

HONOURING INTEGRITY

As we continue our efforts in reformed polemics we constantly need to remember to restrict ourselves to the important issues at hand. In addition we have undertaken from the start of our enterprise to refrain from personal attacks in our writings. One of the frustrations we have encountered in our efforts to deal with important ecclesiastical matters is the apparent unwillingness of Canadian Reformed writers to engage in proper reformed polemics about the many issues we have raised in the eight years of publishing our magazine. In the last number of months, however, we have noticed some interaction with material in Reformed Polemics. Twice in recent Clarion editorials¹ we have noticed comments about material in Reformed Polemics. We gladly, but carefully, re-engage in the discussions referred to in those editorials. Although some attention was paid to the manner (integrity) with which polemics are undertaken, we believe it is sufficient to let the readers judge.

In this matter we can only quote from, and agree with the editorial “Polemics and integrity”, when it concludes with, “As churches we are heading into a time of relations and contacts with others that will of necessity involve much intense discussion among us as well. Differences of opinion will emerge also among one another. Sometimes we will feel the need aggressively to attack the position of others. But we do not convince an opponent by crushing him. Let us try to keep one another’s integrity in tact.” We could not agree more.

Some of us may have wondered about the polemics that took place during the earlier years of the Church. Often personal attacks were as aggressive and frequent as the defense of a Scriptural teaching. It appeared that persons holding erroneous views were considered the enemy rather than a brother in danger of going on, or already on, a wrong path. At the same time it is also possible that one might use the claim of an attack on one’s integrity as a defense when there is no other real defense possible on the position taken. It is, indeed, our hope, prayer and endeavour to maintain amiable, meaningful and brotherly polemics about the Reformed faith.

Integrity – indeed! It is defined by Encarta as 1) Possession of firm principles, 2) completeness, and 3) wholeness. The matter addressed by the editorial “Polemics and integrity” deals with a letter published in Reformed Polemics that was critical of a previous Clarion editorial dealing with a Canadian Reformed consistory’s handling of the matter of Campfire – a camp experience for young people designed with evangelism in mind.

It is surely a difficult circumstance when church members see errors (and maybe even sins) being committed in a neighbouring Church’s consistory (either sins of omission or commission). More than once believers have wondered how to deal with such circumstances. The rule of Scripture is for the concerned member to address the consistory involved. This is the rule of Matthew 18. Although there it is applied to two persons, this teaching also gives us the direction of a concern of a member about sin of a consistory. When someone sees sin in a neighbouring consistory they are obliged to address that consistory about the error of their ways.

In the matter under discussion, participation in Campfire, if someone has concerns about how a consistory has dealt with this matter they should address such a consistory in private. If the matter can not be concluded in this manner, the matter must go the way prescribed in the Church Order. When we follow these firm principles we may say that we have followed the rules we have agreed to in the Church Order and shown us in Scripture. Then we will not be legitimately attacked for being incomplete in our dealings with our brothers and sisters. But then we will have dealt with them in a wholesome manner – with integrity!

We would like to add a more general comment about polemics and disagreements among brothers and sisters. We have already alluded to practices of the past that did leave some unsavory taste with many. As we face a variety of so-called progressive ideas and innovative suggestions it will be good to reflect on how to deal with them and the people who propose and espouse them. When we do that we will observe a spectrum that varies from brotherly love to righteous indignation.

But are these really so varied? Let us consider the matter of love. Is it not as much our desire to restore our doctrinally deviating brother as it is to restore our alcoholic sister? Our Father hates sin! Yet He loves the sinners so much that He sent His only begotten Son to suffer and to die for them. Ought we not to do the same? When we know about a brother or sister who favour strange innovations in the liturgy, or support women voting or women as office bearers, or the

singing of unscriptural hymns, etc. do they become our enemies? Or are the things they are espousing the target of our intervention? It seems so difficult to divorce the one from the other.

In these cases it is of utmost importance that we learn to counter the error rather than attack the person. It is also for this reason that we must continue to learn about the real reasons why these innovations are unacceptable. They may only be unacceptable if they are contrary to Scripture. For the sake of clarity, we had better include here that we believe that the examples we have previously mentioned are indeed directions we consider in conflict with what Scripture teaches. And then it becomes so very important that we understand (and help one another understand) why they are contrary to Scripture. When we learn to clearly show that they are, we will often be successful in correcting or at least silencing the proponents of such innovations. Only when such proponents persist in the face of clear evidence from Scripture ought we to warn them, in love, that they need to repent from espousing unscriptural practices. And even when official Church discipline begins to be applied, love must be the over-riding motive.

A REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION

In the editorial “The Evaluation of Divergences (1)” a comment is made about a statement in Reformed Polemics where believers’ are reminded of their responsibility ‘to become and remain members of his [Christ’s] church-gathering work. The comment conveys the opinion that the believer is rather directed to the join the Church. The Church, according to the editorial, is ‘very concrete and visible so that it can and must be joined.’ Later the conclusion is drawn that ‘This is not a minor matter or a splitting of hairs.’ We must admit that the great difference in these expressions is not clear to us from the comments made in the editorial. At the same time the editorial asks for clarification from our part. We will try to oblige.

