

# The Standard Bearer

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## Our heavenly conversation

Rev. Steven Key

## A crisis of authority: The abuse of church authority

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

## The church, The kingdom of Christ

Rev. James Laning

## Esteeming the daughters of God far above rubies

Rev. Daniel Holstege

## God's wise design of the bee

Mr. Joel Minderhoud



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## Meditation

Rev. Steven Key, emeritus minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado

# Our heavenly conversation

**For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Philippians 3:20**

This month we commemorate Ascension Day. The significance of Christ's ascension is unfolded from many perspectives in Holy Scripture, including in Philippians 3:20. Because our Lord has been received into heaven, "our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Christ, according to Scripture, is our Head, the Head of the church, and we are in Him; therefore, our life is in heaven.

### The meaning

The word *conversation* in Scripture refers not merely to speech, such as is the common usage today; but it has reference to our walk of life, our behavior from every point of view. In writing to the Philippians the apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uses a different word than is commonly translated *conversation* and that refers to one's conduct or walk of life. The word he uses here is a Greek word you would recognize as that from which we derive the term *politics* or *political*. He refers, therefore, to our walk of life as defined by our citizenship, a heavenly citizenship.

We recognize that we have our conversation here on earth—for however many years God gives us. We live among our neighbors and in the various relationships God gives us. But we do so as strangers passing through (I Pet. 2:11). As the apostle Paul calls our attention to things spiritual and to the significance of Christ's ascension, he reminds us that our conversation is in heaven, where we now have our true citizenship.

Heaven is the perfect realization of God's fellowship and love, of communion between God and His citizens. It is that reality in which God rules over all by His grace, and in which kingdom His subjects delight to do His will. There God is King. There Christ is the revelation of the perfect kingship of God, and at the same time the first citizen of that kingdom. God, therefore, rules us through Christ and by the Spirit of

Christ. According to His sovereign good pleasure and His decree of election in Christ, He has established an unbreakable covenant union between us and our King Jesus. Because of that, we who are the citizens of that heavenly kingdom find our chief delight in doing the will of God.

That our citizenship is in heaven emphasizes two things.

In the first place, it means that we belong there. We have a legal right to our place there. That certainly cannot be said from a natural point of view. Of that we are reminded constantly by the sins of our flesh. So that when Paul writes that our conversation or citizenship is in heaven, there is reference to that sovereign work of God by which He has given us that legal right to our place within His kingdom as citizens and as willing subjects of the Most High God. We have that right because of Christ alone who is our wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption (I Cor. 1:30). That legal right to our place in heaven is established by Christ our Head being in heaven. That is God's seal of approval upon Christ's work, whereby He gave us that right to be citizens of God's kingdom.

There is a very important practical reason why we observe Ascension Day. The church looks at the glorified, ascended, heavenly Christ, and knows that she has her citizenship in heaven. We know that because Christ has given us our naturalization papers, the papers by which we know that we are citizens of heaven's kingdom. That is the gospel. In the gospel we have Christ's word and assurance that our citizenship is in heaven. By the gospel we know that our citizenship is in that commonwealth where God is our Friend-Sovereign and we are His friend-servants. Those citizenship papers we lay hold of by faith. God so works in us by His Holy Spirit that we receive those naturalization papers of the gospel and submit ourselves willingly to the government of Christ. We recognize the constitution and laws of the kingdom of heaven. Not only do we have the rights of citizens in that kingdom, but in that kingdom we have citizenship obligations, spiritual obligations, obligations of love.

For that reason, that our citizenship is in heaven means, in the second place, that our conversation is in heaven. Belonging to that conversation is our thoughts, desires, inclinations, speech, all our actions, our whole life in relationship to God and to others. Among many other things, to that conversation belong our life within our marriage relationships, our relationship to our employers, our relationship to the state and to all those who are in authority over us. That our conversation is in heaven means that our whole life is controlled by Christ, so that our walk in the midst of this world is antithetical, in stark contrast to that of the world.

Yes, we still struggle with our sinful natures. But when our life is in heaven, then we exercise ourselves in a tremendous battle against sin and against the world where their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things (Phil. 3:19). Is it so with us? The apostle says (v. 17), “Be ye followers together of me, and mark them which so walk as ye have us for an ensample.... For our conversation is in heaven.” Do we hear this Word of God? Is this true of us?

We are living in an age where heavenly conversation is extremely rare, even in the church. The spirit of our age is self-centered and pleasure-crazed (II Tim. 3:1-5). That affects us. It presses upon us. Looking upon Christ, we must remember our citizenship. We must be able to confess with the apostle, “Our conversation is in heaven.”

## The ground

The ground of our heavenly citizenship is Christ’s perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness, imputed to us by a wonder of grace. The kingdom of heaven is a kingdom entirely different from any kingdom on this earth. Here you might travel to another country. A family might go to Canada and spend some time there with special visitor’s permission and, if they like it, they might over a lengthy process become naturalized citizens. But it is not that way when it comes to heaven. Heaven, as to its idea, is not something you can just try out for a while. You do not apply for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. Before you can enter heaven, even as to its idea—fellowship with God—you must first be naturalized, indeed, born again. John 3:3: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

That you and I are citizens of the kingdom of heaven, whose conversation is in heaven, is due to the fact that Christ has given us those legal naturalization papers by a wonder of God’s grace. Our right to enter is grounded in God’s sovereign wonder work of election and is established by Christ, rooted in the righteousness He

obtained for us in the cross. That right has been sealed in the resurrection of Jesus.

But our entrance into heaven has been realized in His ascension. The believer not only has his citizenship papers in heaven legally but, united with Christ, he already lives in heaven. That again is an astounding truth and hard for us to comprehend through the eyes of our earthly perspective. But we must live in the consciousness of our heavenly citizenship. As our legal and organic Head, the ascended Christ has united Himself with us forever by the outpouring of His Holy Spirit. The heavenly One has made us heavenly. That is the wonder of grace proclaimed to us in the gospel of Christ’s ascension. The ascended Lord of glory regenerates us, calls us, sanctifies us, giving us the knowledge of belonging to His kingdom. He makes us partakers in the joy of that citizenship. He fills our hearts with thankfulness to God and the desire to live for His name’s sake and for His glory. He instructs us in the knowledge of that heavenly conversation. And being instructed by the irresistible and powerful Word of His grace, we say, “Our conversation is in heaven.” Is that true of you?

That heavenly citizenship causes a great tension in our lives. For that heavenly conversation is ours only as a small beginning. But when the heavenly Christ by His Spirit comes and dwells in us, and implants within us His heavenly life and keeps that life alive and gives vibrancy to that life, there is a tension, a struggle, a battle. We are earthly, yet heavenly; sinners, yet righteous; corrupt, yet holy. But our conversation is in heaven.

And that means two things. First, it means that we are sorry for sin and flee from it. Second, it means we want to live the life of heaven, in which the will of God is our delight. We want that in every aspect of our lives. We sing from the heart with the psalmist in Psalm 119, “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Ps. 119:97, 104). We are strangers in the earth, with no abiding place here.

## The fruit

So we also expect the Savior from heaven. For His salvation we long. Though our conversation is in heaven, we still lie in the midst of sin. O, how we long for the day when we shall experience the perfection of heavenly glory, in the fellowship of our God! Come, Lord Jesus!

For that we look. That word *look* is expressive of the longing gaze of the child of God toward God’s promises, a gaze that reaches forth for that which is coming. That hope governs our perspective and our life.

When you view this text in the light of its context,

then you also see that these words are meant to be an exhortation for us. “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.... For our conversation is in heaven.” The apostle says to the believers in Philippi, “Follow us. You cannot see Christ, but you see us. Follow us, and walk

as you see us walk.” We ought to be able to say the same to our children and to those who see our example. That will be true when our eyes of faith are fixed upon the ascended Lord of glory, Jesus Christ the Head and Mediator of the covenant. In Him our conversation is in heaven.



## Editorial

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Crete PRC in Crete, Illinois

# A crisis of authority: The abuse of church authority

In my previous editorial (April 15, 2023) I stated that one of the issues underlying many of the troubles in the church at present is the matter of authority. I asserted that one aspect of this crisis of authority is a critical approach to the idea of authority that essentially wants to destroy structures of authority in the church altogether. I explained some of the basics of “critical theory” as that is found in the world at large, and warned against that mentality shaping our view of authority in the church.

But that is not the only danger that the church faces. Not only is the church threatened by a wrong view of authority by those who are under authority, she is also threatened by the misuse or abuse of authority by those occupying leadership positions in the church. These two dangers collide because those who wrongly adopt a critical approach to the church are sometimes reacting to the real misuse or abuse of authority in the church. Recognizing that most often the church has to deal with the *misuse* of authority through weaknesses and failures, I want to devote this article to a brief examination of the subject of the *abuse* of authority in the church.<sup>1</sup>

## An age-old issue

In recent years the church has become more aware of the dynamics of the different forms of abuse, and that includes the concept of spiritual abuse. But the abuse

of authority by those in leadership positions in the church is not a new phenomenon. It is as old as the fall of our first parents. When we take stock of what the Bible has to say about this subject, we see that the Bible gives many examples of this sinful behavior and warns repeatedly against it.

Many examples of this behavior are recounted in the Old Testament. When the people of Israel asked for a king like the other nations around then, aged Samuel warned them of the kind of king they would receive: “This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons.... And he will take your daughters.... And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards...and ye shall be his servants” (I Sam. 8:11-17). The king would be a cruel man, who used the people for his own advantage.

Later in the history of the kings we have another example of a hard, self-seeking man. After the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam was asked to lower the tax burden on the people. He asked the advice of the old men who had counseled his father, and they told him, “If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever” (I Kings 12:7). These wise men understood the nature of good leadership. But Rehoboam rejected their advice, and instead listened to the advice of the young men: “And the king answered the people roughly...saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions” (vv. 13-14).

