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See "2002 BRF Conference," p. 488

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Meditation

Rev. Rodney Miersma

Content with the Present

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Hebrews 13:5, 6

The words of our text look at covetousness from a different point of view than that

to which we are accustomed. Usually we are addressed with respect to the negative, being warned of the dangers of material prosperity and the seeking of such; for when we seek the things of this world, the Lord sends leanness into our souls. Many texts in Scripture admonish us in this regard. However, our text looks at the positive side, telling us what we *must* do, instead of telling us what we may *not* do.

These words are written to us, the church of Jesus Christ. Even though all men are commanded to serve the Lord, these words are directed, first of all, to the church.

There is good reason for this, because it is only the church, redeemed by the blood of Christ and possessing His Spirit, that can give heed to these words. In the world, contentment is forever an impossibility, for contentment is a gift of God's grace, which He gives only to His own, the church.

In order to see more clearly what contentment is, we should first look at its opposite, covetousness. The writer starts here because we are so inclined to be guilty of this sin. How men covet the things of this world and the money that is used to purchase them! Oh, what a

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magic word that seems to be — money! Money is largely the power that rules the world, controlling the lives of men, individuals, corporations, and nations. People are willing to do almost anything for money. For it they are willing to be dishonest, lie, and sell their own souls. It is the god of this world and of all men by nature. The possession of money is considered to be the purpose of life itself. The Word of God admonishes us not to live that way. I Timothy 6:10 tells us that the love of money is the root of all evil. In Colossians 3:1, 2 we are exhorted to seek the things above, not those on the earth. In the sermon on the mount, Christ admonishes us not to gather unto ourselves treasures that are on the earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and not to be anxious for the morrow, but to seek the kingdom of God first and only (Matt. 6:19, 33). Later, in Matthew 13:22, Christ would have us realize the deceitfulness of riches. The reason for all these admonitions is found in the fact that we all are by nature so covetous. We lust after these things. We seek to grasp what we do not have. That is what the Scripture calls coveting.

Covetousness reveals itself in different ways. First of all, there is the man who seeks the treasures of this world and squanders them as quickly as he has acquired them. He lives for the sheer enjoyment of all that this life offers. It is not a question of daily bread, but simply of wanting more. On the other hand, there is the miser, who, possibly, has worked day and night to accumulate some of the wealth of this world, then hoards it, gloating over that which is his. Both seek the earthy as an end in itself, not as a means with which one must serve the Lord. Both have an anxious care for the things of the world, and both are dissatisfied with their present state or condition.

Contentment we have when the inner state of the soul is in harmony with the conditions around us. Content we should be regard-

ing many things, including the physical condition of our body, of our family, and of our work and friends. Whether they be adverse circumstances or favorable, when our soul is in harmony with them we have contentment and peace. And remember, contentment does not take into consideration the neighbor who may have much more than we. This we are so inclined to do, always looking to the right or left, but not heavenward, from whence we must receive all gifts of grace. Contentment is the virtue that gives peace whether we are millionaires or paupers. We speak of contentment as a gift and a virtue, for such it really is. It is a blessed gift of grace, given by God the fountain of all good. By nature no one possesses it. True virtues such as love, peace, joy, and others, including contentment, are gifts of God's grace and are never found in the world.

We are admonished here to exercise this virtue. The writer is speaking to people who apparently have only the bare necessities of life. This can hardly be said of any of us today. We have much more than our daily bread. But most of God's people, as described in Scripture and seen in history, have been poor. Throughout history they have had to suffer much because of wars, famines, disaster, depression, and persecution. And yet God's people were called upon to be always content. Only those who have experienced these things really know what a marvelous gift the grace of contentment is.

But why? Why should we be content? In the text the writer quotes a promise of the Lord given in the Old Testament on several different occasions. There the Lord assured His people that He would be with them and never leave them. This promise is also given to these Hebrew Christians. They must be content, for He has said: I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.

By means of this quotation the writer, first of all, shows them that

they must live by the Word of God. As we must do that today with the completed Scriptures, so they had to do it with the Word of God which they possessed at that time, namely, the Old Testament. That Word is our only source of comfort and light. It guides us and teaches us the way of the saints. By this Word we must live, and by this Word only.

The promise of which our text speaks was given first of all to Jacob when he was fleeing to his uncle Laban. He had a dream, at night, of a ladder reaching to heaven. In the morning the Lord spoke these words to him. "Behold, I am with thee, ... I will not leave thee." Comforting words they surely were for Jacob. The future was very dark for him; he had no idea what lay ahead. It is at this time that the Lord assures him that He will never leave him. Later, when Moses speaks his last words to the Israelites and points out to them the dangers that are lurking on their path, he speaks the same words. He means to say: Israel, remember this, the Lord promises you that He will not leave you or forsake you. And when Israel stands at the threshold of Canaan, seeing the multitude of wicked Canaanites that they must overcome, this promise again comes to them. This promise the Lord always gives to His people, also to us who live in the confusion and unrest of our day.

But what does this promise really mean? It is put in a negative form; the Lord will not leave nor forsake us. The word *leave* means *to let loose, give up, let sink*. *To forsake* means *to abandon, desert, leave behind in a condition of helplessness*. The two words belong together. To be forsaken of God is the most terrible thing that can happen to any human being. And yet this is exactly what Christ experienced. God let go of Him. In fact, God banished Him from His presence to experience the torments of hell. And when He was in the depths of this

suffering He cried out, O my God, my God, why? But it was through this way that He made atonement for His people, so that they would never be forsaken of Him.


Stating it positively, it means that God will be with them, help them, and keep them. On the basis of Christ's work, this promise is given to the saints throughout time. God will hold them in His almighty hand. To make this personal, He says to you as believer: "At no time, in no wise, under no circumstances will I ever leave you. I will never, never leave you or forsake you." There you have it. God will always be with you. And when the almighty, gracious God is with you, you have everything. All is well. What a blessed promise! But does this promise imply that He will give you abundance of material things? That you will always be prosperous? We know better. We must see, first of all, that the wicked do have bread and are forsaken. Hence, abundance of earthly things is in itself no evidence that God is with us. Secondly, we must remember that bread and other earthly things are not the most important things of life. We may often think so, and we may live in this consciousness, but to have God, that is

the all-important thing. In the third place, when a parent assures his child that he will always seek his good and keep him under his protecting care, does this imply that the child will receive everything he desires? Again I say, we know better. The wise parent will withhold much from the child because he seeks his spiritual welfare. Would the all-wise, all-loving Father do it differently?

Sometimes it is necessary for us to experience hardships and trials and poverty. But in them all God assures us that He will never leave us, but always be with us with His strengthening Spirit and Word. Enjoying this promise, we as His children surely should be content. That is the idea of the text. What tomorrow will bring, no one knows; the future is always unknown to us. But this we know, God will not forsake us. He will also give us in His wisdom and love what we need regarding our physical lives. Be, therefore, not covetous, but content. Living by these promises we have peace of mind and heart. What a blessed life is the life of the saint when he lives by the Word of God!

Doing this we will also be able to express what we read in the last

verse of our text. There we read: "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." The idea is that when we live by the Lord's promises we can utter these words as an expression of our hearts. Also these words are a quotation of the Old Testament, Psalm 118. Surrounded by evil men, the psalmist is not afraid; for Jehovah, the faithful One, is his helper. The idea of the text is that when His beloved ones cry, He is there immediately. The cry of faith is never lost in the wind, but is ever heard. Whatever the future holds for us, we know that Jehovah is our helper. We live in dark days. They will get darker. Do we turn to the things of this world for our strength and comfort? No, we turn to God in prayer. We will pray that our faith may be increased, that we may be able to live by His Word only, that we will receive grace to seek the kingdom of God first and only, and that we may live only by His promises.

