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The Healing of Naaman the Leper

Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

II Kings 5:14

In this fifth chapter of II Kings we have some remarkable contrasts, which deserve notice. The first contrast is between the little Jewish girl and the wicked king of Israel. The little girl believed in her God, while the king trusted in heathen idols. The first was a slave in a heathen land, separated from her people; the second bathed in pomp and luxury in the palace at Samaria. The little girl was convinced that her God had all power in heaven and earth; the ungodly Joram thought that it was a threat to his unstable throne that the captain of the Syrian army should seek help from the God of Israel. On the one hand, undaunted faith; on the other hand, terrifying unbelief.

The second contrast is between Naaman the Syrian captain, and

Gehazi the servant of Elisha. Naaman came from the pagan country of Syria to be cured of his leprosy by the God of Israel. He came to the prophet Elisha and found a cure in a most astounding way. But Gehazi, who grew up in Israel and even served the prophet, preferred the gold and silver of Syria above the treasures of heaven. Naaman the Syrian went home cured, rejoicing in his newfound salvation, while Gehazi went forth from the presence of Elisha covered with the leprosy of the Syrian.

We learn from this account that salvation is by grace only in sovereign mercy. Jesus reminds us of these wondrous, unfathomable ways of God when He tells the unbelieving Jews of His day that there were many lepers in the days of Elisha, but none was healed except Naaman the Syrian.

Naaman held a high position in Syria. Due to his great ability in battle and numerous victories he was made captain over the military forces of the kingdom. All of this we readily understand as being of the Lord. God had given him those victories over the enemies of Syria. Even the victory over Israel because of their sin was of the Lord.

However, Naaman had given the credit to his own god, Rimmon, who was considered the god of war. The truth is that God had given them to him to punish unfaithful Israel and to make His name known among the heathen. It was also the Lord that brought this Syrian captain very low. From the pinnacle of his proud position he was dashed into the shameful humiliation of a miserable leper.

Leprosy is a dreadful disease. It begins with a small spot in the skin and soon spreads until the entire body becomes an unsightly mass of festering sores. The face becomes horribly distorted, limbs twist into grotesque shapes, and soon the fingers and toes rot from the body. Knowing no cure, the victim could only wait for death.

This disease, by its very nature, was a symbol of God's curse. It was a vivid picture of the depravity of the human nature, the destructive power of sin, and the utter despair of the sinner who awaits everlasting torments of hell under the righteous wrath of the living God. As we well know, sin breeds sin, even unto death. That is why the victim of leprosy was, in Israel, an outcast of society.

Naaman had leprosy, although

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

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. David J. Engelsma
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: engelsma@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Don Doezeema
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603
PH: (616) 531-1490
(616) 538-1778
FAX: (616) 531-3033
(e-mail: doezeema@prca.org)

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

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

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

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

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: sean67@cpfbkstore.fsnet.co.uk)

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it had not reached the advanced stage. For a man of his position nothing worse could happen, and Rimmon, his god, could not help him. The future for him looked dark and hopeless, just as it does for a sinner who is brought into the consciousness of his own sin and guilt in the sight of the living God.

Yet there was one very important thing that Naaman did not know, that he was an elect child of God. He was unconscious of the fact that all these things came upon him in the mercies of the God of Israel. God was putting Israel to shame by working His power for a man who was actually a pagan. Years later Jesus points this out so beautifully to the unbelieving Jews of His day by telling them that when Israel had made the measure of their iniquity full, Israel as a nation would be destroyed and God would turn to the Gentiles to gather His own elect out of every nation, tongue, and tribe. God, who is sovereign in mercy, knows His own and knows how to deliver them unto salvation.

Now, how did this Gentile come into contact with the God of Israel? God used the means of a little Jewish girl and the king of Israel, Joram. The little Jewish girl had been taken captive by Naaman in one of his victories over Israel and was brought to his home as his personal slave. Far from her home she clung to her faith in her God. When she found out about her master's leprosy, she said, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! For he would recover him of his leprosy." Then the king of Syria, deeply concerned about the welfare of his valuable captain, consented to send him to seek a cure from the God of Israel.

In His inscrutable wisdom God used this means to bring the king of Israel into the picture. King Joram must be aware of what the true God is doing in order that he may forever be without excuse. We do not know whether the king of

Syria did not know where the prophet lived, or whether he thought that he needed the king's permission to send someone to the prophet. Whatever the case may be, Naaman comes with a letter from his king to ask King Joram to cure him of his leprosy. Fear immediately strikes the king's heart, for his trust is not in Jehovah but in the idol gods of the heathen. He could only surmise that this was simply another scheme to make war against him. Elisha, however, hears about this embassy from Syria and urges the king to send Naaman to him in order that it may be known that there is indeed a prophet in Israel.

Naaman now comes to Elisha with all the pomp and dignity of his office, to impress the prophet with his greatness and worthiness, expecting to be greeted with the honor and respect worthy of his position. Thinking that Jehovah was like unto Rimmon, he thought that Elisha would perform some ritual that would be followed by magical healing flowing from the fingers of the prophet. In turn he would pay for these services with a goodly amount of money and costly garments. Yes, Naaman had it all figured out.

However, he was in for a shock. Elisha did no such thing. In fact, the prophet never even came out to greet him, but simply sent out his servant to tell him to go wash in the Jordan seven times. Naaman felt insulted. Must he expect a cure from the muddy Jordan rather than the sparkling rivers of Damascus? Can the God of Israel do from a distance that which his gods would not even attempt to do? His pride is hurt and he is angry. At this point his servants point out his foolishness. Certainly, if Elijah had required something difficult, Naaman would have exerted his utmost to do it. What Elijah actually requires is so simple, so why not do it?

As we have seen before, the Lord was directing all circum-

stances, for Naaman had to learn a few things. He had to learn that before God he is no more than a filthy leper. It must be seen by him that God alone is the Almighty, that Rimmon has no power. He must learn to confess that the God of Israel is the only true living God, forsaking all others. Wanting to merit his cure, he must learn that God's gifts are sovereignly free. Instead of looking for cures in rituals and ceremonies, he must confess that there is no cleansing power except in the blood of the Lamb, as symbolized in the river Jordan. This is what the Lord was working in the heart of this Gentile by His Spirit, so that he would do some real soul searching. He must come to know that, as lepers deserved to be cast out by God and man, so he stood before the living God as a sinner who deserved nothing less than to be forever forsaken in hell. Instead of dictating how he should be healed, he must learn to cry out, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner." Thus humbled he dips seven times in the Jordan.

Then he saw it, that God is the only God. He realized for the first time in his life that God is God, that Rimmon was but a mere idol. Indeed, it was not the river Jordan that had healed, but Jehovah. As the leprosy disappears from his body, he realizes the power of God that is able to wash and cleanse us even from our spiritual leprosy, until we are made whiter than snow. The cleansing power of the Spirit gave his heart greater joy than the outward cleansing. The peace of God that floods his soul is far more wonderful than the riddance of that dreadful disease. For the first time he realizes that the guilt and filth of sin was far worse than the plague that had ravaged his body, and that the healing was far better than the outward cure.


There is one more thing to be learned, that this healing is a sovereignly free gift. He feels compelled to return to Elisha to offer him substantial remuneration for

his services. The prophet quickly informs him that God's gifts cannot be purchased with money. Salvation is not of works, lest any man should boast. All the money in the world could not pay for that gift, for salvation is of God alone through the price of the blood that God Himself paid for the sins of His people on the cross.

Thus, Naaman went home cured, but possessing also that far greater treasure, faith in the only true and living God whom he now confessed as his God alone.

Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, sought through deception the treasures of this world, which he esteemed above the kingdom of heaven. We know what happened.

He went out from the presence of the man of God a leper, as white as snow. Another leper there now was in Israel, but Naaman, the Syrian, was cured.

How wondrous are the ways of God, unfathomed and unknown! Salvation is by grace in God's sovereign good pleasure. He who glories, let him glory in the Lord! 

Editorial

Labor Union Membership in the Light of Scripture (2)

Bearing the Cross

In their history-long, principled, consistent, and uncompromising stand against labor union membership, as demonstrated in the previous editorial, the Protestant Reformed Churches manifest themselves as true, faithful, and courageous churches of Jesus Christ. The men of the churches show themselves genuine disciples of Jesus Christ, willing to deny themselves and to bear the cross for Jesus' sake.

Their stand against labor union membership has cost the churches many members.

Many more people refused to join the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church, in the strongly unionized Chicagoland area, or left the congregation, during my pastorate, because of the stand against unions than refused to join, or left, because of the sound Reformed doctrine of the church. An astute minister in another Reformed denomination told me at the time that the congregation would be three times as large as it was (and it was then nearly six hundred members), if it were not for the stand against union membership.

The stand against union mem-

bership cost any number of men better jobs. Men with families gave up their job rather than to join a union. They denied themselves, took up their cross, and followed Jesus Christ. They lost their life for His sake. They willingly forfeited the world. Thus, they saved their lives and gained their souls. They were not ashamed of the Son of man and His words in an adulterous and sinful generation (Mark 8:34-38).

In their stand against the unions, the Protestant Reformed Churches "walk the walk" of making known in the life of the members the Lordship of Jesus Christ. There are many churches and professing Reformed Christians today who talk about Jesus' Lordship in every area of life, especially when it costs them nothing. But in their life, especially under pressure of persecution or possibility of suffering loss, they deny Christ's Lordship. In modern parlance, they "talk the talk" but do not "walk the walk." The Bible's name for this is hypocrisy.

Surrender to Union Pressure

The stand of the Protestant Reformed Churches against labor union membership contrasts

sharply with developments in the Christian Reformed Church. The Christian Reformed Church has fallen away abysmally in the matter of faithfulness to the Word of God regarding labor union membership. That denomination made a good beginning. In this respect also, the Protestant Reformed Churches are the real continuation of the Christian Reformed Church as it once was and as it should be.

The good beginning of the Christian Reformed Church regarding labor union membership was in Chicago, always a stronghold of the Christian Reformed Church. In 1886, all three hundred Dutch Reformed workers at the Pullman Works in Roseland crossed picket lines to help break the strike (Robert P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City*, Eerdmans, 2002, pp. 640, 641).

Also in 1886, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church decided that no member of the Christian Reformed Church might be member of the Knights of Labor labor union, the forerunner of the CIO-AFL. The grounds were much the same as those the Protestant Reformed Churches would later adduce in their letters to two presi-

dents of the United States (see J. L. Schaver, *The Polity of the Churches*, vol. 2, Grand Rapids International Publications, 4th rev. ed. 1956, pp. 217, 218).

Then the Christian Reformed Church began steadily to abandon its good stand. It did so under pressure mainly from the Chicago-area churches, whose members were joining the unions because of intimidation and because of the financial benefits. The reason why the Dutch Reformed in Chicago finally joined the unions was not conviction that Scripture permitted labor union membership, much less desire to be a Christian influence on the unions. Rather, the reason was purely pragmatic and materialistic. A Reformed garbage hauler admitted as much to Richard Tempelman, who was a staunch opponent in the Christian Reformed Church of the secular unions.

You correctly observe that most of us don't care what happens in our unions.... Our supreme interest is in enough take home pay. We live too easily on a horizontal plane. We are more interested in what we get than in how we got it.... These are our good people in the pews who are in the scavenger business. They [unions] are organized. You can't do business without belonging. They control things (*Dutch Chicago*, p. 644).

Under pressure, especially from the Chicago churches, the

Christian Reformed synod of 1916 permitted membership in a "neutral union."

How strong the opposition to union membership was in the Christian Reformed Church is evident from the fact that, despite the decision of 1916, synods of the Christian Reformed Church were forced to face the issue again and again until the relatively late date of 1954, when the matter was finally decided. Even at that late date, a synodical study committee recommended that synod declare membership in the CIO-AFL *sinful*. But, as Swierenga relates in *Dutch Chicago*, "so many church members in Chicago, Patterson, Detroit, and other big cities belonged to these unions that the synod rejected the committee report" (pp. 644, 645).

Still, not all voices in the Christian Reformed Church against the unions fell silent. Sounder men continued to speak out, regardless of their synod. In 1959, Prof. Henry R. VanTil of Calvin College wrote a book on Calvinism and culture. In it he asserted that


the believer, in his opposition to the world, therefore, must see that the so-called "neutral union" is an enemy of the cross of Christ just as well as the communistic party leader that curses the church and her King. For the neutrality postulate of the union involves a tacit curse upon the anointed One, whom the Father sent into the world and by whom he now rules over all things.... The labor

unions of our day are not one whit behind those of whom the Psalmist testifies that they took counsel together against the LORD and his anointed (Ps. 2) (Henry R. VanTil, *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture*, Baker, 1959, pp. 201, 202; emphasis added).

Nevertheless, ministers and elders in the Christian Reformed Church, including many who know better, have rolled over and played dead. They allow men and women who are members of an organization that, in VanTil's words, is "an enemy of the cross of Christ," curses Christ, and takes counsel against Jehovah God and His Anointed to partake of the Lord's Supper.

This is the stand, or lack thereof—really, the supine position—of the Christian Reformed Church today, as also of those who have recently left the Christian Reformed Church over women in church office, the United Reformed Churches, and, for that matter, of most Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America.

In light of the perfectly clear, forceful testimony of Scripture, which testimony is the basis of the stand of the Protestant Reformed Churches against unions (as originally it was the basis of the Christian Reformed Church's rejection of the unions), this miserable surrender of the churches to the labor unions is inexcusable, and deadly serious.

(to be continued)
— DJE 

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Martin VanderWal

When Ye Pray

Matthew 6:5-15

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

How blessed is the communion and fellowship between the citizens of the kingdom of heaven and their

Father who is in heaven! Such fellowship is a wonder, for it partakes of the heavenly. These citizens live upon the earth and are surrounded

by the things of the earth. They know their own sinfulness. Nevertheless they enjoy intimate fellowship and communion with the all-glorious, everlasting God. They merely turn the thoughts of their heart toward the heavenly, calling upon the name of God. Straightway they are ushered into the presence of the fatherly majesty of God.

The nature of this communion and fellowship is well described by this word "prayer." Deep in their hearts, the citizens understand their entire dependence upon their blessed, all glorious Father in heaven. They know His abiding love for them. To Him, therefore, they turn their hearts, giving expression to every need of their life. From Him they seek all things — from the honor of His name, to their daily bread. In that way of seeking, they receive.

Such fellowship and communion is simply assumed to be the present practice of the citizens of that kingdom. No commandment to pray is given in these verses. Instead we find the phrase over and over, "When ye pray...." We may rightly say the exercise of prayer is the very breath and life of heaven's citizens.

Prayer is raised up in the form of words, whether spoken or raised only in the heart. Using the good gift of language, the citizen of the kingdom formulates his needs into words and sends them heavenward, to his Father. Those words, whether expressed from the heart only or poured out with the lips, the Father receives. He inclines His ear and answers, pouring out blessings upon His people.

