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"Henry and Lena were married for fifty years already..."

Longsuffering

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

(Hebrews 11:8-10 NKJV)

For the past several months, these meditations have dealt with the beginning aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. We have already studied love, joy, and peace. In this meditation, as we study longsuffering, we will consider part of the life of Abraham.

Abraham was a man of great faith. The Bible tells us in Genesis 12, that God called Abraham out of the land

of Haran. Abraham was called to leave his home town and move to a strange land, the land of Canaan. Even though Abraham, at that time, did not own a single acre of land in Canaan, God commanded him to live there as though he owned the place! He was to move there, live there and travel around within the borders of the land of Canaan that God had promised would one day be inhabited by his descendants.

Because Abraham lived in Canaan without an acknowledged citizenship, Hebrews 11 tells us that he lived there by faith. Hebrews 11:8 begins by saying: “By faith, Abraham, obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance.”

We see Abraham’s great patience in vv. 8-9 as we are told: “And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.”

In other words, we can say that Abraham obeyed God, even though, basically, he hardly had a clue as to what was going on! He had not lived in Canaan before.



Volume 51, No. 8 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) “*And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands...and they cried, ‘The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon’*” (Judges 7:20).

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Because he didn't own any property in Canaan, he and his family had to move around from place to place, sojourning in the promised land.

For how long was this to continue? When did it finally happen that God said to Abraham, "Enough of this. Now you can go back home." When did God say that to Abraham? After how many years? When did God finally tell Abraham he could pack the tent away and build himself a nice home in the country?

The Lord never said that. And because that day never came, Abraham is a good example for us concerning the fruit of longsuffering. Abraham sojourned in Canaan for the rest of his life.

I am sure that most of us enjoy a camping trip from time to time. I do not think, however, that any of us would care for living in a tent all the time. Even ministers, who are called by God to move around from place to place, usually move from one comfortable home to another!

But the faith of Abraham is illustrated for us as we see him willingly leave his hometown, move to a foreign land and sojourn there for the rest of his life. What we see in our forefather, then, is that Abraham's life is characterized by longsuffering. He consistently waited upon the Lord.

So, how patient are we? Are you willing to wait upon the Lord like Abraham did, or are you more likely to attempt to take matters into your own hands? Sometimes it is not easy for us as believers to be patient and wait upon the Lord. We

sometimes think that God takes too long. Or, when He finally does take some action in our lives, it can be the kind of action that we do not appreciate. It is then that we begin to understand the connection between faith and longsuffering.

We should understand that longsuffering is only part of the fruit of the Spirit. You cannot just have love, joy, and peace and then say, "Well, longsuffering is not that important." Rather, we need to understand that it is all part of the same package. We cannot pick and choose between the various aspects of the fruit of the Spirit. We cannot have one without the others.

There are nine aspects to the one fruit of the Spirit. That is why, as we seek to lead godly lives, it is so important for us to show forth the entire fruit of the Spirit. All of these virtues are to be shown forth in our lives in response to God's saving grace in our lives. We are to love one another. We should be joyful in our salvation. The presence of God's nearness should always bring us peace.

When it comes to the troubles and trials of our every day lives, we are to remember God's power and providence and exemplify the longsuffering character of true faith. We are to patiently wait upon the Lord.

The Heidelberg catechism, in Lord's Day 10, tells us that because of God's providence, we can be patient in adversity. In other words, we do not allow the struggles of this life to bog us down more than they should. The sorrows we may sometimes experience here on this earth will not be able to destroy us.

When it comes to living our lives on this earth, we, as believers, are to be just like Abraham our father in the faith: we are just passing through. This world is not our home. We are only sojourners. Hebrews 11:10 tells us that although Abraham sojourned in the land of Canaan, he was actually looking for a different place. Hebrews 11: 10 says: "For he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

By faith, Abraham was not truly looking for an earthly promised land. He was looking for the eternal promised land, the heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, Whose designer and builder is the Lord our God.

For God's people, the knowledge of our eternal home in heaven is the source of our willingness in longsuffering. When we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, our eternal destiny has been secured in Him, by Him, and through Him.

In response to this amazing grace and love of God, we are to be patient with one another, longsuffering in the trials, and sojourning together as we look forward to our home in glory, the true and eternal Promised Land.

Rev. Stephen De Boer
Eastmanville United Reformed Church.

Reading Aloud in the Home

The written word is in trouble. When the *T.V. Guide* and *The National Enquirer* are the two most popular weekly magazines, that says something. When your local library's book promotions include *Goosebumps* and Stephen King novels as top choices, with nary a reference to the classics, it is an indicator of a society that spends its time reading trash, if it reads at all. Of course, we already know this. But the question for the Christian is: how do I create a difference in my home?

There are many good choices Christians can and should make to consciously set a good course in their family life. I believe a time of "family read-aloud" is one of them.

Why Read Aloud?

Our family loves books. It's a dead give-away to any observer. The coffee table and all the end tables have these little and not-so-little stacks of them, as do the night stands and dressers. We ran out of book shelf space long ago, so that books are placed sideways on top of others or languish in boxes. I think I can say that each person of reading age in the family is always in the process of reading a good book. At the same time, we are almost always in the midst of reading a book out loud as well. Why?

When a school, even a Christian school or home school, teaches a child to read, the emphasis is almost always on the mechanics of read-

ing. They are often so busy teaching a child how to read that they forget that a child needs to want to read, to be motivated to master the process and "get to the good stuff". Let's face it, most reading books are boring. Compare any reader with the first few paragraphs of *Treasure Island*, and tell me which one you would prefer. The last thing we want elementary children thinking is that what they're reading now will be as good as it gets. Reading good books out loud will not only expose children to the good books, but cause them to catch the bug to want to read more on their own.

Even a family with many varied ages can do this effectively because a person's listening level is usually above their reading level. As an example, when my oldest was about 5 years old and the next around 3, I couldn't face reading those Little Golden books anymore. (I like many of them, and still read them to my other little ones, but you get my point.) So I took out a 25 cent garage sale copy of *Black Beauty*, and simply began to read it aloud. I had never read it before and figured I'd give it a try. To my surprise, the children liked it and each day waited for the next chapter to be read. We've been reading "real" books ever since.

The added benefit is that we, as parents or grandparents, can now catch up on all those good books we missed as kids! Even if you are not a good reader yourself, the books

are written on a generally easier level. And it is satisfying to see what a little practice can do in such circumstances.

When we read good books aloud to our children, grandchildren, or even the neighborhood children, we open them up to an expanded vocabulary. My 3 year old, Helen, has named one of her dolls Chamomile. It doesn't matter that it's a kind of tea. She heard it in one of her stories, and she liked the sound of it. Where else but in a book would she be repeatedly exposed to such words as "admirable", "famished", or "an embroidered muslin apron"? Little ones are not afraid of big words!

There is also the advantage of increasing attentiveness. With all the exposure to television viewing, which flashes a new image on the average of every 3-5 seconds, is anyone surprised that there is a serious deficit in children's attention spans? A friend adopted a four year old boy who simply could not sit still through a story time. Besides greatly reducing his television viewing time, she bought him a few simple quality books. A few times a day, she would read to him while he sat on her lap. Now, while he still likes to move around, he can make it through any reading time that the family enjoys.

At the same time that these positive things are taking place, something else does too! We weave threads of family identity and belonging into our children's lives. We share ideas and challenges that might otherwise not come into our experience when together.



What to Read

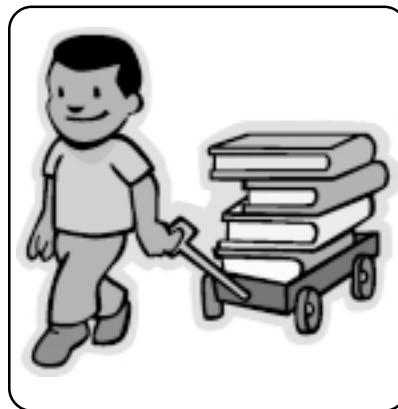
We also give something that isn't so easily measured, but remains a priority goal, and that is a taste for quality literature. For that reason, I choose my titles carefully. I avoid books such as 1- or 5-minute bedtime stories. What's the point? So we can hurry up and get this awful time over with? This type usually gives no author, either (who would confess?). Also off my list are condensed versions of classics, such as *Heidi* or *Ben-Hur* (they always leave the parts out that make it good), the single volumes of multiple biographies (too brief to draw one's interest), the Disney and Sesame Street books (absolutely tasteless), and the Bearenstain Bears books (the father is always the fool!).

