which

² Kenneth Koole, “What Must I Do?,” *Standard Bearer* 95, no. 1 (October 1, 2018): 7.

he had worked in all reformations throughout church history. And all the opponents of the reformation in 2021 will be found liars—if it be reformation.

As a reformation, the events were the Lord's work. Opposing the reformation, you oppose the Lord. Fighting the reformation, you fight the Lord. Slandering the reformation, you slander the Lord. Refusing to join the reformation, you refuse to help the Lord against the mighty, and you bring upon yourself the Lord's curse against the inhabitants of Meroz, who stayed within their walls while the men of Naphtali hazarded their lives in the Lord's battles (see Judges 5:23). Refusing to join the reformation—you retain your comfortable life, your friends and your family, your job, and your reputation—then you bring upon all of those things God's judgment, and you threaten your own soul with damnation—if it be reformation. And cursing those who have taken the Lord's side, you will find yourself in the uncomfortable position on the judgment day of having to explain to the Lord—an impossible task—why when he was in prison, you did not visit him; and when he was naked, you did not clothe him; and when he was hungry, you did not feed him. And you will have to explain to the Lord why you did not hazard your life and love the truth unto death—if it be reformation.

For the Truth's Sake

For this writer the events were not only reformation, but, risking a tautology, they were also necessary reformation. Reformation is always a necessity. Reformation comes about because the church has departed from the truth and will not be corrected. Reformation comes about because the truth in the church can no longer receive a hearing, or that truth is put on trial and rejected as the lie and condemned. Reformation comes about because of the sovereign decree and work of God, which is the ultimate necessity of reformation. According to God's righteous ways, the church has departed from the truth; and according to his righteous ways, the church is reformed. But the word *necessary* is added to the word *reformation* to emphasize these facts. Not only were the events reformation, but they also were highly necessary. The church and people of God were in danger of losing the truth altogether.

How serious the situation was in the PRC became clear later. At the Protestant Reformed synod of 2018, which was supposed to save the denomination from false doctrine, there were negotiations about the truth in the very committee that was tasked to judge an appeal regarding sermons preached by Rev. David Overway.

The synodical decision regarding that appeal must be condemned. If someone does not believe that, I believe that he or she cannot be a member of the Reformed Protestant Churches. If someone does not believe that, then he or she will never be able to reject the current developments of that decision in the PRC. I reject that synodical decision of 2018, and I repudiate my vote for it at that synod. The Lord will forgive me. I was but a child and naïve.

That the synodical decision of 2018 regarding the appeal must be rejected becomes clearer and clearer every day as one views the doctrinal developments in the PRC. That wretched decision is being used to prop up in the PRC every lie that comes along and further denies the truth. Witness only the February 8, 2024, decision of the Protestant Reformed Classis East, which was tasked with judging appeals concerning classis' previous decision to exonerate Reverend Koole of teaching false doctrine. In the February classical decision the most egregious lies were defended on the basis of that synodical decision of 2018. According to the transcript of the classical debate, the delegates hung their hats on that decision of Synod 2018. However, that decision of Synod 2018 is not to be trumpeted as a victory for the truth. That decision of Synod 2018 was a victory for the lie, and it was the establishment of a fatal principle in the Protestant Reformed Churches that led to the suspension and deposition of Rev. Andy Lanning, that led to my suspension, and that led to the putting out of Rev. Martin Vander Wal. Synod 2018 belonged to the convergence of the forces that had been current in the Protestant Reformed Churches for years—as many as thirty or forty or more years—before that synod.

At Synod 2018 fatal negotiations were happening *within the very committee that was deciding the appeal and the doctrinal issues.*³ Those fatal negotiations established a principle in the Protestant Reformed Churches that led to the overthrow of the truth and that ensured that the truth will never again have a place in those churches. The truth was not the main concern of many of the delegates to that synod and of most of the men who served on the committee to judge the appeal concerning sermons preached by Rev. David Overway. The men's main concern was not the condemnation of the lie, but their main concern was the reputations of men. Their main concern was, how could synod get out of its sticky situation? The appellant, Connie Meyer, had established beyond a shadow of a doubt that justification by faith alone—of all doctrines—and the unconditional covenant—of all doctrines—had been denied in the Protestant Reformed

3 See Hilgard Goosen, "Why Did the Goosen Family Leave?," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 9 (November 2021): 25–32.

Churches and that the false doctrine of justification by faith and works and the false doctrine of the conditional covenant had been taught and defended by the broader assemblies and by consistories in the Protestant Reformed Churches. How could synod extract itself from that sticky situation *without harming men*? How could synod get around calling the flagrant, false doctrine *heresy*? For heresy it was. It was the heresy of the conditional covenant and of justification by works.

In the synodical committee the lie negotiated with the truth, and the lie's only plea was this: "The men who teach and defend the lie are good men, and you all know that." That was the fatal compromise of the truth. In the committee the lie won. The lie won for itself the right to negotiate in the committee and at the broader assembly. The lie raised itself to the position of a partner with the truth. And the lie dared to require of the truth—require of the truth!—*that the truth be quiet in the interests of men*. And when the truth compromised—no, when the truth *negotiated* with the lie—the truth lost.

That is what the fathers at the Synod of Dordt recognized. The lie may not negotiate with the truth. So when the Remonstrants pleaded for a place at the synod, at least to air their grievances as equals, the Remonstrants were refused. They were to be tried. The case that was before the Protestant Reformed synod of 2018 demanded to be *judged* by the truth. The truth was to judge, not to negotiate with the lie about how the lie would be condemned or exonerated, how liked and dedicated the men were who taught and defended the lie, how inept they may have been, or how divisive condemning the lie might be. The case was not about a way for the lie to carve out for itself a position of *bargaining* with the truth. As soon as the truth allowed the lie to do that, the truth lost. The truth was lost. Delegates could vote for the advice of Synod 2018 that upheld the appellant, even if they did not believe a word of the advice; and it did not matter at all because the decision of Synod 2018 was going to be overthrown—whatever good the decision contained discarded and the lie it contained driven: "We experience fellowship with God through faith...on the basis of what Christ has done... and in the way of our obedience."⁴

Besides, at Synod 2018 the lie had established the *principle* in the PRC that one cannot condemn the lie without a careful, considered judgment about the reputations of men. According to the PRC, when a doctrinal issue comes before assemblies, then the issue is not about the truth or the lie; the issue is about the reputations of men. People and the assemblies cannot condemn

conditional justification as conditional justification, but they must call it *a compromise of justification*. People and the assemblies cannot condemn the conditional covenant as the conditional covenant, but they must call it something else, anything else, because the reputations of men are at stake. False doctrine is not determined by the words that men speak. Indeed, a man can preach something false, and it cannot be condemned as false because it has been determined before that he is a good man and has a reputation for orthodoxy. If one cannot condemn the lie as lie and one cannot condemn the lie without considering first the reputations of the men who teach the lie, then the lie wins every time. When those are the rules of the game, the truth is fatally compromised as *truth*. The truth does not negotiate with the lie. The truth does not treat the lie as an equal partner. The truth always condemns the lie for what it is. The truth condemns the lie as the lie in the sharpest and clearest possible language. Men are to be judged by what they teach! And men—all men—are to be judged by the truth.

The win at Synod 2018 had a long pedigree. The teachers of false doctrine in the PRC for years were slowly but surely insinuating their bad formulations of doctrine into the ears and hearts of the people. The proof of this is that even now, in spite of all the writing and witnessing that has been done against the errors of the PRC, many stubbornly cling to the errors and will not be corrected, so deeply engrained are the way of speaking and the formulations of the false doctrine. The people have been taught for so long and so consistently that the way of speaking and the formulations of the false doctrine became second nature to the people. One example only is necessary: forgiveness comes in the way of repentance. Those who have taught that language know what they mean, but they covered their deceptive language so that it was hard at first to detect. Many have used the language, not taking the time to consider what it actually means and what it actually implies. Others have used the language because it is a convenient way to give man a place in his salvation without actually saying that. Now after the controversy, those who have taught that language of forgiveness in the way of repentance are coming out with what they mean, and their language is shocking. It is a baby born of fornication between a Reformed father and an Arminian whore, and the baby looks strikingly like its mother. And yet even when this striking resemblance is pointed out and when the shocking terms and phrases are examined and shown to be false doctrine, many have excuses, they turn deaf ears, or they say that it is about time someone started preaching

⁴ *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2018*, 74.

these things. They are mired deeply in the mire of their own backslidings.

Right Definitions

If the events that led to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches are to be judged accurately, then there must be accurate definitions of the principal terms in the question: *reformation* and *schism*.

I start with *schism*. Many defend their failure to come to the truth by hiding behind false definitions of schism. Schism to them is that men act poorly in the church and call other people names. Schism is a mere disturbing of the peace, even if that peace is the peace of the graveyard and of the dead. Things were going along fine. Everyone was playing along with the fiction that all the ministers were orthodox, that the denomination was orthodox. Everyone was content with their ballgames and their lives just the way they were, and someone had to come along and say that all is not well in the churches, that there are ministers who are teaching false doctrine, and that there are other ministers who do their best to cover the false doctrine. “That is schism,” they cry. Their cry is about the same as the cry of the patient who sues his doctor for malpractice when, after running his tests on the patient and confirming the worst, the doctor tells his patient that he has terminal cancer of the brain and so turns his patient’s life upside down. And so many, also many in the PRC, were angry and wildly and haphazardly threw around the charge of schism without even knowing what they were saying.

Schism is not mere fighting in the church. Fighting in the church over the truth of the gospel is not schism and cannot be schism any more than a body’s fight to stay attached to its head, a building’s resistance to being shoved off its foundation, or a wife’s refusal to be separated from her husband. Schism is not condemning some minister in the church for false teaching or even publicly condemning a minister in the church for false teaching. This cannot be schism any more than a patient’s calling the lump that is killing him cancer, or the wife who cleaves to her husband to call the strange man who is making moves on her an interloper, an adulterer, and a marriage wrecker.

What is schism? Schism is to separate the church from Christ her head; to tear the church from her cornerstone, Jesus Christ; and to cause a rift between the bride, the church, and her husband, Jesus Christ.

Schism’s principal cause is false doctrine. Along with that false doctrine, there is always the action of the false teacher to gain the affection of the church for himself instead of for Christ. Absalom was a schismatic who first gained the affection of the people and then sought to

displace David, the king. The Galatian false teachers were schismatics who came with their false doctrine and also zealously affected the people so that the people would follow the false teachers. Whatever the preferred method of the false teacher, always these two things are present: the affections of the people for the false teacher and the false teacher’s false doctrine. So connected are these two, that where one is present, the other is surely lurking. A minister who makes it his business to be the nice guy liked by all and hated by none is a false teacher in disguise and has a false doctrine with him. A minister who brings in false doctrine will also be working to turn the hearts of the people to himself. The blame for schism must always fall on the false teacher. The truth by definition cannot be guilty of schism.

Reformation—what is it? Can such a grand word be applied to what happened for the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches? Many ridicule the idea. They judge with an evil eye, and they weigh the cause of Christ by the pound and the board foot because they are carnal people and they themselves do not pause to consider the works of the Lord and what a reformation actually is. Reformation is the work of Jesus Christ to form his church anew because of doctrinal corruption—corruption of the marks of the true church of Jesus Christ. All the marks stand and fall together because they are all marks that the church bears not of herself but that she bears because of the presence of Christ in her ruling by his Spirit. When another spirit is present and reigns, then the church takes on different marks. In reformation Christ forms the church anew and returns his church back to the truth that was lost and gives an advance in the understanding of that truth. An advance is a feature of reformation too. Reformation is a return and an advance. That advance comes precisely because of the conflict of the lie with the truth. Such was true of Dordt. The fathers at Dordt had the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, and the fathers made a further explanation. They did not change the doctrine, but they sharpened it.

All reformation is emphatically the work of Jesus Christ. If I thought for one moment that reformation was the work of men or that it depended on me or any other number of men and women, then I would quit right now. Souls are at stake, as is the honor, glory, and name of God. It is the conviction that reformation is the work of Christ that is a comforting and an enlivening thought to all who are given the privilege by Christ to be involved in the work and to suffer loss in that work. Reformation is Christ’s work. Reformation is not man’s work. The church is Christ’s. The word is Christ’s, and his word does not return to him void but accomplishes

everything to which he sends it. Christ causes that effect. This conviction is necessary in the face of the opposition and slanderous accusations that always accompany reformation.

Christ's work in the reformation of 2021 has been to form a church. In that church there is a return to the pure Reformed faith. This return is to the truth of justification by faith alone and the unconditional covenant. The advance is to see how these doctrines govern especially the explanation of the elect sinner's experience of his salvation. It is especially at the point of the experience of salvation that there was the reformation in 2021. That aspect of the doctrine particularly was corrupted in the PRC. That corruption involved other aspects of the truth. There was corruption of the reality of the sinner's total depravity, the truth of salvation at the cross, and the reality of the sinner's salvation in eternity. Because the cross was viewed as a mere basis and provision, a basis and provision that would come into effect at some later time, and not as salvation itself, the truth of the application of that salvation to the sinner also was corrupted.

The sinner is saved at the cross. The sinner is reconciled to God. And now the sinner must be reconciled in his own conscience, and this too is the work of pure grace. This too excludes the sinner's work and obedience. The same may be said of eternity. Protestant Reformed ministers ridicule the idea that election means that the elect sinner is saved in eternity. But the truth is that the elect sinner is saved in eternity in the decree of God, and in that decree God beholds the sinner not only as one whom God would save but also as saved in the decree because all the works of God are perfect and perfectly accomplished in his decree. Otherwise, Christ cannot be called the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.

Reformation, necessary? Yes, the false doctrine not only made an appearance but also was defended, entrenched itself, and finally attacked the truth and cast it out. That is the charge of the Reformed Protestant Churches against the Protestant Reformed Churches: "You cast out Christ, and he formed a new denomination."

Damning Evidence

The events were reformation—necessary reformation. And I take the opportunity to point out the evidence that

the events were reformation and that this reformation was necessary. The evidence need only be doctrinal. If the PRC preaches the truth, then the events were schism. If the PRC preaches the lie, then the events were reformation. In the Protestant Reformed Churches, it must be beyond a shadow of doubt that false doctrine is present and advancing. The lie like the truth also develops. And the PRC is developing her false doctrine. Here are some examples of what passes for Reformed orthodoxy in the PRC today. I do not intend to refute these statements. That has already been done. The references to *Sword and Shield* in the footnotes show where that has been done. Besides, the statements stand condemned as they appear in all their appalling boldness.

I begin with the sermons of Rev. David Overway that the Protestant Reformed synod of 2018 judged. The theology of the statements in the sermons never left the PRC, and what those sermons said is what men are still saying today.

The way unto the Father includes obedience...
The way of a holy life matters. It is the way unto the Father...He [Jesus] is the way, your way unto Me, through the truth which He works in your hearts, through a godly life...⁵

We do good works so that we can have our prayers answered...

