

The Standard Bearer

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CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	A Child: Asked For and Lent To REV. RON VAN OVERLOOP	362
<i>Editorial</i>	The 2014 Synodical Preview PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA	364
<i>Search the Scriptures</i>	But Fear Thou God REV. THOMAS MIERSMA	368
<i>All Around Us</i>	The Bill Nye Vs. Ken Ham Debate REV. CLAY SPRONK	370
<i>Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass</i>	Postmillennialism (29) PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA	373
<i>Strength of Youth</i>	To Teach Them War (Intro.) REV. BRIAN HUIZINGA	375
<i>O Come Let Us Worship</i>	The People of God Humbled and Healed: The Element of Prayer (8a) REV. CORY GRIESS	378
<i>Bring the Books...</i>	Book Reviews PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA	380
<i>News From Our Churches</i>	Activities MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER	383

A Child: Asked For and Lent To

For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him: therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.

Samuel 1:27, 28

In 1963 the Rev. Gerrit Vos wrote a meditation for the *Standard Bearer* on this passage. Rev. Vos used the meditation as an opportunity to call parents to pray for sons who would serve the church in the ministry of the Word. The occasion for this plea was undoubtedly the fact that at that time seven of the nineteen congregations in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America were without pastors.

When Hannah prayed for the child she would return to the Lord, she was thinking of lifelong service for the spiritual well-being of the nation. We would do something similar if we would encourage our more gifted sons to enter the ministry of God's Word. And even if the ministry is not a choice or an option, all godly parents are obliged, by their baptism vow, to teach the children God gives to them (daughters as well as sons) in the fear

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of the Lord. Along with such instruction, godly parents will not cease to pray that God graciously bless their instruction and example to the end that the child will give himself to lifelong grateful service of Jehovah in every aspect of his life.

There is a very close connection between Hannah's (and our) asking God for a child and Hannah's (and our) lending that child to the Lord. How close? So close is it, that the Hebrew word that is translated "asked" is also translated "lent." This Hebrew word means "to grant, to give, or to lend on request." And now realize that this same Hebrew word is the basis for the name "Samuel." May we learn the importance of our lending to the service of the Lord the children we ask Him to give to us!

The Important Setting

When Hannah prayed her prayer, it was the later years of the judges. Recall that the period of the judges was characterized by everyone doing that which was right in his own eyes, and generations arising that knew not Jehovah (Judges 17:6; 2:10). It is obvious that the parents of that day taught their children, but they did not command them to keep the way of Jehovah, to do righteousness and justice (Gen. 18:19). These parents

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taught their children, but not the right things concerning sin, salvation, and service. They taught them how to get ahead in the world and how to do their own will. They did not point them to the calling to do God's will, nor did they give instruction in self-denial.

Another important part of the setting for Hannah's prayer was the home of Elkanah. Elkanah was an Israelite whose recorded life indicates that he was not very strong spiritually. He was not content with one wife—as God had established in the beginning. It might be that he felt that his desire for children allowed him to have a second wife. Also, his spiritual weakness as a husband and as a believer is seen in the comfort he thought he was giving to Hannah when he declared, “am not I better to thee than ten sons?” Pretty arrogant! To this God-given headship Hannah was obliged to submit, trusting the Lord to care for her (I Pet. 3:5).

Hannah grieved sore for the spiritual poverty in Israel at that time. The church of God in her day was without good spiritual leadership. We may conclude that the spiritual leaders were typified in her husband and in the high priest, Eli, and his evil sons, Hophni and Phinehas. The nation of Israel desperately needed strong spiritual men to lead them back into the fear and service of Jehovah.

Also important to the setting is the old dispensational perspective of children. Not only was there the hope of being the mother of the seed of the woman and of the seed of Abraham, but also the view that children were a sign of God's blessing on the nation. Notice that Deuteronomy 28:4 and 18 puts the emphasis of the gift of children on the nation as a whole, not on the husband and wife. In the age of types and shadows it meant having a name in Canaan (heaven). Therefore, to be barren in that dispensation was a sign of a curse. It was not itself a curse, but the sign of it—just as having children did not mean that the woman was automatically blessed, but that she had the sign of God's blessing on the nation. (Remember that grace is not in things, but is the attitude of God.) Could Hannah's sorrow also have been that there were times that she wrongly took the sign for the reality and concluded that because she was barren her name (Hannah means “grace”) was false?

Finally, important to the setting of Hannah's prayer is the persecution she endured from Peninnah. On a

personal level Hannah was hurt when Peninnah exalted herself as if her children were her good works and she taunted Hannah for being cursed of God (I Sam. 2:3, 6ff.). In addition, Peninnah represented to godly Hannah the adversaries of Israel, the church. This added to Hannah's general sorrow.

At a Passover feast Hannah was “*marah*” (in bitterness), crying in prayer for Israel and for herself as a believer. It was then that she vowed a vow to Jehovah (10, 11). Hannah (the object of God's grace) prayed. She was given the spirit of prayer, and her bold request in her prayer was for God's sake and for the sake of the church. Her prayer and vow did not begin and end in herself. Such would have been and is a selfish motive. She did not ask for a child so her personal desires would be met, or so she could get even with Peninnah. Rather, Hannah specifically prayed for “this child.” We may believe that when she wept bitterly in the court of the tabernacle she was repeating a request she had made many times over. She was asking specifically for a son (not a girl); and for that kind of a son who would be godly and willing to be devoted to God and to Israel. She sought a sign of God's favor/blessing on His people, so His name might be vindicated and His enemies silenced!

The Fervent Vow

Let us consider Hannah's vow. And the vow of baptizing parents.

Hannah vowed to “give him unto Jehovah all the days of his life” (11). And “as long as he liveth he shall be lent to Jehovah” (28). Remember that the word translated “lent” is derived from the same Hebrew word for “asked.” She asked for Samuel so that he could be used in the service of Jehovah. Instead of being trained to work the family land or to assist in the maintenance of the family and tribe, Samuel was trained for this work of lifelong service of the God of Israel. As soon as Samuel was weaned, Hannah brought him to the house of God and to Eli, the High Priest at Shiloh. It is obvious that Hannah did not want a child for herself, but for the cause of God. And it is obvious that Hannah prepared Samuel in his very early years for his calling, so he went with some willingness into the Lord's service.

Godly believers, when gifted with a child, are to return him (a daughter as well as a son) to Jehovah. Unbelief

views the child to be the product of our will and actions, to be ours to be done with as we please. But graced believers see the child as a gift—the kind of gift that always belongs to the Giver! They give “this child” back to the Lord. The child is to be trained to see himself as belonging to the Lord and to be used for and useful in the Lord’s church. He is to use every talent for the sake of the other members of that body and to guard constantly the unity of the body of Christ.

The child is not his own to do as he wants, but must keep the way of Jehovah and do His righteousness and justice in every part of his life. This is the content of the vow to bring up a child in the “aforesaid doctrine.”


When godly parents themselves serve the Lord and teach their children so to serve Him, then their house becomes a “house of the Lord.” Godly parents are to pray constantly and fervently. Because godly parents are very aware that they cannot make the child that God gave them to be a believer, ready to deny himself, and willing joyfully to take up his cross in God’s service, they constantly pray to Him who alone is able! And by prayer they constantly return (lend) to the Lord the child to be used for His purpose and in His service.

The Blessed Fruit

That Samuel “worshipped the LORD” (28b) is the result of God’s blessing on Hannah’s prayer for a specific kind of child and her vow to lend this child to the Lord. To worship means that Samuel (and all who worship) acknowledge God to be the most blessed One, full of majesty and blessing, worthy of all praise and all obedi-

ence. Samuel was doing what we all will do forever in heaven. Samuel worshiped Jehovah when he willingly served as a judge in Israel. And we worship Him when we give ourselves to doing God’s will in our marriages, family life, employment, and conduct in the congregation in which God places us.

Notice also that Samuel is identified in Scripture as a mighty man of prayer. A little known fact about Samuel is that he is mentioned with Moses for the activity of interceding for God’s people. And we know how fervently and how frequently Moses interceded for God’s people. The same was true of Samuel! “Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them” (Ps. 99:6). “Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people” (Jer. 15:1). Scripture records two of the times Samuel interceded for Israel: I Samuel 7:5, 8, 9; 12:11, 18, 19. Those are examples of what Samuel did often. He was a great blessing to Israel because he frequently interceded for the church of God.

In addition to Samuel being blessed and a blessing, we see that blessing results for godly parents like Hannah. She and all godly parents sing, “My heart rejoiceth in the LORD” (I Sam. 2:1). All the work of instructing our children in the way and fear of Jehovah, when accompanied by fervent prayers, is “graced” (Hannah). We work at instructing and praying because there is no greater joy than to hear that the elder’s children walk in truth, serving the Lord by serving His church. 

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

The 2014 Synodical Preview: Blessings and Opportunities

Reformed churches consciously tracing their lineage to the Reformed churches in the Netherlands have a

rich heritage of ecclesiastical assemblies. Our forefathers understood the importance of proper church government not only for the well-

being, but for the very existence of the church. The sixteenth-century Reformed churches in the Netherlands were in their infancy—small

and scattered, but committed to the Reformed faith. Through most of that century they were also fiercely persecuted by the Roman Catholic Spanish rulers. Worship services could only be held in secret, not infrequently in open fields. Many thousands died for the faith.

