

The Standard Bearer

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CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	Godliness for Employees REV. RON VAN OVERLOOP	170
<i>Editorial</i>	Punctual Attendance on Family Worship PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA	172
<i>O Come Let Us Worship</i>	Called into His Presence: The Opening Service (2) REV. CORY GRIESS	175
<i>Go Ye into All the World</i>	Cross-Economic Giving (1) REV. RICHARD SMIT	177
<i>When Thou Sittest in Thine House</i>	The Discipline of Our Covenant Children REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG	179
<i>Search the Scriptures</i>	Judicial Blindness MR. DON DOEZEMA	182
<i>Pertaining to the Churches...in Common</i>	Mission Outreach by Every Congregation REV. JASON KORTERING	184
<i>Contribution</i>	British Reformed Fellowship Conference, Northern Ireland MISS MARISA KOBILAN	187
<i>Bring the Books...</i>	Book Review REV. DOUGLAS KUIPER	190
<i>News From Our Churches</i>	Activities MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER	191

Godliness for Employees

“Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.”

Titus 2:9, 10

Paul is giving instructions to young Titus concerning his ministry among the new Christians on the island of Crete. He must preach and teach the truth, and godliness of life that is consistent with the truth. One's acknowledgment of the truth should be accompanied with godliness (1:1), and Titus must keep on speaking and exhorting and rebuking with all authority those things that are consistent with sound doctrine (2:1, 15).

The people with whom Titus was working had been ungodly. They were living in the midst of ungodliness.

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Thus Titus is to be very specific in showing the new Christians how the teachings of gracious salvation are not only to be believed but also to be lived (1:1; 2:1; 3:8). After helping Titus see how godliness is to characterize the various age groups in the Christian churches, he then shows how godliness is to be evidenced in the lives of converted slaves.

Notice that spiritual conversion does not free one from slavery. Slaves will remain slaves (as Paul taught Onesimus in his letter to Philemon). But salvation from sin by grace makes them more useful slaves.

The Chief Calling of Slaves Who Are Christians

Among the new Christians in the churches on Crete were servants/slaves. A slave was owned by another. He was completely dependent on his master, and he was expected to obey him. He or she was the property of the master and called to do his bidding 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The master/lord was to care for the slave, providing food, housing, and clothing. In this con-

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nection, notice that Paul identified himself as a slave of God (1:1). He saw himself to be in the 24-hour a day service of his Master. This was not the case simply because Paul was an apostle. This was the case for Paul in the same way that it is true for everyone who is not his own but is bought with the precious blood of his Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

There were also hired servants in the churches in Crete. They were free men who worked for wages for whomever they chose. God's law severely restricted an Israelite's use of slaves. Hired servants were therefore more common than slaves in Israel. While a hired servant could work for whom he would, Scripture gives the same instruction to a hired servant as it does to a slave. Consider Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-25; I Timothy 6:1, 2; and I Peter 2:19ff. As long as a hired person agrees to work for someone, he is that person's servant (Matt. 20:1ff.).

Whatever Scripture says to those who are slaves, it says in effect to employees. While an employee is not the property of the employer, the employee must recognize the authority of the employer to be that of God, which authority must be honored according to the fifth commandment. We will make that application.

The chief duty of the slave (employee) is to "be obedient." While it is translated "obedient," the Greek word in the original emphasizes submission rather than obedience. It means "to arrange under, to subordinate, to place oneself under, to submit to one's control, to yield." Submission is the chief duty because the employer/master is placed by God in a position of authority. As in the other spheres of authority (home, church, and state), so the employer/master has the God-given right to rule his employees/slaves in the work. And the employee is to submit to that authority.

The goal of this submission is to be well-pleasing to the master in all things. That is the meaning of the phrase, "to please them well in all things." Many workers submit, but not in an attempt to be well-pleasing to their employer. Most of the time we submit in order to protect our jobs or so we do not jeopardize a potential pay-raise or promotion. But Jesus expects the employees/slaves whom He saves to seek to please their employers in all things by doing everything that is required of them. To do anything other than try to

please his employer/master is rebellion against God-ordained authority. While the near goal is to please the employer, the ultimate goal is to please God!

Three Implications Arising from This Calling of Submission

The first implication is, "not answering again." This refers to speaking against or contradicting. To answer again is to complain. This complaining is sometimes brought to the employer. But it is often also voiced to others. Both are equally wrong. There is a correct way to bring a complaint. It must be brought in an attitude of request, with a readiness to submit (or seek employment elsewhere). And it must be motivated by a desire to promote the well-being of the business. To "answer again" is not the way to be well-pleasing to God-ordained authority.

The second implication is "not purloining." This is the activity of setting apart for oneself, i.e., embezzling. This can be the outright theft of money, tools, or materials, or it can be working as little as possible for one's wages. Every employee has the calling to be very conscientious in his working, so that he is not wasteful, inefficient, or indifferent. Many consider their stealing to be justified if, as they think, their employer does not pay enough. But God considers all purloining to be a violation of the eighth commandment. It is never justified!

The third implication is the positive calling to show "all good fidelity." This refers to the character trait of being reliable and trustworthy. An employee who is a Christian must inspire the confidence of his employer. This is accomplished by the manner in which he works and by the attitude he exhibits toward his work. This is a loyalty to the business and a genuine concern for the business and for the employer's affairs. This attitude stands over against that of those who are concerned only about their job and their paycheck. And it stands over against shoddy workmanship and absenteeism. The calling to show good fidelity implies that a labor strike is nothing less than an act of rebellion against God-ordained authority. God calls the Christian employee to show personal loyalty by promoting the welfare of the employer in every way he is able. Then he will be judged to be dependable and reliable.

The Purpose for Godliness in Christian Employees


This passage gives as the purpose of such Christian conduct by slaves and servants this: “that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.” One’s conduct and attitude at work is a powerful indication to others of what we believe and confess.

What the Christian professes to believe is the teachings of God, who is our Savior. This is the “sound doctrine” of verse 1. These are the health-giving (“sound”) teachings and instructions of Scripture concerning Jesus Christ, the Savior, our God. The profession of these beliefs should be evidenced in a certain lifestyle. A lifestyle inconsistent with one’s profession indicates that the profession is of poor quality. It is one thing to say that you believe these doctrines, but it is another

thing *truly* to believe them. True faith is always evidenced in a godly life.

This must be true for every Christian. For males and for females. For the older and for the young. For the free and for the slaves.

Paul explains that our conduct is to “adorn” what we believe. Our conduct and the attitude our conduct exhibits are to embellish, ornament, add to the beauty of what we believe. A godly life that is consistent with or harmonizes with the beautiful doctrines of salvation by grace alone in Christ alone adorns those doctrines. Otherwise the name of God and His doctrine are blasphemed (I Tim. 6:1b).

This is the calling of every believer! In a unique way this is the calling of servants and employees. 

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

Punctual Attendance on Family Worship

What makes the home of a Christian different from the home of an unbeliever?

A clear difference will manifest itself on *Sunday*—the Christian family or individual will attend church and seek to set aside the Lord’s day for spiritual rather than earthly activities. Proper observance of the Lord’s day is crucial for our homes. Without it, our homes will be swept away in a flood of worldliness.

But aside from the observance of the Lord’s day, what makes your home, your life as a believing family, different from the homes and

lives of your unbelieving neighbors? Many of us are surrounded by homes that are more or less orderly. Fathers go to work and come home to do various jobs about the house. Children go to school. Mothers work, perhaps in the home, perhaps a job outside the home. From the outside, it may appear quite similar to your home.

What makes our homes different?

What makes the Christian’s home radically different is, first and foremost, the Bible. The Bible must be the foundation of the home. The Bible determines the relationships in the home. It controls the entire life

of the home. Daily instruction is given from Scripture in a Christian home.

Second, in this home prayer to God is continually raised both individually and communally.

Third, God is praised by the people in a Christian home.

Such a home is distinctly Christian. The family gathers together daily to read the Bible, to pray, and to praise God. This home honors God and His Word. This activity of gathering about God’s Word daily has a profound effect on each member of the family, not only inside the home, but also in the school, on the job, and at play.

The point that I am making is that the Christian home (of either a family or an individual) must have regular devotions, or as it is often designated, family worship. If the family that calls itself Christian, followers of Christ, does not gather around His Word daily, there is little that distinguishes it from the unbelieving neighbors. In such a home, something is terribly wrong.

