

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

April 1, 2019 • Volume 95 • No. 13

Salvation is of the Lord

Gerrit Vos

How could any Protestant go 'home' to Rome? (2)

Prof. Barrett Gritters

The Spirit's work of illumination

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Who am I?

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Therefore I have hope

Mr. Mark Feenstra



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.

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Subscription price

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

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Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRCA: www.prca.org

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Meditation

Gerrit Vos (1894-1968) was a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches and long-time contributor to the *SB*. This wonderful article was first published as a meditation in the June 15, 1948 issue of the *SB* (vol. 24, no. 18, pp. 409-411).

Salvation is of the Lord

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish; neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”

John 10:27-30

The occasion for these words of my text must be sought in the curing of the man who was born blind.

That this is so, is evident from the answer which Jesus gives when His disciples ask Him: “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?” To this query Jesus gives answer: “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.”

And then follows the curing of the man and the resultant struggle with the Pharisees. And these two events constitute a manifestation of the works of God: that is, the curing of God’s people from death to life and the hardening of the reprobates that stumble at the curative works of God. But both together in their relation to one another constitute the work of Jehovah God.

That this is so is further demonstrated at the end of the 9th chapter, where Jesus comes to the blind man and heals him spiritually, and where the formerly blind man worships Jesus. Then Jesus says: “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and they which see might be made blind.” And this fundamental statement of the works of God through Jesus is followed by the taunt of the reprobates: “Are we blind also?” And the answer of Jesus: “If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.”

And this manifestation of the works of God through Jesus, a work that is the saving of the blind, on the one hand; and the hardening of the reprobates who say they see, on the other hand, is carried on further by Jesus in chapter 10 by the preaching of a parable of the shepherd, the sheep, the door, the hireling and the wolves. Each has his proper place.

And my text constitutes the conclusion of that dis-

course of the sheep and the shepherd. You may also call it a restatement of the works of God.

And its theme is this: Salvation is of the Lord!

Salvation is of the Lord!

You hear of that wonderful truth in my text three times. Salvation is of the Lord! This truth is evident in the actions of the sheep, in the hand of the Good Shepherd, and in the almighty love of the triune God.

The sheep themselves show that it is God that worketh salvation.

They hear the voice of Jesus!

And that is a miracle.

No matter how sweet the voice of Jesus Christ, and no matter where and how He may speak, the natural tendency of our heart and mind is to stop our ears and to corrupt ourselves in the midst of this chorus of the voice of the Lord.

The speech of Jesus!

It is rich and manifold in form.

There is a universal speech of Jesus as He is the Logos in creation.

From the beginning of creation He has spoken in created things. See Psalm 19, Romans 1, and John 1.

Our fathers have listened to that speech of the Son of God in creation, and they have said of it that “the creation, preservation and government of the universe...is before our eyes as a most elegant book, where in all creatures, great and small, are so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, His power and divinity” [Belgic Confession, Art. 2].

And this book is written by Jesus Christ, but then as the Logos of creation: “And God said...”! The speaking voice of God is the eternal Son!

But who among men hears that voice of the Son?

None of us as we are by nature!

Oh yes, we notice the things which are characters in the book of God, and we take them and use them and enjoy (?) them, but without giving God the glory. Terrible thought: we will even use these things of God’s voice against Him! Thinking that we can make war against the God supreme!

Most wanton godlessness: not to listen to the voice of God's emissary.

And in the fullness of time the Voice of God came on earth, and He spoke again. And the words of Jesus are precious beyond compare.

They are different from the characters of the most elegant book of nature, and yet they are the same in essence. The Source is the same.

The difference lies in this, that this second speech of the Son of God is relative of the work of God in recreation, in the rebuilding and exaltation of all things.

If one thing was plain in the fullness of time it was this: humanity had corrupted its way in the earth.

And there comes Jesus in the midst of the darkness of man!

Listen, He is about to speak!

I am the Light of the world!

Do you see the similarity, and the difference?

Similarity, for God also said at the dawn of the history of the world: "Let there be light"!

Difference, for Jesus is the Light of the world in a spiritual sense. Paul spoke of it in II Corinthians: "For

God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts...." There is the difference! God spoke in the midst of the chaotic darkness, and the result was natural light for the natural world. God spoke again in the midst of the dark heart of man, and the result was spiritual light for the spiritual world of His good pleasure.

And the record of this speech of God anent [about] spiritual things is found in the Word of God, the Bible. It is the voice of Jesus.

And notice: it is of the Lord, whether you listen to His word in nature, or to His word in the realm of His kingdom. God speaks!

Without that voice the darkness remaineth.

Salvation is of the Lord!

And the miracle of salvation becomes manifest in this, that there are men who hear.

That is the miracle of grace in the heart of man.

Without that grace, you will always corrupt yourself, even in the midst of the beautiful symphony of the voice of God in Jesus Christ.

But when grace enters the heart, we take heed to

the voice of Jesus. We hear. My sheep hear my voice.

The objective voice of Jesus penetrates the hearts of man, illuminating him in that heart, so that he sees God in the face of Jesus Christ. Only if and when "God shines in our hearts," do we receive "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

The first fruit of such hearing of the voice of Jesus is regeneration. And regeneration is the light of the world in your heart, dispelling, centrally, the darkness of corruption. You become a new man in Christ.

And the second result is that you follow Him.

You leave the city of corruption and you begin your journey to the city of God, the New Jerusalem. And you will principally use all things to go to that City of God.

They leave the darkness, the sphere of guilt, doom, corruption and death, and they travel to the realm of light and truth, goodness and spiritual power, everlasting love of God and the life that is eternal.

For that is salvation.

Do you not see that salvation is of the Lord?

He found us in our darkness, and that is death and

corruption. And He speaks! And how He speaks. He speaks so that the dead hear His voice, and they leave the sepulcher, and are loosed from the grave clothes that bind them about. They shed them and walk. They see the light of His mercy, and they travel to the face, to the face of God. You cannot keep God's children from walking to heaven.

And going, travelling, marching to Zion, they sing: This God whom we see in the face of Jesus Christ, is the

strength of our strength! His is all the glory!

Salvation is of the Lord!

Salvation is of the Lord!

"And I know them!"

What unutterable sweetness is in these words! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, knows me!

This knowing is no mere intellectual knowing, but it is the same "knowing" of Romans 8. It is because of this "knowledge" wherewith God and Christ know us that we arrive in eternal glory. This knowledge is the beginning of the chain of salvation of Romans 8. "And whom he foreknew, he also did predestinate...."

Do you not see that salvation is of the Lord?

He found us in our darkness, and that is death and corruption. And He speaks! And how He speaks. He speaks so that the dead hear His voice, and they leave the sepulcher, and are loosed from the grave clothes that bind them about. They shed them and walk. They see the light of His mercy, and they travel to the face, to the face of God. You cannot keep God's children from walking to heaven.

Can you fathom this? Jesus knew His sheep from all eternity in a knowledge of indescribable love. He knew them so intently and so wonderfully that for the sake of the loving foreknowledge He went to hell for them.

And note that the loving knowledge wherewith Jesus knows His sheep is the manifestation of the love of God. Note that the “love of Christ” in verse 35 of Romans 8, becomes “the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus the Lord” in verse 39!

And it is because of this knowledge wherewith Jesus knows His sheep that “they shall not perish unto eternity”; you must read the text that way. They shall not perish unto all eternity, no, for Jesus did perish for them. He perished unto eternity, that is, He died the eternal death for them. You see: your Jesus is the Good Shepherd. And your negative pasture is this, that He died the death for His sheep.

It means that He took upon Himself all your guilt, and death, and damnation. And coming from the tomb, He sang into your ears: There is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Me! They shall nevermore die!

And no one shall be able to pluck them out of the hand of the Good Shepherd!

Who would attempt to do that?

Oh, but there are many that would if they could.

There is the devil and his devils.

They would love to pluck you out of the hand of the Shepherd.

Jesus has revealed to us that Satan would like to have sifted the apostle Peter as wheat is sifted. But Jesus prayed. And Peter stayed in the hand of the Shepherd. You can tell that. For when it seems as though Peter was lost, Jesus takes one look at him, and Peter weeps, he weeps bitterly and goes weeping into the night. Oh God, be merciful to me the sinner! It is the strength of the loving hand of Jesus that keeps Peter on the way to the city of God. Judas weeps too, but he takes the cord and hangs himself. And the deepest reason is that Jesus did not pray for Judas, did not know him in love, and did not prepare his pasture.

There is the world, inspired by the devil and his hosts of hell.

And they, too, would like to spoil the sheep of Christ with an eternal spoiling. They hate you, for you exhibit Jesus, and God. Him they hated before they hated you, and they hate you for His sake.

