



THE **STANDARD BEARER**

**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

Those who in any sense of the word — I do not hesitate to say it — build on the foundation of man, on the foundation of Arminian grace or any other common grace, do not build on the foundation of the church. They do not. Only the church knows those who are the sign of aut

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See "A Sure Foundation"

This cover style was used for the SB from October 1993 through October 1998, in various colors ranging from orange to green to the familiar blue. And although there were occasionally full-color covers used before this, this format introduced the use of colorful headings within the pages themselves. *Continued inside.*

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As to the logo in top left corner, managing editor Don Doezema noted that "the RFPA Board has been busy...with matters relating to the use of the logo in the SB...[T]he first *Standard Bearer*...contained a short article of introduction which affirmed that the RFPA 'is convinced that a battle has to be fought.' The armament in the logo suggests the same conviction on the part of today's board. Further, the very first article in the October 1924 issue was entitled 'Jehovah's Goodness,' and the third, 'God is God.' From the beginning, therefore, the emphasis was obvious. As is also the appropriateness of the two Greek letters incorporated into the logo today" (Vol 70, No. 1).



REFORMED
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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of First PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Genuine love

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Romans 12:9

In the preceding verses Paul gives instruction concerning the use of our gifts in the body of Christ. Each believer is wonderfully gifted by Christ. Paul gives a sampling of these gifts. There are the gifts of prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, ruling, and showing mercy. Whatever gifts believers have, they must use them cheerfully for the welfare of the other members of the body of Christ. This is the reality of the communion of the saints.

In verses 9-13 Paul indicates how we must behave ourselves in the body of Christ. We are to be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly love. We must in honor prefer one another. We must not be slothful in business. We must be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Only if we behave ourselves in this way will we be able to use our gifts for the edification of the body.

This list is introduced by the verse we consider for this meditation. “Let love be without dissimulation.” Positively, this means that we must have genuine love. And we are to show that love by abhorring that which is evil and cleaving (clinging) to that which is good.

The meaning of genuine love

The love that is spoken of here is love towards all in general. This love includes love of God, love of the brother or sister in the church, love of the unbelieving neighbor, even love of our enemy.

The love that is mentioned here is the higher form of love. The New Testament uses two words for love. The one word for love (*phileo*) is the love of feeling and emotions. Love has an emotional side to it so that we have strong feelings towards someone. This aspect of love is on the foreground when two people fall into love. The other word for love (*agape*) is the love of intellect and purpose. It emphasizes that love seeks the welfare and happiness of others, even to the point of self-sacrifice. This is the higher form of love. Whenever Scripture speaks of God’s love to us, it always uses this

word. And this higher form of love is the love mentioned here.

This is the love that God commands us in His law to have for Him and for our neighbor. The first great commandment of the law is to love God with our heart, mind, soul and strength. The second great commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. And this love must be the same love we have for God, only now directed to our neighbor.

“Let love be without dissimulation.”

The word “dissimulation” means hypocrisy. This word was used originally to describe a stage actor who pretended to be someone that he was not. From that the word came to mean a deliberate act of pretending and deceiving. You pretend to be what you are not. You pretend to have what you do not possess. This is hypocrisy.

Our love is to be without such hypocrisy.

This means, negatively, that we are not simply to put on a show of love. The love we display for God and our neighbor must not be the love of an actor that merely pretends love that is not really there. We must possess a love that is genuine and real. We must love God, and that love must be a genuine love of the heart. We must love our neighbor, and that love must be a true love of the heart.

It is very enlightening that this exhortation comes to the church. We would expect this kind of exhortation to be given to the world, not to the church. Depravity controls the hearts and lives of fallen mankind and that makes genuine love impossible. But in the church it is different. There we have the work of grace that frees us from the depravity of the Fall and makes us free to love God and the neighbor. However, because the work of grace is not finished in us, there is much love in the church that is fake and hypocritical. And so, we have the exhortation, “Let love be without hypocrisy. Let all love be genuine.”

The manifestation of genuine love

“Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.”

Notice the contrast made between good and evil.

Let's start with that which is good.

In our day it must be emphasized that there is an absolute standard of good. Many view good as relative and individualistic. Everyone determines for himself what is good. What is good for one is not necessarily good for another. And so, it is said, we must not judge each other either. This is in keeping with the fact that man has made himself the standard of good, either his reason, his desires, or his feelings.

Over against this we must emphasize that there is an ultimate good, which is God. Jesus made this clear to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:17, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God." God is the ultimate good. He is the God of all perfection and virtue. He is light and in Him is no darkness at all. He, therefore, is both the standard and the source of all that is good. God has revealed His goodness in the law. The law of the ten commandments as explained in all of Scripture reflects God's own goodness and is the standard of good for us. Consequently, those actions, attitudes, teachings, and institutions that are in harmony with God's law are good.

In contrast, we have that which is evil. If that which is good is that which agrees with God's holy law, then that which is evil is that which transgresses the law. The word *evil* emphasizes especially that which is malicious, delights in injury, and is hurtful to others. Mark 7:21-23 gives us an example of such evil, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man."

The Word of God speaks of abhorring the evil and cleaving to the good.

To abhor the evil means that you hate evil. You hate all the evil of the world that you find around you. You hate the evil that you find in your own life. But to abhor the evil means also that you separate yourself from evil. You separate yourself from the evil actions of others so that you do not participate in them. You separate yourself from those who do evil. And you do so because you hate that which is evil.

Instead, we are to cleave to that which is good. The word translated "to cleave" comes from a word that means to glue one thing to another. It is used in the New Testament to express the fact that some joined themselves to the apostle: "Howbeit certain men *clave* unto him, and believed" (Acts 17:34). It is used to express the fact that in marriage a man is joined to his wife and becomes one flesh with her, as in Matthew 19:5, "And said, For this cause shall a man leave

father and mother, and shall *cleave* to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?" Finally, it is used to express our union with Christ by faith as, for example, in I Corinthians 6:17, "But he that is *joined* unto the Lord is one spirit."

In like manner we must cling to the good. This means that we join ourselves to Jesus Christ in whom all the goodness of God is found. We do this by the faith God gives to His own. Having joined ourselves to Christ by faith, we join ourselves to those good things that Christ works as our Savior. We join ourselves to Christ's church that faithfully proclaims the gospel, administers the sacraments, and exercises Christian discipline. Having joined ourselves to Christ's church, we join ourselves to the fellowship of the saints found in His church. We join ourselves to godly friends. We join ourselves in marriage to a godly partner who reflects the goodness of God. Having joined ourselves to all these things, we also participate in the good works that these good things produce.

This requires that we abhor and separate ourselves from that which is evil. One cannot cling to the good and the evil at the same time. The one excludes the other. Either you cling to that which is good and abhor that which is evil, or you cling to the evil and abhor that which is good.

This abhorring what is evil and clinging to what is good is how genuine love manifests itself. As we have seen, love is the great commandment of the law. This love is a love that seeks the glory of God and the welfare of the neighbor. The various commandments of the law simply show the believer how to live out his love before God and his neighbor. By the keeping of the various commandments of the law in the power of Jesus Christ the believer glorifies his God and does good to his neighbor. And so, if love will be genuine, it will move us to do the good things of the law and to abhor the evil that is contrary to the law.

Let no one that is embracing evil say that he loves God or his neighbor. His life shows differently.

Let us all show the genuine character of our love by abhorring and separating ourselves from evil, while we cling to that which is good.

The power of genuine love

The power to live and maintain a genuine love is found only in God's love to us in Jesus Christ.

Of ourselves we have not the power of genuine love. The Fall left us depraved, inclined to hate God and the neighbor. In our fallen state we are able to love the neighbor outwardly, but not with a genuine love that reflects a deep love of God.

But God has shown us genuine love in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ God seeks our salvation and welfare. God even sacrificed His own Son to accomplish this. This love of God to us is the pattern for our love.

It is also the power for our love. God's love creates love in us and empowers us to love.

Let us live and maintain and manifest a genuine love in the power of God's love to us in Jesus Christ.



Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Hudsonville PRC

The Sabbath: Delighting in the gospel's rest

Churches need to fight for the Sabbath. Battles are not pleasant but they are important, and God's Word makes clear that the Sabbath is always at risk, either of being lost from neglect or being destroyed by hypocritical legalists. Both the "do-what-you-want-because-Jesus-fulfilled-the-law" Sabbath breakers, and the "you-may-walk-slowly-but-not-swiftly-on-Sunday" legalists are enemies of the Sabbath, worth battling fiercely. It does take fights to preserve the Sabbath. And it is worth noting that, although we must warn against both—Sabbath neglect as well as Sabbath formalism—Jesus' main concern was with the legalists. He went out of His way to contend with them; by my count, seven times.