What I do like are true missionary stories. These go right to the children's hearts. They're filled with exciting things that really happened, and have the potential of turning our children's hearts aflame with a passion of getting God's Word out to a lost world. The *Jungle Doctor* series is a good one, as well as some children's books published by Overseas Missionary Fellowship. But don't leave out the "adult" ones, such as *Peace Child*, J. Hudson Taylor, *A Foreign Devil in China*, C. T. Studd, Gladys Aylward, and others.

Our spiritual fathers are another great fountain rarely drawn from. What do our children (or ourselves, for that matter) really know about Luther, Calvin, Hus, Wycliffe, etc. The usual treatment is two paragraphs, or even two pages each, in a text book. Whose interest could possibly be fired about their lives and the issues which drove them?

But read a book out loud on Luther by Bainton (or the *Triumph of Truth* for the less brave), and I guarantee that the children will never forget who Luther is or what he did—and all without a test or study guide!

God's Care and Continuance of His Church by Vreugdenhill is a three volume series that I constantly recommend. We began reading this in the car during one of our marathon car-riding vacations,



and it was so good, we just kept going through the whole series. You know you have a winner when the children beg for another chapter. *The Hiding Place*, by Corrie ten Boom, provoked more questions and thoughtful discussions than any other book we have read.

Magazines also make a good resource for in the home. They are short, colorful (the little ones especially like that), and come in the mail with their name on them! We subscribe to *God's World News*, *Nature Friend*, *Voice of the Martyrs*, *Creation ex Nihilo* (yes, we read an occasional article out loud to them all, plus they have a children's section), and *World*. This is a combination of children and adult fare, and it's surprising how

often the lines are crossed in both directions!

Then there are the books which are not necessarily Christian, but rank tops as a "good read" and still teach Christian values. (Remember Phil 4:8ff which says that whatever is noble, whatever is of good repute, if there is any virtue, anything praiseworthy, to think on those things.) What comes to mind in this line is *Old Yeller* (the movie doesn't count!), *Rascal*, *Lassie*, the *Anne of Green Gables* series, the *Little House on the Prairie* series, books by Charles Dickens such as *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *A Christmas Carol* (again, the T.V. special doesn't count!), *The Hobbit*, *Stories of the Old Dominion*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Stand By, Boys* (account of the flooding in the Netherlands), *The Wheel on the School*, the *Grandma's Attic* series. . .the list goes on and on.

Younger ones, who don't read at all, like the familiar favorites over and over again, with rhymes, repetition and predictable lines: I'll huff and I'll puff; Henny Penny, Turkey Lurkey; or Tiddly Widdly, Mrs. Tittlemouse. I have found Beatrix Potter's books to be the prime solution for providing the things that children love to hear along with a charming story line that keeps me entertained as well. But don't limit them or yourself. We have just discovered some very good art books for little ones, *I Spy*, by Lucy Micklethwait. They might be very willing to hear stories about how germs work, or how the Romans fought the Gauls. You only need to provide a lap and a little time, and most youngsters just snuggle right in. Just be prepared for lots of inter-

ruptions and seemingly irrelevant questions.

Believe it or not, poetry is a favorite around our house. I don't know why poetry gets such a bad reputation. Perhaps it was the turn off from having to study it instead of just reading and enjoying it. I think that applies as well to many of the classics. I mean, do you know of any author or poet who wrote their works with the intention that they be studied by a classroom or investigated through the lens of a study guide? Anyway, we read poetry just for the pleasure of the sound of the words, for the measured cadence, for the sheer delight in thoughts put so succinctly and yet so beautifully. And there is such a fun selection out there. Try Robert Service for the boys—adventurous tales of the Yukon and wild animals, or Robert Louis Stevenson's, *A Child's Garden of Verses* (be choosy of the illustrations if you buy), or collections such as *Favorite Poems Old and New*, *Best-Loved Poems of the American People*, or *101 Favorite Poems*. We tend to steer clear of the newer, weird stuff like Shel Silverstein. Why do schools ignore such stirring classics as *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *Paul Revere's Ride* or *Excelsior*?

Yet another occasional option is listening to books on tape. We just purchased an excellent unabridged version of *Pilgrim's Progress*. My 10-year old listened to the entire book straight through in 2 days. This is also a nice idea for those long car trips.

Dos and Don'ts

Here is a list of Do's and Don'ts for reading aloud:

- 1) Read what you like. Children will know if you're not enjoying it.
 - 2) If a book is bad, forget it, but give it a few chapters—some slow starters end up being the best. (Reading ahead eliminates this.)
 - 3) Caldecott Medal and Newberry Award books are usually very good, but this is not a fool-proof test. The newer ones especially need a critical eye.
 - 4) Get Dad to do his share. Reading should not be looked upon as a feminine thing. With most of our elementary teachers being women, and homeschoolers at home with mom all day, it's time to inject some masculinity into this picture.
 - 5) Don't be afraid to mark the favorite passages in your books. It's really nice to be able to go back and find that one quote to share later on.
 - 6) Let the little ones play quietly near by while you're reading something for the older ones. It may not look like it, but they are listening to every word! We even let the big ones draw or color or knit. Sometimes better listening takes place when hands are busy.
 - 7) Never use reading aloud as a threat. Example: No reading tonight if you don't finish your chores.
 - 8) Limit the television viewing time no matter what. Example: The T.V. goes off in this house at 8:00, whether there is a story or
- not. Never let them think that the book has deprived them of the T.V.
- 9) One expert recommends not getting too comfortable (so you don't get tired?), but we sometimes get our pajamas on and scratch each other backs, or all gather on the bed together. Whatever your family is comfortable with, or the situation calls for.
 - 10) Occasionally read a book beyond their level and stretch them a bit.
 - 11) When beginning a new session, review the context by asking, "What happened last time?"
 - 12) Don't turn these precious times into a quiz or "learning experience". Let children ask the questions if they have any.
 - 13) Avoid moralizing. The story will teach itself. However, if something is relevant to a current situation, I will draw connections.
 - 14) Try to read with expression. For example, Gollum's voice in *The Hobbit* should have a certain quality. On the other hand, I have heard my father-in-law read a whole story in monotone-and fast!-and the kids hung on every word. You don't have to be artistic to please.
 - 15) While suggestions from the listeners are appreciated, you should choose what will be read. You're the one in charge, and you will have a better tendency to choose what is of value.
 - 16) Remember the emotional levels of the children. *Where the Red Fern Grows* is an excel-



- lent book, but some parts are too intense for a younger heart.
- 17) Try to set a specific, regular time. This is not always practical, however, especially if you're the grandparent doing the reading. But don't worry. Once I was reading *Old Yeller* to my children when a missionary family came to visit for a week on their vacation. We just kept reading as normal. When we visited them a year later, the children asked if I had brought along the book so we could finish it.
- 18) If there is a large gap in ages, I find it better to pick the level of the older ones, and then make it up to the younger ones by giving them their own special time of reading at a different time.
- 19) Occasionally vary the fare of your reading. Depending on the ages of your children, it is appropriate and wise to intersperse a few non-fiction choices, or perhaps a humorous one.
- Ways of Influence**
- You can cultivate a love for books within your children by doing a few simple things. One is to give them a book of their very own. This can be a good thing for grandparents to do, or a good gift at holiday times. Put their name in it. Make it a quality book, like a hardcover version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Another thing is to have books displayed around the house. Just lay that book about pirates and their weapons on the coffee table, and see if it doesn't get read. Do your children have their own bookshelf in their room? How about a book in the bathroom with short excerpts, such as Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* or *The Answers Book* published by Answers in Genesis? Isn't this better than reading about the latest kidnapping in *The Reader's Digest*? Here is an opportunity to make one of those conscious choices of the not-so-bad vs. the best. We have a wicker basket in our living room where all newspaper, a good novel, a history or a theological work, nothing shines through as knowing that Dad and Mom (or Grandfather and Grandmother, or Aunt Eloise) think reading is worthwhile. While you're at it, share an excerpt, be it funny, thought-provoking, or simply well-written, from the book you're currently reading.
- Resource Books**
- There are some good resource books out there that give lists, descriptions and even categorize according to age and topic. Try out Elizabeth Wilson's *Books Children Love*, Gladys Hunt's *Honey for a Child's Heart*, Terry Glaspey's *Great Books of the Christian Tradition*, Jim Trelease's *The Read Aloud Handbook*, and one forthcoming from Canon Press called *The Book Tree*.
- The Home Library**
- What about the home library? Is it required to purchase all these books? No. Many of the good, moral books are to be found at the local library, or through the inter-library loan system. Church libraries also usually have many excellent Christian fiction and non-fiction titles on their shelves, and are looking for good ideas for future purchases. It could be that your church has the Piet Prins *World War II* series for boys.
- But either way, in my opinion, there is nothing quite like owning a good book yourself. And it doesn't have to be expensive. I have built a substantial home library mostly through garage sales, second-hand stores, library sales, and school book clubs. Watch carefully for content, though, even in the school book clubs. If you

familiarize yourself with the good titles listed in the resource books above, you'll instantly recognize what you want. And let's not be stingy. We don't blink at a \$20 night out, but often balk at spending that much on a new hardcover book that will last for generations.