The Bible stresses the fathers' responsibility to teach their children *about* God and to *praise* God (as in Deuteronomy 4 and 6; Ephesians 6; Proverbs; and many others). Consider Psalm 78, where believers promise, "We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done" (4). Not only will they teach the children the truth about God, but they will do so in such a way that they together praise Jehovah. The psalmist shows that this activity is not optional—God commands it. "For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children" (5). And he shows the seriousness of teaching this: "That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (6, 7).

The future of his house, even the future of the church, rests on diligent instruction by parents.

The Synod of Dordrecht (1618-19) understood the necessity of this instruction by the parents. The Synod adopted the following:

The office of parents is diligently to instruct their children and their whole household in the principles of the Christian religion, in a manner adapted to their respective capacities; earnestly and carefully to admonish them to the cultivation of true piety; to engage their punctual attendance on family worship, and take them with them to the hearing of the Word of God.

The Reformed ministers and elders delegated to the great synod, knowing how easily these parental duties can be neglected, added:

Parents who profess religion, and are negligent in this work, shall be faithfully admonished by the ministers; and, if the case requires it, they shall be censured by the Consistory, that they may be brought to the discharge of their duty.

Continuing this same care for the covenant youth, the Synod went on immediately thereafter to call for institutions that would assist the parents in this high calling—Christian schools.

Schools, in which the young shall be properly instructed in the principles of Christian doctrine, shall be instituted not only in cities, but also in towns and country places where heretofore none have existed.

For the last six months I have been reading much about the history of the Christian schools, as well as

their purpose, foundation, goals, etc. Even more than before, I have come to appreciate the indispensable blessing of the Christian school for the church. Especially the church of the Reformation recognized the importance of the Christian school for the future of the church. The decision of the Synod of Dordrecht is consistent with that. It is virtually impossible to state too strongly the importance of the Christian school.

Thus, what I have to say next is not to be construed as denigrating the Christian school, or in any way an attack on these schools.

Nonetheless, I have a great concern related to our Christian schools. Is it possible that our own parental, Christian schools are the occasion for the neglect of required instruction in the home?

The instruction given in the school as such is not my concern. The godly instruction, discipline, and devotions are a blessing to the homes. Teachers are assisting the parents in their calling to teach their children.

My concern involves rather the extracurricular activity—such activities as soccer, volleyball, and basketball. Activities that require practices resulting in students missing meals, when devotions are normally conducted in our homes. Games that are scheduled for 5:30 and 7 P.M., so that not only the student athletes miss dinner and family worship, but perhaps a large portion of the student body, and perhaps many a family skips dinner and devotions in order to watch the games.

Have we allowed our parental schools to do serious damage to an important, beneficial, even commanded parental activity? Have the sports activities negated “punctual attendance on family worship”?

I do not assume that all those involved in school-related sports are failing to hold regular family worship. But participation in interscholastic sports makes it very difficult. In the dim and dusty past, as a young father, I coached JV basketball for Covenant Christian High School. I know how difficult, nearly impossible, it is to maintain regular family devotions and keep the commitments throughout the season. As an older father, I had several teenagers working various jobs after school, and then wanting to attend ballgames once or twice a week. Again, it is tough to get the family together—little ones, teens, parents.

School-sponsored sports is not the only threat to family worship. Recreational activity of all kinds and in all seasons can do damage to our devotions. Eating dinner at a restaurant may destroy devotions for that night. Work schedules, especially for teens, can create havoc with the family’s schedule of family worship. In other families, school classes interfere with family worship—not unusual in Singapore.

Some families find solutions. In those years of teens working, we had family devotions early in the morning. That worked for us because I could be with the family for breakfast at the relatively reasonable hour of 7 A.M. I say it worked, but obviously singing and

meaningful discussion of the passage suffers a bit at that hour of the day. For many families that is not a solution because Dad is gone by 5 or 6 A.M. Other families have tried late-night devotions—which might work for some if they have no younger children.


A solution must be found, for the neglect of family worship is not an option. Dordt rightly declared that a vital element of parents’ instruction of their children is that they “engage their punctual attendance on family worship.” We will neglect this to the spiritual peril of our children. It is puzzling that godly families will risk this spiritual peril for the sake of something (bodily exercise) that the Bible, when it pays any attention to it at all, describes as something of little value (I Tim. 4:7). Too often it appears that the admonition of the Spirit is turned on its head. Since “bodily exercise profiteth little,” the Spirit admonishes us to “exercise [ourselves] rather unto godliness. For...godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (I Tim. 4:7-8). But student athletes give themselves to bodily exercise for hours a day, and that, perhaps even at the expense of family worship, a most beneficial activity for exercising unto godliness.

Some will see these comments as an attack on sports. It is not that. I enjoy sports and appreciate the good, clean activity that games give to our teens who can find so little in this increasingly wicked world “to do” with friends or on dates. I can also appreciate that lessons are learned in practices and on a playing field.

This editorial is not a condemnation of sports.

It can rightly be seen as a call to reevaluate the emphasis on sports. There will come a day when the good Christian school will have to decline to participate in interscholastic sports. The obvious roadblock is a requirement to play on Sunday. But is that the only thing that would cause us to reevaluate, and perhaps decide to pull back? Is the net result (currently) of involvement in interscholastic sports positive? Are we able to make critical evaluations of our involvement? Or is it such a settled institution among us that it cannot be altered? Will we participate regardless of the costs?

But above all, this is a call to hold fast the Bible and the place that the Bible must have in our homes. It is all the more important to do so as the days grow increasingly evil. When Paul described to Timothy the terrible wickedness that would fill the earth in the last days, he admonished Timothy, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:14-15).

The evils that Paul described are being fulfilled in our day. Let us be sure, then, that our covenant children from their earliest days know the Holy Scriptures. Among other things, let godly parents “engage their punctual attendance on family worship.” 

Called into His Presence: The Opening Service (2)

Introduction

Last time we examined the various aspects of what has sometimes been called “the opening service.” This section of the liturgy includes the call to worship, doxology, salutation, votum, and benediction. In this article we take a step back and see the importance of this first part of the order of worship in context, especially as we remember that worship is a covenantal assembly with Jehovah.

The Purpose of the Opening Service

You have perhaps noticed that these aspects of the opening service are not strictly the elements of worship that are demanded by the Regulative Principle. The reason for this is that though these aspects of the opening service are part of the worship service, they do not represent the heart of the service. They are biblical, and they go back in Reformed worship at least to the time of Calvin.¹ The use of the benediction in particular goes back to biblical times.² But these, what

¹ See Maxwell, William D., *A History of Christian Worship, An Outline of Its Development and Forms*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982. 112-119.

² The benediction was present in synagogue worship along with the other major elements of worship. See Edersheim, Alfred, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*. London: James Clark and Co. LTD., 1961. 275. Also, the benediction may be referred to in 1 Timothy 2:9. Some have said the mention of prayer with uplifted holy hands could be the benediction.

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I will call “minor” elements, are the opening service, not the heart of the covenantal meeting.

However, “minor elements” does not mean “unnecessary elements.” This opening service is necessary. It is necessary simply by virtue of what the public corporate worship service is—the covenantal assembly meeting with Jehovah God. The purpose of the opening service is to usher us into God’s presence.

A Formal Introduction

We do not come into God’s presence presumptuously. We do not come to the house of God and start speaking to Him as though we happened to bump into Him on the street. There is a certain formality to this meeting. He is the God of heaven and earth; we are dust creatures. There must be a proper leading into the communion and fellowship of the meeting.³

This is similar to the way one would be called to come before a king in the Middle Ages. You would not just waltz into the throne room as though you had a right to come before the king in yourself. You would not start speaking as though the king were any common man. There are the proper introductions that must take place. The king has to beckon you into his presence in the proper fashion. Even if you were the one who wanted the meeting, you would not come into the throne room until the king called you to come in. When the king did call you in, you would respond with an expression of humility and praise for the king’s majesty. Then the king would greet you perhaps. You would in

³ Much like in prayer, we do not begin with the heart of the prayer until certain things are said that lead us into His presence in the right way.

turn express that you are in need of his help, and there is nowhere else you would turn for that help. He would receive you with his blessing. And only then, after you had been ushered into his presence in this proper way, would you get into the heart of what the meeting was about.