So read the instructive history of the Sabbath battles. Read of King James' "war" against the Sabbath in his 1618 *Book of Sports* that allowed sport on Sunday (yes, King James of the KJV). Be familiar with the 1619 Dordt decisions, made on the heels of King James' decrees. Learn about the Puritans' stance on the Sabbath and ask whether it is legalistic or biblical. Compare the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster standards on the fourth commandment. Teach your children about other denominations' strong stance on the Sabbath in former days—for example, the CRC's deposition of a minister in 1924 for false Sabbath doctrine and their exhortations to hold the fort against "the onslaught of secularism" as late as 1974. Elders, remember our own Sabbath controversy in 1975 and remind your pastor when he gets to Lord's Day 38 of his calling to walk the old paths.

The PRCA and her sisters are not alone today. Friends in other denominations are fighting the good fight for the Sabbath. Just last night the magazine of a small Presbyterian denomination came across my desk. The cover article told a story of a tiny, struggling church

with the hopeful addition of a large family that would increase by about 30% the size of the church. To their great disappointment, after a few months the visitors stopped coming because Little League baseball started, on Sundays. The family would not attend church during baseball, and the church would not take "not-during-baseball-season" members. They suffered for the Sabbath. There are others like that. Pray for them.

So we battle.

But the pain of battle will not seem worth it unless we know the *value* of what we fight for. And the Sabbath has a value that is worth putting in bold.

There are many reasons to call the Sabbath a "delight" (Is. 58:13). Let me cite five of them as we enter the year of our Lord 2024.

Delight in God: His creation!

I mention delighting in God's *creative* work first because, although creation is not our main focus on the Sabbath, it is the origin of the Sabbath. When God finished creating, He rested from creating, delighted in the wonder and beauty of it, and commanded Adam and Eve to join Him. "Work six days and on the seventh rest with Me; delight in Me through My wonder-works." Imagine Adam and Eve walking with God, seeing for the first time the beauty of the colorful birds with long scarlet tails and colorful beaks, the playful leaping of a multitude of creatures who were friendly to each other and to them, the extravagant beauty of God's garden that no artist today could portray! From the beginning, the "Sabbath was made for man" (and woman) to behold the beauty of God in His creation.

I judge it to be an overstatement, therefore, to say that because our *main* Sabbath delight ought to be in God's work of *re-creation*—our redemption from Egypt's

sin-bondage—therefore Sunday is not at all for rejoicing in the beauty of God’s *original* creative works. If this morning’s full moon (December 27, 2023) would have been shining last Sunday morning, a half-hour stroll in its light before church would have been a blessed start to the day. “Lord, our Lord, Thy glorious name all Thy wondrous works proclaim.... Moon and stars in shining height nightly tell their Maker’s might”! (Psalter no. 15, Ps. 8). Proper response to the Sabbath breaker who wants to spend all day hiking in God’s creation does not require prohibiting enjoyment of God’s creation (marred as it may be by man). Fight legalism. Joy in creation is a good part of the Sabbath.

Delight in God: His re-creation!

But God’s main work we delight in, of course, is His work of redemption from sin’s bondage, of His re-creation of us by Christ, of the restoration of sweet rest in Him. This is the gospel, and it makes clear the inseparable connection between Sabbath and salvation, between the fourth commandment and the gospel. The advance from Exodus 20 to Deuteronomy 5 in revelation of the Sabbath command shows that God was preparing His people to rest from the *spiritual* toil of sin and rejoice in His work of Jesus’ redemption of us by His cross. “You are weary and burdened with sin—its horrible guilt, awful shame, powerful grasp. You have no rest in its slavery and could not deliver yourselves. So follow My Redeemer out of Egypt. I will baptize you unto Him in the Red Sea. My eternal rest in the land of promise awaits. Rest in Me and remember what I have done to give you this rest!”

Love for the Sabbath, therefore, is love for the gospel. And if we lose the Sabbath, we will lose the gospel.

So in my pre-dawn Sunday walk I want to meditate on the moon’s reflection of the sun, but remembering that *both* are God’s illustrations of His gospel. Sunday’s main business is to bask in the light of God’s Son and pray that it be reflected in me. There is healing in His wings (Mal. 4:2), life-giving power in His rays. When I hear the news that my warfare is accomplished because Christ has made peace for me with God, I rest. What relief! My sins are covered. God approves me, receives me, embraces me, loves me, in His Son.

If God delighted in His first creation, He especially delights in His Son! And so do we, with Him. What great things God has done in Jesus! And He gave us a whole day to rejoice in that greater work. “Six days work and one day rest with Me as we delight in My wonder-work in Jesus.”

In that light, I understand that the *gospel* explains why the church worships on Sunday and not Saturday.

Christ rose in gospel victory on the *first* day of the week (Luke 24:1) and this *first* day is called the *Lord’s* day (Rev. 1:10). Jesus met with His disciples to explain His gospel on the first day (John 20:19, 26). Christ returned to His church to *apply* His salvation on that day (Acts 2), and on that day the apostles gathered to worship (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:1, 2). In other words, the *further* advance in Sabbath doctrine from the Old to the New Testament is that, although the fourth commandment is not abrogated by Christ’s work, the *day* is changed to honor His salvation work. Every day of the week is His, but Sunday is His in a special way. In gratitude I gladly devote the whole day to Him.

Delight in God: His Word!

If the Sabbath is about gospel *rest* in God through Christ, gospel *preaching* should stand at the center of the Sabbath. Preaching gives rest, which explains why in the Christian tradition public worship occupied much of the Lord’s Day and preaching occupied much of the public worship. That is because of the great delight in hearing God speak of His love to us, His Son’s redemption of us, His eternal purposes for us, His promises to preserve us, His wisdom to work all things for our good and His glory. We feed, even feast on His word. If the Old Testament feasts were Sabbaths, the New Testament Sabbaths are great feasts.

In other words, by gospel preaching I actually rest. God creates faith in me by preaching (Lord’s Day 25) and it is by faith that I enter rest (Heb. 4). God heals struggling people by His Word: women bent over with infirmity stand upright (Luke 13); men’s withered hands function again (Mark 3); those blind from birth see (John 9); and lame folk walk (John 5)—all miracles Jesus performed by His *Word* on the *Sabbath*. The spiritual healing these miracles pointed to still takes place by faithful gospel preaching.

Let’s pray then for preachers who are able to prepare sermon-banquets for the sons and daughters of King Jesus. As the Catechism puts it (Lord’s Day 38), obedience to the fourth commandment is to maintain the ministry of the gospel and maintain the schools that prepare gospel ministers.

Delight in God: His saints!

The wealth of Sabbath rest is immeasurably increased *among* the saints. So when the Catechism explains that obedience to the fourth commandment means that we “frequent the church of God,” it does not only mean, “go to the *place* of worship,” but also “be among the worshipping *people*.”

Praying and singing with the saints rests us. Standing among God's people, listen to them encourage us ("This mighty God of grace is ours for evermore," Psalter #133), teach us ("Yea, blest is he who makes God's law his portion and delight," Psalter #1), exhort us ("Lay upon God's altar good and loving deeds," Psalter #7), comfort us ("Not lightly does the Lord permit His chosen ones to die," Psalter #313). Join heart and tongue with them to confess, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth...." This is worship and this is our rest, *among* the saints.

So the communion of saints on the Sabbath is not primarily in the "social hall" after worship is finished, but is in the *sanctuary* where the saints gather. Even before public worship begins, as the people file in—alone or with their children—we "consider" (Heb. 10:25) them all and pray for them one by one. How good and pleasant—restful! —when we dwell in sweet accord.

Mercy to the needy!

And then, how blessed when we can follow the example of our Lord who spent the Sabbath seeking out lame, blind, bent, weak, and oppressed folk to help them. Pure religion is visiting the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, comforting the lonely and bringing hope to the dying. Not only on Sunday, but especially then.

So let's grow out of and away from the selfish notion that the Sabbath is mainly for *me*, and grow into the lovely life that exists for others. Let's invite to dinner those who cannot return the invitation, comfort those who will not pay us back (Luke 14:13ff.), and pray with those whose hearts are sad (James 4:14). The nursing homes may have some saints whose families are faithful to visit, but other residents are not so blessed. For Sunday preparation on Saturday night, maybe we can go through the church directory to make some good plans for mercy on the Sabbath?

In conclusion, let's:

1. Grow in love for the Sabbath. If we lose the Sabbath, we lose the gospel.
2. Remember that resting on *one* day enables me to rest on *all* of them.
3. Learn to despise the legalism we find in our nature. It is a shameful revelation of gospel ignorance when we add burdensome and extra-biblical requirements to the commandment or imagine that keeping the day somehow gains God's favor. The Sabbath is so rich, let's not choke it out with legalism.
4. Focus on Christ, who did not abolish the commandment but fulfilled it. He obeyed it for us so that we

would not be cursed for sin against it, so that we may have His perfect righteousness of keeping it, and so that we are not only eager but able to keep it as He did.