In Psalm 82:2, the Word of God questions earthly judges: “How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked?” And then the judges are

<sup>1</sup> In writing this article, I found especially helpful the following two books: Michael J. Kruger, *Bully Pulpit: Confronting the Problem of Spiritual Abuse in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), and Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community from Emotional and Spiritual Abuse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020). I also found the following podcast to be insightful: Mike Cospoer, *The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill*, produced by Christianity Today.



called to “defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked” (vv. 3-4). This was evidently what they were not doing.

In the time of the captivity, Ezekiel issued a scathing condemnation of the spiritual leaders of Judah who took advantage of God’s people:

Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them (Ezek. 34:2-4).

We have examples and warnings not only in the Old Testament but also in the New. At one point in Jesus’ earthly ministry, James and John requested to be given the positions of honor at Jesus’ right and left hands. When the other ten disciples heard of this, they were furious, which indicates that they wanted the same thing for themselves. Jesus issued a strong warning to them regarding their wrong view of leadership in the church: “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you...” (Matt. 20:25-26).

First Timothy 3:3 gives as essential qualifications for elders that they be “no striker...but patient, not a brawler.” Second Timothy 2:24 says: “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men....” Titus 1:7 says that an elder must be “not self-willed, not soon angry...no striker.” A striker is a violent, quarrelsome man who strikes at others with his actions or words. A striker is a bully, someone that is a fighter in the wrong sense of the term. He is domineering. People are intimidated and scared of him. He wants his own way and is willing to do whatever it takes to get it.

Similarly, in I Peter 5:1-4 the Word of God calls elders to “feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof,” and adds that this must not be done “as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” The exercise of authority in the church may not be a lording it over the sheep.

### The profile of an abusive church leader

Drawing from these biblical examples and warnings, we can begin to build a character profile of an abusive church leader.

What do we mean when we talk about spiritual

abuse in the church? It is important whenever we are talking about forms of abuse to give careful definitions. If abuse is defined very loosely, then anything and everything can be called abuse, which is not helpful for those who genuinely are abused. The same is true of spiritual abuse. With that in mind, here is a definition of spiritual abuse that I believe is helpful:

Spiritual abuse is when a spiritual leader—such as a pastor, elder, or head of a Christian organization—wields his position of spiritual authority in such a way that he manipulates, domineers, bullies, and intimidates those under him as a means of maintaining his own power and control, even if he is convinced he is seeking biblical and kingdom-related goals.<sup>2</sup>

Take note of three key elements of spiritual abuse stated in this definition.

First, spiritual abuse is perpetrated by one in a position of power and authority over others in the church, such as pastors, elders, and deacons. This is similar to other forms of abuse (for example, spousal abuse, sexual abuse) which almost always take place where there is a “power differential,” that is, where one wields a greater position of power and authority in relation to another. This element of spiritual abuse makes it a sin against the fifth commandment of the law.<sup>3</sup>

Second, the individual in a position of authority in the church uses sinful methods to maintain control over others. He often makes use of things like manipulation, being hypercritical, intimidation and threats, and being cruel and domineering. To some people he can turn on the charm and appear very likable, but with other people the mask comes off and he shows himself to be an angry, controlling, hurtful person. This element indicates that spiritual abuse is a violation of the sixth commandment, which requires that “neither in thoughts, nor words, nor gestures, much less in deeds, I dishonor, hate, wound, or kill my neighbor” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 40).

Third, the individual in a position of authority in the church resorts to these methods to gain something for himself. He is interested in his name, his advancement, his agenda, his kingdom. It is for this reason that such abusive leaders are labeled, whether clinically or otherwise, as narcissists. Likely, this behavior is a mask for the bully’s own deep hurt and fear. The adage is usually true: Hurt people hurt people.

The spiritually abusive leader has an array of weap-

<sup>2</sup> Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> In this connection, see the helpful application of the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment to the sins of “superiors” in the Westminster Larger Catechism, Questions 129 and 130.

ons at his disposal to protect himself. He often has carefully assembled a small group of loyal defenders who will protect him at all costs. If accused, he does not have to say a word in his own defense because others are doing that for him. He will often employ something called DARVO, which stands for “deny, attack, and reverse victim and offender.” He will deny the allegations vehemently, and eventually turn things around so he portrays himself as the victim of slander and portrays the victims as the real troublemakers who are obviously rebellious, perhaps unstable, probably unfaithful to the cause, and assuredly out to get him. Often he succeeds in forcing them out of the church. To paraphrase one abusive pastor, “Either you get on board the bus, or you’ll be under the bus as it runs you over.”

And that often is one of the indicators that a person in authority may be guilty of spiritual abuse: the presence of a long trail of broken relationships and hurt people in his wake.

It is important to remember that not everything a pastor, elder, or deacon does wrong constitutes spiritual abuse. The fact that an officebearer might be somewhat unfriendly or have a personality that is a bit intimidating does not make him a spiritual abuser. The fact that an officebearer might sin against a member of the congregation, or make a mistake, or fail to be as sensitive as he ought does not make him a spiritual abuser. Certainly the fact that an officebearer does things that some people might not like, such as confronting them for their sins or making an unpopular decision, does not make him a spiritual abuser. We ought to be careful not to throw that charge out carelessly. At the end of the day, good, wise officebearers are still mere men, and it is necessary for members to bear patiently with them in their weaknesses.

The fact that not every failure on the part of leaders constitutes abuse means that spiritual abuse can be difficult to identify. There must be evidence of a regular pattern of sinful behavior over the course of an extended period of time, perhaps (sadly) for years.

No one ought minimize the severity of spiritual abuse, perhaps by suggesting that it is merely a by-product of the weak, anti-authority society in which we presently live. Real spiritual abuse has devastating effects. Godly members want to submit to leaders as representatives of Jesus Christ but, being the objects of spiritual abuse, they find it nearly impossible to trust any officebearer. They love the church, but going to church now becomes anxiety-inducing misery rather than a joy. They spend all week looking up against Sunday, rather than spending all week looking forward to it. Some find themselves

labeled as a troublemaker, forced out of a church they loved, shunned by those they once counted as friends. Some may forsake the church altogether.

### **An uncomfortable question of church culture**

One might think after reading this that it is relatively easy to identify the characteristics of a spiritually abusive leader. But the reality is that often spiritually abusive leaders are allowed to continue in their leadership positions for many years. What explains this?

Part of the answer is certainly the deceptive nature of the spiritual abuse itself. But that does not answer the question fully. Often there is an unhealthy *system*, an unhealthy culture in the church, one that may not actively approve what the abusive leader is doing but at the very least makes it possible for the spiritual abuse to go on.

One possible factor to consider is inadequate accountability for the leader. There may be churches that provide no accountability structure whatsoever for the leader, or there may be churches that have these structures in place but they do not actually hold the leader accountable. He is given free rein, or at least a long leash, to do what he wants in the church. Often such a leader is a “lone ranger” who has no friends to set him straight.

Another possible factor to consider is the church’s prioritizing of certain outward gifts over spiritual character. For example, a pastor may be of questionable spiritual character, but because he is a gifted speaker the church makes allowances for his sinful behavior. Sometimes the “gift” that is valued is doctrinal precision. One author says, “If a pastor can articulate his theology, cite the Puritans, defend the truth against the liberals, and keep the church doctrinally ‘pure,’ then character can take a back seat.”<sup>4</sup>

The church also ought to consider how ecclesiastical pride creates an environment in which spiritual abuse can occur. A church may adopt the mindset that it is purest of all, that there is no other church on earth that can compare to it. In pride, the church does not have the ability honestly to evaluate itself. In a situation where the church or its leaders comes under scrutiny, the response is to ‘circle the wagons’ and protect the reputation of the institution at all costs.

Another aspect of church culture to consider is a lack of openness to critique and correction. In a church where the leaders promote the attitude of “We are above criticism, so sit down and keep your mouth shut,” an environment is created where a spiritual abuser may flourish. To be clear, I am not talking about leaders

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4 Kruger, *Bully Pulpit*, 12.

warning members against sinful gossip or encouraging members to bring their grievances in a proper way, but I am referring to a situation where all critique is stifled and the leadership is never ready to admit it erred.

What often explains the fact that abusive leaders are not dealt with is fear. Others in a position to hold that man accountable are afraid of losing their own position of authority. Members who are hurt are afraid of being hurt further if they raise their concerns. This culture of fear allows the sinful behavior to perpetuate.

## Conclusion

I hope and pray that all of us who are in positions of leadership in the church will take seriously this warning, humbly examine ourselves, confess sin where that is necessary, and strive by the grace of God to exercise our authority in a more Christ-like way.

I also hope and pray that the church as a whole will honestly face these uncomfortable questions and humbly examine whether an unhealthy culture exists that makes possible the abuse of authority.



## Taking heed to the doctrine

Rev. James Laning, home missionary in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of Zion PRC in Jenison, MI, the calling church

# The church, The kingdom of Christ

With this article I plan to follow a bit of a different approach. There have been discussions recently about the need for something like a curriculum that could be used with those who come to our churches from the outside. With that need in mind, I plan to go through the doctrines at a more rapid pace.

I will begin with the study of the church, and do so for a couple of reasons. First, I have written some articles in the past on subjects treated in the first three sections of dogmatics (theology, anthropology and Christology), and Rev. M. McGeown is currently writing in this rubric on the fourth section (soteriology). So I will begin with section five, which is a study of the church (ecclesiology). A second reason for beginning here is that many professing Christians know relatively little about what the church is or does. Many have never had impressed upon them the importance of being a member of a sound church institute. Thus, when giving instruction to those within and without our churches, it is important to spend time stressing what God says about the church, the work she has been given, and our calling to be a church member, using our gifts to God's glory and for the advantage of His people.