J.G.Feenstra, in his book *Onze Geloofs Belijdenis* reminds us that the Church is both institution and organism. At the same time he makes clear that we ought not to use these terms as a confusing separation of church concepts. But rather we must realize that both of these are attributes of the one and the same Church. Ephesians 4:14-16 also shows us the dynamic nature of the Church. Hence it is certainly true that believers must join the Church, but it is equally true that in joining the Church and by being members of it we are joined to the Church gathering work of Jesus Christ. As organism the Church, in its members, is alive and active. Doing the bidding of her Lord and Master, Who is gathering His Church, it ‘grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.’

For us it is not such a large difference. The Church is dynamic in that it is moving onward to the great day when it will be complete and perfect. It is not yet so. The believers must join the Church because it is the only place for believers to be. It is the place where Christ gathers his people.

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¹ Polemics and integrity, Cl. Stam, Clarion, March 29, 2002 and The Evaluation of Divergences (1), Cl. Stam, Clarion, June 7, 2002.

DISCORD AND HARMONY

By Jane deGlint

Discord destroys. When a fierce disagreement infiltrates a harmonious group, cooperation becomes impossible. The lines of communication start to break down. Sight on the common purpose is replaced with a focus on one’s own right. There is no longer a concerted effort. As a result the joyful willingness to participate has all but disappeared. Disharmony separates people who once supported each other. It causes clashes between friends and brothers. It tears down what is wholesome. It makes unclean what is godly. In short, discord is a pernicious evil.

Shrewd people use discord to their advantage. The officials of the Roman Empire did. In their zeal to conquer the world, they were sometimes up against a strong, united adversary. However, with craftiness they applied a cunning method - Divide et impera: divide and rule. They understood that a nation divided against itself can not stand.

The Roman generals did not invent this mechanism. The father of lies and his assistants have successfully applied it since the fall into sin. The devil knows that any bond becomes weak when the participants become estranged. He took advantage of that knowledge to alienate man from God, and he continues his destructive work by driving wedges between people. The most devastating result of sin is the perversion of love into hate. Wherever people attack one another, the devils rule.

Wherever believers attack one another, the devils rule with a vengeance. Without hesitation they aggressively grab the opportunity for a takeover. Mobilizing the forces of man's old nature, they try to undermine the foundation of the church. They disturb the peace. They prevent effective outreach. They sow doubt. They drive believers away from the flock. They delight, if they could, in the ruins of the church.

Discord manifests itself in several ways. The most blatant form is a violent verbal fight. Instead of carefully weighing the pros and cons, people hurl insults at each other. Instead of providing mutual assistance to reach a solution, they distort facts into a scenario that suits their purpose. Instead of mutual appreciation, there is reciprocal accusation. Instead of love for the Lord and for the neighbour, there is hate. Instead of truth, there is lie. Instead of harmony, there is discord.

Some manifestations of discord are more subtle. As the common goal of working for the Lord becomes blurred, man turns his attention to himself. This self-centeredness shows itself in excessive self-defense. No stone is left unturned to prove one's right. Ironically, as the precarious efforts to defend oneself increase, so do the suspicions that others are resorting to slander and counterattack. A quarreling person is never sure whom to trust. As a result he complains about the one person to the other, in ever growing circles of distrust. Avoidance sets in. Resentment builds . . .

Eventually it is channeled into a hidden agenda. When that happens, we are far removed from serving the Lord together according to his Word. The common dedication lies shattered. Its remainders are buried under a selfish pursuit of our own right. We look out for ourselves, not for our neighbour. As we are carefully plotting to achieve our self-determined goals, we may end up worshipping the idol of self, to the detriment of our wholesome worship of the triune God.

Though at times we may be discouraged about our seemingly constant regression, we do not have to despair. Each time again we may surrender to the Spirit's work of sanctification. We learn again to grieve with heartfelt sorrow because we have offended God by our sin. More and more we start to hate our old nature and we flee from it. And as our old nature is constantly being put to death this way, we start to experience the heartfelt, spiritual joy of our new nature. In God through Christ we feel a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works. (Lord's Day 33)

Throughout the ages the believers have struggled to remain steadfast in love. To strengthen and sustain them, the Lord gave numerous instructions and warnings. The book of Proverbs and the writings of the Old Testament Prophets abound with calls to repentance. As they show the contrast between the ways of the flesh and the ways of the Spirit, they are meant to keep the believer on the path of righteousness. "With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbour, but through knowledge the righteous escape." (Proverbs 11.9) "But you must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always." (Hosea 12.6)

The book of Proverbs contains a detailed description of those who cause discord. "A scoundrel and a villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth, who winks with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers, who plots evil in his heart - he always stirs up dissension. Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed - without remedy." (Proverbs 6.12-15).

The New Testament goes into further detail to instruct the believers about the way of life. In his letter to the Galatians the apostle Paul explains what it means to live in the Spirit. In his exhortation we recognize the echo of the Old Testament. "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: Love your neighbour as yourself. If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other." (Galatians 5. 13-15)

In the strength of the Spirit we are able to restore broken relationship. With spiritual insight and sensitivity, we become ready to close up the wounds that were struck by fierce discord. Understanding our contribution to the disagreement,

we ought to apologize. The trouble sometimes is, that only one party acknowledges the error of his or her ways, while the other party continues to feed the discord. However, that may not stop us from doing what is right. Our Lord Jesus taught us that injustices must be suffered with patience and trust. "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2.23)

Apologizing would be incomplete without forgiving. As we own up to our own mistakes, we delegate the remembrance of our neighbour's wrongs to the realm of forgetfulness. This spiritual healing method reflects the proverbial wisdom of the Old Testament, "He who covers an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends." (Proverbs 17.9)

As healing takes place, the openness returns. Renewed greetings are the balm that heals the wounds of avoidance. The restored harmony remains sound as the attacks of the evil one are averted with the armour of God. The final victory has been won in our Saviour, our Lord Jesus. In him is life.

