

# The Standard Bearer

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## Children graciously given

Rev. James Slopsema

## Preserving our good Christian schools

Prof. Barrett Gritters

## Peace

Rev. William Langerak

## A working man

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## The Supreme Court finds sexual orientation and identity to be protected classes

Mr. Brian VanEngen



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## Meditation

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

# Children graciously given

**And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are those with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant.**

**Genesis 33:5**

Jacob was returning to Canaan after twenty years with his uncle Laban. He had fled Canaan because of the wrath and threats of his brother Esau. Having learned that Jacob had stolen the birthright blessing by deceiving his father, Esau vowed to kill Jacob. Jacob had fled to his uncle Laban alone and empty. He returned twenty year later full. He had large herds of sheep, goats, and cattle. He also had two wives, two concubines, and twelve children.

After crossing the River Jabok, Jacob had to meet Esau. Esau had heard of Jacob's return and came to meet Jacob with 400 men. Fearing for his life, Jacob sent presents ahead to give to Esau. When Esau finally came upon Jacob and his family, Esau embraced Jacob and received him warmly.

In response to the question of who these women and children were, Jacob responded, "The children which God hath graciously given thy servant." To deal graciously with someone is to show them favors they do not deserve. God indeed had dealt graciously with Jacob in giving him his family. God also deals graciously with all believing parents when He gives them children.

This carries with it a very solemn obligation to train up their children in the fear of the Lord—a good reminder for covenant parents as a new year of schooling and catechetical instruction begins.

### A covenant gift

Jacob acknowledged that God had given him his many children.

At this point in his life Jacob had twelve children (eleven sons and one daughter) from four different women. These were all born within a thirteen-year period, meaning that Reuben, the oldest, was at least twelve years old.

That God had given Jacob these many children is

quite obvious from the Genesis account of Jacob's life. In Genesis 29:31 we read that the LORD opened the womb of Leah when He saw that Leah was despised. According to Genesis 30:17 God hearkened to Leah so that she bore her fifth child. Then again, in Genesis 30:22, we learn that God remembered Rachel so that she bore a son, Joseph. Of special notice is that in the last two instances God gave children in response to prayer.

God also gives our children to us.

Married couples often think that they are in charge of whether to have children, how many they will have, and when they will have them. Some take measures to prevent childbirth until they are older and more established, only to find out that they can have no children at all. Others attempt to prevent childbirth and find that God is not bound by their means. Often these unwanted children are resented and even aborted.

All children come from the hand of God. He determines whether we have them, when we have them, and how many we have.

That brings up an important question. May we seek to limit the number of children we have or the frequency with which we have them? God does not legislate in this area; nor may we. But we are guided by certain principles God has set forth in Scripture. One principle is that children are a blessing, and under ordinary circumstances married couples should desire them (read Psalms 127 and 128). Another principle is that in deciding whether to seek children or wait with children, we may not act selfishly but always with a view to how best to serve God. And there is more. At all times we must humbly submit to the will of God when it comes to children in our home. If He withholds children that we desire or gives us children that we did not seek, we must humble ourselves before God who is all wise and good. At all times we must thank the Lord for our children. And it is appropriate also to pray for children, as did Leah and Rachel.

The children God gave to Jacob and that He gives to believing parents are gifts of the covenant.

God's covenant is the bond of love and friendship

He establishes with His elect in Jesus Christ. In that love God lives and dwells with them as Friend with friends. He cares for them and blesses them with every good thing. This covenant is established and maintained solely by the grace of God. The elect are not naturally the friends of God but His enemies. Yet in Christ God atones for their sin and transforms them by a great work of grace so that they love and serve Him. In that atoning work of the cross and the transforming work of the Spirit the people of God enjoy an intimate bond of friendship and fellowship with the ever-blessed God.

The elect who belong to this covenant are known by their faith. In Genesis 17:7 God promised to establish His covenant with Abraham and his seed. The rest of Scripture, especially Galatians 3, makes clear that this seed is all that have the faith of Abraham. In the Old Testament that seed was limited mostly to the natural seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the New Testament that seed is found among all the nations.

All true believers belong to God's covenant.

The children God gives them are gifts of the covenant.

### **A gracious gift**

Being gifts of the covenant, Jacob's children were gifts of grace in which Jehovah God did him a great favor.

This is not the mentality among many today. Many consider children to be no blessing and favor from God but only a terrible burden. That mentality most often arises out of an earthly-mindedness that places too much concern on enjoying the treasures and pleasures that are here below. Children, and especially many children, are a hindrance to the lifestyle many people want to have.

Yet the Bible repeatedly extols the blessing of having children. This blessing is threefold.

First, the work and sacrifice necessary to rear children are in themselves a blessing. Rearing children requires one to be giving rather than just receiving, selfless rather than selfish. This is a blessing in itself as Jesus taught us, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). In addition, to learn the blessedness of giving requires spiritual growth through much prayer. The gift of children is an opportunity to abound in the spiritual riches and joys of the covenant.

Secondly, children are a tremendous resource to their parents who reach their senior years. Psalm 127:4, 5 makes this abundantly clear, "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them: they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies

in the gate." Children, do not forget to care for your aging parents!

But the greatest blessing of children is the fact that children of believing parents are covenant children. God's covenant follows in generations. God places His elect children, destined to faith and glory, in believing homes. What a blessing this is! What a privilege it is to be entrusted with the care of God's elect, covenant children. What a joy to believing parents when their children respond to their training by coming to know the Lord and walk in His ways.

This favor of God to give believers children of the covenant is undeserved.

This was true with Jacob. Jacob had many weaknesses. He ran ahead of the Lord, not trusting the Lord. He was a deceiver, deceiving his father. He was a polygamist, due to his lust for Rachel. He did not deserve the blessing of covenant children. Yet, God graciously blessed him with a covenant family that became the great nation of Israel, the church of the Old Testament.

What was true for Jacob is true for all believing parents. God's work of grace in His people has only begun in this life. The holiest of saints have only a small beginning of obedience. Covenant parents have many weaknesses resulting in many sins. None deserve the blessing of covenant children. Yet God graciously gives to such parents His children in whom He will accomplish the great work of salvation.

How humbling!

How thankful believing parents must be!

### **A solemn obligation**

It is the solemn obligation of covenant parents to train their children in the ways of the covenant. God's covenant children need to be taught all the realities of the covenant. This includes who the God of the covenant is, the salvation of the covenant, the Mediator of the covenant, Jesus Christ, and the life of the covenant. Covenant children must be taught this by word and example in the home from early age on to adulthood. What a blessing God has given to godly parents in providing Christian schools to assist them in this training of their children.

The church also has a responsibility to the covenant children it receives as members through baptism. The church is obligated to instruct them from the pulpit but also through sound catechetical instruction.

Jehovah, the God of the covenant who has given us His children, promises to use these means to bring His children to Jesus Christ and the salvation of the covenant.

Pray that our Christian schools may be able to op-

erate this year in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. Pray for the work of the church in catechizing our chil-

dren. Pray for diligence to train up our children in our home in the fear of the Lord!



## Editorial

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

# Preserving our good Christian schools

We can truly say about our good Christian schools, “The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad!” (Ps. 126:3). The more I think about what God has given us, I *want* to say this. Even the heathen, if they would look at our schools carefully and judge honestly, would say, “The LORD hath done great things for them” (Ps. 126:2).

We have twenty good Christian schools, in which communities of like-minded parents and supporters are banded together to teach the covenant youth the world and life view they embrace, teach all the subjects of the curriculum from the viewpoint of the Reformed faith, the faith of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Among all the Protestant Reformed communities in North America, only five or six small groups of believers have found it not yet possible to band together to do what no single set of Christian parents is able to do. For all the rest, the parents have the high privilege to run and maintain a good Christian school. Some small and struggling, others large and flourishing, but all—from kindergarten through secondary school—are a parent’s efforts to be faithful to their baptismal vow: “I promise and intend to see these children, when come to the years of discretion, instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine...to the utmost of my power.”

Under the richest blessing and undeserved favor of the Lord, Protestant Reformed communities enjoy what is almost unique in all the world. Church, home, and school—a threefold cord that cannot be quickly broken (Eccl. 4:12)—all dependent on God’s unfailing covenant promises.

From the first Protestant Reformed Christian school in Redlands, California in 1934, where my father taught in the 1940s with only one other young teacher (in their first year teaching together their *combined* age was only 36), to what we have today in 2020, a strong conscious-

ness has developed that Protestant Reformed communities of believers need good, Protestant Reformed Christian schools.