For the real tiny tots, board books are great. There's not much text, so their patience doesn't wear thin, and they are durable! Plus, duct tape always puts them right! Use the opportunity to train even one year olds that their books are to be treated with care. Younger ones don't require a great variety of titles. They like the same stories over and over.

In Conclusion

But whether you buy or borrow, nothing can replace the experience of the whole family gathered to share a story together. No one is shushed when a question arises about the character or plot (like watching TV). It's relaxed, and can be put down and picked up again whenever the time is right. It's a time that belongs to everyone and will most assuredly become a cherished memory.

Parents have a wide open opportunity to build, block by block, day by day, good, godly virtues into the lives of their children. The reading aloud of good books is one the best, easiest and most enjoyable ways of doing this. Open one and get started! And may God bless your efforts. He certainly has ours!

Mrs. Karen Adams is the wife of Rev. Peter Adams of Grace URC in Alto, Michigan. Together they are bringing up seven children ranging in age from 2 to 17.

Sound Bites

Torch and Trumpet 1954

December 1953 - January 1954

"The mystic will very seldom contend that the Bible is the truth; for him the Bible is the truth to the extent that it serves his own purpose, namely, to prove his own inner religious feelings. The mystic uses terminology that sounds quite Scriptural, but that it is not Scriptural at all appears when one actually checks it with the Bible."

Communism: A New Religion
Albert Bosscher

"If grace is delimited to signify the favor of God in Jesus Christ which issues in pardon for sin, adoption as children of God and the entitling to eternal life, in a word, salvation - then naturally the non-elect, the reprobate do not share grace, and the term common grace would be misleading and erroneous. Grace, however, in its radical sense is defined as unmerited favor. With this connotation the term allows for wider latitude than saving, sanctifying grace. In the radical sense grace stands opposed to merit. Under the arrangement of the covenant of works man could by his obedience merit the promised good. This privilege he has forever forfeited by his rebellion and disobedience. So drastic was the fall, so drastic and shattering the consequences that unless God intervenes with His sovereign, irresistible saving grace, man cannot be saved, nor can he answer the purpose for which he was created."

* * * * *

"[T]he Calvinist draws a sharp line of distinction between common grace and special grace, a not-sanctifying, not-saving grace and a sanctifying and saving grace. Common grace in no sense of the term shades off into special grace; nor are the fruits and benefits of common grace some sort of stepping stone to the preparatory technique or agency for the reception of special grace."

* * * * *

"Grace is unmerited favor, and say what we will, by reason of sin man is righteously deserving of God's wrath, of His curse. But God intervenes with grace, with His goodness and mercy. He still allows life to continue; there is a rich flow and development of natural life. All that man receives, be he reprobate or elect, is undeserved; it is grace."

Common Grace: The Accepted View
William H. Rutgers

February - March 1954

"Common Grace was and still is necessary for the development of the world after the fall of Adam and Eve. Without common grace the creation would have perished into total destruction as the inevitable effect of sin. Therefore common grace was necessary in order to make the plan of redemption in the coming of Christ possible."

The Calvinistic Conception of Life
Steven Harkema

"If we make our doctrine an occasion for the flesh and an excuse for idleness, we lay ourselves open



to the charge that our religion is vain.”

*Once a Christian,
Always a Christian*
Robert D. Knudsen

“Christ will not break a bruised reed, nor quench a dimly burning wick. He will not say, ‘I do not want this bruised reed; break it off; pull it up by the roots; throw it into the fire to be destroyed.’ He will not say, ‘This dimly burning wick is useless. It cannot serve the purpose of a lamp. Extinguish the smoldering, flickering flame; throw the worthless wick out on the rubbish heap.’ No, Christ will not do that. For the life of the reed is His life, and the flame of the wick is His flame. Bruised as the reed may be, it is not dead; it is alive. That life of the Christian is Christ’s life, imparted in the new birth by the Holy Spirit. That flame of the dimly burning wick is Christ’s flame, the flame given by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Christ suffered and died to give life to the reed, to kindle the flame on the wick. He will not abandon it; He will not reject it.”

Hope for Weak Christians
Johannes G. Vos

April - May 1954

“[T]he first White men and women who settled at the foot of the Black Continent were profoundly religious people, imbued with a very real zeal to bring the light of the Gospel to the heathen nations in Africa. These first South Africans lit a torch which was carried to the farthest corners of the sub-continent in the course of the last three centuries and whose light now shines upon the greater part of all non-white peoples south of the Equator.”

* * * * *

“[T]he full implementation of the policy of separate racial development will take many years. Call it an experiment, if you like, and one could say it is an experiment which is as yet only in its initial stages. Many aspects of the problem are certainly still far from clear, and it would be unwise, even if it were possible, to draw up a blue-print for 50 years ahead. In more than one respect progress will have to be by trial and error. And if in this process we should err, I ask you and your countrymen not to judge our efforts only by our incidental failures nor to reproach us for what you may at this great distance judge as being a lack of the spirit of Christ.”

*A letter to the
Torch & Trumpet*
Daniel F. Malen
Prime Minister of South Africa

June - July 1954

“Unbelief is not absence of belief but rather the belief of an apostate heart, belief that is directed to an idol.”

* * * * *

“It is our duty not just to live among people of differing loyalties but to do everything in our power to bring the Gospel to them in such a way that they must out of conviction believe the only true prophecy.”

*Christian Witness Requires
Christian Organization*
H. Even Runner

Do you ever face the question what God thinks of your attendance in the house of prayer? If you never consciously face this question I am quite sure that God, who commands you to go to church, is not at all pleased with your churchgoing.”

* * * * *

“If we love the Lord we shall be most anxious to meet with Him. And if the Lord says that He loves most to dwell where His people come together to worship Him, the heart which truly loves God will declare: that is the place where I love most to be.”

Why Worship God in Church?
William Kok

“Christ pictures the way to heaven as narrow and steep, a hard upward climb. Its course is always against the gravitational pull of this world, which is ever downward.”

* * * * *

“[B]y virtue of sin and the curse this good world can become a dangerous snare for us. Often we sin more in connection with things in themselves good than with things specifically and notoriously evil.”

*Calvinists - Are They
Worthy the Name*
John De Jong

October - November 1954

“It is well that we constantly remind ourselves of the fact that divine worship is a meeting between God and His people. Every part of our church worship should be either a speaking of God to His children or a speaking of the congregation to God.”

* * * * *

“It does make a real difference whether we just run in for a moment to chat with a neighbor or whether we are meeting an appointment with our doctor. In our divine worship we have an appointment to meet the God of heaven and earth. If we will only remember that we will pay attention even to our appearance!”

Our Help is...Jehovah!
William Kok



Roses by the Garden

by Amber Hilbrand

*As I watch them everyday,
So beautiful and red,
But growing so slow I say,
Today I saw the blossom,
Tomorrow I'll see the bloom.
I'll also see roses,
By the garden is so beautiful
As anything can be.
Finally I'll get together,
All grown and I'll get those.
I'll only see them for a short time,
But next season I'll see them again.
God Bless all Roses!*

Amber Hilbrand is a fifth grader from Grant Christian School in Grant, Michigan. She likes to ride her horse, play piano, swim, bicycle, sing, cook and bake goodies for her dad. This poem won a "superior" in a multi-school Fine Arts Festival.

