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by James Koldenhoven

RETREAT REFLECTS ON SECOND COMING

The spiritual retreat of Dordt College, this year called a "House Party," focused on the topic "Preparation for the Great Banquet." The four hundred and some students and faculty, meeting at Walther League Camp near Lake Okoboji, heard addresses by Rev. B.J. Haan, Rev. J.B. Hulst, and Mr. John Vander Stelt.

Rev. Haan Speaks:

The president of the college opened the series of talks with a presentation entitled "The Certainty of Christ's Return." The repeated theme of the first speaker was that Christ has come, is coming, and will come. He pointed



to the fact that Christ's Kingdom rule was begun with God's coming to Adam and Eve in the Garden. Haan stated, "Always Christ's coming has that goal in mind. In fact, when Christ's coming is begun in God's appearance to Adam and Eve after the fall, when His coming is advanced through the Old Testament, when He comes in the flesh in the fullness of time, when He comes on Pentecost by His Spirit, when He comes through the preaching, life, and labors of His people, and when He comes finally at the end of this age, always it is one idea, one goal, consummated at His final return, i.e., the redeemed humanity in the new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness--His Kingdom come!!"

"God was determined," Haan said, "to bring the creation back to serve Him. When that world which He created fell under the dominion of Satan, God determined to reclaim, to redeem that creation; He moved to bring it back to serve Him, in glorious, obedient fellowship under His rule, never again to fall away from His gracious dominion."

In the speaker's terms, Christ's return is certain because it has already begun and is an on-going and glorious process which is effected by His people and which will culminate in Christ's personal appearance on the clouds of glory.

Rev. Haan used the testimony of I Cor. 15:24: "...Christ will overcome all spiritual rulers...and hand over the kingdom to God the Father." Relevant also to the speaker's theme was Romans 8:19: "All of creation waits with eager longing for God to reveal His Son."

Mr. Vander Stelt Speaks

The second speaker, Mr. John Vander Stelt, spoke on the subject, "Attitudes towards Christ's Return." Vander Stelt outlined three responses to the question of Christ's return. Though two of the views have labels, pre- and post-millennialism, the speaker chose to work out of a description of their life styles rather than give them philosophical or theological formulations.

Vander Stelt described the post-millennialists as optimistic. They busy themselves in social affairs, improving living conditions,

helping the poor, and effecting legislation which improves prison life, for example. The view of the post-mill is that man can usher in the new kingdom, bringing a heaven upon earth. The so-called "social gospel" arises from the view of life generated by the post-mills, the speaker said, while he also noted that they "go easy" on sin.

Drawing on his own experience with the pre-millennial position, Vander Stelt described it as pessimistic regarding this life, culture, society, and morality. This mentality, he said, thinks it can best spend its time searching the Scriptures for symbolic numbers and hints of prophesies about Christ's cataclysmic Second Coming. They view themselves as "priests who are persecuted," while they minimize the kingly role of man.

In the pre-mill view, Christ's coming is imminent, for the Christian is presently under severe tribulation, and tribulation marks the coming of Christ. Vander Stelt demonstrated how the old Judaistic Talmud tradition of numbers, six times 1,000 years plus 1,000, is part of the current pre-mill view which may be found in the teachings of such a man as Carl MacIntyre Sr. It is also connected with much of the so-called anti-communistic movement. Others mentioned in the historical survey of the pre-mill view, especially with respect to their view of Israel, included Theodore a Brackel, Bilderdyk, Da Costa, and D. Kromminga.

Vander Stelt characterized the back-and-forth arguments between post- and pre-millennialists as a ping-pong game. "Ping," say the pre-mills; "pong," say the post-mills. "Christ's coming is the end-station of our effort," say the post-mills; "Christ's work will give us a thousand years of reign with Him," say the pre-mills. While the ping-pong game goes on and solicits participation from reformed Christians, the Biblical meaning of Christ's coming has the support, historically at least, of the Anglican church, the Lutheran church, the Reformed churches, and Augustine himself. And that Biblical meaning, the speaker pointed out, is at the heart of Scripture, the center of the Heidelberg Catechism (Q. and A. 57), and the Belgic Confession (Art. 37), which together say that Christ is coming,

not later, not earlier, not before, not after, but now. The tension of the ping-pong game is unnecessarily created. There need not be a world-compromise mentality, like that of the post-mills, or a world-flight mentality, like that of the pre-mills.

The speaker's admonition was to stop reading Scripture speculatively and "to be faithful witnesses, obedient to the call of Christ." As to the Bible's reference to tribulations and the last days, Vander Stelt said: "As the Christian more and more becomes a faithful witness, to that degree--paradoxically--things will get worse for him." And in the face of this paradox, it is necessary to accept the kingship which is given through Christ, while bearing the tribulations like a priest. "The Reformation is not philosophy," he said, and, "the Reformation is not theology. The Reformation is living like a royal priesthood. We should not be like the post- or pre-mills, "rearranging the deck chairs on the stricken Titanic."

Vander Stelt concluded his presentation with a consideration of several passages of Scripture. One was John 14:1-3: "I go to prepare a place for you," and the reference to "many mansions." Vander Stelt also contrasted the words of Paul to the churches in Corinth and Thessalonica. For the Corinthians, who were losing their distinction among the earthly citizenry and their ambitions, Paul said that Christ is coming soon. To the Thessalonians, who were doing nothing but waiting for the second coming, Paul said, "Get to work!" Paul writes in I Cor. 15: "Your labor is not in vain...." With the reading of Revelation 21:3-7, the speaker concluded his message, leaving the audience with the thrilling knowledge that those in Christ are already laying their hands on the completed kingdom, that they already taste the Great Banquet.

Rev Hulst Speaks.

In the final brief address, Rev. John Hulst focused attention on the topic "Preparation for Christ's Return." He began with a personal illustration in which he and other students, sitting in history class, concentrated--not on the history lecture, not on the prospect of winning a basketball tournament that night,

nor on the dates they had--but on the clock. It had been prophesied by a group in California that at 9:23 A.M., that day, the world would come to a cataclysmic end. And, as the speaker noted, "We were scared!"

His point was that he and his classmates had quite falsely disconnected the coming of Christ from history, from basketball, and from dating. What Hulst turned to then, in correcting this view, was the fact that Christ's Second Coming "means everything for life and living NOW!"

Before going into the subject of preparation for Christ's return, Hulst made it very clear that "First, we have to be saved. It is as simple as that." Then he pointed out that preparation is not only being saved, for "to be brought from death to life means really to live." He said, "The Biblical view of life is not mere existence, but to live in harmony with God, His people, and His creation." God's creation Hulst also called "the kingdom Country."

The speaker sketched the redemptive process through the Old Testament, pausing to reflect on the meaning of being cast out of the covenant fellowship as was the experience of Moses who was not allowed to enter the promised land. Then Hulst showed how "through the death and resurrection of Christ, the fellowship of believers, the church, and the kingdom country were restored."

Rejecting the view that we may sit and wait, or that we will be able of ourselves to bring in the kingdom of Christ, Hulst asked, "But then what do we do to prepare for his coming?" His answer was that we "get ready to live. Live in close fellowship with God, His people, and His country, subjecting all things under His law."

In his final remarks Hulst challenged the students and faculty to live, really live, in the academic situation of Dordt College. He warned against students planning a four-year "pull away from God," which can only lead to hell. Rather, the academic work lying before students, he said, was their area of responsibility; to know it better was their task.

Said Hulst: "We, at Dordt College, once having caught the vision of our purpose, can really live. In our studies, at basketball games, and on our dates. Really live and not be afraid!"