

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine
August 2019 • Volume 95 • No. 19

Walking as children of light

Rev. James Slopsema

A significant conference: A report

Prof. Russell Dykstra

The nature of good works as works

Rev. Brian Huizinga

The confession of the Guanabara Bay martyrs (1558)

Rev. Richard Smit

A significant new Supreme Court decision on religious liberty

Mr. Brian VanEngen



The *Standard Bearer* (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster

Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Reprint and online posting policy

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting or online posting of articles in the *Standard Bearer* by other publications, provided that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; that proper acknowledgment is made; and that a copy of the periodical or Internet location in which such reprint or posting appears is sent to the editorial office.

Editorial policy

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for the Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed. All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

Subscription price

\$27.00 per year in the US, \$39.00 elsewhere
esubscription: \$27.00
esubscription free to current hardcopy subscribers.

Advertising policy

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: RFPA, Attn: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (email: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRC: www.prc.org

The Reformed Free Publishing Association maintains the privacy and trust of its subscribers by not sharing with any person, organization, or church any information regarding *Standard Bearer* subscribers.

Editorial office

Prof. Russell Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest Ave SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
dykstra@prca.org

Business office

Mr. Alex Kalsbeek
1894 Georgetown Center Dr
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
616-457-5970
alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org

Church news editor

Mr. Perry Van Egdom
2324 Fir Ave
Doon, IA 51235
vanegdoms@gmail.com

United Kingdom office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk

Rep. of Ireland office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown
38 Abbeyvale
Corbally
Co Limerick, Ireland

Contents

Meditation

- 439 Walking as children of light
Rev. James Slopsema

Editorial

- 441 A significant conference: A report
Prof. Russell Dykstra

Letters

- 443 • “Father God”—proper address?
444 • Marijuana: Meat offered to idols

All around us

- 444 The Equality Act
Rev. Martyn McGeown

Taking heed to the doctrine

- 447 “As to our good works” (2)
The nature of good works as works
Rev. Brian Huizinga

Believing and confessing

- 450 Of man’s fall, sin, and the cause of sin
Second Helvetic Confession (8c)
Prof. Ronald Cammenga

Go ye into all the world

- 453 The confession of the Guanabara Bay martyrs (1558) 2
Rev. Richard Smit

Church and state

- 456 A significant new Supreme Court decision
on religious liberty
Mr. Brian VanEngen

Activities

- 458 News from our churches
Mr. Perry Van Egdom



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION



Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Walking as children of light

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

Ephesians 5:8-10

Earlier in this chapter the apostle Paul exhorts the church of Ephesus to avoid the abominable sins of the pagan Gentile community. He mentions such sins as fornication, covetousness or greed, and obscene language. The apostle also warns the saints against being deceived with vain words so as to participate in these evils. He cites two reasons for this warning. The first is that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. The second reason is that to follow after the sins of the world is contrary to what they have become in Jesus Christ. They are no longer darkness but light in the Lord.

No more darkness but light in the Lord!

On this beautiful truth we will concentrate our attention in this meditation.

And there is much need for this. The society in which we live is essentially the same as it was for the Ephesian church. Also many are being deceived with vain words to partake of the corruption of our society. But remember what the end result is—exclusion from the kingdom of Christ and of God. And especially remember who you are in the Lord. You are no more darkness but light. Walk, therefore, as children of light.

“Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord”

A contrast is made here between light and darkness. We can view light and darkness on different levels. First, there is *physical* light (the light of the sun) and darkness (the absence of light). Secondly, there is *natural* (intellectual) light and darkness. In this sense, darkness is ignorance and lack of learning. Thus, we speak of the Middle Ages in history as the Dark Ages, a time characterized by a lack of education and learning. From this it follows that light is learning and knowledge.

And so we speak of the Age of Enlightenment as characterized by a resurgence of learning. Finally, there is *spiritual* light and darkness. Viewed spiritually, darkness is sin and evil whereas light is goodness and perfection. According to I John 1:5, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.” This means that God is pure perfection, absolute goodness.

When Paul speaks of light and darkness, he has reference to both the natural and the spiritual realms.

The Ephesians were one time darkness. That means that darkness had been their chief characteristic. They were darkness in that they had lived in ignorance. They had their roots in paganism so that they only had the revelation of God in nature. This gave them enough knowledge of God to leave them without excuse. They knew nothing of Jesus Christ and His salvation. About that they were in the dark. But, spiritually, they were darkness also in that they lived in abominable sin. In the darkness of unbelief they rejected the God of creation to serve idols. In the service of their idols they walked in every sin imaginable.

But now they were light in the Lord. The Ephesians had been enlightened by Jesus Christ, who is the Light of the world. Through the preaching of the gospel Jesus Christ had enlightened them about salvation in the cross. Jesus had also used the knowledge of the gospel to work faith in their hearts so that they embraced Him as their Savior and found His gracious salvation. And so, they were no longer darkness but light in the Lord.

Paul goes a step further to call them the children of light. A child is the offspring of another, who also bears the image of the one who fathered him. In like manner, the Ephesians were the children of light. The great Light (the living God whose light shines through His Son, Jesus Christ) had accomplished a new birth in them. Consequently, they were now the image of that great Light. They were the very image of God rather than of the prince of darkness.

What was true of the Ephesian saints is true of all who belong to Jesus Christ. By nature they are darkness as are all men by reason of their natural birth. But in Jesus Christ they become the children of light.

“Walk as children of light”

Your walk is your life in all its parts. It includes your inner thoughts and desires as well as your outward behavior. It includes your life as you live it in marriage, in your home, at school, at the work place, and in your community. Your walk includes your work, your recreation and entertainments, your social activities—your entire life.

To walk as children of the light is to live our life in such a way that the light that you have become in Christ shines forth in all that you do.

Perhaps an example will make this clear. Suppose that an orphan, reduced to rags and begging in the streets along with the scum of society, is taken in by the king—clothed, fed, educated, even adopted as the king’s son. Now the king would expect his adopted son to walk as a son of the king. He must not return to the streets dressed in rags, begging, associating with the riff-raff, speaking their gutter language. He is rather to reflect what has been given him. He must live the life of a prince.

In like manner, to walk as children of the light means that we no longer act as though we were in the darkness of unbelief, knowing not the Lord and caught in the web of the prince of darkness. Our whole life must reflect that we have been made to be light in the Lord. To use the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:16, we are to let our light shine before men to the glory of God.

The apostle Paul gives content to the idea of walking as children of the light by speaking of the fruit of the Spirit, which is in all goodness and righteousness and truth (v. 9).

The Spirit is the Holy Spirit. It is by the work of the Spirit that we have become the children of light. It is the Spirit, as the Spirit of truth, who has provided the world with the word of truth about God and His salvation in the Scriptures. It is the Spirit who has moved the church to proclaim this Word of truth both in the church and to the unbelieving world, declaring to all who hear the reality of salvation of Jesus Christ. And it is the Spirit who irresistibly applies that Word to the hearts of God’s elect to bring them to the light of faith and salvation in Jesus Christ. It is by the Spirit that we become children of the light!

Now the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.

Let’s look at these three virtues.

Goodness is used here in the sense of kindness and benevolence. It is a reflection of God’s goodness to us in Jesus Christ, according to which He graciously bestows upon us the good gifts of salvation. The fruit of the Spirit who works in the children of light consists

in all goodness. This means that we show goodness of every kind to every neighbor God puts in our pathway. It means that that as we have opportunity we “do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).

Righteousness refers here to obedience to God’s law. The great commandment of God’s law is to love God and the neighbor. How this love is to be demonstrated is spelled out in the various commandments of the law. There are certain behaviors that are forbidden as acts of hatred. But love also lays many obligations on us, both in our relationship to God as well as to the neighbor, obligations that promote God’s glory and the neighbor’s welfare. Obviously, righteous living according to God’s law is how we show goodness to others. This too is the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of the children of light.

Finally, there is truth. Truth refers to the objective truth of God revealed in Scripture. Those still in darkness do not live in truth but in the lies of the prince of darkness. The Spirit transforms us into children of light by illuminating us with the truth of God. And it is only in that truth that we are able to live in all goodness and righteousness. Goodness and righteousness are not found in the sphere of lies and falsehood. They are found only in the truth.

This defines, then, what it means to walk as children of light. It is by the Spirit that we become children of light. And when the fruits of the Spirit control our lives, we are walking as the children of light.

“Proving what is acceptable to the Lord”

That which is acceptable to the Lord is that which is well pleasing to Him. There are things that are well pleasing to the Lord, and there are things that are abominable to Him. The standard for what is pleasing to Him is not determined by what is pleasing to us. The Lord has clearly revealed what is pleasing and acceptable to Him. It is the goodness, righteousness, and truth that are fruits of the Spirit.

We are to prove what is acceptable to the Lord.

The word “prove” has a twofold meaning in Scripture. It means to put something to the test. It was often used of metals to determine whether they were genuine. But it also means to *approve* that which is determined to be genuine and to reject all else.

To prove what is acceptable to the Lord, therefore, means that we are constantly putting our life to the test. The standard by which we judge our conduct is the goodness, righteousness and truth that are the distinguishing marks of the children of light. In our life, that which conforms to this golden standard we keep and follow as acceptable to the Lord. That which is

contrary to this we discard as being abominable to the Lord.

This proving is necessary because of the inclinations of our sinful nature. By the work of the Spirit we have become children of light. But His transforming work is not yet complete in us, leaving us much inclined to the works of darkness.

Oh, how we must prove ourselves!

This proving requires giving much attention to the truth of God's Word, much prayer, and daily self-examination.

Let us walk as children of light.



Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

A significant conference: A report

As all our regular readers know, 2018-19 marks the 400th anniversary of the great Synod of Dordrecht. This Synod was a momentous gathering of theologians from many different regions of Switzerland, Germany, England, and Scotland, as well as all the seven provinces of the “United Netherlands.” The importance of the Synod cannot be overstated. The Reformation, not even one hundred years old, was experiencing its most severe threat since the days of Luther and Calvin. The churches of the Netherlands were facing the question—Will the churches be Reformed—in doctrine, church polity, confession, and worship?

