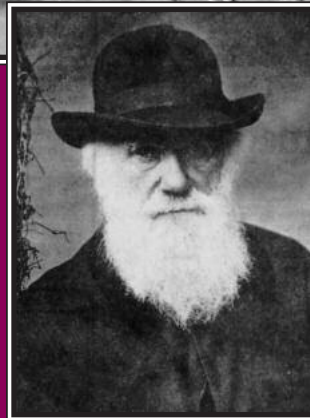


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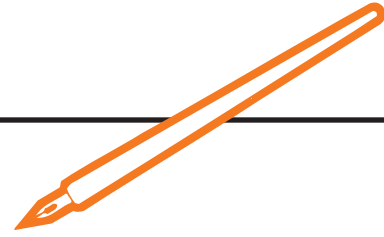


*Vatican
makes peace
with Darwin*

Numbers

10:1-10

By G.Ph. van Popta



Vatican makes peace with Darwin

Pope John Paul II has lent his support to the theory of evolution. He has proclaimed it compatible with Christian faith. On October 22, 1996, in a letter to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, a body of experts that advises the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) on scientific issues, the pope said that evolution is "more than just a theory." The Academy was in session to discuss the theme: *The Origins and the Evolution of Life: Reflections on Science at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*. The Roman pontiff advised that the theory of the physical evolution of man and other species through natural selection and hereditary adaptation appear to be valid.

He made clear that he considers the human soul as of immediate divine creation, not subject to any process; and yet, the pope has sold out to Darwinism.

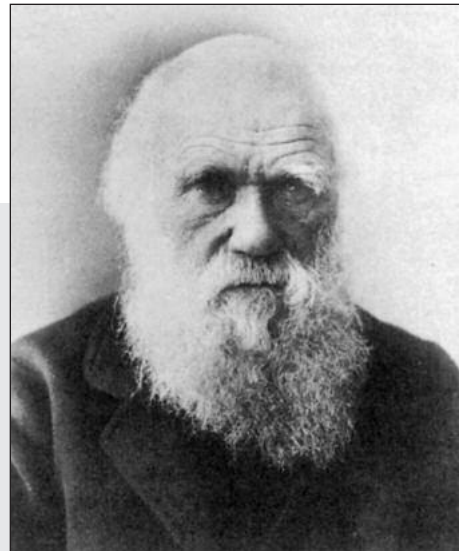
The theory of evolution has probably been best expounded by 19th century English naturalist Charles Darwin. The theory itself is old. Throughout history, the idea that over generations organisms transformed into descendant populations of different kinds has been repeatedly suggested. Some of the ancient Greek philosophers held to such theories. Theories of evolution have been discussed by philosophers and theologians for ages. However, it was Charles Robert Darwin who laid the foundation of modern evolutionary theory. In his 1859 "book that shook the world," *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin theorized that all forms of life developed through the process of natural selection.

The theories of Darwin and other evolutionists about the origins of man have long been anathema to theologians – and to the RCC. Darwin's book and its adherents met with stark opposition from the RCC. The theory of evolution was seen to be in conflict with the biblical account of creation as recorded in the first chapters of Genesis.

It was anathema to others as well. In 1925, in Dayton, Tennessee, a high school biology teacher, John T. Scopes, was convicted for the crime of teaching the theory of evolution in a public school (the "Monkey Trial"). Teaching this theory violated state law because it contradicted the biblical account of creation. Scopes was fined \$100.00.

However, the tension has eased due to modified biblical studies from the late 19th century onward. Today most theologians hold that the doctrine that God created the world and made man in His own image, and the theory of evolution, do not stand in each other's way. The pope has gone on record as having joined the crowd.

The shift of the RCC has been slow and careful, even subtle. In 1950, Pope Pius XII wrote the Vatican's first sub-



Charles Darwin

stantive response to the theories of evolution in the encyclical, *Humani Generis*. (Encyclicals are pastoral letters written by a pope as an exposition of Christian belief and practice. Though they must be accepted by the Roman Catholic faithful, they are not regarded as infallible.) In *Humani Generis*, Pius XII said there is no objection to discussing evolution. He did, however, caution that the theory could play into the hands of communists eager to remove God from the equation.

The present pope has previously endorsed the 1950 encyclical. In his October 24, 1996, letter to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, he went a step farther. He said: "Today, nearly half a century after appearance of the encyclical, fresh knowledge leads to recognition of the theory of evolution as more than just a hypothesis." Although he wants to maintain that the spiritual soul is created by God without any means, the human body may well have had its origin in living material which pre-existed.

What brought the pope to these conclusions? He tells his flock in the letter. He writes:

It is indeed remarkable that this theory has progressively taken root in the minds of researchers following a series of discoveries made in different spheres of knowl-

edge. . . . The convergence, neither sought nor provoked, of results of studies undertaken independently from each other constitutes in itself a significant argument in favour of this theory.

It is indeed remarkable that the man who claims to be the Vicar of Christ has closed the Word of God – or, at best, lets ideas which have progressively taken root in the minds of researchers control his interpretation of the Word of God.

Today most theologians hold that the doctrine that God created the world and made man in his own image, and the theory of evolution, do not stand in each other's way. The pope has gone on record as having joined the crowd.

Ought we to be impressed by the fact that several scientific disciplines have come up with evidence of evolution independent of one another? John Paul is impressed by the "accumulation of facts" and by the "diversity of explanations that have been proposed as the mechanism of evolution." He has pushed the Roman Catholic doctrine of a distinction between nature and grace a step farther. According to him *theology* must explain the origin of the soul whereas *science* tells us about the origin of the body. His conclusion is: "The gospel and evolution theory do not mean the same thing when they speak about *life*."

John Paul has married the gospel to evolution theory. He's put his *imprimatur*, his "stamp of approval," upon the theory of evolution. In fact he is defending a form of theistic evolution. He has baptized a bankrupt theory. This is all the more surprising in light of recent devastating attacks on Darwinian belief (see, e.g., Phillip E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*: IVP, 1991). The RCC is trying to align itself with modern thought even as secular unbelieving scientists are growing increasingly critical of evolution theories.

Let us hold to the teachings of the Scriptures on this, as confessed so simply and beautifully in Article 12 of our Confession:

We believe that the Father through the Word, that is, through His Son, has created out of nothing heaven and earth and all creatures, when it seemed good to Him, and that He has given to every creature its being, shape, and form . . .

The Confession was written more than 400 years ago, and yet it speaks so clearly and biblically to the situation today. God has given to every creature its *being, shape, and form*. With these few words we say that both the reflection of the Ancient Greeks and the ideas of Darwin on the origin of man are dead wrong. With these few words we hold the line that the pope is dead wrong. The simple teaching of Scriptures declares the pope dead wrong.

Better to be 400 years behind the times holding the biblical line than huffing and puffing trying to catch up to the ever-shifting ideas of man!

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By W.B. Slomp

Anger

Read: Psalm 4

Psalm 4:4 Be angry, but sin not; commune with your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.

Do you ever have it that you cannot sleep at night? There are so many things going through your mind that you cannot shut down your thoughts and come to a peaceful state of mind. You worry about things: about your health, your family, your reputation, your finances. You worry about what people think about you. You think that the people are against you. You feel like an utter failure. You are full of despair, and misery. It can even happen that you think that God is against you. Your stomach is tied into knots, and you toss and you turn on your bed, looking for peace and rest; looking for peace of mind.