The intended audience of these articles is not limited to those who come to our churches from outside. There are many adults who realize that although they have gone through our entire catechism instruction, they have forgotten a number of doctrinal points that they

really should know. They would like a refresher course, so to speak, on these doctrines. Yet they would prefer not to spend too long on any one doctrine. They would like to see the forest, as it were, and to feel like they have a grasp of the whole system of doctrine that we call the Reformed faith. So in these articles I will move through the doctrines more rapidly, striving to set them forth rather concisely, while endeavoring to show how each individual tree fits into the whole.

In each article I intend to include at least one illustration from Scripture that helps us understand and remember a given doctrine. The illustrations God Himself gives do serve that purpose. Whether it be a story, a ceremony, a miracle, or a symbol, the pictures God has provided for us appeal to our senses, and impress upon us what our Lord is saying. They make it easier to remember the doctrines and are helpful when explaining them to someone else, including our own children.

Finally, at the end of each article I will provide a summary in point form. Often when giving instruction it is good at the end to summarize what has been said. So a brief summary will be provided in the form of a few bullet points.

So with that being said, let us begin.

## What the Spirit says about the church

To learn about the church we must look not to ourselves but to Scripture. We must not be like someone who does



not look to the Scriptures but simply says, “The church is and does what the church I grew up in is and does.” In contrast, we must look to God and listen to what He says about what the church is and what she is called to do.

Scripture has a lot to say about the church. The attributes of the church (that is, that she is one, holy, catholic and apostolic) are set forth, for example, in the book of Ephesians. In the pastoral epistles (I and II Timothy and Titus) we find instruction on the structure, offices, and work of the church institute. Furthermore, in the epistles that were written to specific churches and in what God says to the seven churches referred to in the book of Revelation (chapters two and three), we find what our Lord says both positively and negatively about a number of specific, instituted churches. These congregations of the past, then, serve to illustrate to us what we should (and should not) do.

Yet Scripture’s instruction about the church is by no means limited to the New Testament. Old Testament Israel was the church. In the history of Israel we see illustrated very clearly that God has one holy people. This people He has delivered from bondage and transformed into a kingdom of priests, set apart from the nations of the world as the one people with whom He dwells. The tabernacle and later the temple were constructed according to the plan God showed His people. These structures, along with the laws concerning what was to take place at the house of God, illustrate for us the attributes and work of the one holy people of God, cleansed by Christ, who continually worship the One who has saved them.

Indeed, throughout the entire Bible we find instruction to the church about the church. The whole book is written to God’s one covenant people, whom He has saved by His grace. He has delivered her from sin and death, and has given her specific instructions as to what He would have her to do.

### **The holy nation, the kingdom of Christ**

So what is the church? The church is the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, and the kingdom of Christ. The church is Christ’s body, consisting of all those who are in Him. The church is Christ’s bride. She is the one people with whom Christ is united in an everlasting bond of marriage. The church is also Christ’s kingdom. The members of Christ’s body are also the citizens of His kingdom.

There is instruction concerning the church in what God said to Israel in the days of Moses. God called Israel out of Egypt and declared to them that they were to be a special people, separate from the Gentiles. “And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and

have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine” (Lev. 20:26).

Israel would be the Lord’s. Unlike the nations of this world, Israel would be a holy kingdom of priests. “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation’ (Ex. 19:6).

They would be the one nation that was holy, consecrated to their God. They would be the one kingdom of priests, brought nigh unto God, and privileged to serve in His presence.<sup>1</sup>

In I Peter we find a reference to this promise that God’s people would be a holy nation. The apostle Peter, inspired by the Spirit, wrote that what God said to Israel earlier at Mt. Sinai applies to the church of Jesus Christ also today. In I Peter the true church is called “...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (I Pet. 2:9).

The church is a people, a kingdom, that is unlike any of the nations on earth. Each nation has geographical boundaries and is ruled by someone on this planet. The church, in contrast, has no geographical boundaries, and no one on earth is its leader. The church, of course, does have a king, but He is in heaven. The church also does have a boundary (that is, a person can be within the church or outside the church), but the boundary is not geographical.

The church consists of all those united to Christ. All those in Christ by faith are members of the church, saved by God’s grace. Those not in Christ are outside the church, and the wrath of God abides upon them. Those within Christ’s body have been brought into her by an irresistible work of God. Having been efficaciously brought in, there is no way they can fall out.

### **The church given the keys**

The fact that the church has been given the keys of the kingdom is an additional proof that the church is Christ’s kingdom. Years before Peter wrote I Peter 2:9, Christ told Peter that the church is the kingdom of God. It was right after Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, that our Lord said to him, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall

<sup>1</sup> When we consider this promise, as well as God’s other promises, we must keep in mind that all God’s promises are to Christ. God promised Christ that He would be both King and Priest forever (Ps. 110:1-4). God promised also that those whom He gave to Christ would be kings and priests under Him. In other words, God’s promise is particular. It is to Christ and to those who are in Him (Gal. 3:16, 29).

be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt. 16:18-19).

Christ, who holds the keys of God’s kingdom, has given the keys to the church. To be outside the church is to be outside the kingdom of Christ. An impenitent person who is removed from a true church is outside the body and kingdom of Christ. That is how serious it is to be removed from the church.<sup>2</sup>

God saved us that we might live not unto ourselves, but unto Him.

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house,

<sup>2</sup> That the church is God’s kingdom has been long understood by God’s people and is confessed in a number of places in our Reformed creeds. Our Heidelberg Catechism in the answer to question 85 (which is about Christian discipline) says that when someone is excommunicated that person is “excluded from the Christian church, and by God Himself from the kingdom of Christ.” In other words, to be outside the church is to be outside Christ’s kingdom.

The same truth is taught in the Belgic Confession. In Article 27 we confess that, “This church had been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be.” This article states that the church is Christ’s kingdom. If the church did not exist, Christ would have no subjects.

In these articles from time to time I plan to include references to our confessions in the footnotes.

an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ (I Pet. 2:5).

We really are priests, and as priests we are to offer sacrifices, *spiritual* sacrifices. We are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, humbly serving Him as those thankful for our salvation. That is our calling. That is also our privilege. May we as priests together glorify our King, joyfully labor together in His service, and offering unto our God the ongoing sacrifice of praise.

### Summary points

- The church is the kingdom of Christ. The members of Christ’s church are also the citizens of Christ’s kingdom.
- Illustration: The nation of Israel in the old dispensation. What God said to Israel about them being a holy nation is applied in the New Testament also to the church today. Israel was the church and also serves to illustrate what the church is.
- Additional proof: The church was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The fact that the church has the keys of the kingdom is proof that the church is Christ’s kingdom, and that to be outside the church is to be outside the kingdom.



## Believing and confessing

Prof. Ronald Cammenga, rector and professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Southwest PRC in Wyoming, Michigan

# Of Jesus Christ, true God and man, the only Savior of the world

## (Second Helvetic Confession, 11e)

### *Our Lord Truly Suffered.*

We believe, moreover, that our Lord Jesus Christ truly suffered and died for us in the flesh, as Peter says (I Peter 4:1). We abhor the most impious madness of the Jacobites and all the Turks who execrate the suffering of the Lord. At the same time we do not deny that the Lord of glory was crucified for us, according to Paul’s words (I Corinthians 2:8).

In this eleventh chapter of the Second Helvetic Confession, Heinrich Bullinger is dealing with the heart

of the gospel. For that reason, this is also the heart of the confession of faith that the believer makes before the world: Jesus Christ, truly God and man, the only Savior of the world—*my* only Savior. Christ’s saving work depends on the truth that He is both God and man—fully God and fully man. If He is not truly God and man, neither can His work be of saving value. Who He is can never be separated from what He does.

For us men and our salvation, “the Lord of glory” suffered and died. Because He was truly a man, He could be the substitute for us men. And because He was truly a man, He could represent us men before the

bar of God's justice. At the same time, as truly God, He could sustain the frightful burden of God's wrath so as to deliver us from that wrath. If He were only a man, He could never be our Savior. It would have been impossible for Him to endure God's infinite wrath against the guilt of sin. And if He were only God, He could not have been a fit representative of human beings. God's righteousness demands satisfaction by one who is of the same nature as those who have sinned.

The particular emphasis of this paragraph of the SHC is that Christ truly suffered. He experienced real suffering. The pain that He endured was real pain, both in His body and in His soul. Throughout His life, from His incarnation to His death, to one degree or another, what He felt as a real man was real agony. What climaxed in the garden of Gethsemane and on the cross of Calvary, was indeed only the climax of that which He experienced every day, every hour, every minute, and every second of His life on earth. From the beginning of His earthly life to its end, He suffered. Truly He was, as Isaiah prophesied, "a man of sorrows" (Is. 53:3). And as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren," in order that He might "make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17).

### Jacobites and Turks

Bullinger usually carries on his polemics against heretics and heresies in separate sections of the SHC that he designates "The Sects." However, in this article in which he defends the biblical truth that Jesus "truly suffered," he chooses to mention two heretical groups who deny the reality that Jesus Christ truly suffered an atoning death. These two groups, whose errors the Reformed "abhor," are the Jacobites and the Turks.

The Jacobites arose in Syria after the Council of Chalcedon, AD 451. They rejected the orthodox doctrine that Christ is two natures in one divine person. Instead, they taught that Christ is only one nature in one person. Some of them went so far as to teach that the human nature of Christ was absorbed into the divine. Although the origin of the name "Jacobites" is disputed, it is likely that they were named after the monk Jacob Baradaï, who pleaded their cause before the church authorities in Constantinople and languished in prison for fifteen years for his trouble. The Jacobite churches survived the Muslim invasions and can still be found in parts of Iraq and Turkey.

