

EXPLAINING WHAT WE CONFESS AND PRACTICE

In the first issue of Volume 8 of Reformed Polemics we discussed “Getting Rid of Idiosyncrasies.” We observed that the long-established Reformed practice of “closed communion” was described by some people as “a Canadian Reformed idiosyncrasy”, and those who take part in and want to maintain this practice were considered to be narrow-minded, judgemental and sectarian. Implicit in this assessment (judgement) of the practice of closed communion and the people who practice it is the assertion that it is an unscriptural practice, and that unity with the CanRC (Canadian Reformed Churches) is out of the question unless we get rid of this so-called “idiosyncrasy.”

In subsequent issues of Reformed Polemics we published two papers that dealt with the matter of our long-established Reformed practice of *closed* communion. In “*Article 61 and Visitors to the Lord’s Table*” we looked at what we as Reformed churches have agreed upon in Article 61 of our Church Order. In “*Admitting Guests to the Lord’s Supper – OPC vs. Canadian Reformed Churches*” we examined the differences between the OPC and the Can/RC in admitting guests to the Lord’s Supper. These two papers clearly show that our long-established Reformed practice of *closed* communion is not simply a convention based on some personal preferences, but a practice founded on clear scriptural principles. These articles explain what we as Reformed believers confess and practice; they “uncover the riches of our Reformed heritage.”

In addition to the two previously mentioned papers on the Lord’s Supper as presented in our last two editorials, we now republish an article that appeared in the Nov 22, 1997 issue of Reformed Polemics. It is titled, “What about the Lord’s Supper?” by Rev. R. D. Anderson, Minister of the Churches (Liberated) in Valkenburg and Katwijk (Netherlands).

WHAT ABOUT THE LORD’S SUPPER?

All kinds of questions are often asked about the Lord’s Supper. What does it actually mean? Why do we celebrate it? Can visitors come, or is it some kind of club-members only affair? What are we actually doing there? I hope in this short comment to outline some of the basic teachings of Scripture with respect to the Lord’s Supper, especially as the apostle Paul shows them to us in his first letter to the Corinthians. This letter addresses the matter of the Lord’s Supper time and again in various different contexts. Why? Apparently the church at Corinth did not properly understand what the Supper was really all about (cf. I Cor. 11:17-22). The church at Corinth had many other problems that Paul also addresses (e.g. prostitution, toleration of incest, participation at idol feasts, etc.), but it is interesting to see that the apostle chose at many points to relate his teaching on these other matters to the Supper of our Lord. That is why references to the Supper are scattered throughout the letter. By taking a tour through these references I hope we shall be able to put together a Scriptural picture of the meaning and use of this sacrament. It would be advisable to read through each passage of Scripture as we come to it.

1) The first place Paul introduces the Supper in I Corinthians is in chapter 5. In this chapter the apostle reprimands the congregation for tolerating a case of incest in their midst (v.1). They have not mourned this terrible sin, nor disciplined the man who had committed it. The apostle Paul instructs the congregation that such a person must be cast out of the congregation, and handed over to Satan (v.5). Tough words. But it was a very serious matter (as is any unconfessed sin before God! cf. Ps. 32:1-5). This disciplinary action was to be officially declared during their worship service (v.4). Note that this disciplinary procedure was not only to be done for the sake of the congregation, but also for the person concerned, that he might realize his sin, repent, and be saved (v.5b). That this eventually happened, we learn from II Cor. 2: 5-11. There the man concerned is restored to fellowship with the body of Christ, having become sorrowful for his sin before God.

What concerns us here in all this, however, is what Paul says in I Cor. 5:6ff. Paul is outlining some of the implications of casting this person out of the congregation. In vs. 6-8 he brings up the image of the Passover; that famous Old Testament feast celebrating Israel's deliverance out of Egypt when the destroying angel went around killing all the first born children (Ex. 12). Only Israel was spared, and that only because of the blood of lambs smeared upon their doorposts. As part of the celebration of the Passover, the Israelites were not to eat any leavened bread. Paul uses this image of unleavened bread to suggest that just as the Israelites clean out the leaven from the bread when they celebrate Passover, so also the church of Jesus Christ should clean out unrepentant sinners from their midst when they "celebrate the feast" (v.8).

Wait a minute. Does the Christian church celebrate Passover? Yes it does! But not with the blood of a lamb, rather, with the blood of Christ! Christ Jesus is our Passover lamb. We "celebrate the feast" every time we celebrate Lord's Supper! That is our Passover meal! Remember that the Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper at the celebration of the Jewish Passover. The Gospels relate how Jesus instructed his disciples to remember this last meal with their Lord. Why? They had to do it primarily as a celebration of his death. Jesus himself made this connection. Note how in Matt. 26:2 he connects the coming Passover with his coming crucifixion. Then at the Passover meal itself he institutes the supper by saying "this is my blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for forgiveness of sins" (Matt.2: 28). You see the apostle Paul was quite correct when he referred in his letter to the Corinthians celebrating the (Christian) Passover.

What do we learn from this passage?

i) In the first place, that the Lord's Supper is a celebration and remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ for our sins.

ii) In the second place, that the congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ must be careful to exclude anybody who is living in unconfessed sin, from the table. The table is NOT open! The congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ has the duty to remove all the old leaven from the celebration, that is, the leaven of unconfessed sin. No member of the congregation may eat or drink of the Supper if he has not confessed his sin. Discipline must be exercised! Wickedness cannot be tolerated at the Supper.

iii) In the third place, notice too, that it is not up to someone's conscience whether he goes to the Supper or not. The man who had committed incest obviously still thought it was quite all right to go. But the apostle says that he must actually be removed! That means that people in the church have to make a judgement. It is interesting to note that Paul continues in chapter 6 by speaking about this matter of making judgements in church. He argues that the church should be able to appoint wise men as judges among themselves, rather than having to go to a secular court (vs.5-6)! The church does this of course by appointing elders through whom the Lord governs his church. That is why it is the (Biblical) practice in Reformed churches that elders oversee who may and who may not attend Lord's Supper. It is not a free for all.

