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Volume 83 ♦ Number 9

Dry and Thirsty

"O God, thou art my God: early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary."

Psalm 63:1, 2

Dry and thirsty! A thirsty soul and a longing flesh in this dry and thirsty land.

Such is the condition of the child of God in this world.

That child of God is surrounded by the good things of this earth. Do not think that these words are the cry of a man deprived of earthly food and drink. No, here is a child of God as he stands before plenty of material good. Plenty to eat and drink he has set before him. Of that plenty he partakes. He eats and he drinks and his stomach is filled. He enjoys the taste of these good things.

Rev. VanderWal is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

He receives them as good gifts from his heavenly Father.

Neither are these the words of a man who is burdened by particular troubles. His way is not attended by painful afflictions or grievous torments. He is not necessarily under attack by enemies. He is not grieved by separation from those close to him. He has his family. He has his friends. He has his health and strength. His lot may be earthly prosperity and ease.

Yet his soul thirsts. Yet his flesh longs. His cry continues that he is in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. No matter how much he may eat of earthly food, his flesh still longs. No matter how much he may drink, his soul still thirsts. By that food and drink he receives strength and health for his body. In his soul he still hungers and thirsts.

For this is a spiritual hunger and thirst, having nothing to do with earthly meat and drink.

Into that spiritual side of this man let us enter.

Let us see him filled with all

spiritual blessings. Let him be of a strong faith. Behold him in the sanctuary of God. There he hears the pure doctrine of the gospel preached. His hearing is the hearing of faith. He is filled with the knowledge of God's grace to him. He knows the pardon of his sins. He knows the provision of God in all his need. He has the hope of everlasting glory.

Still he hungers and thirsts. Yes, he has seen God in the sanctuary. He has seen God's power and glory. He has seen by faith.

Yet, for all that, his soul still thirsts and his flesh still longs.

Why? Why does his soul still thirst? Why does his flesh still long?

Because he lives in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.

The dryness of that land enters into his soul. The emptiness of the earth makes his soul feel empty.

He looks around him, and finds nothing but desolation.

Do you see that desolation? Does its view make your soul thirsty and your flesh hungry?

Behold the multitudes of people

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that fill the earth. Consider them in all their ways and doings. See them in their labor. See them in their homes. See them in their recreation. See them laughing and smiling, talking excitedly about the day's events. See them eating and drinking, enjoying the good things of life.

All this they do without God. All this they speak without a word to Him or about Him. No words of God's power. No rejoicing in His glory. All that power they oppose. All that glory they suppress, trampling it underfoot.

It is a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.

Turn your eyes elsewhere. Turn them to the beautiful cities built by man. Look upon the beautiful gardens. Gaze upon beautiful works of art, sculpture, and painting. Turn your ears to hear. Listen to beautiful music. Listen to the beautiful cadence of lyrical poetry. You will find plenty to fill the senses and enrapture the mind.

But you will also find that man attains all these accomplishments while ignoring God. Denying the very God that gave such gifts and talents to men, they defy His presence. Of his own works man boasts. His own talents and art he gladly displays. Man will bring glory to himself. He will ascribe none to God!

It is a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.

Only one thing will satisfy. Only One will bring contentment and total satisfaction.

"O God, thou art my God!"

The soul of the child of God thirsts for God. His flesh longs for the living God. God is his delight, his hope, his happiness. God is his salvation, his rock, his refuge and strength.

This child has received rich blessings from God his Father. He has received the Holy Spirit of God in his heart. Through the Spirit he has received the gift of faith. Through faith he has received the forgiveness of sins and peace with

God. He has received the precious gift of adoption into God's household. He has received sanctification and preservation. He has the hope of glory within his heart. But this multitude of gifts only increases the thirst of his soul and the longing of his flesh.

His Father and sovereign Friend is the fountain of this multitude of blessings. That overflowing abundance the child of God traces back to its source. By those gifts he has learned much about the love and kindness of God towards him. By their abundance and richness, received through faith, he desires his God. His soul thirsts for God. His flesh longs for God, to see Him. Nothing else will do!

His soul thirsts to see God in His power. His flesh longs to see God in His glory.

That power and glory of God are presently hidden. Thus his thirst and longing.

There is one place where he has caught just a glimpse of that power and glory of God. That sight he received in the sanctuary. In that most blessed place God has placed His powerful, glorious name. There He has placed His great glory. We think of the words of Psalm 132:13, 14: "For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."

That sanctuary of God is the very place His child seeks. The sanctuary is the very place God has chosen to have His name and His truth declared. His child seeks that place. It is the place of God, his God. For that place his soul thirsts and his flesh longs. Entering the sanctuary, he enjoys blessed, sweet communion with his God. There he sees the truth and mercy of God displayed

before his eyes. There the glorious deeds of God fill his ears. By faith he catches a glimpse of a most glorious and wonderful sight: the power and glory of God.

But in the sanctuary he cannot remain. He must needs go out into the world again. As soon as he steps out of the sanctuary the thirst burns in his soul. He wishes to see God's power and glory as he saw it in the sanctuary. Wherever he might look with his eye, he desires to see that glory revealed. He longs to see God's glory reflected in every person he meets. He thirsts to hear God's power declared in every word he hears.

That burning desire cannot be satisfied in this dry and thirsty land, where no water is.

Neither can that earthly sanctuary bring full satisfaction. It is not the place where that power and glory of God are seen in their fullest manifestations. More of that power and glory is to be seen in the sanctuary than in the world. But that sight of God's power and glory is yet through a glass, darkly.

So the soul still thirsts for God. The flesh still longs. In a dry and thirsty land the flesh longs for the

extension of God's power and glory over all the earth. The soul thirsts for God, to see His power and glory in the heavenly sanctuary. It desires the land where there is no more hunger and thirst. It craves the place where its hunger shall be

fully satisfied and its thirst wholly quenched.

God will not neglect the longing flesh of His beloved. God will not leave His child's soul in thirst. God has given him that hunger to be filled. God has given him that thirst to be quenched. Not in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. To heaven's glory God shall

The soul thirsts for God, to see His power and glory in the heavenly sanctuary. It desires the land where there is no more hunger and thirst. It craves the place where its hunger shall be fully satisfied and its thirst wholly quenched.

bring the longing flesh and thirsting soul of His child. God, his God, will satisfy him with the goodness and abundance of that blessed place.


In that heavenly sanctuary God will give His power and glory to be seen to the fullest degree. All His mighty works of power will be fully displayed in glory, displayed for His praise by all His saints. His glory will be reflected in the high-

est possible way in His elect, glorified people. His glory will fill the farthest reaches of heaven with its blessed light. He will give Himself to be praised and enjoyed to the highest degree for ever and ever.

In heaven all thirst is slaked, all hunger satiated. God completely satisfies the hunger and thirst of all His children. Fed by the display of God's infinite power,

nourished by the sight of God's wonderful glory, fullness of joy is theirs for all eternity.

No more thirst of the soul. No more longing of the flesh. No longer a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. Dry and thirsty no more!

Seek God! Thirst for Him! Long for Him! By Him your thirsty soul will be filled. By Him your longing flesh will be satisfied. 

Ministers and (Their) Mothers (2) *

Both minister and godly mother are motivated by love for God and love for the people of God.

Nothing but love will motivate the minister to sacrificial giving. A mother-heart is needed.

A sense of duty will not carry a minister through. He will quickly

resign or be always miserable if obligation alone drives him. The eminently practical Martin Luther understood:

Men who hold the office of the ministry should have the heart of a mother toward the church; for if they have no such heart, they soon become lazy and disgusted; and suffering, in particular, will find them unwilling.... Unless your heart toward the sheep is like that of a mother toward her children—a mother, who walks through fire to save her children—you will not be fit to be a preacher. Labor, work, unthankfulness, hatred, envy, and all kinds of sufferings will meet you in this office. If, then, the mother heart (the great love) is not there to drive the preachers, the sheep will be poorly served.

Duty alone will certainly not cause a mother to persevere. What mother will endure all the painful and sometimes demeaning labors of a mother—because of *duty*? What mother would continue to deny

herself, take up her cross, give up her life—because of *duty*?

Likewise, no minister will do all the painful, self-denying work of a minister, out of duty. Not for very long anyway. Luther said in another place: “For who is willing and eager to suffer ingratitude, to impair his health and possessions by studying and then put himself into the greatest danger? This is why he (God) says: It is very necessary that you love Me.”

Are there ministers who work because they are in duty bound to do the work? Of course there is duty. Of course duty drives them.

But if it is duty alone, soon the drive will ebb, or transform itself into something ugly. To the extent that a minister is driven by duty without love, he must seek forgiveness and a renewed mother-heart.

A paycheck will not do it.

You could never pay a woman enough to get her to do the work of a faithful mother. Try that once. Give a paycheck to

To the extent that a minister is driven by duty without love, he must seek forgiveness and a renewed mother-heart.

* This is the second half of the speech given at the convocation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Seminary, September 6, 2006. The last editorial (January 15, 2007) explained that Scripture draws a comparison between the labors of a minister and the self-sacrificing work of a mother. The editorial concluded with a call to the churches to continue holding before Christian mothers the calling to lay down their lives for their children. Lacking good mothers in the church, aspiring ministers will lack one great example for them in their ministry. As Calvin put it, explaining II Thessalonians 2:8: “a mother nursing her children manifests a certain rare and wonderful affection, inasmuch as she spares no labor and trouble... and even with cheerfulness gives her own blood to be sucked.” Faithful mothers are examples for ministers.

a woman, who is in it for the money, to care for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of a brood of children. For a while avarice may carry her along. But soon she will abandon the work (7 days a week, day and night!) as not worth any amount of money.

