

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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*Martin Luther on
Reformed Education*

Numbers

10:1-10

By P. Aasman

What we've done is worse

They shouted back, "No, not Him!" John 18:40a

Sarah stood just inside her tent, out of sight from Abraham and the three visitors who had come to them. She wanted to hear their conversation. One of the strangers told Abraham the most unexpected thing ever: "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Sarah's first reaction was unbelief. To her this was simply not possible. Her second reaction, hard on the heels of the first, was to laugh. Not only was it impossible, but to her it was ludicrous. Sarah's sin has two distinct parts. The first may be called the sin of omission: she failed to believe the message. The second may be called the sin of commission: she did something terrible. She laughed at God's promise.

This distinction can help us get a deeper insight into sin. When you review what you have done in the day past, it may well be possible that you cannot think of any particular sin that you have committed. You have not become angry with anyone; you have not gossiped; you have not permitted

your mind to indulge in sinful fantasies. You may not have committed such a sin as Sarah did by laughing at God's promise.

But just because you cannot think of a sin which you have actually committed, does that mean that you have not sinned? This is an important issue because we should pray with conviction. We should not pray for the forgiveness of sins if we can't think of any sins that need to be forgiven. We should not confess our sins with a vague sense that we haven't really sinned. It is well known that God will only receive us when we approach his throne with our hearts broken and our spirits crushed because of sin. Should we feel badly, then, if at the end of the day we cannot identify horrible sins that we have committed in the day past?

If we expand our concept of sin to include sins of omission, we will get a deeper insight into personal sin. While on some days our fellowship with God may be so intense that we are not able to easily identify any obvious sins that

we have committed, at the end of the day, there will always be more than enough sins of omission to crush us. In fact, the sins of omission are the worst of them all. This is a point that is easily illustrated.

When Eli saw that his sons were abusing their priestly office, he was deeply grieved. When he heard from the people the things that they were doing, he rebuked them. But what grieved him more was that they did not love Yahweh. Any godly parent will be more grieved at the failure of their children to love God, than by the horrible things they actually do. The fact that Eli's sons were committing such gross things as stealing from the holy sacrifices and abusing the women who came to worship at the temple, was only the working out of their failure to love God.

Or consider this example. Pontius Pilate stood Jesus before the people side-by-side with Barabbas and asked the people to choose whom to release. Jesus had loved this people. He had

What's inside?

Surprise! A mid-summer issue. Usually we combine Nos. 15 and 16, and take a good month-long break from worrying about getting *Clarion* out. Well, we are breaking that long tradition this year. Because of the faithfulness of regular contributors, we had enough material to split the combined issue and run individual ones. No. 15 was mostly about preachers and preaching; No. 16 is largely about teachers and teaching. Right now the teachers and the preachers are enjoying a bit of time off the regular busy schedules. Some are probably doing what many belonging to these vocations like to do – a bit of camping at a provincial park and getting brown as nuts at the beach. It won't take long before they are talking about how to teach Bible. Well, we provide here an article as fuel for that conversation. Rev. J. van Popta gives some insight and direction on how to teach Bible. One of our resident Classics scholars, Dr. R. Faber, writes on the topic of Martin Luther on Reformed education. Not only did Luther have a huge effect on the church; he also influenced greatly the sphere of education.

An author whose name we have withheld writes on the very painful topic of pornography. This is not a pleasant subject, but it is good that it be addressed. Unfortunately, there are those among us who are enslaved to this demonic master. May our publishing of this article help someone break free from the grip of pornography.

Mr. Ralph Winkel has contributed another "Reflections." And then you will find a few of the regular columns. You will, however, hunt in vain for an editorial. That has to do with splitting the regular 15/16 issue and not having had an editor designated for an extra editorial. We are sure you will survive it. Enjoy the rest of Summer. GVP

healed their sick, fed the hungry and comforted those who grieved. And now he loved them with what remained of his life. He was ready to die for them. He had every reason to expect them to love Him in return. "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" Pilate asked. Of course they will say "Jesus." They said, "Not this man, but Barabbas!"

Of all the horrible things our Lord endured at the hands of men, this must have been the very worst. Whatever else they might do to Him, makes little difference. Their cries, "Crucify Him!" simply completed what they had begun. They did not love Him, so they hated Him. They could not have committed such a gross thing if they had not failed to love Him.

