

Covenant Protestant Reformed Church Ballymena, NI

12 September, 2013

Dear saints in the
Protestant Reformed Churches,

US Trip

It was great to meet and fellowship with some of you during our trip to the US this summer (16 July – 13 August). I was privileged to preach eight times in six churches (Calvary, Heritage, Lynden, Randolph, Grandville and Faith) in five states (IA, SD, WA, WI, and MI), give two PowerPoint presentations on the CPRC and its sister-church relationship with the PRC, and attend two weddings (those of a niece in Hull and a nephew in Lynden) and a funeral/memorial service (that of Miss Winifred Koole, a British Reformed Fellowship conferee, who was at the 2001 PRC Synod at First PRC the year I was examined and who was Mary's fourth grade teacher). This was the first time I had preached in Calvary and in Heritage or seen their new buildings. Also it had been some time since I spoke in Randolph and Grandville—I think it was back when I was a seminarian. The support and hospitality of family, friends, and officebearers in the PRC is always very encouraging for us.

We returned heavily and happily laden with good literature for the CPRC Bookstore from various PR evangelism committees, the Seminary, and the RFPA, especially Prof. Engelsma's new book, *The Battle for Sovereign Grace in the Covenant*, Prof. Hanko's *A Pilgrim's Manual*, and John Calvin's "The Christian Life" (a new pamphlet from Edmonton PRC).

Three of the four Sundays we were away, Rev. Audred Spriensma of Byron Center PRC preached for the CPRC, two short pieces in the *Ballymena Times* advertising his ministry. The congregation enjoyed fellowship with him and his wife, Alva. The audios and videos of his services are on-line (www.cprf.co.uk/audio/visitorsermons.htm). On the fourth Lord's Day, Brian Crossett read sermons by Revs. Haak and Hanko (4 August). Susan Hall ran a Children's Bible Club for the younger ones in the CPRC during the week.

New Season

On returning to Northern Ireland, I began a new series on "The Man of Sin" in II Thessalonians 2. The five sermons so far are entitled "An End Times Error," "Christ's Coming Is Not Imminent," "The Falling Away and the Man of Sin," "The Man of Sin and the Objects of Worship," and "The Man of Sin and the Temple of God" (www.cprf.co.uk/audio/NTseries.htm). The series has been receiving a lot of interest, especially on YouTube, with the CPRC channel doing very well of late (www.youtube.com/cprcni).

Our new church season started on the week beginning 1 September. Most of the catechism classes are on Monday nights. This year we have ten students, with two of them being new catechumens. Some of the younger ones are pictured below.



Our Tuesday morning subject is "Christ's Controversies" with the Jewish religious leaders in the four gospel accounts. On what topics was there formal agreement between the Lord and the Pharisees and Sadducees? What were the issues they debated? Which were the biggest or most frequent subjects on which they crossed swords? How large a part were they in His ministry? How are they related to His condemnation and crucifixion? Who started the controversies? How did they begin? How did Christ debate? What sorts of arguments did He use? How do His controversies compare to those of biblical figures (like Jeremiah or Paul)

or those in church history? And what can we learn from all this for our theological controversies and witness today? What are the issues in our day? Are they the same as or different from the topics Christ debated? What can we learn from our Saviour's example as to how we should argue for His truth?

Our fourth year of Wednesday night *Belgic Confession* classes returned to Article 21 on "Christ's Atonement." In our first two weeks, we have analysed and criticised seven major (false) theories of the atonement: the Ransom-to-Satan, Moral, Example, Abandonment, Mystical, Governmental, and Vicarious Repentance theories (www.cprf.co.uk/audio/belgicconfessionclass.htm). Next week, we shall consider the key biblical components of the true doctrine of our Saviour's cross. Seeing the falsity and poverty of the heretical views is very helpful in grasping the truth and power of the Reformed faith!