But Jesus has overcome the world, and He continues to overcome the world by the implanting of a living faith in your hearts. Your faith overcomes the world.

And so: the world is not able to pluck you out of the hand of Jesus.

And there is the power of sin in your heart, inspired by the world and the devil who dwell there by nature. And even though your inner heart is renewed by the power of grace of which we spoke above, there are the remnants of sin in your members, and they, too, would spoil you, and pluck you out of the hand of Christ. Let us put it this way: if Jesus did not hold you firmly in His hand, you, yourself, would try to get out of His hand! You, as you are by nature, are in league with the devil and the world he inspires.

But Jesus loves you, and He holds you. “The Lord my Savior holds me!” Remember how you sang that song? Well, He does. And He does it through the almighty power of His grace which becomes evident in faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God!

For: Salvation is of the Lord!

Salvation is of the Lord!

And I give unto them eternal life!

It is tantamount to saying, as He does later: “My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.”

Eternal life is to know God triune, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.

To have eternal life, therefore, is to have the knowledge of the living God in your inmost heart.

Eternal life is more than enduring life. Adam had this in Paradise. But he could lose it. And he did lose it. Moreover, it was only earthly knowledge of God.

Eternal life is to know God, deeper than Adam in Paradise. It is to know more of God’s virtues in a qualitative and also in a quantitative sense. Qualitative: we know God as the God of our salvation who would go to hell for us. I ask you: what did Adam know of that kind of a God? Quantitative: I ask you: what did Adam know of the riches of the wisdom and the power of God? Through the cross, as a prism, the “white” rays of the virtues of God are broken into the variegated beauties of the knowledge of God in goodness, patience, longsuffering, forgiveness, grace for grace, and what more would tell us of the story of the indescribable love of God in the face of His Son, groaning and crying in eternal darkness. Will you measure the greatness of the love of God? Well, go stand before the cross during the three hours darkness, and listen to the sighs of the Lamb.

Creation, history, providence, the Bible, Jesus and God triune unite to sing one song: Salvation is of the Lord! Are you prepared to sing its choruses? To do so is heaven.



Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

How could any Protestant go ‘home’ to Rome? (2)

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2019, p. 273.

Evangelical Protestants who can see their way clear to return to Roman Catholicism have let go of Protestantism. Although they identify as *Evangelicals*—*gospel* churches—they embrace theology that distances itself from being gospel and come closer to Rome. The ‘protest’ in *Protestant* first diminished to a whimper, then shifted to an apology for leaving Rome in the first place.

From the other side of the River Tiber (see the last editorial), Rome signals openness to unity talks. One hundred years ago Rome pulled up the drawbridge and closed the gates to conversations with Protestants, afraid such would water down their Catholicism. Now Rome signals readiness to talk because Protestantism is coming her direction. To put it straight up, Rome is ready to talk reconciliation not because she repents of her errors, but because she sees that her former adversaries are repenting of theirs. Welcome home to Rome.

Last time I explained Evangelicalism’s ability to look Rome-ward in her loss of the three marks of the true church. Our Belgic Confession (Art. 29) identifies the marks: Pure *preaching* of the gospel, proper administration of the *sacraments*, and right exercise of Christian *discipline*. It is possible to classify these marks in terms of 1) doctrine, 2) worship, and 3) church government. That is, the true church adheres to and preaches true *doctrine*; she engages in biblically governed *worship* (administering sacraments is an essential part of worship); and she exercises biblical *church government* (Christian discipline is an essential part of church polity). But Evangelicalism’s government is no longer biblical, her worship has become ungoverned, and her doctrine is Arminian or Pelagian like Rome’s.

In the last editorial, I explained Evangelicalism’s loss of the marks of proper worship and right government. Here, I emphasize her loss of truth.

Basic to Evangelicalism’s return to Rome is the overthrow of two key doctrines: *justification by faith alone* and the

bondage of the will. These two doctrines were at the heart of Protestantism’s protest against Rome. But over the last 100 years, most of Protestantism has adopted Rome’s teachings that justification is by faith *plus*, and that natural man has a *free* will.

If we in our generations will remain faithful to the Lord, we must first see *that* Evangelicalism relinquished these two doctrines. Wisdom compels us also to ask *how* that could have happened. Then, God permitting in His mercy, we may avoid the path that leads back toward Rome.

Justification by faith alone

Reformation teaching of justification is that our approval by God is by the gracious imputation of Christ’s righteousness alone through faith alone. Our righteousness is not at all based on our works but exclusively on the works and worth of Christ.

Rome, however, taught justification by faith *and our works*. Their entire system of doctrine was built on the error that the righteousness that makes us acceptable to God is given to us partly based on what *Christ* did and partly based on what *we* do, even if what we do (Rome says) is by Christ’s work in us. For Rome, our righteousness is partly from Christ’s obedience (*imputed* righteousness) and partly from our obedience (*infused* righteousness).

Today, Evangelicalism is overrun with Romish teachings. Man is justified by faith *and faithfulness*, by faith and faith’s *fruits, which are obedience*. Or, man is justified *now* by faith alone but justified in the *end* by faith and something more.

A sad but striking illustration of this is Bethlehem Baptist’s John Piper. Piper involves himself in Rome’s error when, in a foreword promoting another man’s book on justification, he says, “Be sure you hear this carefully and precisely: He says *right with God* by faith alone, not *attain heaven* by faith alone. There are other conditions for attaining heaven, but no others for entering a right relationship to God. In fact, one must al-

ready be in a right relationship with God by faith alone in order to meet the other conditions.” According to Piper, faith alone justifies, but other conditions he fulfills gets him to heaven. No works are conditions for justification, but works *are* conditions for other aspects of salvation, in this case glorification.

Piper writes this in his foreword to Thomas Schreiner’s *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification*.¹ This book that Piper promotes contains the same error. But the subtitle of the book is *What the Reformers Taught... and Why It Still Matters* and is one of a series on ‘The Five Solas’ of the Reformation. That is, the book purports to teach Reformation theology, but in fact is an attack on Reformation theology. It is endorsed by Albert Mohler, Jr. and the whole series is praised by Michael Horton. Is one permitted to wish that these men wrote the endorsements without reading the books? But who would do that? And these are the *teachers* of those few on the most conservative side of Evangelicalism still interested in reading theology.

The bondage of the will

Second, much of Evangelicalism denies the bondage of natural man’s will and teaches instead free will. Orthodox teaching holds that natural man’s will is in bondage to sin; his will can only will sin. Deliverance from this bondage is only by the regenerating Spirit of Jesus Christ to liberate the will so that it can truly desire good. Only Christians have wills delivered from this slavery; their wills are free (see the Canons of Dordt, III/IV, Arts. 11-16).

The importance of this teaching Luther expresses in his conversation with the heretic Erasmus in the book Luther considered to be his most important, *The Bondage of the Will*. Luther told Erasmus that the doctrines of purgatory, indulgences, even the papacy, were mere “trifles” compared to his doctrine of free will. “You alone have seen the hinge on which all turns, and aimed for the vital spot. For this I heartily thank you.” Luther believed *free will* to be the peculiar teaching of Antichrist by which he seduced the world. Free will is indeed the chief article of the Roman Catholic faith by which Rome undermines all other doctrine.

Evangelicalism betrays Reformed teaching in many ways, but especially two are crucial. First, by denying limited atonement and teaching that Christ died for all. If Evangelicals will claim to be Calvinist, most of them would call themselves *four-point* Calvinists. The point they cannot accept is limited atonement: Christ died for the elect and the elect alone. Instead they teach Christ’s

death for all. Thus, Evangelicalism cannot teach that Christ’s death is the ultimate reason for man’s salvation, since Christ died for all. Man’s own decision for Christ *by his own free will* is the ultimate reason for his salvation. A bound will cannot choose for Christ.

The other way Evangelicalism denies the bondage of man’s will is by teaching that God wills (wants) to save all men and invites all men to be saved if only *they* will (want to) be saved. Here too salvation then depends on man’s will—his free will. It does not depend on God’s will, for this theology has God willing that all men be saved. Probably man’s will is assisted by some enabling grace so that he can will to be saved. But this is no different from Rome’s old teachings and ends up in the same place: it is not the enabling grace that explains his decision for Christ, because others who have the same enabling grace do not make the right decision. In the end, salvation is by his own will, his free will.

Understand the importance of this doctrine and you will understand why Dordt was truly the safeguarding of the Reformation, in that Dordt reestablished and clarified the doctrine of man’s natural bondage to sin.

