

The Standard Bearer

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The covenant and Dordt, concluded

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Of free will, and thus of human powers

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Letter to Provident PRC, Marikina, the Philippines re COVID-19

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Contents

Meditation

- 319 The Son of man risen
Rev. James Slopsema

Editorial

- 321 The covenant and Dordt (14), concluded
Prof. Russell Dykstra

All around us

- 323 Whither freedom of speech in England?
Rev. Martyn McGeown

Pillar and ground of truth

- 326 The Council of Nicea (AD 325):
The Council's other decisions
Prof. Douglas Kuiper

Believing and confessing

- 327 Of free will, and thus of human powers
Second Helvetic Confession (9a)
Prof. Ronald Cammenga

- 330 Editors' note

Special articles re Coronavirus

- 330 Coronavirus and the King
Rev. Cory Griess
- 333 Letter to Zion PRC re COVID-19
Rev. Joseph Holstege
- 334 Letter to Provident PRC,
Marikina, the Philippines re COVID-19
Rev. Daniel Holstege
- 336 Meditation for Faith PRC, Jenison MI
Mr. Tom Cammenga
- 336 Report from Classis East
Rev. Clayton Spronk
- 339 News from our churches
Church profile—Randolph PRC
Mr. Perry Van Egdom



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Meditation

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

The Son of man risen

Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.

Luke 24:5-7

Early Sunday morning a small group of women left the city of Jerusalem. This group included Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Solome, Joanna, and others—all followers of Jesus. On Friday, they had witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and burial. Now, on the third day, they set out at the crack of dawn intent on anointing Jesus' body.

Upon reaching the sepulcher, these women were taken by surprise. The massive stone set in place on Friday to seal the sepulcher had been rolled away. And the sepulcher was empty! Then they were confronted by two men in shining garments (angels), which brought great fear upon them.

The angels addressed the women with a question. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Then they reminded the women how that Jesus had already in Galilee told them of His coming crucifixion and resurrection. We immediately sense a rebuke. The women had come to the sepulcher with spices to anoint the dead instead of anticipating a resurrection. But in this rebuke they also heard the gospel of grace. They were confronted with the glorious reality of Jesus' resurrection and the truth that through the resurrection He is the Living One. They were also taught the necessity of Jesus' death and resurrection.

A rebuking question!

The women had completely forgotten the words of Jesus from that He must suffer and die but would be raised again from the dead. As the angels pointed out, Jesus had told them of His death and resurrection already when He was with them in Galilee. This took place in Caesarea Philippi at the conclusion of Jesus' third Galilean tour. Jesus asked His disciples, "Whom do

men say that...I am?" This led to the question, "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter along with the others confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priest and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matt. 16:13-21). Notice that Jesus *began* from that time forth so to instruct His disciples. This means that Jesus reiterated this instruction many times over. Jesus did this as He and His disciples passed secretly through Galilee to Jerusalem (Matt. 17:22, 23). He repeated the same in Perea after the resurrection of Lazarus (Matt. 20:18, 19).

However, the women had completely forgotten this instruction.

That was evident, first, from their deep sorrow on Friday. They had seen it all. They had followed the mob to Golgotha and had seen Jesus crucified. They had witnessed the taunts, the jeers, and the mockery of the mob. They had heard Jesus commend His soul to the Father and die. Mournfully they had followed Joseph and Nicodemus to the sepulcher to bury their Lord. After Jesus' burial, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary continued to sit over against the sepulcher (Matt. 27:61). They were in a state of shock and confusion. Obviously they had forgotten the words of Jesus.

That they had forgotten the instruction of Jesus is also evident from the fact that now, on Sunday, they returned to the sepulcher. They came with spices to anoint the body of Jesus, either because there had not been time for that on Friday or because they were not aware that it had been done. Obviously they were not looking for Jesus to rise that day. They had forgotten.

And so the women were met with a (mild) rebuke from the angels. "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Here the angels pointed out that Jesus was not dead but alive. This was to be explained by the fact that He was risen. That was evidenced by the fact that He was not there. And so the angels asked why the women sought to find Jesus in a sepulcher where the dead are

laid to rest. Then came the rebuke, “Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” No, they had not remembered! They had completely forgotten!

This rebuke certainly was deserved. It was deserved in light of the fact that Jesus had repeatedly (not just once) told them of His pending death and resurrection. It is astounding that they should have forgotten. This rebuke was deserved also when we consider from the gospel account *why* they had forgotten. Along with the Jewish nation generally, they expected Jesus to be an earthly Savior and King, establishing an earthly kingdom. Jesus’ death and resurrection did not fit into that framework. And so the women (with the disciples) had ignored Jesus’ instruction.

A well deserved rebuke!

A necessary way!

By reminding the women of Jesus’ instruction, the angels also instructed the women concerning the necessity of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

This necessity is found in the fact that Jesus is the Son of man. Notice what the angels told the women: “The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.”

There were many titles that Jesus used during His earthly ministry. He claimed to be the Christ. He called Himself the Son of God. But most of all He referred to Himself as the Son of man.

The term “Son of man” implies, first of all, that Jesus is human. He is the divine Son of God. But through the virgin birth He also became a man possessing our human nature in every way except sin.

If we will see the full meaning of this term “Son of man,” we must turn to Daniel 7:13-14:

I (Daniel) saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days [God], and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

According to this prophecy, the Son of man is one destined to honor and glory. The everlasting God will give him dominion, and glory and an everlasting kingdom that shall have no end. And Jesus is this Son of man!

But this necessitates Jesus’ death and resurrection.

This follows from the nature of the dominion and

kingdom that Jesus would receive as the Son of man. His kingdom is not an earthly domain. It is not a restoration of the glory days of David and Solomon, in which the rule of Israel would extend to all nations of the earth. It is not a kingdom laden with earthly power, riches, and fame. Rather, it is a heavenly kingdom, as Jesus repeatedly emphasized in His ministry by calling His kingdom the kingdom of *heaven*. It is the spiritual rule that Jesus exercises over the elect of God, whom He forms into a holy nation by a spiritual rebirth. It is a rule that Jesus exercises through the power of the Word and inner working of the Holy Spirit, so that the citizens of His kingdom willingly bow the knee to Him in loving obedience. It is a kingdom of citizens who, during the course of their life here below, find themselves to be spiritual pilgrims and strangers in a hostile world. They have no abiding place here; their home is in heaven. They are merely passing through. They look in hope for the fullness of God’s salvation that they enjoy here only in part.

But such a kingdom required both the death and resurrection of Jesus as the Son of man. It required that Jesus humble Himself in the flesh to the death of the cross as the perfect sacrifice for sin. But it also required that Jesus be raised again from the dead unto everlasting life, that He may receive dominion and power as the Son of man.

A blessed gospel!

In keeping with this, Jesus is risen from the dead as the Living One. This is what the angels asserted in their question, “Why seek ye the living (one) among the dead?”

That Jesus is the Living One means, first, that He is alive. Jesus was delivered by sinful hands to the death of the cross on Friday. On Sunday He arose again. He is no longer dead but living. As proof of this the angels pointed to the fact that Jesus was not there any longer.

That Jesus is the Living One means, secondly, that Jesus is forever beyond the reach of death. This was not true of all those who were raised before Jesus. They were still subject to death. They were raised from death and then died again. But Jesus is the Living One. He has been raised to an eternal life, beyond the reach of death. This is true because He was raised on the basis of His suffering and death, which paid the price of sin and released Him from the penalty of sin.

But that Jesus is the Living One means, finally, that through His resurrection He has become the Source and Giver of life to His people. As the Son of man, He graciously transforms by a spiritual rebirth all those whom the Father has given Him. He raises them from

death unto life, a life of obedience to Him and fellowship with the Father. He recreates them, so that that as new creatures they are equipped to do the good work God has for them in His kingdom, a work that has been eternally foreordained for them.

What a blessed gospel! The Son of man is risen from

the dead to become the Living One! He has been given power and dominion to establish the everlasting kingdom of God! He has raised us from death unto life to become citizens in His kingdom that we may serve the living God and enjoy Him forever!



Editorial

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

The covenant and Dordt (14), concluded

The doctrine of God's covenant of grace with His people must be fully in harmony with the Canons of Dordt. Of course, it is true that in a Reformed church the doctrine of the covenant must be in harmony with *all* the Reformed confessions. But the covenant must explicitly conform to the Canons because the Canons set forth the Reformed doctrine of salvation. And the covenant *is* salvation, for God saves His people in order to bring them into the covenant relationship of love and friendship.

The soteriology or salvation theology of the Canons is, in a word, *unconditional salvation*. The Canons start by teaching unconditional *election*, but this unconditionality governs every aspect of salvation. Nine articles of the Canons specifically reject conditions, including a condition in the covenant. The question begs to be answered: would God eternally plan and in time accomplish a *salvation* for the elect only, a salvation that is completely unconditional, all of God with nothing dependent on men, but then eternally plan a *covenant* that is conditional, a covenant given to many more than the elect, as a way for salvation to be conferred, and that by man fulfilling conditions? *Salvation* all of God, but a *covenant* that is bilateral, an agreement worked out between God and man? It cannot be!

Recall the unconditional nature of the whole of salvation. Predestination, both election and reprobation, is unconditional. Election is not conditioned on man's believing, or on any other possible condition. Rather, election (the one and only election, which is unto salvation in Christ) is determined by the sovereign, eternal good pleasure of God (I, 9-11). Neither is reprobation conditional, but the reprobate are decreed by the "sov-

ereign, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure" of God (I, 15).

