

The Standard Bearer

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Vainly they seal the dead

Rev. James Slopsema

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God's armor for us: The praying soldier

Rev. Brian Huizinga



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Meditation

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

Vainly they seal the dead

Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

Matthew 27:62-66

Jesus was dead. He had been crucified at 9:00 A.M. on Friday, the very day of the Passover. By 3:00 P.M. the same day He had commended His spirit to His heavenly Father in death. With permission from Pilate, the Roman governor, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had buried Jesus' body in the tomb of Joseph.

But now certain of the chief priests and Pharisees came to Pilate requesting a watch to be placed at Jesus' tomb. They remembered Jesus' words that in three days He would rise from the dead. They feared that His disciples might steal away Jesus' body and claim that He was risen. And so they requested a watch of soldiers at Jesus' tomb. This Pilate granted.

How vain this watch was. The last thing on the minds of Jesus' disciples was to steal His body. Besides, Jesus not only *would* rise from the dead, but He *must* rise from the dead. The perfect atonement for sin Jesus had just offered on the cross demanded His resurrection.

But this watch served a good purpose. On Sunday morning this watch of soldiers served as witnesses of Jesus' resurrection as the angel rolled away the stone from the mouth of Jesus' tomb.

A requested watch!

It was "the next day that followed the day of the preparation." This means that it was Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath day. Because it followed the day of

Passover, this particular Sabbath was considered a high Sabbath. As solemn as the Passover day was, it was the day of preparation for this Sabbath day. It was the day to prepare meals for the high Sabbath that was to follow. This little tidbit is added to contrast the unholy work of the Jewish leaders that day to the holiness of this particular Sabbath day.

The chief priests and Pharisees came together to Pilate. Remember that the Jewish day started at sundown. Jesus' burial had just taken place. These individuals were members of the Sanhedrin that the day earlier had brought Jesus to Pilate to be condemned.

They had a concern: "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again." This goes back to the beginning of Jesus' ministry when Jesus drove out the buyers and sellers from the temple. When challenged as to His authority to do this, Jesus responded, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Jesus said this concerning the temple of His body (John 2:21). However, the Jewish leaders twisted this to mean that Jesus said He would destroy the *physical* temple and raise it up in three days. And even though they knowingly misquoted Jesus to discredit Him, they evidently knew the true meaning. "We remember that that *deceiver* said...." The deceivers charged Jesus with their own sin.

And now their concern. What if "his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first." These hypocrite deceivers expressed concern about another error being made! The first supposed error was that the people believed Jesus' claim to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. The last error would be that the people would be deceived into thinking that Jesus was risen from the dead. That error would be worse than the first. Being deceived by the grave-robbing disciples, the people would become permanent followers of Jesus, with supposed word from Him through His disciples.

As so these deceivers had a request.

"Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day."

This was a request that Pilate secure Jesus' tomb from His grave-robbing disciples by posting a contingent of Roman soldiers at the tomb.

A vain watch!

Pilate granted the request of the Jewish leaders, ordering most likely the normal detachment of sixteen soldiers to the tomb.

And then this: "Go your way, make it as sure as ye can." There appears to be some doubt in Pilate's mind that the tomb could be secured. And understandably so. Some very unusual and terrifying events had just taken place in connection with Jesus' crucifixion and death. There were the inexplicable three hours of darkness that descended over the whole land at noon the day before. And then, at the moment of Jesus' death, there was a giant earthquake that tore apart the land, opening up a large number of graves. And there were reports that at the same time the main curtain in the temple separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies had been torn apart from the top to the bottom. How troubling! So much so that all the people that came together at the cross returned smiting their breasts (Luke 23:48).

But orders are orders. Pilate's soldiers went and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch. How vain was this watch!

First of all, stealing Jesus' body from the tomb and claiming a resurrection was furthest from the disciples' minds. The Gospel accounts make very clear that the disciples had completely forgotten Jesus' instruction that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer death at the hand of the leaders and then rise from the dead on the third day. They were taken completely by surprise at Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Neither, therefore, did they look for a resurrection. The women that made their way to the tomb on Sunday did not come with their lawn chairs to witness a resurrection. They came to anoint Jesus' body. Clearly, all of Jesus' disciples were devastated, not having any idea what to do in response to their Master's death. What vanity it was to set a watch to prevent a grave robbery and claims of a resurrection!

But, secondly, this watch was an exercise in futility because Jesus would and must rise from the dead. This was demanded by Jesus' perfect sacrifice at the cross. God sent Jesus to the cross on account of the sins of His people. God had laid upon Jesus the guilt of all their sins. And since the wages of sin is death, Jesus must die the accursed death of the cross in the place of His people. In perfect obedience Jesus endured this hellish punishment to the bitter end. Just before He commended His spirit to the Father in death, Jesus in triumphant victory cried, "It is finished!" But that means that death could

no longer hold Him. His perfect sacrifice demanded His resurrection. God in His justice must and would raise Jesus from the dead. The Jewish leaders could not prevent it. Pilate with his soldiers could not prevent it. Not even the devil himself could prevent it. How vain was this guard!

A significant watch!

This watch of the Roman soldiers was significant in that it was used by God further to substantiate the fact of Jesus' resurrection.

Jesus' resurrection is of greatest importance. It is God's seal of approval on Jesus' atonement at the cross. It is God's pledge that He will one day also raise us up from the grave as He did Jesus. And we need a living Savior who can shower upon us the blessings of the cross for our salvation, beginning with the spiritual resurrection of our dead hearts. As the apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian church, if Christ be not risen, then is our faith vain and we are yet in our sins (I Cor. 15:17).

But Jesus' resurrection was so different than any resurrection before. His resurrection was not a return to this life to remain here a little longer and then to die again. His resurrection was an advancement from the earthly to the heavenly. His mortal, perishable body became immortal and imperishable. His flesh and blood body, adapted to live here on the physical earth, was changed into a spiritual body adapted for heavenly glory. This is why no one saw Jesus rise from the dead. Earthly eyes cannot behold the heavenly.

But because the fact of Jesus' resurrection is so important for our salvation, God left behind many infallible proofs of the resurrection. There was the empty grave discovered by the women. There were the grave clothes left undisturbed, through which Jesus had simply passed. There was the explanation of the angels to the women that Jesus is risen as He said. And then there were the ten appearances of the risen Jesus to His disciples in the forty-day period between His resurrection and ascension into heaven. These all were necessary to convince the disciples of Jesus' resurrection.

But now with the Roman soldiers set to watch Jesus' tomb, there is something added. To let the women in to discover the empty grave, the Lord sent an angel from heaven to roll away the stone that sealed the grave. Not only did the soldiers witness this, but it terrified them so that they became as dead men. After gathering their wits, they returned to Jerusalem to inform the Jewish leaders of what had happened. This only verified the truth of the witness of the disciples to Jesus' resurrection. Even Jesus' unbelieving enemies had concrete proof of His resurrection.

The unbelieving leaders would not accept the fact of the resurrection, even in the face of clear proof. In fact, they paid the soldiers money to spread a false report that, while they slept, the disciples stole His body. That and other preposterous lies have been perpetuated by the unbelieving world to explain away the fact of Jesus' resurrection. The unbeliever will accept the fact of Jesus' crucifixion. But he will not and cannot accept the fact of His resurrection. This is because Jesus' resurrection exposes his unbelief for what it is. It is an evil and foolish rejection of the greatest reality of history—God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself (II Cor. 5:19).

Let us by faith embrace and confess the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

By that faith we will find the great salvation of God.

Low in the grave He lay, Jesus my Savior!
Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!

Chorus:

Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes.
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!

Vainly they watch His bed, Jesus, my Savior!
Vainly they seal the dead, Jesus my Lord!

Death cannot keep his prey, Jesus, my Savior!
He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!



Editorial

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

How could any Protestant go 'home' to Rome? (3)

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2019, p. 298.

How could some Evangelicals imagine Rome as their church home someday (or wish to cozy up to Rome)? Because they have given up most of what made them Evangelicals in the first place; and because Rome dissembles. That is, Evangelicals have *actually* changed, and Rome *pretends* to have changed. Evangelicals (gospel-oriented Protestants) have gradually given up their Reformation church polity, their Reformation worship, and their Reformation doctrines. And the false church of Rome gussies up as the “strange woman” of Proverbs 7, “flattereth with her words,” and with subtle heart and much fair speech causes young Evangelicalism to yield. With flattering lips she forces him.

The deepest common bond

In one area especially, Rome and Evangelicals agree and have agreed for a long time. Because of this, nothing will stand in their way of reconciling. In *this* area both have changed, so neither needs to try to fool the other. All that is needed is the unspoken agreement to ignore the stubborn reality that in their past neither of them thought that *social issues* take priority over gospel truth.

But now they do. Only they do not call it the “social gospel” anymore, because the emphasis by liberal Protestantism on “social gospel” was one main reason Evangelicalism separated from liberal Protestantism 100 years ago. At that time, Protestantism had become more concerned with social change and improving the physical conditions of man than with spiritual change and the condition of man's heart. Evangelicalism's strength was her desire to return emphasis to church and gospel and grace and missions and Scripture's infallibility. Gradually, though, Evangelicalism herself has become enamored of social concerns. But instead of calling it the ‘social gospel,’ it is rebranded as ‘redeeming culture’ and ‘world-transformation.’ And instead of calling it ‘social concern,’ it is ‘advancing God's kingdom,’ with ‘kingdom’ redefined as ‘the world Christianized by the church.’