J.I. Packer wrote a fine introduction to one translation of Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*. Sadly, this author of sound and influential books has changed and become one of the most prominent Evangelical signers of the ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together) statements of faith.

Evangelicalism is changing, *actually* changing. Most of her members would not admit this, or do not realize this, but they are becoming Rome-like.

Rome’s theological shapeshifting

Rome, on the other hand, does not change. She makes a *show* of changing, of moving toward Evangelicalism. She is willing to dialogue about theology with Protestantism now. She is willing to say that she repents of old errors. But her repentance is merely of failing to be evangelical (do evangelism), or of being weak in practice, or of lacking zeal. Hers is not a godly sorrow for teaching gross and God-dishonoring errors. She will not admit that the Reformation was God’s necessary instrument to preserve *Christianity* itself by reformation of *doctrine*.

Rome ‘shapeshifts.’ In order to lure gullible Evangelicals to “the door of her house” without them knowing that her “end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword” (Prov. 5:4, 8), Rome makes herself out to be something other than she actually is.

In ancient mythology, certain creatures were able, by supposed divine abilities or magic, to make themselves appear as some other creature. If you watch only news or sports on television, the advertisements between seg-

1 Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015, 11.

ments make clear enough that Western culture is obsessed with the possibility of shapeshifting. But Christians must remember the false *church* can shapeshift. “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, *transforming* themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is *transformed* into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be *transformed* as the ministers of righteousness...” (II Cor. 11:13-15, emphasis added). It would not be far off to translate *transformed* as “shapeshifted.” Such is the ability of the false church.

Evangelicals cannot recognize the shapeshifting

Evangelicals meander toward the false church like the foolish young man to the honeycombed lips of the strange woman. And Evangelical leaders lure them by repeating Rome’s smoother-than-oil lies: “some divisions are the result of confusion, or of historical arguments burdened by the history that shaped them” (no longer applicable), and in these areas “real breakthroughs are possible.”² They tell members that “other divisions may be irreconcilable,” but even here “serious theological dialogue [I have come to despise that expression in these contexts, because it is a smokescreen] about them has the capacity to deepen appreciation for both sides.” ECT proclaims to Evangelicals, awed by the grandeur of Rome, “we are not as divided as we may have thought.” Any lingering doubts are dispelled in this way: “Divisions that remain are not enough to keep us and Rome apart because at the top of our mutual agenda, truly, are not those old, divisive doctrinal concerns at all, but the far greater and pressing social problems of the world.”

The note of sarcasm in the previous paragraph—usually unbecoming of Christians—is intended only to call attention to the sarcasm with which the ECT writers speak as they celebrate their 20th anniversary: “It should come therefore as good news to Christians everywhere that two communities in North America, who throughout our history have regarded one another with mistrust—[cue sarcasm] *sometimes even competing for the hearts and minds of converts*—have sought to repair the wound of disunity.” The sarcasm (literally, to cut flesh) on their part is to lacerate any of you who imagine that in those days long past it might have been proper to seek to convert a Roman Catholic to Protestantism. Imagine!

Their shapeshifting strategy includes other elements: First, they misapply Scripture to describe their ecumenical efforts. Here is the ECT’s own defense of friendly dialogue between Evangelicals and Catholics:

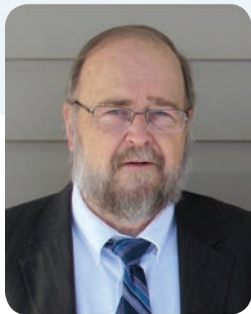
There is good precedent for fellowship...Christians have been discussing the significance of Jesus Christ since he rose from the dead. ‘That very day’—the day of Jesus’s resurrection—two of his disciples were on a seven mile trek from Jerusalem to Emmaus. While they were walking, they were ‘talking with each other about all these things had happened.’ ... Two thousand years later, ECT has picked up the discussion about Jesus and his significance for today.

Second, emboldened by how naïve some are, they openly lie about the doctrinal stands of historic Roman Catholicism. With feigned surprise, they express disbelief that anyone thinks Rome ever erred on justification. “The most ancient and deepest strains of catholic teaching never intended to affirm justification by works alone.” *By works alone?* Of course not. Neither does Rome presently. Neither did Rome at the Reformation. But that was *never* the Reformers’ charge.

Third, using an old tactic, ECT re-names theological differences “differences of expression.” They are merely different ways of expressing the same thing. They use Rome’s Latin expression, translated “diverse but not adverse.” That is, our forms of expression may be *different*, but they are not *opposed*. Catholics and Evangelicals believe the same thing; they just say it differently. Historically, that is a lie. Presently, it comes closer and closer to reality.

Finally, ECT borrows a page from the Arminians’ playbook at Dordt. When they came to their fifth doctrinal point, regarding preservation of the saints, the Remonstrants pretended to punt, as it were: “We need more time. We’re not sure about this. Further study will bring us to a good answer for you.” In the same way, ECT concludes on justification: “Discussion is yet needed on whether justification is by imputed righteousness or transformative righteousness, and what it means that the faith that justifies is never alone.” If you believe that, you would do well to remember the Arminians at Dordt.

² This, and much information for this article, are from the pro-ECT book, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together at Twenty: Vital Statements on Contested Topics*, eds., Timothy George and Thomas Guarino (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015).



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Thomas Miersma, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Of folly manifested and the ruler

Previous article in this series: March 1, 2019, p. 260.

Ecclesiastes 10:4-7

The folly of sin becomes manifested in the world under the sun as it strives with the boundaries God has set in this life. To show this, Solomon who was himself king, turns first to the sphere of earthly government. But before turning to the folly “which proceedeth from the ruler” (Eccl. 10:5), he begins with an admonition in the text to one standing under the ruler as the servant, citizen, or counselor of the king. Both are sinners inclined to folly.

“If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences” (Eccl. 10:4).

The picture is of one who has offended or is perceived to have offended, so that the spirit of the ruler rises against him in anger and displeasure. As the text speaks of “great offences,” we may assume here that the displeasure of the ruler is just. It is the folly of the counselor or servant who has a place in the ruler’s presence. What is the way of folly, the way of sin, in such a situation? The temptation is to justify oneself out of a spirit of rebellion, to strive, to make excuses, to blame the ruler. In the figure, it is to rise up and leave one’s place.

The calling of those under authority is the opposite: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation” (Rom. 13:1, 2). The calling of those under authority is submission in all lawful things, according to the Word of God. The Word of God does not command cowardly action nor false compromise, but a lawful submission to authority.

When that spirit of the ruler rises in displeasure against one, especially for just reason, the way of wisdom is not the way of our sinful inclination to rebellion and stubbornness, but to yield and submit. In doing so,

we keep our place, yield to authority to receive rebuke, and accept judgment. This is the way of meekness before authority and before God. Pride would lead us in the opposite direction. But the ruler is set there by God, and his authority is derived from the One who placed him in his office. Rebellion is, therefore, also a striving against God. It is folly.

The way of wisdom, of yielding, “pacifieth great offences.” Yielding quiets the anger, prevents the quarrel from escalating, and seeks to restore peace. It is the way of laboring to remove the offense, that it should not become greater still. Thus we read, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up strife” (Prov. 15:1). We live in a world where the striving of those in power, among themselves or those under authority with them, predominates in civic life. The tongue of men is given to slander and contention. Men come with grievous words, with the goal of mastery over one another and stirring up strife. This works violence and disorder in society. It is the way of the fool who “saith to every one that he is a fool” (Eccl. 10:3). As sin develops under the sun unto the day of final judgment, the way of a child of God, which is that of wisdom, becomes increasingly difficult. Our calling is still, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18).

With that admonition and instruction, the Word of God turns to the ruler, for he is also a sinner and by nature given to folly: **“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, as an error which proceedeth from the ruler; folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth”** (Eccl. 10:5-7).

The rulers in Solomon’s day, whether in Israel or among the nations surrounding them, were sovereign monarchs, hereditary kings. Our more democratic and republican forms of government did not exist in the Middle East. The principle issues, however, are the

same, whatever form the role of the ruler and those in authority may take. Nor is it to the personal lives of kings to which we are pointed here in this description, but as they stand in positions of power under the sun, that is, to their rule and government. Solomon is again directing us to what he has observed. Where a human ruler in authority is to be found, a sinner is found, and with him the folly of sin by nature. Even a good ruler, held in reputation and honor like a good ointment, is subject to folly (Eccl. 10:1-3).

