salt shakers

CERC 30th Anniversary Special Issue

SOCIETY



LESSONS FROM THE HISTORY OF THE BELOVED CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST NOW AMONG US

Rev. Arie Den Hartog



Welcome to the special issue of Salt Shakers!

Dear Readers,

If you are picking up this booklet and reading this note, it is probable that Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) has touched your life in some way. For so many of us, she is our mother; it is under her roof that we have been fed, nurtured and raised. 30 years on, she stands by God's grace, as a faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ. But do we know her history? How well do we know her battles and struggles in learning and maintaining the truths of God?

In recent years, many of both young and old have been brought into the fold of CERC and have thus also become part of the new chapter in her story. For them, the rich history of CERC is often a complex retelling heard from numerous sources. Others, who have been members longer, seeing CERC develop over the years, look back and remember the pain and bitterness of those struggles but also God's enduring faithfulness to his people.

At the occasion of CERC's 30th anniversary, we have decided to publish a compilation of articles on CERC's story, under a single booklet titled "Our Continuing Heritage". These articles are written from the perspective of Rev. Arie Den Hartog, who laboured in Singapore as a PRC missionary from 1979-1986 and again from 2002-2005 as minister-on-loan from Hope PRC. They were first published in issues 22-26 of Salt Shakers in five parts, under the title "Lessons from the History of the Beloved Church of Jesus Christ Now Among Us". It is hoped that at this joyous occasion, we can all look back and see through this historical lens, God's faithfulness in preserving to Himself a faithful church.

CERC is but one small church in a line of many faithful churches. She is of little strength in the world. Her members are weak, imperfect sinners. There are aspects of her history that are painful, parts of which perhaps in our own wisdom we might like to forget or write differently. However, as part of God's universal, elect body, *the bride of Christ*, she is greatly beloved. This is evident in her struggle, as it is evident in all faithful churches in history. She is greatly beloved, and God's truth dwells in her – truth that is not held without great cost to her and her members, as this history shows. May God help her to hold fast that which she has, that no man take her crown! May she still be found faithful, when our Lord returns in glory.

We are deeply grateful to Rev. Den Hartog for letting us re-publish his articles, and for his frequent contributions for the Salt Shakers. Rev. Den Hartog is fondly remembered by us in Singapore for his extensive labour of love over the years as a faithful shepherd of the Lord's flock here.

LeeYang On Behalf of the Salt Shakers Committee





Rev. Arie Den Hartog is a minister emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. During his active ministry, he served as a missionary (1979-1986) and minister-on-loan (2002-2005) to Singapore.

I was asked to write a short article about the early history of CERC. In the course of working on this article, I decided it might be beneficial to write more than one article. This article is only the first chapter so to speak, of this history. I hope additional chapters will be written, either by myself or others who were directly part of this history.

We had the great privilege of being part of the early years of this history during our years as missionary in Singapore. These years were some of the most exciting and blessed years of our almost forty years in the gospel ministry. This does not mean that there were not also sorrows and trials for us personally. We ourselves were kept by the Lord and rewarded by His continued blessing and joy in our lives and ministry, and also in the life of our home and family.

It is important that the members of the church remember their own history. In the case of the true church of Jesus Christ, this history is the blessed account of the leading hand and the preserving grace of God of His chosen and beloved people. This history involved numerous struggles and battles. As much as we might want to change parts of this history, it is simply impossible to maintain the truth of God without being willing to be engaged in a spiritual warfare and many struggles. Even the history of the church recounted in the Bible is full of such great battles. None of us would choose these battles ourselves because we have some sort of unholy delight in them. There are often painful aspects of these struggles. Some times brethren who have been with the church for a long time leave. Friendships are greatly strained. In some cases, years of walking together and enjoying fellowship come to a sad end. Some even return to the darkness of errors from which they were by God's grace once delivered. God is the judge.

Often it is the case that only after one has gone through the struggles that we can see more clearly the leading and guiding hand of the Lord in the history of the church. Also then we can more deeply appreciate how the truth of the Word of God was preserved among us even in the way of these struggles. The faith of those who endure these struggles is tested and proven to be truly of God. The glory of the truth of God often shines in the midst of the battles for this truth by those who love this truth, are devoted to it, and courageous in defending it.

The true church can be distinguished by the truth of God and of Jesus Christ which finally she holds to, continues faithfully to preach, and to confess and to live by. This they must do in this ungodly world. God uses persons, men and women in history, and gives them the knowledge and courage to stand, and the zeal and devotion to the honour and glory of His name. These men and women properly have a place of honour and glory in the sight of God. However, the truth of God and the blessed preservation of the church is greater than any particular honour and glory of a man or woman. The history of the true church is all about God's faithfulness and the triumph and revelation of His glorious truth in His church. In this truth God's people find their joy and comfort and purpose as well for every part of their life. Those who are blessed with being part and parcel to this history are blessed above all peoples of the world. Great is the salvation of the members of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Great is the final and glorious and heavenly hope of His true church and her exceedingly blessed members.

We came to Singapore before the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore was even instituted as a church. There was already however, the existence of a living plant or, using the biblical figure, the living body of Christ among God's redeemed saints chosen by God's grace for a very high calling in life. The truth of Jesus Christ was planted in the hearts of those who would in time become members of the instituted church that would be established.

ERCS had its beginning as a Bible study group in a secondary school called Monk's Hill. One would perhaps not imagine that the church would have such a beginning. One would imagine that it would have its beginning with mature and long time Christians, perhaps with some learned theologians who had for a long time studied the doctrine of God as theologians do.

However, often the church in God's amazing providence begins with simple and ordinary Christians, in the case of CERCS with those who were recent converts and still very young in their "It can be proven from church history that the true church through the ages of time and in every place is founded upon the one unchanging truth of Jesus Christ."

faith. God raises up leaders for the benefit of giving guidance and establishing and strengthening these new Christians in faith to be long time members of His church. This is a very important aspect of the history of the church, and will serve to strengthen the church for her ongoing spiritual battle and defense of the glorious truth in this ungodly world, and in spite of the departure and faithlessness of short term temporary members of the church.

