

The Universal Drawing of the Exalted Christ

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.

John 12:32

Sir, we would see Jesus. This was the request of certain Greeks in the preceding context. This brings to mind the words of Isaiah in chapter 53:10, where the prophet declares that Jesus would see His seed, referring to the people whom the Father would give Him out of every nation, tongue, and tribe. This salvation of the elect from among the Gentiles is forcibly brought to the attention of the Christ through the request of these heathen Greeks.

The fact that He would see His seed reminds the Savior of His death. If the seed is to spring up and mature, it must first die. Life for all His people is possible only

through His death. Therefore, if Christ is to see His seed, He too must first die.

At this moment, while anticipating the cross, Christ declares the triumphant words of the text. At the moment of the cross it appeared as if the devil had gained the victory, but actually the cross is the judgment of this world. Then the prince of this world shall be cast out. And as far as Christ is concerned, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me."

The lifting up refers, on the one hand, to His death upon the cross of Calvary. This is plain from verse 33: "This he said, signifying what death he should die." One can therefore hardly deny that Jesus is referring in this text to His rapidly approaching death upon the cross.

On the other hand, it is equally obvious that the Savior is referring also to His exaltation at the right hand of God. This is clear from verse 23, which speaks of His glorification: "And Jesus answered them saying, The hour is come, that

the Son of man should be glorified." Although He speaks of the fact that the kernel must die, He also declares that the kernel brings forth much fruit, and therefore rises again.

Therefore, we may safely conclude that Jesus is referring to both His death and His exaltation at the right hand of God. The Savior always associates the two and considers them inseparable. He considers the hour of Calvary to be the hour of His glorification. This is not due to the fact that He glories as such in the unspeakable agony that confronts Him upon the cross of Golgotha, but because the way of the cross leads home. His crucifixion is the beginning of the process that will not be finished and completed until He has been lifted up even unto the Father's right hand.

Note also that the words of the text do not express any doubt. It is not their purpose to convey the impression that the Lord Jesus Christ may possibly *not* be lifted up from

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the earth. This is impossible, because for this very purpose the Lord Jesus came into the world. As so often elsewhere in Scripture, the "if" clause serves to show the inseparable connection between the two parts.

We note also the remarkable chain of events here. There is the hatred of the Jews, His own, and the request of the heathen Greeks who longed to see the Christ. It is remarkable how these two events converge at this very moment. Salvation will come to the Gentiles exactly through the hatred of the Jews. It was the hatred of the Jews that led to the crucifixion.

And now Jesus is about to be lifted up. The cross will not be the end stage of His being lifted up, for Jesus has been ordained to be the King upon Mt. Zion who shall rule forever. He shall lose His life, only to find it again in heavenly glory. He shall be lifted up out of this sin-cursed world and death. This process shall lead Him through the cross and the depths of hell, but shall continue through the resurrection and ascension until He be exalted at the right hand of God. There He shall be glorified with the glory that He had with the Father before the foundation of the world. That glorified Christ, lifted up into heavenly glory through His suffering and death, will draw all men unto Himself.

This drawing is universal. When Christ says "all men," He does not refer to every man, head for head. It simply is not true that all men are drawn to Jesus. This did not happen while He sojourned among us in our flesh and blood, and it will not happen throughout this new dispensation. Some are drawn to Him through the power of His grace and view Him as wonderfully beautiful and attractive, but others hate Him and trample His Word underfoot.

Furthermore, it is not true that the scriptural expression "all men" necessarily means all men, head for

head. Even when the expression does refer to everybody, it does not do so because "all" demands that interpretation. Romans 5:18 is a good example. "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." The striking feature is that the expression "all men" occurs twice here but not with the same connotation. With respect to the condemnation of all men it refers to every man, head for head. With respect to righteousness, it does not, for it simply is a fact that while all men are indeed under condemnation, not all men receive the righteousness of Christ unto justification of life. The expression "all men" refers to all men, everybody, as belonging to a certain class. Condemnation has come to all men through the sin of one man, because Adam was the head of the entire human race. And the righteousness of Christ has come upon all men, that is, all those who belong to that class whereof Christ is the Head, namely, the elect.

In this light we see that Christ will draw all His own unto Himself. And He will draw all men, not simply as limited to one particular people, the Jews, but as out of every nation, tongue, and tribe. This is in accordance with the context, in which the request of the Gentiles reminds Jesus exactly of His seed, which He will gather unto Himself out of all peoples and nations.

It is at this point that many go astray. Some would have us believe that the love of God, as revealed upon the cross, attracts all men. Others would contend that in the preaching of the gospel the Lord shows His intention of saving as many sinners as possible, and that Jesus draws, calls, invites all men unto Himself. This, of course, is not the meaning of the text. The gospel does not come to everybody, for the great majority

of men will never have come under the preaching of the Word. In addition, we must remember that the gospel is a savor of life unto life, but also of death unto death. It never proclaims a Christ who died for all and would have all men to be saved. The gospel proclaims a Jesus who died for His sheep and who came to do the Father's will, namely, that all those given Him by the Father should be raised up at the last day.

Positively, the word "draw" refers to the irresistible drawing by the exalted Christ. Jesus is an irresistible, universal magnet, who draws powerfully and efficaciously unto Himself. This occurred already on Calvary. By His death of the cross He satisfied, in His people's behalf, all the justice of the Lord, paid for all their sins and guilt, reconciled them unto God, and merited for them everlasting life and glory. Then He drew them out of all their sin and guilt and the power of the devil and into salvation of the alone blessed God.

Now He continues to draw all men, all His own, unto Himself as at the right hand of the divine majesty. This drawing of the glorified Christ is a marvelous, spiritual, internal, irresistible, and inexpressibly sweet drawing by His Spirit and through His Word. He enters, irresistibly, into our hearts, renews our hearts, opens our eyes and our ears, and calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light. He draws us unto Himself, and we come. He opens our eyes, and we see. He opens our ears, and we hear. He speaks in us by His irresistible grace, and we hear and come unto Him, unto the Christ of the cross and as exalted in heavenly glory at the right hand of God. Through His power we learn to seek Him, see our desperate sin and guilt, confess our iniquities, and receive cleansing in the blood that flowed from His veins. As we are drawn unto Him, even as He is now the Lord of glory, our eye is fixed upon the things that are

above, and we shall not be satisfied until we see Him, face to face, drawn into everlasting and heavenly glory.

Of that we can be certain, for He *will* draw all men unto Himself. The Savior does not doubt this for a moment. The context brings this out. “Now *is* the judgment of this world: now *shall* the prince of this world be cast out.” How uncertain the outcome would be if man’s salvation were dependent

upon the choice of his own will. However, the matter of our salvation is purely a matter of the highly exalted Christ. When Christ is lifted up, He will draw all men unto Himself. He will indeed redeem them and deliver them through the blood of the cross, the amazing blood that does not *seek* to cleanse us from our sin, but *actually does*.

And being glorified He will indeed continue His work of salvation even unto the end. The work

of salvation, thanks be to God, is His work and surely not ours. He to whom has been given all power in heaven and upon earth and the Spirit beyond measure is surely able to gather all His own unto Himself, even unto the very end.

What blessed assurance! Our salvation is sure. We will be drawn into glory, which the Lord has prepared for all those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. 

Editorial

Prof. Barry Gritters

The Churches’ Need for Preachers (2): A Call to Young Men

The Protestant Reformed Churches need (indeed, all churches need) preachers. They need preachers soon. The need is till the end of time. For the pulpits in the congregations—one-fifth of them now vacant—and the mission fields, the churches pray to the Lord Christ, “Send pastors!”

In the previous editorial (April 1, 2005), I explained why the church places such high value on the gift of faithful preachers. By ministers who are faithful, God perfects saints, performs essential ministry, edifies the body of Christ. This institution of Christ must be preserved among us by God if we are to continue as churches. And I urged upon us to “press this need upon capable young men,” as Synod 2004 asked (*Acts*, p. 24).

But the young men must *desire* the office and seek the work as something *attractive*. The young men may. They can. For the work of the ministry is an occupation like no other. Its joys are above the joys of all others.

“What a glorious work...”

Every young man may know the beauty and joy, even exhilarating delight of the gospel ministry. The *Form for Ordination* speaks of it as “a glorious work.”

First, they realize that theirs is nothing less than an ambassadorship (Eph. 6:20; II Cor. 5:20). If President Bush would appoint one of our young men to be ambassador to, say, the United Kingdom, what a privileged position that would be: a position of great responsibility—representing the most powerful nation on earth; a position of high earthly honor—speaking officially for the President of the United States of America. But the gospel minister represents a far higher Authority, an exceedingly more glorious Ruler—the Lord of all lords and the kings’ King, Jesus Christ. On behalf of Christ the minister speaks. The power of the resurrected, living, and enthroned Lord he represents. What is more glorious than that position?

Second, the joy of the ministry comes from the knowledge of what God accomplishes by it. The *Form*

for Ordination speaks of the ministry as such a “glorious work” because “so great things are effected by it.” Do the young men realize what the ministry accomplishes as it is used by God? Why, the resurrection *victory* of the Lord Jesus Christ is given to God’s people through the gospel ministry. Before a minister begins his work, he may know that the victory of Jesus Christ is his victory, which is given to the elect by preaching. No other occupation can make such astounding claims. No other prospective employer can promise so much. Though he can promise much, he cannot guarantee victory like Jesus Christ can. The gospel ministry is a work in which you *begin* with victory, in which you go out *proclaiming* victory, which you perform by *carrying out* victory.

When the white horse of Revelation 5 rides forth (the White Horse is the gospel preaching), it goes forth executing the eternal and efficacious counsel of God, carrying forth the victory of the Lamb who has all power. His is the battle bow and the garland wreath of vic-

tory. He goes “conquering and to conquer.”

Consider: By the gospel ministry, enemies of God are transformed into allies! Poor struggling sinners are freed from sin’s slavery! Through preaching, sins are forgiven! The gates of the kingdom are thrown open! Through sermons, terrors are driven away, and Jesus appears on His throne as powerful and tender in His love for fearful saints. The Word retrieves wandering sinners. Prodigal sons and daughters come home by the gospel! Hard hearts are broken! Hope grows! Heaven is opened! Saints are ushered home!

But God accomplishes more by the minister’s labors: Worship itself takes place through preaching. *In it*, God converses with His friends. *By its power*, these friends respond with bowing down in honor, ascribing to God great worth, and extolling that worth. Why, the preaching gave them the vision of King Jesus on His throne, before whom they bow. Preaching describes the works of God, and for these works the people of God say: “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!” Preaching manifests God’s perfections, to which believers respond: “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory!” Preaching holds forth the promises of God, on account of which the people purify themselves (I John 3:3), and sing in hope of perfection.

“So great things” God (*God!*) carries out by a minister’s work.

“as a good soldier of Jesus Christ...”