The “error” mentioned that proceeds from the ruler is one of wandering out of the way. That is, it is a departure from wisdom and judgment, a turning from the order of things that rest upon what God has ordained. God gives men gifts of wisdom and prudence, judgment and discernment. It is in that positive sense that we must understand the “rich” here in the text. They are rich through such gifts, not out of covetousness and greed, but by wisdom and prudence under the sun. They are, therefore, men of discernment who should be honored and received as counselors. The fool is self-willed, a profligate waster, a man without good sense. When the ruler sets such a fool in a place of great dignity and honor while the rich are set in a low place, the order of things is turned upside down.

The long-term result is the destruction of the kingdom. The monarch is to seek the welfare of the kingdom and its citizens. His authority is to be exercised for the good of those under him and not for his own grandeur and glory. The error is no different, when in our democratic context, fools are elected to govern in the world rather than those who are sober and have discernment.

At issue in the text is the error of setting such fools in a position of power and influence. It is the ruler who has power to appoint them, to select them in preference to wise men, and to give them honor. It is the ruler who is out of the way. In our context of voting men into office, one would have to say that, in many respects, the error proceeds from the voter as well as those in direct power and authority. When the vain and foolish, the workers of iniquity rule, the end is destruction. God is against them that do evil. Because “righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34), wickedness destroys them. Behind what can be seen under the sun is the working of God’s almighty power and judgment, His wrath against sin, which gives men

over to folly. The text does not dwell on this, though it assumes we understand it.

Rather, the text points us to the effect of this state of affairs, under the sun. **“I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth”** (Eccl. 10:7). This is the result of the folly of sin. Princes in the text are not the spoiled nobility of a corrupt kingdom, but those who are raised up to rule and judge with equity while the servant is not. The picture is again of folly that turns good order upside down, so that things are out of their proper place. Those qualified to rule and exercise authority are rejected, relegated to a low place, and made to walk on foot, while the fool and the servant are exalted and ride on horses. They have power and influence that is unfitting and for which they are unqualified. They have an honor and dignity that only fools in them pride and more folly.

Yet, what Solomon says is what he has seen in the earth; it is what happens. Nor is it something that works anyone’s good. The folly involved will not end well for the kingdom. What is seen is sin and folly working through in the life of men. As it is also from the hand of God, it is a token of His judgment upon sin.

Since we also see these things under the sun, we are called to contemplate them and understand what we are seeing. The same principles and warning the Word of God applies to other spheres of authority—to marriage and family, to employer and employee, and to the life of the church. Also in the rule of the church, when there is a spiritual decline, the same working of folly leads the church in the way of worldlimindedness, an unwholesome respect of persons and doctrinal drift. Walking circumspectly in a sinful world and having a regard for God-ordained authority, while confronting the reality of sinful folly seen before us, is a sober calling. As the fool lurks in our own sinful flesh, it must needs lead us to prayer and watchfulness in the battle of faith.

Walking circumspectly in a sinful world and having a regard for God-ordained authority, while confronting the reality of sinful folly seen before us, is a sober calling. As the fool lurks in our own sinful flesh, it must needs lead us to prayer and watchfulness in the battle of faith.



Taking heed to the doctrine

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

Revelation, inspiration, and infallibility (26)

The Spirit's work of illumination

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2019, p. 208.

The Holy Spirit and the Scriptures

Scripture is the Word of God—the Word of God in the words of men. Because Scripture is the Word of God, it partakes of the attributes of God. In the last several articles, we have considered together the outstanding attributes of Scripture. Included in the attributes of Scripture are its authority, necessity, perspicuity, sufficiency, and trustworthiness.

There is one important subject to which we must yet give our attention before concluding this series on “Revelation, Inspiration, and Infallibility.” That is the subject of *illumination*—an important work of the Holy Spirit in connection with the written Word of God.

The Spirit is the bridge, if you will, between the Bible and the Christian's understanding, believing, and bowing before Scripture as the infallibly inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God. No one will and no one *can* understand the Scriptures except the Holy Spirit opens his eyes, enlightens his mind, and softens his heart. Scripture may very well be the Word of God, but apart from the Spirit's work of illumination, Scripture remains a dead letter—merely words on paper—to those who do not enjoy this work of the Holy Spirit.

There are a number of works of the Holy Spirit in connection with Holy Scripture. We should expect this inasmuch as the Holy Spirit is *the breath* of God and Scripture is God-breathed. The Spirit moved men to write down the Holy Scriptures, so that what they wrote as not their own words but the very Word of God. Peter says that “holy men of God spake *as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” (II Pet. 1:21). Sometimes we think only of this work of the Holy Spirit in giving us the sacred Scriptures. Important though the work of inspiration was, if this is the only work of the Holy Spirit in connection with the Scriptures of which we think, we do not do justice to the work of the Holy Spirit. There is more, so much more.

That more includes the Spirit's preparation of the men whom He moved to write the Holy Scriptures. He caused them to be born into the families in which they were—where they were born, when they were born, to whom they were born. He guided their upbringing and education, molding each man to become one whom the Holy Spirit would use in the writing of the Scriptures. Their background and personal life experiences were all used by the Holy Spirit to prepare them individually to be the instruments of inspiration.

The Holy Spirit worked to compile the various writings of the Old Testament, the gospel accounts, the epistles of the apostles, and the writings of the other human writers of the New Testament. The Spirit also worked in the church recognition of the canonical books of the Bible. There were other books and epistles written by leaders in the church, like Paul's epistle to the Laodiceans (Col. 4:16) and his epistle to the Corinthians, besides the two that are part of the canon of the New Testament (I Cor. 5:9). But over time, the Holy Spirit made known to the church the books that were to be included in the Holy Scriptures. Throughout history the Holy Spirit has worked to preserve the sacred Scriptures, also through the process of translation, so that the church throughout the world and to the end of time would have and have access to the Word of God.

Included with all these other works of the Holy Spirit, there is also the work of the Spirit that we refer to as *illumination*. This is a necessary, even an indispensable work of the Holy Spirit. If there is no illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit's work in inspiration is in vain. Scripture is the Word of God objectively; but Scripture must be the Word of God *to me* and *to you* personally. It must be the Word of God to every member of the church, from the minister and theologian to the youngest child in our covenant families. Apart from this work of the Spirit, the Scriptures remain forever a

closed book. Our understanding of Scripture and belief of Scripture is the direct fruit of the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

John Calvin makes reference to this work of the Holy Spirit early in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in the section in which he treats the doctrine of Holy Scripture. Says Calvin:

The testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded (*Institutes*, 1.7.4; 1:79).

The necessity of the Spirit's work of illumination

The necessity of the illuminating work of the Spirit is the depravity of the natural man. Our total depravity—the extent of our sinfulness—requires the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. The effect of the Fall is that our nature has become corrupt. Our nature is *entirely* corrupt. The Canons of Dordt, Heads III/IV, Article 1, describes the condition of fallen man. As a result of the Fall, man has forfeited all the excellent gifts of God with which he was endowed at his creation, “and on the contrary entailed on himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity and perverseness of judgment, became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in all his affections.”

Although the Scriptures are the Word of God in Jesus Christ, and although God's revelation is clear, we cannot understand the Scriptures nor believe them as we are in ourselves. Our condition is analogous to that of a blind man. Put a flashlight (“torch,” for the sake of our British friends) into the hands of a blind man, and no matter how strong the beam of light that is emitted by the flashlight, the blind man cannot see. The problem is not with the flashlight, but the problem is with the man holding the flashlight. He cannot see; he is blind. Something must happen to correct the man's

blindness, or the flashlight will do him no good. His eyes must first be opened. First he must be delivered from his blindness, and then the flashlight will be of use to him. So it is also with the spiritual condition of the natural man. Something is required in us and upon us if we are going to receive God's revelation in Scripture. If the Scriptures are to be of any saving benefit to us, God must deliver us from our spiritual blindness.

God does this by the Holy Spirit. What is required is the illuminating or enlightening work of the Holy Spirit. This belongs to regeneration. The regenerating work of the Holy Spirit includes illumination. Whom the Holy Spirit regenerates, He also enlightens. When He makes us alive again, raising us up from our spiritual death, He gives sight to our eyes and understanding to our minds. Ultimately, our blindness is due to the fact that we are by nature dead, spiritually dead. When the Holy Spirit gives us new life, He also causes our eyes to see. Now we behold what before we could not see—behold it in all its splendor and glory. Now the truth of God is made clear

When the Holy Spirit gives us new life, He also causes our eyes to see. Now we behold what before we could not see—behold it in all its splendor and glory. Now the truth of God is made clear to us, and God's Word becomes an open book. Apart from this work of the Holy Spirit we are like the members of the church of the Laodiceans, about whom the apostle writes in Revelation 3:17 that thou “knowest not that thou are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

to us, and God's Word becomes an open book. Apart from this work of the Holy Spirit we are like the members of the church of the Laodiceans, about whom the apostle writes in Revelation 3:17 that thou “knowest not that thou are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” And here the saying applies that they are never so blind as those who will not see. That is man's natural condition. That

is the extent of our sinfulness. And this is the need that we have of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.

