



Lux Mundi

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Jesus said: "I am the light of the world." John 8:12



In this Issue

Dort: the election of infants
Broadest Assemblies in Indonesia and India
Mission: What are we passing on?
NAPARC 2019

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Remembered by God

*It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his
 steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 136:23 ESV)*

Sometimes we feel forgotten by God. When things are going against us, in the crises of life, we might ask: Where is God? Has he forgotten me?

But God never forgets his people. When faced with difficult circumstances—our “low estate”—it is comforting for us to recall what Psalm 136 says: “It is he who remembered us in our low estate” (v. 23).

That was the experience of Israel in the Old Testament. When Israel was enslaved in Egypt, the LORD “remembered” his people in their hardship (Ex. 2:24; 6:5). This “remembering” means that God looked with favour on his people and rescued them by way of the exodus from Egypt.

God remembered his people because “his steadfast love endures forever” (v. 23). God is the covenant-keeping God, who does not abandon the work of his hands. As such, God shows his loving-kindness and mercy toward his people.

What is our deepest crisis? It is the reality of sin, of which the slavery in Egypt was symbolic. God rescued Israel from the slavery of Egypt, meaning that God was on his way to rescuing all of his people from the slavery of sin!

And so God sent his Son as our Saviour from sin and all the resulting misery. When Mary the mother of our Lord received word from the angel that she would give birth to the Christ-child, she said, “For he has looked on the humble

estate of his servant” (Luke 1:48). This not only referred to Mary's personal situation, but also to the humiliating situation of God's people in those days while under Roman occupation and with Herod on the throne. God had his eye on Mary and on all of his people! Mary went on to say, “He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy” (Luke 1:54). Indeed, God's answer to the plight of his people is ultimately to be found in Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world!

What about the difficulties we face from day to day? The LORD will either deliver us from our difficult circumstances or he will give us the strength to face them as he leads us on the road to the heavenly Canaan. On that journey, each child of God may know that God has his eye on him or her. God does not forget us. *

Christ's Psalms, Our Psalms – Devotional is a collection of daily meditations on all 150 Psalms, enough to cover a whole year. Sixteen Reformed pastors from Canada and Australia worked together with the special focus of bringing out the legitimate connection to Christ in every psalm. The meditations are written for teenager and up and are suitable for personal, couple, or family devotions. All proceeds from the sale of the *Devotional* are going to support mission work in Brazil. These same pastors have also written a *Study Resource* on the book of Psalms, providing explanation and comment on every psalm with care taken to show the lines to Christ. The *Study Resource* is to be released in late 2019, the Lord willing. For more information, please consult the editor's website, peterholtvluer.com



The logo combines the ICRC logo with the Lux Mundi monogram, an early Christian symbol combining the initials of Jesus Christ (in Greek I and X), referring to Him as the Light of the World (Lux Mundi).

Front cover picture: GKv Goes, the convening church for the 2020 general synod of the Reformed Churches (liberated) in The Netherlands.



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FROM CHURCH TO CHURCH

Twice these past three months I found myself involved in a situation where the basic question was: can a church in one place admonish a church in another place?

A church and a presbytery

The first time was when I, as a fraternal delegate from a classis, attended a presbytery meeting of one of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's presbyteries. There had been an issue between a first church in one presbytery and a second church in another presbytery. The first church had tried to raise the issue with the presbytery to which the second church belonged at an earlier presbytery meeting. At that time the presbytery denied the issue being brought before it – by the slimmest of margins – because the first church did not belong to it. At the presbytery meeting I attended the decision of the previous meeting to deny the request was challenged. On a side note, it all happened in the most brotherly way: I applaud the OPC brothers for how they dealt with their disagreement.

A synod and churches abroad

The second time was slightly different but similar enough. GS 2019 of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) decided to discontinue ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) (GKv), convinced that the GKv approve of developments that are contrary to the Lord's instruction in his Word. GS 2019 decided to send a letter by the correspondence clerk of the synod to each individual church within the GKv. It further mandated the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad to deliver this letter and decision in person, to the next general synod of the GKv. One of the local churches responded to receiving the letter by noting that both the GKv and CanRC have a church order article that regulates communication between churches abroad via the general synod (and, by implication, its committees).

The question both situations raise is: can a church in one place admonish a church in another place?

Scripture

The New Testament clearly indicates that there was direct communication between churches, hundreds, even thousands of miles apart. For example, the churches of Asia sent greetings to the church in Corinth (1Cor. 16:19). Indeed, all the churches of Christ greeted the saints in Rome (Romans 16:16). Right from the start churches collaborated with one another in regards to matters of doctrine and

practice (Acts 15).

Thus, with good reason, the polity practiced by ICRC member churches is described as *presbyterial-synodal*, indicating that local churches are ruled by office bearers and that churches are connected via assemblies and thus accountable to one another. After all, in the final analysis the one Lord has but one church (Ephesians 4:4-6).

In principle correct

So, in principle there can be no objection to one church in one place within the jurisdiction of one broader assembly communicating with another church in another place within the jurisdiction of another broader assembly. Logic would compel one to conclude that it is in principle okay for a church in one place within the jurisdiction of one broader assembly to communicate with a broader assembly elsewhere (as was the case in the OPC) or for a broader assembly to communicate with churches outside its jurisdiction (as was the case with the CanRC).

In principle... What strikes me about both situations is that it was the *polity* of the churches that gave rise to objections. The debate at the OPC presbytery I attended was about what the Book of Church Order prescribed (with lots of "Hodge" in the debate). The one GKv pointed to the Church Order to indicate that the CanRC were acting improperly.

Now, "it is useful and good for those who govern the church to establish a certain order to maintain the body of the church. However, they must at all times watch that they do not deviate from what Christ, our only Master, has commanded" (Belgic Confession article 32). If our church practice prevents churches from communicating with each other, there is an issue with the polity.

Our practices

I can't speak to the issue that has arisen in the OPC. If I understand it correctly, GA-OPC 2020 will now be considering the question. However, I do know of a similar situation in 1960s within the GKv.

Two churches (Bedum and Hoogeveen), each from different classes, each within different regional synods, had an issue with a third church (Breda) in a third classis within a third regional synod. The first two churches communicated with the third church over the issue, to no avail. The first two churches then turned to the third classis, to no avail. They then turned to the third regional synod, and were judged

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ELECTION OF INFANTS

A common prejudice against the teaching of election is that it undermines the assurance of salvation, that it introduces fatalism and uncertainty that overshadow God's grace.

Despite this common misrepresentation, the *Canons of Dort* (the most definitive and universally received statement of the Reformed view) reverberates with praise to the Triune God for His amazing, undeserved grace and confidence in His invincible favor. A fair-minded reader, scouring every article, would discover an absence of any evidence for fatalism or uncertainty of salvation. Because salvation does not hang upon the thin thread of their own initiative and perseverance, but upon the solid chain of God's electing purpose in Christ, believers may be assured of their

salvation. Sovereign and merciful election furnishes believers with the occasion to give thanks to God on the one hand, and rest confidently in His gracious favor in Christ on the other. For the authors of the *Canons*, the teaching of election serves "the honor of God's name...and the comfort of anxious souls."

This note of assurance comes to remarkable expression in one of the articles in *The First Head of Doctrine*, which treats the subject of "Divine Election and Reprobation." After a series of articles on election and reprobation, the authors address in Article I/17 the question of the election and salvation of believer's children "whom God calls out of this life in infancy."

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right. The third church then turned to the general synod, to no avail. This particular case was actually one reason why in the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a schism within the GKv, leading to the formation of the more congregationally organized Netherlands Reformed Churches (NGK). There is thus precedent within Dort polity for churches from different jurisdictions interacting with each other.

As to the CanRC communicating directly within the individual GKv, it is indeed so that both CanRC and GKv have determined that communication between the federations will run via the synods. However, one should remember that within Dort polity, broader assemblies (and certainly general synods) are not permanent bodies. They are no more than assemblies of all the churches within the jurisdiction of that assembly. When the CanRC write a letter to the general synod of the GKv, they are writing to each GKv. If the CanRC want to be extra sure that their communication reaches each individual GKv, they are within their rights to communicate directly with each GKv; even more so when the communication regards information that immediately and directly impacts their members and ministers. Discontinuing a sister church relationship does exactly that, it no longer grants GKv members access to the Lord's Supper in a CanRC on the basis of just an attestation, and it no longer grants GKv ministers access to a CanRC pulpit on the basis of just an attestation.