2) The apostle returns to the Lord's Supper in chapter 10:15- 22 this time in the context of dealing with the matter of eating food sacrificed to idols. May a Christian eat food that has been dedicated to heathen gods? Nearly all meat sold in Corinth at the time had been so dedicated! Were Christians then to be vegetarians? Or could they eat such meat, even if they were invited to a feast where the meat was eaten in honour of various heathen gods? This was a matter that had caused quite a bit of confusion in Corinth, and so Paul addresses it at length, beginning in chapter 8. In chapter 10 however he again relates the matter to the Lord's Supper. This is helpful for us, for at the same time we learn some more about the character of the Supper itself.

i) In the first place, we learn that the wine that we drink is symbolic of the blood of Christ, and likewise the bread is symbolic of Christ's body. When we eat and drink the bread and wine, we share in the body and blood of Christ. Paul goes on to liken the Lord's Supper to a sacrificial meal, like that common in the Old Testament (i.e. at peace offerings, cf. Passover). A lamb would be sacrificed on the altar and then portions of the meat would be passed out. Those who ate took part in the benefits of the sacrifice; i.e. they received the forgiveness of sins symbolized by the sacrifice. Paul uses this point to show why taking part in idol feasts was wrong. But we learn at the same time that the Lord's Supper is like this too. When we eat and drink at the Lord's Supper we testify to the fact that we are receiving the benefits of Christ's death on the cross for our sins. Incidentally that is why it is so important to make sure that no one is present who has not believed in Jesus Christ, nor confessed all his sins to God.

ii) But there is one other important point that the apostle makes here. In v.17 he argues that the Lord's Supper also symbolizes the unity of the body of the congregation. The one loaf of bread at the Supper symbolizes the unity of the one body of Christ that is eating it. Paul picks up this image of the congregation as a body again in chapter 12:12ff. He is by the way referring to the Corinthian congregation as the "body of Christ" cf. 12:27. It is important to note that the image of the "body of Christ" *most* (if not all) of the time refers to a local congregation in Scripture. Each local church is a complete body of Christ, a complete church, with its own ruling session of elders. We learn here from v.16 that the Lord's Supper symbolizes the unity that the members of a particular local church (the body) have in their Lord and Saviour. That is then why each local church has its own celebration of the sacrament. We do not all gather together once a year as churches to celebrate Lord's Supper in one huge gathering, as the Jews used to gather for the Passover. No. Our Lord has instituted that the Lord's Supper be celebrated as the symbol of unity for each individual church. Our celebration of the sacrament then, is in the first place a celebration for our own church, our body of Christ. This body consists of those who have committed themselves to the Lord AND committed themselves to the Lord's church as it is instituted in a local place, under the supervision of the Lord's servants, the elders. That is the body. Thus the celebration of the Lord's Supper can never be divorced from a local church setting. It is always the celebration of the Supper of a particular church. That is why even the Westminster Confession of Faith states that the Supper is to be given "to none who are not then present in the congregation" (WCF 29:3).

What does that imply for visitors? Well, it does not necessarily mean that no visitors may ever be admitted. But it does mean that the Supper is in the first place not really celebrated for their sake. It is celebrated for the sake of the congregation itself. Now we saw from chapter 5 that Paul demanded that each congregation judge and oversee who goes to the Lord's Supper. The elders of a particular congregation are of course well able to do that with respect to their own members (for whom the Supper is served). They should know the flock that they shepherd, and will therefore be able to know who should take part and who should not. It is more difficult for them when they must deal with visitors. Remember that they are responsible to God for overseeing the celebration. That is why traditionally in Reformed circles the elders only admitted those visitors who came from other sister churches and provided an attestation, i.e. proof that they were members of another true church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that they were not under discipline. The elders could then in good conscience admit such people to their church's celebration of the sacrament. If people came without such an attestation, and there were no witnesses to their church faithfulness (cf. II Cor. 13:1), or if they came from some church of which the elders had no knowledge, they could not take part. This was not to judge the hearts of the visitors concerned. But it was a frank confession that, i) the celebration of the Supper was in the first place for that particular congregation, and ii) that the elders could not be expected to take responsibility for those people whom they did not know, nor knew of their churches. If they admitted such visitors, they would only be making a mockery of the oversight that God had charged them with (cf. Acts 20: 28ff).

3) In chapter 11:17-34 Paul takes up the issue of the Lord's Supper for its own sake, to correct the abuses taking place in Corinth. The Corinthians were apparently in the habit of turning it into a drunken party! Paul certainly reprimands them for this! In doing so he goes over the words of institution of our Lord, showing that the meaning of the Supper is rooted in Christ's death, as we have seen. He tells the Corinthians that they need to examine their own hearts before they eat the Supper. They have been sinning against it. This is serious. In fact it is so serious that God has punished some of them with sickness and even death (v.30)! Although the apostle does not again bring up the matter of oversight over who attends the Supper here, yet we see why it is so important. When elders bar someone from taking part (for example the man who committed incest), then they are sparing him from the possible disastrous consequences that result when it is taken improperly. Those who eat and drink in an unworthy manner are guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord (v. 27). It is a serious business, and we ourselves should learn never to take the Supper lightly. In summary we should see that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is a very important and serious part of the worship of each particular church of Christ. It is not something to be taken lightly. God does not take it lightly. He is willing even to kill those who abuse it. We must therefore approach this subject with due reverence and caution, and seek to examine even ourselves before we attend, to see that we too really understand and confess from the heart that Jesus has died once for all, for all of our sins.