Some ministers are driven by money. But not for long, and not in the right way. The church father, once more:

But there are... men who have spiritual charge of people, and seek their own gain, that they may fatten their paunches. They seek the wool and milk of the sheep... just like the present-day bishops. Now this is certainly a dangerous thing and a vice, for in a bishop such a mercenary spirit is especially shameful. Therefore the apostles Peter and Paul... have repeatedly spoken of it. Therefore also Moses says: You know that I have never coveted any man's cattle.... Again, the prophet Samuel: You know that I have never taken from you any man's ass or ox.... For if he whose duty it is to feed the flock is so anxious for wealth and gain, he himself will in short time turn into a wolf.

Love—not duty or money, but love alone—will rightly motivate the minister.

“So being affectionately desirous of you....” That is, desiring, longing for, yearning after you. Paul explains the mother-heart this way: In the same manner in which a mother loves her children—desires them with hearty affection—the minister loves the flock assigned to him.

If you ask how that can be, that a minister *loves* a people so, you must understand the tense of the verb Paul used in II Thessalonians 2:8. Literally, “you *became* dear to us.” As a mother’s affection for her children grows, even in ways that surprise her, so a pastor in relation to his flock. They *become* so dear to him.

Even quickly. For a new minister as well.

If you ask how it could be that a minister loves a people so *quickly* whom he hardly knows, that, too, is not unlike the mother’s love for an unborn child, carried under her ribs for nine months, but relatively unknown to her. That is a mystery I might be tempted to add to Solomon’s list in Proverbs 30:18, 19: “There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: The way of an eagle in the air... the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; the way of a man with a maid.” I might add: And the way of a mother with a newborn. Or, the way of a new minister with a congregation.

The minister loves the people of God. He loves them because he loves God, whose people they are.

Love—and only love—motivates him to work as he ought. Because of love he is willing to sacrifice himself, to have his life sucked out of him. Love leads him to go without, in labor and travail. Long hours, busy evenings, in the heat of the battle for the safety of God’s flock in a sinful world.

The minister’s experience

This—love—is what *causes* many of his sorrows and travails. Among the young people he serves, one walks in unbelief. Because the minister loves him, he is grieved for the soul’s peril. Just as a mother prays for and weeps over her wayward child, the minister travails in his labor with prayer for the wandering sheep. Among the flock, one couple’s marriage is strained to the point of breaking. Love for them and for marriage burdens his heart to labor day and night, putting off other work for a busier tomorrow and a later night. Deep sorrow weighs down his heart when the Lord does not give repentance, because of love.

You learn that from mothers, too. No one knows heartbreak as a mother knows heartbreak. The sorrows of mother with respect to

her children are as deep as sorrows get.

God is good in hiding much of that from the aspiring minister. God is wise in what mothers and ministers know in advance.

But, although there is much sorrow, the ministry is not all sorrow, travail, disappointment.

The pastorate is also joy and rejoicing. As with mothers.

For mothers—joy, great joy, greatest joy, in observing their children love the Lord, and mature in that love. “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (III John. 4). Is there another calling besides the gospel ministry that holds such joys? Not in my judgment, and I think God’s also. Not the least of these joys are watching the young people come to faith in Christ through catechism instruction; seeing the peace of God in the hearts of repentant sinners; observing the Word effect reconciliation in a marriage; sitting with the old saint who falls “asleep” in the hands of Jesus, at peace.

A good translation of what Paul said to the church at Thessalonica is: “We were delighted to impart to you our own souls.” The principle holds true: he who finds his life shall lose it, and who loses his life, for Christ’s sake, shall find it.

The churches’ profit

But we are not interested primarily in the minister’s blessedness. We are interested in the churches’ profit! What a blessing for the churches in such a ministry, where the pastors lay down their lives for the flock, enter into their office not to be served, but to serve. What a blessing... that kind of minister!

The alternative is almost unthinkable. What disaster for the churches if the minister is anything less. There are too many churches that know.

What disaster if a *mother* is any-

thing less! She wants her own time, her own pleasure, her own checkbook, her own nights out, and all the rest. She asks for pity, and is cantankerous when she does not receive it. How ruinous for the family under her care.

What ruin for the church under the care of such a minister. He wants his own time. And pleasure. He lives for his own personal satisfaction. He asks for pity. And quits if he does not get pity, or thanks.

May God give us men who are filled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. May this mind be in them, "which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and

was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." May

Christ's Spirit drive them, "that nothing be done through strife or vainglory. In lowliness of mind let each (minister) esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

Defense of the gospel and...

When the church has such ministers... what a defense of the gospel!

This, primarily, was the apostle's purpose in II Thessalonians 2: to defend the truth that he had preached.

The truth of God in Jesus Christ was all-important.

Paul's defense of the gospel's truth over against the accusations hurled at him was, "I lived among you in honesty, gentleness, sacrificial giving. My life was lived for the sake of the gospel."

Paul had passion for the honor of God's gospel.


And ... because the gospel was God's gospel, he was passionate for the honor of God.

Take note of that passion in

the chapter that precedes. Always God. The church of Thessalonica is *in* God the Father (1:1). Their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope is *in the sight of* God and our Father (1:3). They are beloved *by* God (1:4); their faith is *toward* God (1:8). When they converted, they converted from idols *unto* God, so that they would serve the living and true God (1:9). When Paul called the church to a holy life, it was a life worthy of God (2:12). Thus, *God* put the apostles in trust of the gospel (2:4). When they spoke, it was *God* they would please, and not man (2:4), because the gospel was God's gospel (2:9). *God's* gospel, *God's* church, *God's* name.

What a glorious defense of our faith and of God's honor when ministers, with mother-hearts, offer up their lives.

For the sake of the gospel... and God, whose gospel it is. God's name, God's gospel, God's church. It's all for the sake of God.

Lord of the church, give us such ministers. Lord of the church, make such ministers. 

What a blessing for the churches in such a ministry, where the pastors lay down their lives for the flock, enter into their office not to be served, but to serve.

All Around Us

Rev. Michael DeVries

Heinous Ad Campaign

It seems that mainline denominations, with their steadily shrinking memberships, are becoming increasingly desperate. Anything goes in attempting to attract attention with a view to reversing that trend. *The Record*, newspaper of the Kitchener/Waterloo, Ontario region reports in the November 8, 2006 issue under the title, "United Church Launches Lively Ad Campaign":

Rev. DeVries is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario, Canada.

An ad showing Jesus Christ sitting in a Santa Claus chair is part of a United Church campaign launched yesterday aimed at reaching out to the 30-to-45 crowd in hopes of getting some of them back into the pews.

The ad, among a half-dozen to appear in December issues of lifestyle magazines and community newspapers, is just one aspect of a three-year, \$9-million campaign called Emerging Spirit that also includes an interactive website and a grassroots effort to get the church's 3,500 congregations involved.

The ad, depicting Jesus sitting in a shopping mall with a child

on his knee and surrounded by presents, asks: "Would you still take your kids?"

It is aimed at stirring up a debate about whether the "commercial aspect of Christmas can co-exist with the spiritual and moral" side of faith, said project leader Rev. Dr. Keith Howard. Should Christmas be about Jesus, Santa Claus, or both?

The ads, created in partnership with Toronto-based communications firm Smith Roberts and Co. are also part of an effort to build awareness of the web-site www.wondercafe.ca said Howard, executive director of the project.

Another ad shows two

grooms on a wedding cake and asks, "Does anyone object?" In another, a bobble-headed Jesus sits on a dashboard and readers are offered the choice "Funny" or "Ticket to hell." An ad featuring a can of whipped cream asks: "How much fun can sex be before it's a sin?"

WonderCafe.ca, developed by the church's Emerging Spirit team of Internet experts, hopes to connect with Canadians who don't have a faith community but are deeply interested in things spiritual, Moderator Right Rev. David Giuliano, the church's top official, told a news conference in downtown Toronto.

Statistics Canada's 2001 census showed that membership in the church, the largest Protestant denomination in the country, continued to decline, dropping from about three million in 1991 to about 2.8 million in 2001.

A 16-month-long Environics Research Group study showed a majority of 30-to-45 year-olds "believe in God, that this belief shapes their lives, and that nearly half pray each day," said Giuliano. That's the "good news."

The "bad news," he said, "is that a majority of them see the church as judgmental, arrogant, boring and not able to respond to their spiritual and moral needs."

WonderCafe was launched in hopes of overcoming this negative view of organized religion, he said.

The church sees the website "as a gathering place for people with faith questions...and as having a neighbourhood café feel to it," said Giuliano.

"It offers surfers who are not interested in attending church a chance to discuss faith and spirituality," he said.

Obviously nothing remains sacred. The clear biblical teaching that it is the pure preaching of the gospel that brings in God's people is ignored. There is no longer any shame. Jeremiah 6:15 seems apt, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abominations? Nay, they were not at all ashamed,

neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD."

■ Further Family Fiasco

Judicial activism and legislative decisions are continuing to redefine parenthood and are creating alternative family models. The latest development in Canada was reported by Tim Lai (*Toronto Star*, January 3, 2007) in an article entitled, "One child, three parents." The article explains:

Ontario's highest court has given legal parental status to the lesbian partner of a biological mother, essentially giving a young boy three parents.

The case is believed to be the first in Canada in which a child has more than two legal parents, according to Peter Jervis, a lawyer for the lesbian partner. He said while there have been birth-registry cases in which lesbian couples sought parentage of their children, the fathers in those cases were not active or were unknown due to sperm donations.

In this case, the biological father, a friend of the lesbian couple, remains involved in the boy's life at the request of the two women.

The couple, who are the primary caregivers, have stated that this is in the best interest of the 5-year-old. The father would have lost his parental rights if the lesbian partner had been able to adopt the boy under Ontario law.

The Ontario Court of Appeal ruling released yesterday overturns a 2003 Superior Court of Justice decision not to give the female partner legal status as the child's mother. The judge said the court did not have jurisdiction to grant the title.

Justice Marc Rosenberg, writing on behalf of Chief Justice Roy McMurtry and Justice Jean-Marc Labrosse, found that due to a gap in legislation, the court in this case can exercise its "parens patriae" — the legal term for the state

to act as the guardian for a minor—in declaring the partner a mother.

