



Lux Mundi

38:1 March 2019

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



In this Issue
The Synod of Dort 1618-1619
NAPARC 2018
Cross-Denominational Cooperation
Structuring the Mission Homefront

Magazine published by the
International Conference of
Reformed Churches



VICTOR

Author: Rev. Peter H. Holtvlüwer

Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer is a minister with the Canadian Reformed Churches.



I pursued my enemies and overtook them, and did not turn back till they were consumed. (Psalm 18:37 ESV)

King David, who had been in serious trouble (Ps. 16) and prayed earnestly for God's help (Ps. 17), now celebrates the Lord's answer to his prayer in Psalm 18. He shouts out his love for the Lord (v. 1) and praises him for saving him from death (vv. 4–5). God had acted decisively to rescue the life of his servant, and David is jubilant in public praise. When God delivers, we must praise him to others!

But the Lord had done even more. Not only did he free the king from his overwhelming enemies, he completely turned the tables around. He secured the position of his servant (v. 32), trained him for war and made him powerful (v. 34), shielded and supported him (v. 35), all so that David could go after his haters. He pursued them, overtook them, and thrust them through so that they were not able to rise (vv. 37–38). Those enemies would never again trouble the king or any of his people.

All of this anticipates what God would do for David's greater son, Jesus. Jesus is the Anointed King who also had been savagely attacked by ruthless enemies, even to the point of death. Yet God drew him out of the waters of death (v. 16) and secured Christ with new life and a strong position. Coming forth from the grave was not just returning Jesus to life but it was establishing him as victor over all his enemies.

Christ's resurrection is an incredible turning point in the history of the world—something to give us great confidence and reason to celebrate! Our enemies are in defeat! Easter is

the beginning of the end for Satan, his followers, and even our very own sinful nature, all of whom hate God and work tirelessly to destroy us, his people. Those enemies had thrown everything they had at Jesus, believing they had destroyed him, but his resurrection showed them how wrong they had been. King Jesus now has an indestructible life and rules the world with all of his Father's authority—and he means to fully wipe out all his enemies! This includes death itself.

The forces of hate, evil, and destruction are potent in this world. Many Christians have felt the razor's edge of persecution and oppression. We've all felt the sting of death. But King Jesus' resurrection means their end is fast approaching!



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).

CONTENTS

- 02 Devotional - Victor
- 04 Editorial - Scripture and Confessions

Theology

- 05 Commemorating Dort
- 06 Tulips, Roses, or Bacon
- 08 Joyful Theology
- 10 Preaching the Canons

News

- 11 NAPARC
- 13 In Memoriam
- 14 Asia Pacific Regional Conference 2019

Ecumenics

- 15 Cross-Denominational Cooperation

Mission

- 18 Structuring the Home Front

Book Reviews

- 21 Materials on Dort
- 24 Grace Defined and Defended

CONTRIBUTORS

Editors

Karlo Janssen (Canada)
Sjirk Bajema (New Zealand)
Hiralal Solanki (India)
Glenda Mathes (USA)
Ria Nederveen (The Netherlands)
Lawr Khawbung (India)
James Visscher (Canada)

Design & Print

Minuteman Press Chilliwack, BC, Canada

Regional contacts

North America	Glenda Mathes
South America	Chris Boersema
Europe	
Africa	Paul Bukenya
South Asia	Lawr Khawbung
East Asia – Pacific	Sjirk Bajema

ICRC liaisons

Missions Committee	Arjan de Visser
Diaconal Committee	Pieter Boon
Theological Ed Committee	
Regional Conferences	

SUBSCRIPTION

The digital version is published free of charge to readers. To receive notice of a new edition posted to the ICRC website, please register with luxmundi@icrconline.com, subject line "Lux Mundi digital registration". One is free to print and/or distribute the digital version. To receive a printed copy via mail, printing and postal fees will be charged. To receive a printed edition, please register with luxmundi@icrconline.com, subject line "Lux Mundi postal registration".

CONTACT ADDRESS

Lux Mundi

7949 202a Street,
Langley BC, V2Y 1W8, Canada
Email: luxmundi@icrconline.com
Phone: +1-604-854-4011
www.icrconline.com



Author: Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen

Karlo Janssen is a pastor within the Canadian Reformed Churches. He currently serves on an interchurch relations committee of the CanRC and on the ICRC Publications Committee.

SCRIPTURE AND CONFESSIONS

For the Reformed the years 2018 and 2019 mark the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dort. This synod is world famous as it was here that the churches of the Reformation considered what became known as the Arminian view of salvation. This synod is further important to the Dutch Reformed tradition, as it marked a milestone in the development of church polity.

An issue that touches both the question of doctrine and of polity is that of the role which confessions should play in the churches. The Arminians – then referred to as the Remonstrants – were of the conviction that confessions, as human writings, should be up for discussion at every synod. The Contra-Remonstrants were of the conviction that confessions were to be considered authoritative and binding unless proven to be contrary to Scripture.

During the first regular session of the synod on Wednesday morning, November 14, 1618, this proved to be a flashpoint. The delegates from the provincial synod Overijssel presented a credential urging the synod to do all things “according to the guideline of the divine Word and the common faith, summarized in the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism.”

Some wondered, probably not just the Remonstrants but others too, was this not an attempt to elevate the confessions to the level of Scripture? It would seem that over lunch the delegates from Overijssel had a huddle. For article 3, reporting events right after lunch, begins with a query regarding this line in the credential. The delegates from Overijssel acknowledged that the confessions do not equal Scripture in authority.

“With this declaration they satisfied the Synod,” the acts report.

This makes clear why one does not find direct references to the Belgic Confession or Heidelberg Catechism in the Canons of Dort. There are certainly allusions and sometimes even quotes from either of these documents. However,

there are no direct quotes. For truth is proven by Scripture, and Scripture alone.

It may well be that this incident also shaped the text of what would, in the course of time, prove to be a crucial article in the Church Order of Dort. Article 31 states: “that which is decided by majority vote shall be considered settled and binding unless it is proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles adopted in this General Synod as long as these are not changed by another Synod.”

Those adopted articles are not the Canons of Dort but the Church Order of Dort. Thus later renditions of this church order simply say something like: “unless it is proved to be in conflict with the word of God or with the Church Order”.

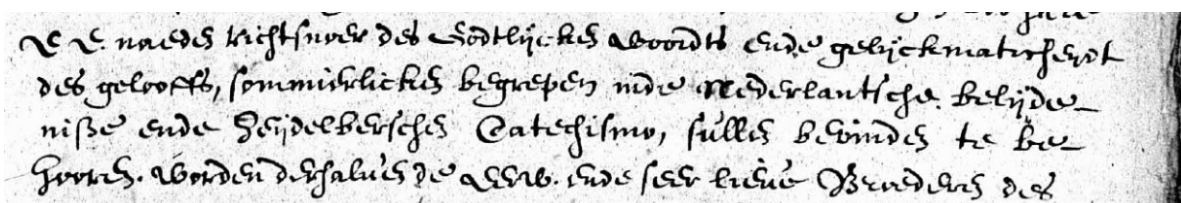
Notice, there is no reference to the confessions in this article. The Synod of Dort understood that convictions and practices are shaped by Scripture and, where Scripture allows room, by standing agreements between churches.

Throughout the course of this year we intend to publish articles on the Synod of Dort in the pages of *Lux Mundi*. Consider it a bit of a buffet on how Dort is remembered and written about in ICRC member churches. This edition has a few such articles.

Further, the reader will encounter two articles on the work of the local church in outreach. One considers how churches from different denominations in the same locale might cooperate in outreach. A second considers what might be learned from Acts 13 & 14.

Finally, there's a press release of NAPARC, the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. As NAPARC predates the ICRC and as most NAPARC member churches are in the ICRC, NAPARC has kind of filled the role as the ICRC regional conference in North America. That may change this year: a North American regional conference is being planned in conjunction with NAPARC this year.

Blessings, and enjoy the read!



The offending line in the credential of Overijssel. For a transcript of the credential see pages 50-51 of Early Sessions of the Synod of Dort, volume 2,2 in D. Sinnema, C. Moser, H.J. Selderhuis (eds.), Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae (1618-1619), (Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 2018).



Author: Rev. Dr. Cornelis P. Venema
Cornelis Venema is professor of Doctrinal Studies at Mid America Reformed Seminary and a minister with the United Reformed Churches in North America.

COMMEMORATING THE SYNOD OF DORT (1618-1619)

The years of our Lord, 2018-2019, mark the 400th anniversary of the convening of the Synod of Dort in Dordrecht, the Netherlands. The Synod of Dort was convened in order to settle the ongoing controversy in the Dutch churches regarding the teaching of Arminius and his followers on the topic of election. The 400th anniversary of this great Synod and the confession it produced, the *Canons of Dort*, ought to be an occasion for thanksgiving for the rich inheritance in the gospel that the Synod bequeathed to the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. In a period of history when many evangelical believers are rediscovering the “doctrines of grace,” it would be ironic were the Reformed churches to miss the opportunity to celebrate the Synod and its achievements.



Johannes Bogerman, chairman of the Synod of Dort (Public domain)

The most important work of the Synod was the formulation of the Canons of Dort, which consist of five main points of doctrine that provide a biblical response to the five opinions of the Arminians or Remonstrants. Though these points are commonly associated with the acronym, TULIP (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible

grace, and the perseverance of the saints), this acronym alters the sequence of the points adopted by the synod and provide a somewhat misleading summary of their teaching. The points in their proper sequence and meaning teach unconditional election, particular or definite redemption, radical depravity, effectual grace, and perseverance. The burden of the Canons is that the salvation of sinners depends wholly upon the gracious purpose of the Triune God: the Father who unconditionally elects his people in Christ, the Son who provides and secures the salvation of all those for whom he died, and the Holy Spirit who unfailingly and effectually calls believers through the Word of the gospel into saving communion with Christ. Salvation is God's work from first to last, and does not ultimately

depend upon any human merit or work.