That is not to say that the work is all joy.

The gospel minister is a soldier in combat—fiercest warfare. This is no peacetime endeavor, the gospel ministry. War has been declared. The minister is on the front-line. No wonder the form for the preacher’s ordination has this charge to him: “Bear patiently all sufferings and oppressions as a

good soldier of Jesus Christ,” and this prayer by the congregation: “Grant him the courage to bear the difficulties and troubles which he may meet with in his ministry.” No recruiter for the Army may hide the difficulties from a prospective soldier. No church may pretend the gospel ministry is easy, for those who seek to avoid hard work.

Mercifully, the Lord does hide much of the difficulty. He does not allow men to see the details. Moments after the approval of my final, oral examination by synod, I was sobered by the comments of two veteran ministers, in which one asked the other over a cup of coffee (in my presence): “Jay, if you knew the difficulties you would face in the ministry, would you ever have aspired to it?” If men do not spare us, the *Lord* does spare us the gritty details.

But He does not hide the reality that the work will include many sorrows, that the burdens will be heavy.

That may be one reason why, when Jesus told the disciples to pray that God “send forth” laborers into the harvest, He did not use the normal word for “send” (from which we get our word “apostle”) but used the word for “send” that means “*thrust out*.” The cost is so high, the work so arduous and taxing, that none will take it up unless the Lord *thrust him out* into the harvest.

The call to ride with the White Horse, however, is a sweetly irresistible call. When it comes it makes those who were initially unwilling to be willing (Ps. 110:3). Still vivid is my memory of the night the Lord powerfully turned my heart—a heart that had resisted and fled from His call—into a heart willing to seek the ministry. The next morning: a letter informing my parents, and a call to my pastor, “What’s the first step to prepare for the ministry?” And I was never so happy in my life. That, too, is the working of “irresistible grace.”

“The prophet’s reward...”

And the joys of the work overshadow the sorrows a thousand times. The rewards far outweigh the costs. The troubles are “not worthy to be compared” to the blessings. The prophet receives a “prophet’s reward” (see Matt. 10:41).

Here and now the minister receives reward. He sees the fruits God gives to his work. Think of it: he can *see* young people and children come to genuine repentance and hearty faith, become equipped to join the battle for Jesus Christ. His heart rejoices with the parents who weep with joy in this milestone for their children. Firsthand he listens to the vows made between a young man and woman, and then later hears some of them promise to raise their newborns in godliness and truth. He *witnesses* warring couples reconciled by the power of the Spirit’s Word. At the deathbed, he has the privilege of hearing the confident testimony of dear saints who die with their hands in Jesus’ hand. In catechism he can observe the wide-eyed children in whose heart the Spirit is working awe before God’s beauty (the joy of many ministers is at its peak in catechism!). He hears personal testimony of the saving power that the sermon had to help in a particular, but unknown to him, distress: “How did you know my needs this morning?” (and sincerely responds, “I didn’t; God did”). He truly experiences the reality of I Timothy 4:16: “for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

And we have not even mentioned the “crown of glory” that the Chief Shepherd will grant when He returns (I Pet. 5:4).

“receive this man...”

The charge to the congregation in the Form for Ordination ends with the promise: “You who receive this man in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward.”

Although ministers endure hardships from some members of the church, the people of God do receive the minister “in the name of a prophet.” They hold him in reputation. To them, the feet of those who bring the gospel of peace are beautiful and pleasant. A con-

stant source of joy and encouragement for ministers.

A faithful minister is ashamed of his own shortcomings, weaknesses, and many faults. He hardly dares think of, much less expect, a reward. He knows he is unworthy of the many helps and words of

gratitude from the saints. But when they receive him anyway, he *learns* what he, as a Reformed minister, has been busy *teaching*: free grace.

God is very good. To ministers, too. 

Letters

■ Tilting at Windmills?

I fear that Herman Hanko’s article (“Charles Darwin and Evolutionism,” March 1, 2005) did not help to advance the cause of creationism. As he informs us,

The fact of the matter is that we who believe in creation have an ironclad case that is *unassailable*. We have *absolute proof* for creation, proof than which there is no stronger. That proof is that God Himself tells us how He made the world. If that isn’t proof, then I do not know what is (emphasis added).

But if Prof. Hanko’s “proof” is unassailable, then why is it always being assailed, and why does he write? Is he tilting at windmills? – battling straw men?

There is nothing ambiguous about the word “unassailable.” Synonyms like “impregnable,” or “undeniable,” or “incontrovertible” come to mind. The fact that Hanko felt compelled to write in the first place is because creationism is *not* unassailable.

Proponents of theistic evolution and the Framework Hypothesis are guilty of syncretism. If plowing with an ox and an ass yoked together is forbidden, how much more so when we attempt to yoke together God’s account of our origins with the pronouncements of science? Is science on the bench, and Genesis in the dock?

A large part of the problem stems from the fact that few non-scientists understand what a “theory” is. Theories are neither true nor false, while the conclu-

sions that flow from them may be either true or false. As the argument is usually stated by Christians, evolution is only a theory, while creation is a fact.

This formulation is unfortunate, as it establishes incompatible categories of thought. It would be helpful to consider both evolutionism and creationism as *competing theories*, each one supported by evidence unacceptable to the other.

Simply stated, evolution finds support in the fossil record, while creationism is supported by the Genesis account. The impossibility of conflating the two becomes immediately apparent.

Prof. Hanko quotes Del Ratzsch, who, after discussing creationist and evolutionist models, says that “Both models are beyond the reach of human proof.”

Ratzsch is correct, and it is here that Hanko’s argument collapses. The Genesis account proves nothing *to the scientists*, while the fossil record proves nothing *to the Christian*. The issue is not the objectivity of the evidence; it is the subjectivism of those considering the evidence. There is no proof recognized by both sides, so constructive dialogue is impossible, and the issue will never be settled.

Hanko’s “ironclad” case works only for those of us who believe; it doesn’t work for our antagonists in the scientific community.

Like many human endeavors, science is neutral; it can be used for both constructive and destructive ends. The thing about science that frustrates is its messianic character. Truth, we are told, can be

discovered only by “hypothetico-deductive” reasoning, with conclusions subjected to rigorous statistical analysis and to peer review.

And because we have no other source of truth, the thought of placing any restraints on scientific investigation, or limiting government funding, is simply out of the question. Science has become our god; its practitioners our saviors.

Unfortunately, Prof. Hanko concludes with two very problematic statements: 1) “To deny creation is to deny salvation in Christ,” and 2) “To believe in creation is to be saved by Christ.”

The first is debatable; the second indefensible. I doubt that he believes the latter himself.

Ralph W. Hahn
Boise, Idaho

RESPONSE:

The proper way to consider “proof” for the doctrine of creation is to consider Hebrews 11:3: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

Faith is not acceptance of propositions which have no “proof.” Faith, in Hebrews 11, is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The things “hoped for” and “not seen” are the promises of God that He will, through Christ, save His elect people and His creation from the curse and death of sin. Faith has, therefore, as its object, not the creation, but the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures. And faith in the Holy Scriptures is faith

in Christ, who is revealed in the Holy Scriptures – from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21.

Faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8), and is given by the Holy Spirit of Christ to the elect only, as a part of their salvation – indeed, as the necessary means of their salvation, for faith is the bond that unites the elect to Christ (John 15:1-7, Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7).

The creation is full of evidence that God is the Creator. In fact, there is no other evidence to be found anywhere in the creation than evidence of God's work of creation. (One ought to read Augustine's marvelous description of the creation in his *Confessions*.) But the creation is under the curse and man is desperately wicked. That is, the creation speaks most loudly of God's fury against sin, and man is so implacably an enemy of God that whatever he may learn from the creation he suppresses in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). Hence, his evolutionism is not born out of his study of the "evidence" in creation; nor out of his ignorance; it is born out of his determi-

nation to drive God from God's own world. Wicked man is guilty of Paul's scathing denunciation of the theory of evolutionism developed by wicked man: "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man..., [and] changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom. 1:21-25). Evolutionism is an idol, because it holds up before us a god who cannot create in six days of twenty-four hours.

The wicked do not have faith. They will not, but they also cannot, believe in creation. Among many others things, Hebrews 11:3 means: Faith is the *only way* to believe the doctrine of creation.

The man devoid of faith will not believe the doctrine of creation as it is given us in Scripture, even

were he to be confronted by the angel Gabriel, who, standing in God's world, would assure all who hear that God indeed formed this world in six days of twenty-four hours. "They have Moses and the prophets (Holy Scripture); let them hear them.... If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:20-31).

The one to whom God graciously gives faith has wickedness banished from his heart, has his eyes opened (Matt. 13:16), and is given the power to receive the Scriptures as the Word of God, infallibly inspired, and the only means to know Truth (with a capital "t"). When he, through faith, receives the Scriptures, also the creation narrative, he receives the Christ of the Scriptures as His Savior and Lord – and is saved. Hence, yes; yes, indeed: "To deny creation (as it is taught in Scripture) is to deny salvation in Christ," and, "To believe in creation (as it is taught in Scripture) is to be saved by Christ."

– Herman Hanko 

Feature Articles

Cornelius Hanko, VDM*

The Rev. Cornelius Hanko was born to Herman and Jennie (nee Burmania) Hanko on May 19, 1907 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He received his heartfelt desire when the Lord in His mercy took him to glory on Monday, March 14, in the year of our Lord 2005.

Prof. Decker is professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

*Latin abbreviation of *Verbi Dei Minister*, "Minister of the Word of God"

Rev. Hanko was baptized in the Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church. During the common grace controversy in the 1920s the Hanko family followed Rev. Herman Hoeksema and the majority of the consistory of Eastern Avenue in their polemic against common grace and their advocacy of one, sovereign grace of God for the elect in Christ Jesus. The Hankos thus became charter members of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan when the Eastern Avenue Protestant Christian Reformed Church,

her pastor and consistory, were cast out of the CRC in 1926. Rev. Hanko, therefore, was the last of the PRC clergy (and perhaps of the entire membership of the PRC) to have had direct, personal contact with the events of 1924–1926 that led to the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Already in his teenage years Rev. Hanko had his eye on the ministry. His first inclination was to be a missionary. That never happened, because the Lord called him to the pastoral ministry for his entire career. Rev. Hanko began his

Prof. Robert D. Decker



C. Hanco, Graduation from the Protestant Reformed Seminary, 1929

studies for the ministry under Revs. H. Danhof, H. Hoeksema, and G. M. Ophoff. He graduated from the seminary in 1929 with five other men (four of whom left the PRC in the split of 1953 and one of whom left the PRC in the early 1960s. All five of these eventually became ministers in the CRC).

