

# The Standard Bearer

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## The fulfillment of the wonder of God

Rev. Dennis Lee

## Marking the season

Rev. Kenneth Koole

## Dordt 400 (5): The meetings of synod

Prof. Douglas Kuiper

## Perfect moral guidance for youth (1)

Rev. Arie denHartog

## Fighting infection

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## 30 years of serving

Mr. Cal Kalsbeek



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## Meditation

Rev. Dennis Lee, pastor of Bethel Protestant Reformed Church in Roselle, Illinois

# The fulfillment of the wonder of God

**“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”**

**Matthew 1:21-23.**

These verses from the Word of God have been and continue to be one of precious comfort to His people through the ages. For in the fullness of time, it pleased God to fulfill His promise of giving to His people the long-awaited Savior from their sins. And He did so by performing the wonder of wonders, causing a virgin to conceive a son, who would bear both the nature of man excepting sin, and His very own divine nature. Our God is the wonder-working God of salvation of us, His people!

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Part of beholding this wonder of wonders is to consider the manner in which it was fulfilled. And God was pleased to accomplish this great wonder in very dark, difficult circumstances for His people. “All this” points to the dark and seemingly hopeless circumstances leading to the birth of our Savior. The Old Testament nation of Israel, once a glorious kingdom under kings David and Solomon, was no longer even a kingdom. It was now but one of the many provinces under the rule of the mighty Roman empire. A period of 400 years of prophetic silence followed after Malachi had spoken. Oh yes, there was still preaching and teaching going on in the temple. But preaching and teaching had fallen on hard times. And that was because the precious gospel of repentance from sin and faith in the coming Christ was lost. The Word of God was no longer faithfully expounded. All these circumstances made God’s people in Israel think and ask themselves, “*Has God forgotten? Has He forgotten His promises? Has He forgotten us, His people?*”

Dear reader, do these questions echo what is in your mind and heart? Be assured that God never forgets. He never lets His promises fall to the ground. He never forgets His people. For verse 22 reads in its entirety, “Now all this was done, *that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet.*” He remembers! He remembers His promises!

In particular, He remembered what He spoke through the prophet in Isaiah 7. Isaiah had said to king Ahaz, “Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God, ask it either in the depth or in the height above” (7:11). And what was the sign? Isaiah declares, “Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” (7:14). Through Isaiah, God had given the sign of the virgin birth. So, “all this was done” in order to fulfill this sign spoken by Isaiah and echoed in Matthew 1:23. God remembered His promise and the fulfillment of this sign. For Christ was coming through the seemingly hopeless circumstances surrounding His people in Israel. The formation and rule of the Roman Empire was to enable the gospel of Christ to spread to the nations in the New Testament once Christ had come. And the dark backdrop of Israel’s rejection of Christ and His gospel prepared the way for God to judge that nation and to give the gospel to the Gentiles! So also, dear reader, God is accomplishing His good purposes and plans for you through the dark and difficult circumstances you may be experiencing!

God was doing just that with His people then. He was busy fulfilling the sign that He had given and promised. And what an astounding sign! We have an indication of how astounding this sign is from Joseph’s struggle with it. For he had planned to put Mary away, albeit privately and not publicly in his love for her. And that was because he thought that she had conceived a child with another man. The thought never occurred to him that the child she conceived was not of man, but the wonder work of God in her.

What an astounding sign! For it was something that was utterly impossible! What is the possibility of a virgin giving birth? Would not the phrase “virgin birth”

be like a “square circle” or a “round triangle”? Humanly speaking, we would only be right to use the word “oxymoron” to describe such a sign: an utter impossibility! Even more, what an astounding sign when we consider that this child of a virgin shall be called, “Emmanuel, God with us.” This child will be God! No, He is God! God incarnate! God Himself in our flesh! This child shall be called Emmanuel. God with us! Wonder of God this is!

God remembered His promise! For is that not an important reason why Matthew begins with the genealogy of Jesus, the promised Messiah of God? God remembers His promise not only from Isaiah 7:14, but from all the way back to Genesis 3:15 and the seed of the woman! This seed of the woman is come through the fulfillment of the astounding sign of the virgin birth! And He who is come is Emmanuel, God with us: One who is all-powerful because He is divine, but also One bearing our flesh (yet without sin), who understands perfectly the very feeling of our infirmities!

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Jesus is come! Come through the sign and wonder of the virgin birth. What a glorious fact!

To be sure, Jesus’ birth is a glorious fact not because of the false glory that the world now puts into the birth of Jesus Christ. The glory of the birth lies not in the idea that He was an absolutely cute, harmless, adorable baby. Nor does it lie in the bright Christmas lights the world displays to glamorize its sanitized version of the environment in which Jesus was born. For let us not forget the fact that Jesus was born in a manger. There was nothing glorious, even decent, about that place. It was a stinky place where animals were tucked away. And let us not forget the reason why that was the case: because there was no room for them in the inn. The world had no room, and still has no room for the real, biblical Jesus of the Scriptures who confronted sin and commanded repentance from it.

Wherein, then, lies the glory of God in the birth of Jesus Christ? The glory of God lies in His faithful remembrance and fulfillment of the gospel promise He made concerning the coming of His dear Son for our sake. The glory of God lies in His fulfillment of that astounding sign and wonder of the divine conception, virgin birth, and sending forth of His only-begotten Son

into the world in our flesh. The glory of God lies in His great, astounding love for us in all these wonders, and most of all, in giving His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer and die for us on the cross.

Do you not see the glory of God in these blessed truths of the Bible, dear reader? And out of them all, do you not see that blessed Savior of yours, Jesus Christ?

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Make no mistake about it. Because of the great faithfulness of God demonstrated in His astounding gift of Jesus our Savior, we have a blessed gospel! The gospel is blessed not because Jesus was a powerless Savior who died trying to save everyone in the world but, in the final analysis, saves no one unless they themselves exercise their own will to believe. That “gospel” is no gospel at all, because if salvation were left up to man, no one would be saved. The gospel is blessed because it is the gospel of one called “Jesus.” And He is called “Jesus,” “for he shall save his people from their sins” (v. 21). This Jesus, and this Jesus alone, is the real Jesus, the biblical Jesus. He is the sovereign Savior, the efficacious Savior, the complete Savior of all and only those who have been

given to Him by the Father to save. For these elect sinners He died. He saved them alone, and will preserve them in salvation unto the end. Jesus saved you and me, totally helpless, God-hating, and Christ-crucifying sinners, from our sins! That is the blessed gospel we have!

And that blessed gospel comes to us through the faithful fulfillment of the wonder work of God in the virgin birth of Jesus, our Savior! Let us rejoice in this our wonder-working God who so loves us and never forgets us! Let us enjoy the comfort and joy of such a blessed gospel. And let us not be ashamed of that gospel, but rather let us be good witnesses of it—declaring it, defending it, and letting it show forth in the way we live our lives before the church and the world this Christmas season and always!

**Wherein, then, lies the glory of God in the birth of Jesus Christ? The glory of God lies in His faithful remembrance and fulfillment of the gospel promise He made concerning the coming of His dear Son for our sake.**



## Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

# Marking the season

Love.  
Peace.  
Joy.  
Hope.

Four words that appear on almost every year-end Christmas or holiday greeting card sent and received.

Wonderful words and appropriate.

But also, very exclusive.

But more on that later.

What strikes me is that if the church of Christ was going to mark yearly God's great redemptive event of the Advent (the promise and birth of the Messiah, the Christ), year's end is the best time. Not the middle of July or sometime in August or such like, but year's end, as the church and the believer are compelled to mark the passing of time. And with the passing of time, we are reminded of the long-awaited return of Christ, His second coming, this time not as a lowly babe ignored by all the world, but in power and in glory on the clouds of heaven with the trumpets of heaven blowing and echoing around the world and the saints still living exclaiming "He comes, He comes! As promised, He comes! Halleluiah, He has come!"

And what is true of His first appearing, in little Bethlehem? "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

I say, "If the church was going to mark the Advent of the Messiah," because not every Calvinistic church has chosen to mark the Advent of Christ with a special worship service on an affixed date during the calendar year. Those of Scottish Presbyterian vintage chose not to, in agreement with Calvin and Knox, and all but anathematized such a practice because it smelled suspiciously Romish to them. The addition of such days to the Lord's Day was something Rome imposed on her members, extra holy days as far as they were concerned, and then used to her financial advantage as she urged her members to come to its cathedrals and worship before its images of the Virgin carrying an infant (which all cathedrals had in some shape or form) and leave coinage behind. Supposedly, another packet of meritorious

works to add to one's pile while Rome's clergy enriched themselves.

Be that as it may, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands at the Synod of Dordt by its Church Order decided there was value to marking the great redemptive event, the wonder of the Incarnation, on an annual basis on a designated day, and decided to keep it on the day church members had been marking since early Christendom (336 AD), namely, December 25.

For the reader interested in the rationale of the Synod of Dordt for its congregations to mark the great New Testament redemptive event of Christ's birth (called Christmas) with a call to worship, along with Easter and Pentecost (and in some locations continuing their practice of marking the days of Christ's circumcision and ascension as well), read Van Dellen and Monsma's commentary on Dordt's Church Order.

Interesting and informative.

As far as our church fathers were concerned, it was a matter of Christian liberty. A denomination has the right to require such of her federation members, namely, to conform to certain practices in the interests of the spiritual benefits perceived and evils counteracted as long as it did not violate a scriptural law or principle.