~Getting Ready for Church~

“Prepare to Meet Thy God”

It has happened more than once that we have been called upon to unite a couple in marriage where evidently very little preparation had been made. It almost appears then as if the bridal pair deemed their marriage as something of minor importance. Bride and groom had made no effort to appear at their best, and the atmosphere consequently created was not conducive to impress one with the solemnity of so great an event. As far as the legal aspect was concerned, all was in proper order, but as far as the moral and the spiritual side was concerned it made a very unpleasant impression. If marriage belongs to the greater experiences of human life here below the atmosphere should be such as would lead us to feel it and to participate in the happiness thereof. The Bible speaks much of marriage, and of the bride and of the bridegroom, and especially the fact that normally the bride prepares herself carefully to be in the best possible condition in order to gain the approval of her groom. And when then so little care is shown in this event, one cannot but fear if such a marriage will be a fruitful one for time and eternity.

If this is the case with parties for whom wedding bells are ringing, how much more must there be a proper preparation when God

meets with his people in the house of worship, especially on the Day of the Lord?

Life here on earth for the people of God can be likened to the days of courtship between a couple who have pledged to each other their love and their fidelity. There is a longing to be together. They look forward to meeting each other and to enjoy each other's companionship. It is in this light that we would like to view the meeting of God with his people on the Lord's Day.

God is Worthy!

Worship is a word which stands in connection with the word "worth." It applies as such to God who is worthy to receive divine honors. It is an attitude of adoration and praise, such as is due to God alone. In it the intellect, heart and will are occupied, the whole being of man is engaged. This must become manifest in a special way in our attendance upon the communion of saints as we are to exercise it in meeting God in worship and in prayer. The apostle John when he on Patmos received the book of Revelation describes himself as "being in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." It lifted him up above the common ordinary things of life and



gave him a vision of higher things.

This I would say is the very essence of what we must experience if we are to take away from the house of God that which we need upon life's pathway. People who do not have the Holy Spirit cannot be in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. They must however seek to get into the Spirit also by attending worship on the Lord's Day. This is a means of grace instituted by God that we might find him. We have the promise that if we seek we shall find, and that God gives his Spirit to all those who ask him.

Preparation for worship we may expect from them who have the Spirit. There has come into their life that spiritual courtship with Christ, the Groom, through the Holy Spirit. This is so beautifully voiced in the Psalms, for example, in Psalms 42 and 84. "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God."

Many Christian people are, thank God, still a church-going people. Many houses of worship are, as a rule still well filled. It is gladdening to see the multitudes throng the house of God on the Lord's Day. Looking at it from that angle we would be inclined to say, "All is well in Zion." It is well however that we probe a little deeper and ask ourselves the question of the *why* and the *wherefore* of our church attendance and the *HOW* of it? What are the motives that are driving us? In many cases parents have taken us to church from our very youth, and the result is that we are there when we begin to choose for ourselves.

The man who was showing an apple in a bottle stirred up great curi-

osity. How did he get that apple in the bottle where the apple was ever so much bigger than the neck of the bottle? The answer was, "I slipped it in when it was little and it grew there." Thus ought our covenant children grow up in the church. Their consciences ought to be so trained that they can not feel right if they do not attend divine worship. And still we know that not all of our covenant children go to church because they love it. Some folks are "churchy" but they have no real love for the church, sad to say. It is

***H*ow much of our worship on the Lord's Day is fruitless even among the true children of God, fruitless because of the absence of the proper preparation."**

a routine they go through, but never has it become a spiritual courtship which they love. Needless to say, that the real fruits are also lacking in such lives.

Fruitless Worship

And speaking of fruit, how much of our worship on the Lord's Day is fruitless even among the true children of God, fruitless because of the absence of the proper preparation. We are not putting the house of our soul in order so that the Lord can come in with the richness of his blessing. That spiritual courtship with our Lord is often so much a matter of routine rather than of fervent love. The things of this life crowd in too much, so that there is

not the proper preparation to meet our Lord on the Sabbath.

We are living in a busy world. We do things in a hurry these days, and we should have a lot of time for the spiritual things, but this hurriedness is so detrimental to spiritual life. The Sabbath should be a time for meditation, but who meditates these days! We hardly know the meaning of the word. Who sits down today to think on the things of the Spirit? The radio razzes and jazzes all day and on top of it comes television. We know what goes on anywhere and everywhere in this old world and anyone who thinks that all this busy-ness fosters spirituality is quite mistaken. We race along with our autos at fabulous speeds compared to that of the oxcart which we still remember as a feature of our boyhood days. We have planes that carry us off a thousand or more miles just to keep a dinner date! In a topsy-turvy world mad with wars and rumors of wars we should crave for the Sabbath, but, alas! we are apt to carry the whole thing with us into the house of God. Life has become a mad rush for money by which we can get that which we long to use to satisfy our restless spirits.

Saturday used to be the time for preparation for the Sabbath, but instead of preparation we try to cram in as much as we can of this world. Complaints are heard about late Saturday evenings spent in shopping and amusements detrimental to spirituality because such people when they come to church are not in a fit condition to be there. Instead of being bright and alert to what is said and done, there is dullness and spiritual insensibility.

Mother used to prepare on Saturday whatever could be prepared for the Sunday dinner so that there might be as much rest as possible on the Lord's Day. Reading matter of a secular nature was carefully put aside. Everything was done to create an atmosphere of devotion. Today a big Sunday edition of the daily gets into many homes. Instead of getting up in plenty of time for reflection on spiritual things, it is a mad race to get to church on time. That's the spirit of the age. And how much are we getting out of the service? It is not what we hear but what we carry away with us to become for us a part of life that counts.

We are to see to *what* we hear and *how* we hear. We have but to listen to the conversation before and after the service and it will tell us how much preparation there was to receive the Word of God. Minds and

hearts are full of everyday matters that the Word finds no abiding place. The parable of the sower teaches us many a lesson in this connection. Hearts like paved, hard roads from which the Devil comes and picks the Word up immediately so that we hardly know what the sermon was about are obvious today. Then there are the "cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches which choke out the Word so that it becomes unfruitful."

The Fault-finding Attitude

All this brings a deadness which brings all kind of criticism. When people do hear it is in an attitude of faultfinding. There is this and that the matter with the preacher and with the sermon and with everything. It reminds me of a certain sermon taster who always had a dark brown taste in his mouth. Busy spitting out his venom after a serv-

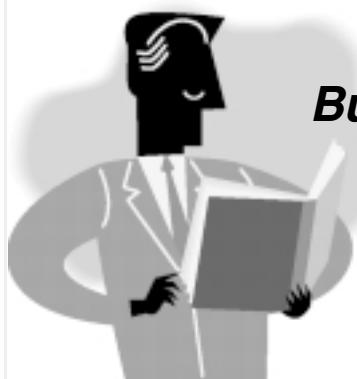
ice, he was overheard by a brother of an altogether different mind who expressed his pleasure to what he had heard. The critic replied, "You eat everything." The answer was, "Choosey hogs never become fat."

The real hunger for the fellowship with God through his Word will bring appreciation. It is reported concerning one of the Erskines that he had a woman in his audience who heard him for the first time and who had been so much pleased and edified that she made a long trip to hear him again, but then received no special blessing. She voiced her experience to the preacher, and the answer was, "Lady, the first time you came to hear the Word of God, the next time you came to hear the preacher." This lady was not the first one to suffer from this malady - the woods are full of those kind of listeners.

To get into the proper attitude when we go to God's house requires preparation. "Prepare to meet thy God." If we count this meeting of so little worth that we do not take the effort to prepare for it, how can we expect a blessing? May the faithful prayer, "Speak Lord, thy servant heareth" be uttered by us. The love for our Lord and his service will then voice itself in true worship.

In honor of Dr. Cornel Venema's appointment as President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary

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Rev. John De Jong [1885-1964] was the pastor of the Iron Springs, AB CRC when this article was published.



New Testament Perspectives on Missions

There is a common prejudice among many Christians that not much, if anything is taught on the subject of missions in the Old Testament. If you want to learn about missions, then you have to look to the New Testament rather than the Old. Whereas the Old Testament gives us only a few crumbs on the subject, the New Testament offers a feast of material on missions and evangelism. Though I sought to oppose this prejudice in a previous article in this series (“The Mission of God in the Old Testament”), there is no doubt that the New Testament provides a richer mine of teaching regarding the church’s calling to disciple the nations and preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. What was promised and anticipated in the Old Testament—the blessing of salvation for all the peoples of the earth—is fulfilled in the New.