5. Teach our children by good example. With reasonable restrictions in the background and the high privilege of rest on the foreground, make the day a delight for them. Let's help them finish their work on Saturday so that they are not tempted to return to it on the Lord's Day. Reading, singing, speaking of the sermon, and visiting the lonely saints, even if it is a chore for them in their youth, will become a delight to them by God's grace in years to come.

6. Finally, since the proof of the pudding is in the eating, as they say, let's taste and see that the Lord is good. To learn how sweet God's law is and that a Sabbath day in God's sanctuary is better than a thousand in a stadium, we just need to live the Sabbath rest... *all* the days of our lives, and especially on Sunday. Then, when I hear the call to prayer, there will be joy and gladness in my soul! When I take God's testimonies as an heritage forever, they will be the rejoicing of my heart (Psalm 119:111).

May God preserve the Sabbath among us!

A Psalm or Song for the sabbath day

It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High:

To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night, Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery; upon the harp with a solemn sound.

For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands.

O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.

Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God.

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Psalm 92



A word fitly spoken

Rev. Justin Smidstra, pastor of First PRC in Holland, Michigan

Snow

When the snow flurries fall at this time of year, we are often not very happy to see them. The cold can be unpleasant. The shoveling can be a nuisance. The roads become slippery and travel treacherous. The snow causes some extra parental anxiety as the new drivers in the family head off to school. As the winter months wear on, one way for us to be more cheerful is to think upon the snow in a different way and look at it through the lens of God's Word.

In the snow God reveals something of the greatness of His power: "for he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth" (Job 37:6). The snow obeys no other. But like the wind and the waves, it knows its Maker's voice. "Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word" (Ps. 148:8). The snow is cold, but the virtuous woman "is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet" (Prov. 31:21). In summer, snow is unseasonable (Prov. 26:1), but the "cold of snow in the time of harvest" is not unwelcome. There is a beautiful divine artistry on display when the snow falls. The Lord "giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes" (Ps. 147:16). With a host of innumerable snowflakes God Himself blankets the earth, turning winter's dull browns and grays into brilliant white. The snow is yet another character in God's elegant book, giving glory to the Creator. Who can fully grasp the mysterious ways of God? After all, "hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?" (Job 38:22).

The beauty of the snow comes out especially in the symbolism God's Word attaches to it. The brilliant whiteness of the snow makes it a suitable picture of unspotted purity, holiness, and cleanliness. Thus Job says "if I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean" (Job 9:30). And Jeremiah, remembering Jerusalem's former days, laments "her Nazarites were purer than snow" (Lam. 4:7); but now "their visage is blacker than a coal" (Lam. 4:8). When the holy angel appeared from the presence of God to announce the resurrection of Christ, "his countenance was like lightning,



and his raiment white as snow" (Matt. 28:3). Something of the holy purity of God Himself radiated from the face and garments of His messenger. The glory of our Savior's deity and His essential purity glowed through the veil of His assumed humanity on the Mount of Transfiguration, where "His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them" (Mark 9:3). Jesus our Savior is pure and holy. In the fullness of time He was born of the Virgin, assuming our human flesh, becoming like unto His brethren in all things, sin excepted. The Word made flesh, whiter than the snow. Yet He came to be besmirched with the grime of our guilt and the dirt of our iniquities. Christ came to take our scarlet sins upon Himself and shed His crimson blood upon the cross, that we might be washed whiter than the snow (Ps. 51:7). Christ came to take our filthy rags, and exchange them for the snow-white robe of His righteousness, the spotless garments of salvation. This is the gospel message, the good tidings of great joy to you, Christian reader: "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Is. 1:18).

When the snow falls in the winter, see it through the lens of Scripture. See God's sign in it. Think upon your scarlet sins and stains of guilt, which no water, not even purest snow water, could ever wash away. Think upon the unspeakable gift of Christ, and upon His blood shed on Calvary for you, which washes away your sins and guilty stains, making you, in God's holy eyes, whiter than the whitest snow. The snow is a beautiful reminder. What tidings of comfort and joy! What peace that passes understanding!



Taking heed to the doctrine

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

The church: The kingdom of God

Beginning with this article I plan to follow a little different approach. There have been discussions recently about the need for something like a curriculum that could be used with those who express interest in the Protestant Reformed Churches. With that need in mind, I plan to go through the doctrines at a more rapid pace.

I 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. 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 are interested in the PRC. 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 cer-

emony, a miracle, a symbol, or whatever the illustration may be, 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 bullet-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 continuously 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 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.¹

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

1 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).

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 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.²

God saved us that we might live not unto ourselves but unto Him. "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritu-

2 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, "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.

al 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 offer 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.



When thou sittest in thine house

Mr. Tom Cammenga, member of Faith PRC in Jenison, Michigan

Bitter weeping and gracious restoration

It is safe to say that each one of us has cried at some point in our lives. It is equally safe to say that each one of us has cried many times. Certainly, when we were babies, this was the case. But even as we matured as young children, teenagers, and even now as adults, there are occasions upon which we cry. And those occasions vary greatly; sometimes there is sadness, other times physical pain, and still others when there is happiness and great joy. All of these can and do often result in tears.

Whether any of us can say that we have wept, and that bitterly, is another story all together. Often, we put these two alongside one another, crying and weeping, and think of them as meaning the same thing; but they are often far different. When one cries, it is often simply to express a shallow emotion such as distress, pain, or sorrow. Think of a child with a skinned knee or a bruised elbow. When one weeps, it is often a shedding of tears to express deep, deep sorrow. Think of what we read in Jeremiah 31:15, which was fulfilled in Matthew 2:18, after Herod had ordered the slaughter of all the children two years old and under in Bethlehem: “Thus saith the LORD, a voice was heard in Rama, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.” Or think of Jesus as He wept over the

city of Jerusalem as it is recorded in Luke 19:42 or His weeping at the grave of Lazarus (John 11: 35). Each of these instances was characterized by deep grief.

When was the last time you or I wept? For some, it has been very recently, for others, it has been a long time. But let’s make this question more specific. When was the last time that you or I wept over our sin? And then, let’s add to that, when have we wept *bitterly* over our sin?

Peter, the same man who not long before his fall had made that beautiful confession recorded in Matthew 16:16, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” now, having heard the cock crow and having met the knowing and hurt-filled eyes of his Lord, according to Luke 22:62, left the hall and wept bitterly. This brings to mind the words of Isaiah 53:3 in their description of Jesus: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

We can only imagine the uncontrollable and inconsolable grief that Peter must have experienced. After having boasted so proudly that he would remain with Jesus even if it meant prison and death, he had not only fled with the rest of the disciples when Jesus was taken into custody, but now he had in very word and in

the hearing of Jesus denied that he had even known his Lord. As fellow believers, our hearts break for Peter. Surely what grief he would endure over the next three days, not only because of his denial of Jesus, but also because of Jesus' crucifixion and death. But oh, how God would use this time and these circumstances to refine this proud, bold, and impetuous man, whose confession would be the rock upon which Christ would build His church (Matt. 16:18). And oh, how God uses those times in our own lives and in our own families, and even in the church, to make us into those whom He has determined us to be. Think for a moment about a very difficult trial that the Lord has led you through and ask yourself whether you would be who you are today had the Lord withheld that trial? Would your faith be what it is today? Would your love for your Savior be what it is today? Would the church be what it is today? In each case, the answer is no. Through these hardships and, yes, even those circumstances in which we have sinned, when by His grace we turn to Him in true sorrow and repentance, He refines us as the gracious and merciful sovereign Refiner.

Do you and I sorrow over our sin, every sin, as Peter did? Well, we might say, certainly most of the sins I commit are not nearly as serious as the sin of Peter. Here was a man who had spent the last three years of his life in intimate communion with Jesus, had sat at His feet and been taught by Him, had eaten with Him, and seen with his own eyes the many miracles that He performed. How, we wonder, could he have so coldly denied Him?

But, beloved people of God, we must see ourselves in Peter. Do you? Do I? We too have spent much time in intimate communion with Jesus, far more actually than did Peter. We too have sat at His feet many times and heard His voice. We too have eaten with Him. We too have seen the many miracles that He has performed. And yes, we too have denied, sometimes vehemently, that we know Him. You see, every time you and I sin, no matter the magnitude of the sin in our own eyes, we deny the Lord Jesus Christ. We deny that He is King and we make ourselves king instead, and our denial then, is really no different from that of Peter.

Peter's weeping was bitter, and this was the case because Peter knew his actions were sinful. This he was, in fact, convicted of when the cock crew, bringing to his mind the words that Jesus had spoken to him only a short time before. He had not simply done something terrible from a human point of view, but he had sinned against the God whom he loved. Those bitter tears of sorrow that ran down Peter's face and fell to the ground were also evidence of his deep sorrow over that sin and

the true repentance that goes hand in hand with such sorrow. How different this was from the shallow and self-centered sorrow that was shown by Judas—a sorrow not of repentance but of regret.