Evangelical Protestants, in even the most conservative Reformed churches, have bought into this vision.

This social vision is the main bond between Evangelicals and Catholics. What binds them is not pulpit and worship with the crucified Christ at the center, or the

gospel of salvation from sin and redemption, but world transformation. For all their talk about justification, Scripture, holiness, and the Virgin Mary, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” (ECT) seeks agreement on these things so that they can be on to their deeper purpose—establishing God’s kingdom. In doing so, ECT preachers do not direct the hope of God’s people to Christ’s second coming to raise the dead and establish His heavenly kingdom (unless, of course, Christ’s ‘coming’ is not His *bodily* coming and the raising of the dead is not the *physical* resurrection, and unless the new creation is defined as ‘this world Christianized’). ECT focuses on *this* world renewed in a righteousness that is not Christ’s imputed righteousness to guilty sinners, but a ‘righteousness’ in which all men—Christian and non-Christian—can engage.

“Ecumenism of the trenches”

When Evangelicals and Roman Catholics talk, their discussions are aimed at culture and politics, that is, *civil righteousness*: the civil good of alleviating poverty, advancing world peace, and witnessing to the sanctity of life and marriage. Because they found each other in the ‘trenches’ of the culture wars, their united labor is referred to as the “ecumenism of the trenches.” Another expression to describe their united efforts is “co-belligerency,” that is, they are *cooperating* in their *belligerence* toward a common enemy. In the book celebrating ECT’s 20th anniversary, their work is described so: “Such solidarity in opposition to the forces of unbelief is aptly called co-belligerency.”¹

The trenches filled with the most warriors were dug in the battle against abortion. Most of the impetus to unite Evangelical and Roman Catholic forces came through the pro-life movement.

The editors of the ECT anniversary book are open about their primary concerns: “We are concerned with moral and cultural foundations of American public life.” Their burden is “the long-term health of the American republic...” to “reverse the deterioration in our public life...” and to have “an educational system that inculcates virtues necessary for democratic self-governance to succeed.” “We need to be fully engaged in the complex *social, cultural, and political* questions that the nation faces.”²

The prominence of social and political matters on their agenda explains why ministers in these churches

sometimes focus on politics in their sermons. Sometimes they even leave sermon-making and preaching for others to do, in order that they can enter politics where they can have a louder voice and greater influence in areas that are most important to them. I saw this first-hand when a few years ago I bought a used car from a Reformed minister who was leaving the ministry in order to run for political office.

This primary interest in politics and social concerns also explains why doctrinal differences must be eliminated or minimized, and Christians who press the importance of them must be swatted away like pesky flies.

Turn these stones into bread

By adopting this mentality, the churches are succumbing to the first temptation Jesus faced, the temptation which is *first* in a principle way. This temptation to turn the desert’s stones into bread would have been the quick end of Jesus’ ministry; the devil was swinging for a homerun on the first pitch. “Feed the world, Jesus. You have the power to solve the problems of world hunger. And (since “bread” in Scripture stands for *all* man’s physical needs) all her poverty, war, murder, and division among nations. You can make the world a good place, safe and peaceful for all.” The Tempter wanted Jesus to perform this miracle, not so that He would simply satisfy His own hunger, intense as it must have been, but so that He would gain the world’s following apart from the cross. Turn these *stones* into bread. Solving the ‘bread question’ became a temptation that Jesus faced repeatedly.

Because Jesus would not feed the world, the Jews crucified Him.

Still today, men are frustrated by the faithful church that steadfastly refuses to attempt to solve the world’s social problems. Frustration turns to anger when that faithful church teaches that Jesus Christ’s fundamental mission was the spiritual salvation of His elect people by a substitutionary sacrifice in which He sustained God’s wrath. So vehement will be their anger, Scripture prophesies (see Rev. 13, for example), that those who refuse to attempt to feed the world and solve her social problems will be squeezed out of the world as Jesus was.

‘Father’ Abraham Kuyper

To a certain degree Abraham Kuyper succumbed to this very temptation to ‘feed the world’ when he proposed union with the Roman Catholics in the Netherlands to fight the culture wars of his day. Abraham Kuyper gave the proposal a theological foundation—the teaching of common grace. The common grace *worldview* taught

1 *Evangelicals and Catholics Together at Twenty: Vital Statements on Contested Topics*, eds., Timothy George and Thomas Guarino (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2015), 59.

2 xiv, xvii, emphasis added.

that God has a double purpose in the world: to save the church by special grace and redeem creation by common grace. Then, common grace itself enabled even non-Christians to perform the civic good needed to change society and redeem creation. A Christianized culture in the Netherlands was so important to Kuyper that he left the office of the ministry to go into politics.

This connection of Abraham Kuyper to Evangelicals going to Rome is not the logical deduction of a Protestant Reformed magazine editor opposed to the doctrine of common grace. The connection of Kuyper to this effort is ECT's own. From their documents comes the assertion: By the doctrine of a common grace worldview, Abraham Kuyper believed that he and his Reformed flock "might be enabled once more to take our stand by the side of Romanism in opposition to modern pantheism."³ For Evangelicals and Roman Catholics who want to join forces to fight the culture wars, Abraham Kuyper has become their 'patron saint.' For the participants of ECT, Abraham Kuyper is champion for his development of the doctrine and worldview of common grace.

If the hinge on which the entire *Reformation* turned was the doctrine of justification, and the hinge on which *Rome* turns is free will, reconciliation between Protestants and Rome turns on the hinge of the teaching of common grace. On the basis of this common grace of God to all, all men—not just Roman Catholics and Protestants, but all men, Christians and non-Christians alike—can participate in the joint project of redeeming the creation and transforming it into the 'kingdom of God.'

And to do that, all nominal Christians are called to unite. But at the expense of doctrinal integrity, the truth of sovereign, particular grace in Jesus Christ. Justification through faith alone and by grace alone is compromised for this union.

"Dear Galatian churches, I have changed my mind." Signed, apostle Paul

For Protestants to engage in this union would be like the apostle Paul sending a revised epistle to the Galatian Christians:

Dear Galatian Christians,

My sorrow and regret for writing my first letter to you could not be deeper. I have recently reconsidered and now retract my *anathemas*. When I said that the man would be condemned by God who proposed that circumcision was necessary for salvation, I was

carried away with untoward zeal. When I warned in clearest language that you lose the gospel itself when you add only one little work to the works of Jesus Christ for justification, I was sadly under the influence of misguided zealots. It would have been better for me to focus on the dangers in your society, and now I do. Paganism prevails in your area. Nero in Rome is promoting homosexuality and worse. For the sake of God's kingdom in Asia Minor, let us put aside our differences and join forces against these evils.

But the truth of Galatians unrevised—the unchangeable truth for all Christians—is that to add just one work, just circumcision, to the work of Jesus Christ as ground of salvation, is to lose the gospel itself, is worthy of the *anathemas* ("let him be accursed") that Christ pronounced through the apostle Paul. Remember, the Galatians *wanted* Christ! They professed their love for and allegiance to Him! They would not *deny* their love for Christ! Yet Scripture says that if the Judaizer's additions were allowed, those additions turned the gospel into an accursed 'no-gospel.'

What is written here is not the position of a denomination that wants to be "ecclesiastical isolationists," as some Evangelicals might call them. And those who believe what is written here may take comfort that today's Evangelicals would give the same hurtful, untrue label to Paul. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

What of your generations?

We want to be a faithful church, and for that we pray for grace for the generation to come. Let the churches hold fast their doctrinal traditions, rooted in the teaching of justification by faith alone. Let the churches hold fast the tradition of antithetical living in an increasingly wicked world, antagonistic to godliness in powerful ways. And let us pray for humility, a *chief* fruit of God's sovereign grace. For a *practical* denial of grace is no less offensive to God than a *doctrinal* denial by a competent (or incompetent) theologian, and God's judgments cannot be any less severe for proud Christians who with pen and pulpit defend the doctrines of grace but deny it in their conduct.

May the Lord be merciful to, and restore to truth and right, those of His who are being deceived by the new social gospel.

For the true gospel of Jesus Christ, may we Christians stand together even if it brings the suffering Jesus Himself endured.

³ *Evangelicals and Catholics Together at Twenty*, 60.

Letters

ECT and prison ministry

Hello, I've been in fellowship with several members of Grace Protestant Reformed Church [Standale, MI]. Their prison ministry, led by Rev. Ron VanOverloop, has been a blessing to the church incarcerated. And part of their ministry includes receiving the *Standard Bearer*. I'd like to respond to an article in the most recent issue (March 15, 2019, vol. 95, no. 12) titled "How Could Any Protestant Go Home to Rome?" written by Prof. Barrett Gritters.