The Abuses Prohibited

As with all the gifts of God, there is always abuse and the potential of abuse. The children of God, when they pray, must guard against every abuse of this marvelous gift. In this passage the King of heaven's kingdom issues two distinct warnings against this abuse.

The first warning is against praying "to be seen of men" (v. 5). This abuse of prayer is the same as that of almsgiving in the preceding verses: to be seen of men. Against it is pronounced the very same judgment: they have their reward. Further, Christ deems "hypocrites" those who pray to be seen of men. Their hypocrisy is found in two things. First, their practice is antithetical to what lies in their hearts. Second, their words speak of great humility. They might speak even of their own wretchedness and the depravity of men. They might speak of the sovereign majesty of Almighty God. Their words would be a powerful demonstration to men of their own deep humility. All who heard would be convinced that here is a humble man. But his heart is of a different frame. His heart searches for his own glory. He wishes for men to talk about him, not about God.

Note well: This hypocrite, praying in the synagogue and on the corners of the streets, is not found out or discovered. His appearance and behavior suggest piety. His prayer is a religious activity, formally correct. What makes him a hypocrite is found in his heart. He prays out of a desire to be pleasing to men. His goal is to bring praise of him out of their mouths.

How blasphemous this is before the living God, who searches and knows the heart! The words are proper and fitting to the majesty and glory of God. With every word, phrase, tone, and gesture, the prayer rings with sincerity and truth. Yet what is heard from that mouth is contrary to what lies in the heart. At bottom there is no sincerity, only detestable hypocrisy. No reward shall he receive of God!

How surprising these words of condemnation must have been to Jesus' audience. The public practitioners of this holy art were no doubt many. They could daily be

found on the street corners and in the synagogues. The people must have loved to be around, to hear them pray. Their prayers were grammatically correct. The pronunciation, enunciation, the accent, rhythm, and inflection were nearly perfect. The emotions and sentiments expressed carried along every hearer to the very throne of God! They were heard by men, and of men they were approved. But that was all.

Be not ye like unto them.

The second form of abuse is given in verse 7, the use of "vain repetitions." These words refer to the repeating of the same phrases over and over again. Or they may indicate the words of an established, formal prayer repeated over and over. This abuse of prayer our Lord attributes first to the heathen. In their worship of idols, the heathen had their own liturgy and litany. They addressed prayers, composed of certain words, to their idol gods. Over and over they would pray, with the hope of a favorable audience with these vain idols. They spoke much, hoping to be heard.

These vain repetitions show the vanity not only of these words but also of the gods to whom these words were addressed. These gods were no gods at all. They were without any power to grant the petitions men brought to them. Their worshipers' many words and "much speaking" demonstrated that truth. We might think of Elijah's words to the prophets of Baal: "Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked" (I Kings 18:27). They do not trust these gods. Therefore they pursue them with many words.

The prayers of the children of the kingdom must not be such. They worship the true and living God. He is sovereign. "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."

Three things must here be observed. First, God is their Father. He desires to load His children with blessings and benefits. Second, He knows the needs of His children. Prayer cannot be a means of enlightening His ignorance. Third, the very thoughts that give rise to the words of prayer are also the gifts of the Father to His dear children. "For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether" (Ps. 139:4).

The very form of the prayers of God's children must reflect His sovereignty. He is mighty to grant their requests and petitions. How blessed, therefore, to bring these words before His fatherly majesty. No petition brought before God is vain. No need, therefore, for repetition.

Another reason lies behind this second abuse of the gift of prayer. This reason, while found among the heathen, presently grows in popularity among Christians. By their much speaking, the heathen attempt to wrest the will of their idol gods to their own purpose. They will this, they will that. Should they express their will enough to their idols, they might perhaps turn their gods' will to grant that request. The will of men overcomes the will of the idol god! No wonder these repetitions fall under the condemnation of vanity. Should a god's will be overcome by the will of man, that god is unworthy of the name. That god himself (or herself) is very vanity.

Let it not so be with the children of the kingdom. Let them not think that they should change the mind or will of their Father by their much speaking. Let them not adopt the ways of the heathen! Let them not say, "my will be done," even by their vain repetitions. Let the children of the kingdom say, "Thy will be done." Let them rest quietly in the divine wisdom and will.

Be not ye like unto them.

The Lord's Prayer

The way being cleared of these two errors, praying to be seen of men and the offering of vain repetitions, our Lord gives us the proper manner of prayer. "After this manner pray ye."

The words that follow make impossible the abuses mentioned before. This is not a prayer that gains the admiration of the audience, whether in the synagogue or on the corners of the streets. It does not border on the poetic or inspirational. It does not rouse the imagination to new heights of sublimity. While it does speak of the kingdom and glory of God, it also speaks of daily bread and the forgiveness of sins. It is a prayer for the closet, behind the shut door.

Neither is this a prayer that is long and drawn out. It progresses from start to finish, and is completed by the word "Amen." In no wise can any part of this prayer fall under the condemnation of vain repetition. It is unlike the prayers of the heathen, who think they shall be heard for their much speaking.

We enter not here into the contents, meaning, or significance of the petitions of this prayer. There is much here, as is attested by the many writings and meditations on this brief, familiar prayer. It is worthy of so much that has been written. But here we will keep the emphasis on its brevity and simplicity.

After this manner therefore pray ye.

One of these petitions is given an outstanding place in this passage. Our Lord gives a brief word concerning the fifth petition of the prayer He has taught us: And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. In this short prayer, there is this one petition that demands something of the petitioner. Before he may seek God's forgiveness of his debts, he must first forgive those in debt to him. Having done so, he is

clear to seek forgiveness from his heavenly father.

Reconciliation with God is found in the way of reconciliation with men. Peace with God is enjoyed by means of peace with men. Note well, the assumption is that there are men that owe the child of God. Against him they have sinned. The question here is whether the child of God has a living and practical knowledge of the grace of God. That knowledge he demonstrates when he forgives those indebted to him. Living in the light of that grace, he is welcome before the throne of God. He is assured that his prayer for forgiveness is heard by his heavenly Father. His debt is surely cleared away.

Our Lord's commentary on this petition is significant. The words of verses fourteen and fifteen show its importance. If there is one thing the petitioner needs, it is the knowledge that his heavenly Father does not deal with him according to his sins. Were his sins held against him, he would be assured only that neither he nor any of his petitions would be received by God. Without forgiveness he must only be cast out of the kingdom and into outer darkness. As his sins are forgiven by God, in the way of his forgiveness of men, he knows that God does indeed receive him before the throne of His holiness, all his other petitions are answered in grace.


With the words of this commentary, our Teacher in prayer leads us also to Himself. We understand our own frailty and sinfulness. We cannot possibly keep this requirement in our own power. We cannot possibly keep it perfectly. Were it a condition, so that we must perfectly fulfill it before we might pray for our own forgiveness, we would never dare come before our heavenly Father with any petition. We know our tendency to bear grudges. We may freely forgive, but we do not even know all the debts men owe to us.

Nor must we undertake a thorough search, to keep an accurate count. But we do know the grace of God within us: we do resolve to forgive those who sin against us. Through grace, we receive grace, even the pardon of all our guilt. Through grace, we and all our petitions are received by our gracious, heavenly Father. .

The only ground of our prayer is this Teacher of prayer. As He has taught us, so let us pray. Let us pray in His name and for His sake. Only then are we received before the throne of God, to receive His blessed reward.

After this manner pray ye.

