

The challenges of being a distinctively Reformed church in Singapore would involve disagreement with others and taking strong distinctive stands for the truth which involved ridicule even in the world of Reformed churches. - *Rev. den Hartog in Perspectives on the Ministry in Singapore*

While unity is important, the basis for unity is founded solely on the truth - the truth taught in scripture, and expressed in our confessions. We do not seek unity at the expense of the truth, covering it up and smoothing out the sharp edges so that it will not offend. - *Isa Tang in Public School Christian Organisations*

Philosophy, which tantalises its students with reaching the pinnacle of wisdom by pure, unadulterated reason, poses a threat to the faith of a child of God. - *Marcus Wee in Philosophy through the Lenses of Scripture*



**salt shakers**  
**joel 3:16 matthew 5:16**

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*Our*  
**Continuing**  
*Heritage*

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## WELCOME TO THE 45TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 45th issue of the Salt Shakers! We are thankful for God's sustaining hands in the continued publication of the magazine, and hope that it continues to be a faithful beacon of light in the midst of this world. We thank our writers for their regular and edifying contributions to each issue.

In this issue, Rev. den Hartog pens a piece reflecting on his forty-two years in the ministry, many of which were spent in Singapore. He was instrumental in establishing the first generation of believers in CERC, and instructing them in the precious truths of the Reformed faith. Today, the third generation of CERC is rising up. Indeed, we marvel at the beauty of God's covenant which continues from generation to generation.

Isa Tang writes about the dangers of so-called Christian organisations in the public schools today. While many claim to espouse Christianity, it is necessary for the Reformed believer to understand the dangers and implications of associating with such organisations.

CERC is commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation this year. We plan, the Lord willing, to organise a Reformation Day conference on 11th November 2017. Rev. Richard Smit from First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, will be the conference speaker. He will be speaking on *The Legacy of Martin Luther*, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Covenant*, and *Faithful through the Days of the Reformation*. We welcome all our readers to attend this worthwhile conference.

Pass the salt, and happy reading!

Blessings,  
Aaron

## BELONGING

>>Chua Lee Yang



Chua Lee Yang is a member of CERC and is the chairman of Salt Shakers.

Where do we belong? Despite the increasingly globalised world that we live in, tribalism and nationalism have not become things of the past. In fact, these trends have been resurgent in recent years. Be it a citizen of a country, an alumni of an alma mater, a member of a prestigious association, a supporter of a sports team – everyone wants to be a part of something, to feel like they belong somewhere. God has built this communal longing into the human psyche.

But being a member of the church is much, much more than mere tribalism, or a banding together along lines of common interest. Being part of the church is our life.

As Christians, we are all part of the body that is the church. We feel a sense of longing for the church. As the elect of God, we *are* the church and it follows that we belong in it. Beloved readers, in this editorial, we begin a discussion on the idea of belonging in the church. “The Church” can refer to several different concepts, but as we approach CERC’s 30th anniversary, it is primarily the visible church institution that we consider here.

David expresses the fervency, this burning longing for the house of God in his inspired songs: *“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”* (Ps. 42:1-2).

*“How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah”* (Ps. 84:1-4).

As David knew, he belonged in the church. He belonged amidst the congregation that praised God and kept the holy day. Thus his great sorrow when he was wrenched from this abode, both when he was exiled by Saul and when his kingdom was usurped by his own son, Absalom. In such times, it was the temple – where he could experience communion with God and with the saints who worshipped Him – which David sorely longed for. Being apart from God’s house, something critical was missing from David’s life, and he knew his need keenly.

*“One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple”* (Ps. 27:4).

What a blessing it is that we have the psalms, from which we can sing the same songs with the same ardour and love for God’s house, thousands of years after David wrote them! The world enjoys the use of songs to drum up nationalism, tribalism, and identity. How much more ought we who belong to the heavenly kingdom to sing the spiritual songs that draw us to it? Beloved readers, the songs we sing illustrate how we, like David, *belong* in the church. Church is where our heart and soul is, where we must long to be every week, every week of the year, every year of our lives.

We belong here – not just any institution that calls itself “church”, and not even just any church that goes under the name “Reformed”, but in *this church*, as each of us confesses when we make confession of faith – that we believe that the doctrine taught in *this Christian church* is the true and complete doctrine of salvation. We belong here, as our conscience convicts us that CERC indeed manifests most clearly to us, *of all the churches within our power to attend*, the three marks of the true church stated in the Belgic Confession Article 29. This is where we belong, where we are convinced in our hearts that we can find the most faithful preaching of the gospel. This is where God has ordained to bring us into the fold, to nurture us and strengthen us, especially through the sacraments. This is where He lovingly disciplines us when we are wayward, through the oversight of our fellow Christian friends, and though may God graciously forbid, through church

discipline.

We belong here, not because her members are the finest earthly society, not merely because we are comfortable being here, or because our fellow members never hurt us, not even because it is advantageous to us – but because this is *where God is*, as well as *where God has called us to be*. The command of God in His word for Christians to join themselves to faithful local congregations (Heb. 10:25) and worship Him corporately is reason enough on its own for us to want to be there.

But there are, of course, tremendous spiritual advantages which are graciously and abundantly dispensed by God to believers in the church. The church is where we have a place as living members of the visible body and where we are lively in its service. This is where we find our true friends, those who are one in the faith with us. Each week, returning to the worship of God, how we long to see their faces – when we have wandered all the week in our vocations among the ungodly, as in a dry and weary land, striving to live out the antithesis each day. What a comfort, that in our difficult pilgrimage upon this earth we are not alone, but are heartily encouraged along by fellow saints in the church!

Despite these obvious and manifold blessings (and there are many, many more), we live in an age where church membership and church attendance are despised. This is no new thing, for Satan, knowing these benefits and the command of God for every believer to join himself to the instituted church – frequently tempts us away from the church, to graze elsewhere on our own. He used famine in Judah to

tempt Elimelech and Naomi away to the greener pastures of worldly Moab. In John Calvin's day, Satan tempted the Nicodemites, who considered themselves secretly Reformed. Rather than to leave everything behind for cities where the word of God was faithfully preached and the sacraments rightly administered, they preferred to remain in the Roman Catholic churches in France. In our day today, Satan tempts many to depart or separate from the church for a time with the promise of comfort, jobs, education or a spouse, or perversely – simply for the fun and pleasure of a vacation. Increasingly as our Lord's return draws near, Satan's highly appealing arguments to entice us away from the church will certainly include the threat of severe persecution that one will face as a member of a true church of Christ.

But despite Satan's allures and threats, the blessing of God remains solely in the true church. In times of fierce persecution, some Christians may be imprisoned on account of their unwavering faith. We doubt not that God is able to feed and sustain those who are wickedly deprived of their liberty to worship God in the ordinary institution. But those who willingly leave and depart the church of their own accord forsake these blessings, while they act contrary to the ordinance of God (Belgic Confession, Article 28). And yet, such are often unaware of their need, and go on their way content nonetheless. As Prof. David Engelsma describes them: "*Though they are going hungry, they have no appetite. They do just the opposite of the sophists: they think it enough to have read three and a half pages in order to declare that they now know everything there is to know. Such people (as it seems to them) do not need to be preached to. As for the Supper, it's*

*all the same to them if they never partake. As for any outward order of the church, they consign that to little children, as if it were beneath them. Now I ask you, are not such people beyond blind? They will yet accuse us, however...*" – Prof. David J. Engelsma in *Bound to Join* (2010) pp. 55-56.

Consider the judgment of God and eventual state of those whom Satan successfully lured away from the church, mentioned above. Seeking prosperity, Elimelech and his sons died as strangers in Moab, and Naomi eventually returned to Judah as a widow in bitter poverty. What about the Nicodemites who loved the life and possessions they could hold onto while being secretly Reformed members of Roman Catholic churches in France? With themselves and their children enveloped by the deadly errors of Rome, they were almost certainly destroyed in their generations. In the future, under the threat of grievous persecution, starvation and death, many will faithlessly depart the true churches of God. Can anyone, from an earthly point of view, blame them? Yet Jesus warns us that even pleading the excuse of such extreme duress, they too will lose everything, eternally (Matt. 10:39). But shall we be found faithful? Let us pray that God may give us all to share David's conviction that the church is where we belong, come what may.

While researching to write on this topic, I attempted to canvass the opinions of various church members. Several practical and perhaps somewhat controversial questions arose for discussion. First, what if one were to rescind one's membership in a true church for another church that shows the three marks, albeit one that

is doctrinally weaker? Second, what about listening to good Reformed sermon recordings while on vacation, where there are no sound churches to be found? Third, what about leaving for studies or work in a land where there are faithful sister churches (eg. the PRCA)? Each of these questions can be addressed in much greater depth than this article can treat, but I give here several possible and brief responses. Perhaps this may be a starting point for further discussion in the societies?

In answer to the first question, we must ask: what is doctrine to us? Doctrine properly taught and believed is nothing but the knowledge of God and His Son, revealed to us in the Scriptures. The first thing Scripture is useful for is the teaching of right doctrine (2 Tim. 3:16). Yet merely knowing doctrine is insufficient. We must also love it. We love doctrine, because it truly shows us our God and our Saviour. We must love doctrine (truth), or we are soon destroyed (2 Thess. 2:10). Now imagine a wife must choose one of several photos of her husband to keep. Of the several options, one is out of focus. In another, her husband is partially blocked by other men. Yet another is vandalized. But there is one more photo that is best – not perfect, but the best one she can find – and she chooses that one. She chooses it because it is the clearest and best representation she can find of the one she loves. What a church teaches as doctrine can be likened to that photo, for doctrine shows us our Lord. Can one who knows what her husband looks like, willingly settle for a blurred or defaced image when she knows a better one is available? Would she really love him if she does? Of course, this is but a weak illustration. On a more solemn note, one who has taken up membership in the church has made a

grave vow before God to confess and defend the doctrines of the church. To leave, then, implies that one has either come to the conclusion that those doctrines previously confessed are not biblical and no attempt to reform the church from within is possible. If this is not the reason, leaving then implies simply that one has decided to abandon their vow for other carnal reasons. The breaking of a lawful vow is a deadly matter that God will not wink at. Let us all examine ourselves and our confession of faith with fear and trembling, and defer not to pay our vows, for the Lord has no pleasure in fools (Ecc. 5:1-7).