"Advances in our appreciation of the value of other types of relationships and in the science of reproductive technology have created gaps in the (Children's Law Reform Act's) legislative scheme," Rosenberg wrote, "Because of these changes, the parents of a child can be two women or two men."

"It's very good news for her; for her son, and for her family," Jervis said. "She's been the mom of this child since he was born, but this grants legal recognition to her status."

"Like any case at this level in the judicial process, it could create a precedent," Jervis said.

This case drew criticism from the Alliance for Marriage and Family. The umbrella group—composed of Focus on the Family, the Catholic Civil Rights League, REAL Women of Canada, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and the Christian Legal Fellowship—was an intervener in the case and opposed the declaration, saying it would go against the traditional family unit in Canadian society and law.

In a similar vein, a sobering article, "Experimental Kids" (*World*, December 9, 2006) by Lynn Vincent, looks at this alternative family scene from the perspective of the children involved. Vincent recounts the experience of Katrina Clark. "At 7 years old, Katrina Clark was a precocious little girl. When adults asked her questions like, 'What does your daddy do?' Katrina had a ready answer: 'I don't have a daddy,' she would chirp cheerfully. 'My mother was artificially inseminated.' Now Clark is 18 and a university student. She is able to give expression to the questions, the pain, the emotional wounds that developed as she grew up." Vincent reports:

Clark is among the first in her generation old enough to be-

gin speaking out about growing up in the brave new world of alternative family models. Driven by the increasing use of reproductive technologies, the debate over same-sex parenting, and the acceptance of single and even “group” parenting, a growing panoply of new “family constellations”—as one psychologist has termed them—is raising questions: Where does society draw the line between adults’ perceived right to parent and what is best for children? What role should the state have in defining parenthood? And with little data to measure outcomes, is the world steaming away too rapidly from the two-parent, mother-father model?

“Our societies will either answer these questions democratically and as a result of...serious reflection and public debate, or we will find, very soon, that these questions have already been answered for us,” writes Elizabeth Marquardt, director of the Center for Marriage and Families at the Institute for American Values (IAV) in New York. In her 2006 report, “The Revolution in Parenthood: The Emerging Global Clash Between Adult Rights and Children’s Needs,” Marquardt cites evidence that governments worldwide are quietly pushing aside old-as-time familial identities such as “mother” and “father” in favor of legal terms elastic enough to accommodate everyone:

- In Spain, where same-sex marriage was recently made legal, the legislature voted to replace the terms “mother” and “father” with “Progenitor A” and “Progenitor B.”
- In the United States, judges in donor-conception and surrogacy cases now must navigate the labyrinthine complexities of the planning, financing, conception, carrying, bearing, rearing, and genetics of a child, to determine which adults hold parental rights. (Commissions in Australia and New Zealand have proposed unraveling

similar problems by allowing donor-conceived children to have three legal parents.)

- In same-sex parenting and divorce cases, U.S. judges have declared non-relatives “psychological parents,” even when a fit biological parent wanted the child.
- In Vietnam, a state-supported hospital is considering setting up a community sperm bank due to demand from single women who want a baby but wish to remain unmarried.

On that front, Katrina Clark’s mother was in the vanguard. “She was one of the pioneering women who went into (artificial insemination) as a single parent,” Clark said. Throughout early childhood, Clark developed coping mechanisms to deal with the utter absence of a father figure in her life. She would tell herself that her father was dead or that the college student whom her mother had chosen from among other potential donors was probably too young to take good care of her, anyway. “It didn’t occur to me that he was aging along with me,” Clark said.

But when Clark hit middle school, parents of one friend divorced while another friend reunited with her long-lost dad. Katrina found herself yearning for the chance to experience not only life’s greatest joys, but also its deepest sorrows. In the divorce case, “I was almost jealous. I knew I could never feel that pain,” she said. “And not only would I never feel that pain, I would never have the chance to reunite....”

Katrina Clark insists that it is not a matter of whether children are wanted and loved.


“But that’s not the issue,” she said. “The issue is adults making life-altering decisions for their children that are in the adults’ best interests as opposed to what’s in the best interests of the child.” And while various

child-welfare experts define “best interests of the child” variously, Clark argues that the real experts, the children themselves, are not being heard.

“Part of the problem now is this is still a new situation,” Clark said. “My generation is the first to be studied and no one has really looked at us. I’d rather not have been a guinea pig, but I was. Still, a lot of people in the medical, scientific, and legislative communities are not listening to us. I don’t know why. Maybe they can’t relate to our pain.”

This article provides another “complaint.” Negative views of adult children are “bubbling to the surface.” Make no mistake. It is the children that suffer when God’s ordinance of marriage is trampled underfoot, when the biblically-ordained family is rejected. What misery! What pain! What a farce—words are cheap—“Best interests of the child.” No one listens. In our day men and women are out for themselves. It is an age of independence. It is an age of self-seeking. And the children suffer.

Let us not be influenced by the spirit of these evil days, for God’s judgment sounds loudly: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption” (Gal. 6:7, 8). They have sown the wind; they are reaping the whirlwind, destroying the very foundations!

In stark contrast to this godless selfishness is God’s command to His covenant people to love—love your neighbor, love your children, love your husband or your wife. Christ Himself demonstrated this love by giving Himself—as a ministering servant all His life, and as a willing sacrifice in His death. Selfless loving is sowing “to the Spirit,” which has the promise of reaping “eternal life.” “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). 

The Prophecy of Malachi

Covenant Faithfulness and Unfaithfulness (14)

The Fifth Disputation: Chapter 3:7-12

7. *Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?*

In this fifth section of Malachi's prophecy he returns again to the sins of the people, this time rebuking them for the sin of robbing God in their tithes and offerings. By this sin also they were guilty of gross covenant unfaithfulness.

The sin, however, was a sin of which Israel had long been guilty. Other sins they had been cured of by the long years of the Babylonian captivity, especially the sin of idolatry, but of this sin they had not been cured. Hezekiah in his reforms had to reestablish the law's system of tithing (II Chron. 31:4-10), but after Hezekiah there is little evidence that the law's demands regarding tithing continued to be observed.

In speaking of their fathers, God reminds them not only that these sins were of long standing, but also that they had learned them from their disobedient fathers, and were really no different from their fathers. Perhaps they prided them-

selves in having forsaken the sins of their fathers, but God shows them that it was not so. Their fathers had been covetous and worldly, and so were they.

This is the way that God visits the sins of the fathers upon the children as He threatens to do in the Second Commandment. He does not punish the children for the sins of their fathers. Ezekiel 18:20 is clear: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But God visits the sins of the fathers on the children when in His just judgment the children learn the sins of their fathers and walk in them and come themselves under the judgment of God. Thus God shows that there is a corporate responsibility for sin. Our sins have consequences, as did Adam's and as do every man's, not only for ourselves and for others but also for our children.

What a warning that is to believing parents! What an incentive to careful godliness! Not only out of the love of God, but out of fear for their children, they walk in God's ways with all their heart. And what grief it is—greater grief there is not—when they see their own sins in their children. Then they pray the more fervently that God will deliver both them and their children from those sins, and that He will be gracious and remember His covenant.

God speaks of ordinances rather than just of one single ordinance concerning tithes for several reasons. He means that there were many laws concerning tithing and that none of them were being kept. He also means to say that the apostasy of the people, both at this time and in times past, was widespread. It was not only the law concerning tithes that they had neglected, but all the ordinances concerning the worship and service of God. That is always the case. Never is it true that the church in her calling to serve and worship God goes astray only at a few small points, but apostasy once begun continues until the whole of obedience to God's ordinances and laws erodes away.

This widespread apostasy also shows the insolence of the question asked by the Jews, "Wherein shall we return?" Not only had they departed in a few minor matters, but they needed to return at every point. Yet they could not and would not see their sin. So it is with those to whom God has not given His grace. Not only

does the unredeemed sinner continue in his sin, but he cannot and will not see his sin or turn from it. How we must beware, therefore, the temptation to make excuses, to play down our sins and the sins of our children, to give no heed to the warnings that come to us from the

What an incentive to careful godliness! Not only out of the love of God, but out of fear for their children, they walk in God's ways with all their heart.

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Word of God and from others, or to pretend that those warnings apply to others and not to ourselves!

Yet God identifies Himself as Jehovah of hosts, the God of the covenant. He does this not only to remind them that as the LORD of hosts He was the lawgiver whose laws they broke and the one to whom all their sacrifices belonged, the one against whom they sinned; but He also hints at His covenant faithfulness to them, for though they had often been unfaithful, niggardly, and hard-hearted, He would never be unfaithful to them.

Of this same faithfulness He speaks when He tells them to return to Him and promises that, in their so doing, He would also return to them. That promise, like all God's promises, is sure and was surely fulfilled in Christ. Never does God cast away His people whom He foreknew.

That He would return to them when they returned to Him does not mean that His returning depended on theirs. In that case there could be no hope of His ever returning to them. Their returning to Him, though He does not say that here, would be, when it happened, an evidence that He had *al-ready* returned to them! Nevertheless, it was only in the way of their returning that they would experience again His favor and blessing. As long as they continued hard-hearted and impenitent, their experience would be that He was far off as a God of mercy and love, and near only in wrath and judgment.

Of this relationship between our returning to God and our experience of His lovingkindness the Canons of Dort speak beautifully. In explaining the sins of God's people the Canons say:

By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their own consciences, and some-

times lose the sense of God's favor for a time, until, on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines upon them (V, 5).

In showing that repentance is always a work of God the Canons say that He:

...by His Word and Spirit, certainly and effectually renews them to repentance, to a sincere and godly sorrow for their sins, that they may seek and obtain remission in the blood of the Mediator, may again experience the favor of a reconciled God, through faith adore His mercies, and henceforward more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (V, 7).

That is the great incentive to repentance—the knowledge that God receives and blesses those who are sorry for their sins. That He always forgives them and never turns away His face from the tears of those who weep for their sins assures us that “though we oft have sinned against him, yet his love and grace abide.” There is, however, no mercy for those who continue to say, “Wherein shall we return?”