The atonement is not conditional. Christ died for the elect, that is, for those only who are given Him by the Father, and the saving benefits of His death are conferred on the elect by the Holy Spirit. Head II gives absolutely no conditions to the enjoyment of these benefits that are given to the elect alone.

The Canons' doctrine of total depravity excludes conditions. All men are born dead in sin, have no free will, and therefore no ability to will or desire salvation, let alone fill a condition unto salvation.

In the Canons, the doctrine of God's sovereign, particular, saving grace leaves no room for conditions. And, it should be noted that the Canons allow for only one kind of grace, namely the irresistible grace that effectually works life, faith, and even the act of believing in each and every elect sinner.

Finally, the glorious, comforting doctrine of the perseverance of the saints unto eternal glory is not conditioned on any activity of man, contrary to the teaching of the Remonstrants. Rather, through faith in Jesus Christ God sovereignly preserves every elect and gives also the assurance of eternal life.

The Canons' doctrine of salvation is Reformed, following the "solos" of the Reformation: salvation is through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone, and for the glory of God alone.

Any theology of the covenant that will be accounted Reformed must be in harmony with the Canons, which is to say, within the boundaries established by the Canons.

The theology of a conditional covenant is not. In fact, some aspects of the conditional covenant are obvi-

ously outside the boundaries of the Canons. The very term, conditional covenant, indicates a difference with the Canons, which condemns conditions throughout. Though Reformed men have tried to maintain that the conditions in their conditional covenant doctrine are not the same as the Arminian conditions, these efforts fail. Their theology is not consistent with the Canons' unconditional salvation.

First, the *conditional covenant* minimizes election by excluding it from any consideration of the doctrine of the covenant, except as an after-explanation of who are actually saved in the end. The *Canons* rightly give election the primary position in salvation. After defending unconditional election unto salvation, the Canons insist that election is the fountain of every saving good, "from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects" (I, 9). Election is preached "for the glory of God's most holy name, and for enlivening and comforting His people" (I, 14). Election governs all of salvation—those for whom Christ died (II, 8); those in whom God works life and faith (III/IV, 10-14); and those whom He preserves unto glory (V, 6-9).

By contrast, the conditional covenant insists that the covenant and election not be brought together. Election, say they, is eternal; the covenant is in time. Election is God's secret counsel; in the covenant God publicly declares promises to believers and all their baptized children. In no way is the covenant to be explained by, much less governed by, election.

However, this is not the Reformed way. Whenever salvation is discussed, as it is with the covenant, the Reformed theologian not only includes election, he rejoices in election and stresses that election is determinative. This is the theology not only of Herman Hoeksema, but also of such Reformed giants as Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper, all of whom built on John Calvin's theology. With Calvin, if a teaching is not consistent with election and reprobation, it cannot stand. The conditional covenant is a departure from that Reformed emphasis on election, namely, that election is determinative.

The conditional covenant teaching of the Federal Vision further perverts the doctrine of election. It identifies all baptized children as elect, but then makes their salvation dependent on the child fulfilling the condition of faith and covenant faithfulness. This doctrine of "election" is a far cry from the election taught by the Canons—an unchangeable election unto salvation.

Further, the conditional covenant insists that God's promise is given to each child "objectively." Among those supposedly receiving this promise of salvation are

reprobate children, as Esau was. This contradicts the Canons' clear teaching that not to all but only to believers does God promise salvation (II, 5; III/IV, 8).

The conditional covenant, by teaching that the promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life is for every baptized child also contradicts the Canons' testimony that Christ died only for the elect, and His saving benefits are only for the elect. This kind of "hypothetical" atonement is Arminian. They insist that Christ died for all, but the benefits of the atonement are only for those who believe.

The conditional covenant rejects the teaching that Christ is *Head* of God's covenant of grace. In Head I, Article 7, the Canons explicitly teach that Christ is both Mediator and Head of the elect, and then connect His work with the covenant: "Christ by the blood of the cross...confirmed the new covenant" and "effectually redeem[ed]...those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation."

The theology of a conditional covenant is not consistent with the Canons. On the contrary, this theology is consistent with Arminianism and its conditional salvation. This is even true with regard to the central doctrine of justification. The Federal Vision, taking the conditional covenant to its logical end, denies justification by faith alone without works, just as the Remonstrants in the Netherlands, whose pernicious errors the Canons rejected. A theology that denies justification by faith alone cannot be considered Reformed.

On the other hand, the theology of the covenant that is unconditional and governed by election is completely consistent with the Canons. In this doctrine of the covenant, election—sovereign, gracious, particular, unconditional election—is not minimized but given its rightful place. Election is the foundation of salvation, namely, God's eternal good pleasure. It is eternal, as the covenant is eternal. Election is in Christ, just as the covenant is with Christ as Mediator and Head, and with all those chosen in Christ. Just as the Canons demonstrate that Christ died for the elect alone, so also in the Reformed doctrine of the covenant, Christ died for the elect only, which is to say, Christ died for each and every one with whom God establishes His covenant. Accordingly, perfect salvation, truly earned for each member of the covenant, is promised to each elect child at baptism. To the reprobate baptized child, whom God has eternally decreed not to save, God promises nothing.

In the unconditional covenant theology, God's grace is only given to the elect. With the Canons, it rejects a common grace that enables the baptized child to respond to God's word of promise. Rather, grace—the only grace there is—sovereign, particular, irresistible grace, is only

to the elect. This grace saves the totally depraved, elect, redeemed sinner born into the covenant. And that same grace will preserve that elect child, not because he fills any condition. Rather, in spite of the child's continued depravity and inclination to every evil, God will save to the end by His grace through faith in Christ.

This is a beautiful, comforting covenant theology. Like the Canons, it gives all glory to God. For as salvation is all of God, so the covenant is all of God—eternally determined and established in Christ; realized in the blood of the cross; established with the elect in time; maintained by God for all eternity. Because it is all of God, this covenant gives complete assurance to the believer that he will eternally be a member of the covenant, that God will forever be his Friend, and he will live with God eternally.

The believer rejoices that his life with God is secure. He lives out of Christ in that covenant. He is not a stock and a block, but he actively loves God and seeks His face. He lives in thankful obedience. He knows the blessing of eternal life, and longs for the eternal perfection in glory.

That is another aspect of the unconditional covenant that deserves to be highlighted—eternity. The *conditional* covenant is only a means to an end. It is an “arrangement” in which God gives salvation, and after the people are saved, there is no need for the covenant any longer.

That is not the teaching of the unconditional covenant. Rather, the covenant is the goal of God. God saves His people from sin and death and thereby brings them into covenant friendship. We glory that the covenant cannot be broken because it is a relationship of friendship between God and His people *in Christ*. Just as the union of God and human flesh in Christ is an eternal union, so our covenant relationship with God is eternal.

This is the joy and anticipation for us and all God's covenant people, blessed life with God—knowing Him more and more; growing in love for Him as we know Him better; living with God in an eternally increasing joy in Him. And in all this, from the lives and mouths of God covenant people, the praises of God will continuously increase eternally—eternally!—for the glory of the covenant God. And that is the goal of all God's work. His eternal glory in Jesus Christ.



All around us

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

Whither freedom of speech in England?

Introduction

Readers will recall the recent case (September 2019) of the British doctor, David Mackereth, whose Christian beliefs were judged unworthy of legal protection. The judge ruled:

All three heads, belief in Genesis 1:27, lack of belief in transgenderism and conscientious objection to transgenderism, in our judgment are incompatible with human dignity and conflict with the fundamental rights of others.

In this article I examine two other cases in England, one of which mirrors the Mackereth case, while the other is a partial victory for free speech. Both deal with the right to criticize transgenderism on Twitter.

A leap backward: Maya Forstater

The first case is that of Maya Forstater, who was

dismissed from her job as a visiting fellow at the Centre for Global Development, an anti-poverty think-tank that has offices in London and Washington. Ms. Forstater's offence was that “she expressed ‘gender critical’ opinions, in outline, that sex is immutable, whatever a person's stated identity or gender expression.”¹ Ms. Forstater is not a Christian, as far as I can tell, but she argues that her belief in the immutability of gender is a “philosophical belief protected by the Equality Act 2010.”

What, then, are her philosophical beliefs and how did she express them on Twitter? The following are examples of tweets deemed to be offensive by some:

Radically expanding the legal definition of ‘women’ so

1 “The Employment Tribunal: Claimant Maya Forstater vs. Respondent Center of Global Development Europe,” <https://docs.google.com>.

that it can include both males and females makes it a meaningless concept.

I think that male people are not women. I don't think being a woman/female is a matter of identity or womanly feelings. It is biology.

[In response to a complaint by Gregor Murray, a self-identified "non binary person"]. On Twitter I referred to Murray by the pronoun "he." This was not purposeful or meant to cause harm. I had simply forgotten that this man demands to be referred to by the plural pronouns "they" and "them." In reality Murray is a man. It is Murray's right to believe that Murray is not a man, but Murray cannot compel others to believe this. I reserve the right to use the pronouns "he" and "him" to refer to male people. While I may choose to use alternative pronouns as a courtesy, no one has the right to compel others to make statements they do not believe. I think it is important that people are able to refer to the sex of other people accurately and without hesitation, shame or censure.