On listening to audio sermons while on vacation where there are no sound churches, there is the matter of our confession of being committed to the worship of God, to *frequent* the house of God on the Lord's Day, as well as to be subject to the elders who have made an official call to worship. There is also the effect on the body to consider – when one member is absent, the rest feel it dearly! Can a body be whole without an eye or a hand? A close reading of Belgic Confession Article 28 shows that to join the church involves “serving to the edification of the brethren”. Do we do that when we leave the church for weeks or months? There are many places in the world that are beautiful and exciting. But must our desire to go there take us away from the corporate worship of God?

Addressing the last question, membership transfers within official sister church relationships are legitimate in themselves. Young men may need to travel abroad and be under the oversight of another church while studying for the ministry. One may in good conscience leave the local congregation, and marry

a fellow believer of a sister church in a different land, continuing to serve the edification of the brethren there. However, transferring membership because one has a feud with other members, or because one dislikes the minister or the consistory – leaving in this manner might not warrant discipline, but they are nevertheless wrong reasons for leaving one's church. Positively, let us instead endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, expressing this love and forbearance of one another also in our membership choices.

These responses express my own personal views, although I am convinced they have a confessional basis. I would be happy to hear further discussion on these issues from our readers.

In closing for this editorial, this year we celebrate CERC's 30th anniversary, as well as the 500th year of the Reformation. In both cases, we are able to do so because of many faithful men and women, whom God alone gave the grace and the desire to be lively members of the instituted church. They stood committed to faithful churches against the scorn and persecution of the world and often even their own families. They stoutly resisted Satan's many overt and subtle temptations to abandon the church and strike off on their own. They did not forsake the assembling of themselves together, despite the pains and trouble of assembling amongst other sinners, as they themselves were. Despite many conflicts, schisms, feuds and shed tears, they stuck it out, still desiring to belong to the visible body. In contrast to making a bold, unwavering stand for the truth (which they certainly did when the truth was at stake), more often on a day-to-day basis, their steadfast commitment to

the church meant the modest, lowly way of forgiving one another, a lowly willingness to be wronged by their brethren for Christ's sake, esteeming their brethren higher themselves. They were patient peacemakers for the sake of the unity of Christ's local body.

How and why did they do all this? Because it is the Lord's good pleasure that His children be gathered and fed in this way. These saints were given the assured confidence of their election and

calling – they were Christ's people. As they belonged to Him, they belonged with His people as well. This confidence gave them courage not to flee from the enemy, but to build with the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other. By faith they saw the pearl of great price in tiny but faithful churches like CERC, and anchored deep where they knew the living waters flowed. Here they belonged and lived out their lives, and received the blessing found only within, and the victory.

We stand today at the threshold of significant milestones of our local church as well as the universal body. As we desire for and look forward to many more years of Zion's peace, let us pray for the grace to be settled in our own hearts as the saints before us did – that this is where we know we belong.

## SCRIPTURE'S COVENANT YOUTH (VIII): SAMUEL

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



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In our last article I introduced you to the family into which Samuel was born. It was not really such a strange family as it would be nowadays, for it was on the whole a godly family which went, in obedience to the law, once a

year to worship God in the tabernacle. By today's standards, it had several weaknesses, however: Elkanah had two wives, which was rather common in the Old Testament but forbidden in the New. One wife, Peninnah, had children, but did not seem to be a very godly woman, for she is called in Scripture the adversary of Hannah, who was the other wife of Elkanah, but who had no children (1 Sam. 1:6). Hannah was a truly God-fearing wife and bore the taunting of Peninnah patiently. But it was difficult for her because her husband did not understand why she was sad. He thought that if he loved her more than Peninnah and gave Hannah more presents than he gave Peninnah, she would be sad no more. Elkanah didn't understand that Hannah wanted nothing so much as children, because she wanted to be a mother in Israel and having children gave her a part in the coming of Christ. She longed for Christ, and that was her sorrow.

One year in their annual visit to the tabernacle, Hannah took the opportunity to pour out her heart to God. She cried with such fervour and anxiety that Eli, the high priest, thought she was drunk and he sharply reprimanded her (1 Sam. 1:10-14).

In Hannah's prayer, she vowed to the Lord that if God would give her a son, she would return him to the Lord all his life as a Nazarite (1 Sam. 1:11). And when Eli heard from her that she had prayed in the anguish of her soul for a son, he blessed her. God heard Hannah's cry and vow and also heard the blessing of Eli, and he answered her prayer: he gave her a child.<sup>1</sup>

Eli's blessing was not the mere expression of Eli's wish that Hannah would have a child, but the blessing of the high priest who stood in the place of Christ Himself who earns all blessings for his people.

**“...our childhood and youth are times of spiritual preparation for the day when we make confession of faith...”**

Hannah's vow is the striking event in this narrative. That vow God heard and that vow Hannah kept. She named him “Samuel”, which means “asked of God”. And so after she weaned him (probably sometime between Samuel's 2nd and 4th birthday), she returned him to the Lord. She did this by bringing him to the tabernacle where she “lent” him to the Lord (1 Sam. 1:28). This passage is a crucial one. The word “lent” does not mean, “give him to the Lord for a little while and then demand his return”; it could more accurately be translated “granted” or “returned”. She received him from the Lord; she returned him to the Lord. She considered him as belonging to the Lord and to be the Lord's possession and not her own.

I already said that Samuel came the closest of any other person in the whole of the Old Testament to hold three offices: prophet, priest and king. And therein lies the importance for us.

Samuel was a prophet because God spoke to him when he was still a child and he brought the word of God to Israel.<sup>2</sup> He was a priest because he brought many sacrifices. In fact, he made a circuit of Israel frequently to make sacrifices in different places. Samuel was not, strictly speaking, a king. But he was considered a judge along with all the other judges. He did rule over the people when they brought him their disputes for settlement and

when he anointed both Saul and David to be king.

After him, there were prophets who were also priests, and there were prophets who were also kings.<sup>3</sup> But there were no men who were both priests and kings. Samuel was in this unique position as a child when he first brought God's word of judgment to Eli (1 Sam. 3:11-21).

Only after Christ completed his work here on earth, went to heaven and poured out his Spirit on his church, were there people who held all three offices. These people are you and I – and all the saints in the new dispensation. We all are prophets, priests and kings (See Lord's Day 12, Q&A 32). Samuel was such from childhood on; so are we.

It is true that our childhood and youth are times of spiritual preparation for the day when we make confession of faith and assume full responsibilities in Christ's church. Samuel did have such preparation; so ought we. We are prepared mostly in the home. Our parents are given God's children for we are given to our parents. They always belong to God not to us.

The second reason why Samuel is important as an example to us is the fact that his mother, when asking the Lord for a male child, made a vow that she would consecrate him to the Lord. To consecrate to the Lord means to set aside for the service of God in one's entire life. Hannah did this in a very literal way by putting him in the tabernacle to do the work of a priest. This was Samuel's time of preparation for his greater work in Israel.

When our parents answer the questions asked of them at the time of our

baptism, our parents do the same thing Hannah did. They consecrate us to the Lord. This does not mean that parents give their children to the Lord by giving them as ministers, elders, deacons and Christian school teachers. But it does mean that our parents give us to the church as Hannah gave Samuel to the service of God in the tabernacle. It means that from the time of our baptism to our confession of faith we are being prepared by the home, the church, and, God willing, by the school for full service in the church.

The church must be the centre of our lives, the most important institution in which we live. All we do is, in all our life, for the benefit of the church and for the glory of God. We love the church; we will do anything to advance the cause of the church; we will sacrifice for the church; we will be faithful to the church. It is the only institution in our lives that will last forever and ever, for it is the very body of our ascended Lord.

We are consecrated to the Lord and prepared in our early years to fulfil that calling. It is the essence of all our calling in this life.

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting and important to note that Hannah specifically asked for a son (1 Sam 1:11). If she had no more children after her first child, a son alone could preserve the family name in the coming generations.

<sup>2</sup> This was a very interesting event in Samuel's life. We are told (1 Sam. 8:1) that the word of God was precious in those days. The meaning is that the Word of God was scarce in these days. God did not speak to Israel, neither through dreams or visions, nor through prophets, nor through angels. God was silent. It was a bad time in Israel's history. When God spoke to Samuel, he did not even recognize it as the voice of God. And when the high priest, Eli, told Samuel to say in answer to God's voice, “Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth” (1 Sam. 3:9). Samuel did answer, but he omitted the word “Lord:” “Speak, for thy servant heareth” (1 Sam. 3:10).

<sup>3</sup> David, for example, was a king who also wrote many of the Psalms.

## ARE UNBELIEVERS IN GOD'S IMAGE? (III)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



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So far, we have presented four arguments against the popular notion that all unbelievers are in the divine image. In the first three, we reasoned from the nature, the number and the idea of the *imago dei*. Then we pointed out some of the amazing incongruities and massive equivocations which logically follow from the erroneous position that absolutely everybody bears the image of God.

**“... we have the false gospel of the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity under the universal fatherhood of God.”**

In this article, we shall produce two more arguments. The first proceeds from the relationship between divine sonship and the divine image, and the second traces several dangerous ethical and theological consequences of the notion that unbelievers are in the image of God.

### Divine Sonship

Let us return to the four parties whom all sides in this debate agree are in the image of God. First, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity is both the image of God and the eternal Son of God the Father. Second, Jesus Christ is both the *imago dei* and the incarnate Son of God. Third, Adam and Eve were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27) as a son and daughter of God (cf. Luke 3:38). Fourth, all believers have been recreated in the image of God (e.g., Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10) and are the sons or daughters of God.

Do you see the pattern here? All four parties (the eternal Son, the incarnate Son, pre-fall Adam and Eve, and all believers) are *both* the image of God and the Son or sons (or daughters) of God. The connection is obvious: sons (or daughters) look like their fathers!

Even in the earthly sphere, this is obvious. Moreover, the visible realm reflects the spiritual realm. By eternal generation, God the Son is the “express image” of God the Father (cf. Heb.

1:3). By spiritual regeneration, God's sons (and daughters) are the image of God in knowledge, righteousness and true holiness (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10).

Let us build on an argument made in the last instalment of this series. The claim that unbelievers are in the image of God means that they are not only the likeness of God and the glory of God, but they are also the sons of God and the daughters of God!