I am so glad that someone has written about the ECT movement, and to give the church warning of this ungodly and unholy movement. There is a program in the prison system that...is called *Keryx*. Twice a year several so-called Protestant churches, Seventh-Day Adventists, and the Roman Catholic Church join hands to put on a "*Keryx* weekend." About forty men are chosen as candidates that are assigned to *Keryx* members, where they spend three and a half days being introduced to the

false gospel. The men are lured by an abundance of special foods and snacks. At the end of the weekend, each man receives a beaded cross with an image of a man on it and pledges to be in unity with their *Keryx* brothers, to believe and love Jesus, and live a moral life. No one is encouraged to leave his religion. So, many men are even the nation of Islam, Catholic, Seventh Day, etc. But, as you pointed out, the reason people of the ECT [like those of *Keryx*] have unity is that they all share in preaching and believing the false gospel, that salvation is by the works of the law and not by grace through Jesus Christ alone. The Lord has moved me for many years to preach against this movement and to warn the church to "come out from among them and be ye separate," saith the Lord. So, thank you for the work that you all do on behalf of the church that you love.

May God bless your work in Jesus Christ's name!

John Collins

Northern Michigan



All around us

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

The secular attack on religious education

Christian education is a great blessing. As the secular state encroaches upon the family, many religious parents are opting for private schools or homeschooling for their children. In Europe good Christian schools are few and far between. Nevertheless, homeschooling and private religious education are also coming under scrutiny by the state.

Homeschooling in Germany

Dirk and Petra Wunderlich are a German couple who desire to homeschool their four children. Unfortunately for them, homeschooling is illegal in Germany. The Wunderlichs have been embroiled in a lengthy legal battle with the German State since 2006. In January 2019 the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled on the case:

[The Wunderlichs] alleged that the German authorities had violated their rights under Article 8 of the [European] Convention [for the Protection of Human

Rights and Fundamental Freedoms] by withdrawing parts of parental authority...including the right to determine the children's place of residence...by transferring these parts to the *Jugendamt* (youth office) and by executing the withdrawal in the form of forcibly removing the children from the applicants and placing them in a children's home for three weeks (1).¹

The ECHR cites the applicable German legislation underpinning the case. The German *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law), Article 6, states,

The care and upbringing of children is the natural right of parents and a duty primarily incumbent upon them. *The State shall watch over them* in the performance of this duty. Children may be separated from their families...only pursuant to a law, and only if the

1 ECHR Judgment: *Wunderlich vs. Germany*, <http://www.adfmedia.org/files/WunderlichJudgment.pdf>. (The page numbers cited in the first part of this article are taken from the ECHR document.)

parents or guardians fail in their duties or the children are otherwise in danger of serious neglect (7).

The German *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* (Civil Code), Article 33, states,

Where the physical, mental or psychological best interests of a child or a child's property are endangered and the parents do not wish or are not able to avert the danger, a family court must take the necessary measures to avert the danger (7).

This includes "instructions to ensure that the obligation to attend school is complied with." Moreover, a family court is authorized to initiate a "partial or complete removal [withdrawal] of parental authority" (7).

The Wunderlichs reside in the German state of Hesse. The *Hessisches Schulgesetz* (The Hesse School Act) states,

All children, juveniles, and young adults...must comply with the rules on compulsory school attendance.... Parents are responsible for ensuring that school-age children regularly attend school and participate in educational activities (8).

By "school" is understood a "state primary and lower-secondary school" or "a grant-aided independent school." Other teaching outside of school "may be authorised by the school supervisory authority *only for compelling reasons*" (8).

The Wunderlichs' complaint centered on Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights, which states:

Article 8 – Right to respect for private and family life

1. Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.
2. There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right *except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society* in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

The right to family life is not absolute, therefore. The State—in this case, the German State—may, if it deems it necessary, interfere with and even withdraw the rights of parents if deemed "necessary in a democratic society," especially if "neglect" is suspected. Most would agree that, if parents are starving or abusing their children, in which case they are monsters rather than parents, the State should intervene. But the German State categorizes most—if not all—homeschooling as "neglect."

Germany's argument in the case of the Wunderlichs is as follows, which could equally apply to other homeschooling parents. First, a typical homeschooling day is described:

It was primarily their mother who taught all four children and school normally started at 10 A.M. and lasted until 3 p.m. with a break for lunch, which was prepared by their mother (3).

The German authorities viewed this as inadequate. Second, the Wunderlich children, according to the *staatliches Schulamt* (The State Education Authority), were "growing up in a 'parallel world' without any contact with their peers" and they "received no attention of any kind which would enable them to have a part in the communal life in Germany" (2). This "risked damaging the children's best interests in the long term," for, continued the *staatliches Schulamt*, the children were prevented from "becoming part of the community and learning social skills such as tolerance, assertiveness, and the ability to assert their own convictions against majority-held views" (3). The family court concluded that "only withdrawing parts of parental authority could ensure the children's continual attendance at school and would prevent them *suffering harm* on account of them being educated at home" (3). Third, after the Wunderlich family had resisted all attempts by the *staatliches Schulamt* to assess the knowledge of their children, the Main Court of Appeal in Frankfurt issued the following ruling:

According to the court, the children's best interests were *in concrete danger* on account of them being kept in a "symbiotic" family system and being *denied an education which met standards which were both well recognised and fundamentally important for growing up in society*. The education they were receiving from the applicants could not compensate for not attending school. Five hours of homeschooling—including a lunch break—which was conducted concurrently for all four children, *could not suffice to offer each child a range of schooling appropriate to his or her age*. In addition, the children were also not members of any sports club, music school or similar organisation where they could acquire other skills important for their education. The court also noted the applicants' submissions as a whole that their main concern was creating a strong attachment between the children and their parents to the exclusion of others. Moreover, by their persistent refusal they were also teaching the children that they did not need to comply with the rules of community life if they found them disagreeable. Lastly, the Court of Appeals found that there were no less severe measures available (4-5).

This decision was executed on August 29, 2013, when up to twenty social workers and police officers removed the Wunderlich children from the parental home: because they refused to leave voluntarily "the children had to be carried out of the house individually" (5). In September 2013 the children's knowledge was assessed and

the Wunderlichs agreed to enroll them in school, but they withdrew their children again on June 25, 2014. After additional lengthy legal battles, the Wunderlichs appealed to the ECHR, which did not object to Germany's anti-homeschooling law:

While the prohibition of homeschooling in Germany is an underlying issue of this complaint, the Court observes that it has already decided upon the compatibility of this prohibition with the Convention...and that the respective part of the application has already been declared inadmissible (12).

The Court further reiterates that it has already examined cases regarding the German system of imposing compulsory school attendance while excluding home education. It has found it established that the State, in introducing such a system, had aimed at ensuring the integration of children into society with a view to avoiding the emergence of parallel societies, considerations that were in line with the Court's own case-law on the importance of pluralism for democracy (14).

The ECHR ruled that "the enforcement of compulsory school attendance to prevent social isolation of the applicants' children and ensure their integration into society was a *relevant reason* in justifying the partial withdrawal of parental authority" (14). The ECHR's ruling, therefore, is that, since "there were relevant and sufficient reasons for the withdrawal of some parts of the parents' authority and the temporary removal from their family home," there was *no violation* of Article 8 of the Convention (16).

Interesting and troubling about this case is the German State's concern—and the ECHR's agreement which that concern—that homeschooled children are isolated from the rest of society. Whether one agrees with that concern or not, one way in which to alleviate that concern would be to encourage interaction with other homeschooling families, as well as to enroll children in extracurricular activities outside of the home. One other question I had as I read the case was this: Do the Wunderlichs belong to a *church* where their children could interact with others outside of the family?

The Wunderlichs plan to appeal to the Grand Chamber of the ECHR.

The United Kingdom and Ofsted

If Germany is concerned that homeschooling might lead to "parallel societies" within her borders, the British state is seeking to impose "British values" upon all schoolchildren under its jurisdiction. Enter *Ofsted*, the "Office for Education, Children's Services and Skills," a non-ministerial department of the UK government

tasked with the inspection of schools and headed by Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman. Writing in *National Review*, Jibrán Khan explains: The British government requires *Ofsted* to ensure that all schools "actively promote the British values" of "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs."² Under Ms. Spielman's leadership, *Ofsted* has "waged a war against religious schools of all denominations for the past two years—and has justified that in the name of 'British values.'" Guess what "British values" are? LGBT issues, of course! In 2010 Nick Clegg, former Deputy Prime Minister, expressed his view that "faith schools must promote homosexual relationships." *Ofsted* has been failing faith schools in England and Wales, not because of a lack of discipline in the classroom, not because of poor examination results, not even because of the state of the facilities—in many cases the religious schools have excelled in these areas, surpassing the standards of the government-run state schools—but because faith schools do not adequately *promote LGBT issues*. One private Jewish school for girls *under the age of eight* failed a third *Ofsted* inspection because "the school did not teach pupils about gender reassignment and sexualities, thereby restricting pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development and rendering them unfit for present-day society." Schools that repeatedly fail *Ofsted* inspections risk being closed down by the Department of Education.

Presumably, the Wunderlichs in Germany were "guilty" of a similar restriction of their children's development. By not teaching what the State demands, homeschooling parents and parents who organize a religious school for their children fall foul of Orwell's Big Brother: as Spielman wrote in her first annual report: "It is right that we use compulsory education *to make sure* children acquire a deep understanding of and respect for British values *even if they are in tension with parental wishes or with community norms*."

