

# The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

January 15, 2018 • Volume 94 • No. 8

## What has happened to the United States?

Prof. Barrett Gritters

## Wonder

Rev. William Langerak

## A house broken— and restored

Mrs. Sue Looyenga

## Wanted— men for the times

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

## *The Presbyterian Philosopher: The Authorized Biography of Gordon Clark*

Mr. Philip Rainey



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

#### Postmaster

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

#### Reprint and online posting policy

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

#### Editorial policy

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

#### Subscription price

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

#### Advertising policy

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

Website for RFPA: [www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)

Website for PRC: [www.prc.org](http://www.prc.org)

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

#### Editorial office

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

#### Business office

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

## Contents

### Meditation

- 171 God's judgment upon the impenitent  
Rev. Rodney Miersma

### Editorial

- 173 What has happened to the United States?  
Prof. Barrett Gritters

### A word fitly spoken

- 176 Wonder  
Rev. William Langerak

### All around us

- 177 The upcoming Irish abortion debate  
177 Pope Francis and the sixth petition  
178 A sinful royal engagement  
Rev. Martyn McGeown

### Search the Scriptures

- 179 It shall be well with the righteous (Ecclesiastes 8:12-17)  
Rev. Thomas Miersma

### When thou sittest in thine house

- 182 A house broken—and restored  
Mrs. Sue Looyenga

### Strength of youth

- 184 Wanted—men for the times  
Rev. Joshua Engelsma

### Guest article

- 186 Invitation to the British Reformed Fellowship Conference  
Rev. Martyn McGeown

### Bring the books...

- 187 *The Presbyterian Philosopher:*  
*The Authorized Biography of Gordon H. Clark*  
Mr. Philip Rainey

### Activities

- 189 News from our churches  
Mr. Perry Van Egdom



REFORMED  
FREE PUBLISHING  
ASSOCIATION



## Meditation

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

# God's judgment upon the impenitent

**If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors.**

**Psalm 7:12, 13**

These words picture the absolute certainty of God's judgment upon the sinner. They also tell us how fierce and terrible that judgment is. God has a sword, a sword of justice, and with it He will punish man on account of his sin. The instruments wherewith God will inflict this judgment and which He has also prepared, according to the text, are instruments of death; instruments that will inflict death, the death of eternal hell. The evil generation of our day that will not endure sound doctrine and turns away its ears from the truth has tried to take away from God this sword of justice. The reality of the judgment as pictured in this word of God they do not want. They try to prove to themselves that God will clear the guilty and by no means punish iniquity, transgression, and sin.

A few centuries ago one of the most predominant strains heard from the pulpit was that of terror; it was like Mt. Sinai, for the pulpit thundered forth the terrible wrath of God. Perhaps in those days some of the Puritans may have gone too far, and given too great an emphasis to the terrors of the Lord in their ministry; but then, the age in which we live has sought entirely to forget those terrors, and this is worse. If one dares to tell men today that God will punish them for their sin, it is charged that he wishes to bully men into religion; or if he faithfully and honestly tells men that sin brings them to certain destruction, it is said that he is attempting to frighten them into goodness.

But then, it does not really matter what men say or think. It is our duty to proclaim the truth, and that necessitates telling sinners that they surely shall be punished. As long as they continue in the way of sin, we shall sound the warnings of the Word of God. So we are enjoined in Ezekiel 3:17 and 18,

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the

house of Israel: therefore hear the word of my mouth and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

This is, then, the command of the Lord; but the cry of our day is that God is not a God of judgment. He is full of mercy and tender love. This we do not deny, for we have always proclaimed the mercy and love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. But this does not conflict with the truth that God executes a severe, just judgment upon all that work iniquity. Conflict results only when men confuse the virtues of God and attempt to apply His love and mercy to those that are objects of divine wrath and judgment. God is indeed a God of love unto His people in Christ Jesus, but the wicked He visits constantly in His holy wrath and just judgment. So we read again and again in Holy Writ. Psalm 7:11, "God is angry with the wicked every day." Psalm 145:20, "All the wicked the Lord will destroy." Psalm 9:17, "The wicked shall be turned into hell and all nations that forget God."

Yet this plain truth is silenced in this wicked generation that will know of no hell. Ministers of the gospel flinch from their duty in declaring the day of wrath. Few there are that will solemnly tell of the judgment to come. They preach of God's love and mercy but without the truth of justice and judgment, which inevitably results in a complete distortion of all the truth. In many circles, the doctrine of future punishment is held in ridicule and mocked. But then, this too is to be expected, for did not wicked Ahab scoff at Micaiah when the latter prophesied of his death? And did not the generation of Noah's day laugh when he warned them concerning their impending destruction. All such mocking ceases when the arrow of death strikes in the heart of king Ahab and he cries out, "Take me from the battle for I must die," and you may be sure that there was no jest and laughter when the flood waters began to cover the earth. Does the present generation need more convincing evidence than this of the truth that God "hath whet

His sword and bent His bow and made it ready?” With that sword He will come in judgment to destroy all the wicked who stand opposed to Him and refuse to obey His Word.

God is just. He is a righteous God. His sword is sharpened and ready to smite the evil doer. The sword of God mentioned in the text is, of course, figurative and should, therefore, be so understood. The sword is God’s weapon wherewith He administers justice and executes judgment upon the wicked. Thus also in the book of Revelation, Christ is pictured as one with “a two-edged sword proceeding out of his mouth.” In chapter 19 that sword is used to “smite the nations.” The antichristian beast and the false prophet are pictured as being cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone, and the rest, that is, those who belong to that antichristian kingdom and bear the mark of the beast, are slain by the sword of Christ (vv. 15-21). That same sword of judgment Isaiah mentions in chapter 27:1 of his prophecy, where we read “In that day the Lord with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.” And, according to Ephesians 6:17 that sword is representative of the Word of God, the almighty, powerful, efficacious Word of the living God. We see that the sword represents God’s holy, indignant, and consuming word of wrath, which He speaks and by which all the wicked perish.

We are reminded of the words of Scripture: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). To be smitten with the sword God has whet and to be pierced with the arrows He has ordained is to suffer the agonies of eternal death in the throes of His unquenchable wrath. Do you not tremble at the very mention of these realities? Do you pause to consider this truth in the mad rush of modern life? Remember, “it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27).

Oh, to be sure, the truth we speak of is most terrible. It is what men sometimes call “a hard doctrine”; but the very terribleness does not make it less truthful. Men may mock it now, but when the hour of destruction comes they will scoff no more. But you may ask: Is there then no escape from that awful sword? Are not all men sinners who must perish under that sword of divine justice? In reply, we turn to Zechariah 13:7-9, which reads:

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones. And it shall

come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

This passage teaches us how God has turned the sword of His justice against His shepherd who is Christ, and through smiting Him has redeemed His people from the awful wrath to come. This refers to what took place on Golgotha where “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:5). There is positively no other way of deliverance. In Christ and in Him alone is all our salvation. By His perfect obedience and death He has made Himself a sacrifice to the sword of divine justice. In Him the wrath of God is appeased and through Him the eternal mercies and love of God shine forth.

“If the wicked turn not,” our text states, God “will whet his sword.” The implication is that God does not whet His sword against those who turn. And the turning here is the act of true, sincere repentance from sin and all its ways. Now, you must be careful that you do not distort the truth here by interpreting the text as though the act of repentance or man’s turning is the ground or condition upon which the sword of God’s justice is turned aside. Often this is done, but this is incorrect. Let us understand and confess that salvation depends on nothing other than what Christ has done for us and what He alone performs by His grace through us.

Yet one might say, “But does not the text say, ‘If he turn not?’” and does not this imply that it depends upon man’s turning whether or not God will whet the sword of judgment against him? Two things must be borne in mind here. The first is that the sword of judgment is already turned away from the people of God in Christ. This was done on Calvary. God beholds no sin in Israel nor perverseness in Jacob. They are cleansed through the blood of the Lamb and justified in the judgment of God at the cross. And the second is this: That they turn, that is, repent, is not because of them but only because of the glorious grace of God given unto them. So we read in Acts 5:31, that Christ is exalted “for to give repentance to Israel.” And in Jeremiah 31:18 we read the prayer of Ephraim, “Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God.” Therefore, those whom God humbles repent; those whom He turns surely are turned; and those whom He draws come. And from them the sword of His wrath is turned away,



for He has delivered them by His own power and grace from the dominion and power of sin. Truly, salvation is from God alone.

But not so with all who do not turn, who remain in sin and continue to walk in unrighteous. Against them the Lord whets His sword, bends His bow, prepares the

instruments of death, and sends forth the arrows of destruction. The day of judgment is at hand. Terrible shall that day be for those who have not found refuge in Jesus and protection from the sword of justice in the blood of His wondrous cross.



## Editorial

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

# What has happened to the United States?

You might attribute my sentiments to the cynicism of an aging man, but the country I find myself in today is not the country in which I grew up in the 1950s and 60s. It has not changed for the better. There is such evil in our land that, without faith in God and knowledge of what Scripture prophesies, I would despair for my grandchildren's future. I know I must not be anxious, but I am still very concerned for them and what they will face in their lifetime.

Like never before in the United States of America, and likely in the history of God's creation world-wide, sin overwhelms us. It seems that all restraints, inward and outward, have been lifted and the world is rushing on to utter ruin from its depravity. My own country takes the lead. In a kind of national suicide, the USA seems to be terminating her own life, spiritually, emotionally, even physically.