Because of the richness of the New Testament’s teaching regarding missions, it may seem hazardous to attempt to summarize briefly its more important features. There is simply too much material to encompass in one brief summary. What I will seek to do, therefore, in this article is only touch upon some of the emphases and themes found in the New Testament. Many of these themes will be explored further when we take up some of the broader confessional and theological dimensions of the work of missions. Therefore, the following survey will only touch upon the high points of the New Testament’s perspective upon missions¹.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

The starting point for any reflection upon the New Testament’s teaching on missions is the great saving event(s) of Christ’s coming into the world, his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The gospel of the kingdom of God that is preached to the nations focuses upon the Triune God’s saving purpose and work in Jesus Christ. Not only is Christ the content of the good news but he is also the One who by his Spirit and Word is gathering the nations to himself.

The mission of God, first announced and promised in the Old Testament, has now reached a decisive point in history. God the Father has lovingly sent his own Son into the world so that whoever believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). God the Son has come to the world to secure the salvation of his people, Jew and Gentile alike, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (1 Tim. 2:3-6; 1 Jn. 2:2). And God the Holy Spirit, who was promised by the Father and poured out by the ascended Lord at Pentecost, imparts the saving benefits of Christ’s mediatorial work to all those who belong to him (John 16:7-15). The good news proclaimed throughout the New Testament is that the Triune God has come and is coming in saving grace, glorifying himself through the coming of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation of his people.

Viewed from the vantage point of Old Testament expectation, the gospel of Jesus Christ’s coming and saving work fulfills all of God’s promises (2 Cor. 1:20). The promise to Abraham that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed, is now coming to fruition. Christ, who first came preaching the gospel of the kingdom to the “lost sheep of Israel” (Matt. 15:24), comes to bring salvation, the light of God’s grace and truth, to the Gentile nations as well. Already at the announcement of his birth by the angelic host, it was noted that this was “good news of great joy which shall be for all the people” (Luke 2:10). When Jesus was presented at the temple, righteous and devout Simeon who had been looking for the “consolation of Israel,” took the child in his arms and declared, “my eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, *a light of revelation to the Gentiles*, and the glory of Thy people Israel” (Luke 2:30-32).

In terms of the progress of the history of redemption, it is important to note that, in Christ’s own preaching of the kingdom of God, there is an acknowledgement that this kingdom will come in *stages*. Rather than an immediate and complete bringing of salvation to Israel and the nations, Christ proclaims that he must first suffer and die and then be raised from the dead (Matt. 16:21). Before the gospel is extended to the nations, the saving work of Christ must be accomplished and only on the basis of that work can the message of salvation then be communicated throughout the earth. Thus, in the ministry of Christ as it is recounted in the Gos-

pels, the inclusion of the nations within the reach of God's saving grace is proclaimed but not in the way it would be subsequent to his resurrection and ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. The kingdom of God revealed in Christ's person and work will only come by way of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross and his victory over sin and death in his resurrection.

In the Gospels' account of the preaching of Christ, special mention needs to be made of his kingdom parables, which describe the significance of the *interval* in history between his first and second coming. These parables make clear that the kingdom of God, though present in Christ and confirmed by his signs and wonders, will only come in its fullness as the Word of the kingdom is preached to the nations. This is especially evident in the imagery of the great feast or banquet that dominates many of these parables. For example, in the parable of the great feast recorded in Luke 14:15-24, Jesus speaks of a certain man who prepared a feast and issued an invitation, "for everything is ready now" (cf. Matt. 22:8). However, those first invited to the feast decline the invitation so that it must be extended over a period of time to others. Though all is ready the feast cannot commence until the house is filled with guests. Similarly, in the parable of the unjust husbandman (Matt. 21:33-44), the owner of the vineyard first sends his slaves and then his own son to gather the fruits of the vineyard. When those invited kill the husbandman's slaves and sons, Jesus interprets this to mean that "the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given

to a nation producing the fruit of it" (v. 43).

Thus, in the context of Christ's ministry and the progress of redemptive history, these parables speak of an intervening period between the coming of the Son and the great banquet at the end of the age. During this period, the gospel of the kingdom, first extended to Israel, will go subsequently to the nations

I t is remarkable to note in the Gospel accounts how much more openly Christ speaks of the necessity and nature of missions after his resurrection than before.

in order that God's house may be filled. These themes are echoed in the parables of the pounds in Luke 19:11-27 (compare Matt. 25:14-30, parable of the talents) and of the growth of the kingdom in Matthew 13. The movement of history, subsequent to Christ's resurrection and ascension, will be marked by the *great work* of God in gathering his people from the ends of the earth to himself.

The Gathering of the Church

Though the Gospels record the coming of Christ, the presence of the kingdom, and the necessity of Christ's cross and resurrection—all of which are foundational to missions—it is only *after* Christ's resurrection that the missionary program of the Triune God begins to advance to and among the nations

of the earth. According to the New Testament's teaching, this program is *the work of God from first to last*, and only occurs by virtue of Christ's commissioning of his disciples, and his ascension and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

The Great Commission

It is remarkable to note in the Gospel accounts how much more openly Christ speaks of the necessity and nature of missions after his resurrection than before. Though the parables of the kingdom in the Gospels describe the interim period after Christ's resurrection and prior to the end of the age as the age of missions, there is no mention of an explicit mandate to preach the gospel of the kingdom to the ends of the earth prior to the events of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection². However, after the resurrection of Christ the Gospels record Christ's explicit commission to his disciples that they should preach the gospel of the kingdom throughout the earth and actively enter the field of harvest.

Though this commission is usually associated with the so-called "Great Commission" passage of Matthew 28:16-20, it is recorded in all the Gospels. Throughout the period of forty days between his resurrection and ascension, Christ instructed the disciples regarding the kingdom and the necessity of missions. This instruction commenced on the day of his resurrection. In the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus appears to the eleven on the day of his resurrection, he makes it known to them that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations,



beginning from Jerusalem” (24:47). At the close of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is reported to have commanded the eleven, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned” (Mark 16:15-16)³. In the Gospel of John, Christ links the missionary work of the disciples with his own coming into the world—“as the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). The great work of the apostles is nothing less than a participation in the work of Christ, *the Apostle of the Father*. Just as the Father sent his Son into the world to bring salvation, so the apostles are commanded to preach and teach the Word concerning Christ in order that those who respond in faith may have fellowship with the Son and thereby also with the Father (1 John 1:1-3). The disciples were not simply to wait for the coming of the Kingdom, but they were to go into the world as “witnesses” on Christ’s behalf and to his saving person and work (Acts 1:6-8).

There are several features of this missionary mandate that stand out clearly in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20. According to Matthew’s account, when Christ appeared to the eleven disciples in Galilee after his resurrection, he said: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and

the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

The *first feature* of this mandate is *Christ’s ringing declaration of his complete authority* not only in heaven but also on the earth. Though Christ has not yet ascended to the Father and taken his seat at his right hand, the reality of his mediatorial reign over all things is clearly enunciated in this commission. When the disciples go into the world to make disciples of all the nations, they do so in the name and authority of Christ to whom the nations belong as his rightful inheritance. In that respect, the language of the Great Commission echoes the promises of the Old Testament that the nations will be given to the Messiah of God whose blessed reign will bring salvation to all peoples (compare Psalm 2). The mission the disciples are to carry out, accordingly, is not one that carries the risk of failure. Rather, it is one that triumphantly declares Christ’s kingship over all the earth and over all peoples. And it is carried out in the confidence of certain success.

The *second feature* of this mandate is that the disciples are expected to go throughout all the earth and to make disciples of all the nations. What Christ had earlier taught—the interval between his first and second coming would be occupied with calling all peoples into the kingdom of God—is now commencing.

“There is no room left for a passive waiting upon the Lord.”

Whereas in the Old Testament, the nations are often depicted coming to Israel and joining her in fellowship with and service of the true and living God, now God’s people are *thrust into* the world. An explicit command is given that the disciples should be out and about among the nations of the earth, preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. There is no room left for a passive waiting upon the Lord, as if the message communicates itself or people will come to know the truth in some spontaneous manner. Rather, it is the responsibility of Christ’s disciples to make the truth known and to seek out the peoples of the earth with the gospel.⁴

A *third feature* of the mandate Christ gives is that *the nations are to be discipled by means of the Word and sacrament*. The church’s mandate is not to “make converts” in the narrow sense of adding persons to the membership roll who express an interest in the gospel. The church is to make disciples, that is, followers of Jesus Christ who are being taught to do all that he commands. This calling to make disciples is to be brought about through the preaching and teaching of the Word of Christ, and the administration of the sacrament of baptism. By means of the Word and the sacramental sign and seal of incorporation into Christ and fellowship with the Triune God, disciples are cut off from their former way of life and identified with the way of Christ’s kingdom. Such disciples are called to acknowledge Christ’s comprehensive claim upon their allegiance and service in all areas of life.