Doing these things by the grace of God we shall be content, regarding the things of today and of tomorrow. And God will be our helper, never leaving us, until we enter His home with its many mansions. 

Editorial

"He Shines in All That's Fair" (and Curses All That's Foul) (8)

Confusion of Grace and Providence

It is a fundamental doctrinal error of the theory of common grace as taught by Dr. Richard Mouw in *He Shines in All That's Fair* (Eerdmans, 2001), his mentor Abraham Kuyper, and his numerous allies in Reformed and Presby-

terian churches worldwide, that it confuses grace and providence. The existence of the world is grace; that man did not become a devil at the fall was grace; rain and sunshine are grace; Beethoven's musical ability was grace; that my decent, unbelieving neighbor does not commit the sins of the Marquis de Sade (so far as we know) is grace;

and that Greece in times past and the United States in the present develop a grand civilization is grace.

Confusion of grace and providence is inexcusable for Reformed theologians and churches. The Reformed creeds plainly and sharply distinguish these two powers and works of God. The consequences of this confusion are destructive of

the biblical, Reformed faith and life.

Providence, which follows upon the work of creation in the beginning, is divine power that keeps all things in existence and governs them (Heid. Cat., Lord's Day 10; West. Conf., 5). Grace, which carries out the work of redemption, is divine power that blesses and saves guilty, depraved sinners (Heid. Cat., Lord's Days 11-33; West. Conf., 7-18).

The power of providence is directed by the counsel of providence, which is the wise plan of God decreeing that and how all things will glorify Him in the day of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:9-11; Bel. Conf., Art. 13). The power of grace originates in and is controlled by the counsel of predestination, which purposes the salvation of the elect church (Eph. 1:3-12).

The power of providence is all comprehensive, extending as well to devils as to angels and including as well the wicked deeds of the reprobate as the good works of the elect (West. Conf., 5.4; Acts 4:23-28). The power of grace is particular, extending exclusively to the elect church in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:28-11:36; Canons of Dordt).

Providence serves grace. God's upholding and governing of all things accomplish the spiritual and eternal good of elect believers. In His providence, God sends evils upon the believer that work his good (Heid. Cat., Q. 26). According to the original German of Lord's Day 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the providence of God makes all things "come to us," that is, to us who believe in Jesus Christ, from the fatherly hand of God (German: "*alles ... von seiner vaterlichen hand uns zukomme*"). Providence works for the blessedness of the children of God. The Catechism is clear that providence does not intend, or effect, the blessedness of all humans without exception: "All things ... come to us from His fatherly hand."

Providence serves grace, but

providence is not grace. Providence itself does not deliver from sin. Providence itself does not bless. Providence itself does not accomplish anyone's true good. Providence itself does not reveal the love of God for anyone, just as it itself does not betoken God's hatred for anyone. That is, from the fact that one exists, is marvelously gifted, and possesses great wealth, one cannot infer that he is the object of God's favor. Think of the ungodly of Psalm 73. Similarly, from the fact that one is grievously afflicted, one cannot infer that he is the object of divine wrath. Think of Job.

That providence is not grace is plain on the face of it. Mere existence is not grace for a man. Jesus said about the traitor that it "had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matt. 26:24). Providence gives existence, and many splendid abilities, to the devil. If providence is grace, God is gracious to Satan.

Providence includes the evils in human life and history. If providence is grace, the flood was grace to those who perished in it; the brimstone and fire that fell upon Sodom and Gomorrah were grace to those cities; the Nazi regime was grace to the Jews; and the rape and murder of little girls by monstrously wicked men in a decadent society are grace to those girls and their parents.

God's providence will everlastingly uphold and govern hell and its inhabitants. Who will say that this providence will be grace to the damned?

Providence in itself is not grace even to the believing child of God. Consider the good things that fall to the believer. The well-watered land near Sodom was not blessing for Lot. The great wealth or the striking beauty that comes to a Christian may prove to be spiritually, and even physically, destructive.

Consider the evil things that befall a believer. In itself, the death of a loved one, or financial ruin, or cancer is no blessing, does not turn from

sin, and lacks the power to draw the sufferer nearer to his God. By themselves, such evils embitter or depress. Not providence in itself, but the grace of God working with the evils in the believer's heart and mind makes the evils beneficial.

Consider the sins in the life of the child of God. These too are included in providence. Was David's adultery with Bathsheba grace and blessing for him? In itself? Was Peter's denial of Christ grace for the disciple? That God governed these sinful deeds for the spiritual and everlasting good of David and Peter, and indeed of the whole church, is beyond question. But it was the grace of God that humbled, forgave, and then renewed David and Peter in connection with their melancholy falls that blessed them, not the sinful deeds themselves—mere providence.

Grace is not in things; grace is in the Spirit and gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Things in themselves are not blessings, any more than they are curses; blessing and curse are the living Word of God in and with and through things. God's goodness to a person—the divine favor that blesses him—is not identical with, nor determined by, a person's earthly prosperity; God's goodness to a person is identical with, and determined by, his eternal election, known by a true faith in Christ, that guides a man or woman to everlasting glory, regardless of his or her physical, earthly, temporal misery and want. "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart," though the clean of heart is plagued all the day long, and chastened every morning (Ps. 73).

Providence, Not Common Grace

All that Dr. Mouw attributes to common grace is, in fact, a matter of providence, and of creation, of which divine work providence is the continuation.

The continued existence of the world after man's fall, as of reprobate, ungodly humans, is provi-

dence, not grace. By His providential power, God keeps His creation in existence, now as a kingdom of Satan and under His curse (Bel. Conf., Art. 13). By His providential power, God maintains fallen man *as man*, though now displaying the image of the devil and serving the god of this world (Acts 17:24-28).

The notion—popular with those who confuse grace and providence—that God had to administer a dose of common grace to fallen man to prevent him from becoming a devil is utterly without biblical and creedal basis. The notion is foolish. No more than there is evolution is there devolution of the species. Creation fixed the species. Neither sin nor salvation affects this fixity. God made man *man*, and man he remains, whether saint or sinner, whether glorified in heaven or shamed in hell. Even the most ardent advocates of common grace will grant that damned men and women in hell will be humans, not devils. But the reason will not be common grace, since on the admission of the defenders of common grace themselves common grace must cease on the day of Christ.

The *purpose* of God with the continued existence of the world, as of the reprobate, ungodly race of humans, is gracious. It is His gracious will to save an elect church from all nations and races to the praise of His glory in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:9-12). This gracious purpose extends to the creation itself, which will share in the “glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). Recognition of a gracious purpose of providence does not confuse grace and providence.

As providence explains the continuing existence of a fallen world, so also does it account for the various physical, mental, scientific, artistic, technological, and political abilities of unregenerated men and women. Likewise, providence is the power of the natural, cultural development of nations. The only nation whose develop-

ment is due to grace is the one “holy nation,” the church, the spiritual kingdom of Christ.

In creating man, the Creator gave him many, unique, excellent gifts. Indelibly stamped on man, as man, are kingship and community. Although the fall severely weakened man’s natural powers and made him a rebel-king, who seeks community apart from God, providence maintains man’s gifted kingship. In a mysterious way, the everywhere present and almighty power of providence arouses and compels fallen men to develop their gifts and powers, and to do so in order finally to establish a grand world-kingdom in which the race is united. This is to say, the power of the Creator that made man in the beginning now maintains him as man and impels him to behave as man.