The doctrine of salvation defended in the Reformation was openly denied, even such cardinal truths as justification by faith alone and the certainty of “once saved, always saved.” In its place were posited fallen man's free will, a resistible grace, universal atonement, and a conditional election. The confessions (the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession) were contradicted in public preaching. Many rejected the Reformed church government developed by Calvin and implemented in the Netherlands. Sabbath observance was shockingly poor in many areas of the Netherlands. That in turn led to increased worldly living. It was a crisis. The very future of the Reformed churches was at stake.

Dutch and international delegates came together to deal with the doctrinal controversies and

to affirm the Reformed confessions. The Reformation was preserved. And the carefully drafted and approved Canons of Dordrecht became the third confession of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands.

The Synod was significant beyond words.

For good reason, therefore, the Reformed church world took opportunity to commemorate this significant synod. The Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary did likewise. In April of this year, a three-day conference was held in the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, MI. It was entitled *Dordt 400: Safe-Guarding the Reformed Tradition* (dordt400.org). The Trinity PRC congregation organized the conference in conjunction with the seminary, and the congregation, led by their Evangelism Committee, did superb work. Every detail was looked after, enabling the entire conference, from speeches to coffee breaks to book buying,



to go forward without a hitch. The many hundreds who attended took notice of their work with appreciation.

What follows is a brief synopsis of the conference speeches.

The conference began in fine form as a full auditorium eagerly anticipated the first speech by Rev. Angus Stewart, minister in the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, on the subject “The Canons as the Original ‘Five Points’ of Calvinism.” No one was disappointed. Rev. Stewart carefully demonstrated what the Canons maintained over against the five points of the Remonstrants. The beauty of the speech was its ability to set forth these profound truths with such clarity and simplicity that all, including the many youth in the audience, could understand them. The speech demonstrated that the truth of God’s sovereign grace is never complicated or hard to understand. Rather the lies of the Arminians are twisted and convoluted—deliberately so.

The next day a very sizable crowd came for the bulk of the conference consisting of five speeches from 8:30 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. (with lengthy breaks). First up was Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor of the Hope PRC (Redlands, CA), who spoke on “Warring a Good Warfare with the Canons.” He brought out beautifully the polemical nature of the Canons. The whole of the Canons is polemical. Obviously, each head of doctrine in the Canons has a (polemical) rejection of errors. But Rev. Huizinga pointed out that polemics runs through the positive sections of the Canons as well. The fathers at Dordt knew the importance of polemics, not only for the sake of defending the truth, but also for the pastoral care of the people. The believers in the Netherlands had heard and read so many errors in many years of controversy. The Canons would assist God’s people by identifying and rejecting the lie from Scripture. But the speech demonstrated that its value does not end there. The Canons are of unspeakable value for the church today in “warring a good warfare.”

Rev. Mark Stand (accompanied by his wife Susan) traveled from Tasmania (Australia) to address the conference on “The Unfeigned Call of the Gospel.” It was certainly worth our while that he came. As one has come to expect from Rev. Shand, his treatment of this doctrine was scholarly and thorough. He focused much of this speech on the Arminian error of the well-meant offer of the gospel, and did so by demonstrating that modern-day theologians in the Reformed and Presbyterian camp actually teach the offer that is condemned by the Canons. The publication of his speech will be particularly helpful as he demonstrated his assertions with many quotations.

The next speech was delivered by Prof. Douglas Kui-

per. His topic was “The Doctrine of the Covenant in the Canons.” Prof. Kuiper pointed out that the Reformed doctrine of God’s covenant of grace was not yet settled at the time of Dordt. In addition, the purpose for writing the Canons was not to set forth this doctrine. Nonetheless, he noted, the doctrine of covenant was very much discussed in the Arminian controversy—he demonstrated how the Canons condemned the Remonstrant errors in the doctrine of the covenant. The Canons, therefore, *assume* the doctrine of the covenant of grace. From this he went on to show what the Canons teach on the covenant.

The Synod of Dordt dealt with many ecclesiastical matters other than the Arminian controversy. One significant matter was the formulation and adoption of a Reformed Church Order. Rev. William Langerak addressed this work in his speech “Maintaining Good Order in the Church of Christ” (the opening words of the Church Order adopted by the Synod). Now, Rev. Langerak had the most difficult task—how can one hold the interest of a general audience with a speech on the church order? He did. Admirably, in my judgment. He filled the speech with stories and anecdotes from the history of the church and the development of the church order. His speech demonstrated superb scholarship. His published speech will be of great interest to all officebearers and members who know the importance of “maintaining good order in the church.”

Friday night was the climax of the day with Prof. Cammenga’s speech on election—the main point of dispute between the Arminians and the Reformed. But the interesting approach was to deal with reprobation, as the title indicates: “Illustrating and Recommending the Grace of Election—Dordt’s Doctrine of Reprobation.” The astute reader will recognize the language of the Canons I, 15. Reprobation was the doctrine attacked most ferociously by the Arminians in the seventeenth century, and still today. The speech will be of much value in its published form, and all the more because Prof. Cammenga ran out of time in the presentation.

The concluding speech of the conference was delivered by Prof. Gritters on Saturday morning. He spoke on “Assurance: Sovereign Grace’s Speech to the Heart.” It was a moving presentation of the doctrine of assurance, which was at the heart of the controversy 400 years ago. The Arminian doctrine robbed believers of their assurance of salvation. The fathers at Dordt took pains to emphasize the certainty of salvation and therefore, our blessed assurance.

The Protestant Reformed Seminary holds conferences generally every other year. We have held conferences on H. Bavinck, J. Calvin, the Reformation of 1517, the

Heidelberg Catechism, and the King James Version. Of them all, this 2019 conference may well be the most significant. For God used the Synod of Dordrecht to preserve *the gospel*. This precious gospel, restored by Reformation from the Pelagian degradation of Rome in the 1500s, was threatened in the 1600s to return to the Pelagian error out of hell. To celebrate Dordt—truly to celebrate the defense and development of the doctrines of grace—is to rejoice in these doctrines and confess that one is willing to stand and fight for them to the death. It is also to say, “Ebenezer,” that is, “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” And that necessarily implies that He will continue to do so in the future. By His grace alone will we persevere.

Interested readers can find the speeches, along with the seven historical PowerPoint presentations, at the

Seminary’s YouTube channel (prcts.org—video) and Trinity PRC’s Sermonaudio page (audio).

The Reformed Free Publishing Association recognized the significance of the great Synod and the value of the conference, and have acted to print the speeches—enlarged in some cases, with references in all. The push is on to have the book available this Fall. It will be entitled *For God’s Glory and the Church’s Consolation: 400 Years of the Canons of Dordrecht*. It will include the seven speeches, but also a historical introduction to the controversy, and a very important addition is Prof. Kuiper’s summary of the 180 sessions of the Synod of Dordt. This will be a regular RFPA book club selection, and any others interested in purchasing it may contact the RFPA. We will keep you posted. *For God’s Glory and the Church’s Consolation*.

Letters

“Father God”—proper address?

Greeting in Jesus Christ!

I’m writing in response to your expression, “Father God gave His Son to us,” in “Saved to serve: The Christian’s reasonable service” (*SB*, June 2019, p. 391). Would that be Father God gave Son God, and is that correct?

I’ve been in Federal Custody nearly 25 years and have always been suspicious...of the different strains of religion I’ve encountered in these places, all under a “Christian” umbrella. Some use that “Father God” in their prayers almost like a mantra, repeating over and over, speaking faster and faster, punctuating every few words of prayer with a “Father God.” Again, I’ve always been suspicious of this.

So I ask you, as I see you have used this, which I’ve not found in any other PRCA writings I’ve encountered before. Is it correct to say “Father God”? Would it not carry through to “Son God” and “Spirit God,” or am I completely wrong?

Thank you!

Terry Beydler
Portland, OR

Response:

Dear Mr. Beydler,

Thank you for your question.

To be sure, the term “Father God” as used in the meditation is in reference to the triune God, who is also the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore, through and for the sake of Jesus, not only our

God, but also our Father. In short, the triune God is our Father for Christ’s sake.

That idea is both biblical and confessionally Reformed. It is biblical, for in several places in identifying believers as the “sons of God” Scripture also in one breath explicitly says that these sons of God, call the triune God “Father,” that is, their Father (cf. Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:5-6).

And because it is biblical, it is also confessional among Reformed believers. The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 9 and Q&A 26 reads as follows:

Q. What believest thou when thou sayest, “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...is for the sake of Christ His Son, my God and my Father....

Here, the Catechism, based on Scripture, identifies the triune God as “the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” and also “my God and my Father.”

Accordingly, the term “Father God” has come to be used in confessionally Reformed circles to refer to the triune God as both the believer’s God and Father. It is a beautiful, concise term of endearment and reverence for our triune God. Not surprisingly then, I am not the first person to use it in Protestant Reformed literature, and in particular, the *Standard Bearer*. The late Rev. H. Hoeksema used that term with exactly that meaning, in two places in his exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism: *The Triple Knowledge* (vol. 2, pp. 122, 128), which was originally published on the *Standard Bearer* (vol. 19, pp. 480, 502). It has subsequently been used

in Protestant Reformed writings with that meaning and has also been used that way in the *Standard Bearer* by various writers. Without being exhaustive, here are a list of references: vol. 37, p. 245; vol. 52, p.965; vol. 74, p. 433; vol. 78, p. 63; vol. 79, p.170.

I am not familiar with the term being used as you have related in your experience, and I do not believe that the proper use of the term “Father God” permits us to be flippant with our references to the Son of God and the Spirit of God.

Cordially in Christ,
Rev. Dennis Lee

Marijuana: Meat Offered to Idols

I felt compelled to respond to Rev. Spronk’s article “A moral turning point: Marijuana” because he suggests it might be wise for the church to forbid all cannabis use but also invites consideration of the question, “What do we think of marijuana’s medicinal use, and how is it different from other painkilling drugs?”