Jesus had every reason to expect love from the people. God has every reason to expect unwavering love from us. God gives us countless gifts, and says, "Now show your love for me." It is a terrible thing for us to use his gifts to commit sinful things. But what is worse, is that they seem to say that we don't love God.

At the end of the day, we may not be able to identify things which show that we hate God or our neighbour, but it is enough that there are countless occasions when we have not shown love for God or our neighbour. The realization that we have omitted to show love should be like the breaking of all our bones. Nobody has any reason to keep his head high when going into God's presence, because what we have failed to do is worse than any outward sin that we may have actually committed.

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Martin Luther on Reformed Education

By R. Faber

Introduction

It is sometimes forgotten that the Reformation was as much concerned with school as it was with church and home. Appreciating the role of education in directing church and society back to the source of the Christian faith, the reformers were committed to the schooling of the young. One of Martin Luther's first acts as a Reformer was to propose that monasteries be turned into schools, while one of his last was to establish a school in Eisleben, where he died in 1546. Not only Luther, but also Melancthon, Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger and Calvin actively promoted Reformed education in their writings and works. Accordingly, it is no exaggeration to state that as a result of the Reformation public education was much altered by the end of the sixteenth century.

“The Reformation was as much concerned with school as it was with church and home.”

The development of Reformed education neither began nor ended with the first generation of Reformers. Well before the Luther and his contemporaries wrote about the necessity of Reformed education, Christian humanists were publishing tracts promoting educational improvement. In fact, one of the hallmarks of the Renaissance movement that was reaching northern Europe was the rebirth of learning. The Reformers not only read the writings of the humanists, but as graduates of universities they had witnessed the debates about the various principles and methods of learning. As a consequence, they were forced to consider the proper function of education in the life of the believer. While the strengths and weaknesses of the Reformers' contribution to Christian education continue to be discussed, it is clear that the sixteenth century wit-



nessed what is perhaps the most concerted effort to reform education according to norms of Scripture.

Whereas the first generation of Reformers made considerable improvements to Christian education, important refinements and applications were made throughout and beyond the sixteenth century, especially in the erection of schools, the development of curricula, the publication of textbooks, and in the examination of philosophical ramifications. Nevertheless, the early Reformers have earned an important place in the history of education, as they were the first to express the principles of Reformed education and to develop objectives and methods. In so doing, they provided an important basis upon which later educators were to build.

The need for educational reform was urgent at the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time there existed no school system as such, and teaching was often limited to the children of wealthy merchants and city rulers. In many places the Roman Catholic church supervised the training of the youth in monasteries, cloisters, and other church-run institutions. But these were falling into disrepute and disrepair, as the populace reacted against the corruption and abuses among the clergy. Many par-

ents simply stopped the training of their offspring, so that one of the first tasks of the Reformers was to convince parents that the spiritual well-being of their children was more important than their physical comfort.

Assuming that the state would be ruled by Christian leaders, Luther imposes upon the government the task of overseeing Reformed education.

Martin Luther was at the forefront of those who realized the need for change in education, and with characteristic zeal he sought to effect improvements in Wittenberg and throughout Germany. While he composed only a few works that treat education directly, his other writings often reveal an attempt to relate education to the doctrinal rediscoveries of the Reformation, and especially to subject learning to the “theology of the cross.” The few treatises Luther did dedicate strictly to education had such impact that they may be deemed seminal for the development of Reformed schooling in the sixteenth century. These works not only influenced teachers and preachers throughout Germany, but they also encouraged other theologians to consider the role of education in society. In this article we shall consider briefly two works by Luther on this subject. We shall examine especially the motivation for writing these tracts, the main arguments for schooling in them, and Luther's ideas about the basis and objectives of education.

Establishing and maintaining schools (1524)

Of the two which will be treated here, one is the letter “To the Councilmen

of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools" (1524).¹ The letter was written in response to the decline of the church-run schools, as well as to the anti-educational sentiments that arose in Wittenberg and elsewhere. One of the premises underlying the arguments in the letter is the doctrine concerning the duties of the temporal government to ensure decency and good order in society; for this reason the letter was addressed not to parents but civic leaders. More than the parents, the councilmen possessed the political and financial resources to erect the schools, and impressing upon them the moral duty to promote the kingdom of God strengthened Luther's cause. Luther therefore reminds the councillors that by their authority from God they must promote a godly society, and he seeks to convince them that proper education would benefit the state as well as the church.