After graduation from the seminary Rev. Hanco and his bride Jennie (nee Griffioen) made their way to Hull, Iowa PRC, in which church Rev. Hanco was ordained a minister of the Word and Sacraments in the PRC. God blessed Rev. and Mrs. Hanco with four children, all of whom are members of the PRC: Rev. Herman C. (married to Wilma Knoper), Professor Emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary; Fred (married to Ruth Miersma), who gave his working life to the Protestant Reformed Christian Schools (Adams Street in Grand Rapids, where he was my ninth grade teacher, Northwest Iowa in Doon, where he taught with my wife, and Hope, Walker, Michigan); Elaine, widow of Richard Bos; and Alice, who cared for her father in his later years.

In addition to the Hull PRC, Rev. and Mrs. Hanco served in the following Protestant Reformed Churches: Oaklawn, Illinois (1935); Manhattan, Montana (1945); First, Grand Rapids, Michigan (1948);

Hope, Redlands, California (1964); and Hudsonville, Michigan (1971). After becoming emeritus in 1977, Rev. Hanco remained active for a number of years, preaching and teaching in the churches and preaching two services per Sunday in Florida during the winter seasons.

His years in First Church were difficult ones for Rev. Hanco because of the controversy that resulted in the split in First and in the denomination in June of 1953. The controversy involved the doctrine of the covenant. The majority of the congregation of First and of the members and clergy of the denomination embraced the covenant view of Dr. Klass Schilder (conceiving of the essence of the covenant as consisting of a conditional promise made by God to every baptized child). These left our churches. During these years, while never compromising the truth of an unconditional covenant of grace and friendship established unilaterally by God with His elect in Christ Jesus, Rev. Hanco never lost a certain healthy balance in his preaching and teaching in First Church. He simply did his work by the grace of God, preaching, teaching, and caring for the flock of God as best he was able.

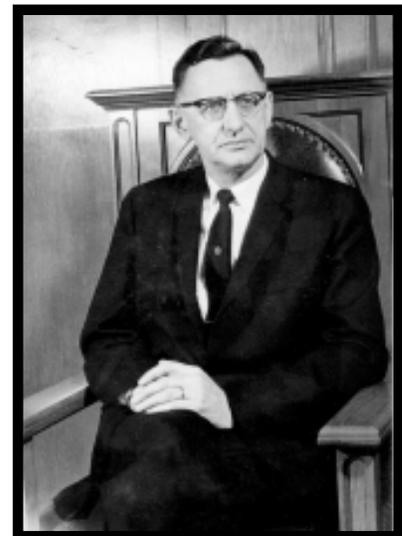
During his years in First Church, which numbered more than five hundred families before the split in 1953 and *ca.* 200 families after the split, Rev. Hanco had my father as one of his co-laborers in the consistory. They became good friends. The Hankos and the Deckers regularly visited together. It was through this contact that I got to know Rev. Hanco on a personal basis. It was during Rev. Hanco's years as pastor of First that I was a student at Calvin College, then located on Franklin Street in Grand Rapids just a short block away from the parsonage occupied by the Hankos. Not infrequently, I would walk from class at Calvin to the parsonage with my questions. Rev. Hanco patiently answered these questions from Scripture and the confessions

and would then offer prayer. Rev. Hanco was used by God, together with my parents to keep me in the PRC as a member and later as one of the churches' pastors. I also had the blessed privilege after October 1, 1965, the date of my ordination as pastor of the Doon, Iowa congregation, to labor for a few years with Rev. Hanco as a colleague. We younger pastors in Classis West leaned heavily on our older, experienced, and competent colleague, learning much from his godly example.

During his pastorate in Hudsonville, Michigan the Lord delivered his beloved Jennie from her suffering into glory. I remember sitting with Rev. Hanco in the ICU waiting-room at the hospital, when he remarked, "Part of me is dying in there." Now Rev. Hanco, having died in the Lord, enjoys God's fellowship in Jesus in glory as well.

We thank God for giving our churches this gifted and faithful servant and for using him for the edification of the churches for the years of his lengthy ministry among our Protestant Reformed Churches. That in the years to come these churches may follow the example of our beloved brother, Cornelius Hanco, and "...earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints..." is our fervent prayer (Jude : 3b).

Soli Deo Gloria! ■



Rev. Hanco, as pastor in First PRC

The Spiritual Life of the Family after the Children Are Grown

Cornelius Hanko

For many years, the writings of Rev. C. Hanko appeared in the pages – countless pages – of the *Standard Bearer*. Rev. Hanko was appointed as a regular writer in 1935, and retained that post until 1990. In the years before the split of 1953, he was one of but a handful of ministers who regularly employed his pen in order to aid Revs. Hoeksema and Ophoff in the daunting task of filling the quota of twenty-four pages twice a month. He had an obvious love for the *SB*. It was, in fact, at Rev. Hanko's suggestion that the *SB* introduced the system of assigned rubrics still followed today.

Rev. Hanko provided quality articles on a wide variety of topics, including missions. His style of writing was a reflection of his style of ministry – solid, irenic, clear, and, above all, uncompromisingly Reformed. Throughout the controversy in the PRC over the covenant in the 1940s and '50s, Rev. Hanko maintained a steadfast witness to the truth of God's unconditional covenant of grace.

If we had to choose one of his articles from past issues of the *Standard Bearer*, we would have had a very difficult time picking one that would accurately reflect both his strengths and his major contributions to the cause of the truth. So we did not attempt that. However, we decided to print excerpts of one of his last public speeches, an informal address at the Eastern Men's and Ladies' League in September of 1998. The speech highlights another of God's gifts to this man – practical, godly wisdom.

–RJD

The years after the children are grown can be the best years of your life, especially from a spiritual point of view. That's why I'd like to talk about that with you tonight. I want to chat a little bit about family devotions when you are merely with

the two of you. And then I want to talk a little about life together in the declining years of your earthly pilgrimage.

Family Devotions

We look first, then, at family worship. The kids are all married. You're there with the two of you.

There was a time, no doubt, when you had to do all in your power to get the family together at least once a day for a meal. Even in the evening, for dinner, one had to go here, and another had to go there. You know better than I do how those things go; it's been so long since my family's been out.

When I was still home as a lad, my Dad used to get us out of bed at 5:30/6:00 in the morning. We had to have family devotions. The whole family had to be around the breakfast table, early, because he had to go to work at 7 o'clock. And in the evening, well, then, of course, the whole family had to be together again.

That's not so easy these days. We're too busy. Oh, we bemoan that we're so busy, always, even after the kids are all married – so busy. It's so nice if you can have devotions together three times a day – that is, at mealtime – and then evening devotions before you go to rest. My daughter and I enjoy that.

But there are different ways in which to have family devotions. I remember one time when I was with a family in Hull. There was a big crowd around the table, and about halfway through the chapter, the father stopped and he went right down the row: "What was my last word?" Nobody knew the last word – except the children,

because they had learned to listen for the last word.

But you know, even if you knew the last word, that would not be the important thing. You want to *understand* what you read. That's why my daughter and I have a Bible dictionary handy during our devotions. And I have a concordance that I haul out. That's pretty well worn now, but we do get it out sometimes. But especially a dictionary is very important. You can find out a lot of things in there – the difference between the burnt offering and a peace offering, between Levites and priests, and so on. It can all be so dry unless you take time to study.

I was in a home one time where the father read just a short passage, and then he stopped and asked questions about that passage. When the family thoroughly understood it (because so often one reads and doesn't understand) then he would read another little passage, and he'd say, "Now what about that? What does that mean?" And he would offer an explanation.

Now, my daughter and I don't do it that way at home, but many times my daughter stops me and says, "What does that mean?" Or I stop and say, "Did you notice that?" or "Do you know what that means?" In that way, the Bible begins to live for you.

And you should have the time now. When the children were all around the table, and they got restless, you couldn't do that so well. But now when there is just the two of you, you have a golden opportunity to read the Word of God and make use of it. Know what you're reading; understand what you're

reading. That's worth so much!

The Presbyterians, you know, don't have our custom. They don't read the Bible and pray at meals. They have their devotions *afterwards*. They go to the living room. There the father reads a portion and talks about it. They sit comfortably in the living room, and they spend quite a bit of time. They sing, and they make a regular little worship service of it. I remember once when I was ready to leave such a home, the mother said to me, "Can we have devotions before you leave?" So we sat down, and with a few children in the living room we had devotions before I left. I thought, "Now that's nice; that's a nice way to part."

I was in Isabel, South Dakota, years ago, and there was an elderly man who told me that when he was young he and his two brothers worked on the farm with their father. They would come in at noon for a warm meal, and they would read the Bible and pray, and then they'd go back to work.

Well, one day Dad asked, "You boys want to read the Bible?"

They looked at him, and they said, "Well, we always do."

"No, no," said the father, "I don't mean that. Do you *want* to? Do you feel a *need* for it?"

They shrugged their shoulders: "Not particularly."

"Well," he said, "then we won't read it." So he prayed, and they went out to the field.

And the next meal the same thing: they didn't read the Bible. That went on for a few days.

Then he said to the boys, "Do you feel like praying?"

Well, now of course they were a bit more alert, and they said, "Well, Dad, aren't we supposed to?"

"Oh, is that the only reason?" he said. "The only reason is because we're supposed to? Then we're not going to pray." So they got up and went to work.

Two days later he said to the boys, "You know, we're just like

the heathen. We don't pray anymore; we don't read the Bible anymore."

And the boys said, "Dad, we'd better. We need that." They had learned that lesson.

And sometimes, I think, we all need to do that. We all need to learn the lesson that we don't do devotions out of custom but because we need it, and we need it badly.

Well now, I suppose some of you think that I'm being a little bit too idealistic. It's nice to sit and talk that way, but to live that way is different. But you know, that's one of the advantages of the later years, the declining years of your life: that you can *take* time.

Life Together in the Declining Years

I would like to impress on you first of all that if you're not yet retired, be sure that you make some plans for retirement. Oh, don't say, "Then I'll go golfing" or "Then I'll go fishing." You can't golf every day. You can't fish every day. And I've known many, many men who were totally miserable when they retired, and who drove their wives practically crazy because they had nothing to do. If you are retired, then be sure you fill the gap with something.

There are plenty of things to do. I tell you, there are so many elderly people who would be so glad if you dropped in and said hello, or even would call them up and ask, "How are you?" There are so many shut-ins and people that are not well in all these different places, in these rest homes and wherever the elderly people are. And you can't imagine how great a blessing you receive yourself. I've often gone away, blushed with shame. I didn't give them anything, but they gave me so much.

Well, if you think I'm a bit idealistic, I'm going to go a step farther. I'm going to remind you of what the apostle Paul says: "Whether you eat, or whether you

drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God." That's quite a thing. It is not easy to learn. But the Bible says it. And, to quote a well-known expression of Rev. Herman Veldman, "You'd better believe it!" That is one thing we must learn: whether we eat, or whether we drink, or whatsoever we do, God first. Not me first, not my family first, not my children, not my grandchildren, not my job, or whatever. God. We believe in God-centered preaching on Sunday; we have to lead God-centered lives all week long.