It is understandable that the terms “marijuana,” and “pot” conjure up lifestyle and attitude that have no place at all in the Christian life. Legalizing the free use of this plant to get high does seem like a moral down turning. Sexuality, food, and wine are also good gifts of God which have suffered stigmas due to horrible abuses. But a stigma is not grounds for banning such things from Christians. The CBD oil extracted from this plant can be isolated from the compounds that affect the mind and make people “high.”

There is no doubt that CBD oil extracted from cannabis plants provides pain relief, often very effectively

where other painkillers do not work well. All the current FDA approved painkilling drugs come with warnings of side effects and the dangers of misuse and abuse. The current epidemic of addictions to opioid-based painkillers in this country is a loud and clear warning. CBD oil appears to have minimal side effects. In fact, many turn to this oil to avoid the bad side effects of other painkillers.

The stigma of marijuana abuse is very real, and I understand the abhorrence of anything related to this plant. The stigma of meat offered to idols was also very real to Christians in the early church. Paul was even willing to refrain from publicly eating perfectly good food offered to idols if he knew it would offend the weaker brother. If the believer can see through the godless abuse of this plant and find pain relief from the CBD oil as a good gift of God, then I see no reason to forbid its use. If using CBD oil offends a brother in the Lord, then some patient explanations and perhaps refraining from public use would be wise.

John Huizinga
Hull, Iowa

Response:

The purpose of my article was to highlight new questions that we face due to the increased legalization and use of marijuana (what is going on all around us) and to encourage members of the church to think spiritually as we wrestle with these questions. I welcome your letter as evidence of such spiritual thinking. Thank you for taking the time to read and respond to my article.

Cordially in Christ,
Rev. C. Spronk



All around us

Rev. Martyn McGeown, missionary-pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, stationed in Limerick, Republic of Ireland

The Equality Act

On May 17, 2019 the U.S. House of Representatives under the leadership of Speaker Nancy Pelosi passed, 236-173, H.R. 5, titled the “Equality Act.” This piece of legislation, a priority for Speaker Pelosi and her party, would, if it becomes law, expand protections against discrimination in the USA by amending the Civil Rights Act (1964), which outlaws discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex (gender), or national

origin. The “Equality Act,” which, by passing the House (something it was not able to do between 2015 and 2019), has taken one more step toward becoming federal law, would add the words “sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity)” to the text of the Civil Rights Act (1964), so that “LGBTQ Americans” would also enjoy protection from discrimination.

A number of provisions in this bill are troubling. First,

while Christians oppose discrimination and support the equal and equitable treatment of all people, this legislation places “sexual orientation and gender identity” in the same category as “race, color, and sex” (that is, gender). Race, color, and gender are immutable and amoral, that is, whether a person is white, black, Asian, European, African, oriental, male or female is *of no moral significance*. In addition, those characteristics cannot be changed. Sexual orientation and gender identity, categories that the Bible does not even recognize, are moral issues. Sexual attraction to and sexual activity with someone of the same gender is *sin*, which every faithful Christian and church recognizes and has understood for the last 2,000 years. A person who identifies as a different gender than his/her birth gender, and behaves in accordance with his/her preferred gender and not with his/her actual gender, is not only confused and deluded, but he/she *rebels against God*. If the law conflates these two things—race/color, which has nothing to do with morality, and sexual orientation/gender identity, which *is* a moral issue—those who hold to traditional moral values (that is, conservative Christians, and to a lesser extent, conservative Jews and Muslims, as well as secular people who do not follow the “LGBTQ” agenda) will be categorized as *racists*. Since a racist is rightly held in execration in modern society, a homophobe or transphobe, words used increasingly to describe those who espouse traditional values on marriage, sexuality, and gender, will be increasingly vilified, and soon with official, legal approval.

Second, as with much legislation passed even by well meaning legislators—who wants to be discriminatory against people; who does not want to help people who cannot access the services that they need; who really thinks that people should be refused service in restaurants and other public locations?—the wording of the Equality Act is needlessly broad and vague requiring interpretation by the courts. The Equality Act forbids discrimination in the following places:

A Stadium or other place of or establishment that provides exhibition, entertainment, recreation, exercise, amusement, public gathering, or public display... any establishment that provides a good, service, or program, including a store, shopping center, online retailer or service provider, salon, bank, gas station, food bank, service or care center, shelter, travel agency, or funeral parlor, or establishment that provides health care, accounting, or legal services...any train service, bus service, car service, taxi service, airline service, station, depot, or other place of or establishment that provides transportation service.¹

What constitutes a “public gathering”? What is a “service provider”? If a transgender person, a man identifying as a woman, arrives at a shelter for women, will he be told to go to the men’s shelter or given accommodation with the women in the women’s shelter? If a transgender teenager, a girl identifying as a boy, enrolls in a public school, will she be permitted to use the restroom, changing room, and shower facilities with the boys, or will she use the girls’ facilities in accordance with her biological gender? If a transgender person is sentenced to serve time in a federal prison, will a man identifying as a woman be incarcerated with female inmates in deference to his “gender identity” but with disregard for the safety of the biologically female prisoners? Given recent precedent, the answer to these questions is not difficult to find.

Third, and most serious of all, the Equality Act makes little to no provision for religious exemptions. Why should it—are religious people free to be racists? If in the opinion of supporters of such legislation, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is akin to racism, why should religious people be free to discriminate? The Equality Act specifically states, “The bill prohibits the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 from providing a claim, defense, or basis for challenging such protections.” The bill also “allows the Department of Justice to intervene in equal protection actions in federal court on account of sexual orientation or gender identity.” The Equality Act would, if it became law, put more pressure on small business owners—bakers, florists, photographers, and others in the wedding business—to violate their beliefs about marriage, sexuality, and gender. It will not take long for legal pressure to be placed upon churches, religious schools, and religious colleges, especially those that receive federal funding. And why should such “homophobes and transphobes” have tax-exempt status?

Law professor at Virginia University, Douglas Laycock, himself a supporter of same-sex marriage, but also an advocate of religious liberty, explains to *National Review*:

[The Equality Act] goes very far to stamp out religious exemptions.... It regulates religious non-profits. And then it says that [the Religious Freedom Restoration Act] does not apply to any claim under the Equality Act. This would be the first time Congress has limited the reach of RFRA. This is not a good-faith attempt to reconcile competing interests. It is an attempt by one side to grab all the disputed territory and to crush the other side.

¹ The U.S. Congress website, <https://www.congress.gov/>

[bill/116th-congress/house-bill/5/text](https://www.congress.gov/bills/116/house-bills/5/text).

What exactly would the Equality Act mean for religious schools throughout the country? “The short answer is that religious schools would be heavily regulated with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity,” writes Laycock. “They would have left an array of constitutional defenses, most of which are undeveloped and uncertain at best.”

Laycock says that religious schools would probably be viewed as “public accommodations” under the Equality Act even if they refuse all federal funding. They could argue that they are covered under the existing exemption of the Civil Rights Act (section 702), but he observes that “they haven’t done well with that argument lately in the lower courts. There have not been that many cases, and the Supreme Court has not spoken; it might be more sympathetic.”

“Schools would still have the ministerial exception, which is constitutional and beyond Congress’s power to repeal. It should protect them with respect to teachers teaching a religion class, or leading chapel services, but courts have generally held that other teachers are not ministers for purposes of the exception,” he adds.²

Supporters of the Equality Act have no appetite for religious exemptions, which they fear could be misused as an excuse for discrimination. While some lawmakers have proposed legislation that includes such exemptions, most “LGBTQ” groups view exemptions as unacceptable. As the advocacy group GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) tweeted, “We will NEVER compromise away the protections of every LGBTQ person from discrimination in order to satisfy those who wish to use religion as a weapon for discrimination.”³

Writing for The Gospel Coalition, Andrew T. Walker explains:

The Equality Act fails to make meaningful status/conduct distinctions. It treats the Christian baker who objects to using her creative talent to design a same-sex wedding cake the same as an individual who would stupidly, and bigotedly, deny an LGBT person a booth at a restaurant. In short, the Equality Act equates Christian ethics with hatred and bigotry.⁴

While the possibility of the Equality Act becoming law is slim given opposition to the bill in the U.S. Senate and the White House, leading U.S. presidential candidates have indicated that they see the passage of the Equality Act as high on their list of legislative priorities if they win the 2020 election. President Barack Obama expressed strong support for it in November 2015, but the bill died in committee and never came to a vote on the floor of the House. Secretary Hillary Clinton’s vice presidential candidate, Senator Tim Kaine assured the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), an LGBT advocacy group, at their 2016 national dinner, that, if elected, Clinton would work for its passage, but she lost the presidential election in 2016. And more recently former U.S. vice president Joe Biden, addressing the same HRC, said about the Equality Act, if he was elected president, “It will be the first thing I ask to be done.”⁵ Other candidates have expressed support for the legislation. It remains to be seen which candidate for U.S. president is nominated and then elected in 2020 or whether in the meantime, the Equality Act makes any progress in the U.S. Senate toward the president’s desk.

President Trump recently expressed opposition to the bill in its current form, although he has not indicated whether, if it passed the U.S. Senate, he would veto it. In 2000, long before he entered politics, Mr. Trump said in an interview with an LGBTQ magazine, “It would be simple. It would be straightforward. Amending the Civil Rights Act would grant the same protection to gay people that we give to other Americans—it’s only fair.” However, more recently, an official from the Trump White House stated, “The Trump administration absolutely opposes discrimination of any kind and supports the equal treatment of all. However, this bill in its current form is filled with poison pills that threaten to undermine parental and conscience rights.”⁶

As the world descends further into immoral madness, given over to such by a wrathful God (Rom. 1), let us be wise as serpents and gentle as doves; let us arm ourselves with the mind of Christ to suffer for righteousness’ sake; and let us cling ever more closely to Jesus our faithful Savior!

2 “Law Professor Explains Why Equality Act Would Crush Religious Dissenters” (*National Review*, May 17, 2019), <https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/05/law-professor-explains-why-the-equality-act-would-crush-religious-dissenters>.