8. *Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.*

9. *Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.*

God now proceeds to show why the neglect of tithes and offerings was such a serious sin. This emphasis was needed then and is needed now, for not only Israel but the church today is guilty of gross unfaithfulness to God in this matter, nor is the church today any more eager to acknowledge its sin than it was in the days of Malachi. Instead, with callous indifference it brushes aside the complaints of God's Word: “Wherein have we robbed thee?”

The tithes of which God speaks were of various kinds. Moore distinguishes them thus:

The tithes required by the Mosaic law were, first, a tenth of all that remained after the firstfruits, (which belonged to God and must be given to him,) which tenth was God's, as the original proprietor of the soil, and was paid to the Levites for their maintenance. (Lev. 27:30-32.) Secondly, from this tenth the Levites paid a tenth to the priests. (Num. 18:26-28.) Thirdly, a second tenth was paid by the people for the entertainment of the Levites and their own families at the tabernacle. (Deut. 12:18.) Fourthly, another tithe was paid every third year for the poor, widows, orphans, etc. (Deut. 14:28, 29.)

Moore adds:

The first three classes of tithes are especially referred to here, as appears from the context, though the fourth was also withheld, as we would infer from chap. 3:5.*

On the basis of II Corinthians 9:6, 7, we do not believe that strict tithing is obligatory for New Testament Christians: “But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. *Every man as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*” These verses require freewill giving on the part of God's people, not giving that is regulated by law. That is, of course, in harmony with the fact that we live in the New Testament. Nevertheless, even these verses show that giving is an important part of the service and worship of God (cf. also Rom. 12:8). God loves a cheerful giver! And the practice of tithing, even if not obligatory, remains a good guide for our giving. If a person is not giving at least a tithe of what he has, he is probably not giving as he should.


Giving is not a matter of repayment, for who can repay God for His abundant mercies. Giving is rather an expression of thankfulness. We give a little of what we have received in order to demonstrate our conviction that God has given us all things in Christ, and to show that we understand that we have only the use of what He gives—that it all remains His, for He is the sovereign Creator and Owner of all.

Failure in these obligations is a matter of covenant unfaithfulness, for those who do not give as they should do not acknowledge God's goodness and faithfulness, and do not recognize that all they have belonged to Him and is given them for

their use because they are His covenant friends. In this way, too, sins committed by lack of giving or by grudging giving are robbery. These sins are robbery not only because they are a refusal to give Him what He requires, but because they are a refusal to recognize that all we have is His. When we do not give or give cheerfully we are not just stealing the *tenth* from Him but *everything*.

Romans 1 condemns the heathen nations for ingratitude, for though they know God through the things that are made and by His own testimony within them, they are not thankful (Rom. 1:20, 21). If God condemns them for ingratitude, how much greater will our

condemnation be for the same sin, aggravated as it is by our knowledge of Him as Savior and our confession that we are His covenant friends.

For this reason, God's curse is upon those who fall under the condemnation of these verses. Though poor giving may seem a small thing to us, it is no small matter to God. His curse is the Word of His anger, which sends the sinner to Hell. He speaks here, therefore, of damnation for such sins. 

* T.V. Moore, *A Commentary on Haggai and Malachi*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974, p. 159.

Feature Article

Mr. Allen Brummel

The Organization of the Berean Protestant Reformed Church in the Philippines

The Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) was authorized by Synod 2000 to seek a calling church for a missionary to the Philippines. The FMC asked Doon Protestant Reformed Church to serve in that capacity. They agreed to do so and subsequently were appointed by Synod 2001.

After a time, a call was extended to Rev. Audred Spriensma. An invitation was extended to him to visit the field before giving his answer. Rev. Spriensma took the

Doon Consistory and the FMC upon the offer and indicated that he would like to visit the field. The request was granted and the FMC decided to send a member of their committee along with Rev. Spriensma. I was the one who was asked to accompany him on the trip.

What a culture shock the traffic and hustle and bustle of the city of Manila was on our arrival. I had previously visited Singapore, when our son (Rev. Allen Brummel) was doing his seminary internship under Rev. Kortering. I had also spent a year in Vietnam back in the 60's, and had at that time visited also Okinawa and Hong Kong. So I was not a stranger to Southeast Asia. But I

was certainly amazed at the seemingly chaotic, noisy, non-stop movement of the traffic. I was happy that I did not have to do any driving in that city, but I could tell that Rev. Spriensma was fascinated by all the traffic and would see it as a challenge.

Our arrival in 2001 was at the tail end of a typhoon, so it was rainy, hot, and humid. At least we thought it was hot. But we were told that it was their cool season, and, incredibly, many of the natives were even wearing jackets.

The FMC delegations had previously had opportunity to meet and visit with the members of the Berean Fellowship and had been impressed with them. Now we

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could see firsthand that there were groups of saints here on these islands who were hungry to learn the Reformed truths as taught by the Protestant Reformed Churches. What a joy it was to speak with them. We could find no doctrinal areas where they completely disagreed with us. They did have lots of questions, for which they sought explanations. They listened carefully to every answer and then questioned the answers, seeking scriptural proofs for them. We could tell they were very well versed in the Scriptures, and that they desired more instruction.

We had some extraordinary experiences during that first trip, staying in local hotels, traveling by tricycle, jeepney, bus, etc. We had gotten stranded by a cancelled flight at Naga, forcing us to travel overland back to Manila using various forms of transportation. We were crowded in buses where it was not uncommon to have one's face brushed by the tail feathers of a fighting cock being transported by its proud owner to the next fight or home from the previous one.

While visiting in Bicolod, on the Island of Negros, we met with a group of people and had a conference with them. While there, Rev. Spriensma was asked to go to a funeral home to say a few words on behalf of a widow from their group who loved the Reformed faith. Her husband had been shot and killed by a man to whom she had gone for counseling. Her husband's family was planning to give him a Roman Catholic funeral, and the widow wanted to have also some Reformed words spoken at the visitation. Rev. Spriensma agreed to that.

After a careening ride in the back of a pickup late at night, we arrived at a huge funeral home with a large atria in the center and several rooms around the outside, in which the bodies of the dead had been placed. The family and friends of each were packed into the rooms and were spilling out into the center area. The room the

victim was in was crowded with his Roman Catholic family and friends. Rev. Spriensma went to the front of the crowded room, read Scripture, and expounded on the text for a time, laying out clearly the Reformed doctrine of immediate entry of the soul to heaven, compared to the erroneous view of purgatory. I was sweating profusely – not only because of the heat, but because of the boldness of the man with the call to be missionary. We were the only non-natives in the place, and as Rev. Spriensma's voice rose, people started to crowd into the room and doorway trying to hear what this tall American was saying. At that point in our trip I knew that even if he wouldn't later accept the call, he certainly had the boldness for the work.

After having experienced many other differences in culture, I really wasn't sure that Rev. Spriensma would accept the call. One way or the other, it had been a blessed visit, and I knew that I would remember, for the rest of my life, all the people whom I had met and with whom I had visited.

Rev. Spriensma did accept the call and moved his family to Manila. They were faced with hardships and difficulties upon their arrival, much of which was due to our not having a mission infrastructure

in place to help with the transition. But, despite the trials and circumstances surrounding the arrival of the family, they got settled in and the work began. And it flourished. The instruction was appreciated and God blessed it.

That brings us to the present. The group requested that they be allowed to organize into a Reformed church of Christ in the Philippines. Their official name would be Berean Protestant Reformed Church in the Philippines. Doon Council and the FMC approved the request and brought it to Synod 2006, where it was also approved.

Rev. David Overway and elder Alan VanBemmel were chosen to go as representatives of Doon's Council to hear the confessions of faith, observe the baptisms, and oversee the organization. I was sent as a representative of the FMC to observe the proceedings. What a blessing it was! I had the opportunity not only to see many of these saints for a second time, but also to meet others who had joined since I had been there five years ago.

We arrived late on Thursday, November 9. On Friday we were taken to visit one of the older members of the group in his home. The traffic, the noise, the smells, and the overwhelming poverty of some areas came back to me in a rush.



Confessions of Faith/Baptism

On Saturday we made our way to the home of a member of the group where we heard the confessions of faith of fifteen people from the fellowship who had requested it and which were also necessary for the organization into a church. The Berean Board of Directors, along with Rev. Overway, Elder Alan VanBemmel, and me, were present for those confessions. It must have been intimidating for them to make their confessions facing these three unfamiliar men. Their confessions in answer to the questions, however, were beautiful! We were moved to tears of joy at the confessions and the knowledge that we were sitting there in that unusual setting on the opposite side of the world, with men and women confessing the same faith and doctrine that we hold so dear.

The confessions were approved by a special meeting of Doon Council on Saturday morning—which was late Saturday evening for us in Manila. On Sunday the confessions were announced before the group. A blessed day of worship took place with two services. Catechism class was held in between the services, with all the members attending along with the children.

The following week was spent with Rev. Overway assisting Rev. Spriensma in a pastor's training class with the group of men from the Bastion of Truth organization. Elder Van Bemmel and I also sat in on that class. Throughout the week we had various visits with the missionary and his family. We also worked on recommendations for future work and reports.

On the second Saturday of our trip we were up and on the road by 4:00 A.M. for the long trip up north to Gabaldon to see the work being done by Vernon Ibe. Vernon is a member of the Berean Church who also pastors a small group in this rural area of the island. Rod Bongat and Sonny Umali also came along with us. We attended a Bible study/worship service led by Vernon. This was held in a small crowded hut with a few of the parishioners present. He first gave us an overview of his speech in English, and then presented it in Tagalog, the native language.

We then proceeded to the loca-




Groundbreaking at Gabaldon

tion where they plan to build a new church. We held a simple groundbreaking ceremony, with Rev. Spriensma saying a few words and offering a prayer of thanksgiving.

After a wait of an hour or two for men to come in from the fields and other places, Vernon led a Bible study in Tagalog. There were several men, women, and children present for this study. As soon as the Bible study was over, we had the five-hour ride back to Manila, arriving late at night. It was a long day indeed.