The Joy of Sunday Rest

By Dr. P. van Gorp

Taken from Reformanda of Oct. 3

Translated by P. de Boer

The discussion about the meaning for today of the fourth commandment continues. On the one hand it is sad that about such a simple subject, over which there has been such unanimity in the Reformed Churches in the past centuries, so much division has come about in many churches since the decision about it at the last Synod. On the other hand it does provide for a new opportunity for us to examine the riches we really have in the Sunday as day of rest. Especially when we consider

that we live in a society that no longer cares much for the commandments of God, particularly the fourth commandment. The 24-hour economy and Sunday shopping can easily deprive us of the joy of Sunday rest.

Delight in the Deliverance from the Curse

The reason for writing about Sunday rest yet again is the appearance of an article in the Kerkblad for Middle and South Holland of Sept.8 written by Br. H. Walinga entitled Remember the Sabbath. In addition to that I also received from a reader of Reformanda an introduction written about the Sunday. In both cases we came across points of view that have not had much of our attention.

In the article by Walinga Sunday rest is characterized as a delight in the deliverance from the curse that sin has caused to fall upon our work. It is not for nothing that the Synod of Dort (1618-1619) spoke about our 'slavish' labour. After all, the Lord did say that the earth is cursed because of our sin, and that we would henceforth eat from it in the sweat of our brow and that He would bring forth thorns and thistles in it (Gen3: 17). But the good news in Jesus Christ is that we are now redeemed from that curse. Now it is no longer the work with all its difficulties and worries that is our focus, but the delight in the deeds of the Creator. He has redeemed us from the cold claws of Satan, redeemed us from the power of death, but also redeemed us from the daily consequences of disobedience. He knows precisely how best to do that. Give man a required, frequently repeated moment of remembrance in something that takes up most of his activity - his daily work. Give man a day of rest every week from the cursed labour.

Walinga then quotes a small booklet by Rev. P. Visser, published in 1959. There we can read,

“The rest God gives is not doing nothing, but a delighting in creation and its maintenance. Because it is created in God’s image this is also the mandate for man – to delight in the result of God’s creation and its maintenance. But sin has broken this too (...). The blessing of work has become a curse. As a result man had to subject himself to the slavery of labour. But soon man was promised deliverance, a deliverance that affected all of creation - hence also labour (...) defiling the Sabbath by working on it is the acceptance of the curse in place of the promised deliverance.”

We would like to include, by way of reminder, the groaning of the whole creation and of God’s children, as we can read about it in Romans 8:19-23. Indeed, everything succumbs to fruitlessness. Our labours accomplish nothing in themselves - nothing is lasting. We long for the eventual deliverance of our body. But we may be assured, in all our struggles, that we yet may be busy with the fulfilling of our cultural mandate given in Paradise. After all the Lord brought us along back then to fill the earth and to develop all the possibilities that He placed in creation. We are, indeed, busy on this earth, that lies under the curse of God, to work towards the future. That gives God’s child the power and motivation to continue on. Our work in the Lord is not futile.

Now that is what the Lord wants us to focus on each first day of the week, time and again, our whole life long. That one day marks every day: the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ gives purpose for our daily work. We rest from our normal work because we know that with it we may be busy with the fulfillment of our Paradise mandate.

Walinga ends his article as follows:

“Is there a prohibition against labour on the Sunday? As Christians may we not participate in the 24-hour economy? Is shopping on Sundays forbidden? And if you have a shop may you not open it on Sundays? And are the machines not allowed to be running in your factories on the Sunday? Yes - there is a prohibition against labour on the Sunday! Why? Well, no matter how unusual it might sound in our society, it is because sweat, thorns and thistles have affected your daily work. Because we have come to live with the illusion that we have done away with these, the Lord wants to confront us with that reality every Sunday again. The weekly struggle to maintain our existence is reality, but the coming peace, the coming delight is something we may never forget. Therefore, remember the Sabbath - therefore celebrate.”

The Lasting Sabbath

That was one aspect of the Sabbath. We wish to pass on several other aspects from the aforementioned study by a reader of Reformanda. In the first place he, too, points to the aspect of redemption. But in addition he points out the praise to God and especially the message from the Lord that man can not live by bread alone - by what he thinks he can do on his own - but only from God's grace. All these aspects are clearly explained in the Old Testament pertaining to the celebration of the Sabbath.

That then is also the essential aspect of the fourth commandment in comparison with the ceremonial sides of it. In some discussions about the Sabbath some rather easily comment that such and such is old testamentic and relates to the Sabbath but does not prove that it is relevant to the Sunday. But such a comment is invalid when it does not prove that the fulfillment of the old covenant prescribes a different use of the Sabbath - day of rest - namely, that resting is no longer commanded by God.

Hence, let us look at a number of aspects of the old testamentic Sabbath that are lasting for the new dispensation.

The Praise of the Lord

Psalm 92 is a song for the Sabbath day. The Holy Spirit makes God's people rejoice about the works of God in creation, about his government of all that happens on earth, about His redemption and the salvation of His own, His children who bear fruit - even in old age. That is how Israel sanctified the Sabbath by making His name great because of all His works.

Lord's Day 38 adds to that by stating that the worship services and the schools must be maintained: make God's deeds known in church and via the schools. His name is to be praised in the coming together of His people as congregation where He is to be praised in song and prayer for all His wonderful ways.

The Redemption

God's redemption promise is the framework of the whole law, but especially of the fourth

commandment. After all, above the law is the word of deliverance: I am the Lord your God Who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And Egypt also represents the slavery to sin. God's people must remain in that redemption by living out of it. That means a life in new obedience over against the Ten Commandments. With regard to the fourth commandment that means resting on the Sabbath. Then all of life is stamped as a redeemed life.