God delivered these young Christians from the darkness and hopelessness of heathen religion to give to them the blessed and glorious light, hope and salvation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through His Spirit He filled them with holy zeal and joy and excitement. They delighted in the fellowship of the truth of the gospel continually, just like the early church in the days of the apostles.

God raised up several young leaders of the original Bible study group, among whom was the late Pastor Lau Chin Kwee, whom God recently took home to glory and the blessed eternal reward of His grace and salvation. Lau Chin Kwee, who was himself a student at the time, was given the gifts to be a teacher and a leader in the Bible study group. The brilliance and vibrancy of the first love for the Lord of this group attracted many others to join in just a few years. In the course of the early history of this group, they had adopted the name Gospel Literature and Tracts Society (GLTS). The purpose of this group in the beginning was not to begin a new church. Its purpose was simply to reach out to other young people and to serve for the spread of the truth of the gospel which God had given to them. One of the means used to spread the truth was the distribution of tracts and literature. A room was offered at the Gilstead Life Bible-Presbyterian Church for the holding of fellowship meetings.

Some very significant events took place. Looking back we can now with amazement realize God's wonderful providence. No one knew at the time where these events would lead the youthful saints of GLTS.

A delegation of ministers and brethren from the Protestant Reformed Churches of America stopped by Singapore. The Bible study group invited members of this delegation to give a series of speeches about the doctrines of the Reformed faith. It would take far too much time and space to tell all the details of the persons and meetings that were held at Life Church. However these events brought about a very distinctive work in the hearts of the leaders of the Bible society then known as GLTS. There was a more conscious movement of leaders to study what we love to call the Reformed faith. By the terminology "Reformed faith" we mean the faith God restored and established in His church through the mighty events of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Soon after the Reformation, this faith was embodied in clear and distinct statements of faith called creeds. The major creeds where these doctrines have in the history of the Reformed Churches been outlined are the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and the Three Forms of Unity - The Heidelberg Catechism, The Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort. The Three Forms of Unity are the confessions of ERCS. But these confessions are also the confessions of a multitude of Reformed churches throughout the world.

The significance of these confessions is that they express in summary form what these churches believe to be the central and foundational truths of the gospel. These truths are new and exciting to those who hear and believe them for the first time. But they are also the old and tried truths of the gospel, which have from the time of the apostles been the foundation on which the church has stood. They are in summary the unchanging truths of God found all through the Word of God and infallibly recorded in the Bible.

Another truth which God led the members of the GLTS to understand already in its early history is the truth that the church is not based on the opinions of one or a few men, as gifted as they may be in themselves. The church is usually founded on the truth that she learns by a group of leaders. God uses these to guide and establish others in the faith. Thank God for the men He used for the original beginning of His church which today is called CERCS. Finally, the true church today is founded on the truth first given to the apostles of our Lord, passed down to succeeding generations, and given to groups of saints in all different places of the world. The amazing thing is that this truth is the same from age to age. It never changes. It can be proven from church history that the true church through the ages of time and in every place is founded upon the one unchanging truth of Jesus Christ. This truth can never be overthrown. This truth makes the church from the beginning of the world and in every nation one church – the church that glorifies God and will finally be exalted to be with Him in glory forever.



In the last issue of "Salt Shakers" I began a series of articles about the history of the church you belong to, namely the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. It is important that we remember this history. When we do so, we do so in thankfulness to God who formed us as His beloved church. Tracing our history helps us as members of the church to understand who and what we are. Originally I had intended to write just one article on the subject. In doing the work of making the first article I thought it might in fact be beneficial to write more than one article. I personally had a part in this history and therefore can write from experience and a personal perspective. I was privileged to be missionary in Singapore for 10 years. I have an ongoing deep love for this church and for her members.

The more I thought about writing somewhat extensively about this subject, the more I also realized the seriousness of the task which I have undertaken. When one writes on the history of a church that has existed now for a number of years, it is of course necessary to be able to summarize this history. Many events have taken place during this history. It would take way too long to give any detailed account of this history, and this would also be more than is necessary. In order to write a history, one has to be able to determine which events were of greatest significance. We can now do that looking back. At the time when these events were taking place we could not yet fully understand their significance.

One needs to be true and faithful in representing events. Judgments have to be made of events and sometimes even of persons. Some of this can be painful. Some of those mentioned might be offended. We make these judgments in charity and only in as far that they will benefit the present day members of CERCS. God will be our judge.

We are also deeply convinced that the main focus for writing a series of articles must be the glorious truth of the Word of God. The church is called to be the "Pillar and Ground of the Truth." ERCS once regularly published a magazine with the name, "The Pillar and Ground of the Truth." The idea of this name cannot of course be that the truth of God somehow depends on any church to uphold it. God alone preserves His truth and the church founded on it. He is never dependent on any mere earthly institution. Rather the calling of the church is to uphold the truth of His Word in a world of darkness and the lie. She is called to defend the truth and reveal the glory of His truth. She is to hold the truth high, for it is by the power of this truth that the members of the church are saved and preserved, and the name of the Lord Who is the Savior and Lord of the church is exalted.

Having given this somewhat lengthy introduction of the subject again, I shall pick up the story of this history where we left off last time.

ERCS had its beginning with a group of young people, who were recent converts from the darkness and hopelessness of heathen religion. These young people themselves confessed that they were chosen of God in His amazing love and saved by His grace.

What made this group of young people so significant in the church world was its love and devotion to the truths of the wonderful sovereign grace of God, whereby He saves His people and forms them as His beloved church. These truths are commonly summarized in what are called the Five Points of Calvinism, also called the five great doctrines of grace. These doctrines are (1) Total Depravity, (2) Unconditional Election, (3) Limited Atonement, (4) Irresistible Grace, and (5) The Preservation of the Saints. These doctrines are commonly remembered by the letters of the flower TULIP.

The young people who were members of the GLTS showed a new and zealous interest in the Reformed faith which is rightly summarized in the TULIP doctrines. In the early years of the GLTS, our former Pastor Lau Chin Kwee and other leaders of the GLTS began to study the Reformed faith by the careful consideration and teaching of the Westminster Confession. This confession is one of the great historic Reformed confessions of the church which summarizes faithfully the doctrines of grace.