A few years ago my son Herm and I were in Birmingham, Alabama. We were doing a little mission work there, and we were trying to find a certain Mr. Smith. We were told that he worked in the steel mills, so that if we wanted to meet him during the day, we would have to go to the steel mills. What comes to mind, of course, is big, burly, strapping fellows who work in the steel mills. Well, we got to the gate, and the guard at the gate asked, "What do you want?"

We said, "We would like to see Mr. Smith."

"Oh," he says, "You can find him in such and such a place. But I assure you," he said, "that you won't talk five minutes with that man before you'll know that he's a Christian."

Now whether that was sarcasm or whether that was in all seriousness, I don't know. But we said to each other, I wonder. I wonder.

Well, we found him in his pickup, and I think it was probably two or three minutes and it already became evident that he was certainly a Christian. Then he said to us, "Come on along to the office. We can talk better in the office." So we went to the office, and there was a whole crew working there. He stepped in the door and he said, "Good morning, folks. God bless you." And they all responded, "God bless you, Mr. Smith. Good morning." You know, I was really amazed about that.

We visited in his home later, and I didn't have a Bible handy. So his young daughter hands me her Bible. And do you know what? Throughout that whole Bible, texts were underscored, underlined very neatly, and with very neat marginal remarks. That was a young girl! I wondered how many of our children would have a Bible like that.

A couple of days later we went to another family for dinner and to spend the evening. When we drove up, we saw above the front door, "Jesus lives here." Well, of course, you and I wouldn't do that.

But I thought, Now if that's true, then it should be evident, too. We entered the house, and after awhile we sat down at the dinner table, and the father led the devotions. He prayed, "May our fellowship together and our conversation throughout the evening remain on a spiritual level." What amazed me was that, not only did *he* keep it on a spiritual level, but his *wife* did too. We talked about some very mundane things, like labor unions, but always from a spiritual point of view. I know, I know,

Baptists carry their religion on their coat sleeves, as we might say, but I can admire something like that just the same. And I could wish that there was more of that in our lives. God first. Whether you eat, or whether you drink, or whatever you do, start the day with God. As soon as you awaken, pray. And the last thing you do before you go to sleep, pray. Remember the Lord and all His benefits, and say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." 

■ Sad events in the Reformed church world

During the past number of years much has been made of the "right" of homosexuals to "marry" and receive the legal benefits of such union. One can understand why those who refuse to recognize the law of God presented in Holy Scripture would take the position that marriage can be whatever the majority decides it to be. But it is very difficult to understand how anyone who maintains the infallibility of Scripture can take a similar position. Sadly, this is what is happening. In the Netherlands there are Reformed churches that not only allow practicing homosexuals to be members "in good standing," but have also allowed practicing homosexuals into the church offices—including the ministry of the Word.

It is troubling that in our country the same trends are evident. The inroads of homosexuality became apparent in the Christian Reformed Church when the First Christian Reformed Church of Toronto decided that it could al-

low practicing homosexuals to serve in the church offices of elder and deacon. When strenuous objections arose from other Christian Reformed bodies, they apparently backed off from this position. Yet their web site shows that the congregation continues to allow such individuals to be members in good standing within the congregation. Their web site states:

We believe that all people are created in the image of God and are unconditionally loved by God.

We are committed to embrace people of all ages, races, genders, sexual orientation, differing abilities, ethnic origins, and economic circumstances.

We affirm that all who seek to live faithfully, that is, confessing Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Saviour, are full participants in the life, membership, sacraments, and leadership of this congregation.

Our desire is to build community in the midst of differences and strive to honour God's greatest commandment, to love one another as Christ loves us.

Their confession is hardly Reformed ("...all people are created in the image of God and are unconditionally loved by God"). The statement seems clearly to imply that they receive also practicing

homosexuals as "full participants in the life...of this congregation."

Recent reports indicate that a critical situation has arisen also in the Reformed Church in America (RCA) in regard to homosexuality. The RCA has two seminaries: Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI, and New Brunswick Theological Seminary (NBTS) in New Jersey. The president of NBTS is Dr. Norman Kansfield. *Christian Renewal*, February 9, 2005, gives a report written by John VanDyk:

Presiding over a marriage is not so unusual for the president of a Reformed seminary. For that same president to conduct his daughter's wedding would be considered special indeed. For him to preside over his daughter's marriage to another woman would be considered an act of sinful disobedience. The Reformed Church in America's Norman Kansfield, president of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, sees things, however, in a different light.

In June of last year, Dr. Kansfield, a long-standing minister and seminary professor in the RCA, led a marriage service uniting his daughter Ann Kansfield to another woman. Ann also graduated from NBTS in 2004 and recently accepted a call to the

Greenpoint Reformed Church in Brooklyn, New York.

Following protests from two classes and a number of individuals to the denomination's General Synod Council (GSC), the GSC sent a letter in October to each church in the RCA. The letter outlined the situation and then announced the following plan of action in response:

1. To send a delegation from the GSC to visit with Dr. Kansfield in a pastoral manner, sharing with him the concerns discussed by the GSC, listening to him, and expressing a desire to seek the unity of the Church.

2. To send this pastoral letter to all ministers of Word and sacrament.

3. To inform the board of New Brunswick Theological Seminary of the GSC's action in this matter.

4. To designate the members of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business to serve as the investigative committee in the event that a charge is filed in this matter.

The letter continues, "The GSC has taken special care both to clarify procedures for any potential exercise of discipline in this matter and to exercise the pastoral concern that should always be a mark of our life together in Christ. In any matters of potential controversy and conflict, our polity is our servant and our friend. We can place confidence in the means by which we hold each other accountable and live in the unity of the Spirit that is God's gift to the church."

Signed by four members of the Council, the letter also mentions "the possible ordination of Dr. Kansfield's daughter" as another concern. But it passes on any possible response in this matter by citing the local classis, which has authority regarding the ordination of candidates to the ministry of Word and sacrament.

With this matter made public by the pastoral letter from the GSC, Dr. Kansfield followed up with his own letter dated November 24, 04. In the two-page letter, Kansfield declares himself to be "saved by Jesus Christ." He describes himself as a "conservative Christian

to whom the doctrines of our Lord's virgin birth, atoning death, bodily resurrection, and return in glory give shape and meaning to my ministry," a "social liberal," "a Reformed Christian" and "an evangelical Christian who cares passionately about the proclamation of the Gospel."

Kansfield follows with a plea that he and his "daughters" be treated "as your brother and sisters." And he argues for the use of Matthew 18's requirements to be put into effect: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone." The seminary professor concludes with a plea that New Brunswick Theological Seminary not be held responsible for his actions because neither did he consult the Board of Trustees nor his colleagues on the faculty.

The article continues by pointing out that in 1978, 1979, and in 1990 the General Synod of the RCA emphasized that "the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to Scripture." They also encouraged the church to "love and sensitivity towards such persons as fellow human beings." The Synod of the Great Lakes of the RCA reaffirmed this position in November 16, 2004.

The article summarized:

At this time, Kansfield remains president of the seminary as well as General Synod Professor of Theology. And his daughter Ann has been ordained and installed and continues to serve an RCA church in Brooklyn, New York.

The *Grand Rapids Press*, February 12, 2005, also reflects on this in an article by its religion editor, Charles Honey:

The Rev. Norman Kansfield, a Hope College graduate and former librarian at Holland's Western Theological Seminary, hopes the controversy will prompt renewed discussion about the RCA's stance toward gays.

"It is very clearly time for the Reformed Church in America and all the rest of the body of Christ to

take up a conversation about how we are going to treat homosexual persons," said Kansfield, 64.

The board of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, an RCA-affiliated school in New Jersey, recently voted not to renew Kansfield's contract when it expires June 30. Trustees reprimanded Kansfield, president since 1993, for officiating at his daughter's wedding in Massachusetts last June without consulting them.

In addition, clergy from West Michigan are among two church groups that have filed ecclesiastical charges, which could lead to discipline or even a church trial of Kansfield at this summer's General Synod.

Further fueling the debate: Kansfield's daughter, Ann, has been asked to lead an RCA church in Brooklyn where she serves as an unordained pastor.

Resolution of both cases will test an RCA stand against gay marriage and its position that "the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to Scripture."

To officials' knowledge, it is the first gay wedding performed by an RCA minister.

The issue likely will surface at the General Synod this June, said a top RCA official.

"We've studied and reflected this carefully for 25 years," said the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, who serves as general secretary of the 284,000-member RCA from its West Michigan regional offices. "I think it's important that that dialogue and reflection continue."

It is interesting, but very disturbing, that the matter of homosexuality and even the "marriage" of homosexuals in this way is a matter of "dialogue" within the churches. It's happened in the Episcopal Church, in some Presbyterian Churches, and now within the RCA. Scripture is clear on the subject. For 2000 years the church has maintained this clear teaching of Scripture. For the last 25 years the RCA, at its synodical gatherings, has affirmed that position. Now the gen-

eral secretary of the West Michigan regional offices of the RCA states, "I think it's important that that dialogue and reflection continue." It doesn't matter what the church maintained for 2000 years. It doesn't matter what the RCA has taught for most of its history. There must be "dialogue and reflection," no doubt until finally "gay marriage" and the "practicing homosexual lifestyle" have been approved by the church. That is the mode of operation in other denomi-

nations. Now the same is taking place in the RCA. The *Grand Rapids Press* article quotes the general secretary, Granberg-Michaelson, as stating that he hopes the controversy won't lead to major conflicts other denominations have endured. "Most of those in the church...don't want to see the denomination torn up in endless and divisive and very painful judicial processes and fights over this," he said. The implication seems to be that the "conservatives" hopefully will ultimately ac-

quiesce so that the denomination remains intact.

It remains to be seen what will develop. Though Rev. Kansfield will not have his "contract" renewed after it expires on June 30, he has not been deposed from office. His daughter has been ordained and installed in office in a RCA church (according to the report in *Christian Renewal*). The question is: Is there the spiritual strength to exercise Christian discipline anymore? 

Our Tsunamis (2)

In the elegant books of creation we read, through the spectacles of Scripture, of sin and grace.

We read some tsunami books in our last Grace Life article. Those terrible killer waves that crashed coasts some months ago are not only lessons in earthquakes and "where to build your next resort." They are spiritual books. They are God's own literature of the "shock and awe" genre. They shock us into an awesome sense of sin and sin's killer threat. Since God has written them, we dare not put the books down.