Not By Bread Alone

Cessation of work identifies the life of a child of God as a life of dependence on the Lord - not by bread alone. Here bread is in contrast to manna. It is everything that a man does to maintain his existence. With regard to bread that means plowing and harrowing, sowing and reaping, grinding and baking, distributing and retailing. And, indeed, that is our calling. But then the Lord says, remember that in the end everything depends on what the Lord is willing to provide. Living by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord means: living from promises. God's child may count on and trust in the care of his God and Lord. That's why there is that rest on the Sabbath. By such rest the people of God confess with a deed that their food and drink is not dependent on themselves and their labour and effort. This is in contrast to those who do not want to recognize God as the spring and source of all good things. The Lord Jesus Christ has therefore forbidden all worry: your heavenly Father knows that you need these things, he says.

A very clear example of this can be found in the institution of the Sabbath year (Lev.23). In the seventh year the people of Israel were not permitted to sow and not even to prune their vineyards. They were not even allowed to reap whatever grew of itself. This required a strong trust in God because now they had to depend totally on Him by refraining from all labour and effort. But the promise of the Lord is (Lev.25: 19 ff.) that the land would provide its fruit to enable them to eat and to live in it in safety. And then the Lord adds (for He knows our worrying and our doubting):

“And if you say, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’ I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, so that it will bring forth fruit for three years.”

Yes, this God remains our God. The same God Who gave reassurance to His people! For that He has even given His own Son. That makes man silent and emotional. The Lord knows of what we are made.

That's why, on Sundays we may just let our work rest, leave the store closed, cease from labour - He gives us His promises, doesn't He? Do we still really believe in that? Or do we reason in a worldly manner because we only concern ourselves with business results?

The great danger in the new perspective on Sunday rest in relation to the fourth commandment is that we unlearn that we are really dealing with God's promises. When we first arrived in Australia so many years ago and were threatened by layoffs if we did not join the unchristian labour unions, God's children dared to trust in God's promises. That was not easy and caused much conflict. But it did provide the rest and peace of living out of God's promises. And the Lord has not put that faithfulness to shame.

A Doctrinal Statement

The objections against the decision of General Synod – Leusden – 1999 with regard to the fourth commandment are often negated by the claim that Synod only dealt with one particular sermon and did not make a doctrinal statement. In the previous century when objections were made against a sermon by Rev. Geelkerken, the Synod did not restrict itself to dealing only with the sermon but also judged the underlying reasons behind it and the direction they would steer the church in. The Synod denied those ideas and spoke out strongly in a contrary opinion defending what Scripture teaches us.

The most recent Synod has failed to reject the erroneous teaching that Sunday rest is merely a man-made rule. Failure to reject an error is a choice. Don't we teach that the true church can be known by its rejection of all that is contrary to the true teachings of Christ?

Always?

Regularly the contention is made that there have always been two understandings permitted in the church regarding Sunday rest. Always, it is contended, there has been room for those who claim that Sunday rest is no longer grounded in the fourth commandment. Therefore, it can no longer be considered an ordinance of the Lord. For that reason the Synod referred to the proclamation of the Synod of Dort. But that was totally inapplicable, as has been shown. Everyone can know that, at least for the last number of centuries, there has been a clear doctrinal understanding that the Lord has commanded the Sunday rest.

This Scriptural conviction has required much sacrifice from God's children over the ages. That will continue to be the case and may intensify in the future. But at the same time that conviction and living according to it has had a strengthening effect in the church. We stood together and strengthened one another in the struggle to remain faithful to the promises of God. Earlier we mentioned the struggles in this regard of the pioneers in the immigrant churches. That's when the Lord tested His people again, just like He did so much earlier in the desert, to see what lived in their heart. At the same time He provided them with the strength to remain faithful to His promises. That was the joy of the time of testing and rescue. The churches of those times have been identified with that test, even until the present. It is our heartfelt desire that also in God's churches in the Netherlands such faithfulness may become apparent and that the disintegrating influence of human wisdom may be put away.

A Clear or Clanking Clarion?

On the front cover of "Clarion" a biweekly which bills itself as "The Canadian Reformed Magazine", even though it is a private undertaking, there are two trumpet blowers and a reference to Numbers 10: 1 to 10. In this passage, we read about the Lord's instruction to Moses to make two silver trumpets and about their use.

The Lord gave specific instructions to the trumpeter. A self-willed melody would not do! The trumpeter was to give a very clear and specific sound on that trumpet. The Israelites were directed

by the sound and would know what to do. The sound to battle was different from that given to come together in the assembly. One can understand that the priests had a great responsibility, for if one did not give a clear and recognizable sound the people would be confused and would not know what was required. When the watchman does not give a clear sound on his trumpet in time of war, the people will not be aware of the approaching enemy and will not be ready for the battle.

The “Clarion” of October 26, 2001 contained an editorial written by Rev. Cl. Stam under the heading “Distinction and/or Separation?” Rev. Stam informs his readers regarding the “Vacation Bible School” (VBS) and the children’s summer camps organized by “Campfire”. He reports that “most congregations in Ontario have lent support to and been involved in these activities” but “there are also among us those who feel such activity is unwarranted, even unbiblical” and congregations where such “evangelism” is opposed. Rev. Stam mentions “Vacation Bible School” and “Campfire” in one breath. It should however, be understood that the VBS is usually operated by members of a local congregation, while “Campfire” requests support from more than one congregation. Is that the reason why Rev. Stam uses the editorial page of “Clarion”? Something is wrong; some congregations do not support “Campfire”!