Girls grow up to be women. Boys grow up to be men. No change of clothes or hairstyle, no plastic surgery, no accident or illness, no course of hormones, no force of will or social conditioning, no declaration can turn a female person into a male, or a male person into a female.

These statements, and many other similar statements (which are statements of fact, about which there should be no controversy whatsoever), Ms. Forstater argues are expressions of her philosophical belief and, therefore, should be protected under the British Equality Act (2010). Employment judge Mr. J. Tayler writes, "To qualify as a 'philosophical belief' under section 10 EqA, the belief must satisfy the five criteria in *Grainger plc. v. Nicholson* [2010]":

- (i) The belief must be genuinely held.
- (ii) It must be a belief and not an opinion or viewpoint based on the present state of information available.
- (iii) It must be a belief as to a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour.
- (iv) It must attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion, and importance.
- (v) It must be worthy of respect in a democratic society, be not incompatible with human dignity and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others.²

The *Grainger plc v. Nicholson* case is interesting because the philosophical belief in question was *belief about climate change!* In that landmark case the Claimant, Mr. Nicholson, argued:

I have a strongly held philosophical belief about climate change and the environment. I believe we must urgently

cut carbon emissions to avoid catastrophic climate change. It is not merely an opinion but a philosophical belief which affects how I live my life.

And the Honourable Mr. Justice Burton ruled:

A belief in man-made climate change, and the alleged resulting moral imperatives, is capable, if genuinely held, of being a *philosophical belief* for the purpose of the 2003 Religion and Belief Regulations.

So, according to legal precedent in the UK, belief in "man-made climate change" is a philosophical belief protected by law, but denial of transgenderism (the Mackereth case) is incompatible with human dignity and, therefore, *not* protected by law. Therefore, in the UK you can lose your employment for rejecting transgenderism, and especially for speaking/writing against it (even if it is only on your private Twitter account) but, if you are an ardent environmentalist, your employment is safe.

Given the legal precedent of the Mackereth case, the ruling on the Forstater case is unsurprising, if disturbing. Judge Tayler writes:

If a person has transitioned from male to female and has a Gender Recognition Certificate, that person is legally a woman. That is not something that the Claimant is entitled to ignore.

The Claimant's position is that even if a trans woman has a Gender Recognition Certificate, she cannot honestly describe herself as a woman. That belief is not worthy of respect in a democratic society. It is incompatible with the human rights of others that have been identified and defined by the ECHR and put into effect through the Gender Recognition Act.

I consider requiring the Claimant to refer to a trans woman [a man—MMcG] as a woman is justified to avoid harassment of that person.

[The Claimant] positively believes that [transwomen] are men; and will say so whenever she wishes. Put either as a belief or lack of belief, the view held by the Claimant fails the Grainger criteria and so she does not have the protected characteristic of philosophical belief.

So, again, the philosophical belief that gender is biologically determined, and neither fluid nor a social construct, does not pass the *Grainger* test: it is not worthy of respect in a democratic society, it is incompatible with human dignity, and it conflicts with the fundamental rights of others.

Even leftist feminist and author of the *Harry Potter* series of books, J. K. Rowling, tweeted her support for Ms. Forstater:

Call yourself whatever you like. Sleep with any consenting adult who'll have you. Live your best life in peace and security. But force women out of their

² Employment Appeal Tribunal: *Grainger plc. vs. Mr. T. Nicholson*, http://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKCAT/2009/0219_09_0311.html.

jobs for stating that sex is real? #IStandWithMaya #ThisIsNotADrill.³

Rowling attracted the ire of transgender activists and the unflattering epithet TERF (“trans-exclusionary radical feminist”) for her “heretical” tweet. In our modern age, heresy is to speak or write against liberal orthodoxy, especially abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. Hollywood actor Mark Hamill liked Rowling’s tweet, but later apologized: “I liked and I didn’t realize it had any transphobic connotation,” he wrote contritely to appease his critics.⁴ Hamill did not realize that by “sex is real” Rowling had meant *gender* is real, nor did he know the significance of #IStandWithMaya.

Unlike Hamill, however, Rowling did not apologize to her critics, which is commendable.

A step forward: Harry Miller

Justice Julian Knowles decided a case in February 2020 in which a “Mrs. B” (so identified in the court documents) complained to the police about the tweets of Mr. Harry Miller, a former police officer from Lincolnshire, England. “Mrs. B” is actually a man, identifying as a “post-operative transgender lady.” In a complaint lodged with Humberside Police, Mrs. B writes: “I was...alarmed and appalled at the brazen transphobic comments [of Mr. Miller].”⁵ It is true that many of Mr. Miller’s tweets were crude (so I will refrain from citing any of them), but should they be viewed as criminal or potentially criminal? Should they be a *police matter*? Justice Knowles writes:

The Claimant’s tweets were not targeted at Mrs. B, nor even the transgender community. They were primarily aimed at his 900-odd Twitter followers many of whom, as I said earlier, can be assumed to be of a like mind. Mrs. B chose to read them. Until she got involved, there is no evidence anyone had paid any attention to the Claimant’s tweets. No-one had been bothered by them. No-one had responded to them. No-one had complained about them. Some of them were so opaque I doubt many people would have understood them even if they had read them.

Despite this, Humberside Police recorded Mrs. B’s complaint as a “hate incident pursuant to HCOG (Hate Crime Operational Guidance),” created a document called “Crime Report Print” (without interviewing Mrs. B, without any critical scrutiny of the tweets, and, crucially, without any evidence of a “crime”), and referred to Mrs. B as the “victim” and the Claimant (Harry Miller) as the “suspect,” something that Justice Knowles found “striking.”

Once the complaint was recorded in the system, Police Constable Mansoor Gul began his investigation. He writes, “I did not identify any criminal offence but was satisfied that there was a perception by the victim that the tweets were motivated by a hostility or prejudice against transgender people.” Officer Gul attempted to visit Mr. Miller at his workplace, albeit not in uniform, leaving “his card with a director of the company with the request that the Claimant call him.” According to Mr. Miller, when he called PC Gul, the conversation went something like this, although the officer disputes certain aspects of the account (especially the “I need to check your thinking” remark):

I informed PC Gul that I was not the author of the verse [an offensive poem that Mr. Miller had retweeted—MMcG] and that it was simply expressing in verse the sense of imbalance of power between the sexes in the context of transgenderism.... He said by liking and retweeting it on Twitter, I was promoting hate.

I again asked for, and received, confirmation that neither the verse, nor any of the other alleged 30 tweets, were criminal. I then asked PC Gul why he was wasting my time.

PC Gul said: “I need to check your thinking.”

I replied: “So, let me get this straight, I’ve committed no crime. You’re a police officer. And you need to check my thinking?”

PC Gul answered: “Yes.”

I said, “Have you any idea what that makes you? ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four’ is a dystopian novel, not a police training manual.”

PC Gul also warned Mr. Miller that

on the basis of the third party complaint, a Hate Incident Record would be generated, regardless of there being no crime, nor any evidence of hate. He warned me that continuing to tweet “gender critical content” could count as an escalation from non crime to crime, thus prompting further police intervention.

Justice Knowles is very critical of the actions of Humberside Police:

The police interfered with the Claimant’s right to freedom of expression. PC Gul’s actions in going to the Claimant’s place of work and his misstatement of the

3 “JK Rowling in Row over Court Ruling on Transgender Issues,” *The Guardian* (Dec. 19, 2019), <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/dec/19/jk-rowling-trans-row-court-ruling-twitter-maya-forstater>.

4 “Mark Hamill Apologises for Liking JK Rowling Tweet with ‘Transphobic Connotation,’” *The Independent* (Dec. 20, 2019), <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/jk-rowling-transphobic-tweet-mark-hamill-maya-forstater-terf-a9254446.html>.

5 Judgment between the Queen on the Application of Harry Miller and the College of Policing and the Chief Constable of Humberside, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/miller-v-college-of-police-judgment.pdf>.

facts, his warning to the Claimant, coupled with the subsequent warnings by the police to the Claimant that he would be at risk of criminal prosecution if he continued to tweet (the term “escalation” was never defined or explained) all lead me to conclude that the police did interfere with his Article 10(1) rights, even though he was not made subject to any formal sanction.

There was not a shred of evidence that the Claimant was at risk of committing a criminal offence. The effect of the police turning up at his place of work because of his political opinions must not be underestimated. To do so would be to undervalue a cardinal democratic freedom. In this country we have never had a Cheka, a Gestapo or a Stasi. We have never lived in an Orwellian society.

There was no risk of him committing an offence and Mrs. B’s emotional response did not justify the police acting as they did towards the Claimant. What they did effectively granted her a “heckler’s veto.”

Justice Knowles quotes several writers, including George Orwell and John Stuart Mill on the importance of freedom of speech in a democratic society. It is encouraging to find one judge in the British judiciary who still upholds fundamental freedoms: “If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear” (George Orwell, unpublished introduction to *Animal Farm*, 1945).



Pillar and ground of truth

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

The Council of Nicea (AD 325): The Council’s other decisions

In the Nicene Creed (the first ecumenical creed), the Council of Nicea asserted that Christ was truly God, having a divine essence. The Council also made other noteworthy decisions, expressed in twenty canons.¹ This article summarizes those other decisions.