Though the Synod of Dort is widely known for its formulation of these doctrinal points, it is important to remember that its work included actions that were decisive for the preservation of the Reformation in the Netherlands and elsewhere. These actions were of lasting significance, not only for the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, but for the Reformed churches throughout the world that find their historical roots in the continental Reformed tradition. Among these actions, several were of special importance.

- The Synod appointed a translation committee, which eventually produced the *Statenvertaling* (“Translation authorized by the States General”) or Dutch version of the Bible. This translation would prove to be the Dutch equivalent of the King James Version in English, as it served the Dutch church throughout much of its history until recent times.
- The Synod adopted a revised Form of Subscription, which continues to be used to this day by Reformed churches that take seriously their adherence to the Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort).
- The Synod adopted a Church Order that continues to serve as the basis for the church orders of Reformed denominations that subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity.

In my view, the Synod of Dort completed the Reformation of the church in The Netherlands, and provided an enduring legacy for the ministry of Reformed churches throughout the world. In the first place, the Canons offer a beautiful, pastoral defense of the simple gospel truth that “God saves sinners.” God does not simply make salvation possible. He actually saves, and he does so out of the depths of his eternal purpose of election.

And in the second place, the Synod made several far-reaching decisions that have contributed to the well-being of the Reformed churches throughout their history. After four hundred years, these gifts of the Synod continue to preserve the church's testimony to the gospel and to govern her ministry in an edifying manner. *

Republished with permission from *The Messenger* (February 2019), the newsletter of Mid America Reformed Seminary.



Author: Rev. Dr. Ted Van Raalte
Ted VanRaalte is professor of ecclesiology at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary.

TULIPS, ROSES, OR BACON?

The “doctrines of grace:” what are they? I remember first hearing this phrase on the lips of ministers and elders of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church back in the early 2000s. I was a fraternal delegate to one of their presbyteries and they seemed to glow when they talked about the “doctrines of grace.” I really felt left out. What were they talking about? How come I hadn’t heard of these doctrines? I mean, I knew what grace was, and I knew what doctrine was, but I had never heard men use this phrase “the doctrines of grace” as if they all understood some particular package of teachings. Whatever it was, their reactions showed me that it had to be something good.

I slowly put two and two together: they were talking about the very teachings that I too loved – the teachings that we confess in the Canons of Dort (abbreviation: CD). To me these were about election and predestination, but to them these teachings were about grace. What a positive perspective! And, how absolutely correct!

Tulips

Sometime in the late 1800s, some English-speaking teacher hit upon the idea of associating the Canons of Dort with The Netherlands by summarizing the five points with the acronym “TULIP.” The Synod of Dort itself, meeting from November 1618 to May 1619, never thought of this idea, nor did they hear of it, for they conducted their synod in Latin, not English. They probably did enjoy the tulips coming up in March and April 1619 around Dort, but never realized how people all over the world would later think of their synod with every tulip they saw. “TULIP” was a much later invention. In case you’ve forgotten, “T” is for “total depravity,” “U” is for “unconditional election,” “L” is for “limited atonement,” “I” is for “irresistible grace,” and “P” is for “perseverance of the saints.”

There are two problems with TULIP: first, the order of the Canons of Dort is actually ULTIP. Unfortunately, there aren’t any such flowers. All I can find is that “ultip” is an anagram for “tulip.” So much for that.

As for the second problem: Your minister may have informed you that the “L” for limited atonement isn’t the most helpful way of characterizing this doctrinal point. After all, the message about Christ’s work on the cross is that it was totally effective, then and there, in saving those whom the Father had elected. To say “limited” atonement might make someone think it was limited in power or sufficiency.

Thus, one minister speaks of “particular” atonement to highlight the truth of CD 2.8 that Christ died for “particular” persons. This gives us “TUPIP” instead of “TULIP.” According to something I found online, “tupip” is an acronym referring to an “orthogonal blend of pentagonal prisms, vertex figure of sadsadox.” Huh? Give me tulips any day.

Roses

Others, perhaps to overcome this “limited” problem, or maybe to cut the association with The Netherlands, proposed summarizing these doctrines of grace under a different acronym: ROSES. Not “roses are red, violets are blue, sugar is sweet, and God loves you.” No, Timothy George, an eminent Baptist historian, proposed that the “R” stand for “radical depravity,” “O” is for “Overcoming Grace,” “S” for “Sovereign Election,” “E” for “Eternal Life,” and the second “S” for “Singular Redemption.” If you would relate this back to our tulip, the order in this case would be “TIUPL,” even further from the actual order of the CD than TULIP. Try pronouncing that! His intentions, however, appear to be to soften the force of the Reformed doctrines. Indeed, “eternal life” is too vague as a replacement for “perseverance/ preservation of the saints,” and “radical depravity,” actually loses something essential that’s represented by the word “total” in “total depravity,” namely that the whole soul (total), that is, all its *parts* are deeply affected by sin. So, as nice as roses are, I’m afraid at this point we’ll have to stick to tulips.

Bacon

But then there’s the real Canadian lumberjack version of the tulip: bring on the bacon! Someone came up with the “five-strip Baconist” instead of the “five-point Calvinist.” Definitely not kosher! The acronym BACON is worked out like this, “Bad people, Already elected, Completely atoned for, Overwhelmingly called, Never falling away.” Not bad at all! Same order as TULIP. This provides us with another memorable option, simpler words, and what you might regard to be a greasier, saltier, tastier, and more Canadian approach. I found some indication online that perhaps the first person who came up with this one was actually unfriendly to the doctrines in question, but I think he may have done us a service if we need to explain the doctrines of grace without using big words. The fact that I found out that the “Tulip Food Company,” makes specialty bacon products for Denmark made this version all the more interesting.

Other attempts

Another author tried "GOSPEL" in place of "TULIP," and nicely highlighted the fact that all the points really have to do with grace. GOSPEL = Grace, Obligatory grace, Sovereign grace, Provision-making grace, Effectual grace, and Lasting grace. This follows the order TULIP, but "provision-making" is far too weak a description of Christ's work on the cross. Once again, the problem is with the "L."

In a book that I would highly recommend, Greg Forster, *The Joy of Calvinism* (Crossway, 2012), we find another attempt, "WUPSI." Unfortunately, this sounds too much like a mistake. But there is something valuable that Forster highlights, namely, the work of each of the Persons of the Trinity in the great and gracious work of our salvation. WUPSI = Wholly defiled: state of man before salvation; Unconditional choice: work of the Father in salvation; Personal salvation: work of the Son in salvation; Supernatural transformation: work of the Holy Spirit in salvation; and In faith, perseverance: state of man after salvation.

The doctrines of grace

Tying together the idea that all of the Canons of Dort really is about grace, and that the three main points highlight the three Persons of the Trinity gives us a very pleasing account. We see that the point about unconditional election is really about the Father's gracious choice, the point about effective (limited) atonement is really about the Son gracious gift of his life for our salvation, and the point about irresistible or insuperable grace is really about the Holy Spirit's transforming grace in our hearts. It's all about grace.

Our God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God. He is united in himself. He is united in his works of creation and salvation. The Father chooses. The basis of his choice is his own love. Thus: Loving Grace. The Son redeems. He does the work of paying our debt and turning away God righteous anger from the ones whom the Father choice. Thus: Effective Grace. The Spirit regenerates sinners' hearts. Thus: Transforming Grace. This Triune work is the only way we can be saved. Only by grace. This is the only way because of total depravity. Thus: it's a Necessary Grace.

The Father's loving choice cannot be overpowered or overruled. The Son's precious blood must have its purchase. Not one drop will be spilled. The Spirit's renewing work is as great in power as creation (Father) and resurrection (the Son). It is the resurrection of our souls, and those who have died once with Christ cannot die again. Eternal life has begun in them, in the very core of their being, in their souls.

All this work of the One Triune God must persevere and come to its completion. He who began this particular good work of faith and salvation in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Thus: Persevering Grace.

Acronym anyone?

So, as you see, I haven't figured out my own acronym. But I summarize the doctrines of grace as follows. The overall title is Sovereign Grace. Then follow the points in the order of TULIP.

Necessary Grace: Fallen man.

Loving Grace: Father.

Effective Grace: Son.

Transforming Grace: Holy Spirit.

Persevering Grace: Saved man. The Triune God at work, bringing a new creation, starting with the resurrection of Christ and unfailingly being completed in his return.

Sovereign grace

This God is truly sovereign. This theology truly ascribes all sovereignty to him. Because God in his grace is sovereign there too, as in all other things, we have every confidence in the work he has begun in us. We have every confidence in proclaiming such a great and glorious Jesus Christ. We have every confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to convert hearts. God will have his people. He will. No one can stop him. We are so delighted to have been drawn in among his people, adopted as his children, and now also enlisted in his army of salvation. Let us with confidence, grace, and love, share this message with the world.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son. And those whom he predestined, these very ones, he also called, those whom he called, these very ones, he also justified, and those whom he justified, these very ones he also glorified (Rom 8:30). The outcome is so sure that Paul speaks in the past tense even of our glory, because this glorification is all completely certain and is completely the case in Jesus Christ, who is in glory and who is our glory.

All glory for our creation, and especially our salvation be to God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now and forever. Amen. ✳

Republished with permission from *Clarion* (April 20, 2018), a magazine for the Canadian Reformed Churches.