"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." (Deuteronomy 30.19, 20)

Fortieth Anniversary for Rev. M. VanderWel.

He walks slowly toward the pulpit and chooses his steps carefully. As he turns the pages of his sermon, his aging hands tremble ever so slightly and his eyesight takes longer to focus. It's been forty years since it all began!

On April 8th, 1962, for the first time, Rev. M. VanderWel assumed his place behind the pulpit and proclaimed the Word of the Lord to his congregation at Sneek, the Netherlands. Forty years later he was blessed to do the same in Yarrow, BC. While our brother does not have the health and vigor he enjoyed forty years earlier, his passion to boldly proclaim the beautiful gospel of grace continues to be as strong as it has ever been. The effects of old age do not suppress his earnest desire to preach.

Having never experienced life as a member in a congregation pastored by Rev. VanderWel's I spent an evening talking about his forty years in the ministry. As we began our discussions for the interview Rev. VanderWel downplayed his ministry within the federation of the Churches. Although he played an active role as a member of numerous ecclesiastical assemblies and as secretary of the Board of Governors, he emphasized what he had not achieved. While there were the speeches he had delivered at League Days and his participation in the Voice of the Church, yet hardly wrote or published anything. As far as that was concerned there were, according to Rev. VanderWel, other ministers more worthy to be interviewed. However he was keen to speak about his love for preaching and his enjoyment in teaching catechism and interacting with the youth of the Church. In all of his work, he had a heart for the people and it was his desire that they would live together in peace and grow in their service to the Lord.

And so Rev. VanderWel has faithfully proclaimed the living Word of the Lord for over forty years. We give thanks to our Heavenly Father for the blessing we have received in Rev. VanderWel's ministry of the Word.

An Interview with Rev. M. VanderWel

What was it that motivated you to become a minister?

"The beauty of it, yes the beauty of preaching the gospel. As a young boy I would go with my father to the church building on Saturday's. As my father would reserve the seats for the elderly I took the opportunity to climb the pulpit. Even while I was sat with my family in church on Sunday – or with my father on the elder's bench - I often thought how great it would be to be a preacher. I also liked the idea of teaching."

Why did you enjoy teaching catechism?

"I believe teaching catechism is foremost in the task of the minister. You just have to take time for it. Our youth form the future of the church. I think I had a good understanding with them and working with the youth was not a burden to me."

Who and what were the major influences during your years at the theological college?

"I am really thankful for my education at the theological college in Kampen. It was an exciting time during the years after 1944. The 'Vrijmaking' had a large impact on my life. Three of the Professors under whom I studied I like to mention by name. First of all, there was Prof. K Schilder, whose lectures have had a major influence on my way of thinking. Then there was Prof. B. Holwerda. It was always a treat when he opened up the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He showed us also the way to redemptive historical preaching! Prof. C Veenhof taught us the art of preaching. Being a talented preacher himself, he was not very merciful in judging the sermon proposals of us students. But we learned a lot!"

What were the expectations of a minister when you started in the ministry and has it changed today?

"Preaching was always central, as well as being involved with the members of the congregation, young and old. Catechism teaching was also very important. But as one elder colleague told me, a minister is supposed to be like a 'horse with five legs.' There are always extra things expected from him.

"Things like counseling, for instance, although it took place in the past, it did not have as much emphasis as it seems to have these days."

Have the expectations from a minister changed?

"I don't think that the expectations of church people have really changed. They often differ from one person to the other. Some enjoy the more confessional tone of the sermons but others are not impressed by it. I am disappointed though, that nowadays some say that the confessions and the church order should not have that much emphasis among us. It also seems that with a lot of our people the confession of the Church is not that important any more. The confessions have to be a living part of our faith. We are to stand behind them. I also hope that our churches do not follow the path of our sister-churches in Holland, where the way of preaching and the way of worship are really changing. During my last visit, I did not feel at home anymore."

How would you characterize your contribution to the ministry of the Word – what do you think the members of your congregations would remember most about you?

"I would rather not speculate on what might be a reason for people to remember my service. I leave that up to them. An important part of my pastoral work was 'making peace', but never at the cost of the truth.

When I retired from the ministry in Abbotsford, I received a box full of broken toys, as part of the Farewell evening. In my personal life I was apparently known as a handyman who liked to fix things. Don't replace things, but rather restore them, you know. Well this whole gesture could also be considered as symbolic of my work as a pastor, namely to repair and to heal what was broken and to restore, in people's personal lives as well as in their relationships to others. I am thankful to the Lord for the fact that I never experienced major conflicts in my congregations. If there were tensions or difficulties, it was a matter of wisdom not to make a big issue out of a certain situation, or to let a difference of opinion grow out into a personal vendetta. But rather to pursue things which made for peace."

What are your concerns for the Canadian Reformed Churches over the next forty years?