However, Scripture declares that unbelieving, impenitent, reprobate humans are the seed of Satan, the old serpent (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:9), and the sons and daughters of Satan. The Lord Jesus denied the claims of the ungodly Jews that God was their Father (John 8:38, 41-42). Instead, He told them, “Ye are of your father the devil [and, therefore, you are his sons and daughters], and the lusts of your father ye will do [because you are like your father and in his image]” (v. 44).

Our Lord went on to explain why the ungodly Jews sought to kill Him (vv. 37, 40, 59) and why they could not receive His truth (vv. 40, 43, 45-47, 55): “Ye do the deeds of your father” (v. 41; cf. v. 38). Here Jesus highlighted two sins (those against the sixth and the ninth commandments) in which the ungodly sons imitated their satanic father: “He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his



own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (v. 44). Ethically and spiritually, the wicked sons imaged their diabolical father!

### Dangerous Consequences

Now we are in a position to outline some of the dangerous consequences which flow from the idea that unbelievers are the image of God.

If sodomites and lesbians really are the image of God (and, therefore, also His likeness and glory), homosexuality is OK. This argument is made repeatedly by various Jews and professed Christians, as it was in connection with the appointment of homosexual Canon Jeffrey John as the Church of England Bishop of Reading in 2003 (though he later withdrew his acceptance). Watch out for more instances of this claim in the days ahead!

This doctrine of the *imago dei* feeds into the liberal notion of the universal brotherhood of man, for all bear God's image. If everyone is in the image of God, then everyone is a child of God, for all look like God their Father. Thus we have the false gospel of the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity under the universal fatherhood of God. This is the old modernist heresy proclaimed by many, such as Martin Luther King, Jr.

Logically, the doctrine of man is corrupted through this teaching of the divine image. If all are in the image of God, what about the truth of total depravity? Surely, the image of God is good, morally good, for the God who is imaged is good, morally good! Therefore, man is not totally depraved. This is the argument of many.

**“Likewise, the well-meant offer... fits perfectly with this (erroneous) doctrine of God's image.”**

Similarly, if everybody is God's image, likeness and glory, then man must have free will. What is the image of the infinitely good God, if it does not entail ethical goodness? And free will (the ability to desire and choose that which is morally good) is crucial for ethical goodness!

Not only the doctrine of man but also the doctrine of God is affected by the notion that everybody bears the *imago dei*. After all, the Almighty must love His image, likeness and glory in the reprobate! This is called a universal or common grace, according to which the unchangeable Jehovah is merciful to those whom He has passed by and ordained to destruction in the way of their sins (*Westminster Confession* 3:7). It is instructive that Abraham Kuyper, the father of common grace, builds so much of his case for this false doctrine upon the erroneous idea of the *imago dei*.

Likewise, the well-meant offer (a passionate desire in the Most High to save the reprobate) fits perfectly with this doctrine of God's image. Surely, Jehovah must desire the salvation of those in whom His image, likeness and glory are manifest?

In the doctrine of eschatology or the last things, it is the truth concerning hell that is most endangered by a universal image of God in man. God's image-bearers in hell? Those who are Jehovah's likeness enduring everlasting burnings? The divine glory in the lake of fire? Could the ever blessed God tolerate such a blasphemous thing as this? If the image of God is in a man, surely there is a spark of His glory in him (the issue is not that of quantity but quality!)? Thus there is no such thing as hell or eternal punishment. Such is the argument of Harry R. Boer, a theologian of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), in his heretical book, *An Ember Still Glowing: Humankind as the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).

I realise that there are some who want to hold that all men are in the image of God (in some sense) within a more orthodox framework of beliefs (regarding homosexuality, man's total depravity, God's sovereign grace, hell, etc.). They argue that the so-called broader sense of the image of God consists solely in the categories of creation or nature and does not concern ethical or moral issues.

Besides the problems with this view pointed out in this and the previous two articles, there is the underlying fact that the term “the image of God” of itself carries great theological and ethical freight. Moreover, the idea that the ungodly are in God's image in some sense has no scriptural support, for the few texts which are brought forward are wrongly interpreted, as we shall see.

## OUR CONTINUING HERITAGE: PERSPECTIVES ON THE MINISTRY IN SINGAPORE

>> Rev. Arie Den Hartog



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The Lord gave us 42 years in the ministry. Retirement is an awesome time of life for personal reflection. This last stage of our earthly pilgrimage causes us inevitably to look back on the whole of our lives. In our minds and hearts we do this especially with respect to the time when we served in the active ministry. Sherry and I do this with humility and thankfulness to God.

During much of our ministry we had a particular burden for mission work in the service of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. In the course of carrying out this calling the Lord gave the great privilege of serving in several foreign countries. Actually the list of countries and places we visited is long. The Lord richly blessed us in every place we were called to serve Him.

Among the most exciting and blessed years of our life were the years we spent in Singapore. We were in Singapore for more than ten years altogether. We gave

a big part of our life. Our interest in Singapore came about when I started to correspond with a group of young people who were part of a Bible study and witnessing group. Most of these young people were at the time college and university students. One of the leaders of this group was a godly man who later became the first native pastor of the new church in Singapore, Lau Chin Kwee. The young people in this group, in the providence of God, had come to know the glorious truths of the Reformed faith and the wonderful doctrines of the Lord's gracious salvation of His people. Their zeal for growing in this knowledge was heart-warming and greatly inspiring to us. God brought a foreign exchange student from this group to live with us for a whole summer. We were serving a church in New Jersey at the time.

At the end of this summer we gave a positive answer to what we believed was the call of the Lord from the GLTS (Gospel Literature and Tract Society), as the above-mentioned Bible study group called itself. We were called to come to Singapore to help this group form itself into a distinctively Reformed church in Singapore, preaching and maintaining the Reformed faith in Singapore. It was an exciting goal and purpose! We moved our family to Singapore in January, 1980, with great excitement and anticipation, hope, and many prayers that the Lord would use us for His purpose and glory. For three years we worked among a group of very dear young Christians to help them grow in the knowledge of the truth,

and finally, to establish the Reformed church among them.

During the seven years of our stay in Singapore we saw many wonderful conversions. Some of these were newly born-again Christians from the darkness and hopelessness of heathen religions. Others came from churches not Reformed in doctrine. After being instructed more perfectly in the truth, these youthful saints came to love with us the precious doctrines of the Reformed faith. How precious are the memories of pre-confession and baptism classes at our home in Pacific Mansion on River Valley Road. Our hearts still burst with joy and thanksgiving to God whenever we remember the day of the institution of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (November 24, 1982). After her institution the church grew in number and zeal for the truth of God. The saints were such an encouragement to us in serving the Lord in those years.

The country of Singapore where this new Reformed church was planted was changing rapidly from being a country of kampongs and hawker centres with much lower economic standing than the USA from which we had come. In a few short years Singapore became the modern, prosperous, world-renowned city that it is today. Opportunities for the well-educated and strongly motivated for successful careers were many. Unimaginable prosperity, far above the parental homes where these young Christians grew up, could be sought after. Time would tell whether the members of the church could

properly handle their newfound wealth and prosperity. The Bible warns many times about the dangers of the love of money and prosperity in this present world. The love for earthly success and honour and glory can easily cause our love for God to grow dim. Involvement in church life can quickly become secondary to pursuing careers and success in the world.

The Lord gave the church in Singapore its own pastors, an exciting goal of all mission work in foreign lands. In November of 1986 we became convinced that it was time for us to move back to America and take up a calling in an American Protestant Reformed Church again. Just before our return to the USA a second congregation was born in Singapore, which became known as the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. She also received her own native pastor very soon after her birth. There were so many blessings of God!

Fifteen years went by. During this time Rev. Kortering served in Singapore as exciting progress in the church continued. Rev. Kortering served in the ERCS for eleven years. Many exciting developments took place in the ERCS. The ERCS continued to grow in the knowledge of the Reformed faith. Among the most exciting events that took place was the establishment of a sister church relationship between the ERCS and the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. The two congregations in Singapore were formed into a denomination. Mission work was being done in Myanmar and India. A small theological school for training young men for the ministry had its beginning. During those years we continued to follow developments of the church in Singapore with greatest

interest.

There were also sorrows, the sorrows of hearing about longstanding members of the church leaving her, often because of love for this present world or in order to follow career pursuits in other places, sometimes considered to be more important than membership in the glorious church of Jesus Christ. It would not be fair to say that all who left the ERCS did so for this reason. There were several other reasons; God is the judge of them all. Some lost their interest in being members of a distinctly Reformed church and for various reasons were content with being members of other churches which were doctrinally diverse. Some even returned to churches which they had come out of, no longer considering the doctrinal errors of these churches to be of any great importance. The Lord was sifting the members of ERCS. Who would continue to stand for the truth and endure the trials and hardships and face the conflicts that are always involved in doing this?

Among the great privileges and joys of our time in Singapore was the opportunity to officiate at an unusual number of wedding ceremonies. How exciting it was to witness many members of the church marrying in the Lord and establishing their own Christian homes. Young people over the years were facing the challenges of continuing to live out the implications of the Reformed faith in their lives. An important part of this was raising the children which the Lord gave them in the fear of His name in a truly covenant home. Most parents were greatly concerned about the future success of their children in the world. There was great pressure on the children to become high achievers through advanced education. Could all

of this be kept in proper perspective in relation to the high calling of serving the Lord in His church? This is an occupation of life greater than any earthly career in this present world.

Over the fifteen years that we were gone from Singapore, doctrinal controversies began to arise in the church, often because of the influence of new members who joined the church after years of study abroad. During their times in other countries they were members of other churches, some Reformed and others not. These joined the church with different ideas and began to exert great influence in the still relatively young denomination. We came to Singapore a second time when these controversies were growing in ERCS. The challenges of being a distinctly Reformed church in Singapore would involve disagreement with others and taking strong distinctive stands for the truth, which involved ridicule even in the world of Reformed churches. Not all had the courage to take these strong stands. Some in the church wanted to be more broad in their perspective in the interest of having fellowship with other churches and having a name and reputation among them. All of these movements led to the sad breakup of the ERCS denomination. This event caused us deep sorrow and anguish of

**“Among the great privileges and joys of our time in Singapore was the opportunity to officiate at an unusual number of wedding ceremonies.”**

heart. Differences concerning the truth caused tensions between longstanding and dear friends and fellow saints.