This became an issue between Presbyterian and Reformed brethren but, interestingly and significantly, one that historically did not prevent fraternal relations in days post-Reformation or post-Dordt.

Neither is it an issue we intend to attempt to settle in this editorial.

Simply put, we are of the Reformed persuasion. And truth to tell, as pastor and preacher, I have rejoiced in the practice of marking these great redemptive events on an annual basis, seeing their benefit when it comes to subject matter for preaching and pointing the people of God to Jehovah-Salvation's wonderful faithfulness in the keeping of His promises, fulfilling great prophecies as they are found scattered throughout the Scriptures. And this on an annual basis.

But especially I have enjoyed the Advent season (call it Christmas-time, if you will) during my pastoral min-



istry. In part, I must admit, not only because it comes at year's end, but also because it comes at year's end for one living in a northern climate. Days are short, nights are long, the weather is cold, and it can, like the Netherlands, be gloomy for days on end, not to say weeks.

And then comes the first official day of winter and, shortly thereafter, year's end. And then that great light that the LORD God created on the fourth day to rule the day (and the seasons) begins its northern trek again and the days begin to lengthen. Speaking of, assuring us of what? Springtime shall come again! And with it, the renewal of life.

How does the Song of Songs in the KJV put it so exquisitely? "For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land" (2:11, 12).

Never heard a turtle, you say? Nor have I. I suppose some scholar will impress us with his knowledge of Hebrew and tell us "Literally, it says 'turtledove'." Granted. But for poetic reasons I prefer "turtle." Don't ask me why.

The cold, seemingly lifeless earth is renewed and life once again abounds.

How does Psalter #171 versify Psalm 65, describing springtime?

To bless the earth Thou sendest  
From Thy abundant store  
The waters of the springtime,  
Enriching it once more.  
The seed by Thee provided  
Is sown o'er hill and plain,  
And Thou with gentle showers  
Dost bless the springing grain.

All these things done in parables, God's creation and its seasonal cycles pointing to the greater spiritual and heavenly realities set forth in His Word, the regeneration of new life, beginning in the hearts of a new humanity, bearing fruit, and foretelling of a whole new creation blooming with everlasting life.

And that brings us back to marking the Advent of the promised Messiah this time of the year. I have found it beneficial.

Even the practice of sending out greeting cards. Some may call them Christmas cards. I prefer holiday greetings, because the occasion for the cards is not primarily, as far as I am concerned, a need to remind each other of Christ's birth, but an occasion to remind others that they are in our thoughts the whole year long, even if we may have little opportunity for personal contact during the whole year.

Year's end serves as an occasion to send greetings to folks we have not seen or personally conversed with for years sometime, friends and fellow believers of the household of faith separated by miles and even by great seas. We have, for instance, developed friendships with saints in Germany and Singapore (to say nothing of those in former congregations half a continent away). Year's end is an opportunity to send them greetings, reminding them that they are still in our thoughts and prayers, encouraging some that though they be small in number and even isolated from many like-minded believers, they are not alone in the world. There are others who share with them a common hope.

And now this simple, basic point: that hope, the only hope there is in all this benighted world, is grounded in the One identified by the last of the Old Testament prophets (and that at time when spiritual coldness and darkness lay over a withering Old Testament church), the One labeled as "the Sun of righteousness" who was to "arise with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2).

Apart from Him there is no hope, no joy, no peace, no true, enduring fellowship of love.

Strikingly, these are realities of which not only the Christian church speaks, but the ungodly world as well. How it longs for these realities.

Of these spiritual realities the church of Christ must speak as decisively and sharply to our present society as the five wise virgins spoke to the five foolish; namely, these treasured realities to be found in our Jesus, the church's promised Messiah, or not at all. "Your lamps are without oil or light. Repent and believe, or perish. There are no other options."

Wonderful words—love, peace, joy, and hope. Wonderful truths and realities found in the Christ Jesus of Bethlehem.

Love! Even the worldings know that great Scripture, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that He gave...."

Notice, not simply "that He sent" (though He did), but He *gave!* The gift-giving LORD God.

And this is the marvel: there is a sense in which, when the incarnate wonder emerged from the womb and was held in the arms of that young virgin and before the eyes of her now husband Joseph, God unwrapped Himself. How does that other great 3:16 passage put it? "Great is the mystery of godliness [the true religion], God was manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16). And again, "And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Love, self-giving love. That the almighty, eternal God gave, and gave nothing less than *Himself* is a wonder beyond words.

And do not forget, *life* is begotten by *love*, not apart from it. God's love in Christ Jesus is pre-imminent. You know not the Father and Son? You know not love, and you are without true life.

But if you know this love and rejoice in it, then you have *peace*. And only then.

Why? Because then you are held in the embrace of the arms of the mightiest Persons and Being there is in the whole universe, those of our Father, who is also the eternal triune God. He is the One who's "got the whole world in His hands," and "the little tiny baby." Held in His arms as His own as one looks out over the raging world? There is no place of greater safety and security.

That's elusive peace, as far as the world is concerned. But not for those who belong to Jesus, body and soul, bought with the precious blood; they have real peace.

May you, while yet on earth, know the peace of being under the protection and care of God's great Prince of Peace.

And then comes joy!

A friend recently sent out this brief reflection on joy, which holds a world of truth.

Some people think Christians should always be smiling and happy, and something is wrong if they aren't. But this isn't necessarily true.

Don't confuse happiness with JOY. Happiness comes with happy circumstances; joy wells up deep inside our souls as we learn to trust Christ. Joy does not mean that we are never sad or that we never cry. Joy is a quiet confidence, a state of inner peace that comes from God.

Life's troubles may rob us of our happiness, but they can never rob us of the joy God gives us as we turn in faith to Him and seek His face.

True joy radiates from within and makes its presence known regardless of circumstances.

How true. "True joy radiates from within," because it wells up from the deep current of Christ's life founded on God's promises found within the heart of every believing child of God.

At the birth of our Christ child the angels "sang" for joy, because well they knew, He and He alone in His person and work was "the joy of the whole earth."

And out of this arises hope.

Hope is a glorious thing. It is the expectation of some glorious, better thing promised in the future that makes whatever losses a believer suffers in this world worth it in the end. Hope means that even in the darkest of circumstance there is a light that burns—yes, even as death takes hold of a child of God, be she young or be he old, a candle-light of hope that is never extinguished,

because the oil with which it burns is the oil of the Spirit of the incarnate Son of God.

As one suffering saint put it long ago, "For I know that my redeemer liveth,...and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26).

All other hopes fail. As the apostle declares in Ephesians 2:12 concerning man in unbelief, "having no hope, and without God in the world."

If one is outside of Christ, one is without God. And then one is without hope. All that the future holds is judgment and death in the end. Despair.

But having Christ, His faith, His love, His life, His promises? One is filled with hope and joy unspeakable, that which the world cannot know.

As we take time to reflect upon the gift of God's Son, the Wonder-Child, and upon the passing of time as we together live in the hope of His return, it is altogether proper to use it as an occasion to greet one another, wish each other well, and to point each other to our one great hope and Redeemer.

We can, of course, do this at any time during the year. Go ahead. Most people welcome cards of greeting expressing good will towards them.

But, human nature being what it is, it is most helpful to have an occasion when we are prompted to do so, and that on a yearly basis so as not to be forgotten altogether.

Year's end is an excellent time.

But what is the marking of time without the Christ-child born once and then, as promised, coming again!

In conclusion, I close with a quote from Martin Luther I came across just recently. "The gospel is not so much a miracle as a marvel, and every line suffused with wonder."

There is truth to that. But truer is this: When it comes to the incarnation of God's Only Begotten, the birth of our Lord, it is both a miracle and a marvel, and every line suffused with wonder.

It is a wonder to be spoken of, gloried in, and by believers, shared.



## Dordt 400: Memorial stones

Prof. Douglas Kuiper, newly appointed professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

# The Synod of Dordt (5) The meetings of Synod

...These stones shall be a memorial unto the children of Israel forever.—Joshua 4:7c

Between November 13, 1618 and May 29, 1619, the Synod of Dordt met in 180 sessions. The interested reader can find a weekly summary of the Synod's work at [www.dordt400.org](http://www.dordt400.org). In this article I will give you only a broad overview of the sessions.<sup>1</sup>

### 180 sessions

The Synod's sessions included four phases: before the Arminians appeared (sessions 1-21, Nov. 13 to Dec. 5); the examination of the Arminians (sessions 22-57, Dec. 6 to Jan. 14); the deliberations regarding the Arminians and the drafting of the Canons of Dordt (sessions 58-154, Jan. 14-May 9); and after the foreign delegates left (sessions 155-180, May 13-29).

Synod almost always met from Monday through Friday, and it met many Saturday mornings. Its morning sessions usually began at 9:00, with afternoon sessions beginning at 4:00 or 6:00. Synod did not meet during the days when the committee to draft the Canons was working, or other times when smaller groups of men were working to bring advice. It also recessed from December 22-26 for the Christmas holiday.

The official language (both spoken and written) of the Synod was Latin. Though the delegates all had different native tongues, they all understood Latin; at the time, it was the language of the academics and scholars.