An aspect of the aesthetic nature of man by virtue of creation is music. The fall did not strip man of appreciation and ability for music. As a power bestowed on man by His Creator, the gift of music is good. But as deviated by the totally depraved sinner away from the glory of God and away from the promotion of the kingdom of Christ to the glory of man and to the promotion of the kingdom of this world, the actual activity of composing, or playing, or singing is sin.

High among the abilities of men, as the Reformed have always recognized, is the political gift, the ability to move and rule a people and nation. Adolf Hitler had this gift. The ability itself was good, as a gift of providence. Therefore, in a way, Hitler and his propagandists were right, in spite of themselves, when they proclaimed that Hitler had been raised up by “Providence” as the uniquely gifted “leader” of Germany. But, in fact, they lied, for they meant that God gave Hitler and his gift of ruling to Germany in His grace and as a blessing. They confused grace and providence. Would the defenders of common grace want

to contend that Hitler possessed and exercised his remarkable gift of ruling by the common grace of God, whether as blessing of Hitler, of Germany, or of the world?

The deepest concerns of Richard Mouw in defending common grace, as of Abraham Kuyper before him, are the continuing existence of the world after the fall, the presence and development in the fallen human race of all kinds of splendid natural abilities, and the Christian’s association with the ungodly in everyday earthly life, using and even enjoying the cultural products of the wicked.

The explanation is providence, not grace.

To confuse grace and providence is to go wrong as regards both of the outstanding works of God, creation and redemption.

The Absurdity of Common Grace

Common grace’s confusion of grace and providence ends in absurdity. It has *Christianity Today* declaring, in an enthusiastic endorsement of Mouw’s book, that God enjoys a baseball game (see “Why God Enjoys Baseball,” *Christianity Today*, July 8, 2002, pp. 49-52). Common grace makes God “the big Dodger in the sky.”

Worse, the confusion of grace and providence that is common grace had Abraham Kuyper teaching that common grace will produce the Antichrist.

At the moment of its destruction Babylon—that is, the world power which evolved from human life—will exhibit not the image of a barbarous horde nor the image of coarse bestiality but, on the contrary, a picture of the highest development of which human life is capable. It will display the most refined forms, the most magnificent unfolding of wealth and splendor, the fullest brilliance of all that makes life dazzling and glorious. From this we know that “common grace” will continue to function to the end. Only when common grace has spurred the full

emergence of all the powers inherent in human life will "the man of sin" find the level terrain needed to expand this power.

In its development of all the powers latent in humanity and in creation, common grace is the "basis" of the Antichrist. Common grace "leads to the most powerful manifestation of sin in history" (Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace," in James D. Bratt, ed., *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, Eerdmans, 1998, pp. 179-182).

Grace—the grace of God—is the source of the Antichrist! Antichrist and his world-kingdom, that is, the kingdom of Satan, are the fruit of the grace of God!


Nor may Reformed and Presby-

terian defenders of common grace dismiss this absurd, if not blasphemous, notion, as the personal speculation of Abraham Kuyper. For one thing, Abraham Kuyper was the father of the doctrine of common grace that they embrace and defend. For another thing, they are as committed to the absurdity as was Kuyper. It is fundamental common grace teaching that common grace works the cultural development of the race in history. But this history-long development will culminate in the culturally impressive kingdom of Antichrist.

Lo, common grace produces the beast! The worst enemy of common grace has not condemned the theory so conclusively.

In this article, I have addressed the first two of Dr. Mouw's deepest concerns, on account of which he thinks that common grace is a necessity. I have contended that the biblical and Reformed truth of God's providence answers the concerns of Dr. Mouw as regards the continuing existence of the world and as regards the natural gifts and powers of ungodly men and women.

It remains to take up Mouw's third concern: the warrant for the Christian's full, active life in the world, including his use and enjoyment of the knowledge and inventions of the ungodly and his association and cooperation with unbelievers in the activities of earthly society.

— DJE 

Letters

■ Variation in the Liturgy

I enjoyed Rev. Terpstra's articles on "The Believer's Role in Public Worship," but his January 15, 2002 article prompted me to write and ask a question. As the same liturgy is performed week after week, Rev. Terpstra notes that there is a temptation to fall into the "sin of formalism, of using the right means of worship in the wrong way, just going through the motions, as if the elements were empty, insignificant rituals." I think this temptation is a strong one, which makes me curious about the Reverend's solution to it. He says that rather than changing the liturgy, we should just concentrate more.

If there was only one possible, acceptable liturgy, I would agree that this would have to be the solution. But since many variations could be acceptable I wonder why changes to the liturgy might not be a better solution. As long as the liturgy is identical from week to week, the temptation to formalism will always be present.

In other situations we do what we can to remove temptation. For example, if the young ladies of a

congregation dressed in an overly provocative manner, it could be argued that the men should simply concentrate harder, to resist the sin of lust. But it would also be quite reasonable to ask the young ladies to dress in a more sedate manner, to remove the temptation.

I am not asking for change, simply for change's sake, but I do wonder why variation in the liturgy, which may help remove a temptation, would not be a good thing.

Jon Dykstra

Editor, *Reformed Perspective*,
Edmonton, AB, Canada

Response:

You raise the issue of changing the liturgy to prevent the threat of formalism, as I mentioned in the January 15 article. I can agree with you that this is possible within the bounds that Scripture and the second commandment give us. The main elements of worship as prescribed by God are unchanged and unchanging. However, there may be variations within this structured liturgy. For example, the use of a different doxology could be implemented from time to time. Or the reading of Scripture could be

placed at an earlier time in the service, instead of just before the sermon. Or a different creed could be used for the congregation's confession, such as the Nicene, instead of only the Apostles' Creed. I dare say that all of our Protestant Reformed churches use such variations. And there is no question this can help to prevent the sin of formalism in our worship.

But my point remains — change or variation in the church's liturgy will by itself never solve the problem of formalism. That is a matter of the worshiper's heart. It is our own personal attitude in worship and our own personal use of the elements of the service that must constantly be changing — that is, changing according to God's work of conversion in us, so that more and more we hate all false worship and strive to be pure and sincere in the way we approach the Lord and worship Him in our services. When we guard our own hearts and seek to be conformed on the inside to God's way of worship, then and only then will the sin of formalism be turned back.

(Rev.) Charles J. Terpstra

■ Saddened by a Synodical Decision

We are saddened by the decision of the 2002 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) to end discussions with the United Reformed Churches in North America (URC) ("Actions of the 2002 Synod of the PRC," *Standard Bearer*, July 2002). This decision was unfortunate for several reasons.


First, the URC is a faithful denomination committed to the doctrines of historic Reformed Christianity.

Second, a continuing dialogue between the PRC and URC, while

perhaps not resulting in ecclesiastical unity (the stipulated goal of the PRC Contact Committee), would, if the PRC were willing, have the desirable effects of nurturing a filial relationship between the denominations and promoting greater respect for and understanding of one another.

Third, the rationale articulated by the synod for ending discussions with the URC reveals an alarming tendency within the PRC to elevate controversial, extra-confessional matters to the confessional level. Room for debate and disagreement should exist within

faithful Reformed denominations on difficult and often mysterious issues such as creation science, covenant theology, and eschatology. Instead of demanding lock-step orthodoxy on matters that spark disagreement among the best Reformed thinkers, the PRC should learn from the URC's example. It would be a refreshing reform if the PRC embraced the URC's humility and realism by recognizing the ability of churches and Christians to differ on some points of doctrine while remaining united in the faith.

