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Not yet ascended to my Father

Rev. James Slopsema

PRC Synod 2018, agenda

Prof. Russell Dykstra

In memory of Rev. Wayne Bekkering

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Foster children, the Easter bunny, and the sexual revolution

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Is the law part of the gospel?

Rev. Cory Griess



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Editorial office

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

Business office

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

Church news editor

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

United Kingdom office

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

Rep. of Ireland office

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

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Meditation

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

Not yet ascended to my Father

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

John 20:17

These words were spoken by Jesus to Mary Magdalene at the tomb on the day of His resurrection.

Mary Magdalene had come to the tomb earlier that morning with several other women to anoint Jesus' body. To their complete surprise the stone had been rolled away from the opening of the tomb. While the other women entered the tomb and were informed by the angel of Jesus' resurrection, Mary, without any investigation, ran back to Jerusalem to tell Peter and John that someone had stolen the body of Jesus.

And now Mary was at the tomb alone. The other women were returning to Jerusalem with the glad news of Jesus' resurrection. Peter and John had visited the grave site, had seen the evidence of the resurrection, and had left. But Mary was still in the dark. She was at the tomb sobbing uncontrollably.

And Jesus appeared to her! At first Mary thought He was the gardener and asked whether He knew where the grave robbers had taken Jesus' body. But when Jesus spoke her name, she recognized Him and reached out to embrace Him. What joy and relief filled her heart!

But then Jesus stopped her. Touch me not!

How strange this must have seemed to Mary. Ever since Jesus had cast out seven devils from her, Mary Magdalene had been a faithful disciple of Jesus. In fact, she with several other women had ministered to Jesus out of their own substance (Luke 8:1-3). How often had not that brought her into close contact with Jesus? And now she was not to touch Him? Besides, did not Jesus understand her great joy? Did not Jesus realize how His crucifixion three days ago had devastated His disciples? Did He not appreciate their grief and sorrow? And now He was here, alive and well. She did not understand it all. But could not Jesus appreciate her ecstatic joy as she reached out to embrace Him?

Touch me not!
How strange!

The explanation for this command is to be found in the nature of Jesus' resurrection.

His resurrection was an advancement from the earthly to the heavenly.

This had not been the case of any other resurrection prior to this. Take Lazarus' resurrection as an example. One month prior to His own resurrection, Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus' resurrection was merely a return back to this life. Although raised from the dead, Lazarus' body remained flesh and blood. It was still an earthly body adapted only to live here on the earth. And Lazarus' body was still mortal. The poor man had to die again. And right along with all this, Lazarus was able to resume his earthly life with all the relationships he had enjoyed before.

But Jesus' resurrection was different. It was an advancement. Yes, the body that Jesus' received in His resurrection was the same body that had been laid in the grave three days earlier. But through the resurrection that body was changed. It was made heavenly, adapted to live in the heavenly realm. And it was immortal. The resurrection placed Jesus far beyond the reach of death. He arose to die no more!

The explanation for this greater resurrection of Jesus into heavenly glory is to be found in Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross. Burdened with the sins of His people, Jesus endured the full punishment of sin. This earned for Jesus the right to eternal life with God. It demanded this better resurrection.

But this destroyed the old way of life that Jesus had with His disciples on the earth. He was now heavenly. They were still earthly. It was impossible for things to continue as they had been.

And this is what Jesus was teaching Mary Magdalene with that surprising rebuke, "Touch me not."

Especially Mary had to be taught this. Not understanding the purpose of His death and resurrection, all

of Jesus' disciples would have rejoiced to return to how things had been. Gladly they would have followed Jesus, sitting as His feet for instruction, rejoicing in His miracles, tending to His earthly needs. And this was true especially of Mary Magdalene. She alone reached out to embrace Jesus as He appeared to His various disciples.

Touch me not!

Things will not continue as they have been.

Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father!

Jesus ascended to heaven forty days after His resurrection. This was a change of place for Jesus. He left the sphere of this earth in His glorified human nature and went to heaven. As to His human nature, He is no more here but in glory.

Jesus emphasized that He would ascend to His Father, whom He also identified as His God. "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus repeatedly spoke of God as His Father. In so doing He was not referring to the inner trinitarian relationship that He has eternally as the second person of the Trinity to the first person. It is true that within the Godhead Jesus is the eternal Son of the first person, who is His Father. But the first person is not the God of the second person. And so we must understand that when Jesus spoke of His God and Father, He had in mind rather His relationship as Mediator of the triune God. Through the virgin birth the eternal Son of God came into our flesh to be the Mediator of God to accomplish the salvation of His elect people. That made the triune God to be the God and Father of Jesus, the Mediator. And to that relationship Jesus now spoke when He told Mary Magdalene, "I ascend unto my Father."

It is important at this point to understand also that as the Son of God in our flesh Jesus, the Mediator, is the heir of God, destined to inherit all things from His heavenly Father. According to Hebrews 1:2 God, "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds." Notice, Jesus is the appointed heir of all things! He is heir of the entire universe. He is heir of the power of His heavenly Father to rule all things, including the hearts and lives of God's elect. He is heir of all the blessings of salvation that God has ordained for His elect church.

This inheritance is something Jesus earned by His suffering and death on the cross as He covered the sin of God's elect church.

And it is through His resurrection and subsequent ascension that Jesus comes into His inheritance as God's

Son. He is seated at the right hand of God the Father. He is clothed with power and honor and glory to own and rule all things. He is also given the blessings of salvation that He has earned for the church.

And the blessed gospel is that Jesus receives His inheritance as our Brother.

Notice how Jesus emphasized to Mary Magdalene this relationship with His disciples: "But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God, and your God." On the basis of Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross and in the power of His resurrection, Jesus' disciples are brought into the very family of God. They are adopted as God's children. They are even given the image of God through a spiritual rebirth. And so they become Jesus' brothers. Bear in mind that Jesus' disciples are not just the small band that followed Him during His earthly ministry. His disciples include all in history who follow Him by faith. All true believers are members of the family of God and know Jesus as their Brother.

And Jesus is not just any brother in the family of God. He is the firstborn. Romans 8:29 teaches that whom God "did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the *firstborn among many brethren*." As the firstborn or eldest Brother in the family of God, Jesus ascended into heaven to receive the inheritance of God. But as the firstborn, Jesus also shares His inheritance with us, His brothers and sisters. Of this inheritance we have a small foretaste now through the working of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus poured out on Pentecost. We will receive our full share when Jesus, our elder Brother, returns for us at the end of the ages.

This is our salvation!

To the ascended Jesus who is now our elder Brother we must cling.

Jesus told Mary not to touch Him because He was not yet ascended to His Father. That did not mean that she could never cling to Him again. It meant that she must wait until He was ascended and come into His inheritance as the Son of God. She must wait until as her elder Brother He would begin to share His inheritance with the family of God through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. And she must cling to Him, not physically but by faith.

And Jesus had a message for Mary to relay to the disciples, "But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." What is touching is that Jesus

also called the other disciples His brothers, so that His God and Father is also theirs. This was even after they had abandoned Him the night that He was arrested. He still owns them as brothers. He can do so because He covered their sins on the cross and earned for them a share of His inheritance. They also must learn with Mary to cling to Him as the risen, ascended Lord who had become their elder Brother.

To this same Jesus we also must cling.

Sometimes we also might long for Jesus to be here

with us in the flesh as He was centuries ago. How wonderful to sit at His feet to learn as His disciples once did! Oh, to see His miracles performed again!

But through His ascension we have so much more. Jesus has come into His inheritance as the firstborn. As our elder Brother, He has begun to share this inheritance with us through the Spirit of Pentecost. One day He will return to give us our full share.

To that Jesus we must cling!

By faith!



Editorial

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

PRC Synod 2018, agenda

In the Reformed system of church government, the synod is the broadest gathering. These ecclesiastical assemblies are assigned the duty to transact “ecclesiastical matters only” and that “in an ecclesiastical manner.” Synods do the work which for various reasons cannot be “finished in the minor assemblies, or such as pertain to the churches in common” (Church Order, Art. 30).

In an *ecclesiastical manner*? What does that mean? From a negative point of view, it means that the work is not performed in the manner of a state legislature, or of the U.S. Congress. The “manner” is very different indeed. For example, in a legislature, the bills are worded with the goal of gaining as many votes as possible. In an ecclesiastical assembly, delegates write the motions as clearly and precisely as possible, but the goal is to be faithful to Scripture and the confessions.

In elected legislatures the members are willing to compromise, to meet those who disagree part way, in order simply to get the legislation passed. In an ecclesiastical assembly, delegates listen to each other, carefully consider the viewpoint of all who speak, but the controlling desire is to be faithful to the truth without compromise. Concessions on dollars to be spent, on trips approved, perhaps. But never a compromise with the truth.

In an earthly legislature, members canvass others in order to gain support for their bill. Bargains are struck, numbers counted, until there are enough votes to pass the bill. In an ecclesiastical assembly, the number one

goal is not to get the motion passed. Rather, the heartfelt desire is that the assembly make the correct decision. If the proposal is demonstrated to be contrary to the Bible, if it becomes clear that the motion conflicts with the confessions, even the ones who brought the motion want it to fail.

In a state legislature, divided votes are common, and are not a cause of concern. In an ecclesiastical assembly, nearly all decisions are unanimous, for all the delegates seek unity, the unity of the Spirit.