This is what is happening in the opening service. God is leading us into His presence, but in such a way that we know He is God and our sovereign, and we are His creatures. He sovereignly calls us into His presence in the call to worship. We respond in humility and praise for His majesty in the silent prayer and doxology. He greets us with the salutation. In the votum we express that we are in need of His help and depend on Him for what we need. He receives us with His blessing, assuring us of His help in the benediction. And only after this may the heart of the meeting between God and us take place.

A Familiar Introduction

But not only is there a certain *formality* to the way God ushers us into His presence, there is also a certain *familiarity*. For not only is God our Sovereign, He is our Father and Friend. If we go back to the illustration of coming before a king in the Middle Ages, but add another element to that illustration, this becomes clear. Assume now that this person who seeks an audience with the king is not only the king's subject, but also the king's son. In this case there would still be formality, for the son is still the king's subject. But the formalities would be infused with love, warmth, grace, and tenderness, for this subject is also the king's son.

This, too, we have in the opening service. The formal structure is there to usher us into the presence of the sovereign God properly, but that structure is filled with language that breathes love and warmth and sonship. We are being ushered into the presence of our Father! He calls us His beloved as He greets us. We are not merely citizens of His country, but citizens who are also sons! He breathes not some vague, cold, strictly formal blessing upon us, but He pronounces the blessing of His heart upon His children whom He loves. "Grace to you and peace, my children," He says. And we sing not only because He is sovereign, but also because He is all love towards His children

in His sovereignty. We vow that He is our help, not simply because He is King and able, but because He is Father and willing.

Formality and Familiarity in the Covenant

It is this wonderful combination of formality and familiarity in the opening service that makes it so perfectly *covenantal*. The covenant is the relationship between God the friend-sovereign and His people the friend-servants. It is a structured fellowship. There must be the recognition that He is God of heaven and earth, a consuming fire in His holiness, perfectly just, so far above us. But at the same time there must be the recognition that this God is our Father and Friend who has redeemed us and cares for us and loves us and draws us close because He loves to have us close.

The opening service is a biblical and precise representation of this covenant relationship as we are ushered into the presence of God. And having thus been brought in, we engage in the main elements of worship in reverence, and also in the sweetest, closest communion and love. Ushered in to Him in this way, we are free to participate in the main reasons for the meeting with the same formality and familiarity. God speaks to us His law as sovereign and Father. He absolves our sins and speaks comfortably to us in His Word, as Holy, Just, and Merciful. And we respond with a reverent and deep filial adoration in song and prayer and giving in the heart of the service.


The Comfort in the Opening Service

There are two voices in the world today speaking to us about life and purpose and meaning and joy. There is the voice of man, and there is the voice of God. The voice of man calls out and tells the church that life and purpose and meaning and joy are found in pursuing what is temporal. It is a voice with no authority. It recognizes no voice from above to lead and to guide. Ultimately this voice is the voice of Satan himself. And as in the Garden of Eden, Satan calls the church to come join him and fellowship with him. He uses the world to call out with lies, "come to me, for at my side there are pleasures forever more." But this voice has no true ultimate authority to call us, and we are fools to respond. Though it pretends to be fatherly and pretends to offer

fatherly benefits, this voice is the voice of no father and friend.

In the opening service of public worship, a different voice calls to us. It is a voice that calls from above. It is the voice of God our Creator and our Savior, the voice of true authority. The voice comes from beyond this world and this life. It is the voice that tells us who we are, why we are here, and where we are going. It is the voice of true Fatherhood. It is the voice that speaks to us of what true peace is in this life. And this voice of God calls us in the opening service into fellowship. It tells us that in His presence we will find true purpose, meaning, and joy.

In the opening service we come by faith, and our response to this voice is that we have no desire to be led by the voice of Satan. God's voice, as the voice of power and tender love, is the voice that has our attention. And we will come to Him for fellowship and for worship. We will come to Him, and we will leave the world behind.

And in the opening service, being ushered into God's presence, God tells us we are His. He gives us to experience that in *His* presence is fullness of joy; at *His* right hand there are pleasures for evermore (Ps. 16:11). 

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD

REV. RICHARD SMIT

Cross-Economic Giving (1)

Christ is pleased to gather His eternally chosen church by His Word and Spirit from all the nations of the earth. The same good pleasure of God has also determined that the nations from which the church is gathered are not identical, but very different in many respects, including wealth. This difference, which God has established and governs by His providence, is one with which the church must reckon, also in regard to the giving of financial assistance in cross-economic situations. In fact, because the gap between the richer and poorer nations is becoming ever wider, the need for careful consideration of God-ordained differences, and the implications for financial assistance, is all the more necessary, for the sake of the gospel and the heavenly kingdom of Christ.

What are the factors involved? On the one hand, the church must fulfill her duty of mercy towards fellow saints whom she knows are in need, even from another nation; but, on the other hand, the church may

not, by her generous giving, jeopardize her own work of missions, hinder the work of the local foreign church, or damage a sister-church relationship between churches on either side of a significant cross-economic gap. How must the church proceed, not only with benevolence, but also with the occasional personal or ecclesiastical gifts that might be sent to churches or fellow saints in a substantially different economic setting? What ought the church of the wealthy countries to do and what ought the churches of the poorer nations to expect for their own spiritual good and prosperity as faithful churches of Jesus Christ in their generations? We will make an attempt to answer these questions by an examination of the aspects of proper cross-economic giving, with special emphasis on an aspect that can sometimes be easily overlooked.



The Bible teaches us that proper giving has several aspects. The first two of those aspects are perhaps the ones we easily remember from the instruction of Scripture.

First, our giving must be a willing activity of mercy

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and love. We read in II Corinthians 9:7: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." According to this verse and its context, our giving for the support of the ministry of the Word, for the causes of God's kingdom, and for the support of the poor (benevolence) ought to be done with a willing and thankful heart and with a heart of mercy towards the needs of saints. Having experienced the amazing mercy of God towards us in His unspeakable gift (II Cor. 9:15), which cheers us upon our way in the wilderness of this life, so must we be a cheerful giver, particularly towards the saints who are in need.

An example of this part of our giving, that it should be motivated and done with a willing, thankful, and cheerful heart, is the widow who gave her two mites (two pennies or two centavos) to the Lord in the service of His temple (Mark 12:42). That act of faith illustrates that it is not the amount of the giving that pleases the Lord, but the cheerfulness and willingness of the widow's new heart to give all that she had that day in thanksgiving to Him.

When there are needs of fellow saints in war-torn countries, or in countries ravaged by some grievous calamity or great adversity that the Lord sends, the saints in prosperity often cheerfully and in mercy give to them in their adversity and need. This was the good example of the churches in the New Testament on several occasions. And this type of cheerful generosity and giving continues in the church of Jesus Christ today, particularly, for example, in our own churches with respect to our mission work and sister-church relationships with saints in foreign nations. This is evidence of the love of the saints for fellow saints in the truly catholic church, for which we may be humbly thankful to the Lord, who puts His efficacious love in our hearts.



A second and important aspect of giving is ability.

For the poor widow in Mark 12:42, her ability that day was only two mites. For Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, their ability to give to the cause of the burial of Christ was far greater, which was obvious from the extremely costly embalming materials that they gave willingly for the royal burial of Christ.

Recognition of the fact that the saints cannot give equally to the same extent because of the economic differences and limitations that God in His providence has placed upon them is found in I Corinthians 16:1-2: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

This understanding, that our cheerful giving is limited by our differing levels of wealth, is also taught in II Corinthians 8:12: "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." Sometimes it happens that the ability of the people of God to give is so limited that they themselves are in need of help from other churches, as was true in the case addressed by Paul in I Corinthians 16. At other times, it can be that the people of God bring a great abundance according to their ability, and this is what happened in the days of Moses when the tabernacle was being built at Mt. Sinai.

In fact, the Bible also records, in connection with the giving of the Israelites for the tabernacle, that their ability for giving was so great that Moses needed to ask the people to stop giving because enough materials had been accumulated for the tabernacle's construction.

And they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much (Ex. 36:5-7).

Clearly, another aspect of the activity of giving includes our God-given and providentially-governed ability for giving towards the work of the ministry, of oversight, and of mercy in the church, and also towards others whom the Lord might bring upon our pathway in life.



Are a willingness and ability the only principles that


govern our giving benevolence to saints who are in need or our giving an occasional gift to other saints, particularly those who have far less wealth than we might have?