The Melitian clergy

During the reign of Emperor Diocletian (284-305), Christians were sorely persecuted, and many renounced the Christian faith. Some of these desired to rejoin the church when Emperor Constantine ended the persecution. The church had to face questions: Should these be readmitted? If so, should they be rebaptized? Might they be clergy? The bishop of Alexandria, Egypt was ready to admit these lapsed Christians to the church and priesthood. Another Egyptian bishop, Melitius, was under the authority of the bishop of Alexandria. He was critical of his superior, was deposed, and proceeded to organize a sect and ordain other clergymen.

Were the clergymen whom Melitius ordained legitimate clergymen? The Council concluded that they were, but that they must be subject to the bishop of Alexandria.

The date of Easter

We celebrate our birthdays on the same date every year, even though that date falls on a different day of the week. Similarly, the Jews celebrated Easter on the 14th of the month Nisan, the date of Jesus resurrection. Christians in Asia Minor followed the same practice. However, Christians in the West chose to celebrate Easter always on a Sunday, rather than on the date of Christ’s resurrection. But which date? The Sunday after the Jewish Passover? Or some Sunday after the spring equinox?

The Council of Nicea decided that Christian churches would always celebrate Christ’s resurrection on a Sunday, the first Sunday after the first full moon after the spring equinox. This explains why our date for Easter varies annually between the latter part of March and the middle of April.

Clergy

The Council made several decisions regulating who may serve as clergy and how the clergy must live. Recent converts to Christianity, and those who willfully castrated themselves were not to be ordained. Ideally, all the bishops in a province would be present to consecrate

¹ https://earlychurchtexts.com/public/nicaea_canons.htm.

a new clergyman; but the Council determined that no fewer than three bishops must be present. Ordinations were invalid when the ordained man had not been examined or had confessed to a serious sin. Clergy were not to live in a house with any woman who was not a wife, mother, sister, or aunt. Those who renounced Christianity under persecution, or who were guilty of usury, should be deposed.

The lapsed

Those who had denied the Christian faith while being persecuted and had returned to the church should undergo a period of penance and be catechized for three more years. Until then, they were not to receive communion, unless they were about to die.

Prayers

Of course, *pray*; that goes without saying. But on *Sundays*, *pray standing*, to picture Christ's resurrection!

Significance

Historical circumstances led the Council to make these particular decisions. To appreciate the decisions fully requires one to understand these circumstances. To do that, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

These decisions are the beginning of a written church polity, an application of scriptural principles regarding church office, church worship, and discipline. The Council of Nicea, then, broke ground in two areas: in church polity, and in drawing up a creed to express positively what the church taught over against error.

The history of the church from Nicea to today is the history of the church developing in her understanding of both revealed truth and church polity. The church of Nicea's day is a case in point. She had begun to understand significant aspects of doctrine: Christ is God. She would next face the question whether the Holy Spirit is also God. The history of the church facing that question brings us to the Second Ecumenical Council, that of Constantinople, in 381.



Believing and confessing

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

Of free will, and thus of human powers (Second Helvetic Confession (9a))

In this matter, which has always produced many conflicts in the Church, we teach that a threefold condition or state of man is to be considered.

What Man Was Before the Fall. There is the state in which man was in the beginning before the fall, namely, upright and free, so that he could both continue in goodness and decline to evil. However, he declined to evil, and has involved himself and the whole human race in sin and death, as has been said already.

The threefold condition of man is his condition before the Fall, his condition after the Fall, and his condition after regeneration. In his pre-fall condition, man existed as he came forth from the hand of God. By virtue of his original creation, man was upright and pure. He was created in the image of God. According to his original creation, he was made in true righteousness, holiness, and knowledge. As he came forth from the hand of his

Creator, man was made capable of willing the will of God. In the words of a later confession, the Canons of Dordt, III/IV, 1:

Man was originally formed after the image of God. His understanding was adorned with a true and saving knowledge of his Creator and of spiritual things; his heart and will were upright; all his affections pure; and the whole man was holy.

Long before the Reformation, Augustine had distinguished the three estates of man with three Latin expressions. The first of these expressions was *posse non peccare*, that is, the estate of man according to which he was "able not to sin." God created man upright and good, capable of serving Him perfectly, that is, capable of not sinning. At the same time, God created him with the capacity to sin. Man could sin, and sin he did. Because God had eternally decreed that Adam would sin, and in harmony with His eternal decree, God made

man *capable* of sinning. God made Adam capable of serving God His Creator, but He also made him capable of disobeying, rebelling, and sinning against the Lord God. In the language of the Second Helvetic Confession, God created man “so that he could both continue in goodness and decline to evil.”

According to his original creation, therefore, Adam had a free will. God made him with a free will. This was one of the excellent gifts that God bestowed on man. He made Adam capable of freely willing the will of God, but He also made him capable of willing contrary to the will of God. Immediately following the lines quoted above from the Canons of Dordt, the fathers of the Great Synod added:

But, revolting from God by the instigation of the devil *and abusing the freedom of his own will*, he forfeited these excellent gifts, and on the contrary entailed on himself blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment, became wicked, rebellious, and obdurate in heart and will, and impure in his affections [emphasis added].

By an act of his will, Adam “declined to evil, and has involved himself and the whole human race in sin and death.”

What Man Was After the Fall. Then we are to consider what man was after the fall. To be sure, his reason was not taken from him, nor was he deprived of will, and he was not entirely changed into a stone or a tree. But they were so altered and weakened that they no longer can do what they could before the fall. For the understanding is darkened, and the will which was free has become an enslaved will. Now it serves sin, not unwillingly but willingly. And indeed, it is called a will, not an unwill(ing).

The second state or condition of man is that which exists after the Fall. This is the estate of man designated by Augustine as *non posse non peccare*, that is, the state in which man is “not able not to sin.” Because of his fall, man is become a totally depraved sinner. As a totally depraved sinner, his will is thoroughly corrupt and bound in sin. He still wills: “indeed, it is called a will, not an unwill.” Man retains his will, the faculty of willing, choosing, and desiring. He remains a rational, moral creature after the Fall. But now, from a spiritual point of view, all that he wills is against God, contrary to the law of God, and in opposition to the revealed will of God.

After the Fall, man did not cease to be a man.

Bullinger says: “he was not entirely changed into a stone or a tree.” He remained a man, but a fallen man, whose powers are completely under the control of sin. Neither was it necessary for common grace to intervene, as Abraham Kuyper taught, lest Adam would degenerate into a beast or a demon. Man is man. Before the Fall he is a man, and after the Fall he remains a man. He retained all his faculties—all that made him a man. But now, he was a sinful man. He was “so altered and weakened” that he could “no longer do what [he] could do before the fall.” Regarding his will, “the will which was free has become an enslaved will. Now it serves sin, not unwillingly but willingly.” He retained a “will,” not an “unwill.” But his will was no longer free; it was bound. After the Fall, man continued to will, to desire, to want. But after the Fall he did and could only will that which was sinful.

Bullinger in the SHC is defending one of the central doctrines of the Reformation: the bondage of the will. This was the one great issue that separated Erasmus and Luther. Erasmus insisted on the freedom of the will of fallen man, that fallen man can at least *desire* to do that which is good, *desire* to please God, *desire* Christ and salvation. Over against Erasmus’ concession to the Roman Catholic Church, Luther and the other Reformers insisted on the fallenness of man’s will. Fallen man continued to will, but his will was opposed to God and to the things of God. Not only could he not save himself but fallen man could not even *desire* (will) that which was approved by God. Both Luther and Calvin wrote books in which they rejected the unbiblical doctrine of free will and in which they defended the bondage of the will as taught in Scripture.¹ Well known is Luther’s “praise” of Erasmus for identifying free will as the great issue between himself and Luther.

In this, moreover, I give you great praise, and proclaim it—you alone in pre-eminent distinction from all others, have entered upon the thing itself; that is, the grand turning point of the cause; and, have not wearied me with those irrelevant points about popery, purgatory, indulgences, and other like *baubles*, rather than *causes*, with which all have hitherto tried to hunt me down—though in vain! You, and you alone saw, what was the grand hinge upon which the whole turned, and therefore you attacked the vital part at once; for which, from my heart, I thank you.²

1 Luther’s book was a direct response to Erasmus’ book on the freedom of the will and was entitled *The Bondage of the Will*. Calvin’s book was entitled *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*.

2 *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Henry Cole (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 391.

Luther charged those who defended free will with denying Christ. So serious is the error of free will!

And I would also, that the advocates of “free-will” be admonished...that when they assert “free-will,” they are deniers of Christ. For if I obtain grace by my own endeavors, what need have I of the grace of Christ for the receiving of my grace?³

All the Reformers considered the denial of free will to be a crucial aspect of the gospel of the Reformation—the gospel as it was restored to the church through the Reformation. They denied free will in the interests of the grace of God in the salvation of unworthy and unable sinners. They saw that nearly all the evils of the Roman Catholic Church were built on a foundation laid on the quicksand of free will. Luther and Calvin, as well as the other Reformers, knew the truth of the bondage of the will personally and experientially. And to a man, they were convinced of this truth on the basis of Holy Scripture, as becomes plain a bit later in this ninth chapter of the SHC.

Man Does Evil by His Own Free Will. Therefore, in regard to evil or sin, man is not forced by God or by the devil but does evil by his own free will, and in this respect he has a most free will. But when we frequently see that the worst crimes and designs of men are prevented by God from reaching their purpose, this does not take away man’s freedom in doing evil, but God by his own power prevents what man freely planned otherwise. Thus Joseph’s brothers freely determined to get rid of him, but they were unable to do it because something else seemed good to the counsel of God.