It is significant that in the face of such opposition, the churches did their best to hold ecclesiastical assemblies—consistories, classes, and provincial synods (national synods were virtually impossible to convene). The ministers and elders might have to conduct their business in strict secrecy; the delegates might have to slip over the border into Germany to hold a synod; but they were willing—so important for the unity, the good order, and the maintenance of the truth was it for these Reformed people.

The twenty delegates and three professors called to the Protestant Reformed synod will not face such hardship or danger when they assemble, D.V., for the pre-synodical service in Hope PRC (Walker) on June 9. Without any need for secrecy they will gather Tuesday, June 10, to convene the 75th synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches.¹

This freedom to meet openly (with visitors welcome) and without opposition must be acknowledged as a precious gift from God. Surely we must be conscious that as our synod assembles for worship and later for deliberation, there are

thousands, indeed millions of fellow Christians who live under persecution and have not these privileges.

Reading through the 2014 Agenda, synodical delegates will recognize abundant evidence of God's blessings on the labors of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and on the churches themselves. First, notice what is not in the Agenda. The Agenda contains not one protest or appeal against previous decisions of consistories, classes, or synod 2013. Do not misunderstand—protests and appeals are not evil. On the contrary, they are the proper, Reformed way to correct wrong decisions and redress possible injustices in the churches. The point is, however, that the King of the church has given to the churches peace. Synod will be able to do its work without major divisive issues pressing for time and attention.

Our first glance into the Agenda will dwell briefly on that which is vital, and yet not terribly interesting for most, namely finances.

The Board of Trustees (BOT) is made up of ministers and elders appointed by synod, plus the synodical treasurer and clerk. The BOT keeps a watchful eye on the churches' funds. They oversee the investments of excess funds and/or restricted funds. They see to it that there is enough cash to finance the work synod has approved for the committees to do. It is obvious that God has given these board members a head for this kind of work, and I, for one, appreciate their efforts. Not so much as a hint of misuse of funds or poor stewardship has ever been attached to the BOT.

The report makes plain that God richly provides the funds needed to conduct the work He calls the churches to do. In addition, God provides dedicated, knowledgeable, and very capable people to assist the BOT—the synodical treasurer, assistant treasurer, bookkeeper, and investment advisor. If you want to know who they are, check the Acts of Synod.

The Emeritus Committee reports on financial needs of the emeriti ministers as reported by the consistories. The lives of careful, godly stewardship of our emeriti ministers, wives, and widows is evident yet today in their asking as little as possible from the churches. In fact, the cost for emeritation will go down significantly in 2015, even though one minister will be added. In that connection, the BOT indicates that the long-term care insurance policy, though expensive, is currently helping the cause much in the assistance needed for Rev. Wayne Bekkering and Rev. Dale Kuiper.

The Student Aid Committee (SAC) report indicates that our current seminary students are not living high off the hog. Though there will be in the next school year, D.V., four married students with children, the total amount the SAC is asking synod to approve is under \$22,000 (aside from a major medical insurance policy for them). Obviously family, friends, and congregations of the students are helping them financially. Perhaps synod should take notice of the ever-increasing balance of the Seminary Student Assistance Fund (intended for emergencies)—currently over \$117,000. The

¹ From 1925 to 1939 the churches met together regularly three or four times a year as a combined consistory, then a classis. In 1939 they divided into two classes, and in 1940 the first synod assembled.

churches are glad for the opportunity to give in collections for the seminarians. However, might it be wise for the SAC to be instructed to bring recommendations for a better use of this large, little-used fund?

One more report deals with numbers—not cash, so much as statistics on the churches. Among reports on other duties, the stated clerk (Don Doezeema) informs synod of a modest growth in numbers in 2013—2.05%. We thank God for His work of adding to the churches families and individuals. Another cause for thanks to God is the quiet, efficient, money-saving labors of the stated clerk, with the indispensable assistance of his wife Judi. However, Mr. D. reports that his current term as stated clerk ends in June of 2015, and, in his words, “I will do well, I think, to make this my last.” I cannot fault him for this announcement intended to prepare synod, but I do not look forward to his retirement. God blessed the PRC exceedingly for many years through the dedicated—astoundingly dedicated—labors of the Doezeemas.

We move on to the heart of the church’s work. *The blessing* of Christ on His church is the faithful preaching of the gospel, and on this score, the PRC are blessed indeed. The synodical deputies of Classis East remind us of Classis West’s examination and approval for ordination of (now) Rev. Eric Guichelaar, last fall already.

The Theological School Committee follows that up with the news that the faculty recommends seminarian Josh Engelsma for a

synodical exam. Assuming that synod adopts the TSC’s proposed schedule, he will deliver his sermon on Tuesday morning, with his oral exam to follow on Wednesday and Thursday. Although the exam is grueling, the faculty and TSC are confident of the outcome—the seminary commencement is proposed for Thursday evening, June 12, in Josh’s home congregation, Hope PRC.

The TSC reports further on the blessing of having ten other students in the seminary, one of whom (Ryan Barnhill) has an internship scheduled for the second half of 2014 in Edgerton, MN.

The PRC is blessed with a solid catechism curriculum for the youth from ages 5 or 6 to about 18. The Catechism Book Committee brings a proposal to synod that will require careful deliberation. It proposes that some of the work on the catechism books that synod previously assigned to their stated clerk now be given to the Reformed Free Publishing Association. Since the RFPA is obviously not a committee of the PRC, this is a radical change with many implications that synod will need to consider.

The three remaining reports to be summarized are the largest, and deal with the essential, Christ-commanded work of the church. Two of these involve the command to preach the gospel to every creature.

The Domestic Mission Committee reports that it is seeking ways to assist congregations with local evangelism that may well expand to become a denominational work—a good goal. Rev. Bill Bruinsma is the one Protestant Reformed mission-

ary in North America. The DMC reports very favorably on the labors of Rev. and Mrs. Bruinsma, the calling church (Southwest PRC), and the Fellowship in Pittsburgh. There is ongoing work to send the word out from Pittsburgh and get new preaching areas established.

The Foreign Mission Committee continues to be excited by God’s blessing on the work in the Philippines. God’s gracious care is evident in the formation of a two-congregation federation. The Berean PRC (with Rev. Vernon Ibe, pastor) and the First Reformed Church of Bulacan (with Rev. John Flores, pastor) officially joined on April 9, 2014 in the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines. Reports are that other congregations may, by God’s grace, be seeking to join, though not in the immediate future.

The FMC is also picking up a work from the Hope PRC in Walker—a work in Myanmar. A delegation from the FMC held a conference in Myanmar this year, and the FMC desires to hold two per year. The hope is that a missionary can be called at some point to work in Myanmar.

Finally, the Lord continues to bless the efforts of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches (CC) to manifest the unity of the church of Christ. The CC reports on excellent relationships and good activities with our sister churches. The first is Covenant PRC NI and its mission in Limerick. This sister continues its clear and uncompromising witness to the Reformed faith in the British Isles.

Second, the CC reports that the excellent sister relationship with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore increasingly demonstrates mutual trust and the binding love of God. The main item there is that the session is making plans to extend a call to the now minister-on-loan, Rev. Andy Lanning. The session is convinced that he is well qualified to be their pastor in this foreign land and culture.

A concrete manifestation of God's blessing will be the presence of delegates from these sister churches—Elder Lee (Kong Wee) from CERC, who will be accompanied by his wife, Dorcas, and their two children, and Rev. Martyn McGeown from NI.

The CC reports that a delegation will be visiting the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Australia in July for a conference on God's covenant, and meetings with their presbytery. Another delegation will be traveling to Germany to continue discussions with the church in Giessen, Germany.

The CC also brings new advice concerning NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council). For the last few years, synod has approved accepting NAPARC's invitation to send observers to their annual meeting. Every year, the CC reports, the CC has struggled with whether or not to recommend attending NAPARC, because there are no guidelines in the CC's constitution regarding participation in such a group. Thus the CC this year recommends not sending observers this year, but rather asks synod to

approve the CC studying this issue of when and whether to participate in an evangelical organization at any level, and when and whether the PRC could ever join any evangelical organization, and then reporting back to synod for approval of the guidelines.

There you have a summary of the blessing and opportunities in the work before synod 2014.

Allow me to discuss a bit more the opportunities that lie before the Protestant Reformed Churches. The churches are at peace. The churches are fully committed to the Reformed faith that God has entrusted to us—especially sovereign, particular grace, and the unconditional covenant, governed by election.

Do you not behold, then, opportunities to do good, positive work in areas where we have not had the time, or energy, or manpower? Some have suggested that this is the time to work on revising the Psalter. Improve the Psalm versifications. Improve the tunes. Improve the liturgical forms, and even the translation of the confessions. That is one area of opportunity.

Let's think in terms of expanding the work of sending forth the gospel of sovereign grace. The Lord willing, we will have ten seminary students next year. The real possibility exists that in three years a fairly large class of students will be examined at synod. In three years! This may give the PRC unprecedented opportunities. So many times in my ministry I heard discussions at synod about the need for missionaries—discussions too often closed by

"We just do not have the manpower," that is, the ministers. The laborers were few. If, however, the Lord gives us more laborers than we have pulpits, what will we say? Perhaps, "Time for some ministers to retire (at age 65)?" Or, will we rather say, "What opportunities might not be opening for us?" I hope, the latter.