3 “The House Just Passed A Sweeping LGBTQ Rights Bill” (*Vox*, May 17, 2019), <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/5/17/18627771/equality-act-house-congress-lgbtq-rights-discrimination>.

4 “The Equality Act Accelerates Anti-Christian Bias” (The Gospel

Coalition, March 11, 2019), <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/equality-act-anti-christian>.

5 “Biden Declares LGBTQ Rights His No. 1 Legislative Priority” (Associated Press, June 2, 2019), <https://www.apnews.com/ab-96c4d9b3a84ef9b10598781ff38e93>.

6 “Trump Opposes Federal LGBTQ Non-Discrimination Bill Citing Poison Pills” (NBC News, May 14, 2019), <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/trump-opposes-federal-lgbtq-nondiscrimination-bill-citing-poison-pills-n1005551>.



Taking heed to the doctrine

Rev. Brian Huizinga, professor-elect of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

“As to our good works” (2)

The nature of good works as works

Works occupy a prominent place in Scripture; in fact, Scripture is from beginning to end a book of works. Scripture attributes works to the triune God, Christ, angels—wicked and holy, and men—wicked and holy. We begin our examination of the good works of the believer by considering the *nature* of good works and noting five general characteristics of our good works *as works*.

A conscious, acting subject

First, works are those deeds consciously and volitionally performed by rational, moral beings. Strictly speaking, a creature like the sky is not capable of performing works. Psalm 19:1 teaches, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.” The visible expanse of the heavens above us gives glory to God; however, it is not an intelligent creature consciously and willingly producing “works” of praise unto God as holy men and holy angels can do. We men are different than the creatures in the heavens above and in the earth beneath and in the waters under the earth, for God created us as personal beings with an intellect and will so that we are able to live consciously before His face performing works of service in love for Him and our neighbor. In marriage, a husband and wife are called to love each other and show it in word and deed, but if a whole week has gone by and they have not consciously performed even one considerate act towards each other, living as intimately as two stars twinkling side by side in the heavens, something is dreadfully amiss. God created us, and in Jesus Christ has recreated us, as new creatures able to do good. Consciously! Willingly! Cheerfully! Lovingly!

Exerting ourselves with energy

Second, the doing of good works is *work*. It requires effort and energy. The New Testament Greek word for “work” is *ergon*, from which we get our English words “energy” and “energize.” The term *ergon* indicates that works, whether good or evil, do not automatically proceed from the doer, but in producing works the doer

must consciously *exert* himself. The apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 15:10, “...but I labored more abundantly than they all...,” and the word “labor” refers to exhausting toil. During his missionary labors in which he suffered afflictions, imprisonments, stripes, hunger, thirst, shipwreck, and slander, Paul’s loving service on behalf of the church took tremendous effort. Deep expressions of loving devotion did not automatically proceed from him simply because he was a believer. Likewise, a false apostle does not automatically slander Christ, scatter the flock, speak perverse things, and draw away disciples after him, by virtue of the fact that he is an unbeliever. His evil deeds are something he chooses to do and exerts himself toward with energy.

That a good work is *work* makes any doctrine of salvation by works terrifying. If good works are not fruits of thankfulness performed in gratitude to the saving God who by His Spirit works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure, but rather somehow contribute to salvation, then salvation comes by our exertion and energy. Good works as fruits of thankfulness are exhausting enough for us believing sinners who so often fail to do the good that we would, while we do the evil that we would not. But if we had to exert ourselves energetically unto the performance of good works in order to obtain salvation from God, the task would not only be impossible but would also bring us to spirit-crushing dismay. Working to earn is bondage.

What we do

Third, works are something we *do*. “Do” is the verb that the Holy Spirit of inspiration employs throughout Scripture to join together the believer as the conscious, acting subject and good works as the product of that believer’s activity. I *do* good works. You *do* good works. Believers *do* good works. We can understand *works* and *doings* as synonymous terms expressing the same idea.

Hear only a brief testimony of the Scriptures: “Six days shalt thou labor and *do* all thy *work*” (Ex. 20:9). “Moses said, hereby shall ye know that the LORD hath

sent me to *do* all these *works*, for I have not done them of mine own mind” (Num. 16:28). Jesus, the perfect doer of perfect works, said of His works, “My meat is to *do* the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work” (John 4:34), and “...for the *works* which the Father hath given me to finish, the same *works* that I *do*, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me” (John 5:36), and “...the *works* that I *do* in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me” (John 10:25), and “I have glorified thee on the earth, I have finished the *work* which thou gavest me to *do*” (John 17:4). Elsewhere Scripture exhorts the believer, saying, “Let him eschew evil, and *do good*, let him seek peace and pursue it” (I Pet. 3:11); and the rich are charged, “that they *do good*, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate” (I Tim. 6:18); and we are all taught, “whatsoever ye *do* in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). We receive the benediction that God “make you perfect in every *good work* to *do* his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ...” (Heb. 13:21).

In keeping with Scripture, the confessions use the same verb “do” in connection with good works. The Heidelberg Catechism asks, “Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still *do good works*” (L.D. 32, Q&A 86)? Quoting Philippians 2:13 and Luke 17:10, Belgic Confession, Article 24 teaches:

Therefore we *do* good works, but not to merit by them, (for what can they merit?) nay, we are beholden to God for the good works we *do*, and not He to us, since it is He that worketh in us both to will and to *do* of His good pleasure. Let us therefore attend to what is written: when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to *do*.” (emphasis added)

What further proves that good works are something we *do* is the demand of God’s law. God’s law of ten commandments is the standard according to which the believer does good works (Heid. Cat., LD 33, Q&A 91). The law says, “Do!” The law makes plain that if a man will live with God there is that which the man must *do*; he must *do* good works of obedience in love for God and the neighbor. When a chief expounder of the law came to Jesus tempting Him with a question about salvation by the law, saying, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life” (Luke 10:25), Jesus brought the man to agree that the law requires perfect love for God; and then Jesus sent that lawyer away with what he must know if he wants eternal life by the law: he must *do*:

“Thou hast answered right, this *do*, and thou shalt live” (Luke 10:28). The law declares, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to *do* them” (Gal. 3:10). God says to all Israel, “Therefore shall ye keep my commandments, and *do* them: I am the Lord” (Lev. 22:31). One who continues in the perfect law of liberty is not only a hearer “but a *doer* of the work” (James 1:25).

What it means “to do” is not only indicated by Scripture’s use of that verb in joining together the believer as subject with his works as an object, but by the lexical definition of the verb. The main OT Hebrew verb that is translated “do” is *asah*, which means “to do, make, produce, work, accomplish, or perform.” From this verb is derived the Hebrew noun *ma’aseh* which means “work” or “deed” as in Genesis 44:15, “...what *deed* is this that ye have done...?” The main NT Greek verb translated “do” is *poieo* which means “to do, make, labor, produce, or work.” When we *do* good works we are *doing* something, we are *producing* something, we are *working*. We are not merely willing or thinking or desiring internally in the soul but we are performing something through the instrumentality of the body. Again, I *do* good works. You *do* good works.

This verb “to do” that means “to work or perform” is not to be confused with the auxiliary verb “do” that simply serves to make the present tense of a main verb. For example, “Blessed are they which *do* hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled (they are not doing (*poieo*) hunger or performing (*poieo*) thirst, but they *are presently* hungering and thirsting),” (Matt. 5:6). Or, “Who by him do believe in God...” (I Pet. 1:21), which does not mean that we do or perform (*poieo*) belief but that we *are* believing.

That a good work is that which we *do* clearly distinguishes good works from faith. Neither faith as a bond nor faith as an activity is something we *do*, work, or perform. Good works proceed from faith, but faith itself is not a *doing*. We do not *do* faith, or *do* knowledge, or *do* trust, confidence, assurance or certainty. We do not *do* embracing, appropriating, or resting. While *doing* and *working* are two synonyms expressing the same idea, *doing* and *believing* are certainly not. *Doing* and *believing* are completely different concepts. Believing is one activity; doing or working is a completely different activity (Rom. 4:5). Commenting on Galatians 3:12, Prof. H. Hanko explains:

Faith is exactly the opposite of law. Faith does not operate on the principle of “doing” or “working.” Faith is exactly not a matter of working. There are those who claim that faith is a work of man, an activity of man’s own free will. In a subtle way they change

the correct statement “Man is saved by faith alone” to mean “man is saved by the work of believing.” This is an inexcusable corruption of biblical truth.”¹

To be sure, faith is an activity (“embrace” is a favorite verb of all three of our Reformed confessions). To be sure, faith is demanded by the gospel call. To be sure, it is necessary to address the hearer of the gospel with the imperative, “Believe!” To be sure, faith as a response to the gospel call is properly called obedience (Rom. 10:16). To be sure, *we* believe, not God. But faith (or, for that matter, repentance as a renouncing of and turning from our sinful works with a broken spirit and contrite heart in response to the gospel call “Repent!”) is not a *doing* or *working* or *performing*. Faith, the faith whereby we are justified, the faith by which we are saved in being brought into the conscious experience and assurance of the favor of God has no inherent efficacy in itself, but is an instrument whereby we embrace the meritorious doings of Jesus Christ. Faith in its activity of believing is not a doing whereby we accomplish something or perform something. While we *do* good works, we do not *do* faith. There is no activity like the activity of faith as the believer who is sovereignly grafted into Jesus Christ by an unbreakable, organic bond inclines his heart unto and rests in the almighty hand of God who through Jesus Christ accomplished everything for the elect sinner. It is exactly the nature of true faith to look away from all the doing that proceeds from it and to look unto all the perfect doings of the Savior revealed in the gospel.²

The distinction between the *activity* of faith and the *doing* of works can be illustrated by the distinction between our eye and our hand. Seeing with the eye is an activity but it is not a doing. The eye does not produce anything. The eye simply beholds a beautiful object and the heart fixes itself upon that object in admiration. So also faith is seeing, an activity whereby we behold the lovely Christ in the gospel and our heart fixes itself upon Him in complete trust. Faith is seeing (John 3:3), but faith is not a doing whereby we produce something. When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, the Israelites who looked and believed were saved (John 3:14-15). They were exercising their faith in beholding an object and embracing a promise con-

nected to it, but they were not doing or performing any work by their activity of seeing. However, the hand is different than the eye. It is an instrument for *doing*. We read in II Kings 22:5, “And let them deliver it into the hand of the doers of the work, that have the oversight of the house of the Lord: and let them give it to the doers of the work which is in the house of the Lord, to repair the breaches of the house.” Believers in the local church who work with their hands the things which are good are doers who do good deeds of loving service. Even as the physical eye and hand are distinct in their activities, so faith (eye activity) and the doing of good works (hand activity) are different. The believer never looks for salvation in the doings of his own hands or even in the worthiness of his own faith as the spiritual hand of his soul (which spiritual hand is different than his physical hand of doing that holds the bread and wine, Belgic Confession, Art. 35) but to the wondrous works that Jehovah’s hand has wrought in the crucified Jesus Christ.