Education would serve the reform of religion and society.

It should be noted, however, that Luther not only addresses the councilmen in this open letter; he also writes to the citizens, his "beloved Germans." For whereas the responsibility of the councilmen is to develop a community in which Christian education may flourish, citizens and especially parents are called by the priesthood of all believers to nurture their offspring. Luther founds the parental responsibility firmly on the Bible, citing several texts as proof. One is Psalm 78:5-7, where we read how God "commanded our fathers to teach [his laws] to their children; that the next generation might know them . . . and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God." Luther also refers to the commandment to honour one's father and mother; the parents' responsibility in enacting this commandment is evidenced by the injunction in Deuteronomy 21:18-21 that rebellious youths be brought by them to the elders for corporal punishment. It is the duty of the parents to teach children obedience to all in authority over them. God, having established a covenant with us, "entrusted [children] to us . . . and will hold us strictly accountable for them (353)." Luther also reminds parents that for

proper training in the faith, Moses freely advises the young to ". . . ask your father and he will show you, your elders and they will tell you (Deut. 32:7)"; for parents have the duty to instruct their children in these things.

And yet Luther writes mainly to the councilmen, for he realizes that there are citizens who neglect their parental duties. Some may not understand their God-given responsibility, others may not be suited for the duty, ". . . for they themselves have learned nothing but how to care for their bellies (355)." A third group of parents is one which does not have the opportunity or the means to educate its children. "Necessity compels us, therefore, to engage public-school teachers for the children (355)." While it may not appear unusual from the modern perspective, Luther's advocacy of a community-organized school was novel. Assuming that the state would be ruled by Christian leaders, Luther imposes upon the government the task of overseeing Reformed education. Not anticipating the conflict between state and church that was to develop later, Luther proposes a system of education that would benefit all members of society, including boys and girls, wealthy and poor. Civic schools would belong to a system of institutions throughout the land and would operate in harmony with the church. In this manner, Luther thought, education could serve the reform of religion and society.

Having alerted both parents and civic leaders to their respective duties in the education of the youth, Luther next describes the benefits of schooling for state and church. The councilmen are enjoined to support education, for "a city's best and greatest welfare, safety and strength consist rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens (356)" than in "mighty walls and magnificent buildings (355)." For the proper government of the earthly realm, education should be viewed as an important means in producing responsible citizens. In short, the councilmen have a vested interest in the training of the young, who will be the future civic leaders.

Influenced by the methods espoused by the Renaissance, Luther believed that the best model for preparing civic leaders was the classical one. For him, the writings of ancient Greece and Rome provided the most complete and exhaustive treatments of all aspects of civic life, including professions such as medicine, law, and the various

tasks of temporal government. This time-bound, earthly government was a divinely ordained "estate", and should carry out its duties with utmost care. The best precedent for the proper conduct of the worldly estate, Luther writes, are the ancient Greeks and Romans, who "although they had no idea of whether this estate were pleasing to God or not, they were so earnest and diligent in educating and training their young boys and girls to fit them for the task, that when I call it to mind I am forced to blush for us Christians" (367). Enthused by the contemporary rediscovery of the classics, Luther acquired a view of antiquity so favourable that the modern must beg to differ; yet he and many peers felt that the methods – if not the cultural values – of antiquity provided the best model for educating future citizens in his own time.

Knowledge of Scripture is both the basis and goal of education; humanistic methods may serve this objective, but they are not to be deemed an end in themselves.

Not only would the state benefit from a Reformed education, but also – and especially – the church. Here, too, Luther advocated the study of ancient life and letters, for he was convinced that knowledge of antiquity would provide believers with a better understanding of the historical, social and linguistic context of the Bible. Whereas the recently published German translation would make the Bible accessible to all German people, Scripture in the original languages must be preserved and studied with diligence. "My beloved Germans," writes Luther in a personal and passionate vein, "let us get our eyes open, thank God for this precious treasure [of the Hebrew and Greek Bible], and guard it well, lest the devil vent his spite and take it away from us again (358)." The gospel must be preserved, the true doctrine must be taught, and the faith must be defended on the basis of God's Word alone. God, argues Luther, who "desires His Bible to be an open book," desires that all know the Bible. Therefore Luther goes on at some length about the value of a classical curriculum for the Reformed school, for he

was convinced that knowledge of the liberal arts – history, languages and the like – provided the best context for the study of Scripture. Not only ministers, theologians, teachers and scholars educated in this manner would best serve the Church, but all believers as members of Christ's body would better know God and His work in this world by means of such learning.