The DMC could consider calling a second missionary. He might begin by assisting in Pittsburgh and doubling the effort there. He could move on to other areas of the country if the Lord opens other doors. We have one missionary for the whole of North America?! Years ago, Prof. H. C. Hoeksema proposed that we should have at least two. Let's start making plans!

The FMC reports that they have talked to the missionaries in the Philippines about the possibility of another missionary. If you consider all the places these men are working, you will understand why. If the field needs that, let's make plans.

The FMC reports that training will be needed for ministers for the Philippines. Singapore will have similar needs, and Myanmar, and India, perhaps. Is it possible that a solidly Reformed seminary be established in southeast Asia? Let's make plans.


So, too, readers, make plans. This will cost money. Increasingly, bequests of estates have been given to the churches. Men who retire and sell a business may have large sums. Let's think in terms of the opportunities.

Let the synod of 2014 and its committees be conscious of what the Lord has given, what He re-

quires, and what opportunities He is giving.

May God bless the synod. Ex-

cept the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.

But let us be laboring steadfastly while it is yet day, ere the night come, when no man can labor. 

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

REV. THOMAS MIERSMA

“...But Fear Thou God”

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

The Word of God in Ecclesiastes 5 turns from considering the general vanity of men to their worship of God, for in that worship of God the folly of sin also manifests itself. Before describing that folly, the text turns to an exhortation, “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God” (Eccl. 5:1).

God’s house, the temple, was the visible manifestation of God’s presence with His people, His covenant dwelling place. It is today the gathering of the body of Christ, the church, which is the “habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22.) Entering that house, we enter into the presence of God to have covenant fellowship and communion with Him. The holy majesty of God calls forth the exhortation, “keep thy foot,” or feet. The point of that calling is a serious one. Keeping one’s foot involves pondering our pathway, having a clear understanding of who we are and who God is as our exalted covenant God. It requires a reflection on Him into whose presence we come, before whom we speak, and to whom we bring our worship. That pathway spiritually is the way of the reverence of faith, the fear of God, with which Solomon concludes this section: “But fear thou God” (Eccl. 5:7).

Entering the presence of God as His dependent people we come not in our own strength or wisdom but as those in need of grace and wisdom that only God can give. Solomon therefore adds, “and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not

that they do evil” (Eccl. 5:1). Entering the presence of God in worship, desiring communion with Him in His house, we come to hear, to be taught of God, seeking His Word and His will. This was true for a child of God in the Old Testament as well as for us. He needed to be taught the law of God and His promises, and so do we. This is the proper fruit of that spiritual preparation of heart that guides our feet unto the house of God.

The fool, by contrast, does not consider where he is going or into whose presence he comes. He is not “more ready to hear.” The text speaks of the “sacrifice of fools.” While that includes a false and formal or ritualistic kind of worship, it embraces all his spiritual activity in God’s house. It embraces not only the sacrifices of bulls and goats laid upon the altar as empty form, but his thoughtless words and prayers, as is clear from the following context and the entering into a vow. The prayer of the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable of the publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14), in its pride and self-righteous boasting, is the sacrifice of a fool.

The Word of God therefore adds: “Be not rash with thy mouth and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few” (Eccl. 5:2). The prayer of the publican, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13), and his attitude, in which he would not lift his eyes to heaven, reflects the truth expressed here. God is infinitely exalted and absolutely righteous and holy. Before Him we are mere creatures of the dust upon earth and, moreover, sinners. We are utterly dependent upon Him, not only for life and breath, but for grace and pardon for sin, for His mercy. His heavenly majesty must fill us with awe, even as the wonder that He is yet

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Previous article in this series: September 14, 2012, p. 493.

also our covenant God who condescends to know us in His love in Christ drives out terror and dread.

There was a time in the history of the church in the transition to the Middle Ages, and throughout them, when the exalted majesty of God and of the glorified Christ was so misused that God in Christ was almost unapproachable, except through mediators like Mary and the saints, who would mediate with the Mediator. Our Belgic Confession of Faith addresses this in Article 26 on "Christ's Intercession." Today the pendulum has swung to the opposite extreme, under the influence of humanistic Arminianism, to the extent that the reverence of faith, the fear of God, has been destroyed in the modern church. The admonition of the text is one we need to hear, "for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few."

The Word of God points us to further reason, rooted in the vanity of the world under the sun. "For a dream cometh though a multitude of business" (Eccl. 5:3). After the labors of the day with its busy cares, worries, and stress, one's sleep is often disturbed by the random wandering of the mind in dreams in the night. Such dreams are an empty vanity. In like manner, "a fool's voice is known by multitude of words" (Eccl. 5:3). In a multitude of words the vanity of sin is to be found. The same random wandering of the dreaming mind comes now in speech of the fool's voice, so that, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin" (Prov. 10:19). While this is true in general, the point of the text is sharper, for it has in view words uttered before God. Man in his rashness with his mouth, his irreverence before God, reveals himself a fool. He himself is vanity. Much of that which passes for the worship of God in our age has this character. It is senseless and thus profane, like the prayer of the Pharisee, concerned with his own importance, full of man's voice, but with no true fear of God. It is the sacrifice of fools. "But fear thou God" (Eccl. 5:7) is a needed warning for us also.

This truth is next applied to the vow. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed" (Eccl. 5:4). Such vows were a voluntary act of devotion. They were made before God in gratitude for His goodness and grace. Sometimes they were an act of thanksgiving, as in the case of Jephthah the judge, in anticipation of God's

blessings. Vows, also necessary ones, such as entering into marriage or when presenting our children for baptism, are profound spiritual acts, which call God to witness. Similar to an oath, the principle of the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 37, Q/A 102 concerning the oath, applies to them, namely "... calling upon God, as the only one who knows the heart, that He will bear witness to the truth, and punish me if I swear falsely."

Jesus references this passage among others when He warns against rash and profane swearing, which characterized the church of that day (Matt. 5:33ff.) and tells us to "let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay." The vow was to be a solemn act of gratitude to God, grounded in His promises and blessings, made in consciousness of the truth that He alone enabled one to keep and perform it. This is still the case in our marriage and baptismal vows. The world we live in has no longer any conception of the seriousness of the oath or vow, not even a superstitious regard. The Christian church likewise, in its tolerance of divorce and remarriage, no longer takes the vow seriously, yet "...the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth" (Mal. 2:14).

The abuse of the oath or vow is a serious matter, as the text points out: God "hath no pleasure in fools." King Saul troubled the people of God with such an oath, which he placed upon them for his own vain glory (I Sam. 14:24-46). The people were robbed of a complete victory over the Philistines that day and were led into sin because of it. We do well to take the warning of the text seriously. Solomon adds, "Better it is that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" (Eccl. 5:5).

Such vows were often connected with thank offerings and sacrifices that pointed to Christ, and as such they were serious acts of devotion, faith, and worship. The fool is one who is rash with his mouth in what he utters before God (Eccl. 5:2). Solomon warns, "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error" (Eccl. 5:6). The point is that a rash vow leaves one guilty before God. Vowing what cannot be performed, or making a careless vow, profanes the glory of God. Seeking then to worm one's way out of it compounds the error. The picture is that of making excuses before the priest, the angel or messenger of God, so as to take back the vow, to thus make it void and not have to fulfill it. It makes a mockery of the spiritual character of

the vow by seeking to reduce it to a simple mistake. God judges such sin, and so Solomon adds, “wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?” (Eccl. 5:6).

God visits the sin, not only of profane swearing, but also of vows entered into in an empty and vain manner. Vows before God, taken consciously in His presence and resting upon His promises and in His grace to keep and perform them, are blessed. For He who is the witness to them is also the only one who can give us the grace to perform them. The Word of God therefore brings both the warning and the calling together here. “For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God” (Eccl. 5:7). The fear

of God must stand at the heart of all worship, prayer, and the making and performance of the vow. That fear is the reverence of faith, which stands before the majesty of God who is in heaven and sovereign over all things. The life of the world is full of the vanity of sin, but in the presence of the sovereign and exalted God and in His fear, there is peace. Drawing near to God in godly fear in Christ, seeking His grace and waiting to hear, we enter into the blessings of living communion with God. Like the publican who drew near to God confessing himself a sinner in need of God’s mercy, we also go down to our house justified, righteous before God in His grace (Luke 18:14), for “...he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”



ALL AROUND US

REV. CLAY SPRONK

The Bill Nye vs. Ken Ham Debate

On February 4 “the science guy” Bill Nye, representing the evolutionist perspective, and Ken Ham, representing the creationist perspective, debated the question, “Is creation a viable model of origins in today’s modern scientific era?” The debate was live-streamed on the Internet and watched by a large audience. I didn’t find any reports about the size of the audience, but I assume it numbered in the thousands. If you did not see the debate yet, you can watch it for free for a limited time at debatalive.org, and I recommend that you do so.

Ken Ham believes in the biblical account of creation. He believes that the book of Genesis is a historical book that records the actual history of how God created the heavens and the earth. He believes that God’s work of bringing all creatures into existence took place over the span of six ordinary 24-hour days. Ham is the founder of answersingenesis.org, a website devoted to teaching and defending the record of God’s act of creating the world found in the book of Genesis.

