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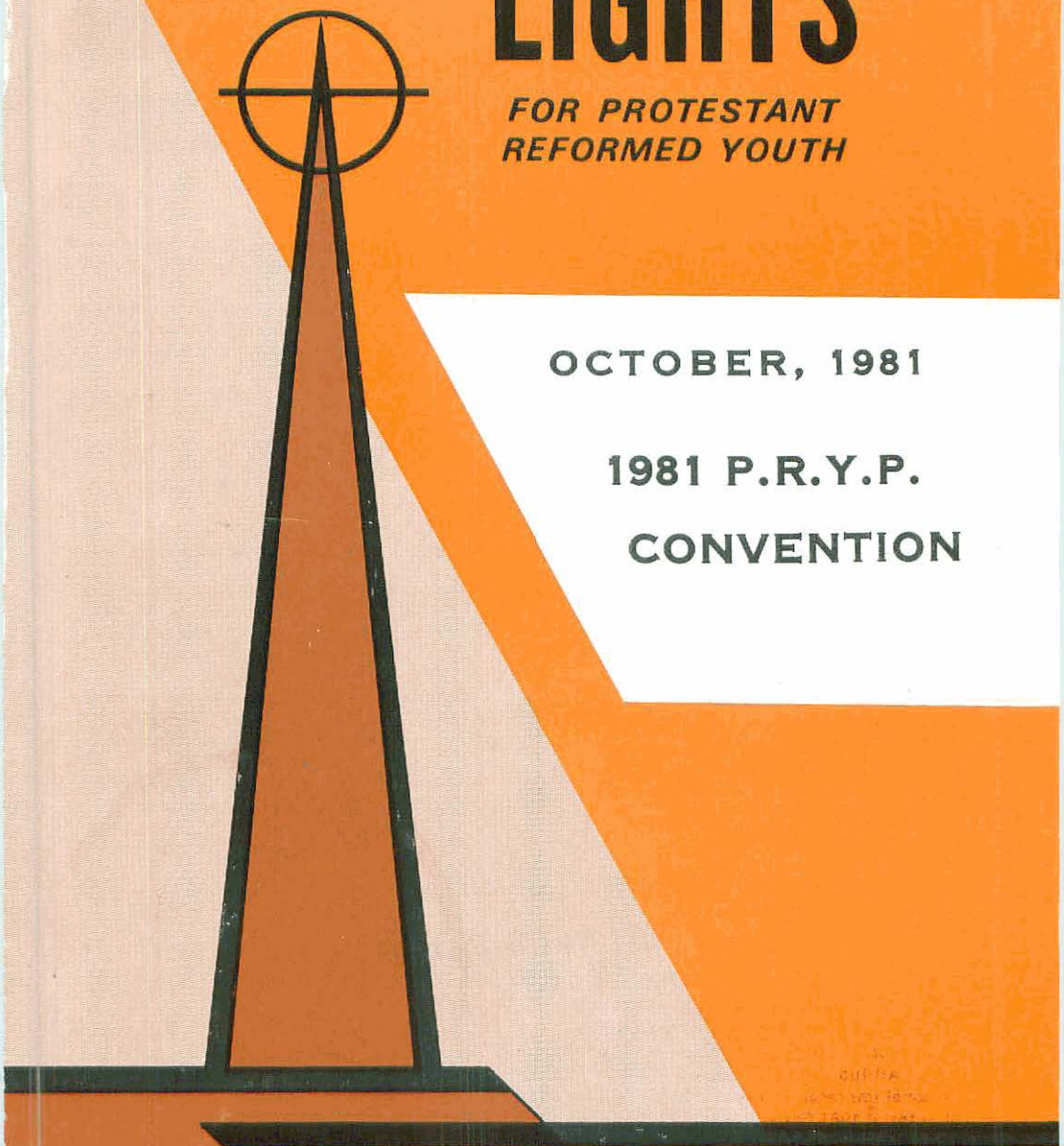
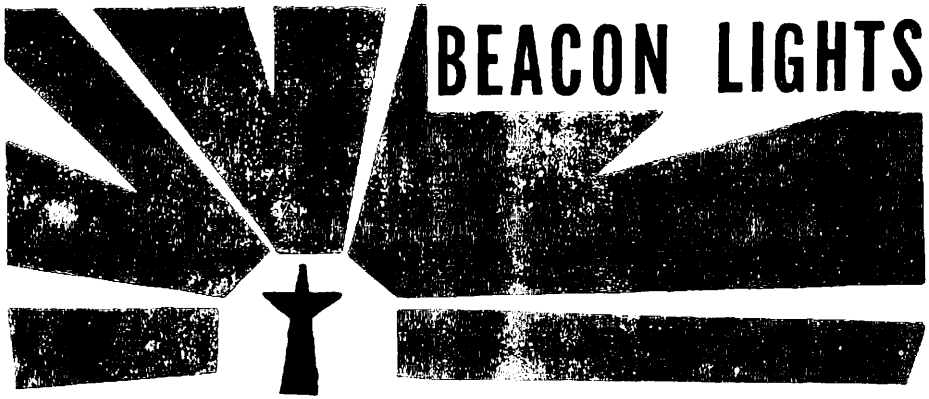


OCTOBER, 1981

1981 P.R.Y.P. CONVENTION



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CONVENTION SPEECHES
THEME: SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Signs in the World

by Prof. Robert D. Decker

As a boy I recall that from time to time my pastors: H. Hoeksema and C. Hanko would preach on the last things. They would preach about the signs of Christ's coming and about the Antichrist and the persecution during the great tribulation. And I was frightened by it all. Rev. Hoeksema used to say from the pulpit that he hoped he would still be living in those days but I fervently hoped I would not! I dare say you share some of those same fears. That's why I'm glad for the opportunity to speak on this subject. Jesus knows our fears. That's why He said: "See that ye be not troubled." We have nothing to fear and every reason to rejoice.

The occasion for these words of Jesus is found in verses 1-3 of Matthew 24. Jesus and the disciples are near the temple when Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple. Then they went to the Mount of Olives. The disciples ask: "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming?" The rest of the passage is Jesus' answer to their question. Jesus explains that the destruction of the temple is a picture of the end of the world. What we have then in this chapter are the signs of Christ's coming and of the end of the world. We shall consider the beginning of those signs, those which occur in the world. They are wars and rumor of war, earthquakes, famine, pestilence and abounding lawlessness. The Lord speaks of these in verses 6-8 and 12.

Let us consider first what these signs are. Jesus tells us they are wars and rumors of war. It was a time of peace when Jesus spoke these words. It was a peace enforced by Rome's military might, but peace nonetheless. Jesus said that's going to change. The disciples were on the verge of hearing of wars and rumors of wars. In the very near future they would hear of these. How true these words of Jesus are. There have been thousands of wars since that time. In Europe there have been three hundred wars in the past three hundred years. The world of the twentieth century witnessed two terrible world wars in which millions were slaughtered. Six million Jews died in the second world war alone. Then there were the Korean and Vietnam wars. And we hear of wars and rumors of war today. Ireland is wracked by conflict, Russia invaded Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq are at war. There is revolution in Poland. The Arab-Israeli world is a virtual time bomb which could explode at any moment and at the slightest provocation. The world is simply an armed camp. The world is armed to the teeth with all kinds of sophisticated weaponry, to say

nothing of the utterly fearful nuclear weapon. The world has the capability of destroying itself with the push of a button in a matter of moments.

But there's more. Wars will continue and increase. Nations shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. War has characterized the entire history of the world. That will continue and increase. Jesus said so. And our Lord told us these are a sign of His coming and of the end of the world.

But there are more signs in the world. There shall be famines. Thousands die from starvation. Children with bloated bellies go to sleep hungry every night. A recent newspaper reported that ten thousand people, most of them children die of hunger per day. There shall be pestilences. Think of the destruction of crops by insects. There are diseases of every sort. Heart disease and cancer kill thousands every day. There are earthquakes in diverse places. How true! They cause untold damage to property and loss of life and injuries. Scientists predict many more and worry about the severity of them. Jesus spoke too of abounding iniquity. Iniquity is literally lawlessness. The word refers to contempt for the law, wilfull violation of the law. That abounds and increases. This too is perfectly obvious in today's world. Prisons are filled to overflowing and they can't build new ones fast enough. In Michigan the problem is so severe that the state wants to release prisoners early. Crime in spite of men's best efforts increases. When we lived in South Holland the Chicago police called the Cabrini-Green housing project, "the war zone." Many streets in our cities are unsafe at any hour of the day or night. But there's still more! How many thousands of babies are murdered in cold blood before they see the light of day!? Think of the pornography, prostitution, gambling, and homosexuality in our world. It's enough to make the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah blush. Drug addiction and drunkenness are problems of huge proportions.

How are all these to be explained? Not as natural occurrences. They don't just happen. They are not to be explained in terms of Political Science or the principles of Sociology. There is no natural explanation which accounts for them.