The perfect test to determine whether or not faith is a doing is to hold faith up to God’s law. The law demands doing. It says, “Do this and live!” If we should take our faith and present it before the law, what would the law say? If the law accepts faith, then faith is a doing because the law only accepts doing. Faith fails the test. The law will not accept faith. The law is not of faith (Gal. 3:12). The law does not want faith. The law never commands a man to believe. The law will snarl at any man who tries to present it with faith. The law will roar in fury at any man who tries to trick it by presenting it with faith as if it were a doing. The law knows faith is not a doing and the law does not want faith. The law wants works, only works, perfect works, the performance or doing of works. When Jesus came to keep the law on our behalf, He did not give the law faith; He gave the law what the law demanded: the doing of perfect works. He said, “Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will O God” (Heb. 10:7). He *did*. He *worked*. He *labored*. He *performed*. He *accomplished*. His whole life long He laid His perfect doings before God’s law, fulfilling every jot and tittle.

In light of the fact that good works are a doing and faith is not a doing, we must be careful never to confuse faith and works by turning faith into a work we must perform in order to be saved. Salvation is by faith alone. Our experience of salvation as justified believers who know God’s pardoning grace is not by our doings but by faith in Christ. If faith truly is something we must *do* to be saved, saved in any sense of the word, then faith is no more faith, grace is no more grace, the gospel is no more gospel, and—terrifyingly—salvation is impossible because salvation by works is utterly impossible for all men

1 Herman Hanko, *Justified unto Liberty* (Jenison MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2011), 209.

2 For further reading on this distinction between faith and works, see Herman Hoeksema’s sermon on Romans 3:27, entitled “Boasting Excluded” as found in *Righteous By Faith Alone* (Grandville MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002), 133-140. The second point of the sermon is called “Excluded Because, according to the Law of Faith, Man *Does Nothing*” (emphasis H. Hoeksema’s).

whether they are indwelt by the Holy Spirit or not. It is one thing to command a man to *believe* (gospel), but it is another thing to command a man to *do* (law). When it is time for the gospel to issue its call, the gospel can frame to pronounce the words, “Repent and believe!” but the gospel cannot frame to pronounce the words “Do this and live!” Such a command is the gospel’s Shibboleth.

The gospel is soul-comforting good news to the trembling, guilt-stricken sinner because the gospel declares, “You do not have to *do* anything to be saved. The Lord Jesus Christ has done every deed for all whom the Father has given to Him. Believe! Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and His doings and thou shalt be saved! And if you do believe, understand it is only because the Father of lights, from whom comes every good and perfect gift, has united you to Jesus and worked your gift of faith into activity by His Word and Spirit so that you cannot but embrace Christ your righteousness!” Hearing and believing that gospel, the sinner goes forth gratefully doing good works.

Known to others

Fourth, works are visible to others. Even as the works of an artist are not the invisible concepts in his mind but the visible paintings in the gallery, so our works are visible and known. The believer’s good works are seen

by unbelievers, for we read in I Peter 2:12, “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.” The works of a believer must be seen or they fail in their function as witnesses to the ungodly, but also they fail in their demonstrative function justifying our claim that we have faith (James 2). Most importantly works are visible for the public vindication of the righteousness of God when in the day of the revelation of His righteous judgment He renders to every man according to His works (Rom. 2:5-11).

Good or evil

Finally, works bear a moral character before God and are either good or evil. Since God demands that even eating and drinking be done to His glory (I Cor. 10:31), all who perform works must consciously and willingly do everything to the glory of God. All will answer for what they have done “whether it be good or bad” (II Cor. 5:10).

In conclusion, my prayer is David’s, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer” (Ps. 19:14).



Believing and confessing

Prof. Ronald Cammenga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Of man’s fall, sin, and the cause of sin

(Second Helvetic Confession, chapter 8c)

Previous article in this series: May 15, 2019, p. 375.

The Sects

We therefore condemn all who have taught contrary to this, especially Pelagius and all Pelagians, together with the Jovinians who, with the Stoics, regard all sins as equal. In this whole matter we agree with St. Augustine who derived and defended his view from Holy Scriptures. Moreover, we condemn Florinus and Blastus, against whom Irenaeus wrote, and all who make God the author of sin.

The last several paragraphs of chapter 8 of the Second Helvetic Confession, are concerned with various denials of the doctrine of the fall of man and original sin. They also answer a perennial charge made against the orthodox Reformed teaching with regard to these two topics, the charge that the Reformed make God the author of sin. The last paragraph responds to certain “curious questions” that sometimes arise when the truth with regard to the fall of man and original sin are presented.

These paragraphs indicate that the Reformed faith is

polemical. Those who follow in the Reformed tradition must always remember this important truth. It is important to set forth the truth positively—defining, explaining, and proving. But the positive setting forth of the truth is never enough. What is necessary besides is that the truth must be defended against those who deny it and distort it. The heresies and the heretics must be identified. This is not mere name calling. The purpose is not to be demeaning and vindictive. It is not the goal to embarrass or publicly to shame these people. The purpose is, first, to warn the people of God, lest they depart from the confession of the truth. And the purpose, secondly, is to convince these heretics of the truth, as well as those who have fallen victim to their false teachings. We engage in polemics, in the words of the apostle Paul in II Timothy 2:25, praying that “God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.” As in the case of Hymenaeus and Alexander, the purpose is “that they may learn not to blaspheme” (I Tim. 1:20).

By “The Sects” in paragraph 5, Bullinger is not referring to “sects” in the modern sense of that term. When we think of sects, we immediately think of religious groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons. Instead Bullinger is referring to an identifiable religious group that had a recognized leader that departed from the faith. He includes in the sects “Pelagius and all Pelagians.” Pelagius (c. A.D. 340-405) was a fourth-century heretic who rejected the teaching of original sin. He denied Adam’s headship, that he was the legal head and representative of the whole human race. He taught that man comes into the world morally neutral, neither bad nor good. Adam’s sin set a bad example, but it did not result, under the judgment of God, in the corruption of the race. And he taught that God’s grace was assisting grace, so that the grace of God and the free will of man work together to accomplish man’s salvation.

Pelagius was opposed by Augustine (A.D. 354-430), who showed very clearly in his writings the errors of Pelagius. Significantly, the SHC says about Augustine that he “derived and defended his view from Holy Scriptures.” Bullinger intends that as especially high praise for Augustine, as opposed to Pelagius who did not make any honest or accurate appeal to Holy Scripture. He set forth not merely philosophical arguments, nor mainly logical and rational arguments, but clear biblical arguments. Remember that it was Augustine who said, “When Scripture speaks, God speaks.” He lived and wrote by that dictum. In his own writings, Augustine appealed continually to the Holy Scriptures in order to demonstrate the truthfulness of his teaching and the errors of his opponents. For Augustine, Scripture was the end of debate. There was no higher authority in the church than the Word of God.

Included with “The Sects” in this paragraph of the SHC are the Jovinians and the Stoics. They erred in “regard[ing] all sins as equal.” The Jovinians were a fourth-century religious group who were the followers of a certain Jovinius, about whom little is known. The church father Jerome (c. A.D. 347-420), a contemporary of Augustine, wrote against him. Although we know little of him, he and his followers are compared to the Stoics. The SHC indicates that part of their error was an insistence that all sins were equal, and that therefore there were no degrees of sins—no sin was more heinous than another sin. Besides this denial, it also seems that the Jovinians located sin in the deed, and exclusively in the deed. Sin did not include the sinful nature out of which the sinful deed arose—a fundamental denial of the depravity of fallen man. Not only what he *does*, but what he *is* belongs to man’s sin and sinfulness.

Classified with “The Sects” are also “Florinus and Blastus, against whom Irenaeus wrote.” The church father Irenaeus’ dates are c. A.D. 130-202. Once again, we know very little of these men. Blastus was a presbyter at Rome. Irenaeus addressed a letter to him entitled *On Schism*. He wrote another letter to Florinus, *On the Sole Sovereignty or That God is not the Author of Evil*. Florinus seems to have defended this opinion. His view seems to have been that since God created all things, He must have created both the good and the evil. This, of course, would have been a fundamental denial of the fall of man into sin and the origin of evil in the perfect creation that God had made, according to the biblical account.

God is not the author of sin, and how far He is said to harden

It is expressly written: “Thou art not a God who delights in wickedness. Thou hatest all evildoers. Thou destroyest those who speak lies” (Ps. 5:4 ff.). And again: “When the devil lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Moreover, there is enough sinfulness and corruption in us that it is not necessary for God to infuse into us a new or still greater perversity. When, therefore, it is said in Scripture that God hardens, blinds and delivers up to a reprobate mind, it is to be understood that God does it by a just judgment as a just Judge and Avenger. Finally, as often as God in Scripture is said or seems to do something evil, it is not thereby said that man does not do evil, but that God permits it and does not prevent it, according to His just judgment, who could prevent it if He wished, or because He turns man’s

evil into good, as He did in the case of the sin of Joseph's brethren, or because He governs sins lest they break out and rage more than is appropriate. St. Augustine writes in his *Enchiridion*: "What happens contrary to His will occurs, in a wonderful and ineffable way, not apart from His will. For it would not happen if He did not allow it. And yet He does not allow it unwillingly but willingly. But He who is good would not permit evil to be done, unless, being omnipotent, He could bring good out of evil." Thus wrote Augustine.

