



INTERNATIONAL REFORMED THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

TEACHING REFORMED THEOLOGY ONLINE
TO PORTUGUESE SPEAKERS WORLDWIDE

Newsletter

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*"A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit."
(Matthew 7:18 ESV)*

The Believer's Life and The Tree That Produces Good Fruits

Pastor Pieter K. Meijer

For the last few months of 2017, as an instructor of the IRTC, I taught the course called Three Forms of Unity. These Forms are the confessions of the faith of the Reformed Churches that have their origin in the Netherlands. Thus, in this article I would like to focus on Answer 64 (Lord's Day 24, on Justification) of the Heidelberg Catechism. We read there the following words: "...It is impossible that those grafted into Christ by true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness." In my view, this is one of the most powerful claims of the Catechism.

The Teaching of Christ and of the Apostle Paul

The confessional affirmation in this Catechism reflects the teaching of our Master in Matthew 7:18 and 12:33. It also refers to John 15:5. The metaphor our Master uses teaches that the believer's life is like a good tree that bears good fruit. Christ gives us great certainty by means of this comparison regarding our life as believers. It is this certainty that Answer 64 of the Heidelberg Catechism expresses in a splendid way, "It is impossible that those grafted into Christ by true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness." What powerful language, "It is impossible that...!"

I have not yet found an identical expression in the other confessions of faith of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. There are similar expressions, no doubt. The Westminster Confession of Faith, for

example, chapter 16, section 2, says, "... good works...are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith...", having as references the biblical passages of Matthew 5:16, John 15:8, Ephesians 2:10, among others. The Second Helvetic Confession of 1566 expresses the same truth, having as references Matthew 12:33 and Galatians 5:6. It is in this latter verse that the apostle Paul teaches something very important – "faith working through love". Using the language of the Heidelberg Catechism, we could say that it would be impossible for faith not to work through love.

Luther and the 500 years of the Protestant Reformation

The affirmation of the Heidelberg Catechism also reflects an influence from Luther. For Luther and the authors of the Catechism, faith was like the good tree (Galatians 5:6). Good works are the fruit and the product of faith. Consequently, good works should not be considered as the tree nor the root. Luther fought against the false doctrine of the Roman Church regarding the relationship between faith and good works. Their doctrine taught that faith, faith in Christ, was not enough to be saved. Good works were needed as merits. The Roman Church mixed justification with sanctification. And it condemned those who believed that we are justified only by faith, without good works (*Sola Fide*).

The Inquisition in Spain of the 16th century, in the 1580s, began to mistrust the great painter El Greco because, as the Inquisition said, his paintings began to

express Lutheran ideas by emphasizing the role of faith. The attitude of the Spanish Inquisition reflects an obsession with the role of good works and contempt for the biblical role of faith.

Skipping over 400 years, from the Inquisition era to the 80's of the 20th century, a fellow worker of mine at the Canadian Reformed Mission in the state of Alagoas, Brazil, once had a verbal confrontation with a nun who said, "You (reformed people) only speak of faith and forget about good works". This nun repeated with her own words the old Roman doctrine.

The Catechism, however, in Answer 64, is here to deny the charge that the reformed people would be forgetting about good works! It is impossible for the believer, grafted into Christ by true faith, to fail to bear fruits of thankfulness.

Here we have an expression of the great value that faith has and about the work of Christ in our lives. Grafted into Christ, according to the teaching of John 15, we will certainly produce good fruits, fruits of thankfulness, according to the terminology of the Heidelberg Catechism. These are comforting words in Answer 64. It is about the teaching of Christ that works in us. According to Galatians 2:20, it is Christ who lives in us!

We give thanks to God who has used men like Luther and the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism to rediscover truths that liberate and encourage.

Author Description and Testimony



Rev. Pieter Koenraad Meijer, aged 70 years, lives in the Netherlands. He is an emeritus minister of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), having entered the ministry of the Word in 1973. He also served the Canadian Reformed Churches from 1978 to 1995 as a missionary in the states of Alagoas and Pernambuco, Brazil.