It would seem to me that to limit churches to interchurch communication only via their broader assemblies is to

introduce a form of hierarchy into the practice of the churches. At bottom, being sister churches means direct communication between a local church in one place with a local church in another place, no matter where in the world they are.

GS-GKv 2020

In 2017 the ICRC suspended the membership of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) (GKv; aka RCN). For a few months earlier the GKv had decided to allow women to serve in the offices of elder and minister, a matter contrary to the foundation of the ICRC. As is common in the Dort tradition, the GKv convene in general synod once every three years. The current synod, which was opened in November 2019 but begins meeting publicly in January 2020, will be considering appeals against the decision of GS-GKv 2017. In 2017 the ICRC decided to "encourage the RCN to reconsider the action of Synod Meppel 2017 in this matter and to restore the doctrine and/or practice of the RCN to be in agreement with the Basis of the Conference". Thus remains our prayer.

This edition

The Synod of Dort met in 1618 and 1619. Thus we are still celebrating its 400th anniversary. In the pages that follow you will find an article on the election of infants as confessed in the *Canons of Dort* chapter 1 article 17. And there is also a book review on the Synod of Dort. We have reports from two synods, one in Indonesia, one in India, and of NAPARC 2019. And further, there is an article on the matter of tradition in the mission endeavour. Blessings for 2020! ✨

This article, which seems to intrude abruptly into the sequence of the preceding articles, addresses a question that had arisen in the debates regarding election in the Reformed churches prior to the Synod of Dort in 1618-19. The remarkable feature of Article I/17 is that it expresses a full confidence regarding God's favor toward such children. Sovereign and merciful election, far from casting a shadow over the question of assurance, undergirds and fuels a robust confidence in God's favor toward the children of believers.

This article deserves special attention, not only because it witnesses directly to the prominence of the theme of assurance in the *Canons*, but also because it has been relatively neglected in the study of the *Canons*. Article I/17 offers a ringing, unqualified affirmation of the confidence believers may have in the election and salvation of their children whom God calls to Himself in their infancy.

We have already noted that Article I/17 appears to intrude into the sequence of articles on election and reprobation. The impression of a break is not surprising, since Article I/17 was not included in the first draft of the *Canons* and was only added at the encouragement of some delegates in answer to a common Arminian objection regarding sovereign election.

The occasion for this article's inclusion is mentioned in the "Rejection of False Accusations" that concludes the *Canons*, which refers to those who, contrary to "truth, equity, and charity," claim that the Reformed teaching of election implies that "... many of the infant children of believers are snatched in their innocence from their mothers' breasts and cruelly cast into hell so that neither the blood of Christ nor their baptism nor the prayers of the church at their baptism



Synod of Dort

can be of any use to them."

The Synod of Dort was convened to formulate a consensus and to reject the errors of the Arminian party in the Dutch church.

To appreciate the force of this objection, we need to remember the high rate of infant mortality. The Arminian complaint was particularly poignant since it robbed parents of any assurance of the salvation of their deceased children. This was not an abstract point of theology for Reformed parents, but a painful addition to their grief. They were also exposed to the fear of eternal condemnation of their children under the wrath of God.

The consensus opinion of the Synod of Dort is expressed in the article as it

has been received by the Reformed churches to this day. Believing parents ought to have no doubt regarding the election and salvation of their infant children whom God calls to Himself. The doctrine of election, particularly in respect to the question raised by the Arminians' accusation, supports a robust assurance of God's favor toward His people, including their deceased infant children. This assurance rests solidly upon the basis of what is revealed respecting these children in the Word of God, namely, that they are embraced by the covenant promise in Christ and set apart as holy.

The Meaning of Article I/17: Two Views

One of the remarkable features of Article I/17 of the *Canons* is that it has not provoked any substantial debate throughout the history of the Reformed churches. Despite the relative absence of controversy regarding this article, however, there are two distinct interpretations. The first, which might be termed the "stronger" or "positive" one, insists that Article I/17 affirms the election and salvation of the children of believing parents who die in infancy. The

During this year marking the 400th anniversary of the publication of *The Canons of Dort*, Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, IN, is running a series of articles by Dr. Cornelis Venema (Seminary President) on the *Canons* in its newsletter, *the Messenger*. In the articles, Dr. Venema explains the history and contents of *The Canons of Dort* as well as their importance for the global Reformed church today. The 2019 newsletter issues may be viewed from the resource page of the Seminary's website: <http://www.midamerica.edu/messenger>

second, which might be termed the “weaker” or “subjective” one, argues that Article I/17 only speaks of the attitude or hope that believing parents should have with respect to their infant children.

The first view

The first interpretation claims that its encouragement to believing parents is rooted in a confident judgment that their children who die in infancy are elect and saved. Doubt is vigorously excluded. There are several arguments defending this interpretation.

First, this interpretation has the sanction of a long-standing tradition and is often represented in commentaries on the *Canons of Dort*. The judgments submitted by the delegations provide evidence that a strong, if not prevalent, opinion at the Synod of Dort favored a ringing testimony to the election of such children. Many Reformed theologians have taken it to be a straightforward affirmation of the election and salvation of the children of believing parents who die in infancy. Among these commentators, it is observed that the language, “ought not to doubt,” is a *litotes*, the use of negative language to express a positive sentiment. The tradition of commentary on Article I/17 understands it to express, albeit negatively and pastorally, a strong certainty regarding the election and salvation of the deceased children of believing parents.

Second, this interpretation appeals to the occasion for its formulation. If the article only encouraged hope that such children were elect, though all the while granting the possibility that some among them were reprobate, it hardly provides an answer to the Arminian accusation. The only answer to the Arminian accusation was to positively affirm the election of such covenant children.

Third, though the judgments of the delegations reflect a spectrum of opinion on this accusation, most called for a positive statement affirming the election and salvation of the children of believers who die in infancy. This is evident from the fact that Article I/17 was unanimously approved for inclusion in the final form of the *Canons*.

Fourth, the “Rejection of False Accusations” at the conclusion of the *Canons* declares emphatically that the Arminian accusation is false. If Article I/17 were stating a less than certain affirmation of the election of these children, the Arminian accusation could hardly be declared false. If any room were left for believing parents to be unsure of the election of their deceased infants, the Arminian accusation retains its punch.

And fifth, the pastoral form of Article I/17 does not mean



Reyanna Janssen, daughter of editor Karlo Janssen, born and deceased May 10, 2014.

that it falls short of a positive affirmation of the salvation of the children of believing parents who die in infancy. Though it is alleged that the language “ought not to doubt” speaks only to the subjective attitude such parents may have in the circumstance of the death of their infant children, this language is used because it answers precisely to the form of the Arminian accusation. A simple statement of the truth, that such children are elect, would not suffice to answer the pointed complaint of the Arminians.

For these reasons, rather than leave uncertain the election and salvation of such children, the first interpretation of the pastoral word of Article I/17 insists that nothing less than a certain affirmation of their election could enjoin upon believing parents the duty to be confident in this circumstance.

The second view

Despite the arguments often mustered for a strong interpretation of Article I/17, there are some interpreters who take a different, weaker view. In the opinion of these interpreters, Article I/17 stops short of expressing a positive certainty regarding the election and salvation of such children. According to this weaker reading, believing parents are encouraged to have a good hope that their infant children are elect, but this is not tantamount to an affirmation of their election within God's secret will and

purpose. Article I/17 speaks to the “attitude” that believing parents should cultivate in the circumstance of the death of their infant children. But it does not purport to speak objectively of the election of such children.

Though this interpretation of Article I/17 seems to have fewer advocates than the strong interpretation, it does have some able and clear advocates. The Protestant Reformed writers, Herman Hoeksema and Homer Hoeksema, have presented a fairly vigorous argument for a more subjective reading of the article. In this reading, Article I/17 encourages believing parents to have hope respecting the salvation of their children who die in infancy, but this hope is a “subjective” attitude that leaves open the question of the status of such children within the hidden judgment of God.

Herman Hoeksema's comments on this article are surprisingly critical. Although acknowledging the important pastoral and historical occasion for the inclusion of the article in the *Canons*, Hoeksema judges the article to be inappropriate for a confessional statement in that it does not express “a definite view concerning the salvation of children who die in infancy” (*Believers and Their Seed*, p. 149). While he acknowledges that many interpreters take this definite view, Hoeksema is convinced that the article speaks only to the attitude of parents in this circumstance and “does not express an objective item of faith...” (*Believers and Their Seed*, p. 150). Hoeksema also notes that the article provides no help to parents who may be unsure whether their children belong to the category of infants or whether they may have reached the age of discretion.