Stephen and Alison VanderWoude
St. John, IN 

Feature Article

Mr. Pete Adams

The 2002 BRF Conference

You might think that the biggest news regarding the British Reformed Fellowship's Family Conference is that it occurred at all. But in spite of rumors of its cancellation, it indeed was held this past July 20th-27th.

There were 50 souls in attendance: 12 from Northern Ireland, 15 from Cambridge, England, 18 from the United States, and others from various places in the British Isles.

The theme of the conference was "Assurance of Salvation."

Through a series of six speeches by Professor David Engelsma and Rev. Barry Gritters, the confessional and scriptural truths of this important, comforting, invigorating, but neglected doctrine were presented. The relationships and connections of assurance to faith, election,

the Holy Spirit, and a holy life were taught. Doubt, which is not foreign to the believer, was also treated. Both speakers and listen-

ers testified that we came to the conference assured of salvation, but that the measure of our knowledge of our assurance increased to the bolstering of our faith.

In addition to the theme speeches, there were other addresses. Rev. Angus Stewart gave a fascinating biographical sketch of the real Saint Patrick. It turns out that Patrick ... but no, I'm afraid



Daniel Houseworth, from Cambridge, England, and Rev. Angus and Mary Stewart

Mr. Adams is a teacher at Eastside Christian School and a member, with his family, of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.




Rev. Barry Gritters, addressing the BRF Conference

you'll have to wait for an article that is forthcoming in the *Standard Bearer* about him. A local Presbyterian minister, Rev. David Silver-sides, was invited to speak on the topic of guidance. This speech was also well received.

This was indeed a family conference. There was the pitter-patter, no, the PITTER-PATTER, PITTER-PATTER of eight pairs of little feet running around, with squeals and laughter. The children knew when it was time to be quiet, however. It was a delight to all the adults to have them there. The five teenagers were much involved together during the speeches and the scheduled outings, and, to say no more, in a number of extra-curricular activities as well. The outings included trips to missionary Patrick's grave and to the Ulster Folk Museum, where much of the earlier life of Ireland could be experienced; a visit to the local sea-

side town of Newcastle; and, for some, even a hike to the top of the mountains of Mourne. The conference schedule was deliberately designed to leave much time for reading, strolling to the local village, walks around the lake — in short, a true vacation.

If fellowship can be gauged by the amount of conversation, then there was abundant fellowship. After every meal, after every speech, and well into each night, conference members could be seen and heard discussing their various social, political, and particularly spiritual backgrounds and concerns. When one comprehends the struggle that some of the families have in order to raise their children in the truth, particularly where there is a dearth of good Christian schools, and when churches do not see the need to catechize their youth, it is all the more reason for those of us who have these privileges to be thankful to our Father for them.

The BRF also held its biennial meeting during the week. Besides dealing with regular business, the members decided, enthusiastically, to hold another Conference in two years' time in Cambridge, England. The tentative topic is the "Covenant." And this brings me to what I consider the biggest news regarding the Conference: the positive hope for the future that was evident. One would initially, perhaps, attribute this to a whistling-in-the-dark, wishful optimism; yet, the members speak of contentment with the Lord's way in the distressing, disruptive events they have experienced, and they look to Him to bless their labors to grow and rebuild. Truly "...the Son of God ...gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself, ...a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith." We are and for ever shall remain, living members thereof. Blessed assurance. 

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

■ Jonathan Edwards— and Birth Control

Christian News, August 5, 2002, presents articles pertaining to marriage and family. Included is an interesting quote from the book, "God's Vision for Families—What the Bible Says About Having Children," by Nancy Campbell. The quote is headed by the statement: "Jonathan Edwards and Laying the Foundation for Future Generations."

"Back in 1990 a trace was done on offspring of the Jonathan and Sarah Edwards family. Jonathan Edwards was a theologian, pastor, missionary and university president. He had a brilliant mind. At age ten he entered Yale College and at 16 years he graduated at the head of his class. When he

was 23 years he became pastor of the church at Northampton, Massachusetts, which at the time was the most influential church in America. That same year he married Sarah Pierrepont, a daughter of one of the founders of Yale, and they had 12 children.

"By 1900 this godly marriage had produced: 13 college presidents, 65 professors, 100 lawyers and a dean of an outstanding law school, 30 judges, 60 doctors and a dean of a medical school, 80 holders of public office including three United States Senators, three mayors of large cities, three state governors, vice-president of the United States, and controller of United States Treasury. They entered the ministry in platoons, sent 100 missionaries overseas as well as staffing many mission boards. Members of the family wrote 135 books and edited 18 journals and periodicals. Nearly another century has gone by since

this study. How much more has this one family influenced the nation? This happened because one husband and wife had a vision for raising godly seed and building a godly dynasty."

One can only wonder what would have been the case if Jonathan Edwards had practiced "birth control" or even abortion to limit the number of children they had to one or two (as is so common today—even within the churches). What a loss, humanly speaking, there would have been for the country! More significantly (though we do not know if all or most of those listed above were Christians), one considers Heaven's population that is drawn by God from one couple who gave birth to twelve children. What amazing fruit follows out of godly couples who bear children of the covenant!!

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

■ Roman Catholic Church: "Salvation for Jews Apart from Christ."

The *Grand Rapids Press* (Aug. 13, 2002) presents an interesting report from the *Boston Globe*:

The Catholic Church, which spent hundreds of years trying to convert Jews to Christianity, has come to the conclusion it is theologically unacceptable to target Jews for evangelization, according to a statement issued Monday by U.S. Catholic bishops and rabbis from the country's two largest Jewish denominations.

Citing teachings dating to the Second Vatican Council – and statements by Pope John Paul II – the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops declared unequivocally that the biblical covenant between Jews and God is valid and, therefore, Jews do not need to be saved through faith in Jesus.

"A deepening Catholic appreciation of the eternal covenant between God and the Jewish people, together with a recognition of a divinely given mission to Jews to witness to God's faithful love, lead to the conclusion that campaigns that target Jews for conversion to Christianity are no longer theologically acceptable in the Catholic Church," declares the document, "Reflections on Covenant and Mission."

The declaration, negotiated by the bishops and an organization representing Conservative and Reform rabbis, demonstrates dramatic changes in Catholic thinking about Jews and Judaism in the wake of the Holocaust. In the decades since Hitler's attempt to exterminate Jews during World War II, the church rejected its longtime position that Christianity superseded Judaism, and instead embraced Judaism as a legitimate faith both before and after the life of Jesus.

"The significance is far more than theological, because for centuries it was the refusal of Jews to embrace Christian teachings that legitimized the persecution, and often murder, of Jews in communities throughout Christendom," said Robert Leikind, New England regional director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Jesus and his early followers were Jewish, but those who embraced Christianity began to turn on those who did not more than a millennium ago.

Cardinal William Keeler, archbishop of Baltimore and the bishops' liaison for Christian-Jewish relations, called Monday's declaration "a significant step forward in the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community in this country."

The Romish church thus joins many others among Protestantism who teach that there is salvation through many other religions apart from the cross of Christ. It is one more large step towards union not only of churches of divers sorts, but union even of those of other religions with what is called "church." Increasingly one sees the evidences of the "harlot" of Revelation 17.

■ 'Non-church' church is popular but hollow

Then there is the report in the *Rocky Mountain News* by Terry Mattingly, who discusses another popular trend in our day: the "non-church" church.

For two millennia, if you knew a church's name then you knew something about the people inside its doors.

Church names stood for timeless saints and traditions—from the Church of the Nativity to the Church of the Resurrection....