Ofsted has plenty of cheerleaders. In 2017 the National Union of Teachers (NUT) demanded that "toddlers as young as two [be] taught about transgender issues."³ It seems like NUT's dream—a nightmare for Christian parents—will come to pass: "All UK schools

2 Jibrán Khan, *National Review*, "Amanda Spielman's War on Religion in Great Britain" (Jan 28, 2019), <https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/01/amanda-spielman-religious-schools-england-secularism>.

3 "Teach Toddlers About Transgender Issues, National Union of Teachers Say," *The Telegraph* (April 17, 2017), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/04/17/teach-toddlers-transgender-issues-national-union-teachers-say>.

will soon be obliged to teach lessons relating to homosexual and transgender issues from 2020, which lessons “will be a mandatory part of the curriculum in the UK and opting out will be illegal for parents, for “parents will be threatened with social services and/or legal ramifications if they object.”⁴ Undoubtedly, Ms. Spielman

and her statist colleagues in *Ofsted* will eagerly enforce the new rules, including (maybe even especially) in faith schools.

4 “Plans for Lesbian, Gay and Transgender Education to be Made Compulsory for UK School Children Aged 5 and Up” (February 27, 2019), *The Liberal*, <https://theliberal.ie/plans-for-lesbian->

[gay-and-transgender-education-to-be-made-compulsory-for-uk-school-children-aged-5-and-up](https://theliberal.ie/plans-for-lesbian-gay-and-transgender-education-to-be-made-compulsory-for-uk-school-children-aged-5-and-up).



Search the Scriptures

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

Of the order of things and consequences

Previous article in this series: April 1, 2019, p. 301.

Ecclesiastes 10:8-10

Having set before us the folly and disorder of affairs in civil life, the Word of God turns to a series of natural or organic connections. The intent is that we should contemplate them, discern the reality of things, and by that reflection point us to the way of wisdom and warn us against folly. We need, therefore, to consider the illustrations in their natural context first.

“He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; and he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby” (Eccl. 10:8, 9).

On the foreground is the person and then his activity, the “whoso” of the text.

The person digging a pit is by that very activity the one most likely to slip and fall into the pit or be injured by a cave-in during its excavation. Similarly, poisonous snakes hide in the thick underbrush to ambush their prey. The one clearing brush or cutting down a hedge, which may be used as a fence, is engaged in a dangerous project: “a serpent shall bite him.” The same is true for the one removing stones, whether clearing a field or removing his neighbor’s landmark; his activity endangers himself physically, whether by dropping stones on himself or some other aspect of the toil he is engaged in. The cutting of wood with an axe is a potential source of self-injury, whether from the axe, flying wood chips,

or something slipping in the process. All of these things are the reality of life and set forth the dangers of someone engaging in these projects in physical terms.

Solomon has said this before in Proverbs, “whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him” (Prov. 26:27). It is also used figuratively: “whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good things in possession” (Prov. 28:10). It is used in the Psalms of the consequence of an evil plot and God’s judgment upon the wicked: “He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made” (Ps. 7:15; see also Ps. 35:7; Ps. 57:6). The hedge is used as a barrier, a defense and protection for the field. It is used figuratively to describe God’s protection of His church, which is then broken down in His judgment upon a people who have departed in the way of sin (Ps. 80:12; Ps. 89:40). Here the figurative idea is that of breaking through a hedge, similar to the thief and hireling of John 10.

While Scripture uses these activities in a variety of figurative senses, we must not overlook the natural point. Even in things under the sun, physically, the way of folly is manifested in carelessness or heedlessness of man in such activities. The natural inclination of man is to go about such activities with the pride of heart that says, “I can do this; others may be injured, but not me.” Man is so often revealed as a fool even in such natural

activities. He denies that there may be consequences to what he is doing. God has joined together the things of this world with boundaries, such as gravity or other elements of physical laws, which shape our activities in doing them. God has made, sustains, and upholds both the things that are made and what we call natural laws governing them. This reality under the sun is God's work of upholding and governing the universe. It is not a matter of a mere organic process, which the heathen call karma, but God's work. Attributing it to the creation as a mere mechanical process, is idolatry and a denial of the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

We need to contemplate this description carefully. That there is a connection between man's activities and consequences, that there is cause and effect, is a work of God undergirding the creation. Moreover, that there is danger and physical harm in them is not a matter of accident, as we so often speak of it, but a certain judgment of God, the working of His curse, in the creation by which all things wear away, are corrupted, and lead to death. Thorns and thistles grow, weeds multiply, under the judgment of God upon us in a fallen world (Gen. 3:18).

The folly of sin leads us to the notion that we control them. When the consequences follow, we label them mistakes or accidents. They were, after all, unintentional or so we would describe them. Yet this is not the whole picture, for it is sin in fallen man that ignores God and the boundaries He has set and maintains. It is the carelessness of foolish, sinful man who, heedless, does himself an injury or injures others. It belongs to the working of God's curse in the creation that it is so. It is in that connection that we pray for God's fatherly care and provision in our activities, for we know that without His blessing they will not profit us. The fool, heedless of this reality and of God its author, passes on in sin and is punished.

While it is this physical reality that is on the foreground here in Ecclesiastes, the Word of God in many passages, as was noted, also takes up these pictures and uses them in a variety of figurative senses to describe man's willful activity of sin and God's judgment upon him. Man digs a pit for his neighbor to ensnare him with guile, to rob and to kill. He breaks down a hedge, the barrier fence, that he may break through and steal. Out of covetousness, he moves the stone, the landmark of his neighbor, to take what is not his. If the physical activity is subject to God's judgment and the working of curse upon the ground, how much more that which is described as wickedness in the figurative application. If God's judgment is manifested in these activities physically, how much greater is that judgment on the fool who thinks he will escape it when he walks in these sins

described by the figurative picture. He will fall into the pit he devised for others and, as he breaks through the hedge, a serpent will bite him.

Pursuing the figurative application of these figures further will lead us away from the point of the text being made here, that God sets the bounds of man's life in such a way that our activity always stands within the bounds He has set. The way of wisdom is the way of discernment of those boundaries and a walk in submission to them. He has said of the fool, "Yea, also when he walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him..." (Eccl. 10:3). The fool strives with those boundaries in sin and rebellion. The judgment of God upon him is not immediately apparent as he digs his pit and keeps digging. His wisdom is self-confidence in himself and his own will. God is not in his thoughts. We read a similar idea in James, "Go to now, ye that say, To day or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow, For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:13, 14).

The text in Ecclesiastes makes the application of this in this way: "**If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct**" (Eccl. 10:10). The description is clear: a dull axe does not cut; the way of wisdom is to sharpen it. The idea of "direct" in the original is a successful or fruitful outcome.

This requires discernment and thought. The one who does not sharpen his axe wastes his strength. He is striving with the order of things under the sun. He is being foolish. This is more than the practical wisdom needed in earthly things, though that is included. Sin is foolishness. It is without direction and strives with God who confronts man on every side with His presence and government. The fool spends himself in his folly and does not truly prosper. He is adrift in the world without God, without true knowledge and understanding. He is in darkness. That darkness makes him as dull-witted as the dull axe.

Wisdom in the fear of God gives direction and therefore profit under the sun. It works a fruitful walk that is successful in its outcome for good. That good is both the prospering of our earthly way, which is in harmony with God's design, and profitable spiritually. It yields both contentment with our daily bread, and our rejoicing in the Lord who gives it. This belongs to the better portion of the child of God in his days under the sun who walks in the light. The man who seeks God's care and blessing in his activities seeks also discernment in the needs of life.



Dordt 400: Memorial stones

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

The Synod of Dordt (9) The case of Conrad Vorstius

...These stones shall be a memorial unto the children of Israel forever.—Joshua 4:7c

The third phase of the Synod included sessions 58-154, lasting from January 14 to May 9, 1619. During this phase Synod deliberated regarding its response to the Remonstrant error and prepared the Canons of Dordt. In early May Synod also treated three cases of alleged false teaching: it condemned the four Remonstrant ministers from Kampen (see blog posts at dordt400.org); it condemned Conrad Vorstius; and it exonerated John Maccovius. This article will focus on the case of Vorstius, and the next one will focus on the case of Maccovius.

Vorstius and his teachings

When James Arminius died in 1610, Conrad Vorstius succeeded him as professor at Leiden. As professor, Vorstius wrote books in which he denied the orthodox doctrine regarding the Trinity and Christ's deity (the heresy of Socinianism). Not only Dutch theologians, but also King James I of Great Britain, asked the States-General (the government of the United Provinces) to expel Vorstius. They did so in 1612, replacing him with Simon Episcopius, who at the Synod of Dordt would be the spokesman of the Remonstrants. Yet Vorstius' teaching needed to be examined and the Synod did so in his absence.