Additionally, Jacobite churches were founded along the Malabar coast in the southwestern part of India. "Malabar" means "hill region," which is the geography

of this portion of India that is the present state of Kerala. It was along this coast that some of the Jews of the dispersion settled after their initial captivity in Assyria and Babylon. According to early Christian tradition, the apostle Thomas brought the gospel to India, beginning with the Jews of Malabar. Later, the Malabar churches were influenced by Jacobite teaching, which led to the founding of churches known as the Syro-Malabar churches. Today, some of these churches continue to maintain a separate existence, while others have been absorbed into the Christian churches of India. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Christians are a distinct minority in India, representing only about two percent of the total population.

The error of the Jacobites was that they denied the full humanity of Christ. Because Christ was not fully a man, neither could He have suffered as a man in body and in soul. Denial of the full humanity of Christ, therefore, necessarily entails the denial that Christ truly suffered. Further, since the divine nature of Christ is impassible, that is, not capable of suffering, as we noticed from the eighth paragraph of this article, to teach that Christ has only a divine nature and a divine person, is a denial of the impassibility of Christ's divine nature. As far as the Jacobites are concerned, that is all there is in which Christ could have suffered.

Along with the Jacobites, Bullinger mentions the Turks. By "Turks," Bullinger and the other Reformers had in mind the Muslims, the followers of Mohammed and the adherents of the religion of Islam.

Islam teaches that Jesus was another good man and divine prophet, alongside Mohammed. He was not a divine prophet in the sense that He was inherently divine. But like Mohammed, He was a divine prophet because He had been sent out by God. His suffering was the experience of the same kind of rejection and abuse that Mohammed experienced—nothing more. Christ's suffering was not the suffering of one who was God incarnate. It was not the suffering of the Son of God in human flesh. And even the suffering that He did endure, was not the suffering of the man who represented other men, who suffered and died as their substitute and in their place. They indeed deny, as Bullinger says, "that the Lord of glory was crucified for us."

Because they deny the very possibility of salvation, "we abhor the most impious madness of the Jacobites and Turks." Not only do Reformed believers abhor the "impious madness" of this cult—the Jacobites—and this false religion—Islam, but publicly the Reformed faith carries on its polemic against them. It does so not only that the faithful be warned against dreadful error, but also that, if by any means, God may grant the ad-

herents of these errors repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.

#### *Impartation of Properties.*

We piously and reverently accept and use the impartation of properties which is derived from Scripture and which has been used by all antiquity in explaining and reconciling apparently contradictory passages [of Holy Scripture].

In this paragraph, the SHC continues to develop the truth of the relation of the two natures of Christ, which are united in the one divine person of the Son of God. Since the two natures inhere in the one divine person, there is an impartation or communication of properties of the divine person to the two natures. In theology this is referred to as *communicatio idiomatum*. This means that the properties of each of the natures, the human and the divine, are now the properties attributed to the person. And this is the explanation of apparently contradictory passages of Holy Scripture.

As a result of the impartation of properties, Christ can be said, on the one hand, to be omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. But He can also be said to be of limited power, limited to one place at one time, and limited in His knowledge. On the one hand, He could say to Nathanael, “Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee” (John 1:48). On the other hand, He could say, “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32). On the one hand, like Melchisedec, He is without father or mother (Heb. 7:3), and yet, on the other hand, He could be born of the virgin Mary, His mother. On the one hand, He is without beginning of days or end of life, and yet, on the other hand, He was born in Bethlehem’s stable and died on a cross outside the city of Jerusalem.

The communication of properties is based on the one-

ness of person subsisting in the two natures of Christ—the hypostatic union. In this paragraph, Bullinger is further developing the implications of the Creed of Chalcedon. Chalcedon famously affirmed that Christ is to be acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division, or separation.

On the basis of the union of Christ’s natures in His divine person, we can attribute what is true of each of Christ’s natures to His person. Thus, the person of Christ is omnipresent, according to His divine nature, not according to the human nature. The person of Christ died on the cross, but according to His human nature, not according to the divine nature.

Though intimately united in Christ’s divine person, the two natures of Christ remain nonetheless distinct. The divine nature is not humanized. Deity cannot share in human weakness or imperfection. But neither can the human nature be deified, as is the error of both the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans. The Roman Catholics teach that by virtue of the priest’s recitation of the words of institution over the sacrament the body and blood of Christ are present simultaneously on altars around the world. In the interests of their view of the Lord’s Supper, the Lutherans teach that at the ascension the human nature of Christ was accorded ubiquity, that is, omnipresence. Thus, Christ’s human nature is now “with, in, under, and around” the elements of the Lord’s Supper. The elements are not changed into the body and blood of Christ, but wherever the bread and wine are present, there also are the body and blood of Christ.

The teachings of both the Roman Catholics and Lutherans contradict the Creed of Chalcedon and violate the biblical teaching of the impartation of properties as defended by the SHC. Christ has both a human nature and a divine nature, united in the one person of the divine Son of God. This is biblical and confessional orthodoxy, which “we piously and reverently accept.”



## A word fitly spoken

Rev. Justin Smidstra, pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan

## Sand

What comes to mind when you think about sand? After a long, cold winter perhaps you feel a certain eagerness for some time at the lakeshore or seaside with the warm

sun overhead and soft sand underfoot. Children may be excited to go to the beach again, or even the sandbox in the backyard, to build something out of sand. Sand



is so ordinary that we do not think about it much. It is dirt we walk on. It can be a nuisance. We shake it out of our shoes, broom it out of our homes, and vacuum it out of our cars.

Yet the Bible speaks of sand and attaches meaningful significance to it. Sand is a beautiful creation in its own right. God is the Master Craftsman, who fashioned all things, both big and small, from the towering edifices of rock called mountains down to every particle of sand underfoot. The sand is God's boundary line. He "placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree" (Jer. 5:22). What most impresses us about sand is the vast number of its grains. Take a handful of sand and study it. Try to count every granule in your cupped hands. That alone is an impossible task. Never mind counting the sand of the seashore! No surprise, then, that the Bible uses sand to describe something that is innumerable and exceeds human ability to count or calculate.

Thus, the sand of the seashore is a fitting figure for the abundance of God's provision for His people. During Egypt's seven years of plenty, "Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea." So plentiful was the harvest that he "left numbering; for it was without number" (Gen. 41:49). In the wilderness Jehovah "rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea" (Ps. 78:27). God gave Israel a land flowing with milk and honey, but He also enriched them "of treasures hid in the sand" (Deut. 33:19). To equip Solomon to govern His people, God gave him "wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore" (I Kings 4:29).

The sand also represented the foes of God's people. Small Israel, the "the fewest of all people" (Deut. 7:7), faced enemies innumerable as the sand. Joshua led Israel against the Canaanites, whose armies were "as the sand that is upon the sea shore in multitude" (Josh 11:4). With Gideon's three hundred, Jehovah scattered the Midianite raiders, "as the sand by the sea side for multitude" (Jud. 7:12). This highlights the exceeding greatness of God's saving power, the vastness of His covenant faithfulness, the expansiveness of His mercy and grace toward His people. Jehovah saves by His mighty hand and stretched out arm! When we ponder the depth and multitude of God's thoughts toward us, we exclaim with the psalmist. "If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee" (Ps. 139:18).

Although each grain of sand is but "the small dust of the balance" (Is. 40:15), many grains of sand packed together are great in weight. Thus Job described his

sufferings, "for now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea" (Job 6:3). Beware of anger, for "a stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both" (Prov. 27:3).

Compacted sand may be heavy, but it not sturdy like a rock. Jesus taught us "every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand" (Matt. 7:26). Jesus' Word is our rock, solid and firm, the one foundation to build our lives upon. Every other word, every philosophy or worldview of man, is like the shifting sand. It provides no sure stability. When the storm comes, it will come out from under you, and the life of the person who has built upon it will come crashing down.

Most significant is the first mention of sand in the Bible, the beautiful covenant promise God gave to Abraham in Genesis 22:17: "in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore." Jehovah has kept this promise through Jesus Christ, who is the Seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16). Through Christ and His work God has gathered to Himself a multitude of the redeemed, an assembly of sons and daughters, innumerable as the sand of the seashore. Through Christ the wonderful prophecy of Hosea is fulfilled: "yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God" (Hos. 1:10). The sand of the seashore is now a beautiful picture of the catholic church of Jesus Christ, the wonderful workmanship of God's saving grace!

Ponder the sand of the seashore. Be not puffed up in pride. You and I, we are but grains of sand. We have nothing to boast in ourselves. Our churches, we are but a handful of grains, a small part of the seashore that is the church universal. Ponder the sand, and the sand will humble you. Ponder the sand, and it will lead you to rejoice! For God has plucked you, believer, from the mass of fallen humanity, and given you a place among the innumerable company of His blood-bought children, that you might be for the praise of His glorious grace. May our praise of the God of our salvation be "as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude," world without end!



## Ministering to the saints

Rev. Daniel Holstege, pastor of the Wingham PRC in Wingham, Ontario, Canada

# Esteeming the daughters of God far above rubies

**Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes. Behold, thou art fair, my beloved, yea, pleasant....**

**Song of Solomon 1:15, 16**

Do you hear the warm and tender affection of Christ for His beloved wife? He does not look with longing eyes or speak with intimate affection like that to anyone else, for He has vowed to be a faithful Husband to this one woman forever. O what high esteem Christ has for His beloved! What gentleness toward His precious bride! Though she is sinful and unworthy of Him, He sees her clothed in His own righteousness and counts her a virtuous woman whose price is far above rubies (Prov. 31:10).