Bill Nye is an unbelieving scientist. During the debate Nye did not say he had no religion, but he argued that religion should be divorced from science. He views the

world from a purely naturalistic perspective. God had nothing to do with the origin of the world. And God has nothing to do with the development of the world. The universe started with a Big Bang and has developed over billions of years through the process of evolution. Nye stated several times during the debate that evolution is a process by which complexity is added to the universe. By means of evolution, simple non-living things have become more complex living things. Thus, all things in the world (rocks, plants, animals, and humans) have a single origin. Ken Ham accurately described Nye’s position as “molecules to man” evolution. Human beings should look not only at monkeys as their ancestors, but rocks and trees as well.

I found the debate between these two men fascinating. Both men demonstrated that they have a vast knowledge of God’s wonderful creation. They discussed layers of ice with atmosphere trapped between them, the distribution of fossils in layers of rock, the expansion of the universe, the 2nd law of thermodynamics, radiometric dating, and many other fascinating subjects. Ham and Nye were very sharp and clear in their presentations, so that even children could follow along (mine did until they had to go to bed).

The two men asked each other profound questions. Ham asked Nye how he accounts for non-living things

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becoming living things if life did not come from God. He asked him how he accounts for the laws of logic and of nature if they were not created by God. Nye asked Ham how he can believe the earth is only 6,000 years old since scientists have discovered rocks and other things in the world that appear to be over 6,000 years old. He asked him how there could have been a flood 4,000 years ago when there are trees scientists estimate to be over 9,000 years old. Wouldn't those trees have died during the flood?

Sometimes both men were unable to answer the questions posed to them. Nye was asked by one of the audience members where the atoms came from that produced the Big Bang. He admitted that he did not know where matter came from. He also admitted that he could not explain where consciousness came from—that is, from his evolutionist perspective he could not explain how consciousness developed from unconscious matter.

Ham admitted that he could not answer certain questions about why the earth appeared to be older than 6,000 years old (I wished that he would say something about God building age into the creation, but he never did). He could not explain why there were 680,000 layers of ice in the arctic north, which many scientist claim would have taken 680,000 years to form at the rate of one layer per year. He mentioned that there are plausible theories that explain how those layers could have formed at a much quicker rate than one layer per year, but he readily admitted that they were only theories. Ham also admitted that he could not explain why different types of fossils in the layers of rock in the Grand Canyon were not mixed among each other in all of the layers. Several times during the debate Nye referred to these fossils in the rock layers of the Grand Canyon. He explains the fact that different types of fossils are not mixed among the layers as the result of the layers forming over a long period time. If the Grand Canyon was formed during the Great Flood, he claims the fossils should be mixed among all the layers of rock. Ham admitted once again he could posit only theories for why the fossils are not mixed.

It is interesting that both men were unable to answer certain questions. But more important is the reason why they were not able to answer those questions. Nye was not able to answer questions about the origin of matter and of consciousness because he rejects the authority of

the Bible. When Nye admitted he could not answer these questions because science does not provide an answer, Ham responded by saying, "there is a book" that answers these questions, it is called the Bible.

The questions Ham was unable to answer were different. They were questions that cannot be answered by science and are not answered by the Bible. They were questions that Nye could not answer, even though he claimed he could. Ham convincingly explained why science cannot answer every question by distinguishing between "observable" science and "historical" science. Observable science is science based on what human beings are able to see. In observable science, scientists are able to establish definite facts. Scientists are able to explain how evaporation works because they can observe it. Historical science is science that attempts to explain things that were unobserved by human beings. In historical science scientists are not able to establish definite facts by means of normal scientific investigation. Scientists might suppose that ice layers in the arctic north took 680,000 years to form at the rate of one layer per year. Or scientists might suppose that the Grand Canyon's layers took millions of years to form. But these suppositions cannot be established as facts because no scientist was present to observe the formation of the ice layers or of the Grand Canyon. This means that when Ham said he could not give definite answers but only posit theories about what happened in the past in these instances, he was being honest. And when Nye claimed he knows for a fact what happened in the past, he was being dishonest.

Ham's honesty extended to admitting his beliefs could not be scientifically proven either. Why does he believe the earth is 6,000 years old? Why does he believe that a flood once covered the whole earth? Why does he believe that Noah survived the flood in an ark? Ham openly professed that he believes these FACTS because they are revealed in the Bible.

Nye was honest about his rejection of the authority of the Bible. He repeatedly ridiculed Ham's insistence that Scripture is the only proper basis for understanding the origin of the universe. He refused to view the Bible as the word of God. He referred to the flood as Ken Ham's flood, and to the "kinds" mentioned in Genesis 1 as Ken Ham's kinds, refusing to acknowledge that the flood and kinds spoken of in Genesis are of God.

Thus, Ham was right when he explained that the main difference between himself and Nye is what they view as the ultimate authority. He explained that there are only two options—one must either bow to the authority of God (and His Word) or to the authority of man. Ham’s creationistic perspective bows to the authority of God. Nye’s evolutionistic perspective bows to the authority of man.

The debate demonstrated that the fundamental difference between a creationist and an evolutionist is spiritual. The difference is: faith vs. unbelief.

After the debate some Christians who accept the claims of evolutionary science that the world is billions of years old and that monkeys are the ancestors of humans attacked Ken Ham as “unscientific” and “fundamentalist.” One theologian, Peter Enns, claimed Ham did not come off very well and did not have any response for Nye’s explanation of scientific “facts.” Enns believes in Nye’s molecules to man theory of evolution and believes that it is unscientific and a poor representation of Christianity for Ham to reject it. And though Enns expressed doubts about Nye before the debate on Twitter, afterwards he praised Nye’s scientific acumen. For Enns the difference is that Nye is a good scientist and Ham is a poor scientist.

However, during the debate Ham proved himself to be a very knowledgeable scientist. He also played videos from renowned scientists to prove that creationists are as capable of scientific investigation and discovery as evolutionists. And Ham did respond to all of Nye’s “scientific” claims that seemed to support the theory of evolution. Ham explained very clearly that he does not accept the authority of scientists to explain what happened in the past, especially when the explanations of scientists contradict the Bible. The essential difference between the two debaters is that Ham is a believer and Nye is not.

Ham did not cast Christians in an unfavorable light as unscientific bumpkins. I was not at all embarrassed by the way Ham represented the Christian faith. As I was watching the debate I cheered as I heard Ham affirm the

authority, infallibility, and inspiration of Genesis, and of the whole Bible. I cheered as I heard Ham faithfully explain the natural meaning of the opening chapters of Genesis, that God created the heavens and the earth in six 24-hour days.

I blame the many so-called Christians who accept the evolutionary claims of scientists that contradict the Bible for misrepresenting and distorting Christianity. Many and influential are the Christians who are more interested in defending and promoting molecules-to-man evolution than they are in defending the veracity of the Bible. They bring shame to the name of Christian by accepting that death existed before the fall into sin, that Adam (if he existed at all) descended from monkeys, and every other silly man-made belief that is part of the theory of evolution. It seems that evolution is taking over the church. So I am thrilled that a large audience was exposed to

a man with the courage and conviction of faith to stand for the plain truth of God’s Word concerning the origin of the world.

I also rejoice that Ham explained the significance of Genesis for Christian morality and for the gospel of Jesus Christ. Why don’t we view people as animals? Why don’t we support the killing of old people and fetuses? Why is homosexuality wrong? Why is marriage a life-long bond? How did sin come into the world? And why do we need the Savior, Jesus Christ? Ham explained, we find these answers in Genesis if we take it as it is, the word of God. He stood before thousands of people, including many members of major media outlets, boldly asserting the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

My children asked me a couple of times, “Who won the debate?” That is often a subjective question. But for those who believe that God created the world in six 24-hour days exactly as He says in Genesis 1, who believe in the supreme authority of God’s Word, and who love to hear the beliefs of the Christian faith confessed and defended, there is no doubt Ken Ham was the winner.



*...the fundamental difference
between a creationist
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Chapter Four

Postmillennialism (29)

The Disastrous Consequences of Postmillennialism (2)

Introduction

The first disastrous, practical consequence of the postmillennial error, pointed out in the preceding article in this series, is the diminishing and then the loss of the one Christian hope: the bodily return of Jesus Christ to raise the bodies of elect believers into immortal, heavenly life and to reward the saints with the bliss and glory of the new world.

Postmillennialism misdirects the hope of the saints to their future earthly reign in a carnal kingdom. Not only is an earthly reign in a carnal kingdom a pitifully lesser good than living and reigning with Christ in the resurrection body in a new creation, ablaze with the glory of the triune God in Jesus Christ; cleansed of devils, sinners, and sin; and home of the sweet, perfect fellowship of all the saints with each other and with God in Jesus Christ. But also the hope of postmillennialism is vain. There will never be a carnal kingdom of Christ in a “golden age” in history. The millennial kingdom of postmillennialism is a doctrinal mirage, a theological dream world.

This article and the next expose a second, equally grievous, related consequence of the postmillennial error. Postmillennialism renders its adherents unprepared for the second coming of Jesus Christ. This is as fatal to a church and to a professing Christian as losing the Christian hope.