Although I would be mistaken, I am tempted to liken what is happening to our country to the disaster that overtook Japan in 2011 when a tsunami of unprecedented magnitude overwhelmed a large part of her coastline. Who can forget the video images of that calamity, the absolute ruin brought about by unstoppable colossal waves? But to make that comparison would be wrong, because Japan was overwhelmed by a force outside of her, which did not originate from her, and over which she had absolutely no control. An earthquake lifted the Pacific to engulf her. But the ruin of our country is self-inflicted. To make the analogy valid, the United States is willfully plunging *herself* into the ocean, bring-

ing upon herself obliteration not only of both coasts but of the entire land.

The other countries of the world, in their own way, are following suit.

I said "like never before" because it becomes evident to all (except to those who *will* not see) that the speed with which we are rushing toward ruin is greater than ever. The extent and the depth of our nationally sanctioned depravity appear now in ways even one generation past could not have envisioned.

## Sex, violence, and lies

Let me illustrate with the sex, violence, and lies that at one time were suppressed, at least outwardly, but are increasingly rampant because the United States approves, sanctions, promotes, and defends them.

One is out of touch with American society if he cannot recognize the common denominator in these names: Harvey Weinstein, Matt Lauer, Roy Moore, Al Franken, John Conyers Jr., Bill O'Reilly, Charlie Rose, Chris Matthews, Dustin Hoffman, Matt Damon, Bill Cosby, Garrison Keillor, Carter Oosterhouse, Jerry Richardson, and more. And being on Twitter is not necessary to know that the hashtag #MeToo represents throngs of women who claim to have been sexually abused by powerful men such as these. The list of men who have been ousted or resigned their positions and lost their wealth because of the sex accusations includes politicians, sports doctors, media moguls, product endorsers, celebrity chefs, sports stars, professional sports team

owners, movie stars, orchestra directors, radio personalities, and news anchors from the highest echelons of their fields of work. The details of their wickedness, what may be known of them, indicate vilest behavior. And how recently has this all come to light? The tsunami comes ashore. Our country is going under in sexual filth.

Some may not listen much to news and thus be ignorant of these sex-abuse scandals, but they cannot be unaware of the sudden increase of mass murders. If I did not live here and know where safe is (usually), the news of our country's violence might scare me from even vacationing in the USA. The mass killings at Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, the Pulse night club in Florida, Sutherland Springs Baptist Church, to name just a few so recent, are mind-numbing. They are drastic enough to make a person almost forget Aurora in Colorado, Fort Hood, Dylan Roof, Virginia Tech, San Bernardino/Redlands, Sandy Hook Elementary, Columbine, and others, if it were not for the media's reminder of these older tragedies on the anniversaries of the blood shed there. One group that watches such things reports that mass shootings (shooting of four or more persons, whether wounded or dead) numbered 483 in the United States in 2016 alone. An average of nine mass shootings every week! (How can one resist putting exclamation marks after *every* sentence in reports like this?) In addition to the *mass* shootings, everyone living in or near an urban area hears news of shooting deaths daily. What is horrifying is that the frequency of these atrocities not only makes me forget the last one, but almost makes the news of the next one unsurprising. Is this what is happening to us? Another fifty people gunned down and we forget it in a couple of days? No wonder the outrage against guns and the pro-gun lobby increases. Our country is going under in violence. The tsunami rises.

One *does* have to partake of news, however, to be aware of big lies flooding the land. Fake news, a horrible euphemism, is ubiquitous and very powerful, as the lie has always been. Websites designed solely for the purpose of spreading lies, for political or financial gain, or both, are common. Governments, news organizations, and individuals are unembarrassed to lie. All the social media tools make the lies spread like a California wildfire. And to compound the evil, a lie is no longer a lie but 'fake news.'

If one would add a fourth wave of evil, it might be pleasure-madness, the love of money, the 'bread and circuses' mentality that speeds ahead (to change the analogy again) like a soon-out-of-control Amtrak train. Our land loves, really worships, pleasure, sports, leisure, luxury, every kind of extravagance and indulgence.

The motto on our currency could well be changed to "In Gold We Trust." Also 'filthy lucre' becomes worse and worse.

I emphasize the first three, though, because our country does not seem to have a gag-reflex for overabundant possessions, but does in response to these other three evils. So a storm of criticism rains down against the powerful men who abuse vulnerable women, against the pro-gun lobbies and conservative politicians who will not stop gun violence by outlawing guns; it even rains down in some outrage against dishonesty. One group denounces another for complicity in an evil; this political party rails against that for its contribution to or promotion of the evil, however now they may define 'evil.'

### Self-righteous outrage

Christians must see this anger for what it is, a self-righteous rampage that censures one form of an evil while refusing to recognize all the other forms. By the grace and light of God, we understand that our country's criticism is hypocritical. Shouting angrily about one type of sexual evil or violence, it ignores or justifies a dozen other sorts which, in God's eyes, may be much worse.

For a few generations already, our society has approved, then defended, and finally promoted aggressively all three forms of these evils. No American should be surprised at their dramatic increase because we have been sowing their seeds for decades.

First, for at least two generations now we have glorified almost every form of *sexual* sin. Hugh Hefner's recent death and the accolades given him remind us of the era when outward restraints on sexual sins were removed. It did not take very long for the sexual revolution to permeate every realm of society. Hardly fifty years ago on television, to show a pregnant woman was deemed improper; now sex of every sort—heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and who knows how many other forms—is the subject of prime-time television, even game shows. Only one generation ago it was still difficult, even socially unacceptable, for a man to dabble in pornography. Now pornography brings the majority of Internet profits. While approving and defending these forms of sexual sin, society is hypocritical when it complains about the others. Where is media's outrage at pornography's destruction of marriages and relationships, to say nothing of the psyche of our country's youth?

Second, for how many years has not *violence* been a part of our society? Increasingly, and boldly, violence emerges (or, better: our society aggressively *drags* violence out) from the dark alleys where she had once hid-

den it, bringing it into the light of mainstream entertainment. The country spends billions and billions on her sponsorship of bloody gore and murder. The video games and movies that often are most profitable are filled with both sex and violence. The brutal mixed martial arts, where even women beat their opponent's face to a pulp, for *entertainment*, is the source of massive profits for promotional companies. Men and women alike pay hundreds of dollars to entertain themselves with the violence. So there is no consistency when Americans spend their energy to enact gun laws when they are mute about the violence that a large part of society sanctifies for their own pleasure. And it certainly will not do for the media to rail against killing by guns when our elite and coddled university professors defend zealously the right to destroy unborn children. What are a dozen or even hundreds killed by deranged gun-carrying men, compared with the millions and millions of children killed by state-licensed doctors? The violence and bloodshed of abortion make the violence of Mandalay Bay look like child's play. But of course, it is not.

And the lie? Probably long ago it could be said that truth had fallen in the streets (Is. 59:14) and perished in our land (Jer. 7:28). For when a people reject Truth with a capital T it cannot be that there will be *any* truth in it. The deadly plague of the Lie now reaches epidemic proportions.

C.S. Lewis was thinking of such a society, foolishly pondering why such evils exist, when he famously said, "We remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst." A man without a chest, Lewis meant, was a man without the 'organ' of a heart, strong and filled with God's truth. Removing the organ (the heart) but demanding its function (virtue) is foolish. Men without chests will not be virtuous. To mock honor and then to be shocked to find murderers, liars, and sexual predators everywhere is foolishness.

### And then there is the church

Our calling as we observe the condition of our land includes asking about the *church's* place in this wicked world. Some churches may well be filled with similar corruptions covered by a veneer of Christianity. But what of my church? Your church?

We live in very wicked lands. Of course, we must not *partake* of their evils or we will perish with them. But how do we *respond* to these evils? Are we aware of the danger of a self-righteous anger very similar to the one we criticize in others? How should I, as a Christian, respond?

I will begin by expressing to God sorrow for the sins of the nation of which I am a part. I am a citizen of this country of which I formerly was proud but now am much ashamed. And it would be unbecoming of me to ignore the fact that I am a citizen of this land and thus guilty of her sins by corporate responsibility. We start there, humbling ourselves before God and confessing our nation's sins. If righteous Daniel in Babylonian captivity could confess *as his own* the sins of Israel, of which he had no active and conscious part (Dan. 9 is one of the most moving confessions in all Scripture), citizens of a country do well to confess their guilt for the country's sin.

Then, we will ask what *active* part we have played in the sins of the nation. In what do we participate? In its sexual sin? On television, in video games, on the Internet, in books? In what way do we approve of or find pleasure in its violence? What part of the lie do we willingly partake in by judging rashly, or believing every word we hear in the politically conservative news? Does our use of social media always comport with the call to speak the truth in love? Or may it be said of us what is said of the country: In a self-righteous rampage they criticize one form of wickedness while ignoring a dozen others?

And what of our own sinful nature? Full of corruption of every sort, with the potential of sin of every kind, burning with lusts no different than those of any unbeliever, we confess that we are evil, born in sin. We are, in our nature, so corrupt that we are wholly incapable of performing any good and inclined to all wickedness. We confess this with sincerity, and deepest humility and shame.

We see the flood ready to overwhelm *us*.

By faith, though, we do not despair. Certainly, we do not look with self-righteous pride at everyone else, but with shame at our own sins and sinfulness. And then we flee from this destructive flood to Jesus Christ and to His church, the 'ark' where is safety.

But since God does not promise to destroy the world by a watery flood again but by fire, we fly to Christ who was willingly consumed by the fire that came from heaven against my sins that He bore.

---

(Next time: So what *happened* to America? What happened to the churches that are becoming like the false church? Could it happen to my true church? God's judgments come upon our *land*. Might they also come upon our churches? What hope is there for us and our grandchildren?)