That's what sinful man thinks. He thinks that man is in control. He measures the force of earthquakes with his seismograph. He forecasts volcanoes like Mt. St. Helens. He spins his theories of world economics to prevent famine and has all kinds of measures to prevent pestilence. With his diplomacy man attempts to end the wars and tensions among the nations. None of this is the answer. At bottom it's utterly futile. Wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes and lawlessness continue and abound.

But Jesus has the answer! "All these things *must* come to pass." Literally Jesus says: it is necessary that these things become. That's a divine necessity. No matter what man thinks or does these things *must* happen. Nothing will stop them or even cause them to slow down. It is necessary that these things become. God said it is necessary. This is divine necessity. God brings these things. God has determined that His kingdom will come in the way of all these things. That's His eternal counsel in Christ Jesus.

What must be our attitude towards all these things? Jesus tells us, and He uses very strong language. "See!" He says. Take note of this! Know this! Our Lord means to emphasize this very, very strongly. One commentator put it nicely when he wrote: "Look out for wars but do not be scared out of your wits by them." This is what Jesus is saying to us. "See, that ye be not troubled." To be troubled is to be alarmed, to be paralyzed with fear and to cry out in terror. The Lord says: "See that ye be not terrified by these things."

Make no mistake these things are terrifying! Think of the terrors of war. Who knows the terror of many millions of war victims and soldiers since these words were spoken? Who can measure the screams as troops and tanks and guns roar through village and countryside or as the bombers devastate cities and towns. Think of the screams of a mother who has just seen her child burned to a crisp or blown to bits! That's war. Go to the hospital and hear the moans and cries of the sick. Witness the fears of the dying. The examples could be multiplied. There is no way one can calculate the terror caused by earthquake and storm. The suffering caused by all these things is simply beyond comprehension. In the face of all these things Jesus says: "See that ye be not troubled."

Why not? The answer is all these things must come to pass but the end is not yet. These are signs of the end of the world. But there's more that has to happen before the end comes. God has determined these things as signs of the final revelation of His glory in Jesus Christ. We must know that. We must be sober and watch and pray. When we see these things we must realize our God is at work bringing the coming of Christ and the end of the world.

All these are the beginning of sorrows. Literally Jesus says these are the beginning of birth pangs. The end is not yet but these signs tells us that the beginning of the end is at hand. Other signs must follow until finally Antichrist comes. And when the gospel shall have been preached to the ends of the world then shall the end come. But these signs: war, earthquake, famine and the rest are the beginning of birth pangs. Just as birth pangs tell us that the birth of the child is very near so these signs tell us that the end of the world and the birth of the new world are very near.

Therefore do not be terrified! Rejoice and be very glad! Christ is coming in great power and glory. We are more than conquerers through Him that loved us.

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Signs in the Church

by Rev. K. Koole

Let me begin by saying that I appreciate the choice of the theme — Signs of the Time. This shows that you as Young People are aware of the dreadful evil of our times, and that you take the nearness of Christ's coming seriously. That is a good sign. Especially, I appreciate the topic assigned to myself — Signs in the Church. Every minister would covet speaking on that topic. As undershepherds of Christ's flock the condition of the church in our day is of special concern to us.

We speak of serious things, things which involve the name of our God and His truth. And from many points of view we speak of grevious matters, matters which have eternal consequences for those who may be close to us. The Christian Church of our day is in a dreadful state. This is true both with respect to her preachers and her hearers, both with respect to doctrine and to walk of life. She is in the midst of a great apostacy, a departure from the truth.

As we look at the signs in the church which speak of imminent judgment we want to look at them from the point of view of both the pulpit and the pew. Christ speaks of both in Matthew 24. In verse 11 he states "And many false prophets shall rise." That is the pulpit. In verse 12 he states, "The love of many shall wax cold." That is the pew. The apostle Peter speaks of both in I Peter 2:1,2. There he speaks of false teachers "who shall privily bring in damnable heresy," (referring to the pulpit), and also warns that "many shall follow their pernicious ways;" (referring to the pew). Apostacy involves both the pulpit and the pew. We shall look at each in turn and also see their relationship to each other.

We must begin by examining the pulpit, the preaching, because that is where apostacy begins through heresy. It begins with wolves in sheep's clothing who seek to scatter the flock. The question is, where does one start one's examination? The pulpits are ripe with false doctrine. Heresies are coming so thick and fast, two by two as it were, that one can not even keep abreast of developments. If we were to try tonight to deal with every species of heresy we would soon have enough material to fill Noah's ark. The church is being drowned in a deluge, a flood of false doctrine. As Christ stated, "MANY false prophets shall rise." Indeed they have risen. Their name is Legion, though they say that their name is Reformed, and Christian, and Protestant. In the name of Christ protestant preachers call into question everything from creation to the resurrection, and deny everything from Total Depravity to the Virgin Birth. Yet they claim to be Christians, and are horrified if you call them

false prophets and declare that they teach "doctrines of devils". They assure you that it is not so. Rather they do this as service to the Lord, and in the best interests of the church. With such men protestant churches have to deal.

The great problem and evil of our day is that Protestant pulpits are filled with Pontius Pilots. Ministers have assented to the murder of the truth, and then have piously washed their hands of the deed. Have they not simply given the people what they have been clamoring for? The reoccuring question raised on Protestant pulpits is the same as Pilot's cynical response to Christ on trial, namely, "What is truth?" They ask this question while looking directly at the Word of God! Men ordained to point to Christ as the way, the truth, and the life, who are called to declare "Thy word is truth.", and that the truth shall set men free, ask "*What is Truth?*"!

Protestant theologians, at least, used to hold up the Bible in response to that question and say, "Here is *THE TRUTH*! It is that from cover to cover. It is the infallible, inerrant, inspired, and perspicuous word of God. It is the absolute standard of all spiritual reality, the compendium of our faith, and the only standard by which we must live." Such Protestant theologians once declared. No longer! Now the Bible is simply one perspective of the truth, (of which there are many), as seen through the slanted eyes of ancient men. Therefore, it is historically inaccurate, scientifically primative, and morally out of date. Protestant men, mind you, say that of the Holy Scriptures. Sons of the very churches which were unshakled from Rome by an insistance upon Scripture's ultimate authority over every tradition of men, now despise that very scripture. And they work the hardest to undermine its trust-worthiness.

The upshot of the matter is that the Christian church is not to imagine that it has an absolute standard of truth in its hands. We are to approach the Bible not with child-like faith, but with the scepticism of the scholar. We are told that to confess "sola scriptura" is not of the spirit of Christian love, but is religious bigotry. No wonder thousands upon thousands turn to the sects and cults. They at least claim to have absolute standards of truth. People feel more secure in these states of pretended certainty than in the pews of hesitant Christianity.

Things are bad in protestantism today. How bad? Things are so bad in many protestant churches that on such vital truths as the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, and the fact of the resurrection, and on such practical issues as divorce and remarriage, and abortion, we find ourselves to be more in agreement with Rome than with many so called protestants. If that does not show how far things have slipped, nothing will. Protestants make Rome look almost orthodox at times. I say this not out of any admiration for Rome, who remains as idolitrous as ever, but to show how bad things are. It is an utterly astounding thing. Protestants have gone farther in the way of heretical teachings than Rome. They dare to deny doctrines of the Scriptures and the ancient creeds that even Rome does not.

The Reformation sufficed to cause a re-formation of the church in Luther's day, a cleansing and a rededication to the truth. I will make so bold as to say that there is no reformation that can revitalize the apostate church of our day.

In Luther's day members of the Roman Catholic church could be revitalized because they lived in ignorance of the Scriptures. The Word was deliberately kept from them. But once the scriptures were preached to them, their eyes were opened, and they saw the Light. Such is not the case today. Ignorance of a different sort characterizes people today, a willful ignorance. Men know about the truth, and they despise it. They are a people who seeing, see not, and who hearing, hear not. They are a people whose "heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest at any time . . . they should be converted." (Matt. 13:15) There is only one cleansing that remains for the apostate church of our day, namely, a being rooted up, cast out, and burned.

Such is the bitter fruit of the teaching of the false prophets. They have brought in damnable heresy, devil contrived doctrines, and so as Peter states in II Peter 2:1,2, "They bring on themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; whose . . . damnation slumbereth not."

So one certain sign of the church's ripening for final judgment is her pulpit's deceitful and wicked denial of Scripture's infallibility as well as of its authority.

Today the Devil adds mischief to evil not by keeping Scripture from men, but by printing such a bewildering variety of translations, so called, and of paraphrases that men become confused as to what God's word really does say. The Devil uses men who play fast and loose with Bible translation. Thus he sows seeds of confusion. That's his mischief. And by means of these unfaithful "translations" false prophets can deny every fundamental doctrine and find support for every false one.