These schools are maintained only through greatest sacrifice and continued vigilance. Large or small, modern and well equipped or always just making do with more dated amenities, none will survive unless the entire community sacrifices time and money to keep them going. And without continued vigilance, the devil’s constant assaults (from the world or through our own sinful flesh) will bring them down. And there are plenty of these.

## Assaults of the unbelieving world

The value of our good Christian schools for Christ’s cause makes them the objects of the devil’s assaults. We have always known that. These days, extra vigilance and even greater sacrifice may be needed.

On the one hand, the devil may use the civil government to bring the schools down. The government is making advances in its wicked definitions of ‘hate-speech.’ Soon, authorities may forbid any teacher to say that sexual aberrations are sin, or other religions are false. School boards are alert to these threats. What we may not forget is that the clamping down against biblical teachings may come as suddenly and unexpectedly as the COVID-19 restrictions. Nothing should surprise God’s people anymore.

Some government assaults may be more subtle and come in the form of enticements rather than frontal assaults. Civil governments may offer money to our schools or parents. And love of money is the root of all kinds of evils in the Christian schools too. True, civil governments may have a difficult time convincing tax-payers to support Christian schools financially, just because the present setup is easy for them: Christian



parents now pay for both the Christian education of their own children and the public education of their neighbors. But efforts are always being made to relieve this double burden of these Christian parents. Various forms of government aid for parochial and Christian schools have been proposed for decades. Maybe it's the system in which all parents are given a voucher to be used at whatever school they choose. Whatever form the government support of the school may take, we need to remember the adage that 'whoever pays the piper calls the tune,' and governments are always interested in calling the tune in Christian schools. Beware, the government will first addict us with money, no strings attached. But soon the aid will be only for 'government approved' schools, and the designation 'government approved' will require the Christian schools to compromise. The compromises will be little by little, but they will be required. Christian parents would do well to read the many *Standard Bearer* articles by Homer Hoeksema and Prof. H. Hanko (starting in the 1960s) on the grave dangers of receiving aid. School boards could consider making these articles recommended reading for their members.

More recently, this money temptation appeared in the form of a plan to have the *church* pay the school tuition of the members' students. First, parents pay the cost of education to the church, tax free, of course; then, the church in turn will pay the school. With a twenty-thousand-dollar tuition bill, a family could save thousands in taxes each year. The only problem is that this method requires compromise. First, it requires the church to promise to pay the tuition of *all* their members' children whether their parents contribute or not. Second, it turns the schools into *parochial* schools (*church* run, as Roman Catholic and Baptist schools are) rather than *parental*. The Reformed view has parents, not elders and ministers, establishing and maintaining the schools.

Let us keep the government out of our schools. Regarding financial aid, we need to adopt the spirit of Israel at the time of Ezra when their unbelieving neighbors offered them aid: "Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel" (Ez. 4:3).

### Assaults from believers' sinful nature

An improper view of *education*, or an improper view of the *schools*, also will do damage to our cause of covenant education.

In our modern age, it is a temptation to adopt an improper—really a naïve—view of *education*. When the Internet is full of quality videos that give instruction in almost any area, when even universities are offering

'online degrees,' and when our schools of late have been compelled to do some of their work online because of government restrictions, we may be tempted to think that Christian education can be done that way—online and with videos. This view forgets that truly Reformed education is more than filling a mind with information, and that education requires interaction inasmuch as this is possible. It's naïve to think that proper instruction of children is accomplished merely by making them learn facts, and thus that reading books and watching videos suffices. That is not proper any more than it would be for a consistory to teach catechism by handing out a book to read or having the minister pre-record Bible lectures that the children can listen to at home.

Good instruction requires interaction. Good instruction requires teachers to listen to their students, to judge whether they understand, to know when to repeat something, or whether to restate it in a different way. Good teachers read faces and body language. A teacher needs to see his students, which is why it was a great challenge for me (and all teachers) this past spring to teach remotely for some weeks. I could see the men sitting behind their computers, but I could not 'read them.'

Most basically, good instruction requires good teachers, and a good teacher is a trained teacher. He or she is trained in the principles of education, the methods of teaching and testing, and is knowledgeable in the subjects he teaches. In a Christian school that means knowing how to teach the subject in the light of God's Word and the Reformed faith. Good teaching requires hard work, which every teacher knows and most students understand. Our schools may be compelled, at times, to hire untrained teachers; and we are very grateful for these men and women who are willing to teach our children. But untrained does not mean unqualified, and those who teach without training must soon become more qualified in extraordinary ways.

For me to believe, years ago, that I could have taught my six children well, without the help of trained and experienced teachers, would have been naïve. It reminds me of the times I put new brakes on our family's cars to save a little money. When my mechanic friend saw the fruits of my amateur labors one time, he kindly but pointedly said to me, "Pastor, why don't you make sermons and let me fix your brakes." He was right. To do a job well, training and experience are required.

An improper view of our *schools* is another danger.

Let me be positive first. I pray that each of us can say, "The schools are *my* schools, in which *I* and other believers give *our* children the best education *we* can give them." The emphasis on the pronouns in that sentence is intended to remind me not to talk about "the"

schools and especially not “that” school, but to speak of “our school.” It is too easy, when I find something I do not like in the school, gradually to place myself in my own mind *outside* of the school rather than as a *part of* the school. A disaffected member of a church or denomination can do that too. Then he begins talking about “the churches” or “these churches” rather than “our churches.” Likewise, disappointed by one thing or another in the schools, instead of viewing the schools as *his own work*, he mentally and emotionally distances himself from them as though the schools are someone *else’s* work.

Then, if the devil has his way, the man or woman gradually begins viewing the school like we might view a business. It provides a service. If we do not like the business’s service, we shop at another store. We have options.

But our schools are not simply ‘service providers.’ What they truly represent is a significant part of our effort as a covenant community to serve God by carrying out our baptismal vows. I pray that I will speak properly about our schools, and that teachers and administrators speak to us not as their customers but as their employers, and of themselves as our servants.

Maybe this would be a good way to think about the schools. Draw a circle in your mind. Label the circle “school.” Do I see myself *in* the circle or *outside of* the circle? Properly viewing our schools has me *in* the circle. Now take this a step further. If I would put myself and all the other parents *outside* the circle, what would be left? If I say, “the school is left,” I would have a wrong conception of the good Christian school. For the school *is* the parents and supporters. Take away the parents and supporters, and you do not have a school. There may be a building with teachers and an administrator, but there is not a good Christian school as we have established them.

The teachers, administrators, and school boards are our servants. Parents have hired or elected them. The school *is* the parents.

Practically speaking, then, because this covenant community is composed of weak and sinful members—you and me—there will be disappointments, just as in my church and in my family. When I see those weaknesses, I will not reject the school because of them. Rather, humbled by them, in humility I will work with all the other parents and supporters to do better, to correct our weaknesses, and to bear with all the other sinners in the community whose sins are not as great as mine.

When the new school year begins in North America (August/September), there may be more government-imposed hardships that will test our resolve to be faithful

as a covenant community. They may well expose in us whether our Christian schools are a strong *preference* or a deep-seated and unshakable *conviction*. That would be good for all of us to consider. A preference that I am willing to give up when hardships come? Or a conviction from which I cannot be moved even when the sacrifices are greater than they are today?

Let us, who are in such privileged areas where we have our own schools, make some school commitments: “We will not take our schools for granted. We will thank our teachers and administrators regularly. We will not wink at errors or culpable weaknesses, but carefully correct what must be corrected and allow love to cover the multitude of others, even sins. We promise, for the sake of our generations, that we will not give up on our schools. When we are fearful or disappointed or even angry, we will not venture out on our own any more than we would if we were rowing together on a boat across the stormy Atlantic. We will stick together for the sake of all the children in our covenant community, even when we may believe that our chances of survival may be greater on our own.”

On behalf of the covenant communities in which we live, I say, “Thank you, teachers, for your devotion to our youth, for giving up your lives for their sakes. Do not weary in your well-doing; and please do not allow yourself to become complacent. Find joy in your work as you labor before the Lord with our sinful children. Thank you, administrators and boards, for your willingness (some of you volunteer many hours and evenings without pay) to oversee the schools. Do not weary in your well-doing, even when we parents are not expressive of our gratitude for your work, and even at times are critical. And thank you, parents, who hold our teachers to the highest standards, understanding that each one has his or her own gifts. You parents, who pay enough for this education that you forgo many other earthly pleasures, great is your reward in heaven.”

To all involved in our covenant Christian schools: God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward His name (Heb. 6:10) in this service to all the children of the covenant. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness (in our Christian schools) and for His wonderful works in providing us the good Christian schools that we have! The Lord *has* done great things for us, whereof we are glad.