The work of a synod is thus conducted in the consciousness that the ecclesiastical assembly is not a representative body. The minister from “congregation X” is not sent by his members to represent them at synod (as is true of a member of Congress). The ecclesiastical assembly is a deliberative body. The delegates come to discuss, listen, and understand. They pray for divine wisdom. Their desire is not to be faithful to the members back home. Their prayer is that they will be faithful to Jesus Christ, the King of the church. They want to say at the end of the meetings, indeed, on every decision, “it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us” (Acts 15:28).

For this reason, the “proceedings of all assemblies shall begin by calling upon the name of God and be closed with thanksgiving” (Church Order, Art. 32). “Except the LORD build the house...” (Ps. 127:1).

The synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches has a number of standing committees whose members

are appointed by synod. The committees receive their instructions for the coming year, and then operate according to their respective synodically approved constitutions. Each year they report to synod on their work, and make recommendations to synod in connection with their work. Sometimes they simply ask synod for approval of their work. Sometimes they come seeking approval of major proposals.

So, what are these committees bringing to the Synod 2018? Allow me to highlight some of the matters in the committee reports.

Foreign missions

The major part of the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) is the mission work in the Philippines. Their report gives a brief overview of our sister churches—the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines—before reporting on the many labors of the three missionaries, Revs. D. Holstege, D. Kleyn, and R. Smit. The FMC reports on the three congregation in the PRCP, and a fourth group working towards organization. An exciting aspect of the missionaries' work is the goal of founding a theological school in the Philippines. Much labor is being expended toward making this a cooperative effort between the PRCP and the PRCA.

A major proposal coming to synod is a new kind of furlough. For many years, our men in the Philippines mission have received a *six-week* furlough every two years. The FMC is proposing that Rev. and Mrs. Kleyn take a *four-to-six-month* furlough. The FMC comes with excellent grounds, including much work that can be done in that time, so much work and study, that one wonders how this will be a rest. But it has much merit for the work of Rev. Kleyn, who has been on the field for nine years and desires to continue there a good long time, D.V.

A furlough or sabbatical of four to six months is something that our churches might also consider for their own *ministers*. A minister could take time off for some profitable study, either private study or in an educational institution. Our ministers work exceedingly hard, are under almost constant pressure, and are continually emptying themselves. A sabbatical allows for some concentrated study, as well as some true rest. In the PRC, the time is ripe for this, with a number of emeritus ministers coming available who could fill in for the ministers for an extended period, doing the preaching, teaching some of the catechism classes, and leading some societies. The ministers would profit much from such a sabbatical, and the congregations would enjoy the benefits.

Domestic missions

Currently the work of the Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) is considerably lighter than that of the FMC. The DMC rejoices in the fact that God has provided a domestic missionary (Rev. Spriensma). The reports make plain that our home missionary is not idly waiting for work to come to him. The calling church, Byron Center PRC, reports:

At present, the Lord has not yet opened up a definite field of labor for our missionary. Nevertheless, we rest in our Lord's promise that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. We trust that God will use the Word that Rev. Spriensma brings to open a field and gather His church. In that faith, we continue to oversee our missionary's labors with various contacts.

Contact with other churches

The Lord has given the denominational Contact Committee (CC) much work. The CC reports on the precious and profitable relations with other churches, starting with the three sister churches. The Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland is experiencing unity and modest growth in the congregation. The same can be said of the mission in the Republic of Ireland, a work that the CC heartily recommends for the support of the churches.

Our sister in Singapore, Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, is experiencing growth not only from marriages and families being established, but also from new converts being added. Since the last synod, their pastor, Rev. A. Lanning, accepted a call to the Byron Center PRC. The CC brings to Synod a proposal to call a "Minister-on-Loan" for CERC, using Grandville PRC as the calling church, just as was done five years ago. The CC gives good practical reasons for this, including government employment policies. Emeritus minister Rev. A. denHartog and his wife Sherry have been supplying the pulpit of CERC since January, and that with great enjoyment, we understand.

Synod 2017 approved the CC's recommendation that the PRCA establish a sister relationship with the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines. This was done provisionally, with the understanding that the advice of our current sisters would be sought. The sister churches bring no objections to the relationship, and the 2018 Synod is now free to make this relationship with the PRCP final.

This certainly is an exciting event for the PRCP and the PRCA, and we can stand together for the truth of the Reformed faith. The Philippines is but a three-and-a-half-hour flight from Singapore, and there will no doubt

be friendly overtures for a relationship between CERCS and the PRCP in the future.

Delegates and visitors to Synod 2018 will be privileged to meet and visit with delegates from each of these three sister churches. CPRCNI is sending Rev. Stewart. The Philippines churches are sending Rev. Trinidad. And CERCS is sending Elder Leong, who has served as elder from the establishment of Covenant in 1986 (with perhaps but one year off). The latter two men come to the Protestant Reformed synod for the first time.

The CC also reports on the joint Reformation conference with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia held last summer, and proposes another in 2019. The very good news from the EPCA is that a “youngish” man (married with four children) has been approved for study in the Protestant Reformed Seminary starting, D.V., in 2019.

In addition, the CC reports on its discussions with the BERG in Giessen, Germany, the Reformed churches in Namibia and South Africa, the approved visit to South Korea, and NAPARC. And finally, the CC gives the results of the Psalter revision poll that was commissioned by the Synod of 2017. The poll gives no clear direction on Psalter revision from the opinions of the members or from the responses of the consistories.

Theological school

The Theological School Committee (TSC) reports with thanksgiving that Rev. D. Kuiper, called by the 2017 Synod, accepted the call to the seminary, and was installed as professor in September. Prof. Kuiper pursues his Th.M. degree in preparation for the gradual transition into teaching, beginning in 2019.

In addition to the normal reporting on professors and students, the TSC brings two significant proposals. The first is a recommendation that synod direct the TSC to seek approval from the state of Michigan to be authorized to award degrees. To this point in its 93-year history, the seminary has given its graduates *diplomas*, but has not sought the right to grant *degrees*. The TSC proposes that this be changed through application to the state of Michigan.

Second, the TSC brings a proposal to remodel the seminary library and to construct a building addition, appended to the north side of the library. The addition will include a larger archives room for the PRC holdings, and some study areas that can be used by professors in the period of transition. The cost of the proposal is significant (\$451,000), mainly due to the special construction needed for archives. The TSC informs synod that there are sufficient funds (primarily bequests) so that it will not be necessary to raise any money for the project.

Space prevents me from highlighting the reports of the Catechism Book Committee, the Student Aid Committee, the Finance Committee, the Emeritus Committee, or the Board of Trustees. The last-mentioned body reported the amazing statistic that the investments of the PRC increased over \$1.3 million in 2017! It is obvious that the Lord provides for the churches well, so that the work of the churches need not be impeded by a lack of funds.

The synodical committees of both Classes report with joy on their approval of the examination of six candidates—three in each classis. And at this writing, the seventh 2017 graduate of the seminary just received a call from Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD. Thanks be to God for providing the needs of the churches, and for providing the right place for every candidate. On the other side of the ledger, Revs. R. Hanko and T. Miersma have joined the ranks of the emeriti ministers since last synod.

Also at Synod are four protests of statements or actions of the Synod of 2017, and an appeal of a decision of a classis. These protests make up 264 pages of the 427-page agenda. Synod may be forced to appoint a study committee to address the problem of ballooning protests and appeals. There is no good reason that protests or appeals should number in the scores, much less hundreds of pages. All consistories are willing in good faith to assist members so that they can bring the clearest, most precise protest/appeal with all the supporting documents needed. It is positively detrimental to overload the ecclesiastical assemblies with a mountain of documents. To put it into perspective, how many of us recently picked up a book of 427 pages, and not only *read* it in a month, but *studied* it in order to be qualified to discuss and make decisions on its content? That is what we are asking all the delegates to synod to do.

There you have a brief summary of the work that awaits Synod 2018. The pre-synodical service is scheduled for Monday, June 11 in the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. The meetings of synod, starting the next morning, will be in Adams Christian School. All who love the church of Jesus Christ are heartily welcome to attend. But even if you cannot attend, do pray for the peace and the wellbeing of Zion and for the work of synod.



In Memoriam

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

In memory of Rev. Wayne Bekkering

My friendship with Rev. Bekkering goes back to the mid-1960s when we worked together at a local grocery store. Interestingly, that is also where we both met our spouses. Rev. Bekkering and I attended Calvin College together, as well as the Protestant Reformed Seminary. Then we served together in the ministry of our churches for nearly four decades. Rev. Bekkering served churches in Randolph, WI; Houston, TX; Jenison, MI (Faith); Pella, IA, and finally as missionary in Ghana, Africa. For the most part our contact with each other was limited to our work on the broader ecclesiastical assemblies. For a few years we pastored churches in close proximity to each other. But we always maintained a cherished friendship.

Rev. Bekkering exhibited the spiritual characteristics set forth in the Beatitudes. What stands out especially was his virtue of meekness. Rev. Bekkering was gentle in his dealings with others, returning good for evil, often giving up what was rightfully his for the sake of the kingdom. When he found himself under attack, he emphasized the need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16). Rev. Bekkering was also a peacemaker. He was not a fighter by nature. When he should have stood up to people and faced them down, he was willing to suffer abuse for the sake of peace. And he was merciful. He had a pastor's heart who loved the people of God and reached out to those in need.