Do we men strive to reflect the gentle and holy love of Christ in the way we behave toward our own wives as well as toward the little girls and other women in our lives? Let us be reminded of what God thinks of the women whom He has chosen and redeemed by the blood of Christ. God says to His daughters, in the words of a recent song that was written for believers to sing to our little girls, “You are beautiful and greatly loved.... The Breath of heaven from above flows through the both of us, singing over us, you are greatly loved.” In Christ, daughters of Zion, you are beautiful and greatly loved by God with a love that can never fail.

When God came into this world and walked among men, he revealed that great and holy love for those He has chosen to adopt as His daughters. One day, when Jesus was busy in Capernaum, the ruler of the local synagogue named Jairus came running up to Him, falling down breathlessly at His feet and begging Him, “My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live” (Mark 5:23). The compassion of Christ for God’s daughters in their suffering would now be on display. Jesus immediately left what He was doing and followed Jairus to his house to see the twelve-year old girl who was so very sick.

But on His way, something else happened that also revealed the mercy of God to His suffering daughters.

There was a certain woman in town who had been suffering from an issue of blood (a hemorrhage) for twelve years. She had gone to many doctors and spent all her money in search of a remedy for her bleeding body, but no one was able to help her. In fact, the doctors had only made things worse for her (Mark 5:26; Luke 8:43). She must have lost all confidence in the medical profession. She had nowhere to turn. What made it worse was that her issue of blood made her ceremonially unclean, and perpetually so (Lev. 15:25). She had to live day-in and day-out bearing the label “unclean,” which must have made her feel ashamed and very alone. To whom could she turn?

Then suddenly, Jesus the great wonder-worker came walking down the road surrounded by throngs of people. She believed in Him and was sure that He could heal her, indeed that He was her only hope. But after all she had been through, she trembled with fear at the thought of walking right up to Him, as Jairus had done. How could she? She was just a woman! An unclean woman at that! He was the great Master! A man who taught with great authority and cast out demons with the very power of God! But she was desperate. So she crept through the crowd and approached Him from the back. She reached out and touched the hem of His garment, and immediately the bleeding stopped, and she felt the healing power of Christ flood her body. But she slipped back into the crowd, hoping desperately that no one would notice.

Jesus stopped, turned around, and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” Jesus was not seeking information. He knew who touched Him. She had not been healed by some magical contact with His clothes but by His conscious bestowal of mercy upon her. He asked the question because He wanted everyone to be aware of the miracle so that they might glorify God, and He wanted her to know that He loved her and she need never be afraid of Him. When the woman saw that she could not hide, she came “trembling, and falling down before him” and “declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately” (Luke 8:47). With her face flat on the ground,

she must have wondered, what will Jesus say? How will He react? Will He be angry with me? What was I thinking to touch His robe?! I am an unclean woman! But her thoughts could not have run too long because Jesus replied right away, “Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague” (Matt. 9:22, Mark 5:34).

Behold what manner of love the Son of God bestows on God’s suffering daughters! As we sing in Psalter #51, “The burden of the sorrowful the Lord will not despise; He has not turned from those that mourn, He hearkens to their cries.” The Lord did not despise this daughter of Zion in her bleeding, ashamed, fearful, and trembling state. In the eyes of Jesus, daughters of God, you are beautiful and greatly loved. When you are bleeding, broken, and alone, go to Jesus by faith and be of good comfort. He is a merciful Savior and a great Physician.

Jesus then showed His gentle love and holy compassion for the little girls of the covenant in their sufferings. Jesus followed Jairus the rest of the way to his house. In the intervening time, the young girl died, and messengers came to tell Jairus to trouble the Master no more. But Jesus said, “Fear not, believe only, and she shall be made whole” (Luke 8:50). Jesus entered the house and told everyone to go out, except for Peter, James, John, and the father and mother of the girl. He looked at the child lying there with her eyes closed in death. He took her by the hand, and said, “Maid, arise,” and immediately her spirit came into her body again. She sat up, and her parents were astonished. What amazing love Jesus has for the little daughters of God! How tenderly He deals with them! In all His dealings with little girls and boys, Jesus never trespassed into touching that is sexually perverse and that deeply confuses and wickedly stabs the tender souls of children. In the eyes of Jesus, the little girls of the Lord are beautiful and greatly loved. When they are sick or sad or afraid, He does not prey upon them like a wolf, but He heals and comforts them and raises them up to eternal life.

If the daughters of Zion are beautiful and greatly loved by God, and Christ shed His blood to heal their issue of blood and to raise them up to eternal life, then how ought we sons of Zion to view and treat them? When a young boy observes his father treating his mother badly, mocking her and belittling her, he starts to believe that women are of little value and their opinions do not matter. But when a boy observes that his father deals gently with his mother, tells her he loves her, honors her opinions, and esteems her highly, the boy understands that women are precious and to be highly prized. When a young man begins to look at pictures of naked women in a magazine or to watch them engage

in sexual behavior in videos on his phone, he begins to objectify women, to become perverted in his view of a woman, to look at her as a thing to use to gratify his lust, rather than as a neighbor to love as himself. But when a young man flees from that temptation and crucifies that lust by the power of the Spirit, he becomes free to see the women around him as God sees them.

A father who sets a bad example and/or a habit of gratifying himself with pornography terribly perverts the mind of a young man in his view and treatment of women. The results are not good. In the workplace or with his friends, that young man engages in foolish and unclean jesting about women and even sexually harasses them. In his marriage, he develops perverted and selfish expectations and fires a barrage of criticism at his wife when they are not met. In private, he betrays his wife through pornography that only confirms and strengthens his perverted attitude that women are there for men to use for pleasure. Brethren, if we behave this way toward the daughters of God, we wickedly stab their hearts and cause an issue of blood to flow.

If we are married men, we must not look with eyes of desire or speak with intimate affection to anyone other than the woman we have vowed to love as our wife until death do us part. With regard to the girls of the church or our own daughters, whether little or teenagers, we are to treat them with the same kind of clean love and compassion that Jesus had for the young daughter of Jairus. With regard to the trembling and frightened women of the church whose hearts bleed and who have suffered much from many physicians of the soul, let us treat them with the same kindness and gentleness that Christ showed to that daughter of Israel whom He healed that day. With regard to our wives, we are to esteem them very highly and consider their price far above rubies. We are to give honor to our wives, as unto the weaker vessel (I Pet. 3:7). We are not to despise them as the weaker vessel, but cherish them and honor them, listen to their opinions and respect their desires. If we have hurt them in the past through any kind of abuse or betrayal, we must earnestly and humbly devote ourselves to the healing of their wounds and seek to regain their trust and respect through constant faithfulness and abiding love.

Martin Luther, that great man who swung the hammer of God’s Word at the apostate medieval church and severely ripped into his theological foes with the pen, had a sweet and tender love for his daughters and a great esteem for his wife Kathie. When his daughter Magdalena suddenly passed away from sickness at the young age of thirteen, Luther wrote, “I love her very much.... In the last thousand years God has given to

no bishop such great gifts as God has given me.... I am angry with myself that I am unable to rejoice from my heart and be thankful to God, though I do at times sing a little song and give thanks. Whether we live or die, we belong to God.”<sup>1</sup> At one point, Luther revised his will to leave everything to his wife rather than to his eldest son, as was the custom of the day. “This is yet another example of how Luther valued women more than most men of his time did, and how he especially esteemed his beloved Kathie. It was around this time that he quipped, ‘I would not give up my Kathie for France or for Venice.’”<sup>2</sup>

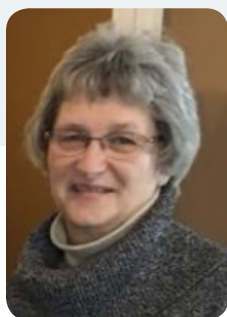
1 Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (New York: Viking, 2017), 414.

2 Metaxas, 415.

Let us too have a high esteem for our dear wives and a pure and godly love for our little daughters. Let us hear the cries of the hurting daughters of Israel and not turn away our ears from them. Let us lead them to Jesus who loves them and who alone can heal them. Let us seek to comfort them so that they can go in peace, and we can sing together,

O happy land, whose sons in youth,  
In sturdy strength and noble truth,  
Like plants in vigor spring;  
Whose daughters fair, a queenly race,  
Are like the cornerstones that grace  
The palace of a king.

(Psalter #393).



## When thou sittest in thine house

Mrs. Sherry Koole, wife, mother, and grandmother in Hope PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

## Consider the birds, the flowers, and more

God blesses His people with four beautiful seasons throughout each year, each beautiful in its own way. For those of us in the northern hemisphere, the season of spring has now sprung. The birds chirp. The flowers bloom. The trees begin anew to yield their fruit. And farmers plant their fields with the hope of a plentiful harvest. How true then, as we sing in Psalter #169, “new life is all abroad.”

As the world around us comes out of its winter *hibernation* and awakens with new life, I believe there is visual and lifelike instruction that we as godly parents can give to our children. We, too, at times can *hibernate* within our homes during the cold of winter while waiting for the warmer rays of the springtime sun to shine. Now, as the grass and trees again turn green, the fruit trees begin to bud, the birds serenade with song, the farmers plant their fields, and the flowers bloom in beauty, the people of God ought to contemplate and consider the goodness of the Lord and how His mercies are new every morning.

Spring is a time of renewal and growth. And in the beauty of *rebirth* that springs forth during this season of the year, there are many wonderful and comforting words of instruction we can give to our children—in-

struction found in seeing God’s care of all creatures, great and small, animal and human—instruction found in the vegetation we see all around us: trees laden with fruit, fields abundant with crops, and the small, yet elegantly beautiful flowers that adorn the earth. Nature *speaks*. It speaks volumes. Yet, I cannot help but wonder if we are *listening*. We ought to be. It has much instruction to give. And it is important that *all* this instruction begins with God. Our children need to learn and know that it is God alone who renews and gives growth—both in nature and in His people. Just as the earth is renewed and the ground again becomes fruitful, so too, His people.