## Letters

### Encouragement for officebearers: Maintaining Sunday worship during the pandemic

As an elder in the church, I very much appreciated the June installment of Prof. B. Gritters' "Reformed theology's commentary on the pandemic of 2020," which began the treatment of the pandemic in light of the six *loci* of Reformed theology.

We officebearers are thankful to God for the sound, consistent guidance afforded us by Reformed theology as a faithful exposition of God's Word to us. The entire editorial was an encouragement, especially the second paragraph beginning with, "We may be very thankful for the care of our pastors, elders, and deacons, who have in these most difficult times given careful thought to our spiritual wellbeing."

The editorial challenged us to contemplate and compare with discernment our decisions with respect to government authority and the ultimate true authority of God, and to ponder: what comprises the worship we are called to render? These are extremely difficult

decisions to make while under the pressure of time, especially as a first live experience of such pandemic issues and the ever-changing government mandates regarding assemblies.

In my experience, the consistory and council decisions for the congregation's spiritual health, (physical too) exhibited thoughtfulness to honor God's command to worship Him, especially on Sunday. "Comparing of notes" among the churches was directed towards this priority: how to keep Sunday a holy day of worship for our members. Every church did not arrive at the exact same "expression" for worship due to varying circumstances and regulations.

Consistories did make the difficult decision not to *assemble* for worship for a *limited time*. I have no concern that any of our consistories have made concrete decisions *not* to worship.

In Christ,  
Barry Warner  
Dyer, IN



### All around us

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

## Black Lives Matter

### Introduction

"Black Lives Matter" (BLM) is not only a slogan but also a movement and an organization that the Christian *cannot* support. The founders of the movement are Patrise Cullors, a "queer activist" married to a woman; Alicia Garza, another "queer activist" married to a transgender man, that is, to a woman who identifies as a man; and Opal Tometi, a Nigerian-American human rights activist. Two events, both perceived injustices, sparked the creation of the organization: the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting of African-American youth, Trayvon Martin, in Florida (July 2013); and the shooting of Michael Brown, another African-American teenager, by Officer Darren Wilson

in Ferguson, Missouri (August 2014), in which case local and federal grand juries ruled the shooting justified.

Two more events have revived the public profile of BLM. The first is the death of George Floyd while in police custody in Minneapolis, Minnesota on May 25, 2020; while the second is the shooting of Rayshard Brooks by an officer in Atlanta, Georgia, on June 12, 2020. In both cases, the dead man was an African-American (black) and the police officers were charged with murder.

I do not intend to comment on the merits of the charges filed against the police officers. My concern is with the Black Lives Matter movement itself.



## The mission of Black Lives Matter

The following citations come from the “about” section of the BLM website:

#BlackLivesMatter...is a global organization whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.

We affirm the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum.

We are working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise.

The “What We Believe” section of the Black Lives Matter website states:

All Black lives matter, regardless of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, ability, disability, religious beliefs or disbeliefs, immigration status, or location.

We are self-reflexive and do the work required to dismantle cisgender privilege.

We build a space that affirms Black women and is free from sexism, misogyny, and environments in which men are centered.

We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement.

We foster a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking.

To summarize, the BLM movement wants to disrupt and dismantle the nuclear family (that is, it seeks the destruction of the family that consists of a male father, a female mother, and children). The BLM movement seeks to empower blacks by securing their access to “reproductive justice” (that is, abortion—unwanted, *unborn* black lives do not matter, therefore). The BLM movement rejects biblical ethics: it opposes heteronormativity, the idea that heterosexuality is normal and preferable; and cisgenderism, the idea that one’s gender identity and expression should match one’s biological gender. The BLM movement is rebellious: it aims at the destruction of the supposedly “white supremacist” structures of society. We see this in the demand for the removal of historical monuments of anyone associated with America’s or Europe’s “oppressive” pasts. This rebellion is evident in attacks upon the police and in a campaign to defund the police. This rebellion is evident in widespread rioting and looting, and in the destruction of property and lives in American cities in the wake of George Floyd’s death, which protests, demonstrations, and riots have spread across the world.

Well meaning Christians, who rightly abhor racism, and who want to improve the lives of racial minorities, and who are tempted to donate time, resources, and money to BLM, should be aware that the movement is inherently *anti-Christian*.

## The philosophical background to BLM

In 2015 Patrise Cullors stated, “We actually do have an ideological frame. Myself, Alicia [Garza] in particular, we’re trained organisers. We’re trained Marxists. We are super versed on ideological theories.” The founders of BLM are not traditional Marxists, but *cultural Marxists*. Karl Marx (1818-1883) viewed history as a struggle between the bourgeoisie (the capitalist class who own most of society’s wealth and control the means of production) and the proletariat (the working class who suffer oppression under the capitalist system). Marx encouraged the workers of the world to overthrow their capitalist overlords, something that happened to a degree under communism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere.

Why did communism not spread across the globe? The answer is that a cultural hegemony, a term coined by Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), exists in the West, which protected capitalism. Hegemony is the dominance of one group over another. Cultural hegemony is dominance maintained through cultural institutions. To state it very simply, Gramsci viewed the common people as victims of a system that is inherently, and irredeemably, unjust. If a person belongs to a group favored by the hegemony, he is privileged, while one belonging to a group *not* favored by the hegemony is a victim.

Moreover, in cultural Marxism the *individual* matters less than the *group*: a white, heterosexual man is by definition “privileged,” while others are by definition “victims” of the hegemony. One is an oppressor, while the other is oppressed. Racism is institutional and systemic, whether we are aware of it or not (“unconscious bias”), not a matter of personal behavior. Therefore, a white, heterosexual male has “white privilege” and “white guilt” for which he must make atonement, which is why we witness white people “taking a knee” in front of crowds of BLM protestors in order to do penance for their “whiteness.”

In fact, there are *layers of oppression*. Oppressions intersect, a theory called “intersectionality” so that, for example, women experience one level of oppression because they live in a patriarchal society infused with “toxic masculinity,” while black women experience further oppression because of systemic racism, and black lesbians experience a third measure of oppression be-

cause of heteronormativity, while a black transgender experiences the most oppression because of the struggles against a system that favors cisgenderism. Witness the “Black Trans Lives Matter” protests that have sprung up recently, such as the 15,000-strong protest in Brooklyn, New York, in June 2020.

If BLM is based on cultural Marxism, their answer is not to address the *behaviors* of young black males in the inner cities, where fatherless homes, gang violence, and black-on-black homicides are serious *moral* issues, for to address the behaviors of young black males, who are more likely to be involved in crime, more likely to have negative police interactions, and more likely to be incarcerated, is *victim blaming*. The answer is to assess group inequalities; assign blame (to the white, patriarchal hegemony—the “system”) for the disparate outcomes; and then redistribute power and resources to disadvantaged groups.

In cultural Marxism, then, individual responsibility is jettisoned because the wealth and power of the privileged have been gained unjustly and must be redistributed to the underprivileged groups. Thus we hear calls to defund the police, an institution belonging to the hegemony, in order to reinvest the police budget into the underprivileged black community. Inequality is never due to differences in behavior, but always due to systemic oppression. People cannot be held personally responsible for their crimes and sins, but they must be viewed *only* as victims of an unjust system.

Cultural Marxists view their mission as *dismantling* the cultural hegemony. To do this they must gain control of the narrative (the importance of political correctness, which controls people’s speech, and is increasingly enforced through “hate speech” legislation); they must gain control of the flow of information (hence their dominance in the media with the censorship of opposing viewpoints); they must gain control of education (the indoctrination of the youth); and they must gain control of the branches of government (the executive, legislative, and judicial branches), thus seizing power from the cultural hegemony and returning it to the oppressed, where it rightfully belongs.

Read the BLM website through the lens of cultural Marxism and you will notice the buzzwords. When the website states, “[our] mission is to eradicate white supremacy,” the meaning is the *destruction* of the hegemony that allegedly victimizes blacks. When they speak of “building local power” they refer to a *transfer of power* to disadvantaged groups. When they speak of “dismantling cisgender privilege,” they fight for a society in which sexual minorities are *empowered*, so that behavior traditionally condemned is celebrated, and where

those who still disapprove are marginalized and silenced. Therefore, the traditional family must be destroyed and society transformed.

## The Christian response to BLM

We are tempted to respond to BLM with “All Lives Matter,” but to a cultural Marxist all lives do *not* matter. In fact, the life of the individual does not matter, especially if he cannot claim victim status. Lives and deaths are exploited in order to overthrow the cultural hegemony. That is why BLM activists rarely protest the black babies murdered in abortion clinics or intraracial killings in cities such as Chicago, but they will mobilize protests to express outrage when a black man dies in an encounter with law enforcement. One is a fight against the cultural hegemony, while the other is not.

