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Volume 83 ◆ Number 1

Hedonism in the Church

From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.

Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.

James 4:1-3

From the previous chapter it becomes evident that the saints in the early church were sinning with their tongues. With the tongue they blessed God, and with the tongue they were cursing each other as brothers in the Lord. James pointed out that this evil speaking came from a wisdom that is earthly, sensual, and devilish. And this kind of wisdom produces envy, strife, confusion, and every evil work.

It's not surprising that James speaks of wars and fightings in the

church. The early Christian church was characterized by fierce infighting.

James points out the source of this infighting. It was the lusts that warred within their members. The word "lusts" is our word hedonism. It means a strong desire for and seeking of pleasure. This was the cause of the infighting that had developed in the church.

What happened in the early church has been repeated throughout history. A hedonistic pursuit of pleasure has repeatedly brought wars and fightings into the church.

God grant that we avoid such folly!



A dreadful hedonism!

We said that hedonism is a strong desire for and seeking of pleasure. The hedonist is one who lives for pleasure. The goal of his life is to enjoy pleasure.

The pleasure of hedonism is not the spiritual pleasures of God's covenant. Within His covenant God has provided full and free salvation in Jesus Christ. That salvation consists of reconciliation with God through the covering of sin. To this salvation belongs a life of

friendship and fellowship with God as we are empowered to serve Him in righteousness. Salvation also includes a life of friendship and fellowship with other children of God, who share in the salvation of Jesus Christ. In this salvation there is great pleasure. The psalmist speaks of this in Psalm 16:11: "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

This is not the pleasure of hedonism.

The pleasure of hedonism is strictly earthly. The hedonist lives for earthly pleasure. He lives for sexual gratification, the pleasure that earthly riches afford, the pleasure of recognition by others, the pleasure of power, the pleasure of position in society.... The pleasure seeking of the hedonists includes the pleasures of sin. The hedonist is not content to enjoy earthly pleasures in moderation but soon runs to an excess that brings him into sin. He is not satisfied with sexual gratification only in marriage, but he also wants this gratification outside of marriage. He not only wants the pleasure of food and

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: dykstra@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: (616) 457-5970
FAX: (616) 457-5980
(e-mail: tim@rpa.org)

Postmaster:

Send address changes to
The Standard Bearer
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: cpraudiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

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drink, but also wants the pleasure of overindulgence - of gluttony and drunkenness. Not only does he desire power and position, but he also wants to abuse that power by lording it over others.

This hedonistic spirit controls the world.

The world in which we live is depraved and completely under the control of sin. This depravity frequently shows itself in hedonism. The depraved world of the ungodly certainly does not desire and seek the pleasures of the covenant as they are found in Jesus Christ. The world rather seeks earthly and often sinful pleasure.

This certainly characterizes the society in which we live. Our society is a pleasure-mad society in which people for the most part live only for pleasure. They live for sexual gratification, for luxury homes and cars, for parties, for food and drink, for vacations. In their pursuit of these pleasures our society runs wild into the pleasures of sin - fornication, gluttony, drunkenness, drug abuse. For the sake of these pleasures they sacrifice their marriages and their families. They will even go into great debt that threatens financial ruin.

But the sad thing is that this same thing is found in the church.

James speaks of your lusts that war in your members. As we have indicated, "lusts" here refers to desires for pleasure - hedonistic desires and cravings. These lusts reside in every saint because the work of God's grace is not complete in him. Because of God's renewing grace, the saint desires the blessings and pleasures of salvation in God's covenant. But he still has a sinful nature filled with these hedonistic desires. These lusts war in his members. This means that they are engaged in a military campaign within him. They contend with the new man that he has become in Jesus Christ and the desires of this new man. At issue in this warfare is which of them will control the members of his body -

his eyes, ears, mouth, hands, and feet. Will the new man with its desire for heavenly pleasures in Christ control his members, so that the members of his body become instruments to seek and find the pleasures of heaven? Or will the sinful nature with its hedonistic lusts for earthly pleasure control his members, so that they become instruments to seek the pleasures of this life?

It is obvious that for many of the saints in the church of James' day the hedonistic lusts of the sinful nature were having the upper hand. And the result was that many were following the hedonistic life of the world of that day.

It is obvious that this is true of many in the church also today.



A sad result!

The sad result of this hedonism in the church was the fighting among the members. James speaks of wars and fightings and even of killing. The word "fightings" is used in the New Testament mostly in the sense of verbal battles or quarreling. This is also consistent with the subject matter of the previous chapter - the sinful use of the tongue. From the term "wars and fightings" it is apparent that these verbal battles were widespread, frequent, and of some duration. And in the process of these verbal battles the saints were killing each other with gossip, backbiting, evil reports, and the like.

How soon this had developed in the church. The book of Acts describes a church that was at peace and unity. Now only a few decades later, there was widespread fighting in the church. How easily the peace of the church is disrupted.

And the cause of it all was the hedonistic desires that warred in their members and that had taken control in their lives.

This is not difficult to understand.

Those who are caught up in seeking their own pleasure tend to

be self-seeking and self-serving. Self-seeking people are quick to get in each other's way, to hurt one another and take offense at one another. This quickly leads to war and fighting.

In turn, those who are caught up in seeking their own pleasure soon become covetous of others. They never have enough for themselves and always know of someone who has more. This leads to envy, taking what belongs to others, and desire of revenge. And war soon ensues.

We see this kind of thing happen in the world on every level - business, race relations and international politics.

The same thing happens in the church.

James adds a few more details to this process as it developed in the church of his day.

"Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war."

What James is saying here is that the saints were not attaining that for which they lusted. In the pursuit of pleasure they desired and sought after earthly riches, ease, comforts, power, and position. But for the most part they were not able to attain enough. This is most often the case. The pleasure that the hedonist attains from earthly things is never enough. He always wants more - more riches, more comforts, and more power. But this more is never enough. He cannot attain. Sometimes a hedonistic spirit and life lead even to poverty. The obvious case is the drunkard.

James indicates that this in turn led to more fighting and warfare. Those who cannot attain what they want are inclined to covet what others have, be envious of them, and even steal from them. All this leads to fighting and war.

James has more to say. "Yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

The saints were not praying. Seeking the pleasures of this world does not lead one to the communion of prayer with our heavenly Father. In anticipation of an objection, James concedes that some were praying. But they were praying amiss. They were praying for that which would satisfy their lust for pleasure. These prayers were unacceptable to God. And the result was that these hedonists received nothing from God. They did not enjoy the blessings of salvation. In some cases they did not even receive the material necessities of life. This is in keeping with the principle that God's gracious gifts are found in the way of prayer. Those who do not pray, or who pray amiss, do not receive.

And that became a factor in their fightings and wars. Only with

the spiritual blessings of grace that come with prayer can we maintain peace and unity in the church. Whatever interrupts or robs us of our prayers will generate strife.



An important calling!

We are called to live at peace and unity in the church. This calling is found throughout Scripture. "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you" (I Cor. 1:10). "And

be at peace among yourselves" (I Thess. 5:13).

That was James' concern in this passage.

And this must be our concern.

Remember how easily and quickly the peace of the church is disrupted.

To have and maintain peace in the church, we must all do several things.

We must pray to the Lord.

In the power of prayer we must turn away the lust for pleasure that wars in our members. We must seek the pleasures of God's covenant as they are in Jesus Christ.

And the result will be that we will be full and satisfied in Jesus Christ.

We will also live at peace with God and each other to the glory of His name. 

Editor's Note

With this issue, the *Standard Bearer* enters the eighty-third year of continuous publishing. This cannot be noted without expressing gratitude to God for making the bimonthly publication a reality - including the financial support, the RFPA, and the superb support staff. Above all, we thank God for willing and able writers who are committed to the Reformed truth.

The start of another volume is a good time to look back, and to give a preview of the coming year.

The *Standard Bearer* will introduce two new features for the coming year. First, we plan to print a number of Rev. Haak's Reformed Witness Hour sermons from past years. The staff agreed with the editors' assessment that Rev. Haak's sermons are profitable, being the fruit of much hard work by a capable minister. The new rubric will be entitled *Sounding Out the Word*, an allusion to I Timothy 1:8, "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord...." The words

"sounded out" are the translation of a Greek word meaning "to echo forth" or "to broadcast."

The second new feature will be installments of a Dutch work entitled *Not Anabaptist, But Reformed* (*Niet Doopersch, Maar Gereformeerd*). The Reverends Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema wrote this 70-page pamphlet in the heat of the controversy over common grace in the Christian Reformed Churches. In it they respond to Rev. J. K. VanBaalen's charge that a denial of common grace is Anabaptist. The translation was done by seminarian Daniel Holstege under the supervision of Prof. David Engelsma.

The October 15 issue of the *SB* will be our annual Reformation issue, devoted to some aspect of the great sixteenth-century Reformation. This year, it is devoted to the reformation in the Netherlands. Another special issue is planned for later in the year on the topic of the Lord's day.

For the rest, our writers remain the same, with one notable excep-

tion. Prof. Herman Hanko has decided to remove himself from the list of regular writers in the *Standard Bearer*. His exposition of Galatians will be discontinued in the *SB*, and readers will have to wait for the rest when the book is printed by the RFPA, D.V. About a half a dozen articles remain to be printed in his rubric *Marking the Bulwarks of Zion*.

This is something of a historic occasion, in that Prof. Hanko has been writing for the *SB* for more years than any other writer, with the possible exception of his father, the late Rev. Cornelius Hanko. Prof. Hanko's first article as the newly-ordained minister in Hope PRC (Grand Rapids) was a feature article on the parable of the sower (Matt. 13) - in the January 1, 1957 issue (Vol. 33). He was soon pressed into regular service as the writer for *All Around Us*, a post he held for fifteen years. Next he wrote columns officially entitled *My Sheep Hear My Voice*, the most memorable of which were his "Let-

ters to Timothy,” advice for a young pastor and his flock, and an in-depth study of “Our Order of Worship.” Prof. Hanko, always willing to plow new ground, delved into the difficult issues of Christian ethics in the rubric *Walking in the Light*. In more recent

years, *SB* readers have profited much from Prof. Hanko’s years of study in church history.

We thank God for Prof. Hanko’s years of service to the *Standard Bearer*. God gave him the conviction that writing for the *SB*, defending and developing the

truth, was an obligation, not an option. For years of faithful service, for pages and pages of edifying articles, for countless book reviews, and for solid contributions to the Reformed faith, Prof. Hanko, thank you!

RJD 

Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole

Existentialism – The Philosophy Behind Our Age

(Written with the beginning of a new school year,
and with college students particularly, in mind.)

What follows is a brief introduction to and summary of the philosophy of Existentialism.