Questions for Meditation and Further Study:

1. Is all public prayer to be condemned? What about form prayers, such as those in the form for the Administration of Baptism and for the Administration of the Lord's Supper?
2. What are some present-day examples of prayer under the first prohibition of Christ—to be seen of men? How can we, when occasion requires public prayer, guard against this abuse?
3. Are formal prayers good for our children to learn?
4. What are some present-day forms of vain repetition? Are we ever guilty of this sin? What are some things we can do to ensure that our hearts and minds are laboring in prayer?
5. What is the organization of the Lord's Prayer? Which petitions receive the priority? Should (or, how should) its organization affect the organization of our prayers?
6. What additional light do Matthew 5:24, Matthew 18:23-35, and Luke 7:36-50 shed on the fifth petition and Jesus' commentary on that petition. 

Feature Articles

Prof. David Engelsma

The Indispensable Qualification for the Gospel-Ministry* (3)

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs....

John 21:15-23

Guarded Against Ministerial Temptations

Not only does love for Jesus move the minister to do the work of a pastor. Un-

dertaking the care of the church in love for Jesus Christ also guards the minister against real and powerful temptations in the work of his office.

First, the indispensable qualification guards against the danger that we love the church and devote ourselves to the welfare of the members simply out of love for people and desire to help people. There are men like this in the ministry. They seem to be model pastors. They are highly regarded by their congregations. But love for Jesus is not part of their ministry. Such a minister keeps peace in the flock *at the expense of sound doctrine and obedience to the law*. Such a minister is a popular counselor to the "hurting," *because he refuses to expose sin, call for repentance, and insist on a sacrificial change of life*. Such a minister is highly thought of as a preacher, *because he never*

preaches anything offensive, always avoids the sharp edges of the Reformed faith, and is invariably positive.

When Jesus put Peter back into office, He did not ask, "Do you love *my sheep and my lambs*?" but "Do you love *me*?"

Ministerial Self-Love

Second, the indispensable qualification guards against the real danger that we ministers love and seek ourselves in the ministry. This is a peril that can never sufficiently be recognized and combated by us. The sin is ambition—ambition not in its usual sense of being willing to work hard, but in the sense of a craving to have the preeminence.

Jesus ruled out this crippling weakness in His ministers in four distinct ways in His restoration of Peter in John 21. Obviously, Jesus

* Prof. Engelsma is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This article is the conclusion of the text of the address given at the commencement exercises of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary on June 16, 2003. The preceding installments appeared in the July 2003 and September 1, 2003 issues of the *Standard Bearer*.

did not ask, "Lovest thou thyself, so that you can ably and shrewdly make your work in my church advance yourself, your career, and your reputation?"

Also, the first of the three questions about loving Jesus included the comparison, "more than these" (John 21:15): "Peter, do you love me more than these?" Jesus was asking whether Peter still claimed to love Jesus more than the other disciples loved Jesus. That had been Peter's claim earlier. The night of Jesus' capture by His enemies Peter said, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I" (Mark 14:29). "I love you more than they do."

In his answer to Jesus' question at his restoration, Peter deliberately ignored the comparison. No longer does he make any such claim. Had he made the claim to love Jesus more than the others, Peter would have disqualified himself from the ministry. There is no place in the ministry for the arrogant attitude of superiority. There is no place for the lust for primacy. Christ is first in the church, and there is no second, or third.

In addition, Jesus nipped in the bud Peter's unhealthy concern, how John, the beloved disciple, would serve Christ. Having been restored to office and having learned by what death he should glorify God, Peter asked, "What shall this man do?" (John 21:21). Jesus' answer was, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me" (John 21:22). This was an important aspect of the restoration of Peter.

These words of Christ give important instruction to us ministers.

It is wrong for ministers to compare the place and work of their colleagues with their own place and work; to resent the gifts and work of another; to be jealous of others; or to hold those with lesser talents and in a less conspicuous position in contempt. All of this betrays self-love.

Christ is sovereign in His arrangement of the service of Him by each of us: "If I will," He said, "what is that to thee?" "You follow me in your own place and way; leave your colleagues' service of me up to me."

And the cure of the ministerial penchant for comparisons is the indispensable qualification: Love for Jesus Christ.

The fourth way in which Christ guarded against crippling ambition in the ministry was His forewarning that in his love for Jesus and in his care of the church Peter would suffer martyrdom: "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not" (John 21: 18). Peter was killed for the sake of Christ, as legend has it, by being crucified upside-down.

I maintain that every faithful minister becomes a martyr by being hated (often within his own congregation), enduring the reproach of Christ, having his name unjustly defamed, suffering loss, and thus losing his earthly life. This is the opposite of seeking and finding one's earthly life and thus advancing oneself. The minister who loves Jesus does not love his own life unto the death (Rev. 12:11).

In his homilies on John's gospel, Augustine put it this way:

For what else mean the words, "Lovest thou me? Feed my sheep," than if it were said, If thou lovest me, think not of feeding thyself, but feed my sheep as mine, and not as thine own; seek my glory in them, and not thine own; my dominion, and not thine; my gain, and not thine; lest thou be found in the fellowship of those who belong to the perilous times, lovers of their own selves.

A Lovely Answer

"Do you love me?"

This question comes to every one of us aspiring or ordained to the office of the ministry.

What is our answer?

Peter's answer was lovely.

It was lovely not only because he ignored the comparison with the others, not only because he affirmed his love for Jesus, and not only because he consistently used a weaker word for his love for Jesus than Jesus had used in His first two questions.

But his answer was lovely also because he grounded the truthfulness of his affirmation of his love for Jesus, not on the evidence of his own attitude and behavior—his spirituality and his deeds of service—but only on Jesus' knowledge of Peter's love.

Mark this well!


Peter's answer was not, "Yea, Lord; my extraordinary spiritual experiences and my exceptional deeds prove my love, or will prove it."

But his answer was, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee."

Three times: "Thou knowest."

At the very end, as at the beginning, of one's ministry—a *faithful* ministry—a minister of the gospel cannot say more than Peter did: "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." He cannot say, "Why, of course, I love you: look at all I have done for you." It is with the work of the ministry—a *faithful* ministry—as it is with the good works of the believer: the more you examine them, the more you see self-love, imperfect love, lack of love."

No, at the end of a ministry, and finally when we give account of our ministry—a *faithful* ministry—to Jesus, the chief shepherd, all we can say is, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee."

This is enough. 

The Real Saint Patrick (6)

The Significance of Patrick

Rev. Angus Stewart

We have seen that Patrick was clearly not the happy-go-lucky guy of popular perception. Nor did he evangelize Ireland in the service of the Roman Church and bring it under the sway of the Roman pontiff as, for example, Boniface did for Germany three centuries later.

Nor was he an abolitionist. Thomas Cahill writes, "The greatness of Patrick is beyond dispute: the first human being in the history of the world to speak out unequivocally against slavery."¹ But Patrick's *Letter* to Coroticus and his men does not condemn slavery *per se* but the kidnapping and murder of "the slaves of God and baptized handmaidens of Christ" (*Letter* 7). Patrick's *Letter* and *Confession* are very different from, say, the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

It would be more accurate to refer to Patrick as "Evangelical" than as "Protestant." The distinctive Reformed doctrines were not developed in his day and it is absurd to expect them to be taught in the *Confession* or the *Letter*. Truth develops over against the lie. When the time was right, the Reformation gospel was stated sharply over against Roman sacerdotalism. But that would wait another thousand years.

Patrick held to orthodox Trinitarian and Christological theology. He had a strong faith in God's promises and a compelling eschatology of hope. His devotion to the Word of God is seen on every page of his writings. His

knowledge of salvation in Christ was the basis for his missionary zeal to the Irish. Jesus Christ "overcame" death and received "all power above every name" (*Conf* 4), therefore the church must go into all the world and teach and baptize (*Conf* 40).