Martin Luther King Jr. famously dreamed of a nation where his children would “not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” BLM destroys King’s dream—a man is judged *only* by the color of his skin.

Moreover, the ‘gospel’ of BLM is graceless. There is no forgiveness: there is only guilt because of the sins of the cultural hegemony to which one belongs, which guilt can never be removed. And if one does not belong to the cultural hegemony, then one is only a victim—never a sinner. Black Lives Matter offers only vengeance, destruction, and lifelong penance with no hope of final redemption.

In reality, redemption comes only through the blood of Jesus Christ. It is only in the Christian church where true unity exists, where so many disparate groups and natural enemies are united in Christ Jesus. In Paul’s day Jews and Gentiles, Roman citizens and barbarians, male and female, and even slaves and slave owners worshiped the same Lord, confessed the same faith, and partook of the same Lord’s Supper. In the church, believing, penitent sinners of all types are one in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:14; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).



## A word fitly spoken

Rev. William Langerak, pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan

# Peace

Peace is obviously precious. For the Old Testament saints, their hello was “Shalom!” Peace! Every time they worshiped, they received this blessing: “The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Num. 6:23-26). And almost every New Testament epistle begins, “Peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Our God, who put enmity between two seeds on earth, is yet the God of peace (Rom. 16:20). Christ, who came not to send peace, is yet the Prince of Peace who came into this world preaching peace, and departed it leaving us with peace (Matt. 10:34; Is. 9:6; Acts 10:36; John 14:27). And the good news is the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15).

One of the most profound gospel statements is this: “Therefore, being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). This simple profundity is because peace passes all understanding and yet keeps our hearts and minds (Phil. 4:7). It does so because peace is unique among the blessings and fruits of the Spirit. First, it encompasses and is the goal of them—you are the object of grace and shown mercy so that you might be at peace; and if the object of grace and mercy, then you have peace. Secondly, among the spiritual fruits only peace is a state of being—you may *have* love, joy, goodness, and faith, but if you *have* peace, you are *at* peace (Gal. 5:22). And a state of being is only known by experience; to know peace, you must be at peace. The wicked cannot know peace because no peace is given them; for to be carnally minded is enmity, but to be spiritually minded is peace (Rom. 3:17, 8:6; Is. 48:22). And to the righteous, God extends peace as an ever-flowing, unending river (Is. 66:12).

Peace passes all understanding because it belongs to that heavenly wisdom that eye hath not seen (I Cor. 2:9). Thus, peace is rarely defined but rather described, often in other-worldly terms—wolf and lamb living together, lion and cow eating straw together, or an infant leading wild beasts and playing with snakes (Is. 11:6, 65:25). Or, it is described as the cessation of its ubiquitous opposite, like warfare (Rev. 6:4). Peace is friend-

ship, unity, and harmony versus enmity, division, and discord (Eph. 2:15; Luke 12:51). Peace is order, truth, and justice instead of confusion, deceit, and oppression (I Cor. 14:33; Zech. 8:16). Peace is quiet, calm, and rest rather than noise, turmoil, and agitation (Mark 4:39; Ps. 4:8, 35:20). Peace is to be satisfied, healthy, and prosperous, not needy, sick, and ruined (Ps. 122:7; Mark 5:34). Peace is to be in safety versus in danger, of good cheer versus anxious, joyful versus grieved, tranquil versus troubled, and comforted versus afraid (Luke 11:21; John 14:17; Judges 6:23).

Peace keeps our hearts and minds because Christ is our peace. The key to peace is righteousness—the work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever (Is. 32:17). Christ *is* our peace because Christ is our righteousness (Eph. 2:14). He makes peace—everlasting peace He made for us with God by His atoning death, opening the way to peace on God’s terms—His righteousness (Ps. 147:14). In Him we have peace, for in Him righteousness and peace have kissed each other (John 16:33; Ps. 85:10). And this peace He gives to us, He guides us in the way of peace, and makes us live in peace and depart this world in peace (John 14:27; Luke 1:79, 2:29, 7:50). His blessed fellowship is a covenant of peace (Num. 25:12).

Wherefore, beloved, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless (II Pet. 3:14). This wisdom from above is peaceable; and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace (Jam. 3:17-18). Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body (Col. 3:15). Follow peace. Seek peace and ensue it (Heb. 12:14; I Pet. 3:11). Delight thyself in the abundance of peace. (Ps. 37:11). Pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps. 122:6). And finally, brethren, farewell: Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you (II Cor. 13:11).





## When thou sittest in thine house

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

# Nurturing our pre-school children (1)

Childcare: volumes have been written on this subject. Many of them are produced by secular (unbelieving) sociologists and child psychologists. Many others are generated by “Christians” who write with a religious flare but ignore the truth of Scripture while imbibing the unbelieving mindset of this world. Magazines are displayed on the table in doctors’ offices and immediately sent to the home free of charge as soon as a publisher finds out from the hospital that a mother has had her baby. Books, magazines, blogs, and videos on parenting are available everywhere. They are downloaded, read, or listened to with the enthusiasm of an open mind ready to be filled with advice.

This is understandable in the wicked world, since parents have no spiritual mooring in the Bible. It is even understandable, perhaps, in the nominal Christian church, where no solid instruction is given in the Scripture and what it teaches about children and child-rearing. Such parents conscientiously search out the best way to raise their children according to modern parenting methods. But when fathers and mothers in the church where God has established His covenant in the line of generations seek out the advice of this world in order to nurture their children, there is reason for alarm. This is true for two reasons. First, young parents ought to learn proper child-care from the godly example of their grandparents and parents before them. How did my grandparents and my parents raise me? Though I may do things a bit differently than they, nevertheless I find in my own godly nurturing in the home profound, biblical principles that I too will follow as I raise my children. If the new generation cannot look to the generation before for such an example, then life in the home is slipping in the church. That is a reason for alarm.

In the second place, in that faithful church where God has established His covenant, new parents must seek out the Word of God and the preaching of that Word. The Bible is our objective guide for all truth—including the careful nurture of our children. When God gives to them their first child, young parents ought diligently to search the Scripture to find wisdom in the care of that child. If they are having a hard time with

this, they can be guided by their pastor or some wise member of the church. These will also help them find theologically sound books to read on the subject.

Proper nurturing of our children begins immediately after they are born. The years prior to attending school are the most formative years of their lives. The knowledge and impressions children absorb in these few years influence the course of their future lives. Parents should not so quickly in their uncertainty (or busyness) send their children away during these years, thinking that an educator can do a better job than they in nurturing their children. During these years, little children need the love, care, and attention of their parents—mothers *and* fathers.

### Who are our children?

The proper nurture of our pre-school children begins with an understanding of who they are. Where God establishes His church in this world He enters into covenant with His people. God’s covenant is His relationship of love, favor, and fellowship into which He enters with His elect people in Christ. He is their God and they are His people for Christ’s sake. It is evident from Scripture (for example, Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39) that this covenant includes believers and their believing children. The establishment of God’s fellowship with believers includes the promise to parents that God will save in the line of their generations. Our children, then, are children of the promise! That is who they are. When a believing mother and father gaze into the face of their newborn infant in the delivery room, they are always amazed at how fearfully and wonderfully we are made. But there is more. They are filled with hope—hope and comfort in the promise God has given them as members of His covenant: “I will save unto Myself a people chosen in Christ from your children and children’s children unto a thousand generations!” Believing parents have no reason to doubt the promise of God to them.

On the other hand, they may not assume that God regenerates every child born into the sphere of the church and covenant. In his great dissertation on election



and reprobation Paul writes in Romans 9:6-8, “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.” Parents in the church may not assume that just because our children are born to believing parents and into a faithful church this in some way miraculously saves our children. With the birth of their infant child, believing parents cling to the promise of the covenant in hope, yet they do not deceive themselves into assuming every child born into the church is regenerated.

Neither do parents of the covenant believe that every child born into the sphere of the church is a recipient of God’s covenant and its promises. A child can be raised in the sphere of the church and covenant. He may hear the gospel call. He may be taught the truths of salvation in Christ. He may even receive all the advantages of belonging to a family and church that shares in God’s covenant blessings. But he has no part in God’s love, favor, or fellowship. He is not one of God’s elect people, neither is he saved in the blood of Christ. That, too, can be true of children born into the church. These are the hard realities of God’s sovereign decree of election and reprobation.