### Formulating decisions

Our synods generally formulate decisions by



assigning a committee of pre-advice to draw up recommendations, which are then presented to the entire synod for discussion and voting. The Synod of Dordt used a different method. Each of the nineteen delegations (all the delegates from a provincial synod, or from a foreign country) met individually to discuss the matters the Synod was facing, and to present written advice. The judgment of each delegation was read aloud on the floor of the Synod, discussion followed, and the Synod's officers would then formulate the final version of the decision. The final version was adopted either by vote or by common consent; when it was adopted by vote, each delegation (not each delegate) received one vote.

Perhaps the Synod used this method because the States General (the national government) used it. Regardless, many of the delegates found this process cumbersome. At one point the Synod faced whether to change the method, but decided to keep it, after which the president exhorted members not to complain.

Although we might have had the same impatience regarding the speed with which the Synod worked, the Reformed churches reap the benefit centuries later. *Careful* deliberation, *careful* expression of the truth, *careful* rebutting of error, takes time. Had the Synod rushed, it is possible it would not have left us with as valuable a document as it did.

<sup>1</sup> My main sources for this material are Herman J. Selderhuis, "Introduction to the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619)" in Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser and Herman J. Selderhuis, eds., *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae (1618-1619)*, vol. I: *Acta of the Synod of Dordt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), XXV-XXX, and Hendrik Kaajan, *De Pro-Acta Der Dordtsche Synode in 1618* (Rotterdam: T. DeVries, 1914), 42-56.





## All around us

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

# European Convention of Human Rights and religious denigration

The European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) states in Article 10:

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

On October 25, 2018, the European Court of Human Rights, a panel of seven international judges, ruled in the appeal of an Austrian woman who had been convicted of denigrating religious beliefs in that country. The appellant, Elisabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff (SW), a Viennese housewife, had stated in November 2009 that the marriage of Mohammed to a six-year old, Aisha, which marriage was consummated when Aisha was aged nine, constituted paedophilia. Her words (quoting from the Court's press release) were, "[Mohammed] liked to do it with children," and "a 56-year old and a six-year old?... What do we call that, if it is not paedophilia?"

Mrs. SW made these statements during a seminar that she was teaching on Islam. Some of her lectures were secretly recorded and the transcripts were handed over to the public prosecutor, with the result that she was tried and convicted in February 2011 for the crime of "denigrating religious belief," namely, Islam. The Austrian housewife was ordered to pay a fine of 480

Euro or face up to six months in prison, for paragraph 188 of the Austrian criminal code prohibits the public denigration of religion that is "designed to stir up justifiable indignation." Her fine was only 480 Euro because it was calculated according to the "day rate" (the law allows up to 360 "day rates"), which in Mrs. SW's case was only four Euro per day because she is a housewife with limited income. Had she been a person of greater financial means, the fine would have been considerably larger. For example, Susanne Winter, an Austrian politician, was fined 24,000 Euro for a similar offence in Austria in January 2009.

In December 2011, the Austrian housewife appealed her conviction, but her appeal was rejected in Austrian Appeals Court; hence, her further appeal to the European Court of Human Rights, which unanimously rejected her appeal in October. Mrs. SW argued that her right to freedom of expression under Article 10 of the ECHR had been violated. The Court disagreed, releasing a press statement summarizing its findings: "Conviction for Calling Muhammad a Paedophile is Not in Breach of Article 10." ECHR, Article 10, is the closest that Europeans have to the (American) First Amendment. Already the reader can see that the right is not absolute, for Europeans' rights under Article 10 "may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law, etc."

The question before the Court was this: does a European citizen have the right to insult Mohammed, the so-called prophet of Islam, or does a European state have a right to forbid and punish such speech (in this case, Austria; but this ruling has implications for all of the EU member-states, and probably also for the UK even after Brexit)? The ruling of the European Court of Human Rights *effectively criminalizes* insulting speech against Islam in Europe. It forbids speech (in the case of the Austrian law) that is designed to stir up "justifiable indignation," but it simply depends on which groups (or group) in Europe and elsewhere are stirred up when their religion is denigrated! The more likely a group is

to be offended (and to show their offense in a violent and aggressive manner), the more likely speech against that group's beliefs will be prohibited! Christians do not riot in the streets when Jesus is blasphemed (nor should they), so it is unlikely that such a law would be used to prohibit blasphemy against the Son of God.

Let me be clear—I do not think that the public labeling of Mohammed as a paedophile is wise or helpful. I cannot think of a *worse* thing to say when attempting to witness to a Muslim with a view to winning him to Christ. It would be much better to concentrate on the glories of Christ than to concentrate on the moral failings of Mohammed. It would be much better to introduce the Bible to the Muslim than to mock the Qur'an. Present to the Muslim the holy character and the matchless speech of Jesus from the gospels so that, if God is pleased, God might draw the Muslim away from Mohammed and to the One who is altogether lovely. The issue is rather this: should it be *illegal* to say it; should the law *forbid* it; should a European citizen's free speech be *curtailed* with respect to it; and should a person be *subject to fines and imprisonment* for stating it?

I highlight some of the statements from the Court's ruling. First, religious belief cannot expect to be "exempt from criticism," for religious persons "must tolerate and accept the denial by others of their religious beliefs." Nevertheless, second, the Court viewed Mrs. SW's statements as "capable of arousing justified indignation," for they were supposedly not made "in an objective manner," and they "aimed at demonstrating that Muhammad was not worthy of worship." Incidentally, in Islam Mohammed is not worshipped, for to do so would be to commit the unforgivable sin of *shirk*, which is the sin of worshipping a creature instead of or in addition to Allah. In addition, Mrs. SW allegedly "failed to neutrally inform her audience of the historical background" (of Mohammed's marriage to a child). Third, the Court "carefully balanced the applicant's right to freedom of expression with the rights of others to have their religious feelings protected, and to have religious peace preserved in Austrian society." Fourth, the court considered that "the impugned statements [went] beyond the permissible limits of an objective debate, and [classified] them as an abusive attack on the Prophet of Islam which could stir up prejudice and threaten religious peace."

Therefore, if someone—in this case a Muslim—is offended, or his "religious feelings" are violated, the person making the statements can expect no protection under ECHR, Article 10. In Islam, it is impermissible to speak disparagingly about Mohammed, a crime punishable by death in several Islamic nations.

To illustrate that fact with just one recent example, albeit one with a happy outcome, I report on the case of Aasiya Noreen (or Asia Bibi), a young Pakistani woman sentenced to death in 2010 for blasphemy against Mohammed. This young lady, a Roman Catholic, offended Muslim farm workers when she sipped some water from a cup that she had fetched for them, her drinking from the cup supposedly rendering the water "unclean." An argument ensued in which Bibi was accused of insulting Mohammed, for which she served eight years in a Pakistani prison awaiting her execution by hanging. Several prominent Pakistani politicians were assassinated for advocating for Bibi and for speaking out against the blasphemy law. After a lengthy appeal, Bibi was acquitted of the charge of blasphemy on October 31, 2018. The ruling caused immediate controversy: her lawyer, Saiful Malook, and the Chief Justice, Saqib Nisar, who made the ruling in Bibi's favor, have received death threats from angry mobs incensed that Bibi will now escape the noose and Mohammed will not be "avenged." Malook has fled the country, but at the time of the writing of this report, Bibi's departure from Pakistan is still being blocked by angry extremists who are placing pressure on the Pakistan government.

Where does that leave the "Mohammed was a paedophile" charge? That Mohammed took a child bride is the account of the Islamic scriptures, not a Western slur; however, Islamic societies interpret the actions of their prophet very differently from how we would:

The Prophet engaged me when I was a girl of six (years). We went to Medina and stayed at the home of Bani-al-Harith bin Khazraj.... Then she took me into the house. There in the house I saw some Ansari women who said, "Best wishes and Allah's Blessing and a good luck." Then she entrusted me to them and they prepared me (for the marriage). Unexpectedly Allah's Apostle came to me in the forenoon and my mother handed me over to him, and at that time I was a girl of nine years of age.

Khadija died three years before the Prophet departed to Medina. He stayed there for two years or so and then he married 'Aisha when she was a girl of six years of age, and he consumed [consummated] that marriage when she was nine years old.<sup>1</sup>

The interpretation of this, however, is the issue. Writing in *National Review*, Andrew C. McCarthy explains:

The problem is not that, in the seventh century, Mohammed married a young girl. It is that, while

1 Sahih-Bukhari, volume 5, book 58, Numbers 234-236, [https://www.sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari\\_5\\_58.php](https://www.sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari_5_58.php)

the West evolves because it venerates reason, much of Islamic culture regards Mohammed as the perfect role model, and this conception of the good is immutable. To fundamentalists, enacting laws against child marriage would be tantamount to saying Mohammed was in the wrong—unacceptable.

As a result, child marriage, like the abuse of women and girls in many other contexts, remains a major problem in Islamic countries. In Saudi Arabia, for example, efforts to establish the marriage age at 15 (and, some hope, to raise it to 18) have been flattened by sharia authorities. [They] point to the example of Aisha, as well as scripture that marks the onset of puberty as the point of marriageability, and decree that no minimum age is appropriate. Even when governments enact a marriage age, fundamentalist communities flout it.<sup>2</sup>

There are many in Europe who advocate for the introduction of Sharia law, a law that would in its most extreme form punish blasphemers of Mohammed with death. Sharia law is fairly widespread in Muslim communities in Europe, although for now it deals with more benign issues such as food laws, cleansing rituals, and banking regulations (usury is forbidden in Islam).