The Reformed faith gave Rev. Bekkering an awe of God that he did not have when he was younger. He confided in me once that his Arminian perspective as a young man led him to give his life over to Christ several times, but each time he would backslide. What could a God who could not save him do to him when he turned back to the world? He lacked the true fear of God. But once he came to know the Reformed faith and experienced the saving grace of a sovereign God, Rev. Bekkering came to stand in awe of the God he once belittled. And with godly fear he served His God with deep gratitude.

Rev. Bekkering had an uncanny ability to remember a person's name. If he met you only once, he would remember you by name five years later. I remember sit-

ting across from him at a program after he was well into his Alzheimer's, and afterwards he knew the names of more people than I did.

The passage that I was asked to use for Rev. Bekkering's funeral was very appropriate to put his life and death into proper perspective. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Cor. 4:17-18).

Affliction is that which presses in upon us so that we have no room to stand or breathe. For Christians, this affliction often has come in the form of persecution for Christ's sake. But affliction also comes in the form of the hardships, pains, struggles, and the disappointments of life that are common to all men because we live in a sinful world under God's curse.

Rev. Bekkering experienced his share of affliction.

The work of the ministry is demanding. It requires long hours that leaves too little time for family life. Then there were classical appointments that kept him away from his church and family for almost three weeks at a time in order to care for a vacant congregation hundreds of miles away. I recall Rev. Bekkering in tears as he confided to me once about his concern of neglecting his family for the work of the ministry.

Every minister of the gospel is subject to criticism from the congregations he serves. Sometimes this can be sharp and hurtful. Sometimes it is undeserved and unfair. This weighs heavily not only on the minister but also on his wife and family. The Bekkerings were not immune to this.

And then Alzheimer's struck, bringing an early end to Rev. Bekkering's ministry. Only those that have a loved one who suffers from this disease know how devastating it really is. Inch by inch the family loses a loved one to memory loss and confusion, until at last all ability to communicate is gone.

But the Word of God says our present afflictions are only light and for a moment. They really are not

all that heavy to carry. And they really do not last all that long.

Yet this is not always our experience. And we may question the reality of this with Rev. Bekkering, as we consider the weight he often had to carry in the ministry and then the Alzheimer's that incapacitated him, leaving him bedridden for several years.

But now we must compare our present affliction to the eternal weight of glory that is to come. This glory is the glory of heaven. It is the glory Christ earned at the cross for His people. It is the glory that they receive at death and ultimately at the resurrection of the body. This is a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. The glory that awaits us in Christ is of exceeding weight. It is a weight that is so great that it cannot be measured. It belongs to that which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man to conceive. It will far exceed our wildest imagination. Think of the Queen of Sheba who, upon seeing all of Solomon's wealth and glory, exclaimed that she had not believed the reports she had heard of Solomon, but that the half had not been told her. This will be the reaction of the saints as they enter into glory. That is due to the fact that this glory is the glory of living in intimate fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. We begin to enjoy that now in Jesus Christ. Then we will enjoy that without the hindrance of sin and do so in the presence of Jesus Christ, whose glory we shall see.

And this glory is eternal. This is not the case with our present existence. The Lord gives us 70 years and if we are strong 80 years. In our present day of medical marvels that is often extended into the 90s. But then we are taken away. But the glory that awaits us in Christ will never end—it is eternal. The last stanza of the hymn "Amazing Grace" sets this before us:

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

The point is that when we compare our present affliction to the glory that awaits us, our present affliction is only light and momentary. All the affliction we could possibly endure in this life is light compared to the glory we will experience in heaven. This is the experience of Rev. Bekkering, whose mind is now clear and who sees and knows things we do not. And what is a lifetime of affliction compared to the eternal glory that awaits us?! This also is Rev. Bekkering's experience as he begins his life in eternity.

But notice too that our present affliction works for us this eternal weight of glory. Often we conclude that the struggles of life work against us. However, we are assured that they work for us. Often we do not understand how this can be. And so we are reminded of the need to live by faith and not by sight (II Cor. 5:7). Yet, the reality is that God in His inscrutable wisdom and love is molding us and preparing us for glory. God has reserved for us a place in glory, which Christ is preparing for us (John 14:1, 2). But in this life He also prepares us for the place. This is really the purpose of this life. The few years we have in this life are not the goal that God has for us in His wise counsel. It is time to prepare us for eternal glory. And God uses many things to accomplish this purpose. He uses the preaching of the gospel, the training of parents, as well as the help and encouragement of fellow believers. But He also uses the pain and suffering He sends in this life. And when we are brought through death to the glory that is ours in Jesus Christ, we will see how this is true. And we will not only admire the great wisdom of our God, but also confess that we would gladly suffer the afflictions of the past a thousand times over in order to attain the glory of heaven. This is, no doubt, the experience of Rev. Bekkering as he basks in the glory of Jesus Christ.

We come to experience the reality of this in this life while we look not at the things that are seen but the things that are not seen. If we look only on the things that are seen, we focus on the hardships, the losses, and the tears of this life. And then the afflictions of life become an unending burden, too heavy to carry. But if we look at the things that are not seen and eternal, we focus on the glory that awaits us and the promise of God

...if we look at the things that are not seen and eternal, we focus on the glory that awaits us and the promise of God to work all things for our glory.

to work all things for our glory. Then, the afflictions of life become much lighter and of short duration.

We are reminded of Jacob, who served his uncle Laban for seven years to marry Rachel. "And they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (Gen. 29:20). If this is true for a man whose focus was on an earthly marriage, how much more for those who are focused on their heavenly marriage with Jesus Christ in glory. The present affliction necessary to attain that glory will not be all that heavy and will seem to be but a few days.

Let us look with the eye of faith to that which is not seen.

Our prayer is that the Lord is His grace and mercy will sustain Mrs. Bekkering and her family in this time of loss.



All around us

Rev. Erik Guichelaar, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin

Foster children, the Easter bunny, and the sexual revolution

Imagine that your foster home was permanently closed, and your foster children abruptly taken away from your home (apparently, so urgently that they were not even permitted to gather up their belongings), simply because you refused to lie about the Easter bunny. And then imagine that your foster home was closed even to the extent that you were prevented from ever serving as foster parents, even to *Christian* children—again, simply because of your refusal to lie about the Easter bunny. This was the experience of Derek and Francis Baars in their interaction with the Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton, Ontario. They recently went to court and won a lawsuit in which they insisted that their freedom of conscience and religion and freedom of expression had been violated.¹ I think it is profitable to consider this case more closely.

The case

Derek and Francis Baars are a young couple in their thirties who are conservative, Reformed Christians.² They were married in 2010. In May 2015 they applied to open a foster home with the Children’s Aid Society of Hamilton, Ontario. During a training program, they revealed to the Society that, based on their religious beliefs, they do not celebrate Halloween or promote Santa Claus or the Easter bunny, as they do not want to lie to children. After passing a home study and going through numerous interviews, they were approved as foster parents. On December 17, 2015, the Baars entered into an agreement with the Society. The very next day the Society placed two sisters, ages 3 and 4, with the Baars. The Baars celebrated Christmas with their foster children without mentioning Santa.

On January 6, 2016 Derek and Francis were introduced to their new placement support worker. This

support worker, knowing the religious convictions of the Baars, brought up the issue of Easter celebrations, and the cultural tradition of having the Easter bunny bring chocolate eggs for children. For two months the support worker repeatedly insisted to the Baars that they needed to affirm the existence of the Easter bunny to the foster children in their home. Although the Baars were very accommodating and sensitive to the cultural upbringing of the children, even willing to go so far as to hide Easter eggs for the children and buy them Easter outfits, they refused to tell the children that the eggs came from the Easter bunny, for that would be lying. The Baars even offered to have the children go to a different foster home for the weekend, but they would not perpetuate the existence of the Easter bunny. This did not satisfy the placement worker, nor, in the end, the Children’s Aid Society as a whole:

She [the placement worker] was insistent about the bunny, the couple [said].

“My husband and I were confused,” Francis said. “I asked her if she actually believed in the Easter Bunny or realized it was fictitious. After evading this question initially, she finally admitted the Easter Bunny was not real, but she did not consider it lying to tell children it was real; she believed it to be an essential part of every Canadian child’s experience.”

...The worker told them the girls would be taken away from their home if they did not tell them the Easter Bunny was real.³

In late February, the Society decided that it would not continue its foster-relationship with the Baars because “they are not prepared to support the agency position and support the needs of the children.” On March 3, 2016 the Society informed the Baars of their

1 The 62-page ruling can be accessed at <https://www.jccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Decision-Baars-v-CAS.pdf>

2 The 62-page ruling stated they were members of the Free Reformed Churches; news reports stated they were members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

3 <http://nationalpost.com/news/religion/christian-couple-says-child-welfare-removed-foster-children-because-they-refused-to-say-easter-bunny-is-real>, April 12, 2017 (updated April 13, 2017).

intention to remove the children from their care. *The very next morning*, the Society abruptly removed the children from the Baars' home and closed their foster home permanently. They were no longer deemed suitable to be foster parents.