On keeping children in school (1530)

Another treatise by Luther on education is the so-called "Sermon on Keeping Children in School" (1530), published in the form of an open letter.² Having received disappointing results of a survey regarding the improvement of life in church, home and school, Luther realized that his earlier call for educational reform had gone largely unheeded. Clearly, changing the thought and behaviour of people would not be so easy as Luther had hoped at first. Many parents still preferred to direct their children to the work force and the immediate material rewards it would afford, than to invest in spiritual development and moral reform. Luther's wish for them is that they "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well (Matthew 6:31-33)." However, the Wittenberg disturbances, the Peasants' Revolt, and the common misunderstanding that Reformation meant an attack upon learning, caused many parents to halt the education of their children as soon as possible. Accordingly in this treatise Luther sets his sights lower, and he focuses more on producing solid Reformed preachers and teachers through whom modest improvements may be made. Yet, unlike the letter of 1524, the gist of this letter is not the establishment of schools, but the proper development of them and their curriculum.

Without the gospel, education is meaningless.

The main addressees of the Sermon are the Reformed preachers throughout the land. Luther speaks especially to them, not because he confuses the jurisdictions of church and school, but because he wishes to impress upon ministers the advantages of education for Christian spiritual development. The relevance of education for both religious and civic realms, as described in the letter of 1524, remains a key ar-



gument for sending children to school. First Luther addresses the problem of the little concern parents show for the "spiritual well-being" of their children. "I see them," says Luther of some parents, "withdrawing their children from instruction and turning them to the making of a living (219)." Neglecting the role of Scripture in the life of their children, parents appear to underestimate the function of learning in the service of the Word, the sacraments, and "all which imparts the Spirit and salvation." It appears that parents do not encourage their children to learn more about God and His works in the created world and history. While admonishing his fellow Germans, Luther reminds parents of the dire warning of punishment "to the third and fourth generation" of those who do not love God, adding that "you are guilty of the harm that is done when the spiritual estate disappears and neither God nor God's word remains in the world (222)." In Luther's view education is crucial to the advancement of the gospel, and all should see to it that their children live first and foremost for the proclamation of the Word in the lives of others and their own. It is also for this reason that he advises all to consider the importance of the preaching office and theology, and all learning that advances them.

As for the Sermon's discussion of the relevance of education for the state, Luther herein attacks especially the increasing materialism of his fellow Germans. Seeking physical comforts, wealth and material prosperity, parents wish for their children not spiritual, but

material well-being. Throughout the letter Luther opposes education to the pursuit of Mammon, knowing that many parents focus on this world rather than the next. Granting that the offices of the temporal realm concern this world, Luther nevertheless values the purpose of the worldly estate as more than the acquiring of material property, since it is "an ordinance and splendid gift from God, who has instituted and established it and will have it maintained (237)." The true function of the secular realm is "to make men out of wild beasts" (237), that is, to effect an orderly, fair, and peaceful society in which the spiritual estate may be fostered. Justice, social order, and the preservation of life fall under the jurisdiction of the temporal government, which must be exercised by people properly educated for such tasks. In this way the temporal realm promotes God's kingdom on earth, as it is subservient to His word and seeks to advance life according to His will. For this reason also, "is the duty of the temporal authority to compel its subjects to keep their children in school . . . so that there will always be preachers, jurists, pastors, writers, physicians, schoolmasters, and the like . . . (256)." After all, in the temporal realm, "every occupation has its own honour before God, as well as its own requirements and duties (246)."

Luther wished to show that Reformed schooling was relevant to both the current world and the future one.