The Signs in Scripture

Scripture repeatedly and strongly admonishes the

church to live in expectation of, and readiness regarding, the second coming of Jesus Christ. “We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body” (Phil. 3:20, 21). “And to wait for his Son from heaven” (I Thess. 1:10). “Comfort one another with these words: the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout...and the dead in Christ shall rise first” (I Thess. 4:18, 16). “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.... Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God...we...look for new heavens and a new earth” (II Pet. 3:10-13). “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

The true church lives in the anticipation of the bodily coming of Jesus at the end of the ages. In response to His assurance, “Surely I come quickly,” she exclaims in the ardor of her love, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

To alert the church to this coming of Christ and its nearness, the Bible teaches signs of the coming. Signs are certain events in creation, in the history of nations, and in the churches. The signs announce and warn of the coming of Christ, not only in that the events are indicators of the coming, as road signs indicate that the city of Chicago lies ahead on the highway. But the signs are also themselves events that make everything ready for Christ’s coming. In and through the events, Jesus is presently coming, is on His way back to the earth. As the falling air pressure, the darkening sky, and the gusty winds are the signs of the impending storm, so the biblical signs of the second coming of Christ are the harbingers of His coming.

The passages of Scripture that teach the signs are especially Matthew 24, II Thessalonians 2 (which specifies a

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Previous article in this series: March 15, 2014, p. 272.

great apostasy of the nominal church and the appearance of Antichrist before the day of Christ), and much of the book of Revelation.

The Signs against Postmillennialism, and Postmillennialism against the Signs

The truth of the signs of Christ's coming does not harmonize with postmillennialism. Whereas the signs forecast increasing wickedness, persecution of the church, and the rise of the antichristian kingdom before Christ's return, postmillennialism predicts the gradual earthly victory of the church in history. To this earthly victory of the church, the biblical signs of the end simply have no relevance. Indeed, they expose the false doctrine of an earthly victory of the church. Not the increase of wickedness, but an increase of godliness is the expectation of postmillennialism. Not the persecution of the church, but the church's physical punishment of all her foes is the postmillennial forecast of the days ahead. Not the rise of the antichristian kingdom, but the establishment over all the earth of the earthly kingdom of Jesus and the saints is the postmillennial doctrine.

With its teaching of the earthly victory of the saints in history, postmillennialism has absolutely no place for the biblical doctrine of the signs of the end, which are all events consisting of the increase of wickedness in history, of the persecution of the church, and of the rise of Antichrist and his demonic world kingdom.

Therefore, postmillennialism rejects the biblical teaching of the signs of the end. It cannot very well deny that the Bible teaches the signs. Matthew 24, II Thessalonians 2, and the book of Revelation are in the Bibles of the postmillennialists as well as in those of amillennialists. But, in a move that is as audacious as it is clever, postmillennialism makes the signs merely events that had to do with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 by the Romans. Postmillennialism thrusts the biblical signs of the end *into the past*. Hence, this exegetical tactic is known as "preterism," from a Latin word referring to the past.

According to the postmillennialists, Matthew 24, II Thessalonians 2, most of the book of Revelation (always excepting, of course, chapter 20 and the millennium), and much of the other prophecy of the end by the New Testament foretell the destruction of Jerusalem in

AD 70 and the judgment of God upon the Jews. Nothing of all this biblical prophecy of the last days, which the Christian church has always understood as genuine eschatology—teaching about the bodily return of Jesus and the days and events immediately leading up to His return—pertains to the New Testament church at the present time.

Christian Reconstructionist postmillennialist Gary DeMar dismisses the biblical signs of the end. "Can we point to *any* signs that would indicate that Jesus' coming is imminent? The answer is no."¹ DeMar continues:

What about the events described by Jesus in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21?... The events rehearsed in the Olivet Discourse are signs leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. These chapters have nothing to do with when Jesus will return at the final judgment. There are no observable signs leading up to His bodily return!²

According to this (representative) Christian Reconstruction proponent of postmillennialism, the book of Revelation is not the outstanding book in the Bible on eschatology—the doctrine of the last things. Rather, the "purpose" of the last book of the Bible "was to describe events leading up to and including the destruction of Jerusalem." Accordingly, "the book of Revelation was written before A.D. 70."³

¹ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1994), 150.

² *Ibid.*, 151.

³ *Ibid.*, 182. The popular, influential Douglas Wilson promotes the same error concerning the vitally important book of Revelation, thus virtually stripping the Christian church of its crucially important message: "The book of Revelation, with the exception of the last three chapters [thus preserving the dear future millennium—DJE], was fulfilled two thousand years ago. This means... that we take the date of the writing of Revelation to be prior to A.D. 70" (Douglas Wilson, *Heaven Misplaced: Christ's Kingdom on Earth*, Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2008, 107). David Chilton sounds the same Christian Reconstruction, preterist blast concerning the book of Revelation: "The Book of Revelation is not about the Second Coming of Christ. It is about the destruction of Israel" (David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Ft. Worth, Texas: Dominion Press, 1987, 43). This is Christian Reconstruction exegesis (in reality, "eisegesis," that is, the explaining away of the plain text in the interests of a dogmatic presupposition, in this case a future millennium of carnal peace, prosperity, and power for the church) of a book—Revelation—that

The postmillennialism of Christian Reconstruction shoves the biblical Antichrist into the distant past, where he is no threat to their carnal kingdom of the saints.

It is inappropriate to look for a contemporary rising political leader and describe him as *the* Antichrist.... John had the time prior to Jerusalem's destruction in mind when he described the theological climate surrounding the concept of the Antichrist.... It is unbiblical to use the term 'Antichrist' for a present-day or future political ruler. The proper context is theological and pre-A.D. 70.⁴

In his advocacy of postmillennialism, specifically that of the Puritans, Iain H. Murray is guilty of the same preterist ploy. Murray responds to the criticism of postmillennialism by Herman Hoeksema: "Scripture certainly does not sustain the notion that the Church will experience a period of great prosperity, antecedent to the coming of the Lord. The very opposite is true." Murray

begins with the promise that the crucified and risen Jesus Christ "cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him" (1:7) and that concludes with the promise by the Lord, "Surely I come quickly" (22:20; see also 22:12).

⁴ DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, 204.

then attempts to refute Hoeksema, in defense of his—Murray's—postmillennialism, by declaring concerning Matthew 24, Luke 21, Mark 13, and similar New Testament prophecies of increasing lawlessness and impending persecution of the church that "all these things point to events which were shortly to take place and which are now past history." The "great tribulation" foretold by Scripture applied to the Jews.⁵

For Murray, as for the Christian Reconstructionists and, indeed, as for postmillennialism generally, there are no signs of the end. The biblical signs of the end in Matthew 24, II Thessalonians 2, and the book of Revelation clash with the rosy optimism of postmillennialism, specifically the forecast of the carnal kingdom of the saints for a thousand years of earthly history. The signs, therefore, must be banished into the distant past and applied to the ungodly Jews of AD 70.

... to be concluded. 

⁵ Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971), 79.

STRENGTH OF YOUTH

REV. BRIAN HUIZINGA

"To Teach Them War"

An Introduction:

Acknowledging Our Warfare (1)

We are at war.

Not a war that leaves our blood pooled on the soil underfoot and holes in our flesh—though it may and it did for the captain of our salvation one dark day on a hill outside of Jerusalem—but it is a war in which souls are killed. It is a war with Satan and his hosts, with this present evil world and all of its rebellious attitudes, vain philosophies, carnal pleasures,

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and corrupt behaviors, and with our own desperately sinful flesh. It is a war with and against *sin*. "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15). Lust (any desire for what God forbids) in the heart must be treated the way Israel treated the inhabitants of Jericho—utterly destroyed. For lust begets sin. And sin when it has run its course always brings death. And death is the judgment of God, the one who must be feared because He is able to destroy both body and soul in hell (Matt.10:28). We are at war right now, not against God, but against *sin*.

We are *always* at war.

As Samson in the lap of Delilah was surrounded by Philistines lying in wait to take him, so we find ourselves, often *against* our will, in the lap of this sinful world with spiritual enemies in high places lying in wait to take our souls. Always! Worse, there is the traitorous foe that is the old man of sin within always scheming and orchestrating attacks by bringing forth fleshly lusts (wicked desires). Lust begets sin, and sin works death. Not only are we as individuals under assault, the entire kingdom of Jesus Christ, in which we fight, is forever under assault. The gates of hell are continuously warring against God's church.

Whether we *confess* it or not—and we ought to—we are at war. Whether we are *conscious* of it or not—and we ought to be—we are at war. Whether we *prayed* for strength for the battle in our devotions this morning or not—and we should have—we are at war. Whether we *preach* it or not—and we ought to—we are at war.

The seriousness of this war surpasses all others in magnitude, rendering them as mere sport. The wise and prudent will study world history and write tomes on the most significant battles of all time. The babes will know by both faith and experience that the war against sin that rages in their own souls as members of God's covenant is far more significant. Souls are at stake. The consequences are everlasting. God be thanked we have more than knowledge of the war, for we have knowledge of the certain victory that is ours in the crucified and risen Lord.

However, our certain victory—perfect peace with God eternally—comes in the way of warring. Thus, warfare we must learn. Our children and young people must be taught war. In much of the tribal warfare in Africa there are more adolescent warriors than adults. Children learn to wield a weapon before a pencil. In the church, spiritual warfare is not reserved for seasoned adults, but demanded of all—young and old alike. Even little children must be taught to “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (I Pet. 2:11). We are at war.