The members of the GLTS, by the grace of God, soon understood how central these doctrines are to the Reformed faith and to the very heart of the gospel of God in Jesus Christ. I trust that the readers of these articles have and are studying the doctrines of grace I am referring to. So I am not in these articles going to give a detailed discussion of these doctrines. There are many sources available for those who are interested in such a study, and every reader of this article should be. The doctrines of grace are not merely one way among others of interpreting the gospel. They are a statement of truths that are foundational to the gospel. Through the history of Christianity many false teachings have over time arisen to contradict these truths and lead believers astray into false teachings.

I came to Singapore in the providence

of God at the exciting time when GLTS was zealously studying the doctrines of grace. This was at the beginning of 1980. I remember with thankfulness to God the calling and privilege and opportunity which I was given personally – to advance the members of the GLTS in deeper understanding of the doctrines of grace.

In the course of the study mentioned above, there were many who attended the meetings of GLTS and, by the grace of God, came to know the glorious truth of salvation by grace alone. Some of these were converted to God and became followers of the Lord for the first time in their lives. Others came to a new understanding of the gospel which they never before had, and they were very excited and full of thanks to God.

The study of the doctrines of grace immediately stirred up controversy with some who attended the meetings of GLTS. This was to be expected. Wherever the truth of God is being proclaimed, there will arise enemies of this truth who oppose it. However, the controversies involved in the early days of GLTS were not by any means always with those who were enemies. There were many who were learning the great truths of sovereign grace for the first time. They were surprised by them. Among the most difficult truths to grasp and believe were the truths of predestination, election and reprobation, limited and effectual atonement. God saves His people by His sovereign and irresistible grace. In saving His elect He Himself breaks the rebellious hearts that are in all of them by nature. Salvation is not by the will and choice of man himself. Salvation by the free will decision of man is a teaching that is so popular among man. But our salvation is all by the wonder-working grace of God and Spirit of God, in the hearts of those who once were rebels against God. God saves all those who were elected in Christ and redeemed by the cross of Jesus Christ. None of those whom Christ died for will ever perish. This is impossible, for then the grace of God would be a failure. To some it seemed at first that the truths they were learning contradicted teachings which many of the members of the original GLTS had learned in other churches which they were once a part of. Thankfully, among the members of the GLTS at the time, there were those who questioned and zealously debated issues of the truth because they were learning, and they wanted to understand more deeply and distinctly the blessed truth of the gospel. These wanted to be able to distinguish the truth from false teachings so current. They wanted to do this through a serious and careful study of what Scripture has to say about the truth of the gospel. The members of GLTS, already in the early days, were convinced of the infallibility and authority of scriptures. Every truth we believe must have its foundation in scripture and be thoroughly tested and tried by the absolute and only standard of the Word of God.

In the early days of GLTS, meetings were held at the Bible-Presbyterian Church on Gilstead Road. There was in those days consideration of whether the GLTS should simply become part of the Bible-Presbyterian Churches in Singapore, since this church also confessed adherence to the Westminster Confession. Why start a new church unnecessarily?

However, an important conviction arose among the members of the GLTS, and especially among her youthful leaders. They realized the need of a more distinctive witness to the doctrines of grace. They became convinced of weakness and Arminian teachings promoted in the Bible-Presbyterian Church. They wanted to be separate from these.

The Lord began to convince the members of the GLTS of the need of a church more fully committed to the doctrines of sovereign grace. Not everyone in the group agreed with this, but God was leading in a definite path which would in His providence come to a very important stage of development among the members of the GLTS. The institution of the ERCS took place under the supervision and direction of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America. I was and still am a minister of the Word of God by God's grace in this denomination of churches. In my mission work from the beginning in Singapore, I was able to share with the young Reformed believers and guide the establishment and direction of the ERCS, with the benefits of the heritage of the truth which God gave Protestant Reformed Churches among whom I was a minister of God's Word. I always considered and continue today to consider that this was a great advantage. No new church today should begin on its own. For every new church is and must be a continuation of the true church that is already in the world.

In labouring to come to the point of the institution of the church in Singapore, the Protestant Reformed Churches of America insisted on the need of adopting a creedal basis for the church to be established. Not everyone agreed with such a pre-requisite for organization. However, this resulted in a very energetic and extensive study of the Three Forms of Unity: The Belgic Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. On January 24, 1984, the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore was instituted with the three above mentioned creeds as her creedal basis.

I close this chapter of the story of which we are remembering with these thoughts. This history should be a demonstration to the members of CERC of how central and precious the doctrines of grace are to the gospel of which the church must be the pillar and ground as mentioned above. Never should the members of CERC allow the glorious truths of grace to recede from being central to her confession and life as the church of Jesus Christ, and to her calling to preach the true gospel of salvation in the world.

Secondly, wherever the distinctive and glorious truths of the gospel are proclaimed, there will always immediately be controversy and challenges. We who are members of the church must not be afraid of this. Read the history of the church recorded in the scriptures. In both the Old and New Testament church these challenges arose. Every church is called upon to defend the truth. We are involved in a great spiritual warfare, the great battle of the ages. In II Timothy, Paul calls this battle the good fight of faith.

Any church that has by God's grace been given the glorious truth of the gospel must be ready to zealously and courageously defend the truth of the gospel against all and every challenge. The members of the church must in fact count the truth to be more precious even than our own lives. If necessary we must be ready to give our lives as martyrs for the truth. Many thousands through the centuries of time have fought in this glorious battle of the truth. The victory of this battle has already been won by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The glorious heritage of the Reformed faith will be preserved by the church when her members know and love the doctrines of sovereign grace, and continue to understand how absolutely central and foundational these truths are for the gospel. Young people also must be willing to stand in the battle of the history of the church. They must know and love the truth to be ready for this challenge.

In our next chapter of the recounting of this history, I will give you a brief history of the new challenges that faced ERCS in the defending of the truth of the gospel in her history, and how she was preserved by God in meeting these challenges and standing for God and His truth.