Synod's decisions

That the Synod did not approve of Vorstius' teachings became clear even before Synod took up his case at its 150th session (May 3). Already in March (at sessions 100 and 112), two delegates from Bremen explicitly opposed his teachings in their addresses to Synod. One of them was Martinius, notable for being one of the delegates most sympathetic to the Remonstrants. When Vorstius' case was treated, delegates from Great Britain, Heidelberg, and Hesse also expressly opposed his views.

On May 4, at its 152nd session, Synod formally charged Vorstius with undermining or denying the

doctrines of 1) the Trinity, 2) many of God's attributes, 3) God's works of creation and providence, 4) the union of the two natures in the person of Christ, 5) the sufficiency of Christ's atonement, and 6) justification by faith alone.

Synod stated that his teachings should not be tolerated and that he should be deposed. However, neither Synod nor the churches could implement this. The States-General (national government) permitted men to enter the ministry and paid their salaries; the States-General had called the Synod and was paying its expenses; so the States-General had to implement his deposition. Accordingly, Synod asked the States-General to depose Vorstius.

The broad scope of Synod's charges is one evidence that the false teachings of the Remonstrants were not limited to the five points regarding sovereign grace. Some Remonstrants explicitly opposed other points of Reformed doctrine as well; indeed, Arminianism was an entire system of theology that, if worked out to its logical conclusions, opposed other doctrines fundamental to the Reformed faith, and even the true Christian faith.

The States-General

On June 27, 1619, the States of Holland and West-Friesland removed Vorstius from office. They resolved to pay his salary six more months, then leave him to support himself. He was also ordered to leave these provinces and never to return.

In late August the national government confirmed this action of the States of Holland and West-Friesland, and expanded it to require him to leave the United Provinces entirely. For awhile he hid near Utrecht, then moved to the area of Holstein in northwest Germany.

Here was a clear-cut case. From the outset, the churches understood what had to be done with Vorstius. As we will see next time, the case of Maccovius was less clear, and its outcome different.



Believing and confessing

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

Of man's fall, sin, and the cause of sin

(Second Helvetic Confession, chapter 8a)

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2019, p. 208.

The fall of man

In the beginning, man was made according to the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, good and upright. But when at the instigation of the serpent and by his own fault he abandoned goodness and righteousness, he became subject to sin, death, and various calamities. And what he became by the fall, that is, subject to sin, death, and various calamities, so are all those who have descended from him.

The main subject of Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 8, is the fall of man into sin. The chapter begins, not by defending the historicity of the creation and fall of man, but by *assuming* man's creation and fall. From the viewpoint of the SHC, there is no question about man's creation by and in the image of God. Neither is there any question about man's fall into sin. The fact that in the church today these fundamental truths are brought into question is an indication of the extent of departure from the historic Reformed faith. From the beginning, Reformed theologians like Heinrich Bullinger and Reformed confessions like the SHC took for granted the closely related truths of the creation and fall of man as recorded in Holy Scripture.

Man was created in the image and likeness of God. That image consisted of "righteousness and true holiness." By virtue of the image of God, man was "good and upright." Through the Fall man lost the image of God—completely. By the Fall man "abandoned goodness and righteousness." He did not lose the image of God in part. He did not lose the image of God in certain respects. He *lost* the image of God. Though still capable of bearing God's image inasmuch as he remained a rational, moral creature, after the Fall he lost the image of God.

Neither did the Fall only result in the loss of the im-

age of God. More than that, man became "subject to sin, death, and various calamities." Through the Fall, the image of God was corrupted and distorted. In reality, fallen man was now in the image of the devil. To the unbelieving Jews of His day, Jesus said in John 8:44, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do." Sons are made in the image of their father (cf. Gen. 5:3). That these unbelieving Jews have the devil as their father means that they are in the image of the devil. What was true of the unbelieving Jews is true of every man by nature.

The Fall of man was due to "the instigation of the serpent." The serpent was the agent of the Fall, as Genesis 3 teaches and the rest of Scripture confirms. It is plain, however, that though the serpent is mentioned, the tempter was more than a snake; it was a rational, moral creature. In fact, the serpent was the instrument of the devil. He indwelt the serpent and spoke through the serpent. The rest of Scripture indicates this, as Revelation 12:9, "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world."

And Eve knew it. She knew that she was talking to the devil. She knew that this serpent was no ordinary snake. It is true that the serpent before the Fall and the special curse of God was quite different from the serpent today. He may very well have had the ability to talk, though certainly not the ability to talk as an expression of thought and emotion, like men and angels. He may have had the ability to mimic the human voice, like a parrot, but not to use the voice to express what he was thinking or feeling. That had to have been an indication to Eve that she was talking to the devil. In addition, there is also the fact that every day, God walked and talked with Adam and Eve. He would have shared with them the fall of Satan in heaven. There can be no question that Eve knew that she was communing with God's avowed enemy. And still she communed

with him, as though he were a friend. Rather than to say, “Get thee behind me, Satan,” as Jesus did, Eve engaged in polite conversation with the devil. That made the Fall inevitable.

Although the devil was the tempter, this in no way excuses man for his rebellion and disobedience. Man is to be blamed; he is guilty. Man’s responsibility for the Fall belongs to the teaching of this first paragraph of chapter 8: “by his own fault [man] abandoned goodness and righteousness.” Man sinned and man was responsible before God for his sin. Although God had sovereignly ordained everything, including the Fall and sin, man is the sinner and remains responsible for his sin.

From the language of the opening paragraph of Chapter 8, it is plain that the focus of the chapter is on the organic connection between Adam and the human race. This is the SHC’s main explanation of Adam’s relationship to the rest of the human race. We all “have descended from him,” Bullinger says. And so, all human beings have become “by the fall...subject to sin, death, and various calamities.” The approach of the SHC is the same as the Canons of Dordt in Heads III/IV, Article 2: “Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring.”

Sin

By sin we understand that innate corruption of man which has been derived or propagated in us all from our first parents, by which we, immersed in perverse desires and averse to all good, are inclined to all evil. Full of all wickedness, distrust, contempt and hatred of God, we are unable to do or even to think anything good of ourselves. Moreover, even as we grow older, so by wicked thoughts, words, and deeds committed against God’s law, we bring forth corrupt fruit worthy of an evil tree (Matt. 12:33ff.). For this reason, by our own deserts, being subject to the wrath of God, we are liable to just punishment, so that all of us would have been cast away by God, if Christ, the Deliverer, had not brought us back.

The result of man’s sin was that he became sinful. God punished sin with sin. Because of his sin, man the sinner became subject to sin, under the righteous judgment of God against whom he had sinned. The emphasis of the second paragraph of Chapter 8 is on the sinfulness of man’s nature. Man not only does sinful deeds, speaks sinful thoughts, and thinks sinful thoughts, but man *is*

sinful. His nature is depraved. Bullinger speaks of man’s “innate corruption.” He speaks of man as “unable to do or even to think anything good.” He not only does that which is evil, but he is “unable” to do otherwise. He is incapable of doing that which is good. And “even as we grow older,” we do not improve, but even in old age “we bring forth corrupt fruit worthy of an evil tree.”

Bullinger was not a young man when he wrote the SHC. He was 58 years old when he first wrote it; 60 years old when he revised it. Although he was not exactly elderly, he was somewhat older. He was an experienced, mature Christian. He knew something, not just of the temptations of the young, but of the sins to which older saints are exposed. He knew that even in old age, we have only a small beginning of the new obedience. Why is that? Why is that the universal experience of older Christians in every age and culture? The explanation is that sin is rooted in our nature, and no matter how long we live, our depraved nature does not improve. All the older members of the church say “Amen” to Bullinger’s assertion that “even as we grow older...we bring forth corrupt fruit worthy of an evil tree.”

Closely connected to the truth of the sinfulness of man’s nature is the truth of total depravity. If, indeed, man’s sinfulness is the sinfulness of his nature, man must be totally depraved. For, if man’s nature is sinful, man is sinful—the whole man, man completely. Though implied, the SHC makes explicit its commitment to the biblical truth of *total* depravity.

Man is totally depraved, first of all, in the sense that *the whole man* is depraved. Man is depraved in all aspects of his nature, and man is completely depraved in all aspects of his nature. We are by nature “averse to all good” and “inclined to all evil.” We are “full of all wickedness, distrust, contempt, and hatred of God.” Moreover, “we are unable to do or even to think anything good of ourselves.”

Man is totally depraved, in the second place, in the sense that *all men* are wholly sinful. The depravity of sin is universal; there are no exceptions. The entire human race and every human being is sinful. This, too, is part of the biblical teaching of total depravity. The SHC speaks of “man,” that is, “mankind, all men” are sinful. It speaks of corruption that is “propagated in us all from our first parents.” Both those who are younger and those who are “older” break God’s law “by wicked thoughts, words, and deeds.” And “all of us would have been cast away by God if Christ, the Deliverer, had not brought us back.”

As in the first paragraph, so in the second paragraph, the emphasis is on the organic connection of the human race to Adam and Eve. Bullinger speaks of sin as “de-

rived or propagated.” And he refers to Adam and Eve as “our first parents.”

Although the emphasis of the SHC is on the organic connection of the human race to Adam and Eve, the legal connection is not altogether out of view. This is apparent from the SHC’s reference to Adam as “man.” It says that “man was made according to the image of God” and it speaks of the “innate corruption of man.” The human race is considered as a unity, with one “man” as its head. It was not only Adam that sinned and rebelled against God; *man* sinned and *man* rebelled.