The main concern of this paragraph is to respond to the charge that the Reformed doctrine of the Fall and original sin makes God the author of sin. By "author of sin" the charge intends to allege that the Reformed doctrine makes God responsible for sin, guilty of sin, and therefore a sinner Himself. Because that cannot be true, the Reformed doctrine of the Fall and original sin cannot be true either.

The Reformers rejected this charge. They did not jettison the biblical teaching of the Fall, but they steadfastly retained it and responded to this false accusation of the enemies of sound doctrine. Bullinger adds his voice to the voice of the other Reformed respondents. Significantly, he acknowledges that his response is not entirely original, but that he is relying upon Augustine. Augustine deals with the problem of evil in a number of places in his writings, including the *Confessions*, *The City of God*, and *Enchiridion*, which Bullinger quotes in this paragraph of the SHC.

Bullinger's response to the charge that his teaching makes God the author of sin is four-pronged. First, he makes clear from the Scriptures that God hates sin. How could He possibly be the author of sin and at the same time hate sin. He quotes Psalm 5:4 in this regard: "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee." Verse 5 adds, "The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity."

Second, in response to the charge that the Reformed view makes God the author of sin, Bullinger points to the teaching of Scripture that the one who delights in sin, loves sin, and tempts to sin is the Devil. He quotes Jesus' words to the unbelieving Jews in John 8:44, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. 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." Clearly, the author of sin is the Devil. He is that as the first rational, moral creature to sin. And he is that because he was the instigator of

man's sin; he tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit.

Third, because man is totally depraved and has and is born with a sinful nature, man always sins at his own impulse and on account of his own willing desire to sin. He is never compelled to sin against his will. Because he is a totally depraved sinner, his will and nature are already completely sinful. As the SHC says, "Moreover, there is enough sinfulness and corruption in us that it is not necessary for God to infuse into us a new or still greater perversity." In addition, as often as Scripture speaks of the fact that "God hardens, blinds and delivers up to a reprobate mind, it is to be understood that God does it by a just judgment as a just Judge and Avenger." God's hardening, blinding, and delivering human beings up to a reprobate mind is never to be understood as God creating sin where before there was no sin, but punishing sin with sin. The sin and the sinner are already a reality; God is not creating sin, but punishing sin with still more sin.

And fourth, God cannot be charged with being the author of sin because He always turns evil and sin into that which is good. With regard to sin, God not only "permits it and does not prevent it," but He "turns man's evil into good," and "He governs sins." If God were the author of sin and delighted in sin, He would not cause good to come out of the evil. That shows that He cannot be the author of sin. So much does He hate sin that "in a wonderful and ineffable way" whatever takes place "contrary to His will" occurs "not apart from His will." The result is that "He who is good would not permit evil to be done, unless, being omnipotent, He could bring good out of evil."

Curious questions

Other questions, such as whether God willed Adam to fall, or incited him to fall, or why He did not prevent the fall and similar questions, we reckon among curious questions (unless perchance the wickedness of heretics or of other churlish men compels us also to explain them out of the Word of God, as the godly teachers of the Church have frequently done), knowing that the Lord forbade man to eat of the forbidden fruit and punished the transgression. We also know that what things are done are not evil with respect to the providence, will, and power of God, but in respect of Satan and our will opposing the will of God.

The concluding paragraph of the chapter on man's fall into sin and original sin addresses itself to what Bullinger regarded as "curious questions." The principle set forth in this paragraph is a sound principle.

Scripture is the authority in the church. That means not only that what Scripture teaches must be believed and confessed. It means that we must not go beyond Scripture. The church must not take away from (deny) Scripture; but neither may she add to the teaching of Scripture, binding men's consciences with that which is not taught in Scripture. This was a characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church, that she added to Scripture her own doctrines and laws and made them necessary to be believed and obeyed for salvation, like purgatory, indulgences, the teaching concerning Mary, and many other examples.

Among the curious questions that Bullinger raises is the question whether God willed (decreed) the Fall. He certainly cannot be charged with being the author of the first sin inasmuch as He forbade the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and also punished man for eating it. But did God *will* the Fall? Was the Fall decreed by God? He grants that what things are done as evil, "are not evil with respect to the providence, will, and power of God." But he seems to hedge on the specific question, "Did God decree the fall of man into sin, yes or no?" The answer, of course, is "Yes." It is not enough to say that these things "are not evil with respect to the providence, will, and power of God." But are they actively *decreed* by God? That is the question.

Where Bullinger hedges, Calvin is much stronger. He makes very clear that it is his position that God decreed the fall of man into sin. He expresses this in a number of places. He says in his *Institutes* that "it ought not to seem absurd for me to say that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his descendants, but also meted it out in accordance with his own decision."¹ And in his treatise "The Secret Providence of God," Calvin says: "Meantime, I freely acknowledge my doctrine to be this: that Adam fell, not only by the permission of God, but by His very secret counsel and decree."² A consistent confession of the absolute sovereignty of God teaches that God decreed the Fall, but that He decreed it in such a way that He is not and cannot rightly be charged with being the author of sin.

As to God's purpose in the Fall, we can surely say one thing: God decreed the fall of the first Adam in order to reveal the greater glory of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, Jesus Christ our Savior.

1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 3.23.7; 2:955-6.

2 John Calvin, "The Secret Providence of God," in *Calvin's Calvinism*, trans. Henry Cole (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1950), 267.



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Richard Smit, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines

The confession of the Guanabara Bay martyrs (1558) 2

Previous article in this series: July 2019, p. 429.

Some of the interesting highlights of the Guanabara Confession include, first, that this document was written by regular church members, not highly trained and ordained theologians. Understanding their God-given place in the body of Christ and their theological limitations, they answered according to their ability. They admitted this fact when writing about one aspect of the doctrine of marriage in Article 14: "... nevertheless, we will leave the judgment on this matter to ones more knowledgeable in the Holy Scriptures...." Although they humbly admitted that they were not gifted, trained theologians like John Calvin and others, yet they produced a clear confession of the faith.

Secondly, it is encouraging to see that they knew the writings of the church fathers. They referenced Augustine (several times), Tertullian, Cyprian, and Ambrose. Have we today read any of the writings of these church fathers and their orthodox statements about the doctrines of the Trinity, the Lord's Supper, forgiveness of sins, and others? Maybe our reading goes back to John Calvin, Martin Luther, and other Reformers, but what about the earlier church fathers? If we have not read beyond our Reformed forefathers, then some reading opportunities still await.

Third, they appealed in their answers to the Word of God, the apostolic doctrine, and the church confessions.

The Confession of Guanabara (excerpts)

3. We believe, concerning the Son of God and concerning the Holy Spirit, that which the Word of God and apostolic doctrine and the symbol teach us.

5. We believe in the holy sacrament of the Supper, as corporal figures of bread and wine, and that faithful souls are actually fed with the very substance of our Lord Jesus, as our bodies are fed by food; thus, we do not understand the saying that the bread and wine are actually transformed or transubstantiated in their body, because the bread continues with its nature and substance; likewise the wine, there is no change or alteration.

We differentiate, nevertheless, this bread and wine from other bread and wine dedicated to the common usage, understanding that these are, for us, sacramental signs, under which truth is infallibly received. The reception of this truth, however, is not possible except by faith, and it is not proper to imagine anything carnal, nor to prepare the teeth to eat, as we learn from Saint Augustine, when he says, “Why do you prepare the teeth and the stomach? Believe, and you have eaten.”

The sign, therefore, does not give us the truth nor the signified thing; but our Lord Jesus Christ, by His power, virtue and goodness, feeds and preserves our souls and makes them share in His own flesh and blood, and all His benefits.

13. The separation between a man and a woman legitimately united by marriage cannot be done, except on account of adultery, as is taught by our Lord (Matt. 19:5). And not only is this cause for separation, but also, with the cause properly examined by authorities, the non-guilty party, if cannot contain himself, should marry, as it is taught by St. Ambrose, on the seventh chapter of the first letter of Corinth. The authority, however, must proceed in this matter with mature counsel.

14. St. Paul, when teaching that the overseer must be the husband of one wife, is not saying that another marriage is not proper, but he is condemning bigamy, which attracted many in those days; nevertheless, we will leave the concluding judgment on this matter to ones more knowledgeable in the Holy Scriptures, and we will not base our opinion in this matter solely on our faith.

16. We believe that Jesus Christ is our only mediator, intercessor and advocate, by whom we have access to the Father, and that, justified by His blood, we will be free from death; and reconciled by Him we will have full victory against death.

As to the saints who died, we say that they desire our salvation and the fulfillment of the kingdom of God, and that the number of elect is completed; nevertheless, we must not direct ourselves to them, as intercessors to obtain something, because we would be disobeying the commandment of God. As to us, the living, while we are united as members of one body, we should pray one for another, as we are taught by many passages of Scriptures.

This is the answer that we give to the articles that we have received from you... (see the end of the article for the full conclusion).

Jean du Bourdel, Matthieu Verneuil, Pierre Bourdon, André la Fon

For example, when explaining their convictions about the doctrine of the Trinity, they wrote that they believed “...that which the Word of God and apostolic doctrine and symbol teach us” (Art. 3). Of course, “symbol” is a reference to the *Symbolum Quicunque*, or, as we more commonly know it, the Athanasian Creed. In so doing, they confessed the faith of Holy Scripture in conscious connection with the church of all ages. This is evidence that they were biblical and confessional, a significant characteristic of being Reformed.

Fourth, the Guanabara Confession confesses truths of Calvinism, especially what we commonly know as the “Five Points of Calvinism.” The confession states total depravity, the bondage of the will in sin, double predestination, irresistible grace, and the preservation of the saints (Art. 10). Although the confession does not address particular atonement directly, there are clear implications from the confession that the men also believed in this doctrine. For example, this is implied in their conviction that Jesus Christ is the only Mediator, Intercessor, and Advocate of the elect by whom alone we have access to the Father (Art. 16).