With this article in the rubric “Strength of Youth”

we begin a lengthy series of instruction on holy warfare in the name of Jesus Christ and on behalf of Jehovah's covenant for the generation of the children of Israel among us today. Our theme is “To Teach Them War,” taken from Judges 3:2. God left wicked Canaanites in Canaan so that the new generation in Israel might have opportunity to learn to war and prove themselves. God left enemies in the land “to teach them war.” We use this rubric in order to teach the youth war. Omitting spiritual military discipline from the instruction we give our children is inexcusable. We must teach them war.

A significant purpose of this series is, if nothing else is accomplished, to make us *conscious* of our warfare and the calling to engage in it. Probably everyone has read something about spiritual warfare, or heard a particularly stirring sermon on spiritual warfare producing a heightened awareness of our calling to do battle against sin.

But how long does our conscious awareness of the battle last? I must ask myself that. All week? All day? All morning? For an hour? A passing moment? Perhaps this article will trigger a sanctified desire in our hearts. But what about tomorrow at this time?

*However, our certain victory...
comes in the way of warring.*

One of the greatest dangers in our spiritual warfare is that we are not always conscious of our warfare and we slip and drift away into an inattentiveness like a slumbering soldier atop the city wall. Then temptations are not avoided but discovered and entertained. Sins, especially bosom sins, are not hated but tolerated, and worse, justified. Wicked attitudes, words, and thoughts are not condemned but enjoyed for just a moment, a night, a season. Selfish pride is not crucified. Proudly waged as something noble before God, unholy fighting with our peers breaks out, and over issues not worth fighting for. The cause and name of God are not advanced but dishonored. The church slumbers, and certain men creep in unawares.

Probably more dangerous than any enemy is the soldier's own carelessness. In many battles, letting down one's guard only a little proves to be one's last move. One day king David not only stayed home from the battle against the Ammonites, but that very act contributed

to and was a revelation of his spiritual lethargy. Shortly thereafter, he was arranging for his neighbor's wife to enter his bed chamber. "Little" sins like letting down our guard in the battle can lead to "big" sins, even gross, public sins. We are at war, and we cannot afford moments or days or weekends or seasons or periods of carelessness, as individuals or as churches. God, who "holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved" (Ps. 66:9), be thanked that we are never one sin away from lapsing into everlasting death. Yet we must know that safety comes in the way of conscious fighting.

Should a weakened consciousness of spiritual war ever be present, could distance from both national and ecclesiastical war be a contributing factor?


Most of us in the PRCA have no firsthand experience in national warfare, or even in the ever changing but always chilling sights and sounds of war. Very few have ever trained for and fought in war. Another foreign power has not invaded and overtaken our country. Our boys are not catching the train en masse and heading off to battle. We do not have Philistines encircling our camp, Assyrians besieging our walls, or Roman soldiers stationed up and down our streets. Life in North America for us is never one of deafening volleys and sirens throughout the night, the rumble of choppers overhead, fields and beaches strewn with corpses, constant bloodshed and smoke. God be thanked for rest in the homeland! But national rest is rare. The history of the world is a history of nations warring. Is there a spiritual danger? It would seem true that national war would heighten one's awareness of the reality of spiritual war and if nothing else draw one farther and farther away from sin and closer and closer to God, which is the essence of spiritual war.

Besides no war for most of us, there is for us as churches no great poverty, no severe bodily persecution, no recovery from a catastrophic calamity that wipes out whole cities (though that could change in a moment, and as they say here in southern California, we are due for a big one—an earthquake, that is). Rather there remains easy and ready access to amusement, the comforts of affluence, and pleasure. God's good providence has made it so. From many points of view our world does not resemble a battlefield and remind us of our calling to war, but an amusement park with blinking neon lights, frivolous jingles, loud screams, and a long line of giddy

pleasure-seekers eagerly awaiting their turn at the base of a towering Back-Slide that alluringly promises unforgettable thrills as one slides farther and farther away from God toward a pit called Bottomless. Outside of God's Word there is nothing that will remind us of our calling to war. You need it. I need it. The church needs it. For, we *are* at war.

Nor do most of us have much experience in ecclesiastical warfare over doctrine. Certainly the church is always under attack, and is always engaged in holy warfare. At every worship service, monthly meeting of the local consistory, and meeting of classis and synod there are battles even when we acknowledge there is peace in the congregation/denomination. But we are not living, for example, in the 1950s, when in the PRCA there was a fierce battle over a fundamental doctrinal issue because the lie of man's sovereignty in salvation presented itself in a certain definite form, threatened to make inroads into the churches, and had to be driven out. There was a battle waging that was taxing to individuals and the churches in so many ways, and was at the same time so spiritually rewarding as weary soldiers pressed closer and closer to their God. Those are not our days.

Not only that, but in the church world at large, the art of right ecclesiastical war is increasingly disparaged and abandoned. When heretics and false doctrine appear in the camp, rather than take up the sword, many are inclined to play the possum and roll over to play dead before the lie, or worse, to embrace it. False doctrine in many Reformed and Presbyterian churches is not viewed as it was during the great Reformation of the sixteenth century, a foe to be slaughtered hip and thigh. The very concept of ecclesiastical warfare is castigated in the name of a false ecumenicity. Young people do not learn war by scanning the surrounding ecclesiastical landscape. Neither, for that matter, will they properly learn biblical warfare in Christian colleges, where being an alert soldier might be *most* urgent.

Such warfare is not part of our ordinary daily national or ecclesiastical experience. Outside of God's Word, nothing will remind us of and instruct us in our calling to war as individuals and churches, and the need to be conscious of our calling. The purpose of this series is to do just that. We *are* at war. War we must learn and wage as young people. 

The People of God Humbled and Healed: The Element of Prayer (8a)

If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

II Chronicles 7:14

Introduction

Someone once said that for the Christian to pray is as natural as it is for a baby to cry. Since that is true, how natural then ought it be for the people of God to pray when they come together in the public corporate worship of the church.

In our series on corporate worship we have looked at three great principles of biblical, Reformed worship. First, worship is the covenantal assembly meeting with Jehovah God. Second, that meeting is carried out in dialogue between the sovereign God and us His people. Third, that meeting is regulated by God Himself in His Word. Next in our series of articles we examined the opening part of the worship service, where God ushers His people in to close communion with Himself. Now we are in the heart of this covenantal meeting, looking at each aspect specifically as we interact with our God in worship and reverence and love. We have examined the biblical elements of the reading and preaching of Scripture, congregational singing, and the reading of the Law. In this article and the next we examine the beautiful element of prayer.

The Element

Prayer is an element of worship demanded by the regulative principle of worship. In II Chronicles 6, during the dedication service of the temple, which was the central place of worship, Solomon prays a long congregational

prayer. In addition, he prays about the people of Israel using the temple as a house of prayer in regular worship. II Chronicles 6:24-25: "If thy people Israel be put to the worse before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee; and shall return and confess thy name, and pray and make supplication before thee in this house; Then hear thou from the heavens, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest to them and to their fathers."

The house of God in the Old Testament was a house of worship that included prayer, and the worship of the church is the same today in the New Testament. Acts 2:42 lists a number of the elements of worship in the New Testament, and one of them is prayer. "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." And in I Corinthians 14 prayer, specifically congregational prayer, is a part of the worship of the New Testament church.

There is no biblical regulation, of course, regarding how many prayers are offered, or how long they should be. This is a matter of discretion. In a typical Protestant Reformed worship service there is a silent prayer at the beginning of the service, a congregational prayer, a short prayer at the end of the sermon, and other prayers included in the liturgy of the sacraments.¹

Prayer is a unique gift of God. It is the most direct form of communication and communion with God we have. In fact, prayer is God's ordained way for us to enter into the closest communion with Him possible. Prayer is a time of opening of one's heart directly to Him to share in covenant life. It is a wonderful thing to consider what prayer does. Prayer pierces through all the noise and hectic motion of this world and finds the God who is in sovereign control over all, attentive. When you think

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Previous article in this series: March 15, 2014, p. 275.

¹ In a future article I will argue that the recitation of the Apostles' Creed is a form of prayer. If one agrees with that, that may be included in this list.

about all that is happening on the earth at any given moment, all the chatter, yelling, cars going here and there, all that God is overruling in His sovereignty, it is a cacophony of sounds. And yet when God's people approach Him calling upon His name, it is as though immediately all else is shut out, and God and His people are the only ones there. It is the secret place of communion and fellowship.

Although they are related, prayer is even more intimate communion than singing. Prayer expresses the thoughts and struggles and joys of the people of God in the most specific terms possible. Song, as we said in a previous article, covers the whole range of the Christian's experience no matter what we are experiencing at any time. But song cannot speak to those experiences as specifically as prayer. Song can address the comfort the believer has in the death of a loved one generally, but it cannot name that loved one and the specific holes that are left in the passing to glory of that specific person. Prayer can be more specific and therefore more intimate.

The Covenanting God of Prayer

We learn most about prayer when we consider to whom it is we are praying. The God of the covenant is the one to whom we are relating when we pray. Knowing especially three things about Him as the God of the covenant leads us to understand what prayer is and how we are to pray.