Illumination in Scripture

The Scriptures speak often of the Spirit's work of illumination. In Psalm 119:18 the prayer of the psalmist is, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.” His prayer arises out of the deep awareness that apart from God's opening of his eyes, he will not understand the Scriptures. God must open his eyes. And with his eyes opened by God, he will behold “wondrous things” out of God's Word. God will answer his prayer for illumination; of this he is confident.

Jesus speaks of this work of the Holy Spirit when

He teaches His disciples that after His departure from them, He will send forth His Spirit. The Spirit “shall testify of me” and “shall receive of mine, and shall show you things to come” (John 15:26, 27; 16:13-15). The Spirit would guide Jesus’ disciples into all truth. Jesus is speaking of His disciples’ enjoyment of the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

The apostle makes reference to this work of the Holy Spirit in I Corinthians 2:9-16. The apostle declares that “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him,” (v. 9). He goes on to say, “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (v. 10). The Spirit works in us “that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (v. 12) and teaches us “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (v. 13). This work of the Spirit is absolutely necessary, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned” (v. 14). And he concludes this glorious section of his epistle on the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit with these words, “But we have the mind of Christ” (v. 16).

In his epistle to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul speaks of the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit. It is his prayer to God that the Ephesians might enjoy this work of the Holy Spirit. He says in Ephesians 1:16 that he does not “cease...to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.” And what is his prayer to God on behalf of the members of the church at Ephesus? The answer is found in verses 17 and 18, “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of all glory, may give unto you the spirit [should be a capital “S” on “spirit”] of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” The Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. He is the one who opens the eyes of our understanding so that we are enlightened. By opening the eyes of our understanding, He causes us to understand the wisdom contained in revelation, that is, the revelation of God in Holy Scripture. Thus we know the hope of our calling

and the riches of the glory of His inheritance. Such is the meaning of the apostle.

In I John 2, the apostle writes of the unction (anointing) of the Holy Spirit that God’s regenerated people receive, whereby “ye know all things” (v. 20). He goes so far as to say in verse 27, “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.” Such is the anointing of the Spirit that they who have this anointing—and every regenerated child of God does—need not that any man should teach them. That is not to deny the teaching ministry of the church, or the need of covenant parents to instruct their children in the fear of the Lord. Not at all. John is himself instructing the church here and gives the members of the church further instruction throughout this first epistle, as also in his other epistles. But it is to do justice to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in the child of God. By the Spirit, the eyes of our understanding are opened so that we understand the things of the Word of God.

This illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is illustrated in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. He read the Holy Scripture in Isaiah 53, but he did not understand. It was only when the Spirit opened his eyes, through the ministry of Philip the evangelist, that he understood what he read. It is very significant that this episode begins with the notice that “the Spirit said unto

Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot” (v. 26). Clearly, the Spirit used the ministry of Philip, but He used the ministry of Philip as a means. It was the Spirit Himself who opened the eyes of the Ethiopian eunuch’s understanding so that he grasped what he was reading in sacred Scripture.

Our Reformed confessions make reference to the Holy Spirit’s work of illumination. That is where we will begin next time.

The Spirit is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. He is the one who opens the eyes of our understanding so that we are enlightened. By opening the eyes of our understanding, He causes us to understand the wisdom contained in revelation, that is, the revelation of God in Holy Scripture. Thus we know the hope of our calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance.



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Protestant Reformed missions

The war years: Mission work flounders (1940-1946) (3)

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2018, p. 91.

We concluded our last article stating that a rift had developed between the eastern and western branches of the Mission Committee. The synod of the PRC had decided that in order to keep the western churches of our denomination actively involved in the life and work of the churches the Mission Committee be divided into two branches, the majority branch from the East and a secondary one from the West. Tension between these two divisions existed from the start but came to a head when the eastern branch decided to approach Synod of 1946 with a proposal to conduct mission work in China. It was not that this idea of foreign mission work was a brain-child of the Mission Committee. Synod 1944 mandated the Mission Committee to look into the feasibility of this matter. The rift between eastern and western branches of the Mission Committee occurred because the eastern branch was recommending mission work in China on its own, *without the approval or input of the western branch*, so it was contended.

Now, this may seem as if it was an appalling breach of brotherly conduct, until we place it in proper perspective. The eastern branch had sent their recommendations concerning China to the western branch for its consideration some months prior to the decision of the eastern branch to go to synod with those recommendations. The western branch had never responded. In fact, it was seven months after the reorganization of the Mission Committee into two branches that the western branch met for the first time in a formal meeting with recorded minutes. This meeting took place on January 20, 1946, only a few months prior to the convening of synod of that year. (These are the only available minutes of that western branch of the Mission Committee.) The eastern branch was merely pushing on with the work, believing that silence on the part of the western branch was consent.

Suddenly, the onus of the rift between East and West seems to fall on the western branch of the Mission

Committee! But we may not be so quick to blame this branch either. If you recall a couple of articles ago when commenting on the new makeup of the Mission Committee, I said it was a formula for disaster. It was! It was first of all, when dividing the Mission Committee into primary and secondary branches. But the main objection to dividing the committee into two branches can be found in the division itself! It may be hard for us to imagine today, but 70 years ago they did not have the modern technology at their fingertips as we do today. No one had a cell phone, texting, or face-time. They did not even have computers and email. Yes, they had rotary telephones (the older generation will remember these), but one had to pay for long-distance calls—and they were expensive. Transportation itself was not as convenient as it is today. People did not book a flight on the Internet, hop on a plane, and arrive at their destination in a couple of hours. Some of the men serving on the western branch of the Mission Committee lived 300 miles away from the others. These men could not hold meetings over the phone or Internet. They had to set up a meeting, drive or take a train to their meeting place, then return home again in the same way. It would be harsh to judge these men for not meeting often enough to keep up with the men on the eastern branch who lived near each other.

There was a joint meeting of the two branches of the Mission Committee on April 4, 1946, during which a general discussion was held on the eastern branch's proposal to work in China and the western branch's objection to this. After this discussion, the proposal of recommending to synod a foreign mission work in China was put to a vote and passed by majority vote. The entire western branch "dissented" from this decision and wished to have their negative vote recorded in the minutes.¹ It was decided by the Mission Committee to

1. MC minutes, Art. XV, 134.

send to synod the minutes of the January 20 meeting of the western branch in order that synod would be aware of its objections when voting on the matter of starting a work in China.²

But there is more. Three overtures regarding mission work were submitted to the Synod of 1946 by various consistories, two of which addressed the matters of friction in the Mission Committee. The consistory of Pella, Iowa overtured synod through Classis West, protesting the ill treatment of the western branch of the Mission Committee by the eastern branch, and protesting beginning a work in China.³ The consistory of Grand Haven, Michigan sent an overture “to return to the former situation in which our Mission Committee was chosen from the Eastern branch of our churches.”⁴ The matter of disagreement within the Mission Committee, therefore, loomed large at the Synod of 1946.

Three issues needed resolving at this synod.

1. The issue of whether our churches ought to engage in foreign mission work, and, if so, should that work be in China. In our last article we pointed out that this was the intent of the eastern branch of the Mission Committee. We included in that article their grounds for a work in China. The western branch dissented from this decision for three reasons.⁵ First, the western branch believed the eastern branch ignored the western branch in coming to its decision. Second, the western branch did not have enough information, since the eastern branch did not send the reports and findings of their investigation into a work in China. Third, the western branch desired that our Mission Committee study the possibility of aiding the *Gereformeerde Kerken* of the Netherlands especially in their work in the East Indies. It was also the desire of the western branch to gain information from the Netherlands churches concerning their mission work, especially in the East Indies. This would be a better future foreign mission work for the Protestant Reformed Churches than China. For these reasons the western branch urged synod to reject the recommendation of the eastern branch.