Well, as far as that is concerned, there is nothing new under the sun. There are and have been many others like you. That is also clear from the content of Psalm 4. This psalm was written by king David. David writes about the distress in people's lives. They are angry because of their present circumstances. And that is not, as some commentators think, because of one's enemies. That is not what David has in mind here. The cause of the distress is the material circumstances they find themselves in. It appears that the people David has in mind just had quite a financial setback. For look at what David says in verse 5. He says, "... put your trust in the Lord."

He would not make such a statement if he were addressing his enemies. For his real enemies do not care about God. They blaspheme and ridicule His name.

Whom then does he address? He addresses instead his wayward brothers and sisters, his fellow covenant people. It seems they have had some kind of calamity which caused them great turmoil. It could have been, for example, a crop failure. We do not know for sure. But whatever it may have been, it is clear the people are distressed because of unfavourable material circumstances. For consider the ending of this psalm. In verse 6 David proclaims, "There are many who say, "O that we might see some good!" And then he gives the response in verse 7. He says about the doings of the Lord, "Thou hast put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound." He is urging the reader to find joy in the Lord and not in the abundance of food and drink. This becomes even more clear when you take a close look at verse 2. The RSV speaks here about those who love vain words, and who seek after lies. From that way of phrasing it you might think that he is speaking about his enemies. But then see how the NIV translates this. The NIV speaks instead about delusions and false gods. David says in

reality, "How long will you love vain things, and seek after idols?"

And now we can understand the kind of anger David is speaking about in verse 4. For he says there, "Be angry and do not sin." David is warning about sin that often accompanies our anger. He is warning against sinful anger, against unrighteous anger. Sinful anger comes about when you are distraught when things do not go the way you expect, or the way that you want. For what is the nature of fallen man? It is man's tendency to want to plot his own course, and not to trust in the Lord, and not to allow anything to stand in his way. For look at how it is in our own lives. We plan and chart our own course in life. We buy our farms, or our businesses, or acquire a job somewhere. And we work very hard. We provide for our families. We give to the church and to the poor. We pay for Christian education. And we do all these things as much as we can in the service of the Lord. We ask His blessings, and do these things to the best of our ability to the honour and glory of God. But then something happens. For example, the bottom falls out of the market. Or the crops fail. Or we lose our job. Or we get sick, and can't work.

What's inside?

We believe and confess that our Saviour Jesus Christ has instituted the sacrament of the holy supper to nourish and sustain those whom He has already regenerated and incorporated into His family, which is His Church (Article 35, Belgic Confession). In Article 60 of our Church Order, we have agreed that: *The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated at least once every three months.* Is that often enough? In a two part article the Rev. Paul Aasman examines the biblical and historical data relating to how often we ought to celebrate the Lord's supper.

The Rev. W.B. Slomp of Neerlandia provides a meditation on the topic of Anger.

In his column, "Nurture & Instruction," Mr. Vanderven answers a letter he received about why we ought to send our children to a Christian school.

Mrs. P. (Sarah) Vandergugten updates us on the contact some of her students have made with Christians in Kenya.

Debbie De Boer fills us in on a *Faithworks* project in the Dominican Republic.

A couple of book reviews and a letter top things off. Happy reading!

GvP

And then what is often our first reaction? We get angry.

O, we don't necessarily scream or yell. Our anger is seldom as overt as that. But anger manifests itself in many ways. For instance, our anger might show itself in our frustration or impatience. When your plans concerning your material security are thwarted, you are dismayed and frustrated, and wonder what you could have done to prevent it. You question your own abilities. You become angry with yourself.

And more often than not you also become angry at others. You look at how others might have been the cause of your misfortune. Or, you compare your situation to that of another person. How come that person has more than I do? How come so-and-so did not have the same setback as I? Is he a better person than I? What makes him or her so special? How come, O Lord?

Consider, what is the nature of sinful man? We get angry when things do not go our way. What was the sin of Cain when he killed his brother Abel? He was jealous of him. He thought that God treated his brother in a better way than He did him. He was angry at his brother for having something which he did not have. And so he murdered him.

Our anger is often an anger directed at God. For although we may not dare to use His Name directly, we nevertheless curse Him in our unrighteous anger. In effect we dare to question His justice. We cry out to Him: "O Lord, why do these calamities fall upon me, and not upon some one else? Why is it that I have so many difficulties in life, and not others? O Lord, why is that in spite of the fact that I want to serve you, you treat me in this way? Where is your justice, O God?"

And then David says to the people who are so full of anger and resentment, "Commune with your own hearts on your beds, and be silent." Commune with your own heart. That is another way of saying, THINK! Think before you speak. Think about God. Stand in awe before Him, and realize how just and righteous He is. Ask yourself, Is your anger justified? Are your plans, God's plans? Are your ways His ways? What has He promised you? Has He not promised you eternal life? Has He not promised you the forgiveness of sins, and peace of mind, and rest, and eternal well-being? And does He not grant these things to you? What more do you want? Think! Do you deserve any of it? He

gives you food. He gives you shelter. He gives you clothing. An abundance! And you are totally unworthy of any of it. For you stand condemned before God because of your many sins.

And now David says, "Though you tremble, sin not." For that is the actual meaning of the word 'to be angry.' It means to tremble. Indeed, there are times when we are shaking in our boots. Something quite unexpected happens. Life deals us a blow we do not expect. We think it is unfair. And then the Lord God says, "Be still. Commune with your own hearts upon your beds. And consider your God. Stand in awe of your almighty Creator and be still." He is the One who made all things. He is the One who is in control of all things. His plans always come to fruition. Only His ways are straight. Your ways are crooked, O puny creature. How dare you call His justice in to question? How dare you call Him in to account?"

And that is why the beginning of the psalm is so beautiful. He begins the psalm by saying, "Answer me when I call, O God of my right!" It actually says, "O God of my righteousness, of my justice." David knows what a wonderful and mighty God he has. And that is why the statement he makes about himself is so significant. He says in verse 3, "But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him." No doubt David will have struggled with God in order to come to that statement. For such insight can only come after a constant struggle. For what happens when calamity strikes? What happens when we are confronted with our sin? We stand naked before God. We ask ourselves how we stand in relation to Him. For we have been robbed of our dignity. And we realize then how vulnerable we are. And then we grieve and struggle with God and cry out to Him, "What are you doing, O Lord God? Help me to understand you. What are you trying to tell me? What are you trying to teach me?"

Those are also the kind of questions Asaph asked in Psalm 77. In the verses 6ff., he asks, "I commune with my heart in the night; I meditate and search my spirit: 'Will the Lord spurn for ever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love for ever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?'" Do you see how confused and wound-

ed and vulnerable Asaph confesses himself to be? Because of his troubles he feels the anger of God descending on him. His unfortunate circumstances make him feel the heat of God's anger.

That is how it should feel. That is how we all are to feel when adversity strikes us. For because of our sin the Lord continues to warn us about His great fury. He continues to warn us that we deserve His eternal anger in hell. And that is why His anger always invites us to change. It invites us to examine ourselves. It invites us to examine Him. That is why we should not easily pass over our own anger. No, God says, deal with it. Commune with your own hearts upon your beds. Think what it is all about. What does it all mean?

And as a believer you cannot help but find the answer in your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Why was He born? It was for no other reason than to bear the wrath of God against our sins. The Father made Him drink the bitter cup of His anger. He forsook His beloved Son. He turned His face away from Him as He hung on the cross. He despised Him because of the great wrath He felt because of our terrible sinfulness. And it is that fury that we never have to face, if we fully trust in Him. What a wonderful thing! What a tremendous comfort! David reminds us to stand in awe before God, and to know His ways. Know that whatever adversity comes upon you in this life, is a reminder of God's anger because of sin. It is to tell you that you are dependent on Him, and Him alone. It is to teach you that earthly things are temporary. It is to remind you that you must constantly examine yourselves, and repent. It is to remind you what an awesome God you have, and how richly He deals with His covenant children. But it is also a reminder that if we repent and believe then He is no longer angry with us because of His wrath visited upon His beloved Son.