A *fourth and final feature* of the mandate is *the wonderful promise*

with which it closes. The Great Commission is sandwiched between an opening affirmation of Christ's universal lordship and a closing assurance of his continued presence—"lo I am with you always, to the end of the age." Christ assures the disciples that he will be present to accompany them throughout the course of their labor in fulfillment of their calling. Though they will be instruments to effect his purpose, Christ promises that he will direct, accompany, and bless the labors of the disciples with fruitfulness.⁵

"Pentecost and Missions"

One further aspect of the New Testament's teaching regarding missions deserves special attention. It is something to which we have referred, though only indirectly, at several points in the preceding summary. The work of missions is the work of the Triune God. Each of the Persons of the Trinity works in a manner appropriate to himself, though in a manner that expresses a perfect coincidence of will and purpose between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Within the economy of the Triune God's working, however, a most decisive place is reserved to the Spirit in the gathering of the nations. When, subsequent to Christ's resurrection and ascension, the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, God's work in the gathering of his people from the nations entered a decisive and (eschatologically) final phase. The Holy Spirit, now poured out upon "all flesh," is the One who represents Christ on earth and ministers through the Word his saving benefits. During the present period of the history of redemption, Christ has become a "life-giving

Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). The ministry of the gospel, which is more powerful and glorious than the ministry of Moses, is such because it is "the ministry of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:8).⁶

In the book of Acts, accordingly, the account of Christ's work in gathering his church is told in a way that highlights the work of the Spirit as the Author of the church and its growth. In the opening chapter, Luke records that, when Jesus was asked whether he was going to restore immediately the kingdom to

ent power to convince anyone apart from the powerful working of Christ's Spirit. The power necessary to lend vitality and effectiveness to the apostle's preaching and teaching is that of the Holy Spirit.

So far as the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Matthew 28 is concerned, a careful reading of the book of Acts will show that it was the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit that inspired the church's obedience. Were it not for the Holy Spirit, leading, guiding, prompting, and effecting, the saving purposes of Christ, the Lord of the church, there would be no gathered community of believers nor growth of the church. There is no evidence, for example, that the early church would have gone about the task of fulfilling the Great Commission to disciple the nations, were it not for the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit. The missionary activity of the church that is related in the book of Acts up to 9:31 is restricted to those who were members of the Jewish or Samaritan communities. Not until the account of the conversion of Cornelius do we meet expressly the problem of the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. What leads the church to bring the gospel to the Gentiles is not simply her obedience to the Great Commission, but the coming of the Spirit upon the household of Cornelius. Only then do we read (after the apostle Peter reported this to the church in Jerusalem) that the conclusion was drawn, "well, then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life." The progress of the gospel, first among the Jews and then among the Gentiles, occurs only because of the initiative and working of the Holy Spirit.⁷

What leads the church to bring the gospel to the Gentiles is not simply her obedience to the Great Commission, but the coming of the Spirit upon the house of Cornelius."

Israel, he replied, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:7-9). What this reply indicates is that, though the book is known as "the Acts of the Apostles," it is really the account of Christ's ministry through the apostles in the power and presence of his outpoured Spirit. The apostles' witness, though authorized by Christ and foundational to the life of the New Testament church, carries no inher-



That the mission of the church is the work of the Holy Spirit is evident throughout the book of Acts. The story told by Luke is thematically set forth in Acts 1:8 where Christ's promise of the Spirit is reported—"you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the earth." At every step of the way, as the gospel goes forth from the day of Pentecost onward, it is the Holy Spirit who initiates and empowers the work of the church. The account of Pentecost itself in Acts 2:1-12 makes clear that the witness of the apostles was a manifestation of the Spirit's presence. At the close of Peter's sermon at Pentecost, it is the Spirit who is promised to those who repent and are baptized (2:38). When Peter responds to those who protest the healing of a lame man, he does so boldly, being filled with the Spirit (4:8ff.). When the disciples speak the Word of God, they speak "with boldness" as they are filled with the Spirit (4:31). Those who resist the testimony of the gospel are said to "resist" the Holy Spirit (7:51). The Spirit calls Philip from Samaria to meet the Ethiopian eunuch (8:29). The Spirit (13:2) calls Paul and Barnabas to their ministry among the Gentiles. On two occasions the Spirit forbids them to enter a particular field of service (16:6,7). This theme of the mission of the church as Christ's mission in the power

and presence of his Spirit dominates the book of Acts from first to last. Were it not for the Spirit's prompting, empowering and enlivening, the witness of the apostles and of the church would never have occurred and, were it to have occurred, would lack any vitality and power to save.

Conclusion

Though we have provided only a brief glance at some of the themes of the New Testament regarding missions, the general teaching of the New Testament is quite clear.

The coming of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit mark the commencement of a new and final epoch in the history of redemption. The promise first made to Abraham that in his seed all the peoples of the earth would be blessed, is now coming to fruition in a marvelous way. The gospel of God's saving presence and work through the mediation of Jesus Christ is now being preached to the ends of the earth. The period of history between Christ's first and second coming is characterized as a period during which the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed to all peoples so that God's house may be filled. The church has the mandate to go into all the world and make disciples of the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Triune God and teaching them all the things Christ has commanded. This mandate represents an authoritative commission

of Christ who has all authority and who by his outpoured Spirit gathers his church.

The mission of the church to and among the nations is, therefore, nothing less than an obedient participation in the great mission of the Triune God. The church is in her innermost being a missionary community, called into existence by the Spirit and Word of Christ and sent to the nations to preach and teach the good news of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Any failure on the part of the church to live out of the reality of this mission of the Triune God, therefore, betrays at the most basic level the nature and calling of the church in this present age.

Endnotes

¹For more complete surveys of the New Testament's teaching on missions and evangelism, see: Herman Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1960), pp. 25-56; and Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 65-103.

²The sending of the seventy recorded in Matthew 10 is no exception to this rule. The commission given to them was restricted to the cities and towns to which Christ himself was going, and the message they preached (and confirmed through miracles) was likewise limited to the announcement of the nearness of the kingdom of God.

³Some of the oldest manuscripts of the New Testament do not include verses 9-20 of Mark 16.

⁴To use the language of J. Blauw in *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, pp. 40-41, the Great Commission expresses a "centrifugal" view of missions (the

"The coming of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit mark the commencement of a new and final epoch in the history of redemption."

disciples are to go to the nations with the gospel), not a “centripetal” one (the nations come to Israel and the people of God). The church is required to seek out actively the lost with the invitation of the gospel, not to hold on to the gospel while waiting for the lost to come to the church.

⁵Though some have argued that this Great Commission was given exclusively to the apostles during the foundational period of the church (for example, Calvin), this fails to do justice to the universal and extensive language of the commission. The disciples are to go into “all” the nations and are promised Christ’s presence “until the end of the age.” The church of Jesus Christ is “apostolic” in the sense that it is founded upon and ministers the Christ-authorized, apostolic gospel to the nations until Christ comes again.

⁶For a summary of the way in which Christ’s presence and work are mediated through the Holy Spirit, see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1979), pp. 14-21.

⁷See Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Missions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), esp. pp. 98-134, 161-85. In this section, I am representing Boer’s argument that Pentecost rather than the Great Commission is foundational to an understanding of the missionary nature of the church and her calling.

What Happened at the CRC Synod?

The CRC Synod 2001 is now history. It completed its work Thursday evening, June 14. Although it had a fairly light agenda, it was in many ways a pivotal synod – not because of significant changes in policy, but because of major changes in personnel particularly in Calvin Seminary. The effects of these changes will become more clear in the coming decades.

Dr. John Timmer convened the Synod Saturday morning and noted that in the context of Pentecost it is the Spirit that gives life to the church. The officers of Synod were: President, The Rev. Morris Greidanus, pastor of the 1st CRC of Grand Rapids; Vice President, The Rev. Joel Boot, pastor of the Ridgewood CRC in Jenison, Michigan; First Clerk, Elder Donald Dykstra from Classis Illiana and member of the Hammond CRC; and Second Clerk, The Rev. Henry Numan, pastor of the 1st CRC in Vancouver, B.C. The latter two were both nine time delegates to Synod. Sunday afternoon a service of Prayer and Praise was held in the Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids.