These realities do not deter the godly mother and father of the church from clinging to God’s promise, however. God is faithful. But this reality does work in such parents an understanding of the importance of raising their children to the utmost of their power in the fear of God’s name. They realize that God uses means. They as parents may be weak and sinful means, but God will use the faithful, persistent nurturing of their children in the home to shape and mold the next generation of His covenant. This is why they present their children for baptism. At that time they vow that they will instruct their child(ren) in the truths of the Old and New Testaments and in the doctrines taught in their church. That vow *immediately* follows them into the infant years of their child. They do not promise to do this later in life as the child grows older. They immediately set themselves to the task of nurturing their child in the fear of God’s name.

The answer to the question, Who are our children? is, in the first place, they are children of the promise of God’s covenant.

In the second place, the answer to this question is, they are sinners. The moment they are born they are sinners. Not only are they partakers of the guilt of

Adam and Eve, but they have inherited their sin—a sin that has been passed down from one generation to the next throughout the ages. Parents—yes, believing parents too—have passed on to their children their sin and unbelief. The Canons of Dordt are explicit in this, “Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring. Hence all the posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted, have derived corruption from their original parent, not by imitation, as the Pelagians of old asserted, but by the propagation of a vicious nature” (III/IV, Art. 2). It may be difficult at times to accept what lies in our infants’ sinful flesh when looking into their soft, adoring eyes. “Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to all evil, dead in sin and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, not to dispose themselves to reformation” (Canons III/IV, Art. 3). For that reason, parents look for signs in their little children of the redeeming work of God’s grace in their hearts. Solomon teaches us in Proverbs 20:11, “Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.”

This knowledge of our little children is vital to the methods used in nurturing them, as opposed to those of the unbelieving world. Unbelief views man as inherently good. If he does evil, it is only because he has been influenced by an evil society. For this reason, it is said, children are born innocent. A baby is free of sin. One writer explains,

When I looked into the eyes of my son, I saw trustfulness, curiosity and joyfulness. I saw no deviousness, meanness or selfishness. In that instant it became clear to me that if he ever acted in a devious, mean, or selfish way, his behavior would have been created by circumstances, not by him.... Children are born innocent. They want to be loved, to learn, and to contribute....<sup>1</sup>

Not only does this idea form the basis for pedagogy in the unbelieving world, but much of the church world has embraced this idea as well. It is part and parcel of the Pelagian and Arminian errors. Those who promote the free will of man speak of an age of innocence. An infant, toddler, and little child up to a certain age is free of sin. They are too young to accept Jesus as their personal Savior. If they die during this young age, therefore, they automatically are accepted by God into heaven because they are yet innocent, free from sin and its corruption.

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1 Jan Hunt, *Children Are Born Innocent* (Internet).

This age of innocence ends, it is said, when the child is old enough to recognize who God is and that disobedience is not just against parents but against God. The Roman Catholic Church set that age at around seven years old. According to that church, that is the age of reason. Others will insist that the age is not so fixed, but that such knowledge develops between the ages of 6 and 10 years old. Until that time a child is not fully aware of sin and disobedience. In all cases, a child is free from sin during infancy and the toddler years. Or, if not free from sin, at least free from the accountability of sin.

Against this conception stands the testimony of Scripture concerning our children, even the tiniest of our children. “In sin did my mother conceive me,” David writes (Ps. 51:5). Job testifies, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one” (Job 14:4). The truth of regeneration is based upon this fact. We need to be reborn or born again because according to our first birth by our parents we are born dead in sins and trespasses (Eph. 2:1). For that reason, sin is found in the heart of an infant the moment he or she is conceived and

born. Even an elect child needs to be born *again* if he is to see or enter into the kingdom of heaven. Neither ought we to be deceived when we look into the eyes of our newborn baby. Behind those fragile, helpless, dependent eyes lies a sinful flesh. This is true even of an infant in whom God has worked by His regenerating grace in the womb of his mother. Even that infant, as holy as he may seem, has but a small beginning of the new obedience. The sin of rebellion that characterized our first parents and plagues each of us does not take long to reveal itself in the life of an infant.

Such a Reformed view of our children will have a profound impact on how we nurture them in those first few years of their lives. In other words, the proper understanding of who our children are sets the underlying theological principle out of which flows the practical application of dealing with our children in a proper biblical way. It reveals to parents what children need and how to meet those needs in order that they might grow up in the fear and nurture of God. We hope to continue this subject in our next article.



## Strength of youth

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

## A working man

Previous article in this series: May 15 2020, p. 381.

As we have been considering what it means to be a true man of God, we have examined different relationships and circumstances in which God calls Christian men to live. We have looked at sexuality and single life, dating, marriage, and family. In this article we take up a different sphere of life in which men must be men: the workplace.

This is an important subject for men to consider. Women also are called to work, but typically that work is done in the sphere of the home and family. The sphere of the man is the workplace and providing for the material and financial needs of his family, if God gives him one. Generally, most men will spend their days earning a living outside the home. At minimum, you will spend 40 of the 168 hours in a week at your job. In many

ways your daily and weekly schedule will be dictated by work. And if you begin working full time when you are 18 years old and retire when you are 65, you will have devoted more than half of your fourscore years to the workforce. For men, work dominates our lives.

The subject of work is an important truth addressed by the Scriptures. Without giving it much thought, we might imagine that such things as money and work are subjects too earthy for God to address in the Bible. But the Word of God has a great deal to say about these subjects. And it is necessary that young men learn from the Word how to be men at work.

### Work and creation

As we examine what the Bible says to men about work,

we begin with creation. On the sixth day of creation week, God made man out of the dust of the ground and in His image. God then placed Adam in the Garden of Eden and gave him work to do. Genesis 2:15 says, “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.” God said to Adam and Eve, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Adam and Eve were not idle in paradise, but were called to be busy dressing and keeping the garden and exercising dominion over the creation.

God’s creation of man to work teaches us two important truths. First, it teaches us that God Himself is a God of work. God commanded Adam to work because, having been created in God’s image, he was to be a dim, creaturely reflection of God. Adam’s working reveals that God is a working God. We must not imagine that prior to creating all things, God was listless and idle. Eternally He was working in His own triune life and in His eternal decrees. He showed Himself to be a working God in His creation of the world, and He continues to do so by upholding and governing all things in His providence. Especially do we see God as a working God in His great work of saving His elect church in Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 5:17: “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.”

The second thing we learn about work from creation is that man’s calling to work is good. As God called Adam to work from the moment of his creation, so God calls men today to be busy working. And this is not evil. Work cannot be inherently evil, because God works and He is only good. Work cannot be inherently evil, because after God created Adam and commanded him to work, God declared, “It is very good.” Work is a good thing; even if we do not enjoy our job, it is a privilege to spend our days busy in the labors God has given us to carry out.

## Work and the fall

But more must be said about work. We must reckon with man’s fall into sin and the effects that this has for our work. Work is a good creation of God and is not inherently evil, but now it is affected by our sin and the consequences of the Fall.

When Adam fell into sin, his sin had consequences not just for himself individually. Since he stood as head of the creation and the human race, his fall had far-reaching consequences for the world broadly. The curse of God came to rest upon the earth. One aspect of the curse had to do with man’s work. God said to

Adam, “...cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground...” (Gen. 3:17-19).

The chastisement upon man is the sorrow he experiences in his work. Before the Fall, the earth gave of its fruit willingly to man, so that his work was not strenuous exertion. But now after the Fall, man has to scratch and claw in order to get his bread. He rises early in the morning, labors under the heat of the hot sun all day so that he sweats and his back aches, and only returns home when the sun sets. The farmer battles the Round-up-resistant thorns and thistles, the heat and the cold, the drought and the flood, to eke out a living. The manager at his desk in an air-conditioned building battles workplace politics, the struggle of hiring and firing, the pressure of the bottom-line, the crush of deadlines, the weight of responsibilities. Every job has its difficulties and struggles that cause us to earn our bread by the sweat of our face.

Not only is it the case that after the Fall man’s work is difficult, but it is also the case that the sphere of work is corrupted by our sins. Spiritual dangers lurk everywhere. Consider the following:

1. *Laziness.* The Bible warns repeatedly against the sin of laziness or sloth (for example, Prov. 6:6-11; 13:4; 20:4; Eph. 4:28; II Thess. 3:10-12). The sluggard is someone who does not use the time God has given well. He is always procrastinating or putting off responsibilities. He never finishes what he starts. He makes all kinds of excuses for why he doesn’t work. This is stealing. He is stealing from his employer because, while the employer is paying him for a full-day’s work, he is giving less than that. The sluggard may also be guilty of stealing from his family by asking them for financial assistance when the issue is that he is not working hard. He might even be guilty of stealing from the church, because his need is not the need of one who can’t make ends meet but is due to laziness.