Though the reading be not for the faint of heart. Or though we think tsunamis are of no concern to us. Though we imagine ourselves on such high ground that we cannot be reached by tsunamis. Though we believe we are in the strongest of theological and ecclesiastical and Covenant Christian High School redoubts, and are doubtless, therefore, sin-tsunami-

proof. We must, dear reader, *Take up the tsunami, and read!*

Reading Our Own Tsunamis

For, I fear, tsunamis of the sin variety are threatening our very shores. Or maybe they have already come. Perhaps we are being swept out into the troubled secular seas! Hard to think of it. Would not we have heard the waves come in? Would not, if they had come, if our houses and churches and schools had been smashed into, and we, tossed about, and gasping for air, and grabbing onto driftwood...*would not we, certainly, as sure as we were smashed and tossed, and as we gasped and grabbed...have been aware of all this?!*

Maybe. But let us remember—tsunamis of sin are from the devil. And the devil, as the Dutch like to say, does not come clomping into church in wooden shoes. So the devil's sin tsunamis are mostly unheard, unnoticed, disguised. As silent subtle waves. Or more like an ordinary tide of ordinary things coming in and going out and maybe taking us with it. And not without some strange things bobbing in their waters by which we sinners are fascinated, and for

which we would dunk. So we bob for strange things in sin tsunamis. All the while unaware of their tsunami-ness. And we have fun in the waves. And there's Mary Lou swimming along. And Uncle Jed. And this program's not crushing me. And that latest hit feels good. And imagine, *all* the people, and even those party-stopping parents finally *at* the party with us young people, and the Pope with the Reformed Pastor, and secular humanists with Sunni Muslims, and environmentalists with the President swimming, as one. And we church-folk—swimming where the grace is easy, and the living is me....

Amazing! *The disguise of tsunamis!*



Philip Ryken, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, notes especially two twenty-first century tsunami threats to the church in his book *The City on a Hill*. I wonder if these, Grace Life reader, are not among the tsunamis threatening us.

For the one, according to Ryken, is *relativism*. This belief has surely flooded the land. Accord-

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ing to the relativist, there is no absolute truth. Truth is relative to the beholder, the situation, the era, the culture. But it is no one thing, and no one thing for everyone at all times. It is the belief, therefore, that there is no God, nor any possibility of God. It is a sign of the times of which Scripture prophesied—when men endure no sound doctrine, turn away their ears from truth, and watch for reality on TV.

Sound like one of those Indian Ocean tsunamis—very far away? Or that maybe this has hit Athens, but never will hit Jerusalem? I wonder. I wonder why, if it is so far away, we are not reading and *studying* the Bible more. I wonder, then, why our Bible Studies must be every other week, and even then, compete with Tuesday-night basketball games. And lose. I wonder if our being so swept up in the current of this world, busy in this and that, and too busy to stop and think, is because our *faith* and *delight* in the Rock of Truth is weak, even going under, drowning. I wonder if collectively we left off thinking and developing theologically when a certain theologian who preached an unconditional covenant was taken to glory according to the very unconditional promises he preached. I wonder if our thinking stopped for us personally whenever we got our newest boat. I wonder why talking shop and sports and sales is so much easier in narthexes, on cell phones, and in school halls than talking truth? And why is so often our theological talk in order to debate, and not to delight together in the deep things of God and grace, and not to learn, even, sometimes, from those with whom we disagree?

Is not all of this a practical postmodern relativism? Worldlings say “no truth!” We betray, by our lack of love of the truth, by our dusty Bibles, canned prayers, and heartless and sometimes ruthless defenses of the faith...that somehow or other the truth and we

are not relating. Or Truth moves *me* less than I systematize or manipulate *it*. Or Truth is second or third cousin. No Brother. No Friend. No Way. No Life. And I am no priest of It. No Prophet of It. No reveler in It. Though I confess It is still King.

Another threat Ryken notes is *narcissism*. This is the love of one’s self and the love, therefore, of pleasing one’s self. The word is coined from the story of a fellow (Narcissus) who fell in love with himself. He used to contemplate and admire his image, so the myth goes, as he stared into a pool of water. That was all he did. And he ended up dying there by the pool. Pining away. In love with his lover. Himself. Dead.

Now an early warning of this tsunami has been given in God’s Word telling us that in the last days men shall be lovers of their own selves, and of pleasures, more than lovers of God. The question that needs putting is: is this wave, too, fast approaching us? Or has it already swept us out to Great America?

Seems to me the ground is wet everywhere, and even in the highlands of the country of the Reformed, with the waters, the tsunami waters, of this inordinate self-love, and this pleasure-seeking.

How else to explain why our skirts and blouses and bikinis may not reveal Victoria’s secret, but certainly suggest ours? And why is fasting as rare among us as an untidy Dutchman, a bloodless Italian, or an infralapsarian? And what else explains why the chief part of many thanks is contributing to the Christian schools or paying the budget? And prayer, the *real* chief part of *all* thanks is a lick and a prayer, the-same-words-at-the-dinner-table-every-night, and no sweating blood, nor real communion with and wrestling with and joy in...*God*? And gracious *homebody* godliness. Holy *time alone with God and His Word* devotion. *On the job* devotion. True love for

all the saints. Ardent passion for *even the pink-haired* lost. Has virtue and life of this sort, *grace virtue and grace life itself*, been washed out to sea by the What’s-In-It-For-Me-Because-I-Love-Me Wave?

And you, young Grace Life reader—what do you look like? What will you look like when you arrive on the other side of adolescence into adulthood, or after you have been twenty-something for fifteen years? What can be, what shall be *seen* of you? This?

Look! Look!

Look at those scars!

Snowmobile limp there.

Evident ability to relate to a ball, more than to self and to other persons.

Dribbling devotion.

Glazed hangover eyes.

Dateless and depressed.

Dated and still dating after all these years,

Looking more and more like the rider

On Man’s merry-go-round divorce-making machine.

Or That!

Behold this man, this woman!

Look at those scars! Deep, jagged, all over!

Stigmata, for sure—marks of the cross they have borne and are bearing!

True Church men and women—of today and tomorrow!

Godly! Down on their knees.

Theology to the toes, and down to their Friday nights.

Decidedly Christian, Truthful, self-denying, giving and growing believers

Glad Grace Lifers—living the life for Christ their Savior and Lord!

Grace Waves

Not sure about you Grace Life readers, but these waves of the sin sort are certainly lapping at my shore. And yes, I will confess, I have been taken for some rather unpleasant rides whenever the relativism or the narcissism or whateverism wave has gotten the

better of me.... And I bear scars, all over, and to my shame, of sin's deadly waves.

God forgive this sin-tsunami rider! And you forgive me too, won't you?

Here, however, is what I have found, and what I would share with all of you.

It is the grace waves. It is the salvation and blessedness of God in Jesus Christ. It is the experience of that salvation. It is the reflection upon this salvation, and the holding on to the truth of this salvation even when the sin waves come, or though we have been, even for a long time, at sea. It is the godly believing defiance of the waves of evil. It is being swept by grace onto the Rock that is higher than I, and higher than the greatest devil tsunamis can reach. And then riding those grace waves in a life of joy and godliness pleasing God!

Salvation comes to us that way, you know—by waves, grace ones. The inspired John speaks of this when he writes in John 1:16 that of the fullness of Jesus Christ have all we received, and “grace for grace.”

Think of that, will you?

Jesus, John has been saying, is the only begotten Son of the Father—very God, the Word of God with God and God Himself. In Jesus dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9).

And we have received, it is written, of *just that* fullness—of the fullness of God! This means we have received God! This means that God is now with us and we with Him, and there is joy and peace in communion with Him!

This all, because this same Son, Jesus, is Mediator. He is Savior. He is the only begotten and eternal Son who “dwells among us” in human flesh. As God *in flesh*, He dies on the cross for our sins. He is risen for our justification. He is at the right hand of the Father. And He pours out His Spirit. So that of the fullness of His own salvation, of the treasury of His own

merit, of His righteousness, wisdom, holiness, and love, have all we received who believe on Him!

So God, and all the blessings of the salvation in Jesus, have all we received!

This way: *and grace for grace!*

Now this means by grace, and by grace fully in this new dispensation.



For the law was given by Moses. But grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (v.17). Not to say there was no grace and truth in Old Testament times. There was indeed! But grace only now in the fullness of the time, in the coming of the Son, in the fulfillment of the promises, in the pouring out of the Spirit...*as a tidal wave!*

Yes indeed, grace lapped on Israel's shore. God revealed Himself to Moses on Mt. Hebron as the Lord God merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth (Ex. 34:6).

But now...*overwhelming, inundating, poured-out-Spirit-of the risen Son, full revelation, Church-temple-making grace!* And rushing grace. Rushing. Rushing into all the world, in all the places, high and low, in all the nations, and rushing to fill hearts—the *free and beautiful grace of the salvation and abundant blessings and life of the Christ of God!*

Grace, other-side-of-Calvary, new covenant *grace!*



And, of course, we know why. Wherever there are tsunamis, think “earthquake.” Same thing with tsunamis of the spiritual kind. The devil shook the earth with his first murderous lie. But now there has been another shaking. And from this the grace waves come.

You know this shaking, don't you? It was prophesied long ago by Haggai. He spoke of a spectacular earth-nation-quake. He said this would occur when the desire of all nations would come (2:6, 7). Well, this desire is ours, Jesus!

And His coming was when the world was shaken!

Oh yes! God in the fullness of the time stepped into time with His own divine foot! And ever since, that time and that earth into which He stepped has been set a shaking, and still is!

Epicenter, Bethlehem! Lie and status quo and citadels of men forever displaced and dislodged and set-a-tottering to doom. Waves of grace and truth set-a-going out, out, and ever out in enlarging circles and divine miles per hour—all by Christ's coming. Grace wherever the Savior steps and in His miracles and grace words. Grace where He hangs. Grace killing death. Grace emptying a tomb. Grace now from the Commander of heaven. Grace flowing to nations through the proclamation of grace....



To you, dear Grace Life reader. And why, the reason why grace is *to you sinner* is only the grace itself. God had determined grace for you. And there you are in your resort. Or on your high ground or swimming with the best of the sinners, rather laughing with them, than crying with saints...and swoosh! No warning. And no possibility of resistance. There the waves are. And before you know it you and your life are visited and overwhelmed. You receive God. You believe God. You trust God. You know forgiveness, and peace and joy in the life from above. And you live by this wave grace—grace life.

More. When you sin now, young and youthful friends, the grace still comes. I really wanted to say this. I need to hear this. I thought you might too. Grace is for once. Grace is forever. And grace is *for day by day*. That, I believe, is in “grace for grace.”

There you are, on your shore. There I am on mine. The grace has come. The living is lovely. But something happens. We sin maybe. Even in our attempts to be

godly young men dreaming godly dreams, we still wish they all could be California girls. Our spirituality is only a memory of the night we confessed our faith. Or we find ourselves with some sort of disease, some limit to what we thought was never ending youthful strength and vigor. Or God puts a wall in front of our path and our plans. And we hurt, our faith falters. *Has God forgotten to be kind?* We say. And those *other* waves start looking more and more good for surfing, or fishing, or swimming....

But then, all of a sudden you wake up one morning. And there is grace again. Or maybe it was there all along. You just didn't see it, or received and appreciated it

less than your stuff and your pleasures. But God did not let you go.

