

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Ballymena, NI

17 March, 2014

Dear saints in the
Protestant Reformed Churches,

Church Visitors

Rev. Garry Eriks (Hudsonville PRC) and Elder Sid Miedema (Byron Center PRC) stayed at the CPRC manse for our annual church visitation (24-31 January). They were well received in the congregation, and the local papers carried articles and photos, referring to one “Pastor Syd Miedema” and his associate Rev. Eriks as a “popular America preacher.”



Rev. Eriks and Sid Miedema

As well as their official meeting with the CPRC Council (with the line drawing of Herman Hoeksema by Erik Lubbers now hanging on the consistory wall), the men helped with the packing of the *Covenant Reformed News* and the *British Reformed Journal*, and joined us at our annual congregational dinner, at which Sid favored us with some of his auctioneering skills. Besides preaching at two Sunday services, Rev. Eriks gave a helpful class on fasting and spoke on “Knowing the Truth in an Age of Uncertainty” at a well-attended meeting in the CPRC. It all made for an encouraging and enjoyable week!



Sid Miedema, Ivan Reid, Rev. Eriks

The Ministry of the Word

Tonight, St. Patrick's Day, will be the last teaching sessions of the four Monday catechism classes. The end of year tests will be next week, DV.

After covering Christ's controversies in the four gospel accounts on the Sabbath; marriage, divorce, and remarriage; Roman taxes; and temple cleansing, our Tuesday morning class tomorrow begins a new topic, the law. How did our Lord view and speak of God's law, as opposed to the scribes and Pharisees? What is its role as regards “righteousness”?

This fits well with CPRC *Heidelberg Catechism* preaching (yesterday's sermon was on Lord's Day 34, dealing with the first commandment) and with our Wednesday night *Belgic Confession* class, which is currently studying justification (Article 24), with one eye on the heretical New Perspective on Paul and N. T. Wright.

Yesterday saw the conclusion of a study of a fascinating character, “The Prophet Jonah,” with 15 sermons on the book of Jonah and one each from the references to Jonah in Matthew 11, Luke 12, and II Kings 14. These 18 sermons in two box sets, along with the 12-sermon box set on “The Man of Sin” (II Thess. 2), are the most recent CPRC productions (www.cprf.co.uk/audio/boxsets.htm).

Others

Brittany Schimmel (Georgetown PRC) stayed with us for a few days and was able to take in two Sunday services and some lovely Northern Ireland walks and weather (14-18 February). We also had friends from England and South Wales at various church meetings.

The CPRC Bookstore (most recently topped up by materials brought from the church visitors and Brittany) continues to disseminate Reformed literature and audio-visuals. January was an especially good month for sales.

Of the 18 translations added to our website (www.cprf.co.uk/languages.htm) in the last two months, 7 are from Africa: Luo 4, Afrikaans 2, and Swahili 1. The others are Italian 4, Hungarian 4, Spanish 1, Russian 1, and Tagalog 1.

Since Ezekiel 33:11, Matthew 23:37, I Timothy 2:4, and II Peter 3:9 are the four texts most often cited in support of the notion that Almighty God has a frustrated desire to save the reprobate, I have created some web pages listing quotes of worthies who oppose that erroneous reading of these texts (www.cprf.co.uk/quotes.htm#desire). Recently, I added comments by Fulgentius of Ruspe (now in Tunisia) and others. Fulgentius was the leading North African church man in the early sixth century. Originally influenced by Semi-Pelagian ideas, through controversy and a closer reading of Augustine, he saw through the folly of the well-meant offer and forcefully opposed it in several of his writings, including one that he wrote in the name of fourteen African bishops.

This is what Fulgentius of Ruspe (468-533) writes regarding Matthew 23:37: “Whence our Savior reproves the malevolence of the unbelieving city with these words: *Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but you were unwilling* (Matt. 23:37). Christ said this to show its evil will by which it tried in vain to resist the invincible divine will, when God’s good will neither could be conquered by those whom it deserts nor could not be able to accomplish anything which it wanted. That Jerusalem, insofar as it attained to its will, did not wish its children to be gathered to the Savior, but still he gathered all whom he willed. In this it wanted to resist the omnipotent but was unable to because God who, as it is written, *Whatever the Lord pleases, he does* (Ps. 135:6), converts to himself whomever he wills by a free justification, coming beforehand with his gift of superabounding grace on those whom he could justly damn if he wished” (*De remissione peccatorum* 2.2, 3).

John Knox and the BRF Conference

2014 is the 500th anniversary of the birth of John Knox (1514-1572), the great Scottish Reformer and friend of John Calvin. So I gave a lecture on “John Knox and Predestination,” dealing with both his reformatory labours and his longest theological work, a book on God’s abso-

lute sovereignty, in which he forcefully refutes, among other things, his Anabaptist opponents’ abuse of the four main texts urged in support of a failed desire of the triune God to save everybody.

The Knox speech in Lurgan (a town less than an hour south of Ballymena), advertised after our Reformed Witness Hour programme and with an article in the *Lurgan Mail* newspaper, was very well attended (28 February). The lecture in South Wales saw far fewer present but very good sales of books and box sets (6 March).

A lecture on John Knox not only fits with the Scottish venue for this summer’s British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Family Conference (26 July – 2 August). It is also helpful because the two day-trips to St. Andrews and Edinburgh are the two Scottish cities most associated with Knox, for he started and ended his reformatory ministry in these places, respectively.

Bookings for the BRF conference are coming on well, but more are very welcome. We hope that many of you will be able to join us at what promises to be a blessed conference on “Be Ye Holy: The Reformed Truth of Sanctification,” with Profs. Hanko and Engelsma. For more information and booking forms, go on-line (<http://brfconference.weebly.com/>)

May the Lord’s gracious countenance shine upon you all!

Pastor and Mary Stewart