In some flocks, a name might tell a church's location or hint at its origins. The Southern Baptist Convention's directory includes almost every name under the sun—from Enigma Baptist to Black Jack Baptist, from Hanging Dog Baptist to First Baptist of Disney (Okla.).

But out with the old and in with the focus groups. Who needs an old church? "First, the vogue was for local churches to drop their denominational affiliation from their name," wrote scholar Gene Edward Veith in the evangelical magazine *World*. "Then came the fad of dropping the word *church*."

The Community Assembly of God Church became first "Community Church" and then "The Community Family Worship Center."

But the sign outside is just the beginning. Inside these doors, many church leaders are morphing into chatty spiritual guides, said Veith. Hymns are out and so are sermons, litanies and scripture readings. Thousands of churches are rigging up video screens.

"Some churches are doing everything they can to eliminate anything that might make them seem like churches," said Veith.

Now, broadcaster Harold Camping has turned up the heat by saying it's time for Christians to realize that all modern churches—liberal, conservative and everything in between—have gone apostate.

"We must remove ourself (sic) from the church," he said in a manifesto posted at www.FamilyRadio.com. "The church has ceased to be an institution or divine organism to serve God as His appointed representative on earth." This concept might appeal to millions of consumers. Sunday morning? Sleep in. No more boring rituals and sermons. No guilt-inducing programs to help the poor.

The big problem is that Camping doesn't sound all that radical these days.

"American churches," said Veith, "have been complicit in this new and heretical anti-church movement. Many have become so indifferent to theology that their version of Christianity consists of little more than, to use the words of country singer Tom T. Hall, 'me and Jesus'"

The description is quite accurate. Many "churches" are no longer churches—but Community or Family centers. There is no room for the Christ, no room for His Word. What proves entertaining to the masses becomes the medium to convey "God" to the people. Many see "God" in everything—but few recognize that one knows God only through Jesus Christ. So some will have their homes to be their "church." These

would separate themselves from the sacraments, from official preaching of the Word, so that they can meditate by themselves within their own homes. The faithful church is indeed attacked from many fronts. May God in His mercy preserve His faithful church, which is called the very "body of Christ" in Scripture.

■ Reports from *Christian Renewal*

Christian Renewal, a church paper published in Canada, contains reports especially from the United Reformed Churches, but also from other Reformed churches as well. In the issue of August 12, 2002, there are several reports about the Protestant Reformed Churches too. A full page, with pictures, presents an account of the Young Adults' retreat in Alberta, Canada under the sponsorship of Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church of Lacombe, AB Canada. It is a very nice report about a very worthwhile retreat—according also to the testimony of those who attended.

The paper also presents a report (full page) of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches. It is not a full report of synod's actions, but concentrates on that decision of synod pertaining to contact with the United Reformed


Churches. The PRC synod decided to break off ecumenical discussions with the URC on three grounds. *Christian Renewal* reported: "There were three grounds for this decision. The first two concerned different conceptions of church unity in the two denominations. The third specified fundamental doctrinal and ethical differences between the PRC and the URC. The URC approve unbiblical divorce and remarriage after divorce even in the instance of one of their ministers. The URC tolerate the 'framework hypothesis' as an explanation of the account of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 by decision of their 2001 synod, which refuses to condemn this hypothesis in its decision on creation and evolution. The URC tolerate, if they do not officially approve, the doctrine of a conditional covenant by virtue of their decision to work toward full ecclesiastical union with the Canadian Reformed Churches. The URC tolerate theonomic postmillennialism by knowingly admitting into their ministry one who holds these teachings."

The report stated:

Active in the discussions with the Protestant Reformed Contact Committee, Rev. Ralph Pontier was disappointed by the PRC synod's decision.

"I am disappointed that the Committee for Contact with Other Churches of the Protestant Reformed Churches proposed to their synod, and their synod adopted, a recommendation to break off discussions with the United Reformed Churches. Scripture commands us to make every effort to be reconciled with fellow believers (Eph. 4:3). I do not think we have exhausted that mandate with the PRC," said Pontier, who saw progress being made during the talks and an increasing understanding of one another.

"We have much in common with the PRC doctrinally, historically and culturally. Our committee enjoyed good Christian fellowship with the members of their committee each time we met. They were gracious and generous hosts. The dialogues we have had and the papers produced have stimulated a deeper understanding of important issues," said Pontier. "However, our contact with them has underscored for me that adopting extra confessional, binding positions unilaterally is a great hindrance to ecumenicity among Reformed churches."

The full report of the actions of our synod on this matter can be found in the Acts of Synod 2002, which was recently distributed to all of the membership of our churches. 

When Thou Sittest In Thine House

Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers

Reformed Family: Contemplation

"Meditate on these things...."

I Timothy 4:15

Ours is a noise-driven culture. From earliest morning, one's life is governed by the continuous sounds of conversation, music, and background

noise. Alarm clocks beep—or sing—to us. Telephones ring. Computers click. Doorbells buzz. Headsets crackle. Television keeps up its incessant chatter, often when no one is in the room. Many of us have taken to carrying our communication noise-makers along with

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us attached to belt or waistband, ensuring that we are never truly free from the cacophony of our culture. Grocery stores, shopping malls, and dentist offices pipe in their intrusive music to make sure there is no lull in noise. The car radio is often the first dial to be turned on after the ignition, unless one has the unfortunate experience of getting into the car after a teenager has used it. Then, the radio and the ignition come on simultaneously. And, loudly! We have become programmed to need noise. Silence, being alone with one's thoughts, is becoming less frequent for us.

Do we feed off noise because we are afraid to think? Do we fill the quiet times in our lives with inconsequential prattle by others because we ourselves are not able to think logically and coherently? Has the derogatory slur become true of us — that we no longer have two thoughts in our heads to rub together? More importantly, are we spending a decent amount of time in prayer, meditation, and reading worthwhile books so that we are able to think discerningly and contemplate eternal truths? Are we using moments each day in the systematic study of God's Word? Do we search out and add companion commentaries and study helps to our personal libraries to know God better and to enjoy Him forever? Do we recommend to one another and read the abundant literature which is available to us to help us on our pilgrim journey?

"Be still, and know that I am God," says the psalmist in Psalm 46. The author of this psalm is undoubtedly demanding a cease from war and imposing a peace on the vanquished by the All-conquering God. "Lay down your arms. Surrender, and acknowledge that I am the one and only victorious God" (James M. Boice, *Expositional Commentary on the Psalms*, volume 2). It is not, Boice adds, primarily a psalm which calls God's people to the contemplative life.

Nevertheless, on a secondary level, one does not err to gather from this passage that there are periods in one's life and interludes during each day when one would do well to "be still" and meditate on God. The contemplative hours are the "selah" from the frenetic restlessness of this life. Minus moments of meditation, we are like wooden animals on a carousel, going round and round, and going nowhere. Failure to indulge oneself in contemplation, writes the late Dr. Zylstra in *Testament of Vision*, and "life is nothing but a treadmill" (p. 140).

Without study and meditation it is not difficult to accept the evolutionism that is so prevalent today: man is nothing but a refined animal. What does an animal do? Well, he spends a big part of his day searching for and hiding his prey; he mates, sleeps, and starts the vicious cycle all over again. This is exactly what man without God is reduced to. He spends all his days searching for prey — building bigger and bigger barns. This includes hiding his prey from others — devising new and ingenious ways to invest his many capital gains. In the end, the man who does not make time to know God and meditate on His Word is nothing more than a pig rooting in the pea patch. He is no different from the animal he claims as his ancestor. "Man that... understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish" (Ps. 49:20).