This paragraph of the ninth chapter of the SHC is intended to safeguard the truth of the responsibility of man and the sovereignty of God. Although the will of fallen man is bound, so that he is a slave of sin, he is not coerced to sin against his will. As a fallen and totally depraved sinner he can only sin—will to sin and commit that which is sinful. But that does not take away from the responsibility of the sinner for his sin. Man always sins willingly, chooses to sin, and desires that which is sinful: “man is not forced by God or by the devil but does evil by his own free will, and in this respect he has a most free will.”

It is precisely because he sins willingly that the sinner is always responsible for his sin. If he were compelled

against his will to sin, he could not justly be held accountable for his sin. Then whoever compelled him to sin would bear the greater responsibility. On account of the fact that man always sins because he wants to sin, delights in sin, and freely chooses sin, he is responsible before God for the sin that he commits. Strikingly, some of the very texts that underscore the sovereignty of God over sin also emphasize the responsibility of the sinner. Jesus says in Luke 22:22 that He goes to the cross “as it was determined” by God. Does that excuse Judas Iscariot for betraying Jesus? It does not: “but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed.” That is also the instruction of the apostle Peter in Acts 2:23. In this text, the apostle proclaims to the multitude on the day of Pentecost that Jesus Christ was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” Nonetheless, those who delivered Him up to be crucified were fully responsible for His crucifixion: “ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”

Although man sins freely (willingly), God is sovereign over sin. God is sovereign over sin because He has eternally decreed sin. Not only did God eternally decree the death of His Son, but He also decreed the way in which Christ would be brought to His cross: the treachery of sinful men. Thus, “the worst crimes and designs of men are prevented by God from reaching their purpose.” Beside decreeing sin, God is sovereign over sin so that *His* purpose is achieved with sin, rather than the purpose of sinful men. Sinful men intended the destruction of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. They hoped that by murdering Him, they would be done with Him once and for all. Instead, those wicked men were used by God to accomplish the salvation of His church and the great glory of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Not only does God use sin and the sinner to accomplish His own purposes, “God by his own power prevents what man freely planned otherwise.” The SHC cites one of the outstanding biblical examples of God exercising His power to prevent what man by his sin had determined. That is taught in the example of the life of Joseph: “Thus Joseph’s brothers freely determined to get rid of him, but they were unable to do it because something else seemed good to the counsel of God.” What this comes down to is that God “makes whatever evils He sends upon me, in this valley of tears, turn out to my advantage,” as the Heidelberg Catechism teaches in Q&A 26. This was Joseph’s confession to his brothers: “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen. 50:20).

The truth of this paragraph of the SHC rings true to human experience. The enemies of the sovereignty

³ *The Bondage of the Will*, 371.

of God often allege that if God is sovereign over sin, He is the author of sin—a reprehensible accusation. Although this is a theological objection to the truth of God’s sovereignty, it is not a practical objection. Every man knows—we know—that when we sin, we are guilty before God for the sin we have committed. Al-

though God is sovereign, we remain responsible for the sins that we commit. “[I]n this respect [man] has a most free will,” that is, he does evil of his own accord and because he desires to do evil. Thus, God’s sovereignty does not rule out man’s responsibility.

Editors’ note

Below you will find some unusual items related to God’s ‘frowning providence’ of sending the coronavirus worldwide. In order to fit these special items, we delay printing of other articles that were planned for this issue. We trust the reader understands the appropriateness of addressing the current issues in the church and world.

We did not *ask* anyone to *produce* special articles. Rather, we noticed what pastors and consistories were doing to care for their flocks in these unusual times, and then asked for permission to print what they had produced: A special sermon, “Coronavirus and the King,” edited for publication; two letters that pastors wrote to

their congregations—one in the Philippines and the other in the U.S.; and a pastoral letter from an elder. This latter indicates that our elders do not simply assume this is the work of the pastors; they themselves are faithful in their calling to watch over the flock.

We are thankful for the willingness of these brothers that we print their words. And we trust that they—along with all the other articles in this issue—will be edifying to you who read.

“The blessing of the LORD be upon you: we bless you in the name of the LORD.”

The editors

Special articles re Coronavirus

Coronavirus and the King*

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

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

Revelation 5:6-7

It is very tempting to just say “coronavirus,” and leave it at that. But it is not just “coronavirus.” Just as it is not simply “graduation,” or “a flat tire,” or “a promotion.” It is graduation, *and the King*; a flat tire, *and the King*; a promotion, *and the King*. And we have to remember that it’s also coronavirus, *and the King*. Without *and the King*, it’s chaos, confusion, hopelessness. With *and the King* there are still questions to be sure, but there is a deep calm and peace. *And the King* changes your whole perspective.

* Adapted from a sermon preached March 22, 2020 in First PRC, Grand Rapids

We may compare it to traveling through a busy airport. How you view what is going on in that airport depends on your perspective. A while ago I traveled through Atlanta International Airport, the busiest airport in the world. It felt like total chaos. People were everywhere walking or running every which way. Planes were everywhere, trucks were everywhere, workers were everywhere, bags were everywhere. But if I would have gone up into the control tower, I would have been able to see that what felt like total chaos down below was in fact a well-ordered system (generally speaking). It depends on your perspective.

During the current tumultuous time we are going through, we need to go up into the control tower over this world to gain the perspective of faith. A few weeks ago everything was “normal.” Then a tiny microbe (that is not even alive) changed everything. Perceived chaos always prompts fears and questions. Now is no different. Are we going to get sick? If we do, are we going to die from this virus, or will it affect us little if

at all? Are our elderly loved ones going to die during this time period? Should we be preparing to say good-bye now? Is this all over-blown or is it not blown up enough? Do the authorities know what they are doing with all the pronouncements they make? Are we going to have work? Are we going to have enough in the congregation to care for each other? And because nobody can give us definitive answers to these questions, the world can start to feel chaotic, completely out of control.

In Revelation 4-5 (the chapters constitute one vision), God takes John up into the control tower of heaven to see that from there all is ordered under the rule of God in Christ. “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven...and the...voice...said, Come up hither” (4:1). And because John was told to write what he saw (1:11) we can, by faith, go up with him, see what he sees, and come back down able to view our world in a whole new light.

Who is worthy to open the book?

However, even up here in heaven, at first sight it appears to be just “coronavirus,” and not “coronavirus and the King.” The strong angel calls to the heavens and the earth with a challenge, “Who is worthy to open the book and to loose the seals thereof?” No one answers. This is why John weeps. These are tears of fear and despair. They would be our tears if the chapter stopped at verse 4. John sees a book in the right hand of God (v. 1). The book contains the thoughts of God (it is in God’s hand); it relates to His power (it is in God’s *right* hand); and they are secret (the scroll is sealed). This can only be the description of how history is to go according to God’s mysterious decretive will. And since the Lamb, who is Christ, takes the book and opens it only after He ascends into heaven, it must further be the particular portion of the plan of God concerning everything from the time of the ascension of Christ to the end. The rest of the book of Revelation confirms this as the seals are opened and everything from Christ’s ascension to His second coming is revealed (in broad lines).

Coronavirus is in that book.

But coronavirus is in that book *as a means to an end*. The heart of this book is the gathering of the church in the New Testament time from every nation, tribe, and tongue unto life with a victorious Christ in the new heavens and new earth. The heart of the book is the fullness of God’s covenant. John knows that if no one opens this book, the cause of God is defeated and the goal of all things is frustrated. In fact, as the rest of Revelation makes clear, to open this book and loose its

seals is not merely to reveal what is in the book, but also it is to rule this universe to the accomplishment of the plan the book contains. Thus, if the book is not opened, there is no hope for the gathering and deliverance of God’s church, no judgment upon the world, no new heavens and new earth. Coronavirus would be without its King.

The Lion/Lamb is worthy

One of the elders heralds the message of victory to John. “Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof” (v. 5). The Christ, He is worthy! To be worthy to open this book one has to have complete *power*. How else could one execute history according to the plan of the book? The Lion of the tribe of Judah has the power. He is the Lion of *Judah’s tribe*, the long-promised King, the Messiah, come from Judah’s loins. He is the *Lion* of Judah’s tribe. As God made flesh, He is full of lion-like might and kingly power. At the same time, we are told He is the root of David. Thus, He is not merely the one who comes *from* Judah (and therefore David’s) line. Rather, He is also *the source* of it, as a root is the source of the tree. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending of David’s line.¹ All this speaks of power, and thus the ability to carry out God’s plan and purpose in history, through trillions of events, to gather His bride, defeat His enemies, and make all things new.

But now the twist. And here is this Lion, John, look! “And I beheld, and lo...a Lamb as it had been slain.” John is expecting to see a Lion. He has been described as a Lion. Instead he sees a Lamb. A Lamb that you could tell had been killed at one time. Maybe the Lamb bore a slice across the throat that John could see had been shut up. In chapter one John expected to see a Lamb, but He saw a Lion (vv. 13-16). Here he expects to see a Lion, and he sees a Lamb.

The vision of the Lamb may initially leave us with the question, where is the power necessary to unfold God’s plan? He is a Lamb, and not only that, He had been killed. Where is the lion-like power that would allow Him to open the seals? Along with John, we behold the beautiful mystery of the gospel here. The Christ is a Lion precisely because He is a Lamb. The fact that He is a Lamb that *had been* slain, but is not slain anymore, means He is a Lamb with Lion power. He has resurrection power over sin, death, grave, and hell. He has “prevailed” over these by dying a

¹ Thanks to Deakin Pipe, second grader from First PRC for this connection. Keep on diving deep Deakin!

powerful death upon the cross, and by rising into new exalted life. He is a Lamb with seven horns (v. 6). He has complete *power* to bring about the covenantal purposes of God.