On Sunday, November 19, during the first worship service we had the privilege of witnessing the public confessions of faith and the adult and child baptisms. This was a very emotional time for the group, the missionary, and his family, as well as for the visiting delegation. During the second service the election of officebearers took place, with their installation immediately after. Mr. Eric Mescalado and Mr. Rod Bongat were installed as elders, and Mr. Edgar Bonsale was installed as deacon.

It was a great privilege for me to have been there when Rev. Spriensma began his work as missionary and now at the time that the group became an organized church. Rev. Spriensma now ends his work there and prepares to take up his labors in Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church.

May God bless this little church of Christ in the Philippines, and may He soon give us another man for this work. 



Saints at Gabaldon

Worship in His Fear: (6) The Offertory

An important element of the church's worship is the offertory. During this part of worship, the congregation has the opportunity to give money for the causes of God's kingdom. They give to support the ministry of the gospel, the poor, and various other kingdom causes, such as the Christian schools, missions, evangelism, and so on.

Having an offertory in worship is biblical. The Scriptures make clear that the people of God have an obligation to give. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him..." (I Cor. 16:2). "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7). Giving is not an option, but a Christian duty.

Such giving is itself an act of worship. For that reason, it is a separate part in our order of worship. The offertory stands alone so that the people of God can worship Him through their giving. It is certainly appropriate, therefore, that the minister announce the collections in this way: "Let us worship God with our offerings." And the members of the congregation should see to it that they do this. Giving should not simply be mechanical, something done without thought or meditation. It is to be a

spiritual activity, done from the heart, and done in praise to God.



Giving is to be a private matter. We are not to give as the Pharisees did, namely, in order to be seen of men. Rather, "when thou doest thine alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth; that thine alms may be in secret" (Matt. 6:3, 4). We should never want anyone to know how much we give, not even those closest to us. Every effort should be made to keep our giving secret.

This means, as II Corinthians 9:7 points out, that each person decides for himself how much to give. Each must give "according as he purposeth in his heart." Determining how much to give is a personal decision. No one else tells you how much. You are to make up your own mind concerning this.

The child of God should give careful thought to this with regard to every different collection that is taken. We can so easily get into a rut, putting in a dollar or two regardless of the cause. Thus, no matter what the collection is for, roughly the same amount is collected. We ought, rather, to think and decide ahead of time how much to give. That decision should be based, not upon what we might have in our wallet as the collection plate approaches, but upon an informed knowledge of the needs that the different causes have. We need to look at the collection schedule ahead of time, understand what the different causes are, find out where the needs are, and give ac-

cordingly. Our giving should be done wisely.

That giving is to be private is not to deny that parents have a right to advise and help their children in this regard. It ought to be understood that children should also give to the collections. Parents ought to teach them to do so. This can be accomplished by parents giving money to their young children to put in the collection. Then, as the children get older and have their own money, they ought to be told to give. The children need parental guidance and help in all this. They need to be taught to give wisely. Then as they mature they can decide for themselves what is good and proper to give, and thus be able to keep their giving private.

One may ask in this connection, "Why then do our churches generally set a budgeted amount per family for the General Fund? Doesn't that stand in opposition to the principle that our giving is to be private?"

To set a budget is, I believe, proper. It is necessary so that we can wisely and carefully take care of the financial needs of the church and denomination. Knowing the budgeted amount per family, the members of the congregation can be aware of how much is needed in order to cover the general expenses within a congregation (pastor's salary, utilities, evangelism, etc.) as well as within the denomination (seminary, missions, emeritus, etc.).

Having said this, it seems to me that the biblical principle of

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giving being a private matter means that also in having a budget there must be a certain amount of freedom. Some may not be able to give the full amount. Others may be able to give more. Each should give as the Lord has prospered him. This is something that each member should decide for himself.

No one should view this, however, as a way to get out of giving. One may be tempted to think that because giving is private he may give very little, or even nothing at all. He therefore tries to get by with giving as little as possible so that he is able to have more money for himself.

Such a one forgets that God sees and knows everything we decide and do. The decision we make in the privacy of our hearts should be made, therefore, in the consciousness that God knows our heart. We stand before His face and can hide nothing from Him. He knows how much we give. He knows how much we are able to give. He knows why we decide to give as little or as much as we do. He knows all our thoughts. And we will have to answer to Him concerning our giving.



More important than the amount we give is how we give. The Scriptures admonish us that our giving should not be done grudgingly, or of necessity, but cheerfully (II Cor. 9:7).

We are commanded, first of all, not to give "grudgingly." To give grudgingly means literally to give out of sorrow. It hurts to give. We would rather not do so.

Sometimes this is true of us. We give, but hesitantly. It grieves us to part with money that we would rather use for our own causes and purposes. We resent the financial demands of the kingdom on us. We count to the dollar (or cent) what we feel is required of us, and don't give any more than we absolutely have to. We give,

but afterwards wish we hadn't given so much.

All such thoughts and actions are condemned. We may not give grudgingly.

Secondly, our giving must not be done "of necessity." This refers to giving simply because we feel we should. We give, but only because God requires it, or because it is expected of us by others (e.g., the church, parents, fellow saints). We give simply because we feel compelled to do so. We give because we do not want God, or anyone else, to think we are stingy.

It is true that giving is a duty. But if the only reason we do so is because God requires it or men expect it, this is not proper giving. Giving out of necessity is also condemned.

Positively, our giving should be done cheerfully, "for God loveth a cheerful giver." We should give joyfully. There should be gladness in our hearts. We should consider it a delight to give to the Lord. We should be happy to give to God's cause and kingdom (to return to God) some of what God has given us.

This implies giving abundantly. We are at times inclined to give very little. We do so because we would rather keep the money, or because we do not trust our heavenly Father's care and think we should take care of ourselves before giving to Him. But, considering that the Lord has prospered us, we should give much to Him. We ought to be very generous in giving. We should give bountifully. And we should do this with joy in our hearts.

In all this we must remember that we are only stewards of what we have. All our possessions and money are not really our own, but belong to God. We have what we do only because He gave it to us. He calls us to use it in order to seek first His kingdom. And when we do so, His promise is to take care of all our earthly needs. We

have no reason to be anxious and worried, for "all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:32).

Be sure you give in the proper way. Not grudgingly or of necessity. But cheerfully.



Finally, we must understand and remember that our giving is an act of worship. Putting money in the collection plate is worship because of our motive in giving. That motive is gratitude to God.

God, as the Giver of every good and perfect gift, has showered gifts upon us. He has given us an abundance of earthly things. But, more importantly, He has given us countless spiritual and eternal gifts. Central in all these gifts, He has, with the love of His heart, given us His only begotten Son.

Just think about what characterizes God's giving of His Son. He cheerfully gave to us His dearest possession, the Son of His love. He was not stingy in giving Him. Nor is He stingy in giving us the blessings of salvation that Christ attained for us on the cross. God gave us His Son with a cheerfulness and generosity that is beyond our ability to comprehend and describe.


Realizing this, we say with the apostle Paul, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (II Cor. 9:15). The apostle says this in the same chapter as and thus in close connection with the admonition concerning our giving to God. This then is what moves us to give generously and willingly and cheerfully to God. Our giving is an expression of thanks and praise for all that God has given us, and thus is an act of worship.

This means, from a practical point of view, that we should strive actively to worship God during the offertory. It is not a time to relax in worship. It is not a time to look around, or to read the bulletin, or to focus upon our children. It is not a time to let our minds and thoughts wander to other things.

We ought, rather, to take the time to think about and ponder all that God has given us. We should be meditating upon God's "unspeakable gift" to us. With hearts

filled with gratitude for His giving, we will then gladly give to Him. And as we willingly and cheerfully give an offering of thanks and praise to God, He is worshiped and

praised through our giving.

With such offerings the Lord is pleased. He loveth a cheerful giver. May we give in a way that pleases and honors our God. 

Marking the Bulwarks of Zion

Prof. Herman Hanko

Modern Heresies: Common Grace (2)

Introduction

Common grace has two parts to it. One part has to do with God's favorable attitude towards all men, expressed particularly in the gracious offer of the gospel to all. The other part has to do with God's grace, worked by the Holy Spirit, in the hearts of all men, which restrains sin and enables man to do good.

This idea of grace was first proposed by Dr. Abraham Kuyper in a massive work to which he gave the title *Gemeene Gratie*. Kuyper gave this title to his book because he wanted to distinguish his common grace from the common grace of the gracious offer of the gospel.

When the followers of Kuyper came to this country in the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century, they too, for the most part, joined the Christian Reformed Church. So there were really two camps in the Christian Reformed Church, both holding to a different view of com-

mon grace. These two camps did not get along very well, and the dissension between them was severe. But they found a compromise that restored peace and unity in the adoption of the three points of common grace. These three points of common grace were the occasion for the expulsion of Revs. Herman Hoeksema, George Ophoff, and Henry Danhof from the CRC.

The Protestant Reformed Churches were organized from Reformed people from both groups within the CRC: one group from the De Cock camp, and one group from the Kuyper camp. These were, however, united in the PRC in their mutual confession of sovereign and particular grace. They rejected both kinds of common grace as Arminian and contrary to Scripture and the confessions.

It is an interesting question why A. Kuyper developed his elaborate theory of common grace. The answer to this question lies in his view of the Netherlands and its role in the defense and propagation of the Reformed faith.

Prior to the Separation of 1834 (*De Afscheiding*) the only Reformed church in the Netherlands was the State Church (*Hervormde Kerk*). Many in the Netherlands, including Kuyper, believed that the Neth-

erlands was destined to be the fountainhead of the Reformed faith in this world. The truth of the Reformed faith, issuing from the Netherlands as a mighty stream, would sweep through the world and have such influence on the world that all nations would themselves become Reformed or would, at the very least, come under the influence of the Reformed faith and benefit from the prosperity and national well-being that would accrue to Reformed countries. The Netherlands would be in this powerful position because it was a Reformed country with a government that supported the Reformed church.