The world of unbelief needs its constant pulsating noise. The profane man squirms in the silence. When, and if, he meditates, he is wracked with his own guilt and inadequacy. He has no cross to which he can flee. So, more noise, please! And, the music — louder, louder! Drown out the emptiness of my life! Keep the volume turned on high, the images flashing, and the pace accelerated so that I do not have to consider my end.

How different, by grace, is the experience of the believer. It is his

delight to know God and enjoy Him forever. In every facet of his life, he contemplates God's sovereignty, His lovingkindness, His grace, and all His many inestimable attributes.

How does a Reformed Christian best do this? One does this first of all on the Sabbath Day. This is "Day of all the week the best, / Emblem of eternal rest," as the old hymn says so well. On this day, especially, by my active attendance at and participation in the worship service I close my ears to the deafening clamor of everything around me. I listen carefully to the speech of God. Throughout the day, I immerse myself as much as is possible in reading Holy Scripture and other worthwhile books and magazines. Even young children can and should be trained to sit quietly, at least for a little time, on this special day while you as parent read to them from materials appropriate to their development. Throughout the week, as well, one must exercise oneself to set apart time to read and reflect on spiritual things. In the same volume Zylstra pens: "Contemplation can sanctify work, provide its reason, give it purpose, harvest its fruits." We are not refined animals. We are a people purchased with precious blood.

Know God.

Jesus Christ, as always, is our teacher and example. If the divine Son of God did not consider it beneath Him to go to God in prayer, or spend time in contemplation, how much more necessary it is for us to seek a quiet place to refresh ourselves for the journey ahead. When Christ needed strength to go on, encouragement in His work, or affirmation in His calling, He escaped the milling crowd and went up into the mountains or to some other private place. "Come ye apart and rest a while," said the Master to His disciples in Mark 6:31.

Be still.

In most of our churches, soci-


eties have already begun for the season. Take time — make time — to study and prepare for the Bible discussion. All kinds of good books, pamphlets, and commentaries are available to us today to assist in the deliberation of God's Word. Many of them have been written by our own clergy. Read for knowledge. Read for enjoyment and pleasure as well. Let us

not be an ignorant and mindless people. May it not be said of us as it was of unregenerate Israel: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6).

Read.

One must completely shut out the pandemonium around him, the ceaseless running to and fro, and find quiet in God. David did not find inspiration — or time — to

write His psalms on the run, but rather, he often considered the vastness of the heavens, the greatness of God, and his own puniness in comparison in the engulfing solitude of the Judean hillside. From his prison cell, the apostle Paul did not call for his laptop (more cursors and keys). He called for his books and parchments.

Meditate. 

Grace Life

Rev. Mitchell Dick

Dating and the Deep Blue Sea... and the Way of Christ (5)

In Evangelio Dominus Ego sum, inquit, veritas. Non dixit, Ego sum consuetudo! (Augustine, in *De Baptismo*, III.6.9, translated, "In the Gospel the Lord says—'I am the truth.' He did not say, 'I am custom.'")

Dating is fatherless. Modern American dating is determined to be fatherless. Not all fathers have succeeded in aborting all their children. But all daters do away with dads.

Fatherless dating is a sign of the end of time. It is just one way, but a significant way, in which end-time worldling young and not-so-young people are showing their disobedience to parents (I Tim. 3:1, 2). It is damning evidence of their following the end-time despisers of dominion and those who speak evil of dignities (Jude 8). It is the sad story even of Christian parents who have, in the matter of the marrying of their children, let the children lead the way, or at best cried

a couple suggestions about Sally, or a weak warning about Irving just before their dating children drove off into the night. Yes, in the matter of the way of a man with a maid a modern youth rights-demanding-insisting-upon-privacy subculture governs many-a-Christian home. Custom rules. Not Christ. Not Heads. But eyes. And hands. And lips. And hips. And hormones. And Hollywood.

More of the Father Principle

The biblical way of a man with a maid, the biblical way of godly marrying is family. The isolation of youth, the pairing off, then the trysting of couples, is unbiblical, ungodly, dangerous, and a dishonor to and disruption of family.

The way of a man with a maid is a family affair, or it is simply this — an affair. Family is the institution of God to be honored in the way of our men with maids. The *already existing families* (of man and maid) are to be honored and involved. Independent, isolated, collapsing-on-itself-and-each-other Dating is no institution of God, but Family is. The way of our men with maids must be a *part* of the way of family, a family affair.

And the only way this will be is if there is leadership. There must be father. Since the head of family is father, father is and must be the head of the way of a man with a maid. Not a titular head. Not Genghis Khan. Nor a brainless head. But the father whom God has given to and in our homes to represent Himself. The father with the authority, with the compassion, with the wisdom. *Your father*, Grace Life reader! *Yours!* And, if you are one, *you father ... you!*

The vital matter of this father-principle, father superintendence, father involvement among our men with maids has been broached in a prior article.

We continue with more biblical proof and conclusions.



Abraham and the marrying of his son Isaac is an example in Scripture of the father principle acted upon in the marrying of covenant children.

Recall the scene in Genesis 24. Sarah, Abraham's wife, Isaac's mother, is dead. The promise of God to Abraham and Sarah has been fulfilled, for now, in the birth of Isaac. It awaits further fulfill-

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ment. For the promise has been that Abraham would be a father of a great nation comprised of all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:2, 3). Yet at this time there is no other covenant seed from Abraham's loins than Isaac. So now Abraham, old and blessed in all things (Gen. 24:1), will seek to be blessed fully in the taking of a wife for the son of his old age. Little does he know (though he does know a little!) that the fullness and the reality of blessing will be in the One seed to come from His loins in and through whom families everywhere will be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (Gal. 3:16; Eph. 1:3; Heb. 11:9, 10)! With little knowledge of these things, but with a true and living faith, Abraham adjures his servant to go and find a proper wife for Isaac. Genesis 24 records how the marriage is obviously directed by and blessed of the Lord.

We often cite the example of Abraham for our learning just *whom* a believer should marry. We learn from this example, from this father of all believers and the marrying of his son, that Canaanites are off limits. Abraham himself says this (cf. Gen. 24:3). We say this. No matter how good they look. No matter how wealthy they are. No matter how much they "seem to be eager to come to church with us...." Canaanites are Canaanites. And God's people are God's people. And light has no fellowship with darkness, nor Christ with Belial (2 Cor. 6:14-18). And "lead us not into temptation" is a prayer we are to make which ought to make for a prayer-life of tempting not the Lord and playing with the doctrines of grace by our cavorting with shapely but ungodly Canaanites. And though the way of a man with a maid is the way of a converted man loving a godly woman's soul *and* her blue eyes, the godly way is not one convert seeking in dating to *convert* pretty blue eyes.

But more. From Abraham we

learn the *way* marrying should be done. And it should be done, according to Abraham's way, so that the father leads the way. According to the narrative in Genesis 24 father Abraham got his son a wife. Abraham sent his servant to his own country and kindred, to Mesopotamia and the city of Nahor (vv. 3, 10). Abraham directs the whole thing. Abraham's will is decisive in the matter. Isaac has no authority here. Presumably, Abraham talked to his son about this. And presumably Isaac agreed to the arrangement, just as on the other end Rebekah was consulted and agreed with Laban and Bethuel. But father Abraham is the Man here, and the vicar of God here, on behalf of the covenant-promising, covenant-obliging heavenly Father! So Isaac was not to go and search for a mate for himself and by himself. Nor was Abraham's servant to bring back a bunch of beauties or even several women known for their godliness (and, of course, godly women can be beauties too!) from which Isaac was to choose through some kind of dating process, and several years of recreating with one after another until he had fallen in love with someone, or at least *more* in love with one than the others.