We hope and pray that you will have the perseverance to read this series of articles, though a bit long, and that you will benefit from them.

In the years after the wonderful event of the institution of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore, God richly blessed her. ERCS grew wonderfully in her numbers. She gathered for worship on the Lord's Day in a humble meeting place. It was a kampong rented from the father of one of her members. This meeting place was filled to capacity with eager worshippers. Worship services were probably longer than most other churches in Singapore. Attention to preaching was inspiring to the preacher. The singing was enthusiastic.

Besides the worship services on the Lord's Day, which were always well attended, there were prayer meetings every Wednesday evening. These were also well attended. The prayer meetings included a short meditation by one of the leaders of the church, usually the pastor, or one of the elders or deacons, or sometimes other gifted young men who could stand and give a simple inspiring exhortation based on a chosen passage of scripture. After the exhortation there was a period of sharing of prayer requests by those in attendance. There were many such requests. Those who came to the prayer meeting understood how important prayer is for the life of the Christian. Christians pray regularly in their own personal life. They also gather together corporately. In these prayer meetings there was a rich experience of the communion of the saints and an encouraging of one another by praying together. Those who prayed knelt on the floor in front of chairs and benches.

The membership of ERCS grew mainly through members of the church bringing friends and relatives to the morning worship services. They did this through zealous personal testimony they gave in their daily lives of the joy and excitement of their God-given faith. They gave personal testimony of the blessed truth they had come to know, and also of how this truth was a mighty source of comfort and joy in the trials and challenges they faced in life. Many of the early members of ERCS were school classmates. Later many were students from pre-U and from universities and polytechnics. Some were beginning their life careers and facing the challenges in the work-a-day world. Some were going overseas for advanced studies.

From the very beginning of our coming to Singapore, there were pre-baptism and confession of faith classes. Meetings for instruction were held at our apartment on River Valley Close on Sundays after the morning worship services. After about a year of regular instruction, large groups of young people eagerly requested to be baptized. Some of the new Christians were recent converts from heathen religion. Some came to ERCS because even though they had become Christians in other churches, they came for the first time in their lives to hear the blessed gospel of the Reformed faith. They realized by the "As we remember the history of God's beloved church, we must remember also the years of the pouring out of God's blessing upon His people."

grace and Spirit of God that the Reformed faith summarized by the Reformed Creeds agrees with the truth of the gospel in every part. Through the instruction given by the preaching, Bible studies and catechism classes, Christians from other churches were brought to a more perfect understanding of the Word of God. There were a whole series of groups of young people who went through the classes. The instruction given was based on the Heidelberg Catechism. When the period of instruction was over, those who attended the classes and desired to be baptized were examined by the elders. When the confessions of these vibrant young Christians were approved by the eldership, they were received for baptism. Worship services regularly included large groups, some as many as twenty that were baptized together. These were joyous occasions.

These years of the history of ERCS were exciting and blessed years. As we remember the history of God's beloved church, we must remember also the years of the pouring out of God's blessing upon His people. In the history of the church from the beginning there are battles and struggles for the truth. There are sorrows as well as joys. There are trials of the members of the church. In these trials the members encourage and support one another. The truth must be defended. In the course of defending the truth there will be challenges and disagreements and differences. In the midst of all these experiences, God preserves His people and encourages and strengthens her members. We remember with thankfulness to God the glorious history of the church and God's blessings upon her members. If years later the church begins to lose the zeal of her first love, she must remember the former years of the great blessing of the Lord.

ERCS grew wonderfully in numbers in the first several years of her existence, by the grace and Spirit of God among her. I can remember when walls had to be broken down to make more room at the kampong where the worship services were being held. Over the years adjacent rooms became available to rent and the worship center was expanded several times for larger audiences at the worship services.

Another very exciting event was regularly happening during those years. Young people were being brought together, young men and young women in the great excitement and joy of Christian love for each other. There was one wedding ceremony after another. At times every other weekend there was a wedding taking place. In a few instances there were even wedding ceremonies where more than one couple was married at a time. Almost the whole church joined the celebrations of the weddings.

After the many wedding ceremonies, young newlywed couples were having their first covenant children. For the first time in the history of ERCS there were regular infant baptisms taking place in the worship services. New parents, many who were raised in idol worshipping homes, were facing the challenges of raising their covenant children in the fear of the Lord.

Pastor Lau Chin Kwee completed his training in the Protestant Reformed Seminary in the United States. He returned, was ordained in ERCS and became her first native pastor. After some years God raised up two other young men from the midst of the church, brother Jai Mahtani and brother Cheah Fook Meng. Both of these spent several years in the USA at the Seminary to be trained as pastors.

As the numbers of the church grew, there was a great need for a more permanent place of worship. In Singapore it is very difficult for a small church to be able to build or purchase a church building. For many years committees in ERCS investigated various potential places of worship. There were many disappointments. Finally in the providence of God, ERCS was able to purchase land and build a beautiful building on Yio Chu Kang Road.

God continued to bless His church richly. Numbers continued to grow. Soon the exciting prospect of starting a second congregation was being discussed. A difficult yet wonderful decision had to be made. What would better serve the cause of the church of Jesus Christ? Was it better to have one larger congregation or was it better to have two congregations and two places for the preaching of the gospel and the gathering of God's people? Singapore is a country with a small area of land compared to other countries. Mass rapid transit was developing in Singapore with the building of the MRT lines. It was easier now to travel from one end of the country to the other. All these discussions resulted in the decision to start a second congregation. The new congregation was established, we believe by God's guidance, on October 9, 1986, and named Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. Its first worship service was held on November 16, at the American School in Singapore. The second congregation was instituted also because God provided a second pastor after the training of Jai Mahtani. This was another exciting event of the history of our church.

Soon after CERCS was instituted the author of these articles returned to the USA. The ERCS had arrived at a stage when she no longer needed the presence of a missionary pastor from another country. Our returning to USA with our family was an event that happened with a mixture of joy and sorrow. We rejoiced that the church in Singapore had arrived at a stage that we were no longer needed. Our sorrow was that we had to leave so many beloved saints behind to return to America all the way on the other side of the world.