Though you tremble, sin not. Put it all into perspective. Think! Think about yourself. Think about God in the light of the Scriptures; in the light of the way He deals compassionately with His people. And once you do that, you can be still. Your shaking will cease, and quiet will overcome you. You can sleep again. God is not angry with you, because you are His child. You cry to Him and He answers you. What a comfort for the believer. What a wonderful God we have!



Celebration of the Lord's Supper – How often?¹

The early church through the Middle Ages

By P. Aasman

Rev. Paul Aasman, minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Grand Valley, ON, examines the question of how often the Lord's supper ought to be celebrated. In what follows, he goes through the relevant biblical data, and the practice of the church from the time of the apostles through the Middle Ages. In the next issue he will examine the position and practice of the Reformers as well as of churches today. – Editor

1. Introduction

Only one generation ago, it was the case with nearly every church that the Lord's supper was celebrated quarterly. This is the minimum requirement of the Church Order. It states that the Lord's supper should be celebrated "at least once every three months." (Article 60) Many churches in our federation have reviewed this matter and have concluded that it would be better to have Communion more frequently. Usually, the decision is then made to celebrating this sacrament every other month.

But is that enough? Is this the *best* for the congregation? Would it perhaps not be better to have it every month? What is really the difference between every two months and every three months? It becomes apparent that the decision as to how frequent the Lord's supper should be enjoyed is a rather subjective matter. Once a consistory has decided to have it more frequently than the minimum required by the Church Order, it become difficult to determine how frequently is best. It is becoming increasingly so that people would like to see this sacrament enjoyed more often than it is presently the case in any of our churches.¹

There are good doctrinal grounds for arguing that the Lord's supper should be celebrated more often than four times per year, but no less persuasive are the historical reasons. This paper will be limited to the direct biblical and historical data related to the frequency of the

celebration of the Lord's supper. Doctrinal considerations will only be touched on as they have arisen in the historical discussions. It is hoped that this study will engender some concern over our infrequent enjoyment of this gift of Christ, and further, that it might provide some objectivity to the discussion as to what should be done about it.

Article 60 – Church Order Lord's Supper – The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated at least once every three months.

2. Biblical data

On the eve of His resurrection, the Lord Jesus travelled to Emmaus with two other men, and upon arriving there, He "took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them" (Lk. 24:30). Because the expressions here are similar to the words Jesus used in the last supper, many have supposed that Jesus was celebrating Lord's supper with these men.² Similarly, it is often supposed that Luke refers to the Lord's supper when on Pentecost day the believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer"; and as well when Luke tells us a few verses later, "They broke bread in their homes" (Acts 2:42,46).³

If these suppositions are accurate, then the NT data would support the notion that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated many times – not just weekly but even daily. However, it is more likely that in none of these instances does Luke have the Lord's supper in mind. This is quite certain in Luke 24:30. The two men with whom Jesus came to Emmaus had not witnessed the last supper, so the giving of thanks, the break-

ing and distribution of bread would have had no special meaning for them. They had never heard of this sacrament nor seen it administered.

The situation in Acts 2:42, however is not as simple. Does the expression, "Devoted themselves to . . . the breaking of bread," refer to the sacrament or simply to eating a meal? There are many commentators who feel that the reference here is to the sacrament. S.J. Kistemaker feels that the context points to the Lord's supper.⁴ F.F. Bruce says that this passage cannot describe a simple common meal: "The 'breaking of bread' probably denotes more than the regular taking of food together: the regular observance of what came to be called the Lord's supper seems to be in view."⁵ Guthrie is less convinced: "It is not, of course, certain that this act of the risen Christ is here definitely connected with the Lord's supper."⁶

Others, however, feel quite certain that Acts 2:42 does not describe the Lord's supper. In the early part of this century, H. Leitzmann had examined the roots of the Lord's supper in primitive Christianity and concluded that the breaking of bread, celebrated joyfully by the first Christians, was no more than a continuation of the daily meals which Jesus shared with His disciples throughout the course of His ministry.⁷ A decade later, O. Cullmann carried this idea further, arguing that these joyful meals of the first Christians became the origin for the love-feasts of the early church.⁸ The love-feasts have their origin in the fellowship meals which people enjoyed with Jesus before and after His resurrection. Cullmann writes:

The Lord's presence was re-experienced during these love-feasts both as a recollection of the *historical* fact of the Resurrection and as an experience of the *contemporary* fact of His invisible coming in the gathering of the Christians assembled "to break bread."⁹

G.F. Hawthorne continues in this line, saying that the “breaking of bread” of the early chapters in Acts was not a celebration of the Lord’s supper but the enjoyment of a religious meal that was common in Judaism:

These daily meals were joyful fellowships which celebrated His resurrection and continued presence in the Church, and which also anticipated the eschatological kingdom. They, thus, may not have originated in or been connected with the Last Supper, but may have had their source and meaning in the post-resurrection meals that Jesus had with His disciples.¹⁰

Luke is especially interested in the fellowship meals which the Lord enjoyed during His ministry on earth, for he records no less than *nine* such meals.¹¹ There are in addition five separate references to Christ enjoying a meal with disciples after His resurrection.¹² C.F.D. Moule has added to this discussion the fact that “breaking bread” does elsewhere in Scripture mean a simple meal. In the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the OT), this expression is used in Isaiah 58:7 and Lamentations 4:4 with the meaning of sharing bread with the needy, and in Jeremiah 16:7 it refers to a funeral feast.¹³

The expression “breaking of bread,” then, is best understood as meaning: “to have a fellowship meal.” Believers often enjoyed such fellowship meals with Jesus Christ, both before and after His resurrection. When in Acts 2:42 and 46 we read that believers were breaking bread again, then it is most logical to connect this with the fellowship meals which believers enjoyed with one another and with Jesus before His ascension. They still enjoyed fellowship with the Lord, but now not physically but spiritually. This is the meal which would later become the love feast, so characteristic of early Christianity. But the point here is that when we read in Acts 2:42 and 46 that believers broke bread with the Apostles and in each other’s homes, there is no need to suppose that they celebrated the sacrament.

Thus Acts 2:42 and 46 as well as Luke 24:30 are not relevant biblical data for the subject we are investigating. This is significant because these passages are often cited (and usually in a very casual way) by those who would teach that the Lord’s supper ought to be enjoyed by the church more often than every Sunday.

As the church moved beyond the direct influence of Jewish culture into a variety of Gentile cultures, the fellowship meal which went by the name

“breaking of bread,” underwent modification. One such modification was that this meal became attached to the celebration of the Lord’s supper in what is called the *agape* feast. It is this *agape* or *love-feast* which Paul has in mind when he rebuked the Corinthians in his first letter to them. He wrote, “When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anyone else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk” (11:20,21).

Already Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) saw here a similarity with what had happened on Pentecost when believers had eaten their meals in common and had all things in common. According to him, this passage shows that Christian fellowship expressed itself in the very same way in Corinth as it did in the beginning in Jerusalem. He describes what would happen in Corinth after a worship service:¹⁴

And when the solemn service was completed, after the communion of the Mysteries, they all went to a common entertainment, the rich bringing their provisions with them, and the poor and destitute being invited by them, and all feasting in common. Commentators today mostly agree that the reference here is to a feast which was enjoyed by the earliest Christians. For instance, Kistemaker writes:

Even though the information Paul provides is scanty, we infer that the Corinthians had displayed inconsistent behaviour at their love feasts. What precisely do we know about love feast? Luke tells us that after Pentecost the early Christians came together in their homes and shared their food as they enjoyed common meals (Acts 2:46).¹⁵

Thus, the love feast became closely connected to the celebration of the Lord’s supper.