I was privileged to live seven of the earlier years of my marriage in the Northwest Iowa region. While there, I observed on a yearly basis the dedication of the farmers to the work of preparing their fields, planting their seeds, seeing to the irrigating of those fields, and tending to and caring for the crops until the time of harvesting and baling came. Though the machinery of today may have made their work easier than the farming days of old, their fields were much larger than those of the past and



their work often included many long hours of labor—day after day after day. Yes, dedication and hard labor—all in the prayerful hope of a plentiful harvest.

Prayerful because Christian farmers know that although it is *they* who prepare the fields, *they* who plant the seeds, and *they* who tend and care for the crops until the time of harvest, it is the *Lord* of the (agricultural) harvest who gives the increase. *He* brings or withholds the needed sunshine and rain. It is *He* who controls the elements—rain or drought, health or blight, warmth or frost (even snow at times), and whether there be a harvest of plenty or not so much. The farmers do toil. They labor diligently and faithfully. Yet all the while they are totally and prayerfully dependent upon God to bless their labors with whatsoever size harvest *He* may choose.

Recalling the fields of Iowa brings to mind the Parable of the Sower and the different types of soil (Matt. 13; Mark 4; Luke 8). Although the parable speaks of various types of soil, I point the reader to the *good soil*—the *soil* where the *seed* takes root. For that *soil* is a picture of us. The *sower*, typifying Christ, sows the *seed* of His Word in the hearts (*soil*) of His own. We must remember that the sower faithfully and diligently prepares his field before planting. He does not just scatter the seed. He plows the field and tries to rid it of rocks and stones, and weeds and thorns (other types of soil in the parable) before planting the seed.

So, too, with God's people. It is only by the indwelling and gift of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that there is even any room at all for the *seed* of the Word to take root, let alone to grow and to flourish. With a heart (*soil*) that has been prepared by the Lord (*Sower*), the Word (*seed*) is watered by the lively preaching and tended to and cared for with church discipline so that we, who were dead in sin and trespasses, are made alive: our old man of sin mortified and our new man put on. The work of the Spirit in our hearts makes us not only hearers of the Word, but doers also, both willing and able to produce much fruit. Yes, through the lively preaching of the Word, that *seed* takes root, it grows, it sprouts, it blooms, and brings forth fruit in our lives. The fruit of a sanctified walk and a life of good works.

Nature speaks. Do we hear? Do we see the pictures that it paints? When we look around at the fields newly planted with crops and the orchards teeming with blossoms, and understand the picture this paints, our hearts well up with gratitude to the Lord for His preparing and provision for us. *He* softens our hearts. *He* bends our wills. *He* guides us with His Spirit while feeding and nourishing us in the green pastures of His Word. All glory be to Him!

*Behold the fowls of the air: ...your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Consider the lilies of the field...even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these* (Matt. 6:26, 28, 29).

These verses point us to more of the beautiful pictures and comforting words of instruction we receive while observing the beauty of God's springtime creation. When considering the birds of the air, I googled as to how many different types or species one might find in the United States. I was amazed to find the numbers ranged between 800 and 1200 plus. I would be hard pressed to name just twenty or thirty of them. Yet, the Lord cares for each and every one. Scripture tells us that they do not plant, they do not harvest, they do not gather into barns. Rather, it is the Lord who sees to their feeding. If that in itself is not amazing enough, look to and consider the even smaller animal life—the smallest of fish, the spider, the fly, the ant, and so on. God cares for them! Each and every one is subject to *His* care. God so governs and designs things that *all* creatures, great and small, learn to live and adapt to the habitat in which He places them. What an almighty and caring Creator is He!

Why then do we worry so? Worry about food, worry about clothing, worry about shelter, finances, and health. If God, who is Lord and King of all creation, cares for the smallest and what we might consider most insignificant of creatures, will He not much more care for us who are His chosen ones, those whom He has purchased with the blood of His only begotten Son? Nature is teaching. Are we listening?

Look, too, and consider the flowers. I was amazed to learn that there are over 400,000 flowering plant species across the world! Makes me wonder if they all have actual names because I, for one, would not even know where to begin. I was happy to learn that the list of the most popular types of flowers that people choose to grow is fifty—a number much easier for me to comprehend. Even so, if put to the test, I do not believe I would be able to name half of them. But I do very much enjoy their beauty, a beauty, we are told, that surpasses that of king Solomon.

The flowers *speak*. They *declare* very boldly, brightly and beautifully the majesty and greatness of God the Creator. Not only did He create each and every flower, He made each one different from the others as to shape, size, color, and so on. He dresses them in a beauty more glorious than that of a king. What a life lesson for His people! The Lord, who cares for and adorns the tiny and wild flowers of the fields, will most certainly see to the needs of His people, those chosen by Him and precious.

One of the first poems I ever wrote (back in the

fourth or fifth grade, I believe) went something along the lines of, *When winter comes, the flowers go, they go to sleep under winter snow. When spring appears, they once more bloom. I pick some for our dining room.* Simple. Childlike. And yet, when thinking about this article, the phrase, *they go to sleep*, kept coming to mind. Are the flowers *speaking* and *painting* another picture here? I believe so. There have been many whom I have known on a personal basis who have been taken to glory in the past several months. Some were closer to me than others, yet all were fellow saints—a beloved brother-in-law, a fellow classmate, a childhood friend, a high-school secretary, and parents, grandparents, relatives and friends of others whom I love. Many of God’s people have suffered and still grieve the loss of loved ones. And although we weep, we do not mourn as those who have no hope. Rather, we do so in the hope of the resurrection, founded on the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Go back now to the perennial flowers, if you would. They *go to sleep* in wintertime only to awaken in the spring, push their way up through the sod, and burst forth in a beauty that is more glorious than that of Solomon. It is a miracle, really. A God-produced miracle. Now look at God’s people. How He cares for them. He feeds them, clothes them, and sees to their every need, physically and spiritually, as they travel the pathway to heaven. And when they die, they *sleep*. They *sleep in Jesus* (I Thess. 4:14). They *sleep* until the day of His

return upon the clouds of heaven, at which time they will arise (awake) to be clothed in robes of righteousness. The corruptible will put on incorruption and the mortal will put on immortality (I Cor. 15:52-54). The beauty of the truth we see pictured here awakens in us a yearning for heaven and has us uttering the fervent prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.”

If given the opportunity, we should all take a long walk on a sunny spring day. Enjoy the heat of the sun’s rays while listening to the birds sing, viewing blossoms on fruit trees, crops growing in fields, and enjoying the sweet fragrance of a myriad of flowers that might cross our path. May the sounds, sights, and smells of spring stir us up to a life of gratitude and good works to the God of our salvation. It is in Him that we live, move, and have our being. He gifts us with His Spirit, feeds us with His Word, and makes us both willing and able to produce good fruit.

What beautiful pictures we see in the spring! And we must share them with our children. For these pictures have the people of God yearning for the reality. The reality that *soon* all things will pass away and God will make all things *new*. We will go to be with Him where He is, to live everlastingly with Him in heaven. What glory that will be! But until then, enjoy the blessings of the springtime (and every season, for that matter)—all while praying the fervent prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.”



## All Thy works shall praise Thee

Mr. Joel Minderhoud, science teacher in Covenant Christian High School and member of Hope PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

## God’s wise design of the bee

Every spring and summer a vital activity occurs in farm fields, greenhouses, and gardens around the globe. Pollen, produced by flowering plants, will be transported from the stamen (male part of a flower) to the pistil (female part of a flower), fertilizing the plant for the production of seed for the future propagation of the plant. This seemingly insignificant, and perhaps bothersome (for allergy sufferers) process plays a vital role within the creation. One particular purpose of

this pollination process is that it is the orderly manner in which God sovereignly governs creation so that future generations of plants will continue to exist and produce the necessary food for both man and animal. Almost all of our food comes from flowering plants and by means of the pollination process. Foods such as grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables are from flowering plants. “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring

forth food out of the earth” (Ps. 104:14). It is in this way of pollination that God chooses to give us our daily sustenance.

But flowering plants and the pollination process are important to us also for reasons other than their being the source of our daily food. Flowering plants are the source of many commercial dyes and many over-the-counter drugs (aspirin), as well as controlled substances, such as marijuana and tobacco. Even much of our clothing (cotton) is made from flowering plants. Besides all of these pragmatic uses of the flowering plants, the flowering plants also serve to adorn the creation with beautiful color and aromas. Thanks be to God for the good gift of flowering plants and the vitally important process of pollination.

God sovereignly directs several methods of pollination, including, but not limited to, the wind, insects, birds, bats, and pollinator robots no less. For the purpose of this article, we will focus on bee pollination, examining three unique characteristics given to bees that display God’s marvelous design used to bring about another generation of plants. May God use a brief study such as this to lead us to contemplate the majesty of our Creator and His many wise designs that serve our good and His glory. “In all Thy works and vast designs, Thy faithfulness forever shines” (Psalter #241, stanza 7b).

### Vibration pollination

Flowers have a male fertilizing organ called a stamen. At the top of the stamen are sac-like structures called anthers, where the pollen is produced and dispersed. When a bee lands on a flower, its hair attracts the pollen grains and the pollen is distributed as it moves from flower to flower. In this way, bees seeking nectar from flowers inadvertently spread pollen from flower to flower. This is the basic manner in which bees pollinate flowering plants.