The greatness of Patrick's work and its difficulties, the glory of the gospel he preached, and his own limited education were used of the Spirit to work in him a profound humility. He was no proud prelate of the same ilk as Augustine of Canterbury, wrongly credited by some for first bringing Christianity to Britain. The honesty and purity of Patrick's soul shine through his works. He was a simple follower of Christ laboring on behalf of His God. He is an example to us all.

Patrick does not hold a place in the history of dogma. He was not a profound thinker, never mind a speculative theologian. He did not have the intellectual skills, nor the time, nor the library, for serious dogmatic reflection. Nor did Patrick translate the Bible into the vernacular for the Irish as did Wycliffe and his followers for the English. Instead Patrick sought to diffuse a knowledge of Latin in Ireland so that the church could understand the Old Latin translation.

But Patrick did have what was needed for his missionary task: an unwavering faith and a fervent love for the truth. Several things stand out regarding Patrick as a missionary. First, he was an itinerant bishop, one of the few we know of in the post-apostolic church. Even the Arian missionary to the Goths, Ulfilas (c. 311-c. 381), was largely stationed in one place. Second, his identification with those for whom he labored

would be commended by any modern school of missions. Third, his desire for a truly indigenous church reflecting the bent of the Irish is highly commendable. Fourth, a Reformed man appreciates Patrick's creedal emphasis and concern for the future of the church.

Will Durant points out that when Patrick died "it could be said of him, as of no other, that one man had converted a nation."² Another peculiarity of Ireland is that it received the Christian faith without the shedding of the blood of martyrs, Patrick and his anonymous helpers evidently dying a natural death.

Patrick's writings show a faith very different from that of the Council of Trent and Vatican I and II. Patrick knew nothing of transubstantiation, the worship of the host, or the mass as a propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead; nor of mariolatry, Mary's immaculate conception, or her bodily assumption into heaven, or her mediation; nor of papal dominion or infallibility, or of religious inquisition. The seven sacraments, auricular confession, the rosary, indulgences, worship of idols, prayers to saints, prayers for the dead, purgatory, and clerical celibacy are not part of Patrick's faith.

Ireland, which is now one of the most devoutly Romanist nations of the world, was not reduced to the Roman yoke till the twelfth century. For more than eleven hundred years after the resurrection of Christ, Ireland was independent of the papal see. Then in 1155, Adrian IV, the only English pope, granted Ireland to the Norman King of England, Henry II.³ Sixteen years later Ireland was sub-

Rev. Stewart is a missionary in the Protestant Reformed Churches, currently working in Northern Ireland.

duced by the English. The church that was built by Christ through the labors of Patrick and others was now claimed to be founded on Peter the rock. At the time of the Reformation, Ireland had been Roman Catholic for less than three hundred and fifty years. Non-Roman-Catholic Christianity, on the other hand, was to be found in Ireland for at least eight hundred years before the Norman invasion.

The ancient Irish church's freedom from both the old Roman Empire and the Roman Church led William Henry Scott to write,

Nowhere does church history provide an example of an accomplished indigenous church of this kind equal to that of the Celtic Church which developed in Ireland in the fifth century.⁴

But the significance of Patrick can be seen not only in his role in establishing the Irish church but in that church's vital role in the progress of Christianity in the early part of the Middle Ages. With the collapse of the Roman Empire and the incursion of the barbarian tribes, European civilization decayed rapidly. Libraries were destroyed and educational standards plummeted. The church was in great peril. However, as Kenneth Scott Latourette remarks,

Thanks to Patrick and to his imperfectly remembered associates and contemporaries, in the declining days of the Empire in the West, Christianity was securely planted in Ireland, well beyond the farthest limits reached by the legions.... From Ireland, too, within a very few generations, Christian monks were to pour into Britain and the Continent, there to revive a faith which had decayed through the turmoil of the years and to carry it to pagan peoples.⁵

Mark Noll, in his book *Turning Points*, identifies twelve key events in the history of the church. In his introduction he mentions a dozen or so others that almost made it on

his list. One of these is "the mission of Patrick to Ireland in the early fifth century."⁶

The missionary passion of the post-Patrician Irish church was a continuation of Patrick's zeal. William H. Marnell points out,

It was the St. Patrick of actuality, the slave of Christ and his follower in exile but not the wonder-worker of tradition old or new, who established the tradition in which the Irish monks who brought Christianity back to Europe in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries lived, worked and suffered.⁷

Similarly, Hughes Oliphant Old writes of the Irish church,

Not content to achieve their own salvation, their monasticism was an evangelistic monasticism. They knew that the Bible taught that they had to share the gospel as well as receive it. And to that sacred task they gave their lives, with all the passion that comes so naturally to the Celtic soul.⁸

The Irish church followed Patrick not only in their missionary fervor but also in their love of learning. Patrick, it is true, was no scholar, but in his writings it is clear that he attached a high value to knowledge. He lamented the loss of the education he would have gained in his youth but for his kidnapping (*Conf* 10) and yearned for "the same talent as the others had" (*Conf* 11). His children in the Irish church over the next few centuries took the opportunity they had to gain a good education, and they led the way in European scholarship.

Many precious manuscripts found their way to Ireland, as did many young men of the continent who sought a first-rate education at one of the famed Irish monastic schools. The Irish church labored hard in copying these precious texts and was renowned for its calligraphy. The *Book of Kells*, written

very soon after the turn of the ninth century and on display at Trinity College, Dublin, rates as one of the world's most famous manuscripts. Irish learning and the books they preserved flowed back to the continent with the missionary monks as did the purer form of Latin that the Irish maintained. Roland Bainton writes that while continental Latin was

corrupted by the emergent vernaculars there was no such danger in Ireland where the native speech was Gaelic. Here, Latin

1. Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe*, (USA: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1995), p. 114.

2. Will Durant, *The Age of Faith: A History of Medieval Civilization — Christian, Islamic and Judaic — from Constantine to Dante: A.D. 325-1300* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), p. 84.

3. Some Roman Catholic scholars have sought to deny Adrian IV's papal bull but it is clearly genuine (cf. Appendix II in Henry C. Sheldon, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 1 [USA: Hendriksen, repr. 1988], pp. 544-546). It is highly ironic that Ireland was "given" to England by the pope.

4. William Henry Scott, "St. Patrick's Missionary Methods," *The International Review of Missions*, (April, 1961), p. 137.

5. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, vol. 1 (USA: Harper & Row, repr. 1965), pp. 222-223.

6. Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), p. 13.

7. William H. Marnell, *Light from the West: The Irish Mission and the Emergence of Modern Europe* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), p. 25.

8. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 111.

continued separate and undefiled, to be brought back to the Continent, after subsequent invasions, by Irish monks.⁹

The Irish also led the way in the study of Greek. John T. McNeill writes, "Nora Chadwick [an expert on the Irish church] can speak of a knowledge of Greek under the Frank[ish Empire] as 'an Irish monopoly.'"¹⁰

Another area in which the ancient Irish church followed Patrick was in her godliness. After all, Ireland was known not merely as "the Island of Scholars" but "the Island of Saints and Scholars." Near the end of the seventh century, Aldfred, king of the Northumbrian Saxons, who was educated in an Irish monastery, penned the following lines concerning the piety of the Irish church:

I found in each great church
moreo'er,

Whether on island or on shore,
Piety, learning, fond affection;
Holy welcome and kind protection.

I found the good lay monks and
brothers
Ever beseeching help for others,
And in their keeping the holy
word
Pure as it came from Jesus the
Lord.