We do good works so that we can receive God's grace and Holy Spirit in our consciousness. So that we can consciously and with awareness receive the grace and Holy Spirit of God...⁶

We look at our good works in the same way. Never of any value to make me be declared righteous before God, but always of help in finding and maintaining assurance that God has justified me through Christ and Christ alone.⁷

When the Catechism [in Lord's Day 45] mentions requisites or requirements [of prayer], it's talking about obedience. I must obey. It's required of God. God requires it of me. God requires a certain obedience from me. Obedience is required here, obedience that I must perform in order to enjoy fellowship with God.

There's requisites to fellowship, as we said, for the child of God, to the one who's justified

5 David Overway, "The Way to the Father," sermon preached February 1, 2015, as quoted in *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2016*, 45; Andrew Lanning, "I Don't See It," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 4 (August 1, 2021): 7–8.

6 David Overway, "Good Works Required," sermon preached December 20, 2015, as quoted in *Acts of Synod 2018*, 120–21; Andrew Lanning, "Our Present Controversy (2)," *Sword and Shield* 1, no. 3 (August 2020): 8–9.

7 David Overway, "Justified by Faith," sermon preached June 8, 2014, as quoted in *Acts of Synod 2018*, 68; Lanning, "Our Present Controversy (2)," 8–9.

in Jesus Christ, the one for whom Jesus has died and atoned and satisfied for his sins. There are requirements for him to fellowship, to approaching unto God, coming to the Father.

Godliness, on the other hand, is the requirement according to Scripture for our prayers to be heard by God. I John 3:22: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him.” Whatever we pray for, we receive. “Because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” We have true fellowship with God. We truly ask and are heard, and God receives our prayer and gives us—because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

I’ve elected you. And I’ve done everything in you so that you walk in godliness. Why? So that when you pray as a godly person walking in godliness—when you pray, God will hear and God will answer.

What do the creeds say about the relationship between obedience and fellowship? That there are requirements. That there is obedience required in order that we may have that fellowship, prayerful fellowship with God...

The Catechism says: Come to God that way, meeting those requirements, meeting those demands of God for a proper prayer, and you can be assured you will enjoy the fellowship of God...

If we but meet these requirements a little bit, by the grace of God, of course, and by God’s grace working them in us—if we meet these requirements but a little, then we will enjoy a little of God’s fellowship. That’s the truth. If we meet these requirements a lot, then we will enjoy much of God’s fellowship...⁸

Are we assured of the forgiveness of our sins without good works? Do good works do nothing to assure me of forgiveness, that I’m justified? Of course, they do. Jesus says it in plain English in the passage before us. And for one to hold

otherwise simply contradicts the plain words of Jesus Christ our Savior.

Forgive others. Live in that obedience. Live out of those good works. And only in that way will you be assured that you’re forgiven, that you are justified by Jesus Christ your Savior.⁹

Rev. Ron VanOverloop preached the following, which was never condemned as heresy:

If any man will hear my voice, He’s not establishing, of course, a condition, there are none, but he is talking about not the condition to establish a union but he is establishing a condition that deals with communion. Not union, that’s grace, it’s all grace, only grace, but communion, fellowship.¹⁰

And yet God commanded; I performed a duty. Two rails. They go side by side. In the wisdom of God—his sovereignty, our responsibility. And it’s all grace, and nothing but grace. And that’s where our gratitude grows and our desire to be obedient unto his commandments arises—the way God works.¹¹

This theology never left the PRC. This theology is taught sometimes in the very same language. Witness the February 8, 2024, decision of the Protestant Reformed Classis East:

Rev. Koole quoted and explained the following statement from Witsius in [the] January 1, 2021 issue of *The Standard Bearer*: “Hence, I conclude, that sanctification and its effects, are by no means to be slighted, when we treat of assuring the soul as to its justification.” (Agenda, pg. 50).¹²

The committee of pre-advice noted Koole’s explanation:

By that last phrase, where Witsius speaks of sanctification as “assuring the soul as to its justification,” he is not speaking of sanctification serving as the basis of justification, but of one’s sanctification...serving as evidence to the soul that one is numbered with the justified.¹³

8 David Overway, “Requisites of Prayerful Fellowship,” sermon preached April 17, 2016, as quoted in *Acts of Synod 2018*, 123–24; Lanning, “I Don’t See It,” 8–9.
9 David Overway, “Forgiveness Known through Prayer,” sermon preached June 5, 2016, as quoted in *Acts of Synod 2018*, 124–25; Lanning, “I Don’t See It,” 9.
10 Ronald Van Overloop, “The Church at Laodicea,” sermon preached June 23, 2019, as quoted in the Agenda for Classis East, May 13, 2020, 121; Andrew Lanning, “Our Present Controversy (3),” *Sword and Shield* 1, no. 4 (September 1, 2020): 8–9.
11 Ronald Van Overloop, “Calling toward the Canaanites,” sermon preached November 29, 2020; Lanning, “I Don’t See It,” 13.
12 Classis East committee of pre-advice, “Regarding Statement #3, Information,” 12; Nathan J. Langerak, “Christ on Trial,” *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 11 (March 2024): 13.
13 Classis East committee of pre-advice, “Regarding Statement #3, Recommendation,” 13; Langerak, “Christ on Trial,” 13.

Regarding the third statement, “Hence, I conclude, that sanctification and its effects, are by no means to be slighted, when we treat of assuring the soul as to its justification,” the committee of pre-advice recommended

that Classis make the judgment that statement #3 and Rev. Koole’s explanation and use of the statement, are not in conflict with Scripture, the Confessions, or the decisions of Synod 2018.¹⁴

In 2018 the PRC supposedly condemned Overway’s statements. At the recent February 2024 Classis East, the Protestant Reformed delegates approved the same theology. The lie negotiated with the truth at Synod 2018. In 2024 the same theology gets itself the stamp of full, Reformed orthodoxy.

Peter VanDer Schaaf wrote,

Cannons [*sic*] 5.7. And 10. likewise demonstrates that God sovereignly works with His rational and moral elect that they experience His delight in a sequence of time and experience, in an organic way in which there is a mutuality of grace, obedience, and gracious reward.¹⁵

Professor Cammenga wrote,

Q&A 70 of the Catechism speaks of the spiritual reality of baptism, which applies to the elect who are baptized. For them baptism is “to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ.” And what does that entail? “It is to receive of God the remission of sins freely, for the sake of Christ’s blood, which He has shed for us by His sacrifice upon the cross.” After his baptism, as he matures in the faith, the child of God appropriates the spiritual significance of his baptism. At that point he “receive[s] of God the remission of [his] sins freely.” Once again, remission (forgiveness) of sins takes place during and not before the lifetime of the child of God.¹⁶

For if forgiveness takes place in eternity, what need is there for repentance in the lifetime of the Christian?¹⁷

Reverend McGeown wrote,

Justification is God’s act of declaring believers righteous, while faith is our activity of trusting Jesus for salvation, which is not God’s act.¹⁸

Reverend Koole preached,

Beloved, the question is, are you seeking the grace that is available? Now that may sound a bit strange from PR pulpits: seeking the grace that is available? But it is proper. I am not talking about regenerating grace. That’s sovereign grace that renews a man. I’m talking about the grace of which the Heidelberg Catechism speaks: he will give his grace and Holy Spirit to those only who ask him in sincerity for them. That’s the grace and Holy Spirit, beloved, to withstand temptation. And we don’t have that automatically!¹⁹

Professor Gritters said,

There are other sins that we never confess. Some of them we don’t even know we committed; some of them are sins of omission we never think about. Now, remember about those sins, God *decreed* not to hold them to our account. Jesus Christ died for them and paid for them. They are fully paid for. If we die not thinking about some of them, you might say that *you’re not forgiven of those sins*. That just means you didn’t hear about that sin God saying to you, “I forgive you.” They’re paid for though. You’re going to go to heaven.

That’s why it’s possible for a baby who dies in infancy, who’s never committed one actual sin, to go to heaven. *He’s not been forgiven in the sense that he never heard consciously God say to him*, “I don’t hold that sin against you.” He’s an infant; he died in his mother’s womb maybe. But Christ died for his sins; God determined to take him to heaven, and he went to heaven though he didn’t hear in his ear and embrace with his believing heart that declaration of God.

But as I was thinking about that today, I

14 Classis East committee of pre-advice, “Regarding Statement #3, Recommendation,” 13; Langerak, “Christ on Trial,” 13.

15 Peter VanDer Schaaf, letter to Grandville, dated August 15, 2022, in appeal to Classis East, 96–97; Nathan J. Langerak, “Pete Won! Now What?,” *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 7 (December 1, 2023): 11–12.

16 Ronald Cammenga, “Antinomians? Without a Doubt (2),” *Standard Bearer* 98, no. 20 (September 1, 2022): 470; Nathan J. Langerak, “Reformed? Not at All! (3): Creeds and Decrees,” *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 9 (January 2024): 10–11.

17 Ronald Cammenga, “Antinomians? Without a Doubt (7),” *Standard Bearer* 99, no. 18 (July 2023): 425; Langerak, “Reformed? Not at All! (3),” 15.

18 Martyn McGeown, “Passive Faith?,” November 15, 2021, blog post, <https://rfpa.org/blogs/news/passive-faith>; Nathan J. Langerak, “Slippery McGeown (2): Active Faith and Justification,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 13 (February 1, 2022): 13–20.

19 Kenneth Koole, “Manna Sent from Heaven,” sermon preached November 29, 2020; Lanning, “I Don’t See It,” 13.

thought, Hmmm. Maybe that needs to be clarified a little bit in this way. When that little infant, who never spoke one word and never thought any thought, gets to heaven, he is able to speak. And this is what he is going to say: “God, forgive me of my sinful nature. Forgive me of my connection to Adam.” And then God is going to speak to him and declare, “I don’t hold that against you because I put that responsibility on my Son, and he’s forgiven”—if we may imagine that. That’s when he would hear God say it to him.²⁰

And to show that all of this theology—which is of one piece—has a long history, in 2003 Rev. Ronald Cammenga preached,

It is not enough for salvation that God has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It is not enough, that there is a Jesus. It is not enough, that this Jesus was born of a virgin; that this Jesus lived a perfect life; that this Jesus taught and defended the Word of God; that this Jesus suffered under the wrath of God in an atoning death; that this Jesus arose with his body from the grave on the third day; that this Jesus is ascended in power at the right hand of God in the heavens. Not enough for salvation. God must not only have sent Jesus into the world, but I must come and you must come to Jesus. I must become one with him so that I enjoy his fellowship and share in his salvation. For salvation it is necessary that I come to him. And if I do not come to him, there is no salvation and no enjoyment of the blessings of salvation.²¹

Rev. Bill Langerak argued at the February 8, 2024, meeting of Classis East for what he believes is the truth of the gospel, apparently also the gospel that he preaches: “Good works are necessary to enjoy or experience fellowship with God. Period.”²²

The Leader

One of the most aggressive promoters of the Protestant Reformed departure has been Prof. David Engelsma. Listen to him.

We do draw nigh to God; God calls us seriously to do so; and there is a sense, a certain, specific sense, in which our drawing nigh precedes God’s drawing nigh to us. To deny this is to contradict the inspired Word of God.²³

First, it is clear as the sun in the heavens that the text teaches an activity of ours in the sphere of salvation, namely, drawing nigh to God, that precedes God’s activity in some sense of drawing nigh to us: “he will [thus and then; note the future tense: ‘will’—DJE] draw nigh to you.” One who cannot or will not notice that the text plainly teaches a certain activity of ours that precedes an activity of God is disqualified as a teacher of the Word of God, and a teacher at all, so plain, so explicit is the text: “draw nigh to God [in the present], and he will [in the future] draw nigh to you.”²⁴

To do justice to James 4:8 by affirming that the text teaches that there is a certain aspect of salvation in which our activity precedes a certain aspect of God’s activity of saving us does not imply that James teaches that the believing sinner is first in salvation and that God is second, as my critics so eagerly and typically rashly charge against James and me. For the truth of the text is that we draw nigh to God by virtue of God’s drawing us nigh to Himself. The full truth of the text is, “I will draw you nigh to myself by the Holy Ghost, so that in the way of your drawing nigh to me, I will draw nigh to you.” God is first in this aspect of salvation also. He draws us to Himself, *and He draws us nigh to Himself by the admonition of James 4, “Draw nigh to God!”*²⁵

20 Barrett Gritters, “The Confusion about Forgiveness,” speech on November 3, 2022, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=11522113504354>; Nathan J. Langerak, “Unforgiven (1): A Hypocrite Speaks,” *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 11 (February 2023): 14–15; “Unforgiven (3): Unless One Becomes an Adult...,” *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 13 (April 2023): 16–18.

21 Ronald Cammenga, “Jesus’ Call to the Weary (1),” sermon preached October 12, 2003, Agenda of Classis East, September 8, 2004, 9; Braylon Mingerink, “The PRC’s Perversion of the Simple Gospel,” *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 8 (December 1, 2022): 38–39.

22 Bill Langerak as quoted in Langerak, “Christ on Trial,” 18.

23 “Professor Engelsma to the Engelsma Family Forum and Terry Dykstra, June 16, 2021,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (March 15, 2021): 9–12; Nathan J. Langerak, “Delusion,” *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 12 (April 2024): 12.

24 David J. Engelsma, “Copy of the Lecture on ‘Antinomism’ given to my Reformed Doctrines Class on January 26, 2022,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 16 (March 15, 2022): 4; Langerak, “Delusion,” 12.

25 Engelsma, “Copy of the Lecture on ‘Antinomism,’” 4; Langerak, “Delusion,” 12–13.

His reference was to my assertion that in a certain aspect of God's work of salvation God works in such a way that He moves us to act in order that He may then act in the way He has determined. In that particular aspect of salvation, God works in such a way that our activity (which He accomplishes) precedes His activity. The precise reference was to His act of the forgiving of our sins. Our repenting precedes His remission of our sins. My statement was as follows: "It pleases God...to forgive in the way of the sinner's repenting...Neither is repentance the cause of forgiveness...[As an aspect of faith it is] the (God-worked) means. It is not the cause...The PRC teach that repentance is the (God-given and God-worked) means unto the remission of sins. As means, repentance precedes remission of sins; as end, remission of sins follows repentance...repentance as an aspect of faith. Repentance is not a 'good work' of the sinner that is a 'fruit' of faith produced by the sinner, but an element of faith itself."²⁶

I explain the sense of the entire list of "if then" texts that my questioner presents to me by a brief explanation of another of the passages, Matthew 6:14, 15. God not only wills to forgive our debts to Him, but He also wills that we forgive each other. Therefore He instructs us that He "will" {note well the future tense—DJE} forgive us when we forgive each other and in the way of our forgiving each other. He warns us that if we refuse to forgive each other, neither will He forgive us.²⁷

I could continue with the quotations. The apostasy, the false teachers, and the carnal element are deeply entrenched in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The PRC is awash in conditions, prerequisites, and things man must do before God can and may act, all, of course, by grace and all covered with that catchall term *in the way of*. In the PRC the way to God is by Christ, faith, and in the way of your obedience; that is the way to peace, joy, happiness, blessing, and salvation now and in eternity. That this is the theology of the PRC cannot be gainsaid. The evidence is overwhelming.

But that is not the Reformed faith. It is corruption, and it is corruption at the point of the believer's enjoyment and experience of his salvation, a corruption that in the end devours all of the PRC's theology.