But God is gracious and merciful. Peter was not left to suffer forever in his sin and sorrow. In a very beautiful way, the very same circumstances that surrounded Peter's denial and resulted in his sorrow and grief were the means determined by God to remove the guilt and sin of Peter, and of you and me. The Lord Jesus Christ took that sin and guilt away through His death and resurrection. Imagine the impression that must have been left on Peter when by the grace of God he came to know and understand that glorious truth! John 15:13 expresses it: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

The next time we hear of Peter is after the resurrection of Jesus. But what, we wonder, happened to Peter between his denial of Christ and the resurrection? No doubt, Peter's denial was known to at least some of the other disciples. Certainly, whoever it was that let Peter into the palace of the high priest (we are not told his name) would have known, and likely others did as well. The words of the angel in Mark 16:7 would also seem to indicate this. Surely the women must have realized the significance of the angel's direction to bring this good news directly to Peter.

It is telling and good for us to notice that after Jesus' resurrection, Peter was found to be with the other disciples. He had not separated himself from them and gone on his own way in shame and sorrow. Either he had sought them out or they had sought him out. Likely, it was both. The communion of the saints, within the family and within the church is so precious. And it was that communion of the saints that Peter, as a believer, experienced and where he undoubtedly found compassion and words of comfort and assurance of his forgiveness. This is the great beauty of the family and of the church. Both are places of refuge where we can and do find protection and help when we are in need. Certainly, neither are perfect. This was the case with the other disciples, as is seen in the fact that they too had denied Jesus. No, they had not done so in words, but their actions in deserting Him were no less a denial than that of Peter. Our families and the church are not perfect because they are made up of sinners such as ourselves. And yet, God was pleased to use those imperfect disciples, and He is pleased to use the imperfect members of our families and the church for the good and comfort of the other members. We must never forget that or discount the great blessing that God has given us in our families and in the church.

Jesus too, had something to say to Peter. The angel at the tomb that Resurrection morning had a word from Christ to Peter, and that word was given to the women to pass on. What was it? “But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you” (Mark 16:7). The disciples, *and* Peter! Be sure that you bring this wonderful news to the disciples, but especially to Peter! Imagine what amazing joy must have filled Peter’s heart at hearing those words. Not only had his Lord, the Lord whom he had denied, risen from the dead, but the instruction of the angel had been to tell him specifically. The heavy and burdened soul of this beloved child of God was suddenly and graciously lifted and renewed with the hope of salvation that the resurrection is for every believer.

We see sometime later in John 21:7 the reaction of Peter to the resurrection of his Savior and the knowledge of his forgiveness. “Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher’s coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.” Peter’s enthusiasm to see Jesus, to talk with Him and to have fellowship with Him shows us that, although he has been humbled and refined, he is still Peter. Oh, that we had such enthusiasm to be with and talk to Jesus and to fellowship with Him! How easy is it for us to set aside our Bibles and to become lax in our devotions, whether they be family devotions, devotions as married couples, or personal devotions. How easily we make excuses for not being in God’s house on Sunday to hear our Lord through the preaching. May Peter’s enthusiasm be ours, and may God, by His Holy Spirit, stir up in our hearts that enthusiasm.

Jesus had another word for Peter that is recorded in John 21. Three times in succession, Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him. Each time Peter becomes more and more grieved by the question posed to him by Jesus. Notice that Jesus asks him three times whether he loves Him. This certainly is no accident and surely Peter was re-

minded by this how many times he had denied Jesus and, therefore, he was grieved. And yet, Jesus does not leave him in that grief. Instead, Jesus commissions him to “feed my sheep,” and thereby confirms to Peter personally, but also publicly to the other disciples that were present, that Peter’s sin has been forgiven and now he, with the other disciples, must proclaim that same gospel of forgiveness and salvation to His Church.

What, beloved saints, is our answer to our Lord when He asks us, “Lovest thou me?” Do we love Him with the love that Peter expressed by dropping all that

he was doing and going to Him as quickly as he could? Do we long to be with Him and to hear His voice? Do we endeavor to show His love for us in the love that we show to others, especially to those within our families and within the church? Husbands and wives, do you show that love to one another? Parents, do you show that love to your children? Children, do you show that love to each other, and to your parents? Do we show that love to the member of the church with whom we may not always agree?

May our answer be the answer of Peter in John 21:17, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” And may we too, as Peter and the other disciples did, be ready and eager to share the good news of forgiveness and salvation that is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and by the grace of God, to live out that salvation in true thankfulness.

Peter’s enthusiasm to see Jesus, to talk with Him and to have fellowship with Him shows us that, although he has been humbled and refined, he is still Peter. Oh, that we had such enthusiasm to be with and talk to Jesus and to fellowship with Him! How easy is it for us to set aside our Bibles and to become lax in our devotions, whether they be family devotions, devotions as married couples, or personal devotions. How easily we make excuses for not being in God’s house on Sunday to hear our Lord through the preaching. May Peter’s enthusiasm be ours, and may God, by His Holy Spirit, stir up in our hearts that enthusiasm.



I believe

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Gender dysphoria and transgenderism (6) “Religious” objections to the Bible’s teaching on gender

Previous article in this series: January 1, 2024, 182.

Introduction

Now that we have thoroughly studied the Bible’s teaching on sex and gender, we are facing transgender activism’s “biblical” arguments that attempt to undo all that we have seen of the Scriptures’ teaching. Last time we dealt with the argument that appeals to Galatians 3:28. This time we face the argument that attempts to explain away Genesis 1:27, “male and female created he them.”

In order to argue against Scripture’s teaching on sex and gender, transgenderism has to go back to the beginning in an attempt to undo God’s work creating sex and gender at the beginning of the world. This is necessary because sex and gender are creation ordinances, laws God has written into His world at the very creating of it, and that apply to all people of all times and all places.

We already saw something of this attempt to erase the work of God in the beginning in the previous article on transgenderism’s twisting of Galatians 3:28. There we saw that some transgender activists argue that God originally made Adam androgynous. Then, God divided Adam into two sexes, male and female. But since in Christ “there is neither male nor female” the gospel of transgenderism is that God takes away the boundaries of sex and gender so that humanity can get back to the way it was when Adam was sex-less and genderless. This false teaching, odd as it seems even to have to address it, makes man fallen before the Fall, and refuses to acknowledge the Bible’s own understanding of creation (Matt. 19:4).

But there is another approach transgender advocates take in their attempt to erase the sex and gender binary¹ in Genesis 1:27. This one bypasses the work of Christ,

arguing instead that gender dysphoria and transgender behavior are themselves part of God’s good creation in the beginning.

The argument

Transgenderism’s argument is that when Genesis 1:27 tells us God created human beings “male and female,” these terms do not limit God’s creation to the strict binary of male or female. The movement offers three “proofs” for this outlandish notion.

First, transgender activists argue that there is an “in-betweenness” to the other binaries given in Genesis 1, and therefore there must be an “in-betweenness” to the male and female gender binary as well. Genesis 1:5 tells us God created the binary of “day” and “night.” And yet, every twenty-four hour period also includes something *in-between* day and night that is really a combination of both day and night. There is dawn, where it is kind of night *and* kind of day. There is also dusk, where it is kind of day *and* kind of night.

In addition to that example, activists point out that in Genesis 1:10 we read of God creating the binary of the dry land He calls “earth,” and the waters He calls “seas.” Yet, when we look around us there are also formations on the earth that are something in-between earth and sea that are a combination of both. There are swamps that are kind of land *and* kind of sea. There are fjords and lakes and rivers that are elements of both sea *and* earth in that they are inland but are waterways.

The binaries of day and night, earth and sea, represent the poles that speak of the majority of created reality. But the presence of what is in-between tells us the Bible does not mean to represent *all* possibilities by giving the binaries of day and night, earth and sea. In the same way, therefore, the binary of male and female represent the majority of what kinds of humans are on the earth. However, in-between these two poles the Scriptures acknowledge there are people who are elements of both: kind of male *and* kind of female.

¹ “Binary” refers to two opposite poles. Here the reference is to the *only* two and opposite sexes and genders God created, male and female.

The creation story in Genesis sets the broad parameters of the world, stating the poles of a series of continuums: day and night; earth and sky; land and sea; plant, animal, and human; male and female. But we are intended to bring to this text our knowledge of the rich variation of the natural world.... The same holds true for gender: male and female may be the extremes of a continuum, but there are many variations along the way.²

Transgender activists argue therefore, that “male and female created he them” is the figure of speech known as a “merism.” Used in various places in Scripture, a merism employs two contrasting words to give a totality that encompasses those words *and everything in-between*. In Psalm 139, David says to God, “Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising.” Here is a merism. Sitting down and rising up are two opposite poles that represent everything about David’s life including what is in-between. Just like in downsitting *and* uprising, the “and” is not meant to exclude any other option like squatting or being on one’s knees,³ so in “male *and* female created he them,” “the ‘and’ encompasses a spectrum by pointing to the two ends of the spectrum.”⁴

The second “proof” that “male and female created he them” does not limit human beings to male and female sex and gender, is the argument that when God created human beings, the Bible says He created them “in his own image” (Gen 1:27). And since God is multigendered (so the argument goes), therefore, humans created in His image must also be multigendered. God is called Father, but he is also described as a female, as in Deuteronomy 32:11-12

where God is compared to a mother eagle. If God, the original, is multigendered, then humans who are made in His image must be multigendered too.