Nevertheless, in Europe it is permissible for governments, for the sake of public peace, to *prohibit* such disparaging speech against Islam and even to punish it, not with death, but with fines and imprisonment. As one religious blogger wrote,

There is something inescapably suicidal about a purported Court of the Enlightenment determining that statements about a religion which are “capable of arousing justified indignation” constitute a “malicious violation of the spirit of tolerance” and so must be censored. Or more specifically, those who defame Mohammed from a point of historical ignorance or religious prejudice may now be fined or imprisoned. If Islam forbids any criticism of its precepts, permitting only Islamic scholars to pronounce upon the reliability of its history and the validity of its morality, *and if the ECHR now affirms this*, in what sense is this not a violation of the freedom of expression of both non-Muslims and all those enlightened Muslims who wish to carry out a bit of quaranic or hadithic form criticism and develop a reason-based prophetology? Presumably, attacking or defaming Jesus is permissible because it is unlikely to arouse ‘justified indignation’ in Christians. Or at least it is not likely ‘to disturb the religious peace of the country.’<sup>3</sup>

2 Andrew C. McCarthy, In Europe, Free Speech Bows to Sharia, *National Review*, October 27, 2018.

3 “Don’t Defame Mohammed: ECHR Affirms European Sharia Blasphemy Law,” *Archbishop Cranmer Blog*, October 26, 2018.



## Search the Scriptures

Mr. Don Doezema, member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan

Upon this rock (35)

A remnant returns (1)

Previous article in this series: October 15, 2018, p. 36.

The history of the church in the old dispensation has been aptly likened to birth pangs. “For pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail,” said Micah the prophet. “Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies” (Micah 4:9, 10).

Interestingly, Micah spoke those words more than a hundred years before Nebuchadnezzar ever set foot in

Judah. Assyria at that time, rather than Babylon, was at the height of its power. But the prophet was given to see what the future held. Grievous trouble there would be, trouble that would shake even the bravest of men. Ejected from their own country, they would be wanderers in strange lands, led away even to Babylon, to die there.

But will all hope be gone? No, because God will yet be true to His word. To strengthen the minds of the faithful, Micah gives hope of deliverance. There, in Babylon, thou shalt be delivered. There, in Babylon,

where all hope will seem to be cut off, the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.

Yes, Babylon will fall. And God's people will be delivered.

To what reality did the prophet speak? To the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, to be sure, and to the decree of Cyrus that Jerusalem be built and the foundation of the temple be laid (Is. 44:28). But there is more.

Cyrus' conquest of Babylon did not result in the destruction of that mighty city. Babylon continued for some time as a city of strength and beauty. But that it would eventually fall was a certainty, for its destruction had been predicted in prophecy by both Isaiah and Jeremiah. According to Isaiah, "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (Is. 13:19). So complete would be its ruin. Jeremiah predicted that "the broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly broken, and her high gates shall be burned with fire" (Jer. 51:58). "Babylon shall become heaps" (51:37), Jeremiah said, and will be "a desolation without an inhabitant" (v. 29).

Indeed Babylon *must* fall; for in Scripture that city has been made to represent the very heart of the antichristian world-power that oppresses the saints of God. The destruction of that city, then, because of its symbolic importance, is the hope of the people of God. "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" we read in the prophecy of Isaiah (21:9), who wrote as if the destruction of the city were already an accomplished fact. "Babylon is fallen, is fallen," we read in Revelation 14:8, where the angel spoke as if the dominion of Antichrist had already been broken.

And Babylon *did* fall. About twenty years after its conquest by Cyrus, the Babylonians rebelled against the Persians. Darius (not the Darius of Daniel 6) put down the revolt and, to punish the Babylonians, he removed the brazen gates and destroyed the walls of the city. A second revolt, about forty years later, brought another Persian king, Xerxes, who wrought further destruction in the city.

With the destruction of its walls, the might of Babylon was permanently broken. The prophecy concerning the fall of Babylon, then, was in a sense already fulfilled. But it is interesting to note that, though life continued in Babylon for many years thereafter (see I Pet. 5:13), the city was eventually forsaken and left desolate. According to Fairbairn's *Bible Encyclopedia*, the present ruins of Babylon consist of "vast mounds of earth and brick" and "heaps of sun-dried and kiln-dried bricks." Those heaps, about fifty miles south of modern Baghdad in Iraq, must certainly be a reminder of the prophecy of Jeremiah (51:37). Fairbairn adds, incidentally, that, af-

ter the destruction of those massive walls, "the ruins have been a never-failing brickfield, city after city being built from its materials." The modern town of Hillah (about six miles from the site of ancient Babylon), he continues, "was built from Babylonian materials, and I dare say, there is not a single room where a brick might not be seen stamped with the name of Nebuchadnezzar." Apart from that, however, all that remains of the once mighty Babylon is...heaps.

And now, what about the Jews? And the end of their exile? And the return to Canaan, the land of promise? And the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the city of David? And the laying of the foundation of the temple? Was this the deliverance, and the redemption, of which Micah spoke?

Yes, it was. Initially. But not ultimately.

Why not? We think, first of all, of the fact that only a small percentage of the Jews chose to take advantage of the decree of Cyrus that put an end to their enforced exile. It has been estimated that two to three million Jews were scattered at that time throughout the Persian empire. A mere 50,000 of them chose to return. The vast majority had, after seventy years, settled comfortably in the land of their captivity. Most of them, in fact, had been *born* in that land. They had never known Jerusalem, which now lay in ruins in a land far away. Except, therefore, for the remnant "whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:5), the Jews for the most part preferred Babylon.

This is not to say that *all* those who remained in the land of their exile were moved by purely carnal considerations. They were not. Nor is this to say that *all* those who returned were spiritually minded and that a utopia was in store for them in the land of promise. That was not true either. Soon enough it became apparent that the old carnality was alive and well in the rebuilt Jerusalem. Deliverance of another sort was what the elect remnant needed.

The carnality of the returned exiles showed itself already in their efforts to rebuild the temple of God. They began well. But then they encountered opposition. Opposition from the Samaritans, who managed to secure an order from Artaxerxes that "this city be not builded, until another commandment shall be given from me" (Ezra 4:21). It was, thus, nothing less than the decree of the Persian king that brought the construction of the temple to a halt. But that other factors were at work here is clear from the fact that Haggai and Zechariah, prophets of the Lord, found it necessary, at last, to direct words of admonition and rebuke to the Jews for *neglecting* the temple (Ezra 5:1, 2).



The problem seems to have been that the initial enthusiasm of the returned exiles for the rebuilding of the temple had waned considerably. They began to view the project as a burden. They had hardly had time to reestablish themselves in a land long left desolate—and must they really now be expected to devote their limited resources to the building of a temple? That did not seem fair. Evidently, too, the older folks did not stop belittling their efforts, bemoaning the fact that, because of their limited resources, they would not be able to build a temple that could compare at all to the one that Solomon had built. Why not, therefore, just...wait? Wait till we have more money—so that we can build a more impressive house for the Lord.

So it did not take much for the Samaritans to “weaken their hands” (Ezra 4:4). And when Artaxerxes commanded that the work on rebuilding Jerusalem cease, they were too quick simply to accept a new state of affairs. They were quite content to continue making their own houses more comfortable and beautiful. They can justifiably forget about *God’s* house—because of that convenient *decree*.

There is no indication that anyone made an attempt to enlighten Artaxerxes. The decree of *Cyrus*, authorizing the rebuilding of the temple of God in Jerusalem, had been forgotten by the new king. And the Jews did not bother reminding him. Rather, they used his decree as an excuse for making mansions for *themselves*.



## When thou sittest in thine house

Rev. Arie denHartog, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

# Perfect moral guidance for youth (1)

Perfect moral guidance for youth can only be found in the Word of God.

The instructors of morality in the world have no absolute standard. Their instruction is ever changing with each succeeding age and every culture. It follows the imagined wisdom of the world, which the apostle James in his letter calls earthly, sensual, and devilish (James 3:15). What was once condemned in past ages is today approved. Immorality of the grossest sort is promoted and glorified by the mass media and the entertainment industry. The world’s celebrities are among the most wicked and immoral, yet the youth of this world are enticed by their philosophy and captivated by their life style. They are willing to pay millions of dollars to these celebrities for the promotion of their wicked ways and life.

The youth of the world are enslaved to the worldwide Internet and hand-held electronic devices. Younger and younger children demand these of their parents to keep up with their peers. They spend hours of their time glued to cell phones. Studies have shown that as much 80% of the traffic on the Internet involves gross and explicit immorality. The world teaches that there is no greater excitement to be found, no greater pleasure and fellowship to be involved with. The world teaches its youth that they need not fear the judgment of the holy

God on all of this. Young people are left confused and sometimes in despair about morality for their lives.

In this article we shall follow closely the question posed in Psalm 119:9, “Wherewithall shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word.”

The instruction of this passage and the whole of Psalm 119 give the perfect guidance that God alone can give. If this guidance is followed by the young men and young women of the covenant, they shall never fall. They will not finally be disappointed. They will be blessed and glorious forever. They will be led by God to everlasting salvation and perfect and unending joy and happiness.

This instruction of Psalm 119 may be the words of a covenant father concerned about teaching true spiritual morality to his children. Some have suggested that the author of Psalm 119, especially in light of verse 9, was himself a young man who desired to teach others like himself. However, there is not sufficient basis for such a conclusion. Perhaps it was composed by an instructor among God’s people who had the benefit of a long life of experience from which he had learned great wisdom.