Nothing here of Isaac the Independent One, searching after some Material One or even some Spiritual One in relative isolation from father. Rather, here is father acting for the son, in the best interests of the son, and especially in the best interests of the covenant of grace. Pretty bland compared to modern American dating? Very godly, very serious, very God-honoring compared to modern American dating!

Abraham: Lord of the Marrying of His Covenant Seed!

Some might object to the contention that the example of Abraham and the marrying of his son Isaac applies to us and to our day.

The objection may be raised: this

fact of Abraham's seeking a wife for Isaac in this way was sin. Poor Isaac! First father tries to kill him (Gen. 22). Now in the very personal and private matter of marrying we see father tyrannizing him. The answer to this objection is clear: there is no indication in Scripture that this way of seeking a wife for Isaac was sin. There is clear evidence that this way was blessed, a blessing for all involved: for Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, and the church!

Another objection is more serious. Some might say: Abraham's seeking a mate for his son was a special instance. It was not meant to be for all time that fathers would be so involved in the marrying of their children. Especially in the New Testament era, we who have the Spirit ought to be able to find a mate for ourselves, and our fathers and mothers ought to trust us enough to leave us to make the decision for ourselves. At best Genesis 24 teaches that fathers should be concerned with whom their children marry. It might even teach that children should be concerned that their fathers be concerned. It does not teach that father is lord of the marrying of his children.

The concern is real, and a good one. The concern is that we might in zeal to rid the house of God of one custom, namely "dating," only be filling it with seven other devilish customs which were never meant to be anything but that — customs only for one era, and for maybe one race of people, and which never had anything to do with abiding principles and which will never fly in 2002, and with Americans, or the Dutch.

Maybe (the objectors might concede) this custom of parental supervision of the marrying of children is for some. Maybe control freak fathers will like this, and maybe cowering kids will submit to this. But my dad and I agree. He's too busy. And I am old enough to decide for myself. He likes what I like. And he respects me and trusts me. And when I let

him know that George has now entered my life, or that I met this great guy at the convention and that we had six dates in four days dad will say "how wonderful" and start saving money.

In answer to that objection, the following is recommended for the reader's consideration:

First, we should remember that Abraham and Isaac and Genesis 24 are sacred history. Therefore, there is *something* here, most assuredly, which pertains to us. There is gospel here of the covenant salvation which is *for us*, and of the covenant responsibilities there are *for us*. Granted, it might not be that Genesis 24 means that we are to employ servants to make matches for our covenant youth (or forty year olds), or that one or a thousand of us ought to agree to marry someone sight unseen. In fact Genesis 24 does not mean this. No one would argue for such strange and strained interpretation and application of Scripture. But it might just be that there is something sacred and abiding about the *principle* of the way of Abraham with his man and the maid, that is, about *the fatherhood involvement, the covenant head of the home responsibility* which Abraham, and God *through him*, demonstrates.

The fact and history of Abraham and its bearing on us and our children ought especially to be considered when we recall that Abraham is called in Scripture the *father* of all believers (Rom. 4:16). This means, among other things, that Abraham is set forth as a principle-man, a man for all time, an embodiment of Truth for our learning of the God who is Father of all believers, of the Christ whose day Abraham saw and rejoiced in (John 8:56), of the promises, unconditional, and to him and his seed after him in the generations (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39), of the faith that he had, and of his being justified by faith as the only way, ever, that one is saved (Rom. 4). Abraham's covenant faithfulness and his obedi-

ence are to be reckoned, as well, as a *pattern* for us children to follow (cf. Hebrews 11 and the several references to Abraham).

Abraham, father Abraham, *our* father Abraham was lord of the marrying of his children. This was because he was lord of the home, under the Lord of the covenant he represented. And this means, in fact, that covenant fathers today must be lord of the marrying of their children.

The lordship of Abraham in his home and its application to us today, *the abiding principle of covenant headship and authority*, even for the marrying of our covenant seed, is proven without a doubt in a passage, a *New Testament passage*, such as I Peter 3. There the lordship of Abraham over Sarah is acknowledged, and the fact that Sarah acknowledged this is set forth as the godly example for wives in covenant homes today. Wives are Sarah's daughters, as long as they do well, and submit to their husbands, and are not afraid with any amazement (I Pet. 3:6).

This all means that husbands *today* are lords. Wives *today* subjects. And all are to acknowledge this in the home. Children as well. Children are Abraham's seed indeed if they do well in calling their fathers lord. No inkling of a thought that when the State says they are legal, children have rights to call the shots in some Thing called recreational dating. Father is lord. In the name of the living God of Abraham, covenant fathers today are lord, and that too, of the way of their men and maids.

Lordship – godly, commanding, superintending, covenant-promoting rule of father today ought to be seen, felt, and desired in the way of our men with maids. Fathers must be Abrahamic with their children. They must know where the godly mates are. They must superintend the pursuit of them. They must govern the way of their men and their maids!

But this means, then, that there must be meek, trusting submission

to fathers among the children and young people of the covenant. Just as in Abraham's day and home, so today an attitude of cheerful yielding to father's will by our men, and submissive meekness by our maids ought to adorn the covenant grace life folk. Godliness and meekness and reverence of father, and not revealing, catch-me-if-you-can fashion, and women and even men with pierced whatever, ought to be the clothing and ornaments of our men with maids. Such adornment as God gives, and as God requires for godly marrying, is indeed "see-through" only in that it reveals the soul. And it is indeed costly, for it is in the sight of God of great price (I Pet. 3:4). But this is precisely what has got to be seen, and what has got to be spent, if there is to be godly, God-honoring marrying!

From Father to Father to Fathers

From Abraham, then, we learn that godly lordship (on the part of the father), and submissive meekness (on the part of children) are to characterize, indeed, are to be the outstanding characteristics of the way of our men with maids.

And what shall I more say of this father principle, the foundation of the family principle for the marrying of children of the promise? This I will!

I tell of Isaac whose personhood was not stifled but whose godliness was promoted in father's way for his marrying; for out in (not playing the) the field, we find him, meditating at the eventide (Gen. 24:63). Of Isaac also, who moaned not that he would have to forgo a wild and woolly decade of dating, who muttered not that he was old enough to have found a wife on his own. Of Isaac also who waited not to fall in love with someone after ten someones, but whose love was to do father's will, and who married, and who *then* loved his bride (v. 67), who *then* gave her birthday presents, who *then* gave her pearls, who *then* took her out to dinner every Friday

night, who *then* said "I love you," and who then kissed her good night. And then some.

I tell of other examples, for example Judah, who learned from father Abraham, and who himself took a wife for his firstborn, Er (Gen. 38:6).

I tell of negative examples of sons of God taking and marrying daughters of (ungodly) men of *all which they chose* (where were the godly fathers?!), and which dating and then marrying game was the occasion of the Flood of God's wrath (Gen. 6:2, 3). Of sinning son Samson who commanded his father and mother to get him a wife of the daughters of Philistia, and whose parents but weakly protested (Judges 14: 1-4).

I tell also of the biblical practice in the Old Testament of children, especially daughters, being *given* in marriage. Of daughters there represented as the property of father, under the authority of father until that authority is transferred, father-willing, to the husband of the bride. Of Numbers 30:3-16, therefore, which tells that the very *vows* a daughter might make before God could be ratified or annulled by the father; but that when the daughter is given in marriage by the father, the husband now confirms or makes void her vows.