"To remain what we are – truly Reformed. When churches approach us, like the URC and the Free Reformed, we must keep an open mind and be ecumenical in the true sense of the word. But we should not drop essential things for the sake of reaching out. In this process of reaching out a remarkable thing is happening. When some churches in the Fraser Valley made quite some progress in their contact with a Free Reformed Church, the warning was heard; 'Don't go ahead of yourselves, let's first see what is happening on the level of the different federations.' In our contact with the URC it is just the other way around. Our latest General Synod has already set a time schedule for getting united, while locally, if I am not mistaken, the churches concerned still have to get acquainted with each other. In my humble opinion we need to exercise more patience in our mutual approach. But time will tell."

What do you have to say about the time you have been in the ministry?

"Someone once asked me whether, if I could start over again, I would still like to be a minister again? My answer was; yes only this time I would like to do a better job! But every time I am in church, be it in the pew or on the pulpit, I

consider the Worship Service a wonderful happening. Then I think of the words of Psalm 27:2 which speaks about the temple as the place "to view the beauty of the LORD my Saviour. The proclamation of the Gospel is then a beautiful thing. To be engaged in the ministry of reconciliation and to hear young and old respond in the congregational singing, is a unique experience, which I enjoy time and again. Therefore, I am thankful for the fact that I have been allowed to serve in this special office for so many years."

Wayne Pleiter

Child Pornography: A look at the Sharpe Trial

By Darren Leyenhorst

When I look at my children and see their innocence it is hard for me not to get angry at the ruling in the recent John Robin Sharpe case. I won't get into the gross details (it would make your stomach turn), so suffice it to say that Mr. Sharpe produced pornographic writings which contained descriptions of sexual acts with boys and men. That his written material is considered by some members of society to be writings with "artistic merit" makes me wonder if our society is striving to be the next Sodom and Gomorrah. Instead of protecting our children the laws seem to be protecting the sexually deviant. When reviewing the court rulings it is hard not to lose faith in our society.

The judge in Mr. Sharpe's B.C. Supreme Court trial held that Canadian legislation regarding child pornography was in place to restrict material that puts children at risk of harm. He then required proof that obscene materials actually cause harm (even though other judges had not required this in the past), but apparently found little "scientific" evidence linking the possession of child pornography to these risks. He decided this even though a reasoned apprehension of harm to children would suffice for the offense under the criminal code. He therefore decided that the law was not achieving its purpose. All of this was decided despite the fact that experts in the field maintained that Mr. Sharpe's writings were not artistic but rather that they actually contribute to the sexual abuse of children. One expert even stated that Mr. Sharpe's writings were among the most violent that he had ever read.

The trial judge took his analysis one step further and decided that the law was an invasion of Mr. Sharpe's freedom of expression and personal privacy. The issue became whether the limitation of freedom of expression by the pornography law is justifiable under the Charter (even given the harm possession of child pornography can cause to children). The fundamental question to be answered, therefore, was whether the Criminal Code goes too far by banning all child pornography (including written materials, computer images, and images drawn by people). At the crux of the case was this question: are Canada's laws banning the possession of child pornography constitutional or do they wrongly intrude on the constitutional right of Canadians to free expression? Both the trial judge and the British Columbia Court of Appeal agreed that the pornography law was unconstitutional. Subsequently, the Supreme Court of Canada declared the law constitutional but allowed an exception for the possession of any written material or pictures created and held by the accused for his personal use.

Mr. Sharpe was retried after the Supreme Court of Canada decision, based on that court's re-interpretation of the law. He was convicted of possession involving pornographic photographs of children, but was acquitted of the charges involving his personal writings on the grounds that they had artistic merit. Even though Mr. Sharpe showed no remorse and wasn't interested in treatment, the courts gave him a lenient sentence of house arrest between 4 p.m. and 8 a.m. He was also denied contact with anyone under the age of 18, and only permitted access to the Internet when it was restricted by software that blocks out pornographic sites. Since this ruling he has also appealed some of these conditions. Canadian Alliance Justice Critic Vic Toews condemned the sentence: "It is clearly inadequate as it fails to recognize the gravity of Mr. Sharpe's offence. Canadians condemn the violent sexual exploitation of children, and the courts must demonstrate that these crimes will be taken seriously. I find it astounding that this judge would state that Sharpe's criminal activities pose no danger to society." Another BC Judge stated that he would have upheld the child pornography law given the fact that Mr. Sharpe conceded that possession of some pornographic material should be prohibited and that the only issue was where to draw the line between permissible and impermissible material. He also said that he thought the trial judge erred in not considering the suppression of the market for child pornography, and

hence the prevention of the abuse of children in the course of producing child pornography, to be a salutary effect of the prohibition. Some critics of the trial have also said that the trial judge should not have been handling this case considering he had seen the arguments before and he has often ruled liberally in favor of freedom of expression.

Indeed, the law as re-written by the Supreme Court of Canada and the sentence given to Mr. Sharpe sends a wrong message to the public. This decision opens the door to acceptance of certain types of child pornography in Canada. It makes the task of police trying to combat child pornography that much more difficult. In the future they must prove that pornography is actually meant for distribution in order to get a conviction. Further, a stiffer sentence would have gone a long way in deterring others from using and circulating child pornography. Case in point: the head of the child pornography task force in Vancouver has said that ever since the ruling in the Sharpe case she has seen a boom in the amount of child pornography that is being distributed.