But the pollination process is much more complex than we have just described. First, it is worth noting that bees visit flowers not only for nectar but also for pollen. The pollen is far more protein-rich than the nectar and serves the bee for its growth, especially the growth and development of the bee larvae back in the bee nest. While seeking nectar and pollen for its own nourishment, the bee also passes pollen from flower to flower. Pollen-spreading is therefore not simply an incidental result of bees seeking nectar, but also a consequence of bees foraging for the pollen.

The anthers of some flowers are long and narrow, completely sealing the pollen within (called poricidal anthers). In addition, the pollen is strongly attached

to the inner walls of these anthers. No casual contact with a butterfly or other pollinator will transfer this pollen. The release of pollen from these anthers requires the shaking of the anther at a particular frequency. That frequency depends on the stiffness, mass, and material properties of the flower, and is even influenced by the bee shifting its weight and grip on the flowers. Scientists have found that poricidal anthers release their pollen when vibrated with a frequency between 100 and 400 Hertz. Perfectly fit by God, bumblebees are capable of making vibrations in the range necessary to dislodge the pollen from the poricidal anthers—from 240-450 Hz. (For musically inclined persons, these are roughly the frequencies ranging from middle C to A). When a bumblebee lands on a flower, it might bite off part of the anther, and then, using its powerful wing muscles vibrate its body, shaking the pollen out of the anther. Because not every bee or pollinator can make these vibrations, bumblebees enjoy limited competition for pollen from plants with poricidal anthers, since God has wisely fitted them to vibrate at the exact frequencies necessary to release the pollen from these anthers. What a marvelous and wise Creator we serve!

### Stinky footprints

Bumblebees, like many insects, secrete chemicals from their feet—foot pheromones, or trail pheromones, sometimes referred to as scent marks. For bumblebees, this foot-secreted chemical aids them in adhering to flowers. Besides this, with its unique and strong odor (lasting up to 24 hours), the chemical communicates what flowers ought to be visited. Research indicates that the chemical footprint has an odor that acts as a repellent to other bumblebees, thus discouraging them from visiting a flower that has just recently had its nectar harvested. Research also indicates that the chemical slowly changes composition during those 24 hours, developing into a pleasing odor, which will again attract bees after the flower has had time to replenish the nectar. In this way God equips bumblebees to forage efficiently without making redundant visits for nectar.

Such detail within even the smallest of creation’s creatures testifies of the sovereign design of the Creator and fills us with humility and praise to our God, who cares for the creation in a myriad of ways beyond our daily observation and comprehension.

### Unique vision

God has given to the bees a particularly strong sense

of smell and a unique gift of deciphering particular odors. For example, bees can discern if the foot odor on a flower is from themselves, a nest mate, or some other bee. Though they have a unique sense of smell, it is used primarily at close range. But it is bees' unique eyesight that enables them to find particular flowers and to see where to land on that flower as they fly by.

Human eyes are able to detect light in the electromagnetic spectrum from about 400 nanometers (nm; violet) to 700 nm (red), while bees are able to see light around 300 nm (ultraviolet light) to 600 nm (yellow). Bees, therefore, are capable of seeing yellow, blue, and violet but cannot see red. However, it is their ability to see UV light that is of greatest importance. Flowers are created with patterns that reflect the UV light in such a way that it serves to direct the bee to the specific part of the flower where the nectar is located, a sort of nectar "bullseye." These patterns the human eye cannot see, but they are visible to the bee, which God has equipped to see UV light.

In addition to their eye-sights' unique range of color, bees also process colors faster than humans and even than any other animal. This ability is important for an insect that generally is in constant motion. Electrical signals from its eyes to its brain are swiftly processed, allowing the bee to gather information very quickly, enabling it to distinguish easily one flower from another as it flies about or as the flower moves in the wind.

### God's vast design and constant faithfulness

We believe and confess "that the Father, by the Word, that is, by His Son, hath created...all creatures...[and given] unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator" (Belgic Confession, Art. 12). In our brief study of the tiny bee with its odorous footprints, unique vision, and vibrating bodies, we are reminded of the important truth that God has perfectly fitted each creature for its role in His creation. All of these unique characteristics serve the purpose of aiding the bee in finding the nectar and pollen so necessary for its survival. But in the process, these characteristics are helpful in distributing the pollen from flower to flower—a process vital to the pollination of plants.

What amazing detail and intricate connections God has woven into His creation! May we remember in our prayers not only to give thanks to God for the good gift of food, but also to contemplate all the intricate and intertwined processes designed and governed every minute of every day by God to provide for His creation.

In the coming months, as we see the bees swoop past or hear a nearby buzz, perhaps we can get past the initial fear of stinger and think pollinator—contemplating God's wise and perfect design.

God's providential care of all the parts of the creation—from the smallest to the largest—are noted in Scripture in order to remind us of God's greatness and of His *faithfulness*. He who clothes the grass of the field (Matt. 6:30), who values the sparrow (Matt. 10:29), who calms the raging sea (Ps. 89:9), and who appointed the ordinances of the heaven and earth (Jer. 33:25) is not only a mighty God, but a *faithful* God, who cares for all His creatures in all their needs. This almighty God will provide for us in all our temptations (I Cor. 10:13), deliver us from all our enemies (Ps. 41:11; Ps. 54:7; Ps. 108:13; Ps. 109), forgive us all our sins (Ps. 103:3; Ps. 130:4, 7, 8), preserve us through all trials in this life (Ps. 34:19; Ps. 121:5-8; Is. 43:1-7), direct all things to work together for our good (Rom. 8:28), and finally bring us to our eternal home in heaven (Ps. 23:6; Ps. 73:23-24; I Pet. 1:9). As He directs and governs all things in the creation for our physical good (even equipping bees with their unique characteristics to serve the pollination of plants so that crops can grow), so He powerfully and faithfully provides us with all we need as His covenant people.

The examples in the physical creation serve as a reminder to us, an undeserving people by nature, that God will not break His covenant with Christ and those who are in Christ (Ps. 89; Jer. 33). "For him my mercy shall endure, my covenant made with him is sure, His throne and race I will maintain forever, while the heavens remain" (Psalter 243, stanza 6). This all-wise God who faithfully governs the earthly creation is our *faithful covenant* God. What consolation we have! "In all things which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father...nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 28). Our covenant God is faithful and will preserve us. Thus we are "persuaded that He so restrains the devil and all our enemies that, without His will and permission, they cannot hurt us" (Belgic Confession, Art. 13). As we watch the bees busily buzzing around this summer, praise God for His great wisdom and *enduring faithfulness*!





## Remembering the days of old

Mr. James Holstege, member of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan and administrator at Eastside Christian School in Grand Rapids, Michigan

# The Kamps family history

As a child who grew up in Hudsonville PRC, I have several memories of our old church building on School Street, now torn down and an empty lot. One of those memories, is watching old Mr. George Kamps, who was Grandpa Kamps to many of my classmates and friends. Sunday after Sunday, with the help of two close family members, Mr. Kamps was helped down the aisle and into a pew, Nellie following slowly behind.

As we continue *Remembering the days of old*...the days and years leading up to and during the startup of the Protestant Reformed Churches...may God be praised. —J. H.

*Much of this article was constructed from the written and gathered material of my uncle Marvin near the end of his earthly pilgrimage. His loving granddaughters, Sydney and Nicole Kamps, put the material into book form.*

—George Kamps, member of Zion PRC

My great-grandfather Willem (William) (1857-1937) was born to Geert Kamps (1819-1922) and Geesje Brink (1820-1886), his second wife. Two years before he married Geesje, Geert's first wife, Jantje Fiening died. Willem grew up in Haren, Groningen in the Netherlands in a Reformed church family home. The Kamps were an Afscheiding (Secession) church family.

I am the youngest grandchild of my grandfather, Geert ("George") Kamps and my grandmother, Pieter-nella Japje (Nellie) Nobel. George was born on January 25, 1891 to Willem Kamps and Geesje (Grace) Brink (1856-1940) in the Village of Onnen, Province of Groningen. Geesje (1856) was a niece to Geesje (1820). George was the second child born to Willem and Geesje. His older brother, also first named George (Geert), died just seven weeks before my grandpa George was born, sadly having drowned in a pit on the family farm. After George, Willem and Geesje were blessed with four more children.

On April 17, 1905, my great-grandparents Willem and Geesje, and their five children: Geert, Folkerdina, Hendrik, Geesje, and Lou immigrated to the United States. They disembarked from the ship *Ryndam*, arriving in the United States at Ellis Island on May 2, 1905. All of their Dutch names were immediately changed by immigration officials to American names: Willem (Wil-

liam), Geert (George), Geesje (Grace), Folkerdina (Dena), Hendrik (Henry), and Lukas (Louis). They left behind Willem's father, Geert Kamps, who was already 85 years of age. Geert lived another 17 years nearly alone in the Netherlands because almost all of his children had immigrated to the United States. To commemorate his 100th birthday, the local newspaper crafted a small article along with a photo of my great-great-grandfather (see above photo). The article mentioned that Geert had 30 grandchildren and 80 great-grandchildren. The author of the article wrote about Geert, "The all important thing is, however, that he gives the honor to God for everything and hopes in the grace of God for eternal life."

After leaving Ellis Island, Willem and Geesje arrived in Holland, Michigan near Lake Macatawa, eventually settling in Borculo, Michigan. From approximately 1906-1909, they rented a home and became members of the Borculo Christian Reformed Church (CRC). After Borculo, the Willem Kamps family moved to East Sau-



Back row, l-r: Hank, Grace, George, Dena  
Front row, l-r: Willem, Grace, Louis

gatuck, where they became members of the CRC there. While in East Saugatuck, my grandfather, George, and his brother Hank worked for a time on the Belvedere Farm. Today, that farm is the Belvedere Restaurant and Bed and Breakfast. Grandpa worked there as a teen, sleeping in the loft of the barn with the other hired hands. He preferred to stay home on the weekends.