When Kuyper saw the possibility of organizing a political party that could control the government, he resigned from the ministry and entered politics. First his party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, gained seats in the Dutch Parliament, and then Kuyper saw the possibility that he himself could become prime minister. But he was able to become prime minister only by forming a coalition with another political party; his party did not have an absolute majority. By means of a coalition with the Roman Catholic party, he did succeed in his goal of becoming prime minister.

His coalition with the Roman Catholics was not a strange move

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on his part. It was obvious to all that although the Reformed Church was the government-sponsored church, not all the citizens of the nation were true children of God nor members of the Reformed Church. If, therefore, the Netherlands was to be the fountainhead of the Reformed faith as a Reformed country, it had to take into consideration the many who were not Reformed, so that all could unite in a common cause of promoting the Reformed faith throughout the world.

Kuyper found the basis for such cooperation among all the citizens of the Netherlands in his doctrine of common grace. Common grace was the one ground on which believers and unbelievers, indeed all the citizens of the Netherlands, could cooperate in a common cause of Christianizing all the world, if not making it truly Reformed. It was the ground, therefore, for Kuyper's involvement in politics and for his coalition with Roman Catholics.

Kuyperian Common Grace

His idea of common grace worked out along the following lines.

The fall of Adam in Paradise was of such devastating severity that without divine intervention, the creation would have become a barren wasteland and man would have become a beast or a devil. God, therefore, intervened with common grace, which He bestowed on all the descendants of Adam to preserve them from bestiality or from becoming demons. This same common grace was given to the creation at the time of the flood, when God established a covenant with all creation and put the rainbow in the heavens as a sign of His common grace.

The result of this common grace was that man, through the power of it, is able to fulfill the original creation mandate: Subdue the earth. Without common grace this would have been impossible;

with common grace, subduing the earth was possible.

This calling to subdue the earth is given to all the descendants of Adam, and because all are able to engage successfully in this task, common grace forms a common ground for believers and unbelievers to cooperate in the common task of earth-subduing.

The cultural mandate implies the obligation of men to discover all the earth's powers and resources and to make use of them in ways in which these powers can be properly utilized. In subduing the earth, men discover the powers of the wind, the rain, electricity, the atom, etc. These powers are, in turn, put to use in ways that benefit mankind, make his life easier and more pleasurable, and give him leisure in which he can develop the arts: painting, sculpture, music, architecture, etc. Thus the human race progresses in the development of culture, which in turn can be used to solve the world's problems: the problem of disease as medicine advances; of poverty, in an affluent society where there are sufficient resources to alleviate the sufferings of the poor; of war, when an equal distribution of the earth's resources are equally shared and people live in peace; of racial and labor strife, when men learn to live together peaceably by easy access to education, and such like things.

Because the unregenerate are striving for the same goals as the regenerate, cooperation is possible between both kinds of people, and the result is a huge area of mutual interest and concern in which wicked and righteous work side by side to put the whole creation and all society's institutions in the service of Christ (*pro rege*).

It all sounds a bit like a post-millennial dream. Although Kuyper would claim to be an amillennialist, post-mil people have claimed him as one of their own, and rightly so. Reformed churches have followed the

Kuyperian dream in many instances, and the making of this world a better place to live, subduing all things to Christ the king, putting everything in the creation in the service of Christ are slogans of institutions and schools that still cling to the name Reformed.

A greater problem is that this cooperation between godly and ungodly can take place in the world of ideas as well. In the early 1920s, Dr. Ralph Janssen, professor in Calvin Seminary, appealed to Kuyperian common grace in support of his higher criticism of the Bible. He found many good ideas in the pagan worship of the nations surrounding Israel, and it was because of common grace that Israel's religion could be formed and molded by pagan thought.

Evolutionism, openly taught in Reformed and Presbyterian schools, is justified on the grounds that unbelieving scientists, by the power of common grace, are able to determine how the world came into existence.

Morally the same is true. Worldly music, instead of being consigned to the generations and moral rot of Jubal, is viewed as God's fruitful work of grace in the hearts of otherwise wicked men. Any act or deed that in any outward way seems to have some mercy about it (a philanthropic gift of a multi-millionaire), some benefit for mankind (the erection of a hospital), some enjoyable or skillful deed (a forty-foot putt by Tiger Woods), is ascribed to the common grace of God, without any regard for God's own verdict: "Whatever is not of faith is sin."

Kuyper himself claimed that the good deeds of the regenerate, because they were worked by grace, would be preserved for heaven, and that we would find also the fruits of the pagans in glory. I find it difficult to imagine that hard rock will be played in heaven, and that the walls of the new Jerusalem will be decorated with paintings by modern artists. Heaven would lose

much attractiveness if such were indeed the case.

Objections to It

Apart from the fact that Scripture is very clear on the crucial point that grace is always sovereign, the defenders of sovereign and particular grace, especially the PRC, launched successful attacks against the theory.


The theory of common grace proposed by Dr. Abraham Kuyper, not only is not found in Scripture, but is also completely hostile to Scripture. One reads Kuyper's *Gemeene Gratie* with amazement that there are so few scriptural passages quoted. Even Kuyper was hard pressed to find biblical support for his position. But worse, the view is hostile to Scripture, for it goes against God's own pronouncement upon the "good" deeds of the unregenerate. All that is not of faith is sin. That passage is unequivocal, all-embracing, and decisive for any evaluation of every deed of man. One gets the impression that the ungodly, in Kuyper's judgment, are capable of far more good than the humble

child of God who daily struggles with his sin, confesses that all his works are nothing, knows that even his very best works are corrupted and polluted by sin, and flees daily to the cross for forgiveness.

Herman Hoeksema predicted at the very outset of the common grace controversy that, if the theory of Kuyperian common grace were ever adopted, it would be the end of the antithesis between the people of God and the wicked. So it has proved to be. Common grace has been a hole in the dike of the antithesis, which hole grew larger with the passing of the years until it became a yawning breach through which poured a tidal wave of worldliness and evil. Look at the church about us today and weep.

The antithesis is not between the Reformed country of the Netherlands and the rest of the world—or America and the rest of the world; it is between the elect and the reprobate in the Netherlands and in America, and throughout the world. The antithesis is marked by the fact that the totally depraved unbeliever, capable as he

is to do mighty deeds with the powers of God's world, uses everything he discovers and invents to promote the wicked kingdom of Antichrist. He sins in everything he does, for his works are not out of faith, but are in opposition to God and in the service of Satan.

The elect and regenerate child of God lives also in the world, the same world as that in which the wicked live. But he lives in the world as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. He thus uses God's world insofar as he has any control over a part of it to seek the kingdom of heaven. He seeks that kingdom, as it is manifested here in the world, in his church, in his covenant schools, in his walk as a faithful citizen who serves the Lord Christ, and as one who witnesses by word and life to the truth of the gospel. He seeks that kingdom by condemning all wickedness in the world about him and testifying of the certain judgment of God upon evil. And he seeks that kingdom by pursuing his earthly pilgrimage faithfully as it leads him ever nearer his eternal destination, the house of many mansions. 

Ministering to the Saints

Rev. Douglas Kuiper

Deacons' Meetings (1) *Their Benefits*

I have a deacons' meeting to-night. Another night away from the family. Endless discussions. Problems without solutions. And I hardly had time to prepare my report on the benevolent case that I am working on with one of my fellow deacons. Oh, how I dislike deacons' meetings!"

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin.

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I hope, deacons, that such is not your view of deacons' meetings. But, because you too are human, such thoughts may have crossed your mind.

Reviewing the purpose and benefits of deacons' meetings should enable us better to appreciate them. Such meetings, properly conducted, enable the deacons to do their work better. By addressing this subject we conclude our treatment of the work that pertains specifically to the office of deacons.



Deacons' meetings are required by our Church Order. Article 40 reads: "The deacons shall meet monthly, or more frequently as the need arises, to transact the business pertaining to their office, calling upon the name of God; whereunto the ministers shall take good heed, and if necessary they shall be present."¹

The reason for this requirement is at least twofold. First, it ensures that the work of the office of mercy

will be carried out regularly in a congregation. Second, this requirement underscores the fact that no deacon is free to do the work of his office on his own; he may do it only in connection with the other deacons. This requires the deacons to meet as a body, and to make decisions as a body regarding their work.

This requirement applies only to the diaconates of certain congregations. In small congregations, with few elders and deacons, in which the deacons are “added to the consistory” (Article 37 of the Church Order), separate deacons’ meetings are not required. In such cases, both elders and deacons meet together once a month to care for the financial and temporal affairs of the church, and the matters pertaining to the offices as a whole; *and* to care for the spiritual affairs of God’s people, which is the duty of the elders; *and* to care for the poor, which is the duty of deacons. But in those congregations in which the elders meet alone to care for the work that pertains to their office, Article 40 requires also the deacons to meet alone, at least once a month, to carry out the work that pertains to their office.

That the article requires deacons’ meetings only of the deacons that are not “added to the consistory” is evident from the fact that the Church Order views the deacons’ meeting as an extension of the consistory meeting. Article 29 speaks of three kinds of assemblies in the church: “the consistory, the classis, and the general synod.” No mention is made of the deacons’ meeting as an ecclesiastical meeting.

My explanation is also the position of VanDellen and Monsma:

Should the Deacons hold separate meetings even in Churches in which the Deacons constantly meet with the Consistory? No. In Churches which have not yet introduced separate meetings for the Elders and for the Deacons the latter need not hold special meetings for Deacons alone. In these Churches ... the work of mercy is

regularly acted upon at the general Consistory meetings. Article 40 is intended for the larger Churches which have their general Consistory meetings and their Restricted Consistory meetings and consequently also need their Diaconal meetings.²

Understanding that the Church Order does not require the deacons in every congregation to hold separate meetings explains the fact that at the annual church visitation, one of the questions put to the ministers and elders, in the absence of the deacons, is this: “Do the deacons attend regularly the services for divine worship as well as the consistory meetings; and in case such meetings are held, do they also attend deacons’ meetings?”³ The phrase “in case such meetings are held” presupposes that in some churches such meetings are not held, and the phrase presupposes this without judgment—that is, without suggesting that in every instance it would be wrong for the deacons not to meet separately.

