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Volume 84 ◆ Number 21

Jehovah: Our Light and Salvation

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalm 27:1

Psalm 27 is a psalm of David.

From the psalm itself it is evident that David was facing great danger from his enemies.

These enemies could well have been Absalom and the many in Israel who followed him in rebellion against David. Psalm 3 was written in connection with David's flight from Absalom. Some see verse 5 of that psalm to express a thought similar to the thrust of Psalm 27: "I laid me down and slept; I awakened; for the LORD sustained me."

Some suggest that verse 10 links this psalm with I Samuel 22:3, 4, which records David's bringing of his parents to Moab for safekeeping because of the

threats of King Saul. They translate verse 10, "For my father and mother have left me; but the LORD will take me up."

Whether or not it was one of these situations that occasioned the writing of the psalm, it is evident from the psalm itself that David was facing great danger from his enemies.

The theme of this psalm is expressed in verse 1, which we consider for this meditation, "The LORD is my light and my salvation."

David makes a confession here. He confesses that the LORD (Jehovah) is his light and salvation, the strength of his life. Notice what is not David's light and salvation: his army, his alliances with foreign powers, his wealth, or his earthly counselors. Jehovah is his light and salvation. Therefore he is not afraid. Even though an army is encamped against him to eat up his flesh, he is not afraid. David can make this bold confession because Jehovah is his light and salvation.

This confession must also be ours as we make our way through

life confronted by many enemies, essentially the same enemies that faced David.

A Terrible Darkness

The fact that David confesses Jehovah to be his light suggests that David faced a situation that was dark and foreboding.

In the Bible darkness is often a figure of distress and danger, whereas light is a figure of deliverance and relief from distress. This is evident from the contrast made between light and darkness in Job 30:26: "When I looked for good, then evil came unto me; and when I waited for light, there came darkness."

It was a very dark day for David.

In verses 2 and 3 of this psalm David speaks of his enemies. From these verses we learn that his enemies were the wicked. There was a host (army) of them that made war with him. They came upon him to eat up his flesh.

Who were these enemies? David's enemies were physical in nature, perhaps King Saul and

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his army or David's own son Absalom and the hordes of Israelites that followed Absalom.

But these enemies were primarily spiritual in nature. The psalm identifies them as the wicked. They hated and opposed David for righteousness' sake. Interestingly, these enemies were most likely of the nation of Israel, the covenant people of God. Here we see again that the church on earth is often dominated by a large reprobate element. And behind these wicked enemies of David was Satan, the prince of darkness.

The intent of David's enemies was to destroy him. They sought to destroy him personally. They also sought to destroy him as the Lord's anointed. By destroying David they hoped to destroy the very covenant that Jehovah had with Israel.

When David faced these enemies, it was a dark day. His enemies were far superior in strength and resources. It appeared that David's life was over and the cause of the covenant in jeopardy.

The darkness that descended on David's life often descends on our lives as well.

We face the same spiritual enemies that David did. The devil walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (I Pet. 5:8). He hates the living God. He hates the Lord's anointed, Jesus Christ. And therefore he hates us—the people of God's covenant. His desire is to destroy us spiritually. He would destroy our faith, rob us of our salvation, and bring us under his own control again. His ultimate goal is to destroy the cause and covenant of Jehovah.

At Satan's disposal is the world of the ungodly that is under his control and in his service. Through them Satan attacks us without ceasing. These attacks come in many different forms. Satan attacks us through

the alluring temptations of sin's pleasures. He attacks us through false doctrine. He attacks us through persecution.

This brings many dark hours to our lives. There are times when we are on the point of being overwhelmed with temptation and sin. There are times when the very existence of the church is threatened by heresy. There are times of terrible persecution when the cause of God seems to be lost. There are times of sickness, loss, or tragedy that the devil uses to bring us to the point of despair because it appears as though God has forgotten us and there is no hope.

A Saving Light

In this dark hour David confesses, "Jehovah is my light and my salvation. Jehovah is the strength of my life."

Jehovah is the covenant name of God. It emphasizes that He is the faithful covenant God of power. This covenant is a relationship of friendship and fellowship that Jehovah establishes with His people and in which He lives and dwells with His people in blessing. David knew Jehovah as his God. He knew that he belonged to Jehovah's covenant. It is this covenant that the powers of darkness ultimately seek to destroy as they attack the people of God.

This Jehovah David acknowledges to be his light and salvation.

Light is here defined by David as salvation or deliverance. David confesses that in the time of darkness and trouble Jehovah is his light, that is, his salvation.

This is further explained in that Jehovah is the strength of his life.

Jehovah is David's light and salvation exactly because He is the strength of David's life.

Certainly, Jehovah was the strength of David's life. He was the One who strengthened David in every situation of life so

that David could do battle with his enemies and either defend himself or overcome his enemies. This was true as David faced the jealous King Saul, who sought his life to preserve his family-dynasty in Israel. This was true repeatedly in David's battles with the Philistines and other nations. This was also true in his battle with Absalom. Jehovah was the strength of David's life.

By strengthening David against his enemies, Jehovah was David's light and salvation in the darkest hours of his life.

Jehovah is also our light and salvation, the strength of our life.

He is that because He first is the light and salvation of Jesus Christ.

We must see David as the type or picture of Jesus Christ. David was the Lord's anointed, appointed by God to be king and thus the defender of Israel and the covenant. As such he is a picture of the Lord's Anointed, appointed by Jehovah to be the Defender and Savior of the church of all ages.

To accomplish our salvation, Jesus Christ was subjected to the darkest of hours. He was required to bear all the punishment of hell for the elect of God and to do so in one short lifetime, especially on the cross. The cross alone could defeat the devil and the hold he has on the church. Even though Jesus is the Son of God in our flesh, the cross was the terribly dark hour that He dreaded all His life long.

But Jehovah was His light and salvation, the strength of His life. Jehovah repeatedly strengthened Jesus as the dark hour of the cross approached. He did so with expressions of approval from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He did so at the Mount of Transfiguration by giving Jesus a foretaste of the glory that awaited Him. He did so in the Garden of Geth-

semane through the angel that encouraged Jesus. And during the darkness of the cross, Jehovah strengthened Jesus even though Jesus Himself lost sight of that help, crying out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

In Jesus Christ Jehovah is also our light and salvation, the strength of our life.

Through Jesus Christ Jehovah strengthens us as we face the onslaughts of the devil, so that we can defend ourselves, overcome him, and one day emerge victorious. Jehovah is the strength of our life when we are tempted, when we are persecuted, as well as when heresy threatens.

What a great light!

What wondrous salvation!

A Wonderful Confidence

Because Jehovah is his light

and salvation, David is without fear in the dark hour that confronts him.

David asks, "whom shall I fear? of whom shall I be afraid?" These are rhetorical questions through which David expresses that he is afraid of and trembles before none of his enemies. He is not afraid, even though from a human point of view defeat looks sure and all appears to be lost.


Stated positively, David has absolute confidence of safety and victory as he faces his many enemies.

David had this confidence because Jehovah was his light and salvation. Were anyone or anything else his light and salvation, he could not have had this confidence. But David had come to know Jehovah as his light and salvation. And so in this dark hour that confronts him, Da-

vid has turned to Jehovah, the strength of his life. With Jehovah as his light and salvation, David has no fear.

The same is true for us.

With Jehovah as our light and salvation, the strength of our life, we have no fears. In Jesus Christ Jehovah saves us in every situation of life. He will strengthen us to fight every battle. This is true now and will be true to the very end of history—even during the dark days of the Antichrist that will come.