The third “proof” for the notion that “male and female created he them” includes other genders, is that God’s purpose in creating a gender different from Adam was to cure Adam’s loneliness. The point is not that Adam and Eve were opposite genders, the point is that Adam was lonely and needed companionship. Therefore, if the void of loneliness can be filled by the same gender, or someone who is a combination of both genders, God is pleased so long as the loneliness is kept at bay.

Answering the arguments

In spite of these arguments, the undeniable truth is that when the Bible says, “male and female created He them,” God’s creation ordinance is that human beings are and ever shall be only of the male or female sex, and, therefore, must express only two genders, male and female.

Yes, there are merisms in Scripture, and there are also swamps that are elements of both earth and sea; yet there is no possible way “male and female” is a merism that includes other “in-between” genders. The Bible itself speaks of parts of God’s creation that are in-between earth and sea as combinations of both. Ezekiel 47:11 speaks of “miry places” or

swamps. The Bible itself also speaks of dusk and dawn as realities that are combinations of night and day as in Deuteronomy 16:6. But the Scriptures acknowledge no other sex or gender than male or female. In fact, when the Old Testament refers back to this verse, it always does so to show that only in these two distinct sexes and genders is there a pair that can be joined together (Gen 5:2, 6:19, 7:3, 9, 16). When Jesus refers to this verse in the New Testament in Matthew 19:4-5, He does so to show that these two sexes were made as the only two (and compatible) sexes, because “they twain shall be one flesh.”

Regarding the second argument, the answer is that God is *not* multigendered. Though God does not have a body and sex characteristics (Jesus does!) the Scriptures identify God as exclusively one end of the male-female

But the Scriptures acknowledge no other sex or gender than male or female. In fact, when the Old Testament refers back to this verse, it always does so to show that only in these two distinct sexes and genders is there a pair that can be joined together (Gen 5:2, 6:19, 7:3, 9, 16). When Jesus refers to this verse in the New Testament in Matthew 19:4-5, He does so to show that these two sexes were made as the only two (and compatible) sexes, because “they twain shall be one flesh.”

2 Justin Sabia-Tanis, “Holy Creation, Wholly Creative,” in James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds., *Understanding Transgender Identities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 202-203.

3 In other words, David is not saying God only knows when he sits down and stands up, but God does not know when he is squatting or on his knees. Psalm 139:2 is a true merism.

4 Eliel Cruz, “Opinion | Where in the Bible Does It Say You Can’t Be Transgender? Nowhere.” *Washington Post*, October 27, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/08/26/where-in-the-bible-does-it-say-you-cant-be-transgender-nowhere/>.

binary: male. He is exclusively called “Father” in the Scriptures. And even if the Bible uses metaphors comparing Him at times to a female, who with any modicum of honesty in their interpretation of Scripture would take that to mean God *is* also female? Paul says that he gave birth to the Galatian churches and feels like he has to labor in birth pangs to give birth to them again in Galatians 4:19. Does the fact that he compares himself to a mother mean we ought to conclude that Paul was identifying himself as multigendered? Such a conclusion is not only untenable, but also laughable. Even more laughable is the attempt to apply the same to God.

Regarding the third argument, it is true that part of God’s purpose in creating a help meet for Adam was to answer Adam’s loneliness. But the point is also *how* God ended Adam’s loneliness. He did so by creating one person with a specific complementary sex and gender, with whom he could become one flesh. There is a false dichotomy in arguing that God’s point in creating Eve was *not* to establish two sexes and genders, *but only* to end Adam’s loneliness. The point was *both*, as Christ’s own reference in Matthew 19:4 to what God did in Genesis 1 indicates. God accomplished the latter by means of the former.

Besides all this, there is a confusion of categories in the very argument transgender activism makes here. The argument is that their misinterpretation of Genesis 1:27 shows there are other *genders* besides male and female. But the argument is based on the attempt to prove that a text speaking about *sex* refers to more than male and female. The only way one could make an argument for more than two *genders* on the basis of a passage that speaks of *sexes*, is if gender and sex are united. They are! Yet, transgenderism says sex and gender are not united. This undermines the entire argument before it begins.

The reality is that no matter how one *feels* about being male or female, he/she is still either male or female in sex and gender. It is impossible to be anything but male or female. As we proved previously, every cell in the human body is either male or female. No matter what one does to the body, or how one dresses, a person cannot change the fact that God has created him/

her one or the other of a sexed binary. Male and female created He them! The fact that a small portion of the population has feelings that are not in line with their sex does not mean that there is in fact more than one sex and gender. Furthermore, God calls the attempt to express oneself as a different gender from one’s sex sin (Deut. 22:5, I Cor. 11:14-15).

Lesson to learn

Before I conclude this article, there is one important lesson for believers. God’s people need to be aware of and always on the lookout for the false notion that God’s Word can be interpreted however an individual or group want to interpret it. There are legitimate differences of interpretation within creedal bounds and there are illegitimate differences of interpretation. And it is naive to think that everyone who calls himself/herself a Christian desires to look at the Bible honestly in order to discern what it indeed says. It is in our rebellious nature to twist the Scriptures to justify our sinful behavior and to handle our guilt not by repenting, but by trying to convince ourselves that we really have done nothing wrong.

For this reason, it is so important that God’s people interpret the Scriptures *together with the faithful church of the present and the past*. It is certainly true that the priesthood of all believers means that every individual believer has the right to interpret the Scriptures for himself/herself. However, the priesthood of believers is

not license that allows anyone to interpret the Scriptures *incorrectly* (even at Bible study in church!). Any sober acknowledgment of our deep rebelliousness and desire to hide behind the fig leaves of our excuses will lead us to interpret the Scriptures in the context of the believing body of Christ. Doing so, may *we* be willing to admit where those same Scriptures expose *our own* sin, and come humbly before the foot of the cross, pleading for the blood of the crucified One to cover our guilty stains.

The reality is that no matter how one feels about being male or female, he/she is still either male or female in sex and gender. It is impossible to be anything but male or female. As we proved previously, every cell in the human body is either male or female. No matter what one does to the body, or how one dresses, a person cannot change the fact that God has created him/her one or the other of a sexed binary. Male and female created He them!



Pertaining to the churches in common— PRC Contact Committee

Rev. Martyn McGeown, pastor of Providence PRC and secretary of the Contact Committee of the PRC

Manifesting true unity and catholicity

The Contact Committee (CC) exists because the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) confess “one holy catholic church.” It is, as we read in the preamble of the CC’s Constitution, “the sacred duty” of the PRC “to manifest the true unity and catholicity of the church on earth in as far as possible...with all churches which have obtained like precious faith with us, both domestic and foreign.”

Scripture urges that we should “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). We do not create unity—that is the Spirit’s work; He has created the unity of the church. We must keep it, that is, we must guard it, protect it, and watch over it. We must keep that unity in the congregation, which requires a certain kind of behavior and demeanor from us (lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, and love—v. 2); and we must keep that unity in the denomination, each congregation esteeming the other congregations, officebearers, and their members very highly in love. To that end, we must labor to put away from ourselves a suspicious attitude: that congregation is conservative, that congregation is liberal, that minister is suspect, that minister is sound; or a hyper-critical attitude; or an attitude of favoritism, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ...” which Paul calls “carnal” (I Cor. 1:12; 3:3-4).

The CC does not exist to promote congregational or denominational unity, but unity with other churches: recall that the full title of the CC is The Committee for Contact *with Other Churches*.

This means that the PRC do not view themselves as the only true churches in the world, but must be active—even eager—in seeking out other churches with whom to express unity in the faith. Our confessions teach that Christ “gathers, defends, and preserves” a church “agreeing in true faith” (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 54); and that the church is “joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same spirit” (Belgic Confession, Art. 27).

Of course, the CC—and the PRC—do not seek unity with just any church or with just any group that calls itself a church. We do not seek unity with false church-

es such as the Roman Catholic Church or grossly liberal churches such as the United Methodist Church or openly Arminian or Charismatic/Pentecostal churches. The CC seeks unity with other Reformed churches with whom there is agreement on the basis of the Word of God as summarized in the Reformed Confessions.