In the next several centuries after Patrick, the Irish church proved faithful to his legacy. She used her learning and piety in the promulgation of the gospel to Scotland, England, Iceland, France, the Lowlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Austria, and other lands farther east. The islands of Iona and Lindisfarne had famous Irish monastic settlements. Through the great missionary work of Columba, Columbanus, Gall, Killian, Virgil of Salzburg, and hordes of other Irish

monks, the white horse of the gospel rode forth from the Emerald Isle.

There is much truth to the words of Thomas J. Johnston about the Irish monks:

In old chronicles and in manuscripts written by Irish hands, ample witness of their work remains; but all that Christendom in Western Europe [owes] to them is by no means fully known or realized today.¹¹

9. Roland Bainton, *Christendom: A Short History of Christianity and its Impact on Western Civilization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 144.

10. John T. McNeill, *The Celtic Churches: A History A.D. 200 to 1200*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 122-123.

11. Thomas J. Johnston, John L. Robinson and Robert Wyse Jackson, *A History of the Church of Ireland* (Ireland: A.P.C.K., no date), p. 92.

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Arie denHartog

Missions and the Book of Acts (1)

The book of Acts has been called the New Testament charter for missions. No other book of the Bible gives us more apostolic instruction regarding both the theology and practice of missions. No course of missions should neglect a careful study of the book of Acts. The book of Acts records the beginning of the history of New Testament missions. It contains the history of the wonder of the deliverance of the church from the bonds and limitations of the Old Testament types and shadows at Jerusalem and of its amazing establishment and growth in

nation after nation of the world. The book of Acts shows how the church was established in the nations of the world in spite of the opposition of the enemy. The triumphant progress of the gospel could not be stopped. The book of Acts clearly shows that the church of the New Testament is a continuation and outgrowth of the Old Testament church and is the fulfillment of all the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament.

We are by the grace of God part of this same church some two thousand years later. With the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ in our hearts we must devote ourselves to the mighty work of the gathering and preservation of this church in the world according to

the sovereign purpose of God. We must labor for the glorious and triumphant advance of the kingdom of Christ to all the nations of the world according to the purpose of God.

The book of Acts sets forth the apostolic doctrine on which the church is founded. It sets forth the God-ordained methods of the work of missions and the apostolic example of how the church must conduct this great work. The book contains examples of true apostolic preaching of the gospel. It includes specimen sermons of the inspired apostles. The book of Acts gives the principles for worship in the New Testament church. The book gives us beautiful examples of how the members of the churches of the

Rev. denHartog is a Protestant Reformed minister-on-loan to Singapore.

apostles lived in the midst of the world.

The two mighty events in the history of redemption that are recorded at the beginning of the book of Acts are of greatest significance for the work of missions. Chapter one records the great wonder of the ascension of the Lord into heaven. Before His ascension the Lord gave final instructions to His disciples regarding the kingdom of heaven, including encouragements concerning its coming triumph and glory. He promised the disciples that He would give them power from heaven to accomplish the mighty work of the preaching of the gospel.

The ascension took place, significantly, before the very eyes of the disciples of the Lord who were called and commissioned of the Lord Jesus Christ to begin the great work of preaching the gospel to all the world. The ascension of Jesus into heaven was His exaltation to the right hand of God the Father. Through His exaltation the Lord Jesus Christ became the Lord of lords and King of kings, exalted above all the nations of the earth. He was by the Father given all power and authority in heaven and on earth to execute the purpose of God and to realize God's counsel for the salvation of His people out of all the nations of the world.

The Lord Jesus ascended into heaven with His hands lifted up over His disciples as a sign that His blessing would abide on them. At the time of His ascension the Lord sent His angels down to earth to give assurance to those who were called to preach the gospel to the nations. This same Jesus who ascended into heaven would so come in like manner as they had seen Him go into heaven. He would return as the exalted Lord to establish His glorious and everlasting kingdom among the saints who would be redeemed out of all the nations of the world.

The disciples who witnessed the Lord's ascension into heaven immediately had some understanding of the great significance of the ascension. Luke tells us in his gospel account that when the disciples witnessed the ascension of Jesus, they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. The disciples would receive a fuller and more complete understanding of the wonder of the ascension when the Spirit of Christ was poured out. Then they would understand more fully the central significance of the exaltation of Christ for the work of missions.

From the time of Pentecost the ascension and exaltation of Christ became one of the central truths of the gospel that was to be preached. So we read in Acts 2 that when Peter was filled with the Spirit he immediately stood up with great boldness and preached the truth that the Christ whom the Jews had crucified with wicked hands was now exalted at the right hand of God above all principalities and powers. He boldly declared the truth that the ascension of Christ was the fulfillment of the promises to David.

The second mighty event recorded in the book of Acts is the wonder of Pentecost. Pentecost was the event in which the exalted Lord Jesus Christ poured out His Spirit upon His church. In His ascension Jesus received that Spirit from His Father. The Spirit of Christ is the sovereign and almighty Spirit of God who accomplishes salvation in the hearts of His elect people. The Spirit of Christ Jesus equips and enables the preachers of the gospel for their great task. The Spirit of Christ gave the disciples knowledge and understanding of the whole of the work of Christ that was greater than they ever had before. This same Spirit also gave them boldness to preach the gospel even to many who were the

enemies of Christ. By the Spirit of Christ many were brought to repentance and salvation, so that 3000 were added to the church in one day.

The signs of the pouring out of the Spirit of Christ upon His church revealed mighty truths about the operations of the Spirit. These signs showed the church that the Spirit of Christ works as the Spirit of salvation. He does so as the sovereign almighty God, whom none are able to resist, accomplishing the great work of salvation in the hearts of whomsoever He will, breaking the natural rebellion of their hearts and giving them repentance and faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The fire that was seen on the heads of the disciples was also of great significance for the work of missions. The gospel must be preached in the midst of a world in which all men are living in wickedness and sin under the dominion of the evil one, serving vain idol gods of human imaginations. The sign of the tongues of fire showed to the church that by the power of Christ corrupt men of this world are delivered from the corruption of their sinful nature and the dominion of Satan. They are delivered from idols to serve the living God. By the Spirit of Christ the elect of God are separated from this sinful world and consecrated to God.

The third great sign of Pentecost was also of great significance for the work of missions. It revealed the purpose of God that the gospel must be preached to all nations of the world. The glorious gospel of salvation must now be preached in all languages in all nations of the world for the salvation of God's elect from the nations.

The day of Pentecost revealed several other things of great importance to the work of missions. The Spirit of Christ anointed the disciples to preach the gospel. By the power of this Spirit, unlearned

men were given understanding of the mysteries of God; they were given to understand the most profound and wonderful truths of God, which none but those who have the Spirit can understand. The disciples now understood these things as they had never understood them before. It was only through this understanding that the unlearned disciples could preach the Word so mightily. By the Spirit of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ the disciples were empowered to speak boldly, without fear, of the things of God. They could do so even before many who were enemies of God and crucifiers of Christ.

The day of Pentecost showed without a shadow of a doubt that God's mighty method of doing mission work is the method of the preaching of the gospel. Throughout history after Pentecost many have sought to invent other methods for doing mission work. These methods are of man's own human wisdom. They arise from an apostate church that refuses to trust and use the methods the Lord Himself has ordained. The apostate church of our day has advanced far in the rejection of Christ's own method for doing mission work. Modern-day methods of missions are those Madison Avenue business tactics that are fashioned after the popular media, immoral rock music, the dance of the world, whatever works. Popular movie stars of the world, even some who live immoral lives, are used to bring the holy message of the gospel. Heavy emphasis is placed on sensational and emotional rallies and psychological persuasion, on feeling and experience and entertainment. The whole business is based on the heresy that man can of his own will be persuaded to believe the gospel. Truth and doctrine are

considered irrelevant. The fear of God is replaced by satisfying the desires of man to be entertained and feelings of all sorts to be aroused.