On April 11, 2017, after several attempts to appeal the decision (and without receiving the decency of any kind of a response from the Children's Aid Society), the Baars decided to file a lawsuit against the Society, claiming that their freedom of conscience and religion and their freedom of expression had been violated. The fact that their foster home had been closed also ended the Baars' ability to foster other local children, and likely interfered with the couple's ability to foster or adopt children after they moved from Ontario to Alberta.

(When a person reads over the case, one asks himself why the Society would take such extreme and urgent action as they did. More on this in a moment.)

Earlier this year, on March 6, 2018, Justice Andrew Goodman of the Ontario Superior Court ruled in favor of the Baars. In his ruling, he declared that the Children's Aid Society

attempted to convince the Baars that the Easter Bunny was not a religious figure and that, as a result, perpetuating its existence should not go against their religious beliefs. In addition, [the worker] essentially told the Baars that their approach to celebrating the Easter Bunny was not acceptable. In doing this, [she] was attempting to compel the Baars to perpetuate the Easter Bunny and celebrate the holiday in a manner contrary to their opinion and beliefs.

Writing for the *National Post*, Adrian Humphreys gives a nice summary:

The Baars sought no money, only a court declaration their rights were violated and that they not be blackballed from future fostering. Justice Andrew Goodman of Ontario's Superior Court of Justice did just that....

[Justice] Goodman said the CAS's actions were "capricious," "not in the children's best interests" and potentially reveal an "underlying animus" by the society and its workers....

The CAS said the children were not removed for the foster parents refusing to lie about the bunny but for refusing to support the birth mother's wishes and failing to be respectful of cultural needs of the children.

"Nothing can be further from the truth," Goodman wrote. "It appears that the Society would not be satisfied with anything other than confirmation from

the Baars that they would lie about the Easter Bunny," his judgment said....⁴

A disturbing detail

The mention of a potential "underlying *animus*" in the ruling is what, in my mind, adds a disturbing detail to the entire ordeal through which the Baars went. An *animus* refers to a strong dislike, or *animosity*, or hostile attitude. When you read the 62-page ruling, you find out that there appears to be some deeper issues that lie buried in this case. A few of the Justice's remarks are as follows:

[173] While the Society insists that they were solely acting pursuant to their statutory objectives in taking the foster children away from the Baars' home and closing their foster home, as outlined above, there is evidence that suggests otherwise....

[174] According to Francis' affidavit, during a phone conversation with the [social worker] on or about the end of February, she states that [the worker] "introduced a new, offensive and entirely unfounded complaint against us: she informed us that she was personally afraid that if a same-sex adoptive couple met us, that we would not treat them well." Francis states that [the worker] further expressed to them that she did not think that the Baars would treat same-sex couples with respect and, further, that the Baars might teach the prospective adoptive children that the couple was "living in sin." The Baars assured [the worker] that they would treat any same-sex couple as people worthy of dignity and respect.

[175] Francis goes on to state that [the worker's] comments had no air of reality, as they were unrelated to the actual situation that the Baars were facing as foster parents. At that point in time, there had been no interaction with prospective adoptive couples nor was there any plan in the near future to do so, since the plan was for the current foster children to return to their biological family. Francis goes on to state that: "[The worker], without any factual basis or grounding, persisted in telling us that because of our religious faith, we would discriminate against same-sex couples."

...[177] I find that the above evidence raises a large question with regard to [the worker's] and, thereby, the Society's, motivations in removing the children from the Baars' home and ultimately the closure of their foster home.

⁴ <http://nationalpost.com/news/canada/requirement-to-say-easter-bunny-is-real-violated-couples-charter-rights-court>, March 7, 2018.

...[178] ... I cannot imagine why, at that point in time, asking such questions [about same-sex couples] would be helpful.... It cannot reasonabl[y] be said that the conversation took place with the intention of assessing the Baars' receptiveness to potential adoptive same-sex couples generally.

[179] As a result, it seems likely that [the worker's] discussion regarding prospective same-sex couples to the Baars was fueled by a potential stereotypical belief in the inability of Christians to support same-sex marriage and not, indeed, pursuant to any valid statutory objective.

As disturbing as this case is (where a Christian is being discriminated against simply for being a Christian), what is even more disturbing is that since the passing of Ontario Bill 89 in 2017, it *is* legal to discriminate against Christian foster-parents if they refuse to endorse the LGBTQ worldview. "Bill 89 changed the law to give the State the authority to refuse applications from prospective foster or adoptive parents if they refuse to affirm transgenderism or other forms of 'sexual identity expression.'"⁵

It makes you wonder: if this case were not about compelling the Baars' to lie about the Easter bunny, but instead about compelling the Baars' to lie about the goodness of same-sex marriage, would the ruling still have gone in their favor? No. Presumably, the Baars' would have been blacklisted from ever being able to foster or adopt children in the future.

Some observations

I think there are a few observations we can make as we look at these events.

First, this case reveals how easy and convenient it is to use the LGBTQ worldview and the new policies of the sexual revolution to target conservative Christians who do not think the way society wants them to think. The evidence in this case suggests that the social worker brought up LGBTQ issues simply because she had a growing dislike of the Baars and their Christian views, and was looking for an excuse to take the children

away. I can only suppose that in the future, these kinds of tactics will be more and more common, and meet with increasing approval and success.

Second, this case reveals the attitude that many people have in society today, that they are able to determine for Christians what parts of their religious beliefs are vital and what parts are not, and what activities are reasonable for a Christian and what activities are not. According to society today, you are an extreme Christian if you cannot compartmentalize life into areas that are "religious" and areas that are "not religious." As Francis so aptly stated in her interaction with the social worker, "there cannot be something that is not religion." I think the burden for Christians, more and more, is to make sure that they are acting consistently according to their biblical convictions *in every area of life*.

Finally, after reading the ruling, I must give my hearty commendation to the Baars for how they behaved in such a difficult and harrowing ordeal. They

remained true to their Christian convictions and acted blamelessly, even when it appears that they were being discriminated against because of their Christian convictions. In the circumstances they were in, they were taking the real risk that they might never be permitted to adopt or foster children

ever again, all for the sake of the truth and God's glory.

One of the newspapers that reported on this case stated that the Baars' have moved to Alberta, and are in the process of applying to adopt a child there. My prayer is that the Lord would bless them and prosper them in their endeavors, and make their hearts glad.

According to society today, you are an extreme Christian if you cannot compartmentalize life into areas that are "religious" and areas that are "not religious." ...I think the burden for Christians, more and more, is to make sure that they are acting consistently according to their biblical convictions *in every area of life*.

⁵ <https://arpacanada.ca/news/2018/03/07/childrens-aid-society-cant-force-christian-foster-parents-affirm-truth-easter-bunny-judge-rules/>, March 7, 2018.



Believing and confessing

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

Of the providence of God

Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 6b

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2018, p. 279.

The Epicureans

We therefore condemn the Epicureans who deny the providence of God, and all those who blasphemously say that God is busy with the heavens and neither sees nor cares about us and our affairs. David, the royal prophet, also condemned this when he said: “O Lord, how long shall the wicked exult? They say, ‘The Lord does not see; the God of Jacob does not perceive.’ Understand, O dullest of the people! Fools, when will you be wise? He who planted the ear, does he not hear? He who formed the eye, does he not see?” (Ps. 94:3, 7-9).

Chapter 6 of the Second Helvetic Confession (SHC) treats the truth of providence, “that all things in heaven and on earth, and all creatures, are preserved and governed by the providence of this wise, eternal and almighty God” (SHC, 6a). The opening paragraph of the confession sets forth the doctrine of providence positively, that is, what we affirm by the truth of providence. The second and third paragraphs treat errors against which the church must guard with respect to the providence of God. The first error is doctrinal. That is the error confronted in the second paragraph, which we consider in this article. The second error is practical, which amounts to an abuse of the doctrine of divine providence. That is the error of supposing that the truth of providence excuses neglect of the means by which God is pleased to execute the decree of providence. An understanding of the important relationship between God’s providence and the use of means is critical in the practical life of the child of God. Consideration of this concluding paragraph must wait until our next article.

In the second paragraph of the SHC, chapter 6, certain false teachers are identified by name. They are the Epicureans: “We therefore condemn the Epicureans who deny the providence of God....” It is significant that Heinrich Bullinger, the author of the

SHC, identifies the false teaching and false teachers by name. This is biblical and this is Reformed polemics. Bullinger is not content merely to describe the error in general terms. Instead, he feels constrained to mention by name those who hold to the error. Just as Paul mentions by name the false teachers Hymenaeus and Alexander, in I Timothy 1:20, and Hymenaeus and Philetus, in II Timothy 2:17, so do the Reformed “name names” in their polemics against error: Arminians, Roman Catholics, Pelagians, evolutionists, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the charismatics, Buddhists, and Hindus. These false teachings, as well as the proponents of these errors, must be exposed in order that they may be forthrightly rejected. The truth is always antithetical. Embrace of the truth necessarily involves rejection of the lie. Faith in Christ necessarily involves repudiation of that which is contrary to Christ.

Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) was an ancient Greek philosopher who founded a school of philosophy that became known as Epicureanism. Among other things, Epicurus taught that the gods were far removed from affairs on this earth. They were essentially disinterested and indifferent with respect to what happened in the world and in the lives of men. It really did no good to worship the gods, pray to the gods, or sacrifice to the gods. You can see, I think, the implications of this pagan philosophy for the teaching of providence. It is a fundamental denial of the biblical doctrine that God is present in the creation, takes an interest in the lives of His creatures, and by His hand preserves and governs “all things in heaven and on earth.”