Psalm 119 uses 22 synonyms referring to the Word of God and the law of God. Every one of its 176 verses, with only two exceptions, contains one of these syn-

onyms. This indicates that the writer of the Psalm had great love for the Word of God and deep understanding of its great wisdom. He knew how many ways the Word of God, if followed, would be of greatest practical benefit.

The Hebrew word translated in the KJV as “young man” can refer to a person from early childhood into the twenties. This word is used in the Bible for Rachel when Jacob first saw her and immediately fell in love with her. It is used for Ruth when she was first married. It is used for Joseph when he was brought down to Egypt, and for Solomon when he first became the king of Israel. It is used for young men in Israel when they were conscripted to go out to battle and fight with the fearful enemy. For the young man in view in Psalm 119, his very life was constantly being threatened.

The verse cited above specifically addresses youth, offering the perfect guidance of morality for their lives that they so desperately need. Youth are at a very important stage of their lives. They will face the questions of a career, the choice of a marriage partner, and a host of other tremendously important questions that will determine the course of their whole life. They must be ready to be independent from their parents and be equipped to live a morally responsible and upright life, making their own good decisions and judgments, though of course not all alone.

Young people are also in a significant stage of life personally from physical and psychological perspectives. Hormones are changing their feelings, desires, and inclinations. These have will have a very strong influence, an almost mysterious power.

In the beginning God made all of these desires good and perfect. Even the strong desire for sexual fulfillment and the intense pleasure and excitement it brings were made good and holy by God. Through the Fall man’s nature became corrupt and depraved. All of his desires, feelings, and purposes are affected by this. As young men and young women grow up, their personalities develop with hearts and minds that by nature are raging with the passions of sin. This is why the question posed in Psalm 119:9 is so extremely urgent. If the way of the young man is not cleansed, he will most definitely be led by his sinful passions to spiritual ruin. This will be true even when he lives an outwardly respectable and honorable life in society.

Immorality is contrary to the perfect holiness, beauty, and glory of God. He is the sovereign, righteous, and holy One. He is the righteous Judge of all. Even the sins that men do under the cover of the darkness are known to God. God is able to judge the secret thoughts and intents and desires of the heart.

We usually think of immorality in connection with the vile sexual perversions so common in the world. This form of immorality is an abomination to God and brings on man His heavy wrath and judgment.

But immorality also refers to every other spiritual-moral violation of the law of God. The pride of man before God is immoral. Hatred for God and the neighbor is immoral. Sinful anger and uncontrolled wrath are immoral. Jealousy and self seeking are immoral. Materialism, the love of money, and all man’s greed are immoral. Every evil lust of man’s heart is immoral. The Bible warns us that love for the world and that which is in the world is enmity against God. All that is in the world is the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (I John 2:15, 16). When the spiritually minded young man or young woman seeks cleansing and moral guidance, he/she must think of all of these forms of immorality.

There is reason, however, why there is such great emphasis and necessary condemnation of sins against the seventh commandment. The lust of these sins in the heart of man is extremely powerful and this lust is never satisfied. It is destructive to the soul of man, making him more and more corrupt. Even though this lust is glorified by the celebrities and media of the world, it brings shame and disgrace on those who live in it and, worst of all, the severe judgment of God.

Pagan religions have always been characterized by the practice of immorality, even making it part of their abominable worship. Only the Holy One whom we know to be the one only, true and living God condemns and judges this evil.

The violation of sexual morality brings to ruin many already in their youth. According to the book of Proverbs, even strong men are brought down to hell by this sin. One of the chief reasons why so many marriages that began seemingly with great happiness and excitement soon end up in the treachery and misery of divorce and broken homes is the immorality many walked in already in their youth. For this reason, the church must not be silent or ever temper its warnings regarding this great evil and its destructive power.

Even in the Reformed church world voices are being heard that advocate softening the warnings against this great evil. “We cannot imagine,” they say, “that our young people will remain holy and pure when they have such strong desires for sex and there are so many pressures in modern society. The world’s inventions of birth control have eliminated the dangers of unwanted pregnancies. It is unreasonable and unnecessary to condemn fornication among youth. We must adapt to our modern-day world and adjust our moral standards and expectations.”

But God created marriage to be a holy institution. This is the beauty and glory of marriage as God created it. Young people should exercise self-control and keep themselves holy for marriage. Failure to do so will make it all the more difficult to live in the blessed intimacy of marriage and in life-long faithfulness and devotion to the one husband or wife whom God has given.

Among the most shocking aspects of this sin of fornication is the breeding in one of deep hatred, often even for those with whom he/she casually sinned. The great evil of rape and the abuse of the women in our society arise from the depraved passions of worldly men. The

sins against the seventh commandment often lead to the most atrocious and violent murders committed in the world in heat of immoral passion. God's judgment is on our society and He is giving men and women over to vile affections.

All of this gives great urgency to the question of Psalm 119:9—"How shall a young man cleanse his way?" This question is directed to the godly young man. A young man who is not spiritually minded has no interest at all in this question. The text is speaking to sons and daughters of the covenant and members of the faithful church of Jesus Christ.



## All Thy works shall praise Thee

Dr. Brendan Looyenga, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Calvin College and member of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan

# Fighting infection

**“Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.”**

**I Corinthians 5:6, 7**

During the time of the early New Testament, the nature of human disease was not well understood. Had Paul been aware of how infections of the body worked, he might well have chosen the analogy of viruses or bacteria to exhort the Corinthians to purge the disease of sin out of their midst. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, however, a strikingly similar analogy does appear in the text that opens this article. The *leaven* that Paul speaks of is in fact a microorganism—yeast—used to make bread rise during the baking process. Without the active efforts of a baker to keep fresh dough free of yeast, it would become “leavened” and start to rise prematurely. Thus the exhortation: Purge out the old leaven before it spreads!

Bakers, of course, are not the only people interested in controlling the growth of microorganisms. In this article we will examine the means by which our bodies deal with infections from bacteria and viruses as a means to understand the way by which a faithful church addresses false doctrine or practices being introduced into the body of Christ. The God-ordained means by which our bodies remain free of harmful infections is to provide us with an immune system. So, too, God has provided a systematic means to maintain good or-

der in His church, a means by which the body of Christ remains healthy and fruitful in the face of constant threats of infection by sin.

The immune system is a wonderful component of the human body that allows for life in a world that is teeming with potentially harmful viruses, bacteria, and other microbes. Without a functional immune system, we would rapidly succumb to infectious disease. It is no wonder that the symptoms caused by human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection—a syndrome we call “acquired immune-deficiency syndrome,” or AIDS—are so feared. When the body lacks immune-defense capacity, it becomes susceptible to infections that are invariably fatal if left untreated. An intact, properly functioning immune system is absolutely indispensable to healthy life in our world.

To understand how this wonderfully fearful system of our body functions, it is important to know a few things about the development and maintenance of the immune system. Like all the other cell types in our blood, the cells of our immune system are produced by stem cells located in the central core of bones that we call the *bone marrow*. While the stem cells residing in our marrow are not recognizable as any one type of blood cell, they can give rise to the entire hierarchy of cell types found in our blood. Collectively, these cells allow us to carry oxygen (red blood cells), to produce blood clots in response to tissue damage (platelets), and to fight off every conceivable type of foreign invader that can find their way past

the external barrier of our skin. This last class of blood cells—which are generically called “white blood cells”—are the major cellular component of the immune system.

The term “white blood cell” actually includes two large subsets of cell types, which can in turn be subdivided into even more specialized types of immune cells. For our purposes, it is sufficient to point out that scientists typically classify white blood cells as being part of either the *innate* (“built-in”) or the *adaptive* (“responsive”) immune system. Cells of the *innate* immune system are constantly roaming the body in search of foreign invaders—usually viruses or bacteria—which they literally gobble up (engulf) and digest as part of their function. This digestive process is incomplete, however, allowing cells of the innate immune system to display molecular pieces of dismembered microbes like trophies on their cell surface as they parade through the vascular system of the body. These molecular trophies serve as a sort of advertisement to other cell types of the *adaptive* immune system, which subsequently “learn” what to look for as they are recruited to the fight.

Once activated and trained what to look for, the cells of the adaptive immune system become an even more potent army against invading microbes. Unlike the more generalized cells of the innate immune system, which typically destroy anything that looks foreign (whether dead or alive), the cells of the adaptive immune system focus their deadly attacks on the one specific target that they were “trained” to identify. This target is usually a piece of one molecule from a virus or bacterium that was captured and digested by the innate immune cells. Having become alerted to the danger of this foreign molecule, the “activated” cells of the adaptive immune system are able to hunt down and destroy anything that looks like that molecule, including the intact viruses or bacteria on which they are found. This system of “learning” employed by the adaptive immune system can also be engaged therapeutically by the use of vaccines, which put the immune system on alert for a specific invading pathogen without seriously endangering the health of the person being vaccinated. As a result, that person’s immune system is primed to respond rapidly if it encounters the live version of this pathogen.