Young People, be not deceived. You have an excellent translation in the King James Version. It is the best available by a long shot. They say it is not clear. Of course not, not if you do not study it. It is perfectly clear if you read it enough to become familiar with it. It omits no true doctrine, it supports no false one. Make it your companion. Knowledge of this faithful translation is your best defense against heretics.

Do not forget, heretics are always to be found in the church, seeking to deceive God's people. They are many and persistant. Heretics are not always so blatant and forward in their propogation of false doctrine. At first they creep in unawares, privily, secretly bringing in damnable heresy, as the Apostle Peter states. They even use Reformed language at first. Ask them whether they maintain the Sovereignty of God and salvation all of grace, and they will answer, "Oh, of course." And they will speak of justification and the atonement too. They have a reformed vocabulary, but they are deceitful.

Let us use an example. It is common for theologians to speak of God's Sovereignty and even to use the word "election". But, they will not speak of Double Predestination, namely, of election *and* reprobation, the eternal decree of damnation. They want election without reprobation. And so, accordingly, they have manufactured a one-sided coin. It is a trick worthy of Houdini. That is exactly what it is, a trick, a deception. It is counterfeit, and must be viewed

as such. Many have bought it and have been deceived. It is worthless. Be not deceived. Such men speak of God's Sovereignty in salvation, but really they teach a salvation by the will of man. And their God is a God desiring the salvation of all, though all are not saved. Such an election is without power.

So heretics speak the language of the church, and people are deceived by the millions. Be not deceived. Inquire more closely as to their precise meaning. Make them define their terms, and then compare those with the definitions of the creeds. Then they will be exposed. That is why heretics hate the creeds. The creeds make clear how reformed terms are to be defined and interpreted. Heretics are then exposed for what they are, wolves in sheep clothing, as prophets devoid of the true words of God. For that reason you must know the creeds, to make heretic's work of deception that much more difficult.

We turn now to the pew.

We must understand that not only do false prophets bear responsibility for the apostacy evident in protestant churches of our day, but the pew also bears great responsibility. There is no apostacy, unless the pew co-operates. False prophets can not flourish in a church where they get no hearing, where the pew protests immediately, (not two or three generations down the line), and where the elders are zealous to discipline. Apostacy is nipped in the bud where there is a zealous love for the truth, where members care more about the truth than about the feelings of nice men. After all, heretics are always nice men, men with attractive personalities and smooth of speech. They have the heart of a wolf, but, remember they have the demeanor of a sheep. Beware!

The point is, in our day the pew supports and encourages false prophets. They like men who say what they want to hear. They do not like men like the bold Elijah, or the persistant Jeremiah. They do not like men like the staunch Athenasius, or the crusty Gomarus (foe of Arminius), or like our blunt old Ophoff. Such men put the truth before popularity. Rather the pew likes men who speak soothing words, who have a certain sophistication, men who are more concerned with a following than about principle. They like men who hurt no one's feelings, men who seek to convict no one of the guilt of sins. Such men the pew welcomes more and more in our day.

Christ, of course, predicted this. He stated, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Jesus is talking about members of the Christian church. *Their* love waxes cold, their love for the truth, for God's name, and for their being subject to His good commandments. That's how it is today. Iniquity abounds and people are numb to it and are numbed by it. People of the church become so engrossed with the pleasures of worldly entertainment and business that their flame sputters. In a few generations it goes out completely. Their love for God and truth is blown cold by the icy blasts of worldliness. And as their love for God's word flickers and wanes false prophets multiply like rabbits, wax bold as lions, and like dragons dare to expound bigger and bigger lies, denying the most fundamental truths. And people swallow them whole. This appeals to them.

This should not come as a surprise. Paul forwarned Timothy, "the time

will come when they will not endure sound doctrine." (II Timothy 4:3) Paul is warning of coming apostacy in the pew. Apostacy begins with a generation that is indifferent to spiritual things, both in doctrine and in walk. They are permissive. They are willing to put up with a little heresy. After all, it is not worth splitting over. They just hope it goes away of itself. But it never does. A little leven leaveneth the whole lump.

In time there comes a generation whose souls are absolutely vexed by sound doctrine. They simply can not endure it. It sets their teeth on edge. So they shut their pulpits to those who preach the truth. They develop what Paul calls "itching ears." They are not content to hear the old ways declared, but their ears itch for something new and astonishing. So they heap to themselves false teachers. They want their ears continually scratched with original ideas. They abhor expository preaching, it is too serious and boring. They want to be entertained by famous names and big productions. In a word, they want their senses stimulated, rather than their hearts. The bigger the lie, the better. They have no appetite for the truth at all. They find it revolting.

Such we see happening today. The words of Jeremiah 5:30,31 are most appropriate. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, . . . and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" Notice, that God states that His people love to have it so! Remember these words were spoken shortly before God sent judgment upon Judah by the hands of the Babylonians. So in our day we prophecy of the judgment God will send upon the church which loves false prophets.

Now what we must do is apply this to ourselves. We must not simply look elsewhere. What we must remember is that apostacy starts out rather innocently, almost without notice. It starts simply with the loss of the First Love. A people lose their first love. They take the truth for granted. Being careless they slip and fall on the ice of 'indifference', and then slide down the hill-side of 'worldliness', and finally plunge over the precipice of 'apostacy' and 'heresy' to their destruction. Loss of one's First Love is no little matter. John's words to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:4,5 states, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast lost thy first love. Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Notice, the loss of the First Love ends in nothing less than the removal of the candlestick, which is the preaching of God's word. So serious is that first step of losing one's First Love. The only remedy is heart-felt repentance.

These words especially are to be applied to us as Protestant Reformed. I fear we are losing our first love. We must take heed. We must always be governed by the spirit of repentance. Apostacy is never far from the pulpit. Neither is it from the pew. It is as close as our own hearts. Does the love of the truth there burn steadily, or does it flicker?

In this connection, remember also that the pulpit is, in our age, under tremendous pressure from the pew. Do not underestimate pew pressure. Do

not underestimate your influence for good or evil. The strongest willed preacher and best intentioned minister can cave into it. Think, for instance, of Aaron, who gave Israel the golden calf because they pressured him so at the foot of Sinai. Think as well of the bold Apostle Peter who, we are told in Acts, withdrew himself from the gentile Christians because of the displeasure expressed by circumcised Christians. He buckled under their pressure, and went against his own better judgment. Paul had to rebuke him.

I say again, do not underestimate pew pressure nor your influence. It can affect the preaching for good or evil. You have clout. Why do you think that when I made this speech I was so conscious of the clock? Because in 50 minutes you can become restless, turn me off, and make me feel very uncomfortable. That happens in church too. People give you 45-50 minutes to say what you have to say, and then the Spirit had better stop inspiring. Their patience runs out. Now that is pew pressure in a minor way. But the point is, it is always there, and ministers are conscious of it.

It takes a tremendous amount of grace for preachers for the sake of principle to resist the pressure of the pew. Not guts mind you, but it takes grace and conviction. You do not always find that conviction in preachers. May God grant that it may continue to be found in our ministers. And may you as pew encourage them, not by a slap on the back, but by taking heed to the word preached. That is the greatest encouragement.

In conclusion I want to deal with the sign of 'betrayal' as this is mentioned by Christ in Matthew 24:9,10. Verse 10 reads, "And then shall many be offended and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another." Christ is speaking here of the Great Tribulation as that was to be foreshadowed by the persecution that would break out upon the Jews and the Christians in the days of the Caesars. Betrayal is part of persecution.

What is striking is that Christ does not warn of persecution at the hands of the world, but he warns us that it will come from an unexpected direction, from within the church itself. Those whom you consider to be brothers and sisters in the Lord will betray you. Those whom the truth offends will turn against the faithful. Christian will be betrayed by Christian. There shall arise many Judas Iscariots, so cold shall the love of some be. Those whom you thought to be sheep will be wolves in whose hearts lurk the bitterest hatred.

One may ask, what sign is there of that today? We are not persecuted as yet, (though some in the world taste it already). Yet it is closer than we might tend to think, and there are more signs than we may at first imagine.

Betrayal takes its initial form in what we may call 'peer pressure'. Young people certainly know what it means to be subjected to peer pressure. It is the pressure to conform to the dominant group, to do as everyone else is doing, in dress, in speech, in behavior. If you resist conformity, you are threatened with being excluded and scorned. You are in a word, weird.

What ought to be of special concern in this connection is that often you find peer pressure displayed in Protestant Reformed circles. Young people know of that. Some young people may fear to act modest and upright because

others may sneer at them, or at least give you the cold shoulder. Because they participate in discussions, have devotions, and obey the campus rules, others say of them, "What an odd ball. Who's going to hang around that kind of person? He or she is not our kind." That is peer pressure, and that is betrayal by those with whom one ought to have the most in common. That is a form of the persecution of which Jesus was talking about. Let us examine ourselves and our attitudes towards our fellow Christians.