Why write about a “philosophy” in a Reformed magazine devoted to theological and ecclesiastical issues? It’s quite simple. A man’s philosophy is his perspective on life. And a man’s perspective on life is practical. In the end it has everything to do with man’s conduct and behavior, what he ‘justifies,’ and what he condemns. As we are so fond of saying, principles work through.

Why this particular philosophy? Because this philosophy has everything to do with the spirit of our age. It is, I am convinced, a key to understanding our present age, its culture and its so-called standards (or, if you will, our society’s reaction against all time-honored standards in everything from the Arts to Sex, and from civil law to child-rearing, opting always for that which is radical, obscene, and anti-moral).

More than any other philosophy, Existentialism reflects what developed amongst the intellectuals of the twentieth century. Such

is not to be minimized. That is simply another way of saying that, in time, it became the ruling mentality of leading educators of the leading universities both in Europe and the States. This means its legacy is far reaching indeed.

For this reason I encourage every young person who is going to a liberal arts college and is required to take a class or two in philosophy to take the mandatory history of philosophy course and then look for one that deals with Existentialism. It will help explain not only what passes for ‘art’ in this modern age, together with its literature, but also much of modern medicine and the sciences, down to what is being agitated for in the biology labs – freedom to experiment with human life, or as modern man labels it, human ‘tissue.’

Today’s debased evaluation of human life as nothing but biological tissue with which to experiment is the legacy of Existentialism, that is to say, Existentialism taken to its logical conclusion. Because, strangely enough, this devaluation of human life was exactly what Existentialism’s founding thinkers wanted at all costs to avoid. But

(and here is the problem) it was something they had to try to prevent without any reference to the Creator God or to His absolute standards of right and wrong. Because if anything characterizes Existentialism in its secular branch, it is the rejection of anything that has to do with the Christian faith and, hence, with God.

Existentialism has been called the Philosophy of Despair and the Philosophy of Irrational Man, and even, by its own thinkers, the Philosophy of the Absurd. Once you understand its main tenets, it is not so hard to understand why.

Existentialism is the philosophy that made popular the saying “God is dead.” The saying itself was lifted from that most anti-God and anti-Christian German philosopher of the late 1800s, Fredrick Nietzsche. By it these philosophers meant not simply that God has passed from the scene, or that He never existed (though that too), but, more insultingly, it was their way of saying “God is of no significance anymore!” It was their contention that God and the Christian religion had failed the human race. The notion of God was an

idea that had outlived its usefulness. It was time for modern man to display the courage of living without any reference to God as creator, savior, or judge.

This is not to say that there is not also a religious and 'Christian' branch to this philosophy. There is – a branch populated by a veritable "Who's Who" of the big names of "Religion and Theology" of the twentieth century (from Bultmann to Niebuhr to Tillich), men whose writings still dominate the intellectual and theological landscape of our day. But these men themselves wrote in reaction to the 'conclusions' of their secular counterparts, trying to salvage something of the Christian faith from the ruins that the 'blitzkrieg' of their secular counterparts left behind. Sad to say, making fatal concessions along the way (as liberals are wont to do), they salvaged precious little. The spiritual and moral bankruptcy of Europe's present-day churches and society testifies to this reality, to say nothing of our own.

But that is another story. It is in the secular branch of Existentialism that we are interested at this point.

The name Existentialism indicates what this anti-Christian philosophy is all about. It has to do with the ultimate questions of life and existence, and with man's in particular. Does a human being's existence have any meaning or significance in the grand scheme of things? Or is this all that can be said, *we exist!* As a dog exists, as a worm exists, as a cold, icy bit of stellar dust exists, and then vanishes from the scene – so it is with man. In the immortal words of a certain Rev. Gerrit Vos, who was anything but an Existentialist, commenting on the brevity of life, "We are born. We kick around a little bit – and before you know it, we are six foot under on Balsam St." (Note: a cemetery is located on Balsam St., just outside the village of Hudsonville.)

In other words, what is it that gives human existence, or, if you prefer, *life*, its value? Is there any reason for choosing to live one way rather than another? Or to have one set of values in your life rather than another? Is there a basis for assessing human life as something of value, something to be preserved and protected. Is there some reason for insisting that the life of a human being is of greater worth than that of a dog or a pig?

To these questions the Existentialist sought to give a positive answer, namely, there is a difference, an essential difference of 'being' that must be preserved at all costs – but, and here is the absurdity if you will, what distinguishes a man from a pig and gives value to one set of choices over against another must be established and maintained without any reference to God, or to any aspect of the Christian faith whatsoever. No little task – and, as should not surprise us, one in which these men failed miserably.

As should be evident by this time, what Existentialism amounts to is the theory of evolution taken to its full and logical conclusion. This is exactly its boldness and, one might say, its honesty. There are any number of men who have accepted evolution as the explanation for the origin of all things, and then tried to avoid its implications concerning creation, God, ethics, and man. Unlike such double-minded men, the Existentialists insisted on brutal consistency here. After all, if evolution is the real explanation of life's origin, then there is no creator, there is no God. And if there is no God, there is nothing beyond this life and the death that devours all. And that means, we must be willing to say, there is no real, ultimate purpose to life on planet earth, not even to human life. We are not essentially any different than the animal that crosses the busy street, is hit, and dies. Human life ultimately has just as little significance and purpose as that.

As was stated above, "We kick around a little bit – and before you know it we are six foot under on Balsam St."

But rather than shrink from such a conclusion, as so many 'cowards' were inclined to do, Existentialists insisted that this is the truth that must be embraced, this is reality for man, and with this knowledge we must live. You want to authenticate your life? Give it some meaning in difficult, perhaps even overwhelming, circumstances? Then do not try running back to God (or to some purveyor of religion). No such 'higher power' exists anyway. Rather you must turn to what is within yourself, and create your own meaning. This is the courage it takes to be true, modern man. At any given moment, only the individual and the moment exists. And it is only by the choice of will to keep living in the face of the absurdity of life (after all, nothing is going to count for anything anyway once the universe fades into nothingness again) that each man gives meaning and significance to his own existence and life.

Welcome to life and the world without God!

But the absurdity of full-blown Existentialism goes deeper than this. The astonishing thing about the main thinkers of Existentialism is how clearly they also saw the depravity and evil of the human race – as clearly as a Calvinist, one might almost say. They were honest enough not to deny this fundamental reality of human nature, that man is deeply flawed and inherently evil. Nor did they deny man's inability to overcome it. And yet they insisted that, looking to self, man must act as if he has reason for all the hope in the world.

How irrational you say. But with what options are you left, if there is no Jehovah God, or Messiah whom He has sent?

I offer for your consideration a quote from secular Existentialism's

foremost spokesman, a little wall-eyed Frenchman (so referred to by his critics) named Jean-Paul Sartre. What follows is lifted from my college notes (without the source designated, sorry to say). "Therefore, in spite of ourselves [meaning, though we would like to come to a different conclusion - kk], we are forced to come to this conclusion, which will seem shocking to cultured lofty souls - evil can not be redeemed, *and man is irredeemably evil*" (emphasis mine - kk).

And you wonder why it came to be known as "The Philosophy of Despair"?

But this, mind you, by a thorough-going unbeliever. What was it that gave rise to such a severe assessment of Sartre's fellow man and race? The events of the first half of the twentieth century, that's what. World Wars I and II. And they were concluded by the dropping of an atomic bomb or two. Exclamation points! God had his own way of confronting man with the folly of his insisting, "Who needs God! We can make utopia on our own. Peace on Earth; it is all a matter of man's intellectual superiority and good will to fellow man."

Oh really! And how then exactly do you explain what has just occurred?

The leading thinkers of Existentialism had already despaired of turning to science (with its inventions and the ability it gave to produce a vast array of machinery) as the great hope of mankind. They saw with clear eyes what the industrial revolution had foisted upon the backs of the majority of mankind, the wealthy with their machinery grinding the masses underfoot, fomenting labor violence and revolutionary doctrines. Clearly, science was not the answer. All it did was detach man from life, and focus on systems and machinery. Rather, the worth of the individual and man's regard for each other was man's only hope.

And then came the senseless slaughter of WW I, driven by senseless greed. And man's newly acquired knowledge of technology enabled men to slaughter men at a horrific rate.

But still a ray of optimism remained, like poppies blooming in Flanders' fields between the crosses row on row. Surely, man has learned from this experience. Who would ever want to live through such a man-made catastrophe again? It is unthinkable.

And then came Hitler and WW II and its unspeakable horrors. Not only the atomic bomb as the scientists' and mathematicians' greatest gift to mankind - Here is Death on a scale never imagined before! - but the holocaust and its brutal disregard for a whole race of people. And this, mind you, by a nation that had been regarded as the most civilized and educated in Europe. And in addition, many of the Existentialists, French by birth, had experienced firsthand the brutal cruelties of the Nazi occupiers, and then in the underground, betrayal by their own countrymen. As the scale of the death camps in Eastern Europe came to light, along with reports of what the Japanese did to the Chinese as a 'sub-species' in the name of barbaric sport, disillusionment and despair set in. "Evil" is the word that comes to mind. And if there is no God of righteousness or mercy, evil of an irredeemable sort.

It was to this conclusion the Existentialists came. We acknowledge not only that there is no God to answer to this evil and redress it in righteous vengeance and justice, overcoming it at last, but neither do we have any reason for placing our hope in mankind. What we have seen in the last three decades, 1915-1945, has cured us of such misbegotten hope. Man is irredeemably evil. Evil is what is strongest in mankind, an arm of death itself, and it is without a doubt what in the end will prevail. Such is the reality we confront and accept.

That being true, the question arises - why then go on? Man might as well give up.

Sartre's response? Never, never, never. In fact, as paradoxical as it may sound, it is exactly by looking despair in the face and determining to go on regardless, that man demonstrates the true worth of man. To be sure, the odds are impossible. And the end is certain, evil and death will prevail. They always have, they always will. They are stronger than mere man. We are doomed to perish and die. It is when a man accepts this, and yet refuses to yield one inch, that he validates his life, and proves an inherent worth.

As absurd as it may sound, it is exactly by accepting that there is no ultimate meaning or purpose to life, that life can now take on meaning. Now one understands the importance of each choice made. It becomes plain that the only meaning that can be given to each person's life is the meaning that the individual gives it by his own choice, moment by moment. Live not for eternity - it does not exist - but for the moment. In the end, the individual and the moment is all that counts.

Sound familiar? I should think so. The language and mentality of Existentialism are all around us.