Warnings Ignored

Long ago the PRC's spiritual father, whom the PRC despises and whose tomb she builds, warned:

Question: Do you consider the Reverend De Wolf and those who sincerely follow him and his preaching now as Reformed and as brothers in Christ?

Hoeksema: For the first I answer, No! I do not consider them Reformed. I cannot consider them Reformed, and I will not consider them Reformed until they retract and until they apologize...I do judge whether a man is Reformed or not Reformed, and I claim that the sermons of the Reverend De Wolf were not Reformed... Unless he retracts and the consistory retracts, I cannot regard them as Reformed, and I cannot regard the consistory that supports him as Reformed. I cannot...

Not only that, but now that I am talking about that anyway, I want to issue a word of warning at the same time...I warn you that all the rumors that I hear and all the talk that is going on about responsibility and the activity of faith and the like runs not only in an unreformed way but will ultimately run you into modernism! That is not the gospel! All that ever have opposed the Reformed truth have always accused the Reformed people and the Reformed leaders and the Reformed ministers of denying responsibility. That's very easy. All the talk about the activity of faith, about our [unintelligible word], about the Bible in distinction from the Confessions—all that talk is principally modernism! That's my conviction. That's much worse.

And therefore, although I'm not here to preach, I nevertheless feel it my calling to issue to all of you a word of warning with my whole heart. I have preached to you the Reformed truth for thirty-three years, and now many of you don't want it anymore! That's up to you, but I'm going to warn you, nevertheless. It's up to you to choose.²⁸

26 David J. Engelsma, "Ignorant, Lying, or Merely Mistaken," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 16 (March 15, 2022): 12; Langerak, "Delusion," 13–14.

27 Engelsma, "Copy of the Lecture on 'Antinomism,'" 5; Langerak, "Delusion," 13.

28 Herman Hoeksema, "First Church Congregational Meeting," June 1953, https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc_sermon=the-history-of-1953; Langerak, "Slippery McGeown (2)," 19.

What Hoeksema warned about—all the emphasis on man’s responsibility and man’s activities—is now the theology of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Yet again Hoeksema warned the PRC:

In this connection [that “Christ is the entrance into the kingdom of God”] I cannot refrain from issuing to all of you a word of warning. I’ll do it. You know, we talk about so much in our day, and in our churches,—we talk about responsibility. We talk about the activity of faith. And similar things. I’ll warn you that on that basis and in that line we’re going to lose the gospel. We’re going to lose the gospel. We’re going to lose election. We’re going to lose reprobation. We’re going to lose the gospel, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. O yes, we must preach the activity of faith. But by the activity of faith I mean not something that you and I must do, except that first of all, by the activity of faith we cling to Christ, and embrace Him and all His benefits. That is the activity of faith. Responsibility? Don’t you ever forget that the accusation that Reformed people cannot maintain responsibility has always been brought against,—Reformed people have always been accused of denying responsibility by those that are Arminians and moderns. We do not deny responsibility. We do not deny the activity of faith. Of course not. But I warn you that with the emphasis that is laid upon these things, upon conditions, upon activity of faith, and upon responsibility, you’re going to lose the gospel. That’s my warning.²⁹

And how prophetic Hoeksema was. With all the PRC’s emphasis on the activity of faith and on responsibility, the PRC has lost the gospel. The PRC is full of conditions

and prerequisites, even though dishonestly the ministers and professors will not use the plain words *condition* and *prerequisite*.

His children did not listen to their father Herman Hoeksema. The men who were charged with building on his theology departed from him while carefully cultivating the reputation that they followed him. And now the PRC has come to grief through that leadership.

The issue between the PRC and RPC is doctrine. The issue is life and death. To save us alive as it is this day, there has been much evil devised; God devised good.

I conclude with a quote from Homer Hoeksema regarding reformation:

The second form of reformation is that of secession. When the carnal element begins to dominate; when the institute itself becomes corrupt; when the word is adulterated, the sacraments are profaned, false teachers tolerated, Christian discipline not exercised or perverted; and when your protests are not heard but are futile, for you are persecuted on account of them; then your church is manifesting the marks of the false church, and then reformation through secession becomes mandatory. In obedience to the word, when it becomes a question of denying the word of God or leaving a certain institute, the question of a certain institute or preserving the true church—no believer, beloved, may hesitate. In obedience to the word, you must either seek affiliation where the marks of the true church are already manifest, or you must act to institute the church anew.³⁰

This the Lord Jesus Christ did.
Hallelujah!

—NJL

29 Herman Hoeksema, “Transcript of Address and Question Hour,” *Standard Bearer* 34, no. 21 (September 15, 1958): 490; “Concerned Men’s Brief Analysis,” in Nathan J. Langerak, “Apology of Rev. Kenneth Koole,” *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 15 (March 1, 2022): 18.

30 Homer Hoeksema, “Reformation: Option or Mandate?,” https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc_sermon=lectures.

THE SCHISM OF CRETE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH

Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. — Luke 12:51–53

It is with great joy for the deliverance of God that in this issue of *Sword and Shield* we commemorate the three-year anniversary of the signing of the Act of Separation and Reformation that led to the formation of Second Reformed Protestant Church.

It is good to look back in thankful gratitude for a moment and to praise God for what he alone has done.

The occasion for the Act of Separation and Reformation was the gracious providence of God in love for his church, whereby he raised up a majority of men within the consistory of Crete Protestant Reformed Church who were offended by the gospel of salvation by Christ alone and apart from man's works.

The congregation of Crete Protestant Reformed Church was witness to the promised manifestation of Genesis 3:15, where God said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed."

God brought enmity between believers and unbelievers at Crete church through the faithful, gospel preaching of Rev. Nathan Langerak. Slowly but surely, members were leaving Crete church and citing different reasons for their departures. Some claimed that the tone of the preaching was not warm enough; others said that the preaching was too doctrinal; and still others said that they wanted to sit in a church where their friends and families from other denominations could sit without being offended. There were two specific truths that came from the pulpit of Crete Protestant Reformed Church that infuriated both the congregation and many of the officebearers. First, they hated to hear that their works were filthy rags before God and were of no use toward the believer's being regarded as righteous in God's sight. Second, they despised the preaching of the antithesis, that God will have his people dwell in safety alone, living in the world but not being of the world.

In January 2021 God once again raised up new officebearers. In one significant way that new consistory was different from any consistory that had preceded it. For the first time at Crete Protestant Reformed Church, God made the majority of the watchmen to be those who were so offended by the gospel they heard from week to week that they were determined to stop at nothing short of silencing that truth.

Prior to 2021 God had already begun placing men in the consistory of Crete who hated the preaching of justification by faith alone. Later it became clear that those men were lying in wait for enough support in the consistory to be able to oust that truth from the church. Those men knew that the preaching was blameless and that they would need another way to silence the truth. One of those men verbally predicted that the deposition of Rev. Andrew Lanning in January 2021 would be "the way they could get to Reverend Langerak."

As promised by scripture, God brought spiritual enmity, which was manifested in a growing division among the members of Crete church. The majority of elders knew that the way to bring peace and unity to a mixed multitude was to remove the "rock of offence."

In February 2021 the consistory made a motion to try to accomplish that purpose. The motion was very wicked in that it was devoid of scripture, the creeds, or any biblical principle. That was not due to lack of time or effort on the part of the elders.

The men who hated the preaching had been slandering Reverend Langerak and his preaching since they had gained the majority in the consistory a few months earlier. Never once did they do this with scripture or the creeds. Instead, they made unsubstantiated accusations against him and piously pretended to be offended that division had come into Crete church, which division was supposedly rendering the preaching ineffectual.

At the consistory's February 11, 2021, meeting, the following motion was passed:

Article 12: Motion made and supported to require Rev. Langerak to resign as a contributing editor of the *Sword & Shield* and discontinue writing for and promoting the publication.

Grounds:

- a. Rev. Langerak continues writing in and promoting the *Sword & Shield* as a co-editor with Andy Lanning, a deposed minister of the PRC who continues to live in the sin of schism.
- b. Rev. Langerak's participation has caused and continues to cause unrest and division in our congregation.

Even as the motion was being formulated, the feeling among the elders was that a motion of that magnitude should really have some kind of reference to doctrine or to Christ or to preaching or at least to a Bible verse or two!

In a last, desperate attempt to grasp at something remotely spiritual to justify the carnal motion, there was an amendment motion to elide ground b. and to replace it with a ground that spoke of the effectiveness of the preaching. That was an attempt by the elders to make a slanderous but apparently spiritual claim that the preaching in Crete church had become ineffective. Some of the men of the consistory thought that they could hang their spiritual hats on this supposed ineffectiveness of the preaching. After all, who would blame an elder for demanding effective preaching in his congregation? Surely, this would sound much more spiritual than the mere fact that a division had come into the midst of Crete church. One of the elders moved the following amendment:

Motion made and supported to elide ground b. and replace it with, "For the sake of the effectiveness of the preaching in our congregation."

Motion to elide failed. Motion as originally moved carried. Andy Birkett recorded a negative vote.

God did not allow that amendment to pass because God himself had made the preaching effective, and all of the elders knew it.

The elders of Crete were ruling by their *own* means, and God would not suffer his truth to be slandered by their attempts to justify their wickedness. Instead, God would cause them to bear witness against themselves in their unspiritual motion with its unspiritual grounds.

After some of the protests to that motion had been treated and Reverend Langerak had refused to comply

with the consistory's unspiritual and wicked demands, the consistory then made another motion to suspend Reverend Langerak from his God-appointed office on the basis of his disobedience to the consistory's demands.

At the time of the motion to suspend, there was still hope that some of the men of the consistory—who had previously voted against the motion to demand subjection to the consistory's will to require Reverend Langerak to stop writing in *Sword and Shield*—might have been given the wisdom to see the unrighteousness of their demand and to refrain from voting in favor of suspending Reverend Langerak.

Another reason for hope was that the week prior to the vote to suspend, the consistory of Crete church had approved the publication of a twenty-four-page document detailing the history of "what occurred in our churches leading up to Synod 2018 and what occurred at Synod 2018. Also to give instruction on what truths were corrupted because of this doctrinal error."

But God, who is a burning light, revealed the hearts of every elder in the consistory room when the vote to suspend was tallied, and every elder in the room voted to suspend, save one.

The suspension was done in concurrence with the consistory of Peace Protestant Reformed Church, who will no doubt bear the same damning judgment as Crete Protestant Reformed Church for her part in that wickedness.

The Sunday following Reverend Langerak's suspension, the consistory of Crete called a special council meeting to be held after the evening worship service. The purpose of this meeting was to hold mutual censure among the officebearers with a view to celebrating the Lord's supper. The vice president of the consistory chaired the meeting and announced that the elders desired to celebrate the Lord's supper as soon as possible because that was "what the congregation needed at this time." Each man was asked in turn if he had anything to say regarding *censura morum*. One elder and one deacon stated that they were in complete disagreement with the wickedness of the consistory in suspending their faithful minister and thereby removing the truth from the pulpit at Crete. The elder and deacon also stated that if the consistory went through with the celebration of the Lord's supper, it would be against their consciences to partake of the table and therefore to partake of this wickedness. The clerk of the consistory then admonished the elder and deacon for their "schismatic behavior in disagreeing with the decisions of the consistory" and directed them to repent of this sin. Mutual censure was brought to a close, and the majority agreed that they would move forward with the celebration despite the fact that there were two officebearers who would not partake. This was

yet another evidence that the consistory was bearing rule by their own means. Instead of working with these two men to restore unity among the officebearers, so that they could all partake of the Lord's supper in full agreement, the consistory attempted to disregard these men and to bind their consciences, in effect, forcing them to partake.

The consistory also twisted the meaning of the terrible sin of schism for its own advantage. The consistory defined schism as "disagreement with a decision of the consistory" instead of its true meaning, which is to separate the bride of Christ from him and the truth of his word. True schism, of course, was the sin that the consistory had just committed when it removed the truth from the pulpit. It was abundantly clear to the two dissenting officebearers that all three of the marks of the true church were thoroughly corrupted at Crete.

God has a judgment regarding unfaithful watchmen who bear rule by their own means and behave as lords in his church. When God appoints elders in his church, God is not divesting himself of his own sovereignty as supreme leader; rather, God is ordaining men to judge in subjection to the yoke of Christ. These men rule as ambassadors of Christ.

When elders throw off the yoke of scripture and the Reformed creeds and rule by their own means, they are ambassadors of the devil, and any appeal to their office as a shield to protect them in their self-rule will have their self-fashioned shield consumed by fire in the presence of God. "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes" (Ps. 82:6–7).

God had raised a new consistory at Crete with the purpose of silencing the preaching of salvation through Christ alone and apart from man's works. By means of these and other wicked men, God gave the Protestant Reformed denomination of churches over to confess a false gospel of salvation in the way of grace-empowered works, through a false god who does not save his people but makes salvation

possible through a mixture of grace and the works of man.

Even though the toxic mixture of grace and works was actively permeating every nook and cranny of the Protestant Reformed denomination and making inroads among the members at Crete church, God continued to feed his church with the pure preaching of the gospel of Christ.

After God had finished his work at Crete Protestant Reformed Church, he quickly delivered his church to safety.

On April 21, 2021, Crete's consistory voted to suspend Reverend Langerak, pending concurrence of the neighboring consistory.

On Saturday, April 24, the consistory of Peace Protestant Reformed Church concurred with the suspension of Reverend Langerak.

On Sunday, April 25, Reverend Langerak was formally suspended from Crete Protestant Reformed Church. The announcement to suspend him was read by Prof. Brian Huizinga, and Professor Huizinga led the worship service that Sunday morning.

On Monday, May 3, the Act of Separation and Reformation was distributed to the members of Crete Protestant Reformed Church, who were all invited to a meeting to be held on May 5.

On Wednesday, May 5, the Act of Separation and Reformation meeting was held, and the document was signed by the charter members of Second Reformed Protestant Church.

On Sunday, May 9, the first worship service of Second Reformed Protestant Church was held at Wonderland Tire Company in Calumet City, Illinois.

Through the formation of Second Reformed Protestant Church, God has manifested his providential care for his church. Israel shall dwell in safety *alone*.

—Andy Birkett

—Lee Wiltjer Jr.

Act of Separation and Reformation

We the undersigned office-bearers and members of Crete Protestant Reformed Church as well as other like-minded Reformed believers declare by these our signatures our separation from the apostatizing church and

the reformation of the church institute from the bondage and corruption into which she has fallen. By this act we express our grievance against the Protestant Reformed denomination for her continuing departure from the

fundamental truths of the Reformed faith as once held by this denomination. We express our commitment to reform the church anew according to the Holy Scriptures, the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order of Dordrecht and to join ourselves to other like-minded Reformed congregations to express the unity of the Holy Spirit in the truth once delivered unto the saints (Ephesians 4:1–6; Jude 1:3). Further, we express our detestation for her departures in Reformed church polity which are manifested in her increasingly hierarchical actions, in her discipline of faithful office-bearers who have shown her errors, and for her denigration of the office of all-believer. By this she holds down in unrighteousness the free course and expression of the truth of the Gospel in all aspects of her life. She values man, his name, and his reputation above the Word of God. In short, she ascribes more authority to herself than to the Word of God and persecutes the faithful in her midst, thereby denying the marks which characterize a true church (2 Timothy 3:1–13).