The Synod of 1946 considered additional objections raised in the overture from Pella PRC and the decisions of Classis West regarding that overture. Pella contended first of all that, when the eastern branch of the Mission Committee passed its motion to recommend to synod China as a foreign mission field, it did so, “with-

out any consultation with the Western Division of our Mission Committee.” Pella continued, “We believe that our Western Churches should have representation when such weighty matter as Foreign Missions...is discussed and recommended to Synod.” In the second place, Pella Consistory pointed out what it saw as a fallacy regarding the recommendation of China as a mission field: “This [the eastern branch’s recommendation] does not mention the possibility of fields, for instance, in South America, or in the Netherlands East Indies, or the Canadian field where thousands of Hollanders are being urged to settle permanently.”⁶

Classis West responded to this overture of Pella with its own instruction to this Consistory, as well as with advice to synod. The instruction to the Consistory, though touching a sore spot, was entirely correct. First, “The Western Branch of the Mission Committee does not represent the churches of Classis West, but is a committee of Synod.”⁷ Pella was wrong to take offence of what had transpired in the Mission Committee as if it were an affront to all the churches in Classis West. Classis West also informed Pella, in the second place, “In connection with what Pella says regarding Canadian immigration of Hollanders, we would say that this belongs to Home Mission or Church Extension work.” Again, Classis West was correct. Work in Canada among Dutch people was not a foreign mission work. It did accurately fit what our churches defined as home mission work; it was church extension or church reformation work. It must be noted too at this point that work among the Dutch immigrants in Canada would become the focus of Protestant Reformed missions in the late 1940s and early 1950s—something that eventually would contribute to a split in our denomination.

At the prompting of Pella’s overture, Classis West also brought to the 1946 Synod its own objections concerning work in China. These were different from those of Pella and the western branch of the Mission Committee. First, it was the conviction of Classis West that the eastern branch did not carry out the mandate of Synod 1944 to investigate *first* support of an existing reputable foreign mission work. Second, it was the conviction of Classis West that the eastern branch did not prove that our denomination was numerically and financially strong enough to support a continued foreign mission project of our own. Further, Classis West contended that the grounds given by the eastern branch of the Mission Committee for a labor in China were weak.

This was the first issue before Synod of 1946.

2 PRC Acts, 1946, 66.

3 PRC Acts, 1946, 70-73.

4 PRC Acts, 1946, 26, 27.

5 Minutes of their January 20, 1946 meeting found on pages 66-68 of the 1946 Acts.

6 PRC Acts, 1946, 70.

7 PRC Acts, 1946, 71.

2. The second issue that needed resolving at synod was the present division of the Mission Committee into the eastern and western branches. It was clear that the present status of the committee was faulty. The complaints of the western branch against the eastern, though not entirely justified, did point out that the present structure would only lead to more disagreement and strife. This was shown by the overture of Pella too. But it was actually by way of an overture from the Consistory of Grand Haven PRC through Classis East that the matter of a change in the make-up of the Mission Committee was forced upon synod. The Consistory of Grand Haven proposed, first of all, “that Synod appoint a Mission Committee of not less than five members from the Western Churches...and that the labors of this committee shall be for church extension work only.” In the second place, “that Synod appoint a calling church within the western Classis for the purpose of calling a missionary to labor in the West, such labor to be in the interest of church extension work only.” Then finally, “that Synod retain the Eastern committee of five mem-

bers for other mission activities such as foreign and domestic mission work.”⁸ Classis East, after consideration of this overture, sent its own overture to synod: “to appoint the Mission Committee from one Classis and instruct Synod to revise the constitution accordingly.”⁹

3. The third issue before Synod 1946, in light of the overtures, was to choose a calling church for a missionary. The western churches leaned heavily in favor of appointing a calling church from the West and doing mission work in the West. With this there was a strong pull to establish the Mission Committee in the West. Certainly, there was some tension on the floor of the Synod of 1946 when Rev. G. Vos began the proceedings on June 5th of that year. Would synod be able to settle the differences and maintain peace in our churches’ mission work?

We will consider the decisions of synod in our next article.

⁸ The above quotations are found on page 35 of the 1946 *Acts*.

⁹ PRC *Acts*, 1949, 36.



Strength of youth

Rev. Jon Mahtani, pastor of the Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church in Dyer, Indiana

Who am I?

“...God, whose I am, and whom I serve.”

Acts 27:23b.

“Who am I?” This is the second most important question to ask and answer. Now and throughout all of life, every morning when you awake, every night before you go to sleep, and before every decision you make between waking and sleeping, you should be answering this question of self-identity.¹ But before asking ourselves this, we must be aware of the *first* most important question, which is “*Who is God?*” Catechism students studying the “Essentials of Reformed Doctrine” will recognize this if they remember the six loci of Reformed doctrine, the *first* being Theology, which answers this

question. Let us be sure to start here. Begin with this question every day, for if you do not first know who God is, you will “mess up” the knowledge of who you are. Only in keeping that crucial knowledge of God’s identity in mind will one rightly answer the *second* most important question—number two of the six loci (Anthropology)—“*Who am I?*”

Even secular, modern psychology today recognizes the critical necessity of self-awareness. The world and its professional (and unprofessional) counselors say things such as, “He’s just trying to figure out who he is”; or “Give her a break. She’s still searching for what her identity is”; or “Be yourself. Don’t try to be someone else.” There is some truth to these claims. Major social and emotional problems arise when young people grow physically but lag in their knowledge of who they are. Self-identity affects your direction in life, your pursuits of higher education and occupation, major decisions

¹ The idea for this article came from a chapter in David Murray’s book *Reset: Living a Grace-Paced Life in a Burnout Culture*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 106.

about whom to date and marry, your confidence level, happiness, friendships, and overall behavior.

While the world and today's psychologists realize the need to answer this crucial question, most have erroneous methods of finding an answer. To the question "Who am I?" the answer is often determined this way: "Whatever my feelings tell me." The result is confusion. One extreme example of this is the LGBTQ movement. "Who am I? Man, Woman, or something else?" And the answer given is essentially, "You are what you feel." Feeling autonomous, man foolishly imagines that he determines his own gender by his feelings.

But what about you? Do you use the method of feelings to answer the second most important question also? As a senior colleague of mine puts it, "Feelings are real, but they are not the source of truth."

High school and college cultures are breeding grounds for many wrong methods of finding an answer to this question. "Who am I?" The answer, though often unspoken, is, "I am what others think of me." What folly it is to have your identity sway with the fickle opinions and judgments of the masses! While there might be some truth in what others think, lies abound. Do skewed standards of beauty get to determine whether you are beautiful? Do opinions shaped by gossip get to determine if you have good character? If people think your identity should be a cool drunk or conceited flirt, is that who you are? Is that how you should behave? Absolutely not! We may not and must not be defined by what others think of us.

There are many wrong ways to determine who you are. Your own feelings and the feelings of others are unreliable. Basing it on your appearance in the mirror is also a faulty manner. Acne, hair-styles, scars, tanning, piercings, sickness, pregnancy, make-up, aging, and any change of your appearance does not change who you are! Your perceived status as you work quietly to beat others in this over-competitive culture does not determine who you are. The troubling memory of past sins repented of is not your identity.

Men often define themselves by what they *do*. "Who am I?" The male mind generally answers: "Student-athlete." "Ford pickup driver." "Hard worker." Approach an adult man at church and ask him to introduce himself. Most likely, after giving his name, he will give his job description. However, while one's deeds do demonstrate his identity, they do not determine who he is! A student-athlete does not become someone else when he graduates from school and stops playing sports. A Ford pickup driver does not become someone else because he totals his truck and gets a Toyota. A hard-working man

does not become someone else if he gets fired and is forced to change occupations.

While this is often true of men, women generally define themselves by their *earthly relationships*. Ask a woman to describe who she is, and she will probably (after giving her name) explain who her husband is and who her children, parents, and friends are. However, while these relationships do affect one's identity, they should not be of primary consideration. What if friends betray you? What if you move out of town and find new friends? What happens when your relationships end with death? Does your identity change?

Beware. Satan is in the business of a kind of identity theft. He does not hack and phish to steal our driver's license and Social Security numbers, date of birth, and other personal information to ruin our finances and reputation. But instead he engages in the identity theft of stealing from our consciousness the true knowledge of who we are. Through pride, busyness, opinions of others, worldly ideas, disappointments, and sins, he is working to distract us from the true and significant answers to this vital question.²

To find the correct answers to this second most important question, we must consider not what we think of ourselves but what God thinks of us. We are not what we have made ourselves to be, but what God has made us to be.

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! (Ps. 139:14-17).

A better way to phrase this question is, "Who am I in God's eyes?" Consider four of the most important answers.

I am chosen by God in love. Election is not just a doctrine. It is not meant to be a mere intellectual answer. It is the deepest truth of who I am! Out of the billions of sinful specks of mankind, He chose me by name—not because I was better than the rest but because in His mysterious good pleasure, He loves me. Will that ever change? No! Even if no one chooses to marry me, even if I am not chosen for a specific team or job, even if all choose to forsake me, I must always remind myself that I am chosen by God in His love.

² Murray, *Reset*, 105.