## A word fitly spoken

Rev. William Langerak, pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan

# Wonder

His name shall be called Wonderful (Is. 9:6). In general, a wonder is anything that is extraordinary in our experience or that defies our ability to imagine, perform, or explain it. It refers to special vows (Num. 6:2), difficult cases to judge (Deut. 17:8), unusual diseases (Deut. 28:59), the unique love of David and Jonathan (II Sam. 1:26), and the greatness of Solomon's temple (II Chron. 2:9). But, more particularly, wonders are glorious revelations of God so astonishing, impossible (humanly), incomprehensible, and unimaginable, that worship is demanded and unbelief is inexcusable.

Wonders, also often called marvels, declare the awesome glory of God. Wonders reveal the glories of His faithfulness, righteousness, truth, and wisdom (Ps. 88:12; 89:5; 96:3; Is. 25:1; 2:29). And especially, wonders declare His incommunicable glories. God is incomparable as God who alone does wondrous things (Ps. 72:18; Exod. 34:10). God is omnipotent, for nothing is too hard (wonderful) for the Lord (Gen. 18:14). Wonders reveal His transcendence and immanence (Ps. 75:1). And wonder is simply a synonym for incomprehensible. To explain the wonder is to deny it. For even when believed by faith, wonders, like God who does them, remain to us unsearchable, inscrutable, and past finding out (Job 5:9; 9:10; 37:5).

Truly, all works of God are wonders. His wonders are of old and without number (Ps. 40:5; 77:11). His creation is a wonder that leaves unbelief without excuse (Ps. 89:5; Rom. 1:20). His providence is not 'ordinary' but a wonder surpassing our understanding (Belgic Confession, Art. 13). We are fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14). The farmer's sowing and reaping is a wonder (Is. 28:29). And even for the wisest man, the way of the eagle in the air, the serpent on a rock, the ship in the sea, and a man with a maid, are wonders (Prov. 30:19).

God does wonders for the purpose of us glorifying Him in our hearts, homes, schools, churches, and lands. Although incomprehensible, wonders are to be known, considered, and believed, are to be remembered, retold, and recounted, especially to the generations following

(Job 37:14; Ps. 88:12; 89:5; 78:4). God expects His wonders to be spoken, sung, shown, and published with the voice of thanksgiving, even among the heathen (Ps. 96:3; 71:17; 9:1; 26:7).

It ought not be surprising, therefore, that the greatest wonders are those of grace, wherein God delivers us far above all we can do, ask, or think; can imagine or explain; can expect or deserve. There are the wonders of His covenant, the conception of Isaac, in Egypt, the Red Sea, wilderness, and Jordan, and even severe judgments on Israel for idolatry, and recovery of a remnant (Gen. 18:14; Exod. 3:20; 34:10; Is. 29:14; Zech. 8:6). Many more are recounted and sung in Psalm 107 between its repeated chorus, "Oh that men would praise the LORD for His wonderful works!"—for His redemption from the enemy, gathering from all lands, satisfying the longing soul, leading us out of the darkness of death, and breaking the chains of sin (please read, then sing this Psalm).

Jesus is *the* wonder of God, the one alone called Wonderful, by whom and through whom God works all wonders. His birth was a wonder told by shepherds (Rev. 12:2; Luke 2:18). When He spoke, those who heard wondered at the gracious words from His mouth (Luke 4:22). When He worked, witnesses wondered saying, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and seas obey him" (Matt. 8:27). Seeing the dumb speak, the maimed whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing, many wondered and glorified God (Matt. 15:31). But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things He did, they were sore displeased and crucified Him (Matt. 21:15). Then, when He arose, again His disciples wondered at that which came to pass (Luke 24:12). When His Spirit was poured out, fulfilled was the prophecy, "I will show wonders in heaven above and earth beneath," all heard His disciples speak in their own language the wonderful works of God, and watched them perform more wonders by the name of this holy child Jesus (Acts 2:11, 19; 4:3ff.). Behold the Wonder. Believe, bow, and worship. Wonderful.





## All around us

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

### The upcoming Irish abortion debate

On December 13, 2017 Ireland took a step closer to liberalizing her abortion laws, with a vote of an Oireachtas Éireann Committee of 14-6 to repeal the Eighth Amendment of the Irish *Constitution*. Oireachtas Éireann is the Irish legislature, the Irish version of Congress (USA) or parliament (UK), with its lower and upper houses, Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann.

The Eighth Amendment of the Irish *Constitution* reads as follows:

The State acknowledges *the right to life of the unborn* and, with due regard to the *equal right to life of the mother*, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right (emphasis added).

In recent years, the Eighth Amendment has become the focus of an attack by those who desire to give women in Ireland the right to abortion, for it makes abortion virtually impossible from a legal and constitutional point of view. If the unborn child has the same right to life as the mother, how could abortion be justifiable unless, *in the extremely rare situation*, where termination of pregnancy might be necessary to save the mother's life? If it is unlawful and unconstitutional to murder the mother, it is equally unlawful and equally unconstitutional in Ireland to murder the unborn child. Therefore, the Eighth Amendment, which has protected the unborn in Ireland since 1983, must be sacrificed to give women "reproductive rights." When you see the words "reproductive rights" or even "women's healthcare choices," think abortion. When you hear of the "termination of pregnancy," think of ending a pregnancy by killing the unborn child.

The decision of the Oireachtas Éireann Committee will now galvanize both sides of the debate. The next step is for the committee to submit its report to the government, which report will then be debated in Dáil Éireann. Following that, a question will be formulated and put to the Irish people in a referendum. Irish Taoiseach

(prime minister), Leo Varadkar, desires a referendum sometime in May or June 2018. Then the Irish people will decide: should the unborn child continue to enjoy the inalienable right to life in her mother's womb or should the door be opened to abortion, thus sentencing such a child to death?

A liberalizing trend in Irish society was revealed on May 22, 2015, when the Irish people voted to change the constitutional definition of marriage to include same-sex unions. Will that liberalizing trend stretch also to legalizing abortion? And if so, to what degree—abortion on demand? Abortion only in the so-called "exceptional cases" of (so-called) fatal foetal abnormality, rape, and incest; or abortion for all cases up to a certain time-period in the pregnancy? The Oireachtas Éireann Committee recommended unrestricted abortion *up to twelve weeks*. Ireland's closest neighbour, the UK (except Northern Ireland), to which many Irish women travel to obtain abortions, allows unrestricted abortion up to *twenty-four weeks*.

While abortion activists have launched their "Repeal the Eighth" campaign, Ireland's pro-life groups have a different slogan: "Love Both."

One further concern that pro-abortion campaigners have is that Pope Francis plans to visit Ireland in 2018 (Pope John Paul II visited in 1979). Will the moral authority of the pope have any influence upon the vote? If recent trends in Ireland are any indication, the answer to that question is no.

### Pope Francis and the sixth petition

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" are part of Christ's model prayer, the Lord's Prayer. For almost two millennia, Christians have used the sixth petition to express their requests to their heavenly Father. For centuries, Reformed pastors have preached on this petition using the words of Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 52.

But the Roman pontiff believes that the petition should be changed. Apparently, the words are too confusing, and even misleading, for a modern Christian to

use in prayer. The pope has two issues with the current wording—first, he says, it is a bad translation; second, it teaches poor doctrine. In a recent TV interview, the pope suggested “Do not let or allow us to fall into temptation” as an acceptable alternative translation:

The French have changed the text and their translation says, “Don’t let me fall into temptation”.... It’s me who falls. It’s not Him who pushes me into temptation, as if I fell. A father doesn’t do that. A father helps you to get up right away. The one who leads into temptation is Satan.

The original Greek of Matthew 6:13 and Luke 11:4 is the same, literally, “And do not carry us or bring us into temptation.” The same verb appears several times in the New Testament: “And they sought means to *bring* him [the paralytic] in, and to lay him before him [Jesus]” (Luke 5:18); “for we *brought* nothing into this world” (I Tim. 6:7); “the bodies of those beasts whose blood is *brought* into the sanctuary” (Heb. 13:11). Christ’s words are not expressed in the passive voice, “Do not let us be tempted,” but in the more direct, active voice, “Do not lead us into temptation” or “Lead us not into temptation.”

But we must be careful, for Christ does not say, “Do not tempt us.” There is a difference between tempting someone and leading him (or bringing him) into temptation. The pope is partly right, for it is indeed the devil who tempts us. Indeed, James goes further: he does not mention the devil, for the lusts of our own flesh tempt us (James 1:13-15). In addition, the Greek word rendered “temptation” can equally be translated “trial” in the New Testament. When God brings us into temptation, He tries us. When God afflicts us, He tries us. But Satan often uses the same affliction (a trial from God’s hand) to tempt us, so that he entices us to sin.

God *does* lead us into temptation, which demonstrates His absolute sovereignty over our lives. God arranges all the circumstances of our lives, including trials and temptations. Jesus warned His disciples about this and urged them to watchful prayer: “Pray that ye enter not into temptation” (Luke 22:40). Even Jesus Himself was led into temptation: “Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil” (Matt. 4:1), where the “spirit” is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into temptation—the Holy Spirit did not tempt Him, but He *led* Him (and even *drove* Him; see Mark 1:13) into a place where He would be tempted!