JOYFUL THEOLOGY



Author: Rev. Dr. David Murray

David Murray is a Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.

The Canons of Dort have been called “a little dowdy,” “a very finely tuned piece of theological writing,” and “the most famous but unread deliverances of any Reformed Synod,” among many other unappealing descriptions. Not many have called them “joyful theology.” But that’s the description I want to propose and defend in this article.

Last month, we highlighted the difficulty of joy in this world, but also noted the biblical encouragement to pursue joy in the Lord as a strengthener of our spiritual lives (Neh. 8:10). We then summarized five ways that Christians have sought joy in the Lord and concluded that the best way to stable joy was through knowing and believing the doctrines of grace as confessed in the Canons of Dort. This more objective approach is the surest foundation for the subjective joy we all crave.

This is not to deny that there are many other doctrines in Scripture that can be used to fuel spiritual joy. Indeed, I would argue that every biblical doctrine can be utilized to germinate and grow spiritual joy. However, I would also argue that the doctrines of grace are the essential pillars upon which all other doctrinal joys depend and are built. Without them, all other doctrinal joys will run into the sand and evaporate.

Sample Joys

In a short article like this, I can only give you a sample of the joys found in the doctrines of grace. But you can dig deeper into this happy well with some further reading. Consider, for example, the joy implied in the chapter headings of Greg Forster’s *The Joy of Calvinism: Knowing God’s Personal, Unconditional, Irresistible, Unbreakable Love*:

- God Loves you Personally
- God Loves you Unconditionally
- God Loves You Irresistibly
- God Loves you Unbreakably

Or, note the explicit joy in Tony Reinke’s chapters in *The Joy Project: An Introduction to Calvinism*:

- The World’s Joy Tragedy
- The Joy Project Designed
- The Joy Project Purchased
- The Joy Project Breaks and Enters
- The Joy Project Unwraps and Unfolds

Another example is *Proof: Finding Freedom Through the*

Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace by Daniel Montgomery and Timothy Paul Jones. The main title *Proof* is an acronym of the main chapter headings:

- Planned Grace
- Resurrecting Grace
- Outrageous Grace
- Overcoming Grace
- Forever Grace

Now, not all of these book chapters map exactly onto the Doctrines of Grace, but I hope you can see the similar general contours and the similar concern to communicate the joy of these doctrines.

Of course, none of these authors nor I are implying that only Calvinists have joy. But, as Forster puts it, “If you want to understand the command to rejoice at all times, and still more if you want to obey it, of all the places you might start looking for help with that problem, the best place to start is with Calvinism.”

All of us are conceding, though, that Calvinists have not always framed and presented the Doctrines of Grace in a compelling and attractive way. Rather, we often use such technical, formulaic, overly-systematized, and negative doctrinal terminology, that joy is the last thing on our hearers’ (and readers’) minds. Boredom, confusion, and irrelevance may be the more common response. “As a result,” says Forster, “they’re robbed—in whole or in part—of the everyday experience of devotional joy that a robust and well-formed Calvinistic piety always produces, and in which, as Calvinists, they ought to be living.”

Personal Joy

On a personal level, I am trying with the Lord’s help to more and more find my joy in the Doctrines of Grace. Let me give you some examples of this.

I rejoice in confessing my total depravity, the corruption of every part of my being, my utter and total inability to do anything spiritually pleasing to God. “How can that be joyful?” you ask. Good question! If all I do is stay there and wallow in my sinful hopelessness, there is no joy whatsoever. However, the absence or watering down of that confession drains away the joy of all the other doctrines. I may be odd, but I find much more joy in denying any contribution to my salvation and attributing it all to God’s

grace than attempting to share the glory of my salvation between us.

I rejoice in God's unconditional election of me. One of the biggest sources of joyful wonder for me is the triple question: "For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7). Another deep source of joy is describing myself using Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29: foolish, weak, base, despised, nothing, but CHOSEN BY GOD!

I rejoice in Christ's definite atonement for me. I can find no joy in an atonement that was equally offered for those who are presently in hell. Such a general "atonement" that doesn't always atone terrifies the wits out of me and could never provide me with a moment of joy. But knowing that Christ had me specifically on His mind and in His heart when He was living, suffering, dying, and rising again – that's enough to give me immeasurable joy. Definite atonement means definite joy.

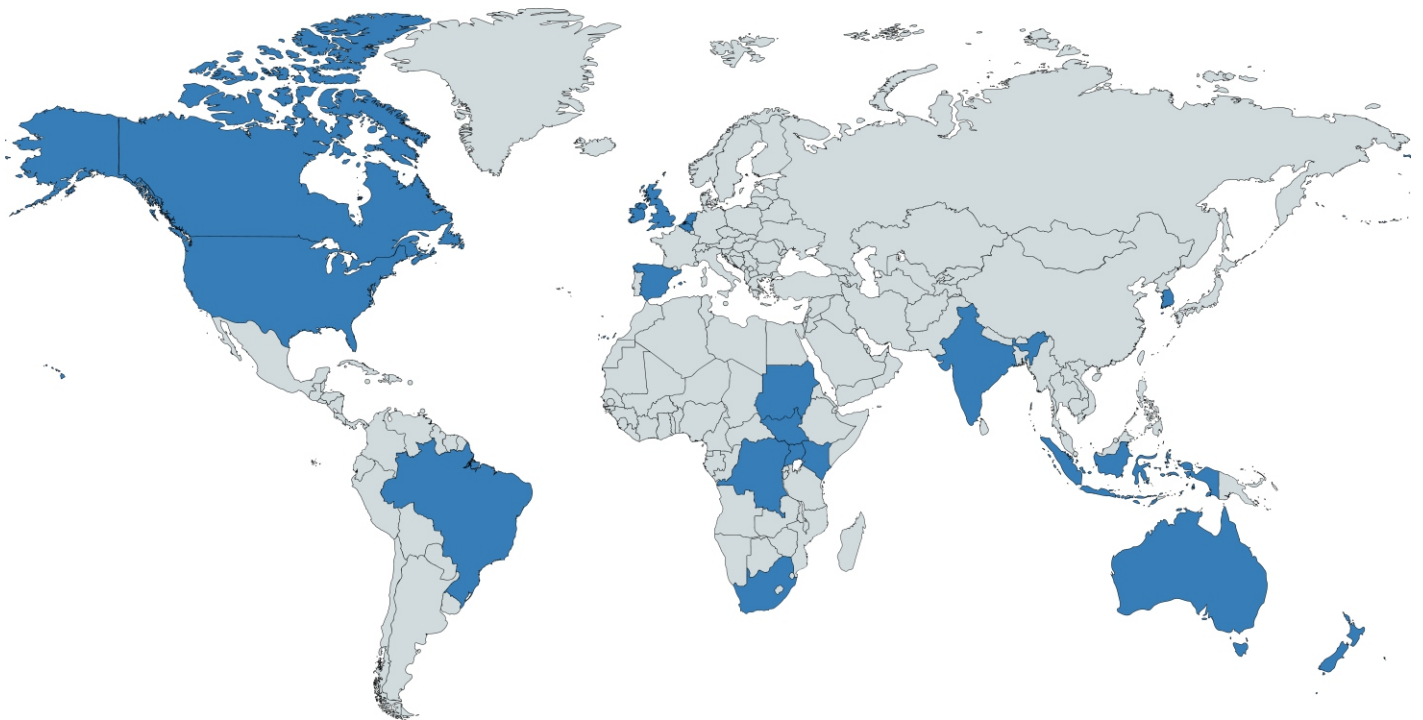
I rejoice in the irresistible work of the Holy Spirit. To think that the Holy Spirit one day went on a divinely planned mission to conquer my heart, to win my soul, to invade my

life—that is such an incredible joy to me. That He resolutely overcome all my opposition, broke down all my defenses, dashed all my resistance, and said, "I'm coming in, and I'm coming to stay!" What joy!

I rejoice in the preserving work of God, without which I could not persevere in the faith, no, not even one day. I didn't get in myself and I can't stay in myself. God alone can and does do that.

Maybe there are some Christians who think they can find more joy believing in a limited depravity, in attributing salvation to their personal choice, in an atonement that doesn't actually atone, in assisting the Holy Spirit's saving work, and in a salvation that can actually end up with them being unsaved. Personally, I would find that totally depressing. Give me the Doctrines of Grace and you give me joy. I encourage you to read the Canons of Dort through this "joy filter," and discover the many ways in which the Doctrines of Grace can become the Doctrines of Joy. ✱

Republished with permission from *The Messenger* (February 2019), a magazine for the Free Reformed Churches in North America. This is the second article in a series on joyful theology.



Locations of ICRC member churches around the world.

PREACHING THE CANONS OF DORT

Author: Rev. Eric Moerdyk

Eric Moerdyk is pastor of the Bethel Free Reformed Church of Monarch, Alberta

Preaching through the biblical themes of God's absolute wonderful saving sovereignty as summarized in the Canons of Dort was one of the most profitable and blessed series, for my own soul as well as my congregation, of my entire ministry. This series grew to 50 sermons when I noticed that the congregation was delighting in it as well. It answered pressing questions many of my own members have, coming out of a hyper-Calvinistic setting where the Canons are often quoted out of context. It also helps people not to over-react to such a background, and to still value God's sovereign grace in salvation as well as biblical-experiential preaching of these themes.

Why is this material a delight to preach and hear? First of all, because it is so clearly biblical. When you begin to read, it is striking that most of the articles, particularly in head I, quote Scripture extensively. It is not difficult to anchor all of the articles in Scripture.