First of all, we learn about prayer from the fact that the God of the covenant is a personal God. God is not a thing, or an it, but a personal being. As a personal being He is a communicating being. He speaks directly to us in His Word. He uses the first person pronoun—"I." And He speaks in His Word to us His people in personal pronouns—"you, my people." II Chronicles 7:14 reminds us He is a God with a name. He is not merely some being out there, but the God whom we know and who has taken us personally to Himself. We are a people called by His name, that text says. He places His name on us. He vouches for us in this world. He protects us. Jehovah's people we are. He keeps covenant with us as a personal God.

Prayer, then, is a personal response to this personal God. He is the God who speaks to us in His Word, and to whom we respond in prayer. This is why the prayers are placed where they are in the service. The congrega-

tional prayer is after God speaks to us in His Law, and the prayer after the sermon is after God speaks to us in His Word. God has given Himself to us in His Word—in His Law and in His gospel—and in prayer the congregation responds by giving all that we are to Him in this covenantal meeting of worship.

Not to pray to God in the covenantal assembly, then, would be most strange. Suppose that you and your wife were at home together and your wife would speak to you and tell you how much she loves you and say that she forgives the times when you hurt her—would your response to that be to ignore her and simply carry on with whatever it is you are doing? In the covenantal assembly, God is setting His grace upon us, and our response is not simply to sit and say nothing. This grace draws us close to Him in prayer. Prayer is the evidence of spiritual life—that there is a relationship with this living, personal God. It is one of the chief experiences, therefore, of the covenant of grace in worship from week to week.

Second, knowing the covenant God as the promise-making and promise-keeping God teaches us something about prayer, namely, of the confidence we may enjoy in its use. Solomon recognizes the faithful character of God in His congregational prayer in II Chronicles 6:14-15: "And said, O LORD God of Israel, there is no God like thee in the heaven, nor in the earth; which *keepest covenant*, and shewest mercy unto thy servants, that walk before thee with all their hearts: Thou which hast *kept* with thy servant David my father that which thou hast *promised* him; and spakest with thy mouth, and hast *fulfilled* it with thine hand, as it is this day."


Since God is the promise-making and promise-keeping God, all prayer, and especially prayer in the covenantal assembly, is made with confidence in this God. It is because He keeps His promises that John says in I John 5:14, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us." We pray pleading with Him about His promises, appealing to them, pointing them out to Him, calling Him to remember them. This is praying according to His will, for we know that His promises are His will. We pray what He has promised us, confident that He will hear.

Prayer is an act of trust. It is telling God that we trust Him and believe what He tells us in His word. We tell Him in the very act of praying that we believe He will care

for us as a congregation and as individuals. Whatever the doubts may be in the child of God's mind about the situation in which he finds himself or the pain he is facing, by the time he is finished praying those doubts are taken away. In the process of prayer we trust that in spite of the struggles and difficulties we face, the God who makes and keeps promises will care for His people.

Third, the God of the covenant is a God who is at the same time both holy and merciful. This teaches us about our approach to Him in prayer. God is a consuming fire, and He is a Father. When Moses went up to get the commandments the second time God proclaimed His name to Moses and in doing so He proclaimed both holiness and mercy. Exodus 34:6-7 "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands,

forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation." He forgives the repentant and will not clear the unrepentant. Therefore we come reverently. We come honoring His authority. We come humbly, as II Chronicles 7:14 points out. But at the same time, we come boldly in the way of repentance, expecting His mercy and compassion. We cry out, Abba-Father, knowing He delights to hear our cry.

He is both holy and merciful for us in Jesus Christ. Therefore we come in the name of Jesus when we pray. Always we come in Jesus Christ. We say His name. But not only that, we come with hearts dependent upon Him. We come pleading His merits. And through Him we come boldly, for He has opened the way. 

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA, review editor

1834: *Hendrik De Cock's Return to the True Church*, by Marvin Kamps. Jenison, MI: RFP, 2014. Pp. xx + 490. \$43.95 hard. [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

This is a book about a spiritual hero. One day, God will honor him before all humans, especially before his contemptible enemies—ostensibly colleagues in a Reformed church—who persecuted him, and before the scarcely less contemptible "friends," who nevertheless refused to join him in his separation from the false church, which would have meant sharing his reproach—the reproach of Christ.

The hero was an otherwise very ordinary preacher in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands in the early 1800s, Hendrik De Cock.

His heroism was his lonely act of separating from the state Reformed Church, which had become apostate, and with his loyal congregation in Ulrum returning to the true church manifesting the marks of the true church as delineated in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith. Emphatically, as the instrument of the act declared and as the title of Kamps' book expresses, the act of De Cock

and his congregation was *return*, not only or even mainly separation, but *return*—return to the truth of the gospel, return to the true church, return to Christ Jesus the head of the church.

This was the everlastingly worthy heroism of the reformation of the church in the Netherlands in 1834, as it is wherever and whenever reformation takes place.

For this act of courage in the fear of God, a courage that despises the fear of man, the hero suffered greatly, as such heroes always do. He was fined, abused, and imprisoned by the state. He was maligned, disciplined, and deposed from office by the church. By all, he was defamed. By avowed friends in high places in the state church he was abandoned.

Reading this penetrating account of a chapter in the history of the Reformed church in the world that every Reformed and Presbyterian Christian should know, especially every officebearer, with particular reference to the abandonment of De Cock by colleagues who knew full-well that the church was apostate and who shared his doctrinal convictions, I was reminded of the incident concerning the German Lutheran preacher Martin Niemoeller. For his brave opposition to Adolf Hitler, in the matter of the Nazifying of the Protestant church, Niemoeller was imprisoned at Dachau. Soon after his

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incarceration, he was noticed in the prison by a colleague who was visiting other prisoners. “Martin,” the visiting preacher exclaimed, “Why are you here?” “That’s not the question,” Niemoeller replied, “The question is, why are you *not* here.”

1834 relates the history of this reformation of the church in the Netherlands in the early 1800s, and does so movingly and incisively. The handsome volume indicates the issues—issues weighty with eternity: the government of the church by Jesus Christ, rather than by the state and a committee of apostate clergymen, and the grand doctrines of the Reformed, Christian faith, including the Godhead of Jesus; the total depravity of the natural man; predestination, prominently, *predestination*; and the saving of the elect sinner by the sovereign grace of God regenerating him.

The fruit of De Cock’s reforming act, lonely and seemingly doomed to failure as it was at the beginning, was the gathering of large numbers of Reformed believers and their children in the Netherlands to form a sizable denomination of soundly Reformed churches. These “Secession” Reformed churches merged in 1892 with the churches that also broke with the state church in 1886, under the leadership of Abraham Kuyper, forming the denomination known as the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

Haunting the reader as he glories in the history of *1834* is the knowledge that these churches have recently rejoined the state church of the Netherlands to form the thoroughly apostate church known as the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. “The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (II Pet. 2:22).

Many Reformed churches in all the world are indebted to De Cock’s and his congregation’s “act of secession or return.” Many owe their origins, under God, to the act. All will benefit from this stirring account of the act of faith that was their birth and is their heritage. Speaking for myself, I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving that the churches of which I and my family are members are highly privileged to be related, ecclesiastically, doctrinally, and spiritually to such a man of God as Hendrik De Cock and then also to the faithful few, including the marvelous Van Velzen, who soon bound themselves with him in the labor. And a petition that God will preserve

us in this tradition, not in name only, but also in spirit and in truth.

The book is not, and is not intended by its author to be, the mere telling of history. Books that merely relate past events in the history of the Reformed churches litter the Reformed landscape. The scholarship of such books is often impressive. With copious footnotes, the books inform how the main character’s hair was parted and what he had for breakfast. But there is nothing in them or about them of the passion and urgency of the struggle of men of God, and women too, often the wives of the reforming heroes, as with Mrs. De Cock, on behalf of the glory of God; the preservation, or regaining, of the truth of the Word of God; and the salvation of the church of Christ in the world.

1834 is different.

It shares and is informed by the love of God in His truth that moved De Cock.

It brings to light the vitally important way of Reformed Christianity in the world, indicates the fundamental doctrines that constitute this Reformed way, and, more by implication than explicitly, calls Reformed churches and members to resist apostasy from these doctrines at all cost or, if the churches and their members are already departing, to return to the true church that loves and confesses the Reformed creeds.

About half the book, the latter half (although translation of important documents is found throughout), is Kamps’ translation from the Dutch of documents that were of great importance to the reformation of 1834, including the document that announced the return of the Ulrum congregation to the true church and, therefore, aroused the fury of the false church and her minions. The documents are timeless in their content and value. Although the statement does not occur in the translated documents at the end of the book, consider this quotation of a predecessor of reformer De Cock: “The principle of the Reformed faith, which is to exalt and to glorify God to the very highest, and to humble man to the deepest depths” (88). This expresses the motivation of De Cock, as of all genuinely Reformed believers in every age, and especially of those Reformed men who battle for the reformation of apostate or apostatizing churches. I distinctly recall the statement of an old, uneducated elder in Hope Protestant Reformed Church many years ago, when I was a mere boy, “God must be all, man, nothing.”