This court decision reflects the moral decline that is taking place in our country. It is ironic that freedom of expression over-rides the protection of children from exploitation. Despite the intention of Parliament to protect children under the law, this court decision citing the Charter of Rights and Freedoms advances the moral decay of our society. It is now up to our government to respond to the courts and speedily draft laws to counter the Sharpe decision. As MP Dan McTeague said on the issue of the current child pornography laws, "they have become a bad joke arrived at by judicial interpretations that see no problem in creating a constitutional right to exploit children." Many other democratic governments ban all child pornography so why doesn't Canada? Recently the government has enacted legislation to address the problem of internet child pornography but it didn't address the legal defense that child pornography has artistic merit.

It seems that our government won't respond to issues unless the public puts the pressure on them (as we saw with the latest corruption scandals). Therefore, we should let our MP's know where we stand on these issues and challenge the government to re-draft the child pornography possession law to reflect Parliament's original objective: to criminalize the possession of material that poses a risk of harm to children. This risk of harm was summarized by the following connections between the possession of child pornography and harm to children: child pornography promotes its distorted acts as normal; it fuels fantasies that incite offenders to offend; it is used for grooming and seducing victims; children are abused in the production of child pornography involving real children.

The bottom line is that criminalizing possession will reduce the market for child pornography and the abuse of children that it involves. Child pornography, as stated in section 163.1(1) of the Criminal Code, is inherently harmful to children and to society.

Parliament has the responsibility and ability to make moral judgments in criminalizing certain forms of conduct. The courts should be sensitive to the legitimate role of government in legislating with respect to these social values. The prohibition of child pornography minimally impairs the right to free expression. The inclusion of written material in the offense of possession does not amount to thought-control; rather the legislation seeks to prohibit harmful material.

If you put the whole issue of child pornography in the light of Scriptures there is no denying our moral responsibilities. The Lord has told us to keep our bodies pure. We read this in 1 Cor. 6:13, 18: "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body." The Bible also mandates us to protect the most vulnerable people in society. We have to send the message to society that child pornography does not have artistic merit in any of its forms. It is an abomination to our heavenly Father as we see in Jude 1:7 where it says, "In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire." Why do the media and special interest groups have to ring the alarm bells? Are Christians being silent bystanders (Lords Day 36) or are we holding the government morally accountable? Is this a situation where we could be a positive, good influence but decide to remain silent? It is our responsibility to witness and be watchmen as we see in Ezekiel 3:18-19. "When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die', and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself." (See also Ezekiel 33) We must let our light shine in the world and let the government know that they need to draft legislation in order to protect children and fight the further perversion of society.

Prayer also plays an enormous role in this matter. We must pray that the God who is in control will direct the hearts of those who govern us against the constant attacks of the devil. Let us remember that we are in the world and are to be mirrors reflecting God's will. We must use all the means given us to promote what is in accordance with the will of the Lord, especially in issues as important as child pornography.

This article was originally written for Surrey/Cloverdale A.R.P.A., the Association for Reformed Political Action

Current Events

Church and State

Pronouncement of a Canadian Prime Minister and the Judgment of an American Court

In the National Post of May 2, 2002 a short story tells of Prime Minister Chretien's extended defense of separation between Church and State. The report claims that Mr. Chretien defended his thinking and decisions in this regard in a caucus meeting where some of his fellow MP's disagreed with recent government pronouncements about this matter. Particular criticism was voiced of the government's insistence that the name of God not be mentioned in memorials on Parliament Hill soon after the Sept.11 terrorist attack in the USA.

Mr. Chretien defended and explained his decision with three remarkable tales from his past. The first was the story of a Roman Catholic man whose body was refused burial in a Roman Catholic cemetery because of his political views. The second was about his Liberal grandfather who was refused communion because he was Liberal and the third was the fact that in the late 1800's Liberals were expelled from the Roman Catholic church because of their liberal views, which included the separation of Church and State. In addition Mr. Chretien remarked on the multi-cultural aspect of present day Canadian society and indicated that in order to respect the religious beliefs of all it was best to indeed keep matters of church and state separate.

In a related case the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in California recently ruled that the American Pledge of Allegiance is illegal. Because the Pledge of Allegiance contains the words 'under God' this court decided that the government showed discrimination in favour of the Christian God. Part of this ruling was based on the idea that church and state must be separate and that the Pledge of Allegiance belongs to the state and should therefore not contain any reference to God Who belongs to the Church.

Comment

As Christians we abhor this kind of behaviour in our rulers and judges. We know that these are wrong minded decisions and we need to learn how to express why we are so sad about these developments. For this reason it is imperative to have a clear understanding of the Scriptural basis from which we may witness about the evil direction in which these pronouncements are taking our nation(s).

The Christian is renewed from complete death to complete life.

Christians know themselves to be renewed. Being dead to sin they have been rescued for life. That is the story of the whole Bible. It can be read in summary form in many places. One such summary is the second epistle of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians. The reader of that book can not come to the conclusion that salvation, renewal or rebirth from death to life only applies to part of man's existence. It is the complete man, who was completely dead in his sins and sinfulness that has been brought alive completely through faith in the sacrifice and death of Jesus Christ. Such a person lives their complete life to His glory.