If, however, you are a deacon in a church in which deacons’ meetings are not required, don’t stop reading yet...

For, first, Article 40 does not apply to you, *insofar as it requires a monthly meeting*. Do not take this to mean that you need never meet as a diaconate. You must meet, *as the need arises*, that is, when you are dealing with benevolent cases. But in distinction from other diaconates, your meetings will not be announced to the congregation, and will not be held on a specific night of each month.

Second, the right understanding of Article 40 certainly does not prohibit you from having monthly meetings that are announced to the congregation. Consider the possibility that having such meetings regularly, and announcing them to the congregation, would be as beneficial for you and your congregations, as for others. The only difference between your meetings and

those of other diaconates would be that, whereas they meet as a body of deacons apart from the consistory, you would meet as a committee of the consistory.



Deacons’ meetings are for the benefit of all.

First, they are for the benefit of the congregation. They remind the whole congregation that she has the office of deacon in her midst, and that this office requires work, time, and effort. The congregation, seeing an announcement in the bulletin that the deacons will be meeting, does well to pray for the deacons as they meet. Perhaps, people of God, we do not often enough remember to pray for the officebearers of the church, as they gather on a particular night of the month to do their work.

Secondly, such meetings are for the benefit of the poor. It may be that one in the congregation has a need that he wishes to make known to the diaconate. By knowing that the deacons meet on a certain date, he is able to come to the diaconate to let them know his need. Admittedly, some in the church would prefer not to make their need known this way; they would prefer to tell one deacon, and let that deacon “get the ball rolling.” Others, however, might prefer to come to the whole body to present their case, being ready to answer any questions that any of the deacons might have, then leaving the meeting so that the deacons can discuss the matter.

1. *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 2002 edition, p. 20. Every article of the Church Order that is later quoted in this article is taken from this book; the specific page references will not be given.

2. Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941), p. 177.

3. *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 2002 edition, p. 113.

Even for those poor who do not desire to appear personally at such a meeting, the knowledge that the deacons have such meetings will assure them that the body as a whole will discuss their case. This, I say, is for their assurance—one whose need is genuine has no reason to be ashamed of his need. He will be comforted in knowing that the whole body of deacons, not just one or two individually, cares for him in his need.

Third, such meetings are for the benefit of the deacons. They are a means to carry out the work to which the deacons are called. Let me underscore that point. The deacons' meeting is not the primary work of the deacon. Rather, it is a means to help the deacons do their primary work well. How the deacons' meeting goes is determined somewhat by how well the poor are cared for. How much any particular deacon looks forward to that meeting will be determined by how deeply he pities those who are poor, how devoted he is to his calling.

Deacons' meetings are beneficial for deacons because they allow the whole body of men to discuss their work, to encourage each other in it, and to benefit from each other's experience. They allow a committee of deacons who are frustrated in their dealings with a particular case to air those frustrations, and receive advice. They allow the

deacons to do their work in an organized way—to develop a plan as to how best to care for the poor in their congregation, and to put that plan into action.

Such meetings are beneficial for the deacons also because they give an opportunity for the deacons to be instructed regarding their office. Article 40 implies that this opportunity could arise, for it requires the minister to be present. He must give advice and counsel, but also instruction, to the deacons as the need arises.

These benefits of deacons' meetings are not merely potential or hypothetical benefits; consciously or unconsciously, the deacon enjoys these benefits.

Here I speak from experience. As a pastor, I must attend consistory meetings. Sometimes much time and effort are put into preparing for them—getting an agenda together, gathering all the correspondence I've received that must be treated, and, even more, making reports and preparing recommendations. But these reports and recommendations assume that the real work of preaching, teaching catechism, and caring pastorally for the congregation is being done. And how well the meeting goes depends, in large measure, on how well the work is being done.


More than once I have left a consistory meeting that went late

and left me tired, in which were treated matters that pastors and elders would rather not treat, nevertheless lifted up and renewed in my spirit. I do not bear the burden of the congregation alone! And, insofar as I do not always bear that burden wisely, God has appointed other men to give me advice and wisdom! The next day, with a better sense of direction and a renewed focus, I can again busy myself in the real work.

Finally, the whole consistory will benefit from such meetings. If the deacons take good heed to their work, the consistory's calling to supervise the deacons will be more easily carried out.

Facing the prospect of an upcoming meeting, deacons should think on these benefits, look forward to the meeting, and be encouraged to prepare well for it.

Also those deacons who meet regularly as part of the consistory, and for whom separate monthly meetings are not required, do well to ask whether they experience these benefits apart from monthly announced meetings. If they find they do not experience all these benefits in their work, they ought seriously to consider having monthly meetings.

Having explained the benefits of such meetings, we will examine in the next article, the Lord willing, what happens at such meetings. 

When Thou Sittest in Thine House

Abraham Kuyper

Forget Not Hospitality

Hospitality

In His faithful Father-care, that extends to the whole of our human life, God the Lord has not deemed it beneath His divine majesty, in His holy Word, to ex-

press Himself even with respect to hospitality.

To God's child nothing happens outside of holy ordinances, and he who fears God will, even in this matter of hospitality, allow himself to be led not by impulse

Reprinted from When Thou Sittest In Thine House, by Abraham Kuyper, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1929. Used by permission of Eerdmans Publishing Co.

and whim, but by the ordinances of God.

At once be it observed that now the holy duty of hospitality demands less from us than in the days of patriarchs and apostles.

In patriarchal times, when they who had been called of the Lord still dwelt in tents, the holy duty of hospitality required that, at the close of day, one call in, refresh, and lodge every traveler that passed by his tent.

This had to be so and could not be otherwise, because a human being created after God's image must not be left like an animal to spend the night in the open.

Without this sacred duty of hospitality a traveler in those days would have perished from thirst or by night have become a prey to wild animals.

Such hospitality, which was incumbent upon every one to offer, was then indispensable to intercourse among people and to the maintenance of human society.

In the appearance at Mamre, Jehovah Himself has sanctified this bounden duty in the tent of Abraham. And when Eliphaz tried to accuse Job of one of the most dreadful sins, on account of which God's wrath had come upon him, it was not least in this, that perchance he had dismissed some poor, weary traveler from his door, and had received in his tent the man of position and power (Job 22).

And when the Lord's people were settled in Canaan, tents of canvas and skins gave place to houses of stone and wood, but the duty of hospitality remained the same.

Even in the days when Jesus was on earth, His twelve disciples went through all the land, and took up their abode with people who were unknown to them.

Yea, our Savior goes so far, that in His striking sermon regarding the last judgment, He puts inhospitality in the foreground as reason of condemnation, saying: "I

was hungry and thirsty and a stranger, and ye took me not in, neither gave me to eat nor to drink."

And thus it was altogether natural that the apostles of the Lord repeatedly bound the duty of hospitality upon the heart of the redeemed of the Lord.

Paul, when he wrote to the Romans (12:13): "Be given to hospitality," and presently to the Hebrews (13:16): "And to communicate forget not."

And likewise Peter (I, 4:9), when he saw how hospitality began to be a burden to some, emphatically commanded them: "Use hospitality one to another, *without grudging.*"

Of this sacred duty God's Word demands that you quit yourself according to the Lord's will.

"Inasmuch as ye have done this unto one of the least of my brethren" spake your Savior, "ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40).

The world dares to say: "Uninvited guests one puts outside the door," but in God's Word it is counted you as sin, when, though you help the stranger along, with anger in your heart you do it grudgingly.

Not only your friends and acquaintances, who can requite you again, but the humble and needy Jesus wants you to invite to your table.

Hospitality must be shown, not because the company of the stranger gives you pleasure, not because presently in turn he will receive you, but because man, created after God's image, is not to be left to himself, and the brother in Christ must not be neglected.

This is still the case in out-of-the-way places, in villages where there is no inn. This duty still holds good in newly settled places in America, where one travels from homestead to homestead. In our East Indies the single European

who lives in a *dessah* is obliged to open his house to every white man that comes along. Even in some of our villages it repeatedly happens that one does not dare to refuse a peddler a place of rest, at least in the hay-mound.

Yet in all this there is but a faint reflection of what the sacred duty of hospitality once was.

Life and social life of men is so greatly changed, and with it the obligation which hospitality imposes on us.



In two respects, especially, this change is very great.

First, in that now there are on every hand good opportunities to spend the night for money, and then of course you should not burden strangers. Or, where there is opportunity, but one lacks the money, provision can be made, at the cost of the community, or privately by Christian charity.

But what above all brought about so great a change is the rise of the generation of vagabonds and landlopers, in many cases tramps bent upon thievery, who abuse hospitality to perpetrate mischief.

These are they who have desecrated hospitality, and have made its ancient practice almost impossible.

Hence the new form which hospitality gradually assumed, by provision of shelter for wanderers, and by opening of all sorts of institutions and homes where strangers are entertained.

Hospitality in the ancient sense now merely exists among relatives, friends, and acquaintances, and, provided they have letters of introduction, among brethren in Christ.



Yet the apostolic admonition to be given to hospitality has even in our days in nowise lost its force.

Does not every one in his own circle know these two kinds of

households, one of which lock their doors upon themselves, and the others that are known for generous hospitality?

On one hand, a father or mother who never concern themselves about the homeless and the helpless, and on the other hand men and women who are constantly alert to help the desolate and the wandering.

Here is a household where a Christian brother who has lost the way never knocks in vain, and next door to it a household in which they know no further care than for themselves and their own.

Again on one hand, households where the note of hospitality ever sounds a welcome, and others that retire within themselves, and care not for what moves outside of their narrow circle.

Generous and friendly one; reserved and almost repellent the other.