It turns out that in 1 Corinthians 11 we have the only direct datum relating to the frequency of communion, for Paul says, “When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper you eat” (v. 20). It is clear that Paul was rebuking them that this is not the case – they should be celebrating the Lord’s supper when they come together. But because they were conducting their “love feasts” so wickedly, the Lord’s supper which was joined to it, ceased to be a blessing and instead became a judgment on them (v. 34). Paul could hardly regard it as a valid celebration of the sacrament any longer.

The significant point here for our study is that Paul assumes that they would celebrate the Lord’s supper every

time they “come together as church” (v. 18). In this very letter, Paul indicates that the people of God come together as church once each week, for in chapter 16 he encourages the Corinthians to set money aside for the poor in Jerusalem “on the first day of every week” (v. 2). When the church comes together, then her liturgy must include at least these two items: collections for the needy and celebration of the Lord’s supper.

The biblical data recommends, then, that when the church gathers together for official worship, then there would also be the celebration of the Lord’s supper. But since the expressions, “breaking of bread” in Luke 24 and in Acts 2 (and Acts 20) do not refer to the Lord’s supper, there is no direct biblical data to support the notion that the church should celebrate the Lord’s supper *daily* or more frequently than at the weekly gathering for worship.

3. The early church

The earliest writing after the NT period relevant to this point comes from the *Didache* or *The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*. The date when this was written ranges somewhere between A.D. 90 - 120. Chapter XIV of the *Didache* (entitled “Christian Assembly on the Lord’s Day”) states, “But every Lord’s day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.” The Lord’s supper is now known by the name, “the breaking of bread,” not after the Jewish opening ritual for a meal (blessing, breaking and distribution of bread) but after the institution of Jesus Christ (He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and distributed it). What is significant for our purpose, however, is that *Didache* states clearly that the Lord’s supper was celebrated weekly, on the Lord’s day.

There were few exceptions to the principle of weekly celebrations of the Lord’s supper in this period. There were some who held that since the Lord’s Supper was instituted in the place of the Passover, it should be celebrated only once per year as the Passover was, on the 14th-15th of Nisan. This was the position of the Ebionites, an early Jewish-Christian sect.¹⁶ Christians in Asia Minor in the second century held a special Eucharist as a parallel to Passover.¹⁷ We might expect such ideas when the Christian church was so close to its Judaic roots, but within a century, the notion that the Lord’s supper should be coordinated with the Passover had disappeared completely.¹⁸

The early church fathers repeat what the *Didache* had stated. Ignatius (A.D. 30-107) exhorts the church to "come together in common . . . breaking one and the same bread, which is the medicine of immortality and the antidote which prevents us from dying" (Epistle to the Ephesians chap xx). For Ignatius, to come together to worship is to come together for the Lord's supper. The same is true for Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165), for he writes, "on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read . . . and when our prayers are ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and . . . there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given" (*First Apology of Justin*, chap. LXVII – "Weekly worship of the Christians"). Irenaeus (120 - 202) speaks about the Lord's supper as an offering of ourselves to God through Jesus Christ, and he says, "thus it is, therefore, also His will that we, too, should offer a gift at the altar, frequently and without intermission" (*Against Heresies*, 4.18.6). Irenaeus would surely be appalled at an intermission of several months between one celebration and the next. Without intermission would mean: every week.

In the early church, there is overwhelming and unequivocal testimony that from the time of the Apostles onward, the Lord's supper was celebrated every Lord's day. This strongly suggests that the apostolic example which the Apostle Paul, for instance, established in the Church of Corinth became the pattern throughout the churches.

4. From the early church to the Reformation

Many unbiblical ideas concerning the Lord's supper began to find currency in the church in the centuries following the earliest period of Christianity. First of all, the worship service became sharply divided between the administration of Word and sacrament. The whole church gathered for the ministry of the Word, but before the Lord's supper could begin, three groups were dismissed from the church: the children, the catechumens and those under discipline. The bread and the wine of the Lord's supper were regarded as things so holy that not only must non-communicant members and visitors be excluded from *eating and drinking* the bread and wine, but also from *witnessing* the breaking of bread and the distribution of both elements. The theologi-

cal motive for this exclusion was that the bread and wine were increasingly thought of as a propitiatory sacrifice that had to be laid on an altar, and the minister of the Word was seen more and more as a priest officiating at the altar. The high point of the Lord's supper was no longer the communion which believers have with Jesus through faith when they eat and drink; the high point became the moment of consecration, when the common bread and wine became holy bread and wine, that is, when the bread and wine was transubstantiated into the real body and blood of Christ. The liturgy became more elaborate as censors, chants, set formulas, formal gestures and so on were introduced. The people were taught to be content with the privilege of witnessing what the priest was doing at the altar on their behalf. The focus of blessing in the Lord's supper shifted from the act of personally eating and drinking bread and wine, to witnessing the bread and wine manipulated by priests at the front of the church building. In fact, people began to regard the work of the priests as being the only means of grace so that it became quite unnecessary and irrelevant to personally eat or drink.

Two contrary notions concerning the Lord's supper reigned at this time. On the one hand, it was held that Jesus Christ is corporally present at the Mass. The result of this teaching was that people were afraid to eat the bread or drink the wine for they were filled with awe and dread at the presence of the Great King. On the other hand, the church taught that the sacraments were a necessary means of grace, that is, an adult could not be saved without the sacrament of Mass.

Ingenuously, people harmonized the two principles together in a way that twisted medieval worship still further. People discovered that they could receive grace without actually touching the body of Christ by transferring the liturgical high moment from the *eating of the host* to the *elevation of the host*, that is, to the moment when Christ became present according to the doctrine of transubstantiation. The 'elevation of the host' refers to the lifting up of the bread just at the moment when the bread had been transubstantiated so that adoring eyes might be lifted up to look upon the body of Christ, and so that everyone might fall in worship before their Lord. A spiritual communion by gazing upon the body of Christ, gained in medieval doctrine a quasi-sacramental value. In practical terms, it meant that many people would come



CALLED to Orangeville, ON

Rev. J. Moesker

of Cloverdale, BC

CALLED to Ancaster, ON

Rev. W.M. Wielenga

of Lynden, WA, USA

running to church when the bell rang to indicate that the host was being elevated during the celebration of the mass, so that the people might receive the sacramental grace which can be had by viewing it. Soon thereafter, they could return home, having "refreshed their souls" and having received the grace which the church claimed was necessary for the salvation of adults.¹⁹

After a period of renewal in the church during the fourth century, communion became less frequent despite the protests of church councils. By the sixth century it was declared that churches must celebrate Eucharist at least three times per year (Christmas, Easter and Pentecost). By 1215, the minimum requirement was reduced to one (Easter), at which time the cup was withheld from the "laity" by church law.²⁰ A theologian of that time, James of Vitry, explains the decline in frequency thus: "Since sins have so multiplied in the land, it is permitted that communion be received by the laity only one time per year, that is, at Easter."²¹

After the period of the early church, the whole celebration of the Lord's supper began to change. It was detached from the preaching of the gospel, and exalted as a mystery fit only for the few. The sacrament was emphasized as a necessary means of grace for adults, while at the same time, it was shrouded under mysterious liturgical actions. As the doctrine of transubstantiation took firm hold in the church, the congregation became afraid to personally participate in the sacrament, and consequently, they were satisfied to merely witness the sacrament rather than personally participate in it. Consequently, over a period of 1200 years, the frequency with which one actually participated in the Lord's supper

declined from every Sunday (52 times each year) to every Easter (1 time each year), although the church leaders tried at times to prevent this decline.