Furthermore, young people, this peer pressure does not end when one becomes an adult. If anything, it intensifies, though you may be better able to deal with it as an adult. The pressure of society upon the God-fearing Christian to conform to society's norms is immense. What is more it is having its devastating effect. For instance, the charge is frequently leveled at the Christian church that she has been guilty of discrimination against women. As a result the church has hastily opened her offices to women. This against the clear teaching of the scriptures. So the church surrenders to the pressure. She dances to the tune piped by the world.

All this raises the spector of betrayal. It is the power of peer pressure that causes people to dissociate themselves from those with whom they were once allied, and even to denounce them.

This, I am convinced, is one of the primary reasons why there is so much bad theology among protestant theologians in our day. Protestant theologians are in a mad rush to dissociate themselves from historical Calvinism. Their reputation in the scholarly world is at stake. They do not want to be labeled as narrow-minded Calvinists. They do not want to be put in the catagory of unscientific, Bible-believing primatives, nor of 'puritan prudes' who have a seventeenth century morality. Those are names that break their bones. Because of the bad press true Calvinism receives, many protestant theologians are in whole-sale retreat from that doctrine.

The result of this is that theologians in circles reputed to be Calvinistic are shouting at the top of their lungs, "Oh no! We do not believe in that old fashioned Calvinism. We are too advanced. It is those people over there who still have that dangerous sixteenth and seventeenth century mentality. But we assure you that we have forsaken those positions long ago. Calvin is being re-interpreted."

Such men frantically wave the white flag of common-grace for all to see. It is the white flag of surrender. It announces that there is yet divine reason for allegiance with the world. They assure the world that they preach no form of discrimination, not even creedal. All are welcomed under their banner.

What ultimately happens is that those who have dissociated themselves from true Calvinism begin to point the finger. They say to the world, "Here we will show you who really believe what you wrongly accuse us of maintaining." And do you know at whom the finger begins to point? At those who are labeled 'Hyper-Calvinists'. They are those who maintain 'double-predestination'; who speak of the jealous God who hates wickedness and judges the wicked; who refuse to join efforts to unite the world in earthly peace, but who rather speak

of the antithesis; and more and more, those who deny the free offer. Do you recognize yourself? Such protestant Calvinists offend. Such other protestants hate for giving them a bad name. Such others will gladly betray. And such will know what it is to suffer for Christ's sake. That, Christ assures us, is to be our lot in the future.

Young people, assess yourselves; assess your love for the truth. Are you hot? cold? or just luke-warm? Know your calling. Count the cost. Keeping the word of God is going to cost you dearly, maybe your all. But what means more to you? Your name? or Christ's name and your soul? Do not listen to the siren call of the world. Do not give space to Pontius Pilots on your pulpits. Do not act like Judas Iscariots. Be faithful Disciples.

Christ Jesus promises, "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." (Matt. 24:13) It will take endurance, spiritual stamina. It will take much grace. God grant you that irresistible grace. Take your stand on the truth, for indeed, the truth shall set you free. Yours is the crown of glory.

Purpose or Calling

by Rev. Wayne Bekkering

The passage that I want to call your attention to is found in Luke 21:34-36. "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

These words of Jesus are sobering words. They are words that ought to make us sit up and take notice. They are words that ought to call us to examine ourselves in the light of the theme that you have chosen for the Convention. These are words that ought to make us ask, "How are we doing in light of this truth of the Word of God?"

Do you find the subject of the "Signs of the Times" to be interesting? Do you view these things with a sort of intellectual curiosity or a spiritual concern? Let us look at the reason why Jesus gives us these signs. We can find it stated in verse 34, "Take heed to yourselves lest . . . that day come upon you unawares." These words bring before our minds the staggering concept of standing in that last day before the Son of man.

As Reformed people we are loath to present the truth of the Word of God

in such a way that would tend to scare people out of hell, and scare them into heaven. That does no good anyway, because if one has no heart for the truth of God all the scare tactics of men and preachers are of no avail. Men can tremble for a little while, but when the moment passes they fall back into their old ways again.

We want to emphasize from the outset that as God's people we do not stand on shaky ground. We have a mighty and an unshakable foundation in the unchangeable, eternal election of God. We therefore stand on the rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ. We must not let the consideration of the signs of the times shake us in our confidence in God's great and free salvation. We must let nothing shake us; no man, no thing that happens round about us, nay, even when we see the stars fall from heaven and the moon turns to blood and the sun no longer gives its light. When these things begin to come to pass Jesus tells us to lift up your heads because your redemption draweth nigh. Yet Jesus says, "take heed to yourselves."

The literal meaning of "take heed" is, "take hold of yourself alongside." Perhaps it means something like when we say, "Get a hold of yourself." Jesus says, "Get ahold of yourself, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life."

The concept that is on the fore in this text is our *hearts*. Our hearts are important. Our minds are important and our bodies are important, but especially are our hearts important. Young people you have good minds and strong bodies. You study to train your minds and you exercise to strengthen your bodies. That is all right, but don't forget your hearts. Our hearts are important because they are the very center of our spiritual lives. In our hearts God performs the miracle of regeneration. Through our hearts we are bound to God in a spiritual relationship through Jesus Christ. Even as we grow intellectually, we grow physically and we also grow spiritually through the work that God has implanted in our hearts by His incorruptible seed.

We may wonder why Jesus directs this weighty admonition to our hearts. The Word of God tells us that the heart is very deceitful, and that means my heart, and that means your heart as well. That is why Jesus says to us, "take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged."

The idea of the word "overcharged" in our text means to be weighed down. It means to be so influenced by the things that follow in the text-surfeiting, drunkenness and the cares of life, that our hearts become covered. The life and testimony of our hearts can become smothered to one degree or another if we are involved in surfeiting, drunkenness and the cares of this life. This is a serious matter, that is why Jesus Himself warns us lest at any time *your* hearts become overcharged. If that happens then that day comes upon you unawares.

The word "surfeiting" is a rather broad word and encompasses all forms of immoderation and excess. The root idea of this word pictures the sick feeling one has after he has indulged himself. Surfeiting means to misuse God's good gifts in such a way that we give ourselves to follow the lusts of our flesh.

Surfeiting can apply to many areas of our lives; whether that be food or drink; whether that be in squandering our time and our energy.

Surfeiting pictures a situation in which one misuses things in such a way that he immerses himself in lustful excess. In immersing oneself in these things the testimony of ones heart is covered over, layer by layer, and if one does not get ahold of oneself his heart is overcharged.

We might like to take the position that this cannot really apply to us as Protestant Reformed young people. This might be a good word to describe what goes on out there where there is no fear of God, where they don't get together for a Christian young people's convention, where they don't honor the Lord's Day, where they take God's name in vain, where there is all sorts of partying; surfeiting must certainly mean that. It does mean that, of course, but we must see from the context that Jesus addresses this word to the church. He addresses this word to you and me, in the interest of our hearts. Take heed to yourselves!

Each one of us has our lusts. If we allow our lusts to have free reign in our lives we become so immersed in the pursuit that the end will surely be that our hearts are overcharged. Then the testimony of God's work in us becomes so shrouded with the carnal cares and desires of the lusts of the flesh that the witness of our hearts is all but silenced. But not entirely if we are children of God. Yet we must watch. We must not sit back and be carnally secure and say, "Oh, this can't happen to me". It can. Jesus knows. Jesus knows our hearts. Jesus says to us, "take ahold of yourselves." Look at yourself! Are there things in your life that are of such a character that they involve you to the point that your hearts are overcharged with surfeiting?

In our text Jesus uses another word that raises a matter of grave concern and that is drunkenness. It is interesting to note that Jesus does not include drunkenness in the category of surfeiting. Surfeiting is a broad enough term for that, but Jesus choses to distinguish drunkenness from general careless living. Was drunkenness a problem in the church of Jesus' day? Too much wine is literally the meaning of the word. Because wine was the drink in those days, which if misused could intoxicate men. The word could certainly mean in our day, too much beer or too much whiskey. It is not difficult to see why Jesus especially distinguishes drunkenness, is it? What is it that more quickly renders us spiritually insensitive to the things that we do, think and say than drunkenness? This is a serious matter. So serious that Jesus says that no drunkard shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Drunkenness is a serious matter for young people. It is a serious matter for our older people also. All together we ought to take heed to ourselves lest at any time the witness of our hearts become so layered over with these things that we can easily stray and walk in the way of spiritual - moral carelessness and sin.

The cares of this life is the third area of examination that Jesus points out. The idea of this phrase is "anxiety". Those things that so affect us that we get up tight over them. Parents become concerned and anxious about different things than young people do. What are the anxieties of young people? What

are the things that make you up-tight? What are the things that you would not be caught dead doing or not doing? What are the things that are really important to you? What kind of clothes you wear? The places that you go on dates? Your friends, your hairdo or your car? Who says that these things are important? Let us be honest! Does not our peer group? Peer pressure is real, awfully real, and it involves the cares of this life.