When such a renewed person, a Christian, goes about his daily work it takes on new meaning. It is no longer a work for survival, for he may now pray "Give us this day our daily bread." When such a Christian goes to work it is not for self-satisfaction for he/she will now pray "Hallowed be Thy name." A Christian does not work to build a better world for himself and his fellow man. Rather he prays, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." A Christian petitions God each and every day in order to show in his daily activities that he is doing it all out of thankfulness for the renewed life he

has received. He recognizes and confesses that “Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever!” He is sure of it – “Amen!”

The Church is the place and means of God’s gifts of grace.

Because of the remaining vestiges of sin in renewed man God has given many means of grace to help him begin to live his completely new life in Jesus Christ. God has chosen to dispense these means of grace in the gathering of believers – the Church. These means of grace include the pure preaching of the Word of God, the pure administration of the two sacraments He has given to the Church and also the discipline of the Church to bring back those members who stray from the way of renewed life.

With these truths in mind we might comment on several issues that come to mind in our review of the Canadian Prime Minister’s pronouncements and the Ninth Circuit Court’s judgment.

Sphere Sovereignty

When we realize that the Christian is renewed from complete death to complete life we will more easily understand that the various spheres of life do not have different fundamental guidelines. Rather, we will more easily understand that the one and same principle - obedience to the word of God - guides all of life.

Many years ago another Prime Minister and his followers began to devise a separation between church and state. His name was Abraham Kuyper. He became Prime Minister as the leader of a Christian political party. But during his days as Prime Minister the many splits occurred in the Church. Often the members of one group considered it inconsequential to work together in education or government while they could not be together in worship. As a consequence, Prime Minister Kuyper [and later developed more elaborately by his followers] devised the notion of sphere sovereignty [Sovereiniteit in Eigen Kring]. This thinking held that various disciplines had their own fundamental basis. Law, education, medicine, justice, etc. all had their own fundamental basis, just like the Church had the Three Forms of Unity. As a result Christians could still work together in so many other areas even if they could not agree with matters regarding the Church.

In the days of Abraham Kuyper these various spheres of life would still all function from a common ‘world view’ called Christianity or as some preferred, Calvinism. Today Prime Minister Chretien works from a worldview of multiculturalism.

As we have seen, for a Christian all of life is one. Renewed life is lived in the body of Jesus Christ, the Church. Thus when there is division among men regarding the Church then there is division among those same men in all of life. A Christian can not consent to public life without God. Christians can not educate their children without God. A Christian can not obey the laws of a country if they counter the Word of God.

When we live as renewed Christians then terrorist activities receive a God-centered response from us. We do not ignore the source of our new life because in our nation there are those who reject our God, or others who serve Him in their own fashion. Rather we praise Him for Who He is and we implore Him for mercy. We may ask Him for a clearer understanding of the path of history. We may plead for strengthened faith in the face of physical danger to our nation and ourselves. But we can not condone the rejection of the source of our renewed life like the Prime Minister of Canada is doing.

Let us pay a little more attention to that term worldview. It continues to receive increasing prominence among Christians today. Small Churches do not lend themselves well to political strength in a democratic political world. So a new common basis has been sought. Today we call that common basis a worldview. If we have what is called a Christian worldview then we are all considered to be on the same basis. We really belong to the same invisible, undefined, non-descript group called Christians. Some even dare to call it the Church. A Christian worldview sounds nice, but if it means condoning disobedience to God’s word, or if it means compromising the truth then it is not a truly Christian worldview. Then it does not represent a renewed worldview but a compromised worldview. Then it does not put God and His Word first, but it puts man first with his own, at best, tainted ideas of how things should be done in a sinful world. God does not ask man to find the best way to get the job done. He tells us the best way to get the job done – be obedient to My Word.

All politicians, but especially those who profess to be Christians, must review their priorities. Who comes first in their lives? Is it God and His Son Jesus Christ or is it their eagerness to rule? Where do they seek their strength and comfort? Do they seek it in God's holy word and at the place where it is purely preached each week and where it is accompanied by so many gifts of grace? Or do they seek it where there are greater numbers of people who have a similar worldview?

Let us make one more comparison between national leaders. Both Prime Minister Chretien and President Bush of the USA were confronted with a difficult situation on September 11, 2001- a national disaster beyond quick, human solution. President Bush took the opposite direction from Prime Minister Chretien. He quoted from Scripture and spoke of his belief. Later he participated in a multi-denominational service where also the truth of Scripture was proclaimed. In both countries a variety of faiths are prominent, but President Bush showed his personal faith. He was not afraid to show his faith as he led his nation through a difficult time. In this way he made clear that God is not divorced from his nation's existence. He allowed the nation to see that for him the powers beyond the control of the world's most powerful nation are not beyond the control of Almighty God.

Surely it is most difficult to be a leader of a nation where so many religions live together. One may even wonder if it is possible for a Christian to lead a nation with such diverse religious affiliation. In the United States there are also many examples of the State being separated from the Church. Yet, the blatant pronouncements by Prime Minister Chretien contradict the Scriptural norm for Christians; a norm that shows us that all of life is one.