(To be continued and concluded in the next issue.)

¹The opinion expressed by J. Van Bruggen is fairly wide-spread when he says, "Our infrequent celebration of the Lord's supper is evidence of a low level of spiritual life," in *Annotations to the Heidelberg Catechism* ET (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1991), 189.

²For example, Leon Morris says, "Some have seen here a reference to the breaking of bread in the communion service," in *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Luke* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 340.

³In his commentary on Acts, Calvin writes that 2:42 refers to the Lord's Supper, but 2:46 does not, even though "some do think that in this place, by breaking of bread is meant the Holy Supper."

⁴S.J. Kistemaker, in *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 111, points to the fact that in Greek, Luke wrote about "the bread," i.e., the bread that was set aside for the sacrament of communion. However, the Greek definite article

cannot be treated like the English definite article. It often means very little. Furthermore, the word "bread" is also definite in Lk. 24:35, and we have just concluded that here "the bread" cannot be the bread consecrated for the sacrament.

⁵F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 73.

⁶Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 720.

⁷Especially important in the following discussions was his work, *Messe und Herrendmalh* (1926).

⁸See his essay, "The Meaning of the Lord's Supper in Primitive Christianity," ET (1936), published in *Essays on the Lord's Supper* (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1958).

⁹*Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰See the article "Lord's Supper" in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible* Volume 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975/76), 982-983.

¹¹See E.E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 193.

¹²Cullmann refers to Lk. 24:42, Jn 21:12, Ac 10:41 and Ac 1:3-4. One might add Lk. 24:30.

¹³In *Worship in the New Testament*, Ecumenical Studies in Worship # 9 (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1961), 19.

¹⁴*Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, in *Nicene and Post-*

Nicene Fathers Volume 12 (Peabody: Hendrikson Publishers, 1995) 157.

¹⁵S.J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 390

¹⁶A.J.B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1952), 56 n.1.

¹⁷See on this, T. Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Volume iii (Minnesota: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, nd), 274. Higgins refers to Zahn. Zahn does not make it clear whether the Christians of Asia Minor celebrated the Lord's supper only once per year, or if they had a holier celebration of the weekly Eucharist at Easter.

¹⁸J.N.D. Kelly wrote that Jewish Christianity was a powerful force in the apostolic age of the church, but the rapid expansion of Gentile Christianity eclipsed their influence, and "the dispersal of their main community in Jerusalem after the outbreak of the Jewish war (A.D. 66) completed their isolation." See his *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Harper & Row, 1960), 139.

¹⁹Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 155.

²⁰W.D. Maxwell, *A History of Christian Worship: An Outline of Its Development and Form* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 65.

²¹Miri Rubin, op. cit., 148.

NURTURE & INSTRUCTION

By T.M.P. Vanderven



Why do you send your children to a Christian school?

One of our readers asks for a discussion about how to deal with the struggle to teach our children the skills and attitudes required to remain "strangers" in this world. The letter writer adds the following explanation:

Unlike my own children, I have never gone to a Christian school. My education was "different" from theirs in a way that is not always reckoned with today. I was tempted to use the word "better" instead of "different," but that would not be true.

I remember incidents of ridicule for saying "Christian" things as a young child in a secular environ-

ment. This ridicule came not only from my classmates, but from the teacher also. My parents would often remind me of what I was while in school: I was to be a "stranger" there; I was to be an example. I should not hide my light under a bushel . . .

How short I fell of my parents' admonitions is easy to guess; of course, that struggle is never over. Yet I remain thankful that it was already impressed on me at an early age that Christianity was not going to be easy in the world we live in. The antithesis between the church and the world is easily distinguishable.

Maybe the best way of describing what I would love to see you tackle in an article can be summed up in this question (I made this up, but am a little ashamed of asking!): Do you send your children to a secular school and teach them how to be Christians in the world, or do you send them to a Christian school so they can learn how to become worldly Christians? (I'm sure that you can see why I am ashamed of this little play on words!).

* * *

Well, here it is; there is no reason at all to be ashamed for asking this

question. No, it is not a new question, but it certainly is an important one. It will take more than a short article to discuss it. And more than that, we all would do well to consider this question. Therefore, I invite our readers to react as well. In this installment let me focus on the aspect of *being a Christian in the world*.

It seems to me that every generation must struggle with questions such as the reader poses: why do we do what we do as Christians? Parents are concerned that their children will leave the well-trodden paths of protection – do it our way, and all things will be well, is the implied advice. Children naturally challenge their parents as they search for their own identity and their own place, questioning the propriety of the parental ways of doing things – why do we have to do this or that? And these young challengers will all too often win out because of the many inconsistencies of their parents – which parent can claim perfection as an educator? Do as we say and not as we do! And so there are tensions between the older and the younger generations – the generation gap, we call that.

It may take us, human beings, up to twenty years or more before we can act and live independently. The deep desire of parents – and by extension of educators – to provide children during their years of growing up with a protective, nurturing environment, is much more than an instinct; it is the way for parents and their children designed by God in His wonderful wisdom. The Christian school functions within this protective network aimed at leading children to maturity. Teachers stand *in loco parentis*, required to take care of their charges as a responsible parent would. As an extension of the home, the Christian school seeks to promote the total well-being of its students, providing an environment in which they feel comfortable and safe, in which they can trust the instruction and the instructor, and by which they are supported on their path towards independence. The teacher stands in a vital trust relationship with her students, a relationship that is essential to the proper functioning of the educational process.

Thus, a first part response is: In order for a family or a school to function well, it needs to provide a nurturing environment where parents and educators and children can live and work together in a relationship of trust and harmony. Within this setting, the chil-

dren are to learn from the adults how to deal with the questions of life.

Do not build a wall, separating family life and school life from life within society. The Bible does not teach us this; our creeds do not profess this. When the Heidelberg Catechism speaks of our only comfort in life and death (Lord's Day 1), we ought not theorize about what type of life that might be: it is our life as we live it every day in whatever circumstances. That's what we ought to show our children: our trust in our Lord Jesus counts for everything in every moment of our lives, whether we relax or are busily at work, whether we study inside the classroom, or play on the school ground: we are busy with life; we are alive as God's people.

In order for a family or a school to function well it needs to provide a nurturing environment where parents and educators and children can live and work together in a relationship of trust and harmony. Within this setting, the children are to learn from the adults how to deal with the questions of life.

Our children may learn this slowly, over time. It's a good thing we do not have to use the throw-in-the-pool-and-swim approach when educating our children. I am sure, many a person has learned to swim that way, and perhaps even came to like swimming as well. However, there are better ways of helping children grow up: a safe environment within which children learn by precept and example of the adults what it means to live as a Christian; what it means to speak and use the Word of our Lord; what it means to confess our

sins and shortcomings and ask for forgiveness; what it means to help each other; what it means to make choices for the Lord and against the world, our flesh, and even Satan.

Will this God-directed mind-set always stand out, loud and clear? No, not at all. There will be times when the name of the Lord will not even be mentioned as we are struggling to complete that thousand-piece puzzle. There will be times when the Bible remains untouched as students work hard to solve their mathematical problems or are trying to get the lawnmower started as part of their weekly summer chores. Yet regularly, even on a daily basis will they get together around the supper table – with their teacher at the end of a school day – and together confess that their only help is in the name of the Lord Who has made heaven and earth. They will thank Him for allowing them to move around that marvelous creation with all its wonders and questions; they will thank Him for the fun of play, for the challenge of the math problem, for the friendship, for the food . . . they will thank Him for everything there is, and for everything that they were allowed to do. They will thank Him for being alive in Christ (Col. 3:15-17).