Apparently “Campfire” is high on the list of Rev. Stam’s priorities. He went out of his way to visit consistories to persuade them to support “Campfire”. Not every consistory was convinced that “Campfire” was a truly reformed cause. They even expressed their unwillingness to officially support this organization through congregational prayer, bulletin announcements and financial contributions. According to Rev. Stam, there was even a “pastoral letter” warning the members of a congregation that participation was “wrong” “even unbiblical”.

Rev. Stam has serious objections to the manner in which a particular consistory approached this matter in their congregation. This consistory referred to Lord’s Day 27 of our Heidelberg Catechism. Question and answer 74 states that the covenant children are “distinguished from the children of unbelievers”. The consistory’s approach was that distinguished also means separated. This, Rev. Stam feels, is misguided Anabaptist isolationism. He cannot understand why distinguished also entails and includes being separated. We are sure that Rev. Stam knows that the children of God are distinct and have been set apart. It is alarming to see the ease with which he tries to make the point that the setting apart of the covenant children means that the “danger” of a “yoke of isolationism” is laid upon us and our children. He feels that “to be in the world and yet not of the world” needs to be discussed again, to educate us in reaching a new understanding.

We feel that Rev. Stam is doing an injustice to that particular consistory by portraying a twisted and misleading view of the arguments provided in regard to not participating in “Campfire”. Many of the scriptural arguments provided by that consistory are conspicuously absent in the editorial. Why is this misleading view given?

When Christ, in John 17: 15 and 16 speaks of being in the world, but not of the world, it means we are to be different than the world. We are to be holy says the Lord “because I am holy”. Do not contaminate yourself with those that are not holy. Do not accept their lifestyle, or the environment

in which they live. Do not use their unholy speech and actions. May the consistory not have difficulty with the fact that this camp integrates children of Christ's church with the children of unbelievers, from families where there is much pain and misery due to abuse, alcoholism, etc., for the express purpose of (paedo) evangelism? We are not talking about adults, who are confessing members of the church. We are talking about young children, who have not yet reached the age of discernment. Rev. Stam forces his point by creating false dilemmas and coming to unwarranted conclusions. He states that, "adults are often more gullible than children" and then turns 180 degrees to reassure that there are many adults supervisors present at this camp. He forces the argument by suggesting that all who disagree with him are on the side of the chief priests who did not want the children to shout "Hosanna".

When reading this editorial we cannot help but feel uneasy about the way the subject is approached. He seems quite prepared to blur the antithesis, for the cause of "Campfire" which he equates with evangelism; setting pragmatism above principle. It would seem that the whole approach has strong overtones of evangelicalism. There should be serious objections, in our circles, to the way in which the conclusion of "isolationism" is reached. We could then even point to our Belgic Confession when it speaks about the true church and call that isolationism!

Rev. Stam is giving an unclear and indistinct sound, which is confusing to His people, young and old, and to those who are to instruct them in the scriptural way of witnessing to others of the hope that is in them. The sound of Clarion's trumpets has added to the confusion. Such an editorial should have no place in a reformed magazine, unless it is published with a refutation from other members of the editorial team.

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Wellandport

BUILDING ON THE REFORMED HERITAGE

A plea to stand united around the Word

By Jane deGlint

Within our Canadian Reformed Churches some changes have taken place. A shift took place from Dutch to English, which was both natural and expedient, since a church cannot be a light for the world if its members express themselves in a foreign tongue. A shift in occupation can be registered as well. The immigrants, who established the Canadian Reformed Churches, were mostly farmers and small businessmen, whereas at present the number of professionals has grown and is still increasing. This vocation shift represents a healthy spread of Canadian Reformed people through the layers of our society. Then there was a shift in ecclesiastical outlook. This change in appreciation for the Reformed tradition is welcomed by some and rejected by others.

As the members of the Canadian Reformed Churches became more established in their communities, they came into contact with many other Christians. As can be expected, they were

asked to identify themselves. They had to describe to what denomination they belonged, since the Canadian Reformed Churches do not have the same profile as the Anglicans or the Roman Catholics. Some were quite happy to explain their background and leave it at that. Others also readily described their Canadian Reformed church, but were, at the same time, intrigued by and attracted to the ways of the Christian denominations that had a longer history on the North American continent. Over time this appeal of non-Reformed denominations lead to a growing desire among some Canadian Reformed people to discard a portion of the Reformed heritage and to import some more Evangelical elements. Many of these changes relate to the way we worship, our view on the sacraments, the place of our confessions, the songs we sing.

The contact with Christians from other denominations was not the only reason for the desire to change certain aspects of the Reformed tradition. The general shift in our society towards an emphasis on feelings is a factor as well. With emotion in the centre, doctrine and tradition easily fade to the background.

There is one more reason why the Reformed tradition is questioned. Discontentment can also stem from unbelief. People who drift away from the truth do so quietly, or with a stir. It is the latter type that pushes for change, only to disappear in the turmoil. Often these people eventually start leading a worldly life, and as such fall outside the scope of this article. To them goes out our call for repentance while we plead their cause at the Throne of Mercy, privately and as congregation.

As far as ecclesiastical outlook is concerned, our Canadian Reformed churches can more or less be divided into two groups: those who promote the Reformed tradition and those who are more Evangelically inclined. These two groups have much in common. They share a strong faith in the Lord. Trusting in His providential care, they dedicate their lives to the service of their God. With humility and gratitude they acknowledge Jesus as their only Saviour. In time of need and calamity they experience the common bond of faith.

Nevertheless, there are definite differences between these two groups. In the first place it can be noted that the confessions are viewed differently. The Reformed group holds the confessions in high regard as documents of faith which promote unity and preserve the truth. The more Evangelically minded group, on the other hand, considers certain sections of our confessions outdated and perceives these historical documents are somewhat restrictive.