But more than that, the Lamb has the *right* to do so. To take this book and carry out its purposes one must not only have the *power*, but also the *right*. This too is what it means to be “worthy.” This Lamb has prevailed over sin, death, grave, and hell, *on behalf of* all those who are to be redeemed in this New Testament age and who are to be taken into the fullness of that covenant in the new heavens and new earth. This gives Him the right to carry out God’s plan and purpose. There is a ground for the plan’s accomplishment! “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: *for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood* out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (v. 9).

In verse 7 the Lion/Lamb takes the book. That moment is the crowning of the King. It is when the ascended Lord appeared in heaven, was enthroned with God, and was given the power to rule over all things unto the carrying out of the purposes of God.

Your Christ, who has taken the nails for you and your hell along with them, is right now unfolding what is in that book. Right now, in March of 2020 He is doing this. In great things, little things, hairs that fall from heads, heads of state that fall from thrones. In microscopic viruses and their movements across the world. Did you know that in that scroll was written, “Winter/spring of 2020, spread of coronavirus,” and every last detail about how it would accomplish the building up the kingdom of Jesus Christ?

Did you know that the King is using it that way right now? Did you know that you are likely to meet someone in heaven (if not many people) who will say to you... “It was the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit at this juncture of my life, that God used to break my rebellion. I thought I was in control and I was living that way. But this coronavirus came along and it shattered my perception of myself in this world. I wasn’t in control. I was tiny. It showed me that I was fragile. And grace brought me to my knees and led me to look up.” And do you know how you are going to respond? You are going to say, “You know, even

though I was as a child of God for many years, it had that effect upon me too. Under the influence of Word and Spirit it was being used to make me grow and to preserve me. It made *me* also see that this world is not my home. I was getting too comfortable. I was living as though I were in control. It made me think about how dependent I am. God used it to humble me and to give me a sense of dependence and trust in Him, and the realization fresh again that my only hope really is in Christ.”

Our response

This is why the elder can say to John, “weep not!” (v. 5). And it is why I can write to you and to myself, calm your fears child of God, and dry your eyes. It is not just “coronavirus,” it is coronavirus *and the King*. And if it feels even more out of control next week than it did this week, take the perspective you gained from the control tower into what feels like the chaos of your world. And remember, even if you cannot see from down here in the midst of it all, it is all ordered for the good of His church and the glory of His name.

You and I must go through a time of coronavirus antithetical to the way the world does. With caution, yes. With care, to be sure. That is our calling. But not with dread terror, as though the Lion/Lamb did not take the book and is not opening the seals thereof. Instead, with a certain calm in the face of chaos, knowing coronavirus has a King.

Furthermore, we ought to go through this time with worship in our hearts and on our lips. “And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb.... And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy...” (vv. 8-9). Coronavirus has been made to serve us. One day, when it and all other pains and sorrows are not needed as servants anymore, it will be taken away like so much scaffolding from the building. And with a freedom and fullness unknown to us even now, all creation, angels, and just men made perfect, will join with one voice crying, “Worthy is the Lamb, our King!”

Your Christ, who has taken the nails for you and your hell along with them, is right now unfolding what is in that book. Right now, in March of 2020 He is doing this. In great things, little things, hairs that fall from heads, heads of state that fall from thrones. In microscopic viruses and their movements across the world.

Letter to Zion PRC re COVID-19

Rev. Joseph Holstege, pastor of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

March 16, 2020

Dear Zion Congregation,

It has been quite a weekend and week beginning! Just a few days ago we were going about our lives as normal and coronavirus was something we heard about on the news. It was a matter for shrugging shoulders or even jokes about the panic and hysteria into which some were descending. But *now* we are at home with our children looking ahead to days and even weeks of disrupted plans, changed schedules, and isolation. *Now* we are beginning Monday without the blessing of assembling in God's house on Sunday. *Now* our lives are being impacted directly, whether we believe it is necessary or just an over-reaction.

I confess, as any school teacher who gets a snow day understands well, the release from yesterday's duties did afford some relief on my part after a few busy months. Sitting in my study after a very quiet Sunday, however, I realize more the implications of extended social isolation. The Consistory has not yet made a decision about this coming Sunday, but it does not seem like the reasons for canceling yesterday will have faded away by this weekend. If anything, it seems like matters will get worse before they get better. I was made aware just this morning that the Center for Disease Control (CDC) is recommending no assemblies of more than fifty people for the next several weeks. It is only a recommendation at this point, but it says much about the direction things are going. As no teacher would welcome more than one or two snow days in a row, so no preacher (or teacher!) welcomes the prospect of such an extended hiatus from regular duty. I am already missing you just thinking about it.

This morning I was reading Psalm 9 in my personal devotions and the last verse stood out to me in light of current events. The verse belongs to a prayer of the psalmist for judgment on the enemies of God and His people. Certainly, as the pandemic passes through our region, Christian love compels us to be concerned for the health and well-being of all those around us. As Christians, we ought to be model citizens of our nation, and regarding the neighbor, we ought to "prevent his hurt as much as in us lies," (Lord's Day 40 on the 6th Commandment). But we must also keep in view the big picture of God's judgment on ungodly men who reject His Son and despise His church. Psalm 9:20 says, "Put

them in fear, O LORD: that the nations may know themselves to be but men. Selah."

If the coronavirus has done nothing else, it has reminded the nations *they are but men*. They are flesh and blood, capable of getting infected with viruses simply by walking through the invisible cloud of someone else's sneeze. They are mortal, and like the grass of the field they will wither and die. It is this knowledge that they are but men which has thrown the world around us into such panic and fear. When your life is bound up with the material around you, nothing but panic remains when everything can be snatched away by nothing more than a tiny strand of chemicals called a virus.

We, too, are but men. We, too, can get infected by walking through a sneeze. We, too, will wither and die like the grass of the field. We, too, have been humbled by the rapidity of change as it has swept into our lives seemingly out of nowhere. But we have a wonderful opportunity now to show we have no reason to fear. On the contrary, even in the midst of a pandemic we have every reason to trust our Father and even rejoice. Did not Jesus tell us that the same Father who created and controls the chemicals and progress of the coronavirus has numbered all the hairs on your head? Did not the Lord teach us not only that wars and rumors of wars would herald His coming, but also "famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" (Matt. 24:7)? Perhaps an economic downturn will come as a result of these events. Perhaps our schooling plans will have to be put on hold. Perhaps you will become infected with the virus yourself. Perhaps you will lose your life. It is easy to confess the gospel when the tree is green and life is easy. How about when the stories of pestilence in history books and the news come to haunt our daily lives? The apostle triumphantly proclaims in words that seem almost unbelievable, "Nay, in all *these things* we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

What an amazing thing if panicked neighbors should see in you, instead of a mirror image of their hysteria, the calm repose of one whose trust is firmly in Jesus. What a beautiful witness if a colleague or friend should see in you, instead of a poster-child for mocking and Internet memes, a source of compassion, strength, and good will in a day that knows little of genuine leadership. We have an opportunity, people of God. The

nations are being reminded they are but men. We are being reminded that our strength is not in men at all, but in the living God. Let us not squander the opportunity, but represent our Lord well.

May the blessing of the Lord's house be upon you in these interesting times, even if the hand of providence has deemed it best to keep us shut up in our own houses temporarily. Though I cannot give you the benediction in our public worship service, I can point you to the

benediction of Scripture. "Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD. The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion" (Ps. 134).

Sincerely in the love of Jesus Christ,
Rev. Holstege

Letter to Provident PRC, Marikina, the Philippines re COVID-19

Rev. Daniel Holstege, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines

March 21, 2020

Dear beloved congregation of Provident PRC,

We are going through a strange and uncertain moment in our lives! We did not expect the pandemic of COVID-19. Just a few weeks ago, we observed the hand of God in the eruption of Taal Volcano and we had no idea that soon we would be bound to our homes because of a worldwide pestilence. But our almighty God and Father determined this moment before the foundation of the world and works everything according to His perfect plan (Eph. 1:11)! He directed that microscopic coronavirus to infect a human in China. He controlled

those tiny viruses as they traveled from one human to another, one nation to another, one continent to another. He sent plagues of disease on Egypt long ago, bringing that mighty nation to its knees, to show His power and declare His name in the earth (Ex. 9:13-16). He has now sent the plague of COVID-19

on a world that continues to oppose Him and serve other gods. He has brought the mighty nations to their knees by a microscopic germ! "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket.... All nations before him are as nothing..." (Is. 40:14-17).

But do not fear, for God is our God for the sake of

Jesus Christ. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God..." (Is. 40:1-2). What is your only comfort in life and death? That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 1)! God has forgiven all your iniquities and healed all your diseases (Ps. 103:3-4). God is your refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble (Ps. 46:1). He is with you in your homes. He is with us in our home too. Although we might feel alone and separated from our church family, we are never alone for God is with us.

Remember that God has no wrath toward us whom He loved and redeemed through the death of His Son.