As we send our children to a Christian school, we do not want them to learn how to become Christians, let alone how to become worldly Christians. We want them to go there as children of our Father, learning from their brother or sister teacher about their Father's world with all the good things that He created, and also about all the evil things that are in that world – Satan is powerful, and the antithesis is a reality: there is a war going on, and our children better know about that. But don't try to train them in the middle of battle. As yet, the Lord gives us our Christian families and Christian schools as safe havens for our children. Let us make the most of every opportunity (Eph. 5:15,16)!

Let's pray that our families and schools are, indeed, model places for Christian life where our children are prepared for battle with the armoury of Scripture.

* * *

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Faithworks in Dominican Republic – July 1996

In the middle of the Caribbean Sea lies the island Espaniola. It is a poor island divided into two countries: Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Many people suffer here because of their poor living conditions. Yet life for people in the Dominican is better than in Haiti. For the Haitians anything is better. Even though many Haitians have been manipulated or forced into coming into the Dominican Republic to work as slaves, their life in the Dominican Republic is still an improvement. Yet life for a Haitian in this country is not easy. They do not have any status or citizenship. They simply do not belong. The government knows they are there and allows it mostly because they are cheap labour for the sugarcane fields, which are owned by the government.

The Haitian life is uncertain. They could be walking home one day from the sugarcane field and be picked up by government officials and be transported to another area. As a result many families are split up. Most try to return home as soon as they can, but it could take days, months and some do not return for years. Their homes are made from scraps of tin and anything else they can find. They are not given the opportunity to own land. The privilege of owning land, which we often take for granted, is kept for Dominicans only.

On July 13, eleven eager members of the Canadian Reformed churches, 10 from Souther Ontario and 1 from BC, bet at the Toronto airport. It was the beginning of a two-week trip to the Dominican. This trip was organized by the volunteers, under the auspices of the CRWRF, in order to give relief to Haitian refugees who find themselves in this difficult situation.

This was not a trip done by these eleven people only, for much time and support had been given by other members of the church community as well. It was encouraging to find people who were interested in this project and willing to support it. This support came first of all through their words and prayers. Some were also able to assist us finan-



The ministry centre where we stayed.

cially. In this way we were able to prepare ourselves for the trip that lay ahead. The Haitians also realized, and were truly thankful for the support that we received from our church communities.

During the two weeks that we were there we were able to complete two building projects. At the work site, Max Vantil, the project coordinator, helped us to convert our enthusiasm and willingness to useful labour. Many of us had little or no construction experience. Now we were expect to lay block, build shutters, build trusses, make door and window frames, nail tin, and paint. Even with our inexperience, we were able to accomplish quite a lot on the first day. Slowly but surely the first building, a 20 x 30 church began to take shape. By the end of the first week the church was finished. This building would be used, not only for Sunday worship, but also as a community centre that gives relief, for example distributing used clothing.

Our second building project was a pastor's home. The previous pastor's home was not suitable for him and his family to live in. With new found experience we were able to finish this building in better time than the church. As

the homes have no electricity, plumbing or insulation the buildings can be completed quickly.

As mentioned previously the Haitians themselves are unable to own land. Even if they build something of worth it may legally be taken from them by a Dominican. With a group of foreigners building the home the villagers are less likely to take control of the house.

During the second week a Bible school was also organized. A simple Bible story was told and translated by one of the young members of the congregation. Then followed a related craft, some singing, and a game or two. Children from the church and the surrounding neighbourhood attended. Their enthusiasm for the games was clearly heard, and their pride in their craft was easily seen, even several days after it had been made.

On the two Sundays we were there we had the opportunity to worship with four different congregations. These churches are all members of the Federation of Reformed Churches of the Dominican Republic. Initially these people heard the Gospel through the Back to God hour. Over time they have become independent of other federations,



Putting up the trusses on the church.

us focused on the reason we were there. It was not for our own glory, but for God's glory only. Nevertheless these discussions allowed us to share our impressions and thoughts about the day. For many of the group this was the first experience with situations like this. It is hard to imagine how life can go on like this, when so many things seem to be lacking. It is easy to see things as being unfair, but we discussed that we must be responsible with the gifts God has given to us and use them to His glory.

Upon returning home, our minds were reeling with all we had experienced. We were eager to share our impressions of what we had seen and done. Yet in it all we try to remember 1 Peter 4 "whoever renders service, as one who renders it by the strength that God supplies; in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." For we did not do this on our own strength.

Debbie deBoer 

and have their own assemblies. Some missionaries continue to work there as well as mission aid workers like Max Vantil. The two to three hour services were difficult to understand due to the language barrier. Both Spanish and Creole are spoken during the service. However, it was not difficult to recognize their thankfulness for all that God had done for them. This was especially evident in their singing. They expressed their joy through many songs. They often repeated songs, accompanied with tambourines, guitars and clapping. This is typical of singing in Caribbean countries. During the services the elders of the church would take attendance using little cards that are punched to show the member had come to church. The members were very proud of these, as it gave them a sense of belonging in a country where they don't. At the end of the service they greet each other and wish them the blessings of the Lord for the coming week.

In the evenings and on Sunday afternoons we had group study time. Before the trip a journal was assembled. Each day had a text that we discussed. Often this led us to compare our life and work in Canada with the life we saw and experienced in the Dominican. It also kept



Working on a craft at the Children's Bible School.



The team in front of the pastor's home – our second project.

From Sudan to Kenya . . .

A little more than a year ago, a number of Grade 11 Bible students at Credo Christian High School took the advice of Dr. VanDam and addressed the plight of persecuted Christians in Sudan (*Suffering in Sudan*, vol. 44, No. 21, Oct. 21 1995) in letters to Prime Minister Chretien. The Prime Minister replied and *Clarion* was so kind as to feature two letters the students received (vol 45: No. 7, April 5, 1996). As a class, we felt good that we had heeded the wise advice of Dr. VanDam, and that in some small way we might be making a difference. Well, we were in for an even better surprise! The pebble had been thrown into the pond and the ripples are still fanning out.

At the end of August, 1996, two of our students, Karen Moesker and John Torenvliet (whose reply letter from the Prime Minister had been featured) received a letter from Africa at our school address which had been given as the return address. Surprisingly this letter was not from Sudan, but from Kenya! It contained an introduction to a small church, Mwarogoncho Christian Fellowship in Kisii, Kenya. The pastor requested help "to extend the work of our church here in Kenya. We also request you to send us Bibles, literature and any other teaching aid booklets for us to use in our church. Please we ask you to help us and support us in prayer. . . ."

We can think of no other explanation than that someone connected with this small congregation in Kenya got our address from *Clarion*, amazing as that may seem. Our first reaction was unbridled enthusiasm. "Of course, we would help! How could we refuse?" We soon realized, however, that some caution was warranted. First of all we requested further information from Mwarogoncho's pastor. We began to put out other inquiries, including one on the Refnet, and several leads developed.

Rev. J. J. Peterson of the Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church in San Antonio, Texas gave us a couple of OPC



and PCA missionary contacts in Kenya itself, as well as an address in Holland of a Reformed minister quite familiar with Kenya. He warned us, "Be cautious with the Lord's money. There are opportunists in Kenya who will use the church to get money. On the other hand, there are many wonderful Reformed brothers and sisters in that country."