In his commentaries and other writings, John Calvin makes reference to the false teaching of the Epicureans. Included in his comments on Psalm 121:3 (“He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber”), Calvin says:

As the Epicureans, in imagining that God has no care whatever about the world, extinguish all piety, so those who think that the world is governed by God only in a general and confused manner, and believe not that he

cherishes with special care each of his believing people, leave men's minds in suspense, and are themselves kept in a state of constant fluctuation and anxiety (*Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 5:65).

Calvin describes the teaching of the Epicureans, especially as it relates to God's relationship to the world. He also points out how the false teaching stands at odds with the truth of the Christian confession, as well as the impact that it has on the Christian life practically. The result of embracing this false teaching is that "men's minds [are left] in suspense, and are themselves kept in a state of constant fluctuation and anxiety."

The error of the Epicureans resurrected

It is doubtful that Reformed Christians today will confront anyone who professes to be an Epicurean. But the teaching of Deism, which arose during the scientific revolutions of the seventeenth century and exerted a great influence on the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, is only the resurrection of Epicurean thought. According to the Deists, God did indeed create all things, but thereafter removed Himself from any active involvement in the creation, allowing the creation to continue to exist according to fixed, natural laws built into the universe. God is detached from the material universe. The Deists popularized the watchmaker analogy. God is the divine watchmaker, who after having designed and built the watch, winds it and allows it to run its course according to the principles (laws) of its design.

Deism has been resurrected in the church of our day by the theistic evolutionists. According to theistic evolutionists of every stripe, God made the first, primitive life-forms. He gave existence to matter in the beginning. But then, from that moment onward, all things developed according to the natural laws that were built into the universe. It is possible, some theistic evolutionists will grant, that God intervened at appropriate junctures in the development of the world. One of those junctures was the time at which He gave to an ape-like ancestor of Adam a soul—perhaps. But for the most part, God is detached from the creation. He is not actively involved with nor present in the world. Rather than being an active participant in the life of the creation, He is a divine spectator, merely observing history unfold before His eyes.

This teaching, which is only Epicureanism resurrected and dressed in different clothes, is a fundamental denial of the providence of God. It is a repudiation of the truth that God has not only created all things, but also upholds and governs all things. The teaching of theistic evolution is not only an erroneous teaching

about origins; it is also an erroneous teaching about the continued existence of all things—providence. Theistic evolutionists "blasphemously say that God is busy with the heavens and neither sees nor cares about us and our affairs" here on the earth.

This also points out that the teaching of theistic evolution is contrary to the Reformed confessions. The Second Helvetic Confession does not stand alone in what it teaches about God's providence. Using similar language, the other great Reformation confessions also set forth the truth of God's providence. In complete agreement with the SHC are the Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 13, "Of Divine Providence," the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 10, and the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 5, "Of Providence." The teaching of theistic evolution is not only unbiblical, but also clearly contrary to the Reformed confessions. For this reason, Reformed and Presbyterian churches, seminaries, Christian schools, and institutions of higher learning must not tolerate in their midst those who teach the heresy of theistic evolution. For that is, indeed, what the teaching of theistic evolution is: heresy. It is heresy inasmuch as it contradicts the express teaching of the Reformed confessions. Because it does, it must be rejected and they who teach it must be dealt with by the church. They must not be tolerated, but must be disciplined. They must not be left in the church to exert their influence, especially on the young people, but must be set outside of the church and called to repentance.

Blasphemous and folly

Before leaving this paragraph, there are two things that we ought to note. The first is the SHC's designation of the error of the Epicureans, and by implication that of the Deists, as "blasphemous." Bullinger states that the Reformed church "condemn[s] the Epicureans who deny the providence of God, and all those who *blasphemously* (emphasis added) say that God is busy with the heavens and neither sees nor cares about us and our affairs." This is an especially "blasphemous" error because of the implications of this error for the truth concerning God Himself. Blasphemy always touches God Himself, His being and nature.

It is true, of course, that every error, in one way or another, is an attack upon God. Heresy always impacts the truth concerning God—who and what God is. But that is especially true of this particular error. The error of Epicureanism, and its illegitimate offspring, Deism, is an egregious error. It denies that God loves and cares for His people. According to the Epicurean, God is indifferent to the plight of those whom He has chosen. He turns a cold shoulder to the cries of those whom

He has redeemed in the blood of His dear Son. He is completely unaffected by the distresses, temptations, and persecutions of those who are indwelt by His Spirit.

That is blasphemy—of the worst sort! That is a fundamental denial of who God is in relation to His people. It denies God’s fatherly love and care for His people. It denies that they are His beloved bride and His dear children, upon whom He can never turn His back. It denies that they are ever the apple of His eye and remain constantly the object of His favor. Impiety and sacrilege in the extreme!

And it is folly, consummate folly! Significantly, Bullinger quotes Psalm 94:8, “Ye fools, when will ye be wise?” The question is a rhetorical question. It is not a question seeking information that the psalmist does not possess. Rather, it is a question that is intended for emphasis. The psalmist knows the answer to the question, and those to whom he puts the question also know the answer to the question. Those who say that “The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it” (v. 7) are fools. Not only *ought* they to know better, they *do* in fact know better, despite what they may say. That is what a fool is. A fool denies what he knows is the truth and acts contrary to better knowledge. As

much as the natural man knows that God is and that He alone is the Creator, so does he know that God is present in the creation that He has made. Not only did He create everything in the beginning, but from that moment onward, He upholds and governs all things by His almighty and everywhere-present power. That is the providence of God.

To a great extent, the Reformation restored to the church the biblical doctrine of God’s providence. The sovereignty of God in salvation was not the only casualty of the Roman Catholic Church’s denial of the sovereignty of God and the widespread acceptance of the free will of man. Lost and forgotten was also the biblical truth of the providence of God. More and more, God was pushed out of His universe, and more and more He was made dependent on autonomous man. God did not rule, but reacted. He did not control, but cooperated with. He did not perform His will, but pleaded His will.

The Reformers recovered the biblical truth of God’s providence. That truth is that “all things in heaven and on earth, and all creatures, are preserved and governed” by the providence of God.



Guest article

Rev. Cory Griess, pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Is the law part of the gospel?

I remember being quite confused for a long time by the question that titles this article. I remember being further confused by statements made by Protestant Reformed authors, such as the following: “In fact, Scripture makes clear that the law *is* gospel, for it has the power to convert the soul, to make wise the simple, and to enlighten the eyes.”¹ And, “The law is gospel. If anyone doubts it, let him read Psalm 19 and Psalm 119.”² And, “For Calvin and Calvinism, with regard to

the elect believer law is an aspect of gospel.”³ How can this be? The law requires perfect obedience for us to be justified, an obedience of which we are not capable. That is not good news! On the other hand, the gospel proclaims that Christ’s perfect obedience (not our own obedience to the law) justifies us. That *is* good news! So how can an orthodox theologian say the law is the gospel? They are opposites!

My confusion became great concern when it became clear to me that the Federal Vision collapses the law into

1 Herman Hanko, *Contending for the Faith* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2010), 177.

2 Hanko, 263.

3 David J. Engelsma, *The Reformed Faith of John Calvin* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2009), 263. Note that these quotes do not do justice in themselves to the full explanation of the authors, of course, and must be read in context.

the gospel. This movement teaches that the Scriptures require our obedience to the law in addition to Christ's obedience to the law in order for God's people to be justified. According to this heresy, the law is the gospel, and our obedience to the law is part of the good news by which we are justified.

Carrying out the requirement of our Church Order, Article 68, which requires that Protestant Reformed ministers "shall on Sunday explain briefly the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the Heidelberg Catechism..." helped me gain some clarity here. In fulfilling that calling, I was helped by seeing that, biblically and confessionally, there is more than one use of the term "law," and there is more than one use of the term "gospel." In this article I treat the two uses of the term "gospel." In the next, I hope to treat the uses of the term "law."

There is both a narrow use and a broad use of the term "gospel" in the Bible and in the confessions. Narrowly defined, the gospel is the good news, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (I Tim. 1:15). It is what Paul declares in I Corinthians 15:1-5,

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you...how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve.⁴

This is the most frequent way we use the term "gospel," as it is the most frequent way the Bible uses it.⁵ Thinking of the gospel this way, the church can speak of the "bad news" that I have to know from the Bible before I can know the "good news" from the Bible: that I am a sinner who has not met the righteous requirements of God's law and am liable to be punished for it.

This is the way the Heidelberg Catechism uses the term "gospel" in Lord's Day 6 (Q&A 16-19). Here the Catechism brings out into the open for the first time our Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. This God-given being who is very man, very God, and perfectly righteous, is the only one who can reconcile us to God. But since we cannot see or hear this Jesus, for He came to earth 2,000 years ago, the Catechism asks the question, how do I know about Him and what He has done to be our Mediator? The Catechism answers, "From the holy gospel."

The "holy gospel" here is not another word for the Bible. Rather, it is a reference to the narrowly defined good news of Christ come to redeem His people from sin. Two things prove this. First, the Catechism goes on to speak of that gospel as that which

God Himself first revealed in Paradise [before the Bible was written, but now recorded in the Bible]; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly, has fulfilled it by His only begotten Son.