Second, it is a delight to preach through the Canons because of the wise, pastoral, and experiential way in which these truths are conveyed. Truth taken out of its context becomes a theological bullying tool. These truths are revealed in Scripture in a certain order for wise reasons. They are revealed to humble the pride of man, to glorify God to the highest, and to comfort His people (I:14).

This biblical order is revealed in each head of doctrine. Head I deals with election by God the Father, but it does not begin there. It begins with the open door of the gospel to sinful people by quoting John 3:16 (1-3). Election is only brought up in order to explain the division of faith or unbelief in response to this gospel. Unbelievers have no one to blame but themselves. Yet believers should credit God, not their own faith or choices, and in so doing receive 'unspeakable consolation' (6), adoring the depths of God's mercy, repenting, and loving Him who has so greatly first loved us (13). Wise counsel is given to those who do not yet have assurance of election on how to respond to these truths (16).

Head II deals with the cross of Christ. Some Arminians have accused the Reformed of putting barbed wire around the cross and forbidding anyone except the elect and born again to believe in Christ crucified. There have been such 'reformed' voices in church history. However, the Canons cannot be lumped in with this viewpoint. Instead of

beginning with the question for whom Christ died, this head deals with what sin deserves (1-2), and then with what Christ's death accomplished as well as its infinite value (3-4). Preaching this cross is to take place 'promiscuously', meaning without sorting or distinctions, (5) together with the call for everyone who hears to repent and believe. You do not need to wait until you know you are born again or elect to believe in Christ crucified. It also means that evangelism beginning with 'Jesus died for you and has a wonderful plan for your life' is an unbiblical statement nowhere to be found in Scripture. It is not needed to preach or evangelise wisely, biblically, and with a real warmth as well as urgency.

Head III/IV deals with the converting work of the Holy Spirit. God is vindicated with the description of our fall from holy purity, and our utter inability and unwillingness to reform or want to reform (1-3). Then follows the call of the gospel with a 3-fold use of the word 'seriously' in the original Latin. God seriously calls all who hear, seriously and truly declares that it is acceptable that all who hear obey the call, and seriously promises eternal life to every single one who believes in Christ (8). Why stress the call before describing being born again? Because it is the call of the gospel, blessed by the Spirit that produces the fruit of regeneration and then repentance and faith (12)! Regeneration is then beautifully and magnificently, as well as discriminatingly, described and celebrated (11-13) as an act of God. The article builds up to stressing our responsibility and God's use of means, of the Word preached as the seed of regeneration (16-17).

Head V is a spiritual treasure in preaching. I spent 24 sermons on this head, for it deals with the life, struggles, questions, and doubts of God's children. It also gives tremendously moving and helpful pastoral counsel about the various conditions of spiritual life, backsliding, serious repentance, and assurance.

In each article then, the truth is taught in its context as well as both warmly and discriminatingly. This demonstrates clearly that Reformed theology and our confessions are by their very nature experiential, and therefore Reformed preaching must be experiential too without descending into experientialism. When you reverse the order and preach election before the call of the gospel, election before the preaching of the cross, or election and regeneration before



teaching the call of the gospel this tends to produce either blind pride or despair. This is really 'vainly prying into God's secret ways' (1:14).

Third, these doctrines have ripple effects in so many areas of church life and practice. They explain why we worship and evangelize in a reformed way – not as a matter of tradition, but as a matter of biblical principle. Why don't we have altar calls, revivalist meetings, or pump people up with music before pressing for immediate profession of faith or rededication to the Lord? All of these things flow from Arminian theology and contradict and even deny Reformed biblical principle. Why don't we press people for an immediate profession of faith by raising a hand, repeating

the 'sinner's prayer' or signing a pledge card? Because biblical conversion and biblical assurance should not be based on our own acts, but on acts of God. Preaching through these doctrines rightly anchors practice in theology.

When seen in this light, preaching these doctrines is to be done in the church 'with reverence, wisdom and piety, for the glory of God's most Holy Name and the enlivening and comforting of His people' (1:14). When done biblically, by God's grace it does produce these effects. *

Republished with permission from *The Messenger* (January 2019), a magazine for the Free Reformed Churches in North America.



NORTH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN & REFORMED COUNCIL

NAPARC - PRESS RELEASE NOVEMBER 30, 2018

The 44th annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) convened on Tuesday afternoon, November 13, 2018 at the Jubilee Presbyterian Church, a church of the Korean American Presbyterian Church. Host pastor, Rev. Dr. S. Steve Park, 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.

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 officers. Elected as Chairman was Rev. David Kim of the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin). Elected as Vice-chairman was Rev. Dr. L. Anthony Curto of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Rev. Ralph Pontier was

elected to a second term as Secretary, and Rev. Todd De Rooy was elected for the first time as Treasurer replacing Rev. Dr. Maynard Koerner who retired from that position after serving faithfully for 20 years.

The chairmanship and vice-chairmanship rotate annually between the 13-member churches following an alphabetical listing. The vice-chairman this year is slated to serve as chairman next year, and his denomination is asked to host the following year.

A large portion of time was spent on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning with each member church giving an oral report on the state of its church. Following each report delegates could ask questions and a designated delegate led the group in prayer for the church that had reported. One theme was repeated in several reports, that the work of missions is thriving among the churches.

On Tuesday evening Rev. Ryan Kim helped lead a devotional service during which he preached from Genesis 26. On the Wednesday evening following a sumptuous feast, we were inspired as we listened to a Korean pastor, Dr. Greg Paek, who spent many years as a missionary in Indonesia. He spoke about the challenges and opportunities for expanding our missionary engagement today. On Wednesday afternoon delegates were able to challenge and encourage


one another through a discussion of three topics suggested by member churches. The topics were:

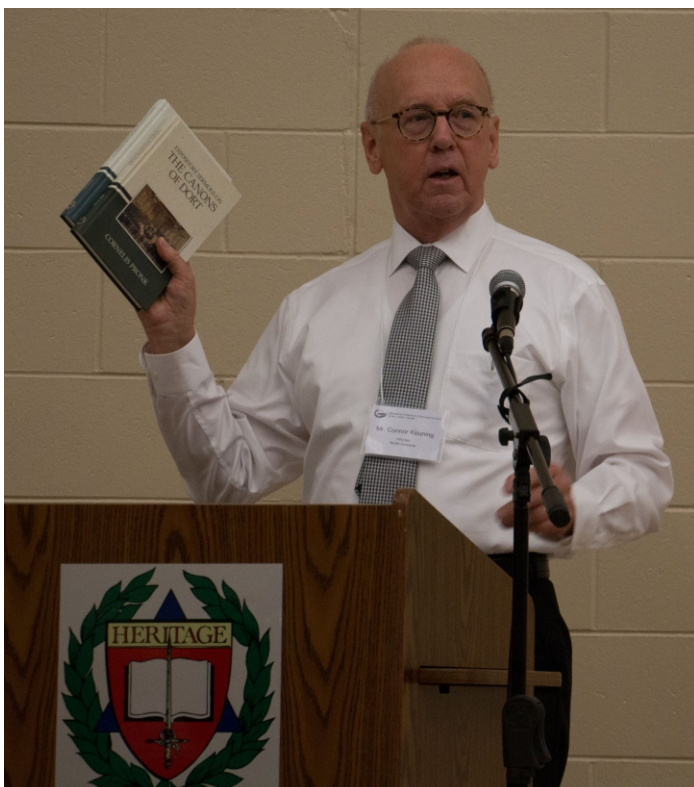
As North American culture is becoming increasingly pluralistic and secular, how might we develop a vibrant Reformed witness, although we are a small, minority group?
Retaining the integrity of our commitment to our Reformed Confessions and understanding of the importance of the church in a secular world. Holding forth in our day the Biblical teaching and norms for gender, sexuality, marriage and the family.

On Thursday morning, Mr. David Nahkla, administrator of the OPC Committee of Diaconal Ministries, addressed the body concerning the diaconal goals of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) and the diaconal relief work of the OPC. He hopes to organize a NAPARC consultation on diaconal relief, as authorized by last year's Council.



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's mission consultation included representatives from ICRC member churches as well as NAPARC members, which enhanced the interchange and was reported by Mr. Mark Bube to be one of the most encouraging consultations in memory.

The NAPARC schedule runs from Tuesday afternoon to Thursday noon and provides time slots for bilateral 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. One fruit of these meetings, and of NAPARC itself, is that in this past year there were three concurrent synods/general assemblies involving six-member churches. The next meeting of the Council is scheduled to be hosted by the Korean Presbyterian Church of America (Kosin) at the Rohthem Presbyterian Church in Anaheim, California on November 12-14, 2019. 



Promoting the Canons of Dort at ICRC 2017.

Source: www.naparc.org

IN MEMORIAM: JACK JAY PETERSON

The following "In Memoriam", written by Donald Duff, appeared in a recent Issue of *New Horizons*:

On November 24, 2018, the Lord called his servant Jack Jay Peterson home to glory at the age of 89. Jack was a graduate of Wheaton College (1952) and Westminster Theological Seminary (1955). He was ordained by the Presbytery of California on May 21, 1957, and served churches for forty-four years in Chula Vista, California; Stratford, New Jersey; West Palm Beach, Florida; Carson, Lark, and Leith, North Dakota; and San Antonio, Texas.

Jack was first of all a pastor, a true shepherd of the flock. His preaching and prayers were profound but spoken so that they could be understood by all. He was greatly loved by the flocks he served. Many especially remember him from youth camps.

Jack was also a true churchman, always active in the courts of the church. In 1972, he was moderator of the General Assembly; over the years, Jack served on several different General Assembly committees. His most notable service, for forty-one years, was on the Committee on Ecumenicity and

Author: Rev. Dr. Karlo Janssen

Karlo Janssen is a pastor within the Canadian Reformed Churches. He currently serves on an interchurch relations committee of the CanRC and on the ICRC Publications Committee.