And what fertile soil for evil. In the end, it does not matter what choices the original Existentialists were hoping men would make for the benefit of mankind, for the betterment of all. Each man's choice is entirely up to him - thereby to make his life authentic and give it meaning as he judges it best for himself (because there is no ultimate standard by which to measure his assessment, making it right or wrong). And if one decides that crack cocaine is what gives him meaning, or chanting "The Jewish race must die," or putting a bullet into one's head, who ultimately has the right to tell him, this is wrong and will not be permitted? In the end, the ultimate 'evil' becomes the

authority that would stand in one's way to prevent one from authenticating who he is.

If nothing else, Existentialism

brings home the true folly of unbelief, the bankruptcy of life without God and His Word – but also, why modern man stands in such need

of the gospel. As every unbelieving man knows deep down, without God's truth he is without hope in this world. 

All Around Us

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

■ Federal Vision in the PCA

Earlier in this rubric I have written about "federal vision" theology and its new teaching on justification. One of the denominations that seem to be tolerating this teaching is the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). In the August 2006 issue of the *Christian Observer*, under the heading "Members Of Federal Vision Study Committee Appointed," we read this,

The 34th PCA General Assembly approved erecting an ad interim committee "to study the soteriology of the Federal Vision, New Perspective, and Auburn Avenue Theologies, which are causing confusion among our churches. Further, to determine whether these viewpoints and formulations are in conformity with the system of doctrine taught in the Westminster Standards, whether they are hostile to or strike at the vitals of religion, and to the present declaration or statement regarding the issues raised by these viewpoints in light of our Confessional Standards." The GA authorized the moderator to appoint the members of this committee.

The committee has since been appointed.

■ Gender Inclusive Language for God

From the same magazine (*Christian Observer*, August 2006), under the heading "Substitute Names For The Trinity," we learn of a de-

cision from another General Assembly.

Delegates to the Presbyterian Church (USA) national assembly meeting voted to "receive" a policy paper on gender-inclusive language for the Trinity. That means church officials can propose experimental liturgies with alternative phrasings for the Trinity, but congregations won't be required to use them.

The panel that worked on the issue said that the classical language for the Trinity should still be used, but Presbyterians should seek "fresh ways to speak of the mystery of the Triune God" to "expand the church's vocabulary of praise and wonder." The panel also stated that one reason for the change is that the language limited to the Father and Son "has been used to support the idea that God is male and that men are superior to women."

Some of the suggested options include "Mother, Child and Womb," "Rock, Redeemer, Friend," "Lover, Beloved, Love," "Creator, Savior, Sanctifier," and "King of Glory, Prince of Peace, Spirit of Love."

The motives sound so noble – "to expand the church's vocabulary of praise and wonder" – but the true motive is resistance to the biblical and created order of male authority and female submission. And the result is blasphemy, not praise and wonder.

■ So What is Going on in your Teen's Life?

Do parents really know what goes on in the life of their teenage children, the pressures, the temptations, the lifestyle patterns that are promoted? Recent studies show that they do not, and that the

parents themselves are really to blame for this.

From a *USA Today* article (8/16/2006) entitled "Survey: Parents clueless on booze, drugs at teen parties," we find that parents and teens have different perceptions of what goes on at parties. These statistics are the results of a telephone survey from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse.

- 80% of parents say: Neither alcohol nor marijuana is available at teen parties.

- 50% of teenagers say: Alcohol, drugs or both are available at teen parties.

- 98% of parents say: Parents are normally present at teen parties at their home.

- 33% of teenagers say: Parents are rarely or never at teen parties.

- 99% of parents say they would not serve alcohol at a teen party, while 28% of teens say they have been offered alcohol at supervised parties.

- 80% of teenagers will drink alcohol before they get out of high school.

- 50% of teenagers will have tried marijuana by this time.

Joseph Califano, the chairman of the center that conducted this survey, says of typical parents,

They smell no pot, they see no drinking and they hear nothing of the drugs that their kids are using. I think they really have no sense of how awash their teens' world is in alcohol and drugs. There is a terrible disconnect.

These figures ought to prompt conversation and supervision by covenant parents of their teenagers. Perhaps it is more pleasant for parents not to know what really goes on, or perhaps it is easier to be an

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Eli and not restrain our sons and daughters, but biblical parenting requires staying engaged.

■ Unbelievable Peer Pressure

Another area of a young person's life, of which a parent may easily be ignorant or misinformed, is life on the college campus. Many of our young people attend colleges and universities, and a large number of these are living on campus in dorms. What is going on in these dormitories?

An August 10, 2006 article from *BeakPoint*, a daily email publication from Prison Fellowship, reports on life on one American college campus. Yes, every campus is different, and the rules and level of supervision vary, but the young who attend college all have the same evil nature, and you have to believe the pressures are there. I quote the article in full here.

Dorm Brothels: Is Promiscuity
Obligatory?
August 10, 2006
By Mark Earley.

At Maryland's Loyola College, ethics professor Vigen Guroian was lecturing on Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Students were comparing the novel—in which sexual promiscuity is required by law—with life in their own freewheeling dorms. Guroian pointed out the difference: Promiscuity on campus is voluntary, whereas in *Brave New World*, it's mandatory.

After class, a young woman came up to Guroian and told him he was wrong. Peer pressure and living arrangements on campus make promiscuity "practically obligatory," she said. "When it seems like everyone else is 'doing it,' it is hard to say no," she added. "It is more like *Brave New World* here than you think."

Guroian was not altogether surprised. He attended college himself in the late 1960s, when colleges gave up the responsibilities of *in loco parentis*. Up until

then, separate dorms for men and women, along with stringent rules regarding visitors of the opposite sex, "made it possible for a female student to say 'no' and make it stick," he writes. While the rules were not always followed, they established the boundaries and norms of acceptable behavior.

Today, these boundaries no longer exist. In his book, titled *Rallying the Really Human Things*, Guroian writes that the abdication of *in loco parentis* "opened the floodgates to the so-called sexual revolution, inviting much of what goes on today in college dormitories." Men and women share dorms and even bathrooms at some schools. It's not unusual, he says, for dorms to have a designated room set aside for casual hook-ups.

In effect, he says, colleges have "gone into the ... brothel business." Meanwhile, college administrators ignore the truth: Coed dorms work to the advantage of male sexual aggression. And the results are tragic.

"I know that young people are getting hurt, some permanently scarred for life," Guroian says. "I hold colleges like my own morally accountable, if not complicit in this harm. The colleges know what is going on, and they [simply] shovel out self-serving rhetoric about respecting college students as adults. And," Guroian says, "when those 'adults' get hurt, they order up more psychologists ... to bandage the casualties, my children and yours."

Guroian is right: These appalling conditions are both terrible and tragic. Students today need a great deal of wisdom to navigate a course of integrity in dormitory life. But the journey should not be made more difficult by college administrators who seem unable, or unwilling, to acknowledge the truth about human nature: Putting healthy young men and women together in close quarters only promotes promiscuous behavior. In the short term, these living conditions interfere with the students' ability to learn. In the long term, they damage their ability to form successful marriages.

Before sending their kids off

to colleges, parents ought to investigate the living arrangements. Alumni can also put pressure on their schools, demanding that they offer at least one non-coed dorm for women. And students themselves should ask administrators why they are being forced to live in surroundings that degrade them—a setting that turns college dormitories, according to Guroian, into virtual brothels.

Maybe this is what your son/daughter is dealing with in his/her life.

■ Controlling the Contributing Factors

Parents should know that the parties and the sex don't start out there, but they begin with what is and isn't allowed in the home before and while the children are dealing with these pressures from outside the home. Contributing factors in the home can be television and radio, or the newer forms of media, Internet, iPods, and even cell phones with music, Internet, and picture and video capabilities. With these, the teens have an amazing amount of access to unsupervised illicit material that will feed the beast within.

From (of all places) the Associated Press, I have an article entitled "Dirty song lyrics can prompt early teen sex" (August 7, 2006). Here are some quotes:

Teens whose iPods are full of music with raunchy, sexual lyrics start having sex sooner than those who prefer other songs, a study found.

Teens who said they listened to lots of music with degrading sexual messages were almost twice as likely to start having intercourse or other sexual activities within the following two years as were teens who listened to little or no sexually degrading music.

Among heavy listeners, 51 percent started having sex within two years, versus 29 percent of those who said they listened to little or no sexually degrading music.

Don't we know this? "Evil communications corrupt good manners" (I Cor. 15:33).

From *Lifesitenews.com* (August 28, 2006), we have an article with this telling title, "Go to your room - And Don't Turn on your TV, Computer, your Video Games...." (You can read this article yourself on line). And isn't this much of the problem?

Maybe not just in bedrooms, but unsupervised, or used as a babysitter.

Maybe not just television, but the iPods and Internet and cell phones.

"I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.... I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes.... Mine eyes *shall be* upon the faithful of the land.... He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house...." (Ps. 101).

■ Now "Same Sex Sells"

Now it isn't just sex that sells, but it is homosexuality that sells.

From *Time Europe* (August 7-14, 2006), under the title "A New Ad

Adage: Same Sex Sells," we have the following:

A ruggedly handsome man emerges from under the hood of a car, rubbing his grimy hands on white cloth. Leaning against the dark sedan, another man, young and athletic looking, gifts the mechanic a neat new watch. His reward? The man leans in and the two share a kiss. Some kind of underground gay romantic comedy? No, it's a recent TV commercial for Italian designers Dolce & Gabbana, and it's part of a growing trend in European advertising toward ad campaigns that better represent consumers' diversity. And if those consumers are gay, so much the better for advertisers, who have found a way to tap into a disproportionately affluent slice of the market.

So advertisers have found a new niche. The article goes on to quote different advertisers, in the USA too, who are developing this area of the advertising market. The target, they say, is the affluent homosexual sector of society. But

don't be fooled, this kind of advertising achieves more than just selling to that particular segment of society. If advertising draws attention and is memorable, it has sold its product - who can forget a commercial in which two men kiss - and so the target is more than the homosexual community. This kind of advertising, along with much of what is now on television, portrays the homosexual lifestyle as an acceptable alternative, promoting tolerance, and even perking curiosity and interest, among viewers. People are entertained by this. People take pleasure in it.

This is certainly indicative of where our culture and our world are headed. Romans 1 describes the highest expression of human depravity in a society in terms of "women changing the natural use into that which is against nature" and "men, leaving the natural use of the woman, and burning in lust one toward another." And it goes on to talk not only about those who commit such things, but also about those who "have pleasure in them that do them." 

When Thou Sittest In Thine House

Mrs. Janice Miersma

Royal Children: Stewards of God-Given Abilities

"You are so talented!" "I just don't have a talent for that." You have probably said or heard these words many times.