A study of church history will show that such divisions have taken place again and again in the church. In the providence of God these were often necessary for the maintaining of the truth of God and of the salvation of Jesus Christ. We are confident, however, that the Lord preserves His church and those who remain faithful to His truth. The Lord will judge, and the Lord will bless those who stand for His truth and the glory of His name. After years have gone by, this also will be very evident in the lives of God's people. Where is each one of us at in our lives after years of living the Christian life and being a member of the church of Jesus Christ? Have we grown in the knowledge of the truth? Have we remained strong in His truth? Have we grown deeper in our love for the Lord? Have we endured the trials, struggles, and spiritual battles which God has sent us in our lives? Where are we today in our lives and in our homes and families? Is the Lord truly central in our lives? Is our love for the true church of Jesus Christ and the cause of His kingdom which she represents still the greatest love of our lives? Would we be ready to sacrifice all that we have in this world for this chief love, even sacrifice our very lives should the Lord require this of us?

Our hearts are filled with joy and thanksgiving to God when we hear about and think of the church of Jesus Christ in Covenant ERCS. We have witnessed her continuation in the truth and her growing and standing fast in the truth. We rejoice at the covenant family life evident among her members. We rejoice to hear about those who have remained with the church and grown to be strong and more mature

and distinctive in their commitment to the Reformed faith, which we believe to be the blessed truth of the gospel of God. Among the most central of the doctrines of the Reformed faith are the truths of sovereign and particular grace and God's elective love for His people. Another is the truth of the definite and effectual atonement of the cross which glories in Christ alone. Another is the truth of His gracious unconditional covenant of grace, which God maintains with His chosen people in their generations, even in spite of the sin and unworthiness of His people themselves.

The Lord knows those who are His. He never forsakes His own. All of these truths are central to the gospel, and they must be maintained and defended by the church in her confession and life. The members must live out the practical implications of these doctrines in their personal lives and in their homes and families. On the mission field especially the church grows wonderfully as God gathers His elect through the preaching of the gospel. When the church is established she must continue her zeal for the preaching of the gospel outside of her own walls, always zealously desiring the salvation of others and working to gather new members from outside into the church. At the same time, the church must be greatly concerned about the continuation of the generations of the covenant. She must be greatly concerned about keeping her members themselves steadfast in the truth and about raising a new generation from the children born in her midst. If the church is to continue for years to come it must be concerned about future generations of Christian families in her midst. This is the wonderful way of God's covenant. Serious covenantal instruction called

catechism must be given to covenant children to help them to grow strong in the truth.

Recently I preached a sermon on a passage from Paul's letter to the church of Philippi. At the time he wrote these words he was himself in prison in Rome. Later he would die a martyr for the gospel and for the glory of Jesus Christ. In this passage Paul speaks of his greatest concern for the future of the church. The passage is an earnest prayer to God for the church. What is significant is that Paul does not make the chief concern of his prayer the prosperity and worldly success of her members. He does not pray that the church might continue to grow in numbers and become a megachurch. He does not pray that the Lord might so rule that the church does not have to suffer persecution in this ungodly world.

For a church to remain faithful to her Lord she must be ready to suffer persecution. Furthermore, all they that live godly lives will suffer persecution. Listen to the prayer of Paul:

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phi. 1:9-11).

We leave you with this as our great concern for the future of CERCS and her members.

## PRESENT DEVELOPMENTS IN REFORMED CHURCHES

>> Rev. Nathan Langerak



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The Reformed church is always reforming. That reformation consists of her constant development of the truth to bring her confession and life more and more into conformity with the Word of God. There is also the constant reality of departure. Churches that once held to the truth in a certain way forsake the truth and adopt false doctrine. In both senses there are developments in Reformed churches today.

The single greatest threat to Reformed churches is the heresy of the federal vision. This false doctrine is a threat to their very existence as churches of Christ in the world. This is because the federal vision denies the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which is the heart of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Justification is the message of the gospel recovered by Martin Luther in the Reformation of the sixteenth century and faithfully taught by all the great reformers after him. Justification by faith alone is the truth that God forgives the sins of all those who believe in Jesus Christ and imputes to

them Christ's righteousness by faith alone and for Christ's sake declares the believer worthy of eternal life. To corrupt this doctrine is to corrupt the heart of the gospel. The false teacher that corrupts this doctrine is anathema. The church that corrupts this doctrine has become the false.

The federal vision corrupts the doctrine of justification by faith alone. It denies that the justification of the sinner is by faith only without any works. It teaches especially that the sinner's justification in the final judgment will be by works. Men like Norman Shepherd, Richard Lusk, Peter Leithart, Douglas Wilson, and James Jordan have introduced this into Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

The federal vision's starting point for its denial of justification by faith alone is the doctrine of the conditional covenant. Thus far this root of the doctrine and many of its evil doctrinal consequences have not been condemned at the broader assemblies. The conditional covenant has had widespread and almost universal acceptance in Reformed churches. Those who taught it in the past defended the error by saying that the conditions were fulfilled by grace. The federal vision has aggressively developed this idea. For it the covenant is made with both elect and reprobate alike—with Jacob and Esau so that God promised to be the God of Jacob as well as Esau. In the covenant, God gives grace to all. The continuation of this covenant on earth and perfection of this covenant in heaven depend on

the faith and obedience of the covenant member by grace. For this reason, the federal vision teaches the covenant member can, and often does, fall out of the covenant and perish. Furthermore, the final judgment will be based partly on the work of Christ and partly on the covenant member's faith and obedience by grace: what one does in the covenant by grace will be part of the reason for his salvation. For the federal vision salvation is partly by Christ's work and partly by the works of the sinner. For the federal vision salvation must be based on the covenant member's works by grace because the covenant is conditional.

This heresy has swept over Reformed churches like a typhoon. Because of their commitment to the conditional covenant these churches are completely powerless to defend against this heresy. Every Reformed and Presbyterian church and church member must be on his guard against the subtlety of this soul-destroying heresy. Every Reformed and Presbyterian church and church member is called to reject that false doctrine and those who teach it, even if they promote it with the charisma, eloquence, and authority of the angel Gabriel.

The widespread acceptance of this false doctrine, chiefly its doctrinal foundation of the conditional covenant, has led to another curious development in the Reformed church world. That development is the redefinition of the charge of antinomianism.

**"(Antinomianism's) subtle form is the denial that the justified believer must do good works..."**

*Antinomian* means against law. The term describes the heresy that denies the necessity of good works in the life of the justified believer and that excuses sin in the life of the professing Christian by appeals to grace. Its blatant form is the doctrine that the child of God has been delivered by grace to sin freely. Its subtle form is the denial that the justified believer must do good works and that he must be exhorted to do good works. This heresy was present in the Old Testament in Jeremiah 7. It was present in the New Testament in Revelation 2 among the "Nicolaitans" and in "that woman Jezebel". It troubled Luther in John Agricola and Calvin in Geneva. It remains a real threat today.

The development is the redefinition of the term *antinomian*. This is found in the book, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?*, by the well-known, learned, and articulate author, Mark Jones.

In his book he minimizes the classic definition of antinomianism, "we have not understood the debate if we simply identify antinomians as those who flatly reject the use and necessity of the moral law in the life of Christians".<sup>1</sup> This comes out in the repeated warnings that antinomianism "must not be confused with the etymological meaning of *antinomian* (i.e., 'against the law')".<sup>2</sup> By this he also minimizes

wickedness of life in violation of God's law as the measure of the antinomian.

This minimization of the classic definition of antinomianism as "against law", and its necessary minimization of wickedness of life as the measure of the antinomian is evident in the Reformed church world today. For example, where is the law of God about marriage honoured today? It is ironic in the extreme that the warnings against antinomianism come from those who by appeals to grace defend or fail to condemn the rank violation of the law of God concerning marriage by pew and clergy. Excuse for sin by appeals to grace is antinomianism. This practice is widespread with regard to divorce and remarriage, so that those who live impenitently in that sin are given an honourable place in the pew and the offices. Antinomianism is present wherever that takes place and whoever does that is an antinomian. This all seems to pass Mark Jones by in his pursuit of a definition of antinomianism.

But what, then, is his definition of antinomianism? His first question to determine whether a theologian is antinomian is ominous: "are there conditions in salvation?" He asserts about supposed antinomians that "the divine element and the human responsibility", what he calls the "conditional aspect of the covenant of grace", were not upheld by "the majority of antinomian theologians".<sup>3</sup> He further explains about conditions in the covenant in the book, *A Puritan Theology*,

*The conditions of the covenant were principally faith in Christ and its fruit of new obedience. The former condition was understood, against the Antinomians,*

*as an antecedent condition, so that no blessing procured by Christ could be applied to the believer until he or she exercised faith in Christ...To maintain that the covenant of grace is not conditional...has no biblical warrant, for that reason, the Reformed orthodox spoke of requirements or conditions demanded of those who would inherit the promise of salvation.*<sup>4</sup>

For Mark Jones the covenant is emphatically conditional. To speak of it as unconditional is not Reformed, but antinomian. This is also a new definition of antinomianism. By means of it, denial of the conditional covenant and the defence of the unconditional covenant of grace may be smeared as the gross false doctrine of antinomianism, in a similar way as denial of the well-meant gospel offer and defence of the particularity of the call of the gospel are slandered as hyper-Calvinism.

In this connection it is significant that Mark Jones makes precisely that connection himself in his book, *Antinomianism*. He vaguely defines antinomians as those who "make Christ totally responsible, not only for our imputed righteousness, but also for our imparted righteousness".<sup>5</sup> He is criticizing the thought that Christ is our justification (imputed righteousness) and our sanctification (imparted righteousness). Against this view, he makes the supposedly devastating charge, "this view obliterates human responsibility to the point that antinomianism ends us becoming a form of hyper-Calvinism".<sup>6</sup>

What Mark Jones believes by hyper-Calvinism he explains in the book, *A Puritan Theology*: the hyper-Calvinist believes "that God does not sincerely offer grace unconditionally to every

hearer of the gospel".<sup>7</sup> That is not historic hyper-Calvinism. Real hyper-Calvinism taught that the church could only preach to the elect. Mark Jones' version is the redefinition of hyper-Calvinism that is bandied about by proponents of the well-meant gospel offer.