Meanwhile, the modern-day church has largely abandoned the preaching of the gospel as God's method for doing mission work. The book of Acts reveals the truth that God's method for doing evangelism is, for all ages, the preaching of the gospel. The book of Acts reveals the amazing and true success of this method for accomplishing the purpose of God and the salvation of the church of Jesus Christ.

The book of Acts has much to say about the message that the church is to preach in the world. We shall have more to say about this in coming articles. The church is not to preach a social or political message. The church is not to preach an Arminian so-called gospel that is no gospel, which imagines that God must plead for men to move their own will before He is able to save them. Those who are sent by Christ into the world are to preach the mighty and glorious gospel of Christ crucified, raised, and exalted and the one who is coming again as the sovereign Lord of all to establish His glorious, everlasting kingdom in the new heavens and earth.

A study of all the sermons recorded in the book of Acts leaves one without any doubt concerning what the church must preach. Faithful preachers of our day must continue to pattern their sermons after the great examples of the sermons of the apostles. The book of Acts records the glorious fruit of God on the methods He Himself has ordained. This method accomplishes the mighty wonder of the true conversion of men and the gathering and establishing of the church of Jesus

Christ in all the nations of the world. By means of the preaching of the gospel the Lord Himself added to His church daily such as should be saved.

The wonder of Pentecost gives us a beautiful picture of the church born of the Spirit of Christ and by the power of the preaching of the gospel. We read a beautiful description of the apostolic church and her members: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking of bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:41-47).

This passage of Scripture speaks volumes even to how and what the true church of Jesus Christ should be today. God's Word tells us the wonderful change wrought in the hearts and the lives of men when they are saved by the mighty power of God. It tells us how the true members of the church of Jesus Christ are bound together in faith and love and are united in the truth of God. We learn from this passage of Scripture the whole purpose for which the church is saved and for which she exists in the world, namely for the praise of the God of her salvation. 

The book of Acts reveals the truth that God's method for doing evangelism is, for all ages, the preaching of the gospel.

Report on the Edmonton Family Conference on “THE COVENANT HOME”

Scattered, much needed, rain showers could not dampen the spirits of those who participated in the Edmonton Family Conference on July 4-6, 2003 in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Sponsored by the Evangelism Committee of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Edmonton, a congregation numbering twenty-six families, the Conference was the fruit of more than one year of planning. Fourteen subcommittees shared the work and responsibilities in planning for the Conference, and most of the congregation was involved in helping, in one way or another, at the time of the Conference. The Conference was held at Parkland Immanuel Christian School, located on the western outskirts of Edmonton.

The Conference was well attended, with more than three hundred registered and a number of visitors as well. Participants included older folks, families of every age and size, including a goodly number of young adults and young people, and many children. They came from the states of Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, and Washington, as well as the provinces of British Columbia and Alberta. Members of eleven PR congregations and the Spokane, WA Mission were present, and there were a number of participants from other denominations. Five PR ministers were in attendance, as well as nine PR Chris-

tian school teachers. A large number of participants were camped in close proximity in the nearby Devon Lions Park. Others found lodging in nearby hotels or with families of the Edmonton congregation. Wonderful fellowship was enjoyed around the campground campfires as well as in various homes.

The Conference began on Friday evening with registration, at which time name tags, information, souvenir Canadian flags and pins, and coffee mugs with our Conference logo were distributed. Rev. Steven Key, pastor of the Hull, Iowa PRC, set the tone for the Conference with the Friday evening speech on the topic, “Maintaining Marriage in an Age of Adultery.” Following the speech, refreshments were served, and “meet and greet” time was enjoyed by all.

On Saturday morning a delicious pancake breakfast was provided at the school prior to the speech by Rev. Allen Brummel, pastor of the South Holland, Illinois PRC. Rev. Brummel, present with his wife and seven young children, spoke on the theme “Bring-

ing Forth Children in an Age of Selfishness.” Following a lunch of sloppy joes and hotdogs, Rev. Michael DeVries, pastor of the Edmonton PRC, delivered the final conference speech on the topic “Promoting Obedience in an Age of Rebellion.” Those in attendance found the conference speeches to be edifying, practical, and solidly biblical. During the Saturday speeches, activities were provided for children under age ten, which included Bible lessons, based upon the historical narratives in the book of Daniel, and crafts. A group photograph was taken after the final lecture. None of us will forget that, just when the photo was to be taken, the electricity went out in the gym. We sat patiently in the dark singing Psalter Number 1, and after 10 minutes or so the lights finally came on, and the photo was finally taken. Outdoor games scheduled for late Saturday afternoon had to be cancelled due to rain, but a large group of older children, young people, and young adults participated in five-pin bowling on Saturday evening.

A wonderful Lord’s Day was



Some conference participants


Rev. DeVries is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

experienced by everyone in attendance. Due to the sizable number of worshipers, worship services were also held at the school. The sermons delivered were in beautiful harmony with the Conference theme. Rev. A. Brummel led the morning worship, preaching on I Samuel 2:11-36 under the theme "Eli's House Cut Off." The conference catering committee outdid themselves in serving a delicious baked ham and mashed potatoes noon meal. The 3:00 P.M. afternoon worship service was led by Rev. S. Key, who beautifully concluded our Conference weekend preaching on Psalm 127:1a under the theme, "Building a Home."

Following a light supper of

ham/cheese buns we lifted our voices in praise and thanksgiving in the evening singspiration. A highlight of the singspiration was listening to the young children sing a Psalter number they had learned during the children's activities on Saturday. Groups congregated at the campground as well as at a couple of nearby homes for visiting on Sunday evening. Most of those who attended from afar traveled to see the church buildings and parsonages in both Edmonton and Lacombe. Many were also able to tour the beautiful Canadian Rockies either before or after the Conference. There were reports afterwards of people meeting up with fellow saints in places like

Lake Louise, Banff, or the Columbia Icefields. Few could visit Edmonton without at least taking a peek at West Edmonton Mall, the largest shopping mall in the world.

According to all reports the whole Conference was well organized and ran very smoothly. We are thankful that so many had the opportunity to visit our congregations here in Alberta. Our Edmonton congregation was richly blessed and encouraged as we renewed friendships and made many new ones. We are convinced that, by the grace of God, our Family Conference served to strengthen and promote "The Covenant Home" and to glorify our covenant God. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Minister Activities

Faith PRC in Jenison, MI has a new trio from which they will call a pastor. That trio is made up of the Revs. W. Bruinsma, R. Cammenga, and R. VanOverloop.

The Hull, Iowa PRC, calling church for our denomination's work in Ghana, extended a call to Rev. R. Cammenga to serve our churches as missionary, along with Rev. W. Bekkering. With Rev. Cammenga on that trio were the Revs. M. Dick and J. Laning.

Candidate W. Langerak has accepted the call he received from the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI to serve as their next pastor. Candidate Langerak's acceptance of Southeast's call means that he has declined the call he received from the Byron Center, MI PRC to serve as their next pastor. Since that decline Byron Center's council formed a trio of the Revs. G. Eriks, D. Kleyn, and J. Slopsema.

The Hudsonville, MI PRC has extended a call to Rev. C. Haak to serve as their next pastor.

Congratulations to Rev. and Mrs. G. Eriks, who celebrated the birth of a daughter, Kate Elizabeth, born on Sunday, August 3.