After being engaged and trained for the fight, cells of the adaptive immune system carry out their attack on invading microbes in a variety of ways. These means of fighting infection include the use of long-range chemical weapons (*antibodies*) as well as cell-to-cell combat that, like a modern army, can neutralize threats at a distance or at close range. The analogy of an army at war goes even further as other tissues in the body get involved. All tissues are capable of sending out chemical

“distress signals” that attract immune cells to the site of active infection. The same biological signals that cause inflammation, swelling, and pain sensations in damaged tissue also serve to recruit immune cells, which rush to the site to carry out the job of destroying foreign invaders. More subtle signals that we are not aware of—called *cytokines*—are also at play, circulating through the vascular system to constantly inform the dispersed immune system of the condition and integrity of the entire body. In truth, the immune system is an amazing component of the body that functions very much like a resident modern army, always prepared to fight any sort of invader that might cross the outside borders of its host.

There is a valuable analogy between function of the immune system and the way in which the church identifies and perceives threats to her faith and life. Note that these threats are very real and *must* be correctly combated by the church. What, then, is a correct response? In truth, it looks very much like what our immune systems do when a harmful invader enters the body.

In the first stage of response, the harmful doctrine or practice must be clearly identified as a potential threat to the church. This is one of the essential functions of faithful preaching, which is rightly *antithetical* in nature, exposing the lies of false doctrine and identifying sinful patterns of living. As such, our first notice of a potential “infection” most often comes from the pulpit through ordained pastors of the Word. As overseers of the preaching, elders in a faithful church are specifically commissioned by Christ to further ensure that false doctrine and practices are not being introduced into the church by those who ought to be bringing the truth of God’s Word (Titus 1:9-11; Jude 1:4). In some circumstances the presence of a doctrinal or practical problem may be first noticed by a perceptive church member functioning in the office of believer, in which case that concern ought to be brought forward to the consistory for proper evaluation and resolution.

Regardless of who first sounds the warning, the church or its members enter the second phase of response when the danger of a doctrinal or practical threat becomes clear. In this second phase, the church rallies the theological resources necessary to expose the specific threat that false doctrine or improper practice poses to the body of Christ. Significant work must be done to educate the church as to the nature and particular danger of this threat and, once again, much of this work falls on the shoulders of officebearers at the “site of infection” in a local church. Their means of exposing error is certainly the light of Scripture, but also the wise counsel of creeds. Let us not forget that many infectious errors in the church of Christ are not new. Like a good vaccine, our creeds provide us with a collective re-



cord of prior infections and allow the church to respond quickly when a similar form of that infection emerges. With a clear sense of the danger that has been identified by Scripture and the creeds, the body of Christ can enter into the third phase of responding to false doctrine or practice, which is to clear the infection from its midst.

This third phase must necessarily begin in the local congregation where the infection was first exposed. In many cases, the work of eradicating a false doctrine or practice both begins and ends under the watch of a faithful consistory, which is the goal that is outlined by Paul in many of his epistles to specific congregations. But like an infection that has entered the bloodstream, there are times when error spreads outside the local congregation and becomes a more serious threat to the broader body. In such cases the work of exposing and treating the error becomes the work of an entire denomination in its ecclesiastical bodies, starting at the level of consistories and working up to the level of *synod* in a Reformed denomination—or their equivalent body in other forms of church government. In the multitude of wise counselors (Prov. 11:14; 15:22), the source of sinful doctrine or practice is directly confronted and combated. Like the immune system, ecclesiastical bodies have a variety of tools at their disposal to fight doctrinal errors. They may directly examine parties involved regarding their orthodoxy or perhaps require a rejection of the error and repentance. In God’s goodness, this action

may remove the error from the church. But when these approaches fail to resolve the error, ecclesiastical bodies proceed through the steps of excommunication to remove those who will not submit to the spiritual authority exercised by the church. Whatever the means, the infection of false doctrine or practice is removed so as to maintain health in the body of Christ. This is right and good. It is the way of Scripture (Matt. 18:15-18; I Cor. 5).

In conclusion, I point readers to the Synod of Dordt (1618-19), which is celebrating its 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and next. The work done at this ecclesiastical assembly is a clear example of the church uniting all of its theological resources to eradicate the deadly infection of Arminianism that had crept into the Dutch Reformed churches. Four hundred years later we continue to treasure the central work of this synod—its Canons—as a living “vaccine” for the threat of the Arminian infections that continue to emerge in the modern church world. Thank God that He has given both our physical bodies and the body of Christ a means to combat infections! The immune system is indeed an amazing aspect of our being “fearfully and wonderfully made,” which ought to turn us to our Creator in praise and worship.

The Lord willing, we will continue to build on the analogy between the immune system and the church in the next article in this series, considering other aspects of similarity, albeit from a different perspective.



## Reformed Free Publishing Association Annual meeting

Rev. Angus Stewart, pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland.

# The RFPA, the CPRC, and the spread of the truth (1)

### Default position

The typical professing evangelical Christian in our day, sadly, is a long way from being able to confess the Reformed faith as summed in our “Three Forms of Unity” and become a member in one of our Reformed churches.

In all likelihood, he (or she) holds some Arminian ideas. Even if he calls himself a Calvinist, he probably thinks that God loves everybody, that Christ died for all men head for head (at least in some sense), and that God earnestly desires to save everybody. Romans 9 does not come into it!

In eschatology, our representative evangelical is probably a dispensationalist.

With regard to the first Christian sacrament, he will likely be baptistic. Even many paedobaptists in our day would dismiss the issue as relatively unimportant.

If you ask him about the covenant, he might respond, “What’s that?” Moreover, most of those who *are* covenantal believe that it is merely a contract and not a gracious bond of fellowship between Jehovah our Father and us, His beloved people.

All sorts of charismatic ideas are abroad in our day:

the baptism with the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, ongoing prophecy, and more. Most evangelicals are charismatics or are open to their ideas or would not condemn them.

The truth that God alone determines how He is to be worshiped—the regulative principle of worship (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 96)—is largely unheard of.

If you speak about the church with an evangelical, the two of you may not even be referring to the same thing, because the truth that churches are to be evaluated according to their faithfulness in the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline may well be new and strange to him (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). Even mentioning church discipline seems scary and unchristian to many, despite I Corinthians 5.

If the catechetical instruction of the children of believers crops up, most evangelicals would respond, “Well our church doesn’t do that. I do not like the sound of it; it sure sounds like a lot of hard work!”

If the conversation turns to the subject of marriage, the typical evangelical thinks along these lines: “Since the state allows (easy) divorce and remarriage (while one’s spouse is living), well then, that should be fine with the church of Christ, too.” It is as if Mark 10:2-12 is not in the Bible!

If you mention the Reformed creeds, your evangelical interlocutor may well ask you, “How in the wide world do they fit with the authority of Scripture? Besides, all these old creeds are too deep and divisive!”

This is what the average professing evangelical in the twenty-first century believes regarding the ten things just mentioned: the doctrines of grace and the end times, baptism and the covenant, charismaticism and worship, the church and catechetical instruction, and marriage and the creeds.

To arrange all this slightly different, the typical evangelical holds views that are “A” for Arminian, “B” for baptist, “C” for charismatic and “D” for dispensational. You could even, if you like, sum up more of his ideas in terms of sub-biblical and erroneous positions regarding the four “C”s—the church, the creeds, the covenant, and the children of believers (including their teaching)—as well as low and false notions of marriage and worship.

In the preceding decades and even the last few centuries, there has been a massive decline in Protestantism from biblical and Reformed teaching. Hosea put it like this: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (4:6).

What I have just described is what I refer to as the “default position,” the standard setting, as it were, for most evangelicals, that is, professing Christians who

are not Eastern Orthodox or Roman Catholic or modernist. This is the default position or standard setting not only for most evangelicals in the U.S.A. but also in Canada, the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, continental Europe, the Philippines, and for the most part, the world over.

The default position was once that of the majority of those who have come from the outside as adults—myself included—to join the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) in Northern Ireland and the Limerick Reformed Fellowship (LRF), our mission work in the Republic of Ireland. If we were to exclude from our consideration the sisters who were raised in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) and have joined the CPRC or the LRF (mostly through marriage), the percentage of our members who joined us as adults and once held the default position is even higher.

The evangelical default position may sound strange to many who were born and bred in the PRC. It is a long way from where you are theologically. All should recognize that there is a big gap, even a chasm, between evangelicalism in the twenty-first century and the Reformed faith of Holy Scripture summed in our confessions.

If we think in terms of the world of the prophet Hosea, our day is not even that of the southern Kingdom of Judah. Our day is that of the northern Kingdom. Hosea 4 declares, “The LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land” (v. 1), yea, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (v. 6).

What is needed is a change in doctrine or belief and, flowing from that, in life or practice. There must be growth in the knowledge of Scripture and in true theology. The accumulated rubbish of years and decades of false doctrine for many people must be cleared away by the Word and Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is necessary for the typical evangelical, never mind those from the cults, from humanism, from Roman Catholicism, or from paganism.

## Role of the RFPA

At this stage, you are probably already sensing that there is a role in this for the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA). Of course, the RFPA has many roles and helps many parties. But here we are focusing on “The RFPA, the CPRC and the Spread of the Truth.” More particularly, our concern is with the spread of the truth especially to those outside, such as the typical professing evangelical in the default position or to those who are closer to the Reformed faith of Scripture, as well as the politically correct pagans who rule our decadent Western world.

So how does the RFPA help the CPRC spread God's truth? First, as well as helping many of our people become members in the church in the first place, the RFPA also assists those who are in membership. Most of us subscribe to the *Standard Bearer* and some also pass it on to others. Some in the CPRC are members of the RFPA Book Club and those who are not also buy many of their fine books. Two of the classes in our congregation are studying RFPA works: the men are working their way through Mark Hoeksema's *Studies in Acts* and the ladies are discussing *Saved by Grace* by Prof. Ron Cammenga and Rev. Ron Hanko, because this year is the 400th anniversary of the Canons of Dordt.