Our giving, were it to be governed only by these two principles, could cause problems, especially when we are dealing with cross-cultural and international differences in wealth. Examples can be given of cases where gifts of financial assistance, governed only by the principle of ability and of a cheerful generosity, caused unintended but harmful consequences among those on the other side of a very wide cross-economic gap. The generous and well-intended gift eventually resulted in a situation of jealousy and strife for the poor receiver. Gifts provided solely according to ability and cheerfulness can generate jealousy and strife, and can be a stumbling block before the preaching of the Word among the recipients in the much poorer economy.

The Scriptures warn us indirectly about this problem, for example in Proverbs 19:4b. There we read the simple statement, "Wealth maketh many friends." This happens in the world when, for example, a man receives a windfall of a lottery jackpot. Suddenly the man, obtaining his vainly gotten wealth, gains a host of previously unknown friends. It is even a temptation among believers that they are attracted to wealthier saints because of their wealth and its earthly comforts and not because of the communion of the saints in Christ that we share. What the proverb states may of-

ten also apply to a believer in a very poor economy who receives a sudden gift or regular gifts from a contact or acquaintance in a wealthy western nation. Suddenly his newly acquired resources make for him many friends, including a miserable group of companions: strife and problems.

It has happened in missions conducted by a wealthy church or denomination in a poor country that when money flowed abroad out of cheerfulness and a willingness only, many were attracted to the mission work because of the financial benefits that it potentially presented. The mission was perceived as a pipeline to the "promised land" through which there was expected to be a "trickle-down" effect of wealth and earthly opportunities. News of such opportunities ordinarily spreads quickly, and many became attracted to the missionary or church not for food for their souls, but for food for their bellies. In fact, if one examines the history of our own PRCA foreign mission work in very contrasting cross-economic situations, he will find examples of this problem of giving that was well-intended and generous, but had harmful consequences and brought irreparable damage.

Our giving certainly must be and has been, by the grace of God, willingly merciful and according to our ability. However, it is important to remember that proper giving in sharp cross-economic differences must have another aspect to it, namely, wisdom. More on this...next time. 

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

The Discipline of Our Covenant Children

It is my intention to write a few articles on the above mentioned theme. Many over the years have written on this subject. In preparation for writing these articles I am reading again some good

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articles and books from my library. God's Word has much to say about this subject. Our hope and prayer is that another study of this subject will not be considered unnecessary repetition and that we will not imagine that we already know all we need to know. Parents especially have to consider over and over again what God's Word has to say about this subject.

The subject is of greatest importance in our modern-day world. Lawlessness and wickedness and immorality abound in the lives of many young people. Much of this can be traced to the permissiveness with which they were raised. Many grow up to be irresponsible adults. Young people are often totally unprepared for stable, lifelong careers. Juvenile delinquency, violence, and sexual promiscuity among the youth of our land are some of the greatest problems of our society and they seem to defy solution. Many young people have little direction in life. Their minds and hearts are full of despair and anger and hopelessness.

The blame for the failure of students in public schools is often attributed to poor teachers in our public schools. We need better training and more money for the teachers, better facilities to teach in, modern-day expensive equipment, computers for every student, and so on. But often the cause of the failure of the public schools is in fact the many broken homes in our land, and the resulting chaotic and wretched home life of children, which seriously affects the instruction and discipline of children and young people. Few in the world will admit this because such an admission would condemn the adulterous and wicked lifestyle, the covetousness and greed and lust, of the peoples of the world. Few parents are willing to take the time and make the necessary personal sacrifices for the proper raising of children. The work of discipline is given over to day-care centers and to individuals who have neither the authority nor the wisdom and love needed for the raising of children.

Even in the church there are at times tragic cases of children who grow up to be rebellious and wicked because of the grievous lack of instruction and discipline in their homes. The classic biblical example of the failure of discipline in the home is that of Eli and his sons. Even though Eli was a godly man, he was a serious failure as a father. His children grew up to be dreadfully wicked. The rebelliousness and brazen ungodliness of young people often have their cause in the failure of parents to instruct their children in the knowledge and fear of the Lord. The fearful judgment of God came upon the sons of Eli and even on their generations. Apostasy in the churches often had its root cause in that children were not properly instructed

and disciplined. When parents who were themselves raised in covenant homes depart from the established covenant traditions of their parents, wickedness will often grow at a shockingly rapid pace in the lives of the next generation. May the Lord preserve us from this in His mercy.

We confess that the Lord is our covenant God and that we are His people. He has saved us by the mighty power of His grace and Holy Spirit from the corruption of this world. We believe that it is the purpose of the Lord's sovereign grace to continue His covenant in the line of the generations of believers and their children. This is in itself a great wonder of God's working in our families that ought to fill us with humble gratitude and amazement. This gratitude to God ought to inspire us to be faithful in our covenant obligations and serve the Lord by raising our children in the fear of His name. We and our children are to be different from the ungodly world. Our homes and families are to be different from the world. Our hope is in the work of God's grace and regeneration in the hearts of our covenant children.

The great responsibility of raising children in the fear of the Lord has been laid by God upon parents. The Lord gives parents authority and power for this great task, especially fathers. Even when God gives us the wonderful opportunity to send our children to good covenant Christian schools, the first responsibility for the training of our children rests squarely on our shoulders as parents. Without the foundational work of parents in the home, the work of the Christian school teacher is very difficult if not impossible. Even catechism instruction by the church will be almost hopeless if there is not support of it by responsible parents who take their calling seriously in the covenant home.

We believe that our children are conceived and born in sin. No amount of mere human effort on the part of parents can change the sinful nature of our children. God, however, commands us to admonish our children with the authority of His Word. This Word, by the grace and Spirit of God, can change the sinful nature of our children. The Lord has called us to drive from the hearts of our children the foolishness with which they were born and teach them wisdom. This is done by the

power of godly discipline. The Lord calls our children to be holy and consecrated to Him, and He calls us as parents to work this in them through godly instruction and discipline.

The responsibility of disciplining our covenant children requires a great deal of wisdom from God and earnest spiritual concern for our children. It must be made a matter of constant, fervent prayer by parents and even the whole church. It requires constant, diligent effort and large personal sacrifice on the part of parents, motivated by genuine covenantal love for the children whom the Lord has given to us.

The authority of God's Word must be maintained in our home. One writer makes an excellent distinction between ruthless, proud authoritarianism of unloving fathers and the proper, authoritative maintaining of God's Word in our homes. The former will do great harm to covenant children. The latter, with God's blessing, will do them great good.

As parents we must give formal instruction to our children, instruction in which we teach them objectively the truth of God and His Word and His commandments. There must be time and order in our covenant homes for godly instruction. We must lay hold on God-given time and opportunity for this in our homes in the busyness of life. Covenant fathers must not make their lives too busy with secular careers. Mothers must resist the modern-day temptations to forsake their God-given role of being the keeper of the home and of properly caring for covenant children entrusted to them, in order to pursue some glamorous career in the world. One of the greatest dangers for apostasy even for the church among us is the temptations for wives and mothers to compromise on the covenant tradition of mothers' role in the home.

God's Word must be explained and applied to the daily lives of our covenant children in all the circumstances that arise from day to day in our homes and in society. Much of the training of our children comes in the natural course and flow of our life in the home and society. Of very great importance in the training of our children is that the instruction we give by our words must be supported and demonstrated by the daily examples we show them in our own attitude and perspective and behavior in all of our life as parents.

We must set before our children the pattern of godliness.

Even secular writers on this subject have often said that instruction and discipline must be taken seriously from the earliest ages of our children. Personality, character, morality, godly perspective on life are very much established in children already at a very young age. The book of Proverbs speaks of this. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Prov. 19:18). A child that is not disciplined in the early years of his life will become hardened in the ways of sin. The time of childhood is the time of God-given opportunity.

The subject of disciplining our children is a broad subject. It has many important dimensions. In Scripture one of the main words for discipline means literally to teach and train a child from earliest childhood to mature manhood or womanhood. Everything that we do for our children to bring them from early childhood to mature and responsible adulthood is included in the work of discipline.

We lay the basis for the discipline of our covenant children by teaching about God Himself, His sovereignty, power, and greatness, His glory, His holiness, righteousness, and truth, His goodness and His great salvation of His people in Christ. The truths of God Himself and of His salvation must be taught to our children, so that from their childhood they learn to fear and reverence and obey God and to love Him as their God. The instruction and discipline of our covenant children can never be accomplished by merely teaching them virtue and morality, or truth in the abstract. Even the world often tries to accomplish this, and fails miserably in the end even if it succeeds in producing noble and seemingly morally upright and scholarly children, who are well behaved and respected in society. As covenant parents we must above all teach our children the fear of God and reverence before Him, obedience before Him, and the purpose of our life to serve and glorify Him.