In addition to the subjectivity and uncertainty that characterize the language of the article, Hoeksema adds another argument against taking it as a definite statement. Since we know from Romans 9 that not all of those who fall within the “sphere” of the covenant are elect, we cannot infer from the apparent covenant status of such children that they are elect. Upon the basis of these considerations and his rejection of the texts often cited to support Article I/17, Hoeksema concludes that the most the church can say on the question is that “the Lord saves *His seed* out of our seed” (*Believers and Their Seed*, p. 158).

Homer Hoeksema's discussion of Article I/17 in *The Voice of Our Fathers* is similar. He also argues that the “negative and subjective viewpoint” of the article confirms that it only speaks to the attitude of believing parents in the circumstance of the death of their infant children (p. 276). Since the article does not express a definite conviction,

Homer Hoeksema concludes that it is “of little doctrinal or confessional value” (p. 277). Unlike Herman Hoeksema, who bases his discussion almost entirely upon the text of Article I/17, Homer Hoeksema appeals to the judgments of the various delegations at the Synod of Dort. According to him, these judgments confirm that it was not the intention of the delegates to express a definite conviction. Homer Hoeksema lists four considerations supporting a subjective interpretation: 1) the primary point of doctrine affirmed is the teaching of the election and reprobation of infants, not the “narrow question of the salvation of children of believers who die in infancy” (p. 276); 2) not one of the judgments of the various delegations expresses “a purely objective and Scripturally established statement” (p. 276); 3) the Scriptures in the judgments of the delegates to the Synod do not teach that all children of believing parents who die in infancy are elect; and 4) the judgments of the delegations prove that “the Synod by no means intended to express as a hard and fast ecclesiastical statement of doctrine that all children of believing parents who die in infancy are elect and are saved on the basis of the testimony of Scripture, but that the Synod exactly avoided such a statement” (p. 277).

The arguments of Herman Hoeksema and Homer Hoeksema illustrate the second interpretation, although our view coincides with the first interpretation: the article forthrightly affirms the election of the deceased infant children of believers.

Article I/17 & the Westminster Confession

Is there any difference between the affirmation of Article I/17 of the *Canons of Dort* and the affirmation of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 10.3? The *Westminster Confession of Faith* affirms that elect “infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.” Since both of these statements express the common faith of the Reformed churches, a comparison is in order.

An obvious dissimilarity between these two confessional statements is that they address different questions. Though WCF 10.3 speaks about the election of infants, it deals primarily with “effectual calling.” The first article of chapter 10 affirms that effectual calling occurs in the lives of the predestined, ordinarily through the means of Christ's Word and Spirit. WCF 10.3 explains that “elect infants,” unable to make use of the “ordinary means,” are saved through the

Spirit of regeneration in an extraordinary manner.

A dissimilarity of less significance is that Article I/17 does not address the election of infants of non-believing parents. By contrast, WCF 10.3 describes the general category of all elect infants who die.

Each confession addresses the issue from a different perspective, but neither makes any affirmation that is inconsistent with the other. This is evident from the similarities that can also be detected between them.

The most significant similarity is their common teaching about God's sovereign election. Both statements assume that salvation or non-salvation depends ultimately upon God's sovereign and merciful election of some persons and not others. On this fundamental, biblical and Reformed teaching, these confessional statements fully concur.

WCF 10.3 affirms, and Article I/17 infers, that the deceased children of believing parents are not excluded from salvation due to their inability to make use of the ordinary means of salvation. God's electing purpose is invincible and will be effected upon the basis of Christ's mediatorial work and the Spirit's application of that work to all the elect.

These two statements do not contradict each other, and a Reformed believer can in good conscience affirm both. Because they address distinct questions from different points of view, however, it is also possible that a believer who subscribes to WCF 10.3 might not subscribe to Article I/17. All Reformed believers, whether they hold to the *Canons of Dort* or the WCF, must agree that "elect infants who die in infancy" are regenerated without the ordinary means of grace.

WCF 10.3 expresses a truth common to the Reformed confessions: salvation depends entirely upon God's sovereign and electing grace. Article I/17, by comparison, expresses a truth that is particular to the *Canons of Dort* and constitutes one of its unique contributions to the Reformed confession of sovereign election.

Concluding Observations

Though Article I/17 of the *Canons of Dort* has been relatively neglected, it provides an important example of the Reformed view's stress on God's honor as the Savior of His people and the believer's comfort in His gracious favor. This study warrants three general conclusions.

First, any interpretation of Article I/17 requires careful attention to the precise question that it answers. Unless this question is properly defined, we will not be able to determine accurately what is affirmed in this article. The question that Article I/17 addresses is not merely the general question whether God elects or reprobates infants, though this was denied by the Arminians and affirmed by the Reformed delegates to the Synod of Dort. Nor is Article I/17 addressed to the general question whether there may be elect as well as non-elect persons with whom God covenants in the covenant of grace. The judgments of the various delegations to the Synod of Dort indicate that there was a general consensus among those present that not all of the children of believing parents are elect. The opinions of these delegations include references to Romans 9, which teaches that some children of believing parents, like Esau, may be reprobate within the will and purpose of God. But these general points of biblical and Reformed teaching were

not the specific focus of Article I/17. Rather Article I/17 answers specifically a question regarding the election and salvation of the children of believing parents whom God calls out of this life in their infancy. As some of the judgments of the delegates are careful to observe, God did not will that these children should live and grow to an age of discretion. They are children who were not in a position to break the gracious covenant that God had established with them and their parents. The persons whose election and salvation is addressed in Article I/17 are a special class of persons within the framework of the covenant of grace. The Arminian accusation was that the parents of such children could not be certain of their salvation, since they might well be reprobate within the secret will of God. The great question, and the only



Westminster Assembly

question, to which Article I/17 speaks, then, is the question whether believing parents may be confident of the election and salvation of these children.

Second, if we bear in mind the specific question to which Article I/17 provides an answer, we will hardly be able to escape the conclusion that it amounts to nothing less than a definite statement of the election and salvation of these children. The arguments set forth in support of what I have termed the “stronger” reading of Article I/17 all concur at this point. Only a strong affirmation of the election and salvation of the children of believing parents who die in infancy provides a satisfactory answer to the Arminian objection summarized in the Canons' closing “Rejection of False Accusations.” Article I/17 would be an evasion of that accusation, if it only encouraged a “strong presumption” or “hope” that such children are elect within the purpose of God. Even a strong, hopeful attitude that such children are elect leaves the door open to the possibility that they are not elect. But this would be tantamount to granting the truth of the Arminian complaint that the Reformed view provides believing parents no reason to be confident of the election of such children.

The principal objection to the “weaker” view of Article I/17, is that it *abstracts* from the particular question to which this article answers. The weaker view, which claims that Article I/17 only encourages believing parents to have a good hope regarding the election of their children, opens the door to a speculative appeal to the secret will and judgment of God that would invariably undermine any such hope. The argument for this view emphasizes that God's electing will ultimately distinguishes between some children of believers who are genuinely recipients of the covenant promise (election) and others who are not (reprobation). It also observed that some children of believing parents grow up and fall away in unbelief and disobedience, and that this accords with the sovereign purposes of God. When proponents of the weaker view apply these general truths taught in Scripture to the particular persons who are envisioned in Article I/17, they conclude that Article I/17 could not be a positive affirmation of the election and salvation of such children. The problem with this line of reasoning is that *it undermines any possible basis for assurance, not only in the case of the deceased infant children of believers, but also in the case of any believer.* By opening the door to a measure of doubt by appealing to the secret judgment of God, this approach unavoidably opens the door to similar doubt in the case of any believer's

assurance of salvation. This line of speculative reasoning is expressly precluded by the opening phrase of I/17, when it states that we “must make judgments about God's will from His Word.” The way of assurance for believing parents set forth in Article I/17 is the *same* way of assurance that all believers must follow, lest the assurance of election and salvation be no more than a hopeful attitude regarding what may possibly be the case. When Article I/17 says that we must make judgments about the election and salvation of such children upon the basis of God's revealed Word, it reflects a long-standing Reformed conviction that the revealed Word of God in the gospel is the “mirror of election,” and the principal basis for the believer's assurance of God's favor.