RFPA literature is important to me as the minister of the congregation because it reinforces the church's preaching and teaching. In any group, there are also some people who particularly benefit from reading, not only hearing. The two means together strengthen each other. Our members need the conviction that the Reformed faith that we hold dear is both true and important. This builds up both individuals and their families, and it encourages and equips them to be effective witnesses.

The RFPA helps us greatly as regards the CPRC Bookstore, for the vast majority of our books come from them. The RFPA provides us with an excellent and growing range of commentaries, both on biblical books and on our creeds; doctrinal and devotional works; books of church history and biography; books for children and educational materials.

The RFPA publishes the works of our missionary, Rev. Martyn McGeown. *Called to Watch for Christ's Return* was his first title. *Grace and Assurance: The Message of the Canons of Dordt* has recently been produced. Lord willing, the next RFPA publication will be Pastor McGeown's sermonic exposition of Micah, which proclaims the incomparability of our glorious God [which is now available-ed.].

Our bookstore's bestselling RFPA title is Rev. R. Hanko's *Doctrine According to Godliness*, which consists chiefly of "Covenant Reformed News" articles that he wrote when in Northern Ireland as the CPRC's previous pastor. Readers like its short but substantive chapters with their helpful application. For similar reasons, *Doctrine According to Godliness* is also our most translated book, with all or parts of it in thirteen languages.

Numbers two and three on the CPRC's RFPA best-sellers list are both by Prof. David Engelsma: *Prosperous Wicked and Plagued Saints* (a perennial concern for the people of God) and *Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root* (exposing a wicked doctrine assaulting Reformed and Presbyterian churches).

Our bookstore also stocks other Protestant Reformed works, such as, Don Doezema's three-volume *Upon This Rock; Christ's Spiritual Kingdom*, published by the congregation in Redlands, California; and *The Confessions and Church Order of the PRCA*, a very important work.

The CPRC Bookstore sells the seven British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) books that were written by Protestant Reformed men (Profs. H. Hanko and D. Engelsma, and Rev. A. Lanning). The RFPA helps us with these by negotiating a good price for us with an American publisher, by distributing them to churches and evangelism committees that pre-order them, and by storing the CPRC's copies for us to transport to Northern Ireland later.

Other fine titles in our bookstore include some sermons by John Calvin and some works by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) in Australia.

Besides books, the CPRC Bookstore stocks Protestant Reformed pamphlets on many subjects. These are shorter and simpler items that we give out free to people who are interested in learning the truth. Those who want a longer and deeper treatment often turn to a book, which is where the RFPA material comes in. Before their transportation to Northern Ireland, the RFPA graciously stores these pamphlets for us.

Our church produces sermon series, Belgic Confession classes, and conference addresses in DVD and CD box sets. Thus we have a range of materials in different formats: written, audio, and video.

When it comes to displaying our Reformed resources, the attractive RFPA books are of great help. There are many RFPA titles in the cabinet in the narthex of our church building. We place these books and our other materials on tables after all our lectures or conferences in Ballymena, South Wales, or elsewhere. We want the attendees to leave with something in their hand that will reinforce the truth that was taught.

The CPRC uses various other means to promote RFPA literature. Our main website ([www.cprc.co.uk](http://www.cprc.co.uk)) contains a large section on our books, which can be ordered online. Lord willing, when my longsuffering wife completes the massive job of revamping of our current website, it will have a completely new appearance. Then our online articles and pamphlets will automatically display a link to pamphlets or books on the same subject.

When we send out the "Covenant Reformed News," a short monthly paper that Prof. H. Hanko and I write, we include a flyer advertising our RFPA books. The RFPA mails us several hundred copies of the "RFPA Update" which is also inserted into the envelope with the "Covenant Reformed News."

We advertise and link to RFPA books on Facebook, and sell some this way too ([www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC](http://www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC)).

The RFPA assists us when we fill our orders and post them out, because we send color RFPA catalogs with the books that we often wrap inside an old *Standard Bearer*. This has even gotten some *Standard Bearer* subscriptions! When they send the check back for their

order, people will often say, “That is a great magazine. I really liked this or that article.”

Financially speaking, we are very pleased with the discount and the good credit that we receive. The RFPA even helps us by taking credit-card payments from some of our foreign customers (and taking it from the CPRC Bookstore’s bill with the RFPA), because we do not sell enough to justify the cost of our installing credit-card facilities. The RFPA staff go the second mile!

## Special notice from the Theological School Committee

### 30 years of serving

I have been commissioned by the Theological School Committee (TSC) of the PRC to a most delightful task. However, to do the task thoroughly would likely require a special issue of the *Standard Bearer*. Consequently, I will be a bit abbreviated and selective. The delightful task is to express the TSC’s great appreciation for Judi Doezema’s thirty years of service as the seminary’s secretary.

Judi’s secretarial work at the seminary required that she serve many people in a myriad of ways. Any attempt to list them all will be inadequate, but I submit the following paragraphs to provide the reader with a little peak into some of the particulars of her service and the manner in which she served that demonstrate she went far beyond her routine duties of answering the phone, welcoming visitors, handling mailings, preparing bills, maintaining supplies, overseeing the kitchen, etc.

Judi served the TSC by assisting the TSC secretary in the preparation of reports and in various other secretarial tasks including copying and scanning.

Judi served the registrar/librarian/archivist with scheduling, preparing calendars, grade reports, foreign-student needs, checking out books, yearly library inventory, and by helping maintain the PRC archives’ index.

Judi served the faculty by assisting with various course-material needs (syllabi, copying articles, etc.) by her careful work on calendars, schedules and reports.

But the following responses from our professors in regard to Judi’s work demonstrate that Judi’s impact on the seminary went far beyond her job description:

I’m usually the first one here in the mornings at about 6 A.M. because I teach a zero-hour Greek course. But, try as I may, I rarely, if ever, beat Don and Judi. Sometimes, if I got up earlier than normal, I would meet them as I rounded the corner, while they were trudging up the driveway, even through the deep snow. But usually I would come up the drive and the lights would be on and the alarm disabled. Sometimes in the snow and

wind Judi would even be carrying a 9x13 of goodies to treat us on Fridays when she *always* brought something for the students. Even when it was snowing, they always walked to the seminary from their home a quarter mile up the road.

And when it was snowing, they came even earlier, so that the walks would always be completely shoveled by 6 A.M.—the time any normal person should consider seminary’s start time to be. On these snowy days Don would head straight to the storage room to start the smelly little two-cycle snowblower, while Judi would begin shoveling. If one of the shovels was broke, it was hard for me to wrest the good one out of her hand so that I could help her. And all this was *before* their own driveway and walks were shoveled.

Her cheery, “Good morning, prof.” every morning was our usual welcome. And her, “Goodbye, prof.” every evening was our send-off. She is very tenderhearted...it is her nature certainly. She could not squish a bug....she would trap them under a styrofoam cup, whether a spider, a stinkbug, or a beetle. She would then quickly cover the cup with a piece of paper or a hand, take it outside, and release into the wilds whatever critter was captured inside. She loved her plants and bestowed tender care upon them. She has a Thanksgiving cactus at the seminary that annually is filled with blossoms as a result of her care.

She cheerfully handled thousands of requests in her time here. Here from 6 A.M. to 5 P.M. She ate her lunch at the desk. And, oh, yeah, what is a vacation? She and Don rarely took a day off, let alone a vacation.

Judi served our seminary students by providing them with a “Student Directory,” class schedules, a calendar, and course materials. In addition, she assisted them with their bookstore needs and copying services. But





her service to our students was much, much more than that, as one of our former students makes clear:

Judi greeted each of the students, by name, with a warm smile and “good morning” each and every morning we came to seminary. If she was there when we left, and she often was, her cheery farewell followed us out the door.

Judi flawlessly assisted me with printing off exegesis papers, practice preaching sermons, class papers (especially Dogmatics papers), and typed exams to *exact* specifications (quantity of copies, double-sided or not, etc.). If any mistakes were made in fulfilling any one of these “orders” (and there were mistakes), they were certainly my own.

Judi unfailingly supplied mouth-watering baked goods for coffee-break every Friday, in sufficient quantities to allow those who were so inclined (I was so inclined) to have a second helping.

Judi uncomplainingly washed the stacks of dirty dishes we left in the sink every day, and tidied the kitchen while we whooped it up playing ping-pong in the basement.

Several times when I had packages delivered to me at the seminary, Judi quietly carried them to my desk and deposited them in my hands if I was there or laid them on my desk to await my arrival.

Judi offered personal encouragement to me in my work. When she would print off my exams or papers, she would sometimes express amazement at the work required of us as students of the seminary, and follow those expressions with heartfelt assurance of her prayers for grace and strength for me and the other students. These quiet encouragements were most edifying.

In these ways and countless other unnamed and probably unnoticed (and thus un-thanked) ways, Judi humbly and faithfully served the routine and smooth running of the seminary, and thus served the churches and their work of training men for the gospel ministry.

It was a delight to go over my seminary days and think about all the ways in which God used Judi as an instrument in my life, in the seminary’s day-to-day routine, and in the service of our churches.