In order that we may face the dark hours of danger with no fear let us turn to Jehovah as our light and salvation. Should we seek our light and salvation elsewhere, we will be left with the fear of defeat and destruction. But with Jehovah as our light and salvation in Jesus Christ, we will have no fear. 

Editorial

Prof. Barry Gritters

Catechism: The Old Path, the Good Way (2)

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

Jeremiah 6:16

We gratefully acknowledge that, for almost 85 years, the Protestant

Reformed Churches have asked for the old path of catechism: the church instructing her youth. God be praised for preserving the PRC on that path, giving rest to our (and our children's!) souls.

Catechism was God's way in the Old Testament when the Levites gave systematic instruction in God's law. It was God's way also in the New Testament, and has been carried out for 2000 years up until today. The church would not have survived without the training of her youth.

Catechism season is upon us.

These editorials call the church—all who are involved in this great work—to ask for this old path, walk in this good way, and find rest for the children's souls.

There was hardly a time when the church's enemies did not understand the importance of catechism instruction. When Christianity was sanctioned in the Roman empire by Constantine, teachers worldwide promoted Christianity by teaching the children. Then Constantine's nephew, "Julian the Apostate," enemy of God and truth, suc-

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2008, p. 460.

ceeded him on the throne and attempted to destroy Christianity by requiring state certification of all catechism teachers. In God's providence, the counsel of Julian failed because he died in battle the following year. In Reformation times, the Roman Catholic Church realized that "the heretics have chiefly made use of catechisms to corrupt the minds of Christians." The Roman Catholics acknowledged that "the advantage which the Protestants hath gotten...came by this exercise." The Roman Catholics were so impressed with the influence of catechism that they set up their own machinery to train their army of capable Catholics. To this day, the Roman Catholic's "Society of Jesus" (Jesuits) is influential because of the academic rigor with which they train multitudes of children and young people.

That today so many Protestants today are abandoning catechetical instruction is, therefore, more than a little ironic. But for generations already the path has been abandoned. Story has it that in the 1800s a Roman Catholic priest, visiting a protestant bishop, said: "What a poor foolish people you Protestants are. You leave the children until they are grown up, possessed of the devil, and then go out reclaiming them with horse, foot, and dragoons [perhaps in missions, BG]. We Catholics, on the other hand, know that the children are as plastic or clay in our hands. We quietly devote ourselves first to them. When they are well instructed and trained, we have little to fear for the future."

A good reminder to those today who might be tempted to devote themselves to missions rather than the important work of teaching children.

Sound doctrine

But there are other ways to depart from this old path than

by abandoning catechism altogether.

A church can lose its way by teaching fluff, or drivel, rather than meaty, sound doctrine. The churches must teach sound doctrine.

In the days of the Judges there arose a "generation that *knew* not the LORD." The reason for that fatal ignorance was that the generation had not been taught. For lack of knowledge, more than a few generations in old covenant times were destroyed (Hosea 4:6). Thus, the new covenant word is that we (children included) must "grow in grace, and the *knowledge* of our Lord" (II Pet. 3:18; my emphasis, BLG).

Faithful Reformed churches will ensure that the children know God's truth. Sound doctrine.

PRC catechism curriculum is, first, seven years of Bible history from age 6 to age 12—three times through the full history of both Old and New Testaments. The children start with Bible *history*. Notice, the generation that did not know the Lord in the days of the judges, lacked this heart knowledge because they did not know *history*: "nor yet the works which he had done for Israel" (Jud. 2:10). Children come to know the Lord largely by knowing His works.

After they are grounded in history, the children learn doctrines of Scripture taught systematically. First, instruction in the Heidelberg Catechism is given for two years. Then, two years in the *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine*, until grade 11 or 12. After high school, the young adults usually learn from one of the other creeds or from the Church Order, according to the elders' judgment. Each of these classes

makes plain that the church's confession is the expression of the Word of God.

Always the Word of God.

Application of sound doctrine

Proper catechism instruction also includes *application* of the Word of God. Application is as important in catechism as it is in preaching. And because preaching is incomplete without application, catechism is incomplete without applications—practical, penetrating applications. It will not do just to teach the history of the flood, the doctrine of total depravity, unconditional election, or the truth of the church. The children must hear the *comfort* of the flood history, the *cautions* implied in our depraved natures, the *love* of God in His gracious giving of us to Christ, and the *assurance* that those who now are living members of the church shall ever

remain so. It is not enough for a pastor to teach Scripture's infallibility without teaching, with conviction, that the Scriptures are *profitable*, able to make one wise unto salvation, that they are food for one's soul, a light in a dark

world, the love letter of God to His dear children.

And applications take preparation. To make them properly takes great care. To direct them to the particular age takes much wisdom. A five-year-old is different from a nine-year-old, who, again, is not a seventeen-year-old. Not just anyone is able to do this work.

But catechism instruction is always instruction in and by the *Word*.

The subject is not the "issues of the day" (although the word will be brought to bear on the issues of the day; applications include these issues).

The subject is not the social

It is not enough for a pastor to teach Scripture's infallibility without teaching, with conviction, that the Scriptures are profitable...

problems of the world (although catechism will instruct the youth about the social problems of the day, and point out the Christian's social calling in the world).

But the subject and starting point is always the Word of God.

Sound methodology

The old path can be abandoned by teaching something other than the Word of God.

It can also be forsaken by teaching poorly.

Not all talk about the Bible by a church officebearer in the presence of children is catechetical instruction. There is a right way to teach and a wrong way to teach. And, though teaching poorly is not as bad as not teaching at all, it comes close.

A good catechism teacher must be trained to teach.

Not everyone is qualified to teach catechism any more than everyone is qualified to teach in the good Christian schools. Although a man may know his subject, parents cannot abide a teacher who cannot explain it to children. Parents must dismiss a school teacher who, although he is able to explain it, lacks wisdom. And no school board will renew a contract of one who, although he can explain the material, cannot manage a classroom of rambunctious youth. Teaching school takes many different qualifications. So does teaching catechism.

That not everyone is qualified to teach catechism is seen when we remember that catechism instruction is a form of, though not identical to, preaching. (Reformed churches have recognized the difference between catechism instruction and preaching in their allowance of elders to teach, even though elders may not preach. They recognize the close similarity in that they require that the one who teaches be an of-

ficebearer, a man chosen for his aptitude for teaching: I Tim. 3:2; II Tim. 2:24.) As not everyone is qualified to preach, everyone is not qualified to teach. And to be skillful in teaching ("apt to teach" in the KJV is really "skillful in teaching"), one must usually be trained.

No doubt, as with many pastors, so with elders who teach, often the skill is gained through some halting attempts and less than first-rate efforts. But usually the elders who teach have experience from teaching school, have clearly recognized gifts of teaching, or have received some training. (Many elders may be interested to know that a consistory recently asked for instruction designed for elders to teach catechism; God willing, next summer this can take place.)

But there is a method in good catechism teaching, as in all teaching.

I mention a few of the important methods, not so much to assist elders who may be teaching catechism (I regard with high respect those who are willing and able to teach. My father, a teacher as much by nature as by training, often taught catechism when Redlands was vacant), but to impress upon the church the difficulty of the undertaking. Pray that all the teachers may teach well, may convey the Word of God to the youth clearly, for the salvation of their souls. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. But let none of us stand in the way of the children hearing.