What are talents? Are some people just born talented while others are not? Are gifts and talents to be defined strictly in terms of intelligence and of artistic or athletic abilities? As royal children of

our heavenly Father, given the privilege to labor in His kingdom, to represent His cause in this world, and to serve Him in heartfelt gratitude, we have seen that He entrusts many aspects of His creation to our care as stewards, that they all may be brought in praise and glory to Him. Further, as parents, pastors, and Christian school teachers, we have the calling to train the royal children entrusted to our care in the ways of this stewardship.

Having examined our calling as stewards of material things and of time, we will attempt in this and coming articles to examine stewardship of God-given abilities, often called talents, and our calling to help our children to develop their abilities in the service of their heavenly Father and King. As a background, we will look at the fact that these abilities are indeed God-given, that we may also develop in our children this consciousness. Then we will look at

Mrs. Miersma is the wife of Rev. Thomas Miersma, missionary in Spokane, Washington.

the purpose for which God gives us abilities, and finally, at ways in which they may be faithfully developed. In a future article we will look at the kinds of abilities that will equip our children to serve the kingdom of their Father.

That not all children are the same is self-evident. Some of us are blonde, others brunette, others redheads. Some are heavily built and muscular, others petite and fine. Some have facial features that are regular and pleasing, others less so. These differences not only enable us to recognize one another, have fellowship and communication with each other, and be attractive to one another, but they are also a reminder to us of the greatness of God's handiwork in the seemingly infinite variety of the one human being that He has made. All are of Adam, yet each is an individual, particular expression of the human. Now this is just on the outside. Intelligence, sensitivity, perception, particular strengths and expressive abilities, to name just a few aspects of our humanity, vary tremendously from one individual to another. Again, all are of Adam, yet each an individual, particular expression.

How does this come about? While I am certainly no expert in the area of human psychology, it seems to me there are a number of aspects to our individuality. First, there is the unique "I," or person, that God implants in each individual. Then, there is the genetic makeup, the particular combination of genes that God ordains for each one. You cannot change the color of your hair and eyes or the shape of your nose and ears, other than by artificial means like dyes or plastic surgery. Further, God ordains for you the home in which you will be raised, including your particular parents and siblings and all the experiences of your life. It is often said, for example, that married couples grow to look more like each other as they live together for many years. This is something that

occurs whether we are conscious of it or not, but there are also those things that occur because of conscious choices we make. You can care for the body that God gives you, or you can allow it to grow weak and flabby.

There is an analogy here to other aspects of our humanity, such as intelligence, abilities of perception, and others mentioned above. Although you cannot alter those aspects that are genetically determined, the environment in which you live will have a tremendous influence on how that genetically-determined aspect develops. Recognizing that also our environment is a matter of God's sovereign appointment, and knowing that God uses means to accomplish His purpose, we want to look somewhat at the means of our conscious choices and those of our parents and teachers. What part each of these elements play has been the subject of much study and debate, the "nature vs. nurture" controversy, but we believe, ultimately, that all our abilities are God-given, whether because of the particular genes we are given, or because of the environment in which He places us, or because of the conscious choices we make. We confess with the psalmist in Psalm 139:13-14, "For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."

Scripture testifies to the variety of abilities that God gives. We read in Exodus 28:3, "And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him..." The opening verses of Exodus 30 recount God's appointment of Bezaleel, Aholiab, and others, as those whom He had filled "...with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner

of workmanship..." for the purpose of building the tabernacle. Reading through the latter chapters of I Chronicles and the first chapters of II Chronicles, we find references to able men, strong men, cunning men, skillful men, men endued with understanding. God gave Daniel and his three friends tremendous gifts of "...knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom..." (Dan. 1:17). Scripture does not tell us what means God used to bestow these gifts, but simply that He did. While there are fewer passages speaking directly of specific gifts in the New Testament, we do read, in a parable of Jesus, of talents (money) being distributed to each according to his "several (his own unique) ability." In Romans 12:6ff., we read of receiving gifts, differing according to the grace given us. And in I Peter 4:10, we read, "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

Not only do the examples given above show us that our abilities are given by God, they also point us in the direction of the purpose for which God gives abilities: to clothe the priests; to build the tabernacle; to serve King David; to build the temple; to stand, antithetically, as God's men, in the court of the typical antichrist, Nebuchadnezzar; to serve our Lord by faithful labor in our appointed calling; to minister to one another. God also gives abilities to the children of this world, and while they too ought to use their abilities in the service of God, they refuse to. Just as they abuse the material gifts of God, the things of His creation, and time itself, so they only develop their natural gifts more and more in the service of sin, either to make a lot of money by them, to achieve personal pleasure and gratification by them, or simply to glory in the gifts themselves, worshiping and serving the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). These kinds of goals and abuse of God's gifts are

rooted also in our sinful nature. May we ever recognize and flee from such thinking.

How do we build the tabernacle, serve the King, stand antithetically in the court of antichrist? As men, we use our abilities to labor faithfully in our calling, that we may establish and care for covenant homes. We go out to labor in various callings in the midst of a wicked world, where we too are called to stand for God's cause and kingdom in the midst of an antichristian world. As women, we labor with our gifts in the home, caring for the physical needs of our husbands and children, making our homes places of spiritual refuge in the midst of a wicked world. As men and women, we employ our gifts in the rearing of the royal children, the covenant seed, entrusted to us by the Lord. As men, women, and children, we use our gifts to read, study, and attend to the Word of God. If given the calling as men, we labor faithfully and cheerfully in the special offices of the church as elders and deacons. We use our gifts to build one another up in the faith by lending a listening ear to the sorrowful and lonely, speaking a word of encouragement or spiritual comfort in due season, giving our strength to help a busy mother or elderly person, using our abilities of sewing, cooking, or baking, or our artistic or musical abilities to serve our fellow saints.

John Calvin says, in commenting on I Peter 4:10, "If we excel others in any gift, let us remember that we are the stewards of God, to the extent that we may kindly share it in friendship with our neighbours as their necessity or benefit may require." This stewardship extends to our covenant children, who also have a calling to use their abilities in the service of God's kingdom.

When we try to determine what particular gifts we or our children have been given by God, we ought first of all to beware of the idea that talents or abilities are lim-

ited to intellectual, artistic, musical, or athletic abilities. Busy looking for signs of budding musical or artistic genius, we miss the gift of a winsome personality, or a sympathetic nature. Discouraged by our young son's seeming inability to memorize times tables, we miss his mechanical ability or his ability to stick to a job and finish it. Secondly, using our gifts and talents to serve the Lord doesn't require "superstar" status. Most of us whom God has formed to be His church, His body, are pretty ordinary people. We appreciate the gifts of the musical, artistic, or athletic geniuses of this world, recognizing that these abilities are given by God, the amazing capacity He has created in man to develop his God-given human potential, and that they serve His sovereign purpose in the development of this world, but the words of God to His prophet Samuel may be applied here, "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." In God's eyes, it is the voice raised, the instrument played, the story written, the portrait painted, the ball well thrown, the garden grown, the machine well-maintained by a humble child of God, offering the development or fruit of his or her ability as a sacrifice of thankfulness to Him, that is well-pleasing.

Does that mean sloppy playing or shoddy workmanship is alright as long as we love the Lord? Never should the child of God take that attitude. Love of God will impel him to bring the best that he can. Nor will he despair because he cannot achieve the perfection he desires, for he knows that he and his work are received for the sake of Christ's perfect obedience and sacrifice. Additionally, while there are certainly things about ourselves and our children that we will not ever be able to change, simply to

sit back and expect our abilities to develop on their own is analogous to expecting our children to grow without food.

What are some ways in which we can help our children discover and develop their abilities? As with so many other aspects of their training, for our very young children this begins with learning love for God and the neighbor in the way of our example and instruction in obedience. But to develop the abilities themselves, we must learn what they are. Recognizing a young child's particular gifts will probably come in the way of playful learning, accommodated to the level of his maturity. In a sense, in the times in which we live, much of a child's work is play. Now this may seem pretty obvious, but in the technologically "advanced" times in which we live, many children don't really play much. They watch videos, television, play electronic games, and run computer programs by mouse manipulation, but they don't really play. Children must, in a sense, be taught to play actively, both alone and with others. While we often tend to focus on teaching children to interact rightly with each other, to develop their social abilities, there is also a need for children to be able to be alone, to develop their particular gifts in solitude.

While we ought never to live, in the church, as those who are independent, acting as though we do not need the other members of the body, we need to guard our children against a fleshly peer-dependence that is not rooted in the interdependence of fellow members of the body of Christ, but rather in a need for approval or "belonging." God has placed our children in families, ordinarily with siblings, as the place where their abilities will grow and develop and where they will learn to use their abilities in His service. Thus, children should also learn to help in the home with simple tasks fitted to their ability. They will learn to serve their fel-

low-saints with their abilities by serving brother or sister. In this way too, not only will their particular gifts begin to become evi-

dent, but they will begin their lifelong service of God by serving others. Next time, we hope to look further at the development of gifts

in the school years, as well as the abilities and gifts that every child of God should strive to develop.



Islam (8)

Issachar's Response to Islam

"And the children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do; the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their commandment."

I Chronicles 12:32

The West is dying!

At least that is Patrick J. Buchanan's assessment as presented in his book *The Death of the West*. Buchanan bases his case primarily on three factors. In the first place he demonstrates that the West is dying physically: while the world's population has doubled in the last forty years, reproduction among the European peoples is declining. As a result, according to Buchanan's calculations, over the next fifty years one hundred million people of European ancestry will vanish from the earth. Second, Buchanan believes the West is dying because of immigration. Europe is being inundated by an Islamic-Arab-African invasion, and the United States now harbors "a nation within a nation." His reference here is to the influx of a large Hispanic contingency that has no desire to assimilate into American society. Third, the West is dying

morally because it is being de-Christianized. Christian values have been undermined, leading to the influence of a culture of death in American Society.¹

Buchanan's assessment is worthy of Issachar's consideration. Especially is this true when one considers the impact that this has had on the West's response to Islam and how as a consequence modern-day Issachar should respond to Islam.

The Consequences of Multiculturalism

The adoption of anti-Christian values by many in positions of influence in the West has had a significant impact on the West's reaction (or should we say, non-reaction) to Islam. In fact, as its affinity with Christianity is more and more rejected, its ability to confront Islam is more and more compromised. Amazingly, the increasingly secular West appears to be discovering that it is more closely aligned with Islam than with Christianity.