Upon This Rock (8)

Judicial Blindness

Isaiah was a prophet in Jerusalem during the reigns of no fewer than four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Is. 1:1). Uzziah and Jotham were good kings. Judah therefore enjoyed an extended period of prosperity. The great increase in worldly wealth and luxury was accompanied by a decline in spirituality among the people generally. When Jotham's son Ahaz began to practice idolatry, first after the manner of "the kings of Israel" (II Chron. 28:2), and then "after the abominations of the heathen" (28:3), the people were quick to follow suit.

From the very beginning of his sixteen-year reign to the bitter end of it, Ahaz "did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (28:1). In fact, the extent to which Ahaz led the people in the grossest forms of idolatry staggers the imagination. The first demonstration of his defiance of God and of His word is found in verse 2: he made "molten images for Baalim." He also introduced the worst of the heathen rites connected with the worship of these idols. Human sacrifice was sometimes part of the service of Baal (or of Molech, which according to Jeremiah 32:35 seems to have been closely associated with Baal worship). Even this most repulsive form of idol worship was not too much for Ahaz. For we read that he "burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel" (28:3). Almost beyond belief! Ahaz (of the line of *David!*) and Judah (the people of *God* in the old dispensation!).

Even this was not the extent of Ahaz's rebellion. "He

sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree" (28:4). The divinely appointed *place* of worship obviously meant nothing to one who cared not at all about the *manner* of worship or, for that matter, the *object* of worship.

In fact, Ahaz meddled at will with many aspects of worship that had been prescribed by God Himself, and that were of rich symbolic significance. While in Damascus to see the king of Assyria, Ahaz spied an altar that was very much to his liking. He made a sketch of it, sent the drawing to Urijah the chief priest, and ordered him to build one like it in the court of the temple (II Kings 16:10, 11). In the court of the temple there already *was* an altar—the brazen altar of burnt offering, built by Solomon according to specifications given by God (I Chron. 28:11, 12, 19). But Ahaz preferred the altar of his *own* making. When he returned to Jerusalem, he himself offered burnt offerings on his newly constructed altar, and, finding the old brazen altar to be in a more prominent position than his own, he moved the altar of God farther "from the forefront of the house" (II Kings 16:14), so that his own would occupy the most favored position, with nothing to compete with its splendor.

To top it all, he "cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord" (I Chron. 28:24). The shutting of the doors surely indicates that, by direction of Ahaz, all the services that were to be conducted by the priests in the Holy Place were discontinued. The images and the new altar of Ahaz replaced all that was holy. Further, he "made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods" (28:24, 25).

Not only was Ahaz tampering with that which had been prescribed by divine ordinance, he was also, by dis-

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Previous article in this series: January 1, 2013, p. 153.

carding much of which had symbolic meaning, rejecting that which was signified. By setting aside the altar, for example, he was showing what he thought about the *sacrifices*, which were basic to the worship of Jehovah. The very salvation of the Jews was bound up in those sacrifices. For the temple, the altar, the priests, the sacrifices—all these looked ahead to *Christ*. But Ahaz cared not at all for that. And he found Urijah, the *high priest*, willing to cooperate with him. No wonder that Isaiah described the leaders of Ahaz's day as "watchmen [that] were blind," and "shepherds that cannot understand" (Is. 56:10, 11).

Ahaz and the people of Israel were made to feel the anger of God for their apostasy. The reign of Ahaz, in fact, brought one disaster after another to the country of Judah. Judah was delivered into the hand of the king of Syria, who "carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus" (II Chron. 28:5). The king of Israel, too, smote Ahaz and Judah "with a great slaughter. For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men; because they had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers" (28:6, 7). Likewise did the Edomites come and smite Judah, carrying away captives (28:17); and the Philistines "invaded the cities of the low country" (28:18). Thus did the Lord bring "Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he had made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the Lord" (28:19).

One hundred twenty thousand valiant men...dead. In one day! The magnitude of that loss, in a country so small, and in time so short, is staggering. Hard to imagine, one would think, a consequence of apostasy more grievous.

There was indeed, however, a more grievous consequence. More grievous—and yet one that we might overlook. Isaiah did not. "Therefore, behold, I will proceed [in judgment of their apostasy] to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder" (Is. 29:14). And what was that work? That a 120,000 men will fall in one day? No. It's this: "the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid" (29:14).

Calvin asks, "...for what kind of punishment is more dreadful than blindness of mind and stupidity?" And

he adds: "This indeed is not commonly perceived by men, nor are they aware of the greatness of this evil; but it is the greatest and most wretched of all."

And what is the sin of which this most-wretched-of-all punishments is a consequence? Our thoughts might, perhaps, go immediately to Ahaz's burning of his children in the fire. But that wasn't it. It was...*their worship of God*.

We look at Isaiah 29:13: "*Forasmuch* as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men...." And then follows the consequence: "...*therefore*, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work...." "He [that is, God] could not testify more plainly than by the tremendous severity of this chastisement, how great is the abhorrence with which he regards false worship" (Calvin).

Israel had learned, years earlier, the truth of that—that is, of the abhorrence with which God regarded false worship. Shortly after their consecration as priests of the Lord, Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, were careless in carrying out their new duties in the office. And they paid for it with their lives. A bolt of fire from the Lord struck them dead on the spot (Lev. 10:1, 2). Calvin points out, also in this connection, the deadly seriousness of profanation of *worship*. He acknowledges first that "apparently it was a light transgression to use strange fire for burning incense; and again their thoughtlessness would seem excusable, for certainly Nadab and Abihu did not wantonly or intentionally desire to pollute the sacred things, but, as is often the case in matters of novelty [i.e., new duties], when they were setting about too eagerly, their precipitancy [hastiness] led them into error. The severity of the punishment, therefore, would not please those arrogant people, who do not hesitate superciliously to criticize God's judgments; but if we reflect how holy a thing God's worship is, the enormity of the punishment will by no means offend us."

The applicability of that to the Jews of Ezekiel's day, and to the Jews of Jesus' day, and to the church world of our day is clear on the surface. Especially for that reason we must be clear also as to the *reason* for God's jealousy with respect to the form of worship.

What comes to mind immediately when we consider the transgression of Nadab and Abihu is God's *holiness*. One who comes *precipitously* into the presence of God does not come *reverently*. One who comes *carelessly* into the presence of God will all too easily and quickly neglect God's *prescription* for worship. That is what Nadab and Abihu did. In their offering of incense in the tabernacle, they brought "strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not" (Lev. 10:1). Thus did they violate divine prescription for worship. This, in itself, was no small matter. But fully to appreciate God's abhorrence of this profanation of worship, we must bear in mind that the ceremonies involved were not arbitrarily imposed on the people of Israel. In the dispensation of shadows, they were *types*. When, therefore, the Lord commanded that live coals from the altar of burnt offering that stood before the tabernacle be used to burn incense on the altar within, the people of Israel could take for granted that this divinely-prescribed procedure had typical significance. Though they could not have anticipated the details of the fulfillment of these types, we sell them short, we underestimate them, if we think that they could not have sensed the connection between the two altars. The incense, they understood, was offered to *God*—and as a *sweet-smelling* sacrifice. And how could *Jehovah* be pleased with the scent of smoke from burning incense from an altar in the tabernacle? How could God's people, all of whom are sinners, find favor with God and be accepted by Him? Well, that had everything to do with the expiatory sacrifices on the other altar, the altar of burnt offering. There must

be *atonement*—atonement by the *shedding of blood*. Apart from *that*, the burning of incense would be but a vain show, and, worse, a robbing Christ of His honor.

Those last few words were borrowed from John Calvin, who thus characterized the worship of the Jews in the temple of God in Jerusalem some 800 years after Nadab and Abihu paid with their lives for their trespass in the tabernacle in the wilderness.

Robbing Christ of His honor. We ought to ponder that. If it be true, that strange fire (Lev. 10:1, 2), hypocrisy (Is. 29:13), and bloody hands (Ezek. 23:37-39) were not only profanations of God's sanctuary but also a *despising of Christ*, we can well understand why they met with such dreadful vengeance from God (death in the one instance, spiritual blindness and eventual deportation in the other). We might, however, be inclined to wonder how, or even *whether*, the Jews in the old dispensation *could* rob Christ of His honor. Is Calvin, perhaps, attributing to the Jews of the old dispensation a level of comprehension that was in fact *beyond* them? To ask this question is not, of course, to call into question the severity of God's vengeance on them. That His judgment was, and is always, in perfect accord with justice we take for granted. Our question is only this: Was the sin of the people of Judah relative to their worship of God only a trifling with divine prescription for the manner of that worship (which, in itself, would justify God's vengeance on them), or was that sin aggravated by an awareness of the symbolism involved in it, and a despising of *it*?