Why, then, do we pray, “Lead us *not* into temptation”? If God wills to try us, should we not seek out occasions of temptation so that we can be tested? The

Heidelberg Catechism answers: “Since we are so weak in ourselves that we cannot stand a moment, ...do Thou therefore preserve and strengthen us” (Q&A 127). If we know our weakness, we will not trifle with sin. If we understand our weakness, we will beseech God not to be put to the test. If we are conscious of our weakness, we will beseech God that—if it is necessary for our salvation and for His glory—we will be preserved *in* the temptation and come through the trial with our faith strengthened. But we would prefer, if it is possible, that the temptation or trial should pass from us.

In effect, we pray thus when we utter the accurate English translation of Matthew 6:13 and Luke 11:4, as we have it in the KJV, “Father, do not put me in a situation, where, left to myself, seduced by my own flesh, and assailed by the devil, I fall into sin, ruin myself, and bring dishonour to Thy holy name.” If you think such a situation is not possible, read Judges 16 and shudder at the presumption of Samson; read Luke 22, both Christ’s warning and Peter’s foolhardiness; and contemplate the Canons of Dordt V, Articles 4-6. Do not tempt God to lead you into temptation, to withdraw His grace, and to let you fall, so that you learn a painful lesson in humility! God has many ways to chastise His children—leading us into temptation is one of the most painful rods that He uses. But do not fear, because our faithful God will “with the temptation also make a way to escape [notice that—God *makes* the temptation *and* the way to escape from it], that ye may be able to bear it” (I Cor. 10:13). However, the way of escape might not be easy: Joseph’s way of escape from Potiphar’s wife (a temptation he actively sought to *avoid*) was to suffer for years in an Egyptian prison rather than to sin against God (Gen. 39).

We need the sixth petition exactly as it stands. It is a testimony to God’s sovereignty, a testimony to our weakness, and a testimony to God’s faithfulness. It is hardly surprising that the pope misunderstands it: Rome is not exactly known for a robust confession of God’s sovereignty!

### A sinful royal engagement

On November 27, 2017 the media was abuzz with news of a royal engagement—Prince Harry, the youngest son of Prince Charles and (the late) Princess Diana, announced his engagement to Meghan Markle, an American actress. Sadly, this is not something Christians can celebrate, for Harry is following in his father’s adulterous footsteps by marrying a divorced woman against the law of God.

Prince Charles married Camilla Parker-Bowles, now the Duchess of Cornwall, in 2005, after Camilla’s divorce from her husband, Andrew Parker-Bowles, in

1995, and after the death of his late wife, Diana in 1997. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, refused to officiate at the wedding of divorcees, so that couple was married in a civil ceremony followed by a Service of Prayer and Dedication in St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. The latter ceremony included *an act of penitence* in which Charles and Camilla supposedly "confessed their sins" before solidifying their iniquities by entering into a lifelong adulterous relationship!

We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, by thought, word and deed, against thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly Thy wrath and indignation against us.

Notice that there was no specific confession of adultery, nor was there a turning from that sin, in which case the wedding would not have taken place.

Meghan Markle, Prince Harry's fiancée, married Trevor Engelson in September 2011, but the couple divorced barely two years later in August 2013. This means that by marrying Markle Prince Harry will enter

into an adulterous relationship, for in God's eyes Markle is still married to Engelson and cannot without adultery be married to another man: "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery" (Luke 16:18).

Nevertheless, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle will not have to go through the hypocritical ceremony of bewailing sins in which they intend to persist, for the Church of England, which is embroiled in controversy over same-sex marriage, is happy to allow the couple to marry, as long as Markle is baptized! In fact, the current Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, is happy to officiate, and the couple might even "tie the knot" in Westminster Abbey.

The Church of England and British society have fallen a long way since 1936, when Edward VIII scandalized church and state by abdicating the throne so that he could marry (that is, live in adultery with) the divorced American socialite Wallis Simpson. Today, adultery, whether disguised as marriage or not, is so common that people barely bat an eyelid.



## Search the Scriptures

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

# It shall be well with the righteous

Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God. There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity. Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun. When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also there is that neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) Then I beheld all the work of God,

that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.

Ecclesiastes 8:12-17

The Word of God now turns to what is a confession of faith. What is seen under the sun, because God's judgment does not fall immediately on the wicked, is that the wicked pursue their evil course. "Therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Eccl. 8:11). They arrogantly presume that God does not know and cannot or will not judge.

They are wrong. But this is a matter of faith in the truth of God as a righteous and holy God, who is both sovereign over the affairs of men's lives and judges sin in time and eternity. Therefore, "though a sinner do

evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged..., it shall not be well with the wicked” (Eccl. 8:12, 13). The word “prolong” is used twice in verses 12 and 13 with different reference points. The first refers to his evil activity. He walks in his sin and does evil again and again, so that the days of his evil activity are extended. His days in that sense are prolonged, a hundredfold in his evil works. It may seem as if he escapes judgment. Wisdom discerns that all is not what it seems: “It shall not be well with him.” There is an end that must be taken into consideration. The sinner shall die and enter into the place of judgment. We may be inclined to see only what is before us at the moment: the pathway of wicked men and their works, or the misery in the wake of their sins. What that wicked man is actually doing is filling up the cup of iniquity unto condemnation; he is not “getting away with it.”

Solomon says this wicked pathway of life does not truly prosper: “But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow” (v. 13). The second reference point, in that word “prolong,” is to the measure of his days. His prolonged career in sin does not add days to his life, as Solomon has said: “neither shall wickedness deliver those given to it” (Eccl. 8:8). He is running unto death and judgment. Solomon has made this point before, that though a man live twice a thousand years without good, it profits nothing for he still dies (Eccl. 6:6). He has no peace now and judgment will come.

He draws a picture of that life of the wicked. It is as a shadow. It is a transitory passing thing, insubstantial like a shadow or a passing vapor. It is also like a shadow that grows longer and longer toward sunset until it vanishes away with the close of day. As that shadow that grows long and fades, so the lengthening of the wicked in sin does not mean it is well with them. They stand under the wrath of God and descend into eternal darkness. They shall perish. The root of their folly is also set before us: it is so with the wicked “because he feareth not before God” (Eccl. 8:13).

By contrast he says, “...yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him” (v. 12). The fear of God is the beginning and true foundation of wisdom. It is the way of blessing. He repeats the idea: there is the person, the God-fearer, and there is his walking by faith in true wisdom fearing before God. By implication he turns from the way of evil to walk by faith in childlike obedience. For he is not only a God-fearer, but of them “which fear before him.” He lives consciously as one who stands in the presence of God, the King, hearkens to His Word, trusts His grace, and walks in that fear before Him.

By faith Solomon can say of them that fear God, “that it shall be well with them” (v. 12). God’s grace and favor shine upon them now, and though their days are also as a shadow in time, under the sun, yet their end is blessed.

Such confidence of faith is needed, for we walk by faith in God’s promises not by our own understanding in what is seen under the sun. Under the sun, what we see may appear contradictory. He declares, “There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also is vanity” (v. 14). “Happen” here is not random chance, but rather a sudden touch that strikes or brings one to the ground. In the context, it is God’s sovereign rule over man’s life when death carries him away. The righteous and the wicked both die. The righteous die and suffer affliction, while the wicked go on in the way of their sin. Job is an example of this, who though righteous, yet it happened unto him according to the work of the wicked. It was exactly the error of Job’s friends that, as it happened to him according to the work of the wicked, they drew the conclusion that Job himself must be wicked. The same mistake is made when judgment does not fall immediately or quickly upon the wicked.

The mistaken premise is that we can figure out what God is doing and understand His judgment by what we see in the world around us. It belongs to the limitations of wisdom and man’s understanding that this is not so. It rather belongs to the vanity, the transitory character of our life and of the world itself. Solomon explains this more fully in what follows.

But first he would draw out a conclusion that he has pointed out before rooted in that vanity of life, our limitations of understanding, and our calling to walk in fear before God. The right conclusion is not despair, nor the pride of the wicked who do not fear before God. Rather, it is to live presently in contentment of faith with thanksgiving. He says, “Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun” (v. 15).

In commending “mirth” or rejoicing he is not saying, “Let your heart be in the house of feasting and mirth” (Eccl. 7:2-4). He has rejected that impulse as the way of folly. To rejoice in the present daily blessings, one’s daily bread, is not only appropriate but the way of wisdom. The morrow is hidden from us. This kind of rejoicing, the covetous man, the man pursuing evil, can never real-



ly do. His bondage to covetousness will not let him rest in contentment and rejoice. His mirth is that of excess, sought as an end in itself. Rather, Solomon has in view what abides with us of our present labor under the sun. The word “abiding” has a kind of figure in it (in the original), of a person who comes and lodges for one night and is gone. So also is the fruit of our labor for the day. It is to be received with rejoicing, and the blessings received under the sun for that day. This is the way of wisdom. In that sense we are “to eat, and to drink, and to be merry,” or rejoice.

But wisdom includes also a recognition that God Himself imposes this limitation upon us, in the transitory character of life under the sun. The days of our life and our labor are that “which God giveth him under the sun” (v. 15). This rejoicing is part of what God is doing with them that fear God, His blessing upon us. The measure of our days are in His hand. He sends both joy and sorrow. Thus we may see, by faith, that it is well with us for His grace shines upon our way. And the end of that way, though death, is also a matter of faith; there too “it shall be well with them that fear God” (v. 12).

By faith also we know that it shall not be well with the wicked. God is righteous and a righteous Judge. That truth of who God is is not shaken by the transitory character of life or its vanity. Rather, that truth of vanity imposes a limitation upon our understanding from what is seen under the sun. The life of man and the whole creation through the Fall is subjected to vanity. Wisdom belongs to the comfort of faith in discerning the will of God and walking in it in fear before Him. It has also a limitation. God is God and His sovereign determination is not revealed to us in the ordinary affairs of life.