And third, our study confirms one of the characteristic features of the doctrine of election in the *Canons of Dort*. In the specific case of the deceased children of believing parents, the authors of the *Canons* desired a clear statement of assurance that would comfort parents and belie the false accusation of the Arminian party. Despite the Arminian charge that the doctrine of election undermines the assurance of salvation, the affirmation of Article I/17 declares that God's sovereign and merciful election is the only solid basis for assurance regarding the salvation of the deceased infant children of believers. For such children to be saved, God must love them in and for the sake of Christ. Indeed, no one is saved whom God does not graciously choose to save in Christ. This holds true for children as much as for adults. As members of the fallen race in Adam, the children of believers whom God calls out of this life in infancy are saved solely by virtue of God's gracious favor. Far from intimating any doubt respecting the assurance of their election, this article declares an assurance securely founded upon the biblical and Reformed teaching regarding election. It illustrates what we noted at the outset: the biblical and Reformed teaching safeguards the singular honor of God who sovereignly and graciously saves His people in Christ, and it undergirds the believer's confidence in His gracious and invincible favor. ✱

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GGRC SYNOD 2019

SYNOD OF THE CALVINIST CHURCHES IN INDONESIA (GGRC)

AT THE YUSUF GRC IN KORLOK ON ROTE ISLAND, AUGUST 13-15, 2019.

Thanks be to the Lord that our General Synod at GRC in Korlok on Rote island could go very well. On Monday August 12th all delegates both from Indonesia as well as from abroad arrived at the little airport of Ba'a Region on Rote island.

From abroad we could welcome Rev. Dr. Anrew J. Pol and Br. Otto Bouwman who came on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), Rev. Dr. Dick Moes who came on behalf of the United Reformed Church North America (URCNA), Rev. Anthon Souman and Br. Eric Heerema from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), and Rev. Anup Kumar Arun Hiwale from the Evangelical Reformed Church of India (ERC India). Rev. Anup was accompanied by his wife and youngest child. Also present were two brothers from the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI). Those were Rev. Kardinal and Evangelist Rongos.

From Ba'a they traveled to the Synod place in Korlok – Landu–Lete, using a bus provided by our local Indonesia government of Rote Region. They arrived in Korlok village in the dark, other delegates from the GGRC had already arrived. After having dinner and fellowship together they all got rest before the opening of the General Synod on the next day.

Opening

The General Synod was opened on Tuesday August 13, 2019. The Korlok Church as the convening church opened the synod by speaking words of welcome to all the delegates that had come, as well as representation from the

government. The General Synod was begun with a worship service together led by Rev. Steven Hun from GRC Nordale. He read Psalm 133 and offered a brief meditation on this Psalm about how good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! He emphasized the importance of being together, united in peace and joy in one faith. He then closed the service by asking all of us to sing praising our God by sing together from Kidung Jemaat 249:1. This song speaks of the importance of being together in one faith, one baptism and one Lord and God.

Executive

Following worship, on behalf of the convening church Elder M.E.I Bulan, SH.S.PdK from GRC Yusuf Korlok invited the delegates to take their seat at the Synod table and spoke some words of thanks. Once all the GGRC delegates found their places, Elder Erik and Rev. Hun of the convening church led the delegates in electing the Synod executive. Elected to the executive were : Rev. Melki Z. Bulan S.Th. as the chairman, Rev. Yonathan Snae, M.Div. as the vice chairman, Rev. Yeheskiel Boling, S.Th. as clerk and Elder Soleman Dethan as recording clerk.

Rev. Melki Bulan as the chairman of synod then asked all the delegates to rise in order to express their faithfulness to the Bible and agreement with the Reformed confessions. The delegates then were asked to recite the Apostles Creed and sang together Kidung Jemaat 242:1 (All glory be to God).



Greetings from sister churches and contact churches

Since Rev. Dr. Dick Moes from the URCNA had to go home already the next day (there was an issue with his flight tickets), the Synod's chairman, Rev. Melki, requested the delegates from abroad, both sister churches and contact churches, to pass on their greetings to the Synod first. Thus Rev. Moes was given the opportunity to address synod first.

Rev. Moes spoke on behalf of the URCNA, one of our sister churches. He expressed his joy and happiness at being with our delegates in this our Synod. He was also quite impressed with the way we held our Synod. Even though we held it in a very rural region with such simple facilities he noted it could still function well and professionally. Rev. Moes on behalf of URCNA gave his greetings to all the delegates and wished us all the best for the Synod. Rev. Moes hoped that our relationship as sister churches may continue and that we could help each other as brothers in the Lord.

After Rev. Moes gave his speech, the chairman gave the opportunity to Rev. Anup Kumar Hiwale from the Reformed Evangelical Church of India. In his speech Rev. Hiwale also said that it would be great if we as reformed brothers in the Asian context could work together and help each other build the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Rev. Hiwale also said that they would gladly invite delegates to attend their Synod.

The next greetings were given by Br. Otto Bouwman from the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) as our sister



Delegates to Synod GGRC 2019

church. In his speech Brother Bouwman said that we all should be happy now both GGRC and CanRC are sister churches, even though it took 18 years to get to this point. We are happy and thank the Lord for the relationship we have as sister churches.

After Br. Otto Bouwman gave his speech, the chairman asked the brothers from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) to give their greeting. The greetings were delivered by Rev. Anthon Souman. In his Speech Rev. Souman gave the greetings from the brothers and sisters from the FRCA.

After that the speech was given by Rev. Kardinal from the GGRI. Rev. Kardinal said that he and his colleague Ev. Rongos were happy to be on Rote island and enjoyed the brotherhood relationship with all the delegates. Rev. Kardinan invited the GGRI to send delegates to attend their National Synod to be held in West Kalimantan in 2020.

Besides all these speeches from the sister churches and contact church the Synod also received letters of greetings from the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) as well as from the GGRI-NTT.¹

All the greetings were given in brotherly love. The chairman asked a pastor to lead in prayer for each denomination that had given their greetings to the synod.

Indonesian Government speech for the Synod

According to custom and regulations here in Indonesia, when we convene a general synod like this, we invite the



Dr. Pol addressing Synod

¹ Editor's note: The GGRI (Reformed Churches in Indonesia) is more like a federation of federations, consisting of the GGRI in West Kalimantan, the GGRI in the NTT province, and the GGRI in Papua. As the next GGRI synod is in West Kalimantan, the interchurch relations committee is currently the responsibility of the GGRI in West Kalimantan. The GGRC is for the most part, in the NTT province.



Executive of the Synod

Indonesian government so that the Synod could be regarded as a legitimate meeting. Thank the Lord even though it was late, a representative from the government did come in the late afternoon and gave his speech and greetings. The speech of the government was given by Mr. Jostaf Faah, SH. He is a Christian and gave a great and Biblical speech, offering a lot of encouragement to our delegates. After that we all had a great dinner and enjoy fellowship together.

Synod devotions

On the first full day of Synod, it was opened by a devotion led by Rev. Dr. Pol² elaborated on the theme of brotherly unity in Psalm 133. He emphasized that we should be thankful when there is true unity in the Lord. He explained in his two points that this unity is an amazing miracle and that it should be respected by us as God's children. After the devotion, Dr. Pol asked all the delegates to sing in praise of our Triune God. Rev. Yonathan Snae led in closing prayer.

On the second day of Synod, the assembly was opened by a devotion led by Rev. Kardinal, M.PdK from GGRI in West Kalimantan. Rev. Kardinal first asked the delegates to praise our God from Kidung Jemaat 392 and then read Luke 5:1-11. In his devotion Rev. Kardinal talked about how to fish for people and follow our Lord Jesus Christ. Rev. Kardinal then closed his devotion with words of prayer.

Brotherly fellowship

Synod proceeded in an orderly fashion and went very well. There were lots of proposals from our local churches and all were thoroughly discussed. Most importantly, we sought to

collect wisdom from the delegates in a Christian manner.

We were grateful that during the meeting of synod Rev. Dr. Andrew Pol, who is fluent in Indonesian, could translate all our debating, discussions and decisions for the brothers from abroad by typing his translation on his laptop so that they could read along while synod could kept going with its business.

Synod main decisions

Most of the proposals that coming from our local Church were about how to strengthen our Reformed teaching for the members of the churches as well as how to find and collect funds to provide more Reformed literature, including material on the church order and Sunday school for the younger children.