Next time: Robbing Christ of His honor. 

Mission Outreach by Every Congregation

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The outreach we speak about in this article is mission work. It is hard work. It taxes our patience. It tries our commitment. And it stirs in us the deepest sense of helplessness.

Having said this, we quickly add that it is right and beautiful for every congregation to do it.

There are two reasons for this.

First, it is the response of faith to obey the commandment of our Lord. Two passages from the Bible come to mind. Matthew 28:18-20: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Then we also have John 10:16: "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." The words of these texts were directed to the disciples, who represented the New Testament church that was about to be instituted.

Second, there are blessings assured us in the way of obedience in doing this work. There is no greater description of this than our Lord gave to the church of Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13). We quote a small part: "I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.... Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God."

Little wonder, then, that one of our forefathers wrote these words in 1880, quoted in the book *Christian Reformed Tradition*, by J. H. Kromminga:

Also with a view to our own church there is certainly great reason to support missions. If that church is to avoid death by stagnation, she must exercise and develop her fellowship with God and with Jesus as Mediator in the work of love, and that work finds a fitting place on the mission field.

A church which does not love missions, but works for itself alone, and shuts itself up within itself, is in danger that it will wither and die for want of vitality, by which it is spiritually crippled, and for want of that

fresh air which is enjoyed only where love works outward as well as inward.

The point of focus here is upon the local congregation working towards the organization of a new congregation within a reasonable distance. The suggestion has been made that it ought to be within a hundred miles. It ought to be apparent that such a work involves the entire congregation. The elders have to oversee this project. The church extension or evangelism committee has to do most of the leg work. The pastor and mature members of the congregation may be called upon to help lead a Bible study. There may be need for some to support the mission effort by attending some of the activities of the mission outreach. For this reason we write this article in the *Standard Bearer*, rather than address it to the Evangelism Committees. We desire every member of our churches and each congregation to consider this work.

The question may arise whether this is the work of the local church, or whether it ought rather to be the work of the denominational Domestic Mission Committee. The answer is that it belongs to both. It is the calling of the local church to do this work and the calling of the DMC to render its assistance. If this work is a great distance from any one of our congregations, then the DMC is to take the leadership on behalf of the churches and from the very beginning call a missionary to do this work. The Christian Reformed Church struggled with the question of the relationship between the local congregation and the denominational mission committee for many years. We also struggled with this same question in our history. In 1912 the CRC wrote a Mission Order, which assigned mission work to the local congregation, even work among the heathen. Only years after that did they leave this position and centralize their work in the Board of Missions, the Executive Committee, an Executive Director, and almost entirely left out the local church. In 1912, the years of their strength, which, as I indicated before, is also our history, they included in their Mission Order,

Article 2, Each church is obliged by the missionary command of the Lord to fulfill its duty by sending out or helping to send out a minister or ministers of the Word among the heathen, and has within itself every-

thing that is necessary for this purpose, and is bound to the regulations of this Order, unless the synod makes exceptions in particular matters.

Our own synod made a significant decision in 1965 when it adopted the so-called New Mission Policy. Remember, this is almost 50 years ago, and it said,

There is, however, a rather close connection between these two items (local church and mission committee)—a relation which exists even at such times as we do not have a missionary. For not only is it true that the Mission Committee should aid local churches in church extension work (and such cooperation would by no means be excluded in case we again had a missionary); but it is also true that the local churches should aid and cooperate with the Mission Committee in the work of home missions; and especially in the discovery and preparation of possible fields of labor in the general areas in which our churches are located, the local churches can be of assistance.

Synod criticized the haphazard way in which missionaries were sent to areas where little preparatory work was done. Once a missionary arrived, there was very little effort to coordinate radio ministry, the printed page, and today we would add, the Internet. The DMC wants to take this approach by working with the local congregations. The Constitution of the DMC requires that the DMC find possible fields and work closely with the local church, so they can function as a calling church and assist in the organization of a new congregation when the group is ready. We propose to work together from the very start.

There are plenty of precedents for this involvement of the local church.

The Bible itself is the best source. One example is the missionary activity of the apostle Paul. Most of us are familiar with the outreach in the province of Galatia, where the churches in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were organized (Acts 14:20-23). Later, mention is made of the province of Macedonia, where churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea were formed (Acts 16:11-17). The same is true for the province of Asia, where the congregation of Ephesus was instituted (Acts 19). These local congregations

were the springboard from which the gospel went into the entire area and many churches were organized. For this reason we read in Titus 1:5, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee." Churches were established beyond the reach of certain key cities, and that was done by the local congregation. Finally, we read in Romans 15:19, 23 how Paul gloried in the mighty work of the Holy Spirit: "Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you; whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you." The distance from Jerusalem to Illyricum covered all the territory between Jerusalem and Rome, and Paul did not cover all this territory himself. The churches that were established in the key cities did outreach.

Many of our own congregations participated in the organization of new congregations within a certain distance. Quite exceptional was the work done by Lynden when they approved their pastor flying to Edmonton, Canada to hold a Bible Study there bi-weekly and visit among interested people. The DMC was called upon when the work progressed to the stage of possible organization. Once Edmonton was organized, they did a similar work in Lacombe, which was closer by. South Holland did much the same with their work in NW Chicago, which led to the calling of a missionary and eventually the organization of Bethel Church. Hull-Doon-Edgerton participated in the work in Sioux Falls under the guidance of the DMC. Many of our churches participated in the organization of daughter congregations.

The main difference in today's work is that it includes, and possibly focuses mainly upon, the unchurched and secular. The principle of working with the Jews first and then the Gentiles can be translated into today's scene as working with people who have some connection with Christianity, and even more pointedly, with the Reformed faith. The day of finding groups of displaced Reformed believers extending to us a Macedonian call seems past. There still are some out

there, but our focus cannot be exclusively upon them. It must be broader and include others, in fact anyone in whom Christ works an interest. We must not limit our Lord's work; the gathering of the church in outreach will include anyone who responds to the call of the gospel. Ultimately, we can plan all we like, but only Christ will direct us towards those whom He wills to call. We must be open to include some we deem most unlikely and follow the direction of our Lord. The conversion of unbelievers is the supreme goal of mission work.

If you are reading this article as a member of your local church extension committee or evangelism committee, you might ask, where do we start?

Two words of caution bear at this point.

First, we must continue to focus on the important role the preaching of the gospel has in outreach. We may begin with a Bible Study in a new area and with the Lord's blessing form a mission group of interested people. Ultimately, however, the goal is to have a missionary present and, with his presence on the Lord's Day, begin to conduct worship services. We propose to put forth more effort to draw together a group of people before introducing the preaching of the gospel in a formal worship service. How long this will take, and exactly what methods are employed to reach the goal, will depend entirely on how the Lord is pleased to bless our efforts.

Second, we must not deceive ourselves into thinking that if we use a method that is systematic and faithful to the Bible, then it is guaranteed that we will organize more churches than in the past. We are living in the

last days. No one can possibly dispute this, and the Bible does not hold out the prospect of tremendous growth. We are not Postmillennialists, who hold an empty dream. We do know that the instruction that our Lord gave His church is not time-conditioned. He did not say, go make disciples all through history with the exception of the last days. Obedience requires us to do it. But we are not dreamers, and we know that this is very difficult work, especially in the last days. Yet, our Lord promises to be with us always, even to the end of the world. What more do we need for mission outreach?

We would like to work with the local evangelism committees and suggest that you consider this as your work. We have a power-point presentation that we can use to explain our working together. We have a document that Missionary Bruinsma helped us to prepare that outlines our projected plans. For the churches in the Michigan area, we would like to meet with you in person, if you so desire. If you are too far from us to meet in person, we can arrange some ways to work together. Rev. Bruinsma will explain more details in another *Standard Bearer* article to follow and give us some information about how he is implementing this in the Pittsburgh area.

Mission outreach without prayer is empty and formal. May God guide all of us to have a heart for missions and to consider an outreach ministry with a view to establishing a new congregation.