These are all references to a specific part of God's revelation, that part which is known narrowly as the "gospel." God revealed this gospel of the coming Mediator before the Bible was written. Thus, "the holy gospel" cannot be all the contents of the Bible itself. Later, and now fully, God places the revelation of that same gospel in the Bible for us. The Catechism is certainly also making that point, but it does not merely state, "I know this from the Bible." Rather, it says, "I know this from the *gospel*, repeatedly proclaimed to us now *in the Bible*." The gospel here is not all the teachings of the Bible, but something specific and limited that the Bible now contains.

Second, the Catechism is making a careful law/gospel distinction as it moves from knowing our misery to knowing our salvation. The Catechism had asked in Lord's Day 3, "Whence knowest thou thy misery?" It answered, "Out of the law of God."⁶ Now it asks in Lord's Day 6, in identical language, "Whence knowest thou this?" (the Mediator, salvation, the opposite of misery). And it answers, "Out of the holy gospel." Both the law and the gospel, conceived in this narrow and limited sense, are contained in the Bible, but there is a strict distinction between the two in the comparison between Lord's Day 3 and Lord's Day 6. This is vitally important to maintain and to be clear about. Justification by grace alone apart from works of the law depends upon it. Romans 3:27-28: "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." In this sense, to answer our question, no, the law is not part of the gospel.

Much like the term "regeneration" though, there is not only a narrow use, but also a broad use of the term "gospel." This is the use of the term in such passages as Romans 2:16, "In the day when God shall judge the

4 Where the apostle states the heart of the gospel as the matter he delivered to the Corinthians that was literally ("first of all"), "of first importance," that is, the central message.

5 Look up the word "gospel" and you will see. For example, Matthew 4:23, I Corinthians 1:17, etc.

6 The sharp reader will anticipate the next article by seeing that there is a different use of the word law here in LD 3 from what is used in what I quoted above from LD 6.

secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.” Here the “gospel” (same Greek word as above) is broad. It is not limited to the message that Jesus has come to atone for sin, but includes eschatology, even the judgment of the ungodly by Christ. Or, again, in I Timothy 1:10-11:

For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine; according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

Here “sound doctrine” including sound doctrine about the law, its meaning and use, is included in “the glorious gospel.” This is not the main use of the term “gospel” in the New Testament, but it is a distinctive and particular use.

The Canons of Dordt use the term “gospel” in this broad sense in Article 14 of the Fifth Head of Doctrine:

And as it hath pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so He preserves, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and promises thereof, as well as by the use of the sacraments.

Homer C. Hoeksema notes in his commentary on the Canons that the Latin original adopted by the Synod of Dordt has “gospel” a second time, and not “His Word” as in our English translation. Hoeksema gives this translation of the original:

Moreover, even as it hath pleased God to begin this his own work of grace in us through the preaching of the gospel, thus through the hearing, reading, meditation, exhortations, threatenings, promises *of the gospel*, and also through the use of the sacraments, he preserves, continues, and perfects it.”⁷

Hence, the article communicates that in this broad sense, the preaching of all the Word of God (including the threatenings and exhortations of that Word) is part of the preaching of the gospel. All the Word of God is in this sense “good news” for us, and must be preached

as such. By the preaching of all the Word of God, God preserves us. Hoeksema draws out the point:

For that Word, whether it exhorts or threatens or promises, is always the Word of God’s grace to His people.... Always His Word is a Word of grace to His own, and always He is graciously inclined toward His people, even in the so-called threatenings of the gospel.”⁸

This broad use of the term is highlighted by the fact that in our English translation “Word” was used in place of “gospel,” obviously in an attempt to clarify the meaning.

In this broad sense of the term “gospel,” to answer our question, yes, the law is part of the gospel. Yes, the law is gospel. The whole Word of God is in this

sense good news to us, even the law that exhorts and threatens us. For God’s people, the threatenings come in grace. They are, as Hoeksema puts it, “pedagogical” for them.⁹ In addition, the law comes to God’s own who have been delivered from the bondage of Egypt. God says to

them, “I am the Lord Thy God, love Me for what I have done for you.” Our relationship to the law has changed. In its “third use” it becomes the way of our Father, the good rules of life in Father’s house. Through this law we learn ever more deeply our sin, run ever more earnestly to Christ, and pray ever more fervently to be conformed to the image of His dear Son (Lord’s Day 44, Q&A 115).

So, is the law part of the gospel? I have come to the conclusion that the answer is, “Yes, and No. It depends on what you mean by ‘the gospel.’”

Next time, “Is the gospel part of the law?”

In this broad sense of the term “gospel,” to answer our question, yes, the law is part of the gospel. Yes, the law is gospel. The whole Word of God is in this sense good news to us, even the law that exhorts and threatens us. For God’s people, the threatenings come in grace.

⁸ Hoeksema, 762-63.

⁹ Read his comments carefully and you will see “pedagogical” does not just mean in the sense of the first use of the law, but also in the sense of the third use of the law.

⁷ Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of our Fathers* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980, 2013), 755 (emphasis added).



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

A precious jewel (2)

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2018, p. 282.

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.”

Revelation 7:9, 10

In the previous article we considered the doctrine of the image of God and, in particular, the way this doctrine is traditionally understood within the Protestant Reformed Churches. The perspective taken by the PRC makes a key theological distinction between the *material* image of God—true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness—and the uniquely human capacity to bear this image in a *formal* sense. Readers will recall the metaphor of a wedding ring used to illustrate this distinction, in which the wedding band represents the capacity of humans to hold and display the precious diamond that represents the actual image of God. In this second article I plan to build on this metaphor by considering the properties of a diamond, and how they point toward a more complete understanding of what it means for people to bear the image of God. The key properties we will consider are the *organic* composition of a diamond and its fashioning as a *many-faceted* jewel, both of which serve to deepen our appreciation for the *corporate* nature of the image of God in His elect people.

The etymology of the word “organic” and the route to its current usage make for an interesting study in the development of language. A quick check in an online dictionary will yield up to fourteen different uses of the word as an adjective, all of which can be traced back to a Greek root word that few of us would readily connect with our modern understanding of the term (*organon*, meaning “instrument of work” or “tool”). Today the word “organic” very likely conjures up a variety of definitions for readers of this article, the most prominent of which is simply “natural.” We live in a world where the term ‘organic’ has become a desirable characteristic for

food and other consumer products that are produced by ‘natural’ means, free of industrial fertilizers, pesticides or preservatives. For those readers who are familiar with the natural sciences, the term brings up thoughts of a certain discipline of chemistry involving the study of carbon atoms. This relationship is in turn a reflection of the fact that biological life is based on carbon chemistry, which makes up the core of nearly all biological molecules including DNA, proteins, and carbohydrates. In this sense, anything that is ‘organic’ is a product of life, which until very recently was recognized by nearly everyone to be a highly ordered function of divine creation. As such we speak of God’s living creatures as “organisms,” each one an intricately wrought collection of functional tissues—that is, “organs”—which carry out the work of a body. And so, we come full circle to the Greek root.

Within this linguistic framework it is the chemical composition of diamonds that earns them the designation of being ‘organic’ compounds. As I noted in the previous article, diamonds are in fact composed of pure carbon, with the constituent atoms arrayed in a specific three-dimensional pattern to produce a clear, crystalline material. This specific pattern of many carbon atoms is uniquely fit to serve as a jewel because it is transparent despite its high capacity to bend and disperse—or refract—light. These properties are what make a properly cut diamond sparkle as light passes through it. As such, we can rightly say that the organic nature and geometric cut of a diamond are absolutely essential to its distinctive properties. A different array of carbon atoms or the addition of impurities would render a diamond useless as a jewel, because it would destroy the properties that make a diamond beautiful to display. In a similar sense, the cut of a diamond is essential to maximizing its beauty, because the geometric arrangement of its many faces ensures the best refraction and dispersion of light. Anyone who has seen a ‘diamond in the rough’ knows exactly what this means! It may be a real diamond, but it is not especially beautiful until it has been fashioned correctly.

Bearing in mind the limitations of any metaphor, we can say something similar about the doctrine of the image of God. Like the diamond in a wedding ring, it is organic in nature and finds maximal beauty by its fashioning into a gem of many facets.

When theologians use the word ‘organic,’ it is important to discern carefully what they mean and the motivation behind their use of the term. It recently has become popular to talk about “organic theology” as an alternative to “systematic theology,” by which term the authors often intend to subvert the unity and inerrancy of Scripture to allow for “doctrines [that] can grow and mature, or evolve over time” to accommodate current movements in the church and society.¹ This is certainly not the intent of historically Reformed writers who most often utilized the term to explain the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit in, through, and by humanity to accomplish the will of our triune God. For instance, it is common to read of the Spirit’s work of inspiration as being ‘organic’ in nature, by which the authors intend to acknowledge the role of lively human instruments in this divine work (II Pet. 1:21).² In this sense the proper theological concepts underlying the term *organic* include both an *instrumental* and a *biological* component that are faithful to the original meaning of the word and its relationship to living creatures.