I am righteous in Christ alone. Justification is not for elite theologians. It is the most simple-minded elect's identity! I am the chief sinner, a blaming, excuse-making, stubborn sinner—but I am forgiven. God judges me as one who has already finished suffering for all my sins—past, present, future. He judges me as one who has kept all His commandments perfectly through my life. Why? Only because Jesus did it in my place. Others may judge me harshly, hold a grudge against me, and condemn me. My conscience and Satan's accusations may bring sinful doubts again and again to my mind, but my unchanging identity is that I am righteous in Christ alone.

I am a saint by the Spirit's sanctifying work. Not sinless—not yet—but I am progressing in holiness. Holiness is not for the older, more mature leader in the church, but it is every forgiven sinner's identity, including my own! I am able to say “No!” to increasing pressures of worldliness. I am able to fight addiction and flee temptation. I am able to improve in thankful obedience, in sincere worship, and in disciplined devotions. I am a temple of the Holy Spirit, possessed by God Himself, to be holy as He is holy.

To be child of God is a comfort to every saint. The infinite God, whom neither space nor time can contain and whose power has no limit, is my Father! He has adopted me into His family and kingdom! I am royalty, a prince or princess of the King of heaven. Because I am a precious child whom He holds in His everlasting arms, He allows nothing to touch me against His good will, allows me never to be plucked out of His hands, conforms me more and more into His image.

I am a child belonging to the Most High God. To be a little child is not a shameful idea for my younger sibling to think about. To be child of God is a comfort to every saint. The infinite God, whom neither space nor time can contain and whose power has no limit, is my Father! He has adopted me into His family and kingdom! I am royalty, a prince or princess of the King of heaven. Because I am a precious child whom He holds in His everlasting arms, He allows nothing to touch me against His good will, allows me never to be plucked out of His hands, conforms me more and more into His image.

Search the Scriptures and you will find more wondrous answers to this second most important question. Who am I? I am a pilgrim and stranger on this earth, citizen of the kingdom of heaven, member of the bride of Christ, child of the light, friend of God, slave of Christ, and more. Yes, there are other true answers like these regarding physical beauty, athletic prowess, funny personality, musical talent, and earthly ability. But though significant, these are of lesser significance than the answers of Scripture. Beloved, chosen, righteous, holy child of God, knowing who you are, now *be* who you are.

Report of Classis West



Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met on March 6-7, 2019, in Heritage PRC (Sioux Falls, SD). This small congregation did a fine job of hosting the

delegates over two full days. The meeting was capably chaired by Rev. Stephan Regnerus, who was serving in this capacity for the first time in his ministry.

After opening devotions and the constituting of Classis, routine reports of the stated clerk, classical committee, and reading sermon committee were read and approved. The church visitors also reported on their work over the last year and the presence of unity, peace, and love prevailing in the churches.

Over the course of the two days, Classis dealt with two appeals of members against the decisions of their respective consistories.

In the first appeal, the individual objected to First

PRC (Edmonton) consistory's decision to read an apology in response to his protest of his minister's preaching on the doctrine of providence. The individual argued that his consistory must proceed rather to suspension under Articles 79-80 of the Church Order. After careful deliberation, Classis upheld this appeal, judging that the minister was guilty of a fundamental and persistent doctrinal error and that an apology was inadequate in this instance. Classis advised First PRC (Edmonton) consistory to suspend their pastor and conduct an investigation into the extent of his error. If the consistory should request it, Classis appointed a special committee to assist in the implementation of the decisions.

Due to the nature of the second appeal, it was treated entirely in closed session. After careful deliberation, Classis upheld the individual's appeal and gave instruction to the consistory involved.

In other matters, Classis made the following schedule to supply the pulpit of the vacant Immanuel PRC (Lacombe, AB): Rev. Marcus (May 26 and June 2), Rev. Regnerus (June 16 and 23), Rev. J. Langerak (August 18 and 25), Rev. R. Kleyn (September 8 and 15), Rev. Guichelaar (September 29 and October 6), and Rev. N. Langerak (October 20 and 27).

Classis approved the subsidy requests for 2020 for three churches and forwarded them to synod for its ap-

proval. Worthy of note is the fact that two congregations who have requested subsidy in the past (Heritage PRC and Lynden PRC) are not in need of subsidy for 2020.

Classis also voted for various classical functionaries. Rev. Engelsma was appointed to a three-year term on the Classical Committee. Rev. Lee was appointed to a three-year term as a *primus* synodical deputy, and Rev. Guichelaar was appointed to a three-year term as a *secundus* synodical deputy. Classis appointed Revs. Hanko, Key, R. Kleyn, and Laning as church visitors, with Revs. Brummel and T. Miersma as alternates.

Ministers delegated to Synod 2019 were Revs. Brummel, Huizinga, Key, R. Kleyn, and Laning. Alternates are Revs. Barnhill, Engelsma, Guichelaar, N. Langerak, and Lee. Elders delegated to Synod 2019 were Brian Gritters (Hull), Hilgard Goosen (Immanuel), Alan Meurer (Bethel), Don Terpstra (Peace), and Bert Worries (Crete). Alternates are Duane Bruinsma (Crete), Todd DeMeester (Hope), Glenn Feenstra (Hope), David Griess (Loveland), and Eric Ophoff (Crete).

The expenses of this meeting totaled \$10,457.11.

Classis will meet next in Calvary PRC on September 25, 2019, the Lord willing.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma
Stated Clerk, Classis West



Bring the books...

Mr. Charles Terpstra, member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan and full-time librarian/registrar/archivist at the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Therefore I Have Hope, 12 Truths That Comfort, Sustain, & Redeem in Tragedy, by Cameron Cole. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018. Paper, 208 pp. \$14.99. [Reviewed by Mark Feenstra]



What if the *worst* happened? Would I lose my faith in God? Would I be able to live? For Cameron Cole, the *worst* was the loss of his three-year-old son, Cam. *Therefore I Have Hope* is the author's story of the *hope* that he found alone in God's Word and the gospel.

The author calls this story "Narrative of Hope." The book traces his path through God's promises, breaking the journey into three sections. The first

part, the "Initial Shock," includes bedrock truths: God's grace, the gospel, the resurrection, and faith. Only these truths hold and sustain us when terrible things come to us.

Cole entitles the next part, "The New Normal." How is it possible to live after the shock of bitter loss wears off? The book explores the empathy of our High Priest, Jesus Christ. It grapples with finding purpose in

God's providence (including a brief, insightful look at Romans 8:28). It describes the author's struggles with doubt, experience in God's presence, and the knowledge of his sin and the grace and forgiveness obtained in Christ.

In the final section, "The Long Haul," Cole encourages the reader who must persevere through the rest of this earthly life after the worst has come to him. The topics include true joy found alone in Jesus Christ, life and purpose found in His service, the promise of the Second Coming, and fellowship with Christ and our dear ones in heaven. He points us to our final home:

In this long journey of suffering, there is hope that a day will come when God completely eliminates your misery. It will all be over. No tears, no anxiety, no bitterness. You will be fully healed. Heaven is a real place that God has prepared for you. You will escape the fall and experience perfect union with God forever (184).

This book gives expression to real life! Cameron Cole holds nothing back. The pain he describes is very raw, the anguish excruciating. He brings the reader to the day his son died. Right with him in the scattered, confusing thoughts in the hospital, and then back to the heart-rending first time in an empty bedroom. But running through all of his story there is a true, firm reliance in the sovereign grace of God and a confession of His good purpose of salvation for His elect in Jesus Christ.

A few critiques: More than once the author goes too far in suggesting that what God had felt for Jesus

while He hanged upon the cross can be compared to our human finite and imperfect feelings. He writes: "In the same way that parents who have a child with a terminal illness live in dread of the day their son or daughter will inevitably pass away, God the Father lived with that *same dreadful anticipation*, knowing that he had sent his Son to die on the cross" (85). This example falls short of the perfect and transcendent relationship between the Father and the Son, and raises our suffering of fear to an example that we can never comprehend.

Another mild critique: While discussing doubt, the author equates it with merely questioning "Why?" "So often religious people criminalize doubt. They mistakenly believe that it's a sin to ask God 'Why?'" He goes so far to say "that Job's sin lay in his *lack of doubt*. His sin was over-confidence" (109). But by the end of the chapter he approaches the truth of laying your doubts (defined as confusion and incomprehension) before God and believing and focusing on God and His perfection.