Our prayers join yours. To Him be the glory. 

CONTRIBUTION

MISS MARISA KOBILAN

British Reformed Fellowship Conference, Northern Ireland, July - August 2012: "Ye Shall Be My Witnesses"

Miss Kobilan, who lives in the State of Washington, was one of the attendees at the British Reformed Fellowship Conference in NI last summer.

Last summer, the British Reformed Fellowship's biennial family conference proved to be a tremendous success, as it combined beautiful

scenery, wonderful fellowship, and superb teaching. Saints from Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, England, Italy, France, Wales, the Netherlands, Hungary, Canada, and the United States of America gathered for a week of teaching and fellowship in beautiful County Down, Northern Ireland. The theme of this year's conference was, "Ye Shall Be My Witnesses." All facets of what it means to be a Christian witness were covered, with plenty of emphasis put on the practical aspects. Thought-provoking questions and discussions occurred after the speeches were given. The weather remained cool and rainy for most of the conference, with some occasional periods of sun.

Near the seaside resort town of Bangor, and within a short distance of Belfast, stands Lorne House, a 21-acre estate including house and grounds. This was the venue for the 2012 BRF conference. Lorne House was built in the Scottish-Baronial style in 1875 by a man named Henry Campbell. Lorne House provided splendid accommodations, and conference-goers enjoyed excellent meals prepared by the cooks.

Saturday afternoon marked the start of the 2012 BRF conference. It included arrival of attendees, dinner, introductions, and fellowship.

On Sunday morning Prof. Herman Hanko preached on the text Zechariah 4:1-6, entitled, "By the Spirit of the Lord." This sermon focused on the important truth that the building of the church is entirely God's work. The Sunday evening worship service included a sermon by Prof. David Engelsma on the text Acts 7:54-8:1a, entitled, "The Martyr Church's Witness to the Ascended Lord." This sermon explained the relationship of the church's witness and Christ's Lordship.

Right away on Monday morning, the group headed off via train to the Titanic Museum in Belfast. The museum provided a stunning visual experience, with nine galleries utilizing multiple dimensions. The Titanic was designed to be the very best of comfort and luxury, and the museum brought this to life. Much to everyone's enjoyment, the museum even featured a ride, where a full-scale reconstruction of the shipyard and ship building could be viewed. Covering the entire history of the Titanic, the museum exhibits began with the economy and industry of Belfast at the time of the great ship's conception, and ended with the tragic

wreck, when the Titanic hit an iceberg south of Newfoundland.

Later that day, some from the BRF conference went on an open-air bus tour of Belfast, which highlighted some of the major history of the city. Various ornate buildings and churches were viewed, as well as a very large estate, and Queen's University. The tour included a recap of the recent unrest in Northern Ireland, known as the Troubles. These struggles lasted from 1969 to 1998, and involved Protestant Unionist versus Catholic Nationalist communities. Their quarrels involved political and military matters, not religious ones. Mainly at stake was the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. The Troubles ended quite recently, in 1998, with what is known as the Good Friday Agreement. The older, residential part of Belfast is still divided into Catholic and Protestant areas, with Shankill Road as the divider.

That night Prof. Hanko gave the first conference address entitled, "The Divine Calling to Witness." He expounded upon our biblical calling to witness, and emphasized God's sovereignty in salvation. He described the world as a very dark place, with the church as the only light shining in it. Many at the BRF conference sang Psalms together in the evening.

Tuesday saw two conference addresses. The first was by Prof. Engelsma entitled, "The Content of the Witness." Prof. Engelsma explained that the worth and value of our witness is the content, and that the content must be the truth.

There was a period of free time during the afternoon, and some of the group walked to the nearby town of Holywood, where they enjoyed talking together at a cafe.

The third conference address was given that night by Prof. Hanko. It was entitled, "The Official Witness of the Church." Prof. Hanko expounded the fact that the official witness of the church is the preaching of the gospel. He went on to explain that only the true church is able to produce individuals who can be witnesses, and that the goal of individual witnesses is to bring people under the official preaching of the church. That evening more Psalms were sung, and later on, games were played by those who were interested in staying up later.

On Wednesday morning, the group went on a coach (or bus) tour of the East Antrim Coast. Along the way, the bus driver explained what we were seeing on the tour. The tour included a stop at Carrickfergus Castle, one of the best preserved medieval structures in the world. Carrickfergus Castle was built in 1177 by an Anglo-Norman knight named John de Courcy. John de Courcy built the grand edifice after he had invaded and conquered Ulster. Parts of the castle have been redone to show what it probably looked like in its original state. Replicas of medieval weapons were available for inspection, and many in our group tried their hand at using some of the weapons—only in jest, of course. The weather during the tour of the castle was very authentic—rain and a fair amount of wind. Outside the castle stands a statue of Prince William of Orange, a diminutive man from the Netherlands who lived from 1650 to 1720. His history is significant, as it relates to the spread of the Protestant Reformation. In his attempt to conquer the British Isles and restore Roman Catholicism, King James II of England also endeavored to conquer Ulster. Prince William took his troops, landed in Carrickfergus, and helped to defeat James II at the Battle of the Boyne on July 1, 1690. The tour also included a stop on the edge of the Antrim coast, where many in the group walked a fair distance along the coastline to a lighthouse. Later on, the group was allowed time to tour the town of Carnlough, and at this time the weather began to improve.

That night, Rev. Martyn McGeown gave a special lecture entitled, “Mission Work: Message and Methods.” Rev. McGeown explained that it is the instituted church alone that sends missionaries. He also outlined the method used in mission work, which we gather from the book of Acts and the writings of the apostle Paul. An update on the progress in Limerick was also given. Later in the evening, Psalms were sung and more games were played.

On Thursday morning the biennial general meeting of the BRF was held. Various matters of business were taken care of, including selecting a theme for the next BRF conference. The topic for the 2014 BRF conference will be, “Be Ye Holy: The Reformed Truth of Sanctification,” D.V.

In the afternoon that day, the Lorne establishment

offered several optional, outdoor activities, and many chose to participate in them. One activity was archery, and the other was a high ropes course in the shape of a square, called the cube. The ropes course included a rope wall, climbing a tall post, walking on a balance beam, walking on a rope while holding onto a loose cord above, and jumping off a high platform while trying to hit a small punching bag. All the participants wore harnesses, and had a very enjoyable time. Some of the others who chose to opt out of these activities went to Belfast for shopping and sight-seeing.

That evening Prof. Engelsma gave the fourth conference address entitled, “The Personal Witness by the Word,” in which he explained that the members of the instituted church participate in the church’s witness by membership, prayer, and financial contribution. He also talked about the fact that the individual members are still required to witness by their speech, and that the church instructs and trains the members to be good witnesses.

On Friday morning Prof. Hanko gave the fifth conference address entitled, “The Personal Witness of a Godly Life.” He expounded this topic by saying that there is no witness without a godly life, and that we must live a godly life before we can give a spoken witness. He also made clear the important fact that the church is absolutely essential in the life of a pilgrim.

Friday afternoon consisted of a period of free time, and many conference attendees passed the time by talking together, while some did some sight-seeing.

Friday evening brought about the sixth conference address, entitled, “The Manner of a Christian Witness.” Prof. Engelsma said that the wrong manner of witnessing will hinder the witness. He discussed how I Peter 3:15 describes meekness and fear as the correct manner of a Christian witness, and explained what that means. He also said that we must keep in mind who we are witnessing to. The sharp condemnation of a false teacher would not be appropriate as an answer to a curious unbeliever. Prof. Engelsma emphasized the fact that love for God must motivate us, and also warned against the attitude of tolerance that is so prevalent in our day. This tolerance of wickedness, he said, is destructive of churches, souls, and society.

Many of the conference attendees were successful at

starting a small bonfire that evening, an endeavor that was made quite difficult by the damp environment. More games were played as well.

On Saturday morning the conference was brought to an end and people departed. There was more than a little sadness as goodbyes were said. Enjoying fellowship with saints from all over

the world is a precious thing, and it was difficult to bring it to an end.

In short, the 2012 BRF conference was a remarkably wonderful event that was comprised of the best elements for which one could hope: excellent teaching, blessed fellowship, and sight-seeing in one of the most beautiful areas of the world. 

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA

God In Our Midst: The Tabernacle and Our Relationship With God, by Daniel R. Hyde. Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2012. 255 pages. Hardcover \$18.00; ebook \$9.00. ISBN 978-1-56769-281-5. Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.