Beloved sisters

First, the CC maintains a relationship with sister churches in other lands, namely with the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland (CPRCNI—our sister since 2007), the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore (CERCS—our sister since 2011), and the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP—our sister since 2018). A sister-church relationship means, according to the CC Constitution, “mutual acknowledgment of offices,” “mutual acknowledgment of membership attests,” “the delegation and reception of delegates to the broadest assemblies of sister churches,” and [that we] “take heed to one another’s life as churches.” A sister church relationship is established, “only with those foreign churches of whom we are assured not only that they accept the Reformed standards [which include the Westminster Standards, see Synod 1985, Art. 23—MMcG] as their basis, but that they indeed maintain them in their ecclesiastical life.”

In practice this means that the CC maintains friendly correspondence with our foreign sisters and that a delegation is sent to visit our sisters, preferably once a year. That delegation usually conducts church visitation at the sister’s request according to Article 44 of the Church Order. The CC also invites our sister churches to send a delegate to our annual synod, which they often do, enriching our synod considerably; such delegates have an advisory vote on all matters, so that we can hear their insights as the synod makes its deliberations.

The CC is happy to report that arrangements have been made to visit our three sisters—at the time of publication, two of the three visits should have taken place already—and our relationships remain strong.

One of our sisters, the Protestant Reformed Church in the Philippines, has only one pastor, Rev. Vernon Ibe, and two congregations, Berean PRC and Provident PRC. Part of the CC's work at this time is seeking to help our sister with pulpit supply for her vacant congregation, Provident PRC.

Highly esteemed corresponding relationships

Second, the CC maintains a corresponding relationship with one church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia (EPCA—relationship established in 2009). A corresponding relationship is one where “significant and broad agreement exists” but where “differences are important enough to preclude a sister-church relationship.” Our relationship with the EPCA is not as close, therefore, and does not have the same benefits as that of our full sister-church relationships. Nevertheless, our seminary has aided the EPCA by training their students; and in the past our churches have held conferences on important topics and welcomed speakers from the EPCA to conferences organized by our seminary. We urge the readers of the *SB* to remember to pray for our brethren in Australia.

Cordial, but as yet unofficial, relationships

Third, the CC maintains cordial contact with other churches where there is, as yet, no official relationship, either sister or corresponding. Some of that contact is closer than others, of course. One very promising example is the *Bekennende Evangelische Reformierte Gemeinde* (BERG) in Giessen, Germany with whom the PRC have been in contact since at least 2006. Dr. Klautke and his son Jochen, the current pastor of the BERG, for example, are familiar to many readers of the *SB*, and especially to Faith PRC and Zion PRC through the ART-BERG Committee that helps support our German brothers' seminary. We hope to welcome some of our German brethren to the USA in 2024.

The Ecumenical Council of NAPARC

Fourth, the CC's Constitution states that the CC “shall participate in ecumenical councils,” where such a council is defined as “a gathering of churches each of which holds formal membership in the council based on a firm commitment to the authority of Scripture and either the Reformed confessions (Three Forms of Unity) or the Presbyterian confessions (The Westminster Standards)” and “a gathering of churches that acknowledge one another as true churches of Jesus Christ, yet have significant differences in doctrine and practice that keep them from forming into one denomination.”

Since 2010 the CC has been sending observers to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). NAPARC has currently thirteen member denominations, while two denominations—the PRC and the Bible Presbyterian Church—send observers.

Synod 2017 made an official decision not to join NAPARC, but to continue to send observers. One of the reasons was NAPARC's “allowance of member denominations who have exonerated those who embrace the teaching of the Federal Vision (FV)” (*Acts of Synod 2017*, Art. 45, p. 33).

A good number of NAPARC-affiliated churches have studied and rejected the FV,¹ although consistency in applying such study reports to concrete cases of discipline has varied.² In fact, when our observers presented the 2017 decision to that year's meeting of NAPARC, some “objected to our presentation that some of the churches of NAPARC had exonerated Federal Vision” (*Acts of Synod 2018*, Art. 29, p. 32; see also pp. 255-256).

The CC reported to Synod 2020: “Many of the member churches of NAPARC have adopted statements condemning the Federal Vision, but NAPARC has not officially spoken to the matter or acted regarding member churches that we believe have exonerated those who embrace the teaching of the Federal Vision” and they added that “the CC intends to give a presentation regarding our view of the FV that also seeks to determine whether NAPARC has any desire to deal with this serious threat” (*Acts of Synod 2020*, Art. 36, pp. 44, 45). In November 2021 a delegation attending NAPARC was unable to make a presentation about the FV “since [they were] observers, not members.” In addition, “various of the denominations [have] drawn up their own responses to the Federal Vision error, which the delegates would consider to be their doctrinal position.” Synod 2022 then authorized the CC to continue to send observers to NAPARC, which “does not bind the PRC to any of NAPARC's positions or decisions” (see *Acts of Synod 2022*, pp. 33-34, 92).

Readers should understand that NAPARC does

1 Dr. R. Scott Clark, Professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Westminster Seminary, California, and a member of the URC, wrote in November 2013 that “the FV movement has been rejected by several of the major denominations in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).” Dr. Clark provides links to various documents responding to the Federal Vision produced by denominations such as the OPC (2006), PCA (2007), and URC (2010), <https://heidelblog.net/2013/11/for-those-just-tuning-in-what-is-the-federal-vision>.

2 See, for example, a series of four articles in the *SB* in 2011, “Update: Federal Vision on Trial in the PCA,” for an analysis of the case of Jeffrey Meyers; and “Update on Peter Leithart” (*SB*, April 1, 2015).

not make official doctrinal pronouncements, nor does it exercise discipline—they leave that to their member churches, although they do desire that the members of NAPARC be conservative. They suspended the membership of the CRC in 1997 because of that denomination’s practice of ordaining women, for example, but NAPARC views itself more as a venue for different denominations to encourage one another and learn from one another.

A typical meeting at NAPARC can be briefly described: first, there is a plenary session at which each of the thirteen members of NAPARC and the two observers give a presentation about their churches. Each presentation is followed by a time of Q&A’s and prayer for

the presenting denomination. Second, there are speeches presented by the hosting church on various doctrinal and practical topics of interest to Reformed and Presbyterian denominations. Third, there are bilateral meetings where churches have the opportunity to discuss matters with one another more privately.

It is the hope of the CC to find and follow leads for more substantial discussion with other denominations. We desire to share our distinct doctrinal heritage of particular grace and the unconditional covenant with others, and present it in a winsome manner, and we also desire to learn from others in areas where we have less experience or expertise. In all of this, the CC covets the prayers of God’s people for wisdom and faithfulness.



Translated treasures

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

Reporting to the consistory

From A Brief Explanation of the Church Order by Johannes Jansen

Article 74: “If anyone, having been admonished in love concerning a secret sin by two or three persons, does not give heed, or otherwise has committed a public sin, the matter shall be reported to the consistory.”

This article was already incorporated in the church order by the Synod of Emden (1571)¹ and has been maintained until now. It deals with reporting a sin to the consistory. We point out:

1. *In what cases should sin be reported to the consistory?* The Convent at Wesel (1568) already stated that a private sin that does not cause public offense and only after rejection of the “frequently repeated admonitions,” and a public sin accompanied by open offense,

must immediately be communicated to the consistory.² These two cases were soon recorded in one article at Emden (1571). The Synod of The Hague (1586), however, inserted the words “in love”: “If someone, having been admonished *in love* concerning a secret sin by two or three persons,” etc.³ Experience had taught that the exhortation sometimes took place formally, but not *in love*, and that was the intent of the provision. These two cases are thus brought under the same rule that they must be reported to the consistory. As for the first case, the failure of the private admonition makes private sin necessarily take on the character of a public sin. And as for a public sin, there need not precede a private admonition first; it must immediately be reported to the consistory because it causes public offense.

It says here that they shall be “reported to the *consistory*.” This is based on Matthew 18:17. But it does not say there, “Tell it unto the *consistory*,” but, “Tell it unto the *church*.” However, this is not a contradiction. Jesus here discharges discipline to the congregation, which at

1 Article 28 of this church order reads: “Anyone who has sinned secretly and has not heeded the admonition of two or three persons or one who has sinned publicly shall be brought before the consistory.” Cf. Richard De Ridder, ed., *The Church Orders of the Sixteenth Century Reformed Churches of the Netherlands Together with Their Social, Political, and Ecclesiastical Context* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1987), 118.

2 The reference is to Chapter VIII:9, 10 from this synod. Cf. De Ridder, *Church Orders*, 93-94.

3 The quotation is from Article 67 of this meeting. Cf. De Ridder, *Church Orders*, 359.

first was still without a consistory, but was later placed under the leadership of the consistory. The congregation exercises discipline through the instrument and under the direction of the officebearers.