B. B. Warfield rightly states that the modern heresies regarding Christ's atonement proceed from a false and pagan (!) view of the universal love of some vague benevolent deity:

To such a pass have we been brought by the prevailing gospel of the indiscriminate love of God. For it is here that we place our finger on the root of the whole modern assault upon the doctrine of an expiatory atonement. In the attempt to give effect to the conception of indiscriminate and indiscriminating love as the basal fact of religion, the entire Biblical teaching as to atonement has been ruthlessly torn up.... Our modern theorizers are never weary of ringing the changes on this single fundamental idea.... God is continually reaching longing arms out of heaven toward men: oh, if men would only let themselves be gathered unto the Father's eager heart! ... And the indiscriminate benevolencism which has taken captive so much of the religious thinking of our time is a conception not native to Christianity, but of distinctly heathen quality. As one reads the pages of popular religious literature, teeming as it is with ill-considered assertions of the general Fatherhood of God, he has an odd feeling of transportation back into the atmosphere of, say, the decadent heathenism of the fourth and fifth centuries, when the gods were dying, and there was left to those who would fain cling to the old ways little beyond a somewhat saddened sense of the *benignitas numinis* [i.e., a benign or kind or benevolent

divinity]. The *benignitas numinis*! How studded the pages of those genial old heathen are with the expression; how suffused their repressed life is with the conviction that the kind Deity that dwells above will surely not be hard on men toiling here below! How shocked they are at the stern righteousness of the Christian's God, who loomed before their startled eyes as He looms before those of the modern poet in no other light than as "the hard God that dwelt in Jerusalem"! (*Works*, vol. 9, pp. 293-295).

This was written over a century ago and now, sadly, that erroneous view of a universal divine love is even more deeply rooted in our age! These grand subjects—the atonement, Christ's controversies, and the Man of Sin—make for a lot of research for the various meetings but it is enriching work.

The Ladies' Bible study and the Men's Bible study are led by members of the congregation. They meet periodically on Fridays and Saturdays to discuss the women of the Old Testament (using Abraham Kuyper's book) and Ezra (using Prof. Gritters' study guide), respectively.

All sorts of people make time to do all sorts of things, if they really want to. If folk can go to sewing classes or sports activities each week through the year, why should the Christian not attend church meetings through the week? Let me encourage you to go to a Bible study or doctrine class or discussion group in your church, and then keep attending through the year. It is of great help in growing in the truth of God's Word, it encourages your fellow saints (whereas your absence discourages them), and it sets a good example especially for your children in catechism classes, for they see their parents going to and enjoying church activities through the week, leading them to become active adult members when they grow older.

Others

Rev. J. Y. Paulraj of Vellore, India, with whom Georgetown PRC works, notified us of his trip to the British Isles, including a few days in Northern Ireland, so we asked him to give a PowerPoint presentation after our Sunday evening service (8 September). The two Ballymena papers published the article I sent them about his missionary talk and several visitors attended through this. It was good to meet him and have him with us. His speech was

very interesting, and the video should soon be on-line (www.youtube.com/cprcni).



Rev. Paulraj and Rev. Stewart

Twenty more articles were added to our translation webpage (www.cprf.co.uk/languages.htm): 6 Hungarian (by Balint and Ferenc, a new helper from Romania), 5 Hiligaynon (a new translator, Praiseel Rose Corpus, is working in this language used in parts of the Philippines), 4 Italian (including “Justification: The Heart of the Gospel,” a 44-page pamphlet produced by Holland PRC containing three conference speeches), 2 Spanish (by translators in Canada and Cuba), 1 Portuguese (by a lady in Brazil), 1 Russian (by a new translator, Roman Turenko, in Nizhni Novgorod), and 1 Ambonese Malay (we now have the *Apostles' Creed* in this Indonesian language).

The Reformed Worldview has received a couple of reviews in the British Christian press. An *Evangelical Times* article by an advocate of common grace was inaccurate and negative

(May, 2013). Despite this, it generated a couple of sales of *The Reformed Worldview* and stirred up another man to commend it in the *British Church Newspaper* (12 July), resulting in a good number of copies of the book going forth (www.cprf.co.uk/bookstore/reformedworldview.html). It is said that there is no such thing as bad publicity!

Plans for next summer's British Reformed Fellowship (BRF) Conference are progressing. We plan to have the booking forms available before the end of the year. In the meantime, the BRF website has all the information one should need at this stage, including conference venue, dates (26 July – 2 August, 2014), speech titles, and prices (www.britishreformedfellowship.org.uk/index.php/conferences/upcoming).

We will be travelling to Grand Rapids on Monday, 14 October, with Rev. Martyn McGeown and Marco Barone of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship for the Heidelberg Catechism conference in Hudsonville PRC later that week. Lord willing, we will see some of you there!

May the Lord grant you all zeal and steadfastness this new church season so that we all grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Him,
Pastor and Mary Stewart