And consider this typical plea for peace and unity at all cost against the reformers: Having denied that Christianity is “doctrine,” the influential Petrus Hofstede de Groot resisted De Cock and the reformation with appeal to the “whole, gentle, lovely *spirit* of Christianity” (293). The siren-song that lures the churches on to the rock of destruction is ever the same.

The response by God’s champions to this seductive song about the “gentle, lovely *spirit* of Christianity” is also always the same: blunt condemnation, and insistence on sound doctrine. De Cock responded to de Groot:

You err in this grievously, and you follow only what pleases your heart and your darkened understanding. That darkened mind prefers a broad way; it wants to be king itself and to rob the Lord Jesus of his throne and crown. But truly this false doctrine is not found in the gospel. This is the truth: the way is narrow and the gate is strait that leads to life; and our corruption is of ourselves, but our salvation is from the Lord our God (298).

In opposition to the subversion of the Reformed faith and church by de Groot’s “gentle, lovely *spirit* of Christianity,” De Cock called Reformed Christians of his day—and ours—to the genuine spirit of Christianity:

Show spiritual nobility in that you are afraid of nothing except sinning against God; you must show that you despise everything that would hinder you in this regard. Let the worldly, civil, and conforming (that is, adapting to everything in society) Christian, who is that lazy, lukewarm Reformed person, who is that Christian who treads softly, accommodates, and makes a fine display, who is the pious advocate of virtue, the spirit who deceives through sweet words—let such people mock you and characterize you as intolerant, burdensome, impudent, haughty, and stubborn dictators. What does it matter? Jesus was called Beelzebub. Would his family members go unscathed? A Christian must be able to be despised and be able to despise (125).

The sound doctrine on which De Cock especially insisted was predestination, about which most of the ministers were silent, because they detested it. To a broken reed of a Reformed minister, De Cock wrote: “The preachers are also of the opinion that they should not

preach the whole counsel of God, but only half of it, and be silent about God’s eternal decree and election” (252). Against the smooth, influential, but heretical ecclesiastic de Groot, who, unable to preserve his suavity when predestination was confessed, “screamed that the preaching of it [election] was an unheard-of and unallowable novelty” (288, 289), De Cock declared that predestination must be preached, including reprobation, and that predestination is “the expressed doctrine of God’s word” (275-291).

A main instrument in God’s reformation of the Dutch church in the early 1800s was De Cock’s republishing of the Canons of Dordt, which had been so neglected by the church that it had become virtually unknown. Some ministers who did know about the Canons cursed the confession.

Reformed Christians today can, and must, judge among the churches claiming to be the spiritual heirs of 1834 by ascertaining which of them love, readily confess, preach, and defend the Canons of Dordt. This is a sure test. Similarly, apostasy among these churches is evident from the silence concerning Dordt (at least with regard to Dordt’s being more than a historical curiosity), the appalling ignorance of Dordt, the outright criticism of Dordt, the bold contradiction of Dordt, e.g., by the confession of the “well-meant offer,” and in certain instances the official relegation of the Canons of Dordt to a non-binding status.

1834 is a bombshell on the vast choir of Reformed churches sweetly singing the “gentle, lovely *spirit* of Christianity,” in 2014, especially the Reformed churches with a connection to the Reformation in the Netherlands.

With the publication of the book, the RFPA continues firmly to establish itself as a unique, necessary Reformed publisher. It produces books addressing issues, current developments, and history that are critical for the maintenance, recovery, and promotion of historic, creedal, doctrinal, Reformed Christianity in our time.

The *real* issues, the *significant* developments, and the *vital* history!

Strange and discordant pieces of music in an age when many nominally Reformed publishers devote themselves to contributing scores for the wider, louder singing of the “gentle, lovely *spirit* of Christianity”! ❧

Young Adult Activities

The Young Adult Society of the Loveland, CO PRC hosted their annual Young Adults' Retreat on April 7-10 at Bear Trap Ranch, near Colorado Springs. This was the first retreat held at Bear Trap Ranch in the mountains west of Colorado Springs, where the elevation was just over 9,100 feet. There was fresh mountain snow when the young adults arrived, but the weather during the rest of the retreat was spectacular. The theme of this year's retreat was, "God's Sovereignty in the Life of Job." Two of our pastors spoke on that subject. Rev. Steve Key spoke on "Job's Life: A Powerful Illustration of God's Sovereignty," and Rev. Cory Griess spoke on "Living Under God's Sovereign Way." There were three discussions throughout the retreat on God's sovereignty, the antithesis, and the calling of men and women of God. There were 28 young adults who attended this year's retreat, or, according to Rev. Key, you could say 30, when you include Pastor Griess and his wife, Lael, who still fit in that age category. The young adults enjoyed some mountain hikes from the ranch, including a night hike to an area about 10,000 feet, overlooking the entire city of Colorado Springs and surrounding area. They also took an afternoon trip into Colorado Springs and visited the Olympic Training Center. The

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final day the group went to Manitou Springs and took the Cog Railway to the top of Pikes Peak. Rev. Griess also added that though it was not on the schedule, most of the retreaters thought free time went until 3:30 in the morning. But that too allowed for some good conversation and the development of some close friendships. It sounds like another very enjoyable and, we trust, spiritually beneficial Colorado retreat.

Young People's Activities

This year's annual Easter Mass Meeting was hosted by the Young People of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, and was held Sunday afternoon, April 13. Rev. Carl Haak, pastor at Georgetown, was this year's featured speaker. Pastor Haak spoke from Judges 14:14 with the theme, "Out of the Strong Came Forth Sweetness." Pastor Haak applied Samson's tearing open the lion and then the bees making honey in the carcass to Christ, taking death, guilt, and sin in His bare hands and by the cross destroying them and turning them into the sweetness of salvation. The young people in attendance enjoyed some good fellowship together with refreshments afterward.

Sister-Church Activities

At the request of Covenant PRC in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, the Council of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI released their pastor, Rev. Arie denHartog, for a three-week trip to Northern Ireland in April and early May. Pastor den-

Hartog planned on filling the pulpit of Covenant while their pastor, Rev. Angus Stewart, and his wife, Mary, traveled to Tasmania to speak at the Family Camp of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church from April 17-21, preach at Brisbane EPC on April 27, and lecture and preach in Singapore from April 29-May 6. While in Singapore, Rev. Stewart also hoped to discuss the possibility of a sister-church relationship between Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland and the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. During that same time period, Pastor denHartog was scheduled to fill the pulpit of CPRC, preaching there April 20 and May 4, and in the pulpit of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship on April 27. Pastor denHartog also planned on giving three lectures while there, April 23 on "The Importance of the Historical Adam"; April 28 in Limerick on, "Living in Perilous Times"; and May 2, again in Covenant, on "The Role of the Father in the Christian Home."

Mission Activities

We rejoice and give thanks to our heavenly Father for a memorable and historical day on April 9 when, under the blessing of God, the organizational and first meeting of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP) took place. At that meeting the Berean PRC, where Pastor Vernon Ibe serves, and First PRC in Bulacan, where Pastor John Flores serves, were united together formally and officially in a

special ceremony, followed by a regular business meeting. Part of that historical day included a meditation by Missionary Pastor Daniel Kleyn on I Corinthians 15:58. This was followed by the reading and signing of two different documents by all the members (minister, elders, and deacons) of the two consistories. First, the Declaration of Agreement was signed, in which was stated the basis of unity and the purpose of the PRC in the Philippines. Then the Formula of Subscription was signed. We thank God for this visible display of the unity of the church in the truth.

Congregation Activities

The Spring Ladies' League meeting was held on April 8 in the auditorium of the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD. Rev. Allen Brummel, pastor at Heritage, spoke on Proverbs 31:30, under the theme,

"The True Beauty of the Virtuous Woman." An offering was taken for the Sioux Falls School Society and a dessert bar provided refreshments.

As reported last time, the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA held their first service in their newly purchased church building on Sunday, April 6. Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor at Covenant of Grace, chose to preach from I Samuel 7:12 for that morning's service, under the theme, "Hitherto Hath the Lord Helped Us." Pastor Kleyn's sermon had three points. 1—Looking Heavenward to God's Power. 2—Looking Backward on God's Faithfulness, and 3—Looking Forward at God's Promises.

The Young People of Covenant of Grace also held a furniture, rummage sale at their newly acquired church on April 11 and 12 to clean out some of the extra furniture and supplies that came with the church building.

The Kalamazoo, MI PRC recently started an Organ Fund, with a view to replacing their current organ, purchased in the mid 1980s. That organ has needed several repairs the last couple of years or so. Kalamazoo also learned that the one and only repairman available in southwest Michigan able to make repairs will soon be retiring, with no one to take over his business. Consequently, it seemed like the right time to consider a new organ.

Minister Activities

Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, declined the call extended to him to serve as pastor of the Doon, IA PRC. Rev. Clayton Spronk received the call to our Doon IA PRC. And Rev. Rodney Kleyn declined the call he was considering from Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express sympathy to Herm and Lorraine DeVries, John and Becky DeVries, and Laura DeVries in the death of their mother and grandmother,

THERESA REITSMA.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
David Kregel, Assistant Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their sympathy to their members Rich and Jane VanTil and their children, in the death of their mother and grandmother,

FAYE VAN TIL.

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee..." (Psalm 55:22).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
David Kregel, Assistant Clerk