Those student and professor attestations of Judi Doezema’s willing service did not at all surprised me. They reminded me of the kindergarten teacher with the same name who greeted me as a new teacher at Adams Street Christian School back in the fall of 1973. They reminded me of the Judi who served as my secretary during my years as administrator at Adams. They reminded me of the Judi who was “Judi-on-the-spot” no matter the task that needed to be done; even the task of shoveling snow off our school ice skating rink “down below” long after school was dismissed. But I digress.

While Judi’s service as the secretary of the Protestant Reformed Seminary is completed, she plans to continue the work she has long been doing at the seminary for other causes in the denomination. She will, for example, continue to prepare Reformed Witness Hour sermons for printing; work with the Stated Clerk of Synod in the publishing of the annual Acts; and give in-house assistance to the editors of the *Standard Bearer* in their preparing of each issue for publication..

One might be tempted to ask, “How could one person do all this work?” Some time ago the TSC asked Judi to make a list of the things she did while working at the seminary. In response, she listed and explained much of what I have written in this article; then at the very end she wrote: “Note: I usually spend 55 hours per week at the seminary—and rarely run out of work.”

When Judi reads what I have written, she will likely respond something like: “I only did what anyone else would have done.” While that may be so, nevertheless the TCS, (and I am sure we speak also for the faculty and students) thanks Judi for her selfless, dedicated service, and we thank our Father in heaven who gave her a heart to serve in the godly manner that she did.

No doubt we will miss her cheerful response to our phone calls to the seminary: “This is Judi, how may I help you.”

Cal Kalsbeek, for the TSC



## News from our churches

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

### Trivia question

We are certainly in the Christmas season! The world around us stretches that season as long as possible for financial gain. Christians celebrate Christmas because

of Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer. How many of the New Testament gospel writers tell of the birth of Jesus? Answer later in this column.

## Evangelism activities

At Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA this year's Reformation lecture by Rev. R. Kleyn was on the subject, "The Canons of Dort: Defending and Defining Grace." This topic was chosen in connection with the 400-year anniversary of the Great Synod of Dort at which the Canons were written and adopted.

From the bulletin of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI we find this interesting note:

A group of men from our congregation visit the Kent County Jail to hold a short chapel service with inmates there. Two men go each time and they read, pray, teach, and answer questions that the inmates have. They go once every other month, as we are not the only church group who does this. These men ask that you keep them, as well as the Christian inmates, in your prayers.

## Young people's activities

The Crete young people once again sold the Simple Qpon books to raise money for the 2019 Young People's Convention. The young people called on those in the congregation to take orders. Each coupon book sold for \$20 and contains coupons for local restaurants, fast food, bakeries, arcades/fun centers, bowling alleys, car washes, ice cream shops, and much more.

The young people in Randolph, WI sold delicious sub-sandwiches as a fundraiser, and those at Bethel PRC sold scrumptious egg rolls. Mmm!

The young people in Pittsburgh PRC hosted a chili cook-off recently on a Friday night. Members of the congregation submitted pots of their finest chili, the young people served as judges, and all left happy and filled! A free will offering was taken for the young people there.

This announcement was placed in the bulletin of the Doon, IA PRC:

The Young People's Society invites the adults of the congregation to their Car Challenge scheduled for Saturday, November 24. If you like adventure, scavenger hunts, teamwork, a contest, and good food, this event is for you! You may pre-arrange your team of 4-6 people or just show up at church at 10:00 A.M., and we will be sure you are added to a team. Hope to see you there!

As one young adult put it: "I had a blast!"

## Congregational activities

The Building Committee of Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD scheduled a fall cleanup day at church on a Saturday in November. They were busy raking leaves, trimming

trees, and doing a deep clean inside the church building. Many hands were needed, and all were encouraged to participate in the up-keep of the church property that God has graciously given them.

The Council of Georgetown PRC sent a delegation of Pastor and Mary Haak and Joel and Ellen Bruinooge to the PRC of Vellore, India for a three-week visit (Nov. 7-27). Pastor Haak was to lead seminars on the doctrine of eschatology for area pastors and students of the Sola Gratia Academy, conduct classes in the Tamil and English congregations on the covenant family, preach on the Lord's Day, meet with the PRC of Vellore Council, and make visits to the members of the congregation and the children of Grace Foster Home. We pray for a blessing upon the word of truth to the hearts of many.

The Activities Committee at Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI planned an evening of bowling at Hudsonville Lanes. Members of the congregation met later at church for light refreshments and fun. We wonder what the high bowling score was? Sure sounds like a fun night!

In Randolph, WI their annual Fellowship Supper was held recently at Randolph Public School gym.

## Mission activities

Rev. Daniel Holstege recently accompanied Rev. Vernon Ibe to the Philippine Island of Leyte. The PCRCP mission group, the Protestant Reformed Fellowship of Albuer, is located in the city of Albuer, Leyte. Pastors and elders of the PCRCP are making more regular visits to Leyte to preach there and help the fellowship in other ways. May God continue to bless the spread of the mystery of the gospel of Christ in that far away land.

## Seminary activities

Do you know that four-hundred years ago, on November 13, 1618, the Synod of Dordt began and did not conclude until nearly six months and 180 meetings later? Are you familiar with the history that led to that lengthy synod? Do you know about the weekly events that occurred during that great synod? Join the blog at Dordt400.org to follow that history and be informed in light of the PRC seminary's conference on April 25-27, 2019. Remember that the conference includes a writing contest with great prizes! Sign up and submit your essay by January 15 at Dordt400.org.

## Young adult activities

The Loveland Young Adults Retreat is scheduled to occur March 18-21, 2019 at the YMCA. The speakers

will be Rev. S. Key and Rev. R. Van Overloop. The theme is “Ambassadors for Christ,” taken from the text II Corinthians 5:20.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1.

### Trivia answer

Only Matthew and Luke recount the story of Jesus’ birth.

## Announcements

### Walking in the Way of Love (volume 2)

*A Practical Commentary on 1 Corinthians for the Believer*

This volume treats the apostle’s explanation of the main theme of the epistle in his glorious paean to love in 1 Corinthians 13. Also included in this commentary is treatment of the doctrinal heart of the epistle—the apostle’s instruction regarding the resurrection. The apostle grounds all of his instruction about the way of love in the gospel of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Failure to walk in the way of love as revealed by the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians is an abject failure of faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and in one’s own resurrection. Walking in the way of love is the great evidence of faith in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.



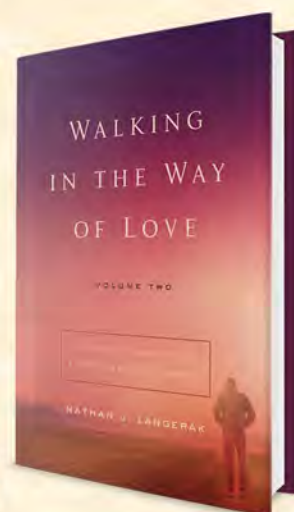
mail@rfpa.org



616-457-5970 (Coming January 2019)



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### Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of the Immanuel PRC express their Christian sympathy to Dave Zylstra, his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren in the death of their wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, **Susan Zylstra**. May they find comfort and assurance in the words of II Corinthians 5:1: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Brian Tolsma, Vice-President

Hilgard Goosen, Clerk

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of the Immanuel PRC express their Christian sympathy to Peter and Cindy van Iperen and family in the death of Peter’s sister, **Lianne van Iperen**. May their comfort be found in God’s Word where we read “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 15:56).

Brian Tolsma, Vice-President

Hilgard Goosen, Clerk

## Announcements continued

### Wedding anniversary

With thanksgiving to God for their prayerful upbringing and example of faith, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents, **Pete and Judy Brummel**, who will celebrate 50 years of marriage on December 19, 2018, Lord willing. Our earnest prayer is that God will continue to bless them richly in their marriage. “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Genesis 17:7).

Brent and Stacy Haarsma

Michell and Caitlin Post

Courtney, Carly, Cassidy, Colby

Gary Brummel

Lane\* and Cassandra Brummel

Dillon and Ashley Brummel

Everleigh

Sydney, Thomas, Isaiah, Kerstin, Bethany

(\*Tricia Brummel, in glory)

Kevin and Kathy Brummel

Jason and Alissa Van Maanen

Sophie, Paula

Chris and Laura Cleveringa

Logan, Traiton, Chayce, Maesa

Brian and Renae Faber

Jadyn and Amara

Peter and Keisha Brummel

Shaely, Ava, Breck, Tatum, Atley, Aria

Matt and Ellen Brummel

Kenzie

Darrin and Ashley Brummel

Braleigh, Bentley, Raeya, Adalyn, Maddox

Kyle and Rachel Brummel

Andrew and Ashley Lenting

Hull, Iowa

### Teacher needed

The Edmonton Protestant Reformed 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](mailto:gr.tolsma@gmail.com) / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at [s\\_r\\_ferguson@hotmail.com](mailto:s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com).

### Teacher needed

Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School (Loveland, CO) is seeking applicants for an additional high school teacher for the 2019-20 school year. Interested candidates may contact the Administrator, BJ Mowery at (970) 218-3420 or [bmowery@lovelandprcs.org](mailto:bmowery@lovelandprcs.org) or the Education Chairman, Joe Ophoff at (970) 818-6790 or [joe@scotthomeinspection.com](mailto:joe@scotthomeinspection.com).

### Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 9, 2019, at 8:00 A.M., in the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI.

Gary Boverhof,  
Stated Clerk