I tell also of I Corinthians 7:38 which speaks of the practice still in the New Testament church, of fathers giving or not giving daughters

in marriage. And of the apostle's concern in II Corinthians 11:2 that his very ministry be a picture of this father's giving in marriage in order that the chaste virgin be presented to Christ....

I tell also, therefore, that there is *no such biblical thing!* as some quasi "state of being" for a child of the covenant in which the child is "on his own" and independent of parents. There is never anything holy said of children who are "let loose" or who break loose to find their way or their mate.

And I tell, finally (though this I surmise), that when godly men of old walked down the aisle, and were asked, "Who giveth this woman to this man in marriage?" they could say "I do" with confidence that *every step of the way*, from the time their daughter was ready to marry, to the time she was betrothed, up till this time ... *they really did!*



Oh, I tell, dear readers, and no doubt in one way or another we all have been told before. But who is listening? And to Christ rather than custom?


Let us heed our Father in heaven who is Trinity God, and then God the Father of Adam who speaks to us of how holy covenant love-life should be and should be from father to son to many sons. Let us ponder anew Abraham the father of all believers, and the

many other fathers of covenant who reflected and who acted upon the father principle of the godly way of men with maids.

Those fathers! Our fathers, our fathers! Given to Israel-Church as the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof! Sterling examples, they! Riding over all enemies, they! Hurling sharpened spear of Truth and Honor and Reverence and Marriage and Covenant at youth subcultures and dynamic dating duos, there they go! Running through the troop which would parade arm-in-arm and bumper-to-bumper along Grand Haven pier — there we see them. In the church too these fathers, and their principles, ride on, fire in their eyes, defenders of the Sacred Place, the Sacred People, the Sacred Generations. Scattering everywhere those who would date, drink, and be merry, there are the fathers, zealots for the glory of God!

And there are such fathers' sons. They are God's sons. They are militant, in the Name of God, for the way of Christ, the way of the Word, the way of family, of father, and of Father God for true men and true maids of God's covenant.

There. Right in your own home. Grace has visited this home. Grace has made a grace father. And grace mother. And grace children.

Grace Life. For this graceful way. It is the way of Christ for Christ's men with Christ's maidens fair. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Society of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a "Summer Sing-spriation" Sunday evening, July 14, in their church auditorium. In addition to inviting their congregation to join them, they made a special effort

to invite families and friends from around their church home to come and join them. In addition to audience singing, there was instrumental and other vocal participation.

In evangelism news from the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL, we find that they are presently sending out tapes to 156 individuals on a weekly basis and six per week within their own congregation. For the month of June there were 329 unique hits to their web page.

This August the Evangelism Committee of the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI once again sponsored their annual Summer Seminar. This year's theme dealt with "The Christian and Money." For four successive Wednesday's in August, interested participants met together at Southwest for a timely discussion of money and how it affects their lives. Rev. R. Cammenga opened the series on August 7 by looking at "Making Money." This was followed one

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

week later by Mr. David Ondersma, a retail loan officer at a local West-Michigan bank, speaking on "The Christian and Debt." Then Rev. Cammenga spoke on "Money and Marriage." And finally Rev. G. VanBaren spoke on August 28 on the subject, "Treasures That Money Cannot Buy." Outlines and handouts were provided for each discussion, and there was abundant opportunity to raise questions. If you are interested, both audio and video tapes of the seminar will be made available at a later date.

Congregation Activities

On July 1 the internships of Seminarians Paul Goh and Bill Langerak officially began. The council of the Bethel PRC made Mr. Goh and his wife welcome by inviting the entire congregation for a time of fellowship immediately following their evening service on July 7. Our Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI officially welcomed Mr. Langerak and his family on July 10. Southeast combined with that welcome a demonstration of the Allen Organ that their council was presenting to their congregation for their approval at a later date. Their evening concluded with a strawberry shortcake/ice cream social, which was to help the young people raise funds for this year's convention.

Evidently the congregation of Southeast liked what they heard July 10, because on July 22 they approved the purchase of the Allen Renaissance 320 organ.

On Thursday and Friday, August 8 & 9, the Men's Society of the Loveland, CO PRC sponsored two lectures by Prof. H. Hanko on the rearing of our covenant children. The timing of these two lectures seemed especially appropriate, with the school year less than three weeks away. It no doubt served as encouragement, not only to parents, but also to the entire church, as they considered this essential calling. Opportunity was given for discussion and questions.

Prof. Hanko also preached once for Loveland on August 11.

School Activities

With the school year now in full swing, we often fail to consider that these schools are indeed a blessing from our heavenly Father. We often just assume that they will just continue. We were reminded of this recently when we read that the Heidelberg PRC School will have to wait at least one more year to begin operation in the Chicago area. They had hoped to be able to begin with kindergarten this fall. A willing teacher was available, but the number of students was insufficient to begin. We remain confident that in God's perfect time it will come to pass.

Northern Ireland Activities

The British Reformed Fellowship sponsored a family conference, beginning July 20, in Castlewellan, a small town in the south and east of Northern Ireland, beginning July 20. The 50 or so who attended were housed in an old castle on a large estate. Prof. Engelsma and Rev. Gritters each spoke three times on the subject of the assurance of salvation.

Minister Activities

Candidate D. Overway has accepted the call to serve as pastor of the Covenant PRC of Wyckoff, N.J.


The congregation of the Byron Center, MI PRC has extended a call

to Rev. C. Terpstra to serve as their next pastor. With him on that trio were Revs. A. Brummel and M. DeVries.

Rev. R. VanOverloop declined the call he received from the Grandville, MI PRC.

Young People's Activities

Our denomination's annual young people's convention was held this year at the Epworth Forest Conference Center in Northern Indiana, August 12-19. It was hosted by the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI, which makes this, we believe, the first convention ever to be hosted by a church in one state and held in another. From talking to different young people after the convention, we can also safely say that this year's convention was a huge success. We were able to pick up some of that mood when we had the privilege of attending this year's Pre-Convention Singspiration, held Sunday, August 11 at Fair Haven Ministries in Jenison, MI. What a blessing to sing praises to God with over 1500 like-minded fellow believers and to see 400 young people up on the stage singing.

Rev. Gritters, Haak, and Terpstra developed this year's convention theme, "Youth, Examples of Godliness," in three speeches throughout the week, and the conventioners were kept extremely busy with a seemingly endless variety of spiritual and recreational activities. 

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Announcements

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Gary and Karen VanderSchaaf and family in the death of Karen's father,

MR. NORMAN DICE,

and to Rev. Audred and Alva Spriensma and family in the death of Alva's father,

MR. GERRIT VANVUGT.

"My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:26)

Tom Bodbyl, vice president
Ken Vink, assistant clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The family of Prof. David and Ruth Engelsma expresses its sympathy to the many members of the Protestant Reformed Churches who knew and loved him, especially the Loveland congregation, in the death, on July 13, 2002 at the age of 77 years, of

PAUL G. GRIESS,

long-time and faithful member of the Loveland, CO Protestant Reformed Church and close and dear friend.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. 21:4).

REMINDER:

This is the last issue of Volume 78. If you desire to have your volume bound, please bring the entire volume (beginning with the October 1, 2001 issue) to the seminary by October 15. The cost of binding your own volumes is still \$13.00.

NOTICE

The annual meeting of the RFPA will be held on September 26, in Southwest PRC at 7:30 P.M. Prof. Hanko will speak on the history associated with the book *Sin and Grace*. Everyone is welcome to attend.

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