We have desired only the pure preaching of the Reformed faith as contained in the Holy Word of God and summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. For many years in our church the Lord provided that faithful preaching by our minister, Rev. Nathan J. Langerak, who shunned not to declare to us the whole counsel of God. We were built up in the most holy faith and comforted by Christ's gospel. Crete Protestant Reformed Church has taken to herself the marks of a departing church by the unjust use of the keys of the kingdom entrusted to her. This is clear from the suspension of her faithful minister who has without ceasing labored day and night for the spiritual upbuilding and health of the members and lambs of the congregation to which the Lord called him. Never has anyone shown from Scripture or the Confessions any errors in his doctrine or walk which are worthy of suspension throughout the time he served Christ's church.

The consistory's act of suspension is nothing less than a rejection of Christ himself as he is revealed in the faithful office-bearer of Christ and as he speaks to and teaches his church in the gospel (Ephesians 4:20–21; 2 Timothy 4:3; Matthew 10:40). This rejection of Christ is intolerable and will serve for spiritual destruction in the generations of those who remain in her fellowship. The office-bearers have thereby persecuted the truth by silencing the pure preaching of the gospel, corrupted the pure administration of the sacraments for Christ's sheep who cannot partake with her in her sins, and corrupted the mark of discipline by exercising it against the godly.

Doctrinal departure by the Protestant Reformed denomination is manifestly evident in her toleration of false doctrines that the way unto experiencing covenant fellowship with the Triune God is by our obedience unto the law. Similarly, the benefits of salvation are presented as our motivation for obedience, which has the same effect as declaring that our experience of covenant fellowship is by obedience to the law. By these teachings, Christ is separated from His people and Christ's perfect and complete work of salvation is displaced. These teachings withhold Christ and his completed salvation from his elect people. These teachings are the true and terrible schism in the body of Christ.

For years in the Protestant Reformed denomination, we have observed the erosion of commitment to the sole authority of the Word of God and the pure Reformed doctrine. We have seen false teachers defended and the godly who rebuked the churches for their errors persecuted and defamed. We have witnessed the reputations of men honored above adherence to the truth and rejection of false doctrine. We have seen the true preaching attacked and slandered as antinomian. We have witnessed that consciences are bound by human ordinances in things that the Lord has left free. We have observed that men faithful to their callings to defend the truth and to militate against the lie have been declared sinful and schismatic. We have witnessed lies and hypocrisy in the dealings of the assemblies. We have seen the office-bearers of the church behave as lords in God's heritage by ecclesiastical brutality, intimidation, and willful disregard for good order and decency. We have suffered as faithful pastors and office-bearers have been suspended and deposed for carrying out their calling to expose lies and false doctrines by warning and rebuke. We have witnessed lies that are contrary to the pure Reformed creeds tolerated in the public preaching and writing of ministers.

Therefore, we call all those spiritually-minded persons to separate from the apostatizing church and to contend for the doctrine that was once committed unto them (Jude 1:3; Acts 2:36–42; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Revelation 18:4; Belgic Confession Articles 27, 28 and 29). We declare that in all things we hold to God's Holy Word, to the Three Forms of Unity, the accepted liturgical forms, and the Church Order of Dordrecht. Moreover, we declare that we reject the unjust suspension of our pastor and continue to acknowledge him as our minister.

Andrew T. Birkett, elder
Lee A. Wiltjer Jr., deacon

Men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.—1 Chronicles 12:32

DEAR WORMWOOD

The devils and evil spirits are so depraved that they are enemies of God and every good thing, to the utmost of their power, as murderers, watching to ruin the church and every member thereof, and by their wicked stratagems to destroy all; and are therefore, by their own wickedness, adjudged to eternal damnation, daily expecting their horrible torments.

—Belgic Confession article 12

My dearest Wormwood, It has been nearly eighty years since we last corresponded. That you managed to evade me after losing your patient all those years ago still irks me. I guess you had friends in lower places than I was aware of. But never mind all that. You have moved down the ranks, I see. I applaud your achievements. Working with the Prince himself, highly impressive. But do not let your head get too big, for you once again answer to me, your dear, old uncle. If you have not yet been informed of the matter, the Lowerarchy has assigned you to my charge once again. How serendipitous for us both. And so I expect you to send me reports of your work as you have done in the past.

I see that you too are involved in the project to murder souls in the Protestant Reformed Churches. That has been the Prince's goal for some time now, as you know—to destroy that denomination. The reason is obvious. The gospel—how I hate that word—was proclaimed clearly there for many years. I do think we have had great success lately in removing the gospel though and replacing it with our words. Much of what I hear and read and observe radiates the pleasant smell of sulfur. The Prince himself stands behind all our words, and when our words come out of men's mouths, I cannot help but feel elated.

Since you have been otherwise occupied in years past, perhaps you are not familiar with the ruin that we have perpetuated against the Protestant Reformed denomination. I will briefly fill you in. It has been a fierce battle; no victory has been easy. And I refuse to give credence to the rumor that it is because our Enemy, the One whom it is said created us, restrains us so that nothing can happen without His appointment. Providence, His subjects like to say—another despicable word. Fear not, and do not listen to such rumors. There

is no such thing. There will be a day yet when we will finally be victorious and achieve the Prince's purpose to set up our Man. But I digress.

I was there in 1924 when the Prince instigated his plan of attack in the Christian Reformed Church. We were able to get many souls to believe that grace is common, that man can do the good, and that there is cultural good in the society of natural man; and then we expelled any man who taught otherwise. We thought we had carefully introduced just the right amount of our words. We were somewhat successful in our purpose to eradicate the gospel, but I despise to admit that we were thwarted somehow by a few who were filled with that One. (Oh, how I hate that One and hate how he makes all his own look like him. Despicable!) And that stench of the gospel kept emanating forth from the pulpits of the newly-formed denomination, the Protestant Reformed Churches. In fact the stink grew even stronger, and the Enemy's truth sounded forth even more boldly. Putrid smell—at times reminiscent of a lily of the valley or a rose of Sharon, at other times of the sweet smell of incense. Keep this to yourself, but I think it was because the Prince's stratagem was not foolproof. I am not saying that I am smarter than him—how dare you let that thought cross your mind—but I think he could have been more subtle. Subtlety is key in our line of work.

Then in 1953 we thought that we had the church rid of Him. We had the numbers and had made deep inroads, and the Wolf—so aptly named—and others were openly teaching that man's act of conversion is a prerequisite for man to enter into His kingdom and that salvation is promised to all who hear on the condition that they believe. Man and his believing and working were made the determinative point. More of man is always a tasty morsel. But we should have been more careful, you see, with the words *condition* and *prerequisite*. We need

to keep the people sleepy, and such bold words can cause them to jolt awake. The cause of that One prevailed once again, much to our anger, but not without great loss of their members and ministers.

We did, however, fare much better in 1953 than we originally thought. Some might say that we were thwarted then too, but I disagree. “We are only talking about our conscious experience.” Delightfully deceitful, I say. That rotten seed was planted, and we just had to tenderly care for it—a little sulfur here, a little fire there. The plant tried to spring up a few times, but the Prince did not think the time was right, so we waited a little longer until he gave us the go-ahead. (And do not tell me that this delay was due to providence or, just as detestable, according to some sort of counsel or purpose of our Enemy.) Ah, and then we released in full force the product of our black thumbs. Black, twisting tendrils of lies and deceit that, when they lay hold upon an unsuspecting soul, put it in a chokehold and drag it down toward death and hell with us.

We began to see more and more that the members in those churches began to get bored with what they call the gospel. I note with glee that the sound coming forth from their pulpits changed to less emphasis on the One and more emphasis on what the people were doing. The people began to clamor for “practical preaching” and a “balanced gospel” instead of doctrinal preaching. That just meant more of man and less of our Enemy. We gave them those terms to help them cover the blatant idea that man must work for his salvation! Many fall victim to such terms; it is a lovely abomination to hear. Use that to your advantage. Try to make sure that the people are uninterested in doctrine. Doctrine requires study and careful examination. Doctrine requires thought and prayer. These are all things we want the people to avoid. But practical preaching with its resultant emphasis on man and his working is the best way to displace doctrine. It is best if you can get it in the minds of the people that doctrine is cold, abstract, and divisive. I trust you understand what I am saying here, dear nephew. Doctrine is bad; the very idea needs to be expunged. Doctrine needs to be perceived as a dirty word that only “unloving” people learn. Make them divert all their energy and efforts to “practical” matters.

And it also helps to get them so wrapped up in their own material goods that they never have time to study these matters. That is not so hard, really, considering the affluence of the age. The world’s goods are potent tools for us as well. Men love to serve the god called mammon. Try to get them interested in bigger houses, barns, cars, boats, and vacations. Maybe even attempt to sprinkle in a few vices: sexual enticements, mind-altering

cocktails, and mind-numbing substances. If men will not overtly serve us, then it is just as well to have them serve mammon.

Perhaps one of our best wiles was employed at the now-infamous Synod 2018, where we succeeded in getting the entire Protestant Reformed denomination to adopt that phrase of which I am sure you are well aware: “We experience fellowship with God through faith (instrument) on the basis of what Christ has done (ground), and in the way of our obedience (way of conduct or manner of living).”

I advise you to use that phrase, specifically the last part, often in your labors. Plant the people on that phrase; make it their standard bearer and their banner. Avoid speaking about the first two parts; the people must have less of that and more of their obedience. Focus all of their debating and arguing over man, his working, and his doing. And, therefore, the first two parts will never enter in. I do not think the phrase will fail you; it is most diabolical. If the people you encounter do know and understand the doctrine for which they are fighting, let them use the phrase as a cover to seduce others. And if the people you encounter are ignorant and sleepy, which many are, then that is just fine—whisper the phrase in their ears; push it to the forefront of their minds; let it be the buzzword and the catchphrase that they grab onto and never let go, so that it becomes a mantra that they rattle off when they are questioned about what they believe, whether those doubts and questions arise in their own consciences or are posed by others who have not yet succumbed to our slumber-inducing chloroform.

You need the people to stop looking outward to Him but inward to what they are doing. Cover it up, of course, by saying that it is the work of Him *in* them. That sounds better. But after, add that they must do it in order to—use “in the way of” here—get something in their experiences and consciences. Do you understand what I am saying? Use the terms *good works, obedience, responsibility, repentance* and make the people think about getting something for themselves, not about thankfulness or gratitude—I have no use for those sentiments. I do not think you will be able to fool them yet by an outright rejection that the One did everything for their salvation *objectively*, which means their salvation is out there floating in the nebula; but you will deceive them if you say that for them to appropriate salvation and experience it *subjectively*, in their hearts and lives, they must work! Make the people understand that by their doing, in whatever form it may take, they obtain.

Do you see how, even though we did not gain the ultimate victory in 1953, it was not all in vain? We knew that to say outright that salvation is by grace and works

would be too jarring and obvious. To teach that was not quite slippery enough to attain our goal. All throughout history we have had to come subtly. The great Tempter came in the garden in the serpent, you well know, to tempt Adam and Eve that they could be as God, knowing good and evil. And man believed our words. And really our work ever since then has been to slander our Enemy, His truth, and His One and instead exalt man, as that stands opposed to Him. But to say that salvation in man's experience is by grace and works is not different than what the Prince told Eve in the garden. Man is really God. God is not God. It remains our task to push that vile idea into the minds of men, and it is of utmost importance that you keep that objective before you in all your work, whether with the worldlings or the religious types.

It really does not take much to get men to think that way. Underneath their veneer of piety, men are not so different than us, really—depraved. You find that the idea of man being God is right there, in their own minds and their own natures; you barely even have to introduce the idea yourself. All you need to do is fixate their attention on passages in their Book that say things such as “What must I do to be saved?” and “Labour therefore to enter into that rest” and “Work out your own salvation.” We must use our Enemy's Book and twist the words to make it appear that man really is the most important one. The if-then clauses are also of great benefit to us in this. Going back to what I suggested before, keep the people from careful study of doctrine, and they will be fooled by those texts, by what they call the “plain meaning of the text” and the “orderly way God works.”

Do not forget either that they have something called the three forms of unity, which is supposedly a summary of the doctrine of His Book. They can be disadvantageous for us because they allegedly systematize the doctrine and make it easier for the people to understand. And unfortunately there is not really a lot of man to be found in those forms; when I read them I find that they are intended to bestow comfort, extol sovereign grace and election, and speak as one's personal confession of faith. These are reprehensible views that I hate and that are injurious to our cause if these creeds are believed to their full intent. But no matter, all of these hurdles can be overcome. If you can use the few lines that appear to extol man and his working and take them out of their proper context and manipulate them just right, I have found that the people will latch onto those phrases as if those phrases have been the focus the whole time. It has seemed to work splendidly so far. But if all else fails, it might be better just to discredit the creeds as a whole. Personally, this is one of my favorite tactics. This makes

some of His children very angry because they claim that the creeds are a result of “the Spirit's leading the church into all truth” or some other such notion. But the creeds are not in reality His Book, are they? The creeds are not actually *inspired*, as they say the Book is, are they? Do you see? Now you have told the people that they can take or leave the creeds. This is a strategy we have used effectively for many years now.

Lately, we have convinced the people of our words that they must repent first, and then their Father will forgive them. This is a tremendous source of ecstasy to me. The result of this teaching is twofold. The first effect is that some of them will actually think that they are giving something to Him for which He in return will impart a blessing. (Can you imagine such a ridiculous thing? It is laughable. A mere, mortal creature presenting his pitiful gift to a king and then expecting something in return? It would be one thing if man were an excellent creature such as you or me, but man is but dust, a worm.) Those ones will be filled with what is considered by some to be a fatal flaw: pride. And then we have them exactly where we want them. That one must first repent ungodly their God and essentially makes man God—we have brought them full circle then, really, from our first victory way back in the beginning. So, dear nephew, keep bringing to the front of the people's minds how good they are, how good their repentance is, how good they feel when they repent. In essence, make them focus on themselves and what they do and experience—make that come first and be the controlling factor.

The second effect is perhaps more amusing to me. There are some still who are spiritually sensitive, and oh, what torment this teaching will inflict upon their poor souls. The despair—I can almost taste it. Realizing that they can never repent perfectly enough (for their Father unjustly demands of them perfection), they will be driven mad in trying to repent of every sin they committed each day, only to lay their heads on their pillows and be struck by the thought that perhaps they missed some sins, and perhaps they did not repent sincerely enough, and perhaps they sinned even during their prayer for repentance, and then they will have to start all over again. They will work themselves to the bone and will never have any rest.

Turning to another matter, due to the unfortunate circumstance that only allows us to be in one place at one time, I was not able to attend the recent Protestant Reformed classis meeting held in February. I was only able to read the pre-advice and the decisions of Classis East, but from what I can tell it was a cacophony of our words. I gather that you were present at the meeting and that you were also involved in some of the work that led up to the meeting. I anticipate reading your report

containing a firsthand perspective of the event and am more than willing, as usual, to offer my seasoned advice for your current labors.