God has sent signs of His judgment in history recorded in His Word, that we may know that He is a righteous Judge over against sin. He showed Himself to be such in the flood, the plagues upon Egypt, the destruction of Pharaoh in the Red Sea, the fall of Jericho or the destruction of Sodom. That He is a righteous Judge God’s Word and works testify. But that does not mean that we can figure it out day by day in ordinary life by what is present in the world before us. Thus, there is a limitation to wisdom, in that which is hidden in the counsel of God. The vain, transitory character of life, where we do not know what shall be or when it shall be, makes it so. The problem is not in God; the limitation is in us as creatures of the dust.

Solomon, therefore, addresses further this limitation in verses 16, 17 (cf. text at the beginning of article). Solomon by the gift given him had applied his

heart to know wisdom, to understand with skill and discernment the world around him. This was a matter of applying his *heart*, not merely his mind. That is, he was seeking a *spiritual* understanding not simply earthly wisdom, for the heart is the spiritual center of a man’s life. He sought to see the business or travail that is done upon earth, so as to know it, that is, to discern and understand it. He sought not merely the outward form of it, but its meaning and purpose. He was seeking to know God’s purpose and work therein.

He points us to the intense and prolonged character of his study and reflection. The parentheses added in the next part by the translation would suggest that the all-seeing eye of God and His beholding the works of men is being mentioned. The parentheses could better be dropped, as it is rather Solomon’s sleeplessness that is indicated. In seeking to understand, he kept himself awake at night with his reflections so that “neither day nor night” he saw sleep with his eyes. He did what many children of God have done pondering a matter, particularly when it is one of trouble and distress, when the way of God is not clear, or when the burden of the matter weighs upon mind and heart. It is this spiritual struggle that is in view, in which one walks the floor over the matter the way one walks with a fussy infant with a fever.

From it he derives his conclusion: “Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun” (v. 17). The conclusion reached is that behind all “the business that is done upon the earth,” there is the “work of God,” that is, God’s sovereign disposition and ordering of men’s affairs by His almighty power. To that work belongs both that God is righteous in judgment and that it yet happens to the righteous and to the wicked in a way that transcends our limited understanding (v. 14). Because behind the works of man is the work of God, “a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun.” This is not a matter of frustration with the limits of our understanding. It is rather part of his confession, as the fruit of reflection, and as such it testifies to a humbling of one who is a child of God in submission to the will of God.

The searching of wisdom in man is limited. What is known is known by faith, not merely by the power of earthly observation and discernment. “Because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it” (v. 17). This is Solomon’s confession of his own activity, of his sleepless nights. The activity was not unfruitful, as the book testifies, but the wisdom derived from it is limited because the one

seeking to understand is himself finite and limited. The work that God does is a divine work, transcending the power of man, a mere creature, to fully comprehend it, even though a believing child of God. The principles we may know, which God has revealed in His Word. The way of God in His holy perfection and His sovereignty over all things is set before us in Scripture. But

wisdom that is given to bring instruction and comfort is not exhaustive. The works of God are far deeper than our thoughts. Wisdom is not an end in itself. It leads us beyond ourselves into the presence of God that we should fear before Him in all His majesty, power and glory. It leads, therefore, to the real comfort of wisdom, which says “Thy will be done.”



## When thou sittest in thine house

Mrs. Sue Looyenga, member of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan

# A house broken—and restored

The house, for all the violence it had endured in the storm, had, thankfully, been built upon a firm foundation, and still stood upright in its place. Various pieces of its frame littered the yard, along with sticks and leaves and other detritus that the wind had tossed; but that was not the real calamity. It was the inside of the courtyard surrounded by rooms that formed the Judaeian home that showed the ferocity of the storm. There had been a vine, beautiful and flourishing, inside the walls of the house, rooted in that courtyard. It had provided fruits in abundance and a hospitable shade, even for all that sat around it. But now, now it was smashed and shredded and from every appearance would be barren for some time, if it survived this travesty. Its tender blossoms were madly strewn about the yard, and its tendrils twisted and torn. To all who looked upon its vestiges, it was a desolate sight. The tears of passersby fell at the remembrance of its former state.

Amazingly, in the courtyard, not far from where the vine had been planted, a feisty, generations-old olive tree still stood upright, though it was twisted and somewhat hunched over with age. It had outlasted many a blast from the weather over its numerous years, and it appeared there was hope for the family tree to recover from the storm. But no—maybe not for long. One look at the tender plants that grew up from its roots and that had been flourishing well all around the base of the olive tree told otherwise. They were splayed on the ground, all akimbo, and looking for all the world as though the wind and the floods had all but destroyed them right along with the vine. The only thing they had in their favor was the fact that they were still bound to

the ancient tree, and it was the venerable old tree's roots that fed them, and not their own at this point.

It had been a violent storm, indeed, to shake the vine and the olive plants so mercilessly. But the storm had passed now, and there was work to be done. Restoration was a necessity if the house and the vine and the olive plants were yet to survive. But there was no one to take charge, to put things to rights, to give care and nourishment to the tender vine so that it might recover and bear fruit again, to prop the olive plants in their places around the olive tree and see to their needs. The vine was even more fragile than it had been when planted, and the little olive plants were yet young and needed tending until they were at least fifteen years old and bore their first good fruit for harvest. Only time would tell how they would fare in their desperate situation. But it was over now. The servant who had promised to care for the property he had sought from the master was gone. There would be no return. He had found another house, another vine.

---

Far from the ancient households of Judea in both time and place, homes in the United States of America have, nevertheless, seen the violent winds of divorce wreaking havoc for many years now, especially with the advent of the possibility of “no-fault divorce” in the state of California in 1970. And those bold, cold winds have not bypassed the homes of some of those across the aisles in our churches, as God's mighty foe, Satan has increasingly sought to destroy God's precious gift of marriage and family relationships through the sins of

abuse, adultery, and/or abandonment by those entrusted with the care and keeping of their families by their marriage vows before Him.

Some of us have loved ones who have barely survived its ravages; and some of us have emerged from these whirlwinds ourselves, like Job did, stunned at the Hand of God upon us. And yet, by the breath of the Spirit within, we came to know that the Lord was the One who had given, and the Lord was the One who had taken away (Job 1:21), and He was worthy of our praise, even in this. But the storm is fierce and destructive that comes through divorce, and that is not an overstatement. In the middle of its desolation, it is easy to wonder—even as believers—how any kind of recovery is even possible. An abandoned wife and her young children—by the filing of a decree intended to set free the one who had vowed to care for them—have been relegated to the courts of the land for determination of how their lives will proceed in two separate households. How can there even *be* a normal life again? The truth becomes bitterly clear to those who remain in that home shattered by divorce: the strength will not be found in the vine by the (in)sides of the house's wall, nor will the tender plants rise up in their own power. It is the Master Himself who will come to the aid of His helpless ones—and He does. He does this by His Spirit in their hearts, through His Word in their ears from faithful pastors and elders, and by the members of His body, the church, here on earth.

Jesus Christ Himself knows the agony of desertion as no other ever has or ever will. He knows the place of the olive tree well, for it was in the garden at Gethsemane—*Gat Shemen*, “the place of the olive press,” that the bloody sweat was pressed out of Him like olive oil. All His earthly friends had deserted Him in their own weariness at that point, as He faced the most horrible desertion yet to come when God Himself would forsake His Son on the cross of Calvary. And He knows the courtroom and the fear and the injustice that awaits those who carry God's Name on their lips. He knows the mockery. He knows the betrayal and the denial of those He once called friends. And He draws near to them, a High Priest who has been Himself “touched with the feelings of our infirmities” (Heb. 4:15). Though there be many who have been wronged by others, or have suffered pain in body or soul, or suffered hunger, poverty, persecution, loneliness, or cruel mockery, is there any whose sorrow has approached a sorrow “like unto his sorrow?” (Lam. 1:12). He has known *every* sorrow as the “Man of Sorrows,” who came into our human flesh to suffer willingly. When they have no voice to utter their pain to God, God's children have His Spir-

it to intercede for them with “groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26). And the Father listens, and promises and pours out upon us such blessings as we cannot imagine—for the sake of His well-beloved Son.

His Word, when we hear it from the mouths of His faithful servants, read it ourselves, take it into our hearts, and hearken to His commandments, brings peace in the storm—peace like a river that sustains, nourishes, strengthens us for every need we have (Is. 48:18). We are able to have joy in suffering as we “humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God” in our suffering, and as He Himself lifts us up to heights of joy in His presence (I Pet. 5:6). We have His assurance that our “reward is great in heaven” when we suffer reproach on earth for Christ's sake from others who seek to destroy our name (Luke 6:23). And though often, because of court orders and visitation schedules, mothers and children are separated for days as they obey earthly judges, they have God's precious promise that “nothing can separate us from the love of God,” by which we are bound together even when physically we are, for a time, far apart (Rom. 8:38-39).

And though it is God Himself who helps the lonely and distressed in their need, there is nothing more beautiful than when His help comes through the body of Christ in the form of the willing hands and open hearts of fellow believers. The mercies of Christ brought by the servants of the Lord in the diaconate; an invitation of hospitality and fellowship to a broken family; the card or letter or hug or kind word of encouragement; the offered prayer; the visit; the pledge of help; the gift of a meal; the concern for needs not only physical, but spiritual; the welcoming smile—all of these are the pouring out of Christ's love upon the wounds of a broken family. Do you know, reader, that inasmuch as you have done these things unto those who feel at times that they are “the least of his brethren,” you have done them unto Him? (Matt. 25:40). The needs are ongoing, weighty at times, and often bring others into situations that are painful and unpleasant to see, but the help of God's people to fellow saints who have been chosen by God to suffer in this way bears a beautiful blessing: the sight of a vine being strengthened and once again bearing fruits of the Spirit in her home, and olive plants flourishing around the table.