First, the teacher will exert all his powers to make the truth clear. He will not be satisfied until the children understand what he's teaching. In Nehemiah 8 the Levites not only read distinctly, they also "gave the sense, and

caused them to understand the reading." This is explanation by illustration, repetition, and the use of every appropriate tool to cause the hearers to understand.

Second, the teacher will repeat, restate, and review. One of the great principles of teaching is "a little at a time, oft repeated." One temptation of young teachers is to try to teach too much at once. Another is to suppose that when children hear something once, they will remember it. But children remember what they hear many times. In each class, the main point of the lesson is stated, illustrated, applied, repeated. Then, when one gives evidence that he did not understand, the process is repeated until it is plain for all. Repetition and review also go from week to week. One of the delightful experiences in teaching catechism is seeing the children, at the end of the season, able to repeat and explain all of the important truths that have been repeated week after week. And I strongly recommend that this review include tests or other review exercises after every five weeks, even though this lengthens the season by a month. It always used to be so. The benefits of review are great.

Third, the good catechism teacher asks questions. He doesn't waste time by using a strict "Socratic method," which method results in the children talking as much as he does. But he certainly does not lecture for forty-five minutes, or he will find out sooner or later that, although the bright and obedient children "got it," others remained in the dark. This is another reason catechism instruction is so difficult (another reason to give review tests, too). A man must determine whether the children are grasping the truth, and then do whatever it takes to "cause them to understand." Asking questions not only helps him gauge at what level to begin (Augustine's

though teaching poorly is not as bad as not teaching at all, it comes close.

emphasis), but asking questions helps the teacher gauge whether he has been clear, and whether the students he thought were taking notes were actually doing tomorrow's science homework. We teachers must not be naïve.

An effective teacher is orderly; is demanding (how many times haven't I heard older saints say, "My minister was hard, but we learned so much!"); is enthusiastic (God forbid we ever teach His truth in any other way); disciplines in love the disobedient; and requires a mountain of memorization.


Because catechism is not teaching mathematics, but the Word of God, the teacher will aim at the heart (albeit through the head); will make explicit that what he teaches is not his word but God's Word; will show, especially to the older students, that the Reformed faith is the "faith of the fathers," the "old path," historic Christianity; and will always have a spiritual perspective and a biblically practical goal: the maturing of them in Jesus Christ and

the preparation of them to make a good, public confession of faith.

Because teaching catechism is teaching the Word of God, it does not suggest, but declares. At the end of the day the students have heard, "Thus saith the Lord! This is the word of God to which we all must submit."

At the heart of all the instruction is the love of God. Methods are vital, but teaching is useless if it is not the teaching of the love of God. The teachers love God;

the students sense that. God loves the children; the children hear that. If the heart of the Scriptures is the Lord Jesus, and if the Lord Jesus is the manifestation of God's great love, then the teaching of Scripture in catechism is the teaching of the love of God. Oh, that our children know the love of God! God give us teachers who love the covenant children.

God bless our catechism instruction this season! 

Imitate, then, the good, bear with the evil, love all;
for you do not know
what he shall be tomorrow who today is evil.
And do not love their wrongdoing;
but love them to the end that they may attain to holiness;
for not only is love of God enjoined upon us,
but likewise love of our neighbor,
and on these two commandments depend
the whole law and the prophets.

Augustine, in his "Catechizing the Uninstructed"

■ Miracle Mania

Perhaps no movement made more of an impact on the church world in the twentieth century than Pentecostalism. The early years of the twenty-first century have seen no diminishing of Pentecostalism's influence.

A current "revival" in Lakeland, Florida is taking the world by storm, at least as far as media coverage is concerned. It is creating considerable controversy, even among Pentecostals. Rusty Leonard and Warren Cole Smith report in *World*, June 28/July 5,

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

2008 in an article entitled, "Same Old Scam?":

Canadian Todd Bentley doesn't look much like a minister. The 32-year-old has body piercings and tattoos on his arms and neck, and he often dresses in black.

But a minister of the gospel he is, or claims to be—and those claims have become the real story of a series of meetings Bentley is holding in Lakeland, Fla.

Bentley's British Columbia-based Fresh Fire Ministries arrived in Lakeland on April 2 for five days of revival meetings at a local church. These services would be broadcast on God TV, a satellite network with a worldwide viewership.

The services were different in another way, Bentley claims: God showed up in a powerful way. A New York public relations firm was quickly hired to send out press releases claiming "documented healings," and God TV relentlessly plugged its broadcasts of the services.

The services, now held in a huge air-conditioned tent, have gone on for months now, and as many as 10,000 people a night are coming. Bentley claims hundreds of people have been healed of everything from deafness to infertility—though he did admit that in the latter case we wouldn't know for sure until the women actually got pregnant. As for the other cases, WORLD made repeated requests for documentation of healings, but claims

of "privacy issues" were the only response.

A visit to one of Bentley's services suggests that he is learning how to turn the big crowds into big money. ATM machines have been set up, providing attendees with ready cash for the offering plate and book purchases. The offering is now a significant part of the service, taking as long as 30 minutes. Bentley has not released financial information, saying he is "too busy keeping up with what God is doing" to pull the information together....

This tent revival is getting so much attention because of "extravagant claims that it is the most contagious, transferable, and tangible anointing in history. There are astounding reports of angelic visitations, prophecies, visions, conversions, miraculous healings and even raisings from the dead." So writes James Beverley in *Faith Today* (July/August, 2008). Bentley claims numerous encounters with angels. He talks about being caught up in a pillar of fire to heaven where angels operated on him. He says he has met Abraham and Paul in the heavenly realm.

Clearly even many sympathetic to Pentecostal theology are apprehensive and are waving "a yellow flag of caution." One nearby Pentecostal pastor warned his congregation "not to attend any of this counterfeit revival." Les Grady, editor of *Charisma* magazine, wrote in one of his columns: "We have no business teaching God's people to commune with angels or to seek revelations from them. And if any revival movement—no matter how exciting or passionate—mixes the gospel of Jesus with this strange fire, the results could be devastating."

But what about the miracles? The healings? When the leaders of the Jews conferred together regarding the healing of the lame man at the temple gate, they had to admit, "for that indeed a no-

table miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it" (Acts 4:16).

Must that be our answer today? I answer with an emphatic, "No!" The miracles, including the miracles of healings, were clearly part of the apostolic office according to Scripture, and that office was a temporary office in the church (see II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3, 4; Mark 16:20).

But why do the Pentecostal healers succeed and continue? For the simple reason that a large percentage of all the sick will get well anyway, and to the rest the divine healers can blandly and piously say, "you do not have sufficient faith."

Further, in many instances there is outright fraud and deception for purposes of financial gain. Indeed the wealth and extravagance of many Pentecostal churches and their leaders remind us of Scripture's warning against false teachers in the church who "through covetousness with feigned words make merchandise of you..." (II Pet. 2:3).

In other instances the afflictions are psychosomatic ills removed by psychological means. Physicians contend that healings tend to occur in afflictions such as arthritis, lameness, allergies, headaches, etc.; with such things healing is likely due more to auto-suggestion than to any physical miracle.

Finally, in many instances the power is undoubtedly Satanic. The healings are the lying wonders of the wicked. Prof. David Engelsma writes in the pamphlet *Try the Spirits*:

The wonders of Pentecostalism, like the miracles of Rome, are fraudulent. They are part and parcel of the only miracles that Scripture prophesies of the last days: the signs and wonders of the false christs and false prophets who would deceive the very elect, if it were possible (Matt.