In addition, Adam and Eve were “our first parents.” Generally, parents are organically connected to their children. They are their parents’ offspring. But parents are also the legal and representative heads of their children. As parents, they decide and act on behalf of their children. For good or for evil, parents represent their children. Without consulting their children, they may move their family to a different part of the state or to a different country. Altogether without the consent of their children, they may change the school that they attend. Without consulting their children, they may switch their church membership or take them entirely out of the church. The seriousness of parenthood is exactly that parents are the legal and representative heads of their children. For good or for bad, the decisions that they make affect their children. So also were Adam and Eve the legal and representative heads of the entire human race. What they did, they did on behalf of and as the representatives of the rest of the human race.

In the end, this is the explanation for the righteousness of God in punishing the whole human race on account of Adam’s sin. This is the explanation for the fact that “we are liable to [God’s] just punishment” for what Adam did. How could God punish us for a sin that we did not commit? How could He punish us for Adam’s transgression? What is the explanation of the fact that in God’s judgment for Adam’s sin, not only Adam, but the rest of the human race has become “subject to sin, death, and various calamities?” The explanation is that Adam was the head and representative of the human race. The consequences of Adam’s sin were not only his own, but they were also visited on all his children. God is a God of justice.

And what is the remedy? In whom do we have hope? The SHC says that “all of us would have been cast away by God, if Christ, the Deliverer, had not brought us back.” Our hope is in Christ. Our hope is in Christ because He is the second Adam. Like the first Adam, He is our Head and Representative. We do not die on a cross; He died on the cross. We do not bear the infinite wrath of God; He endured the eternal wrath and curse of God. We do not satisfy God’s justice; He has satisfied God’s justice for all for whom He died. Just as Adam represented us in his disobedience, so Christ represents us in His obedience. What He has accomplished He has not accomplished for Himself alone, but for all of whom He is the Head. Just as all Adam’s posterity bear the fruit of his disobedience, so do all who are the posterity of God in Christ according to electing grace bear the fruit of His perfect obedience. That is our salvation.



Strength of youth

Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California

To teach them war (concluded) God’s armor for us: The praying soldier

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

Ephesians 6:18

Prayer and war are inseparably related. Certainly this holds true of prayer and physical warfare so that as the old adage goes, “There are no atheists in foxholes.”

Anyone in a trench with bullets whizzing overhead or anyone who is in the midst of some terrifying calamity “prays.” Even those who say “there is no God” and never pray, “pray” when their life is on the line, vainly hoping some higher power will hear and help them. Nevertheless, we have in mind *true* prayer offered by Christians in the name of Jesus Christ and *spiritual* warfare. Between these two there is an inseparable

relationship according to Ephesians 6:18. There is no main subject or verb in this passage quoted above, for the inspired apostle is continuing the main thought of the preceding verses: “Christian brothers, put on the whole armor of God and stand!” Now in verse 18, he adds, “Praying always....” Warring soldiers pray. God sees to it.

Through prayer as an exercise of faith the Christian soldier is made strong in his armor. Prayer is not a distinct piece of armor like the helmet or shield, but it is that which holds all the pieces of armor together and through which they are made effective. God answers prayers and brings His indispensable aid to the armed soldier so that he is strong in his armor in the power of divine might. Satan knows that the soldier who goes to church every week and can even rattle off doctrinal formulations, but does not pray betrays his outward profession and is easy prey. The absence of prayer reveals the absence of armor and, instead, the domination of the flesh. Satan also knows that the praying soldier is mighty in God. We do not know everything Peter was doing the night he was talking to a maid by the high priest’s palace, but we know he was not praying. We do not know everything Daniel was doing in the lion’s den and prior to it, but we know he was praying. Prayerless soldiers fall. Praying soldiers stand. Experience confirms it. The inspired apostle exhorts us to put on the whole armor of God—and prayer—that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

His uttered prayers

The Christian soldier is “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.” Prayer is the soldier’s conscious uttering of words to his God. The triune God takes the elect sinner into His covenant of friendship through Jesus Christ and makes him a Christian soldier. Because the Christian soldier lives as God’s friend, he is no longer the friend but the foe of the devil and sin. He is hated by the world. As the friend of God, the soldier is always praying because communion with God is delightful to him in his new heart.

What the Christian soldier utters is contained in the phrase “with all prayer and supplication.” “Prayer” is Scripture’s most general term for the act of praying and it refers to every form of devotional speech to God, including utterances of adoration, confession of sin, and thanksgiving. The Christian soldier prays with *all* prayer, meaning, he uses *all* these different utterances *all* the time—morning and evening, privately and publicly, in church, at home, at work, and at school.

Moreover, he prays with all “supplication,” which is a specific kind of prayer. The idea is something like

this: “Praying always with all prayer and especially with the prayer of supplication.” Supplication refers to an entreaty in which we plead with God to give us something: “Remove this thorn! Heal me! Deliver me from temptation! Grant me wisdom to know what path to choose! Provide a job for me! Grant me a wife! Keep my tongue from folly! Deliver my friend from drunkenness! Rescue my sister from her infatuation with a false church! Destroy the devil! Preserve the church! Send the Lord Jesus! Not my will but thy will be done!” It is not surprising that special mention would be given to supplication, for the praying Christian is a soldier who is always under attack and encountering dangers in the heat of battle.

The Christian soldier utters these prayers “in the Spirit.” That is, he prays in the power of the Holy Spirit. First, because the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, the Christian always prays, “*for Jesus’ sake.*” The Christian soldier recognizes that of himself he is unworthy to come into God’s presence by prayer and most definitely he is unworthy to ask God to give him anything, so he always prays in the name of his Savior. Jesus in His perfect life and atoning death is the soldier’s only way to God and God’s blessings. The wicked in foxholes cannot pray, for they do not have the Spirit, and without the Spirit they will not pray in Jesus’ name. Pleadings that are not in the name of Jesus are not prayers but arrogant demands that God abhors.

Secondly, to “pray in the Spirit” is to pray sincerely and *from the heart*. Sometimes the Christian soldier utters thoughtless, rote phrases; and sometimes when others are leading in prayer, his own mind wanders. To pray in the Spirit is to pray from the heart with understanding and earnestness.

Thirdly, to “pray in the Spirit,” is to pray *with confidence*. The soldier’s faith can come under ferocious assaults. But when he prays in the Spirit, the soldier has complete confidence that God hears and answers all his prayers for Jesus’ sake. Others may give up and say, “What’s the use in praying? God does not hear me.” But the soldier who prays in the Spirit is assured he is accepted in the beloved and keeps praying in confidence.

Finally, to “pray in the Spirit” is to pray *according to the Word of God*. The Spirit always works in and through the Word of God. There are flippant and irreverent prayers that do not harmonize with the majesty of God in Scripture, greedy prayers for riches that do not harmonize with the humility required in Scripture, prayers for miraculous healings that do not fit with the expectations of Scripture. The Christian soldier is always in the Word, and his prayers are informed by the Word.

In uttering all these prayers and supplications before God, the Christian soldier is vigilant and attentive on the battlefield, always *watching*. In order to *utter*, he *watches*. “Watching with all perseverance” refers to being alert. And he is not only watching for himself, but “for all saints.” The saints are those who are in God’s covenant and indwelt by the Holy Spirit so that they are the sworn enemies of sin, Satan, and the wicked. Each Christian soldier is carefully watching with all perseverance for all his fellow soldiers.

Why? *Thereunto!* Watching for this reason: prayer! “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching *thereunto....*” He watches that he might pray. Praying in the Spirit by uttering words to God is the goal, and in order to pray bringing meaningful requests unto God for others, the soldier is always watching the whole battlefield with perseverance and supplication.

Watching the field, the Christian soldier knows what is going on in the lives of other young people and saints of all ages in his congregation so that he might supplicate for the new mother, the new officebearer, the member under discipline, the shut-ins, the widows, and the ill. He reads the *Standard Bearer*, the *Acts of Synod*, and other literature to keep abreast of ecclesiastical developments so he knows how to pray for all the saints. He reads the newsletters that come from the missionaries or other organizations like the Society for Special Education or the Reformed Witness Hour in order to supplicate for others. He pays attention to world news, so that he might know about attacks on religious freedom, natural disasters, war, worldliness, and other troubles affecting fellow soldiers all throughout the world so that he can pray for them. The Christian soldier watches with all perseverance and supplication for all saints in order to pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.

His urgent prayers

How urgent are these prayers! “Always” and “watching” and “perseverance” imply urgency (read the passage again). But also “wiles,” “wrestle,” “spiritual wickedness in high places,” “the evil day,” and “fery darts” in the preceding context (Eph. 6:11-17) indicate the urgency.

First, the Christian soldier urgently prays for himself. He will never wake up to quiet on the home front. The devil or one of his demons spends the night sleeping beside the soldier’s bed and, as soon as he stirs, the devil is ready to tempt—tempt him to have negative thoughts so that he feels gloomy getting out of bed, or tempt him by some circumstance or comment or thought or message, hoping he will be on edge, lose control of his spirit, and speak harshly or hastily. How urgent are the soldier’s prayers!