Interchurch Relations. Jack traveled the world representing the OPC and was acquainted with the leaders of many Reformed communions.

Texas Jack, as many knew him, was at the forefront of Presbyterian and Reformed ecumenics. He was zealous in reaching out to others. He was as zealous for confessional fidelity. I'm thankful and honoured to have known Jack. As one who came into inter-church relations since 1997 (I was in my mid twenties then), and in the years 2002-2008 responsible for establishing a relationship between the RCN and OPC, I've had many a chat with Jack and learned much from him. I look forward to the day those chats can resume. May Jack's zeal for the unity of God's church, no matter what background or location, a unity sought in truth and faith, continue among God's people today. ✱

Republished with permission from *New Horizons* (February 2019), a magazine for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.



The Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations in 1997. Rev. Peterson is the gentleman front-left.

ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE, MELBOURNE 2019

Joint Hosts: Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia & Christian Reformed Churches of Australia

Following the very successful Conference in Seoul in 2015 the next Regional Conference is scheduled for Melbourne jointly hosted by the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. ICRC members and representatives from other like-minded churches are warmly welcome to attend and contribute to the strengthening of Christian work and witness in the region.

1. Time

The Conference will begin on Tuesday morning **1 October 2019** with registration from 9.00am and conclude by 5pm on Thursday **3rd October 2019**.

2. Venue

The venue is the Robert White Hall within the Assembly Hall at 156 Collins Street, Melbourne. This is a modern facility in the CBD owned by the Presbyterian Church of Victoria and close to a number of attractions such as the National Gallery of Victoria, the Aquarium etc. etc.. The venue has wi-fi and an overhead projector.

3. Accommodation

Those flying into Melbourne Airport can get the Airport Bus to Southern Cross Station (30 minutes) and stay at whatever

accommodation in the CBD suits their wish and budget. The cost of fares and accommodation including breakfast is the responsibility of those attending. Some assistance from the ICRC for those ICRC members from the developing world for whom this may be too heavy a burden may be available. For information on this contact Reinier Noppers reinierticktock@gmail.com. Delegates' meals will be at the venue at the cost of the hosts.

The CRCA has 10 churches and 1300 communicant members in the Melbourne metropolitan area (one Chinese) and the PCEA 4 (one Southern Sudanese) and 140 communicant members. If people are staying longer preaching opportunities could be available on the Lord's Day.

4. Topics

We are resolutely committed to making the Conference one which deals with matters of practical value which doesn't mean, of course, that the theological underpinnings will be neglected - far from it! We plan four main speakers. Two subjects already arranged are:

Trinitarian shaped worship – its Basis and Necessity and Presentation in Preaching – Rev. Dr Peter Adam, internationally known, has committed to this so you can be sure it will be challenging and helpful.

A Positive Eschatology in an Age of Negativity

Mark Bube from the OPC will give us an Overview of Global Missions and current challenges and opportunities, and similarly the area of Diaconal ministry will receive attention. We want to ensure plenty of time for networking and private discussions. Once we know who is attending we will ask different ones to take short devotions and others to introduce their churches, and arrange for small group leaders.

5. Our request

Could you let us know as soon as possible likely attendance at the Conference from your churches so that we can continue to plan a great conference?

Grace and peace, Christian love and prayer

Lourens Nel <pastor@lrc.org.au>

Rowland Ward <rowland.ward@gmail.com>



CRCAus delegates to ICRC 2017 – Photo: L. den Butter



Author: Rev. Dr. Pieter G. Boon
Pieter Boon is a minister with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. He also serves on the Diaconal Committee of the ICRC.

UNCHARTERED WATERS: HOW SHOULD LOCAL CHURCHES FROM DIFFERENT FEDERATIONS COOPERATE?

Introduction

In South Africa a couple of local congregations from different federations have started working closer together. Being in the same city, yet from different denominations, makes things a bit more complicated. Questions that arise are for example: If in one of the federations women are serving in the ecclesiastical offices in some local congregations, should this prevent cooperation with other local churches? In our times it becomes a reality more and more that traditional church denominations display a variety of theological sub currents. These sub currents can vary from theologically conservative to liberal. In South Africa to this can be added political sub currents, to be either politically conservative (still defending the old 'apartheid' ideas) or to be politically liberal. To be conservative or liberal in political matters often runs parallel to being conservative or liberal in theological matters. And to complicate things further, there are those who are politically conservative, but theologically liberal. And there are those who are theologically conservative, but not politically conservative, still rejecting the 'apartheid' ideas of the past.

In this complex landscape it is not always easy for local churches from different denominations to move closer to each other and start trusting each other. Perhaps one might ask: Why should one pay attention to matters of politics? Shouldn't churches refrain from political debates, limiting themselves to theology? The reality is that often theology and politics cannot be separated. One can think of questions like: Can Reformed people support political parties that include abortion, same sex marriages and the like? And, very relevant to the South African context, is it tolerable in Reformed churches to entertain people with views opposing mission work, or the integration of believers of different cultural backgrounds into one federation? Is it tolerable to even bar black people from white worship services? Things like these still happen in churches from the Reformed tradition in South Africa and obviously cause debates.

For this reason a conference was held recently, called *Reformed Today*. Afterwards a brochure was issued, containing brief confessional-like statements on a number

of actual topics. In this way the conference endeavoured to bring together Reformed churches who really are one in the Reformed faith both in doctrine and practice.¹

In this article I want to share with you two of these confessional statements. Each is followed with a few remarks from my side, explaining and clarifying their actuality in the present day South African context.

1. Mission Remains Essential and Necessary

"Geographically spoken, the Gospel has reached the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). This was a fact by the end of the 19th century already. Yet this doesn't mean that Christ's Great Commission is completed. In many countries the Christian faith has only reached part of the population. Often the Christian faith is also mixed with other religions (syncretism). Also millions of new people are born every year, growing up outside the church. Christ's Great Commission to his apostles (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15) is as important as ever. Since the church of Christ is built on the foundation of prophets and apostles, it is the church's task to continue with it. Mission is not a hobby of individuals or organisations, but Christ's command to his church. A true and healthy church is characterized by a love for and tangible activity in regards to mission and evangelization.

The Great Commission is rooted in both Old and New Testament. Christ's command to his apostles is the consequence of God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4) that in him all nations on earth will be blessed (Isaiah 49:6). In Christ this promise was fulfilled and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit this promise is realized in the period of the new covenant.

The primary purpose of the Great Commission can be summarized in the following three main activities:

- The repentance of unbelievers (heathen)
- The planting of Christ's church in areas where there is not a (true) church yet
- The glorification of God's Name across the earth.

Christ's Great Commission also entails evangelization, where established churches reach out to unbelievers and

¹ *Gereformeerde vandag. Belydende kerk in die hede* (2017). Editors: Dr. P.G. Boon & R. van der Kooy. A digital copy can be obtained from the author: fampgboon@gmail.com

apostates in their neighborhood, aimed at their repentance and (re)entry into the church of Christ.

In executing the Great Commission secondary goals can also be pursued, like education to the youth, theological training, medical care, poverty alleviation, social justice and the like. Yet these secondary goals should never replace the primary purpose of the Great Commission, or push it to the side line.

Therefore the so called *Missio Dei* approach should be rejected, where the focus on the primary goal of the Great Commission disappears into the background. It causes that unbelievers are not called to repentance anymore, no churches being planted anymore, and it entertains an image of God that does not conform to Scripture.

Furthermore all forms of mission or dialogue viewing other religions or worldviews as viable ways to God, and where our Lord Jesus Christ is not professed as the one and only Way to the true living God, should be rejected. When the primary purpose of the Great Commission is pursued, it will lead to all other religions and worldviews being exposed as false. There is no other Mediator between mankind and the only true and living God, no saints, no ancestors, no living or dead (John 14:6). Our Lord Jesus Christ, as his Word testifies about Him, is the only Way and Truth. In his Name alone each human on earth is called to repent, to believe, to become member of his church, to devote his life and to persevere (Acts 2:37-42).

It is the task of mission and evangelization to preach the full council of God to each human on earth, to warn everyone in time for the imminent day of judgment, and to call on them to become heirs of life everlasting (Acts 17:30-31). How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace (Romans 10:15)! It is the living God sending them to those He had elected unto eternal life (Romans 8:29-30)."

Clarification

The *Missio Dei* approach is a common approach in contemporary missiology and has developed during the course of the 20th century. One of its founders is the late South African theologian David J. Bosch with his text book *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991). According to this approach God ('Dei') sends ('missio') himself into the world

through all ages in order to reconcile the world again with himself. Within this paradigm mission isn't anymore only about preaching the Gospel, calling unbelievers to repentance and planting churches. Any activity whatsoever (whether food aid programs, poverty alleviation, medical care, political liberation, nature conservation etcetera) can be regarded as mission within this paradigm. On the one hand this sounds impressive. Yet the reality more than often proves to be that with this approach the primary focus of mission (namely preaching of the Gospel, calling to repentance, planting churches) is shifted to the background. Although liberal churches often are very much involved in mission nowadays, this doesn't mean yet that the full Gospel is preached. By stretching the definition of mission to encompass almost anything, the *Missio Dei* movement in actual fact disempowered the Great Commission of Christ. The *Missio Dei* approach as reigning paradigm is taught nowadays widely at (liberal) universities. With the above confessional statement we call on believers, congregations and federations to return to the classic Reformed, that is Scriptural, approach to mission. Mission funds should be used to spread the Gospel, to call to repentance, to plant churches, and not merely for the upliftment and empowerment of people in general.