All praise to the One who “gives beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” that those who mourn in Zion may be called “trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified” (Is. 61:3).



## Strength of youth

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa

# Wanted—men for the times

“Be a man! Man up! Don’t be such a girl!”

Sound familiar?

I have a feeling that most young men are familiar with these expressions. Maybe your hair is getting a bit long, and your dad scolds, “Get a haircut! People are going to mistake you for your sister! You need to look more like a man!” Or maybe you are afraid to talk to a girl at school, and your friend prods, “Man up and talk to her!” Whether coming from parents or from a group of buddies, at some point you have probably been told that you need to be more manly.

But have you ever stopped to think about what that means? What does it mean to be a man? What is expected of you as you enter into manhood? What exactly is it that makes you different from women? And not simply, what does the world or what do my parents or peers think it means to be a man, but what does my heavenly Father say?

That is what I would like to examine with you over the next few articles. I want to lay out for you a biblical perspective on what it means to be a mature, Christian man.

### A word to everyone else

If you are not a young man and still reading this, please do not stop! While addressing young men directly, I think there is benefit for others.

I think there is benefit for women, especially young women, in understanding what it means to be a man. Hopefully, they will be able to understand their brothers in Christ better and encourage them to be what God calls them to be. For those who are thinking about marriage, the benefit is that you know what kind of man to look for in a husband and how to help him grow into that more and more.

I also trust that there is benefit for parents and grandparents in reading this. As a father of four little boys, I want my sons to grow up into strong, godly men. And I am sure this is the desire of every conscientious parent of boys. Perhaps what is written here can be the springboard to further discussions with your sons as they grow into spiritual maturity.

### Masculine muddle

In my opinion, it is absolutely imperative that we have straight in our minds what it means to be a man. I do not want to overstate the case, but it would be wrong to undersell the issue too. This is a critical issue for the church in the twenty-first century.

The reason why this is so important is due to the world in which you are now growing up. The world is actively promoting certain views of what it means to be man. These perspectives are boldly proclaimed in TV shows, movies, music, books, magazines, the Internet, and social media.

One view that the world gives of manhood is that a real man is strong, handsome, and a bit wild. He has body-builder muscles and dashing good looks that turn the heart of every woman to mush. He drinks beer (lots of it!), drives either a Corvette or a heavy-duty pickup, and answers to no one. He is driven by sexual lust and can be found hopping from one bed to another.

Another, equally troubling view of manhood is that it really does not exist. The wise of this world inform us that gender is really just a social construction, something invented by an unenlightened society centuries ago, perhaps as a way to further oppress women. But today in our enlightened society, so they say, we are able to move past that into an age when people are free to be whatever they want to be.

Witness the surge of societal support for same-sex relationships. The world celebrates this as progress, since we are learning that this is the way that these individuals were born and they are simply living out what they are.

Witness the tidal wave of support for transgenderism. Even though a young boy has the physical anatomy of a male, he has always identified more with being a girl. As he gets older, he is encouraged to take on a more feminine name, to dress like a woman, to receive hormonal injections, to mutilate his body through endless surgeries, all in an attempt to bring everything into line with the way he feels.

What is frightening is that this thinking has infiltrated the church world, even the Reformed church world.



More and more there is a push to accept the idea that a man can be whatever he feels like being.

Thankfully, there is not this push in the PR churches. Yet, there is still the possibility that we too have a muddled view of what it means to be a man.

Think for a moment: what would you say is included with being a man? Often we think that a man has to be physically strong. He probably has a deep, gravelly voice. He can grow a beard in a week (or less). On a Saturday he can be found covered in grease under the hood of car. He is unconcerned about his clothes or appearance. He played every sport in high school, and still is gone once a week for his softball or golf league. He enjoys hunting and fishing, owns several shotguns and deer rifles, and is secretly “packing heat” (that is, carrying a concealed weapon). He never cries, cannot understand why others show their feelings and get emotional, and is too macho to tell anyone close to him that he loves them. If you cannot picture in your mind what I am describing, do a Google search for “Marlboro man.”

“What a man!” we think.

Now, think for a moment: what would you say is unmanly? Someone who is unmanly is small and weak. That person maybe has a high-pitched, squeaky voice. He cannot grow facial hair to save his life. He has soft, uncalled hands used to pecking on a keyboard rather than turning wrenches. He is always dressed carefully and stylishly. He was always the last one picked for a game at recess, has never played organized sports, and probably could not tell you the difference between a touchdown and a homerun. He has never gone hunting, gets woozy at the thought of killing an animal, and is secretly scared of guns. He would much rather spend his time reading a book, doing photography, or playing the piano. He can be brought to tears by a kid’s cartoon, and tells those around him that he loves them.

“What a sissy,” we think. “Not much of a man.”

But if that is the way that we judge manhood, then we too have an incorrect view of masculinity. Our perspective of manhood is based on personal or cultural standards, rather than on the standard of God’s Word.

### **The need of the hour**

What the church needs at this late hour in history is men. Not men as the world would define them. Not men as we would define them. But the church needs men as God would define them in the Bible. The church needs spiritually strong, spiritually mature, Christian men. The church needs you who are young men to grow and develop into such men.

This need is not unique to the days in which we are now living. This has always been the need of the church on this earth. But especially at this time does the church require godly men. We are living in evil days. In the world, the cup of iniquity is swiftly filling to the brim and wickedness abounds on every side. In the church world, the love of many waxes cold and there is a forsaking of the old paths. The foundation of the kingdom of Antichrist is already being laid, and the days of persecution appear to be coming in the not-too-distant future. The church needs men to be men!

I am not saying that the church needs men to the exclusion of women. Not at all. The church also needs spiritually mature, Christian women. But the church needs godly men to take the lead by encouraging, nurturing, and leading these godly women.

If there are no godly men, then God may well raise up women in that time of crisis, similar to what he did at the time of the judges. The story is familiar. The people had sunk into another cycle of disobedience toward God, with the resulting chastisement of being conquered by a heathen nation, under whose thumb they suffered for twenty years. During that time God raised up the prophetess Deborah to judge the people. The reason for this is that there were no strong men who dared take the lead. Even when Barak finally stepped forward, he timidly said, “If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go” (Judges 4:8). Deborah assured him that God would give the victory, however “the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman” (v. 9).

Is it possible that the Lord is plaguing our society with radical feminism as judgment for the weakness of the men? This is certainly not to condone the wicked rebellion of the feminist movement, but could it be that God has allowed this to take place because men are not truly being men?

This ought not to be in the church. It ought not to be the case that God has to raise up women to lead because the men are not being leaders. The church needs her men, especially her young men, to be real men of God. This is the need of the hour.

And for men to be real men, they must know what it means to be a man. Not a muddled idea of masculinity, but what God truly requires of men in His Word. More on that next time.



## Guest article

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

# Invitation to the British Reformed Fellowship Conference (July 2018)

Perhaps some of you are beginning to make vacation plans for the summer. If you are, let me encourage you to come to the biennial British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Family Conference, which we are planning for July 2018 at Hebron Hall Christian Centre ([www.hebronhall.org](http://www.hebronhall.org)), just four miles from Cardiff, the capital city of Wales.

The BRF conferences are held every two years, in various parts of the British Isles. With the last three having been held in Northern Ireland or in Scotland, we are excited to return to Wales, which is not only a beautiful part of the world, but also the home country of the conference chairman, Brian Harris, whose son Joshua is well known to many of the young people who attend the PR Young People's conventions.

Speaking of the PR Young People's Convention (YPC), our conference will *not* clash with it, for it will be held from Saturday July 21 to Saturday July 28, which gives time for people to get back for the YPC (Monday August 13 to Friday August 17).

The conference promises to be a time of rich, Christian fellowship with attendees from across the world. The last conference brought together believers, young and old, from the United Kingdom, Ireland, continental Europe, the USA, Canada, Singapore, Australia, and the Philippines; at every conference the group seems to get *more catholic*. As an explicitly Christian and Reformed conference, we provide solid Reformed teaching from the Word of God, ably delivered by our two main speakers, Prof. D. Engelsma and Rev. A. Lanning. Last time, their speeches were on the subject of eschatology, which speeches are in the process of being made into a book. This time, the subject chosen by the BRF is "The Reformed Family—According to the Word of God." Our two speakers plan to develop the subject in six main conference addresses: "The Divine Origin of the Family;" "The Authoritative Content of the Gospel;" "The God-Fearing Man and His Virtuous Wife;" "The Reformed Family: Parents and Children;" "It is Good to be Single;" and "Unbiblical Divorce and Adulterous Remarriage: A Scandal."

The needs of our Lord's Day (July 22) will also be

met, for we will have two worship services (with Revs. Stewart and Lanning preaching the Word) and a presentation on Christian education in the afternoon. How many other vacations provide that?

BRF conferences do not consist *only* of speeches and other devotional exercises, however. There will also be a lot of time for recreation, with plenty of activities available on site—a swimming pool, sports hall, and pool, snooker, and table tennis tables. A short walk from the conference center will take you to a railway station with frequent trains to Cardiff and the coast, both only a few miles away. We will also be arranging day-trips to interesting, scenic and historical sites, including a fifteenth-century castle near the Welsh border and the site of the martyrdom of an English bishop!