I found *Therefore I Have Hope* to be a valuable and truthful guide through God's Word. Those who have suffered the loss of a child will find that it will arouse memories (some painful, some beautiful) of the worst days of their lives; but the book will remind parents how God's grace has held them close and carried them through. Any child of God who reads this book will see through God's Word that Jesus Christ is your Hope. You will be confident in the worst trials of life, knowing and believing that His victory over sin, death, and the grave will carry you through whatever may befall you in this life.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

The old church building still stands on the corner on Doon's Main Street. Purchased by the Doon PRC in the 1920s from a Baptist congregation, it served the Doon congregation until 1975. The building was sold to a local carpenter for his workshop. He is mostly retired today. The tile floor in the basement remains, upon which the shoes of pacing ministers clacked as they conducted catechism classes. Another item remains in

the basement from the days of congregational life there. Any ideas what that might be? Answer later in this column.

School activities

From the Siouxland area bulletins:

You are invited to Trinity Christian's Pasta Feed and Game Night on Friday, March 22, featuring a freewill

donation, lasagna supper (5–7:30 p.m.), volleyball (high school age and older, \$10/person), bean bags (grade school, free), and Rook (all ages, \$5/person). The volleyball tournament will again have separate divisions based on competitive edge, as indicated by your team captain upon sign-up.

The Fundraising Committee of the Protestant Reformed Christian School of Wingham invited all to their first ever school auction on Friday, March 8, with doors opening at 6:30 p.m. Many came to support the school and joined for a fun evening that was filled with good company, good food, and good items to bid on!

Minister activities

Rev. J. Laning of the Hull PRC was led by God to decline the call from Immanuel PRC, (Lacombe, AB) on March 3.

The Council of Grandville PRC extended a call for minister-on-loan to Covenant ERC in Singapore to Rev. C. Haak (Georgetown PRC). On March 10 he declined the call.

Rev. J. Engelsma (Doon, IA) declined the call from Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI. Trinity's Council formed the new trio of Revs. E. Guichelaar, W. Langerak, and J. Mahtani, with Rev. Langerak receiving the call on March 3.

From the Contact Committee:

A joint delegation of the FMC and the CC left this past Thursday (Feb. 14) for the Philippines. Rev N. Decker is representing the CC, and Rev. J. Engelsma is representing the Doon Council and the FMC. They will be visiting our sister churches in the Philippines over the next two weeks, the Lord willing. In addition, Rev. Decker will be going to Singapore to conduct church visitation with the CERC with Rev. Regnerus who will be preaching for the CERC in Singapore at that time. Please pray for the Lord's blessing upon their labors and their travel.

Indeed the safe travel was provided and the men returned in good shape after a busy visit. We are thankful these men could observe and experience many aspects of the work there. Their extensive reports are crucial to the work that the various bodies here oversee.

Young people's activities

From one of our bulletins:

Young People's Society: One by one, churches, seminaries, Christian high schools and colleges are denying the literal interpretation of the creation

account of Genesis 1. In doing so, they are destroying the very foundation of Scripture and of the Christian faith. How about you? Does it matter what you believe? Is it really a "salvation issue"? We begin our study of Genesis 1 tonight, examining the false theories concerning the creation of all things—and why it makes all the difference what you believe! Come prepared to think...discuss...and examine your own foundation! Study sheets were handed out this past week. We look forward to another good discussion!

Western Young People's Retreat: Young people, reserve the dates of July 16-19 for the annual retreat in Spokane. This year it will be at Camp Sanders, in Idaho (same location as last year). Registration information is coming soon.

Young adult activities

Save the date! The Crete Young Adult Society will be hosting a Yard Game Tournament to raise funds for the Achieve Program on Saturday, April 27, 2019, at Crete PRC. In case of bad weather, the tournament will take place the next Saturday, May 4. In addition to the tournament, there will also be a pay-to-play ax throwing contest with the winner receiving the coveted golden ax! Registration forms and further information will be provided at a later date.

Lynden PRC Young Adults Retreat Updates: Registration opened on Monday night, February 25! The link is posted to their Facebook page and in upcoming bulletins. Complete the forms on their website to secure your spot! The event will be capped out at 60 retreaters, so make sure to register early on! If you have any questions about the registration form, email lynden-prcya@gmail.com or leave a message on the Facebook group: Lynden PRC Young Adults Retreat 2019. "We look forward to seeing you!"

Mission activities

The Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan plans to undertake the Youth Camp on April 18-20, 2019 at Paradise Adventure Camp 2, City of San Jose del Monte. Theme is "Salt of the Earth and Light of the World." Registration fee is P2,000.00 /person inclusive of board and lodging. Rev. Flores and Rev. Ibe will be the speakers for the event.

From the bulletin of the Maranatha PRC in Valenzuela City, Philippines:

A scheduled conference on the Synod of Dordt that the Protestant Reformed Theological School is sponsoring in commemoration of the 400th anniversary of that Great Synod will be held at Trinity PRC in Hudsonville,

MI from April 25-27, 2019, the Lord willing. Because of a generous donation they have received from an individual for this cause, they are able to offer to pay for two ministers from our churches to attend. [And]...they can arrange the necessary accommodations for them while they are staying in the States for the conference. The PRCP Contact Committee has decided that Revs. Flores and Ibe will be attending the conference with an alternate Rev. L. Trinidad, the Lord willing. Let us pray that the U.S. Government Embassy in Manila will issue their visas.

Trivia answer

You may have guessed what still remains in the basement of the old church on Main Street. The piano. It is hard to imagine how it got down there in the first place. And no one wanted to try to get it out. Those narrow wooden stairs would not permit that. So it stayed. If that old piano could talk, what would it tell of Hoeksema, Hanko, Decker, and the rest? More trivia next time.

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

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC express their sincere sympathy to Carleen Dykstra in the death of her grandmother, **Ruth Hanko**. It is our prayer that she and her family may receive comfort and assurance from the Word of God in Psalm 116:15: “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
David Pryor, Clerk

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 8, 2019 at 8:00 A.M., in the Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by April 8, 2019.

Gary Boverhof, Stated Clerk

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.

Teacher needed

Loveland PR Christian School (Loveland, CO) is seeking applicants for both 1st / 2nd grade and 3rd / 4th grade teaching positions for the 2019-20 school year. Interested candidates may contact the Administrator, BJ Mowery at (970) 218-3420 or bmowery@lovelandprcs.org or the Education Chairman, Joe Ophoff at (970) 818-6790 or joe@scotthomeinspection.com

PRC Synod 2019

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2019, are hereby notified that all material for this year’s synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Rev. Ron VanOverloop
11243 8th Ave. NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49534
(rvanoverloop22@gmail.com)

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

- Apr. 7 “In What Love Rejoices”
I Corinthians 13:6
- Apr. 14 “Love Bears All Things”
I Corinthians 13:7
- Apr. 21 “Risen According to the Scriptures”
I Corinthians 15:4
- Apr. 28 “Love Believes All Things”
I Corinthians 13:7

DORDT 400

Safe-guarding the Reformed tradition

A three-day conference sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary



Illustrating and Recommending the Grace of Election—Dordt's Doctrine of Reprobation

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA served four congregations in the PRCA before his appointment in 2005 as the professor of Reformed Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.



Assurance: Sovereign Grace's Speech to the Heart

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS served two congregations in the PRCA before his appointment in 2003 as the professor of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.



Warring a Good Warfare with the Canons

REV. BRIAN HUIZINGA has been the pastor at Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California since 2011.



The Doctrine of the Covenant in the Canons

PROF. DOUGLAS KUIPER served as the pastor in three congregations. He was appointed by Synod 2017 as the professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.



The Polity of Dordt: Om Goede Orde in de Gemeente Christi te Onderhouden (Maintaining Good Order in the Church of Christ)

REV. WILLIAM LANGERAK has been the pastor at Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan since 2003.



The Call of the Gospel

REV. MARK SHAND was ordained in 2001 as a minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, and from 2009 to the present he has been the minister of the Launceston congregation.



The Canons as the Original "Five points"

REV. ANGUS STEWART is the pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) in N. Ireland and chairman of the British Reformed Fellowship.

Held at Trinity PRC April 25–27, 2019 | dordt400.org

Announcements continued



MARCH ISSUE

Are you dating?
Have you dated?
Will you date?
As a Christian,
how should
you date?

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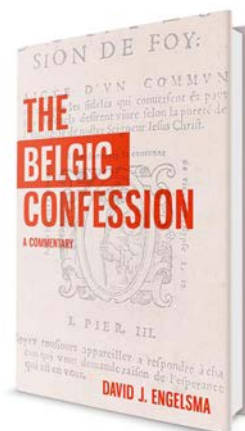
THE BELGIC CONFESSION

— Volume 2 —

DAVID J. ENGELSMA

Volume two begins with article 22, the Confession's opening article on the doctrine of salvation, continues with the Confession's lengthy treatment of the doctrine of the church, and concludes with the Confession's explanation of the doctrine of the last things—eschatology.

Expected release date is April 2019. This book will be sent to all book club members.



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