2. *Materialism.* It might be the case that we work hard and avoid laziness, but we do so for all the wrong reasons. We pour ourselves into our job to earn, to have, to spend, to indulge. Our work is motivated by materialism and earthly-mindedness. A job becomes a means to accumulate money and earthly possessions and to live life to the fullest. Rather than seeking first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33), we seek first the things of this earth and of our own personal kingdom. Rather than setting our affections on things above (Col. 3:2), our desires are toward the things of this earth.

3. *Employer/employee sins.* In a number of places, the Word of God gives instruction to both masters/employers and servants/employees (Eph. 5:5-9; Col. 3:22-4:1; James 5:1-11; I Pet. 2:18-25). The great danger for employers is that they mistreat and take advantage of their employees. They do not care for them, do not pay them adequately, and do not protect them. The danger for employees is that they do not respect their employer. They badmouth the boss behind his back, take advantage of his generosity, and carry out their tasks with a lick-and-a-promise.

4. *Escapism.* Sometimes we can look at work wrongly as a way to escape the responsibilities or troubles of life. There has to be a balance here: certainly it is healthy for us to stay busy, in part so that we do not endlessly dwell on our problems. But there can be a wrong attempt to escape the responsibilities of marriage and home by burying oneself in work. Or there can be a wrong attempt to escape the troubles of life not by rolling the burden upon the Lord but by finding escape in work.

5. *Idolatry.* This is probably the greatest danger we face in our work, and one that underlies all the other dangers. Too easily we make an idol of our work. We make an idol of our career advancement, of the money we make at our job, of the praise of men for our gifts, of the power that comes with our position. This might show itself in being a workaholic, someone who works too many hours because he is endlessly pursuing an idol. This also shows itself in our finding our identity in our work rather than in Christ. This is a great danger for men in particular. We so quickly identify ourselves with our work. If someone asks us who we are, our answer is often, "I'm a builder, a doctor, an engineer, a farmer, a mechanic, a pastor."

## Work and redemption

Thankfully, as Christians we have hope in the face of sin and the curse. That hope is in Jesus Christ and His work. He took upon Himself the likeness of sinful flesh, condescended to dwell in this world under the curse, and came to work. His work was to do the will of His Father and redeem His elect people. His earthly ministry was one of constant work: preaching and teaching and performing countless miracles. In reading the gospel accounts one gets the sense of constant activity and busyness with very little opportunity for rest. Especially did Jesus spend Himself in His work at the end of His life as He suffered the wrath of God at the cross and gave His life to atone for our sins.

As men, our confidence may never be in our own working and busyness. Rather, we trust alone in Christ

and His perfect work. On the basis of His finished work, we are forgiven of our sins with respect to our work. And by the power of His work in us, we are strengthened to fight against our sins and to work out of thanksgiving for His work. And we look forward in hope to the removal of the curse, when in perfected bodies and souls we will serve God forever in the new heavens and earth.

Keeping this always in mind, we seek to determine what work the Lord would have us to do. We take stock of the unique gifts and opportunities God gives us (cf. Rom. 12:3-8). We seek out the wise counsel of parents, friends, teachers, and fellow saints. And through prayer we fill out that job application and strike out on that career path. As Christians we have a vocation, a unique calling from God. The idea of a calling is not just for pastors and teachers, but for electricians and salesmen as well.

In the work we are given to do, we strive to work hard. There are few things worse than a man who will not work hard. It ought to be the case as Christians that we are the best, most-desired employees. We respect our employer, give an honest day's labor, make the best use of our abilities, are faithful and trustworthy, seek the good of the company, and refuse to cheat and cut corners.

In working hard, we seek to do so with the right motive in our hearts. We are not laboring to be rich. We are not seeking greatness as the world counts it. We labor as grateful servants in God's heavenly kingdom. God does not need us, but He is pleased to use us as instruments in His hand for the advancement of His kingdom. That means that our labor is not empty and meaningless, as I Corinthians 15:58 reminds us: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Even the lowliest ditch-digger has an honorable, necessary place of service in the kingdom.

The way this kingdom-focus often comes to expression is in our giving. We work hard not for materialistic purposes, but so that we might use the money God gives to support our family, send our children to a Christian school, feed the poor, provide for the ministry of the Word, and promote the various labors of the church (evangelism, missions, seminary instruction, for example).

Finally, we work not for our own glory and the praise of men, but for the glory of God. "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. 3:23).

Let this prayer be yours as you leave for work in the



morning, and as you lay your weary body to rest at night:

So let there be on us bestowed  
The beauty of the Lord our God;  
The work accomplished by our hand

Establish Thou, and make it stand;  
Yea, let our hopeful labor be  
Established evermore by Thee,  
Established evermore by Thee (Psalter #246:3).



## Church and state

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# The Supreme Court finds sexual orientation and identity to be protected classes (1)

On June 15, 2020 the United States Supreme Court handed down its decision in the case of *Bostock v. Clayton County*.<sup>1</sup> This case involved the question of whether the Civil Rights Act of 1964 should be construed to prevent discrimination against homosexual and transgender people, and others with varying sexual orientation. The Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act does apply, in a landmark decision that has far-reaching implications for our churches, schools, and individual believers.

### The background for the case

The decision actually involved three different cases, each with relatively simple facts. In each case, an employee was terminated from employment for being homosexual or transgender. In each case, the employee filed a claim that the termination violated his/her rights under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which is commonly used as the basis for claims of discrimination, including claims of discrimination based on sex. Usually these claims involve women who claim that they were paid less or treated differently because of their gender. In these three cases, one federal circuit court had ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 *does not apply* to cases of discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and only applies to discrimination based on biological sex. Two federal circuits had ruled that the 1964 Act *does apply* to claims based on sexual

orientation or identity. When there is a disagreement between circuit courts on issues of law, the Supreme Court resolves the issue, and the Court was called on to settle the question in this case.

For many years the Supreme Court has been divided, with four liberal justices on one side of issues such as this and four conservative justices consistently on the other side. The ninth justice, Justice Anthony Kennedy, was usually the deciding vote, siding with either the liberal or conservative wings of the Court. However, Justice Kennedy recently retired and was replaced by Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who is considered conservative. This caused many to believe that the Court now had a solid five to four conservative majority. However, in the *Bostock* case, the Court ruled 6 to 3 in favor of applying the 1964 Civil Rights Act to cases involving claims of discrimination due to sexual identity or orientation. The opinion was penned by Justice Neal Gorsuch, a Trump appointee considered by many to be a conservative who follows the same line of legal thought as former Justice Antonin Scalia. Scalia was a solid conservative, and was a strict textualist, which is to say that he interpreted statutes as they were written, rather than reading into them what Congress might have meant by the words that they wrote. Gorsuch and the liberal wing of the Court were joined by Chief Justice John Roberts, who is also considered a conservative.

### A textualist interpretation?

Justice Gorsuch purported to follow the strict textualist

<sup>1</sup> *Bostock v. Clayton County*, 590 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2020).

line of reasoning in interpreting the statute in this case. He stated:

This Court normally interprets a statute in accord with the ordinary public meaning of its terms at the time of its enactment. If judges could add to, remodel, update, or detract from old statutory terms inspired only by extratextual sources and our own imaginations, we would risk amending statutes outside the legislative process reserved for the people's representatives.

With this in mind, our task is clear. We must determine the ordinary public meaning of Title VII's command that it is "unlawful...for an employer to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin."<sup>2</sup>

Applying these principles to the cases at hand, Justice Gorsuch reasoned that an employer who fires an individual for being homosexual or transgender fires that person for traits or actions it would not have questioned in members of a different sex. Justice Gorsuch's reasoning is that if a transgender man is fired for dressing like a woman, but a woman is not fired for dressing like a woman, there is unlawful discrimination on the basis of sex.

Justice Samuel Alito filed a lengthy dissent, which was joined by Justice Clarence Thomas. Justice Gorsuch had claimed to be construing the strict language of the statute to avoid usurping the role of the legislature, but Justice Alito began his dissent with the statement "There is one word for what the Court has done today: legislation."<sup>3</sup> He noted that for the past 45 years, bills have repeatedly been introduced in Congress to add "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" as protected classes under the Civil Rights Act, but that such bills have failed.<sup>4</sup> The implication, of course, is that if Congress had thought that "sex" in the original act included "sexual orientation" and "gender identity," there would be no need to try to add those terms. Gorsuch responded in his majority opinion that it does not matter what the legislative history is if the statute is clear, and it clearly refers to differential treatment on the basis of sex.