For Luther, knowledge of Scripture is both the basis and goal of education; humanistic methods may serve this objective, but they are not to be deemed an end in themselves. Unlike the humanist Erasmus, Luther did not consider education per se as contributing to the salvation and piety of the believer. The depravity of the human will, Luther argued, is so great that without the righteousness of God no-one can progress in piety, let alone be saved. Equally condemned before God, all believers are equally saved by God's grace through faith in the death of Christ – regardless of education. Without the gospel, then, education is meaningless. And it is only from the perspective of the gospel that education must be valued. On the basis

of the Bible all youths should pursue education as a means to becoming responsible men and women who can govern churches, countries, people, and households.

Conclusion


Within the scope of this article, it is not possible to provide an exhaustive assessment of Luther's proposals for educational reform as expressed in the "Letter to the Councilmen" and the "Sermon." Needless to say, critical questions have been posed, especially about Luther's distinction between the temporal and spiritual realms, the use of humanist methods and values "in the service" of Christianity, and the nationalism that appeared to result from the developed German educational system. Luther did not address various disciplines of study, nor the practicalities of training the young. It would be appropriate, however, to conclude by noting briefly the reasons for the basis, method

and objectives of education as delineated in these works.

In writing these public letters, Luther sought to promote a Reformed view of education which at the same time answered the criticism of opponents. For example, there were the Waldensians, who considered the classical languages as needless for the proper understanding of Scripture. To them Luther pointed out the value of knowing Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. And in advocating the study of antiquity (its history, culture and literature), Luther intended to silence those who mistakenly wished to abandon all learning on the grounds that it was irrelevant to the study of Scripture. There were also the "spiritualists", and those who believed in direct revelations from God; these parties placed too little value in the temporal, earthly realm. To these Luther responded by demonstrating the value of education for the understanding of God's working in this

world. There was also the continuing influence of scholasticism, with its increasingly defunct view of education that appeared both irrelevant and impractical. In promoting his views of education, Luther wished to show that Reformed schooling was relevant to both the current world and the future one. And finally, the movement against which Luther inveighs especially in the "Sermon" is the ubiquitous materialism, which sought to provide training in the acquisition of worldly goods while ignoring the eternal ones. In sum, whereas Luther's views would be much refined by pedagogues later in the sixteenth century and beyond, they did provide a substantial basis for the further reform of education.

¹English translation by A. Steinhaeuser in *Luther's Works*. Vol. 45 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962), 347-378.

²An English translation is offered by C.M. Jacobs in *Luther's Works*. Vol. 46 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 209-258. 

I *still* don't know what Redemptive-Historical Interpretation is!

By J.L. van Popta

Though in our churches the redemptive-historical interpretive model is held up as the best way to understand God's Word, many still say, "I still don't know what redemptive-historical interpretation is!" It is important for teachers who want to draw deep from the riches of Scripture to understand and to learn what it is, and how to apply its principles. Many have tried to explain it. Perhaps some counter examples will help us to understand.¹ I suggest that there are three other basic models of Scripture interpretation: intellectualist, moralist-exemplarist, and liberal-critical. By better understanding those three we can more clearly see what redemptive-historical is.

Intellectualist

The intellectualist method stresses facts and data. God is someone to be



known and studied as one might study an object. God is a rational being and Scripture is God's thoughts and words about himself. Scripture becomes simply a series of proof texts to be memorized, concepts to be learned, and truths to be organized in a systematic way. Man is created in the image of God; He is a rational being who has to learn the facts. The intellectualist teacher will have the students do intellectual activities. Students will be required to recite Bible texts and to explain doctrine with supporting proof texts.

Learning the facts is important, but it is not the final purpose of Bible study.

Moralist-exemplarist

The moralist looks at Scripture a little differently. He sees God not as an object to be studied, nor the Bible as a book of facts about God. Rather, he sees God as judge whom we will all meet someday. God is busy writing down all our faults in a big book. Man is a moral being. He must choose between the right and the wrong. The Bible is our case book to guide us on the way; it is a book of rules. The stories teach us what to do and what not to do. Bible class is to build up moral character. Moralism thrives on drawing lessons from the Bible. It uses the Bible as a book of examples: good or bad. The students should learn right from wrong by emulating Bible characters



(or by distancing themselves from their behaviour).

Learning moral behaviour is a good thing, but this is not the first nor final purpose of Bible study.