His definition of hyper-Calvinism, though false, is revelatory about his view of antinomianism, since he makes them basically the same. When Mark Jones speaks about man's responsibility in salvation, he does not mean that in salvation God treats man as a rational creature, so that man is responsible for his rejection of the gospel, even though God reprobated him. By responsibility he does not mean that when God works faith in man he actually believes and repents. When he uses *responsibility*, he means man's response to God's offered grace. When Mark Jones speaks of faith as a condition, he does not mean what so many in the old days meant when they referred to faith as condition, namely, that God works faith in his elect as the necessary means of their salvation. When he speaks of faith as a condition, he means man's response in the covenant to offered grace, by which man distinguishes himself from others in the covenant equally furnished with grace. By these terms he means what the proponents of the well-meant offer mean when they speak about conditions and responsibility: that God offers grace to all and man must respond to that offered grace in faith and so distinguish himself from others who are equally furnished with grace. For him the supposed hyper-Calvinist, who denies the well-meant offer, and the supposed antinomian, who denies conditions in the covenant, are the same. For him, they both deny a universal offer of grace, a grace made

effectual by an act of the sinner and without which the grace of God fails to save the sinner.

By these definitions he makes the denial of conditions in the covenant the new antinomianism. The definition is false, as false as the definition of hyper-Calvinism as the denial of a well-meant offer. The charge of antinomianism is false, as false as the slander that to deny the well-meant offer is hyper-Calvinism.

Reformed churches and believers must be on guard against this tactic. In the face of the legalism of the federal vision, the Reformed church, preacher, and believer must be willing to draw the charge of antinomianism from those who preach another gospel, which is no gospel at all.

This also brings up a positive development in the Reformed church world: the new book by Prof. David Engelsma, *The Gospel Truth of Justification*. His book was published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association to honour the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The book is a faithful proclamation and defence of the classic, creedal, Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone. All the different parts of the doctrine are explained in clear language over against denials of it past and present. For that alone it is worthy of promotion and study. The book is also a development by its careful and clear relating of the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the unconditional covenant of grace. Thus far, that connection has not been made or not made very clearly or so systematically and thoroughly. Because it was not made, the federal vision exploited the doctrine of the conditional covenant to

**“the Reformed believer... ought to recommit themselves to hold fast the traditions and reject every heresy repugnant thereto.”**

teach justification by works, deny the gospel, and spread it far and wide. The book demonstrates that justification by faith alone demands the unconditional covenant of grace and at the same time that belief in the conditional covenant demands a conditional justification, which denies the gospel. It proves that because Scripture teaches justification by faith alone, the conditional covenant has no warrant in scripture and the Reformed creeds at all. This book and its development ought to be closely studied by every Reformed believer so that they can better understand these developments both of the false doctrine of the federal vision and the conditional covenant and of the advance of the truth of justification through confrontation with that heresy. This book ought to be promoted vigorously for its stirring and spirited defence of the gospel of grace and the unconditional covenant of grace. In light of these developments the Reformed believer and church ought to recommit themselves to hold fast the traditions and reject every heresy repugnant thereto.

<sup>1</sup> Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 124.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 318.

<sup>5</sup> *Antinomianism*, 29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>7</sup> *A Puritan Theology*, 963.

# PHILOSOPHY THROUGH THE LENSES OF SCRIPTURE

>>Marcus Wee



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“Why do you believe in God, even though you cannot prove that He exists using reason alone?” my classmate asked me. “Shouldn’t you follow where the arguments lead you?” This phrase – following where the arguments lead – had been used by our philosophy professor, who insisted on applying the strict standard of pure reason to analyse everything he came across. Following the arguments, one can neither prove nor disprove the existence of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Thus, in order to be rational, one should suspend belief – or disbelief – in God’s existence, a position known as agnosticism. Or so my professor claimed. This question is faced by the child of God – why believe in God, when we are unable to prove His existence by reason alone? We seek to examine this question, by broadly considering the tools used in the academic subject of Philosophy.

## Philosophy

The word “philosophy” is used in a variety of ways, which we can briefly consider. First, philosophy is an attitude. It originates from the Greek word “philosophia”, which literally means “love of wisdom”. In Ancient Greece, philosophy was not so much

an academic subject as it was a way of life characterised by the love of wisdom. It was this love of wisdom that characterised Socrates, who followed wherever the arguments led, even when doing so led to the loss of his life through capital punishment.

Second, philosophy is also used as a general worldview one has, which is founded upon certain basic principles. We can ask, “What is your philosophy in life?” meaning the basic principles one holds to which guides how we live our life.

Third, philosophy can also be understood as an academic subject offered at schools. It involves reasoning, the process of deriving conclusions from a series of supporting statements. In particular, philosophy seeks to derive conclusions about the essence of things. Philosophy aims to get at the fundamental questions, such as the origin of the universe, the purpose of life, and everything else in between. In this article, we focus primarily on philosophy as an academic subject.

## Philosophy Examined in the Light of Scripture

Philosophy employs two main means of attaining wisdom – intuition and reasoning. Though employed rigorously within philosophy, these tools are used in our everyday life as well, and the applications we draw will be relevant to all of us. Let us examine each philosophical tool in turn, to see what God’s word states about them.

## Intuitions

Intuitions are basic beliefs which strike one to be fundamentally true, even in the face of opposing evidence. They are the ‘gut instincts’ that retain a strong grip on us, which we find extremely difficult to shake off. Much of philosophy centres around the test of intuitions. For example, a moral theory which claims that murder is always right may be something that even the ungodly philosopher rejects. Murder just seems to be wrong – period. Even the most defensible theories, which have many strengths, can be rejected just on the basis of running afoul of our intuitions.

## Testing Intuitions

What should we make of this practice of relying on intuitions? First, we should note that intuitions on their own are not to be simply discounted. Many humans have strong intuitions against acts like murder and stealing, and in support of principles like the golden rule, which are in accordance with Scripture. These intuitions are the

**“This question is faced by the child of God – why believe in God, when we are unable to prove His existence by reason alone?”**



work of the law written in the hearts of men (Rom. 2:14-15), the innate sense of right and wrong that every human possesses, even if they do not know God's law as stated in His word. This work of the law allows even ungodly men to "do the things contained in the law" – not to obey God's law, but to live by principles which are broadly in accordance with it.

It is not as if philosophy would be better off disregarding these intuitions. However, philosophy's mistake is to rely on these intuitions as if they are infallible. When compared to the light of God's clear and searching word, our intuitions are only a dim candle flame by which we grope around in the dark. Like us, our intuitions too are corrupt, and in need of sanctification by God's word.

That the wicked world's intuitions are corrupt is clearly seen today. While being convicted that murder is wrong, the world redefines murder to exclude abortion and euthanasia. From the principle of loving one's neighbour, the world decides that homosexual relations must be 'lovingly' accepted as an alternate lifestyle choice.

The child of God, while engaging in philosophy, cannot simply rely on his intuitions alone. He must ensure that his intuitions are in tune with God's Word, and not according to his or society's intuitions. Where intuitions are not in tune with God's Word, the former must be refined according to the latter. God's Word must be used to test our intuitions, and not vice versa.

## Reasoning

Intuitions are the basic building blocks of philosophy, which are combined

together by reasoning, the process of deriving conclusions through supporting statements, or premises. There are various types of reasoning, but philosophy is especially interested in deductive reasoning, where a conclusion can be 'deduced' from a series of premises. When the premises are true (supposedly either due to a clear intuition, like 'murder is wrong', or a sensory perception, like 'grass is green'), they can be combined together in an impeccable arrangement to ensure that the conclusion also turns out to be true.

Philosophy places its unwavering trust in the use of reason. Just as how conclusions are to be rejected because they run afoul of our intuitions, so too are they to be rejected because they are not supported by reason. However, while intuitions involve a slightly subjective element, reasoning is a process which can be assessed objectively, and a clear judgment made that a belief is unreasonable. As what Aristotle terms "rational animals", reason has an extremely strong pull on us. We feel compelled to accept reasonable beliefs, and reject less reasonable ones. To be "unreasonable" is a vice which we seek to correct.

Philosophy presumes to analyse the word of God by reason, as if it were just another work of man. It derisively points out that the Bible's best claim to be the Word of God – by its own testimony – is a circular argument, one that holds no weight whatsoever. Any other book could claim the same thing. Philosophy decides that at best, a god can be proven using reason, but not the God of the Scriptures, and instructs us to suspend belief in God. Philosophy, which tantalises its students with reaching the pinnacle of wisdom by

pure, unadulterated reason, poses a threat to the faith of a child of God.

## Testing Reason

What should we make of philosophy's antics? Philosophy errs, but its main error is not in using reason as a means to attain wisdom. Reason is a legitimate and valuable tool by which we make decisions in this life, and study God's Word. Philosophy's error is that it holds reason to be the highest standard by which everything, including God's infallible Word, is to be judged.

Philosophy errs, because it fails to recognise that wisdom is not first of all a series of correct beliefs, but a Person, Christ, the Word of God Himself (1 Cor. 1:30). Philosophy errs, because it fails to recognise that wisdom is attained, not primarily by the means of reason, but by the means of God's Word – by Wisdom Himself. And philosophy errs, because it fails to recognise that the gospel of Christ, which it deems foolish, is the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:22-24).

We must call philosophy out as the contentious usurper that it is (Rom. 2:8), an accused masquerading as a judge. God's infinite word has to be the standard by which everything is to be judged, and philosophy, with its absolute reliance on finite and depraved reason, is due its turn at the stand. And philosophy is clearly found wanting, especially when it presumes to understand more than what God's word reveals to us.

Philosophy is aware that it cannot independently prove reason to be the infallible standard by which everything is to be judged – such a proof would have to involve reason itself, and

make the whole proof circular. Yet, it condemns the Bible for claiming itself to be the infallible standard. However, it is not as if both philosophy and the Bible are in the same circular quandary, and we are free to place our trust in either or none as we deem fit. The proof of the Bible far excels the proof of reason, for the Spirit applies God's Word to our hearts, to convict us in our souls of the Bible's authority and authenticity. Our faith is not only a certain knowledge but also an assured confidence, a confidence which cannot be possessed by one who places his trust in philosophy, or any other idol.

Thus, when philosophy protests loudly

that one has no external evidence to prove the Bible's infallibility, it must be silenced as a petulant child who refuses to grasp a fact so simple and true. When philosophy gesticulates wildly that we are unable to know with certainty that we exist as humans and not as mere brains in machines, it must be shown up by God's Word for the bumbling, short-sighted fool that it is. And when philosophy uses impeccable reasoning to reach the conclusion that a sovereign, electing God has to be unrighteous, we echo together with Paul, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God (Rom. 9:20)?" Philosophy has to be held accountable by God's word, otherwise it presumes

to hold God's word accountable.