The plenary sessions on Monday were devoted to Seminary matters. Dr. James De Jong, president of Calvin Seminary, pre-

sented 22 candidates for ministry which included four women. The students were from Russia, Cuba, The Netherlands, Canada and the United States. Since Dr. De Jong plans to retire from Calvin Theological Seminary, this would be the last time he would be introducing the candidates.

Dr. Cornelius (Neal) Plantinga, Jr. was approved Monday evening to replace Dr. De Jong as the new president of Calvin Seminary. He will take up the position on January 1, 2002. Plantinga indicated that he wanted to develop a collegial community to think together on issues facing the church and society. His desire for Calvin is to provide a classical education for contemporary ministry. He noted that the world needs the witness of Christ from the church and that the Seminary should provide an education that “models Christ”. He observed that Christ came “full of grace and truth” and that we should not separate the two and emphasize truth at the expense of grace. He hopes to structure his new responsibilities in such a way that will allow him to continue his research and writing.

“[T]here were those who wanted some sort of ordination for youth workers, directors of education, music directors and other ministry staff people.”

Rev. Duane Kelderman, co-pastor of the Neland Avenue CRC, was approved for the

Dr. Cornel Venema is a contributing editor of *The Outlook*. He serves as President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana where he also teaches Doctrinal Studies.



new position of Vice President of Administration at the Seminary. He will assist the president and handle much of the day to day operations of the Seminary. He indicated that he would like to make the Seminary a resource for the churches.

Three other appointments were made to the faculty due to the retirements of the seminary's chief operating officer and Professor of Missions, Dr. Roger Greenway, and Dr. Henry Zwaanstra who for some 38 years introduced generations of students to the joy of studying church history. His career set a new record for length of service on the faculty – a remarkable achievement.

Synod interviewed and appointed Rev. Pieter Tuit from Australia as Assistant Professor of Missiology and Dr. David Rylaarsdam to teach Historical Theology. Rylaarsdam is a graduate of Dordt College, Calvin Seminary and the University of Notre Dame. Dr. Mariano Avila, a native of Mexico with degrees from Juan Calvino Seminary, Calvin Seminary, Temple University, and Westminster Seminary (Philadelphia) was appointed as Assistant Professor of New Testament. All appeared to be competent scholars and acquitted themselves well in their interviews. This represents a significant change in the make up of the faculty.

Official Acts of Ministry

An issue which consumed considerable time was discussion of the overture on "official acts of ministry." Initially there were those who wanted some sort of ordination for youth workers, directors of education, music directors and other min-

istry staff people. Synod decided that where appropriate these may be ordained as evangelists with the approval of classis and the concurrence of the synodical deputies. According to Article 24 of the Church Order evangelists are already permitted to engage in official acts of ministry such as the preaching of the Word and the Administration of the Sacraments. In congregations where there are no ministers or evangelists, elders may be granted the right to exercise "official acts of ministry." The General

"[I]f this view of ordination prevails it will considerably diminish the significance of ordination in the life of the church."

Secretary wisely noted that there was another study committee considering alternative routes to the ministry so perhaps this report could be tabled or incorporated into that report study committee's report. Unfortunately his advice was ignored.

It should be noted that if this view of ordination prevails it will considerably diminish the significance of ordination in the life of the church. Ministerial ordination historically was closely tied to the liturgy of the church, particularly the administration of the means of grace, i.e. the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. Ordination for youth workers, directors of music, etc. was never considered necessary because preach-

ing and the sacraments belonged to the official work of the church under the supervision of the elders through ordained clergy. Ordinarily the way to ordination in the office of minister was through seminary training. Synod has now noted that "ordination is not a way of recognizing a person's academic credentials". That is true and Article 7 of the Church Order provided for such ordination by way of exception. However, what is omitted is that seminary training was not geared simply to provide an academic credential but to ascertain whether a person had the gifts for ministry. It was the church as a whole putting its imprimatur on such people by recommending them for call upon completion of certain academic requirements. Because of the centrality of preaching in Reformed worship the church has placed a high value on an educated clergy. What has now emerged is a kind of fundamentalist ethos on this issue. Recommendations for ordination will come from a plethora of sources. Rigorous theological training will be circumvented and since there are no set standards for ascertaining "gifts" there will emerge a wide variety of ordained persons in the churches. Certainly it will diminish the significance of ordination as well as the importance of seminary education.

Interdenominational Matters

Synod voted to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and also with the Christian Reformed Church in Cuba. It also asked the Interchurch Relations Committee to begin exploring the possibility of renewed fellowship

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with the Protestant Reformed Church. This is long overdue. In fact it was even suggested from the floor of Synod that we apologize for the split of 1924.

Dr. Douwe Visser addressed Synod on behalf of the GKN (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands – RCN). The GKN is moving toward unity with the Hervormde Kerk and the Evangelical Lutheran Church (the Samen op Weg movement). For several years the CRC has had restricted fellowship with the GKN. Synod now instructed the Interchurch Relations Committee to report to Synod 2003 to either recommend restoration of full ecclesiastical fellowship or provide reasons why this would not be appropriate at this time.

Internal Matters

Two new directors were ratified for denominational agencies. Rev. Calvin Bremer was appointed executive director of the Back to God Hour and Dr. Gary Bekker as executive director of World Missions. These men were not interviewed for these positions but rather Synod ratified these appointments which were made by the Board of Trustees.

Formerly there was a fund for needy churches which assisted churches in need to maintain a witness in their communities. This was later changed to the fund for smaller churches. Currently it is administered by Home Missions. Now in order to continue receiving help churches must apply for ‘Heritage

Church’ status. If classis declares a congregation is a Heritage Church it will receive two dollars from the denomination for every one dollar contributed by classis to maintain support for the church. Formerly size was a criteria for Heritage Church status. Synod decided this was not essential for such a designation.

Smaller churches have played an important role in the life of the denomination. They have been a source of ministers. They have provided pulpits where recent seminary graduates could be introduced to parish ministry, and have closely identified with the denomination and its causes. Keeping them viable is relatively inexpensive when compared to the cost of a new church plant. It appears, however, that Home Missions is assigning its resources to new church plants which have a very high rate of attrition. In fact the old formula of mother-daughter churches has proven to be far more successful in establishing viable churches. Instead of building on our strengths we seem to accentuate our weaknesses in this area.

When synods are described it is often in terms of the mood that seemed to prevail. Some used the words “harmonious”, “grace-filled”, “considerate”, “forward looking”, and “inclusive”. Certainly it was one of the shortest synods on record and the chairman, Rev. Morris Greidanus, should be complimented for conducting the proceedings efficiently and with good humor. But a synod cannot be evaluated only in

terms of its mood, but will be ultimately measured in terms of its decisions and their impact on the church.

The ideal of being ethnically inclusive is commendable and it was good to see Native Americans, African Americans, Korean Americans and a variety of ethnic background represented as delegates. In large measure, however, we continue to think in terms of Dutch ethnicity. In a discussion on relations with the GKN one delegate referred to this denomination as our “mother” church when in fact the GKN was established some three decades after the CRC in North America broke from the RCA in 1857. While there has been a concentrated effort to shed our “Dutch” identity, we have not been as focused in maintaining a distinctively reformed identity. This has muted our witness in the cultural milieus which we encounter in North America.

With the innovation of computerized voting synod has become much more efficient. This is a welcome change although it is difficult to assess the support or lack of support for some proposals since the numbers are not announced on the tallies. With a shorter schedule the opportunity for deliberation has been curtailed. For example, some significant appointments (e.g. in World Missions and Back to God Hour) were merely ratified by the Synod without an interview. Even when there are interviews single candidates are presented to Synod. Care must be taken



that Synod not become a staged event like a political convention for the benefit of the churches.

Thunder Clouds

There are certainly some thunder clouds on the horizon. One is the issue of women in office. A pane of women advisors was allowed at Synod perhaps in anticipation of the church order being changed in 2005 and women being seated as delegates. There is a “gift” theology that is being promoted as a kind of egalitarian ideal for the churches. If a person has certain gifts they are entitled to be office-bearers in the church. Gender is not a consideration.