Alito also attacked the notion that Gorsuch was providing a strict textualist interpretation as he had claimed. He noted that the majority opinion acknowledged that a statute should be interpreted "in accord

with the ordinary public meaning of its terms at the time of its enactment," and argued that the meaning of discrimination based on sex in 1964 would have been considered to be biological sex. He appended a copy of the definition of "sex" from the 1953 edition of Webster's dictionary, which defined "sex" as one of the two divisions of organisms, either male or female. Justice Brent Kavanaugh also filed a separate dissenting opinion in which he attacked Gorsuch's claim to textualism. He cited numerous examples from former Justice Scalia, noting that textualism gives words in statutes their "ordinary meaning," not their "literal meaning."<sup>5</sup>

Justice Alito noted the multitude of federal laws that prohibit actions based on sex, and the effect that the Court's opinion could have on them, such as housing laws; laws effecting use of bathrooms, locker rooms, etc.; women's sports; employment by religious organizations; healthcare; freedom of speech; and constitutional claims in which these rights are asserted. Justice Gorsuch dismissed such concerns, stating that only Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was before the Court in this case.<sup>6</sup> Gorsuch also noted that Title VII itself included religious exemptions that were not asserted in this case.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Gorsuch pointed out that with the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA),<sup>8</sup> Congress went even further to protect religious freedoms than the exemptions in Title VII. Gorsuch noted that in at least one of the cases considered in the *Bostock* decision, the employers had claimed protection under the RFRA, but had not asserted those claims on appeal.<sup>9</sup>

### Why analyze this decision?

We have spent a considerable amount of time in this article looking at the various positions asserted in the decision for two main reasons: 1) because of what those positions tell us about the status of the law and how the courts may rule on future cases; and 2) because those majority and dissenting opinions demonstrate the far-reaching effects that this decision will have on our everyday lives.

<sup>5</sup> Kavanaugh dissent, at 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Bostock*, majority opinion, at 31.

<sup>7</sup> *Bostock*, majority opinion, at 32.

<sup>8</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb through 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb-4.

<sup>9</sup> *Bostock*, majority opinion, at 32. Often the failure to assert such a claim on appeal is not an oversight by a party, but rather a tactical maneuver to force the appellate court to rule on the merits of the main statute. In this case, the goal may have been to force the Supreme Court to rule on the applicability of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act rather than relying on RFRA to avoid ruling on that issue.

<sup>2</sup> *Bostock*, majority opinion, at 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Bostock*, Alito dissenting, at 1.

<sup>4</sup> Alito, at 2.

With regard to the first point, it is obvious that the conservative majority many had hoped for is far from reality. This is a good reminder to us once again that all things are in the hands of our heavenly Father, and all things unfold in accordance with His will. Man may think he has a “fix” that will improve this earthly life, but when the Father wills a different outcome, His will governs all.

With regard to the actual makeup of the majority opinion, we do not know what motivated the individual justices. The opinion of Justice Gorsuch in particular is difficult to understand. Although he claims to be a strict textualist, and it could be argued that he felt bound to reach this conclusion by the text of the Title VII statute, the dissenting opinions of Alito and Kavanaugh demonstrate that the outcome of the majority opinion is not warranted by a true textualist interpretation.

Chief Justice John Roberts’ vote joining with the liberal wing is also somewhat puzzling, as he is also generally considered a conservative. Roberts has voted with the Court’s liberal wing on several notable occasions before, such as when the Court upheld the Affordable Care Act.<sup>10</sup> Some have speculated that Roberts’ vote with the majority was a tactical decision. As chief justice, Roberts is responsible for assigning the writing of a decision. However, if Roberts was not part of the majority, that responsibility would probably have passed to Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, as the most senior associate judge on the majority side. If Roberts knew that the decision was going to come down in favor of applying Title VII to sexual orientation or identity claims, by siding with the majority he could assign the opinion to one of the more conservative justices, to limit the scope of the decision. All this, of course is mere speculation, but could explain Roberts’ position as well as the likelihood that he would support efforts to limit the effect of the decision in the future.

In Gorsuch’s opinion, he did make reference to both the religious exemptions of Title VII, and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. This could mean that, while generally applying the Title VII provisions to claims

of sexual orientation and identity claims, he would be willing to limit the effect of those provisions on religious organizations and individuals standing on religious grounds.

On the second point mentioned above, regarding the far-reaching effects of this decision, it is hard to fathom the impact that this decision will have on future decisions. In an appendix to his dissent, Justice Alito listed 168 different federal statutes that would be directly affected. It should be noted that roughly half of the states already had some state law protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and identity. However, changing the definition of “sex” in

federal law will impact all states, and in connection with many areas of law that state law does not touch. There may be different impacts for religious organizations such as churches and schools than for individual businesses, as well as different defenses that can shield those organizations and businesses from liability. The Supreme Court is

also scheduled to hear a number of cases in which they will consider application of the religious exemptions in cases similar to this.

In a future installment of this article, we will look at some of the areas of law impacted by this decision, the differences for religious organizations and individuals, and some general principles to keep in mind when limiting liability that could otherwise result from this momentous decision.

**...it is obvious that the conservative majority many had hoped for is far from reality. This is a good reminder to us once again that all things are in the hands of our heavenly Father, and all things unfold in accordance with His will. Man may think he has a “fix” that will improve this earthly life, but when the Father wills a different outcome, His will governs all.**

<sup>10</sup> *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius*, 567 U.S. 519 (2012).



## Hope (Redlands) PRC's outdoor worship

Rev. Matthew Kortus, pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Redlands, California



On July 19, 2020 Hope PRC in Redlands, CA assembled together for corporate worship—*outdoors*.

The occasion for this outdoor worship service was the executive order of the Governor of California, prohibiting all indoor religious services due to recent increase in COVID-19 cases statewide. In light of this order, the church council made the decision to worship together outdoors, for this would enable the congregation both to worship God corporately on the Sabbath as He commands and to obey the civil government at the same time.

So on July 19, the members of Hope PRC gathered together for a very special worship service. Not only was this the first outdoor worship service in the history of the congregation—something we had only seen in church history books—but this was also Hope PRC's first time assembled together again as a complete body since mid-March. In the weeks prior, only a fraction of the con-

gregation was physically assembled together at each service, with the others tuning in to the live-stream.

In light of the special occasion, a special sermon was preached. Pastor Kortus preached on “The Restoration of Worship in Israel” from Ezra 3:1-7. This text was chosen because it records the first corporate worship services that the Israelites held after their return from captivity. In addition, since the foundation of the temple was not yet laid (3:7), Israel worshiped God apart from the building that had been at the heart and center of their worship for so many years.

As a congregation, we have noted God's providence that we live in a region where it is almost always sunny, and thus we do not have to worry (too much) about inclement weather. At the same time, the climate we live in presents the challenge of keeping the congregation as cool as possible during the services. So, as the pictures show, we have been making use of existing shade on the Hope Chris-





tian School property, setting up canopies, and dressing down ever so slightly. In addition, we have changed our worship times to 9A.M. and 6:30P.M. to avoid the hotter parts of the day. Admittedly, in spite of these efforts, outdoor worship is not nearly as comfortable or convenient as what we are used to. But as Ezra 3 teaches

us, the worship of our God is a priority above all else. Thus, as a congregation we are glad for the opportunity to worship God in this way.

May our God continue to grant us this conviction as we go through the hottest time of year and face other unknown challenges from the disease or government.



## News from our churches

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

### Trivia question

Grace PRC in Standale, MI is approaching an important anniversary. Do you know what that special date is? See the church profile. More trivia next time.

### Minister activities

Unity PRC called Rev. G. Eriks. God led Rev. Eriks to accept this call and he plans to become Unity's first pastor!

First Edmonton PRC called Rev. N. Langerak. Rev. Langerak declined this call. Edmonton's new trio became Rev. J. Engelsma, Rev. R. Kleyn, and Rev. M. VanderWal. Rev. VanderWal received this call.

Kalamazoo PRC called Rev. C. Spronk. On August 9, he declined this call.

Rev. R. Kleyn declined the call from Cornerstone PRC. Her new trio is Revs. M. DeBoer, E. Guichelaar, and C. Spronk. On August 9, the congregation called Rev. DeBoer.

Recently Rev. and Deb Bleyenbergh were able to enter Canada in order to begin his labors in Immanuel PRC (Lacombe) after a 14-day quarantine. He was installed on August 2.

### Mission activities

Our missionaries are in the fifth month (from March to July 2020) of being under the General Enhancement Quarantine in Metro Manila, and still there are areas under the lockdown rules with a close supervision of

the authorities. There are equivalent penalty fees and/or certain number of days of being in prison if caught without any reasonable explanations. Let us therefore continue to pray to our Almighty God to bring the saints there back to their normal gatherings in the sanctuary of the Lord.