24:24); the power and signs and lying wonders of the man of sin who will deceive those who do not receive the love of the truth (II Thess. 2:9-12). Beware! Do not be hoodwinked by the modern-day miracle mongers!

Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey make an irrefutable point in their pamphlet, *Healing*:

Often on television or the radio I hear speakers promise that healing is always available for all believers—a statement that approaches logical absurdity. If it were true, need any Christian wear glasses? Or die? Yet what godly person in recent memory has ever defied mortality by not succumbing to bodily malfunction? Surely disease and lowered cellular efficiency is leading each of us—including every faith healer—toward death, and no amount of prayer and faith will reverse the process.

Can God heal? Yes, indeed! Does He? Yes, indeed! Does He always heal? By no means! Does He heal by means of men employing the special gift of healing as in the days of the apostles? Emphatically not!

Our heavenly Father, according to His providence, by His almighty power is often pleased to bring healing and restoration. Is it not a wonder each time we recover from illness or injury? Are not the body's immune system and healing mechanisms utterly amazing? "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14a). At times God may be pleased to bring healing and restoration when men, learned physicians, would deem it impossible!

But let us not be deceived by the fraudulent miracles of the Pentecostals. It is incumbent upon us to set our hearts, not upon earthly life and health and strength, but upon the heavenly realities. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment,

worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17).

■ The Feminine Face of the CRC Synod

For more than thirty years the Christian Reformed Church has been moving in a direction of full ecclesiastical equality of men and women. Though there remains an element (likely quite small at this point in history) that continues to maintain that having women in church office is contrary to Scripture, it ought to be clear that there is no turning back. The most recent meeting of the CRC Synod (2008) ought to have made that crystal clear.

In *Christian Renewal*, July 9/16, 2008 (p. 14), Editor John Van Dyke gives a good picture of the place of women at the broadest assembly of the CRC:

For years it was rare to find an Agenda for the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church without some mention of the subject heading, "Women in Office." Whether it was via overtures, committee reports or some form of communication, the cause consumed the denomination.

Begun in the late 1960s, almost 40 years later, women for the first time officially occupied seats at the denomination's broadest assembly, which meets annually in June. Classes in support sent 26 women to Grand Rapids this year, out of the 188 delegates. Of the 26, one was elected to serve as synod's vice-president, Rev. Thea Leunk, pastor of Eastern Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids. Next to her, as synod President, was Rev. Joel Boot (also last year's President), and 1st and 2nd clerk were filled by Rev. Leslie Kuiper of Wisconsin and the Rev. Laryn Zoerhof of Indiana.

According to an initial article in the *Grand Rapids Press*, the obvious was stated in black and white: "The future looks less promising to those who oppose women clergy on biblical

grounds," wrote Religion editor Charles Honey. "Kuiper, the Synod clerk, called the meeting 'difficult for me,' (because of his opposition to women's ordination) but promised to cooperate with Leunk and other women. 'I know that we'll work together and work with respect,' Kuiper said." From all accounts, from beginning to end, that was the nature of the case.

There were times of "discomfort" for some delegates who, for example, were served communion by women officebearers at the opening service for synod. This prompted discussion, based on an overture, near the end of synod about how best to deal practically with this "problem" in a denomination with two views on the subject that are considered equally valid scripturally, yet in opposition to each other. At the other end of the spectrum there were rumblings from some delegates about the need for equal representation at synod between men and women, on committees of the denomination. "Feeling each other's pain" has become the new catch-phrase at synod.

"Feeling each other's pain"?? I don't think so. Rather, the attitude appears to be, towards those who continue to oppose women serving in the special offices of the church, to put it crudely, "Suck it up; and get with the program!"

Rev. Wybren Oord, Editor of the *Outlook*, would seem to concur. He writes in the July/August 2008 issue (p. 27):

...Synods in the past tried to walk a fine line by not permitting women elders and ministers to be delegates to synodical meetings. Delegates to Synod 2008 saw not only women delegates, but those in favor of women in office flaunted their view by voting for a woman as vice president. According to the *Grand Rapids Press*, delegates opposed to women in ecclesiastical office protested the pre-synod service where women elders served the Lord's Supper. They believed that delegates opposed to women in office should


have a male elder serve them. It seems the line in the sand for CRC conservatives has changed from "as long as it is not in my church" to "as long as it is not in my pew." How long can this last? Synod declared that it was up to the church leading the service who would serve communion.

The lines that conservatives have drawn in the sand over the last twenty years for the sake of unity have been washed away by the waves of tolerance. Although the CRCNA Synod has declared their view of Scripture as valid, it has rebuffed those opposed to women in office at every turn. It has mocked them in their convictions.

Centuries ago the prophet Jeremiah spoke of false prophets who cried out, "Peace, peace" when there was no peace. Today they cry out "Unity, unity" when there is no unity.

What can one say but... "sad but true." What folly to suppose that the Word of God says two opposing, contradictory things! Understand, this is not a problem with the clarity of Scripture. The Word of God is perspicuous, clear, able to be understood. No, it is a matter of apostasy, false doctrine! Mr. Mark H. Vander Pol, a student at Westminster Seminary in California, in the June 2008 issue of the *Outlook* puts it well:

Throughout the past twelve years of discussion on this issue, Synodical reports have constantly had to redefine the "peace" in the church as a result of its stance on holding both positions as biblically viable. Nobody has tried to completely hide the underlying tension, but some have attempted to cover it up with platitudes and "harmonious" language. That tension cannot be bound forever—it will erupt again, and this latest ruling of Synod might just signal the final chains being broken.

Again, what can one say but... "sad but true." 

The Courage of the Minister of the Word (concl.)*

The Necessity of Courage

The courage that speaks the word boldly is necessary – necessary in every minister – and the necessity is nothing less than the God-ordained necessity of the preaching of the word for the salvation of the elect and the gathering and preservation of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. That boldness is necessary is plain from the prayer of the early church in Acts 4:29: “Grant...boldness.” The church was not praying for something incidental to her life, but for a necessity.

The word of God must be spoken. Christ is pleased to utter His living voice to save His own and gather His church through the preaching of His word.

The word must be spoken fully, with nothing held back. The word must be spoken according to the specific need of the congregation, as required by the particular need of the believer or child of believer, and in view

of the precise obstacle that bars the way to Christ on the mission field, or the way of following Christ after conversion, which is also the concern of missions.

Salvation through preaching is not a magical thing, as if the preacher repeats, “Jesus saves,” in every situation, and, presto, preaching is the means of grace.

To a congregation troubled by the lie of antinomianism, the minister must preach Jesus as the sanctifying Savior, who uses commands, exhortations, and admonitions. To a domineering husband, in deep marital trouble, the minister preaches Jesus as the Savior who says, “Love your wife, as I love mine.” To a mission audience inclined to regard Jesus as one among many saviors, the minister preaches Jesus as unique, particular, and exclusive, the only name given under heaven by which we must be saved.

In an address to the Kampen seminary in 1882, when he was seventy-three, the father of the Secession, Simon van Velzen, said this about the necessity of courage in the minister – a subject on which that courageous servant of Christ was eminently qualified to speak:

Courage is the soul of the preaching. Courage gives power and strength to the preaching; it shows the authority and the majesty of the Word. If, on the contrary, one is a preacher without courage, he on his part hinders the influence of the admonitions, the proper judgment of the matters, and the most

penetrating conception. This scandalous weakness humiliates the ministry, causes the hearers to hold the ministry in contempt, shamelessly to reject the yoke of the Lord, and arrogantly to look down on the ministers.¹

If a minister lacks the courage to speak boldly, the word will not be preached as it ought to be preached for the salvation of the church and the glory of the Lord Christ.