This becomes clear when one considers the "doctrine" of multiculturalism as it is preached in the West. Multiculturalism is the view that all cultures are morally equal. This presupposition is based on the relativistic belief that man is basically good, and that the good people in each society have discovered what is best for them. Multiculturalism promotes "...the

idea that no one culture is better than any other, and no culture should enjoy the preferential support of public opinion or government. They oppose integration and assimilation of immigrants. Each immigrant group should keep its own identity."² Consequently, one must not pass moral judgment on any society or culture. Under this way of thinking, one may not pass moral judgment on Islam as compared, for example, to Christianity. Interestingly however, multiculturalism as preached by the Western media and on the Western college campuses is not an *unbiased* acceptance of all cultures as morally equivalent. Western culture is held by them to a higher standard: the standard of perfection. Thus the West's failures with regard to slavery, colonization, capitalism, etc. lead to the "politics of guilt" and the need for the West to atone for past "sins." As a result, the West is viewed as the cause of the problems that develop in the world, particularly those involving the West's conflict with Islam.

Consequently, while the West is taken to task for its past and present failures, Islam is accepted

Mr. Kalsbeek is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2006, p. 475.

1. Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Death of the West* (St. Martin's Press, New York 2002).

2. Johan D. Tangelder, "Islamisation of Europe (4) The West's self-imposed identity crisis" *Christian Renewal*, 21 June, 2006: 4.

without question. In fact, Islam often is permitted to promote its ideas in the schools of the West (see *Standard Bearer*, Dec. 1, 2005 pp. 107-108). A most glaring example of this has been reported and evaluated in *Free Inquiry* as follows:

In December 2005, Georgetown and Harvard Universities accepted \$20 million each from Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal for programs in Islamic studies. Such money can only corrupt the original intent of all higher institutions of education, that is, the search for truth. Now, we shall only have "Islamic truth" that is acceptable to the royal Saudi family, a family that has financed terrorism, antiwesternism, and anti-Semitism for over thirty years. Previous donations from various Saudi sources have included gifts of \$20 million, \$5 million, and \$2 million to the University of Arkansas, the University of California at Berkley, and Harvard, respectively.³

Strikingly, it takes a magazine devoted to secular humanism to identify this incongruity for what it is. Others have pointed out where this timidity to speak against Islam is leading the West. Gene Edward Veith pointedly exposes and chastises American educational institutions and media for their refusal to expose Islam for what it really is. Veith demonstrates that these institutions are quick to offend Christianity but out of fear treat Islam differently. Veith writes: "On university campuses, Christianity is routinely criticized, while Islam is treated with kid gloves. The Jesus Seminar casts doubt on the Bible, but there is no Muhammad Seminar to cast doubt on the Qur'an."⁴

Veith goes on to address the dire consequences of this approach for the West, which in his opinion is tacit acceptance of the status of dhimmis. Islam reserves for "people of the Book (Christians and Jews)" who do not convert to Islam the opportunity to retain their

religion - but only in the way of accepting the status of dhimmis. "This entailed paying a special tax, which was really tribute money to Islam, accepting second-hand citizenship, and following special laws limiting the practice of their religion and keeping Islam as supreme."⁵ Veith suggests that this is exactly what is happening in Western societies: "...Muslims, empowered by democracy and multiculturalism, are implementing the principles of dhimmitude in their new homelands."⁶ In Veith's view then, out of fear the West refuses to challenge the teachings of Islam, with the consequence that Islam is becoming a kind of privileged religion, while the West is left with dhimmis status in its own society.

Islam as the Savior of the West

Which is exactly what Islam believes the West needs. In Islam's view of things, the West needs to be delivered from its decadence. Islam will save the West by bringing the chaotic West under the order of Islam (ultimately in the form of Shari'a).

Little wonder that the disciples of Islam would think this way. They are right! The West *is* on the verge of complete moral collapse. Like a vulture, Islam is hovering over a dying West. Muslims are ready and eager to offer their faith as the remedy to the deplorable moral condition within their host countries. In the words of Wolfhart Pannenberg:

If Western freedom in fact means no more than individual license, others do well to try to defend their communities and spiritual values against the encroachment of Western secularism. Beyond the defensive mode, Islamic missions in Western societies express a strong sense of missionary vocation aimed at liberating Western nations from the materialism and immorality associated with secularism. These Muslims view Christians as having failed

in the task of the moral transformation and reconstruction of society. Such criticism is a serious challenge to traditional Christianity and to Western culture. A culture devoid of spiritual and moral values is not equipped to meet that challenge, and is bound for disintegration and decay.⁷

Furthermore, Muslims believe that in the Qur'an *they* possess God's final and complete revelation. According to their doctrine of abrogation, the Qur'an trumps all previous revelations from God, which, of course, includes the Bible. Consequently, in Islam's view, the West must convert to Islam. After all, their Qur'an is God's last word to mankind, and it contains God's instructions both religiously and politically. As former missionary to Muslims Bassam Michael Madany expresses it:

Since Islam is religion, politics, and culture, in one entity, Muslims carry with them, consciously or unconsciously, the ideal of establishing ultimately an Islamic regime where the rule of Allah takes a concrete shape, in the here and now. When circumstances are favorable, Muslims are bold enough to advocate and proclaim their political philosophy in Western lands, as they have done recently in the United Kingdom.⁸

Some Things for Issachar to Consider

Taking into consideration the moral decline of the West and Islam's attempt to fill the vacuum leads one to ponder: Is it possible for the West in general and the United States in particular to fall under Islamic rule? History has the answer! History demonstrates the rise and fall of nations. No exceptions. Even Rome, the so-called "Eternal City," fell to the barbarian tribes of the north and east!

The occasion of Rome's fall led Augustine to write *The City of God*, in which he answered the critics of the Christians who were blamed

for its fall. In response to the complaint that because Christians had forsaken the Roman gods calamities had befallen Rome, Augustine presented the case that there is no "Eternal City" in this world. Rather, the city of God is the church. All other cities and civilizations are doomed, only the church endures.

In fact, history also demonstrates that the fall of kingdoms and nations serves the church in a very special way. Rome's fall, for example, did not result in the fall of the church. Rather, Rome's fall exposed countless pagans to the penetrating, irresistible power of the Word. As a result, the barbaric peoples of the north and east became subject to the gospel. With this light from history, Issachar can look forward to the sometimes fearful unknowns of the future in comfort and confidence: our body is

being gathered, and God's kingdom is being established. Foolish speculation as to whether or not the West will fall to Islam as a means of God to gather His people from the Muslim peoples will profit little. Nevertheless, it certainly would be a just judgment on the West for God to do so. "How ironic it would be that a European culture that demanded unlimited personal freedom might wind up living under the repressive heel of Muslim totalitarianism. Or that a culture that rejected its Christian heritage might, instead, be subjected to Islamic fundamentalism."⁹

While modern-day Issachar has no reason to fear the possibility of the fall of the West, neither does it have any reason to desire the postmillennial dream of its own earthly kingdom. All things considered, that too would be a nightmare. In fact, if one would desire to know what such a kingdom

would be like, he need only consider being under the rule of Islamic Shari'a. Those dreaming of an earthly kingdom under the Old Testament law should explain how their dream would end up any different from what life is today for the Iranians.

To be concluded 

3. Ibn Warraq, "The Need for Qur'anic Criticism, Part 1" *Free Inquiry* April/May, 2006: 60.

4. Gene Edward Veith, "Dhimminized" *World* 6 May, 2006: 32.

5. Veith 32.

6. Veith 32.

7. Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Christianity and the West: Ambiguous Past, Uncertain Future" December 1994 *First Things*.

8. Bassam Michael Madany, *The Bible and Islam: Sharing God's Word with a Muslim*, <http://www.levant.info/BAI-O.html> (online book) Chapter 8.

9. Ed Vitagliano, "Europe's Chastisement?" *AFA Journal* April, 2006:16.

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jason Kortering

Evangelism in the Established Church (4) Practicing Personal Evangelism

Part D, Equipping Ourselves for the Work

As we consider the subject of how we equip ourselves for the work of personal evangelism, I like to focus on five things.

First, we must begin by checking our hearts. Each one of us must ask himself this question, Am I right with my God? Personal evangelism, or personal witnessing, is

a spiritual act that requires spirituality. All such spirituality is expressed by our own personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

Jesus makes this point in His Parable of the Lost Son, sometimes called the Parable of the Prodigal Son, recorded in Luke 15:11-32. We can quickly review the main points of this parable. The younger son requested the inheritance of his father before his father died, he received it, and he squandered it in a far country. He had a spiritual awakening there when things went very badly after he had wasted all

his money. He recalled that the servants in his father's house had more comforts than he did. But he realized fully that he could not just pack up and return home. He had sinned against his father by placing greater value on his money than on his friendship with him in the home. Hence, he proposed to himself that the way of reconciliation involved two things. He had to admit to his father that his past action forfeited his claim to any benefits of being his son, since he had disowned his father. He had to tell his father that his request

Rev. Kortering is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

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was not for recognition of sonship, but simply for a place in the paternal home as a servant. More than that, he had to admit that his past actions were sinful against his father and that he had to tell him, "I have sinned and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (v. 19).

Upon his return, this young man learned what paternal love was really like. His father was longing for his return, was glad to receive his son back, was ready to forgive him, and gave him a place of honor in the family. All of this was his expression of forgiveness in response to repentance. Obviously, this is the main point of the parable for all Christians.

When we are honest about our spiritual state and condition before God, we quickly identify with this prodigal. We know from our own experience our desperate state and our inability to do anything that makes us acceptable to our Father in heaven. We learn time and time again what love is really like - Father accepts us for the sake of Jesus His Son. Our acceptance is not based on our being good enough for Father, but rather in that Father makes us good enough for Himself in the death and resurrection of His own Son. Love flows from Father to us and is the source of our being accepted. The proof of our understanding such forgiveness is demonstrated by our love, which we return to Father and to Jesus His Son. We celebrate our acceptance by listening to our Father and feasting in His house. Our worship is our delight in Father. We marvel at the depth of His forgiveness and acceptance of such unworthy children.

By contrast, the elder brother, who was such a good fellow, goes into a rage. Even the father in the parable admits that the elder brother was a good young man. He did obey, he did keep the rules of the family, he did conform to all the desires and aspirations of the father. But he could not forgive his brother who had erred and

gone astray. He criticized his father when he gave a feast for him. He poured out his criticism and judgment of his father and his brother. Why did he do this? The reason was that he did not know his own sins or unworthiness. He could see the faults of others but not his own. He was a Pharisee, self righteous, judgmental, outwardly good but inwardly far from enjoying God's forgiving love.

What does this have to do with personal evangelism? Everything. If we do not know our own personal sins and salvation in Jesus Christ, we act like the elder brother. So easily we can view ourselves as very good and acceptable to God. In the next breath we can so easily criticize others, our fellow church members, other Christians, our neighbors, and pat ourselves on the back and brag about how much more faithful we are. Such a spirit will never reach out to others, because it lacks the love that is necessary to do the work. The more self-righteous we are, the more judgmental we are of others. The next thing we do is to justify our refusal to share the gospel with unworthy sinners. A forgiven prodigal, such as we ought to be, is so appreciative of Father's love and acceptance that it motivates him to consider that what happened to him can by Father's mercy happen to the most unworthy of sinners who cross his path. Father may even use us as His instruments to lead others to the house of feasting, and nothing would make us more pleased with Father.