However, when it comes to offices in the church the Scriptures do take gender into account. When confronted with passages such as 1 Corinthians 11 & 14, or I Timothy 2 there has been no compelling argument that the ordination of women to ecclesiastical office is not contrary to the clear teaching of scripture. While the votes may be in Synod to move toward women in office, the case has not been made in the churches. After six years a majority of the classes have still not ratified changing Article 3 of the Church Order. It is also true that even though there are a number of vacant pulpits, women candidates are not getting calls. There are a limited number of jobs that can be created to accommodate these women. Per-

ceptive observers that favor women in office seem to be discovering that it is more difficult than first anticipated to change strongly held views on the authority of Scripture and dismiss a 2000 year tradition of biblical obedience. The denomination, while pressing for women in ecclesiastical office (which some think the Bible expressly forbids) paradoxically allots virtually all of its significant bureaucratic positions (e.g. Editor of the Banner, administrative heads of our schools and agencies of which the Bible says nothing) to middle aged white males with Dutch surnames.

The second cloud on the denominational horizon concerns church growth. While this synod may have ushered in the new millennium as an era of good feeling we cannot escape the undeniable fact that the denomination is not growing appreciably and, in fact, over the past decade has experienced a considerable decline in church membership. There are three reasons for this. The first is the exodus of individuals and congregations for the United Reformed Churches. The second is the fact that we are not keeping our children. The third is our inability to compensate for these losses through our mission and evangelism programs. We cannot escape taking a good hard look at these matters in the future.

The third cloud on the horizon is the state of the pulpit ministry, the call-

ing of the local pastor. The pulpit ministry is no longer being viewed as an honorable and attractive vocation and calling. Many of our brightest and best young men are choosing careers in medicine or law or business while our pulpits go begging to be filled. Increasingly our churches will suffer from a lack of dynamic reformed preaching and effective pastoral care.

How can we address the gathering storm? This is a question that does not admit of an easy answer. The first thing we must do is to think corporately and critically about the future. If Synod evolves into the business meeting for the denominational structures we must develop alternative deliberative forums. There once was vigorous dialogue in publications such as the *Reformed Journal*, *Torch and Trumpet* and the *Banner*. *Reformed Journal* ceased publication, *Torch and Trumpet* (now *The Outlook*) greatly enlarged its denominational purview, and the *Banner* has become a kind of *People Magazine* for the denominational Dutch sub-culture. Virtually all of the material emanating from the denomination comes from public relations departments and can hardly be considered models of intellectual objectivity. We need a new ethos, we need to get beyond our feelings and reassert a reformed intellectual heritage that was theologically focused and biblically informed.

“The denomination, while pressing for women in ecclesiastical office paradoxically allots virtually all of its significant bureaucratic positions to middle ages white males with Dutch surnames.”

Secondly, we should not get side tracked. We need a clearer understanding of what the church is about and we need more focus in pursuing the basic tasks of the church, of proclaiming the Scriptures as the whole council of God, disseminating the good news of salvation by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to reaffirm the church's role as the guardian of the holy sacraments and we need to be faithful in the painful and difficult task of exercising ecclesiastical discipline. To assist in this the denomination is a servant of the churches. The churches are not servants of the denomination.

Also, the denomination must beware of becoming side tracked by special interest groups. For example, historically the denomination has allocated its resources in carrying out its task into two major areas, education (primarily Calvin College and Seminary) and missions (primarily foreign missions since home missions were considered classical matters). In the last four decades we have supported committees for Abuse Prevention, Disability Concerns, Race Relations, Social Justice and Hunger Action. We have a board of publications, manage a pension fund, have a committee to stay in contact with the Canadian government, manage a foundation, have a youth ministry committee and the list seems to be getting longer every year. That is not to suggest that these concerns are unimportant. The questions we have failed to confront are whether the denomination allocating its resources to address these various causes becomes side tracked from its primary calling. Could these con-

cerns be addressed by other Christian organizations than the denomination? The bureaucracy cannot keep expanding without confronting these questions.

Finally, we must recognize that the Lord of the Church will accomplish his ends and his purposes. That was evident in a moving presentation of the work in Sierra Leone by Rev. Paul Kortenhoven, a long-time missionary in this troubled country in West Africa. The civil strife there brought indescribable suffering, but through it all is the confidence that the Lord will preserve his church. Clouds on the horizon can bring refreshing rain or devastating hail. Calvinists know that they are the Lord's clouds, it is the Lord's rain, and it is the Lord's hail. Our responsibility is to be faithful. That is the measure by which the success of Synod will ultimately be judged by the Head of the Church.

Rev. Richard Blauw of First Christian Reformed Church in South Holland, Ill. served as a delegate to Synod.

Bethany URC is planning to host the **3rd Annual United Reformed Men's Conference** on Sept. 28 and 29. The theme of the Conference, "*Understanding the Times and Knowing What to Do*", comes from I Chron. 12:32 where the unique description is given of the sons of Issachar as they are prepared to respond to David's call for service in the king's army.

On Friday evening

Rev. Casey Freswick "*Understanding the Face of Liberalism.*"

Rev. Richard Kuiken "*Understanding Three Needs which Our Wives Need Met at Home.*" Followed by a round table discussion.

On Saturday

Dr. Mark Campbell "*Understanding Medical Situations - Considerations.*"

Rev. Andrew Cammenga "*Understanding Worship and Worship Wars.*"

Rev. Mark Vander Hart "*Understanding: Creating God's Kingdom, Genesis 1 as Gospel.*"

Rev. Bill Green "*Understanding Missions and the Local Church.*"

Rev. Art Besteman "*Understanding the Blessed Fruit of Zealous Bible Study.*" Followed by a round table discussion.

The Conference fee is \$35 and includes a continental breakfast, catered lunch, and study guides for the lectures. Checks should be made out to Bethany URC and sent to the church address: 5401 Byron Center Ave. SW, Wyoming, MI 49509. For lodging information, call the conference chairman, Frank Jones at (616) 531-7285.



God's People, My Parish

Henry and Lena were married for fifty years already by the time we moved into their neighborhood. I remember one summer afternoon I heard voices coming from their yard. I walked over to their house and discovered them sitting on lawn chairs in their driveway. I also remember coming home and telling my wife how surprised I was by that sight. "They've been married for fifty-some years," I said. "What could they possibly have left to talk about?"

I would soon find out that they talked about everything together. And what a pleasure it was for me to be able to often share in their conversations.

It didn't take long for me to realize the wonderful love they had for each other. I recall one day Henry came to our house very upset. I asked him what was bothering him. He replied, "I lost my wedding ring somewhere between our two houses. Could you help me look for it?" He continued to make excuses for losing it. After all, he reminded me, the band was over fifty years old. "A lot thinner than it used to be." While he was talking about it, I began to realize how precious what the ring symbolized was to him.

It represented his love for a woman who meant more to him than life itself, and her love to him. It represented a wife who had helped him raise his children, work the farm, and more, it represented his love for the person he could talk with.

We never found the ring. He joked about how that freed Lena of her responsibility to him, but I knew it hurt him not to be able to find it. Every now

and again I would see him walking around the area where he said he lost it. And, I have to admit, I was there a time or two, as well.

Years passed and every warm afternoon or early evening, Henry and Lena would get their lawn chairs out of the garage, put them on the driveway, and sit and talk with one another.

When we moved to another church I would talk about Henry and Lena in my pre-marital counseling class. I began to use them as an example of how couples need to communicate with one another. "Nothing fancy," I would tell them, "you just need to take the time to talk with one another."

One of the biggest problems in marriages today is that we fail to do what Henry and Lena did. Couples are so busy with their lives, so glued to the

television set, and so involved in activities outside the home that they no longer know how to just sit on lawn chairs in the driveway and talk to each other. And then, when they get older and the children are out of the house, they don't know what to say to each other.

A couple of years ago we got a phone call that Lena had passed away. Shortly after that, we got another call that Henry had become so ill he was unable to go to her funeral. We drove out to Iowa to visit with our dear friend. By the time we arrived, the Lord had taken him home, as well.

Jesus says in John 14, "In my Father's house are many mansions..." I can almost picture the mansion God has prepared for Henry and Lena. Only they are not in it. They are out on the driveway just talking with one another and gazing at Him who is Light.

Rev. W. H. Oord

The Annual Meeting of The Reformed Fellowship

When: September 20

Where: Bethany URC in Wyoming Michigan

The Speaker will be Dr. C. Venema, President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. The topic will be *Does God Know the Future - An Evaluation of the Openness of God.*

Punch is at 6:00 PM, Dinner is served at 6:20 PM.

Dr. Venema will speak at 8:00 PM



Everyone is Welcome to Attend!

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