It is this twofold sense of the word ‘organic’—instrumental and biological—that is compelling when one considers the doctrine of the image of God. This viewpoint can be observed in the writing of Dutch reformer Abraham Kuyper who is—to my knowledge—unique in his application of the term to the doctrine of the image of God. It should be said at the outset that the underlying premise that Kuyper espouses is overtly aimed at a very wide definition of the image of God in humanity, which he placed under the broader category of common grace.³ He very clearly indicates that his concept of the image applies to every single human, irrespective of his or her status in the divine plan of double predestination. Let me be clear that I am not espousing Kuyper’s position on common grace or the image of God in this

article. Rather, the interest of this article is to examine the concept of an ‘organic’ view of the image of God in its breadth and fullness displayed in the diverse body of Christ that we call the church.

So what is this ‘organic’ view of the image of God? Let us start with Kuyper’s own words.

For good reason, therefore, we pose the question whether the creation of man in God’s image does not have a significance vastly greater than what has been acknowledged up until now in individual terms. The answer lies in the simple observation that the image of God is certainly much too rich a concept to be realized in one single person. In looking at parents and children we can sometimes see the facial features and character traits of the parents to be spread out over the several children in varying proportions but always in such a way that none displays them in their fullness. How much more do we not have to confess that the image of Eternal Being, if we may so put it, is much too full and rich to be reproduced in one individual.⁴

The basic premise of Kuyper’s statement is striking because it provides us with a better understanding of how the image of our infinite God can be represented in finite humans. It should be sufficiently obvious that no single human person, with the exception of our Lord Jesus Christ, could completely represent the infinite attributes of God. Because He was equally divine and human, having two perfectly complete but separate natures, Christ could be the “express image”—or precise replica—of the divine substance in human form (Heb. 1:3). This way of displaying the image of God is *quantitatively* impossible for creatures, both individually and collectively. No matter how many believers display the image of God, they cannot approach the infinite perfection of attributes belonging to God.

But Kuyper is not speaking in a *quantitative*, that is, “measurable” sense in his development of an organic image. Note the illustration of family resemblance that he uses to make his point. Oftentimes a child bears some resemblance to his or her parents but is not exactly like either of them. At the same time, however, when we look at a family of several siblings we can observe many of the parents’ features—or *qualities*—that collectively represent the parents’ appearance rather well, though not completely. All of the children in the family share equally in their genetic heritage, but each in his or her own way reflects the image of the parents in a *qualitative* sense.

4 James D. Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 177-78.

1 <http://rawgod.com/index.php/2014/04/05/organic-theology/> and <https://biologos.org/blogs/archive/evolution-and-our-theological-traditions-calvinism-part-11>

2 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol I, ed. John Bolt; trans, John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 388-389. Ronald Hanko, *Doctrine According to Godliness* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 18-19. Homer Hoeksema, *In The Beginning God*. 2nd ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2015), 14-18.

3 Abraham Kuyper, *Common Grace*, vol. II, ch. 83, 623-627.

An important point that we must be careful to acknowledge is that God's image is fully present in every redeemed child of God renewed in Christ. This means that when we speak of the 'organic' image of God being the collective display of His glory in the members of Christ's body, we do not mean that the image found in any individual believer is partial or incomplete or lesser than that found in another believer. All redeemed children of God bear the image equally and fully, yet in a unique way. The illustration of family resemblance that Kuyper uses is faithful to this truth because children in a family share equally in their heritage. None of them is essentially more or less of their parents in terms of genetic inheritance, since all of the children are organically related to their parents in the same way. At the same time, however, each child displays the image of his parents in a different and unique way.

When we move from this illustration back to our consideration of the *material* image of God in believers—that is, true knowledge, righteousness and holiness—it becomes easier to understand how the image of God is better captured in the entire body of Christ rather than in individual believers. Because the *formal* aspects that make believers capable of being image bearers differ from one believer to another, the way that the image of God shines through them emphasizes God's attributes in a unique and different way for each believer. Though this collective image falls short of the infinite attributes of God, it still allows for observers of the church of Christ more completely to grasp the breadth and fullness of God's image in His people.

Consider for one moment the diversity of natural and spiritual gifts given corporately to the church (I Cor. 12). There are gifts of learning and teaching, of ministry and service, all of which can be put to use building up the body and thus glorifying God in Christ. No one person bears all these gifts, and even if someone did, they would be of little use without other human objects upon which they could be exercised. The beauty and strength of the church is its *corporate* nature, a body with many members who are necessary to the functioning of the whole organism. When this organism is filled with the Spirit and functions as intended by God, it reflects His image in a way that is impossible for any single believer to do alone. So too a diamond. When given many facets that are arrayed in an orderly and precise fashion, it radiantly displays light far better than an unshapen lump of crystalline carbon dug out of the earth. Facets to the diamond are not just important, they are crucial to its purpose as a gemstone!

This truth also has some incredibly important implications from a biological point of view. Foremost

amongst these important implications is the necessity of *diversity* in the body of Christ. And though this diversity does not seek its definition in modern secular ideals of ethnicity and gender, we ought not shy away from recognizing that diversity in the church is in more than just spiritual gifts or natural abilities. The passage that introduces this article points to that truth in its presentation of the multitude of glorified, elect believers before the throne of God. The central theme here is the unified purpose of a body containing diverse individuals. Arrayed in identical white robes earned for them by the Lamb, they raised their voices together to declare a singular message of worship to the Redeemer and His Son. Perhaps missing from our initial reading of the passage, however, is John's statement that this multitude of people spoke their praise in the widest variety of languages he could describe. In a representation of all humankind, these believers brought glory and honor to God in words that surely sounded very different, though they carried the same message of praise.

It is worth asking *why* John was inspired by God through a vision—not just words—to describe the redeemed saints before the throne in heaven (Rev. 7:9). It appears from the written words that John was amazed by the sheer diversity of the people he saw, which was probably all the more striking given the relatively limited cultural experience he would have had. Although the Roman empire in the Mediterranean world was fairly diverse in an ethnic sense, it is doubtful that John would have recognized people from other contemporary cultures such as those from China, Scandinavia, or North America. We can be sure, however, that when John described the multitude as encompassing "all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," he meant exactly that.

This diversity of glorified, elect believers has its source in God's design of His biological creation. Like the microbes, plants and animals that adorn His creation, God saw fit to create in humanity the capacity for a great diversity that would emerge in time from Adam and Eve. The very fact that God created them male and female—both in His image—is a testament to God's intention that His people grow into a multitude of diverse people (Gen. 1:27). The creation of complementary genders that can only reproduce sexually is a design mechanism that ensures and reinforces genetic diversity in the creation. So too was the wisdom in God's direction to Old Testament Israel that they not reproduce with close family members like the heathen nations around them (Lev. 18:1-17). Though they could not have understood the reasons for those prohibitions at the time, we know with great clarity today that such practices necessarily

increase the risk of genetic disorders and an overall loss of health within a population of individuals. Marriages and reproduction outside of close family bonds, on the other hand, promote greater genetic variation and increase the likelihood of health in a growing population.

The extent of human biological diversity, which we see in the many ethnicities of our modern world, is the result of God's providential guidance of genetic change through history.⁵ When John peered forward in time to see what the entire body of Christ looked like, he saw the complete, organic result of this guidance. In

In that vast multitude...the diamond of God's image sparkled brightly because it had many facets carved into it by the One who implanted the image in that multitude.

⁵ One example of how divine providence guided the diversification of humanity is implied by the events at the Tower of Babel. In this context God intentionally separated a unified group of people into distinct groups by a confusion of their languages, which resulted in their scattering over the face of the earth (Gen. 11:1-9). This geographic separation almost certainly is what promoted the natural genetic diversification of each unit into a distinct ethnic population.

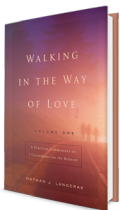
that vast multitude were men and women, Jewish people and Gentiles of every kind—all of whom praised God with the particular form given to them by their Creator. In them the diamond of God's image sparkled brightly because it had many facets carved into it by the One who implanted the image in that multitude.

Do you love God's saints in India, or Germany, or Singapore, or Nambia, or the Philippines—or anywhere else in this world? Do you pray for them as fellow members of the body of Christ, and fellow heirs of the promises made to Abraham? Do not look at the differences in our ethnicities, cultures, and national histories as a barrier to the worship of Jehovah, but as a means He has used to enrich the presentation of His image to the world around us. Together with them we bear the image of the One True God who has created us, redeemed us, and made us suitable settings for His precious jewel.



Bring the books...

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



Walking in the Way of Love: A Practical Commentary on 1 Corinthians for the Believer (vol. 1), by Nathan J. Langerak. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2018. 432 pages, hardcover. [Reviewed by Rev. Ron Hanko]

This is an excellent and much-needed addition to anyone's collection of commentaries, whether layman or preacher. Though I never preached through the book of I Corinthians, in preaching on individual texts I repeatedly found that there were few useful commentaries on the book. Nevertheless, this treatment is not only for preachers but is eminently readable and within the scope of any layman. Indeed, it will be

most useful not as a commentary but as good Christian reading, since it does not treat every verse in the book.

This is a review only of volume 1 (I Cor. 1–9), with volume 2 due out later this year. If Rev. Langerak's treatment of the rest of the book, including chapters 10, 11, 13 and 15 is as valuable as this, it will be well worth the purchase price of nearly \$80.00 for the two volumes.

That the book does not treat every verse is my only criticism, if it is even criticism. Rev. Langerak's treatment of chapter 1, for example, excludes verses 14–17, 19–20, and 25, and so with the rest of the chapters. Nevertheless, the book does not overlook any important material in I Corinthians and the verses skipped do not interfere with the readability of the book.