Learning moral behaviour is a good thing but this is not the first nor final purpose of Bible Study

Liberal-critical

Proponents of a liberal-critical method try to find the background sources to the Bible. They ask a different set of questions. "Where did Matthew get his stories? How can we explain the miracles? Where do the folk tales and myths of the Ancient Near East fit into the Bible? Through what processes did the stories come together?" To the liberal-critical teacher the Bible is not revelation from God but the account of Israel's religious history and the, perhaps true, perhaps not true, story of the birth of the Christian religion. The Bible is the testimony to, and the account of, the religious experience of various groups of people and of individuals. In the Bible we can find the aspirations and evolution of Old Testament Israel and New Testament Church. It is the product of human processes.

This method is not based on a high view of Scripture and so is not beneficial to us. It is however, important to know about it, for it lies back of many books and resources that the Bible teacher will use. Ignorance of this perspective causes many Reformed confessions to adopt very poor hermeneutical principles and foundations.

Redemptive-historical

The redemptive-historical method studies God's Word as the history of redemption as found in the unfolding and progressive revelation of God's mighty acts for and in his people, in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It first of all tells the account of God's redemptive work and grapples with it in its historical setting. "Where does the narrative fit in the big pic-

ture?" The redemptive-historical approach also attempts to deal with the literary character of the passage. For example, Psalm 105 is a song of praise to a covenant keeping God. When it is studied it should be studied as a song, not primarily as a synopsis of Israelite history, even though in a sense that is what it is.

The historical, geographic, political situation will be brought to bear on the matter. We can use good commentaries, encyclopedias, atlases, Bible hand books, dictionaries, lexicons, etc.

Christological thrust

The redemptive-historical method acknowledges and highlights that the whole of Scripture testifies of Christ. The Old Testament points to Him. The New Testament witnesses of Him. The Old Testament anticipates his coming; the New Testament confirms and anticipates his return. Jesus Christ is the center, the focal point of history, but He is also working through history. An interpretation that does not point to Him and his redemptive work is lacking in precision and is at best incomplete.

The redemptive-historical method studies God's Word as the history of redemption as found in the unfolding and progressive revelation of God's mighty acts.

Moral / ethics - Knowledge / facts

All this does not mean that there is no moral or ethical lesson in the Bible or that knowledge and fact learning and memorization are unnecessary. There is a role for moral example. We should not approach the Bible as if it were just a history book with no concrete impact in our lives. Memorization of Scripture is important. The study of doctrine is essential. A Christian ethic is based on Scripture. But to come to these, doctrine and ethics, we must first have a good interpretive model from which to work.

Old Testament illustration

To better understand these various interpretive models we should look at some biblical narratives and see how they might be interpreted and taught in Bible class. First we will examine the account of Joshua and Jericho.

Israel crossed the Jordan, marched thirteen times around Jericho and the walls fell down.

Intellectualist

The intellectualist might say, "Class, we've read the story of the fall of Jericho. What can we learn? This is the lesson. The destruction of Jericho is proof of the doctrine of double predestination. The wicked are destroyed, but Rahab is saved." Or the teacher might ask, "How many times did the Israelites march around the city?"

The Liberal-critical

The Liberal critic has another approach. This teacher will say to the class after having read the account, "Of course we understand that this is just an ancient myth. The walls could not have fallen miraculously; there must have been an earthquake! If the people of Israel actually did march around the city so many times the shaking of the ground caused the foundations to weaken and the earthquake caused some of the walls to collapse. It is doubtful that this happened when Israel entered the land but is likely just an ancient tale that developed around an event long lost in the mists of time. Perhaps it was told to explain why Jericho was an unwallled city for so many years. In fact, class, the story may have been part of the Sodom and Gomorrah myth with Jericho situated in the same valley. Jericho was 'moved' from the south to its location on the Jordan River by an editor in order to make a dramatic opening to the story of Joshua."

The Moralist-exemplarist model

The curriculum from Bob Jones' University helps us illustrate the moralist-exemplarist model. Joshua's conquest was the result of obedience.