Second, to equip ourselves for personal evangelism we need to understand that this activity is God's will for us and that our obedience to it is an answer to His call. I put it this way deliberately. We must not think of personal witnessing as something that is extra and beyond the call of duty. Every Christian has the calling to be engaged in this activity. This is true because of his prophetic office, given to him by our Lord Jesus

Christ. We have spelled this out in detail in past articles, so here we just insert this point to keep this perspective. The call to serve King Jesus as a Christian includes three aspects: a prophetic, priestly, and kingly dimension. In connection with the prophetic aspect, we are anointed, by our union with Jesus Christ, to be able to speak His word to others. Parents do this in the instruction of their children; laborers do this when they describe the reason of the hope that is in them to fellow workers; we do this as neighbors in our interaction with them. The point that is important here is this, that we may properly compare the call of a pastor to the call of the Christian as prophet. They are different, surely, and must not be identified as one and the same. But we can say this, that just as important as the call from God to serve in the ministry is to the pastor, so important is the call to witness to every Christian. It is God's will that we do it. With the call is the promise of spiritual enabling. Since God calls us to engage in personal evangelism, we turn to Him for wisdom and strength to do it. The call helps us to see the seriousness of the labor and the strengthening that comes from the God who called us.

Third, we must examine our motives for doing this work of personal evangelism. We can look at this from different points of view. If we are *not* engaged in this activity, we might ask ourselves why this is. There are a number of possibilities. Does it seem to you, perhaps, that the church emphasizes the *preaching* of the gospel to such an extent that the importance of your prophetic role as a believer is minimized? I am convinced that the PR position regarding the official preaching of the gospel does not do this. If you do not busy yourself with personal evangelism, might it, instead, be due to spiritual coldness as mentioned above? Or might there be some sin in your life that you would have to aban-

don if you are to get sincere about your personal witnessing? If you have any sin that controls you or that you commit, obviously you would have to abandon that sin if you will give a good testimony. Examples of this would be cursing, drunkenness, filthy conversation, or what have you. Do you want to convince yourself that you don't have to witness to others - in order that you can hide your own sin in your bosom? Another possibility is that you may feel completely inadequate and overwhelmed by this activity and convince yourself that you are just not cut out for it.

None of the above is an adequate reason for our not practicing personal evangelism.

It is also possible that we may practice personal evangelism but from *wrong motives*. We might say, I need more fulfillment in my life as a Christian, and if I witness to others, it gives me this dimension. Now it is true that this does result from practicing evangelism, but we must be very careful that our doing it is not pride or self-serving. We can add to this that some Christians might view witnessing for Christ and God as an act of good that helps them gain favor with God and acceptance by Him. Then we have a wrong idea of faith and works. Our acceptance by God is not based on anything we do. It is based on the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross and His perfect obedience in keeping the law of righteousness for us. We might imagine that if we witness to others, we serve our fellow man in the best way. Again, that is true, but our motive for serving our God must never be *man*. It must always be *God*. For God's sake we must reach out and share the gospel with others, that it may please God to use us to introduce a non-Christian to God and His Son.

Finally, we must not do it to please the church. Yes, it pleases the church when members exercise their living faith and witness, but the motivation must not be to

please men, not even our pastor or elders. It must always be to please God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

Thus we can summarize the proper motivation. This involves three things. It is, first of all, in obedience to God who has called us to this prophetic office and equips us to exercise it to His glory. The chief motive of all mission work, and personal witness as well, is to bring glory to our God. We do this when we faithfully speak His word of truth to all who ask us a reason of the hope within. Second, we do it out of love for our neighbor for God's sake. Again, it is not simply love for our neighbor as a human being. It is that of course, but we must love him for God's sake. God placed this neighbor upon our pathway. This may have the express purpose that, as we demonstrate God's love for us and we show that to him, he comes to know the Father as the prodigal son of the parable.

Third, personal evangelism adds a beautiful dimension to our personal life as a Christian. We are blessed by this activity, and God tells us this as well. We are enriched spiritually when we see a non-Christian struggle through his doubts and fears, his stubbornness and sins, and come to the cross of Jesus for forgiveness and to the family of God for friendship. Members are personally enriched as the entire congregation is blessed through the wonder of grace God works in their midst.

Fourth, we must take inventory of the gifts God has given to us for this work. We have emphasized repeatedly that the call to faithful witness includes the assurance of divine enabling. Even though it is true that God can use a nominal Christian to bring this word of witness, as He sometimes does in the pulpit of the church as well, it is not God's usual way, and we do not want to rely on such abstraction. Evidence of the divine call is associated with the giving of the gifts.

Hence, as we consider the sub-

ject of equipping ourselves for this notable activity of personal evangelism, we must examine ourselves regarding gifts for this work. We carefully distinguish these gifts from the temporary gifts of the Spirit given to the apostles in the early church, such as miracles and speaking in tongues, which have ceased (I Cor. 13:8). God also gives special gifts to those who are called to the holy office of ministers, elders, and deacons. We are speaking of the gifts given to fulfill the prophetic office of every believer. Actually, they are no different than those given to the special offices, except that they pertain to the office of believer. The description of these gifts in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1, as they relate to the special offices, can certainly apply to every believer. The point is that not every believer has received these gifts, and therefore they do become the measure of those called to the special offices, in whom these gifts must be present. Every believer who possesses these gifts (and there are certainly more believers that possess these gifts than those who serve in special office) is blessed by God to use them in personal evangelism. This is the answer to women who impose themselves on the office of minister of the gospel, claiming they have the gifts. Having the gifts does not determine the call to holy office, which is restricted by Scripture to men only. These women must be encouraged to use such gifts in serving God in other ways, both in the church and in the world. To some degree every Christian has these gifts, but some possess them in a greater measure. And by grace these gifts can also be cultivated for greater service. If you feel yourself inadequate or unqualified to engage in personal evangelism, do not use this as an excuse to abandon your calling. Rather, search carefully your spiritual condition before God and sort out where you lack and what needs development, and then focus on that.

Paul said in I Timothy 4:7 that we must exercise ourselves unto godliness. The word there is the same as a gymnast, which indicates persistence, repetitive practice to perfect the skills.

Finally, we must remind ourselves that our preparation for evangelism includes the use of prayer.

As is true in all areas of spiritual conduct, such work is not natural, it is a wonder of grace. This is the answer to any lack of incentive or ability to do it. Lack of incentive is natural because it is the response of the natural man to God's wonderful work of grace. We must never "give in" to such thoughts and responses. As Chris-

tians we are no longer under the control of our natural man. If we were, then we could rightly say, "I can't, and therefore I won't practice personal evangelism." Rather, the perspective of the inspired apostle Paul encourages us to express, after our struggle with our personal demons, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord that I am delivered from the body of this death so that I can serve Him with my sanctified mind and soul."

The only way we can get out of the prison of our own weaknesses, and even our sins, is through the grace of God in Jesus Christ. These blessings of anointing, which are so important for us in order to fulfill our holy pro-

phetic office, come to us through fervent prayer. When we ask God for the presence of His Holy Spirit, He provides this for us through worship on the Lord's Day and as we engage in daily family and personal prayer and worship. Spiritual stamina, which is essential for difficult and challenging work, comes to us from our heavenly Father as He administers it to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. We must never measure our ability without taking into account what God is able to do as He equips us.

These five areas of consideration are important for us as we prayerfully equip ourselves for this great work that God assigns to us.



In His Fear

Rev. Richard Smit

Maintaining Our Landmarks

Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.

Proverbs 22:28

You may have seen a man alongside a highway or on some land nearby, perhaps with his baseball cap on backwards, peering into the scope of a survey instrument set atop a tripod. At some significant distance away, there would have been another man, holding up a long stick and moving from place to place on a piece of land according to the hand signals or two-way radio commands of the man behind the survey instrument.

One of the uses of surveying is to obtain a legal description of a particular parcel of land. Surveying will provide the exact dimen-

sions of the piece of property. Once obtained, the dimensions of the property are recorded with the land department of the local county or municipal office. In addition to that, surveyors will pound into the ground long metal stakes at the corners of the property or at a predetermined distance (an offset) from the corner of the property or the property lines. These metal stakes assist surveyors in future work to find and know the property lines and corners so that buildings, which may be constructed on the property or on an adjacent property, will not crowd or even straddle illegally the property lines.

Those metal stakes today are protected by law. It is an offence to remove them. We must honour them and maintain them.

This commonplace illustration is what Proverbs 22:28 holds before our hearts and minds with spiritual application. In that passage, Jehovah instructs us to fear

Him and be wise by the faithful maintenance of our spiritual landmarks. Because of the real and constant threat to tamper with the landmarks, Jehovah puts this duty negatively and sharply, "Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set!"



This was originally a command given to Israel in Deuteronomy 19:14. Moses instructed Israel, prior to her entrance into the land of Canaan, not to move the landmarks of the land that would be set. When the landmarks were erected, they were made of large stones, or piles of stones, perhaps even with an inscription engraved upon them, to indicate the specific boundaries of all the portions of land distributed among the Israelites in the land for an inheritance. These landmarks would show exactly what piece of ground in the land belonged to which family.

Rev. Smit is pastor of the Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.

Once these landmarks were in place, Israel was forbidden, for any reason, to move them. Moving them was equivalent to stealing from the neighbour his land. Moving them was rebellion against Jehovah, who sovereignly and wisely guided the distribution of the land of Canaan to the Israelites and to their seed after them in their generations. To move the landmarks was to deny God's counsel, which determined what a particular family in Israel would possess. Because it was so determined by God, it made those landmarks truly ancient, i.e., those that were decreed and determined from eternity. Therefore, to tamper with the divinely placed landmarks was a grievous sin of rebellion against God's authority and a grievous rejection of the spiritual significance of the inheritance in Canaan.

Moses taught Israel to honor the landmark with utmost reverence and thanksgiving. For the believer, the landmark was a clear type of God's grace and blessing to mark out for them their undeserved and unmerited portion in the land of Canaan. As a result, they understood that the earthly landmark was a sign of God's grace, which marked out for them their place in the heavenly land of Canaan.

This understanding of God's people was reflected by the psalmist in Psalm 16. In verses 4 and 5 we read,

The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places: yea, I have a goodly heritage.