Mission Activities

Our churches were invited to the installation service of Rev. Angus Stewart, who was called by Hudsonville, MI PRC as missionary to the British Isles, the main focus of his work being with the Covenant Reformed Fellowship of Northern Ireland in Ballymena. This installation and worship service took place on Thursday evening, August 14, in the Hudsonville sanctuary, with Revs. B. Gritters and G. VanBaren officiating. Rev. Gritters led the service and installation, and Rev. Van Baren preached the sermon, based on I Thessalonians 2:3, 4 under the theme, "Put in Trust with the Gospel." The installation concluded with Rev. Stewart giving a brief explanation of his work, followed by the closing doxology and benediction. After the service everyone

was invited to stay and visit with our churches' newest missionary and his wife, Mary, over refreshments.

Recently two elders from the calling church for our churches' mission work in Pittsburgh, PA, the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, traveled to Pittsburgh to supervise interviews for confession of faith, in line with the decision of Synod 2002 (Article 38, B, 6, b). The Lord willing, public confession of faith will take place in our Pittsburgh Mission on Sunday, September 21.

Our churches' Domestic Mission Committee has decided that for the coming year there will be a total of four visits to Fayetteville, NC and the PR Fellowship there. Plans call for different pastors to go there, with one of the visits to include a conference on the Reformed faith. The first visit was scheduled for August 13-17 with Rev. M. Dick and Elder D. Moelker making their way south. During this visit, plans were made for catechism and Bible studies, a time of fellowship together, a meeting with Fayetteville's steering committee, and then Sunday worship. In re-

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

sponse to this visit, the Fellowship intended to mail out a flyer and update their announcement on radio station WFNC, in order to notify their contacts of these special events in the life of the PRFF.

Young Adult Activities

Over the past several years we have written about various "Retreats" for the ever-growing number of young adults in our churches. What is striking, at least to me, is the enthusiasm with which each of these subsequent retreats is greeted. Without fail, the young adults to whom I talk always say the last retreat was the "best ever," and the one sponsored by the congregation of the Edgerton, MN PRC and their young adults was no different. Even though I didn't talk to all 57 of the young adults who attended, the ones I did talk to all said it was the "best ever." So someone must be doing something right. Edgerton's retreat developed the theme "Light in the Darkness: Living the Antithesis," and was held from August 4-8 at Inspiration Hills Camp. Prof. H. Hanko spoke on three successive nights on "The Idea of the Antithesis," "The Antithesis and the Truth," and "The Antithesis and the World." Some

of the more unusual activities included cricket, lawn mower races, a corn maze, and a high ropes course. Thanks to Edgerton for making this retreat the "best ever."

Evangelism Activities


Our Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI sponsored their annual "Summer Seminar" again this year. This year's seminar treated issues related to medical ethics. Included were presentations on "Depression and Modern Psychiatry" by Rev. J. Slopsema, "Invitro Fertilization and Genetic Engineering" by Mr. Gary Lanning, and "Drugs and Chemical Dependence" by Mr. Dean Poppema. These seminars were held the first three Wednesdays in August.

Saturday morning, August 16, the Evangelism Committee of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL invited their congregation to join them in going door to door in their church neighborhood to distribute information about their church and various evangelism tracts.

Young People's Activities

This year's Pre-Convention Singspiration was held at Fair Haven Ministries in Jenison, MI on August 10. Mr. Dwight Quenga

led the singing, accompanied by Mrs. Glenda Koops and Miss Elisabeth Key. In addition to audience participation, there were two special numbers. Candidate W. Langerak, along with the Revs. Dick, Gritters, Kley, Terpstra, and VanOverloop combined their voices to sing Psalter #356 and "Rise Up, O Man of God," and Miss Shari Faber played Psalter numbers 344 and 349 on her harp.

This year's Young People's Convention was held from August 14-19 at Ester Park, Colorado, and was sponsored by the congregation of the Loveland, CO PRC. According to early reports, some 400 young people had signed up to attend this year's convention, with an additional 200 "visitors" signed up for various activities throughout the weekend. Our Loveland congregation appropriately chose for their theme (if you have ever been to Loveland and the Rocky Mountains, then you know what I mean), "Surrounded by God," based on Psalm 125: 1,2. Prof. R. Dykstra spoke on "God Is Our Protector," Rev. C. Terpstra followed with "The Character and Responsibility of God's People," and Rev. R. Hanko concluded with "The Preservation of God's People." 

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REMINDER

This is the last issue of the volume year. If you desire to have your copies bound, please bring the entire set (beginning with the October 1, 2002 issue) to the seminary by October 15. The cost of binding your own SBs is still \$13.00.

NOTICE!!

First PRC of Holland, MI is seeking individuals who would be able and willing to translate Protestant Reformed literature into the Spanish language. Those interested should contact Paul Starrett at 624 64th Ave., Zeeland, MI 49464, or by phone, (616) 688-7344.

ANNUAL MEETING

The RFPA annual meeting will be held on September 25, 8 P.M., in Trinity PRC. Rev. Woudenberg will speak on the topic: "1953: Our Continuing Heritage," focusing, particularly on the basic currents of thought that ran through Hoeksema's theology. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Advertising for a worker for the RFPA

The Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) is seeking applications to fill a part-time position to work in the area of promotion and advertising of the *Standard Bearer* and books. For a list of job duties, contact the RFPA office so we can mail or fax it to you.

Please call the RFPA office at (616) 224-1518 or Nicholas Kleyn at (616) 291-4647.

ANNOUNCEMENT

With gratitude to God for preserving us for the past fifty years, a number of our area churches are planning lectures for October 30 and 31: the first, by Prof Russell Dykstra on "Tried by Fire: Why the Protestant Reformed Churches Had to Endure the Split of 1953"; the second, by Prof. Herman Hanko, on "Conditional Theology and the Road Back to Rome." These lectures will be at Faith Protestant Reformed Church at 7:30 P.M. Come, and bring a friend.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church expresses Christian sympathy to fellow office-bearer elder Darrel Huisken and his wife, Bonnie, in the death of Bonnie's mother,

MRS. EDNA KRAKER.

May the bereaved family find comfort in the promises of God's Word and be upheld by His grace. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (1 Corinthians 5:1).

Rev. Ron Cammenga, President
Peter Feenstra, Assistant Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Hope PRC expresses its Christian sympathy to elder John DeVries in the passing away of his brother,

JAMES DEVRIES.

May he take comfort in God's Word, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

Rev. James Laning, President
Harry Langerak, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church expresses Christian sympathy to elder Gerrit Boverhof and family in the death of his brother,

HENRY BOVERHOF.

May the family find comfort in the assurance of God's Word in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Rev. Ron Cammenga, Pres.
Darrel Huisken, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Society of the Doon PRC express their Christian sympathy to a beloved member, Henrietta Klein, in the loss of her sister-in-law,

MRS. MARIAN KUIPER.

May our heavenly Father strengthen her by His Spirit, and may she find her comfort in the words of God: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Rev. Richard Smit, Pres.
Geraldine Blankespoor, Sec.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies' Society of Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Henrietta Hoksbergen, her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren in the death of

MR. WILLIAM HOKSBERGEN.

Psalms 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Ed Westra, Pres.
LaDonna VanDenTop, Sec.

REFORMATION LECTURE

Friday, October 24, 2003
7:30 P.M.

Rev. David Overway

will speak on

"What Churches Need Today"

liturgical renewal? theological pluralism?

or knowledge of the truth

taught by faithful preaching of the Word of God?

Join us at
Covenant PRC
283 Squawbrook Road
Wyckoff, NJ

All are invited to attend.
For directions call: (201)847-1754