Also there are some proposals on how to collect funds for building churches for our local and new mission congregations as well as to improve the economic circumstances of many of our members. In order to solve the problems the Synod decided to establish a special committee for this.

Synod also gave the Committee for Relation with Churches Abroad (CRCA) the mandate to continue to build relationships with our sister churches and churches with which we have contact.

With a view to our relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) (GKv), there was sadness. Synod was grieved by the new developments in this denomination regarding women in office. Though there is a sister church relationship between the GKv and GGRC, there is no direct cooperation with the GKv in any project nor does the GGRC receive support from the GKv. Yet, as sister churches, Synod decided there is an obligation to pass on our advice and wisdom to them. Thus our Synod gave the mandate to the CRCA to write a letter of advice to them that by the grace of God they can to come back to the right Biblical principle. Synod determined that if the GKv do not repent, the GGRC will discontinue the relationship with them.

In connection with our relationship with the CanRC, the Synod delegates were so happy to see that the brothers from CanRC were able to come and sit with us at our General Synod. We were very happy that the General Synod of the

² Editor's note: Dr. Andrew Pol used to be an instructor at the seminary on the neighbouring island of Sumba. Several of the GGRC pastors have been his students.

CanRC held last May accepted our denomination as their sister churches. By attending our Synod, they met with our church leaders and could see with their own eyes how our federation functions and how we as Reformed brothers are willing and love to teach our people to grow more and more in our reformed doctrines. We hope that through attending this General Synod, the brothers will be able to give a right and true testimony to other churches, so that they can all pray for us and that we can support each other well for the upbuilding of God kingdom.

Cultural differences: sharing a bed...

We were so happy to see that our brothers from abroad were able to adjust well to our life on Rote island, even though the synod was held in a rural area, with very limited cell service and wifi, with a different kind of food, and a different way of life.

One thing that we noticed was that the brothers from abroad were not keen on sharing a bed with another brother. One of my very close brothers kept telling me, "please don't have another brother sleep in the same bed as me.....".

I guess this is the hardest part for some of the brothers from abroad to adjust to in our culture. In our culture, we love to sleep together as brothers in the Lord. As a matter of fact, we as Indonesian brothers always sleep together in one bed while sharing and telling stories. That was how we grew up with and there were no negative thoughts. Instead we could share lots of thoughts and try to collect some wisdom for our church or community problems.

Thus we were a bit surprised to hear the brothers were unwilling to share a bed, but we understand!!

On the other hand we all were so happy to see that all our delegates were willing to come and enjoy the glorious fellowship during the Synod. We could share thoughts and feelings together, sing together, eat together, sit together, discuss lots of thing together, had fun and laughed together. Above all, we were so glad we could worship our God together in one faith and love as children of God and brothers. We thank God for all the wonderful experience and the good atmosphere.

Synod Committees

The Synod appointed 4 important committees for our denomination for the years 2019-2022. Those are:

- Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad: chairman: Rev. Yonson G. Dethan, Vice Chairman Rev. Y.M.Bunda, S.Th, secretary : Br. Soleman Dethan; further members: elder M.E.I

Bulan, SH, S.Pd.K, Rev. Yeheskiel Boling, S.Th, Rev.Melki Z. Bulan, S.Th.

- Committee for Internal Church Affairs:³ chairman : Rev. Gabriel Manno, S.Pd.K, vice chairman Rev. Steven Hun.S.PdK., secretarty Marten Djari Members: Rev. Paulus Udju Lulu, Rev. Yonathan Snae, M.Div.
- Comittee for Financial Affairs and Fund-raising: chairman : Elder Samuel Y. Tunga, S.Pd, Secretary elder Dominggus O. Lay, S.AP.
- Committee for Church Administration: chairman elder Dominggus O. Lay, S.AP, vise chairman elder Noven Doroh, SH, Secretary: elder Febrianus Dake, S.PdK, members: elder Linus Lulu, Ev. Yunus Kosat, S.Th , Br.Isak Teti, S.Pd and Br.Ferdinan Haba.

Synod also decided appointed the GRC Ebenhaezer Noelbaki (by Kupang, Timor Island) to convene the next synod in August 2022, the Lord willing.

Saying Goodbye

Synod was closed on Thursday, August 15th, 2019 with a devotion led by Rev. Yeheskiel Boling, S.Th. He first asked the delegates to sing praise our God by singing from Kidung Jemaat 407. Rev Boling read Psalm 23 about the LORD as our Good Shepherd. He then closed in prayer. After the closing of Synod, all the delegates received opportunity to give final words of impression and say goodbyes. It was a very emotional time. There were many tears given the beautiful time we had together, and now we would all have to be separated from each other and say farewell.

We all praise and thank God for all his blessings and the good time we had together in Korlok, Rote Island. *

³ Editor's note: e.g. contact with the government.

**SOLA GRATIA
SOLA SCRIPTURA
SOLA FIDE
SOLO CHRISTO
SOLI DEO GLORIA!**

SYNOD 2019 - RPCNEI CELEBRATIONS OF 40 YEARS AND THE 29TH SYNOD

Author: Rev. Dr. V. Lalnghakthang
V. Lalnghakthang is a minister with the RPCNEI,
serving as its general secretary.

As a mark of the 40 years of God's Faithfulness, the **Reformed Presbyterian Church North East India** has celebrated the Ruby Jubilee during the 29th Synod on the 30th November 2019 at the Children's Home Saikawt, India. More than 2000 congregations from different presbyteries and mission field comprising of 13 people groups gathered for the celebration.

The celebration begins with unveiling of the Jubilee memorial stone by the founder Pastor Rev. Thangkhawvel (88) and dedicated for the Glory of God by Rev. Damkhawlien (80) which was followed by singing Halleluiah Chorus by the jubilee choir. The first Board of Directors, present executive committee members, Presbytery



Unveiling of the Jubilee Memorial Stone



Dedication prayer for the memorial stone

representatives, the founding local church representatives and guests sounded the jubilee gong for the glory of God as well.

The indoor celebration program began by singing the jubilee song composed by the Rev Lalnghatlien Songate, Pastor with the RPCNEI. The General Secretary gave a church

growth report of 40 years. A Jubilee souvenir was released and dedicated by Elder L Kiemlo Pulamte, the then Promotional Secretary and the message was delivered by the Rev. Ros Infimate, the then General Secretary. Different choirs from Presbyteries present melodious song in praising God.

The Celebration Committee recognised the founding leaders, first workers, first Pastor, first elders of the church by giving out memento. Few minutes' silent prayer was observed to give respect to the departed souls of the founding leaders and church members and a prayer was offered for the family members. Congregations from different states of India had travelled one or two day to attend the celebration. The Rev. L Roshyama Hrangchal, President Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship (RPF) and Vice Principal Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and the Rev. Dr. Ramengliana, Secretary of the Northeast India Christian Council (NEICC) graced the celebration and give greetings to the gatherings. Brother Cees Timmers and his wife Rianne Timmers from the Netherlands have graced the jubilee on behalf of India Mission and the DVN, Netherlands. Jubilee greetings were received from sister churches and international partners which are published in the souvenir. And the celebration closed with a Jubilee Feast.

The history of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India goes back to 1935, after the American Presbyterians started work in North India. Still, the Reformed Presbyterian Church



Delegates to the 29th Synod of the RPCNEI

North East India was started only in the early days of 1979. But, the Lord has blessed the church tremendously. RPC was started with 10 local church but has grown to 102 local churches in 40 years. And the Lord increased the membership to more than 11,000 in 6 presbyteries, 7 mission field; and it runs 35 institutions including schools. The church was started voluntarily without having a regular monthly salary by the former workers but today it has 468 regular workers. Among many successful stories of the ministry in 40 years, the result of Children's Home Saikawt ministry has contributed so much in the life and ministry of the church besides its contribution to the community at large, that most of the present leadership of the church are the alumni of the Home.