“God created the world in six days, but he used forty to instruct Moses about the tabernacle. Little over one chapter was needed to describe the structure of the world, but six were used for the tabernacle.” (Herman Witsius, as quoted on page 202 of this book).

This fact alone justifies the writing and publishing of this volume. My own interest in reading it was heightened by the fact that I am preaching a series of sermons on the tabernacle’s furnishings for Lord’s Supper.

The main section of this book consists of seventeen chapters that explain Exodus 25-40, in which God gave Moses directions regarding how to build the tabernacle with its courts and furnishings, and how to gather the materials for it. This main section is preceded by an interesting 35-page introduction, in which Rev. Hyde explains the idea of the tabernacle in Scripture and discusses hermeneutical principles (methods of interpretation) regarding this section of Scripture. After the main section, Rev. Hyde includes a conclusion, and an appendix containing both a plea to pastors to preach from the Pentateuch and homiletical principles to guide pastors in such preaching.


Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, Minnesota.

I recommend this book to interested readers of the *Standard Bearer* for three reasons.

First, in telling Israel to *make* a tabernacle, and *how* to make it, God was giving His covenant people visible lessons regarding His grace in His promised Christ and regarding life in God’s covenant as it will be ultimately enjoyed in heaven. These lessons are relevant for us today, as we are sinners who stand in continual need of God’s mercy. Rev. Hyde brings this out clearly in each chapter.

Second, the book makes good devotional reading. The book is a commentary on these passages of Scripture—but not a technical commentary; it includes good food for the soul, and Rev. Hyde is diligent in applying the gospel to the reader. The style is easy to follow, and engaging.

Third, the book presents the matter from a Reformed perspective. It clearly promotes the historic, Reformed, biblical faith that is dear to us. Rev. Hyde is a Reformed pastor with a good understanding of the Reformed faith. He is the pastor of the Oceanside United Reformed Church in Carlsbad, CA. He refers often to the Reformed creeds (including the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards) and to Reformed liturgy. It is true that on rare occasions Rev. Hyde uses words or terms that we consider inconsistent with sovereign grace—such as when he refers to God’s call to His people to gather for worship as an invitation (160). Nevertheless, the book’s frequent appeal to the Reformed confessions and liturgy makes clear that it promotes the historic, Reformed, biblical faith that is dear to us.

After reviewing some books, I get rid of them. This is not one of those. It will stay on my shelf. 

Congregation Activities

Last year the city of Hudsonville, MI made the decision to tear down the building that our Hudsonville PRC had built and called home from 1927 until moving into bigger facilities in 1976. But before that building came down in early December, the city of Hudsonville approached Hudsonville PRC to see if they were interested in purchasing the original bell that still hung in the steeple of that building. They were. As you can imagine, this old bell has both historical and sentimental value to our Hudsonville congregation, as it dates back to their beginning, and was purchased in part from funds raised by the Young People's Society. Many young men of that society, and now adults in Hudsonville, can remember ringing that bell. Hudsonville, as yet, does not have a specific plan for the bell's future place or use, but recent bulletin announcements have reminded the congregation to give any ideas to their Building Committee. So, next time you have the opportunity to visit our Hudsonville congregation, be sure to look for the bell. You might even hear it ringing ten minutes or so before the worship service begins.

A recent bulletin from the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD informed their congregation that their library was ready. Our readers may remember that Heritage recently purchased a new place of worship

in Sioux Falls, and since the previous congregation was disbanding, Heritage was able to purchase, not only the building, but also all the contents, which meant that Heritage purchased a library as well. Heritage's Library Committee organized and cataloged the books in their "new" library, which contains an assortment of Christian literature, including both fiction and non-fiction titles on a wide range of topics. Many of the books were unfamiliar to Heritage, so the Library Committee asked the readers to read with discretion and if they had any questions or concerns to please contact them.

The members of the West Michigan PRCs were invited to a choir concert given by the choir of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI on Sunday evening, December 16. In addition to the choir singing, there were several special numbers, and the audience also had an opportunity to sing some Christmas carols.

Recently the congregation of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI was informed of an effort by their membership to be involved in communication with several PR ministers and missionaries in distant locations. A schedule was drawn up for a month at a time, and various members were asked to write those men. We bring this up here because it's always a good idea for any of us to write these men, and second, we were somewhat surprised at how many names were on that list. In the month of January, Southeast will send something to Rev. Bruinsma, Rev. Smit, Rev. Kleyn, Rev. Lanning, Rev. Stewart, Rev. McGown, and Rev. Ibe. If you would like

to join in these efforts, you can find contact information, either mailing or email addressed, in the *Acts of Synod and Yearbook* or at PRCA.org.

By mid-January all our churches will have held their annual Congregational Meetings. Men have been elected to the office of elder and deacon, and annual budgets have been approved. Most of these meetings are usually routine, but some do contain recommendations by Councils that may be of interest to you, the readers of the *Standard Bearer*. The Council of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL was authorized to investigate properties or existing buildings in locations south, most likely in Indiana, for future growth. And a proposal from the Council of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI to purchase equipment necessary to provide live stream video of their worship services on the Internet and to provide a video feed to their basement also passed.

On Wednesday morning, December 19, the members of the Ladies Bible Study of the Grandville, MI PRC met together for their usual Bible study, followed by a special presentation by Ming Ying Chong, the administrator of *Gratia Dei Sola Media*, who just happened to be in West Michigan through Christmas. GDS (their website: www.gdsmedia.org) is a translation agency based in Singapore. About 70% of the material that they have translated is Protestant Reformed. They also translate material from the EPCA and the Netherlands Reformed Church. Most of the

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Standard Bearer

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Jenison, MI 49428-7137

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material translated is geared toward children's spiritual education. GDS is committed to translating Reformed literature. Catechism books have been translated into Mandarin, Spanish, Burmese, Afrikaans, Arabic, Indonesian, Japanese, and Korean, and most are available as a free download to any who wish to use it. Another reminder of the different means God uses for the spread of the Reformed faith.

School Activities

Each year at Christmas time the students of Heritage Christian

School in Hudsonville, MI contribute to a Christmas collection. This year the collection went to *Gratia Dei Sola Media*.

Hope PR Christian School held their annual all-school program on December 7 in the auditorium of nearby Grandville High School. The program's theme was, "The Christian's Trust."

That same evening, the combined Jr. High Doon and Hull, Iowa Fall program was held at the Hull, IA PRC. The Jr. High band, choirs, and combined choir performed numbers in praise to our God.

The students of Trinity Christian High School in Hull, IA presented their Christmas program on December 10 at Trinity. Trinity's band and choir performed general anthems of praise to our Lord and also Christmas music.

Minister Activities

Rev. W. Langerak declined the call from the Randolph, WI PRC.

Both the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI and the Hope PRC in Walker, MI extended calls to Rev. C. Haak to serve as their next pastor. ☞

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ It is with joy and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father that we are privileged to celebrate, on January 24, 2013, the 50th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

GERALD and BONNIE KUIPER.

God has richly blessed us through the godly example of their marriage and by their faithful instruction in word and deed throughout the many years the Lord has given them. It is our prayer that God may continue to keep them in His care and bless them in the years to come. "So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth thy praise to all generations" (Psalm 79:13).

- * Jerry and Beth Kuiper
Jordan, Travis, Kelsey, Levi
- * Doug and Pam Dykstra
Josh, Justin
- * Jim and Karen Daling
Nathan, Brandon, Leanna, Jeremy

- * Matt and Tami Kuiper
Alyssa, Nicki, Ryan
- * Tim and Annette Kuiper
- * Andy and Kim Kuiper
Mara
- * David Kuiper

Hudsonville, Michigan

Classis West

■ Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Lynden, Washington on Wednesday, March 6, 2013, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by February 4. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify John Heystek, 1518 Abbott Rd., Lynden, WA 98264 (360) 354-7021 or nwelectric@frontier.com.

Rev. D. Kuiper, Stated Clerk

Teacher Needed

■ Hope PR School, Walker, MI, is accepting applications to fill a lower elementary position for the 2013-2014 school year. For more information or to apply for this position contact Ron Koole (phone) 616-453-9717, (email) rkoole@hopeprcschool.org or Dave Langerak (phone) 616-437-3643, (email) dave.langerak@gmail.com.

Seminary

■ All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Bill VanOverloop (Phone: 669-1504). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 20, 2013, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Bill VanOverloop, Secretary