In this first volume, Rev. Langerak certainly shows

that the epistle of I Corinthians “is not an abstract treatment of love, but a pointed application of the calling of the Christian to walk in the way of love as that must characterize the believer’s whole walk in the world” (p. ix). He successfully relates each chapter to that main theme.

I suppose that in reviewing any commentary the reviewer always turns first to well-remembered and favorite passages. I certainly did and enjoyed reading again both those passages and their explanation. There are certainly points at which I would disagree with Rev. Langerak’s exegesis, but they are minor. The book is doctrinally sound, pointed in its applications, up-to-date and right in its criticisms of the modern ecclesiastical world, and edifying.

I especially enjoyed Rev. Langerak’s fourth and fifth chapters, titled “The Powerful Word of the Cross (1:18)” and “Salvation by the Foolishness of Preaching (1:21–24),” and the chapters on Christian liberty (chaps. 24 and 25), but those are personal preferences. Others will find the book of particular value in other areas, perhaps

in this first volume the chapters on sex, marriage, and single life (chaps. 19–23), since those chapters address issues that are destroying the lives of many both within and outside the church.

One quote from chapter 19 that caught my attention had to do with what Rev. Langerak calls “A Peculiarly Christian Sexual Ethic”: “The Christian sexual ethic, the behavior of Christians regarding sex, is peculiar. Peculiar has to do with one’s property. What is peculiar to you is what you own. That belongs to the Christian’s sexual ethic. The Christian is owned by someone. He is owned by Christ. He was ‘bought with a [fair, goodly] price’ (v. 20). He was not bought cheaply. He was bought with blood. Having been bought, he is owned body and soul by Jesus Christ, who is then lord of his body. The Christian behaves in a certain way with respect to his body because he is owned by someone. He lives in the peculiarly Christian ethic according to the word of his Lord and because it is the word of his Lord.”

I look forward to volume 2.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Which PRC minister has been the mentor of the most seminary interns? Answer later in this column.

Minister activities

On Resurrection Sunday, April 1, emeritus pastor Wayne Bekkering was taken to glory at God’s right hand. Rev. Bekkering served his Lord faithfully as husband, father, and minister of the gospel of grace. He served PRC congregations at Randolph, WI; Houston, TX; Faith in Jenison, MI; and Pella, IA, as well as serving as a missionary to Ghana. He was ordained in 1972 and became emeritus in 2005. Funeral services were held April 5 at Hudsonville, MI PRC. We express our sympathies to his wife Phyllis and the Bekkering family, and thank God for the labors of this faithful servant.

Rev. Martin McGeown, missionary-pastor of our sister church in Northern Ireland, was joined in mar-

riage in early April to Larisa De Jong. May God grant them a long and blessed married life! Rev. McGeown is serving in Limerick, Republic of Ireland and traveled to the USA to be married. Candidate Jonathan Langerak filled the pulpit in Limerick during this time.

Our home missionary, Rev. Audred Spriensma, spent three weeks in March/April preaching for a group in St. Petersburg, Florida.

On April 15 Rev. Allen Brummel announced his acceptance of the call extended to him by Calvary PRC in Hull, IA. We are thankful to God for a clear revelation of His will in this and pray for His blessing on the Brummel family as they transition to their new place of service. We also pray for Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls as they are now vacant. After the Council formed a trio of Revs. E. Guichelaar, S. Key, and Cand. J. Langerak, Candidate Langerak received this call on April 29. We thank God for providing places for all seven of our 2017 seminary graduates.

Congregational activities

The congregation in Byron Center, MI PRC, with their children, spent time enjoying their pine-box derby car races on a recent Saturday.

Southeast Protestant Reformed Church (formerly Fourth PRC) will be celebrating 75 years of existence in March of 2019. A book is being prepared to commemorate this event. If you have memorabilia, pictures, anecdotes, etc. relating to this history and are willing to share, please contact Tim Pipe, Sr. at 616-890-2545 or email tpipe9@hotmail.com.

Many congregations in West Michigan cancelled their morning worship services on April 15 due to an ice storm in the area. The Siouxland area congregations were the recipients of a “Sprinter” (spring/winter) blizzard on the 14th. Most were able to hold services the next day. We are reminded that although our calendars indicate Spring is here, God reigns supreme and none can stand before Him no matter the time of year!

Family conference

The dates for the 2018 Edmonton Family Conference have been finalized! First PRC plans to host the conference July 20-22, 2018 D.V. Hear from the three speakers, Revs. B. Huizinga, N. Langerak and J. Marcus on the topic of “Seeking the Lord.” Mark your calendars and plan to attend what promises to be a spiritually encouraging time of growth and fellowship with saints from Canada and abroad, as well as an opportunity to see some of the beauty that God has created in Canada. For more information or to register, please visit their website at <https://edmontonfamilyconf.wixsite.com/conference2018>, or contact Scott Ferguson at EFC2018@outlook.com.

Young people's activities

From a recent bulletin of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI: “Thank you from the young people for your support at our recent Culver’s fundraiser. Our final fundraiser for the season is the Aussie Burger Fry and Bake Sale Fundraiser, which will be Saturday, April 21, 5:00 - 6:30, in Heritage’s small gym. The menu includes all your favorite Aussie toppings (egg, beets, pineapple), along with hot dogs, chips and salad. And for dessert, enjoy Aussie Anzac cookies with an ice cream bar. Baked goods will also be available for your Sunday coffee. Proceeds are for this summer’s convention.” Ah, yes, Aussie Anzac cookies. They alone are worth the trip!

Young adult activities

California Young Adults Retreat: Registration is now

closed for the retreat being planned for July 2-5, 2018, in Redlands! Capacity was limited to the first 69 applicants. We see this as a good sign of the interest in a wonderful opportunity for fellowship and spiritual growth with fellow believers.

School activities

Wow! Was that a treat! Protestant Reformed secondary education is precious to us, and there was a blessed opportunity to experience the unity of it on April 12. The six choirs of our Protestant Reformed high schools (Covenant [Grand Rapids, MI], Heritage [Dyer, IN], Hope [Redlands, CA], Faith [Randolph, WI], Loveland [Loveland, CO] and Trinity [Hull, IA]) presented a combined concert of edifying choral music in the B.J. Haan Auditorium of Dordt College in Sioux Center, IA. The voices of 283 of our covenant youth joined together to sing the praises of their heavenly Father! And what a beautiful noise it was! Directors David Baldwin, Eric Gritters, Laura Kuiper, Joel Langerak, and Stephanie Uittenbogaard are to be recognized for their tireless efforts. After five other numbers by the mass choir, the evening ended with Psalter 369, “Brotherly Love” and closing prayer by Rev. Brian Huizinga who happened to be providing pulpit supply for Calvary PRC in their vacancy. Many also profited by watching the event via live-streaming. Now the burning question from all those who attended: When will it happen next?!

Covenant Christian High School of Grand Rapids Michigan held a 50-year anniversary celebration at Fair Haven Church in Jenison, MI on Friday, April 27. There was also an open house at Covenant Christian High School on Saturday, April 28. Many attended and much reminiscing took place. Dessert and beverages were available in the gym, as well as plenty of time to see and talk with classmates, teachers, and supporters. Thanks to God for His covenant faithfulness in the education of His children!

Trivia answer:

Actually, two ministers in the PRCA have each mentored four (4) seminary interns. They are Rev. Steven Key and Rev. Kenneth Koole. Rev. Key worked with two interns in Hull, IA PRC and two in Loveland, CO PRC, while Rev. Koole worked with one in Faith PRC and three in Grandville, MI PRC. More trivia next time.

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

Announcements

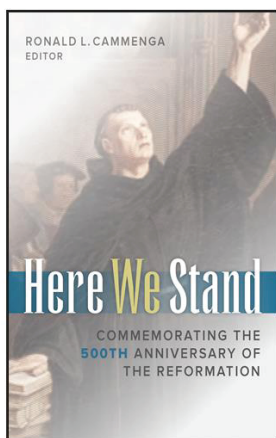
Teacher needed

The Edmonton Protestant Reformed Christian School is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2018-2019 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1-3, and the board is willing to work with the teacher on a curriculum suited to their preference. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com.

HERE WE STAND

Commemorating the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation

Ronald L. Cammenga, editor



This book commemorates the anniversary of a great event—the Reformation of the church in the sixteenth century. The content is based on speeches that were given at a 500th anniversary conference organized by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. The authors have since added significant

material to their chapters, thereby enhancing the value of this work. Readers will be edified by this book, whether they learn new information or they are reminded anew of the vital truths of the great Reformation.

Retail: \$14.25 | Book club: \$9.26

To order this book, visit
www.rfpa.org, phone (616) 457-
5970, or email mail@rfpa.org.



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION

Call to Synod!!

Synod 2017 appointed Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Byron Center, MI the calling church for the 2018 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2018 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 12, 2018 at 8:00 A.M., in the gymnasium of Adams Christian School (please note the change of venue from the May 1 SB).

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 11, at 7:00 P.M. at Byron Center PRC. Rev. S. Key, president of the 2017 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Mike Elzinga (clerk@byron-prc.org). Phone: (616) 328-2753.

Consistory of Byron Center PRC
Mike Elzinga, Clerk

Reminder

Remember that the *Standard Bearer* is published only once during the summer months: June, July, and August.