And there are always pressures on the minister that he not preach the word as it ought to be preached.

Threats

There are always what Acts 4:29 calls “threatenings,” which tend to frighten the minister so that he does not speak the word boldly and, therefore, in reality does not speak it at all. Courage to speak boldly is necessary because of threats. In Acts 4:29, the prayer for boldness was occasioned by threats against the apostles – severe threats, threats to their earthly freedom, their bodily ease, and their very physical life. The call on God, “Behold their threatenings,” not only indicated the fact of the threatenings, but also the effect that these threatenings were likely to have on the preachers, if God

¹ Simon van Velzen, “*De Vrijmoedigheid die Vereischt wordt in den Dienaar des Woords: Rede Uitgesproken bij het Overdragen van het Rectoraat* (Kampen: G. Ph. Zalsman, 1883), 29. The translation is mine.

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* This is the second and concluding installment of the text of the address – the final rectoral address of the speaker – on the occasion of the graduation of Mr. Heath James Bleyenbergh from the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary on June 12, 2008 at Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI.

did not grant courage. Like us, the apostles naturally feared the threats, and naturally would cease preaching Jesus.

There are threats against the minister also today, threats that have this in common, that they intend that the minister in one way or another not speak or teach in the name of Jesus.

For some ministers in other lands, and soon for ministers in the nations of the West, the threats consist of open, physical persecution.

But there are other forms of threats, which are just as hurtful to the minister and just as powerful to stop him from speaking the word. There is the threat of contempt, slander, and ostracism from the compromising and apostatizing Reformed churches.

There is the threat of criticism, lack of popularity, hostility, and even departure of members from one's own congregation.

There is the threat of disapproval from one's colleagues in the ministry, and a certain exclusion from the group. "Peer pressure" is every bit as much a reality, and powerful, in the ministry as in high school.

There is the threat of loss of friends. One reason why a minister must be watchful concerning special, close friendships in the congregation is that friendship must never be permitted to shut his mouth regarding truths that his special friends might oppose. I suppose Paul had friends in the churches in Galatia. He said that some were willing to gouge out their own eyes in order to give them to the apostle (Gal. 4:15). But he rebuked those friends, publicly and sharply, "O foolish Galatians."

There is the threat of being cast out of one's own congregation. Herman Hoeksema's admonition to me on my last day of class with him, many years ago now, has always lived in my soul, "Preach the word; and if the Prot-

estant Reformed Churches cast you out for preaching the word, preach the word!" He was not referring to deposition for heretical preaching or sinful behavior. Nor was he referring to dismissal on account of foolish behavior, or on account of a minister's stubborn insistence on his own agenda, resulting in the troubling of the congregation and denomination. But he referred to an unjust and wicked expulsion from the church because the church refuses to hear the bold preaching of the word of God, such as Hoeksema himself suffered at the hands of the Christian Reformed Church.

Yet one more powerful threat against bold speaking of the word is the charge that the bold speaker jeopardizes, and even disturbs, the peace of the church. This threat may be the most powerful of all against the faithful minister, for he loves the church and desires her peace.

It would be instructive to review church history with particular regard to the doctrinal crises during which defenders of the faith were admonished, and threatened, not to speak the word of God *with appeal to the peace and unity of the church*. This was the charge against Athanasius: by his resolute confession of the Godhead of Jesus he disturbed the oneness of all Christendom. This was the charge against the Reformation. Think of the letter of Cardinal Sadolet to Geneva: Calvin and the Reform broke the unity of mother church. This was the charge against the orthodox at the time of Dordt: by their intolerant insistence on fine points of difficult doctrine they divided the Reformed Church in the Netherlands and unsettled the Dutch nation. The same was charged against the Secession in 1834.

This was also the charge against the fathers of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1924 and in 1953. In fact, when I consider the pressure in 1953 on the

faithful ministers "not to break up the small denomination, not to divide families, and not to separate friends" by a bold speaking of the word of God concerning salvation by (sovereign) grace in the covenant, I regard it as a modern wonder that those ministers continued to speak the word with all boldness.

The apostles themselves were threatened with the charge and penalty of being disturbers of the peace of the (Jewish) covenant community and even of the world: "These that have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

Against all these threats must every minister have the courage to speak the word boldly.

Such is the necessity of courage in the face of powerful threats that Scripture warns that forever outside the new Jerusalem are the "fearful," that is, those who under threats failed to confess Jesus Christ (Rev. 21:8). Here we may well recall the warning attributed to Luther:

If I profess with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved.¹

Courage is necessary, and, therefore, God gives courage to His ministers.

The Possibility of Courage

The courage required in a minister is a gift—a work of almighty grace in the minister's soul, as much as is sanctification. Courage is not a natural quality of the personality of some, which others lack, in which case,

¹ No one has yet found this saying in Luther's writings. So true to Luther's spirit and ministry, however, is the saying that no one challenges its authenticity.

of course, those who are without courage are excused and those who have, and exercise, courage can be criticized.

In the remarks about himself that are the closest to an autobiography that Calvin ever wrote, in his preface to his commentary on the Psalms, Calvin described himself as bashful and timid and, therefore, altogether disinclined towards the ministry.¹ Scholars scoff at this description of himself by the Reformer. They insist on portraying Calvin as naturally strong-willed, aggressive, and domineering. But one thing Calvin was not. He was not a liar. He was naturally what he said he was: bashful and timid, "which led me always to love the shade and retirement."² All the man's remarkable courage was, in fact, God's gift to him.

Fact is that we ministers are all naturally fearful, cowards, intensely solicitous of our own earthly advantage and, therefore, averse to speaking the word of God with boldness.

The apostles and early church prayed that God would give the needed courage, which even the apostles lacked: "Lord...grant!"

Today also, the church and her preachers must pray for the minister to receive courage as a divine gift.

God answers this petition by putting the minister in mind of several truths. First, the word we must speak, and speak boldly, and the word that men are wickedly trying to silence with their threats is God's word: "Grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." It is a divine, saving, authoritative, God-glorifying, and glorious word. The minister de-

¹ "my natural bashfulness and timidity," John Calvin, "The Author's Preface," in *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), xliii.

² *Ibid.*, xli.

rives his courage from the word itself that he is called to speak.

Second, we ministers are God's servants: "Grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word." We are not the servants of men, not even of men and women in the church. We have no duty to please men. God has called us. We are bound to His service. Him, we are called, and determined, to please.

And what a God is this God whose servants we are!

Courage—indomitable courage—rises in the naturally fearful soul of the minister as he keeps in mind that the God whose servant he is and whose word he must speak is "the Lord"—the sovereign and almighty God in the risen Jesus Christ. Even the threats are His decree and by and under His power. This is the confession of the church

that prays for courage in Acts 4:29. "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:27, 28).

With these truths in mind, we are, and cannot but be, courageous.

Graduate Bleyenbergh, in the final judgment you will give account of your ministry to the Lord Jesus. Be sure of this. The question that Judge Jesus will put to you about your ministry will

not be, "Did you manage to avoid all criticism, opposition, and suffering, because you successfully skirted every controversial issue, skillfully avoided addressing the real weaknesses and troubles of the congregation, and pleased everybody?" But His question will be this: "Did you preach the whole counsel of God, and did you speak my word boldly?"