In history the church develops. She grows in numbers. In Singapore this growth included the adding of members who already had considerable history in other churches and some who had learned about the Reformed faith even in other countries such as the United Kingdom and other places. Over time the church grows in depth of understanding the truth of God's Word. New challenges arise in defending this truth as members who already have their own established understanding of God's Word are added.

ERCS was from the beginning of her history blessed, we humbly believe, through the guidance of the Protestant Reformed Churches, by her missionaries and other men from the PRCA that God sent to help and guide her in the first years of her history. These men included myself and later Rev. Jason Kortering who spent altogether 11 years as missionary pastor in ERCS. Others also gave themselves to periods of labours in ERCS.

The years of the history of the church are also the history of growing and developing in the understanding of the Word of God and its application. The church has existed in the world since the time of the apostles, actually from the beginning of time. When a new church is established in any country, she learns from the church which has gone before and in particular from the church God uses to establish her. This is necessary and good in the providence of God. This is an indication really of the truth that the church is one in the truth, even as she is established in one nation after another. She is and must be one in the truth. The readiness and willingness of the members of the church to do this is their wisdom and godliness. This is the reason that the constant remembrance of church history is valuable. Every new church will soon face the challenges of defending the truth which other churches in other parts of the

world have faced in their particular history. She will often have to defend the truth against the same errors and heresies which soon arise in every land.

The PRCA, who was used of God to establish ERCS in Singapore, was deeply concerned about the future of the church and her growing in the knowledge of the truth and remaining faithful to the truth once delivered to her over the years. This concern was born out of a deep love of the Lord which had grown over the years of labouring through our missionary and in other ways with ERCS. The author of these articles had a very great personal interest in all of this over the years.

There were several issues which were in part brought into the ERCS by the PRCA, but also because ERCS would soon in the providence of God have to face these same issues of herself. The PRCA in her history had to defend the truth of God's sovereign and particular grace over against the entrance of the idea of false concept of Common Grace into the Reformed churches. Several very important questions were involved in this whole controversy. Is God gracious only to His people, or is He gracious also to the ungodly world? Secondly, the question is: Does God have both a saving and a nonsaving grace? Related to these important and foundational issues is the question of whether or not God makes a general wellmeant offer of salvation to all men in the preaching of the gospel. Does God desire to save all men or does He desire to save only His chosen people whom He loved from eternity? Does God realize this desire so that all those whom He desires to save will actually be saved, or is it the case that many whom He desires to save are finally not saved because of their own resistance to the offer of the gospel? The PRCA was led by God's grace to understand the great issues of the truth involved in all these questions. She was led to understand that the doctrinal controversies that were brought into the Reformed churches were a challenge to all the wonderful doctrines of grace which over the years have come to

be known as the Five Points of Calvinism and the TULIP doctrines.

Before I close this chapter of my series of articles, I will also just mention several other important areas of understanding and maintaining the truth of God that the influence of the PRCA brought into the ERCS. A very important one had to do with the right understanding of the truth of God's covenant of grace with His people. Was this covenant sovereign and unconditional or was this covenant dependent on the condition of faith on the part of children born of covenant parents? Did the covenant of God depend on the decision of these children to accept their place in God's covenant?

A third area of the truth of God which was brought into ERCS was a question of great practical concern in the life of the church. It had to do with marriage - whether marriage is an unbreakable lifelong bond established by God, and broken only by God at the death of those who were united in their marriage by God. What does this mean as far as the rightness or wrongness of divorce, when the vows of marriage are broken by man and treachery committed by of one of the partners against another in marriage? Furthermore, do those who are divorced by the actions of men and sins against marriage have the right to marry some one else if they so desire? These questions are of very serious practical concern. God's truth and honour are involved. They involve the truth that marriage is intended by God to picture the relationship of Christ and His church, and the faithfulness of His love for her. These questions concern the important matter of maintaining faithfulness in marriage, and for the continued blessing of God on covenant homes and families.

The PRCA has been criticized for bringing the above mentioned issues into the life of ERCS. This resulted in controversy. Was this even right? The PRCA is not ashamed of having done this. She did this in love for the truth of God first of all, and secondly in love for the future of His beloved church in ERCS. "We remember with thankfulness to God the glorious history of the church and God's blessings upon her members." Inevitably, and even as part of her calling in the world, every church will have to decide what her relationship to other churches in the land and even in the world should be. The church of Jesus Christ has a broader unity then simply the local church. But great carefulness is necessary in making right decisions to join with other denominations.

Questions arose in ERCS regarding whether the church should hold two

worship services on the Lord's Day. Questions arose whether it is proper to use the Heidelberg Catechism is the worship service in connection with the preaching.

How did all of these questions develop over the years in ERCS? This is certainly a very important part of understanding the history of the church in Singapore and the history of CERC in particular. But my article is already long. We will tell this part of the history in our next article, DV.



The history of God's church in the world is a history of His wonderful work through Jesus Christ by His Spirit. The crucified and risen Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior is now exalted at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. He is the Lord of the nations, ruling with sovereign and almighty power as the Son of God over the history of the nations of the world. The chief work which the exalted Lord Jesus Christ does in the history of the world is the gathering, defending and preserving of His church. She is made up of His elect people, chosen by Him in love from before the foundations of the world. The book of Ephesians is one of the greatest books of the Bible from which we can learn the doctrine of the church of Jesus Christ. Read the first 4 verses of Ephesians chapter one in connection with what I have just written above concerning the church of Jesus Christ. Read also verses 17-23 of this same chapter. Let me quote the amazing conclusion of this chapter, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."

The history of the true church of Jesus Christ has many glorious and joyous events. These events are the mighty and wonderful works of the Lord Jesus Christ in gathering and defending His church.

Because this history takes place in a world of sin that is under the curse of sin, there are also sad events that take place. Even those who are used for the gathering and the work of His church are themselves sinful and still imperfect. This will remain true all the way up to the time when the church is delivered out of this sinful world and her members are finally made perfect, and the church of Jesus Christ is glorified in heaven.