From the Berean PRC in the Philippines:

The visit of Rev. Ibe and Elder Alann Penaverde with the saints in Gabaldon, Nueva Ecija went well by the grace of God. Our brethren and sisters in the Lord were very encouraged to see us and hear again the Word of God preached in their midst. Rev. Ibe led them in their worship service. The visit was cut short because we can only stay there for 24 hours; thus we needed to go home right after the service in the morning and we did not have the pleasure of time for extended fellowship. Nonetheless, the time spent with the saints there was precious and greatly appreciated. We pray for God's continued care and blessings upon them in this time of continuing crisis. May God strengthen them with His Word! We ask the congregation to remember the saints in Gabaldon in our prayers.

The Theological School of our PRCP federation planned to begin another year and semester of seminary instruction on Tuesday, August 11. The seminary students this year are Bro. Jeremias Pascual, Bro. Emmanuel Jasojaso, and Bro. Ace Flores. The instructors are Revs. D. Holstege, D. Kleyn, and R. Smit. The seminary faces once again the challenges of instruction during the ongoing restrictions of the coronavirus quarantine. In light of the quarantine in the NCR region, the commit-

tee for theological instruction requested that if some members of the PRCP wish to visit in person the classes of Hermeneutics (Rev. Holstege), Church History (Rev. Kleyn), or Reformed Dogmatics (Rev. Smit), they should contact the individual instructors in advance for details about visiting, especially since in-classroom visits may not be possible in some weeks. Let us all remember the students and instructors in their work in our family and personal prayers.

### Evangelism activities

The Evangelism Committee of Edgerton PRC is planning the fall lecture for Friday, October 30 at 7:30 p.m. The lecture will be held at Bethel CRC in Edgerton with Prof. D. Kuiper speaking on the topic “How Rightly to See Christ in Scripture.” Those in the area are asked to mark this on the calendars and to plan to attend.

The Evangelism Committee of Southeast PRC recently invited members of the congregation to participate in a door-to-door event witnessing to the gospel of Jesus

Christ and the presence of their church in the community. The event was planned for Friday, August 28.

### Protestant Reformed singles

Lord willing, there will be another short conference for Protestant Reformed Singles (geared towards those ages 25+) on September 25-27 in Grand Rapids, MI. Rev. Jonathan Mahtani and Rev. Stephan Regnerus have agreed to speak. Anyone who desires to register should email [prcsinglesconference@gmail.com](mailto:prcsinglesconference@gmail.com) by September 7.

### PRC Seminary

The PRC Synod 2020 approved the entrance of Luke Bomers (Hope PRC, Walker, MI) and Arend Haveman (Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI) into the seminary this Fall. Both are finishing their pre-sem studies this summer. Pray for them as they prepare to take up their studies for the ministry.

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

## Church profile—Grace PRC, Standale, MI

In January of 1994, a meeting was held in the basement of Hope PRC to discuss the possibility and feasibility of forming a new congregation. On June 5, 1994, we began separate services at the Grand Valley Orthodox Christian Reformed Church on the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Lake Michigan Dr. We had to work around Grand

Valley’s services, which were 9:30 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. We met at 1:00 in the afternoon and 7:30 in the evening.

Our pulpit was always supplied by either visiting ministers or seminary students. Rev. P. Breen consented to preach three Sunday evenings each month for us. Two elders and one deacon from Hope PRC came to



each service to “watch over us,” as we were yet members of Hope.

By October 1994 our group had grown to 22 families and a committee of three was appointed to work toward organization. In February 1995, our group requested permission from Hope’s Council and Classis East to organize. When Classis East met in First PRC (Grand Rapids, MI), on May 10, our request was granted.

Organization as a church took place on Thursday evening, July 6, 1995. The front 13 rows on one side of Hope PRC were reserved for the families taking part in the organization. We all walked down the aisle together as a group. We began Grace PRC with 23 families and 9 individuals—55 confessing members and 52 baptized members.

Our first building committee went right to work looking for suitable land to purchase for a church building. In February, 1996, they sent a proposal to the Council to consider buying land on the corner of Leonard and 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue and also renting a house for our first parsonage. Both were approved at the congregational meeting held February 26, 1996. However, as we were proceeding with building plans, in December of 1997, the congregation of the Grand Valley OCRC decided to disband and offered to sell us the church and parsonage.

Our Council proposed to the congregation to accept the offer and to purchase an additional 2.4 acres of land directly to the north of the church property. These proposals passed at the congregational meeting on January 7, 1998. Already in March, we had to enlarge our

sanctuary. We did this by removing an existing interior wall behind the pulpit area, which gave us quite a few more rows of seats. In 2001 we again needed to expand and put a large addition onto our church along with rooms for Sunday School classes, societies and larger catechism classes. In 2017, we began construction on a new sanctuary, converting our previous meeting area into our fellowship hall. The new sanctuary included a new organ and piano, and should last us for many years.

Rev M. Dick was our first pastor and faithfully served us for 12 years. Due to some conflict in our congregation regarding his homeschooling, he was released as our pastor in June 2008. The period of time without an under-shepherd was very short, for Rev. R. VanOverloop accepted our call to come over and help us. We witnessed his installation on November 23, 2008 as our second pastor. We are thankful for his ability to lead us through a rather difficult time and that he continues to this day, making plain the truth of the Scriptures.

As we approach our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an instituted church, our congregation, by God’s grace, has grown numerically as well as spiritually. According to the recent *Acts of Synod*, we now have 97 families, 96 in catechism, with the total number of souls being 386.

We are thankful for our church, our mother church, and above all, to God. Great is His faithfulness! And may His faithfulness inspire us to be faithful to Him (Lam. 3:23).

## Announcements

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC, Loveland, Colorado extend our sympathies to Kevin and Carol Scholfield in the death of Carol’s mother, **Mrs. Frances Elliott**, who died on July 8th at the age of 87. We pray that the Lord comforts, sustains and abides with Kevin and Carol in this time with His everlasting mercy and kindness. “But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth” (Psalm 86:15). “He [The Lord] healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3).

Rev. Steven Key, President  
Erick Solanyk, Clerk

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Loveland, CO PRC extend our Christian sympathies to Dan and Georgia Lanting in the death of their mother and grandmother, **Wilhelmina Lanting**. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Rev. Steven Key, President  
Erick Solanyk, Clerk



## Announcements continued

### Wedding anniversary

With thanksgiving to our heavenly Father, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents, **James and Gladys Koole**, who celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary on August 1, 2020. We are thankful for the godly example they have set for their children and grandchildren and pray that God will bless them in the days and years to come. "For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

Matthew and Stephanie DeBoer  
Rev. Matt and Sarah Kortus  
Peter Koole  
Michael and Rachel Cnossen  
Joe and Leah VandenToorn  
Gord and Rebecca Tolsma  
David Koole  
Monica Koole  
Jared and Lydia Bosveld  
Tyler and Lisa Koole  
25 grandchildren

Grand Rapids, Michigan

### Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Edgerton PRC on Wednesday, September 23, 2020, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Edgerton's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

### Reformed Witness Hour [reformedwitnesshour.org](http://reformedwitnesshour.org)

#### Rev. A. Spruiensma

September 6—"The Horn of Salvation Raised Up"

Luke 1:72

September 13—"The Spirit's Work in the Covenant"

Romans 8:15-17

September 20—"The Mediator of the New Covenant"

Hebrews 12:22-24

September 27—"The Blood of the Everlasting Covenant"

Hebrews 13:20, 21

### SAVE THE DATE!

RFPA Annual Meeting

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA

*"Trusting in God's Covenant"*

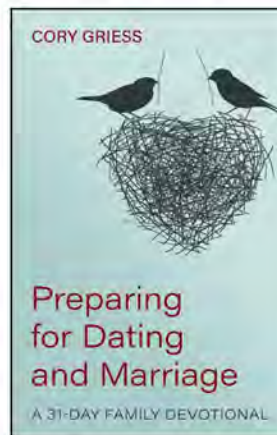
*"Promises in the End Times"*

September 24 - 7:30 pm - Grace PR Church

Now available!

### Preparing for Dating and Marriage

A 31-Day Family Devotional by Rev. Cory Griess



#### Topics include

- ♦ What marriage is
- ♦ Who to look for, who to be
- ♦ Parental involvement
- ♦ The need for unity in doctrine and life

This book will NOT be automatically sent to book club members UNLESS you are a Gold Star member. All others must order the book to receive a copy.

"[This book's] approach allows parents to tie good instruction regarding dating and marriage with something they are already doing: leading their children in daily devotions."

—Rev. Joshua Engelsma, author of *Dating Differently: A Guide to Reformed Dating*

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