Nor will He. He will find you out. With grace. With grace favor, grace beauty, grace power. Grace! Sent from the epicenter, from the Lord coming once, and coming history-long, and coming again. Reaching you, and reaching me, and reaching fellow sinners. Day after day. Trial after trial. Struggle after struggle. Grace on our naturally barren shores. Grace smashing our own Self-fortresses, and our resorting-to-man resorts.

Grace to you. From God our Father. And from Jesus Christ the Lord. Through the working of the Holy Spirit.

And grace...*wave upon wave* of grace!



Believe it. Show they have come to you, and that you are no longer empty, but full of Christ, and full, *like Him, and like sons and daughters of God in His image*, of grace and truth! Tell the world that grace waves are the day by day lovely waters of your life—even the waters which take you out to work and to play, which are the waters of your relationships, and which take you home to rest.

Waves of waters that are sweet to drink. And our joy to ride.

Grace Waves!

Drink. Ride. And be gloriously...*happy!* 

All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee

Mr. Joel Minderhoud

Sown of God

Thy spirit, O Lord, makes life to abound; The earth is renewed, and fruitful the ground;

To God ascribe glory and wisdom and might, Let God in His creatures forever delight.

(Psalter 287, v. 1 –
Versification of Psalm 104)

Warmer days are slowly approaching and with it comes all the joyous expectancy of life renewed, refreshed, and restored. We see new life all around us – not in all its full mid-summer glory – but we see it and anticipate it as the warm, earthy smells greet us once again after the cool crispness of winter. The life of spring has begun and it

will continue to grow and flourish and blossom in the months to follow. We see it in buds bursting, water flowing, eaves dripping, greens peeking, animals chattering, farmers sowing, and seeds sprouting. Slowly the earth awakens, as it hears the voice of the Creator calling it again to spring forth and bud and green and be quickened.

We do well to remember that this is the hand of the Sovereign Creator, our Almighty Father, who each spring reminds us of the awesome work that He is doing in and through us – a work that He alone begat in us, and a work that He will bring to its full completion. Though we were dead in our sins, He gives to us that principle, that seed, of new life, so that we are born again in Him. Out of that seed of new life, He makes us to grow spiritually, that we in this life bring forth good spiritual fruit and grow deeper in friendship and fellowship with Him.

So, it is good for us in the midst of our busy lives to pause in the springtime and consider the restoration of life all around us, particularly as it is seen in the sowing of a seed and its subsequent growth and development. Out of something seemingly lifeless comes an abundance of life. Much of the busy work of spring is that of sowing the seed. And what an abundance is ours when through the careful nurturing of that seed, through the means that God provides, those seeds grow and develop and give to us of their bounty both in beauty and in provision. And, when viewed in the light of Scripture, it affords to us a marvelous picture of God's work in and through us.

The Earthly Picture

Seeds, from a biological perspective, develop as a result of pollination and fertilization. Pollination is the transferring of genetic

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information from the male sections of the flower to the female sections, whether in the same plant or from one plant to another. We are amazed by the unique means God uses to accomplish this. Wind, tiny insects, and even humans are the tools He uses to transfer pollen from one flower to another. When the flower is pollinated, the male and female cells join, and consequently divide, creating an organized mass of cells, consisting of an embryo, endosperm, and seed coat — the three basic parts generally found in most seeds. When the developing seed matures, it ceases from further growth and development and remains dormant until specific environmental conditions arise that will promote further development, resulting in full plant growth. The environmental conditions necessary to begin germination typically include a specific level of moisture, warmth, oxygen, and light. When sufficient levels of these factors are present, the seed will germinate and begin the process of developing into a full-grown, fruit-producing plant.

Central to each seed is the “embryo” — the actual seed of new life. This embryo contains all the genetic information to make the complete plant. In God’s infinite wisdom, the embryo has everything that the plant will need. In a tiny embryo is contained the complete “life” of the plant, but only in an immature form. Around the embryo grows two parts — the endosperm and the seed coat. The endosperm is the initial “food supply” for the embryo when it begins to develop. During the months in which a plant is making its seeds, some of the carbohydrates formed in the process of photosynthesis will be transferred to the seeds to be stored as the endosperm. Surrounding the embryo and en-

dosperm is a protective coating called the seed coat. These coats vary in thickness and durability depending on the plant. The purpose of the seed coat is to protect the embryo and to inhibit early germination. Moisture and other vital nutrients cannot penetrate a thick seed coat, and thus germination cannot begin.

In the providence of God, there are a number of ways in which this seed coat can be broken at the

proper time so that the necessary environmental factors can penetrate to the “embryo” and begin the germinating process. For ex-

ample, some seeds are cracked by the freeze-thaw cycle of winter in which the seed coat shrinks under cold conditions but expands when warmed. As the weather oscillates between freezing and thawing, the seed coat may several times shrink and expand — causing cracks to develop in the seed coat. Some seed coats are cracked or scratched by the nibbling of animals. And in some cases, such as the strawberry seed, the seed coat is weakened when it passes through the digestive system of an animal. Thus, God provides many ways in which the seed coats are sufficiently weakened so that moisture, heat, oxygen, and light may penetrate to the “embryo” and begin the germination process.

Of course, the seed and its potential growth are nothing without soil. Soil provides the seed with the nutrients necessary to continue the growing and developing process. Everyone understands that a seed may begin germination on the kitchen counter, in a cup of water; but, without soil, that developing seed will not turn into the desired plant. In modern greenhouses certain plants do grow without physical soil, but the plants are bathed in solutions that are rich in nutri-

ents. In one way or another, however, the plant must have a nutritional diet in order to grow. And that diet is found, for all practical purposes, in soil. So it is with all plants — a good nutritional basis is key for the germinating plant to grow and mature.

Soil contains nutrients vital to growth. As we learned earlier in this rubric, nitrogen is a key nutrient that God places in the soil through amazing processes. But other nutrients, such as potassium, phosphorus, and magnesium, are also necessary elements found in the soil. Potassium is an important element in the plant because it is used in the process of osmosis — which maintains proper water levels within the cells of the plant. Phosphorus helps in the making of various enzymes that the plant will need, and magnesium is the main element in the chlorophyll molecule (the molecule that takes the sunlight energy and uses it to form glucose molecules, which in turn are used by the plant and other organisms as their fuel for cellular processes). Besides these main elements, there are many other important nutrients in the soil that are important for the plant’s growth and development.

The Spiritual Reality

Seeds, and their organic growth and development, are used often throughout the Scriptures, to illustrate and to help us better understand certain revealed truths of our God. For example, Scripture teaches us to be careful and diligent because we reap what we sow (Hos. 8:7; Gal. 6:7-9). The seed is also used to describe the growth and development of the church in the kingdom of God from a simple seed to a full-grown plant (Luke 13:19). In stark contrast to this, the works of sin are also pictured as beginning in seed form and developing over time into massive, destructive plants (James 1:15). God teaches us about our victory over death, with the hope of a new

It is good for us in the midst of our busy lives to pause in the springtime and consider the restoration of life all around us.

heavenly life, by the picture of a seed dying in the ground and sprouting forth as a new beautiful plant (I Cor. 15:35-38). God uses the plant world for numerous spiritual pictures, which we have not the time to discuss.¹ But we will take a few moments to consider the seed as a picture of the spiritual seed of regeneration as that first work of God in our hearts apart from any means, and then also as a picture of the mediate work of our God in conversion and in our daily walk of sanctification as seen in the growth and development of the earthly seed.

In an earthly seed, the embryo is alive. Even though it does not grow, apart from the aid of soil or environmental conditions, it is alive. The living, physical seed that is planted in the earth is used as a picture for us of God's planting in us the incorruptible seed of spiritual life (I Pet. 1:23). We, who were dead in sins, have been given a new life in Christ — regeneration. Regeneration "is the act of God, whereby He implants the seed of the new life into the heart of the sinner ... not in the consciousness of the sinner as such, but in the very depth of his heart."² All of the blessings and glory of that new life are present at that time of regeneration, howbeit only in seed form (I John 3:9). Just as the seed embryo is truly alive and, in principle, is the *plant* because it contains all of the life that that plant will have, so too, the regenerated child of God has everything of the new life of Christ in him, but only in seed form.

This amazing and humbling truth is solely the sovereign and particular work of God. We are born of God — from death into life. "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26 teaches that God takes away our

stony hearts and gives to us a new heart of flesh. "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (I Pet. 1:23). This, apart from any means (preaching, etc.), is our new life. God speaks, efficaciously and powerfully, and we live, apart from our conscious knowledge (Ezek. 16:6). But then, with eyes to see and ears to hear, we come to this knowledge by the Word, which by the gospel is preached unto us (Rom. 10:17).

Soon the earthly seed in the ground will germinate and, under the influences of the warmth of the sun and nutrients of the soil, grow and develop into a beautiful fruit-bearing plant. This earthly growth is a picture of our spiritual growth — our daily conversion and sanctification. Once the new life of Christ is placed in us, we grow spiritually, like

a tree by the riverside. But God uses means for this growth. A plant embryo is alive, but it must be subjected to moisture, warmth, and oxygen in order for it to begin its growth and development. So, too, the child of God is spiritually alive because of the seed of regeneration placed within him. By the will of God, this new life will grow and develop and bear fruit, that the blessedness of our God may be seen. What farmer, desiring fruit, places a seed in the ground and then does not care for it? How much less our God and Father! He implants the seed of the new life and then, through means, causes us to grow spiritually and bring forth good fruit.

God accomplishes this growth through a variety of means. He uses the preaching of the gospel centrally to cause this spiritual growth. Thanks be to God for faithful preaching! Thanks be to God for faithful ministers! May God be gracious to us and continue to provide us with faithful labor-

ers! But God uses other means that find their basis and strength in the preaching. Thanks be to God for Christian discipline, for faithful parental instruction in the home, for families that sing the songs of Zion, for Bible studies, for personal devotions, for godly, distinctively Reformed, Christian day schools, for Christian homes that are a haven in the midst of the spiritually-killing influences of the world. The spiritually rich environment in which we live is that rich soil of the seed. Our spiritual growth depends upon these means that God provides, and that through the gift of faith we receive. We ought not to neglect these good means! For if we do, we can be assured that we will shrivel and wither spiritually, just as a plant void of good nutritious soil will wither and die. May God give us the grace to see and use the means He gives — faithfully attending the worship services, studying His Word in both family and personal devotions, and ridding ourselves of the poisonous influences of the world that try to choke and overrun our spiritual lives. And by that same grace may we obey the command to "put off the old man with his deeds; and [put] on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:9-10)

God's Bountiful Provision

God, in His infinite wisdom, provides us with all we need for body and soul. For truly we marvel when we consider all the things that must occur between development of the seed and its subsequent growth into a new plant. It is our Father in heaven who directs those many and varied processes that we, and all creatures, might be fed and nourished physically. What a mighty and loving Father is ours! May we give that serious consideration each day, especially in the spring as we watch the farmer sowing the seed.