With respect to the cares of this life Jesus warns, "Take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be overcharged." Lest the way of God's Word and righteousness become so distant to us because the cares of this life are so real. The cares of this life can do that to you. They can make the spiritual life of our hearts seem so far away, so unimportant. But these other things that the kids see — they become so important to us.

Jesus says, "take heed to yourselves:" Who is your master? Who is the lord of your heart? Who stands in the day of judgment to answer for you? Do your friends? No, each one of us stands personally and spiritually responsible before God.

It is so easy for us to get caught up with the current of things and drift along. Whereas the Word of God calls us to take hold of ourselves. To do that is very difficult. I know that, you know that. Because to take hold of ourselves means to go against the current — to go against our flesh. To go against our flesh is hard, but the question is, does it go against our hearts? Take heed to yourselves with respect to these things!

The seriousness of this warning comes to light as Jesus gives the reason for it, "Lest that day come upon you unawares." How can that be? It is exactly in the way of surfeiting and drunkenness, and when the cares of this life are so dominant that we rather do what the crowd says than what God says. If one so walks, the testimony of his heart is so silenced and his eyes are so blinded and his ears are so deafened that he can't hear the words of Jesus nor see the signs of His coming. In that way that day comes unawares.

How can we escape these things that come to pass? Jesus gives the answer to that question in our text, and at the same time gives us a comfort when he says, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always."

What does it mean to watch? Does that mean that we be able to recognize that day when it comes? Do we want to know what that day looks like so that when it draws near *then* we will get busy and prepare ourselves. That is exactly unwatchfulness. Watchfulness means that *now*, not in two years or five years, do we begin to take these things seriously. It is in the way of a life of spiritual concern and watchfulness that we guard ourselves from being overtaken by that day.

To watchfulness Jesus adds "Pray always". Prayer is a rather common theme in the Scripture, but here Jesus qualifies it by saying, "Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." To pray such is not based on the erroneous teaching of the pre-millenial rapture. The child God expects to suffer for Christ's sake. This means rather that we live prayerfully and carefully out

of the hearts that God has given us. It means that we show concern for the things of God and His kingdom. Does this mean that we make ourselves worthy by our walk? Are we saved by our good works? No, we are saved alone by the blood of Jesus Christ. Now in thankfulness we walk prayerfully and carefully. In the way of spiritual watchfulness and concern, and taking hold of our lives in the light of God's word do we finally stand before the Son of man without terror.

To stand before the Son of man does not only mean that we stand physically, for we know that all men shall stand before Him. The point is that we be able to stand the judgment. In that day when the Son of man makes division between men that we stand. When Christ says to some, "Away with you, I never knew you." — that we may hear our Lord and Savior say, "Enter ye into the joy of my Lord." — that is standing.

Young people, God's way is difficult. It requires self-denial. It requires that we begin to struggle in that good fight of faith. Do you have that struggle within you? Do you have a keen consciousness of that struggle against sin in your hearts? Then rejoice and be exceeding glad that God has counted you worthy to stand in that day.

Attitude and Preparation

by Rev. M. Schipper

Delegates to the PRYP's 1981 Convention,
Beloved Young People and Friends:

INTRODUCTION:

First of all, we wish to express our deep appreciation for having been chosen to be one of the speakers to this convention. This honor we have enjoyed several times before when we were in the active ministry. But we want you to know that we consider it a great honor to be called for this task out of retirement. That the committee for arrangements asked the oldest living minister to speak was by itself a most inspiring incentive to respond favorably. And when we relate this request to the theme chosen for this convention, the call to speak became all the more inspiring. We remind you that youth is certainly not out of step when it honors its elders.

In the second place, we wish to compliment our young people on your choice of a theme for this convention. It seems to me that you could not have

chosen a more appropriate and timely subject. It augers well that our young people living in these last days are concerned with the implications of your theme. In the last years of our active ministry we not only called attention in our preaching to those signs that speak of the nearness of Christ's coming, but we stressed the proposition that in our view all preaching must have but one objective, namely, to prepare God's people for the coming of the Lord.

In the third place, from all that has been said by the three previous speakers to this convention, it must have become very evident to you that the signs of Christ's coming are indeed abundant. I consider it part of the duty of the last speaker to briefly summarize what has been said, and then to draw a final conclusion of the matter. As the first speaker pointed out, there are many signs of Christ's coming evident today in our world. And, as the second speaker stressed, there are also many important signs in evidence today in the church world. All of which, as the third speaker emphasized, should prevent us from being deceived.

And now in the fourth place, we wish to point out that in spite of all the signs of Christ's coming, the striking thing is that no one knows the precise hour of the Lord's coming. It is especially this that the Lord stresses in the last part of Matthew 24, which has served as the Scriptural basis for the theme of this convention. Already in verse 36 the Lord informs us that the Father has reserved the knowledge of the hour of Christ's coming Himself. In a parallel passage in Mark 13:22, the Lord informs us that even He did not know the hour while He was pointing to the signs of His coming. The text reads: "But of the day and the hour knoweth no man, no, not angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." Without getting into a long doctrinal dissertation respecting the natures of Christ, let me say that we simply conclude from this statement that Christ, according to His human nature, and as He was speaking to His disciples, did not know the precise hour of His return. But notice again in two more places how Christ stresses the ignorance of us to know the hour. In verse 42 He states, "Ye know not the hour your Lord doth come." And in verse 44 He states, "For in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh."

This, of course, raises the question: Why didn't the Father inform us precisely as to the exact hour of Christ's return? Would not our covenant God have done us a great service if He had given us this information? Now it will be the burden of the rest of our speech this evening to show to you the divine wisdom in withholding from us this knowledge, and this will lead us to set forth positively the subject that was assigned to me.

OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THESE SIGNS

I.What that attitude must be.

II. How the Lord illustrates what that attitude will be.

III. The blessedness of assuming the proper attitude.

I. What that attitude must be.

The key attitude toward the signs of Christ's coming as expressed by the

Lord is announced in verse 42. "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." Watchfulness is the key word. The antonym of watchfulness is: carelessness, heedlessness, inattentiveness, unmindfulness; all of which terms indicate the very opposite attitude of watchfulness. If you are not watchful with respect to the sign of Christ's coming, you will be careless, indifferent, unmindful of His coming. Watchfulness, on the other hand, implies that you will be wide awake and alerted by the signs, and you will be constantly vigilant and expecting Him. With respect to the signs of Christ's coming, it means that you will be constantly looking for them. And that implies that you know those signs, and that you are able to detect them when they appear. It implies that you are constantly on the look-out for them. There is not a moment when they are not on your mind and in your thoughts. You are able to detect them as soon as they appear. You are able to associate them with Christ's coming, and they are as so many soundings of the footsteps of the Saviour as He makes His approach to us.

The second attitude, related now to the actual coming of the Lord, is expressed by the Lord in verse 44. There we read: "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Preparedness follows quite naturally watchfulness, and must be understood as a result of it. If we are not watchful, it follows that we will be wholly unprepared. On the other hand, when we are vigilant we will be constantly preparing ourselves, and therefore ready for His appearance. Preparedness implies first of all that we get ourselves ready for His coming. And when we consider ourselves in terms of householders, stewards, as the Lord speaks of them in our passage, it implies that the household which belongs to the Lord will also be made ready. The housewife who loves her husband, and expects him to return home at any moment, does not greet him at the door wearing a sloppy and grimy dress; nor will she allow him to find her with her hair disheveled, and the house into which he is about to enter looking like a pig's sty. Nor will we who are seriously watching for our Lord's return allow ourselves to be found wholly unready for His coming, or the things over which He has placed us in charge to be found by Him in disarray and confusion.

Now it must be pointed out at this juncture that both of these attitudes, namely, of vigilance and preparedness, are stressed by the Lord in the light of the fact that we do not know the day nor the hour of Christ's return. Notice this in the text. "Be watchful therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." and again, "on account of this be ye also ready, for in an hour when ye think not, the Son of man cometh." You may be sure, beloved, that if the Lord had revealed to us the hour of His coming, the danger exists that we might be slothful and indifferent. Need I remind you that though we are children of God, we are that in an old nature? And according to that old nature, we do not want the Lord to return. When Christ shall return, our old nature will be destroyed along with the present world that always fans the evil lusts of our nature into a flame. So our corrupt nature does not want Christ to return. You can understand that. Moreover, if God had revealed to us the hour of Christ's

return, you can bank on it, our old nature would take advantage of us and make us to be slothful and indifferent. That is evidently the reason why God has not revealed to us the hour of Christ's coming; in order that the new man in Christ in us may subdue that old nature, and cause us to be watchful and ready, and to live in the expectation that at any time Christ may return. Now we know, of course, that Christ cannot return at any moment. We are not Premillenial or Dispensationalists, who say that Christ may come at any time. Christ can come only after all the precursory signs of His coming have been fulfilled or realized. Our calling is to be constantly looking for these signs; and it is incumbant upon us that we are always ready. Such are the proper attitudes we are to assume with respect to the signs of Christ's coming, and with respect to the Parousia itself. But the question arises: will these be the attitudes we will assume? This leads me to my second thought.