From what I have gleaned regarding Classis East, one of their veteran ministers taught in a dry, dusty magazine (just the kind of magazine I like) that there is that which man must do to be saved. And he weaved an unholy web using many words and phrases in his writings. Men protested to the classis—some for, some against. And the final decision was that the minister's words and phrases by themselves were ambiguous and may lead to false doctrine. I was practically rubbing my hands together with merriment when I discovered that. Ambiguity, confusion—those are our trademarks. None of this clear, simple gospel business. Our work thrives when the people are confused.

And so the classis did not condemn the minister or his doctrine, and he sat there silently the whole time? Is that all true? If so, it is splendid to hear that our words have found ready entrance into the members' minds, and it appears that we will not have much trouble from here on out. Any man can teach our words in those churches with impunity. It opens the door to all kinds of our words!

I wonder if now is not the time to add in more. We have already gotten them to deny total depravity, marriage as a life-long bond (some have gone back to the idea that divorce is permissible on two grounds, adultery and desertion), the unconditional covenant and justification by faith alone (both in the people's conscious experiences, of course), and the emphasis of faith being a bond. My advice to you is to think through what words and phrases of ours might be easy to add into their preaching and teaching in order to try and take away more honor from Him.

One last note before I sign off: I think you know better than to bring up the rumor that our scheme with Synod 2018 and its after-effects was technically a failure once again, due to what the Protestant Reformed

leaders called *schism* (strange how they think that entertaining word is a negative term!) and other events, which led to the formation of the Reformed Protestant Churches and the continuation of that niggling sound of the gospel. But I must admit in all of this that the formation of another denomination is lamentable. Our Enemy had once said that the gates of hell could not stand against His church, and every time we are within a hair's breadth, it all seems to fall apart. And again, that deplorable gospel goes out louder, more powerful, and more clearly than the time before! I cannot understand how that happens.

But no fear, this is not a cause for your concern at this time. If he has not already, the Prince will be turning his personal attention there, for he hates nothing more than that bad news and has made it his utmost goal to exterminate the gospel and the One whom it represents. But you and the others will continue our objective in the Protestant Reformed Churches; there is still work to be done.

Regarding the new denomination though, we need to be careful about those who remain in the Protestant Reformed Churches, that they do not join. We have them on the right path away from Him, and we need to keep them there. I see your fingerprints all over the movement to slander and discredit those who joined the new denomination. Looking over your work, you were able to paste on them the epithets *antinomians*, *radicals*, and *schismatics*. That was a shrewd move that paid off. Very few have left the Protestant Reformed Churches for these new churches. Keep labeling those in the new churches with such terms; then the others do not have to think, read, or study too closely the words that we introduced.

I await your reply in the coming months.
Your affectionate uncle,
Screwtape

—TDO

Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.—1 Timothy 4:13

WHAT HAPPENED AT ZION? (3): MR. MEELKER'S ANTITHESIS

Soli Deo Gloria

“**N**ot unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.” Glory to God alone!

“I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” Glory to God alone!

“Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Glory to God alone!

Glory to God alone! This was the first song ever uttered by a creature. This was the song of the sons of God, those flaming spirits and morning stars who witnessed God's creative act in the beginning. When God called the world into existence by the word of his power—glory to God alone! When he formed the seas and the dry land—glory to God alone! When he filled the skies and the seas and the earth with their creatures—glory to God alone! When he formed man from the dust of the earth and when he formed the male's perfect female counterpart from the rib—glory to God alone!

Glory to God alone! This was the very breath of Adam during that brief moment in Eden.

Glory to God alone! This has been the refrain of the church that God creates for himself in the world by his marvelous call while she passes the time of her sojourning here below in fear.

Glory to God alone! This is the melody of the souls of just men made perfect in heaven.

Glory to God alone! This will be the everlasting chorus of the redeemed and glorified creation into the ages without end in new Jerusalem. The apostle John, being lifted up in the Spirit on the Lord's day, beheld, and lo! a great multitude that no man could number—of all nations, kindreds, people, and tongues, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands—stood before the throne and the Lamb. And that great multitude cried with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!” And all the angels stood round about the throne and about the elders and

the four beasts and fell before the throne on their faces and worshiped God, saying, “Amen. Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever! Amen.”

Glory be to God, who is good. “Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good.”

Good is God because he *is* goodness. Good is he, being righteousness and justice and truth, love and holiness and spotless purity, the implication of all his infinite perfections. Good is he in all his divine being. Good is he in all his thinking and willing. God is not the supreme good alongside other goods. Nay, he is the sole good and the overflowing fountain of all good. There is none good but God. Man's most precious possession is to be possessed by the only good and ever-blessed God.

Glory be to the eternally good God who determines to reveal his glory outside himself. Glory be to God who in his counsel purposes to reveal the glory of his name *antithetically*, in order that the glory of his most perfect and adorable being be set over against the dark backdrop of all evil. He determines from everlasting not only to reveal that he is truth but also to do this in opposition to the lie. He is righteousness over against all unrighteousness. He is light over against all darkness and shadow of turning. He is life over against death. He conceives in his free and determinative counsel to reveal his spotless perfection and radiant being, full of grace and truth, in antithesis to the horror and ugliness of sin and corruption. He conceives all that is opposed to him as an object of his terrible wrath and hatred for that specific purpose of magnifying the glory of his most holy name. And there is a day that comes quickly when this antithesis shall be made manifest before every rational and moral creature—the day of the Lord! Then every tongue shall confess, whether willingly or nillingly, that he is God to the praise of his most excellent name.

Antithesis. We use this term, but what comes to mind when we say it?

The term *antithesis* most basically refers to two entities or principles that are set over against each other.

The term conjoins the Greek prefix *anti* (against) with the Greek verb *tithemi* (to set) and connotes the idea of opposition.

When the term first entered theological discourse is unclear. Henry Stob, a professor of philosophical and moral theology at Calvin Theological Seminary until his retirement in 1975, wrote,

The use of the term *antithesis* in theological discourse dates, as far as I can determine, from the post-Hegelian era [referring to the early nineteenth-century philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel, a philosopher who employed the term in his philosophical system]. It appears not to have been used by John Calvin or by his seventeenth- and eighteenth-century disciples. It came into prominence, however, with the so-called Neo-Calvinism that arose in the Netherlands during the latter half of the 19th century. Guillame Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper popularized the term, but they did not accept its Hegelian connotations... They posited the view that a vast gulf exists between Jerusalem and Athens, and that a commitment to Christ cannot be harmonized by a purely humanistic outlook on life. At an early age Kuyper... proclaimed with word and deed that a radical antithesis exists between those who do and those who do not live their lives out of obedience to Jesus Christ. And in so doing he believed himself to have the support of the gospel and also of the classical Christian tradition.

And so indeed he did. Even though the term *antithesis* was not at all, or only scarcely, employed by theologians before his time, the thing to which the term itself is applicable had been in the purview of religious thinkers for ages.¹

Therefore, it is likely that the term *antithesis* arose within the Dutch Reformed tradition less than two centuries ago.

However, the term was present in the doctrine of the Protestant Reformed Churches from the very beginning of its existence. This is evident by an early article that Herman Hoeksema wrote in the *Standard Bearer*.² And the peculiar emphasis of the Protestant Reformed Churches concerning the antithesis was that the antithesis is to be traced back to God's eternal counsel and determination to glorify his name to the highest possible degree. In his counsel God conceives of the antithesis as the revelation

of his most perfect and adorable being over against all that is corrupt and perverse.

Thus when we use the term *antithesis*, this must be foremost in our minds: glory to God alone!

No Concern for God's Glory

In his letter to the consistory and congregation of Zion Reformed Protestant Church, Mr. Meelker expresses his concern. He expresses his concern about pastors and individuals, churches and denominations outside the Reformed Protestant denomination. He expresses his concern about members of the congregation who have fellowship with family members who have left the Reformed Protestant denomination in disgust over its doctrine. He expresses concern for members of Zion who felt exhausted and beaten under the preaching at Zion. He expresses concern that the little children of the congregation were being trained as warmongers. He expresses concern for the Protestant Reformed family with whom he has close friendship.

With great sorrow he expresses these concerns.

But not once does Mr. Meelker's letter express concern for the glory of God. You do not need to take my word for it. Let me set Mr. Meelker's letter before you once more:

Dear consistory of Zion RPC,

It is with much sorrow that I write this letter to you. For many months our congregation has been divided, and we are growing more and more divided by the day. We could try to point at specific doctrines that the denomination holds to, which members of the congregation disagree with. We could point at the way we treat each other and how we walk together in the life of the body. We could look high and low for the problems each member has and attempt to diagnose the cause of our division. But in doing so, we won't get to the root of our division. It wasn't until recently that the root has been brought to light. It has been brought to the consistory by members of the congregation that the preaching is dividing our church. It has been discussed at length in our consistory meetings. It has been discussed at family visitation. It has been protested against.

The issue is our view of polemics and antithetical preaching. To be clear, the issue is not antithetical preaching (truth vs. lie) altogether, as this

1 Henry Stob, "Observations on the Concept of the Antithesis," in *Perspective on the Christian Reformed Church: Studies in Its History, Theology, and Ecumenicity*, eds. Peter De Klerk and Richard R. De Ridder (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1983), 242, https://archive.org/details/perspectivesonch0000unse_r6e2.

2 Herman Hoeksema, "Antithesis, Synthesis and Dualism," *Standard Bearer* 4 (May 1, 1928): 353–57.

is a necessary part of the preaching. The issue is our consistory's perception of how the antithesis ought to be preached. This is the view our church holds to. The churches in the Reformed Protestant denomination are the only churches who have the uncorrupted truth. No other church of no other denomination has this truth. And since the antithesis requires a continual warfare against all that is untrue, we will draw the sword against all who are not Reformed Protestant. This view requires us to condemn every church, preacher, and individual with the harshest possible condemnation if they do not belong to this particular institution. We view them as "dogs and pigs," feral pigs who you mow down with a machine gun from a helicopter. We despise and hate them because they are not of us. We are to separate ourselves from our families, shunning them as though they have no place in the kingdom of heaven, regardless of their godly walk and confession. The office bearers are to rebuke the members of the congregation who have fellowship with family members outside of the RPC. If we do not continually rebuke them, then the office bearers, along with those "wandering" members, have no love for the truth.

These rebukes and condemnations have come. They have come relentlessly from the consistory and the pulpit. Many in the congregation feel beaten and are exhausted. Some have cried out to the consistory for help. Others have told the pastor directly. The consistory's response has been this. "The truth hurts. It cuts as a sharp sword, and our flesh needs this cutting. Our flesh doesn't like to be cut but we need it, and if they don't believe it, it is because they don't love the truth!" (This is a paraphrased quote, not verbatim)

The consistory knows the pushing of this antithetical view is what is dividing our congregation. What the congregation hears after bringing their grievances is not a word of comfort for their weary souls. It is not what Isaiah brought to a downcast people. Isaiah 61:1-3 "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; [2] To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; [3] To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the

garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." When the sheep are downcast, they need to hear that they are "trees of righteousness" rather than that they "wander to Sodom."

What is of additional concern is that we are not teaching the lambs of the congregation to fight for the truth. We are preparing them to be warmongers who hate all those outside of the RPC. We are teaching them to condemn everybody. I say this from personal experience. After church a couple weeks ago our 8 year old son told us that a Protestant Reformed family with whom we have a close friendship does not love God. "They can't love God because they go to a church who doesn't preach about God. They preach about man. If they loved God they would not be in that church. That's why we had to leave."

Our consistory would have rejoiced at this child's "confession," except he really doesn't believe it. He was repeating what he hears at church. Oh, he understands quite well why we left the PRC, but he doesn't believe that everyone there hates God. He doesn't believe it because he is taught contrary to that in the home. I refuse to teach him to condemn everyone outside the RPC. Rather, I teach him to judge whether a man shows himself to be a child of God by his walk and confession.

I am convinced that the preaching will not change in this church. As an office bearer, I cannot teach what this church would require me to teach. As a father, I cannot continue to defend my minister and denomination by telling my children "that's not what they mean." For this reason, I cannot remain in this church. And while it grieves me to leave, I am confident that the Lord, as our faithful Shepherd will guide our family, never unto Sodom, but always in the way of truth. With this letter, I request that my membership papers, along with those of Sonja, James, Jorie, Maggie, and Vivian be sent to my home.

Your brother in Christ, Nick Meelker

Oops! I stand corrected. There *is* concern for the glory of God in Mr. Meelker's letter. However, this did not come from the mouth of Mr. Meelker but from the lips of his eight-year-old son. It was the child who set things in terms of God and God's glory over against man and man's glory. But Mr. Meelker quickly silenced his son. Mr. Meelker would not let the glory of God come from the mouth of babes.

Oh, how Mr. Meelker comes swooping down to defend the honor of men! Yet he has nothing to say about the glory of God. For Mr. Meelker the concerning thing at Zion was not the glory of God alone. It was everything *but* God's glory. Mr. Meelker sorrows greatly, but not because there was anything preached that diminished the glory of God's name. He sorrows greatly because men were abased. This fact itself condemns his whole letter, and I could let the matter rest here.

But I will not.

A Beggarly Description

Under this rubric *Our Doctrine*, I have been examining Mr. Meelker's letter that was sent to the consistory and congregation of Zion Reformed Protestant Church. And it is pertinent to examine this letter under the present rubric because the issue at Zion was a doctrinal matter. The issue was the doctrine of God's sovereign decree of reprobation. More specifically, the issue was the doctrine of God's sovereign decree of reprobation as it manifests itself not merely between churchmen and pagans but also as it manifests itself within the church and sphere of the covenant.

That Zion was divided over the doctrine of reprobation is not how Mr. Meelker frames the issue in his letter. In his letter Mr. Meelker explains the division at Zion this way:

The issue is our view of polemics and antithetical preaching. To be clear, the issue is not antithetical preaching (truth vs. lie) altogether, as this is a necessary part of the preaching. The issue is our consistory's perception of how the antithesis ought to be preached.

According to Mr. Meelker, the issue was the consistory's perception of how the antithesis ought to be preached. Mr. Meelker claims that he does not reject antithetical preaching altogether. He says that preaching of the truth over against the lie is a necessary part of the preaching. And he presents the doctrine of the antithesis in terms of truth against lie.

Now certainly this portrayal of the antithesis as "truth vs. lie" is not wrong in itself. The truth is absolutely antithetical to the lie, and there can be no synthesis of the two. And to maintain this antithesis between the truth and the lie requires continual warfare on the part of the church. This is reflected everywhere in our Reformed liturgical forms. I give two examples to briefly underscore this point.

That the antithesis involves standing for the truth and rejecting the lie is reflected, first, in the second question

asked of those members of the church who make public confession of faith:

Have you resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine [contained in the Old and New Testaments and in the articles of the Christian faith and taught here in this Christian church]; to reject all heresies repugnant thereto; and to lead a new, godly life? (*Confessions and Church Order*, 266)

Second, that the antithesis involves standing for the truth and rejecting the lie is reflected in the Formula of Subscription, to which the undersigned and every other officebearer in a Reformed church must subscribe:

We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine [of the three forms of unity], without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by our public preaching and writing.