2. *How the consistory gains knowledge of the sin.* This can take place in various ways: namely, by *notification* (reporting) to the consistory, because both in the case that the private exhortations do not succeed and in the case of a public sin the command of Jesus applies: “tell it unto the church” (Matt. 18:17); by *evidence*, that is, when the sin of its nature is public, for example, open false doctrine in word or writing, public drunkenness, etc.; by *confession* of the sinner himself, whether it be only to relieve his conscience, or to find reconciliation; by *accusation of someone who is outside the congregation* against a member of the congregation, if such a person expressly fulfills these three conditions, that he points out the *time*, the *place*, and the *nature* of the sin, and the consistory finds therein reason to investigate whether the complaint is well-founded; and by *anonymous letters and casual rumors*, which, however, as a rule must be mistrusted, and can only give cause for further investigation when the *time*, *place*, and *nature* of the sin are evidently brought to light.

3. *What the purpose of this notification to the consistory is.* Mainly two things: First, so that the consistory may *investigate*. This investigation must be carried out impartially. They must also give the accused the opportunity to defend himself and therefore hear him orally or, if he is absent, ask for his explanation in writing. In the 16th and 17th centuries it was even allowed that the defendant, provided he submitted to the order and direction of the consistory (classis, synod), was assisted by a spokesman. The consistory may only hear reliable witnesses; first of all, the members of the congregation who are not under discipline because of unreliability; and also all honorable and trustworthy persons outside the church; but not persons known as liars and evildoers. And after the hearing they must judge what value to attach to the statements of the witnesses. They establish this with caution, and do not base this judgment lightly on a testimony only from those outside the church, unless they bring forth such obvious evidence that all doubt is excluded.⁴ The consistory also watches for the one who swears lightly, which so often occurs. The rule in the churches is: let your communication be yea, yea

and nay, nay! The investigation must also be conducted in silence, carefulness, discretion, dignity, and above all, impartiality. The consistory does not speak about it to third parties, does not communicate to one what the other has said, and does not rely on loose rumors and suspicions. The *purpose* of this investigation should never be to expose a secret sin to the government, even if it were a sin of theft, murder, or manslaughter, but only that the truth should come to light and be evident to the accused whether guilty of disciplinary sin or not. If the *result* is that the complaint is found to be *unfounded*, the consistory admonishes the accuser to withdraw his charge and, if he may refuse to the utmost, finally place him under discipline himself. If, even after serious and careful investigation, it remains *purely uncertain* whether the accused is guilty or not, the rule applies to the consistory: *in dubiis abstine*, that is, in doubtful cases one must abstain. If, in a very serious case, the accuser’s yes is opposed to the accused’s no, then it may be stated explicitly and with sorrow that the statements are diametrically opposed, so that on one side the conscience must be burdened with a lie and both parties sincerely admonished to take account of their testimonies, that the guilty not be hardened but retract his statement and seek forgiveness from God. If the guilt is probable, but not sufficiently proven, then the consistory suspends its judgment, surrenders it to the Lord, and waits for any clarification in the course of time. If the guilt has been proven, the ecclesiastical admonition commences.

Furthermore, [the purpose is] so that the consistory may *admonish* the guilty. There is also a brotherly admonition, by virtue of the office of believers (Matt. 18:15-17). But the admonition of the consistory has an *official* character. In a broader sense, it can be entirely vague in the preaching of the Word and in the preparation for the Lord’s Supper, but also for a specific reason, for example, in case of danger of error and contamination with false doctrine, etc. (II Cor. 10:9, 10; II Chron. 21:12; Acts 14:22; 20:31; Rom. 12:1; II Cor. 5:20, 21). In a *narrow* sense, it takes place in a specific disciplinary case, after proven guilt, and has a reprimanding character. Thus Paul rebukes his fellow apostle Peter (Gal. 2:1-14), and the congregation of Corinth because they tolerated the incestuous man in their midst (I Cor. 5:1, 2; etc.). It can be done orally, but, in case of unwillingness to come to the consistory or receive a deputation from its midst, also in writing (II Cor. 10:9, 10). The purpose of the exhortation is to save the sinner, to keep the church from contamination, and to watch that God’s name be not blasphemed on our account but honored and praised (II Cor. 7:7-9; II Cor. 12:20, 21; 13:2). The result may be that the sinner recognizes not only the *fact*

4 Jansen includes at this point a reference to the April 25, 1897 edition of the magazine *De Heraut*. This edition can be found online here: https://www.delpher.nl/nl/tijdschriften/view?identifier=MMUB-VU04:001857069:00001&query=heraut&coll=dts&page=11&facets%5Bperiode%5D%5B%5D=2%7C19e_eeuw%7C1890-1899%7C1897%7C&crowid=2.

but also the *guilt* of sin. In some cases, for example, in the case of drunken people who almost always repent in a sober state, it may be necessary to take them away from the Lord's Supper for a while in order to give them a probationary period. But if, after a shorter or longer time of probation, that confession turns out to be genuine, then reconciliation must take place (Prov. 28:13). It may also be, however, that the sinner, after the tender-

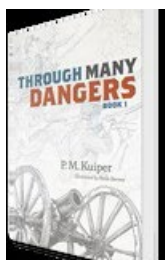
est admonitions, refuses to admit his guilt and persists stubbornly in his sin. In that case, the admonition will proceed to censure (withholding of the Lord's Supper, Art. 76). It must then be clearly recorded in the minutes: a. the point of accusation; b. the proven guilt; c. the evident impenitence; and d. the decision to withhold the Lord's Supper. If necessary, he must be given a copy of the decision.



Bring the books...

Mr. Charles Terpstra, member of Faith PRC in Jenison, Michigan and full-time librarian/registrar/archivist at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and SB book review editor

The following book is reviewed by Robert P. Swierenga, Research Professor, A. C. Van Raalte Institute, Hope College, and Professor of History Emeritus, Kent State University



Through Many Dangers, Books 1 and 2, by P.M. Kuiper, illustrated by Paula Barone. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2021. 408 pages, \$23.95. Paperback.

The Civil War never ceases to fascinate Americans. This gem of a book tells the many dangers faced by the "Holland Rangers" of Company I of the 25th Michigan Volunteer Infantry, a unit of young men from Rev. Van Raalte's Holland *Kolonie* who fought for three years under the able Colonel Orlando Moore and Lieutenant Martin De Boe.

To give the story flesh and blood, author P. M. Kuiper used the techniques of historical fiction to describe the actual experiences of the Dutch boys, more than one hundred in number. In the book, four *Kolonie* men make the ultimate sacrifice, which was a lower proportion than casualties suffered by the entire 25th Michigan company.

The main character is Harm van Wyk, joined by friends Ted Vogel, Kees De Groot, Gerrit Bol, Howard Tillema, and Frank De Windt. (A sub-plot is the growing romance between Harm and Howard's sister, Sarah Tillema, who prays for their safe return.) All are members of Rev. Albertus Van Raalte's church, who bled "Union blue" and pleaded with God for their safekeeping every Sunday in worship. The Dominie all but recruited the first eighty-two volunteers in a rally, including his sons, Ben and Dirk, which pleased him and dismayed his wife and, indeed, every mother.

In Kuiper's book, these God-fearing young men pray their way through the trying hours, encourage one an-

other, practice good Dutch cleanliness, drink only coffee to avoid dysentery, and have a designated cooking crew who barter and scrounge for nutritious ingredients. These practices cut down on death from diseases that felled many soldiers, although several contract typhoid fever.

Along their travels, the *Kolonie* boys also learn to talk about their faith. While marching for days or preparing for battle, they sing Dutch Psalms and recall Scripture passages, catechism lessons, and the Dominie's sermons, all of which take on new meaning. They worship several times in southern Presbyterian churches, and befriend other Union soldiers, notably the Lutheran bugler, Spencer Grey, who as a pianist and connoisseur of classical music tempts Kees and Ted with "worldly amusements." They also try unsuccessfully to evangelize the hillbilly drummer Clay Fowler and Charlie Markey, a thorn in the flesh. The Holland boys once discuss common grace, and they admit their hypocrisy for gambling at cards, attending the theater, and "foraging" (stealing a pig, taking fence rails for firewood, a lady's jewel piece, etc. The jewelry heist smites the thief's conscience to the point that he returns it behind enemy lines at risk of his life).

These immigrant boys from the Michigan frontier travel over large swaths of the south, experience death up close, meet government officials at the Capital, and face slavery for the first time. War changes and matures them, making them ready for lives as humble servants of God.

A summary of the book is as follows:

The story begins with the decision to go. Van Wyke enlisted against the wishes of his father and after two years he symbolically capitalized the "v" in Van in his

letters to signify to the family that he was no longer a Dutch immigrant but an American citizen. The recruits marched to Kalamazoo, where Commander Moore drilled them daily to produce a fighting force. But war had to wait for months in Louisville, as the men were assigned “white glove,” ceremonial duties with precision and polish.

When they faced their first battle in July 1863, after a full year under arms, they were ready. The enemy was the feared General John Hunt Morgan’s Raiders at Tebbs Bend, KY. Col. Moore insisted that his men dig deep trenches and bulwarks whenever they bivouacked, fight frontier style, and carry deadly English-made Enfield muzzle-loaders rather than American-made Springfield rifles. They were taught to reload and fire three times per minute. Thanks to this training, they defeated the much larger, battle-hardened enemy. One Dutch boy is wounded but recovers in hospital and rejoins the company. On Christmas day 1863, in a battle defending a rail bridge at Munfordville, KY, another Hollander becomes the first to die. After the battle, those surviving had free time to explore a vast cave, presumably Mammoth Cave.