Almost all rooms are en-suite, with bedding and towels provided. Accommodation is full board, so we will be well fed throughout the week. Free wifi Internet is available in designated areas of the center, and Hebron Hall has several tea/coffee areas to provide refreshments and a place to chat throughout the day.

The cost for one week full board is as low as the BRF can make it, and much cheaper than you will find in



Hebron Hall Christian Centre

any hotel. Booking forms, including prices, are available on the BRF website ([www.britishreformed.org](http://www.britishreformed.org)) and will also be included with the new, special Reformation issue of the *British Reformed Journal*. Conference booking secretaries are Kristin Crossett ([kcrossett@covenantchristianhs.org](mailto:kcrossett@covenantchristianhs.org)) for UK/Europe, Briana Prins ([bprins@covenantchristianhs.org](mailto:bprins@covenantchristianhs.org)) for USA/Canada, and Lisa Ong ([lisaonghx@gmail.com](mailto:lisaonghx@gmail.com)) for Singapore.

Cardiff is relatively easy to get to, with flights from the USA through Dublin or London, for example. From Cardiff airport, it is a 15-minute taxi journey to the conference center. For additional information, visit <http://brfconference.weebly.com> or email Mary Stewart ([angusmarystewart@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:angusmarystewart@tiscali.co.uk)).

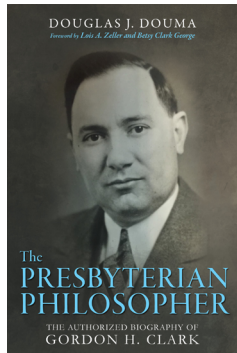
We hope to see many of you at the sixteenth biennial BRF Conference in Wales!



## 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

*The Presbyterian Philosopher: The Authorized Biography of Gordon H. Clark*, by Douglas J. Douma. Wipf & Stock Publishers: Eugene, OR, 2017. Pp. 292. [Reviewed by Philip Rainey, member of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI.]



A book review about a Presbyterian (and not only so, but a philosopher!) might seem misplaced in a Reformed magazine such as the *Standard Bearer*. Such a view would be understandable, but it would also be incorrect. For there is much in this book that is instructive for Reformed Christians in general and the readership of this magazine in particular. Not a few of the controversies described in this book concern doctrines that led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches and constitute the very reason for their continued existence.

Dr. Gordon H. Clark (1902-1985) was a renowned Christian philosopher and Presbyterian theologian. As a philosopher, his major contribution was the development of a thoroughly Christian theory of knowledge; as a theologian, he subscribed strictly to and assiduously defended the system of doctrine laid down in the Westminster Confession of Faith. His uncompromis-

ing stand for Westminster orthodoxy brought him into sharp conflict with leaders in his own denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).

The author, Douglas Douma, as a native of Grand Rapids, Michigan, is well acquainted with the history of the common grace controversy that convulsed the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in the early 1920s. Accordingly, he has performed an invaluable service by locating the struggles that faced Dr. Gordon Clark in the 1940s within the larger context of the earlier controversy.

Of the thirteen chapters, three are devoted to the controversy over Clark's ordination to the ministry of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1944—what has come to be known as the Clark-Van Til Controversy. I believe the value of the book lies in the author's lucid treatment of the controversy. Herman Hoeksema took a keen interest in the controversy, writing a series of articles in the *Standard Bearer* at the time. Douma, following Hoeksema, explains the controversy in the OPC in terms of the arguments over common grace in the CRC in the early 1920s. Douma quotes extensively from Hoeksema's articles and obviously shares his viewpoints.

In November 1944, five members of the faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia) led by Dr. Cornelius Van Til lodged a complaint against Gordon H. Clark's ordination to the ministry. This document became known simply as *The Complaint*. It ad-



dressed four theological topics: the incomprehensibility of God; the relationship of the faculty of knowledge to other faculties of the soul; the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility; and the free offer of the gospel. *The Complaint* represented the theology of Dr. Van Til who had been raised in the CRC and was a minister there until taking up a teaching position at Westminster Seminary.

Of the four topics the first received most treatment. The complainants' doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God governed their understanding of the other three issues. It is not easy to follow all the lines of debate between Clark and Van Til on this subject, but Douma makes it as clear as possible in chapter seven. Both parties to the controversy agreed that, since God is infinite, man can never know Him fully and exhaustively. But they differed in the question of the relation of our knowledge to God's knowledge. The whole question came down to the matter of the content of God's knowledge and the knowledge that is possible to man; and specifically this question: does a proposition have the same meaning for God and man? To this question Clark gave a resounding "yes"; the complainants denied it.

The complainants put the matter beyond any doubt when on page 5 of *The Complaint* they declared, "we dare not maintain that His knowledge and our knowledge coincide at any single point." Van Til had developed a two-level theory of knowledge according to his Creator-creature distinction. According to this theory, the knowledge that God possesses of Himself and all things is qualitatively different than man's knowledge; in other words, it is not a difference in degree, but in kind. In words that have come to define the thinking of almost every reputedly conservative Reformed church and theologian since, *The Complaint* declared: "Because of his very nature as infinite and absolute the knowledge which God possesses of himself and of all things must remain a mystery which the finite mind of man cannot penetrate" (112). Clark's disavowal of this position and his unwavering conviction that God's revelation of Himself to us in Scripture is logical and self-consistent led the complainants to charge him with rationalism. For the same convictions, Herman Hoeksema was similarly charged, as are the Protestant Reformed Churches to this day.

Clark completely repudiated Van Til's view of knowledge. After stating some true propositions from the Bible he wrote: "The propositions mean to the man who knows them, to the man who grasps their meaning, exactly what they mean to God, although God, as was said knows implications of these propo-

sitions that man does not know; but the truth itself is the same for man as it is for God. If a man does not grasp God's truth, he grasps no truth at all, for there is no other truth than God's truth" (260).

In a devastating attack on the Van Tilian position, Clark went on to write: "*The Complaint* makes the truth God has qualitatively different from the 'truth' man has. There is not a single point in common. Whatever meaning God has, man cannot have. And since the Bible teaches that God has all truth, it must follow on the theory of *The Complaint* that man has no truth. The theory of *The Complaint* is therefore skepticism" (260). Clark here makes a crucial connection between revelation and the knowledge of God. The Bible itself claims to be a revelation of God's truth, but if man is unable to grasp divine truth then in spite of revelation God remains hidden. Essentially, therefore, Van Til's position is no different than modernism.

Herman Hoeksema, in his articles on the controversy, agreed with Clark's criticisms of *The Complaint*. Hoeksema too believed that Van Til's doctrine of the incomprehensibility of God was not the historic Reformed doctrine. He also repudiated Van Til's belief that a proposition cannot have the same meaning for man as for God and that consequently Van Til had a skeptical view of the Bible. Hoeksema wrote:

To say that any proposition does not have the same meaning for God as it has for man is, it appears to me a rationalistic contention. The complainants do not derive this proposition from Scripture, nor will they ever be able to find Scriptural ground for it.... [It is also] a denial of the truth of revelation. That our knowledge of God is finite, and that even through revelation we can never comprehend God, the infinite One, has always been held by all theologians. But if what God revealed to us has a different meaning for Him than for us, God is not only incomprehensible, but also unknowable. Then revelation itself is not true and reliable.

And so, it still seems to me that the issue between the complainants and [Dr. Clark] is not the incomprehensibility of God, but the question whether revelation itself is intelligible to us. To deny the latter is to destroy the very foundations of theology (*Standard Bearer*, Vol. 21, Issue 12, [March 15, 1945], 265).

Another of *The Complaint's* points concerned Clark's denial of the so-called "free offer of the gospel" (the doctrine that in the preaching of the gospel God expresses a desire to save all who hear, reprobate and elect alike). Clark rejected this doctrine on the basis that to say (as did the complainants) that God sincerely desires the salvation of those whom He has from eterni-



ty determined not to save is an outright contradiction. The book's treatment of this point is outstanding. It is an excellent and fair overview of the whole free offer controversy tracing the history of the doctrine from its origin in Scottish Presbyterianism to its later manifestation and development in the CRC in the early 1920s. The author draws attention to the influence of the CRC on the Clark case. In so doing he quotes from Herman Hoeksema, who also connects the introduction of the doctrine into the OPC with the presence of three former CRC ministers on the faculty of Westminster Seminary, the most notable being Cornelius Van Til.

Chapters five and ten are an exceptional analysis of one of Clark's great contributions to Christianity, namely his development of the apologetic system known as "presuppositionalism." There are two components to presuppositionalism: Clark's rejection of empiricism (which he viewed as logically invalid) and his acceptance of worldview thinking. Traditional Christian apologetics, such as the classical proofs for the existence of God, were largely based on empirical arguments. Clark believed all such arguments had as their starting point non-Christian assumptions; hence, they could never be a satisfactory foundation for a truly Christian philosophy. As Douma puts it: "he believed that one must reject non-Christian presuppositions in favor of a Christian one: the truth of

the Bible" (67). Clark himself later put it this way: "Instead of beginning with 'facts' and later discovering God, unless a thinker begins with God, he can never end with God, or get the facts either" (58).

Douma is not completely uncritical of Clark. In chapter twelve he describes Clark's formulation of the incarnation and specifically of the doctrine of the union of Christ's two natures in His one divine person. Clark's formulation of this doctrine has been charged with the heresy of Nestorianism, a charge from which despite repeated reformulations he never quite seemed to escape.

Clark's significant and interesting career as a college professor is ably described by Douma, together with interesting anecdotes and recollections of his teaching style. Clark's family life, love of chess, and pursuit of drawing and painting in his later years are some of the other aspects of his life that make for interesting reading.