R. J. Rushdoony elaborates on the fact that God is indeed the source of all things and comes to us with His guidance for all of life in His Word. In his book "The Foundations of Social Order", when dealing with the Creeds of the church and in particular, the Apostle's Creed, Rushdoony writes, "The Creed thus has vast implications concerning history because of its declaration that God is the creator of all things. This declaration immediately makes God the source of all ethics, of all morality, and of all law. In all non-Christian systems, the source of ethics and of law is the state; it is the polis, the empire, or the kingdom. There is no understanding the gulf between Aristotle and Plato, for example, and Christianity, apart from this fact, and the gulf cannot be legitimately bridged. Either God is the true source of morality and law, or the state is. If God is the true source, then the Word of God must be harkened to by church, state, school, and every sphere of life as the one authoritative source of morality and law. As institutions and orders declare law, the most do it ministerially, as administrators under God. The Word of God therefore speaks to every sphere, including church and state, and the Word of God is over the church and corrects and disciplines the church."

Of primary importance to the Christian is obedience to God. It is our thankfulness for renewal. Only when we have that truth clearly in mind can we begin to determine how our obedience can be best used in the places God puts us. Our need for thankful obedience may preclude our participation in efforts and offices that appear to have good goals and intentions. At other times the places we have been given by God may force us to witness openly and publicly about our faith Him. He may put us in places and positions that force us to witness of His sovereignty, of His grace and mercy, and also of His justice. But our jobs, positions or responsibilities may never prevent us from witnessing clearly and consistently about our first joy.

PdB

Canadian Government law upholding Scriptural marriage attacked by Supreme Court of Ontario

The National post of Saturday, July 13, 2002 reported that the Supreme Court of Ontario has lifted the ban on gay marriages. They smugly remarked that the Netherlands is the only other country to have legally sanctioned same-sex marriages.

In the story carried on the front page of the National Post some details of the arguments of the justices were provided. The judgment has left open a possibility for the federal government to intervene before it can be acted upon. "If the federal government does not take action within that time period [2 years – PdB], then the definition of marriage in Ontario will change to the union of 'two persons'. The ruling binds civil marriages, not religious ceremonies." Mr. Justice Harry LaForme was quoted as having written, "The exclusion of same-sex couples serves no pressing, nor even legitimate, government objectives." He added, "The restriction against same-sex marriage is an offense to the dignity of lesbians and gays because it limits the range of relationship options available to them. The result is they are denied the autonomy to choose whether they wish to marry. This in turn conveys the ominous message that they are unworthy of marriage."

Anti-polygamists Held Forum in Vancouver

The US Center for Public Education and Information on Polygamy together with an organization called Eye on Polygamy held a forum in Vancouver, Canada and expressed the concern that Canada was becoming a safe haven for polygamists. [National Post, July 13, 2002]. Hugo Gurdon wrote a short editorial in the National Post that pointed out that "Polygamy is illegal but not prosecuted in this country because the law banning it probably does not pass muster with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Canadian State long ago barred itself from the bedrooms of the nation, and unconventional sexual relations are not merely tolerated but widely celebrated. Data at Statistics Canada suggests that 1.2 million people now live in sexual relationships with men and women to whom they are not married."

Comment

There will be few Bible believing Canadians who still consider their country a Christian nation. The consequences of the idea that State must be kept completely separate from Church are clearly seen in decisions and trends in the State. Laws and court decisions are taking a diametrically opposite position than the Bible on which the Church is based. When judges dare to state that the sin of men exchanging unnatural relations with men [and women with women] should be given the right to the God-ordained union between man and woman in the most intimate relationship reflecting the relationship of God with His Church, then surely we have become a secular nation, even an anti-Christian nation.

For many years the sanctity of marriage has been ignored and discarded by the Canadian government when it allowed divorce for a variety of reasons. In addition the laws we adjusted many years ago to accommodate common law 'marriages'. A watchful Christian easily sees the power of the evil one as he directs nation and society ever further away from the laws of God. God says He hates divorce. The world answers back, "we love divorce, it gives us more freedom." In the beginning God instituted marriage by explaining that a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall be one flesh. The world says, "No, no gays and lesbians are also worthy of marriage". Blindly they follow the father of all lies. Often they are no more than pawns under the direction of the evil one who leads them in the spiritual warfare that can not be victorious.

The Church does not have a mandate to rule and govern nations. The Church has a different nature and calling, but those who make up government have a calling to live according to all that God has commanded. They must realize that they owe their existence and the existence of the very nations they govern to the God whose people the Church is. Rulers are obliged to recognize God and His Word. That word is proclaimed in the Church. Therefore it is impossible to separate State from Church. Each has its own place. The one ought not to intrude on the calling of the other, but they must work in step with each other.

Let us be cheered by the sure knowledge that the outcome of the spiritual warfare that intensifies as history progresses is without doubt. The victory is clear and we are on the winning side. Let us hold fast to the Spirit that guides us in this battle, listening to His direction [Word] and asking steadfastly for His help [Prayer].

PdB

NEWS FROM CHURCHES IN ECCLESIASTICAL FELLOWSHIP

Notes from the 2002 General Assembly of the OPC

(Source: Web page on the Internet - www.opc.org/GA/69th_GA_rpt.html)

The 69th General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church met at [Gordon College](http://www.gordoncollege.edu), Wenham, Massachusetts, from June 12 through June 18, 2002. This unofficial report is provided as a service to the body of Christ; it is but one commissioner's observations, not an official record of the Assembly, and should not be quoted as such. Questions or comments may be addressed to the [Rev. Donald J. Duff, duff.1@opc.org](mailto:duff.1@opc.org), stated clerk.