Your students must recognize that God demands [obedience] from them. The Bible is not just a book for pastors and Bible teachers or just

a textbook for their Bible classes. It is the rule book for their lives. . . . With each passage they must ask, "How does this affect my life?" What does God's word demand of me?" God will reward their efforts; obedience will bring good success.² So the account of the defeat of Jericho is a lesson for obedience. If you, like the people of Israel, do exactly as told, then God will bless you with every success. The history of Achan is a counter example. Disobedience will cause God to withdraw his blessing. The lessons are obvious. The same God who brought Israel into the promised land can meet our every need.

An interpretation that does not point to Him and his redemptive work is lacking in precision and is at best incomplete.

Redemptive-historical

A teacher using the redemptive-historical model will have an entirely different look at things. This teacher will point out that "God had made his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and now He is fulfilling his promise to bring their children to this land. Jericho is the first fruits. He brings the people across the Jordan in the time that the river was high and miraculously conquers a fortress city guarding the way. Jericho was a pagan city. God himself was the leader of the army. The people could see that God was keeping his covenant promises and that they could depend on Him to conquer the whole land. As God took Jericho through the mediator Joshua and secured blessing for his people and executed his wrath and judgment on the wicked, so also the better mediator (see Hebrews 4) Jesus Christ has laid claim to the new heaven and the new earth for his people."

New Testament illustration

We can also use a New Testament illustration. In John 6:1-14 the Lord Jesus feeds the five thousand. Five thousand follow the Lord Jesus into the hills to the other side of the sea of Galilee. They need something to eat. A boy has five little loaves and two fish. The Lord receives them and feeds the five thou-

sand and the disciples collect twelve baskets of left-overs.

The moralist, in trying to build the character of his students, lost the Lord Jesus in whom alone lives are changed.

The Intellectualist lesson

In the classroom of an intellectualist teacher the account is told and then: "Well children, what did we learn from the Bible story today? How many people were there on the hillside? Who supplied the bread and fish? How many loaves were there? How many fish? How many baskets left? Very good. Let's open up our arithmetic books."

The Liberal-critical

The liberal-critical method demands to understand how the account came to be written as we have it today. (This lesson would not work well in primary grades but imagine it anyway.) "From where did John get the story? Did he get this from one of the other gospel writers. Did a later editor add it? Are the words of Jesus authentic? What actually happened? How does this story compare with the other times that Jesus feeds great crowds? Are the stories repetitions of the same myth but just different versions?"

The teacher might say, "Well boys and girls, if Jesus was actually teaching in the countryside (and that's probably not true) it was likely just outside Jerusalem and not in Galilee. And even if there were five thousand people, they would not all go out to follow Jesus without food except for one boy. The generosity and kindness of the little boy with the five loaves and two fish shamed all the grown ups and so they all took out the food they had hidden in their robes and in the end they had more than enough because *everyone* had taken food along."

The Moralist-exemplarist

The moralist-exemplarist is always looking for a moral / ethical lesson. "Well boys and girls, what did you learn from this Bible lesson today? Yes, just as Jesus fed the hungry so we too should feed the hungry. What else? Yes, of course just as the little boy was generous, so we too should be generous and

share our food. This is a good lesson in sharing. Sharing is good. Let's all try to share today."

The teacher teaches a good moral point here but he missed the story. The account of the Lord Jesus Christ was just a launch pad for his little moral application. But the account in John 6 is *not* about sharing. It is *not* about selfishness. It is about the Christ, the Lord Jesus. John 20:31 says that these signs (including the feeding of 5,000) were given that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ. That is why John wrote down the story. The moralist, in trying to build the character of his students, lost the Lord Jesus in whom alone lives are changed.

Redemptive-historical

We need to ask of the characters how they function as prophet, priest or king. How was David responding as king to God? How was Moses, the mediator of the Old Covenant, prophet, priest, and king? How was Elijah a prophet? What of Ahab? Did he fulfill his calling? Or Solomon? Not Solomon as a good example/bad example, but Solomon as the Anointed of the Lord. The Lord Jesus says that Solomon was great, but that a greater one had come.

We must ask, "How was the Lord functioning as prophet, priest and king in John 6?" He was the prophet who taught the people. In his priestly office, He dealt mercifully with them. He had compassion on them. As King, He had authority over all creation. He could do even the impossible in providing for his people. He not only cared for their spiritual welfare but also for their physical, for the gospel is more than just about your soul but also about your body. He himself is the bread of life, as He explains in John 6:22 ff. He tells how Moses provided manna but that the Father gives bread from heaven. Jesus, by feeding the five thousand, was the One greater than Moses. And we know that He gave himself as our heavenly food and drink by which we are nourished to everlasting life. This caused a separation among his followers.