We became confident that Mwarogoncho Christian Fellowship was a group that deserved our support. We were strongly urged not to send money, but to work through a legitimate organization such as the World Home Bible League. In the fall of 1996, during

School Spirit Week, the students at Credo raised approximately \$1,500.00 for this cause.

What did we learn? A lesson in humility. The Lord will use our obedient deeds in unexpected ways. While we were intending to accomplish something in one area, the Lord was busy preparing the way to bless others who belong to Him. Let's remember to pray for the persecuted Christians but also the fledgling Christians who stand at the beginning of the road to the New Jerusalem.

On behalf of the students at Credo Christian High School,
(Mrs.) Sarah Vanderugten

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

I disagree with Rev. Agema's view of the Church and for his vision for Church unit. I will focus on only two points which he raises in his article entitled "On Church Unity" in your January 10, 1997 issue.

In his third point Rev. Agema takes issue with Rev. Visscher who says we should abandon the practice of announcing a member's withdrawal from the Church of Jesus Christ where he or she leaves a Canadian Reformed Church to become a member of another Reformed Church. Relying on Article 28 of the Belgic Confession, Rev. Agema defends the practice. He reasons that since his Canadian Reformed congregation is the true Church of Jesus Christ it is a sin to leave it. He ignores the reality that the recipient congregating may also be the true Church of Jesus Christ as measured by the same confessional standards.

In his fifth point Rev. Agema advances the view that the local Church council is not yet in a position to make that positive judgment about the recipient Church, and will not be until our Federation as a whole has made that decision. It is this authoritarian, top down view of Church government with which I disagree. It precludes individuals and even local congregations from making judgments about other Christians and other Churches based on Scriptures and Confessions.

In our unity discussions locally we have been asked whether it is the official position of the Canadian Reformed Churches that we are the only true church. Although we adamantly deny this, we are often pointed to articles which over the years have been published in *Clarion* and elsewhere which certainly have led intelligent and fair minded individuals to conclude otherwise. I'm afraid Rev. Agema's article will only fuel that misconception further.

Rev. Agema does not clarify his position with his prostitute analogy which he introduces in his third point. Rather, it pollutes the waters and will lead to anger and further alienation between Reformed people of different Denominations or Federations. I'm afraid that if Rev. Agema's view of the Church and his vision for Church unity become predominant in the Canadian Reformed Churches, Church unity will never become a reality. And it will be we who are guilty of obstructing the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ.

T.J. VanPopta
Langley, BC

Terug

*By die doopvont staan sy
Haar kind styf vasgedruk
Ek het jou alleen gekry
Haar binnemens le stuk*

*'n Psalm
Troos
Skeppingswonder
Kunsborduursel fyn bewerk
gemaak in die aarde onder
God's werk van mense ongemerk*

*Sy voel die warm lewe teen haar
Kind van God is jy
Jou pa is weg
buite
daar
Hy wil nie saam die JA bely*

*Ek is skuldig Heer
My sonde druk my neer
Ek was voor U in tranes
smart
rou
Op U, God wil ek bou*

*Ed was daar buite - nag
Self kerkdeure toegeslaan
Herders hou die wag
vir my moet jul laat staan*

*U wou my niet laat staan
Goeie herder Heer
Kom terug!
Moenie gaan!
Skaap van my
Ek wil jou leer*

*Sy staan voor God's gemeente
hier
'n Skaap het teruggekom!!!
God's bruid
Opnuut versier
die kind behoort aan Hom!*

*Haar vader wat haar ondersteun
Heer, so mag ons op U leun
Lei U voortaan ons wank'le skrede
tog op die weg van ew'ge vrede!*

H. Stolpher

Homecoming

*At the baptismal font she waits
Her child clasped close
All by myself I got you
Her inner self lies scattered*

*A Psalm
Comfort
Wonder of creation
Knit together
Intricately wrought
in the depths of the earth
God's handiwork not seen by man*

*She feels the warm life throbbing
You are God's child
Your dad is gone
outside
far away
He will not say I DO with me*

*I am guilty Lord
My sin bears down upon me
I was in tears before Thee
Sorrow
Mourning
In Thee I rest my case*

*When I was outside - darkness
Slammed church doors myself
Shepherds keep watch
Have to let me go*

*You did not let me go
Good Shepherd Lord
Come back!
Don't go away!
Beloved sheep
I will teach you*

*She stands before God's people
here
A sheep came back!!!
God's bride
Adorned again
The child belongs to Him!*

*Her Father Who will carry her
Lord, may we lean on Thee
Guide Thou our faltering steps
In the ways of eternal peace!*

Translated from Afrikaans
- by Mrs. W. Kanis
**Mededelingsblad van die Vrije
Gereformeerde Kerk te Pretoria**
- 3 December 1995



Republished Sermons by Calvin

Calvin preached much. According to the Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1541 Calvin was expected to conduct two Sunday services and three during the week. By 1549 the weekday services however became a daily occurrence. They were held Monday through Friday on alternate weeks before people went to work and commenced at 6 in the morning in the summer and 7 during the winter. On Sundays Calvin usually preached on a New Testament passage and during the week he dealt with the Old Testament. Virtually nothing is known of Calvin's sermons prior to 1549. That year was a turning point for then Denis Raguenier started to take down Calvin's preaching in very accurate short-hand. He saw to it that the sermons were written out in longhand and bound. Those who wished to borrow them could do so for a fee which went to help poor foreigners. Raguenier kept this up to his death in 1560, after which other stenographers took over. Calvin preached his last sermon on February 2, 1564 and the Lord called His servant to himself on May 27 of that year.

The work of Raguenier and others was very important for Calvin did not write out his sermons and did not even use notes. Calvin allowed his sermons to be taken down and published but he did not check them. Twice Calvin did involve himself with printing his sermons. In 1552 he published four sermons and he once wrote a foreword for an edition of sixty-five sermons on texts from the gospels.¹

With this background, we can better appreciate the fact that Old Paths Publications has reissued long neglected sermons of Calvin from Genesis and Psalms. Calvin's sermonic style tends to be very simple and straightforward. After a brief introduction in which he would often remind his listeners of subject of the previous sermon, he goes straight to the text and explains it part by part, giving application after each thought unit has been finished. In the end, he exhorts to prayer and supplication. The simple style makes these ser-

mons quite accessible for the modern reader. Although we live in a much different world, certain things have not changed, such as the struggle against sin and the need to heed the Word of the Lord and to give glory to God in everything.

John Calvin, *Sermons on Election and Reprobation*. Foreword by David C. Engelsma. Old Paths Publications (223 Princeton Road, Audubon, New Jersey 08106 U.S.A.) Hardcover, 317 pages (plus Publisher's Preface, Foreword, and indexes). \$ 36.95 US.

These thirteen sermons were first delivered by Calvin as part of his series on the book of Genesis (September 4, 1559 to February 1561). They were translated into English and published separately as sermons on election and reprobation in 1579. Old Paths Publications has somewhat updated the original English translation by John Field and for the first time in more than 400 years, English readers can again read and ponder these messages from Genesis. That fact alone makes this edition a most welcome accomplishment! Appended to these thirteen sermons is a short treatise entitled "An Answer to certain slanders and blasphemies, wherewith certain evil disposed persons have gone about to bring the doctrine of God's everlasting predestination into hatred."

I find the title, *Sermons on Election and Reprobation*, somewhat unfortunate for although many of these sermons certainly deal with these doctrines, they also do have a broader interest. They are sermons on Genesis 25:12-27:38, chapters that start with the conception and birth of Jacob and Esau and end with Jacob's receiving from Isaac the blessing of the first born. The many different issues that this part of Scripture raises are also reflected in these sermons.