The Statistician, Mr. Luke Brown (Presbytery of Philadelphia), reported on the growth of the church. 12 churches were added to the denomination, 4 either withdrew or were dissolved. There were 12 new mission works added while 8

works were organized and 3 were terminated. Two large churches withdrew but others joined and the denomination continues to grow in almost every other area. A large number of young people made public professions of faith in the past year. The Advisory Committee was silent on the Statistician's report. Mr. Brown was nominated and declared elected for another term. Mr. Poundstone led in prayer for the Statistician.

(Following a recess,) the Rev. John A. Bouwers, the United Reformed Churches of North America delegate from Ontario, addressed the Assembly. He addressed the question of why the United Reformed Churches has been slow to draw closer to us in fellowship. It is because that denomination views such a close relationship as but a step toward full union. They are ready now to work toward that end. It will take time due to Confessional and polity differences (they view themselves as United Reformed Churches (note the plural), with the emphasis on local church officers, while the OPC is the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (note the singular). These things need to be worked out but the United Reformed Churches are committed to that end.

A number of church planters, present at the Assembly as commissioners, were introduced, as well as five of our Regional Home Missionaries (Messrs. Ollinger of Ohio, Tyson of Philadelphia, Poundstone of Southern California, and DeLacy Andrews of the Southeast). There are over 60 Home Mission Works currently in some stage of development. One of these already has over 120 members!

... an Overture (request for official action) from the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic to revise the Book of Discipline to make it clearer as to what procedures are to be followed when a person is not repentant—a censure (e.g., suspension, excommunication) may be upgraded (e.g., from suspension to excommunication) after a year without a further trial.

The [Book of Discipline](#) says, “When, after the passing of a year, a person suspended indefinitely has failed to manifest repentance, it shall be the duty of the judicatory to consider whether suspension should be continued or more severe censure should be imposed. It may proceed to deposition or excommunication or both without further trial.”

But what if the 12 months expires and no action has been taken? Can the original court act after 13 months, or 14? But what if it is clear there will be no repentance? And what must be recorded in the minutes with regard to circumstances?

The Advisory Committee recommended that the upgrade be permitted before the year expires and that the circumstances calling for such action be recorded in the minutes. The committee also proposes that further review must take place in another 12 months.

The overture requested the same things and added that the right of the one censured to respond to any new facts cited before the increase of censure is imposed should be established. Dispute of such facts would be recorded in the minutes as well. Is this important? Yes, because it adds facts on the basis of which the one censured can make an appeal to a higher court of the church.

Both the committee and the original overture strengthen the requirement to deal earnestly with the sinner and seeking repentance rather than letting the person sit in limbo. But the overture from the Mid-Atlantic also is meant to keep a church court from abusing its authority and strengthening the censure without due process—the overture would require disputes of new facts to be recorded in the minutes. In other words, this protects the rights of one accused of sin.

The overture failed so what was left was the Advisory Committee motion. This passed and will be sent to the Presbyteries for consideration. If a majority of the presbyteries approve, the change will become part of our Book of Discipline in the year 2005.

Next the Report of the Committee on Ecumenicity was considered. We have fellowship with 26 other denominations in this country and around the world. We continue to draw closer to the Bible Presbyterian Church. A few years ago they told the General Assembly that they were wrong to depart from us in 1937. We are continuing to meet together to discuss ways to increase the level of fellowship with the ultimate goal of formal union. The committee urged pastoral prayers be raised in each congregation for persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. It recommended closer fellowship with the Presbyterian Church of Japan. It recommended we enter into stronger fellowship with the Reformed Church of Quebec. We congratulated the Presbyterian Church of Korea in Kosin on 50 years of ministry by way of approving a letter to that effect. We also sent a letter to the North American Presbyterian Reformed Church council with the resolution that the CRC be removed from that fellowship. There was prayer for the CRC that it would

repent of unbiblical practices that led to this action (e.g., authorizing the ordination of women to the offices of minister and ruling elder in that denomination).

The Assembly heard fraternal greetings from the Rev. Mr. Feenstra, delegate from the [Canadian Reformed Churches](#).

The Directory of Worship Committee report continued to be considered by the Assembly as questions were asked of the Committee. The Committee recommended, and the Assembly approved, that the proposed revisions be sent to the Presbyteries and Sessions of the Church for study in preparation for the 70th General Assembly voting on the revisions. If that Assembly should approve it then the Presbyteries will need to approve it by a majority for the church as a whole to adopt it. There was an attempt to amend the proposed directory to permit a ruling elder to read the salutation and the benediction. This reflects an ongoing difference in the church between those who believe there are only two offices taught in the Scriptures (elder and deacon) and those who believe there are three offices (minister, ruling elder and deacon). The proposed amendment was defeated. The proposed revision says that ruling elders may “at times” lead the worship service. Those words were removed. There was prayer for the committee and for the study of the proposed revision that will take place.

Two matters will come before the 70th Assembly that will define the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for some time to come. One is the [revision](#) of the [Directory of Worship](#). The other is the study of views of the days of creation. Please pray for the committees and others who will study these matters and contribute to next year’s debate and decision. Pray that our God would give his church wisdom.