II. How the Lord illustrates what that attitude will be.

You will observe that in the last part of Matthew 24 the Lord speaks parabolically. The parable begins with verse 43, where the Lord speaks of the good man or master of the household, who will not suffer the house to be invaded by the thief. If he is true to his calling, he will be vigilant and ready to prevent an invasion by the intruder. The parable continues in verses 45 to the end of the chapter, where the Lord speaks of the master of the household whom his Lord has made to be ruler over his household. That master or ruler over the household is further described by the Lord in terms of his being a faithful and prudent servant, and in terms of his being an evil servant. If he is a faithful and prudent servant, he will be diligently providing food for the household, and he will be so doing when his Lord returns to inspect his labors. If, on the other hand, that servant is an evil man, he will conduct himself in the manner the Lord describes in the parable. His evil conduct is motivated by the evil thoughts of his heart, according to which he imagines that his Lord delays his return, and therefore he begins to smite his fellow servants instead of feeding them, and he begins to eat and drink with the drunken. Such are, briefly speaking, the elements in the parable.

The point of comparison in the parable is the attitude of the householder with respect to the return of his lord, when that householder is a good and faithful servant, and when that householder is an evil servant. If he is a good and faithful servant, he will be performing his duties faithfully until his lord returns. On the other hand, that same servant if he is an evil man, will be conducting himself as the Lord describes him in the parable.

Now it would be a serious error in our opinion to spiritualize the elements in this parable. This is done by some, when they explain the household to be the church, and the servants to be the officebearers of the church. With this explanation of the parable we find it difficult to agree. Though it is true that the Lord is speaking here to His disciples, there is no suggestion in the entire context that the Lord has in mind the particular calling of these disciples with respect to the church.

Rather, we believe, the point of comparison in the parable is the attitude of every man with respect to the return of Christ. No man, whether he be a disciple of Christ or not, has a right to ignore Christ's lordship. Every man, whether he be a child of God or a wicked man, has a calling to serve Christ. Every man, whether he be righteous or wicked, is accountable to Christ, and will give that account when Christ appears. In one word, what the Lord describes in the parable is the attitude of all men with respect to Christ's coming with a two-fold description. Either that man will be faithful and prudent, and therefore vigilant and prepared for Christ's coming; or, that man, occasioned by Christ's apparent delay, will be eating and drinking with the drunken, inattentive in respect to Christ's coming, misusing his calling by assuming the position of lordship, and thus smiting his fellow servants. And when the Lord comes that man will be caught with complete surprise. You see, in the end both are confronted by the appearance of Christ. That makes the parable to be most significant.

There is something here of a doctrinal nature and of great significance to us that we wish to call to your attention.

Generally in our view of the covenant idea we are inclined to limit that conception to the generations of the believers and their seed. And that seed in its development is then composed two-fold, in elect and reprobate seed.

However, there is a broader conception, which embraces the world and all men. To understand this, we must keep in mind that when God created the world and man upon it, He established with that man a covenant-friendship relation. Adam was created God's covenant friend-servant. As such he was mandated by the Lord to cultivate the earth and to care for God's world.

We know, of course, that man did not remain in his state of rectitude. Through the temptation of the devil and by the act of wilful disobedience he rebelled against Jehovah his God, assumed the position of lord in the creation, confiscated as it were God's creation to himself. All this in opposition to Jehovah. And all his posterity followed him in the rebellion, refusing to serve the living God. So all men stand in the midst of God's creation with fists raised in rebellion against God, using all the tools of God's workshop to their own advantage.

This, of course, is not merely accidental, but all this takes place under the decree and all-wise purpose of God, Who from everlasting determined to realize His covenant through the way of sin and grace. Hence, as we are informed in John 3:16, God, Who love His world, gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him might have eternal life. Those who believe on Him do not do that of themselves; it is given to them of grace. Out of the mass of fallen humanity there are those who were given to Christ in sovereign election, who are redeemed by Christ through His blood, who are regenerated by Him through the Spirit. They are restored to God's covenant, are made to be once more His covenant friend-servants. In hope these covenant friend-servants look for Christ to return in His Parousia with the reward of grace, according to which they shall inherit with Christ all the blessings of

God's covenant in the new creation.

All the rest, who have been reprobated by the Father, will develop in the way of their sin to destruction. They deny the lordship of Christ. They deny the efficacy of the cross and the resurrection, as well as the lordship of Christ. They live and act as though Christ shall never return; and when He shall return, they shall be caught with surprise, and shall be cut assunder and their portion shall be with the hypocrites, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This is really the significance of the parable.

Everyone is pictured in the roll of steward. God in Christ is Lord over every man. God is the Lord because He is Creator and Sovereign. Christ is the Lord as the reward of merit, and appointed to rule over all. No man has the right to ignore His lordship.

The steward never becomes lord. According to his fallen nature he assumes that prerogative. Nevertheless, man, as he comes from the loins of Adam, is never more than a servant. He must acknowledge that God is the Lord, and that Christ is His vice-Gerand by God's appointment. In one word, every one is required to serve God and to give account to Christ for all that God in Christ has entrusted to him.

Now the point in the parable is that apparently the Lord delays His coming, and over against this the steward reacts. He reacts either as a good steward, or, he reacts as an evil steward. Thus the Lord illustrates what the attitude of every man will be with respect to Christ's parousia.

If he is a good steward, he will be faithful and prudent. He will be conducting his Lord's business properly; caring for his Lord's household, providing faithfully meat for his Lord's servants. Whether the Lord tarries or should come suddenly, it makes no difference to him, - always he is ready, and living in anticipation of his Lord's return.

On the other hand, if the steward is wicked, he will be conducting himself in the manner and according to the attitude described in the parable. He will say in his heart: My Lord delays His coming. He will begin to smite his fellow servants; assuming his Lord's lordship. He will be eating and drinking with the drunken. And all this he will do until he is caught with surprise by the suddenness of his Lord's return.

III. The Blessedness of Assuming the Proper Attitude.

Of course, if the steward conducts himself evilly, - he must experience the Lord's wrath.

Such a steward is said by the Lord to be evil in his heart. And that means he is thoroughly corrupt. In his heart are evil thoughts, and from those evil thoughts he produces evil deeds. His thought is: My Lord delays his coming. Therefore I will give vent to my evil lusts, and put out of my mind entirely my lord's coming. I will use my Lord's substance to satisfy my evil lusts. Consequently he neglects his calling to feed the household as he was required. He beats his fellow servants instead of feeding them. And he uses his Lord's substance to eat and drink with the drunken. Indeed, this evil servant shall be

caught with surprise. Just as the inhabitants of the earth in Noah's time, and as the citizens of Sodom, who had filled their measure of iniquity. When the Lord of that servant comes in an hour when he is not looking for Him, being unconverted and hypocritical, he does not live in the hope of Christ's return.

His lot shall be with those who shall suffer the torments of hell. He shall be cut in sunder. He shall be appointed his portion with the hyprcrites. His lot shall be with those who weep and gnash their teeth eternally in outer darkness.

But blessed are those servants who are faithful to the end!

These shall not be found idly waiting their Lord's coming. Nor will they say in their hearts: My Lord delays His coming; therefore I will just sit and wait for Him. Rather, they who are faithful and who will not be found wanting, will be diligently performing their business. They will be fulfilling their vocation in life in obedience to Him, doing with diligence the labors of those vocations God in His providence assigned to each. The king and the president in the government of his country according to the Law of God. The minister of the gospel in the administration of the Word of God. The elder in watching over the church of Christ in the exercise of Christian discipline. The deacon in the administration of Christian mercy. The parent in the provision of his family, and in the instruction of his children in the fear of Jehovah. The child in loving obedience to all in authority over him. The grave digger and garbage men in their humble task to earn their daily bread, in the sweat of his face, and to have something over for the cause of Christ in the world.

These, with respect to the coming of the Lord will be watching for the signs as they will appear. And they will be preparing themselves for the coming of the Lord.

And they shall be accounted blessed by the Lord when He comes. He will pronounce them blessed before all men and angels and devils. They shall experience this blessedness to the full forever. For to be blessed is to be full and to lack no good thing. They shall be satisfied in glory.

Is that your expectation, beloved?

Then you will not be living in fear as you see the signs of Christ's coming multiply. Rather, you will be living in hope that presently you will see the Lord face to face. And you will be living in the expectation that you will hear from His lips: Come, ye blessed, enter into the kingdom which I have prepared for you. He who has this hope in him shall not be caught by surprise; but he is being changed into Christ's perfect image, and will be like Him when He appears.

I thank you for your good attention.