On one side a self-sufficiency that affects you coldly and uncomfortably, sometimes exhaling the odor of selfishness; and on the other a captivating, cordial, and enticing approach that warms your heart by the warmth of the heart, that goes out toward you.

Between these two lies all the broad difference, whether the spirit of hospitality is upon us, or whether we do not count with this holy ordinance of our God.



Truly, the rights of individual home-life come first.

There is first marriage, the household, husband, wife, children, servants. This is the starting point. There must first be a household, before it can offer generous and hospitable shelter to those who stand without.

There is order in the ordinances of God, and after this order the household comes first, and after that in the household the stranger.

And bitter have been the results when one had always strangers about, and always spent oneself on strangers, until at length one could no longer get along without them, and had no social life without them, even at the price of neglecting one's own wife and children.

A family-life that seeks to develop a rich social life within its own bosom is indispensable for the formation of heart and character. Only in such families flourishes tenderly Christian faith and Chris-


tian love. Yea, in such a family only does the stranger feel himself truly happy.

Only, this flourishing of happiness in one's own home must not degenerate into incapacity for general fellowship, into cold indifference to what goes on outside, into withdrawal of oneself from society, and into making little islands of life without a bridge that links them.

Where such becomes the case the spirit of narrow-heartedness creeps in, which overestimates everything that belongs to one's own home and hearth, which with disgust and envy spies what others do and not do, and surliness that repels rather than generosity that invites and attracts is made the rule of life.

Especially among Christians with holy seriousness such an evil spirit must be excluded.

This exclusive, repulsive, and self-sufficient spirit is the direct opposite of the spirit of hospitality, and curses God's holy ordinance.

Sin separates and closes up the heart, but the Spirit of the Lord opens the heart wide, and makes the warm glow of uniting, of *brotherly love*, go out toward you. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregational Activities

Perhaps you had the opportunity back in December to take in a Sunday School Christmas program at your church. If you did, then you no doubt extend your sincere thanks, along with mine, to all our Sunday School children and teachers for their Christmas programs. What a joy it was to see the Lord's goodness to us in our children and to hear them confess the wonder-

ful message of God's love and grace in the gift of His Son.

The "News" would also be remiss if we did not stop here and add our sincere thanks to the young people of our churches for their efforts during the month of December. We cannot say for certain, but we are relatively confident that all the young people of our churches reserve an evening close to Christmas when they get together both to sing Christmas carols and to deliver Christmas cards to certain widows and widowers, elderly couples, sick and shut in, or those with special needs, in their congregations. Perhaps the young people will never really know just

how much those efforts mean to those visited, but let me assure them that it is much appreciated by all the other members of their church home. Not only that, but it also serves as a positive reminder "that he who loveth God, love his brother also" (I John 4:21).

Not all Christmas caroling back in December was limited to our churches' young people. The 4th and 5th grade Catechism classes of our Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI went caroling in their church neighborhood Sunday evening, December 10. Lunch and games followed the singing.

The Steering Committee of the possible daughter congregation of

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

the Hull, Iowa PRC invited all interested individuals to an informational meeting December 13 in the sanctuary of Hull PRC.

The Christian Fellowship Society of the Hull, Iowa congregation enjoyed their annual Christmas Party December 28 at their church. Activities included a scavenger hunt, followed by fellowship, snacks, and refreshments.

All adult members of the Bible Study Societies of Grace PRC in Standale, MI, whether young or old, married or single, were invited to a special Christmas Bible Study/Song-Fest/Fellowship time on December 19 at their church. Those attending were promised an evening set aside for reflection and gladness as they considered God's unspeakable gift, His Son, Jesus Christ.

At their annual Congregational Meeting held in mid-December, the congregation of the Lynden, WA PRC approved two proposals from their Council. One proposal was to replace the parsonage roof and the other was to purchase a CD burner for their church's Evangelism Committee.

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Lynden, WA PRC sponsored a car rally and soup supper Saturday, December 9. This activity was for their entire congregation, even children. The rally began in the afternoon at Lynden, where teams were made for the rally, clues given, and rules explained. After the car rally, a soup supper was also served. Baby-sitters were also provided for those who preferred not to take their children on the car rally. Donations were accepted for the 2007 Young People's Convention.

The young people of the Byron Center, MI PRC enjoyed a fellowship get-together on December 28. The evening began with some bowling at Fairlanes Bowling Alley in Grandville, followed by a gift exchange and refreshments later at Byron Center.

Members of the Young People's Society of the South Holland, IL PRC were invited to attend a Chicago Blackhawk hockey game on Friday evening, December 29.

School Activities

Again this past Christmas season the students of Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a Gift Certificate Drive to help those in need in our area PR churches. To participate one could purchase gift certificates to area grocery stores, gas stations, etc, or simply send a check to Covenant. We can also happily report that in a subsequent announcement from Covenant, they thanked everyone who contributed. While they did not have the exact numbers yet, they had already exceeded their goal for the drive.

The Promoters of Eastside Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI invited their supporters to a physical and mental activity night at Eastside on December 27. Participants were advised to come prepared for activities that included bombardment, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, chess, and other board games.


The students of the South Holland, IL Christian School presented their annual Christmas Program on December 21 at Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN. The program developed the theme, "God's Covenant Promise Fulfilled."

Mission Activities

The Council of Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, the calling church for our denomination's mission work in Pittsburgh, PA, organized two work groups to go to Pittsburgh to work on the recently purchased church buildings. The first was to go around January 5, D.V. This group's duty was primarily to clear out and then clean up the buildings. The second group was scheduled to go down the week of January 22 D.V., and was to do repair work on the buildings, including carpentry, plumbing, painting, and other work.

The Domestic Mission Committee of our churches has a committee dedicated to the development of mission policy, fields, promotion, and advertising. This committee has developed a web page to promote missions, to let people know what our mission committee does, and especially to give to interested persons a point of contact with the PRCA, if they are interested in our churches becoming involved in mission work in their community. Interested? Check out the page at www.prcahome.missions.org.

Minister Activities

January 1, 2007 the congregation of the Doon, IA PRC, the calling church for our denomination's mission work in the Philippines, extended a call to Rev. Dick to serve as our churches' next missionary there. 

Announcements

TEACHER NEEDED

Covenant Christian High School is accepting applications from certified teachers in the Protestant Reformed Churches for the 2007-2008 school year. Anticipated openings are in the areas of English, Foreign Language, Vocal Music, and Computer/Technology. Those interested can contact Rick Noorman at 616-453-5048 or moorman @altelco.net, or Bob Faber at 616-942-7038.

TEACHER NEEDED!

Hope Christian School of Walker, Michigan will be needing to fill the position of 9th grade homeroom teacher for 2007-2008. Those interested are asked to send application by February 1, 2007. An English/Literature background would be beneficial but not a requirement. Please contact Ron Koole (616-453-9717) or Neil Meyer (616-791-9643). E-mail correspondence hopeprcs@juno.com.

THE STANDARD BEARER

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On January 25, 2007, our parents and grandparents,

**REV. GISE and CLARA
VANBAREN,**

celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. We are thankful to our heavenly Father for sparing them these many years for each other and for us their children and grandchildren, and for their faithfulness to the word of God in their marriage. May our God continue to be with them and us that we be faithful until our Lord returns on the clouds of glory. "For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our God even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

- * John & Valerie VanBaren
Mitchell & Jennifer
Jordan
Jason & Jill
Jared
- * Robert & Carolyn Prins
Kyle, Eric, Kristin, Brianna,
Andrew, Alicia
- * Gerald & Heidi VanBaren
Molly, Melissa, Jeremy
- * Michael & Marilyn VanOverloop
Derek, Keith, Caleb, Katelyn
- * Kevin & Denise Haan
Mitchel, Erika, Elizabeth
- * Daniel & Sheryl VanBaren
Megan, Erin, Alison, Zachary
- * Philip & Patricia VanBaren
Clarissa
- * Aric & Rachel Bleyenbergh
Seth, Faith, Rebekah,
Cassandra
Hudsonville, Michigan

OFFICEBEARERS' CONFERENCE

CLASSIS WEST OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCHES

Doon, IA - Tuesday, March 6, 2007

Pentecost and Pentecostalism

*But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel;
And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God,
I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.... Acts 2:16-17*

9:00 A.M.

Keynote Address

The Outpouring of the Spirit: Pentecost and Its Effect on the Church
Rev. Martin VanderWal, Pastor of Hope PRC, Redlands, CA

10:30 A.M.-12:00 P.M.

Pentecostalism: An Overview

Rev. Dennis Lee, Pastor of First PRC, Edgerton, MN

12:00 P.M. - Lunch served in the basement

1:00 P.M.-2:30 P.M.

Signs of an Apostle: The Temporary Gifts of the Holy Spirit
Rev. Steven Key, Pastor of Hull PRC, Hull, IA

2:45 P.M. - 4:15 P.M.

Filled With the Spirit: The Evidence of the Spirit's Work in the Christian
Rev. John Marcus, Pastor of First PRC, Edmonton, AB

* All past and present officebearers, as well as all interested people, are invited to attend.

* After the noon meal, a freewill offering will be taken to defray expenses.

NOTICE!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will convene at the Doon PRC in Doon, Iowa, on Wednesday, March 7, 2007, at 8:30 A.M. All material for the agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, February 5, 2007. An officebearers' conference will be held on Tuesday, March 6, 2007, the Lord willing, on the subject of "Pentecost and Pentecostalism." Delegates or visitors, who will need lodging or transportation, should notify Doon's clerk or pastor by phone (712-726-3382) or e-mail (doonprc@mtcnet.net).

Rev. Richard Smit, Stated Clerk

NOTICE!!

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. Jeff Kalsbeek (Phone: 616-453-6455). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 26, 2007, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Jeff Kalsbeek, Secretary

Reformed Witness Hour

February 2007

Date	Topic	Text
February 4	"I Am the Bread of Life"	John 6:35
February 11	"I Am the Good Shepherd"	John 10:11
February 18	"I Am the Light of the World"	John 8:12
February 25	"I Am the Door of the Sheepfold"	John 10:9