The Kamps family, like many immigrants, lived in several rental properties and constantly moved because when Willem and Geesje fixed up a house and made it their home, the landlord would sell it. About 1915, the Willem Kamps family moved to Wayland, Michigan after purchasing nearly 80 acres. My grandfather, now 24 years of age, and his brother Lou led the cows behind the wagon of furniture from East Saugatuck to Wayland. The Kamps family then became members at the CRC mission station in Bradley, Michigan.

The Bradley CRC mission station did not have their own pastor. During the summer months the small congregation was favored regularly with excellent preaching by Calvin Seminary professors S. Volbeda and F. tenHoor, as well as other preachers who vacationed near Gun Lake and filled the pulpit on the Lord's Day. Sometime before 1920, George was made deacon. However, this was met with some resistance, as his nomination was protested by an older man in the church. This protest was based on the fact that George Kamps "was not the husband of one wife" (he was not yet married) as is a requirement in Scripture. Single men supposedly could not be officebearers! The man's protest was denied.

My maternal great-grandpa Cornelius Nobel (1863-1938) was a member in the state church in the Netherlands. Cornelius was a keen follower of Dr. Abraham Kuyper's leadership in the *Heraut* and *De Standard* and his other writings. He left the state church and joined the Gereformeerde Kerk (GKN) and was one of the founding fathers with his wife in the Strijen GKN Church in the South Holland Province.

My grandma Nellie Nobel ("Nellie") (1904-1984) and four of her siblings immigrated to the United States and arrived at Ellis Island on June 14, 1920 on the ship *S.S. Finland* with her parents Cornelius Nobel and his second wife Marie Groeneveld. Nellie's birth mother Teuntje Verzijl died in childbearing in 1907. Cornelius Nobel then purchased a place almost adjacent to the Kamps family farm in the Wayland area. Nellie became a neighbor of George and a fellow church member in Bradley CRC. Nellie, then sixteen years old, found work as a domestic servant in Grand Rapids, Michigan on Franklin Ave. for a well off and established Dutch family. Nellie worked there throughout the week and on Sunday mornings she would help the lady of the house

get her family ready for church. Finally, she would ready herself and walk to another nearby church, Eastern Ave. CRC. Nellie spoke with great admiration for her young enthusiastic minister, Herman Hoeksema, who recently took his second charge at Eastern Ave. CRC.

George and Nellie were married May 24, 1921. They were married at the parsonage of Eastern Ave. CRC by Rev. H. Hoeksema. This wedding took place during the upheaval in the churches over the instruction in the seminary by Dr. R. Janssen. Why were George and Nellie, who were living in Wayland, married in Grand Rapids, and why specifically by Rev. H. Hoeksema? First, great-grandpa Willem and great-grandma Geesje and children knew Rev. H. Hoeksema and frequented the pews in his first charge, 14th Street CRC in Holland, from 1915-1920. They were impressed with the Groninger manner of Rev. H. Hoeksema's personality and preaching: straightforward, direct, properly bold, relentless, yet dignified and consciously delivered scriptural truth in service of Christ Jesus. Second, the Kamps family lived in and among the church and read *The Banner* and *De Wachter*. Early in his ministry, Rev. Hoeksema was an associate editor of *The Banner*. Third, my grandpa George knew Rev. H. Hoeksema long before 1924. While in the Netherlands, George attended the local Christian grade school in the city of Groningen. This is the same grade school Herman Hoeksema was attending, although Herman was five years his senior.

In 1924-1925, the Kamps family became members in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). It was my great-grandpa Willem Kamps who said to his children, "*Algemeene genade ist algemeene verzoening!*" (Gener-



Back row, l-r: Nelson, Cornelius, William, Marinus, George

Middle row, l-r: the twins—Marvin, Leon

Front row, l-r: Louis, Tillie, Nellie, George Sr., Grace, John

al [common] grace is general atonement!”) He did not want to hear that kind of unbiblical preaching and thus stood with Reverends Hoeksema, H. Danhof, and G. M. Ophoff.

From 1922 until 1932 George and Nellie had seven children. In 1923, George’s brother Hank died of spinal meningitis, leaving behind two children and his wife. In 1929, their sixth child, my uncle George, was born with polio, no vaccination yet having been discovered. During this time they became members of the first Byron Center PRC. Rev. G. Ophoff would drive to the farm to give catechetical instruction to the children. Grandpa George did not have a suit for church. Due to the Depression era, he only had jeans that Nellie would launder on Saturday. Rev. Ophoff noticed his need and gave him one of his suits. Later, Rev. Ophoff inquired why George did not wear his suit. Well, simply put, George was six-feet three-inches tall and very slim built. Rev. Ophoff was much shorter and not such a thinly built man.

Then finally in 1932, George and Nellie were faced with having to give up the farm land to secure his father Willem’s farm. The bank also came to take the farm animals. The effects of the Great Depression hit the family hard. Grandpa sold his onions, which were raised on muck in the back of the farm property, to a company in Chicago. The onions were transported by rail, but George did not receive a check for his onions. Instead, he received a bill for the shipping. The onions were worthless on the market.

The George Kamps family moved six times over the course of the next 14 years and eventually had twelve children in all. In 1935, they moved to the city of Grand Rapids for work and became members of First PRC. Then in 1938, they moved to the west side of Grand Rapids and became members of Creston PRC, where Rev. H. Veldman served. About this time, George scratched his arm on a barbed wire fence at his home that eventually led to blood poisoning. This ailment left his hands deformed because penicillin was not yet formulated.

In 1939, the family moved out of the city to “apple orchard country,” north of Grand Rapids. It was here that the last two children (the twins), Leon (my Dad) and Marvin (my uncle), were born. This move removed the Kamps children from the Christian schools. The neighborhood was mostly non-Reformed people or Roman Catholics. George surely yearned to be out of the city, having been a farmer his whole life. Rev. H. Veldman had a message for George at family visitation, “George, you don’t belong here!” This was because George left the Reformed environment and specifically the Pine Street Christian School.

Not long after this admonition, George and Nellie moved back to the city with all twelve of their children, back to the Christian school and a more Reformed neighborhood. This move also benefited their second oldest son Hank, who was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1940. He could more easily get the medical care he needed. In 1944, at the young age of 21, Hank died from lung cancer that metastasized to his brain.

Then finally in 1947, the family moved to Hudsonville, Michigan into their first purchased home since the start of the Great Depression. On a Sunday, not long after moving there, a fire raged and burned a portion of the home. The Oostrink construction company that George was working for donated their time and effort for a couple of days to rebuild and restore the home. Hudsonville PRC’s diaconate helped financially. George and Nellie were profoundly grateful for this care of God’s people.

My uncle Marvin spoke of his father as a soft, kind, unassuming, sober, hardworking, and selfless man. He did not waste time with idle pursuits and self-seeking endeavors. “I learned more about spirituality from our father’s quiet submission to the Lord’s way, from his self-denying embrace of the church, and the individual saint, than I learned from most of the learned men and women that I met on life’s pathway. God used him to enrich our lives spiritually, if not intellectually, politically, and financially.”

It is evident by their challenging journey from the Netherlands to America, and ultimately into the PRC that it was only by God’s grace and mercy that the Kamps family was preserved. George and Nellie remained in Hudsonville PRC until their deaths. God blessed them with 77 grandchildren and over 230 great-grandchildren and today many, many great-great-grandchildren. Our God keeps His covenantal promises.

Presently, the majority of the George and Nellie family remain in the Western Michigan area. Our Protestant Reformed family has existed for nearly one hundred years. During its infancy, the Kamps family was led to this beautiful Reformed heritage. At the end of his book titled “Our Dad,” uncle Marvin said it well: “We had a grand rearing. We were given dedicated, loving, self-denying parents; we were placed into the church through baptism; we were instructed in the truth of the Reformed faith in catechism and the preaching and called upon to walk as God’s friends in the world. We often failed; our God never failed us but He was ever faithful.” For this we give thanks. May God graciously continue to preserve the Protestant Reformed Churches.



## Announcements continued

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express our Christian sympathy to Dan and Julie Kaiser in the death of **Mary Kaiser**, Dan's mother, who died February 9 at the age of 87. II Corinthians 5:1, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Rev. D. Noorman, President  
Dirk Westra, Clerk

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express our Christian sympathy to Don and Judi Doezema in the death of **Joyce Pastoor**, Don's sister, who died March 12 at the age of 91. Revelation 21:4, "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."

Rev. D. Noorman, President  
Dirk Westra, Clerk

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council of Loveland PRC expresses their Christian sympathy to Chad and Paula Kamminga and their children Colton, Hunter, Wyatt and Austin in the death of their father and grand father, **Randy Kamminga**. We pray that the family take comfort in the words of Revelation 21:4, "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."

Bob Brands, President  
Joel Moore, Clerk

### Call to Synod

Synod 2022 appointed Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan the calling church for the 2023 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2023 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 13, 2023 at 8:00 A.M., in SW PRC.

The Pre-synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 12, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. S. Key, president of the 2022 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Dirk Westra, email: [dirkwestra89@gmail.com](mailto:dirkwestra89@gmail.com). Phone: 616-307-6096.

Consistory of  
SW PRC  
Dirk Westra, Clerk

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

#### Rev. Carl Haak

- May 7—Marriage Is Given by God  
Genesis 2:18-24
- May 14—God's Design for Marriage  
Genesis 2:24
- May 21—The Rule of Conduct for Marriage  
Colossians 3:12, 13
- May 28—The Dress Code for Marriage  
Colossians 3:12, 13