2. True Ecuminicity

"Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gathers, defends and preserves his church out of the whole human race (Joel 2:32; John 10:4,11,14; Acts 2:221; 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-27; Heidelberg Catechism 21). Therefore we believe that Christ's church is peopled by all nations, languages, cultures, old and young, rich and poor (Colossians 3:11; Revelation 5:9). No manmade structures may curtail this diversity of Christ's church. Each believer and each church is called to pursue full fellowship with everyone sharing the true faith, and not to limit the unity in faith only with those sharing the same culture or language. At the same time this

does not take away that the Gospel should be preached as much as possible to each and everyone in his mother tongue (Acts 2:6,11). Nevertheless boundaries because of linguistic or cultural differences may not lead to ecclesiastical divisions. It is therefore important to warn against the dangers of nationalism, where the fact that



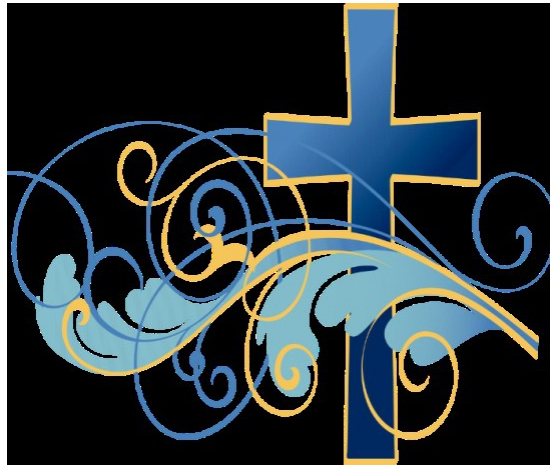
a believer is primarily a citizen of the kingdom of heaven is pushed to the background. This also applies to the danger of racism. There is but one Scriptural antithesis, namely between believing and unbelieving, between the empire of Christ and the empire of Satan (Psalm 129:4-5; John 17:14-17; 1 John 2:18-19; 3:10-17).

It is the duty of each believer to join the church where God's Word is purely preached and fully put into practice (Psalm 22:23; 23:6; Acts 2:42-44; Hebrews 10:25; Belgic Confession 27-29). Therefore we reject the doctrine of pluriformity. Believers should take a stand against false doctrine and erring churches and denominations (Psalm 84:11; Galatians 1:8-9; 2 Timothy 2:19; Revelation 2:9). True believers are duty bound to look for one another and to be church together (John 17:11; 20-21; Ephesians 4:3-4), cling to each other, encourage and when necessary admonish each other.

Furthermore each local congregation is duty bound to pursue federational unity with other congregations bearing the marks of a true church, namely the pure preaching of God's Word, the pure administration of the sacraments (Baptism and Lord's Supper) and the exercising of mutual discipline (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Revelation 1:11; BC 29). The purity of a congregation is not found in its historic origin, but in its being church in the present. God's covenant is always conditional, meaning that no church or federation can claim to remain God's people for ever.

Throughout church history many churches have become apostate. God, who is great in mercy, has given through the ages times of reformation, revival and return to his Word (Psalm 102:13-14; Isaiah 1:9; Romans 9:29). Jesus Christ is an eternal King who will never be without subjects (1 Kings 19:18; Isaiah 59:21; Matthew 16:18, 28:20; John 10:28-29; Acts 2:39; 1 Corinthians 1:8-9; BC 27). Therefore the tendency of local congregations to remain part of a denomination because of traditional loyalty or for other secondary reasons should be rejected. And therefore each local congregation should reflect from time to time (for example each new generation or quarter of a century) in which denomination their calling to be church of Christ can be executed best.

We profess the Scriptural calling that local congregations



should live in federational unity with other congregations building on the foundation of God's Word alone (1 Peter 2:6-10). At the same time we should be aware of the danger that belonging to an erring denomination can negatively influence local congregations in executing their Christ given duty (Acts 4:19-20; Romans 9:6; 2 Timothy 2:16-19). Christ's church gathering work is dynamic and each new generation has the task to put the call to unity into practice (2 Corinthians 13:5-6).

In this regard we reject the ecumenical movement pursuing a unity not founded upon the Word of God alone. Christ gives unity in the truth (John 17:17; 1 John 1:6; 2:4; 3 John 1:4). Any other unity is not a gift of Christ."

Clarification

Denominations in the 21st century still bear the heritage of the 20th century, an age in which the ideology of nationalism was rife. It caused world wars and also ecclesiastical divisions. As Reformed believers we profess that we are primarily citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We are duty bound to live in ecclesiastical unity on earth with all who share this citizenship.

Furthermore it is a reality that in many cases denominations have become sediments from the past, in the present accommodating in theological orientation a wide spectrum of congregations. This is not as Christ had intended it. His church gathering work is dynamic, and congregations who want to build on his Word alone in doctrine and life, actively have to pursue federational unity with other congregations with the same desire. At the same time they have to distance themselves from congregations who have repeatedly shown that they do not reflect the marks of a true church (BC 29) in doctrine and life.

Conclusion

It is my conviction that frequent and thorough communication can bring believers and congregations together. The above mentioned conference and brochure were initiatives to serve this purpose. Unity in faith is a gift given by Christ in each generation. Our task is to discover and unpack this gift. We should have the boldness to admit where there is no unity in truth anymore, and also to be bold in living it out where there is unity. *



Author: Rev. Dirk Griffioen

Dirk Griffioen is a minister with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. Among others he has served as a missionary in Indonesia.

LOOKING FOR THE IDEAL STRUCTURE FOR MISSIONS

In Acts 13, following the intermezzo about the imprisonment of the apostle Peter by Herod in Jerusalem and the miraculous liberation afterwards, we yet read about the tragic death of Herod. There is a connection between the death of the persecutor of the Christians and the space that the congregation of Christ received thereafter. “The Word of God increased and multiplied...” Acts 12:24. And immediately following this, the author Luke zooms in on the life of the first gentile-Christian church in Antioch: Acts 13:1-4. While the first congregation of Jerusalem appears to have been under the leadership of the apostles and the elder James (the brother of the Lord), in Antioch there were Jewish Christians and Christians from the nations (“gentiles”) who have received leadership. They were leaders “from among their own”. In all likelihood they would have been “elders” although we do not read that they had been appointed. However, mention is made of the ministry of prophets (and teachers). They were people who bring the heavenly message by the authority of the Lord. They admonish the people to listen to the Word of God and to hold fast to the teachings of Jesus. Occasionally we read of a prophecy about the future (Acts 11:28): a certain Agabus prophesied through the Spirit about a great famine that would affect the entire inhabited world (the *oikoumenè*). It stimulated the congregation in Antioch to set up an aid campaign for the brothers and sisters in Judea. The gift (money is apparently easier to transport than grain or food!) was taken by Barnabas and Paul to the churches in Judea.

In Acts 13 information is presented about the attitude of **the first congregation** in Antioch to “the nations”. We learn how it regarded “the nations”, a reference to all nations, tribes, languages and nations beyond the Jewish world. In view is the dividing lines between “the people of God”, i.e., Israel which consists of only Jews, and the “peoples” (the “goyim”). It appears that the congregation there does indeed have an eye for “the nations” who do not yet know the name of Jesus. On a given day the Holy Spirit announced to the congregation to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the task the Spirit has in store for them. This revelation of the Spirit did not drop out of the blue. The information that

follows is extraordinary in how it provides insight into how the missions “to the nations” took place. The following things are mentioned of this fellowship of believers in Christ in Antioch.

1. A church of Christ had come to be in Antioch. This church or congregation of Antioch received leaders and under the “leading guidance” of the Holy Spirit, through the Christians



Rev. Griffioen at the African Conference of Reformed Churches, 2016

from Cyprus and Cyrene, there was an unexpected growth in the number of members, who were later built up by the instruction of Barnabas and Saul. We read a little later about how this human and divine process took place and how the expansion occurred. True to custom, every Jewish community had appointed leaders, the elders and the scribes (usually with the priests as lawyers). We often think that the formation of a (growth)congregation takes place on account of a workable vision, a skilfully chosen path, and a convincing leadership. Elsewhere in Scripture we learn how a congregation is started. It is the work of God, through the Spirit who sends people on their way and lets them do “nothing other” than announce the good news. The *Word* that is sown falls into the hearts and in an begins to *grow* in a way that cannot be understood. This cannot be anything but *growth by the Spirit*. That is the way it must have taken place here too. Not only did the fleeing Christians from Jerusalem

and Judea seek a safe haven in the metropolis of Antioch, they also seized every opportunity to spread the news of Jesus. The believers who attach value to the gospel that they are hearing begin to move through the Spirit also: they seek out each other to encourage and to help one another, to share, and to be there for each other. This is the beginning of the church as a fellowship of sincere believers in Christ, a congregation of believers, Acts 9:15.

2. We discover that there are “leaders” in the church, prophets and teachers. They are mentioned by name, and we also learn of their place of origin. Five names are mentioned: Barnabas, Simeon who is called Niger (“the Black one” or the one with a dark skin colour; possibly from a mixed marriage?), Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a childhood friend of the tetrarch Herod, and Saul. These leaders¹ are not social or political leaders, the emphasis being on the fact that they are servants, sent by an Other, passing on and sending out the message. Forget the current position and function of the preacher (the “minister”), and focus on what really “makes” for a prophet or teacher: someone who is called and instructed to make something known of God, or a teacher who has the assignment to pass along the knowledge that he has of God and his Word (the Gospel). He is not someone who projects himself as a leader or someone who knows more than others. Rather, he is a person who makes known the good news about the Kingdom. He has no strength and authority based on his background or education, nor from his unique skills or personal qualities, these come from the Holy Spirit. It is crucial for this spiritual leadership of the congregation that the “leadership” consists of a team. In Ephesians 4:11-13 we read much more about the “qualities” and the functioning of these leaders who are the true servants.