Secondly, the Christian soldier urgently prays for other saints. If they are saints, the devil hates them. Some young Christian soldiers have lost the will to fight; they cannot even get out of the tent in the morning and put on their armor to go out in the battlefield.

They stay home from school or go masking their dark souls with a half-smile. They are deeply depressed, overwhelmed with anxiety, and not even thinking straight. They feel like they are all alone at the bottom of a deep, dark pit. Not only are they unable to pray, they have come to doubt that there is even a God to whom they can pray. Christ will never let go of such soldiers He purchased with His blood. He will work His Spirit in them empowering them to cry out to a friend or pastor, “Help, I can’t even pray!”

Some Christian soldiers have experienced the death of a loved one and their grief is so profoundly deep that they feel only coldness within, and under the continual buffeting of Satan are beginning to lose a desire to go on. You might see a grieving soldier who is in the cemetery with his knee down by a tomb stone sobbing over a relationship that is no more.

Some soldiers endure hardness for Jesus’ sake. They are being persecuted physically or emotionally or psychologically. They are being bullied, and called names for being upright in conduct and speech. They are suffering the loss of possessions or opportunities, even a job. They are being tempted by Satan to compromise their faith and confession.

Others have a parent or sibling walking in unbelief, or they suffer never-ending pain, or some great debilitation in body or mind, or loneliness, or trouble finding their way in life, or the emptiness of hearing from the doctor that they will probably never be able to have children, and the devil continues to tempt

Why? *Thereunto!* Watching for this reason: prayer! “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching *thereunto....*” He watches that he might pray. Praying in the Spirit by uttering words to God is the goal, and in order to pray bringing meaningful requests unto God for others, the soldier is always watching the whole battlefield with perseverance and supplication.

them to live in continual sadness or to get angry with God.

Some Christian soldiers are being blinded by Satan right now and tempted to commit gross acts of wickedness that will cause regret for the rest of their lives. They will fall, or already have and do not care. Others who grew up on the hearty meat of the Reformed faith are being tempted to apostatize for the sake of a boyfriend or a job or the thrill of rebellion, or hatred for the truth. You might not know who they are, but they are on every field, and maybe even sat in the pew ahead of you last Sunday.

How urgent are the prayers of the watching and praying soldiers who plead with God in the name of Jesus that He might comfort, reassure, break, humble, rescue, and preserve His saints everywhere!

Thirdly, the Christian soldier urgently prays for ministers, asking that God will make them bold to preach. There may be people in the congregation who do not want the sharp application of the Word of God, and they make themselves known. The preacher can be tempted to backpedal or soften the Word of God so that he is not confronted by them. There are enemies without who hiss and snarl and make ominous threats if the church condemns their wicked lifestyle through preaching. Sometimes the preacher is even jailed for the sake of the truth. Pray that God make the minister bold, lest the sword of the Spirit be sheathed and the whole army suffer. If Paul needs prayers for boldness, then every man does. Listen to the next two verses: “And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph. 6:19-20)

His unceasing prayers

Unceasing are the Christian soldier’s uttered battlefield prayers (“praying always”). The soldier is not a monk who abandons life in the world in order to retreat to a high mountain and spend all his waking hours with his hands folded and his knees bent in prayer. That he prays *always* means he is not only utilizing appointed times throughout the day to fold his hands, close his eyes, bow his head, and utter words through his mouth to God, but he also lives his whole life conscious of

God and with a prayerful spirit. A profitable time to pray with eyes open is while cruising alone in a vehicle as sacred music quietly plays in the background, contemplating God, His greatness, and your need for Him. How regrettable that a soldier should drive home from school with profane music thumping in his car stimulating the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. The Christian soldier is praying always by communing with God in his heart.

The Christian soldier knows his strength is not in prayer itself, but in the God to whom He prays. Christ is the soldier’s strength. Christ who was made weak in our flesh as a Man of sorrows smitten and sacrificed on the cross for us. But in His weakness He was strong;

He was judging the world; He was casting out the prince of the world; He was being lifted up that He might draw us unto Himself. He was accomplishing victory for His people. The risen Lord is our strength and might. Christ-less soldiers fall. Christ-clad soldiers stand. Christ works His Spirit in us so that we pray

in the Spirit and through those uttered, urgent, unceasing prayers His strength becomes ours and we stand in the battle.

That he prays *always* means he is not only utilizing appointed times throughout the day to fold his hands, close his eyes, bow his head, and utter words through his mouth to God, but he also lives his whole life conscious of God and with a prayerful spirit.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

Praying always....



Bring the books...

Mr. Charles Terpstra, member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan and full-time librarian/registrar/archivist at the Protestant Reformed Seminary



The Belgic Confession: A Commentary, (Volume 2), by David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2019. Hardcover. Approx. 400 pp. [Reviewed by Rev. Allen J. Brummel.]

With thankfulness to God we receive the second volume of Prof. D. Engelsma's commentary on the Belgic Confession. This second volume contains the continued solid instruction and practical counsel that we have come to expect and love from the pen of this author. Those who appreciated the first volume will eagerly embrace this second one as its companion to complete the treatment of the Belgic Confession.

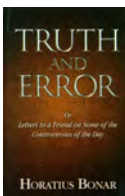
Although you may have some commentaries on the Belgic Confession already on your shelves, including the helpful and appreciated work by P. Y. De Jong, *The Church's Witness to the World*, you will be well served by adding this commentary set to your library. This commentary is distinctively Reformed, thorough, and interacts throughout with the text of the confession. Engelsma carefully explains the text of the confession, sets it in its historical context, explains its contemporary relevance, bringing in a plethora of texts and exegesis to explain and elaborate on the doctrines. The pastoral warmth of the confession shines through this volume and is enhanced by the author's own experience as a pastor and seminary professor for over forty years.

This reviewer found the commentary to be a valuable aid to his preparation for a Bible study that treated the Belgic Confession article by article.

There are chapters and passages that thrill the soul and move the Reformed believer to deep joy and thankfulness. A defense of justification by faith alone (Arts. 22, 23) precedes an extensive treatment of sanctification and the place of the law in the life of the believer (Arts. 24, 25). Engelsma's stirring explanation of Articles 27–29 and the calling of the believer with regards to membership in the instituted church are chapters that we, our children, and grandchildren need to hear in our day and age. The believer must not only love Jesus, but must also love the church as the body of Christ.

Disappointing to me were the comments on Article 36 regarding the need to change the wording of the confession. While I agree with the suggested change, Engelsma knows that the way to accomplish a change in the creeds is not to write a book suggesting a gravamen, but to formulate the carefully worded gravamen oneself and submit it to the broader assemblies. I believe the author is best qualified to heed his own call and I hope that he takes up this important matter soon.

It is not enough merely to subscribe to the confessions; we must know and love the confessions to which we subscribe as Reformed believers. Our families and children need to be familiar with the content of the confessions. Officebearers must know and love the content of the confessions. Engelsma provides believers and the church of Christ with a great service, and I pray this two-volume commentary will promote renewed study and zeal for the Reformed truth as together we "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3).



Truth and Error, Or Letters to a Friend on Some of the Controversies of the Day, Horatius Bonar. New Ipswich, NH: Pietan Publications, 2014. Paperback. \$12.00. [Reviewed by Prof. Douglas Kuiper.]

various controversies: denial of the totality of man's depravity (7, 95ff.); "high Calvinists" quickly becoming "Arminians of the lowest grade" (12); exaltation of man, and diminishing of God's glory (20ff.). Additionally, Bonar dealt with a wrong understanding of the relationship of man's will to God's will (Letter 3); of divine election (Letter 4); of the relationship between God's foreknowledge and His predestinating decree

This book consists of letters written in response to

(Letter 5); of Christ as the substitute for the elect, a definite number (Letter 6); of faith and assurance (Letter 7); and of the Spirit's work (Letter 9). And, a religious bustle and zeal without vitality (141), manifest by people harping upon "one string; what *they* call the gospel: (144).

Where and when were these controversies? Yes, in the Netherlands in the early 1600s. Yes, everywhere today. But also in Scotland in the early to middle 1800s. There and then lived Horatius Bonar (1808-1889), pastor of the Free Church of Scotland in Kelso, and author of biographies, hymns, and other books and treatises.

He wrote the ten letters included in this volume to his flock, as a pastor today might email or blog for his congregation about prevalent errors. Bonar exhorts his beloved flock to evaluate these teachings in light of Scripture and to see their error. In the process, Bonar defends the doctrines of sovereign grace and God's glory in saving sinners. An appendix to the book is entitled "Be Reconciled to God," and is a sermon on II Corinthians 5:21. Why it is included is not explicitly stated, but it is a fitting pastoral conclusion to the doctrinal treatises.

I called them "doctrinal treatises" because these letters do engage the false doctrines of the day. Though meaty, they are practical and pastoral. One can read them with profit today too, for when one defends the truth against error on the basis of Scripture, the defense and explanations of Scripture need not change. I will

not summarize his work, but point out a few gems that I found in it.

First, the response to the charge that Calvinism makes God the author of sin (30) is as pertinent today as ever.