He will then give you the opportunity to prove that you spoke His word with boldness by displaying before Him and the whole world the "marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal. 6:17)—the

scars, or, as it is in the Greek original, the "stigmata," of your suffering on account of your bold preaching of the word in the face of the threats. Perhaps, for you, whose ministry stretches some years into the future, those stigmata will be physical scars. But surely they will be the scars of a soul lacerated by criticism, of a name loaded with opprobrium, and of an earthly

life wounded by painful losses.

To the churches, the exhortation is, "Pray for courage for your minister." And when God grants your request, do not bristle at the gift as it expresses itself in bold preaching and teaching, nor immediately commence efforts to silence the bold speaking of the word. Rather, receive it as a necessary aspect of the gift of the glorious gospel of your salvation.

"And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).




Up

Up is not a very impressive word. But it need not be, to be important in the Christian faith. Our God, who delights in saving base things, has also given great significance to rather mundane words. Faith and idolatry are the difference between worshiping *a* god and worshiping *the* God. Heresy or orthodoxy regarding the Christ is determined by a single Greek letter (*iota*). The truth of creation rests upon the word *day*. And *up* is more significant than we may realize. Together with its antithesis *down*, this humble word describes an entire plane of our existence—one dimension of the four we occupy. Simply imagine life with only left-right, backwards-forwards, past-future, but no up-down, and you get an idea of its importance. And *up* also has great spiritual significance.

Christianity is a faith of ascension, and *up* describes the rich, certain, progression of its life. Especially three aspects of it are emphasized. First, *up* describes the busy activity of Christian life. *Up* is the direction of anticipated action, while *down* is the direction of idleness. If someone ceases from activity, then he goes down—he lies down, sits down, or puts his tools or hands down. But, in Scripture, people who get busy go up—they rise up, get up, stand up, look up, come up, spring up, lay up, set up, bring up, take up, gather up, lift up, nourish up, grow up, or cheer up. There is a long list of activities saints go up to do. They go up to war and destroy, to testify and judge, to possess and build, to weep and laugh, to plant and reap, and to help and deliver. When something important needs to be done, they rise up early. Abraham and Jacob (Gen. 22:3; 28:18), Moses and Israel (Ex. 12:31); Joshua and Gideon (Josh. 6:12; Jud. 6:38); Hannah, Samuel, and David (I Sam. 1:19; 15:12; 17:20)—all rose up early to perform some significant covenantal work. God, who never sleeps, nevertheless rises up early to deal with us (Jer. 7:13). *Up* is especially prominent in the activity of worship. Places of worship—tabernacle, temple, and altars—are raised up (Ex. 40:18, I Chr. 21:18). Instruments of worship—eyes, hands, and soul—are lifted up

(Ps. 123:1; 134:2; 25:2). Offerings of worship—praise, prayer, and song—rise up (Ps. 5:3; Is. 24:14). So do the saints. Whenever traveling to Mt. Zion, though not the highest mountain, and no matter from what altitude, country, or direction they came, the children of Israel went *up* to worship (Is. 2:3).

Secondly, *up* denotes the necessity, certainty, and finality of an action. Something bound might get loose, but if bound *up* there is no escape. So we read in Scripture of things swallowed up, dried up, ate up, stirred up, sealed up, burnt up, or torn up. Cities, the mouth, and heaven can be shut up. In Christ, our sins are not simply sealed, but sealed up (Job 14:17). Our Lord not only holds us, but holds us up—from the womb and by His right hand (Ps. 71:6; 18:35). When He lifts up the light of His countenance upon us, it cannot go dark (Ps. 4:6). When He builds up Zion, it lasts forever (Ps. 102:16). And from among us, God has decisively raised up the covenantal Ark, the Judge, the Prophet, the Priest, and the King, who Himself was lifted up on the cross, from the grave, and ascended up into heaven (Gen. 7:17; Jud. 2:16; Deut. 18:15; I Sam. 2:35; Jer. 30:9).

Finally, *up* describes the progressive advance of the saints by God's grace, from down in misery and humiliation, up to joy and glory. The wicked, who refuse to go up, are cast down to the ground, to death, to the grave and hell (Deut. 1:26; Ps. 55:15; 147:6; Prov. 7:2). But the Lord lifts up His covenant people—from the bondage of Egypt and abomination of Babylon, to the glorious promised land (Josh. 24:17; Ezra 1:11). He brings us up from the pit and miry clay of sin, and sets us upon the Rock (Ps. 40:2). He raises us poor up from the dust, lifts us beggars up from the dunghill, and sets us up among princes on the throne of glory (Ps. 113:7). Our souls He has brought up from the grave, and lifted us up from the gates of death to be set in glory on high forever (Ps. 19:3; 28:9; 30:3; 69:29). Wherefore, lift up the hands that hang down and the feeble knees (Heb. 12:12), lift our hearts up on high in heaven where Christ Jesus is our Advocate, whither the tribes go up, to give thanks unto the glorious name of the LORD (Ps. 122:4). 

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This World Is Not Our Home

Introduction

As Christians today, it is our responsibility to learn what is going on in the world, and to do so with an eye towards understanding the times in which we live. Sometimes the events we notice are quite obviously fulfilling biblical prophecy, and at other times we have to examine events more closely to try to discover a cumulative effect. By doing so, we can better understand the times in order to be prepared for what lies ahead.

Recently, the Associated Press reported that millions of people around the world could face death due to floods, famine, drought, and violence caused by climatic changes, natural disasters, and human acts.

This type of writing is common today. It seems that everything is labeled a “crisis” by the media. This crisis-mentality is often what leads people to look to the government and science more and more for answers. The whole world is looking more and more to human ingenuity as a god for its salvation from crises, both real and imagined.

In the Post-Depression era in which we now live, the first place many turn to for all of their needs and concerns is either the government or technology. God has not instituted the civil government to supply us with our every need

or to solve all of our problems; but, bit by bit, that concept has worked into the warp and woof of the average citizen’s concept of the government. Add to this the growing reliance on technology, and it is no wonder that faith in God is being abandoned.

When there are weather-related disasters, economic troubles, housing problems, etc., people seem quickly to turn to the government to bail them out and to find the answer to the problem. Very few nowadays consider this earth to be a temporary home, with an eye to the signs of the times, which indicate its near demise. Few put their trust squarely on God and His Savior Jesus Christ.

As we can see from merely picking up a newspaper, there is plenty in the world that gives reason for concern and that points to the need for a “savior.”

Natural Disasters

Hurricanes have hit, bringing devastation to many parts of the world. The 2005 season produced an unprecedented 28 storms, including Hurricane Katrina, which devastated New Orleans, killed 1,500 people on the U.S. Gulf Coast, and helped push oil prices to then record levels.

A horrific cyclone hit Myanmar in 2008, bringing death and destruction that will affect the region for many years to come.

By June 1, 2008 the year already ranked as the deadliest tornado-year in the United States since 1998. Tornadoes have continued to strike with regularity – affecting also people of our own

church in Randolph, WI earlier this summer.

Earthquakes seem to be increasing in frequency and intensity. More than 69,000 people died in the 2008 Sichuan China earthquake, as just one example of recent seismic activity.

During recent years, floods and flash floods have caused billions of dollars in damage. Floods are among the most common and widespread of all natural hazards. Even more importantly, they are the number one weather-related killer.