## Conclusion

It is true that following the arguments by reasoning never leads one to the knowledge of the triune God. However, rather than this being a strike against God's word, this is a decisive blow against the infallibility of reason. Studying philosophy can be profitable for the child of God, but we must take heed to "study philosophy as divines, and not study God's word as philosophers". Only then is true wisdom to be had.

## CKCKS RETREAT: THE GOD OF ZION'S YOUTH

>>Eric Lanning



*Eric Lanning* is a youth in CERC.

The annual CK/CKS Retreat was held this year from Thursday to Saturday, 22-24 June, at the newly renovated Changi Cottage. The theme of the retreat was "The God of Zion's Youth". It was a bit of an extension on this year's church camp's theme, but focused mainly on the youth of the church. The theme verse was Psalm 48:14: "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death". The theme song, Psalter #134, was a versification of that psalm.

The committee who organized the camp consisted of Joseph, the camp master, as well as Yang Zhi, Deuel, and Nichelle. I thought that it was encouraging to see some of the youth step up and do things for their first time. It was the first time Joseph and Deuel were on a camp committee. Deuel and I led discussions, and Nathaniel and I chaired speeches for the first time.

There were two speeches, one on "The Joy of Zion's Youth" and the other on "The Security of Zion's Youth". Rev. Lanning was the speaker, speaking to us via video from Michigan, where he was attending the PRC's Synod. The first speech showed us how God is our guide, what is true joy, and the judgments of God. The second speech was about the defences of Zion and the next generation. We were edified by the messages, and afterwards we had

fruitful times of discussion related to the speeches.

For the final night we had a steamboat dinner. We also had a special night that included a prayer meeting. We split into our devotions groups, small groups of seven or eight people. We shared a little bit about ourselves and then prayed for each other. It was nice to learn about each other and be able to pray for each other. I thought it was a good way to end the camp.

The retreat was well planned and had a good mix of spiritual activities, physical activities, and free time. We could tell the committee had worked hard to make it a good retreat. We had a blessed time at the camp, fellowshiping and learning about Zion and her youth, and we are thankful to God for the time we could spend there.

# PUBLIC SCHOOL CHRISTIAN ORGANISATIONS

>>Isa Tang



*Isa Tang* is a member of CERC.

While walking around my university campus recently, I noticed many posters promoting various events of campus para-church organizations (CPOs), such as teas, talks, and Bible studies. These posters flash titles like “God is Calling You”, “Permission to Dream”, and “Celebrate Christ”, with the hopes of attracting Christians from all denominations to their events. This situation is not unique to my university. Most of these CPOs operate branches in the other tertiary institutions in Singapore, and organise similar programmes for the students of those institutions.

If you are a student, you too may have been approached to attend a CPO activity, or even to join the CPO itself. Or perhaps you may one day be approached by a CPO. As Reformed Christians, what should be our view of these fellowships? Should we join them? Before we answer these questions, we must understand the missions and purposes of these CPOs.

## **Their Mission**

For this section, we will examine the stated missions of some prominent CPOs in Singapore, including the

Navigators, Cru (previously called Campus Crusade), and Varsity Christian Fellowship. While the precise missions will differ among individual CPOs, and we cannot analyse every single CPO’s mission here for lack of time and space, we can notice that at least among the few prominent CPOs, there are certain similar overarching messages that they wish to bring forth through their activities.

The one most similar goal among all CPOs is evangelism. Their goal of evangelism is advertised through statements such as “to know Christ and make Him known” and “reach, build, and send Christ-centred multiplying disciples who launch spiritual movements”. The CPOs hope to achieve this through events such as tea sessions, summer camps, and talks. Some also organize campus evangelism efforts like giving out snacks and offering to pray for other students. Some even try to be “a blessing beyond borders” by participating in overseas social mission trips.

At first glance, this may sound like an excellent way of fulfilling the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, where Jesus commands “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations”. However, we must understand these CPOs’ bases for their evangelism efforts. For example, The Navigators quote 2 Corinthians 5:14 as their motivation, stating that “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that **Christ died for all**” (emphasis mine). This is a clear expression of the Arminian doctrine of universal atonement, in contradiction

to the Reformed and biblical truth of limited atonement. While this does not necessarily mean that everyone in the CPO holds to an Arminian viewpoint, from the organization’s own statements, it is clear that the organization’s efforts are founded on false Arminian teachings.

To be in a supposedly “Christian” organization that holds to doctrines contrary to the Reformed faith, especially contrary to a doctrine that is a cornerstone of the Reformation, is extremely dangerous for a Reformed young person, especially in his youthful years when he can be easily swayed by compelling mentors who disagree with the Reformed viewpoint.

In addition, one must ask if he can truly support the activities of an organization when they are clearly grounded on a basis that we cannot agree with. An evangelism effort grounded in Arminianism fails to give God the glory that is due, since it now shifts the emphasis to man’s work. If we were to join such an effort, would we not be - at least implicitly - supportive of this false basis?

Furthermore, let us not be tempted to forget the rest of Matthew 28:19. After “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” comes “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost”. This demonstrates that the calling to evangelise is given to the church, because after preaching the Word comes baptism, and from there, church membership. An individual can share the gospel, but he may not

preach, and neither can he baptize. In their evangelism efforts, CPOs neglect the importance of church membership, choosing to focus only on the process of individual conversions, with no thought for what happens afterward. In addition, when CPOs think to convert men through their personal evangelistic efforts, they go against God's will for man to be saved through the preaching of His Word in the worship service, through the ordained minister.

Another common mission of these CPOs is to foster growth and maturity among their existing members. They seek to "help believers mature in their relationship with God so that they can in turn reach the lost and help others mature in Christ". Bible studies, quiet time sharings, prayer meetings, and testimonial sharings characterise the weekly sessions among the disciple groups (DGs) of the CPOs. Fellowship and fun are also encouraged through sports activities, potluck dinners, camps, and vacation training programs.

Once again, this sounds exactly like what is taught in Scripture. Does not Proverbs 27:17 say that "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend"? Surely, this must mean that we must help our fellow believers along in their walk with God. In fact, even our own CK/CKS constitution states a similar purpose: "To assist the young people as they grow in the knowledge of Christ to be godly, Reformed men and women, integrated into the organic life of the church."

However, we must note that the attendees of the CPOs' activities include Christians from any church and denomination. Unlike in CK/CKS, where we have a common

doctrinal ground, in the CPO there will be those who hold to erroneous teachings including common grace, universal atonement, the conditional covenant, pre- and post- millennialism, or even charismaticism and tongue-speaking. When people from such diverse backgrounds come together for a Bible study, it is inevitable that differences in scriptural interpretation will surface. Who, then, has the right interpretation? Is it not very confusing for a young man or lady to come to a Bible study and hear several different explanations of the same text, and leave without knowing which is the right one? Or worse, adopting the wrong explanation? This is no help at all to the growth of a fellow believer.

The other alternative, as some might advocate, would be to go the way of having "no creed but Christ", an attractive proposition that in reality preaches tolerance rather than the defence of the truth. To avoid confrontations with others in the group who hold to different beliefs, a Reformed Christian in a CPO may be tempted to keep silent in the face of incorrect doctrines, choosing simply to bury the differences and enjoy the company of fellow Christians, rather than incur the ire of the group by speaking out.

### **Our Differences**

These organizations proudly announce that they are inter-denominational. They welcome Christian youth from all churches, all distinctives, and all beliefs. They encourage each other with their mutual love for Christ and evangelism.

Here is where we ought to be careful of the dangers of a false ecumenism. In our earlier discussion about the Bible

study sessions organised by CPOs, we have highlighted how the differences in our doctrines could make it difficult for us to have truly fruitful meetings. By welcoming Christians of every background into one big fellowship, despite the differences, CPOs really leave no choice except to send out this message: it does not matter if we differ on doctrine. As long as we love Christ, let's come together and do things together.

This is in contradiction to Scripture, which asks the question: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). What basis is there for unity if we cannot agree, especially on such important things as doctrines? If we choose to persist in remaining in a CPO, chances are we will choose to remain silent, rather than defend our faith and offend.

While unity is important, the basis for unity is founded solely on the truth – the truth taught in Scripture and expressed in our confessions. We do not seek unity at the expense of the truth, covering it up and smoothing out the sharp edges so that it will not offend.

### **To join or not to join?**

So, should I join my campus' Cru or Nav? While there are no hard and fast rules, perhaps a young person should consider some of these factors when deciding whether to join a CPO.

Firstly, what is your purpose for wanting to join a CPO? Are you joining to make friends? If you are, then remember the words of Amos 3:3. It is not wrong to be friendly to people, including those who participate in CPOs, but there is no true unity if you cannot be agreed. Are you joining to share the Reformed truth?

While that may be a noble motive, you would do well to reflect if that is the best way to do so, considering you will be severely outnumbered by those who do not share the same views. Perhaps it would be more fruitful to use your time to privately share the Reformed faith with those who show interest, rather than attempting to fight for change in an entire organization.

Secondly, consider that our time and energies are limited. While we are called to serve God and His kingdom, this is primarily through membership and service in the local church. Will your participation in a CPO cause you to become so busy that you no

longer have time to attend CK/CKS or other church programs? Will you be so burdened with your duties in a CPO that you cannot serve on committees in the church? Or will you end up with no time even to meet and commune with the saints in CERC? If your membership and participation in a CPO is causing you to neglect your church, then you should seriously reconsider if you should be devoting that much time to the CPO over the church.

Finally, while we may generally disagree with the purpose of CPOs, there are nevertheless lessons which we can learn from them. For example, their zeal for evangelism is one trait that we can

emulate, albeit in the correct, biblical manner. God is pleased to use His church as the means to call His people to Him, and as a church we would do well to be zealous in promoting the gospel. We may also learn from how the members in the CPOs take great interest in communing with and encouraging their fellow members. As brethren, we too would do well to remember that our Christian walk is not done alone, but that we ought to lead each other along, because “iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Prov. 27:17).

## PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA'S ESCHATOLOGY NOTES (V)

>>Aaron Lim



*Prof. David Engelsma* is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. He was Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies from 1988 to 2008, and has been an ordained minister since 1963.

Suppose I were to ask you who or what is the most awesome and fearsome figure in the entire book of Revelation, what would be your instantaneous reply to that question? How many of us might not answer that question with the answer – the great red dragon of Rev. 12, which represents Satan himself

persecuting the church and being one with her, after he has been cast out of heaven? Or how many will answer that it is the beast out of the sea accompanied by the beast out of the earth in Rev. 13, representing the antichrist which has power over all nations, blasphemes God for forty-two months, and fights against and overcomes the church? The antichrist will also be able to perform wonders, and kill those who refuse to worship him.