Though He sends trials into our lives to increase our faith and teach us patience, He does not pour His wrath upon us because He has already done that at the cross. Jesus took your sins and my sins on His shoulders and suffered much worse than the coronavirus to pay our debt. He gave His blessed body to be nailed to the cross and

suffered the anguish of all the plagues of God's eternal wrath for you and me! He finished that suffering. It is all finished. Then He arose from the dead with the victory over death! Do not fear the coronavirus. Say with the courage of faith, O coronavirus, where is thy sting? O COVID-19, where is thy victory?

In times like this, the Lord might give opportunities to let our light shine before men by our good works. I pray that your neighbors will notice that you do not fear COVID-19, but you have hope, and that they ask a reason for your hope (1 Pet. 3:15). Be ready to give an answer!

The providence of God means that “health and sickness...yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.” The advantage of knowing this is that “we may be patient in adversity...and place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move” (Lord’s Day 10).

Fear not, beloved! For Jesus promised to come again for us. He will make a new heaven and earth, and God will wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there will be no more death, sorrow, or pain, for the former things will pass away (Rev. 21:1-4). Jesus promised that before the end there will be earthquakes, famines, and pestilences in various places (Matt. 24:7). Jesus, who loves us, is fulfilling His own prophecy. He is opening the seals of the book of God’s counsel, including the fourth seal that sends the pale horse with the power to kill with pestilence (Rev. 6:1-8). Jesus is coming for us! He is preparing the world for His final appearing on the clouds of heaven. Remember what He said: Watch, lest coming suddenly I find you sleeping! (Mark 13:36-37).

So, we will have to stay at home and cannot assemble at church for a while. That makes us truly sad. But we must submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake (I Pet. 2:13-17). God ordained government for this very purpose to be “the minister of God to thee for good” (Rom. 13:4). We ought to pray for our rulers so that we might “lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (I Tim. 2:1-2). The government has imposed an “enhanced community quarantine” so we may not do many of the normal things we do, including assembling for public worship. If the government forbade us to assemble for worship in order to outlaw Christianity or the Reformed faith, we would have to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). That would mean persecution and fleeing. But the government has not done that. It has banned mass gatherings of all groups and religions to prevent the virus from spreading. We ought to support that effort to protect our health and the health of others. “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” In love for our families, we will keep them safe at home. In love for our neighbors, let us follow the government guidelines and help those in need. In times like this, the Lord might give opportunities to let our light shine before men by our good works. I

pray that your neighbors will notice that you do not fear COVID-19, but you have hope, and that they ask a reason for your hope (I Pet. 3:15). Be ready to give an answer!

We, the Holstege family, are doing fine here at our home in Antipolo. The school our children attend has suspended classes. We are not sure if or when their classes will resume. Sis. Leah and I are taking care of our children at home. We only go outside our gate to get food. We are content with the Lord’s will that we stay at home for a while. We miss all of you. We missed worshiping with you last Sunday and will miss it again tomorrow. I missed our Wednesday Bible study and Saturday catechism class. Lord willing, we will be able to resume church activities in the middle of April. Until then, our souls may sing, “As pants the hart for streams of living water, so longs my soul, O living God, for

Thee; I thirst for Thee, for Thee my heart is yearning; when shall I come Thy gracious face to see?” (Psalter #115, stanza 1).

We hope you are all healthy and well in your homes. Feel free to contact an elder, deacon, or me if you have any concerns.

On Sunday, we plan to participate with you by watching the worship services of Zion PRC, as the elders arranged, and by singing together with our children. The pastor of Zion is my brother, Rev. Joe Holstege. We look forward to hearing him because we rarely have that opportunity. He is the *bunso* (youngest) in my family. I am the *kuya* (oldest brother).

All things work together for good to us who love God, who are the called according to His purpose. Maybe one reason the Lord shut us inside our homes is to give us the good gift of time to read His Word and other good literature, to draw near to God in prayer, to think about spiritual things, and to have fellowship with our families.

Be not discouraged that we cannot go out as usual. Count it all joy. Rejoice in the Lord. Redeem the time. Soon, Lord willing, the quarantine will be lifted, and life will continue. This will be only a brief moment in the big picture of our lives. God is waking us up, calling us to look away from our normal routines up to Him and the things of heaven. Let us devote this time to Him and rejoice that eternity is drawing closer and closer.

In Christ’s love,
Rev. Dan Holstege

Maybe one reason the Lord shut us inside our homes is to give us the good gift of time to read His Word and other good literature, to draw near to God in prayer, to think about spiritual things, and to have fellowship with our families.

Meditation for Faith PRC, Jenison, MI

Mr. Tom Cammenga, elder in Faith PRC

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Jeremiah 29:11

As Christians, you and I cannot help but be impressed by COVID-19. The words of Jesus Christ throughout Scripture ring in our minds as we witness the latest developments in the world around us. The question we face is: what is our reaction to these events? Do we react with fear? Are we filled with anxiety and worry and maybe even dread? Do we wonder what the government or maybe our employers are doing to protect us?

Although it may be true that some of these correctly describe our feelings, at least to a degree, if our reaction ends here, then we are not seeing COVID-19 for what it truly is, a sign of the return of our Lord. We are missing the certain comfort that is ours amid an anxious and uncertain world.

Imagine for a moment that you are traveling to a destination at which you are very excited to arrive. As you travel, along the way you see signs that announce your destination to you and the direction you must travel to get there. These signs do three things. In the first place, every sign you encounter on the road serves to confirm

to you the reality of your destination. The place you are traveling towards is an actual, physical place, and eventually, you will arrive there. Secondly, each sign serves to inform you that you are on the right road. The road you are on will indeed take you to your very real destination. Finally, these first two results serve to build within you a growing anticipation and excitement that continue to build until at long last, you reach your destination.

This, beloved, is how we must view COVID-19 as it points us to our Lord's coming again. It is *real*! He *is* coming, and this sign, along with all the other signs, proves it! And although our individual roads may vary drastically, seeing this sign and all the other signs for what they are; proof that our Lord is coming again—and that very soon—assures us that the road He has placed us on and leads us along, *will* bring us to our intended goal or end. Yes, because of our fallen human nature we experience some anxiety, worry, and even dread. But child of God, by faith, knowing these signs, and to what they point, and the assurance this brings, can we not help but be filled with an ever growing anticipation and yes, even excitement, as we look forward to the day that our Lord Jesus Christ will come again?

Indeed, "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

Report of Classis East of the PRCA

March 17, 2020
Hudsonville PRC

At the request of the Consistories of Faith, Grace, and Hope, the Classical Committee of Classis East called for the convening of a meeting today to consider the request of Rev. David Overway to be released from the ministry according to Article 12 of the Church Order.

Rev. Bruinsma led in opening devotions and declared classis properly constituted. Rev. N. Decker, by rotation, presided as chairman of the meeting. Because Michigan's governor signed an executive order banning assemblies of more than 50 people effective at 9:00 A.M. on March 17 until 5:00 P.M. on April 5, a recommendation was made to adjourn and treat the items on the agenda at the regular meeting of classis on May 13. The

motion failed. Instead classis passed a motion to meet in closed session in order to comply with the governor's order. The Consistory of Wingham decided not to send delegates due to the possibility that they would not be able to return home or that they would be required to be quarantined upon reentry into Canada.

Classis passed the recommendation to *approve the decision of Hope PRC's Council to 'grant Rev. Overway's request to be released from the ministry according to Article 12 of the Church Order' on three grounds.*

The synodical deputies from the West concurred with this decision. The chairman read appropriate verses from I Samuel 7 and encouraged Hope's Council and Mr. Overway to find comfort in the unfailing help that God gives His people.

Other actions taken by classis include:

a. Approving a subsidy request for \$40,000 for Kalamazoo PRC for 2021 to be forwarded to Synod 2020 for its approval.

b. Approving a classical appointment schedule for five(!) vacant churches: Cornerstone, Hope, Kalamazoo, Providence, and Unity PRCs. May the Lord send us pastors!

c. Approving the work of the church visitors in the labors they performed helping the Council of Hope PRC.

d. Appointing Rev. R. VanOverloop moderator for Hope PRC.

e. Appointing Rev. C. Spronk to a three-year term as Stated Clerk of Classis East.

Classis adjourned around 2:30 p.m. May the Lord use these decisions for the good of those who are directly affected, for good of our denomination, and for His glory.

In Christ's Service,
Rev. Clay Spronk, Stated Clerk, Classis East



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

In which year was Randolph, WI PRC organized and who was their first installed pastor? Answers in the church profile section below. More trivia next time.

Sister-church activities

The CERC of Singapore enjoyed pulpit supply from the following: Rev. K. Koole, in February; Prof. Dykstra, March 1 and 8. But future supply was closed due to the coronavirus outbreak there and here in the U.S. (cf. note later in this report).

From the Doon, IA bulletin:

Missionary pastor Rev. Daniel Holstege requested that he might baptize his daughter, Violet Joy, in Provident PRC in the Philippines. This is the church that Rev. Holstege labors in regularly. Doon Consistory sent a letter to the Consistory of Provident asking their oversight of this important occasion. Provident readily agreed and Rev. Holstege baptized Violet on March 1. Also, Irene Smit requested of us that she might make confession of her faith in the Maranatha PRC where Rev. Smit labors regularly. Doon requested of Maranatha that they provide oversight of this important occasion and they readily agreed. Irene appeared before the Consistory and gave a good confession. Her public confession is scheduled for March 22 with her

father leading the service. We are thankful to God for the unity and good working relationship between our Council and Consistory and the churches in the Philippines! And we are thankful to God for their witness of the gospel in that far-away land.