In reading through these sermons, one hears as it were the familiar echoes of the Canons of Dordt. Calvin does not present us with abstract truths, but he expounds the text before him and so

brings the truth of God's word close to us. Calvin leads us through the questions that are often raised against these Biblical teachings (e.g., does this doctrine make us careless, pp. 46f., why did God allow evil, pp. 48ff.) and he cautions us to accept what Scripture teaches, not to be wiser than God, but to be humble and acknowledge that his judgments are very deep (e.g., pp. 28, 30f., 42ff). The great comfort that comes with predestination is also stressed by Calvin (e.g. pp. 58f., 68-71, 168f.).

Other issues that arise in these sermons include the marvel of receiving of children (Isaac prayed twenty years for offspring, Gen. 25:20-21, 26) and the responsibility this brings. Calvin notes that those who are married and desire offspring should pray to God for them, for two reasons. God is the one who gives them. "The second is that it is not enough that their houses be full of children, unless that God always govern them, For it were much better that they had no offspring at all, than to have a perverse seed" (p. 23). Calvin urges fathers to follow the example of Isaac, but notes that Isaac prayed not just for offspring "only after the natural appetite of men," but he looked up higher and knew that the salvation of the world was to proceed from his posterity (p. 23). Other issues arising from the text include how we live with our unbelieving neighbour and make agreements with him (in a sermon on Gen. 26:26-27:1). Calvin also deals with our status as pilgrims in this world which demands a sober lifestyle and not a pursuing after riches (in a sermon on Gen. 25:29-34). Such a lifestyle also subjects us to many miseries, although we are enabled by the promises of God (in sermons on Gen. 26:1-5 and vv.11-21). Another issue Calvin touches on is that the efficacy of the sacrament, such as the Lord's Supper, does not depend on the worthiness of the one officiating, for he is only an instrument (in the sermon on Gen. 27:13ff.).

The foreword to these sermons is written by David C. Engelsma, Professor

of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies at the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches. These churches stand apart from other Reformed churches by insisting on their Declaration of Principles of 1950 in which they maintain, among other things, that the promise of God is unconditional only for the elect and that the promise of the covenant is not for all who are baptized. They hold that God makes His covenant only with the elect. This stance means in effect that God's promises do not really count for all those who are baptized, but only for the elect. It also means that you cannot be sure if those promises were really meant for your child. Of course all this smacks of the doctrinal binding that lead to the ecclesiastical liberation of 1944 in the Netherlands and we need not enter into the entire matter here.

The issue is however of importance for this book review, for as could be expected, Engelsma attempts to find support for the Protestant Reformed position in these sermons, but he fails. He states in his foreword that "Membership in the covenant is determined by election" (xii) and quotes from Calvin's second sermon (on Gen 25:21-22) for proof as follows:

And, moreover, we are taught a far greater thing, and that is in the first place that albeit God had established His covenant with Abraham, yet notwithstanding He would declare that this was not all, to have made offer of His grace, but that it behooved that He choose according to His liberty such as He thought good, and that the rest should remain in their cursed state.

As I read it, Calvin here says that God not only made a covenant with Abraham, but also choose such as pleased Him. This quotation says nothing about membership in the covenant being determined by election and indeed makes a distinction between the two. They are for Calvin two different points. Indeed, earlier in the sermon from which Engelsma quotes, Calvin warns that "they that are called into the Church does [sic] not always remain there" (p. 26). Referring to the example of Ishmael and Esau he warns "let us walk in purity, and labor to make sure our election, and to have the testimony thereof in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost" (p. 27). Later (pp. 33-34), Calvin stresses that Ishmael's receiving the sacrament of circumcision was to assure him that

God accounted him of the number of his children, that he was a member of Jesus Christ, that the curse which

he had drawn from Adam, was abolished: yea but this stood him in no stead at all. As much may be said of Esau, and of all their like: but howsoever it was, we must not despise (= despise, cvd.) the benefit that He showed towards all the stock of Abraham. As at this day when we speak of the inestimable blessing that God hath bestowed upon us, when His Gospel was preached: this same shall be spoken to all indifferently.

The free offer of the Gospel goes to all. The promises associated with circumcision went also to Ishmael and Esau. They are included as recipients of the promise in Abraham, for the covenant was made with him and all his descendants (Gen. 17:7; see pp. 49, 59-63, 158, 199-206; also see Calvin's commentary on Gen. 17:7). Esau despised the promise and renounced the grace of God. This action only makes sense if the promise had indeed been given to him (see pp. 232, 236).

Let us now very briefly, by reason of space constraints, note the other reprint.

John Calvin, *Sermons on Psalm 119*. Foreword by James Montgomery Boice. Old Paths Publications (223 Princeton Road, Audubon, New Jersey 08106 U.S.A.) Hardcover, 454 pages (plus Publisher's Preface, Foreword, and indexes). \$ 41.95 US.

Calvin preached these sermons on Psalm 119 from January 8 to July 2, 1553. The French original was translated by Thomas Stocker and published in 1580. The Old Paths Publications edition is a reissue of Stocker with some modernization, thus making available these sermons again in the English language for the first time in over 400 years.

Psalm 119 is an acrostic Psalm, that is each of its twenty-two stanzas starts with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in perfect sequence. Thus the first stanza starts with the first letter, aleph, but also each of the 8 lines or verses in that stanza start with this letter as well. Calvin has followed this structure to preach twenty-two sermons on this part of Scripture.

It is good to have these sermons available. Psalm 119 is a rich contemplation of the law of God. How good in our day and age when the revolutionary slogan of "no law and no master" holds so many captive, to ponder the rich gift of God's law and word to His people, using these sermons of Calvin. As Calvin puts it in his first sermon, this Psalm is one

by which we may learn to rule and order our lives, whereby also he (the Lord) exhorteth us to well doing, to comfort us in all our afflictions, to ratify unto us the promises of salvation, to open unto us the Gates of His everlasting Kingdom, that we might enter into everlasting life (p. 4).

The reader will be greatly rewarded.

Finally, two concluding observations and comments on both of these reprints. First, commentaries of Calvin exist for the passages of Scripture explained in both these volumes. The difference is that the sermons tend to be more expansive in explanation and more pastorally focused than the commentaries. Calvin applies the Word more directly to the lives of God's people in the sermons.

Second, the editor and publisher, Ernie Springer, has obviously expended much love and dedication to these volumes. They are expensive, but the production is of a very high quality. The editor has also wrestled with language issues. I can appreciate his dilemma of what to do with an old English translation. For the most part, the translation has been left as it was to reflect as accurately as possible the original text. This aim as such is commendable in reproducing a historical document. However, changes have been made in spelling because these are not just to be historical documents, but books that people today pick up and read and become enriched by. For that reason, I do regret that his updating has not gone further. Many archaic words are more clearly defined, but many are not (e.g., terms like "quailed"; "issue"; "booted"; "buckler") are not really comprehensible anymore today. Perhaps in future reprints, more modern equivalents could be given. I also found irritating that God is spelled, GOD, god, and God. For the ease of the modern reader, why not stick to one spelling, especially since no one is completely sure why the different spellings were in the original.

With these comments I do not wish to scare potential readers away, for I think these volumes should be read! There is godly preaching here that will be of great value. Although the English is not modern, the serious reader will have no difficulty following Calvin's exposition.

¹The information found in the above introduction can also be found in T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (1986) 9-13 and W. de Greef, *Calvijn en het Oude Testament* (1984) 16-18.