How often is it not the case that when we think about the end and what will happen at the very end, we tremble in fear at the prospect of the antichrist as though he was the most awesome and fearsome figure. We tend to shudder at the prospect of the antichrist as though he were most terrible. That is a mistake. That thinking or answer on our part is a serious mistake.

The most awesome and awful figure in Revelation is Jesus Christ. He is the terrible one in the right sense of the word “terrible” – awe-inspiring. When we think of Revelation, we must think mainly of Him. We must not think of Him with terror, but with awe. In comparison with Jesus Christ, antichrist and Satan are but players and nothing to be terrified by. Jesus Christ is the Lion; antichrist and the devil are pussy cats in comparison to him. So does Jesus Christ dominate the end that if we have him as our Saviour and Lord by a true faith, we have absolutely nothing to fear about the end, and all the things that will transpire in history as we come to the end of history.

On the contrary, having Him as our Lord and Saviour, we look forward to the end. All of the struggles through which the church must go, and all the suffering through which we may have

to experience are things to look forward to because they are a privilege and an honour on behalf of the awesome Jesus Christ.

The end that we are studying is all about Jesus Christ, His coming, His power, His kingdom, kingship, and glory. Everything that is part of the last things is determined by Jesus Christ and accomplishes the purpose of Jesus Christ. I propose to you that this is not always how the truth of eschatology is preached and taught. This is not always how we Reformed believers think of the end. The first and main thing, the all-controlling thing that must be in our mind and soul is Jesus Christ.

Tonight, the very first truth about Jesus and the end that I want to bring out is that the end is about Him – Jesus Christ. The end is all about Him. Such is the truth of this that the question to ask about every aspect of eschatology, or the truth of the end, is: what does this reveal about Jesus Christ? How is this related to Jesus Christ? How does this serve Jesus Christ? Only when every aspect of the end is understood in its relationship to Jesus Christ do we understand the truth about eschatology.

I want to prove this now:

Rev. 1:1 teaches that the whole book

**“The end that we are studying is all about Jesus Christ, His coming, His power, His kingdom, kingship, and glory.”**

of Revelation is about Jesus Christ. The revelation does not only mean what Jesus Christ reveals about the end, but the revelation means that which is made known about Jesus Christ. It is about Jesus Christ; it is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Verse 2 tells the same thing. The book is a testimony about Jesus Christ. He is the content of the book.

The content of the book is spelled out in summary form in Rev. 1:5-7. When He comes and the nations wail because of Him, He is the awesome and fearsome figure. Notice especially that Jesus is the Prince of the kings of the earth. These kings are otherwise fearful persons, as is true of kings. They have power and a certain glory. The kings of the earth are the mighty rulers of the nations of the world who will ally with antichrist to persecute the church of Jesus Christ. Of those kings, Jesus is the Prince (vs. 5-7). “Prince” in the Greek original is ruler, or commander. He governs them all, controls them all, and determines their actions with his sovereign power. He is the Prince of Pilate, of Caesar, of Barack Obama, of Vladimir Putin.

Still indicating that the book of Revelation is about Jesus Christ, I call your attention to the message of the seven churches in Rev. 2-3. The message is Christ’s namesake. The name of Christ is the message of the church. In Rev. 2:13, the church at Pergamos is praised because they held fast the faith. The book is about Jesus’ name and the faith of Jesus. In Rev. 3:8, with regard to the church of Philadelphia which was not criticized, she kept the name of Jesus and did not deny His name. That is the importance of the church in these last days. Our testimony is the testimony that Jesus is the Christ of God.

Again and again, the book of Revelation affirms that all aspects about the truth concerning the end reveal Jesus Christ. In Rev. 5:9ff, a certain book is opened. That book represents the counsel or plan of God which represents everything that will happen in the last time, especially those things immediately preceding Jesus’ return. The content of that book has to do with the Lamb that was slain (v9). God rewarded the Lamb on behalf of God’s people by raising Him and exalting Him to the kingship that belongs to Him now.

In connection with the book that represents the counsel of God about the end, there are seven seals that open the book, so that what God decreed will happen takes place in time and history. Those seven seals represent all the events that will happen. They begin and end with Jesus Christ (Rev. 6:1-2). The very first seal is the running of the white horse, which is the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Notice how history concludes according to the opening of the last seal. There we read (v12ff) of the destruction of the present creation, the departing of the heavens, the wicked are terrified and cry for the hills and mountains to fall on them to escape from the wrath of the Lamb.

History in the new testament begins and ends with Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation tells us that the appearance of the antichrist is strictly governed by Jesus Christ (Rev. 11:7). Antichrist is always striving to come, but he cannot come and does not come until the two witnesses have finished their testimonies. When the gospel has been preached in all the world so that all of God’s elect are regenerated and brought to faith and saved, the whole church is gathered, then and only then does antichrist appear. His appearance

**"The ultimate purpose of the last things is the marriage of the Lamb to His bride, the church."**

is governed not by what the devil is intent on doing, but by Jesus Christ. He must be glorified in the saving of the church throughout all nations. Then the antichrist comes to put a stop to the gospel for a little while. The coming of the antichrist depends on the mission of Jesus Christ in the gathering of His church through the two witnesses (Rev. 20:1-3).

The old serpent is bound for a thousand years, the time of the new testament when the gospel goes out to save God's people from all nations. Only when that period is up, finished, because all the church has been gathered and brought to salvation, is the dragon loosed from his chains so that he can deceive the nations for a season. Everything in the book is controlled by Jesus Christ and centres on Jesus Christ.

Rev. 12 pictures the whole of the end time history. That is the time from Jesus' ascension until He comes again. Rev. 12 pictures the whole of end time history as focused on the man-child who rules all nations, and on the war against that man-child by the dragon. The dragon who represents Satan is ready to devour the child of the woman as soon as the child is born. The woman is the church. The dragon was standing

there trying to destroy the child. Think of Herod's march on Bethlehem. Then the man-child was caught up to heaven by God Himself, and the dragon turns his wrath on the woman, the church in the world. The important thing is that all of the warfare is concentrated on Jesus Christ.

We are the objects of the attacks of the devil only because we belong to Jesus Christ, represent Him, and confess Him. Satan has no interest in us personally. But inasmuch as we have the mark of Jesus Christ on our foreheads through baptism, and we confess Him and belong to His church, that makes us important to Satan – in the sense that we are worthy of his assaults so that he will destroy us if he could. The beast out of the sea in Rev. 13 continues that theme.

Rev. 14, following the account of the persecution of the church, reminds us that amidst the persecution, Jesus Christ does gather and preserve his church. As we are in the midst of the persecution, Rev. 14:1 assures us that the warfare of the dragon against the church is futile. The dragon is defeated. He does not destroy one single member of the elect body of the church of Jesus Christ. The defeat of Satan and his kingdom is taught in Rev. 14:8. The point is that all the attacks on the church and believers are in reality attacks on the Lamb himself, Jesus Christ. He is the main figure in the book of Revelation.

Rev. 17:14. All the attacks of the church are at their heart attacks on the Lamb. It is going to be important for us to remember when this persecution actually breaks out. That persecution is going on already today. It does not always have the same aspect; it does always involve putting someone in

jail or burning him on the stake. Persecution also takes the form of reviling, slandering, ostracizing. Persecution goes on all the time. When you personally feel an object of this persecution, what is really happening is that the servants of Satan are making war with the Lamb. Satan and his hosts cannot get at Jesus Christ anymore. The Lamb is also present in the church in the world by His Word and Spirit. Satan is capable of identifying his presence. When he attacks the church and the true believer, he is really after the Lamb. We are not important, but we are members of His body. So he can touch the Lamb by touching us. He makes war with the Lamb.

The ultimate purpose of the last things is the marriage of the Lamb to His bride, the church (Rev. 19:7ff). That is the very goal of eschatology – the great marriage feast of the Lamb and His bride, the church. The conclusion of the book of Revelation is the realisation of the goal of God – the glorification of Jesus Christ in the new world as the head of the human race (Rev. 21-22). There the whole conclusion is: Jesus is glorified; He sits down on the throne with God to share in the power and glory of God. The man Jesus Christ does that and exercises all the dominion, manifests all the glory of God in the new creation. That is what God is after in the history of the last things. When that happens, you and I will be sharing in that dominion and glory. So intimately are elect believers united to Jesus Christ that we not only share His salvation, but also in His awesome glory. Again and again, we are assured that we will reign with Him. That is our future. We will reign with Jesus Christ over all things.

## BOLDNESS IN SOCIAL SETTINGS

>>Stephan Regnerus



*Stephan Regnerus* is a member of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.

Mary pushes “Send” and leans back contentedly in her computer chair. She has made all the necessary plans, the invites have been sent out on Facebook messenger, and the only thing left now is to prepare the food for the social gathering on Sunday evening. She is excited about the young adults coming over; she enjoys hosting and is comfortable conversing with people. If Mary were to complain, which she is very hesitant to do, it would be that she can feel overwhelmed at times. It seems like she always must do all the work for social settings. If she does not do the work of hosting, then who will? But she keeps these thoughts to herself and consoles herself with the fact that she is doing a good work, promoting

unity and fellowship among the young adults of the church. Someday, perhaps, someone else will take over the work of inviting others to social settings.

What has been described in the above paragraph is a hypothetical scenario, not intended to call out any specific “Marys”, but to call to mind the idea of “social settings”. What are social settings? Who is to set them up? Should Christian young people feel obligated to RSVP positively to invitations to social gatherings? And finally, how can Christians be biblically bold in social settings?

A social setting is a *gathering of people who interact with each other with the purpose of enjoying each other’s company*. They are not gathered with any explicit religious, political, or financial motivation. In other words, Mary is not having people to her home to worship God, nor to select the next ruler of their nation, nor to make money by working. Instead, Mary has arranged this social gathering in order that she might enjoy the fellowship and company of other people.

We who are Christians have an important motivation to be active in Christian social settings, because we believe God is a covenantal God who is jealous for fellowship with His people. The primary way God fellowships with His people is on the Sabbath day, in the official act of worship. But God’s fellowship with people is not limited to the Sabbath day; He lives in and with His people at all times. 2 Cor. 6:16, “Ye are the temple of the living God;

as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people”. Immediately after giving the covenant formula, God gives a command that has important application for social settings: “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord” (2 Cor. 6:17a).