Second, Bonar is good at pointing out logical fallacies that those who oppose the truth make. I found intriguing his point that one who denies that God elected certain particular persons must also deny that God elected Israel as His nation, and David as His king (58).

Third, his remarks regarding the use of the word "all" in Scripture were very instructive. After he categorizes into four classes the 1,200 or so texts in which the word "all" is used, he notes that obviously, in most of the texts, the word "all" cannot mean "every." Nor do the Arminians try to make the word "all" mean "every" in every place it occurs. Only in a few select texts do the Arminians insist it means "every" (75-78).

Fourth, he deals well with the age-old question that is asked as an attack on Calvinism: "Why does God command men to believe, if they are unable to?" Part of his answer is to remind us that Christ commanded Lazarus to come forth, who was dead—and by His command, gave life (102ff.)!

Having never heard of Pietan Publications before, one more reason I was glad to read this book was to reinforce in my mind that other smaller, lesser-known publishers today are reprinting significant works of years past. Go to www.pietanpublications.com to browse what else they offer.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Can you guess which type of animal I am thinking of? You may not have known that sometimes their owners race these animals. They often live to be 18-20 years old and often deliver one young per year. Sometimes they can reach a mature weight of 800-1,100 pounds. Most often they are slate grey in color. Answer later in this column.

Minister activities

On March 3 Rev. W. Langerak, pastor at Southeast

PRC in Grand Rapids, MI received the call from Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. On March 24 Trinity received the blessed news of his acceptance.

Also on March 3, Rev. J. Laning, pastor at Hull, IA PRC, declined the call extended to him by the congregation at Lacombe, AB, Canada. Her Council then submitted a new trio: Revs. E. Guichelaar, M. McGeown, and M. VanderWal. On March 24 Rev. Guichelaar received the call.

Rev. Carl Haak, pastor at Georgetown PRC in Michigan, had been considering the call extended to him by

the Grandville, MI PRC to be a minister-on-loan to the CERC in Singapore. On March 11 Rev. Haak announced he was led by God to decline this call. From a new trio of Revs. J. Engelsma, G. Eriks, and C. Spronk, Rev. Spronk received this call on March 24.

Congregational activities

Prayer Day services were held Wednesday, March 13, in most of the Protestant Reformed Churches, while others held theirs in February.

From Byron Center PRC's bulletin we find this significant item: "There will be an informational meeting to investigate the startup of a daughter congregation on Tuesday, March 12 at 7:00 P.M. at church. Agendas are available today in the fellowship hall on the table by the mailboxes."

Advance notice: Why do we use the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible? What errors are found in other versions? Please reserve Thursday evening, May 9, for a presentation at Calvary PRC in Hull, IA on the KJV.

From the Hudsonville, MI PRC bulletin: "Great Escape Night: The Activities Committee will be hosting a "Great Escape Night" on Friday, March 15 at church. This is for all adults high school and older. You will be divided into teams in which you will be solving and finding clues to race against the clock and try to be the fastest to escape the room. There will be many different topics including science, Bible trivia, literature, and even baking! Cost is \$10 per person and space is limited! Sign up in narthex today!"

Parsonage lawn make-over! Beginning with the use of two sod-cutting machines on Thursday March 21 and March 22 and then hauling away of old sod on Saturday March 23 in dump trailers. People brought shovels and rakes, etc.! That's what they did in Lynden, WA recently. Sounds like a grand plan! Quite the project too.

Members from Crete, Cornerstone, and Peace choirs plan to present the Easter cantata "Hallelujah, What a Savior" on Sunday April 14 at 7:00 P.M. at Peace PRC. The songs and narration beautifully tell of our victorious Savior.

In the great northwest of Iowa, the "Hundred Year Flood" occurred in 2014. Folks in these parts had never seen such torrents before. Now, they have experienced the "Hundred Year Flood" three times in five years, including this March. The town of Doon, Iowa was enterable only from the east, with roads in all the other directions covered by water, raging seas of water. A few miles downstream, the town of Rock Valley evacuated many of its residents. As with all floods, the waters abated and those affected tried to return to normal. We think of the verse in Proverbs 21 that states: "The

king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; he turneth it withersoever he wills."

Denominational activities

Dordt400! April 25-27. Trinity PRC. The seminary-sponsored conference celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Great Synod is approaching! Please make plans to come to hear important speeches, see displays of 400-year-old artifacts from Dordt, learn the winners of the writing contest, and meet friends of the PRC coming from at least 10 different countries! Speakers are our seminary professors; Revs. B. Huizinga and W. Langerak; and Rev. A. Stewart (CPRC NI) and Rev. M. Shand (EPC Australia). Trinity PRC, in Hudsonville, is our host. The conference will be live-streamed via Trinity's website for those unable to attend. For more, see Dordt400.org

Young people's activities

The 2019 Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention, hosted by Southwest PRC and Providence PRC, will be held August 12-16, 2019, at Camp Michindoh, in Hillsdale, Michigan. Visit prconvention.com for more information.

The annual Western Young People's retreat is planned for July 16-19 in Spokane. This year's retreat will be at Camp Sanders, Idaho, same location as last year. Registration information will be coming soon.

School activities

The CCHS choirs presented a joint concert with the choir from Heritage Christian High in Dyer, IN on Thursday, March 21, at 7:00 P.M. at Crete PR Church. Also, on Friday evening, March 22, the CCHS Choirs gave a concert at 7:00 P.M. at Fourth Presbyterian Church in downtown Chicago! It was well worth the trip to hear the choirs in this century-old cathedral at the end of the Magnificent Mile!

The Adams Christian School Foundation will be holding its 30th Annual ACS Foundation Golf Scramble on Monday May 6 at Egypt Valley CC. Registration is scheduled to start at 12:30 P.M. followed by the shotgun start at 2:00 P.M.

Mark your calendars for May 18, Adams (Christian School's) Amazing Race—4 cities, 20 stops, 1 scavenger hunt and 5 challenges.

In Lynden, WA the notice read this way:

CCS Ladies Aid Dinner: It's a Spud Fest! The Ladies Aid is planning a baked potato dinner with all the fixings, this week Friday, March 8, at the school. Serving times are from 6:00 to 7:30 P.M. After dinner, it's games! Bring your favorite board game to play, sign up for the Baggo

tournament, or just be a spec-tater. There will also be activities for the small fries. Hope to see you there!

Future Teachers and Ministers:

Information for the 2019 PR Scholarship Fund essay competition is now available. Prospective ministers and teachers should email prscholarship@gmail.com to receive the essay topics and submission requirements. Completed essays must be submitted by May 31st.

Trivia answer

The carabao is a type of water buffalo native chiefly to the Philippines, and also introduced to Guam. I

have never seen one move at more than a walking pace, but am told some pull carts in special races. Known also as the “Philippine Tractor,” they are essential for Filipino farmers. 3% of them are albino. They often eat water plants and rushes, or prepared fodder. The carabao is mostly a docile animal, but has great sickle-shaped horns that curve backwards toward its neck. I remember a photo long ago of missionary Rev. R. Smit riding a carabao. I had that chance once and declined it—my one regret from a trip to the Philippines.

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

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC in Kalamazoo express their Christian sympathy to Sarah Kiel, her husband Brad and her family in the death of Sarah’s grandfather, **Mr. Henry Ekema**. May they be comforted in the words of Jesus Christ “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11: 25, 26).

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
David Pryor, Clerk

Wedding anniversary

“But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children. To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them” (Psalm 103:17-18). With thankfulness to God, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents, **Michael and Ruth Elzinga**, who will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary on April 27, 2019, Lord willing. We have been blessed by their godly example to continually trust in the faithfulness of God, and for their steadfast dedication and love to us, their children and grandchildren. We pray that God will bless and strengthen them in the years ahead.

Phil and Stacy Lenting
Hannah, Nick, Brendan
Tim and Schareane Elzinga
Cairin

Sherry Elzinga
Gerald and Deb Feenstra
Brice, Cole, Alexa
Grandville, Michigan



JUNE ISSUE

Subscribe today at beaconlights.org

As a believer you are united to Christ.

What is this union?

How does it affect your life?

Does it even affect your life?



Announcements continued

Teacher needed

The Edmonton PR Christian School is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2019–2020 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1–4, and the board is willing to work with the teacher on a curriculum suited to their preference. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com.

Teacher needed

Loveland PR Christian School (Loveland, CO) is seeking applicants for both 1st / 2nd grade and 3rd / 4th grade teaching positions for the 2019–20 school year. Interested candidates may contact the Administrator, BJ Mowery at (970) 218-3420 or bmowery@lovelandprcs.org or the Education Chairman, Joe Ophoff at (970) 818-6790 or joe@scotthomeinspection.com

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 8, 2019 at 8:00 A.M., in the Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church.

Gary Boverhof, Stated Clerk



DORDT 400

Safe-guarding the Reformed tradition

A three-day conference commemorating the
“Great Synod” of 1618–19

April 25–27, 2019

Trinity Protestant Reformed Church
3385 Van Buren Street, Hudsonville, MI 49426

Learn more and enter the writing contest at
dordt400.org

Sponsored by the Theological School
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