We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned synod [of Dordrecht, 1618–19], but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 326)

And I could also quote from the Form for Ordination of Ministers of God's Word and the Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons (*Confessions and Church Order*, 284–85, 291). I could point to Church Order article 55 (*Confessions and Church Order*, 397). And I could also quote scripture at length. The antithesis requires continual warfare on the part of the church over against all that contradicts the truth of scripture.

However, there is a deeper matter to the doctrine of the antithesis that Mr. Meelker purposefully ignores. In fact, when Mr. Meelker asserts that the antithesis consists in "truth vs. lie," his assertion is a thinly veiled dismissal and jettison of the whole doctrine of the antithesis. What he rejects is that the antithesis is not *merely* a matter of truth over against the lie. What he hates is that the antithesis includes the idea of reprobation.

This is evident by the quotations from my sermon series on 2 Peter that Mr. Meelker uses to denounce the consistory's doctrine of the antithesis. (Having explored these sermons last time,³ I only briefly refer to them here to show that there was a stark doctrinal difference in Zion regarding the truth of *reprobation* in connection with the

3 Luke Bomers, "What Happened at Zion (2): Wrestling," *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 12 (April 2024): 28–33.

truth of the antithesis.) These sermons expounded the presence of false teachers and their damnable heresies and the massive wake of apostasy that follows them in light of the doctrine of sovereign reprobation. God's eternal decree discriminates the human race into those whom he elects in his free and sovereign love and those whom he rejects in his wrath and hatred. And in 2 Peter, this eternal decree of God *manifests* itself concretely within the church whenever false teachers and their disciples, having known the way of righteousness, depart from the truth and entangle themselves again with the pollutions of the world. God's eternal decree explains why some cleave to the truth and others blaspheme the truth. God's eternal decree explains why that happened in Peter's day, and God's eternal decree explains why that happens yet today.

But Mr. Meelker refers to these sermons in his rejection of the consistory's position regarding the antithesis. Why? Because he wishes to gut the antithesis of any weight or substance. Under the guise of standing for the doctrine of the antithesis, he presents a dry skeleton devoid of any flesh and substance. He does not confess that what must be preached about the antithesis includes the idea of sovereign reprobation in the sphere of the covenant. He does not believe that the doctrine of God's decree should govern and interpret the rise of false teachers in the church today. He does not believe that the doctrine of God's decree should govern and interpret the massive wake of apostasy that follows false teachers today.

But if one talks about the antithesis, he is not talking about mere "truth vs. lie." When one talks about the antithesis, he is immediately confronted with the glory of God—with God's holy being, with God's glorious sovereignty, with God's faultless wisdom, with God's determination to reveal his light over against the darkness, with God as the potter who forms for himself vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath and who chooses that the latter must always serve the former.

Across every natural distinction of race, color, sex, age, and position, there is a cleavage that separates men into two different and opposing camps. There are children of light and children of darkness. Sons of Christ and sons of Belial. There are two cities: the city of God and the city of the world. And these two peoples stand in complete opposition, for they serve either God or god, he who dwells in the heavens or a stock of wood and stone, the truth or the lie. The testimony of the former camp is "Glory to God alone!" The testimony of the latter camp is "Glory to man alone!" The cause of the former is that God is all in all in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. The cause of the latter is that man is all in all in the kingdom of the man of sin who sits in the temple of God claiming to be God.

Furthermore, the antithesis has to do with God's covenant. The antithesis is not a mere logical implication of God's covenant. The antithesis is not a mere good and practical application of God's covenant. The antithesis is *intrinsic* to God's covenant with his people. How does God express his covenant of grace in Genesis 3:15? "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed." That is how God reveals his covenant of grace for the first time in scripture! In scripture God also speaks of his covenant in these terms: "I will be a God unto you and to your seed." He says, "I will be to you a father, and you shall be to me a son." He says, "I am married to you." Yet never out of view when God speaks of his covenant is the antithesis of Genesis 3:15. Or as James says in the New Testament: "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (4:4).

The antithesis is about God. The antithesis is about how God will be glorified. God ordained the darkness. God determined that the evil and all his reprobate enemies should serve his glory. His holiness and purity and righteousness stand in glorious relief against the pollution and corruption and unrighteousness of this present age. God willed the darkness, but always as an object of his fierce hatred that his glory might be served. The antithesis is not a bare speaking of the truth and a condemning of the lie, for the covenant is a relationship of love for God, which necessarily includes *hatred* of whatever is not of God. For those whom God has brought into covenant relationship with himself, the antithesis involves an abhorrence toward whatever is not holy. Covenant life with God expresses itself with loathing whatever is not consecrated to the glory of God.

There is no common ground between those who follow the truth and those who follow after a lie. Sure, in this world all men have natural things in common. But it is this world that is also the spiritual battleground upon which two seeds continually clash. The calling is to be an enemy of those who hate God. The calling is to be an enemy of those who profane the glory of God with their false doctrine. The calling is to be an enemy of those who manifest their hatred of God by their miserable indifference when false doctrine drags Christ down from heaven and makes him beg and wait on man until man first does his part. And the loss of the antithesis in the lives of God's people shows that they are not thinking covenantally.

It is this aspect of the antithesis that Mr. Meelker rejects. And to cloak his unbelief in the truth of God's sovereign reprobation within the church and sphere of God's covenant, he gives the antithesis a beggarly description of "truth vs. lie."

A Wandering from a Peculiar Heritage

Though Mr. Meelker is very assertive in his letter that he does not wander from the truth but rather is led by the Lord in the way of truth, he now foolishly strays from the precious heritage of the truth that God gave to him.

That the antithesis is grounded in the decree of election and reprobation is the peculiar heritage that was passed down to Zion Reformed Protestant Church from her spiritual fathers. Even the opponents of Herman Hoeksema recognized that he constructed the idea of the antithesis in terms of election and reprobation.⁴

I now quote Hoeksema at length to demonstrate our peculiar heritage:

For this purpose [of glorifying his name] God wills a people of His covenant, that shall exist to the glory of His Name and whose sole purpose is to shew forth His praises and to manifest His glorious virtues. They must be partakers of His nature and life, they must be bearers of His image, they must be vessels of His light, manifestations of His righteousness and truth, of His Holiness and grace and love. For the realization of the counsel of God, they must be of His party. And since it was God's eternal purpose to reveal this glory antithetically, as over against the darkness of the lie, unrighteousness and corruption [and] this power of darkness must be there in the vessels of wrath and the children of light must be brought into closest connection with them, in order that they may manifest the light and condemn the darkness, stand for the truth and condemn the lie, walk in holiness and love and condemn corruption and enmity of God. Thus God conceives of the vessels of mercy and those of wrath, that the former may reveal the glory of God's virtues over against and in opposition to the powers of darkness. Thus is God's eternal purpose. For He is the potter and we are the clay. And it is His sovereign prerogative to make known His power and glory in vessels of honour and of dishonour, and to raise Pharaoh for the purpose of revealing the glory of His infinite Name. Such is the counsel of election and reprobation. They are not two coordinate parts of God's counsel, but the latter serves the former. Reprobation serves both to bring out the glory of election and to lead in a way of opposition and sin God's covenant to highest conceivable glory.

Such is the idea of the antithesis.⁵

And that the antithesis does not involve merely “truth vs. lie” but encompasses the entire life and worldview of the Reformed believer was also taught to us. Here is what Prof. David Engelsma wrote:

In sharp contrast to the conforming mentality of the worldview of common grace, the Reformed worldview is antithetical—unashamedly, boldly, urgently antithetical...Two radically different groups of people, hostile to each other, live in the closest proximity. They develop two fundamentally different cultures in the same spheres of creation. One group confesses the sovereignty of the triune God and Father of Jesus Christ and willingly submit to the Lordship of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. The other rebels against God and His Messiah. The Reformed worldview calls Christians to be separate from those who deny Jesus Christ and thus the one, true God.

Is any truth clearer, or more emphatic, in Scripture than the antithesis?

God Himself set the history of the human race on its way with the word of Genesis 3:15, dividing the race into two antagonistic families: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Old Testament Israel must dwell in safety alone (Deut. 33:28). It is no different for the New Testament church and child of God.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (II Cor. 6:14–18).⁶

4 Stob, “Observations on the Concept of the Antithesis,” 245.

5 Herman Hoeksema, “Antithesis, Synthesis and Dualism,” 354–55.

6 David J. Engelsma, “The Reformed Worldview on Behalf of a Godly Culture,” *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 38, no. 2 (April 2005): 32–33, <https://www.prca.org/prtj/apr2005.pdf>.

And further from Professor Engelsma:

The worldview of the Bible is antithetical, and the antithesis is grounded in divine predestination. Whatever worldview fails to reckon with the antithesis, weakens the antithesis, or denies the antithesis is false.

The antithesis that is basic to the biblical worldview for the church and Christian in the New Testament is spiritual. It is the separation and warfare between faith and unbelief. The believer thinks God's thoughts after Him; God is not in all the unbeliever's thoughts. The believer does all to the glory of God; the unbeliever lives for self, humanity, and sin. The believer trusts in God in Jesus Christ for salvation and, indeed, all things; the unbeliever trusts in the arm of human flesh, or frankly despairs. The believer obeys God in love; the unbeliever either tramples the commandments of God underfoot, or outwardly observes the laws of God out of self-interest.

The antithesis between the seed of the woman—Jesus Christ and those who are His by divine election—and the seed of the serpent—those who are Satan's progeny according to divine reprobation—in the New Testament age is not physical. The antithesis certainly must, and does, come to physical expression. The Christian does not worship with the pagans or with the false church (I Cor. 10:14–22). He may not date and marry an unbeliever (I Cor. 7:39). He may not cultivate friendship with an unbeliever (II Cor. 6:14–18). He may not cooperate with unbelievers in ungodly enterprises, for example, building an earthly kingdom of God apart from Jesus Christ, the pardon of sins, and lives of holiness (II Chron. 19:2). Reformed parents educate the children of the covenant in their own schools, where the instruction is based on Scripture and the Reformed confessions and where the law of God rules the speech and conduct of all the students (Eph. 6:4).⁷

An antithetical attitude must be assumed by the believer in every sphere of life in the midst of the world toward the world of darkness. It is not his calling to leave the world but to live the whole of his life from a different spiritual and ethical principle than the natural man. The believer is in the world but not of the world. What is our Lord's prayer? "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). By virtue of God's call to his elect

church, drawing them out of darkness into his marvelous light, the antithesis must necessarily dominate the entire life of the Christian in the world. Why? Because God decreed it and because God establishes this by his wonderwork of regeneration and because God himself works it by his word and Spirit.

Although this doctrine of the antithesis has long been taught to Mr. Meelker, he now holds it in contempt as a yoke of bondage and not the way of perfect liberty. This understanding of the antithesis Mr. Meelker flatly rejects in his letter. Mr. Meelker speaks of the antithesis, but he speaks of it in word only. No, he has not silenced the concept of the antithesis into oblivion. However, if he maintains what he asserts about the antithesis in his letter, then a complete silence of the antithesis is soon to follow. Currently he pretends to defend it, only claiming that the antithesis in a Christian's life is never absolute but relative in actual manifestation and practice. He believes that the antithesis is absolute in some respect—in terms of "truth vs. lie"—but he also maintains a certain practical synthesis in this world between the children of light and those of darkness. He claims himself the theory but not the practice. And soon he will lose both.

If Mr. Meelker does not believe what his son said about the Protestant Reformed Churches—"They can't love God because they go to a church who doesn't preach about God. They preach about man. If they loved God they would not be in that church. That's why we had to leave"—if Mr. Meelker does not believe that, then why did he leave Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands in the first place? The very existence of Zion was a testimony against the Protestant Reformed church in Southern California that she had rejected the truth of God and embraced a doctrine of man. Who rejects the truth of God and embraces a doctrine of man—one who loves God? Who can stomach preaching that proclaims that the cross of Jesus Christ was not enough, that one must approach the table of the Lord's supper with their own righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, that one must avail himself of available grace to preserve himself in this present waste-howling wilderness, that if a man would be saved there is that which he must do, that good works and obedience must not be slighted in their ability to give a child of God possession of his salvation—one who loves God?

The mouth of babes and sucklings was instructing Mr. Meelker. And he detested it. He detested it because he does not believe that there may be friends and family members whom God has hated from all eternity and willed their destruction. He does not believe that when

⁷ Engelsma, "The Reformed Worldview on Behalf of a Godly Culture," 35.

those enemies of God manifest themselves in the church and sphere of the covenant by their rejection of the truth, we hate them too.

Yes, we hate them.

That hatred does not preclude real sorrow.

What does Paul utter in the epistle to the Romans?

1. I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,
2. That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.
3. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. (Rom. 9:1–3)

What an *astounding* confession that the inspired apostle makes with an oath! If confronted with the choice between being accursed from Christ and his brethren saved or being saved and his brethren accursed—he would himself be accursed everlastingly. I confess that I understand that expression of the apostle’s grief only a little. But is there anything more grievous than seeing

your own children and your own parents and your own siblings—kinsmen according to the flesh—walk in the way of destruction?

And further,

1. Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.
2. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. (Rom. 10:1–2)

But we also confess with the psalmist:

21. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?
22. I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. (Ps. 139:21–22)

Why?

“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake.”
Glory to God alone.

—LB

RUNNING FOOTMEN

And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.—Leviticus 26:7

THE ANTITHESIS IN THE REFORMED CREEDS

The Organic Relationship of All Things

To understand the doctrine of the antithesis in the Reformed creeds, we must first have before our minds the organic idea. When we speak of the organic idea, we refer to God’s creation of all things especially in the light of God’s counsel regarding man. It is election and reprobation that cut through the generations of man and separate the world into two parties: the party of God’s friends and the party of God’s enemies. The organic idea permeates the entire Bible. In fact, one cannot understand scripture whatsoever without a sound understanding of this organic idea.

The original principle of the organic idea is found in article 12 of the Belgic Confession.

We believe that the Father, by the Word, that is, by His Son, hath created of nothing the heaven, the earth, and all creatures as it seemed good unto Him, giving unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator; that He doth also still uphold and govern them by His eternal providence and infinite power for the service of mankind, to the end that man may serve his God. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 34–35)

The creation was and still is one organic whole that has its central point of life in the heart of man. As created, man stands before God as prophet, priest, and king. These are the “several offices” that God gave to man. Indeed, all creatures serve God the creator. This is God’s purpose with the creature. And all creatures are for the service of man to the end that man may serve his God.

When man according to the good pleasure of God fell into sin, this did not change the essential organic unity of all things with God’s purpose of government by his eternal providence and infinite power. Man’s fall into sin introduced no interruption to the control of God’s power, which upholds, works through, and rules all things. Eternally it was not the will of God that man should rightly function in his offices of prophet, priest, and king; but rather it was the will of God that man should suppress God’s truth, consecrate all things to man, and rule for himself. By means of the fall, man organically became God’s enemy. But God’s grace, out of the same original organism, destroyed the enmity in the heart of man through Jesus Christ. What then is the result of the division of sin and grace? The antithesis. After the fall, man continued to develop in opposition to the original creation ordinance and opposed those who bear the fruits of regeneration. On the one hand, there are the elect, those who are chosen in Christ from the foundation of the world, merely of grace, that they should be God’s friend-servants in the midst of the world. On the other hand, there are the reprobate, those who are appointed to wrath in eternity, that they should be God’s enemies in the world.