We see that God’s word has important commands regarding fellowship with Him and with His people. But we also know that the devil goes forth as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. The devil will use any tool he can to prevent God’s people from speaking and fellowshiping with each other and with their heavenly Father. In the beginning, the devil used a lowly serpent as the means by which he pitted husband against wife and mankind against God. Let us examine several ways we can be biblically bold in social settings.

The first way we can be bold is by taking the initiative to host, or at least contribute to, a social event. Especially the young men do well to remember this. If Singapore is similar to America in this regard, then it is generally the young women who take the initiative in setting up social events. I am thankful for the young women’s willingness to do this. But young men, I encourage you, step forward. Prepare to be a leader both in marriage and in the church by being a leader now, taking a role in organising social events. Do not be not like Barak, who hid behind the skirt of Deborah while she led the men of Israel into battle.

**“...how can Christians be biblically bold in social settings?”**



Another way in which we can be biblically bold is by putting forth effort to attend the good social events which have been planned. If a man wants to have godly friends, then he must show himself friendly to godly people. Proverbs 17:18, “A man that has friends must show himself friendly”. The individual who lives on the edge of the church, rarely attending social functions with other church people, may not expect in return that the people of the church will go out of the way to be kind to him. If you want friends and the benefits of friendship, then show yourself friendly.

But there is another important aspect regarding the RSVP to social functions, and that is the ability to say “No” to ungodly invites. There are certain times when the child of God must be bold to decline an invite, because he knows that being in that social setting will tempt him to sin. When your secular work colleague invites you to come to the bar with him after work hours, ask yourself, “Is this something that the antithetical child of God should attend? Will it build me up in holiness? Will my eyes be tempted to lust after that which God has not given me? Will my hands be tempted to touch things that should not be touched?” The same questions must be asked as you consider joining online social gatherings. In today’s world, one does not even need to leave the bedroom to attend a social gathering; they can join groups and communities and games right on their smart phone. Say “No” to online invites that will tempt you to disobey God’s holy law.

But now you are at the social gathering, and the environment is a good one. Mary has sent out the invitation, the date has come, and the people have

arrived. What does the Bible say about boldness at the event itself?

First, pray that the Lord give you boldness to set a watch on your mouth. Psalm 141:3, “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips”. The tongue is a little member, but it can work so great an evil. One particular way the lips can work a great evil is by being continually argumentative and schismatic at social gatherings. The cantankerous individual ceases not to complain, whether it be about politics, the weather, the minister, personal difficulties, or family struggles. Proverbs 18:17 calls such a man a fool: “A fool’s lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes”. Before you go to the social setting, pray that God will give you boldness not to speak about contentious matters which only stir up strife and controversy.

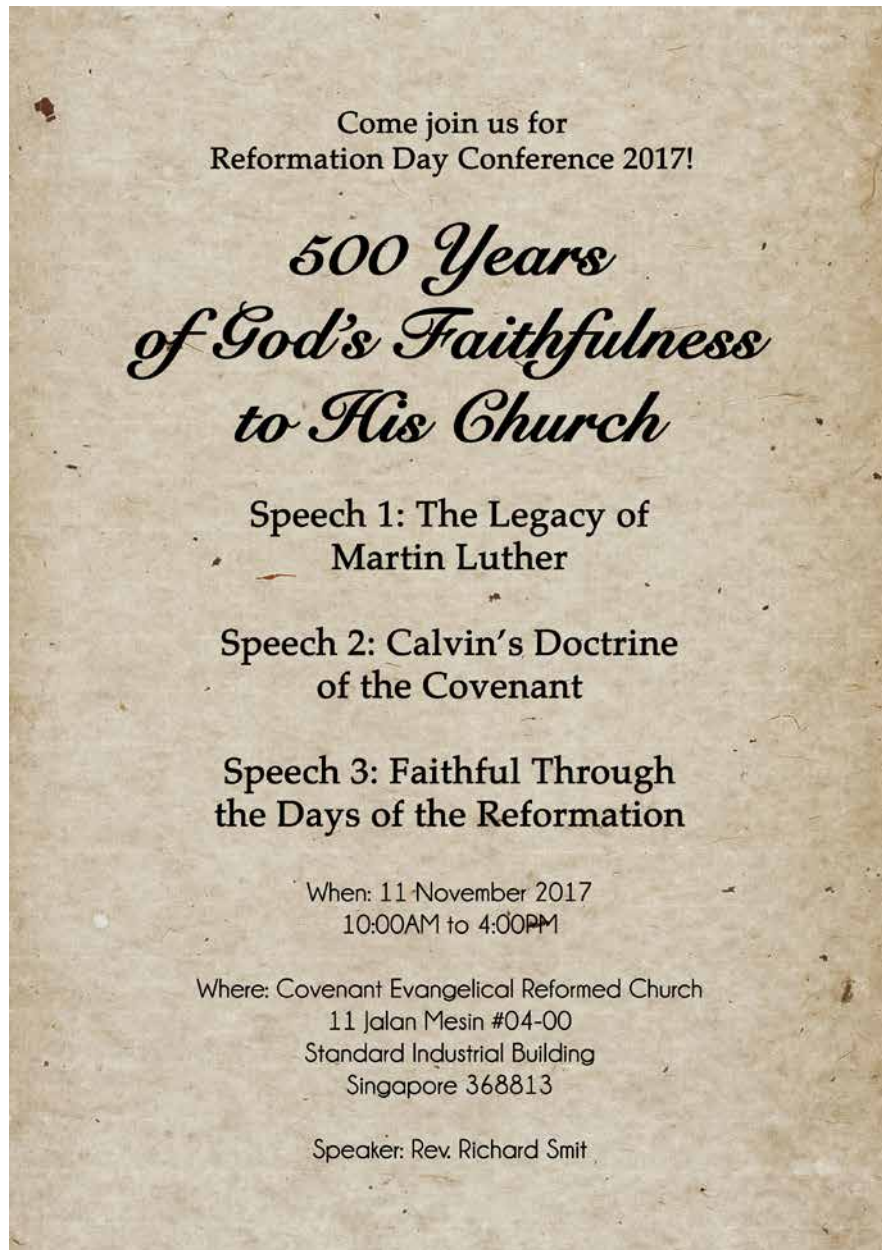
Another way in which the lips can work a great evil is by gossiping. The gossiping individual is generally insecure in himself, so he consoles himself by degrading others. Sometimes he tells the truth, other times he does not, but always his stories have this intended effect: make the other person look worse, while making himself look better. The biblically bold Christian who is making plans to attend a social gathering must pray for boldness not to gossip or slander, but instead to speak the truth in love, to defend and promote the honour and good character of his neighbour, as much as he is able (H.C., L.D. 43).

If the thought of attending a Christian social function fills you fear and anxiety, then remember that true, biblical boldness is not natural to fallen man. Feelings of anxiousness at the thought of attending or hosting a Christian

**“The gossiping individual is generally insecure in himself, so he consoles himself by degrading others.”**

social function is quite normal. But what must not be normal is how you respond to the anxiety. Instead of responding by clamming up and refusing always to attend, respond by lifting up your supplications to God in prayer. Ask Him for a rich measure of the Holy Spirit, who is able to empower and comfort His people.

For those who tend to be more outgoing but who struggle to control their impulsive tongue, continue to seek the forgiving grace of Jesus Christ. We all are sinners, and we all behave at times like the impetuous Peter, who, in light of social pressure “began... to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man [Jesus Christ]” (Matt. 26:74). When we deny Christ with our words or our actions at social settings, and consequently we feel shame for our sinfulness, then be bold to go to God’s throne of grace. And as you confess your sins to God, be assured that He is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).



## REMEMBERING 500 YEARS OF THE 1517 REFORMATION

JOHN HUS' QUOTE:

*"I shall die with joy today today in the faith of the gospel which I have preached."*

*John Hus' confession when he was burned at the stake*

*Source: Portraits of Faithful Saints by Prof Herman Hanko*



# News from the Churches

## Singapore

On July 16, Chew Lap Meng and Lim Seow Thong were installed into the office of elder, while Lee Meng Hsien was installed into the office of deacon. We thank God for His provision of men to serve in His ministry, and continue to remember our office bearers in prayer.

CERC held a church fellowship outing on Singapore's National Day (August 9). It was a welcome opportunity for good Christian fellowship. Activities included singing, devotions, hiking at the new Windsor Park, and lunch together afterwards.

Marcus Wee and Lim Tze Yan were joined in holy matrimony on August 12, with Rev. Andy Lanning officiating the ceremony. We rejoice with them and pray the Lord's blessing on their union.

Prof. & Carol Dykstra visited CERC enroute back to USA from Australia. Prof. Dykstra preached for both services on August 13. We are thankful for the good fellowship we could have with them once again.

Josiah Tan has returned to Grand Rapids with his family to continue his studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. Remember our brother and his family in our prayers as they sojourn apart from us.

We thank God for the good turnout at the recent Family Support Ministry (FSM) seminar which was held on Friday, September 1. The theme for the seminar was "It Is Good to be Single", with Rev. Lanning's speech applying the doctrine of the covenant to single life.

## Kolkata

In CERC's bulletin dated September 3, we find in the Pastoral Voice the news that "The CERC Fellowship of Kolkata had been asked by their landlord to leave the house where they are currently worshipping. It is very difficult for CERCK to find a place to worship, because most of the rental properties available refuse to rent to a Christian Fellowship for worship. However, in God's providence, Rev. Singh met a man on public transportation who has a house for rent in the same neighbourhood as the current place, and offered to rent it to CERCK for worship." We continue to pray for our brothers and sisters in Kolkata, trusting that the Lord faithfully provides for His people, even as he provided for CERC Singapore throughout her "nomadic" years.



Covenant Keepers outing to Fort Siloso



Ordination of 2 elders and 1 deacon



Exhortation during National Day Outing



A nature walk for National Day Outing



Holy matrimony of Marcus & Tze Yan



Bridal party of Marcus & Tze Yan's wedding

### Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

We are a Reformed Church that holds to the doctrines of the Reformation as they are expressed in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt.

Place of Worship  
11, Jalan Mesin #04-00  
Standard Industrial Building  
Singapore 368813

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Morning Service:  
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Afternoon Service:  
2:00pm to 3:00pm

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