Though RPC was started in 1979, its first Synod was in 1990. Therefore, the Ruby jubilee was celebrated together with the 29th Synod. The Synod session was held for three days attended by 114 delegates from 6 Presbyteries and 4 Mission Field. Rev Lungawiruol Khawbung (known as Lawr) was elected as the new Moderator and Rev Saithanglur Joute the Vice Moderator. The synod received the General Secretary report and resolved 61 proposals made by the presbyteries, executive committee and the synod nomination committee. The synod decision includes – approval of ministry Plan and Budget for 2020; Review of

the Missionary Recruitment Policy; Church Standard on Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Bi-sexual. Since the LGBT is against the Bible the 29th Synod disapproved of those people involved in this act. The Church cannot accept this and members who indulge in such acts would be excommunicated and can be re-admitted again only after confession of their sin. The Synod approved functioning of Reformed Education And Development Society (READS) which is a diaconal ministry department of the church from 2020. All the development department work will be carry out by READS, and Development Department be known as READS. And the Synod decided to open a new mission field in Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh state as well. ✳

'Great is thy Faithfulness' Lamentations 3:23

NAPARC 2019

The 45th annual meeting of the **North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council** (NAPARC) convened on Tuesday afternoon, November 12, 2019 at the Rohthem Presbyterian Church in Anaheim, California, a congregation of the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin). The outgoing Chairman, Rev. Dr. David Kim, led the opening devotions.

NAPARC is composed of 13-member churches which include the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC), the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), the Reformed Church of Quebec (Église réformée du Québec) (ERQ), the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA), the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin) (KPCA), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PresRC), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), and the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). Representatives of the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) and the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) attended as invited observers.

No representatives of the PresRC were able to attend this year but they hope to return next year.

The basis of NAPARC's fellowship is "Confessing Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Sovereign Lord over all of life, we affirm the basis of the fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to be full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts, and to its teaching as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms."¹

One of the first orders of business was the election of new officers. Elected as Chairman was Rev. Dr. L. Anthony Curto of the OPC. Elected as Vice-chairman was Rev. Bryce Hales of the PCA. Rev. Ralph Pontier was elected to a third term as Secretary, and Rev. Todd De Rooy was elected to a second term as Treasurer. The chairmanship and vice-chairmanship rotate annually among the 13-member churches following an alphabetical listing. The vice-chairman this year is slated to serve as chairman next year,

¹ NAPARC Constitution, II. Basis



Delegates to NAPARC 2019

and his denomination is asked to host the following year. A large portion of time was spent on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday with each member church giving an oral report on the state of his denomination or federation. Following each report delegates could ask questions and a designated delegate led the group in prayer for the church that had reported. Reports related reasons for rejoicing and reasons for humbling ourselves under God's mighty hand. There were encouraging reports of progress toward greater levels of unity among some of the member churches. The reports made evident that the Lord continues to build his church as he has promised. All matters were brought before the Lord in prayer.

On Tuesday evening we enjoyed a delicious buffet of Korean food provided by the host congregation. Our hosts also led a devotional service that evening with Rev. Barnabas Jung presiding and with Rev. Dr. John Song preaching. His text was 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3 and he spoke on "Life in Christ: works of faith, labors of love, and endurance of hope." On the Wednesday evening following a sumptuous feast, we were inspired as we listened to Rev. Dr. David Kim give an historical overview of the Kosin church both in Korea and in North America – a church born in the crucible of extreme persecution and martyrdom.

On Wednesday afternoon and Thursday morning, delegates were able to challenge and encourage one another through a discussion of three topics suggested by member churches. The topics were:

- *What is the current stance within NAPARC on organic union?* This was proposed for discussion by the ARPC. During this discussion, delegates were referred to a previously published document on the NAPARC website, "Informational Documents" which contains a definition of organic unity and an essay on the topic.
- *As we are and will be dealing with an increasing number of issues and cases regarding such topics as human sexuality; marriage, divorce and remarriage; LGBTQ issues; pornography, gender identification, etc., would it be helpful to create a NAPARC depository to share any denominational position papers or committee reports or other publications dealing with these issues?* This was proposed for discussion by the HRC. As a result of this discussion, the NAPARC Secretary was asked to collect, index, and distribute a list of currently available resources from member churches.

- *The wisdom, propriety, and utility of a linguistic updating of Confessional Standards.* This was proposed for discussion by the OPC. Delegates expressed both encouragement and caution regarding such an endeavor.

Another topic was introduced and explained but the discussion was scheduled for next year's meeting. The RPCNA wishes to discuss the propriety and wisdom of limiting denominations within national boundaries.

The NAPARC schedule runs from Tuesday afternoon to Thursday noon and provides time slots for bi-lateral meetings between the inter-church or ecumenical committees of the member churches. These smaller meetings have proven fruitful for member churches to grow closer together and manifest more fully their oneness in Christ.

In addition to the annual meeting of the Council, NAPARC sponsors consultations where representatives of member churches gather to discuss cooperation in a specific area of ministry. For more than thirty years, there have been annual world mission consultations in September of each year. This year representatives from nine NAPARC member church world mission agencies (ARPC, CanRC, FRCNA, HRC, OPC, PCA, PresRC, RPCNA, and URCNA) met together at the OPC's administration offices in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. Joining with them were representatives from four NAPARC member church diaconal ministries or agencies (CanRC, FRCNA, OPC, and URCNA). It was reported: "The sessions were productive, and the fellowship was sweet." Mr. Mark T. Bube served as the chairman and Rev. Dr. Arjan de Visser served as the secretary.

The next such NAPARC joint consultation is scheduled for September 15-16, 2020, again in Willow Grove, with Mr. Bube as the chairman and the Rev. Douglas B. Clawson as the secretary for the world mission agencies, and Mr. David P. Nakhla as the chairman for the diaconal mission agencies. The Council enjoyed the gracious and generous hospitality of the Rohthem Presbyterian Church and experienced warm and joyous fellowship with fellow delegates, observers, and other guests.

The next meeting of the Council is scheduled for November 10-12, 2020, to be hosted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church at the Shiloh OPC in Raleigh, North Carolina. ❄️



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WHAT ARE WE PASSING ON? THE MISSIONARY TRADITION AND THE “TRADENDUM” IN MISSION WORK

Mission can be so self-evident to the Christian church that no consideration is given to the question what the most obvious description of mission might be. Nevertheless, that which is the *content* of missionary activity – i.e., the good news of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ – is worthy of being held up against the light of God's revelation. The content of the Gospel can certainly be considered. In addition to the *format* of the Gospel, the content always needs to be mirrored to the Bible. The custom of regularly assessing the known central themes of mission work should not be limited to a consideration of the *methods* of the mission work. This also applies to other questions such as *who* is doing the actual com-missioning and *why* are we involved in missionary work? The structure of the mission received attention in my earlier contribution (*Lux Mundi*, March 2019). This time I would like to draw your attention to the content of our *missionary* activity.

There is a great deal of agreement as to what mission means: it is to make known the Gospel of grace. Everyone, near or far, needs to be told who Jesus is. People need to hear about his work of saving the world and how he is preparing for his Kingdom to come. One of the apostles wrote in a letter to a congregation that he himself had founded the short content of his message. He did not want to convince anyone by his eloquence, but although he was weak and insecure, he said, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). And in 1 Cor. 15:1-11 the same apostle, Paul, explains more broadly what this implies. Although he was an apostle *sent out* by the church at Antioch, he provided for himself through his manual labour. This means he did not travel around with a cartload of baggage or a parade of personnel. He remained on his own and approached people one by one with the knowledge of Jesus Christ, the crucified. In the history of mission we see a nuanced depiction. Sometimes there are people who, with the best of intentions, feel called to proclaim “Christ only, and him crucified”, while also unconsciously carrying with them many other things, and sometimes – also very innocently or deliberately – passing these on to the receiving parties. It is fair to say that *every* western missionary takes along a load of baggage with him

when he goes out into the world to tell the good news to those for whom Jesus is unknown. Although the missionaries in the 1950's in (Dutch) New Guinea (now Papua) had good intentions to really focus and to only tell the good news about Jesus, the (former) governor, Jan van Baal, saw something else happening. He said, “The missionaries concentrate themselves on the message of the Gospel, but the tin cans that they carelessly throw away have more influence on the Papuans than all their stories about Jesus”. The history of the mission shows that people all over the world were willing to hear the stories of missionaries, especially because they were primarily interested in the things the missionaries brought along from western society. The mirrors and the beads spoke to their imagination. And one can think also of medicine, clothing, tools and other materials. It seemed hardly possible to bring the good news to the people without these materials. It is hardly possible to bring the good news 'without ulterior motives' to the man or woman. It is certainly possible to explain the need for these side effects as a virtue; but it is more important for the missionary to take into account of *what* it is that is being passed on. It begins by examining the tradition that has been shaped in the history of the missionary work, and to focus on what it is all about. The question is how people have determined what needs to be passed on.