Some of the events that take place in the history of the church are so deeply sorrowful that we wonder why God, who so loves His church and who is always sovereign, even allows them to happen. There are mysteries involved in this. However we know from the Word of God that God loves His church from everlasting to everlasting. He will never forsake her. He uses even the trials and sad events that take place in her history for her ultimate good and salvation.

The history of the church of Jesus Christ is also centrally about the preservation of the truth of the gospel in her midst. God has given the glorious truth of the gospel to His church to know, confess, proclaim and defend in the world. The members of the church, by the grace of God, are made glorious in their valiant efforts to proclaim, defend and maintain the glorious truth of her Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord has given to His church the truth of the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. It is by the power of the preaching of the gospel that the Holy Spirit, working in the hearts of the elect of God, calls them out of darkness into the marvelous light of God to show forth the glorious praises of God. After God has brought His elect unto salvation through faith and repentance in Christ, the Lord Himself, by His Spirit, joins His elect to His church. He does not leave them alone. God is pleased not only to save millions of individuals all over the world. He is pleased to form them into His church in order that they together might worship and praise Him in the world to glorify Him. Every believer saved by grace is solemnly obligated to join himself or herself to a true manifestation of the church on earth. He may not live alone or separate himself from the true church. This is disobedience to the

"we know from the Word of God that God loves His church from everlasting to everlasting. He will never forsake her. He uses even the trials and sad events that take place in her history for her ultimate good and salvation."

Lord and very detrimental to the spiritual welfare of God's people, and we might add, also to their children, should God's people in the providence of God be married and God gives them children.

According to His covenant purpose God is pleased to continue His church in the world in the line of the generations of believers. This is a wonder of God's way of working that particularly reveals His sovereign grace. Every believer, and especially those who are married and receive children in marriage, must be concerned about being members of the church, not only for themselves, but also for the future welfare of their children. The covenant children of believers must be catechized by the church so that they grow strong in the knowledge of the truth, and to bring them to maturity to be faithful and steadfast members of the church. They are, according to God's covenant purpose, to be prepared to be the succeeding generation of the church.

The most glorious and faithful members of the church of Jesus Christ are those who know and maintain the truth of the gospel. They live by this truth in their daily lives. They are ready to make all kinds of sacrifices and endure all kinds of hardships for the sake of the church of Jesus Christ and the truth of the gospel that the Lord has given to her. Those who are faithful to the Lord count not even their own life dear to them. They are ready to stand for the truth even if that means martyrdom for them personally. The martyrs of the church will have a great and glorious eternal reward in heaven. Even when God does not call us to be martyrs for the church and the truth of the gospel, which the church must preach, the members of the church must be faithful to the Lord and His blessed and glorious truth at all cost.

Not all who are at one time members of the church will remain her members and continue to be faithful to her and the precious truth that must be maintained by her. Sadly there are those who were once members of the church, who for various sinful reasons leave her and return to the world. I just preached a sermon yesterday in the church I am pastor of from 2 Timothy 2. In chapter 1 and verse 15 Paul makes this sorrowful note, "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes." Paul makes this statement after exhorting the members of the church, as he often does in his letters, to hold fast to sound doctrine and to be faithful to the church of Jesus Christ among us.

The inspired apostle John has this to say concerning those who forsake the truth after they once seemed to embrace it. "They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (1 John 2:19).

I have written a very lengthy introduction to this chapter of recounting the history of the Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. I hope that this lengthy introduction will help you to have greater understanding of the last two chapters of this history, which I still intend to finish.

A new era of development took place in this history. Several wonderful developments took place. At her organization, ERCS was established on the basis of the great Reformed creeds together called the Three Forms of Unity: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. This was greatly significant in the history of ERCS. The Reformed creeds represent the historic Reformed faith of the past. It was the hope and prayer that ERCS should continue to build on this foundation in years to come, and that she would be strong in the truth of God and remain faithful to the glorious heritage she had received. ERCS had by the grace of God the potential of being a center for Reformed faith in the whole surrounding area where she was planted.

The ERCS now had two congregations, the newest one of which was Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. God gave two new pastors to the ERCS, brother Jai Mahtani and a few years later brother Cheah Fook Meng. Both of these brethren received their training in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. Not only was this significant for ERCS, it was also a great joy for the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

The ERCS became busy with the work of missions in foreign countries, including in Malaysia, and in Myanmar. This work was begun under the leadership of a number of brethren who gave themselves to this work and made great sacrifices to perform this work. Pastor Lau Chin Kwee was active in this work also. Though this work involved many struggles and difficulties, this work was blessed. Work was done among many peoples and especially two denominations in Myanmar.

Because there were now two congregations in the ERCS, discussion arose about the wisdom and advantages of forming into a denomination.

The Lord continued over these years to bless the two congregations in many wonderful ways. He continued to add to the church those whom He saved. Over the years there were many marriages in the churches. God gave children to newly established homes. Besides baptism of those newly added to the church, there were now frequently also infant baptisms taking place in ERCS. New families and Christian homes were being established, a very exciting thing in a Reformed church. Many were soon concerned about the instruction of covenant children and raising them in the fear of the Lord.

During these years Pastor den Hartog and his family returned to take a call again in a church in the USA. For a while it seemed as though ERCS could continue without the presence of a pastor from the USA, and this was also the desire of the PRCA.

However, because of developments in ERCS over time, it was considered wise to call another pastor from the PRCA to help the young growing church in Singapore. This call was answered in 1991 by Rev. Jason Kortering and his wife Jeanne. The next chapter of this history could perhaps be better written by Rev. Kortering. However I will do my best to write it, if need be with consultation from Rev. Kortering. It was indeed the joy both of ERCS and the PRCA to have Rev. and Mrs. Kortering in Singapore. The hope and prayer was that through their presence the relationship between ERCS and the PRCA would grow richer and the bond between these denominations would become stronger.