3. The main activity of the congregation is jointly serving God. Of this unique gathering of believers together with the “leaders” it is said that they were worshiping the Lord, Acts 13:2. This *core activity* of the congregation is *the* way of life for this group. This is what it is all about. In the worship services praise is given to God and the congregation finds her encouragement, energy, strengthening, and healing. It is sometimes said that worship means making room for God. It is the other way around: God already has everything (He is the Kingdom), and instead He offers room for His children, who constitute His people (congregation) and in fact come together in His Name. We do not ask if God wants to walk alongside *us*, but we promise to follow the Lord in all things and to concentrate on his honour, his name, and his

will. Of these regular activities (which most certainly took place also on “the day of the Lord”) we discover that they regularly **fast** during their **prayer services**. This is not the outward expression of an inner hunger for God, but the expression of a new lifestyle: abandoning everything that does not belong to the Kingdom and focusing on the things that really matter (believing, praying, and following Jesus). Nowhere do we find a stronger faith in God and a total acknowledgement of being dependent on Him, than through fasting. Nor is it an individual expression of a believer, who imposes discipline on himself, who seeks solitude and avoids the community. In Antioch people were fasting and praying *together*. Immediately following this announcement about fasting and the habit of prayer we read that the Holy Spirit said to the church (so not to just one or to just a few members of the congregation) that Barnabas and Saul should be made available for the work the Holy Spirit had assigned for them. So there is a verbal commission from God to send out these specifically named persons. These short announcements at least indicate that it is possible that the Spirit speaks to the entire congregation and has a concrete message concerning the calling, appointment, and deployment of the messengers. Remember that this is the rule in the congregation of Christ. Of course, there may be individual vocations (“I felt it in my heart that the Spirit told me to do this”, or “God put it on my heart that I should do this or that”), but these callings should at least benefit the entire congregation, and should be shared and confirmed with the entire congregation. Together you are a congregation of Christ, not a sum total of individual believers!

4. “After fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” Here we discover the iron rule for ecclesiastical deployment: setting people apart from within our own ranks and sending them forth with a specific task. It

¹ There is much uncertainty as to how to understand the gifts referred to as “prophets and teachers”. Both “offices” have to do with teaching and explaining the Scriptures. Acts 11:26 reports that Barnabas and Saul (brought by Barnabas to Antioch and previously from Tarsus) were both “teachers”. In 1 Cor. 14:6 the apostle Paul calls himself a prophet. *One* person may have received multiple *gifts* from the Spirit, and thus carry out different callings. Often the gifts are limited to a certain person, Eph. 4:11. It needs to be understood well that the gifts of the Spirit are focused on building up and strengthening the entire congregation, and never to glorify the bearer of these gifts, 1 Cor. 12 and 14.

is very strikingly stated: “Thus being sent out by the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 13:4). The Spirit is sending out ... The church is indeed the home base; it is also the bridge to the next stage of the work. The involvement of the congregation appears from the laying on of the hands, which is more than what we would nowadays call ordination to office. The laying on of hands accompanies praying for someone. It also symbolizes the involvement of the entire congregation with those who are being sent out. Being sent out in connection with spreading the Good News and the revelation of the secrets of the Kingdom can therefore never be an individual initiative. The congregation is involved in all phases of the mission, up to and including the involvement after the missionaries are sent out, and *listening to the stories upon their return*. The appropriate structure of this mission through the congregation *and* by the Holy Spirit (the “setting apart” for the benefit of others) is not the work of a para-church organization, an association for mission or by a “sodality” (a task-oriented social network for specialized work in which the institute itself is less important than the community, cf. an order of monks, missionary institutions or societies, etc.) in contrast to the “modality”, an organization with or without ecclesiastical ties, where the emphasis is on the formal structure, the institution that is the backbone of an organization. The mission of the apostles takes place *from the local community*, with minimal structure, a “flat organisation”.

The mission work of the congregation in Antioch is strongly dominated by the efforts of the apostles. The congregation remains actively involved in all decisions and control is always in the hands of the Holy Spirit. The proclamation of the good news abroad is church work. The Holy Spirit sets things in motion and keeps things moving.

5. After the missionary deployment there is feedback or reporting. In Acts 14:26, Paul (thus named since 13:13) returned from their first journey (generally called the first missionary journey). The return journey to Antioch (“the place where they were commended to the grace of God”, Acts 14:26) was carried out in a reverse direction, to strengthen the brothers (i.e., the churches that had been formed) and to appoint elders and to encourage the believers. The elders are appointed (“confirmed in their calling and duty”) after fasting, prayer, and having been “committed to the Lord” (Acts 14:23). Upon arrival in Antioch, they “***gathered the church together, and declared all that God had done with them.***” The apostles were sent forth with a great and clear mission: to tell the story of Jesus.

Upon their return they have an equally grand *story* to share. Both apostles have experienced many things, and have also experienced pain and setbacks, yet the praise for God who has done great things is paramount. The apostles have simply done what they had been called to do: to witness of the Gospel of the Kingdom in Jesus Christ. The conclusion is clear: their story relates “***how God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles!***” There is not a word about developing a suitable strategy or coming up with an effective method: the God of salvation opens a door through His Spirit.² It must be clear that God's Spirit can and needs to open the door to the gentiles, the peoples who have always been far away, outside of the circle of God's covenant with his own people. Therefore there are precisely two directions in the image of the opened door: the nations can come near to God through this door, and the apostles, the ones who proclaim the Word, go out to the nations.

We consider this information of great value for the structures of the work of mission. After all, it is not just a model that we are offered at some point in the history of the mission, the expansion of the congregation of Christ. It is a description of how the Spirit blazes paths in time. Especially now that we have been reflecting at different moments in the past year, about the role of the local congregation in carrying out the “Great Commission”.

We are hearing many complaints – and they are justified – about the distance between our provincial mission work in Africa and the involvement of the local church. Moreover, many church members figure that our national organization, *Verre Naasten* ('distant neighbours') is even further removed from the local church.

Just as in the congregation of Antioch through the apostles who have been sent out and then returned, there is to be a direct relationship with the work of the Spirit in the areas where the workers have been active with the Word. ✱

² In 1 Corinthians 16:9 the apostle Paul notes that God opened a wide door to him for effective work. Revelation 3:7-8 also speaks of a door that can be opened and shut by Him who has the key of David.

This article originally served as a presentation to a local congregation about the work of mission.

MATERIALS ON THE CANONS OF DORT

The following reviews were gleaned from The Messenger (December 2019), a magazine for the Free Reformed Churches in North America; these reviews are being republished here with permission.

A Classic Audio Series on the Canons

Available on www.sermonaudio.com: search under “Rev. Paul den Butter”.

Rev. P. Den Butter (1938) still preaches every Lord's Day, mainly in the Christian Reformed Churches in The Netherlands.

Review by Mr. Connor Keuning, who serves as an elder in the Maranatha Free Reformed Church of Hamilton, Ontario.



From 1978 to 1982 Rev. Paul den Butter served the Hamilton congregation, after serving the Toronto congregation since 1975. He told us more than once that the study of the Puritans greatly strengthened his understanding, love, and commitment to the doctrines of grace.

Sensing a need to reinforce these doctrines in our congregation, Rev. den Butter started what turned out to be

a series of 21 sermons on the Canons of Dort ending this series on the last Lord's Day that he was our pastor. He felt motivated by Jude's call: “[I] exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (v.3b) These sermons were well received in the congregation and far beyond it. It was not uncommon to have over 80 orders of cassette tapes per week, some going as far as New Zealand. They also inspired ministers outside our federation. A couple belonging to a local Netherlands Reformed congregation said that for weeks they could tell in the preaching that their minister was listening to this series. The sermons cut deep and provided solid meat for hungry souls. Not a few of the Lord's people could hardly wait to be served this kind of spiritual food the next Lord's day. He created much appreciation and love for Biblical doctrine. ✱

Young People: *When I drive roads that lead from Hamilton to Waterloo, sometimes fragments of these sermons still come to mind. In my first year of university, I had a 50-minute commute to Waterloo, which let me listen to Den Butter's sermon series. During this time, these sermons were one of the means the Lord used to strip of all self-confidence and self-righteousness and thrust upon the triune God of all grace. Let me challenge other young commuters to listen as well – prayerfully!]*

“O, that God would kindle a fire in our midst – a fire of zeal for the truth – a fire of love for the truth – a fire which burns in our heart as a result of personally partaking of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ – sovereign grace! May God through His Spirit also enable us to contend for that faith with all our might!

Study the truth! Please, congregation, be not lazy in these things! Study the Word! Study the doctrines of our faith! Love the faith of our fathers! Beg God that the gospel of Christ may have power upon your heart and that you may love the Word....

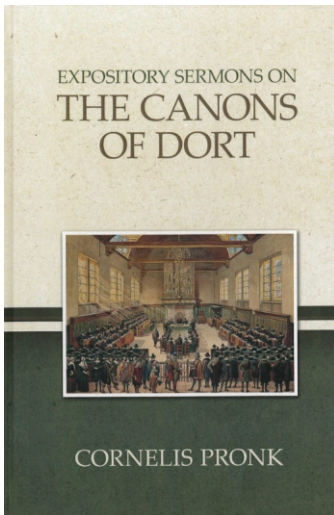
I feel that under God I should seek to lead you to a better understanding of these precious truths. If they go, we go! If they go, our foundation is gone. I wish that God may use my labors in our midst to instill in our hearts a love for the Canons of Dort and for the truth revealed in the Canons of Dort which are so Biblical - so thoroughly Biblical!” – Rev. P. den Butter

A Spiritual Gem of Sermons to Read

Rev. Cornelis Pronk, *Expository Sermons on the Canons of Dort* (Free Reformed Publications, 2013).