Another difference can be observed in the approach to liturgy. Whereas the Reformed group places the emphasis on worshipping the Lord and proclaiming the Word, the Evangelical group would like to see more participation from the pew. This difference also manifests itself in the songs that are considered suitable for worship services. In the one group the Psalms take centre stage, whereas the other group would like to see ample room for songs which express the response and experience of the contemporary believer.

There is also a difference that concerns revelation. The Reformed group maintains that the Bible is completed and that all that we need to know for our salvation is contained in the Scriptures. The Evangelical group accepts that as well, but often adds an inner voice. Whether consciously or unwittingly, many of them allow themselves to be guided by messages, which they claim to have received directly from God.

Yet another difference concerns the way of salvation. The Reformed group is careful to live by the 'Sola Gratia' of the Great Reformation - by grace alone. The Evangelical group does not

deny that, but at the same time stresses that man must accept Jesus before he can be saved. This active conversion can easily lead to adult-only baptism: the ceremonial washing testifies to real faith that comes after conscious conversion.

These differences can lead to friction and suspicion, which both are not edifying. Harmony must be sought, but not by way of arbitrary compromise. The directions for unity can be found in the riches of our Reformed heritage. This heritage contains several parts. One segment is formed by the confessions, which ensure that the riches do not disappear over time. Churches who function without confessions lack historical and doctrinal depth. Another section concerns the sober and humble worship of God, which centres on the proclamation of the Word and avails itself readily of the Psalms. Incidentally, the Psalms express any emotion a believer may experience, but at the same time they are prophetic revelation. Yet another integral part consists of the great emphasis on the infallibility and completeness of the Bible. God does not send direct messages anymore, though He surrounds His people with His providential care. Believers recognise the Lord's hand in their lives, but they cannot claim to know more than His revealed will. And lastly there is the centrality of the covenant, which is initiated by the LORD. In His steadfast love God extends His promises to the believers and their children, making them willing to walk in obedience. Of this divine commitment baptism testifies.

It is not necessary for all the members of the Canadian Reformed churches to agree with each other on all things. Some people are practical, others prefer exchanges of thought. Some thrive on tradition while others are more innovative. However, these differences should all be in agreement with the Reformed heritage. Of course, our Reformed heritage is not a stagnant entity. We must build on it as different times demand an emphasis on different issues. For example, the sanctity of life was still respected in the sixteenth century, and the first chapters of Genesis were not yet under the surgical knife. However, as we progress towards the Great Day we must expand on our heritage, and not arbitrarily diminish and replace it. With appreciation for the past, knowledge of the presence and confidence for the future, we continue in the strength of our faithful God.

Have we found true, lasting contentment?

I try to avoid driving through downtown lately. I'm sure you can appreciate what I'm talking about. It's busy – incredibly busy, especially on Saturdays. And with Christmas only a few weeks away, it's not appearing to let up. Traffic is congested with a seemingly endless flow of vehicles. Parking spots (if you can find them) feel like they're only two-thirds the width of what they used to be. A huge sport-utility vehicle, with the driver on his cell phone, just changed into my lane, cutting me off, causing a tidal wave of my Tim Hortons coffee to spill onto my lap and into the upholstery of my seat. It's these events that get your blood pressure up.

Inside the jam-packed malls, it gets even busier. Crowds of people, if not standing in line-ups, are blindly rushing past each other (traveling in every imaginable direction) running themselves ragged, saddled by bursting shopping bags. Interact & visa cards are swiping, cash

registers are a ker-chinging and people are working themselves into a buying frenzy for the Christmas period.

It goes without saying that this time of year can be stressful and tense for millions of people nationwide. Don't get me wrong – we are in no position to complain. We are undoubtedly blessed beyond belief to live in Canada where our standard of living is only a faraway dream for billions of others. Taking this into consideration, have you ever wondered if all this activity is actually making us better people? With all this stuff readily available to us at the swipe of a bankcard, are we finding that we're better, happier citizens? Are we really more content as a result of all of this? Are we finding true, lasting contentment?

In this day of so many technological advances, each generation seems to raise the "contentment" bar. We seem to need more and more things to be satisfied. How clear this becomes when we look at the steady volume of sales flyers, catalogues & advertisement literature that pours through our mail slots on an almost daily basis. We are bombarded by those that would have us believe that the answer to contentment lies in surrounding ourselves with neat stuff, which can excite us, amuse us or make our lives easier. My grandparents' generation knew nothing of DVDs, e-mail, microwaves or having two cars at their disposal, but my generation has grown to expect such things. And no matter how much we manage to accumulate, it seems we never have enough! It's a phenomenon you could call the "Barbie-doll" law: "Accessories once considered optional become mandatory, creating needs and wants we never thought of before" Is it not ironic that in a country as rich as ours there still remains so much greed & selfishness?

More often than not, we come to the end of every endeavour and acquisition vaguely discontented and unhappy. Henry Kissinger, former U.S. Secretary of State, wrote, "To (North) Americans, tragedy is wanting something very badly and not getting it. But many... have had to learn... that perhaps the worst form of tragedy is wanting something badly, getting it, and finding it empty." How easily don't we become disinterested in possessions that once captured our fancy? If you're not convinced, go garage sailing for a morning and you will have no misunderstanding as to why we can call our society a "throw-away" society. This 486 computer I'm working on right now is no exception to the rule. Only a few short years ago, it was the latest and the greatest: now, it's ancient hardware. I hesitate to replace it with the latest "latest & greatest" model, because this, too, will soon be updated. Talk about short-lived "satisfaction"!