As I write this article, wild fires are raging at various points in the western parts of our country and at spots throughout the globe, including the Greek isles.

The media keep reminding us of food shortages that have driven up the cost of grain, meat, and all food commodities.

A worldwide pandemic is a very real threat, according to world health experts, who claim that it is not a question of “if” but “when”?

In these times of unprecedented natural disasters from the hand of God, natural man responds by looking to technology, politicians, governments, and political unions. But we as Christians must put our faith in God.

Man-Made Disasters

In conjunction with the natural disasters already noted, there are several man-made problems occurring. There appear to be wide vulnerabilities in the global financial system. A case in point would be the actions of a French

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trader, Jerome Kerviel, at Societe Generale in the earlier part of this year. The activities of this rogue trader caused a 7.2 billion-dollar loss and triggered a global stock sell-off, which points to a widening systemic risk in ever more complex financial markets.

In light of the fact that one rogue trader can cause that much economic upheaval, people are more than willing to accept ever increasing regulation and control by the global economic elites to *save us* from a coming global economic collapse. A global banking and security system that will promise peace and stability will seem all the more appealing.

Readers in America, who are facing the weak U.S. dollar, high inflation, astronomical gas prices, banking failures, and the housing "crisis," know that there is a cry for more government intervention and global collaboration by those seeking an earthly, humanistic solution.

And just that is already occurring at an alarming rate. The July 14th 2008 *Grand Rapids Press* headline story, "Feds are Your Loan Officers," points out that our government will now be setting terms and standards for almost all home loans and student lending after the recent federal bailout of Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. Our government will now legally control your mortgages. These events should cause one to wonder what "emergencies" could cause the federal government to call those mortgages due and put you even more under their control. The borrower is always slave to the lender!

Let the Christian beware of putting too much faith in government and political leaders or in international unions to bail us out of every new "crisis" that comes along, whether it be natural disasters, economic woes, or threats of terrorism. It is the feeling of this writer that as we get nearer and nearer to the end of time

there will be a significant string of economic and natural disasters that will cause nearly everyone to look for man-centered answers in the form of political unification, technology, and, ultimately, the Antichrist, who will skillfully combine the two. Only the elect will not be fooled, and even that only by the grace of God.

Globalism

Always in the name of peace, economic stability, and security, countries are coming together to form unions. As these groups continue to form and coningle we see a slow but steady march toward a one-world government that will usher in the antichristian kingdom.

Terrorism, economic distress, and food and fuel costs have reshaped world politics. The U.S. hegemony is waning and must now court partnerships with other countries and political groups to combat these pressing issues. These pressures have led us to an increasingly interdependent world.

At the same time that countries are coming together to solve these problems, power is coalescing ever more in the hands of few—closer and closer to a one world leader.

We are all aware of the rise and influence of the European Union, which began merely as an economic union to aide in rebuilding after WWII; but have you heard of the North American Union? When the leaders of Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. met recently, they underscored the deep ties and shared principles of the three. A task force sponsored by the influential Council on Foreign Relations has developed a roadmap to promote North American security and advance

the well-being of citizens of all three countries. It proposes an ambitious vision of a new community by 2010, with specific recommendations on how to achieve it. This plan is outlined in Task Force Report #53 and is available from the Council on Foreign Relations. This is all being planned in the name of peace and safety.

While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape (1 Thess. 5:3).

The same July 14th 2008 *Grand Rapids Press* also featured an article about the newly instituted "Union for the Mediterranean."

The leaders of 43 nations from Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa have launched a Union for the Mediterranean—all of this being a brainchild of the French,

of course. Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, not surprisingly, was the only leader in the whole of the region to object to the idea. French president Nicolas Sarkozy called it an "extremely moving, very important moment." Education, food safety, health care, and social welfare were cited in the article as the reasons for this new union.

Technology

These signs of the healing of the wound of Babel are not new to this generation. Neither are the economic and natural disasters. The thing that makes all of this the more urgent to you the modern reader is that, whereas during previous times of turmoil the technology was not there to govern an entire world politically and economically and to monitor the buying and selling of every individual the world over, now the technological ability is here,

...we see a slow but steady march toward a one-world government that will usher in the antichristian kingdom.

and is increasingly being integrated into our society.

The Bible talks of the mark of the beast that everyone in the end times must have in order either to buy or to sell. Not until recent times did people understand how this prophecy could possibly come to pass. There was simply no way that anyone could control the buying and selling activities on such a large scale. Certainly it will be a monumental task to keep track of all men, and their financial transactions, all across the globe.

Today, the entire world is blanketed by GPS satellites that allow us to track anything from our teenager's cell phone to our golf drive, within a few feet. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved, already in 2004, the country's first radio-frequency identification chip that can be implanted in humans. This VeriChip is being resisted by privacy groups for use in humans as of yet, but has been widely used in animals and has been implanted in humans in Mexico by large corporations for *security reasons*. With today's powerful computer capabilities, coupled with the use of the Internet and GPS systems, it would not be a stretch to say that the technologies are in place for a one-world government to track all the movements and financial transactions of all humans.

Knowing What to Do

I do not believe that the people developing this technology are necessarily conspirators purposely developing a system that they know the Antichrist will use for his own wicked purposes. They are men and women who are developing what, to the natural eye, are brilliant ideas for the world's future. Nor do I believe that today, as I am writing this piece, the technologies I write about are now the mark of the beast. Rather, I see them as being technologies that need to be in place in order for the Antichrist to accomplish his scheme.

As Christians we know that unregenerate man will use these ever-increasing technological options in the service of the antichristian kingdom. God in His providence has given humans the ingenuity to develop these tools and with them to fill the cup of iniquity, so that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will come on the clouds of glory.


We who are in America live in a free and democratic society where the government is expected to protect our privacy, not violate it. Therefore it is improbable to think that our government could introduce such control over its people without there being first deepening financial and/or security crises. This is what will give important pretext for more political unions and tighter and tighter control over the citizens.

As we note the fulfillment of

biblical prophecy and the speeding of the world toward the Day of Judgment, what must we do as Christians? Must we fight against all political unification and all technological advancement that seems to fit the schemes of Antichrist?

On the contrary, we must submit to the government until it orders us to go contrary to God's law, and we must utilize modern technologies in the service of God and the furtherance of His Kingdom on this earth.

An important calling as well, it strikes me, would be to show love for our neighbors who have been affected by these natural and economic disasters, by extending the mercies of Christ to those in need, for example the saints in Myanmar, as well as those in China and many in our own country who have recently been devastated. God is known and honored by these acts of Christian mercy in the last days.

As Christians, we must trust in God, not the ingenuity of man, to save us. We realize that God's judgment calls for the utter destruction of this world, but we have our hope not in this world, but in the next. In response to these unsettling events, those who understand the times must know what to do. We must band together as the church of God in this world and support and encourage each other in the Word of God, while being a light in the darkness of these times. 

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Congregation Activities

With a mixture of great excitement and eager anticipation, thirty-six participants from fifteen different congregations from all over the country (Hull, Doon, Loveland, Kalamazoo, Georgetown, Randolph,

and Bethel, to name just a few), accompanied by several older chaperones, left early Monday morning, August 4, for a week-long canoe trip to the Boundary Waters in northeastern Minnesota. What an opportunity for these young people to drink in

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

the serenity and beauty of God's creation in a way they might not have experienced before. By God's grace these "explorers" were drawn nearer to the Creator and His creation as they also meditated on the theme, "Called to Fight the Good Fight," based on I Timothy 6:12. Thanks also to the young people of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL for organizing this year's trip.