Church traditions

It is through humans that traditions came into place. Customs and habits are passed on from one generation to the next. People are inclined to follow in earlier footsteps, without asking why it “simply happens the way it does”. Traditions come about through the formation of habits. It clearly has to do with the law of preservation of certain behaviours. We always do things this way, so why should we deviate from it? Indeed, there is an element of security to follow a good habit. We feel safe with it, without having to think about why we always do something the way we have always done. As soon as the traditions are elevated beyond any criticism, we can speak of conservatism. Traditions can also change and develop with the culture and with the people who find them valuable and who adapt to the

circumstances.

A tradition does not necessarily have to be ancient. Pioneers create their own traditions. It's always like this, and it's like this because that's the way it's always done. The followers recognize him from the fixed patterns of his predecessor, and with that they confirm the traditions again. The habit of finding something important, the content of the faith, is maintained and passed on because it is tradition. In this way, tradition generates its own authority.¹ A positive angle to this is that tradition can help in better understanding the Bible, but it cannot help to strengthen or confirm the authority of Scripture. The reason why something is passed on from one generation to the next is usually unknown, and rarely thought through.

In the history of the church (and therefore also in the history of mission work!) we can already find with Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 140-202 AD) the conviction that the church is perfectly



capable of determining what belongs to the instruction of Christians. The tradition is therefore described as the guarantee of faithfulness to the original instruction of the apostles, and as a protection against the improper renewal and the wrong interpretations of the biblical texts.

In his book *Commonitorium*, the fifth century Saint Vincent of Lérins (who died between 445 and 450) writes about the way in which one should deal with tradition. Vincent is known for his statement that one should only *adhere to what is believed everywhere, always and by everyone*. This is essentially “catholic”, in the sense of it being *applicable universally*. The weakness of his thesis is that if there is no difference of opinion about a certain doctrine, then one has to accept it, or “believe” it. General validity (universality) of a doctrine or custom is no guarantee for orthodoxy. Think of

all kinds of popular beliefs that are generally accepted, but that are not true or biblical. For the instruction, the “substance” of the biblical message, or for what one wants to pass along in the concrete mission situation the criterion of Vincent is very important: universality, antiquity (old age) and consensus (all have to agree on it). In later centuries, this rule of Saint Vincent of Lérins started to take on a life of its own.² The tradition became a static parcel of teachings of the church. Certain movements also developed that considered the tradition of the church as the living Word, which would live on in the hearts of the believers. When we think of the “tradition of the church” we always have to think of “the general faith (in the sense of the doctrine) of the church of all centuries”. When we think about the tradition of the church, we quickly arrive at the doctrine of the church of all ages. This doctrine is largely defined in the historical documents and confessions. In these documents

at least an attempt is made to express the “teaching of the apostles” in an unambiguous and balanced way. The church confesses that it is called to make clear – internally and externally, orally and in writing – how it understands and preserves the complete and the living gospel. And the principles by which one lives also need to be passed on to the following generation(s). How beautiful it would be when this established tradition was also passed on as a living tradition. It concerns the proclamation of God the Father in his Son Jesus Christ, and the active working of the Holy Spirit in the

church and in people's hearts. The true conversion of man involves a new creation “from above” through the Spirit. It is not in the first place about an inspiration by people, who in the most proper and pure way want to tell people the good news of God.

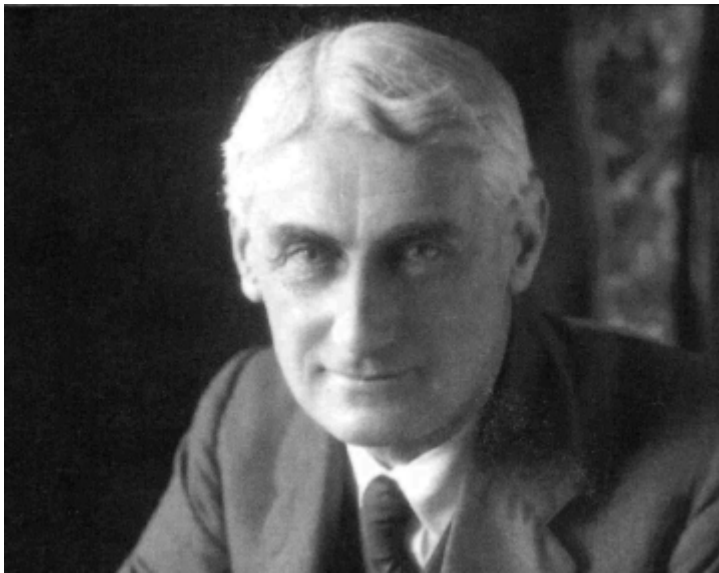
Traditions and mission

What, then, is the most profound message of the good news that is truly communicated in the transmission of the

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 1998, 2nd edition, p. 284.

² Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology, An Introduction* (fourth edition) Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 136-141.

Gospel? Anyone who reflects on this will soon arrive at the heart of the question: it is about what we have *received*. This is the “*traditum*” of the Gospel, which is part of the foundational “*tradendum*”: that which *needs to be passed on*. At the end of the nineteenth century, Anglican missionary Roland Allen (1868-1947) did a passionate study



to unearth Paul's methodology. He concluded that the missionary societies and also the sending churches had deviated from the proper track, and had become too concerned with the transfer of the ecclesiastical and civic culture of the country of origin. Western culture was transferred, without hesitation or second thought, to people from another, non-western culture. And this, Allen argued, is not part of the *tradendum*. He believed that there are essential *tradenda* that need to be passed on or transferred: the Bible, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the apostolic liturgy (yes, Allen remained a high-church Anglican!). Allen had an observant eye for the western imperialistic features in the mission of his days. He declared war on anything that resembled western influences and designs in the “machinery” of the church, the institutes, the church buildings, the church organisations, the liturgies, the hymns, up to and including the harmoniums, the pipe organs and the archdeacons.³ No “young” church escaped the “side effects” that the missionaries consciously or unconsciously added to the content of their message. The Presbyterian church order and confessional writings can be found in Presbyterian missionary churches, in Africa and South America. The

Genevan psalm melodies of the Reformed churches are noteworthy all over the world. The evangelical churches in Africa, Asia and South America apparently could not get around the “praise songs” from the USA, with or without unmusical, blaring electronic music! It is possible that the “young churches” chose of their own free will not only to adopt the Gospel (the Bible), all too often the pressure of the missionaries from the West was too significant. In some cases it may have been a case where they did not have to think creatively about how to give their own format to the liturgy in their own culture.

Of course, over the centuries all missionaries have struggled with the question of what is to be passed on. From the well-known Apostolic Convention (the meeting of the apostles at the Jerusalem Council) mentioned in Acts 15, we get the impression that the determination of what belongs to the *tradendum* is above all a matter of prayer, consultation and trust, under the guidance of the Spirit. The (negatively formulated) conclusions of this consideration in Jerusalem were communicated by letter to the ecumenical churches:

“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell” (Acts 15:28-29).

However, these decisions include a precept about *how* Gentiles who have come to faith should *conduct* themselves. Without mentioning it in as many words, the rather forceful demand of the Jewish Christians to circumcise converts from the Gentiles and also to impose Jewish laws on them, goes beyond the rules of the Church or culture.⁴ The Judaizers, the Jewish Christians, had their own ideas about what had to be passed on. At the council in Jerusalem, this tradition was put aside because it would be tantamount to imposing “heavy burdens on the Gentiles who convert to God” (Acts 15:19). It also becomes clear in the Jerusalem missive that those who are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus are saved in the same way as the Jews, namely by faith alone! This is a very short description of what needs to be passed on! Only that which is necessary

³ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods – St. Paul's or Ours?* Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans Publishing House, 1962, reprint 2001.

⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Finality of Christ*. London: SCM Press, 1969, p. 104-110.

for the building up of faith! The new people of God consists of Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus. Together they form *one* people of God, a people over whom the name of God has been proclaimed. James himself states this in Acts 15 in terms of restoration: the rebuilding of David's fallen tent, and the rebuilding from the ruins (Acts 15:14-18).

The Biblical Transfer

The English missionary Newbigin (1909-1998), who worked in India for 37 years, points out that in Peter's sermon the



classical definition of the *tradendum* can be found: Those who received Peter's words (Acts 2) allowed themselves to be baptized and to be recorded in the name of Jesus. *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42).* Four elements emerge: the “teaching of the apostles”, the formation of a “fellowship”, the “breaking of bread” and their “devoting themselves to prayer”. These four elements contain the compelling demand to break with the former (pagan) community and the faith that accompanied it, and instead to be guided by the Holy Spirit into fellowship with the Lord Jesus and with one another in the new communion. Faithfulness to the teaching of the apostles also leaves little room other than the examination of the Scriptures, the teaching of the prophets and apostles.