From Kentucky, Company I marched two hundred miles east over the Cumberland Mountains to Knoxville, fighting skirmishes along the way, before taking Ohio River steamships and then training to join General John Sherman’s famed march through Atlanta, fighting almost daily. More men from the *Kolonie* are killed. Harm kills a rebel no older than himself and feels sick at heart. War, as Kuiper details, is hellish.

In the fight at Rocky Ridge, GA, a close friend of Harm dies in battle. After the fall of Atlanta, the Holland boys were assigned to General John Bell Hood’s

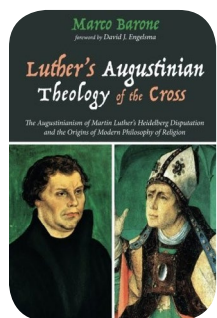
army and returned to Tennessee to fight at Franklin and Nashville. Then they were sent east again on Ohio River steamships and trains to Washington, DC., where they spent a cold January in warm quarters and even had time to take in a play at Ford’s Theater, the site of Lincoln’s later assassination.

After Atlanta, the company traveled by steamboat via the Chesapeake Bay to North Carolina to join Union troops in the battle of Fort Anderson, where they freed Union prisoners in the infamous Confederate prison camp at Andersonville. Mercifully, the war ended in June 1865 and the Holland boys were sent home to a huge celebration led by Rev. Van Raalte. Most saved their enlistment bonus and monthly pay, rather than waste it on “wine, women and song,” which gave them a fat nest egg after the war.

Author P.M. Kuiper mastered historical accounts of the war so thoroughly that the novel comes close to being actual history. There are even a few times the author steps out of fiction into actual history. For example, in one battle scene, we are told that “Ben van Raalte, oldest son of Rev. van Raalte, had crept back to the battlefield, retrieved the flag, and returned it to camp.” (Ben’s younger brother Dirk lost his arm to a musket ball, but this is left unmentioned.) Appendices include an expansive bibliography, a definition of military terms, and a monthly timeline that parallels the encounters of Company I with the greater war. Actual letters penned from the battlefield to family and friends back home provide apt quotes for the fictional dialogue. Harm Van Wyke’s pencil sketches, actually by the skilled hand of Paula Barone, illustrate and enhance the storyline. This is a Civil War story that Christian readers will not want to miss.

The following book is reviewed by Bruce Feenstra, second-year student in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Wyoming, Michigan

Luther’s Augustinian Theology of the Cross by Marco Barone, Eugene, OR: Resource Pub., 2017. 162 pp. Softcover. \$23.00. ISBN: 978-1556355998.



First Corinthians 1:18 teaches that the “preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). This is the antithesis between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross which is set forth by Martin Luther in his *Heidelberg*

Disputations. In *Luther’s Augustinian Theology of the Cross*, Barone dives into this grand theme as it is found in the *Heidelberg Disputations* and emerges with a valuable book for the Reformed Christian.

This book is a valuable read, first, because it examines the much-neglected *Heidelberg Disputations* of Luther with detailed insight. This work has not the fame of Luther’s *Ninety-five Theses* or the pedigree of *The Bondage of the Will*, yet it “has become the manifesto of Luther’s thinking inasmuch as it contains the hallmarks of his entire theology” (2). Reformed Christians ought to become familiar with the *Heidelberg Disputation* and Luther’s theology of the cross contained therein.

Second, there is profit in studying the similarities between Luther and Augustine. Rome accused the Reformers of abandoning the faith of the fathers, but this work shows the antiquity of Reformed theology. Since “a vast majority of scholars...tend to put much stress upon the differences between Luther and Augustine” (9); it is necessary for a work such as this to remind the Reformed Christian that his faith can be traced back to the ancient church fathers. I especially appreciated Barone’s arguments concerning Augustine’s view of free will, having myself struggled to interpret Augustine’s view on this essential matter. Many, including Roman Catholics, quote Augustine in favor of free will. However, Barone makes a strong argument that “the seminal principle of the bondage of the will, with its defining characteristics, is a position that Augustine consistently held from the beginning to the end of his Christian life” (26).

But above all, this book is valuable for its presentation of the theology of the cross not only as a doctrine but as a worldview. Everything must be viewed through the cross, for “the cross is key to both ethics and epistemology, not only theology and general philosophy” (103). All men are drawn to a theology of glory, seeking to obtain salvation by man’s power. We are drawn to the mighty, the wise, the noble after the flesh, but the theology of the cross flips all that on its head by revealing the truth of human nature and God’s salvation. The cross reveals all the might, wisdom, and nobility of man to be weakness and foolishness. The cross reveals a righteousness that is not of man but of God. “A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is” (86).

Barone is determined to show the applicability of this worldview to all systems of thought. Not content simply to explain Luther’s theses, he expands his view and widens his scope to compare the theses set forth by Luther with ancient and modern philosophers. This book, he explains in the introductory chapter, is made up of two parts. The first part, consisting of chapters two through five, travels back a thousand years to prove the faithfulness of each one of Luther’s theses to the theology of Augustine. The second part, consisting of chapter six, leaps a couple hundred years into the future to test the applicability of Luther’s theses to the philosophies of Aristotle, Kant, and Leibniz.

In the first part (chapters two through five), Barone divides the theses of the *Heidelberg Disputation* into four different groups dealing with four distinct topics: free will, virtue, righteousness, and the cross. Each of Luther’s theses are considered one or two at a time

with a thorough explanation of the meaning and a comparison to the writings of Augustine. First, Luther is shown to reject free will: “Free will, after the fall, exists in name only” (15). This topic is treated first because in order to understand the theology of Luther and Augustine “it is essential to grasp first their anthropology” (13). Second, Luther proclaims man’s utter inability to be virtuous and to merit by good works. “Although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins” (39). Third, the righteousness of God is introduced as the solution to the problems presented by the bondage of the will and man’s utter lack of virtue. It is, of course, a righteousness that is the believer’s by faith alone: “He is not righteous who does much, but he who, without work, believes much in Christ” (58). The fourth section comes to the core of Luther’s theses: the theology of the cross.

The second part (chapter six) evaluates the views of Aristotle, Kant, and Leibniz on these same four topics of free will, virtue, righteousness, and the cross. These philosophers are shown to be essentially the same in their worldview. Their philosophy begins with man and ends up rejecting the cross. The paganism of Aristotle, the Pelagianism of Kant, or the semi-Pelagianism of Leibniz are all products of the same theology of glory.

I would recommend this book to most adults because of its surprising accessibility, though it is likely too difficult for children and most young people. The average adult might see that this is written for a doctorate in philosophy and be scared away. I was that average reader, expecting a dense philosophical work. Barone writes at one point that a “detailed exposition of Kant’s philosophy in general and his approach to religion in particular...will be taken for granted in the knowledge of the reader” (120). However, I read on in ignorance and still managed to gain some profit. Barone obviously strives for clarity in his writing. A clear outline never leaves the reader wondering where he is. Helpful summaries are so frequent that they almost become too repetitive. Difficult terms or concepts are sufficiently explained. While prior study in philosophy will certainly help a reader, it is by no means necessary to grasp the main ideas presented. Perhaps it will not be the easiest read, but for any who wish better to understand Luther, Augustine, and the theology of the cross, it will be a worthwhile read.

Announcements

PRC archives—Materials wanted!

The 100th anniversary of the PRC is rapidly approaching (2025). With that in view, the PRC archives is looking for donations of anything and everything related to her history—personal (family), congregational, and denominational. We are interested in documents (official records, programs, bulletins, letters, etc.), photos of all kinds, and recordings in all forms. Large or small collections of materials are welcome! Please bring your items to the seminary, or call or email the seminary for pick up of your items (prcseminary1925@gmail.com). We look forward to seeing what you have!

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Randolph PRC on Wednesday, March 6, 2024, at 8:30 A.M. the Lord willing. All material for the agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by February 5 (30 days before classis convenes). All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Randolph's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Prof. Douglas Kuiper

February 4—Worshiping the Only Good God (1)

Matthew 19:16-21

February 11—Worshiping God in Spirit and in Truth (2)

John 4:21-24

February 18—Using God's Holy Name Reverently (3)

John 5:19-47

February 25—Keeping a Day of Rest on God's Holy Day (4)

Luke 13:14-16

Call to aspirants to the ministry

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in the 2024-2025 academic year should make application at the March 21, 2024 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

Accompanying the application must be a testimonial from the prospective student's Consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school or on the seminary's website (prcts.org/admissions).

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 21 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the
Theological School Committee,
4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Wyoming, MI 49418

Joel Minderhoud, Secretary

The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.