For your information, audio-streaming and sermon archives for Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI are now available. This means that if you go to www.georgetownprc.org and click on the "Sermon Audio" icon on the middle/right side of the website, you can hear Georgetown's pastor, Rev. C. Haak, live. This is of special benefit if you cannot make it to church. Or you could also encourage a friend or loved one to tune in. If you would like to hear an archived sermon, you can click on "Sermon Archives" (below the "Sermon Audio" icon) to get a listing of archived sermons and then click to listen.

We believe it would be safe to assume that all our churches have a church picnic sometime during the summer months, but the Loveland, CO PRC may be the only one of our congregations that gets to enjoy a yearly choir picnic. In addition to the joy that comes from singing God's praises throughout the year, these choir members also enjoy a summer potluck dinner together.

The "News" has noticed that in addition to annual church picnics, many of our congregations are also participating in summer, week-long, church-camping outings. Although we cannot say for certain, the list seems to be growing each year. Events center in the activities associated with camping, with one night of the week featuring a potluck or pizza party for the entire congregation, campers or not. This

year's list of camping congregations included the Immanuel, Trinity, First (Holland), and First (GR) churches.

Sunday, August 10, the congregation at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI hosted what has become their annual "Summer Sing-spiration." Members of surrounding congregations were invited for an evening of fellowship and praising God through song. The evening included audience singing with brass accompaniment, as well as instrumental and vocal special numbers. An offering was received for the evangelism work of First.

Members of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada were invited to come out Saturday, July 19, for what was advertised as a little work and a lot of fellowship as they gathered together for a work bee to lay new sod around their parsonage.

Before summer gives way later this month to fall, we want to include the theme of a sermon preached back in July by Rev. Doug Kuiper while visiting the Loveland, CO PRC. Rev. Kuiper preached from Proverbs 10:5 under the theme, "The Wise Son's Use of His Summer."

Sister-Church Activities

Our denomination's sister church in Northern Ireland, the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, took part in the biennial British Reformed Fellowship Conference at the Share Center, located on the shore of Upper Lough Erne CO, Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, from July 25-August 1. Profs. D. Engelsma and H. Hanks spoke on "The Work of the Holy Spirit," while Rev. A. Stewart presented a special lecture on Charismaticism, a vital subject in our day of widespread and growing charismaticism. Those who attended were promised that they could come and marvel at far greater works of the Holy Spirit than have ever


been taught or practiced by the charismatics.

Mission Activities

Rev. R. Smit, pastor of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada, accompanied by his brother, Deacon P. Smit from the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA, traveled to the Philippines in mid-August. Rev. Smit provided pulpit supply in the Berean PRC in Manila over the Sundays of August 17, 24, and 31. Our denomination's FMC and the Doon PRC Council also asked the delegation to make other visits, including travel to Inayauan (on the central Philippine island of Negros, south of Bacolod City), in order to visit with Pastor Rosal and his congregation and to provide some speeches on the theme, "The Faithful Covenant Home" (Col. 3:15-21). Plans also called for the men to accompany members of the Berean Consistory to visit the mission group in Gabaldon, northeast of Manila on the island of Luzon.

Elders Ray Ezinga and Leon Griess, members of the Loveland, CO PRC, the calling church for the mission work in Spokane, WA and Missionary Rev. T. Miersma, visited the Covenant of Grace PR Fellowship of Spokane August 14-18. During this visit they conducted family visitation, met with Rev. Miersma and his family, and encouraged the Fellowship.

School Activities

The Lord willing, the doors of Trinity Christian High School in Hull, IA opened for the first time, for instruction of ninth grade students, the morning of Monday, August 25. Joyful celebration of this manifestation of God's bountiful blessing will be marked by the first convocation, which will be held that evening at the Hull PRC. 

Index to Volume 84

For the April 15th issue, we neglected to change the page numbers which are the same as the April 1 issue (314-336). Therefore, for this index, we have placed the letter “b” behind the page number to indicate that they are in the April 15th issue.

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WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 4, 2008, our parents and grandparents,

MR. and MRS. JACK VAN DYKE, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

We are thankful to our covenant God for His sovereign care over them and for the years He has given them. We are deeply grateful for their godly example and for the covenant home they provided. We pray that God may continue to bless them and keep them in His care.

"But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

- ❖ Ken and Sheri Pastoor
Erinn, Jared
- ❖ Dave and Nancy VanBaren
John and Missy Torlach
Reuben, Ethan
Brenda, Chad, Michelle, Jessica
- ❖ Dave and Julie VanOverloop
Todd and Nicole Kooienga
Jeffrey, Andrew, Alaina
- ❖ Jim and Kim VanDyke
Josie

Wyoming, Michigan

TEACHERS NEEDED

The Protestant Reformed School in Wingham, of Wingham, Ontario, Canada, is planning, the Lord willing, to start a Protestant Reformed school beginning in September 2009. We are planning to include grades K through 12 and are looking for 2 teachers. We are seeking applicants to fill an administrative roll and teach upper grades. Also we are seeking applicants to fill the elementary grade position. Those applying should be members of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Interested applicants should contact board Vice President Mr. Harvey Kikkert at (519) 523-4823 or email hkikkert@scsinternet.com for more information.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

We rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

GERALD and CLARA VAN DEN TOP,

as they celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary, Lord willing, on October 10, 2008.

We are thankful for the many years of Godly instruction given to us. We are grateful for their love and guidance and we pray that God will continue to bless them in the years to come. "And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me forever, for the good of them, and of their children after them" (Jeremiah 32:39).

- ❖ Randy and Barb Feenstra
Jackie Feenstra
Gerald and Deb Feenstra
Nick and Lauren Dykstra
Madison
Craig Feenstra
Marty Feenstra
- ❖ Arlen and Ruth TerAvest
Becky, Stephanie, Emily, Gerard,
Gerrit
(and Bobby in glory)
- ❖ Bob and Carey VanDenTop
David, Shelley, Julie, Seth, Sara
- ❖ Karl and Joyce VanOostenbrugge
Jason and Cassie VanOostenbrugge
Alex
Brad and Katelyn VanOostenbrugge
Joel VanOostenbrugge
Jordan VanOostenbrugge
- ❖ Bill and Marge Zwak
Mike, Doug, Amanda, Tanya
- ❖ Ed and Chris VanDenTop
Jill, Steve, Amy, Trent
- ❖ Don and Lisa VanDenTop
Nathan, Danielle, Austin, Tyler
- ❖ Tom and Erika VanDenTop
Tabitha, Wesley

Coopersville, Michigan

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The council and congregation of Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Gary Van Der Schaaf and their children in the recent passing into glory of their father and grandfather,

MR. DOWIE VANDER SCHAAF.

It is our prayer that they may receive comfort in the words of Psalm 103:17,18: But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them."

Rev. Carl Haak, President
Gerald Kuiper, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Cornerstone PRC congregation and council express heartfelt sympathy to Gene Kuiper, daughters Mary and Sue, and to their extended family in the passing of

AGNES KUIPER.

May we take comfort and encouragement in the words of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior in John 14: "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know."

Rev. Nathan Brummel, President
Tom Venhuizen, Secretary

ANNUAL RFPA MEETING

7:30 PM
September 25, 2008
Southwest PRC