There is truth to the statement that there is no LASTING earthly satisfaction – marriage, family, money, fame, success, enlightenment, travel, athletics – NOTHING – completes our joy. We might THINK it does, but any satisfaction we gain in our quest fades quickly and becomes a vague memory, if it can be remembered at all. (No one's denying here that in life, there are many happy events and people we get to know and love along the way, but even these, too, will have an end) The old saying is true: "You can't take it with you when you go"

The standards for TRUE contentment, thankfully, know no calendar. They will never become obsolete. Although the 21st century will continue to bring all kinds of marvels to our world, you can be certain that these won't bring a better definition of contentment than the 2000-year-old words of the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:11-13. He said, *"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.... Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry... I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"*. Paul's contentment wasn't based on shaky, temporary & uncertain things that *"... moth and rust destroy...(that which) thieves break in and*

steal" (Matthew 6:19), but rather on a God who can grant true satisfaction through the joy of knowing Him. He is a merciful God who will rescue us from our own stubborn sinfulness. Regardless of what may happen to us in this life (and we are reminded daily in the news of how fragile life can be) we are comforted. We can take a great deal of comfort in the knowledge that our security is based not on the things we have achieved, accumulated or have control over, but rather in the power of Him who is in control of all things.

Through the guiding work of God's Holy Spirit, we see how Paul found his contentment. The same can be said for you and me. Although our small-minded, sinful human nature stubbornly resists believing in and loving God (it's in our very character to naturally hate God and gravitate to sin), in His grace and compassion He still shows His love for us. He has sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to be crucified in payment for the guilt of the sins of mankind. In other words, through the saving power of Christ's death on the cross and resurrection, all people who believe in him have been freed from the chains of sin and are granted eternal Life after they die. (This is the basic message of John 3:16). God miraculously nurtures a seed of faith in our hearts. He enables us to believe in Him (although there are many things we don't understand or comprehend) and to love Him. He works in us a desire to read his Holy Word, the Bible, to learn more about Him, and also to praise and worship Him in the company of other believers.

Put aside a moment to take stock of your life. This can be difficult, but we all need to do it. Where are **you** placing your hopes for finding contentment? In your possessions? In your career, or your investment portfolio? And if you think you've found contentment, will it last? Will you take it with you after you've breathed your last breath? What will be the story of your life?

As we make our way into the busy holiday Season, let us never forget the importance and urgency of God's call to us in His holy Scriptures to place our hopes for finding true and lasting contentment in Him alone.

The foregoing was originally written for The Path. "The Path" is an outreach newspaper/bulletin published by the Home Mission Committee of the Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church. It is hand-delivered to homes in the nearby vicinity.

Ryan van Driel
December 2001

TERRIBLE TIMING?

Newscasts after newscast, Canadians have been subjected to seeing the demise of Mr. Stockwell Day as leader of the Alliance Party in Canadian politics. Attacks on his leadership seem to be never-ending, coming from all quarters, from the expected governing Liberals as well as from his own caucus members. As leader of Her Majesty's Opposition, I'm sure Day expects negative feedback from numerous critics. He has been in the political arena long enough to know that there is always a hungry wolf out there trying to draw blood. What is different about Mr. Day's critics is that they are not attacking his party's policies as one would expect from politicians but they are attacking him as an individual. Some of the most hard-hitting attacks are aimed against him as a person.

One of the first things troubling Mr. Day since he assumed the leadership of the right-wing Alliance in the summer of 2000 was the fact that he was known to be a conservative evangelical Christian. He was rudely questioned, among other things, on his beliefs about creation, the age of the earth and the sanctity of life. His Bible-based answers led to widespread ridicule among the nation's journalistic elite. These reactions of the media gave many the impression that there is no room for Christians and their Biblical influence in Canadian politics. "If that's what happens to him, is there any hope for us?"

Now here we come with a new venture, encouraging Reformed Christians to get involved in politics. Is there more hope for us than for Stockwell Day? Will our message with its foundation on the Three Forms of Unity be more acceptable to the country's journalists and the Canadian people? Is this not awfully terrible timing to try to get support in this venture when we have seen the "rewards" for other Christian politicians? Is there room for Christian influence in our world of consensus politics?

You may be surprised to hear that the answer I give is that definitely NOW is the time to be (come) involved. It is exactly in such a situation that a strong Christian Biblical voice is necessary for our country and its citizens. Exactly at a time when our country's leaders are telling us that personal faith has no bearing on their everyday lives as politicians, we need ordinary faithful Reformed Christians to speak up giving Christian direction and encouragement to our elected representatives. When politicians and judges are making decisions on topics such as same-sex marriages, human cloning, and stem cell research, they need our prayers, our letters and our phone calls to encourage them to make right decisions. Yes, action IS *necessary*.

Action is also *required* of us. In 1 Timothy 2 the apostle Paul urges Timothy to make "requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, [so] that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." Praying for the work done by "those in authority" over us implies that the work they are doing is important to us and to all Canadians. And praying for that work also implies that we know what that work is all about. And knowing that our "quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" are dependent on that, we must all take action where and when that is warranted.

Perhaps some will say that they are not at all politically inclined or perhaps don't have a lot of time. Those are some of the reasons for the founding of the RCPRC (Reformed Canadian Political

Research Council). We realize that you have a full-time job in order to pay tuition at school and to pay the mortgage. We realize that many of you are already busy with important work in the Kingdom of God, perhaps in church or school related matters. It may be difficult for you to write a letter or prepare a brief to be presented at a local meeting. Call, fax or e-mail the RCPRC office and Peter will do what he can to help you out. On the other hand, if you have had experience in these matters and have a file of briefs and presentations that may be useful to others, give Peter a call and offer them for the RCPRC files. Then he can share them with others who may be able benefit from your experience and expertise.

Will it be easy? No, definitely not. We have seen in Mr. Day's example how difficult it can be to be publicly mocked and ridiculed when you stand up for the truth. Along with the prophet Nehemiah we will pray "[Lord], strengthen [our] hands." (Neh.6:9b) Also in these matters "My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." (Psalm 121:2)

Can we expect to see positive results because of our efforts? Perhaps not for a long time or maybe never! The changing of the hearts and minds of our politicians is in the hand of the Lord. We will not be discouraged if changes are long in coming but we will continue, prayerfully, to be faithful in this work as Reformed Canadians.