The ancient landmark, which was a visible marker of the divine distribution of the earthly land of Canaan to Israel, was a picture of the divine and gracious distribution of the heavenly land of Canaan to God's true Israel in Christ Jesus according to election. The landmark spoke to them of God's covenant promises, His faithfulness to

His covenant and His people, and the blessedness of their place in God's covenant. The landmark spoke to them of the coming Messiah and His death, through which God reveals that gracious, merciful, and sovereign distribution of the heavenly land of Canaan unto His people in Christ.

Similarly today, God has given us an ancient landmark, established and determined as ours from eternity and given now to us in time by the Spirit of Christ. That landmark is the Holy Scriptures, which mark out for us the proper boundaries for our doctrinal confession and our daily walk in life. The Scriptures have at their focal point Christ crucified. That is really the ancient, historical landmark that reveals to us the basis of God's covenant of grace, the sovereignly set boundaries of that covenant, and our life within God's covenant of grace. The ancient landmarks reveal to us God's gracious distribution to us of our inherited places in the heavenly Canaan, and those landmarks reveal unto us the fences that mark the boundaries of our daily confession and walk of life. The Scriptures demand that our confession be true to the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ and that our walk of life be holy as our God is holy.

The ancient landmarks include other things, like our Reformed confessions. The landmarks include the distinctives of the Reformed faith in worship, liturgy, doctrine, and daily living. Within the boundaries of those God-given distinctives, we enjoy true spiritual peace and prosperity in our hearts, our homes, and our congregations.

The text refers to these landmarks as ancient because they are given to us from the Lord. They have their origin in the Spirit of Christ, who led our forefathers to demarcate the straight lines of what our doctrinal confession or what our daily walk of life ought to be in light of the Scriptures. As a result, the ancient landmarks are not merely nice monuments of church history,

but they remain in their subordinate relationship to Scripture, sacred and authoritative for us. That underscores the reason for the prohibition in Proverbs 22:28 that we may not remove the ancient landmarks that God has given to us as Reformed believers today.



What kind of threats does the Lord address with this prohibition to tamper with our ancient landmarks?

First, there is the threat from the world to obliterate the ancient landmarks. There is always present the deliberate attacks of the Devil to destroy the ancient landmarks. One example is the Devil's attempt to obliterate from modern society the very ancient landmark of the truth of holy marriage. This landmark is very ancient: it has existed since the sixth day of history. Nevertheless, there is the attack on marriage to overthrow God's institution of marriage as the lifelong bond between one man and one woman and allow marriage to be the union of any combination of men and women. Besides that present-day attack, there are many more bold attacks against ancient landmarks by the workers of iniquity because they hate and rage against God, His creation ordinances, His Word, and His exalted, only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

In addition to the bold threats, there are the subtle threats to move the landmarks a little to the left or a little to the right. The threat is not to destroy the landmark altogether, but initially to move it a little bit.

A man might sinfully want to move his landmark in order to make his lot bigger. He may not like how narrow his lot is and try deceitfully to move the boundaries in order to create more room on his lot. This widening of the lot might provide better opportunities for more buildings on the lot and more room for a larger garden.

Similarly, we might be tempted to do so spiritually. In covetous-

ness and unbelief, we may regard the placement of the ancient landmarks as making our life much too narrow and lonely. We judge that by moving the landmarks a little bit, we might gain more room. As a result, we will not feel so constrained or pressured.

Or, perhaps, instead of moving the ancient landmarks, there is the temptation to make the ancient landmarks less prominent in our life and confession. We might neglect them by letting the weeds of our sin and spiritual carelessness cover the landmarks or by simply ignoring them. Though the landmarks have not been altered, yet the same effect is achieved. In unbelief, we think now we are free of the constraints and narrowness of the landmarks. For example, in dealing with one who is living in a public sin, we might ignore the ancient landmark that judges them outside the boundaries of obedience and faith. Our goal in doing so might be to get along with that wayward one and avoid spiritual and uncomfortable (to our pride) conflict.

An example of this threat against the ancient landmarks is found in the life of King Jehoshaphat. He ignored and covered up in his heart and mind the ancient landmark regarding proper friendships. Jehoshaphat covered up the landmark that marked friendship with Ahab as out-of-bounds and spiritually perilous.

Rather than making it clear that our lives and confession are governed by our ancient landmarks, we might try to soften their appearance in our confession and walk of life in order to get along with others. We might be tempted to minimize the particularity of God's grace, the unconditionality of God's covenant, the lifelong state of marriage, the headship of the man over the woman in all spheres of life, justification by faith alone and without our works, the sin of drama, an understanding of our antithetical life in the midst of the world and ungodliness, or other

doctrinal aspects of our ancient landmarks, arguing that then more possibilities and opportunities for personal or ecclesiastical relationships and partnerships might develop.

We are tempted to allow the ancient landmarks to be eroded for the sake of avoiding persecution or reproach. Rather than be mocked by classmates, work colleagues, or other Christians for trying to show utmost reverence in prayer to our heavenly Father by using the unique pronouns of "Thee," "Thou," and "Thine," we might give in to the trend to use the common pronouns of "you" and "your" when speaking to our Holy Father.

Perhaps while working on the job, rather than rebuke a wicked co-worker for his lewd joke, we might offer an approving chuckle. In so doing, we have ignored the ancient landmarks of holiness and godliness in order to avoid the narrowness of persecution and to satisfy the lusts of our sinful flesh.

We are tempted to ignore the landmarks for selfish desires. For example, rather than insist, on our summer vacation, that church attendance on the Lord's Day under the chief means of grace is mandatory, so that it will often determine what the vacation destination will be, we might ignore the landmark of the necessity to assemble with God's saints for worship in order to make room in our life for a greater variety of vacation possibilities or for carnal activities.



Failures to maintain the ancient landmarks, as God and His Word require, will receive God's judgment. God will show us that any attempt to broaden the boundaries beyond what God has set will only bring misery and future perils. Proof for that is found in God's judgment upon Jehoshaphat's sinful friendship with Ahab. Jehoshaphat's friendship with Ahab almost cost him his own life.

And that friendship with Ahab bore the fruit of the spiritually undesirable marriage of his son Jehoram and Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel. That in turn bore the terrible fruit of wicked Athaliah's extermination of the seed royal, except for the baby Joash by God's grace and faithfulness. Similarly, the Lord will chastise His people who move the landmarks or permit them to be ignored.



Over against those temptations to destroy the landmarks, or even to move the landmarks slightly, the Lord calls us to maintain the ancient landmarks that our forefathers set.

Love them because they speak of our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Honor them.

Be content with them.

Study them thoroughly.

Cherish them because they are the blood-bought inheritance that God has given to you by faith alone.

Guard them because they are constantly attacked.

Defend them from the gainsayers.

Teach them to your covenant youth daily.

Desire that they be distinctively and soundly preached from sacred Scripture.

Speak of them in humility and godly fear to those who ask you about them.

Delight in the boundaries that God has set for your life and doctrinal confession in order that you might enjoy the blessedness of His covenant with you and your seed after you.

Be faithful to them and so to Jehovah, our covenant God.

For faithfulness to Him and to His ancient landmarks, seek daily for wisdom and the strength of Christ and His Spirit to live holily in your inheritance, marked out with His gracious care. 

Rivers

Perhaps on vacation this summer you had opportunity to visit, cross, boat, raft, canoe, tube, swim, or fish some lovely river in God's creation. Have you thought what human existence would be like without rivers? We would miss far more than awesome vistas and pleasurable recreation! Life would cease. How much vegetation, and how many crops, creatures, individuals, and even civilizations would perish if not for the presence of some river?

Every great human habitation has had some significant river running through it—Egypt had its Nile, Assyria its Tigris, and Babylon its Euphrates. Paradise was no exception. A river went out of Eden to water the garden, then divided into four smaller rivers—Pison, Gihon, Hiddekel, and Euphrates—each providing life to a quadrant of the world (Gen. 2:10-14). And Israel had its humble Jordan. Besides these, the Old Testament mentions the rivers Abana, Ahava, Arnon, Chebar, Gad, Gozan, Jabbok, Kanah, Kishon, Pharpar, and Ulai. But the New Testament whittles things down to two, the Jordan, where God's people flourish, and Euphrates, where the enemy grows mighty. In the end, there will be only one, the River Jesus and its tributaries (John 7:38).

What important events have occurred near rivers! Consider only the mighty Nile. It was the scene of Pharaoh's dream of 14 cows (Gen. 41:1-21). In its waters he smothered crying covenant babes (Ex. 1:22). But Moses found life in that river (Ex. 2:5). As God's agent, he then turned the Nile into blood so it died (Ex. 7:17-25), and he called frogs from it to destroy Egypt (Ps. 78:45). Later, when another antichrist from there proudly supposed he created this paradise for his own personal pleasure, God again cut down this civilization that was living from His river (Ezek. 29:3).

Rivers belong to that innumerable host of Jehovah with which He accomplishes His eternal purpose—grace for His people and curses upon the ungodly. With the same rod that Moses used to smite the Nile, he also brought forth a river of life in the desert for Israel (Ex. 17:5; Ps. 105:41).

The Lord dries up mighty rivers (Ps. 74:15), but more than once swallowed up His enemies with their torrential floods (Ps. 5:21). Israel passed through the same river that drowned the Egyptians (Ps. 66:6). But when His people trusted in other nations, thus "drinking from their rivers," God chastised them with a river of mighty kings (Is. 8:6-7). Doing this work of the Almighty, these rivers even clap their hands to praise this Judge of earth (Ps. 98:8).

God delivered significant visions of salvation near rivers. By Babel's streams, where Israel sat and wept, Daniel sees their redemption (Dan. 10:4; 12:5-6). By the river Chebar, Ezekiel dreams of a new creation featuring a river with amazing qualities. It flows from an altar, and although no new streams enter, its waters grow deeper and wider, bringing life to an entire new world; fishermen line its banks, trees rooted nearby produce copious food and medicine, and the sea where it empties becomes sweet (Ezek. 1:1; 47:1-12).

Rivers, therefore, play a significant role in establishing the new covenant kingdom. When the sixth trumpet sounds, four angels in the Euphrates slay an alarming part of men (Rev. 9:14-15). The sixth vial dries up this same river, freeing amphibious antichristian spirits from the ooze to unite the nations against the Lord (Rev. 16:12-16). But God is faithful. His Christ shall have dominion from the river unto the ends of the earth (Ps. 72:8). He promises "when you pass through the rivers, they shall not overflow you" (Is. 43:2). To His people, He extends peace like a river and dries up the rivers so the glory of the Gentiles can pass into His kingdom like a flowing stream (Zech. 10:11; Is. 48:18; 66:12). And, as in Ezekiel's vision, the most significant feature of the new creation is not "a sea of crystal," for there will be no more sea (Rev. 21:1). Only a clear, refreshing river of life, God's river, the River Jesus (Rev. 22:2). In Him, "the glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams" (Is. 33:21). This river with its streams shall make glad the city of God (Ps. 46:4). And so we sing even now, "The fountain of eternal life is found alone with Thee; from rivers of unending joy, our thirst shall be supplied" (Psalter 94:3). 