Fifth, they rejected transubstantiation and the popish mass, which is the subject of Articles 5-8. In rejecting the popish eucharist, they wrote, “thus, we do not understand the saying that the bread and wine are actually transformed or transubstantiated in their body, because the bread continues with its nature and substance; likewise the wine, there is no change or alteration” (Art. 5). It is encouraging to observe their God-given ability to reject the heresy of transubstantiation, and that “transubstantiation” and other significant doctrinal terms were in their working vocabulary. They were certainly well equipped and prepared to defend the truth of the Word of God.

Sixth, they rejected the Roman Catholic practice of monastic vows of celibacy and upheld the necessity of marriage for those in the office of the ministry of the gospel. While we agree with their understanding from Scripture about divorce on the ground of adultery (Matt. 19:5), we do object to their understanding of the freedom of “the non-guilty party” to remarry while his or her spouse remains alive. We believe that the remarriage of the “non-guilty party,” unless the “guilty” spouse has died, is forbidden by Scripture (Rom. 7:2-3). Beyond that objection, we can appreciate their insistence on marriage normally for ordained pastors

in the church. They were concerned to keep the churches pure from unnecessary vows of celibacy, which tended “to corrupt the true service of God,” and to protect ordained pastors from such vows that in most cases, according to their observation, only tempted God (Art. 13).

Seventh, they rejected the whole Roman Catholic enterprise of additional intercessors and mediators in the saints who have died and are now in heaven. They wrote that “as to the saints who died, we say that they desire our salvation and the fulfilment of the kingdom of God and that the number of the elect is completed; nevertheless, we must not direct ourselves to them, as intercessors to obtain something, because we would be disobeying the commandment of God...” (Art. 16). Thus, they boldly rejected Mary as co-mediatrix and all other saints in heaven as those to whom one may pray for a blessing or some other kind of spiritual or physical help.

Finally, in their last article, they rejected prayers for the dead, and, by implication, masses for the dead, another Roman Catholic enterprise. This is a common practice still today, the goal of which is to merit for the dead souls of relatives in purgatory a reduction in their painful purgation (suffering) and an early release (justification) into heaven. The four believers (see box for names) rejected this practice as a pagan custom, contrary to the church fathers, and contrary to Scripture (Art. 17).

From our brief sampling of the Guanabara Confession, it is not difficult to imagine the angry reaction of Captain Villegagnon, a loyal Roman Catholic, to the Huguenots’ resolute rejection of deeply rooted practices and teachings of the Romish church. About 12 hours after receiving their response, he hung them. After the death of these Reformed martyrs and the expulsion of the French Huguenots from Guanabara Bay, the presence of the Reformed faith and preaching would not return to that region in South America until later in history.

What are some points of significance about this part of Reformed church history?

First, Reformed churches were interested in foreign missions from the beginning of the Reformation and did the work of foreign missions as they were able. This history is a clear example of that. John Calvin and the church in Geneva encouraged and sent gifted and trained men in obedience to the Lord of the harvest to South America for a potential ecclesiastical work for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ in another part of the world. This concern for foreign missions is im-

plied in the Guanabara Confession when the men wrote about “the fulfilment of the kingdom of God and that the number of the elect is completed” (Art. 16). The attempt to establish a Huguenot-friendly settlement in South America had the purpose of the establishment of a Reformed congregation and foreign mission work with the Tamoio and Tupinamba tribes. Thus, their belief in sovereign grace and election did not hinder them from foreign mission work, but rather served as the sure basis and motivation for the Huguenot families and ordained missionaries to serve the Lord in South America among new peoples, tribes, and languages according to His will.

Second, a characteristic of the members of Reformed churches at that time, shown by the Guanabara Bay martyrs, was how capable they were in explaining and defending the Reformed faith (apologetics). At that time (and still today), Roman Catholicism appeared to view ignorance and doubt as virtues for its disciples. Ordinary members of Roman Catholic churches were generally ignorant of the Holy Scriptures and lived in fear and doubt about their salvation and future. In contrast, the Reformed churches fed the flock of God with His Word so that the sheep received certain, doctrinal knowledge and hearty assurance of their salvation in Christ alone. That these men could write the 17 Articles of the Guanabara Confession in a relatively short period of time is evidence of the grace of God through the means of faithful catechism training and expository preaching in the Reformed churches in France and Geneva. Certainly, they were not destroyed for lack of knowledge. Rather, by the faithful administration of the means of grace, they were equipped by the Holy Spirit to explain and defend accurately and without confusion the doctrines of Holy Scripture according to the confessions of the true church of Jesus Christ. Of course, this is a good example for us to imitate in our present age.

Third, embracing and maintaining our confession of the truth of Holy Scripture according to the Reformed confessions comes with a high price. This history of the Guanabara Bay martyrs illustrates that price: everything, even our earthly life. In spite of the present ease in which most of us live with regard to our Reformed faith and practice, we must realize that embracing the Reformed doctrine by a living faith in our present age exposes us and our generations to persecution and death for Jesus’ sake. This should be no surprise to us because Jesus told us this would happen to His true disciples. If the enemies of the kingdom of God treated Christ as they did, then we should expect to suffer similarly and die for His sake (John 15:18-21). In light of that

high cost, we must seek the grace and Holy Spirit of our Father to prepare us and our children to write, if necessary, our own death warrants in answer to a persecutor who asks us about our Christian hope and threatens to torture and kill us if we do not recant our biblical and Reformed convictions.

Fourth, it is important to remember that the Lord of the harvest was in providential control of this chapter in Reformed church history. The Lord of the harvest executes God's will, and so guides the spread of His true gospel in the earth. That means that what the Reformed in France and Geneva in the 1550s may have envisioned for the spread of the true gospel of Christ in the earth, specifically, the Guanabara Bay region, the Lord did not bring to pass. According to the Lord's will, the Huguenots were only in Guanabara Bay for a short three years. It was not the Lord's time for Reformed churches to maintain a witness of the Reformed faith in missions or established churches in Brazil for many generations after 1558. Not until much later in history, would the Lord bring back the light of the Reformed churches to that region.

That principle of the Lord's sovereign guidance in

missions is an important principle to remember. The good foreign-mission desires that we may have regarding the spread of the Reformed faith into new and hard-to-reach places may not come to pass when and for how long we have desired or envisioned. We are reminded that the Lord of the harvest directs and fulfills His work of missions through His servants according to God's good pleasure and eternal counsel by various means. Even in missions, not our will, but the Lord's will must be done. All of our planning, praying, preaching, and pouring out of our souls in the work remain always subject to His sovereign direction and good pleasure.

Finally, may the concluding wish of the Guanabara Bay martyrs expressed at the end of their confession be fulfilled in us as it has been in them. They concluded thus:

This is the answer that we give to the articles that we have received from you, according to the measure and proportion of faith, which God has given us, praying that He may be pleased that this faith not be found dead in us, but bearing fruits worthy of His children, and that we may grow and persevere in it, so that we will render praises and thanksgiving to Him forever. Amen.



Church and state

Mr. Brian VanEngen, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, is a practicing attorney

A significant new Supreme Court decision on religious liberty

We often hear about court cases involving challenges to displays of religious symbols on public property, whether it be displays of the Ten Commandments or a cross or some other item of religious significance. The United States Supreme Court recently issued a decision in such a case involving a cross on public property as part of a war memorial, *The American Legion v. American Humanist Association*.¹ This decision is significant, not for its subject matter, but for the legal analysis used by the Court in reaching its decision. Although the news media widely reported simply that the Court had allowed a display including a cross to remain on public property, the case actually merits a closer look for its potential impact on religious liberty cases in the

future, as it departed from previous Supreme Court jurisprudence.

The factual background of the case begins shortly after the first World War. After World War I, residents of Prince George's County Maryland decided to erect a war memorial in Bladensburg to remember those from the county who died in the first World War. The project was started by a private committee and finished by the American Legion. The memorial is a forty-foot tall Latin cross, and is known as the "Peace Cross." It is not clear why a Latin cross was chosen, but as the Supreme Court noted, it is not surprising as it had become a symbol of the war, and brought to mind the rows of plain white crosses marking the graves of the soldiers buried overseas. The cross was originally on private land, but as the area around the cross developed, it

¹ *The American Legion v. American Humanist Association*, Docket No. 17-1717, 588 U.S. (2019).

eventually stood in the middle of a busy intersection, and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission acquired the cross and the land on which it was situated.

The cross stood for nearly 90 years when an action was filed by the American Humanist Association requesting a court order requiring the Commission to remove the cross or modify it by removing the cross-arms to make an obelisk or some other secular symbol. The American Humanist Association is a non-profit organization with the self-proclaimed mission of advocating “progressive values and equality for humanists, atheists, freethinkers, and the non-religious across the country.”² The group alleged that the use of public funds to maintain the cross, and its presence on public property, was unconstitutional. The American Legion intervened in the court action on behalf of the Commission to defend the cross.

This case involved questions of First Amendment jurisprudence, as the challengers alleged that the maintenance of the cross on public property at public expense violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Establishment Clause provides that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” The District Court granted summary judgment for the American Legion and the Commission. This means that the court found that there were no relevant factual disputes and that the law in the case required a ruling in favor of the American Legion and the Commission. In doing so, the District Court looked at previous Supreme Court precedents, including a case involving a display of the Ten Commandments³ and the test established in the case of *Lemon v. Kurtzman*,⁴ which has been used to determine Establishment Clause cases since it was decided in 1971.

The challengers appealed the decision of the District Court to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, where a divided panel reversed the District Court and ruled against the American Legion and the Commission, largely based on its application of the test from the *Lemon* case. The *Lemon* test consists of three parts: whether a challenged government action 1) has a secular purpose; 2) has a “principal or primary effect” that “neither advances nor inhibits religion,”; and 3) does not foster an excessive government entanglement with religion.⁵ The Fourth Circuit determined that the cross failed the second part of the test, the “effects” prong,

because a reasonable observer would view the Commission’s ownership and maintenance of the monument as an endorsement of Christianity.