But consider how much more

The child of God is spiritually alive because of the seed of regeneration placed within him.

we ought to marvel at how our Father provides us with what we need spiritually! He does so graciously provide — and in abundance! We ought never to doubt that, but be encouraged, by the resurgence of life we see all around us, that God graciously supplies our every spiritual need. As we examine the work of God in our hearts, may we see a sovereign, covenant God, who brought us from death into life and continues day by day to nourish and care for our spiritual growth and development that we may grow deeper and closer in friendship with Him as our Father.

On this earth we will not grow into perfection. Our new life is but in principle, and the full realization of this new life comes only in the way of our dying and our final

resurrection. This is true from two perspectives. We have in us the new man, that seed of new life that is growing and flourishing, but in this life we still have that old man of sin that clings to us and perverts even our very best works (Rom. 7: 22-23). Only in the way of death are we ultimately freed from that sinful nature. And, secondly, we still have our physical, earthy bodies that must be changed into heavenly, spiritual bodies in order for us to experience our new heavenly life to the fullest (I Cor. 15: 35-37). This too, comes only after death and the final resurrection, as we are taught in John 14:24. “Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” We long for the return of Christ and

the day in which we shall be completely changed, raised in power and glory (I Cor. 15: 51-52). Knowing the victory is ours in Christ, may we be steadfast in our walk here below. And may the sowing of the seed and the renewal of life all around us be an encouragement to us that we may be “confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). 

1. Rev. Homer Hoeksema notes other important pictures in Scripture that the plant world provides. The interested reader can read of these in *Unfolding Covenant History*, Volume I (pp. 44-50), available from the RFPA — see www.rfpa.org.

2. Hoeksema, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics*. RFPA: Grand Rapids, MI, 1966, p 460.

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Jai Mahtani

Equipping Our People for Personal Evangelism (1)

Introduction

In order that we might take seriously our calling to equip the saints, and thus explore areas where officebearers might help to equip God’s people to be busy in personal evangelism, I believe that we ourselves must be fully convinced of the proper place of personal evangelism in the church. What is evangelism? Whose duty is it to evangelize? Whom must we evangelize? What is the place of personal evangelism? These are some of the questions that must be answered as we consider the need to equip God’s people for personal evangelism.

Evangelism is the duty of the church to make known the gospel to all men.

Evangelism is the God-given duty by which the church is called to make known to all nations the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me say that Reformed people ought to be the most multi-cultural in their mission efforts, since they insist that when the Scriptures speak of “all men” or “the world” the reference is to all kinds of people.

Biblical and Reformed evangelism must also emphasize the faithful proclamation of the gospel message. I am going to take for granted that all of us understand the importance of this essential principle of Reformed evangelism. It is simply wrong to emphasize zeal in missions and forget that the

message of the gospel is the most important thing. We must not bring a false gospel. We must bring the glorious gospel of grace that a man is justified by faith in Jesus Christ, which faith is not of man but is the gracious gift of God.

It also needs to be emphasized that God has given to the church this high calling to do the work of evangelism and missions. It is simply not the calling of parachurch organizations to send out ambassadors of the gospel. The tools they produce might be useful, and we are not saying that all their work is useless or in all cases detrimental, but the Scriptures plainly teach that it is “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15) that God has appointed as the agent to preach the gospel. A man cannot preach

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except he is sent (Rom. 10). God sends His servants through His church. The church therefore must take that God-given calling seriously. She must faithfully feed God's people and she must diligently spread the gospel. I will assume that all of us are convinced also of this important principle of missions.

This duty of the church to make known the gospel to all men must be taken very seriously by the Protestant Reformed Churches. The gospel may not be hidden under the bushel. It must continue to be preached to the nations till the return of Christ. Without a doubt we must continue to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints and be doctrinally sound as churches. But what needs to be understood is that, besides the building up of the flock itself, the church must know it to be her God-given duty to evangelize beyond her pale.

Every congregation must be busy in that work and not leave it to a denominational mission committee or a particular calling church to do evangelism. Every minister must know it to be his duty to lead his congregation to be "mission-minded" and not simply applaud the missionaries when they effectively do this on the mission field, or complain when they do not seem to be carrying it out as effectively and quickly as we might like. Our own members in our own churches, and not only those on the mission field, must be zealous to witness of the truths of the gospel by their life and by their testimony to those around them. All our people in all our congregations must be equipped to do personal evangelism because evangelism is the duty of the church to make known the gospel to all men.

The chief means for evangelism is the lively preaching of the Word.

The question is asked: "Is not the gospel made known chiefly by means of the preaching of the Word?" The answer is: absolutely! Reformed evangelism must not only emphasize the God-given calling of the church to be the vessel He has ordained to do the work of evangelism, but Reformed evangelism must also uphold the biblical means God has ordained for this work: the official proclamation of the gospel in the preaching of the Word. Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). People are not converted to

Every congregation must be busy in that work and not leave it to a denominational mission committee or a particular calling church to do evangelism.

Christ by watching movies or puppet shows. People are only converted to more movies and puppet shows by watching movies and puppet shows. God does not work repentance and faith in the hearts of sinners by man's word and by man's entertainment. God works repentance and faith in the hearts of His people by the preaching of the Word. The chief means for the work of evangelism is the preaching; no personal evangelism is possible without the preaching of the gospel; indeed, without the preaching of the gospel, there is no possibility of salvation.

The lively preaching of the Word not only works and strengthens faith, but it also produces personal evangelism. For one thing, it gives content to the witnessing; secondly, the preaching itself is the means that works the zeal in the members to witness; thirdly, the preaching of the Word ought to produce godly lives that result in people asking, and our people responding; and finally, it is the preaching too that makes believers

know how to do that work of evangelism meekly, humbly, in true love for the neighbor. We will return in more detail to this in our next section that deals with personal evangelism as the fruit of the preaching itself.

Without the preaching of the Word, personal evangelism will not only be ineffective, it will have negative and detrimental results. What would one who imagines himself to be involved in personal evangelism witness to when he does not come under the preaching of the Word himself? What would he be able to testify? What would his testimony be? That it is possible to live a Christian life without the preaching of the Word?! That the means of grace can be despised? What an ungodly witness that would be! We must recognize all such evangelism as unbiblical.

It is true of course that there are circumstances that are exceptional and temporary. There are times when under severe persecution the declaration of the gospel by the church is hindered. In those times, God can and will use the lively witness of His people. But the point that must be emphasized is that personal evangelism must not become a substitute for preaching. Even under such dire circumstances as persecution, personal evangelism will lead to a hunger and a thirst and a genuine search for pure preaching. I have experienced that firsthand. I have seen how underground churches in Communist and Muslim lands come into existence: God's people cannot worship publicly, but they risk their lives by still seeking out the pure preaching of the Word underground. And their testimony is never: we do not need the preaching of the gospel! Rather, as they witness to each other and to others, they long for the preaching of the Word.

Besides, what is the goal of personal evangelism? Is it not ultimately to lead others to the preaching of the Word? Did not the Samaritan woman go to town with the

personal testimony: "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" (John 4:29) and did not "many more believe because of (Christ's) own word and say unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:41-42)? Should we not be saying to fellow saints and to others around us: "Come, let us go into the house of the LORD" (Ps. 122:1)? If personal evangelism sometimes must begin in a jail cell or in a living room or in a Bible study, the goal must still be to bring others to join with us in the public worship of God under the preaching of His Word. Anything other than this biblical goal is not properly Reformed evangelism. It is this perspective that we must take if we are to emphasize personal evangelism among our people.

Personal evangelism is the fruit of lively preaching.

This important element in Reformed evangelism must not be forgotten or slighted in any way. No, personal evangelism must not be a substitute for the other important principles of Reformed evangelism mentioned above. However, having given proper place to those elements, we must never forget that one of the blessed fruits of such lively, biblical preaching is the godly witness of the saints. Whether or not there is numerical growth, there will always be spiritual fruit under the preaching of the Word. One of those fruits is that under the preaching of the Word our people will be equipped for personal evangelism. Where the Word is preached, and where sinners are called out of darkness into God's marvelous light, God's praises will be heard! Where the gospel is proclaimed, and God's people set their affection on things above, and look for the blessed hope of Christ's return, a powerful witness will result.

God's people will confess Christ! God's people must confess His name! Confession of faith in the church is important for church membership and as an expression of our commitment to Christ and to His kingdom. But confessing our faith before others, daily, both by our walk and our talk is absolutely necessary. In fact, without such a lively witness, one cannot make confession of faith in good faith. Belonging to the essence of the biblical idea of confessing one's faith is the promise to make known our hope to all around us. Christ told us clearly in Matthew 10:32-33: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." This confession is to be made not only publicly before God and the saints, but also before men, before *all* men.

Of course, we must recognize that God gives different gifts and talents to His people. Not all the saints are people-orientated; some are quiet, others are more given to conversation. Our personalities affect the way we witness; there is no doubt about that. But we can all learn together to improve and to be involved in personal evangelism. We must all honestly examine ourselves and put away excuses we might give with regard to giving a good witness for our Lord Jesus Christ and for the precious truths of God's Word.

The passage in I Peter 3:15 is almost always quoted in any discussion that has to do with personal evangelism. Let us take a few moments to consider this and a few other passages that relate to personal evangelism. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a rea-

son of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." We have here really two imperatives; first, we are to sanctify the LORD God in our hearts, which clearly means that we must consciously live in the fear of God, who is holy, so that we ourselves walk in that holiness before the face God; and secondly, we must be always ready to give an answer or, a "verbal defense," for that is what the word *apologia* means in the Greek. No, this does not mean all of us must know how to give a theological dissertation on every subject. Of course not! But it does mean that we must stand ready to defend our hope. It is true that the text adds: "to every man that asks," but we must not stand behind the excuse: "No one asks, so I do not tell!" A quick look at the context will show that Peter is exhorting God's people to walk in godliness in every sphere of life, and that they must expect the world to ask, and that they must stand ready to answer!

Why do our neighbors not ask? Why do our friends not inquire about our walk? Is it possible that they do not see in our lives that much of a difference? Is it possible we hear God's Word in the preaching, but we do not really do what the preaching obligates us to do in gratitude to God? Or is it possible that they do see a difference, but the last time they asked they did not get an answer filled with

Is it possible we hear God's Word in the preaching, but we do not really do what the preaching obligates us to do in gratitude to God?

meekness and fear, but rather with haughtiness? Or perhaps even with anger and bitterness? God's people need to be equipped to do godly, humble, friendly, personal evangelism, and this is possible only under the preaching of the Word. It is the preaching itself that the Spirit uses to produce the fruit of personal evangelism in the lives of the saints.