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Report of Classis West

On Wednesday, September 6, 2006, Classis West convened in Hull, Iowa.

On the day previous, an officebearers' conference was held. The theme of the conference was "The Holy Spirit: True and Co-eternal God." Four speeches were presented, which treated the person, divinity, and work of the Holy

Spirit, as well as a historical overview on the development of the New Testament church's understanding and confession of the truth of the Holy Spirit from the early church to the present. Delegates from Classis as well as some visitors from the area congregations in Northwest Iowa attended the conference. Classis finished its

work before noon on Wednesday. The expenses of Classis totaled \$6,862.97. Classis West plans to convene in its next regular session on March 7, 2007, in Doon, IA, the Lord willing.

Sincerely in Christ,
Rev. Richard J. Smit,
Stated Clerk 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

For readers of the *Standard Bearer*, and especially the "News," who may believe that our congregations in Canada face the hazards of snow year round, we present as proof to the contrary an item in a recent bulletin from the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada inviting their members to a church Golf Tournament on September 7. After golf there was a hot dog roast at the home of one of Edmonton's members.

The council of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI informed their congregation recently that they had approved the recommendation of their committee that Faith begin the process of establishing a daughter congregation. This committee was to begin canvassing members of the Faith congregation to determine interest for such.

The consistory of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI invited their congregation to a short Sing-spuration of Psalter numbers after their evening worship service on Sunday, August 27.

The congregation in Hudsonville, MI extended a special welcome to Mr. Martyn McGeown on

Sunday, August 20. Mr. McGeown, a member of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, had arrived safely the 17th of August to begin his studies at our seminary in preparation for the ministry. To make Martyn feel at home, the members of Hudsonville have begun to invite him to home-cooked meals. This gives Hudsonville's members a better opportunity also to get to know him.

Members of the Doon and Hull, Iowa PRCs were invited to an evening of fellowship and pizza hosted by the Sioux Falls Bible Study on September 6 in the Oakview Library in Sioux Falls.

Young Adult Activities

The Young Adult Society of the Edgerton, MN PRC sponsored a Young Adults Retreat on August 14-18 at Inspiration Hills in NW Iowa. The theme of the retreat was, "Fighting the Good Fight of Faith," with Rev. J. Mahtani, pastor of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, and Rev. D. Lee, pastor at Edgerton, as the featured speakers. Rev. Mahtani spoke twice. On Monday evening he spoke on "Fighting the Good Fight of Faith," and on Wednesday he followed with a speech entitled, "The Reward of the Fight." On Tuesday evening Rev. Lee spoke to

the some twenty-five young adults on the topic "Prepared with the Spiritual Weaponry to Fight." Besides the speeches and discussions, there were other fun activities such as softball, canoeing, swimming, tennis, and a visit to the corn maize.

Denomination Activities

With the meeting of Classis West on September 6, an Officebearers' Conference was held the day before at the Hull, Iowa PRC. The theme of this conference was, "The Holy Spirit: True and Co-Eternal God." The keynote address was given by Rev. R. Smit, pastor of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, entitled, "I Believe in the Holy Ghost." This speech was followed by three sectionals throughout the day. Rev. J. Mahtani, pastor of Bethel PRC, Roselle, IL, spoke on "Worshiped and Glorified." Rev. D. Overway, pastor of the Doon, IA PRC, spoke on "Who Spake by the Prophets." And Rev. Doug Kuiper, pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC, spoke on "Grieve Not the Spirit."

Evangelism Activities

In mid August members from both the Hudsonville, MI and Trinity PRCs sponsored a booth at the Hudsonville Fair. New rules

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

at the Fair implemented a couple of years ago insist that each booth at the fair be staffed whenever the fair is open. This means that it takes a lot of volunteers from Hudsonville and Trinity to staff their booth each day. But it gives those who do, a unique perspective on the average fairgoer, and a couple of hours handing out literature can lead to some interesting conversations.

Rev. J. Kortering gave a special presentation on "Mission Work in India" after the evening service September 3 at Grace PRC in Standale, MI. This event was sponsored by the Grace Evangelism Committee.

Grace's Evangelism Committee also again this year helped PR students at Grand Valley State University with their Christianity on Campus organization. As in past years, the group of students set up a table at GVSU's annual Campus Life Night to introduce themselves

to students at GV. To help the students, the ladies of Grace provided brownies, cookies, muffins, and other goodies to serve to visitors at their table. The response to this effort last year was very positive.

School Activities

The first annual Faith Christian School Classic (10K/5K/1mile fun run/walk) was held the morning of August 19 at Randolph Park in Randolph, WI, with proceeds for the Building Fund of Faith Christian School. Looking at the Registration Form for the event, we see that age categories started at 13 and under and went all the way to a masters division (55 and up). So no one was left out, which also means that no one will be left out next year for the Second Annual Faith Classic. There is room for all of us - just start running.

Members of the Heritage Christian School Association in Hudsonville, MI met August 28 for a special School Society meeting to

approve action taken by Heritage's School Board to deal with a carpet mold problem that appeared in late July and early August. The heat, humidity, and soaking rains of the summer evidently made conditions ideal for mold to appear on most of Heritage's elementary classroom floors, three of them so severe that Heritage had to hire an environmental cleaning service to remove the carpet and clean the rooms. In response to this problem, the School Board decided to remove and replace all the carpeting in the affected classrooms at a cost of around \$60,000. Due to the severity and urgency of this unforeseen problem, the Board was forced to react before there was time to seek Society approval. This mold problem also led to concerns that the project might not be complete before the first day of school. But with the help of several work bees, Heritage was able to start their school year on time. 

Announcements

YEARBOOK CHANGE

The new bulletin clerk for Kalamazoo PRC:

Marcia Kiel (Mrs. Tom)
2826 Olney Rd.
Kalamazoo, MI 49006
(269) 381-3763
tkiel1957@sbcglobal.net

NOTICE

South Holland Protestant Reformed Christian School is currently seeking applicants for a Discovery Center (Resource Room) teacher. Interested applicants should contact the Administrator, Mr. Ryan VanOverloop

[school - 708.333.9197;
home - 708.825.1716]

or the Education Committee Chairman, Mr. Ryan Regnerus at 708.474.6321.

REMINDER:

The last issue of the volume year has been distributed. If you desire to have your own copies bound, please bring your entire set (October 1, 2005 - September 15, 2006) to the RFPA building (1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison) by October 15. The cost of having your own SBs bound is still \$13.00.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Edgerton PRC extends its Christian sympathy to the Brands families on the passing into glory of

MR. ARTHUR BRANDS.

We pray that they may receive comfort in the words from Psalm 73:24: "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

Rev. Dennis Lee, President
Allen Brummel, Clerk

Lecture

Loveland PRC
Evangelism Committee

October 31, 2006
7:30 p.m.

at Loveland PRC
709 E. 57th St.
Loveland, CO 80538

Speaker:

Prof. David Engelsma

Topic:

**Justification and
Good Works**

copies available on tape
or CD upon request
(970) 667-1347

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Jenison, MI 49428-7173

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PUBLIC LECTURE

On October 27, 2006 the Evangelism Society of Southwest PRC will sponsor a public lecture,

“The Present Overthrow of Dordt: Justification by Works in a Conditional Covenant.”

The speaker will be

Prof. David J. Engelsma,
professor of theology

in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

The lecture will be given at the

Grace Community Church
in Hudsonville, Michigan,

beginning at 8:00 P.M. There will be opportunity for questions.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to God, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

RICH and KATHY FEENSTRA,

as they celebrate 30 years of marriage on September 24, 2006. As they have walked united in Christ, they have seen some sorrows but also many blessings from the Lord. God has enriched their marriage by giving to them not only children, but also grandchildren. In this we see His faithful covenant promise. Our prayer is that God will bless them also in the years ahead, and that whatever obstacles He may send their way in this journey of life, they may give all the glory to God, confessing together: “I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well” (Psalm 139:14).

- ❖ Steve and Lauren Feenstra
Megan, Keegan
- ❖ Keith Feenstra and
Holly Lotterman
- ❖ Doug and Rachel Feenstra
Dylan
- ❖ Lisa Feenstra

Hudsonville, Michigan

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We give God praise and thanksgiving that we may share with you the wonderful news that

**HENRY and BETTY
TIMMERMAN**

celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on September 28, 2006. As we reminisce, we can see God’s hand guiding and carrying them through the joys and trials of this life. What a comfort knowing He is always faithful to His children! We are thankful to God for blessing us with a Christian home where we were taught God’s truths, and for our parent’s dedication and sacrifices they endured so we could have a Christian education. We can also see their wisdom as they advised us according to God’s Word. We are grateful to God for giving them this time together and we pray that He will continue to bless them in the years to come.

“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts” (Psalm 145:3, 4).

- ❖ Deb and Jeff Cole
- ❖ David and Jackie Timmerman
- ❖ Gary Timmerman
- ❖ Todd and Susan Timmerman
- ❖ Kevin and Sally Timmerman
- ❖ Mike and Kari Timmerman
12 grandchildren,
4 great-grandchildren

Jenison, MI

Have you
checked out the
RFPA website recently?

www.rfpa.org

NOTICE

It is with gratitude to our covenant God that we acknowledge the gift of our beloved pastor,

REV. RODNEY MIERSMA,

who has now served as pastor and missionary in our denomination for 35 years. He labored as pastor in the Protestant Reformed churches of Isabel, SD; Pella, IA; Holland, MI; and Lacombe, AB, for a total of 23 years. In addition he labored as missionary in Wellington, New Zealand for 9 years and served as our foreign missionary in Ghana for a few years before he began his labors in our Loveland congregation in January of this year. May the Lord continue to use him for the preaching of the gospel to His name’s honor and glory. II Tim. 4:2: “Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

Dave Poortinga, Vice-president
Robert Brands, Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

October 2006

Date	Topic	Text
October 1	“Why Is the Sabbath Day Profaned?”	Nehemiah 13:15-22
October 8	“Shall We Transgress in Forming Mixed Marriages?”	Nehemiah 13:23-29
October 15	“Remember Me, O God, for Good”	Nehemiah 13:30, 31
October 22	“Remember Our Persecuted Brethren”	Hebrews 13:3
October 29	“Justification by Faith Is the End of all Boasting”	Romans 3:27, 28