They declare what God has done and said to bring this intended people to the Messiah, and what this Messiah has said and done to set those people free.

These four elements of the *tradendum* in Acts 2:42 shaped the first congregation in Jerusalem. This congregation can be called the “prototype” of the church of Christ. The *tradendum* gives structure and direction to Christianity as it grows and expands. The first thing that went out was the “teaching of the apostles”. This included the “accounts,” i.e., the facts about the coming of Jesus, the Son of God to earth, the life of Jesus, his teaching and his miracles. It was therefore not about the benign opinions of the apostles about what they experienced with Jesus, but precisely about the verifiable facts, cf. Luke 1:2. The apostles were also chosen and had been prepared for their task by Jesus himself. The apostles set off as messengers with a commission, see Acts 4:33 - “With great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”

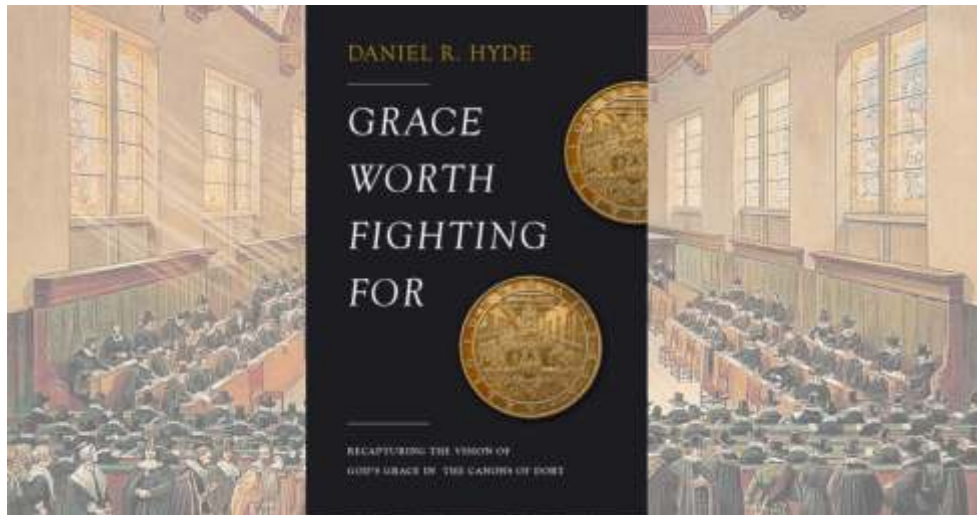
It is not necessary to point out that these apostles were closely involved in the recording, literally in the writing, of the teachings of the apostles by the four evangelists. In the early church there are testimonies such as that of Justin Martyr, who said that the apostles drew from their memory what was imposed on them in the compilation of the gospels. Yet we confess that the Spirit guided the apostles and that the words they spoke or wrote are the Word of God, reliable and true. When people came to believe in Jesus it was not circumcision that followed, but baptism as a sign of “belonging”. And there was the experience of fellowship and participation in the sacrament – the breaking of bread. It can be regarded as significant that in the total writings of the apostles (gospels and letters) there are hardly any prescriptions about the set-up or design of the *tradendum*. After all, the formation of the tradition in the congregation depends also in part on circumstances and culture.

The modern missionary person cannot escape taking into account of what undeniably belongs to the *tradendum*. And above all to ensure him- or herself that there is no cultural tradition hidden in the missionary's baggage. Focussing on what belongs to “the Gospel of the Kingdom” is of continuing importance. The Good News, i.e., that which is to be passed on, resounds in the language of the recipients and it may take on those forms in the lives of the faithful that are provided by the culture of the hearers.



Grace Worth Fighting For

*Author: Rev. James Zekveld
James Zekveld is a minister set aside for church
planting with the Canadian Reformed Churches*



On the 400th anniversary of Dort, Rev. Daniel Hyde, minister with the United Reformed Churches in North America, wants to remind us again of the importance of Dort to the whole church. So what makes Rev. Hyde's book special among all the literature on Dort? Rev. Hyde wants to demonstrate the catholicity of Dort. He desires to prove Dort's continuity with the 1500 years of Christians doctrine before it. This catholicity not only affirms the historic doctrine of the church of Christ, but also seeks a consensus on the various ways in which the Reformed had interpreted that tradition up to this point. The men of Dort wanted to be guided by Scripture and so were careful not to condemn theological systems that sought to affirm the primacy of the grace of God in his electing purpose. Rev. Hyde has written this book so his contemporaries can recover the catholic vision exemplified in the Canons.

Rev. Hyde wants to do this in an accessible way so that the regular pastor and layman can have better access to the theology of the Synod. He succeeds. The book is easy to read and well laid out. He explains the significant points of the Canons well along with historical awareness. Somebody who wants to begin studies in the Canons of Dort would have a hard time finding a better resource for understanding the theology that produced the language of the Canons.

Hyde frames his work within recent scholarship recovering the depth and breadth of Reformed theology in the

sixteenth and seventeenth century, particularly Muller's work on the Reformed Scholastics. Muller has rehabilitated the theology of the Reformed Scholastics, demonstrating their continuity with the first reformers; Luther, Calvin, Bucer, and others. He has also reminded us once again of the diversity of thought among the Reformed. It is wonderful to see these insights integrated into an accessible explanation of the Canons. They flesh out the picture of what was going on at Dort for us.

The recent scholarship of Michael Lynch on the British Delegation to Dort also brings a unique perspective to the book. There is sometimes a tendency to devalue or ignore the contributions of the British Delegation. Though some of their views were in the minority, they had an important voice in shaping the Canons and in providing a moderating voice between different factions. Notably, the wisdom and erudition of the British delegate John Davenant played a role. There was also politics involved. James I was an essential ally against The Netherland's primary enemy at the time: Spain.

Rev. Hyde is at his best when he brings out the importance of the catholicity of this synod. He argues that the way the Remonstrants framed the doctrine of predestination completely undermined the historic doctrines concerning Christ and his works. As Turretin likes to note, it was the Remonstrants who were the innovators, meaning that it

was the Remonstrants were departing from and undermining the historic doctrines of the church. Hyde draws parallels between the work of the Synod of Dort and the Councils of Orange and Carthage, along with numerous references to the Church Fathers and Medievals. This historical background is part of the catholicity of the Synod. It desired to preserve what had always been taught by the church of Christ.

There was another aspect to this catholicity. The Synod's catholicity was revealed in their attempts to affirm the theologies of the various Reformed traditions so long as they attempted to grapple with the truth of an election based on God's good pleasure. Even though there were deep tensions in the Synod of Dort, the Synod ended with a document that could be affirmed by the diverse group of delegates. Hyde's attitude channels the final fraternal Spirit of the Synod, even if the process may not have been so "catholic." We can see this in his generosity to the Lutherans in his discussion on the Perseverance of the Saints.

In this desire to emphasize catholicity perhaps he does miss a couple of things. One is the role of the civil government in pushing these men to a consensus. It is a real question whether the Synod would have held together without the push from James I and Prince Maurice. What is the significance of the interference of the civil government to the catholicity of the Synod? Another discussion that is missed is the reception of the Canons in the countries from which the delegates came. Hyde does mention that the Dutch and the French received it as a standard, meaning

that they bound their ministers to this standard. I was left wondering about the reception in Germany, Switzerland, and England and how that affects the enduring catholicity of the document. These are not major critiques, but some interaction with these realities would have added an important perspective.

The book left me wanting more (something that a good book does). I was curious to learn more about the particular theologies of the German delegates. How did the French church and the Swiss church interact with the Canons? What were the particular differences between the delegates on the perseverance of the saints? What about church order? Were their conversations on that? What other peripheral issues were discussed? Of course, a popular treatment will not deal with all these questions, but I hope that this work will prompt others to dig into this synod that is unique in the history of the Reformed churches.

I have high praise for this book. It challenges both pastor and laymen to stand firm against those who militate against the doctrines of grace. It should incite in all Christians a doxology to the "depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" This is the God who saves. At the same time, it should give the pastor and laymen humility as the church seeks to find the best way to express the mysteries of God's grace. ❄

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May all our readers be blessed by our Lord in 2020!