SINGSPIRATION SCHEDULE

November 22 — Faith
December 20 — Hudsonville
February 21 — First
April 18 — Hudsonville
May 16 — Hope
September 19 — Southwest
November 21 — Faith
December 19 — Hudsonville

PERSONAL IMPRESSIONS
41st 1981 PRYP Convention

by Tim Heemstra

At the 41st annual Protestant Reformed Young People's Convention, during which mine was the blessed opportunity to participate as a chaperone with my wife and friends, I was asked to share some of my personal impressions of the week's activities with the readers of *Beacon Lights*. These impressions are from one who has most fond memories of the PRYP conventions of the 1960's as a youthful participant, but who enjoyed the action-packed, spiritually stimulating week in July, 1981, even more as a member of the "older generation".

The additional years have given a new perspective and a sense of deep appreciation for the heritage and trust with which we as churches have been endowed by our covenant Father. The youthful church of today has been blessed richly with many talents and abilities which were displayed during the week. These gifts must be further developed as the youth of our churches mature physically, emotionally, and spiritually into adults of that living body of Christ. We trust that this week of convention was a period of growth in these areas for our youth as they face their lives ahead, encountering the signs of the times in an evil, apostate world.

One initial impression, but one also sustained throughout the whole week, was that of the faithfulness of our God in saving His people through the covenantal seed generation after generation. Here were gathered on the college campus the full age span of two, three, and four generations at singspirations and speeches. There were monarches in the faith whom I recall from my youth as being "old". There were many middle-aged and retired couples who I had recalled seeing in past times only as large families sitting together in church or assembly. Now all their children have grown and moved out to develop families of their own. There were hundreds of young people, children of my contemporaries at past conventions. Many young adults I barely recognized but knew as toddlers only a few years ago. I'm sure that our older ministers can appreciate the development of the church in covenantal lines as they have seen it unfold in their lifetimes of ministry. This is a savored blessing. An appreciation of this internal growth and development is a gift that is enhanced with the added years. Personally, I guess you could say, I "felt my age showing".

Another vivid, personal impression was the marked *diversity* that

appeared in the group of conventioneers as they gathered under a common bond of faith. The age span of registrants ranged from 14 to 26 years. They came from all parts of the country and world. Some flew in from the Southwest, U.S.A., others flew in from the Netherlands. A large group drove a van packed from the West Coast, others biked from Chicago. The East Coast and the Deep South were equally represented. There were those who bused, car-pooled, and "trained" from all over the Midwest. Still others but walked across the street with sleeping bag and sachel in hand to participate in this convention "in their own neighborhood". There were young people from a number of other church denominations present who sought the fellowship and spiritual growth which might be obtained at this Protestant Reformed convention. To sit together in a large gathering or small devotional group over God's word from such a variety of backgrounds is something that all conventioneers should appreciate. Ours is a universal, omnipresent God who transcends all geographical and human bounds.

There was diversity in the selection of speakers at the evening addresses on the convention theme, "Signs of the Times". These speakers came from a variety of backgrounds and a broad spectrum of ages — first-charge pastor to minister-emeritus. Each was able to bring a different perspective on the topic and deliver a charge to our youth to observe the signs of the coming of Christ in their lives.

There was a pronounced diversity in the strength of the faith in the young conventioneers. It was evidenced in their testimony at discussion groups, devotional meetings, and in their conduct at free time and recreational activity. We find that some of us are strong in our faith. Some of us are weak. The chaperones and discussion leaders encountered this range of personal faith and conviction. I recall one small discussion group in which very few were interested in discussing an exciting and relevant topic. No preparation had been done. No thought or concentration was attempted. One young fellow, when asked his input on a simple spiritual question, gave a long yawn as editorial comment and replied, "I guess I never really thought about it." That group required much spiritual maturation and, I trust and pray, grew during the latter course of the convention. I participated in another discussion group which could not quit. It ran overtime and reconvened in the evening for further Bible study.

There were a few conventioneers who showed a marked weakness in their faith and were most puzzling to me. They have read the rules and regulations for the convention regarding curfews, proper campus boundaries of activities, and required attendance. They have signed the registration form which states the purpose of the convention: to have Christian fellowship and to exercise themselves spiritually by listening to speeches and participating in discussion groups and devotional periods. Then they endeavored as much as possible to get out of these activities and to get away with breaking the rules. These few spiritually immature had great difficulty in displaying a Godly attitude. It was encouraging to see the vast majority assist these weak colleagues in following

proper order and in learning to grow in the faith. The strong in the faith helped the weak to grow.

There were others who could not get enough spiritual stimulation via the planned activities and conducted their own additional study groups in their dormitory rooms. This was also exciting to see.

During recreational periods the diversity of spiritual strength and development appeared in the type of conduct, speech, and dress displayed by the conventioneers. Most conducted themselves as Spirit-filled Christians enjoying the fun of fellowship and recreation. A few had to be "encouraged" to display proper Christian witness to their fellow conventioneers and other groups on the campus. We trust that there was further personal, spiritual strengthening.

The diversity of the personalities of each of the members of the dormitory devotional group left its impression on me. Some bubbling, out-going personality was quick to share his faith with others. There was youthful zeal for the Christian life. Other young people in the group, just as firm in their faith, were quiet, contemplative introverts who had more difficulty in sharing in a group situation. But from this diversity came one of the most enjoyable experiences of the convention. I enjoyed sitting together in casual, pajama and bed-nob surroundings with God's Word and a common bond of faith. We each talked intimately of deeper, personal thoughts on God's presence in our lives, and how we might individually conduct ourselves in these last days. This was a sign in our time of the Holy Spirit's presence not only in the beautiful interior of a formal church building, but also in a spartan dormitory room.

Another impression I share with you is the respect for the participatory attitude and supportive concern that the ministers of the host churches provided to the young people. They participated in social and recreational activities with ambient ease. They played, they discussed, they counseled, they disciplined all with an attitude of concern and accessibility to the young conventioneers. Yet they held their repsect, if not generating more, as spiritual leaders to our group of youth. I had the good opportunity to see them in action as pastoral counselors to troubled youth with spiritual and psychological problems. We saw them as laughing, joking chaperones. But also as pastoral undershepherds caring for a young flock. Their humanness along with their special calling as spiritual leaders was respected by the young people and fellow chaperones alike.

The last impression I share with you is an appreciation for all the hours of work and planning which went into making this convention a success. One Federation Board member on multiple committees confided to me that he had participated in 52 meetings over the course of the last year in working out the arrangements for this convention. The coordination of three separate sponsoring churches — Holland, Faith, and Southeast, must have been difficult. But the Convention Steering Committee is thanked for providing such an enjoyable week for all of us, young and "old".

Minutes of 1981 Convention

Minutes of the 41st annual Protestant Reformed Young People's Society Convention held at Calvin College, August 20-24, 1981.
Hosts: Faith, Holland and Southeast
Theme: "Signs of the Times" Text: Matthew 24
Speech topics: I. Signs in the World
II. Signs in the Church
III. Purpose or Calling
IV. Attitude and Preparation

Monday, July 20

Southeast Church was the registration site from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Young people from all over the country picked up their convention packets and boarded buses for Calvin College.

At 5:00 PM we assembled at the Campus Commons for devotions and supper. After supper was finished, we met at the Phys. Ed. Building for the Convention Picture. After we waited there for about 15 minutes, we found out that the photographer, Mr. Dale Bartelds, was waiting for us at the Seminary Pond. Since we were being threatened by dark clouds and thunder we hurried over and had our picture taken.

At 8:00PM the Fine Arts Center was the center of attraction. Professor Decker had the first speech of the convention on the topic: Signs in the World. Federation Board President Brian Dykstra opened with prayer, and the special number was given by a male quartet of Jim Noorman, Randy Schipper, Dan Monsma and Todd Terpstra with Rachel Kamps at the piano. Prof. Decker closed the meeting with prayer.

Parents and other adults gathered in front of the dorms for punch and cookies. There was also a make-your-own sundae party for all interested in ice cream. Most of the activity, however, was at the Phys. Ed. building where there was volleyball and the opening round of the basketball tourney.

At 11:30 PM all conventioneers met with their chaparones for devotions

and at 12:30 AM, in spite of all visual evidence, was "lights-out."

Tuesday, July 21

The main event of the morning was in the Gezon Auditorium at 9:00 AM. Seminarian Barry Gritters introduced our discussion topic "Our Political and Social Responsibility."

At 10:30 we boarded buses and left for North Shore in Grand Haven where we hoped to arrive at 11:30 for lunch. However, the young people did not know that the drivers had a small surprise in store for them. Instead of going straight to the beach, the drivers took us on a scenic tour through suburban Grand Haven and out-lying housing developments. The beauty of the West Michigan landscape was beyond imagination or description. There was grass, sand, and trees enough to keep each conventioneer on the edge of his seat. But when we went past a newly built church for the fourth time, it did not take much to figure out that we were lost. Well-known traveller Steve Hanko then came to the rescue, and led the drivers to the beach an hour behind schedule. The boys busied themselves with throwing the girls in the lake, and the girls responded by drying off and unsuccessfully trying to remain dry.