The British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) conference booking forms are now available (www.brfconference.weebly.com/booking.html). "Union with Christ" is the theme that will be developed by Prof. David Engelsma and Rev. Andy Lanning in the six main addresses at Castlewellan Castle, Northern Ireland (11-18 July). John William Perkins is to give a special lecture on "Union with the Free Will of Christ in the English Puritans." Already there are about 80 confirmed bookings, many more than there has been at this stage for any of the 15 previous BRF conferences. A good number of countries will be represented, and it promises to be an enriching time of Christian teaching and fellowship.

As the COVID-19 (coronavirus) began to take the world by storm according to the God of the heavens, the Doon, IA PRC Philippine sub-committee received the following from our missionaries in the Philippines (March 13):

Dear Doon subcommittee, This is a note to keep you informed of just a few details of developments here regarding the COVID-19 outbreak or "pandemic." There

might be members in the Doon congregation wondering what is happening to us when this news spreads to the U.S. news media.

The President Duterte of the Philippines has ordered on Thursday night a 30-day quarantine of the Metro Manila area (National Capital Region) starting on Sunday, March 15, continuing until Sunday April 12. Of course, this lockdown covers the next 4 Sundays. It does restrict our travel into the Metro Manila area. For example, we cannot drive a car into parts of Metro Manila where we normally go: to Provident PRC, Maranatha PRC, or PRC Bulacan because the roads to Bulacan pass through Metro Manila. So our freedom to get around is severely limited for the next 4 weeks.

The Berean PRC has canceled its services for March 15, and presumably for the other Sundays as well, in response to the mass community quarantine. As a result, Rev. Kleyn and I are not traveling to SNO (South Negros Occidental) and have canceled that trip. How this will affect seminary classes which resume on March 24, we do not know at this time. We are working on a solution, possibly having classes by Skype with the seminary students. We will keep you updated.

As far as our safety and health, we are all doing fine. We will just be having a very long “staycation” in the next several weeks. The churches here are preparing to livestream services to the members via Internet. Pastors will lead services/preach in their homes and broadcast via Internet on Facebook or Skype. We will see how it goes on Sunday, March 15.

Congregational activities

Most, if not all of our congregations in the USA and Canada are feeling the impact of COVID-19. According to God’s providence and the running of the horses of Revelation, this invisible army has taken us by storm, a storm of infectiousness. As the President of the USA and various state governors have prescribed, we have been included in the lock-downs, closings, postponements, and social distancing. Church services and many church activities have been canceled and self-quarantines are in place as the church, along with the world, attempts to retain its health. We take comfort in knowing that “God is our refuge and strength” and that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” A mighty fortress is our God!

Young people’s activities

2020 PRYP Convention—Registration for the 2020 Young People’s Convention opened on Monday, March 16! Chaperone registration was open until the end of March. The convention is planned for August 10-14,

2020 at the Lake Williamson Camp in Carlinville, IL.

Western Young Peoples Retreat, hosted by Lynden and Spokane Young People, will be held July 14-17, 2020 at Camp Sanders in N. Idaho. This is a retreat for young people ages 13-18 (going into 9th-12th grade). More information and registration was made available in March. Contact Rev. R. Kleyn (r.kleyn@prca.org) if you have questions.

Minister activities

The Calvinist conference on the doctrine of God sponsored by several Presbyterian churches in Tennessee in April at which Prof. D. Engelsma was to speak has been postponed because of the health alarm. Likely, the conference will now be held this Fall.

Let us continue to pray for Rev. John Marcus and his family and the flock of First PRC in Edmonton, AB. With the approval of Classis West, Rev. Marcus was released from the ministry in First PRC under Article 11 of the Church Order and is eligible for a call from another PRC. He is also available to preach in the churches and has been busy doing so. Consistories needing pulpit supply are encouraged to contact him. First PRC of Edmonton formed the new trio of Revs. J. Engelsma, J. Laning, and M. VanderWal. May God be with Rev. Marcus and with the Edmonton congregation.

The latest appeal regarding Rev. Mahtani’s employment pass was denied once again by the Singaporean government. With a lawyer’s aid, the session of CERCs had sought more information and clarification regarding this denial. Later we heard the following: Rev. Jon Mahtani received news that in God’s providence the door is completely closed for him to be minister-on-loan to CERC Singapore. In light of that, the CERC instructed Grandville PRC to call another minister-on-loan. Grandville’s new trio for minister-on-loan includes Revs. G. Eriks, E. Guichelaar and R. Kleyn. Also, Grandville PRC announced that Rev. Mahtani is eligible for a call beginning April 1.

The Singapore government is placing under quarantine for two weeks anyone who visits Singapore. This will hamper for some time the PRCA’s attempts to supply the CERC pulpit. Remember our brothers and sisters in Singapore in a time when they are without an under-shepherd, and now are cut off from our help in many ways. May the Great Shepherd of the sheep care for His flock in these circumstances, as we trust He will.

Rev. J. Engelsma (Doon, IA) considered calls from Cornerstone PRC (Dyer, IN) and Kalamazoo PRC. He declined both calls on March 29.

Providence PRC (Jenison, MI) has formed a trio of Rev. G. Eriks (Hudsonville PRC), Rev. M. McGeown

(Limerick Reformed Fellowship, Ireland), and Rev. W. Bruinsma (Pittsburgh PRC). On March 22 Rev. McGeown received this call.

Unity PRC formed the trio of Revs. E. Guichelaar (Randolph, WI), J. Mahtani, and C. Spronk (Faith PRC).

Rev. Heath Bleyenbergh and his wife Deb had planned to move to Lacombe in mid-March, but their entrance to Canada was denied because of closure of the border due to COVID-19. We await God's will in this too.

Seminarian Josiah and Hui Qi Tan and children returned to Singapore in mid-March. Josiah's mother has suffered from cancer for the last few years. She is very ill and her family has been called to be with her.

May they find the all sufficient comfort of belonging to Christ to be their strength and stay.

Young adult activities

Save the dates: August 3-6, 2020 for a Young Adult's Retreat in Colorado!

School Activities

Friday, April 24 is the date for the Faith Christian School Jog-a-Thon in Randolph, WI. Get those legs loosened up!

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

Church profile – Randolph, WI PRC

In July of 1942, Rev. C. Hanko came to the Randolph area and began to give speeches. Later, Rev. H. Hoeksema came with him and the Reformed truth was expounded. The church was organized in August of 1943 with eight families and several individuals.

Worship services were held in the Congregational church in the afternoons and evenings. Special meetings and catechism classes were held in various homes. Later, a "basement church" was purchased from the CRC and was used until 1974, when a new building was built beside the basement church. That building was outgrown and a new sanctuary was attached in 2008-2009. The old sanctuary is now used as our narthex with the pews of the old sanctuary used for much of the trim work in the present sanctuary.

In the Fall of 1994, we were able to start our own PR school located in the Dutch-American Foods building.

Our own school building was constructed in 2006, with an addition put on in 2017. We currently have grades K-11.

Our worship services are at 9:30 A.M. and 2:00 P.M. We have 61 families, 140 communicant members, and our total membership is at 246.

We have Men's, Ladies, and Adult Bible societies. We also have an evangelism committee and broadcast the Reformed Witness Hour on two local radio stations.

Our ministers over the years have been Revs. G. Lubbers, H. Kuiper, E. Emmanuel, G. VanBaren, D. H. Kuiper, W. Bekkering, K. Koole, J. Slopsema, A. denHartog, S. Key, D. J. Kuiper, and presently, Erik Guichelaar.

The Lord has been faithful to us and we rejoice in His work in our congregation. "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."



Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express our Christian sympathy to Brian and Denise Gritters, Henrietta Gritters, Jordan and Shantelle DeBoer, and Brittany Gritters in the death of their son, grandson and brother, **Jordan Gritters**. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Corinthians 5:1).

Rev. James Laning, President
Gene VanBemmel, Clerk

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 13, 2020 at 8:00 A.M. in Byron Center PRC.

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated Clerk

Wedding anniversary

On April 24, 2020, the Lord willing, our parents, **Ken and Mary Velthouse**, will celebrate 50 years of marriage. Their marriage and example of godly living has been a blessing for their children and granddaughters. We are thankful for their love for God's church and our Christian schools. We pray for God's continued blessing upon their lives together. Psalm 48:14: "For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even until death."

Michael Velthouse
Erika, Samantha, Kayla
Stefan and Kristin Engelsma
Matthew and Amanda Velthouse
Cassidy, Ashley, Kaitlyn, Grace, Carmen,
Isabel

Marc and Andrea Velthouse
Maya, Hailey, Jade, Emerson, Tess
Byron Center, Michigan

Teacher needed

Loveland Protestant Reformed Christian School (Loveland, CO) will be hiring a full-time elementary teacher for the 2020-2021 school year. All interested applicants should contact the school Administrator BJ Mowery (970) 218-3420 bmowery@lovelandprcs.org or Education Chairman Joe Ophoff (970) 818-6790 joe@scotthomeinspection.com.

RUN! FIGHT! LEAD!
YOUNG MENS CONFERENCE
GEORGETOWN PRC

APRIL 25, 8AM - 12PM (BREAKFAST INCLUDED)

FOR ALL HIGH SCHOOL / COLLEGE AGE YOUNG MEN

**TOPICS: BROTHERLY LOVE, PORN ADDICTION
CHRISTIAN WITNESS & PERSONAL DEVOTIONS**

SIGN UP HERE BY APRIL 22!
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