To order, contact Janey Slingerland, Free Reformed Publications administrator, 403-254-6591 / bookorders@frcna.org

Review by Rev. H. Overduin, pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Calgary



Instead of being a *book review*, consider this to be a *book promotion*. Rev. Pronk's sermons on the Canons of Dort were first published as a paperback in 1999 and then edited and republished in 2013 as a hardcover book of just under 300 pages. This 30-sermon series was originally preached during the years 1977-1978 in Grand Rapids (where he served from 1973 to 1987). I remember well finding the first edition such a

blessing to read that I even purchased a copy for each of my children and encouraged them to read it too!

This book is a spiritually edifying gem explaining so clearly and pastorally (as is so characteristic of the Canons themselves!) the doctrines of grace and the all-sufficiency of Christ crucified, as the one and only Saviour of sinners. These sermons preached 40 years ago are yet so relevant and rich, even as is the summary of the doctrines of grace so nobly upheld by the Synod of Dort 400 years ago. Think here of 1 Timothy 4:16: *"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."*

As noted by another concerning the Canons of Dort, "It is an old document but not outdated. The issues debated then still apply today. Much of evangelical Christianity is Arminian. We have to be discerning and exercise caution. The false doctrine of Arminianism is in Christian novels, educational material, and on radio and television [and all over the web-wide world]. The doctrines contained in the Canons of Dort are unacceptable to many because it puts a knife into the sinful heart of man, cutting deeply into human pride." The genius of this book is that it doesn't expound the faithful gospel teaching of the Canons in an argumentative and combative manner, but in a gentle, gracious, urgent,

Christ-exalting, grace-extolling, Triune God-honoring way. (Just go to Sermon Audio to listen to Rev. Pronk's recent speech at Seminary Day, September 4, 2018, on "Canons of Dort: Still Relevant?" for his hearty, humble, winsome manner!)

A special feature of the book is an appendix at the back of the book with suggested Scripture readings and Psalter selections for use in a worship service led by an elder.

This book is so worth your while to read again and again. It is a classic of most honest, helpful, comforting, practical, gospel teaching. It's a book not only to give to your children, but to your grandchildren too, and to whomever you may want to pass on a good word "in season, out of season"!

Some precious quotes from the book:

"The Canons begin where the Bible begins: with man's lost condition and misery, in the state of guilt. Before the apostle Paul begins to speak in Romans 9 about the mysteries of election and reprobation, he has already laid the groundwork in chapters 1 to 3. The Canons, too, start with the fact of man's total lostness before taking us to the dizzying heights of Predestination."

"What does it mean to believe on Jesus? It does not mean that I have to believe that I'm saved or that Christ died for my sins. It means I go to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to be my



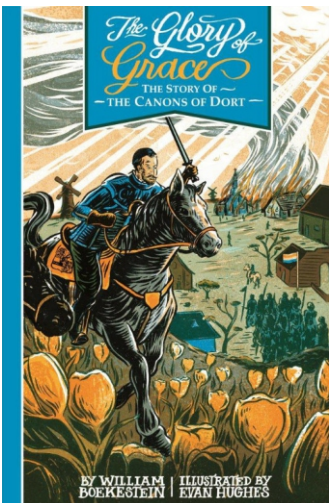
Rev. Cornelis Pronk at ICRC 2017

Saviour.... You believe what the Gospel says about Christ, namely, that He is the Surety for sinners and the Substitute of guilty, hell-deserving transgressors of God's law. What a Saviour we have! We have to praise Him for that salvation.”
 “Faith, worked by the Holy Spirit in the heart, is ceasing from our works. It is realizing that nothing I can do is acceptable to God, but that my only hope lies in the work of Another: Jesus Christ. Everything that had to be done for my salvation has already been done two thousand years ago. Faith learns to rest on that. Faith is the very opposite of striving and of

working. It is realizing that I not only *can* do nothing, but I don't even *need* to do anything. The great work has been done. That is faith! A lesson even God's people have to learn over and over again is to cease from working.”
 “The more a believer learns to plead on the promises of God and clings to them, the more assurance of salvation he will receive. This is Biblical.”
 “No Christian will persevere without the preservation of God; vice versa, no Christian is preserved by the Lord without being active in persevering.” ❀

Korean Translation: *These sermons have been translated into Korean and been purchased by many Koreans. Steven Lee, a member of our Calgary congregation, writes: “We are indebted to the Synod of Dort for the treasure it has left us. With clarity and precision, the Canons of Dort discern the false teachings that undermined the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am grateful for the publication of Rev. Pronk's sermons in the Korean language. May the Korean readers find the sermons instructive and pastoral.”*

The Synod of Dort for Children



William Boekenstein, *The Glory of Grace: The Story of The Canons of Dort* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2012); hardcover; 32 pages; \$5.00 USD.
 Rev. William Boekenstein is a minister with the United Reformed Churches in North America.

This hardcover booklet is designed for children. It is a great resource for parents to explain what that document is in the back of our Psalter. A child might think, “Canons? Don't they go 'boom'!” But that word has two 'n's. These Canons were written 400 years ago, and we still use

them to show what we believe today. Teaching our children about why the church has the Canons is very important. William Boekestein is to be commended for giving the church such a useful teaching tool.

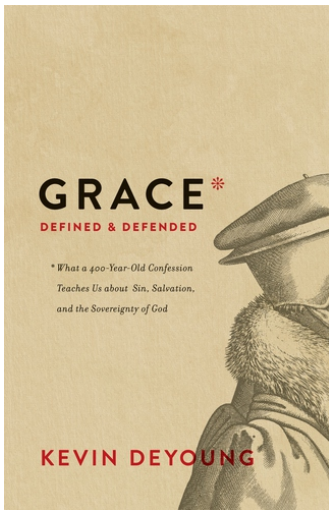
The author uses the first section of the book to briefly trace the background history and setting of the 1618/1619 Synod. The illustrations, without being overly graphic, show that this was a life and death matter! The second section of the book summarizes the actual events of the Synod of Dort and the beautiful doctrines re-emphasized for the Church. It was encouraging to read that during the Synod, the Netherlands was called to a day of fasting and prayer by the government. Parents, take this excellent little book and introduce your children to the important roots of our Reformed theology. Then, take them to the back of the Psalter, read, and discuss the beautiful teaching of the Canons. ❀

TULIP: Grace In Full Bloom

Author: Mr. H. David Schuringa

Grace Defined and Defended: What a 400-Year-Old Confession Teaches Us About Sin, Salvation and the Sovereignty of God by Kevin DeYoung. Crossway, 2019. 150 pp. Cloth \$18.99.

Rev. Dr. Kevin DeYoung is a minister with the Presbyterian Church in America and assistant professor of systematic theology at Reformed Theological Seminary (Charlotte).



Kevin DeYoung, himself of Dordrecht ancestry, takes on the Canons of Dort, our crown jewel of a confession adopted by the Great Synod of Dordrecht 1618-1619. More like Cliffs notes than a scholarly tome, his latest book is eminently suitable for believers desiring to understand the doctrine of salvation in some depth.

Sad but true, he points out that today people “would be hard pressed to spot the


subtle but important distinctions between Arminians and the traditional Calvinists.” That said, the author’s stated goal of producing a “brief, accessible commentary on the history and theology of Dort” is more than accomplished.

We catch something of the writer’s heart that Dort is about “the nature of grace – supernatural, unilateral, sovereign, effecting, redeeming, resurrecting grace, with all of its angularity, all of its offense to human pride, and all of its comfort for the human soul. That’s what Dort wanted to settle. That’s what they were jealous to protect . . . some truths are just too precious not to defend.”

As promised, he guides us through each article of the Five Points with excellent, brief but packed summaries, followed by insightful, lucid comments. His appreciation for Dort breathes fresh air since, after all, in drifting churches the Canons are the first to be shot down. DeYoung shows himself to be a Calvinist of high caliber, with Biblical precision and gravitas. He does not hedge on essentials such as God’s sovereignty, the substitutionary atonement or indiscriminate gospel proclamation. He is evidently convinced that the doctrine of Dort, in all its richness, is steeped in Scripture.

In his reference to supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism, DeYoung indicates that the latter position was included in

the Canons. Apparently so. And there’s even a little more to the story which is that supras were not thereby excluded, as the *infra* inclusion was encouraged by Johannes Bogerman, the President of the Synod, who was himself supralapsarian. Likely due to the fact that it has become customary among some modern writers to take aim at the TULIP acronym, DeYoung lists the usual acrostic limitations with sufficient measure of acumen: he concludes that “although we don’t have to get rid of the acronym, we should appreciate there are many more flowers in the Dort garden than just the TULIP.” Truth is, having learned the mnemonic as a child, he has “no desire to banish the TULIP from our theological vocabulary.” Indeed, as it has served the English-speaking church well for more than a century, and likely longer.

With this worthy contribution to the continuing commemoration of Dort-400, DeYoung does his Dordrecht forefathers, and ours, proud, if that were permissible. Anyone looking for a clear view of what Dort really says and means will discover afresh the reason for the hope that is within, their only comfort in life and in death. 

Republished with permission from *Christian Renewal* (March 8, 2019), a magazine published for the United Reformed Churches in North America.