After returning to Calvin and eating supper Vice-President Dave Rau opened the second speech with prayer. The pastor of our church in Randolph, Wisc., Rev. Koole, spoke on the topic: "Signs in the Church." Val Poortenga from South Holland played the piano for the night's special number.

The second round of the basketball tourney was held after the speech. Punch and cookies were again available for all outside the dorms.

Wednesday, July 22

The main events of the morning were again held in the Gezon Auditorium.

At 9:00 Seminarian Ken Hanko presented the discussion topic for the day: "Infant Baptism." 11:00 was the time for the first business meeting. President Brian Dykstra opened with prayer and took roll. Of 15 societies in the Federation only 2 were properly represented (First Junior and Hope Senior) 34 delegates were not present and none from Edgerton, Hull or Southwest.

The financial reports of the Federation Board and Beacon Lights were read. Balances on hand as of April 30, 1981 were: —Fed. Brd: $16,405.73 —Beacon Lights: $11,056.23.

The Scholarship Co. reported that two $1,500 scholarships were awarded to Judy Kuiper of Lynden, and Rachel Jansma of Iowa. Dues for members were again set at $12.00 with the following breakdown: $8.00 for Convention Costs; $3.00 for Scholarship Fund; $1.00 for Beacon Lights.

The nominees for the new offices were also read.

Vice-Treasurer Mike Lotterman closed with prayer.

Again we boarded busses at 1:30, this time to go roller skating at Woodland Skating Rink. Because of the fact that there are no places of beauty or interest between Calvin and Woodland, we arrived on time.

After supper, the Fine Arts Center was the site for the third Convention

Speech. President Brian Dykstra opened with prayer and introduced the evening's speaker. Rev. Bekkering pastor of our Houston, Texas church spoke on the topic: "Purpose or Calling." A girl's sextet of Paula Faber, Kris Dempsey, Pam Pastoor, Joan and Mary Oomkes and Gail Flikkema with Faith Ophoff at the piano provided the special number. Rev. Bekkering closed with prayer.

After the speech a pizza party and cookies were again available. the Volleyball tourney was held in the Phys. Ed. building for those who signed up.

Thursday, July 23

Seminarian Everett Buiter introduced the discussion group topic for the day, "Christian Witnessing."

When the discussion groups ended, the delegate board met for the last business meeting. The only item on the agenda was the election of officers. President Brian Dykstra opened with prayer and took roll 28 delegates were absent and none were present from Edgerton, Hull or Southwest. The only societies properly represented were First Junior, First Senior, and Hope Senior. Only one ballot was needed to elect the new officers. The new officers were as follows: Vice-President - Gerry Van Baren; Vice-Treasurer - Doug Wassink; Vice-Secretary - Laurie Kamps; East Spiritual Advisor - Prof. Decker.

Seminarian Everett Buiter, Hope Senior delegate, closed the meeting with prayer.

During the afternoon the annual East-West softball games were held. This year there were 2 co-ed games played with each side winning one game.

This was the day of the banquet so things were rather quiet as the young people readied themselves for the big event.

Because the banquet ran overtime, the speech started about 20 minutes late. Vice-President Dave Rau opened with prayer and introduced Rev. Schipper, emeritus pastor of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Rev. Schipper gave an uplifting speech on the topic: "Our Attitude and Preparation."

Kevin Bylsma played an arrangement he wrote himself for the special number.

Friday, July 24

The only activity of the day was packing-up and leaving Calvin for Southeast Church. Young People said their good-byes as each left for his home. Our prayer is that God will grant His grace to His people as we face the last days, and that we might not fear the Signs of the Times as forerunners of our persecution, but see the signs as they are a witness to tell us that our Lord Jesus is coming in power and majesty to take us home with Him.

Respectfully submitted,
Brian D. Dykstra
Fed. Brd. President, 1981

THE 1981 CONVENTION

by Rev. W. Bruinsma

I was asked by the *Beacon Lights* staff to give the readers my impressions of the past convention. Evidently they felt that I as the retiring spiritual advisor of the Federation Board and as a minister of one of the host societies would be able to give you the inside scoop from a minister's point of view.

I think the very first facet of the convention a parent likes to know is whether their children behaved as was fitting mature, Christian youth. As one who attended this convention I feel that the young people should be highly commended on the way they conducted themselves. I have attended, as a chaperone or a member of the discipline committee, three different conventions. Behavior-wise this one has been the best. I am happy that I am able to say that too.

Just because this was true however, does not mean that there is no room for improvement. As always, there seems to be a small group of what I would call "rowdies" that like to press the rules just about to their limits. At times it seems that these forget the purpose and intent of our conventions: to meet *and date* other Protestant Reformed youth and also to listen and derive spiritual benefit from the speeches and discussion groups. Such rowdiness must not, on the other hand, be attributed to the vast majority of the conventioneers. In fact our conventioneers were much less of a heartache to the chaperones than other of our young people, who did not belong to the convention, yet who came at night specifically to cause trouble. It can be said that the conduct of our conventioneers at this past convention has renewed my hope in future conventions.

Besides good behavior there was also a genuine interest shown in the theme of our convention: "The Signs of the Times." It is my impression that our young people are very much aware that they live in the midst of evil days, and that Christ's return upon the clouds of glory is coming quickly. This awareness I witnessed in the interest shown in the speeches and discussion groups. One of the four speakers commented favorably to me on the attention and interest shown in what he had to say.

The past two conventions have also increased the number of speeches to four. I feel this has proved to be a real asset to our conventions. I also have heard others say the same thing. The discussion groups too gave a chance for the young people to express many of their concerns.

The last observation I would like to make is that more older young people attended this convention than in the past few years. That was a real treat! I would like to encourage more of them to attend the next one in Iowa. I think they missed a good thing!

NEWS from, for and about our churches

by Marcia Hanko

BIRTHS

Mr. & Mrs. Dave Moelker of Hope were blessed with the birth of a daughter Kathryn Jean on June 15.

Mr. & Mrs. Randy Meyer of First were blessed with a son on June 7.

Mr. & Mrs. Peter Westra of Hull were blessed with a son, Peter Scott, on April 30.

Mr. & Mrs. Roger Buys of Hull were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Pamela Sue, on May 1.

Mr. & Mrs. Paul Haak of South Holland were blessed with a daughter, Tricia Renae.

Mr. & Mrs. Gerald Kuiper of Faith were blessed with the birth of a son, David Ryan.

Mr. & Mrs. Darlo Zventenhoorst of Doon were blessed with a daughter, Judeth Dawn, on March 16.

Rev. & Mrs. Den Hartog were blessed with the birth of a son, Timothy James, on February 17.

Mr. & Mrs. Ron Van Voorthuysen were blessed with a daughter January 26.

Mr. & Mrs. Mike Gritters of Redlands were blessed with the birth of a son on May 26.

Mr. & Mrs. Randy Hendricks were blessed with a daughter on May 25.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Ken Snauwaert from the Lutheran Church joined our South Holland congregation.

The congregation of Hull received the papers of Ed Karsemeyer and family from Faith.

South Holland congregation received the papers of Ed Holleman from Hope.

MARRIAGES

Berend Meelker & Janine Jabaay of Redlands were united in marriage on February 20.

Don Knott & Kathy Looyenga of First were united in marriage on June 12.

Rand Powers & Shirley DeJong of Hull were united in marriage on May 15.

Daryl Wesselink & Judith Driesen of Hull were united in marriage on June 5.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACTIVITIES

A Young People's Banquet was held in the Hull school gym on May 4.

A soup supper was held in Hope School gym on May 26.

A Talent Program, sponsored by the Hope Jr. Y. P. Society, was held at Faith Church on May 3. Proceeds were for the '81 Y. P. Convention.

Young People of Doon sponsored an evening of basketball & volleyball on March 13. They had a Bake Sale there with the proceeds for the 1982 convention.

A Rollerskating Party was held on February 23 in Sioux Center sponsored by the Y. P. of Doon.

The Young People of Redlands sponsored a Pancake Breakfast on February 7.

A singspiration was held on March 1, sponsored by Y. P. of Redlands.

A skating party, sponsored by the Y. P. of Redlands was held on March 16.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

A Rollerskating Party was held in Sioux Center on March 16, sponsored by the Doon School Circle.

A Singspiration, sponsored by the Adult Bible Class of Doon, was held on February 1.

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The Convention Steering Committee would like to thank all those who contributed to the success of the convention. We appreciate the help in planning we have received from our advisors and members of the Host Societies. We remember also the financial help received from other congregations in both fund raising and patron collections. We especially would like to thank the speakers for their instructive and edifying messages.

But above all, we thank our Heavenly Father for gathering and protecting us throughout the week. May He continue to guide us throughout our lives as we contend for the faith and uphold that rich heritage which is ours.

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