The next era of this history would, among other things, be greatly influenced by the presence of Rev. and Mrs. Kortering in Singapore. They would give more than 11 years of their lives to the cause of the church in ERCS, making many personal sacrifices and giving a great deal of wisdom and guidance to the future of the beloved church in Singapore. During this era, more exciting developments would take place. The two congregations would be formed into a denomination. The church order of Dort would be adopted to guide the ecclesiastical affairs of the new denomination. Official sister church relationships would be established between the ERCS and the PRCA. First Church would be able to purchase land and build a beautiful building of her own to hold her worship services and many church activities.

During this era, much work also was done to continue the work of missions in Malaysia, Myanmar and in India. In connection with the desire to continue to be faithful to the Lord in the work of missions, there was exciting foundational work done for establishing a theological training school for ministerial students both from Singapore and possibly from other countries as the Lord in His providence might send. The school was named ARTS (Asia Reformed Theological School). All of these things were very exciting developments. Many brethren worked hard personally and in committees related to the work to accomplish these aspects of church life.

My article is already very long. I will continue the story in the next installment. In this next chapter there would be both joys and exciting developments, as well as sorrow and disappointment and trials. God leads His Church. Christ the exalted Lord preserves her in the world for His own glory and praise.





CONCLUSION TO TRACING THE HISTORY OF CERCS: LESSONS FROM THE HISTORY OF THE BELOVED CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST NOW AMONG US (V) >> Pastor Arie den Hartog

I intend this to be the last chapter of my series of articles on the history of CERCS. This last chapter involves the labours of three ministers of the Word of God from the Protestant Reformed Churches of America. We are thankful for the labours of all of these men of God. This last chapter also includes the labours of Pastor Cheah Fook Meng. Pastor Cheah was dearly loved among us for his youthful vibrant ministry. Covenant learned a very difficult lesson about the providence of the Lord when He suddenly took Pastor Cheah from us and brought him to glory. There are mysteries in the providence of God that are sometimes so deep that we cannot fully understand them. We only rest assured that God does all things well in His perfect wisdom. He always remembers His love for His church, and works all things for the good and salvation of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

During the period of time of CERC's history of which I am writing, other significant things were taking place. The event that brought the greatest sorrow was the breakup of the ERCS as a denomination. We wondered about the purpose of God's providence and why we were being so deeply tried. But through all these events our faith was purified and strengthened so that we are what we are today.

Important discussions were being held concerning some of the doctrinal positions of ERCS as a denomination. Not all might realize the significance of this. The church of Jesus Christ is founded on truth. She is called to confess this truth in a world where God has planted her. In the world where the church is found there are many different churches and different opinions regarding the truth. The church of Jesus Christ is called to maintain His truth in this world, and defend it against the many false teachings that arise in every age. She must be strong and mature in her faith. See Ephesians 4:11-16. The church must perform her calling in love for the truth and for the glory of her Lord. She must continue to search the scriptures to grow in her understanding of the glorious truth of Jesus Christ. She must maintain a lively and zealous interest in this truth. Her members must always guard against allowing themselves to be so caught up in the things of this world that they lose their first love for their Lord. The church must also be on guard against the evil of dead orthodoxy. The hearts of God's people must be guarded against becoming cold and sterile. God hates a religion that is mere formalism and ceremony. In standing for and fighting for the truth, the church receives her courage and strength from the Lord. She is completely dependent on Him. The members of the church must find their comfort and hope in the truth as they face many trials and persecutions in this ungodly world. Through this process and by the Spirit of Jesus Christ in their hearts, members are drawn closer and closer to each other, experiencing the blessed reality of the communion of the saints in their fellowship together.

Every new church in various places of the world must learn to appreciate the history and development of the truth that has taken place in other churches among God's people in other lands and cultures. Each new church needs to remember that she is not the first to face the challenges of knowing, understanding and defending the truth of God. Each new church that appears in history must be ready to learn much from those who have gone before. God uses churches that have been through the battles of defending the faith to instruct and encourage churches that are still young in their faith.

Especially over the later years of the 1990s and the beginning of the years of the 2000s, ERCS faced a number of important doctrinal issues that she had to take a position on. Failure to take a stand will often result in falling into the same errors which have led astray many in the church through history. Especially those called to oversee and lead the church have a great responsibility in this regard.

One of the doctrinal controversies ERCS faced involved the truth of the sovereign, particular grace of God. By this grace God saves and preserves His chosen people and glorifies His own name in the midst of His church. The question that was faced was whether God, in addition to sovereign and particular grace, also has a universal grace to all men showing a kind of favour to all men in common. Does God show His favour to all men without the purpose to save them from sin and death and hell, but only to do them temporal earthly good?

Does God through His common grace to all men, in the preaching of the gospel reveal the desire on His part to save all men? Is the preaching of the gospel a general well-meant offer of salvation to all those who hear the gospel? Scripture clearly teaches that not all men are saved. Does the unbelief of man frustrate the desire of God to save them? Is the preaching of the gospel not only the power of God to save those who believe, but also the means whereby the ungodly reprobate are hardened in their sin and left without excuse before God? Does the preaching of the Word of God need to include the warning that Jesus gives in John 3:17, that those who do not "In order for the church to remain faithful to the Lord, her members must by the grace of God always maintain their first love for the Lord and for His truth..."

believe are condemned already and the wrath of God abides on them?

Questions regarding these important truths of the preaching of the gospel have troubled Reformed churches everywhere in the world for a long time. Ministers of the PRCA emphasize in their preaching the truths of sovereign particular grace, and distinguish this truth from the false teachings regarding common grace which are maintained in many other churches. The leaders of the ERCS were challenged to take a position. In trying to do this, the leaders of ERCS were reading the writings produced within the PRCA and also those produced in other denominations. It was not wrong for these men to study the teachings of others. However, what troubled the church was that for a long time the doctrinal controversy was not settled clearly on the basis of the Word of God in the minds and hearts of the members of ERCS and even of the leaders. This created confusion and left the members of the church being 'tossed to and fro' as Ephesians 4 warns about.

In the years of controversies many left the church. Some return to churches they had come from originally, not wanting to be engaged in the conflict. In some cases these returned to churches where there were even more serious doctrinal errors.