Clark was one of the great Christian thinkers of his era, but he was also a humble servant of Christ who suffered for his unshakeable commitment to the absolute authority of the Bible. Clark's work was a clear trumpet call to the church of his day to an unashamedly doctrinal Christianity as the only effective answer to theological and moral relativism. To read this book is to hear that call—and to hear it loudly—in our own day.



## News from our churches

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

### Trivia question

How many members of the Rev. Richard Smit family moved to Antipolo in December? And do you know the name of the subdivision in which our missionaries reside? Answers later in this article.

### Minister activities

Upon receiving a decline from Rev. B. Huizinga, First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI formed a new trio of Rev. J. Mahtani, Candidate D. Noorman and Rev. C. Griess. On December 14 the congregation called Rev. Griess to be their next pastor.

Southwest PRC announced her new trio consisting of Revs. A. Brummel, J. Mahtani, and Candidate D. Noorman. On December 17 the call was issued to candidate D. Noorman.

December marked 40 years of service in the PRC ministry for Rev. Kenneth Koole. He was ordained as minister in 1977 and served the churches of Randolph, WI; Redlands, CA; Faith in Jenison, MI; and Grandville, MI PRC since 2002. The congregation in Grandville thanked him for his faithful labors in their midst and on behalf of the denomination. A coffee social was planned for a Sunday evening in January. We too give thanks to God for a faithful servant in Rev. Koole!

May God also continue to use him for the good of the churches in the years to come. In the summer of 1976, as a student, Rev. Koole ably filled the pulpit of the vacant PR congregation in Doon, IA. Ask him sometime about the light pole in center field.

The congregation of Byron Center PRC welcomed Rev. A. Lanning and his family with an open house on December 30, a great opportunity to meet their new pastor before his installation. Rev. Lanning was installed by Rev. S. Key (his father-in-law) on December 31, with a welcome program/singspiration held after the evening service.

Pastor A. denHartog has been asked by the Contact Committee of our denomination to serve our sister church in Singapore, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, for an extended period. CERCS will be without its own pastor after Rev. A. Lanning leaves in December to take up the call to Byron Center PRC. The denHartogs are planning to be in Singapore at least until after the PRC synod of June 2018 makes a decision on the CERCS calling a minister-on-loan, the Lord willing, from our denomination. Let us pray for the Lannings, Covenant ERC, and the denHartogs during this time. The denHartogs planned to leave for Redlands, CA, December 19, to spend some time with their children and grandchildren there. They will fly out of Los Angeles for Singapore on January 23, 2018, D.V. Candidate D. Noorman is supplying the pulpit of CERC from December 29-January 16.

### Sister-church activities

From the bulletin of the Covenant PRC of Ballymena, Northern Ireland:

The church visitors, Rev. Nathan Decker and Sid Miedema, will be in Northern Ireland from Thursday 18 January to the morning of Thursday 25 January. The congregational dinner will be held on Friday, 19 January. On Wednesday, 24 January, Rev. Decker is planning to give a lecture on “Living Wisely in a Digital Age.” They will be with the Limerick Reformed Fellowship from 25-29 January.

### Congregational activities

As they usually do, the members of the congregation at Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB, Canada shared *ollie bollen* after their New Years’ service. Yum, yum.

The Psalm Choir began its new season on January 8. Practices are at 2:00 p.m. at Hudsonville PRC. All are invited to sing Psalms of praise to our God.

Grandville PRC voted to install new LED lighting in their parking lot.

The congregation at Hudsonville PRC voted to reseal their parking lot.

Psalter revision surveys have been submitted to the PRCA consistories, who will then submit a report of their findings to the Contact Committee of our churches.

An expansion project open house at Trinity PRC in Michigan was held on a Saturday in December, so that adults of the congregation could walk through the addition and see the progress that had been made. Expansion committee members were on hand to answer questions and explain details.

### School activities

The Heritage Christian School Society (Hudsonville, MI) recently held a special meeting in which it approved a plan for a seven-room expansion. Fundraising has begun and is expected to continue into 2019.

Many of our schools presented band, orchestra, and choir programs during the time of Christmas.

Many registered to attend the Tasting Bee to be held at Adams Christian School on Thursday, January 18. Punch bowl and appetizers were to be served as guests arrived. Also, all registered guests were to receive a cookbook, but there were additional books available for purchase. That sounds like a delicious evening!

### Seminary activities

The seminary’s interim course this year is “The Theology of John Calvin” and taught by Prof. R. Cammenga. Classes meet from Monday, January 8, 2018 through Wednesday, January 17, 2018, in the morning, 9:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. Any who were interested in attending were welcome.

### Trivia answer

Rev. Richard Smit and his wife Tricia took with them these children: Jay, Irene, Rosalyn, Seth, Carl, Ryan, and Silas. Their two oldest children, John and Rebecca continue to reside in Hudsonville, MI while the others have now taken up residence in House 12, on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The name of the subdivision in which all three of our missionaries currently reside is the Beverly Hills Subdivision. I have wondered about our missionaries purchasing their own jeepney, and think it might be worth considering. Jay could be the designated driver. His younger brothers tell me he would be the ideal choice! More trivia next time.

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

# Announcements

## Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathy to Doug and Sue Bleyenburgh and Mike and Amy Langeland and their families in the death of their mother and grandmother, **Joanne VanBaren**. It is our prayer that they and their extended families may receive comfort from the Holy Spirit in I Corinthians 15:55-57: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Rev. Carl Haak, President

David S. Miedema, Clerk

## Resolution of sympathy

The congregation and Council of the Hull PRC express their sincere and heartfelt condolences to Elder Don and Marilyn VerMeer and Gerb DeJong in the death of their mother and mother-in-law **Esther VerMeer**. May they find peace from God's word through the prophet Isaiah: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 66:13).

Rev. James Laning, President

Jeff Baker, Clerk of Records

## Teacher needed

**Covenant Christian High School** in Grand Rapids, Michigan is accepting applications from members of the Protestant Reformed churches to fill a teaching position in the area of Mathematics for the fall of 2018. Applicants should be certified for Secondary Education. Applications can be obtained by contacting Rick Noorman (616-453-5048 or ricknoorman@gmail.com) or Dr. Doug Bleyenburgh (drbleyenburgh@comcast.net).

## Teachers needed

The **Northwest Iowa Protestant Reformed School** in Doon, IA, is seeking a teacher for grades 3 and 4 for the 2018-2019 school year as well as an Administrator. For more information or to apply please contact Brent Wynia—712-470-2757, brentwynia@hotmail.com or Joey Mantel—712-470-6493, jsmantel@outlook.com

## Resolution of sympathy

The congregation and Council of Hull PRC extends their sincere and deep sympathy to Don Hoksbergen, the Craig and Heather Hoksbergen family, the Andrew and Amanda Moss family, and Ken and Doris Hoksbergen in the passing of their wife, mother, grandmother, and sister-in-law **Bonnie Hoksbergen**. May they take comfort in the gracious words of I Corinthians 15:54: "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

Rev. James Laning, President

Jeff Baker, Clerk of Records

## Resolution of sympathy

The congregation and Council of Hull PRC extends their deep and earnest sympathy to the Brian and Pauline Kroese family, the Mark and LaBeth Hoekstra family, the Jeff and Rose Andringa family, Ted and Harriet Hoekstra, Florence Brunsting, and Margaret Hoekstra in the death of their father, grandfather, great-grandfather, brother, and brother-in-law **Henry Hoekstra**. May they rest in the assurance of our faithful Lord and Father found in I Corinthians 2:9: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

Rev. James Laning, President

Jeff Baker, Clerk of Records

## 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.

## Teachers needed

**Adams Christian School**, a K-8 school located in Wyoming, MI, is in need of teachers for the 2018-2019 school year. We encourage all interested individuals to contact Rick Mingerink, school administrator (rickmingerink@gmail.com) (616-531-0748) for more information.



## Announcements continued

### Seminary

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Bill VanOverloop (phone: 616-669-1504). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, March 6, 2018, 4 P.M., D.V.

Student Aid Committee  
Bill VanOverloop, Secretary

### Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Loveland PRC on Wednesday, March 7, 2018, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by February 5 (30 days before Classis convenes). All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Loveland's consistory.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Stated Clerk



The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: for they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and riches unto thy neck.

# T is for Tree


A Bible ABC By Connie L. Meyer

One of the most important reasons the author chose to write an ABC book was to introduce young children to a variety of Bible texts.


After each letter of the alphabet is introduced, children read a rhyme that is limited to three lines. The Bible texts included on each page can be read as a child's attention grows and allows.

A wide varies of colorful illustrations will capture the attention of young children as they listen to the words that are read to them.


Coming late winter 2018. Preorder today!



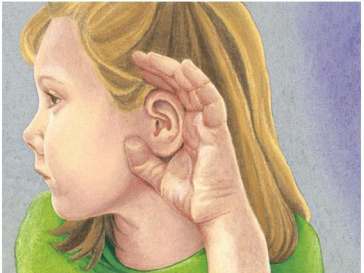

REFORMED  
FREE PUBLISHING  
ASSOCIATION



616-457-5970



mail@rfpa.org



# E is for Ear

To hear what's wise and true;  
Like seeking hidden treasure  
Found only by a few.

"My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom...and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God."  
—Proverbs 2:1-2, 4-5

And thou shalt be as a tree that is planted by the river, that bringeth forth fruit in its season, and its leaf shall not wither, neither shall it be cut down, for thou shalt be as a tree that is planted by the river.