The American Legion and the Commission appealed the ruling of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the Supreme Court reversed the decision, finding that the Bladensburg cross is constitutional. As mentioned previously, this decision is noteworthy for several reasons. First, the vote was 7 to 2 in favor of maintaining the cross. In recent years, the court has often been divided 5 to 4 on such decisions, with 4 conservative justices, 4 liberal justices, and Justice Anthony Kennedy being the deciding vote. Justice Kennedy recently retired and was replaced by Justice Brett Kavanaugh. The four other conservative justices are Chief Justice Roberts and Justices Thomas, Gorsuch, and Alito. The liberal justices are Ginsburg, Breyer, Sotomayor, and Kagan. However, in this case Justice Stephen Breyer, a member of the liberal wing of the Court, also joined with the majority. Justice Kagan also concurred in the outcome.

It should also be noted that Supreme Court justices do not simply concur (agree) or dissent (disagree) with a majority opinion. A justice may agree or disagree with the outcome of the case but for a different legal reason than that stated in the majority opinion. That justice will then file a separate concurring or dissenting opinion, which other justices may then join in. In this case, Justice Alito filed the majority opinion, which was only joined in its entirety by three other justices, including Justice Breyer. The other justices filed concurring opinions to reach the 7 to 2 majority, with Justices Ginsburg and Sotomayor dissenting. The point is that, while a majority of the justices supported the outcome in this case, it is difficult to gauge exactly where the sentiments of the Court are on this issue, since the justices reached the majority conclusion by different means.

Nevertheless, there are some significant changes to the law that we can glean from this case. First, the Court abolished the *Lemon* test, at least with regard to cases such as this involving the Establishment Clause and historical religious monuments. Instead, the Court considered four factors to be considered in such cases, all of which tend to focus on the length of time that something has existed. First, the Court noted that ascertaining the original purpose of something that has been around for a time may be difficult, so it is difficult to determine if that purpose was improper. Second, the Court stated that some monuments or institutions may lose religious significance and gain historical significance, such as the war memorial in this case. Third, the Court also noted that with the passage of time some

2 <https://americanhumanist.org>

3 *Van Orden v. Perry*, 545 U.S. 677 (2005).

4 *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971).

5 *Id.* at 612-13.

religious symbols or practices may be retained for the sake of familiarity, such as state flags with a cross or a city with a biblical name. Sadly, this means that the more people forget the proper religious significance of something, the more likely it is to be tolerated in the public realm.

The fourth and most interesting factor stated by the Court is that when a monument, symbol, or practice has been around a substantial amount of time, removing it may not appear to be a neutral government act. In other words, removing something that has existed or that has been done for a significant amount of time would cause a reasonable observer to think the government was hostile to religion. The Court used the example of the prayer that has been offered at the opening of Congress for 200 years. This factor is interesting in that the courts have not traditionally focused on limiting government hostility towards religion, only on whether the government limited the exercise of religion in a non-neutral way. As we have previously noted in this rubric, the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* decision,⁶ in which the Court ruled in favor of a bakery charged with discrimination for refusing to create a cake with a pro-homosexual message, was also based on the state's hostility towards the baker's religion, not on the inher-

⁶ *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, 584 U.S. (2018)

ent rights of the baker. It will be interesting to note whether this focus continues in future cases.

At this point, it appears that the Court's analysis is only limited to longstanding, historic practices or monuments. Some of the justices appear to indicate in the *Bladensburg* cross case that they would abolish the *Lemon* test for other cases as well, and Justice Thomas stated as much. This, coupled with the shift in the majority voting on the Court, and the Court's interest in guarding against hostility towards religion, all demonstrate that there is still some defense for religious institutions, and churches in particular, against the rising tide of intolerance in the world today. Although this case is brought under Establishment Clause jurisprudence rather than the Free Exercise Clause, the same general arguments could be made.

Our churches have maintained the same doctrines and practices for many years. Under the analysis used by the Court in the *Bradenburg* cross case, once it is demonstrated that a doctrine or practice has a long-standing history in our churches, the burden should be on someone challenging that practice to show that they are motivated by something other than hostility towards our religion. It may be that the Lord provides a means such as this to allow us freedom to worship for a little while longer in the midst of a world that grows increasingly hostile towards His church.



News from our churches

Mr. Perry Van Egdome, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa

Trivia question

Do you know who represented the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines at the 2019 Synod of the PRCA? Answer and more, later in this column.

Mission activities

From the bulletin of Provident Christian Church in Marikina, the Philippines: "Last Wednesday, the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines Classis approved our request for membership in the PRCP! We rejoice and thank God for His goodness in guiding us to manifest the oneness of the church by joining the communion of Protestant Reformed Churches with

their sister churches throughout the world. May the Lord richly bless us as we dwell together in brotherhood from this time forward with the saints of the PRCP."

Provident makes the fourth church in the federation, joining the Berean PRC, the PRC of Bulacan, and Maranatha PRC in Valenzuela City. May God continue to bless the congregations, pastors, and officebearers in the Manila area, to His glory!

Congregational activities

From Byron Center PRC: "The Council of BC PRC would like to inform members of our denomination that on Sunday, July 7, our church began holding separate

worship services for members from our church hoping to form a daughter church. The worship services are being held at Zion Christian School in Byron Center, MI at 9:30 A.M. and 5 P.M.”

To obtain CDs or DVDs of the recent Dordt 400 Conference sponsored by the PR Theological Seminary, (dordt400.org) please send your request to trinityprc1@gmail.com.

Seminary activities

Seminarians M. Kortus and J. Maatman have been unanimously approved and declared to be candidates for the ministry of the Word in the PRC by Synod, eligible for a call beginning July 13. We rejoice with these brothers and their wives and families, and thank God for the gift of two more eligible pastor-teachers for the churches. As of July 14, they were on three trios: Immanuel, Hope (Redlands), and Southeast PRCs.

Minister activities

Rev. B. Huizinga (Redlands, CA) declined the call to Southeast PRC. Synod 2019 called Rev. Huizinga to replace Prof. Cammenga as Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament. Rev. C. Griess was chosen to be the alternate. On June 30 Rev. Huizinga announced God had led him to accept the call to the seminary. We are thankful for a clear indication of the Lord’s will. Let us remember him in our prayers.

Rev. R. Kleyn (Covenant of Grace, Spokane, WA) received the call to Southeast PRC (Grand Rapids, MI). On July 7 he declined this call.

The Council of Grandville PRC formed the following trio for minister-on-loan to Singapore: Revs. G. Eriks (Hudsonville), J. Engelsma (Doon, IA), B. Huizinga (Redlands, CA). On July 11, the congregation voted to call Rev. J. Engelsma.

Trivia answer

Rev. John Flores of the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan was the PRCP representative at the PRC Synod in June. This was the first time for Rev. Flores in the USA. When I asked him for his analysis of his trip he responded:

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here are some of my reports about my visit in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Thank you for this opportunity! This was my first time to set foot in the United States. After the flight of almost 20 hours (including a stop-over in Tokyo, Japan and Detroit), what I experienced back in 2007 when I visited Ireland happened to me again—jetlag! My body did not understand if I should be going

to sleep or not because I left at 8:00 in the morning and arrived in Grand Rapids at almost 5:00 in the evening, but it would then have been 5:00 in the morning in the Philippines. I was waking up at 3:00 in the morning, but it felt to me that my sleep and rest were complete. I experienced this for almost one week. The time difference between GR and Manila is 12 hours. So I could only talk with my family every morning and evening.

Because of my early arrival to the U.S. (Thursday), my adjustment to the climate was faster. I thought it was supposed to be summer weather, but when I arrived in GR, wow, the temperature was 18 degrees Celsius (64F). That is the cold temperature in the Philippines from December to February, but this was summer in Michigan! Yet I enjoyed the weather and the visit to Synod from June 12 to 17.

I was able to meet personally some of the officebearers of various churches of the PRCA, all of whom I knew only by name but just now was able to meet personally. During the meeting, I could see the orderliness and deliberation of the synodical delegates from the committee reports, protests, overture, examination of two students, and their graduation! I am thankful to Jehovah that in His providence I was able to visit the said meeting which truly encouraged me and enabled me to see the sweetness of what is said in Lord’s Day 21 about the communion of saints. I did not feel like a visitor or stranger at synod, but like a brother in Christ! Especially the hospitality that was shown to me by those who received me into their homes—Prof. and Mrs. R. Dykstra, Elder and Mrs. D. Kregel, and most especially the parents of Rev. Dan Holstege, Elder Jim and Kathi Holstege (Southeast PRC) who treated me like a son every day at their house—became a happy part of my life while in the United States.

It is my hope that such good relations will continue between the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines and the Protestant Reformed Churches in America through the sending of delegations to each other for the edification of the body of Christ, as it says in our confession, *that everyone must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members* (Lord’s Day 21, Q&A 55).

Thanks to Rev. Flores for this interesting report! More trivia next time.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:3

Announcements

Wedding anniversary

With thanksgiving we rejoice with our parents and grandparents, **Gaylen and Laura Te Slaa**, who will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary on August 28, 2019. We praise God for their years of marriage, lasting love, dedication to church and family, and Christ-centered home which has been a blessing to so many. “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them” (Psalm 103:17-18).

Jeff and Bethany Te Slaa

Todd and Karla VanBaren

Drake, Avery, and Cooper

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Annual meeting

The Annual Meeting of the RFPA is planned for September 26, at 7:30 P.M..

Teacher needed

The **Edmonton PR Christian School** is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2019–2020 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1–4, and the board is willing to work with the teacher on a curriculum suited to their preference. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com.

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 11, 2019, at 8:00 A.M., in the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 12, 2019.

Gary Boverhof, Stated Clerk

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Calvary PRC, Hull, Iowa, on Wednesday, September 25, 2019, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk 30 days before classis convenes, that is, by August 26, 2019. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Calvary’s consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Cory Griess

- August 4 “Total Depravity” (2)
John 6:44, 65-66
- August 11 “Irresistible Grace” (1)
John 6:37
- August 18 “Irresistible Grace” (2)
John 6:37
- August 25 “Preservation of the Saints” (1)
John 10:27-29