Dr. Abraham Kuyper gave expression to the organic-antithetical view in connection with the elect-reprobate world in this way:

God first *makes* this organism a *part* of all created things. Then it finds its higher expression in *the world of mankind*, as the noblest part of the entire work. Further, through sin the world changes into an instrument that is deliberately used *against* God. And finally, through Christ, it becomes both a false and a true organism, of which the first must be put down and the other must be placed over it...

That is the reason why sometimes I find the world *in the service of God*, and at other times I hear it spoken of as an organically formed power that stands *opposed to God*... This is all in harmony with what Jesus and His apostles have in mind. The judgment of the curse rests upon

that sham world that must be put down, but the entire world is upheld so that the nucleus of the organism of the world may be saved and glorified. Thus it appears, on the one hand, that Jesus is the Savior *of the world*, but on the other hand, that He says, “I pray not for the world”... At one time, “I am the light of the world,” and on another occasion, “The world cannot see me.” Or if you will, in one place, “The Lamb of God that bears the sin of the world,” and in another place, “I have overcome the world!”...

When Scripture speaks of the large Christian organism, which we call the mystical body of Jesus, or the living church, as it still lives in this present world, then the church stands diametrically opposed to the world. Then the world hates her, and she must fight the world. She must be crucified to the world, and the world to the church. It is a life and death struggle, a struggle that must and will end with the world subdued by the church, condemned by it, and conquered through Jesus...

And, conversely, Scripture points out that in that church the nucleus of the world is saved. God’s plan, which appeared to be defeated through sin, still continues and comes out right, and the organism of the world, though from a different point of view, still operates as God had intended... Then, obviously, we see the opposite: that the world is not judged, but is *saved*; not conquered, but *rescued*; not damned, but *reconciled*.⁸

Thus you have the organic idea as it is found on every page of scripture as a permeating theme and an interpretive rule that forms the basis of the doctrine of the antithesis.

The Sharp Divide

The Reformed creeds share the viewpoint above. Though they do not contain a section on the antithesis per se, the Reformed creeds speak from the viewpoint of predestination, of God’s counsel governing all things, and thus upon the antithetical position that the Christian must have over against the world.

It is very evident that the creeds approach the matter of doctrine as black and white. The Reformed creeds insist on the truth positively and necessarily condemn the lie negatively. Especially the Canons of Dordt is divided this way. There is always an antithesis. The truth on the one hand, the lie on the other. Lord’s Day 11 is a perfect

8 Abraham Kuyper, *Dat De Genade Particulier Is* [That Grace Is Particular], as quoted in Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *Sin and Grace*, ed. Herman Hanko, trans. Cornelius Hanko (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2003), 75–76.

example. The question is asked, “Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare⁹ of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 95). The beginning of the Lord’s Day positively sets forth Jesus as a complete savior. Jesus alone saves us and delivers us from sin so completely that salvation cannot come in any other way. But it is not enough to say that. The Heidelberg Catechism goes further. The Catechism brings us to another question about which many of us do not dare to think. There are many who say that we may not judge others, especially someone’s personal faith. They say that if someone says that he believes in Jesus, even that Jesus is a complete savior, then that one is a Christian. The Catechism says no sir. The creed demands a doctrinal judgment upon a person’s own confession and life. When men say that they believe in Jesus but insist that they are saved in the way of obedience, that their acts of faith precede God’s blessing, or that they must do something to be saved, then they deny that Jesus is a complete savior! How so? They seek their salvation in something other than Jesus Christ. The Catechism therefore calls them unbelievers. On the basis of this Lord’s Day, dear reader, would you say that to your Protestant Reformed family members and friends? The antithesis between the truth and the lie, between the true Christ and the false Christ, demands that we make this our public confession for God’s glory.

Appeal is made to Canons 3–4.15 to support the false idea that we may not judge other professing Christians. Men say that the Reformed confessions teach us not to condemn other Christians and other denominations. Let us hear the article in question. The article reads,

With respect to those who make an external profession of faith and live regular lives, we are bound, after the example of the apostle, to judge and speak of them in the most favorable manner. For the secret recesses of the heart are unknown to us. (*Confessions and Church Order*, 169)

Who does the Canons have in mind here? “Those who make an external profession of faith and live regular lives.” First, we must agree that there is no contradiction in the three forms of unity. The Canons cannot say something different than the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession. The forms are all one united whole. If the Canons says that we must “judge and speak of them in the most favorable manner,” and the Catechism calls us to pass a sharp judgment upon those who boast of Jesus in words but are in fact unbelievers, then we cannot posit a contradiction between the two Reformed symbols. We

must say therefore that the Canons have in mind here the man who outwardly professes the *Reformed* faith as it is summarized in the three forms of unity. This fact can be demonstrated from the context of the Canons, which was dealing with the heresy of the Arminians. Do not forget that the Canons was written primarily against members, pastors, theologians, and teachers who were all *in the same denomination*, so to speak. The men at the Synod of Dordt were not attacking the lie as it was “out there” but as it was in the midst of their own *Reformed churches*. The Canons was not bound to speak of the Arminians “in the most favorable manner.” While indeed “the secret recesses of the heart are unknown to us,” it is also true that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). What was spoken out of the mouths of the Arminians? Was it the truth? They professed their faith, but their faith was the faith of the devil. Their faith was exactly what the Heidelberg Catechism calls false faith, for the Arminians indeed boasted of Jesus in words, but their entire system of doctrine was a complete denial of Jesus. Throughout the creed, the Canons describes the lie of the opponents as “a fancy of men’s minds,” “injurious error,” “untrue,” “the teaching of Pelagius,” “opposed to the doctrine of the apostle,” “repugnant to the entire Scripture,” “absurd,” “despising of the wisdom of the Father and of the merits of Jesus Christ,” bringing “again out of hell the Pelagian error,” “destructive poison,” and “the denial of all the efficiency of God’s grace.” The Reformed creeds set forth the truth antithetically over against the lie and condemn not only the lie but also the persons who believe that lie.

The Concrete Application

The Belgic Confession states that our church membership has practical bearing on those with whom we have fellowship. According to article 28 of the Confession, it is the duty of all believers to “separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 61). The Confession has in mind a spiritual separation that God has already formed in the hearts of his elect, whereby the believer is crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to him. There are some who like to sound pious and say that you should not “cut people off” or “shun” people because they do not believe the same as you do. Such terms like *cutting off* and *shunning* are vividly harsh terms used to hyperbolize and even mock at the confessional calling to separate from those who do not belong to the true church. Of course, all would agree that we are separate from a church membership standpoint. They will say, “We are separating from those who do not belong to the church by having our church membership

⁹ The German word for “welfare” may be translated as *assurance*.

elsewhere.” How can the believer say that he is separate from his family or friends as far as his church membership is concerned, but as far as his communion, fellowship, and relationships with his family and friends in the false church that everything is hunky-dory? The Confession does not divide up our lives, but it simply states that “those who do not belong to the church” are those from whom believers are to “separate themselves.” The believer is called to manifest the separation that is already there. This is done concretely by the believer who refuses to pretend all is well with the people whom he knows do not belong to the true church. The separation spoken of here is not a carnal, physical separation, although often the antithesis works out in such a way that there is no physical contact between two parties after a time. How does the believer spiritually separate himself from those who do not belong to the church? He does this by unceasingly calling attention to why there is a separation. Furthermore, the believer says loudly to them, “You walk contrary to the ordinance of God, and outside the true church there is no salvation.” In a word, the believer calls his family and friends to repentance. By this antithetical testimony, the Christian has no fellowship with those in the false church but is really separate from them.

The antithetical calling in the creeds is not only negative; there is also a positive motivation behind the calling to separate. In Belgic Confession article 28, we find this phrase: “That this may be the more effectually observed” (*Confessions and Church Order*, 61). Over against the false church and the members thereof, the Christian is busy maintaining the unity of the church, submitting himself to the doctrine and discipline thereof, bowing his neck under the yoke of Christ, and serving to the mutual upbuilding and edification of the brethren. The Confession links the believer’s separation from the false church with his calling toward the true church. The Christian’s duties toward the true church are so entire and all-encompassing that he simply does not have the time, nor even the desire, to fellowship with those in the false church. His delight is with those who fear God!

In conclusion let us be exhorted to be diligent in observing our Christian calling with respect to the true church, to have no fellowship in doctrine or life with the false church and its members, and to persevere in the good fight of faith, confessing that all of this is God’s work alone in the hearts of his people.

—Elijah Roberts

CONTRIBUTION

THE BEATITUDES (5): THE BLESSED MERCIFUL

Introduction

We continue our treatment of the beatitudes by considering the fifth of the Lord’s beatitudes. It is helpful to note that these beatitudes are the several declarations of blessing by Jesus Christ in his famous sermon on the mount. The main theme of the sermon is the kingdom of heaven and her citizens. That is what Jesus always preached. Jesus came preaching that the time had come and that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. The gospel that Jesus preached was always the gospel of the kingdom of heaven (Mark 1:14–15). And within the context of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus declared those blessings upon her citizens. We have considered already

the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, and the hungry and thirsty; and in this article we turn to the next beatitude: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt. 5:7).

Who They Are

The first question that we are presented with in the text is, who are these merciful? The citizens of the kingdom are poor in spirit; they are meek; they are also merciful. For one to be merciful literally means that one shows mercy toward others. The citizens of the kingdom show mercy as an extension of the mercy of God shown toward them. Not, you understand, as if the merciful are so touched by

the mercy of God shown toward them that they are compelled in response to show the same mercy toward others. Rather, when the citizens of the kingdom are merciful—that is, when they show mercy—that is really the extension, the outworking, the sure fruit of the mercy of God that has been shown toward them. There can, therefore, be no correct understanding of that mercy apart from a consideration of mercy in God himself. Just as there is no righteousness, no truth, no holiness, and no love apart from God, there can be no mercy apart from its divine source or origin.

Mercy in God is that perfection in God according to which God is tenderly affected toward himself and eternally wills his own blessedness. God is merciful in himself apart from any consideration of the creature. Mercy has its seat in the will and affection of God. God is tenderly affected toward himself and wills his own blessedness as the most blessed God and as the fullness of divine perfection. God has willed and only ever wills his own blessedness.

That God delights in himself and wills his own blessedness gives to us a window also into the trinitarian life of God. God the Father beholds himself in all the fullness of divine perfection in the Son and delights in the Son as the radiance of the Father's being and the express image of his person, willing the blessedness of the Son. And God the Son likewise delights in the Father. Such is the effect of the delight of the Father toward his Son that it creates in the Son his own delight of the Father. The Son eternally wills the supreme blessedness of the Father. Mercy, as that is born out of love, is the fruit of that bond of fellowship and friendship in God, which bond is the Holy Spirit. Mercy, therefore, has its end in the covenant. Covenant fellowship is the end of the mercy of God, for the covenant is the very life of God. There is no more blessed life than the life that God himself lives out of, through, and unto himself. Mercy, like love, does not exist in a vacuum but needs an object. God as merciful in himself means that God is the supreme object of his own mercy, which therefore necessitates that God be the triune God.

The scriptures reveal God as the God who delights in mercy and delights to show mercy. That is astounding. God eternally wills his own blessedness and seeks his own blessedness in everything and is also tenderly affected toward us and wills that we be supremely blessed in him. It is no wonder then that the apostle makes the whole matter of salvation to be subsumed under the standard of mercy: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which *according to his abundant mercy* hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3, emphasis added).

The mercy of God is the standard according to which God performs all our salvation. The mercy of God shown

toward his people is described as abundant not only because of the source of that mercy but also because of the depth of misery from which it saves. God's mercy reaches down to his people in their low estate, where they lie under the curse and are by nature the children of wrath, even as others (Eph. 2:1–4); and God's mercy raises them out of all their misery and woe appalling and raises them to the very heights of heaven itself, where they are already now seated together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (v. 6).

God's mercy is a rich, tremendous mercy. That mercy, therefore, is the desire or motivation of God for his people's salvation. God's mercy toward his people is therefore that attitude of tender pity toward his people in their misery and the power to deliver them from it. The citizens of the kingdom are those unto whom the mercy of God has reached down, plucking them from out of destruction's pit; raising them out of the miry clay of guilt, pollution, and death; and setting their feet upon a rock.

The eternal source of that mercy of God is God's eternal will and good pleasure. God is merciful to whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens (Rom. 9:18). God is tenderly affected toward his people in their misery and is moved with bowels of compassion to deliver them from it because from eternity God has set his love on them and chosen them to be vessels of mercy over against those whom he did not love but whom he hated and willed their eternal destruction. Therefore, we see that the nature of the mercy of God shown toward his people is utterly gracious. From eternity God chose from one lump of clay, as it were, certain persons to be vessels of mercy and others to be vessels of wrath. Sovereign election was an act of divine mercy on the part of the sovereign Lord, in which he appointed certain persons to salvation and life eternal apart from any consideration of who they would become or what they would do, whether good or evil.

The end of that mercy of God shown toward his people is for them to know and to enjoy God as their God and to know themselves as sons and daughters of the King, adopted as children and heirs for Christ's sake. Christ himself is the revelation of the truth, justice, and mercy of God. Indeed, there is no possibility of mercy apart from Jesus Christ. For the same God who delights to show mercy is also a God who delights in justice and who judges all the nations in his righteousness.

Perfect justice requires that sin that is committed against the most high majesty of God be punished with both temporal and eternal punishment. Perfect justice requires that sin committed against God be punished with extreme punishment in body and soul. The question that confronts us then is, how then can we be delivered,

who are sinners by nature and by very deed? The answer is that it is utterly impossible—at least it is for man. With us deliverance from sin and guilt is utterly impossible except there be one who satisfied the justice of God for us.

The gospel declares the righteousness of God, who will by no means acquit the guilty and who punishes iniquity, transgression, and sin in his wrath, and yet who is also the God of infinite mercy, who has delivered his people in Jesus Christ at the cross. There at the cross the mercy of God was raised up for the whole world to see in all its graciousness, in its particularity, in its righteousness. For it was there at the cross that we were delivered in principle from all our misery and woe. There at the cross Christ bore all the sins of his elect people and sustained the burden of the wrath of God that was due unto them for their sins against God, thus delivering them from it.

Such mercy is known and experienced by the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Although we will touch on this more later, we must insist here that part of the deliverance of the people of God is that God creates in them the will to show mercy and causes them to show mercy toward others. We might say that that is the very purpose for which God communicated his own mercy toward them.

The citizens of the kingdom are merciful toward those who are without. Businessmen in the church are called to show mercy toward their employees by treating them well and paying them honestly for their labors. Employees are to show mercy toward their employers by being longsuffering toward them, laboring as unto the Lord and not unto men. The citizens of the kingdom are called to show mercy toward all those who are in authority over them, showing all longsuffering toward them, submitting themselves unto them in all things lawful, and not having a spirit of rebellion or hostility toward them, recognizing them to be ministers of God unto them for good.