Another doctrinal question came into the ERCS from various sources. This was

related to the important Biblical doctrine of God's covenant of grace. One of the main questions faced was whether God's covenant is conditional, based on the faithfulness of His people themselves. Do the children born of believing parents have to fulfill a condition, which if they fail to do, they will be lost? Or does God sovereignly maintain His own everlasting covenant of grace with His chosen people, never failing to realize and fulfill it? History shows that God cuts off unbelieving generations from the covenant who show themselves reprobate, impenitent and unbelieving. But our faithful Lord preserves His covenant of grace with elect believers even in spite of the many weaknesses and failings of these people. The PRCA maintains that God is faithful to His covenant. His covenant is from everlasting. It will never fail. God maintains His covenant with believers and their children by His sovereign grace alone. This is not dependent on the faithfulness of His people themselves. If the covenant of God were dependent on our faithfulness it would certainly fail because of our own sin and weakness and many falls into sin. God Himself always turns His elect again unto repentance and to Himself in the greatness of His unfailing love and mercy. Our salvation as members of God's covenant of grace is all of grace, and of grace alone. To God be the glory! Our trust is in Him alone and not in ourselves.

In the midst of the many discussions the doctrines regarding mentioned above, there arose also an important question of application of the truth in the lives of God's people. This truth has to do with the permanency of marriage. Christian marriage is so important for the continuation of the covenant of God with believers and their children, and for the continuation of God's church among Every church, no matter where them. it is in the world, will be faced with the awful reality of the corruption of the destruction of marriage by this ungodly world. This corruption also often enters into the church if she is not on guard. The PRCA earnestly desired that ERCS stand

with her on this practical question of such great importance, for her future and for the good of the families in the church.

The discussion regarding marriage was a difficult one for ERCS. She had to face questions regarding this truth directly for the first time when some marriages in her midst were in trouble. Trouble in marriage affects the relationships between those who are married in deeply personal ways. This struggle often causes very deep and bitter feelings. Children of troubled marriages are inevitably seriously affected. The leaders of ERCS were faced with the urgent calling to carefully study the teaching of God's Word regarding marriage. God's Word clearly condemns the treachery of divorce when a man or woman puts away his or her partner. The particular question that became the source of most of the debate was whether those who are once divorcees are allowed to remarry after a divorce. Scripture teaches that such persons should remain single or be reconciled to their God-given partners.

The PRCA taught in the ERCS that marriage is intended by God to be a lifelong bond of faithfulness and love. For this reason, divorce is forbidden by God. In the case of ongoing adultery on the part of a spouse who does not repent, a Christian may put away the unfaithful spouse. This 'putting away', however, does not dissolve the marriage bond in the sight of God. Scripture teaches that only God establishes the marriage bond and only God dissolves this bond at the death of one or both partners in marriage. As long the spouse of a man or woman is alive, both parties of a broken marriage must remain single. This is the clear teaching of Romans 7:1-3 and even more particularly of 1 Corinthians 7:11. God established His own strong law for the good of marriage in the church. Furthermore this truth of marriage is important because God designed marriage to be a picture of the lifelong faithfulness and love of Christ for His church, and of the faithfulness of God in maintaining His covenant of grace with His people.

In the abovementioned controversies, missionaries and ministers of the PRCA who laboured among the congregations of the ERCS tried, with patient and longsuffering care, to give leadership in the ERCS and to encourage her to be steadfast to the truth committed to her. There was recognition that ERCS was a new and young denomination in need of growing in her knowledge of the truth and for deepening her commitment to the Reformed faith in many ways.

The controversy on marriage continued for years in the ERCS. Lengthy studies were made. Brethren were divided from each other, because of stands they took. Appeal was made to many who did not agree with the instruction given by the PRCA in the ERCS. No clear settled position was taken by the leaders of ERCS for a long time. Sadly, this controversy led to the break up between the two congregations of ERCS, and also of the break of the sister church relationship between ERCS and the PRCA.

When positions regarding the truth of God divide the church, God will be the judge. To divide the church over non-essentials is a grievous sin. Sometimes truths involved in controversy are so serious that there must be separation and reformation. Divisions regarding the truth are always very painful. There were those in the ERCS who in these controversies became convinced that they did not want to continue in the direction presented by men from the PRCA. The direction was considered too narrow and there arose a desire instead to have closer fellowship with other churches. There was a strong desire on the part of some of the leaders to be more broad-minded and open in tolerating different doctrinal teachings in the church that came from several different denominations which often came through new members who joined the ERCS over the years.

We are thankful to God that the leaders of Covenant took a stand even though this meant serious disagreement with brethren. We are thankful to God for the labours of Prof. Herman Hanko and his wife during the days of controversy. He helped CERC to understand the controversies that troubled ERCS and to lead the leaders of CERC to take a stand for the truth. We are thankful for the growth in the knowledge and love of the truth which Covenant Church has experienced in the recent years of her history.

Through the history of the denomination called ERCS, there have been many that have for a time been members and then after several years left again. Each of us must consider where we are presently. Are we being faithful to the truth in all areas of our lives? For the members of CERC we have this ongoing challenge – is the beloved church that we belong to maintaining and defending the truth of God for His glory and the spiritual welfare of her members? Are we interested not only in our own personal spiritual lives, but also in standing together in the faith in the midst of a faithful church of Jesus Christ?

I make these practical concluding remarks. In order for the church to remain faithful to the Lord, her members must by the grace of God always maintain their first love for the Lord and for His truth. They must be zealous and faithful to continue in their own personal study of the Word of God, that they might be able, through clear and spiritual understanding and necessary discernment, stand for the truth in love for the future of the church and the generations of the covenant. They must resist all temptation to make other things in their lives, such as pursuing an earthly career, or the love for riches and glory in this present world, the chief concern of their lives. We must be ready to make great personal sacrifices for the truths sake. Remember the many martyrs in the history of the church who counted not their own lives dear to themselves. The leaders of the church have a great responsibility. They themselves must study continually to grow deeper and deeper in the knowledge of the truth. They must discern the truth from false teaching and lead the members of the church in the way of His truth. As members

of the church we must continually pray for our leaders. May God help us all and by His mercy keep us faithful to Him.



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.

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