Peter Veenendaal

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NEWS OF INTEREST/CONCERN TO THE CHURCHES

CHURCH DEFINES MARRIAGE

Nunspeet, the Netherlands - In order to prevent possible legal accusation of discrimination, the "Christelijk Gereformeerde" synod formulated a definition of marriage. This definition will become part of the Church Order (article 70). It was also decided to prepare a guideline for consistories about common law living.

The need to define marriage is connected to the growing acceptance of same-sex marriages, with which also the churches are confronted. The churches might be accused of discrimination, would they refuse to solemnize weddings of same-sex couples.

Before it reaches that point the "Christelijk Gereformeerde" churches want to be able to say, for example, to the government, "These are our rules." This point received attention during the discussion of the report from the deputies for contact with the government.

The accepted definition reads, "A marriage is a legal, publicly sanctioned cohabitation of one man with one woman which, in accordance with the intent of marriage, is meant for life."

Deputy Prof. Dr. J. W. Maris pointed out that this way also registered partnership is excluded from the definition.

Source: Nederlands Dagblad

News of Interest

Seminary Shuffle in Brazil

In a major effort that started two decades ago, the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB), the largest Presbyterian body in the country (3,715 churches), for the first time in its 140 years of history established a Graduate Center in Sao Paulo. The institution had a faculty of eight Brazilian doctors (Ph.Ds., Th.Ds.) and two masters, most of them having attained their degrees at European and North-American schools.

The Andrew Jumper Presbyterian Graduate Center derived its name from the late Rev. Andrew A. Jumper, pastor of one of the large founding Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) congregations. Jumper had the vision to help Presbyterians in Brazil establish a strong Reformed center for the training of pastors and professors for seminaries. By means of an agreement with IPB, EPC funded the advanced training of the new faculty in major seminaries.

Since September 1997, the Graduate Center has been located at Mackenzie University, a traditional Presbyterian school in downtown Sao Paulo, Brazil's largest city. Over the years, through the efforts of its professors, the Graduate Center expanded to an enrollment of over 400. An innovative certificate program through the Internet was initiated, the library was improved, and the professors began to teach some of the modules at Presbyterian seminaries throughout the country.

A theological journal, "Fides Reformata," published twice a year, reached its tenth issue, having elicited enthusiastic support from many in the church and in other denominations. Over the years, however, the Reformed, conservative stance of a majority of the professors began to disturb IPB's leadership. It was felt by some that the church needed a more pluralistic theology and practice.

When, in 1999, the new members of the Board of Theological Education (JET) were installed, the Graduate Center's bylaws were changed in order to limit the professors' influence. Four external members were included in the Graduate Chamber, the Graduate Center's governing body, headed by its director. JET made clear that the theological orientation of new professors was not an issue. Although JET has the authority to supervise the Graduate Center, the changes implemented were made without consulting the professors.

In early March 2001, after repeated complaints of most of the professors were not heeded by JET, five of them signed a document in which they expressed misgivings about the situation and requested clarification of some issues. JET was asked to forward this letter to the General Assembly's Executive Committee, seen by the professors as the appropriate venue to deal with the problem. JET informed the professors that they would be heard individually on May 5th 2001.

When the General Assembly's Executive Committee met in April, JET's directors submitted a letter in which they argued that three of the professors had stepped away from their commitment to the church's constitution and standards of faith, violated their work contract with Mackenzie Institute, and conspired to start a new denomination.

The issue was the founding of a Reformed theological school (FITRef) through the Internet. This school, which has no formal connection with IPB, has among its supporters IPB ministers and others who have ties with the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands. After a recent visit to Brazil, a committee of this denomination expressed reservations about IPB's theological orientation. The Executive Committee turned JET's inquiry into a formal accusation and appointed JET itself to investigate the matter.

JET took the opportunity to demand that the professors sign a statement of allegiance to the new Graduate Center's bylaws. Five of the professors did so. Two others refused to sign invoking reasons of conscience and were fired on the spot. JET also dismissed the Center's director, appointed a new director who was not a professor in the Graduate Center, and took other punitive measures. Upon hearing what had happened to their two colleagues, the other professors withdrew their signatures from the statement of allegiance.

Finally, on June 1st, there was a meeting of the three parties: JET, the professors, and the directors of the General Assembly's Executive Committee, which were to serve as mediators. When the professors met separately with the Board of Directors, its moderator surprised everyone with an unexpected statement. He said that he had written an article for IPB's official organ portraying the attitude of the professors as one of insubordination. If the crisis had a happy outcome, he would not send the article for publication. With this sort of mediation, it became clear to the professors that prospects of a satisfactory solution were bleak. JET then presented the professors with a proposal for reconciliation that seemed to them weak and unconvincing. They responded with a counterproposal requesting the annulment of most of the arbitrary decisions of May 5th. JET rejected the request and fired the professors, bringing to seven the number of professors dismissed.

The dismissal of the seven professors shook the relations between IPB and EPC. One of the founders of the Graduate Center wrote a blunt letter to the moderator of IPB's General Assembly. Reformed Theological Seminary, which had signed an agreement with IPB to start a Doctor of Ministry program at the Graduate Center, postponed its participation indefinitely. The leadership of IPB, continued to publicize RTS as a partner in the D.Min. program for several months. The General Assembly insists that the problem was administrative only and not theological, that the crisis is over, and that the Church is at peace.

The seven professors ousted, who have signed statements confirming all information related above are: Alderi Matos, Augustus Lopes, Davi Gomes, Heber Campos, Mauro Meister, Tarcízio Carvalho and Valdeci Santos.

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