However, the citizens of the kingdom show mercy especially toward their neighbors in the church—toward their wives, their husbands, their children, and their fellow church members. The citizens of the kingdom desire that all things in the church be done in mercy. The citizens of the kingdom show mercy by showing all longsuffering toward the other citizens of the kingdom, willing to do good to them and never evil, even when the members of the church make that extremely difficult and even demand of their time, their energy, and their resources. The citizens of the kingdom are merciful.

The citizen of the kingdom is merciful toward his wife, so that he walks in love toward her and makes her the object of his delight and desires to do good to her and provide for all her needs, whether physical or

spiritual. The citizens of the kingdom of heaven are merciful toward their children, so that as parents they pity their children and exercise all patience and longsuffering in raising their children in the fear of the Lord according to the demand of the covenant in the home and in the good Christian school, even when the children misbehave and do not always heed their instruction. Christ gives officebearers to his church to be ministers of mercy toward the poor and indigent, to grant relief to them both spiritually and physically as they have need. We refer especially to the deacons, who are called of Christ to be ministers of the mercies of Christ to the poor and needy. The minister is called to be a preacher of the mercy of God, bringing the gospel of mercy, not the doctrines and commandments of men, to the poor and needy souls of the congregation.

And here we may not limit the meaning of the text to the external displays of mercy of the citizens of the kingdom. We live in a world where mercy is something that is made to be almost entirely outward, where with a touch of a button someone can send money overseas to give to the relief of some impoverished family that he has not met and probably will never meet in his lifetime. The world has all its charities and volunteer relief programs. Many people appear to be merciful men and women, unto whom the Lord is not merciful, who have never tasted of the mercy of God, and who will be condemned to hell with all their works.

To be merciful is to be tenderly affected toward others and to will the blessedness of others with the goal being their highest good, which is covenant fellowship with God. The citizen of the kingdom is not reluctant to show mercy but is motivated by a sincere, Spirit-wrought desire to do all good toward and to seek the eternal salvation and blessedness of his neighbor.

This has a special application to the behavior of the members of the church toward their former friends and acquaintances who have stepped foot on the road to apostasy from the truth or who are walking in the way of sin. Mercy is shown in speaking the truth every man with his neighbor! Mercy is shown in speaking the truth even to those who hate and vilify the one who brings that witness. Are not the merciful also those who are persecuted and falsely spoken evil of for Christ's sake (Matt. 5:11)? Indeed, it is not merciful, nor is it loving, but it is most cruel and unmerciful to refrain from speaking the truth for the sake of earthly peace. The man or woman who refrains from speaking the truth is no more merciful than the man or woman who sees another person flailing about in quicksand, sinking deeper and deeper by the second, and who says nothing, neither reaches out to deliver but with a cold heart turns a deaf ear.

The Explanation of This

What explains the merciful? The merciful are those whom God has delivered in his own mercy and grace toward them. God is the sole cause or explanation of the merciful. This must be so because the citizens of the kingdom are by nature most unmerciful. By nature man does not delight to show mercy but delights himself in cruelty. What shall we say about wicked man, concerning whom the scriptures say that even his tender mercies are cruel?

Man is not merciful toward his neighbor because he does not love his neighbor but is an inveterate hater of God and the neighbor. That must be remembered when it comes to mercy. Mercy is born out of love. Really, mercy is love as that love is motivated to deliver the object of that love from out of the greatest misery and to bring the beloved into the highest state of blessedness and glory. And, therefore, when we consider the natural man, we must say that he is as capable of willing the blessedness of his neighbor as he is capable of blessing the name of God.

There is nothing more foreign to the natural man than to show mercy. Instead, man curses God to his face, and man murders his neighbor in his heart. Man might show what appears to be mercy on the outside, but it is only a thin cover that he uses to serve his own purposes and agenda. A man tends to the needs of his wife from a superficial viewpoint, not because he is moved and motivated by a will to do good toward her but because he seeks a feeling or an advantage that might serve him. A man takes care of his employees and is honest because he thinks that he can buy loyalty and sees an earthly advantage to not running his business like a crook. A man is a member of a church because of how the church can best serve him and his carnal desires.

Not so for the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The citizens of the kingdom are those whom the Lord beheld from all eternity with eyes of tender affection and with bowels of mercy. The Lord moved to bless the citizens and to deliver them from all their sins and miseries, chose them in Jesus Christ, reached down to them by a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm and delivered them in their consciences and experiences from all the terrible guilt of sin, and released them from sin's terrible bondage. That is the essence of what it means to be a citizen of the kingdom. God himself must reach down and transform the cold and unmerciful heart, putting in its place a heart of flesh wherein God himself enters and rules by his word and Spirit.

Within the heart of the citizen of the kingdom, there is a newfound perspective that he is poor in spirit and therefore utterly destitute of any hope of salvation in himself. That citizen has also undergone a profound and deeply spiritual change of mind concerning sin, so that whereas formerly he gloried in sin and boasted in his

wickedness, now he is a mourner who sorrows daily for his sins and pleads for the forgiveness of his sins on the basis of Christ's perfect satisfaction. And, too, when God comes to that one by his gracious rule in his heart, God comes by a wonder of divine grace and works in that new heart new desires and a new will, a will that delights in mercy and delights to show mercy toward others. Therefore, true mercy is that which proceeds out of the regenerated heart alone and which evidences itself in the life of the citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

The Blessedness of the Merciful

The merciful are blessed. How are they blessed? Is it because they are merciful? Is it even true that they are blessed in the way of showing mercy? Is that why you and I are blessed—because we did something? No, not at all. If we were to be honest with ourselves, we would find that often we are not merciful, but we are most unmerciful and cruel. And if you were to say to me, "Well, I am merciful!" then I would say this, "Are you perfect in your displays of mercy?" For if a man were to be truly merciful in the fullest sense of the word, then he would be a well-nigh perfect person. Then that man would love the Lord his God and his neighbor perfectly with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength. Surely, the blessedness of the merciful is not in the way of his showing mercy. Rather, Matthew 5:7 defines what is the blessedness of the merciful: they shall obtain mercy.

The Lord Jesus does not lay before us a condition upon which a blessing from God depends. Instead, he lays before us a promise, which is God's holy oath that he swore by himself, for he could swear by none greater. God's promise does not fail, and God's word never returns to him void. There is, therefore, a certainty in the promised blessing: the merciful *shall* obtain mercy. No more may the citizen of the kingdom doubt that God is merciful toward him than if he were to suppose that God's promise fails. God does not bless his people sometimes and then other times punish them. God is merciful, always merciful, full of tender pity toward his people. This mercy of God belongs to the goodness of God according to which God only ever blesses the righteous and only ever curses the wicked.

The citizens of the kingdom know in their consciences and experiences that God is merciful toward them. God himself has reached down in his mercy and has delivered them from all the dreadful guilt, shame, and bondage of their sins. They know that it is of the Lord's mercy that they are not consumed. They awake to each new day and boldly live in it, knowing that the mercies of the Lord are new every morning and that his faithfulness is exceedingly great. God will never leave nor forsake them, and his eyes are always toward his people, especially in their misery.

And then by faith the citizens of the kingdom are also confidently assured that what they have obtained already now in principle shall be obtained forever in the life that is to come. They will not always have to strive with the weaknesses of their faith and the sinful lusts of their flesh, which corrupts even the very best of their works, so that they cannot do the good that they would. They will not always need to cry out to be delivered from this body of death and from out of this life, which is only a vale of tears and a valley of the shadow of death. When they shall appear before the righteous tribunal of God at the end of their lives upon earth, they shall not hear the verdict of judgment without mercy. For then they

should only look forward to that day with the greatest dread. Rather, they shall at last be delivered when God vindicates them in Jesus Christ, who brought justice and mercy together at his cross, and in whom the citizens of the kingdom shall be raised far above this night, to view the glories that abide and to dwell with God in perfection, world without end.

That mercy of our Lord shall be revealed at his coming, a mercy that shall lead us to everlasting life, and therefore it is that mercy that will not rest until we are completely delivered from all sin, death, and corruption and brought finally into the rest that is promised us in heaven.

—Garrett Varner

LETTERS

Greetings *Sword and Shield* readers, As the warm weather approaches with the excitement of getting outdoors and enjoying summer plans, we warmly welcome and invite all members of the Reformed Protestant Churches to the family conference to be held at Gull Lake Ministries from August 27–31, 2024. This venue is located at 1800 Burlington Dr, Hickory Corners, Michigan 49060.

The living accommodations at Gull Lake offer an all-inclusive resort experience for families in condo- and hotel-style units featuring private bedrooms and bathrooms with a shared living room and kitchen. The private cottages provide bedrooms, bathrooms, living rooms, and kitchens. Breakfast and supper will be gourmet, buffet-style meals in a large dining room with a panoramic view of the surrounding lake.

Besides the comfortable living accommodations and the meals, the venue offers a variety of daytime activities for young and old. These activities include a sports lake, pickleball courts, splash pad, bowling alley, pool tables, gymnasium, and much more. We will have some daytime activities for the younger children like we had at the last conference at Green Lake, Wisconsin. We are confident that you will have an enjoyable week at this venue, which should satisfy both young and old with its host of options for entertainment. Or if you just want to sit and fellowship, the resort has many great spots to do that also.

If you cannot stay the whole time but want to come just for a day, you may do that. More information regarding the day passes will be communicated closer to the date of the conference once we finalize the details with

the resort, but pencil the dates on your calendars, as we would love to see you there.

The theme for the speeches is “Union with Christ.” The first speech, titled “Union with Christ: In the Holy Spirit,” will be given on Wednesday by Rev. Nathan Langerak. On Thursday Rev. Luke Bomers will give the second speech on the topic of “Union with Christ: His Meritorious Work.” The last speech, titled “Union with Christ: The Inevitable Fruits of Thanksgiving,” will be given by Rev. Tyler Ophoff on Friday.

As a committee, we are super excited for this momentous gathering to enjoy fellowship and the communion of the saints with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

For more information, you can scan the QR Code below, which will take you directly to Gull Lake Ministries’ website!



—On behalf of the steering committee,
Todd Kaptein, chairman



REFORMED BELIEVERS PUBLISHING UPDATE

The publication of the May 2024 issue of *Sword and Shield* means that Reformed Believers Publishing has now published sixty issues of its magazine in the last four years. Reaction to *Sword and Shield* continues to be fiercely twofold. After reading and rereading the articles, some rejoice in the truth of Christ that leaps from the pages. They weep that God is pleased to give them such a glorious witness to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ in this dark world. Others, as our editor noted in the March issue, chillingly reject the witness of *Sword and Shield*. God uses the magazine as a witness to harden those who in unbelief have rejected Christ in his complete work of salvation. It is clear that this magazine serves both as a means in the hastening development of the false church, as that false church will be used by the antichrist, and in the gathering of the small and beleaguered true church just before Christ returns. A more glorious purpose for publishing *Sword and Shield* cannot be imagined.

For the first time in a couple of years, the board is operating at full strength with nine members. Joel Langerak was elected board president and serves on the publication committee with Andy Birkett and Elijah Roberts. Jason Cleveland continues as treasurer and serves on the finance, technology, and personnel committee with Doug Mingerink and Stefan Bodbyl, who is board secretary. Vice president Aaron Cleveland serves on the progress, promotion, and membership committee with Ed Ophoff III and Dan Schipper, who is vice all. The board continues to meet monthly to carry out the work of Reformed Believers Publishing (RBP).

Reformed Believers Publishing continues to publish a magazine that is solidly doctrinal, polemical, and relevant to what is taking place in the church at this time in history. The board is very thankful for the tireless efforts of our editor in chief, Rev. Nathan J. Langerak. He continues to write spiritually stirring meditations, vigorously polemical editorials, and pithy farewells. Rev. Luke Bomers and Rev. Tyler Ophoff add to the boldness of the magazine with their monthly contributions. Those occupying the office of believer have contributed fearlessly to the new

rubrics, *Running Footmen* and *Insights*. *Sword and Shield* very much has a lion-like personality. One is reminded of Reverend Langerak's quotation of Augustine at the first annual meeting of RBP in 2020: "The truth is like a lion. You don't have to defend it. Let it loose. It will defend itself."

The board wishes to express a word of thanks to the two copy editors of *Sword and Shield*. Mrs. Evelyn Langerak has copyedited the magazine from its birth, and more recently Mrs. Allyson Ophoff assists in this work. While all of their work is done behind the scenes, often late into the night as the publishing deadline approaches, and their names never appear on the masthead, a value cannot be placed on their work. The editor in chief has repeatedly expressed this to the board. We also wish to express a word of thanks to Mrs. Tami Cleveland. Since the beginning of the magazine, she has taken care of the mailing list, monthly mailing of the magazine, and coordinating the gathering and distribution of the bound volumes, among other office duties.

Reformed Believers Publishing continues to mail *Sword and Shield* to nearly two thousand subscribers in the United States and in many foreign lands at *no subscription cost*. Each issue costs about \$5,000 to print and mail, sometimes more, depending on the length of the issue. That some readers place a high value on the bold content of the magazine is evidenced by the many financial donations to RBP. One simple request for funds last fall resulted in \$67,000 in donations through January 2024. At the time of this update, the treasurer reports \$76,000 in funds. The board is thankful that it does not have to beg for funds.

God be praised that in the darkness of the lie and censorship, Reformed Believers Publishing was formed. God be praised for the appearance of *Sword and Shield* on the spiritual battlefield. God be praised for four years of the publication of *Sword and Shield*. "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places" (Deut. 33:29).

—The board of Reformed Believers Publishing



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FINALLY, BRETHREN, FAREWELL

Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise; for the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue. They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause. For my love they are my adversaries: but I give myself unto prayer. And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love. Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labour. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the LORD; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the LORD continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth. Because that he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart. As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing like as with his garment, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil into his bones. Let it be unto him as the garment which covereth him, and for a girdle wherewith he is girded continually. Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the LORD, and of them that speak evil against my soul. But do thou for me, O GOD the Lord, for thy name's sake: because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me. — Psalm 109:1–21

Christ's prayer recorded here has little acceptance in the church world of today, which has embraced the God who loves everyone and the Christ who died for all. Christ's prayer could not be printed on the pages of many magazines, just as the doctrine of the prayer could not be preached from many pulpits. If a magazine did print the prayer and call attention to its doctrine, then the prayer would be distasteful to many.

The prayer of Christ has a place on the pages of this magazine, and we sing this prayer because that word too dwells richly in our hearts. Christ's prayer is against Judas, who betrayed the Son of man with a kiss. Christ's prayer is likewise his prayer against the officebearers of the churches that displace him, all the while they take Christ's name on their lips and do their evil work in his name. Their words are smoother than butter and softer than oil. But there is war in their hearts. "Christ, Master, Lord," they say. They fall on Christ's neck and give to him a kiss that says love but is a sign to others to destroy Christ. Thus they bring against themselves this prayer of Christ. All that evil God decreed for the salvation of his church and for the exposure and destruction of the hypocrite, who takes Christ's name on his lips and takes Christ's body and blood into his hands but who loathes Christ. Thus this prayer is a faithful reflection of God's own eternal attitude toward the man.

—NJL