The passage in Acts 8:4 clearly refers to the saints who were scattered from Jerusalem under perse-

cution: "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word." These men and women went evangelizing, not preaching, as the KJV incorrectly has it. The Greek word is *euanggelew*, which is different from the word *kyrusso* (as in Rom. 10). The former is the general word for the spread of the gospel; the latter refers to the official heralding of the Word. All God's people are involved in evangelism – by their prayers, by their witness, by their life, and by their talk. Not all are preachers and not all are missionaries; but all who are under the lively preaching of the Word are indeed involved in evangelism by their witness.

Consider too the apostle Paul's commendation of the Thessalonians. I Thessalonians 1:8-10: "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing." What a powerful witness these saints in Thessalonica gave: they "sounded out the word of the Lord!" But please notice with me that in the previous verses Paul first commends them for *receiving* the Word. I Thessalonians 1:5-7: "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.... And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia." This is important. Without being under the preaching, they could not have sounded out the Word,

for personal evangelism is one of the blessed fruits of the lively preaching of the Word.

Another passage that shows this vital relationship between preaching and witness is Colossians 4:5, 6: "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." This passage is very interesting. Paul writes from prison. He has asked in the previous verses for prayer as he performs his calling: "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak." But then he turns around and exhorts the saints themselves, as if to say: "Do not only pray for me in my calling to preach the Word; you yourselves walk in wisdom toward them that are without (not bound in jail, but freely walking about), redeeming the time (even as every prisoner must know how to make good use of his time); make sure that your speech is seasoned with grace, so that you also may know how to answer every man." Sure, preaching is the chief means for missions, but true preachers must demand, and true preaching will produce, the personal evangelism of God's people themselves.

Notice the same spirit with which the apostle wrote to the saints at Philippi. Philippians 1:27, 28: "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit,

with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God." Again, Paul writes while he is in bonds for the sake of the gospel. He holds out hope to the beloved saints in Philippi that he might yet come to them. He thanks them for their prayers and for sending a gift through Epaphroditus. But he says that there is something yet more important than all of that: "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel..." and he goes on to instruct them in this passage regarding the work of personal evangelism. God's people must not allow the terror of their enemies to stop them from witnessing to the truth. They must make sure that their conversation, i.e., the whole of their conduct, matches the gospel of Christ. Above all, they must learn to strive together in one spirit, with one mind, for the faith of the gospel. This is the work of Christ's church under the preaching. The people of God, under the preaching, must do personal evangelism.

There are, of course, many other passages that we might identify and study, but just these few will suffice to show that in any discussion of Reformed evangelism, there must be place given to personal evangelism. Let it be reiterated here: personal evangelism does not take the place of the preaching; it is the fruit of the preaching. It is not to be done in separation from the church; it is a vital part of the church itself. It is the fruit that we must expect from the lively preaching.

...to be continued. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

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

Mission Activities

Rev. J. Mahtani, our churches' missionary to Pittsburgh, PA, and the Fellowship there was scheduled to be heard on radio sta-

tion WORD FM 101.5 in Pittsburgh on March 20 & 27. These two pre-recorded interviews, on the subjects of the atonement and the resurrection, were planned to coincide

with Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

We are also happy and thankful to report that the Lord has provided the volunteer assistant, Mr. Wes Koops, a former elder from First PRC in Holland, MI. Mr. Koops, with his wife, planned to be in Pittsburgh from March 21 - April 11. Part of Mr. Koops' work was to encourage our missionary, his family, and the core group. Mr. Koops also planned to visit with the Steering Committee, attend catechism, Bible study, and Fellowship meetings. He was also to help with work at the mission office, answering phone calls, and cataloging pamphlets, tapes, and such like.

Rev. G. Eriks, pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, the calling church for our denomination's mission work in Spokane, WA, and the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship, along with Mr. Al Elzinga and his wife, representing our denomination's Domestic Mission Committee, visited the field in Spokane March 4-7. Rev. Eriks preached for the Fellowship Sunday morning, and the group enjoyed a time of fellowship with the emissaries after the service. This trip was made as part of the oversight of the Spokane Mission.

This time of year many of us living in the northern part of North America often "wish" that winter would finally give way to spring. So I found it interesting to hear those same sentiments expressed by Mrs. Sharon Miersma, wife of Rev. R. Miersma, our churches' missionary to Ghana, W. Africa, only from a different perspective. She writes in a letter dated March 4, "Saw on the Lacombe bulletin (Immanuel PRC) that they had their annual sledding and hot dog roast in February (Family Day, Feb. 21). I remember the first winter we were there and it was soooooo cold. We wondered how they could sit outside on straw bales and roast hot dogs and marshmallows – and 'enjoy' it!! Well, we got used to it and also enjoyed it. Now this year in

February we are sweltering in 95° heat and said to each other ... remember Lacombe?" So, be careful what you wish for, the cold will give way to warm soon enough.

Young Adult Activities

Since our last "News," two of the Young Adult groups from our churches have sponsored retreats.

March 14-17 the Young Adults of the Loveland, CO PRC sponsored their annual Spring Retreat at the Y.M.C.A. of the Rockies in Estes Park. This year's theme was "Spiritual Growth," and this year's speakers were Rev. W. Langerak from the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, speaking Tuesday night in the Willome Conference Center on "What is Spiritual Growth?" and Rev. G. Eriks, pastor of Loveland PRC, speaking Wednesday evening on "How to Grow Spiritually."

March 18 & 19 the Young Adults of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI hosted a weekend retreat at the Farmstead Inn in Shipshewana, IN. Sandwiched between a homemade Amish dinner and breakfast, the young adults had the opportunity to hear Rev. R. VanOverloop, pastor of the Byron Center, MI PRC, lead a discussion Friday evening entitled, "Guarding Our Hearts Against the Influences of Sin," and Rev. R. Kleyn, pastor at Trinity, lead a discussion Saturday morning on "Overcoming Sin in Our Lives."

Congregation Activities

Sunday evening, March 20, the congregation of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI hosted a "Psalm Sing." The theme for the evening was, "Christ Portrayed in the Psalms." A collection was taken for this year's convention, hosted, of course, by Faith.

Members of the Lynden, WA PRC were invited and encouraged once again to come to a painting party. This "party," scheduled for February 22, was advertised as Lynden's last evening of painting,

since this "party" would complete the entire interior of their church building. Plans were to paint the church kitchen and council room.

The senior members of the Hudsonville, MI PRC congregation were invited to join the Junior Christian Fellowship Society for their fourth annual Game and Dessert Night on Friday evening, March 4.

The council of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI appointed a Library Committee to study, organize, and promote this service to their congregation.

At a congregational meeting, February 14, the congregation of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI adopted their council's proposal to renovate their parsonage.

Members of our churches in the Chicago, IL area were encouraged to reserve Palm Sunday evening, March 20, for a Celebration in Song at Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN. Plans called for an evening of music, refreshments, and fellowship. Part of the program included a choir made up of members from the three area churches.

Minister Activities

Rev. S. Key declined the call he was considering from the First PRC in Holland, MI.

Rev. G. Eriks declined the call from Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL.

Rev. J. Mahtani declined the call from First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada.

Our Lord delivered, on March 14, His faithful servant Rev. Cornelius Hanko from the infirmities of this life. Ordained in 1929, Rev. Hanko was minister in our churches for some 48 years. Many of us have received the heritage of the truth through his ministry. We rejoice in the knowledge that this man, who suffered in so many ways on the behalf of the gospel, is now made a pillar in the heavenly temple, and given a crown of glory and a new name (Rev. 3:11, 12).

We extend our sympathy to the Hanko family and remember them in prayer. 

Announcements

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 11, 2005 at the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan.

Jon J. Huisken,
Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On April 23, 2005, D.V., our parents and grandparents,

**MR. and MRS. DAVID M.
ONDERSMA,**

will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary. We rejoice and praise God for His faithfulness in their marriage these many years. Their covenantal instruction and guidance is a blessing and source of strength to each one of us. In the Old Testament, a standing stone was a monument to the next generation, testifying of God Himself and His great work in that place. So also our parents are "living stones": their godly example points us to God and His work in their lives. We are thankful for their sacrifice and service, which reflects their commitment to the truth held by the Protestant Reformed Churches, in which we have been given a rich heritage.

"...What mean these stones? ... That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever" (Joshua 4:21b, 24).

- * David and Amy Ondersma
David Jay
- * Randy and Suzanne Dykstra
Jonathan, Alex, Derek, Nicholas
- * Jon and Sarah Decker
Jordan
- * Shawn and Holly Feenstra
Dana, Ty
- * Kevin and Sally Timmerman
Kate, Josie

Holland, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. Ted Hoekstra, his daughters: Phyllis and Ike Uittenbogaard, their children and grandchildren, and Marilyn and Loren Te Grotenhuis; brothers Bert VanMaanen, Tom VanMaanen, Harold VanMaanen; sisters Margaret Hoekstra, Jane Hoksbergen; brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law on both the VanMaanen and Hoekstra sides of the family; and many nephews and nieces, in the death of their wife, mother, sister, grandmother, great grandmother, and aunt,

MRS. TED HOEKSTRA.

May they find their comfort in the Word of God in Romans 14:8, "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Don VerMeer, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of the Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Peter Roy Westra, her children, Peter D. and Jan Westra and family, Marlin and Sandy Westra and family, fellow elder Ed and Verna Westra and family, Gary and Jeralyn Westra and family, Bruce Westra, and Bart and Janice Zandstra and family, as well as brothers and sisters-in-law: Joyce Kooiker, Tim and Clarine Kooima, Alvin and Sally Kooiker, Glenn and Betty Kooiker, and many nephews and nieces in the passing of their husband, father, brother, grandfather, great grandfather, and uncle,

MR. PETER ROY WESTRA.

May they find their comfort in the Word of God in John 14:2b, 3, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

Rev. Steven Key, President
Don VerMeer, Assistant Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

The Lord willing, on April 18, 2005, **RYAN and NANCY REGNERUS** will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary. We, their children and grandchildren, express our sincere appreciation to them for their godly example and for their covenantal instruction. We praise and thank God for His goodness to them and for the years He has blessed them together. It is our prayer that He will grant them many more years together. "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

- * Ryan and Stephanie Regnerus
Anna, Elaina
- * Brandon and Kelly VanOverloop
Thomas
- * Aaron and Bobbi Regnerus
Jonah
- * Travis and Katie VanderKolk
Mason
- * Mary Regnerus

Lansing, Illinois

SPRING LECTURE

The Evangelism Committee of First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan will be sponsoring a Spring Lecture entitled:

"A Look at Bible Translation"

Speaker:

Professor Emeritus
Herman Hanko

April 29, 2005 at 7:30 P.M.

at the
First Protestant Reformed Church
of Holland
3641 104th Ave.
Zeeland, MI 49464

Refreshments and fellowship following the lecture and tapes of the lecture will be available upon request.