Testimony: "I have been involved with the cause of the IRTC for years as a member of the Board of Directors and since the beginning of this year I serve as the chairman of this board. I am also an instructor and in this capacity I interact with students from a variety of countries, dedicated brothers and sisters who are committed to Christ and His church. For me it has been a joy to be part of this community. It is my prayer that the IRTC may continue to be a capable and effective instrument for forming workers for the church of the Lord."

IRTC Activities in 2017

Ralph Boersema, President

Dear brothers and sisters, I would like to share with you some facts about our college ministry from 2017. Its activities grew significantly last year, especially in the latter period. This fact gives us joy in the Lord and good hope for even greater growth in 2018. We plan to offer nearly twice as many courses in 2018.

Seventy-one students studied in 2017. Sixty from Brazil and eleven from nine other countries. Thirty new students have confirmed their enrollment. On average, the courses have seven students enrolled in them. The course with the greatest attendance was that of Covenant Theology I with sixteen students. The number of users accessing the IRTC webpage was 11,152.

I thank God and my brothers and sisters for the many undeserved blessings. Let us persevere in the Lord with gratitude and full confidence. May His Kingdom come!

Student Testimonials about the above news:

Xavier Tianeque wrote, “To God be all glory. Thank you for the encouraging news.”

Elton A. Pereira wrote, “I am very happy for the advancement of our school. I believe that the demand for sound and reformed schools will make this number increase.”

Newton C. Nogueira wrote, “What great news! Praise the Lord! I am also very happy and hopeful to attend this highly praised college in our country [Brazil]. My wife and I have always dreamed about studying at a higher education level, but it is only now that this dream has become possible. Despite all of the difficulties that we have encountered because of never having taken Distance Learning courses and being away from regular schools for so long, with the training from the IRTC, we are even more motivated to be able to improve our preparedness for ministry in our local church, which makes it all worth it.”

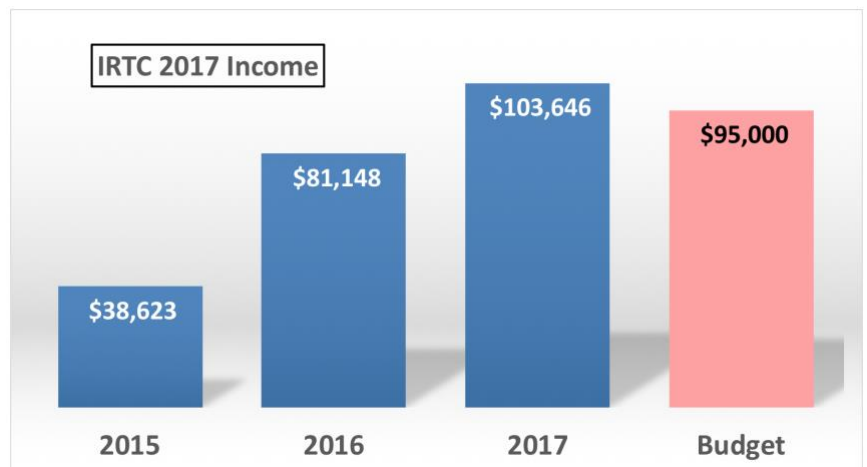
IRTC 2017 Income

Daniel Portela, Executive Vice-President

2 Corinthians 9:8 – “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

God has indeed blessed the IRTC in 2017. Through the generosity of many brothers and sisters, as well as increases in number of students and revenue from tuition, the IRTC successfully surpassed its required revenue budget. Praise the Lord!

Our goal for 2018 will be similar as we are increasing the number of classes and teachers and will continue to invest in our distance learning capabilities. We are certain that our father in heaven will raise up supporters in addition to new students.



If you feel called to assist in this endeavour and can contribute financially with any amount, please visit the “Donations” page on our website (www.pro-rege.net/ds14.htm), and there you will find all the information necessary for making your contribution in the USA. Canadian donors, please make your donations at www.irtcsociety.ca.

The following are other ways in which you can help the IRTC:

1. Pray for the IRTC, its teachers, leadership, students, and financial situation.
2. Refer prospective students to the IRTC.
3. Share this newsletter to disseminate the work and the needs of the IRTC.

May the Lord bless and keep you!

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