Other examples

We could reflect on other examples. How would the moralist or the intellectualist interpret various stories? On the other hand, how would we interpret within a redemptive-historical framework?

The story of Joseph and the butler who forgot becomes a lesson against

forgetfulness. The moralist will explain how we are not to forget those shut in, not to forget kindness to old folks or poor people or even maybe those in prison. But this is not really the point. Rather, this account of Joseph and the butler tells us of how God used the butler's forgetfulness as his means of saving Joseph's life and getting him to Pharaoh's court at the right time so that Joseph could intervene on behalf of God's covenant people.

***We need to ask of the characters
how they function as prophet,
priest or king.***

To the moralist, Gideon becomes a lesson on how God can use shy and insecure people to do great things. The account of David and Goliath is a lesson on standing up for God.

The moral of Lot's story is, "Bad company ruins good morals." The liberal-critical interpreter would say the story of Lot and his daughters is simply a nasty bit of negative PR against the Moabites and Ammonites, Israel's mortal enemies. It is not really a true story, says he, but a myth made up by Israel to say that their enemies to the east were the offspring of incestuous relationships. A bunch of illegitimate children!

Conclusion

We need to root our Bible teaching in the redemptive-historical method with the Reformed confessions as our paradigm. Teachers need to use all sorts of resources to show the mighty deeds of God which He has done for the redemption of his people that they might praise Him. They must use those resources to explore the Bible and to make it memorable and fascinating. When this is done with the history of redemption as the framework and when this is done within a Reformed world view, informed by Scripture and Confessions, then they will equip their students with life time skills which they can use to interpret and rightly understand

Resources

S. G. De Graaf, *Promise and Deliverance* is indispensable to the Bible teacher. Though it stresses the typological very strongly it is a "must need, must read" resource.

N. H. Gootjes, "Rethinking Redemptive-Historical Preaching," *Clarion* 39:15-19 (1990).

A. Edersheim, *The Bible History: Old Testament* (2 vol.) is also an inexhaustible resource for reading and understanding the Old Testament. Dr. Edersheim was a Presbyterian minister in Scotland in the last century. Being born of Jewish parents his writings bring wonderful insights to Old Testament history.


A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* is an amazing 2 volume work which sheds light on much of the Jewish background of the Lord's day. Both of the works by Edersheim (*Bible History and Life and Time of Jesus* are dated, however, being from the last century.)

NIV Atlas of the Bible is a wonderful resource for learning more about the physical and political geography of the Holy Land.

Y. Aharoni & M. Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas rev ed.* is critical, but is one of the best historical atlases in print today. It contains a wealth of information about empires, wars and battles as well as about the migration of the various people of the Bible. It includes information on the intertestamental period as well as post New Testament history.

the Word of God. Ultimately that should be the aim and objective of Bible teachers.

¹These examples are borrowed and modified from L. Vos. "Revelation-Response Bible Teaching: Its Distinctive Approach." (Photocopied transcript of a taped lecture) CSI / NUCSS, 1977.

²J. Creason Jr. *Bible Truths for Christian Schools: Book B*, Bob Jones U. Greenville: 1977, pg. 117f. 

My Struggle With Porn

I know that for many people this is not an easy topic. Countless people have been hurt by its effects. Over the years, a number of articles (written by women whom it has hurt) have appeared in *Clarion* which attest to this fact. Still countless others, mostly men, struggle with it daily. It affects their marriages, it burdens their consciences and it deadens their Christian life. But there are some who deny that pornography is such a problem among the men of our churches. I am writing to claim otherwise. Porn is a pervasive problem. I be-

lieve that many Canadian Reformed males, teenagers and adults, have been caught up in the deadly seductions of pornography and the Internet has not made things any better. I know this from speaking with many others, from what I've seen, and sadly, also from my own personal experiences. So I would like to tell you how destructive porn can be. I want to warn the young men and teenagers who have never indulged in this sin. And I would like to alert the leaders in our churches to this sin which lives in hiding among us.

Getting into porn

My own experiences with pornography began at a very young age, Grade 2 to be exact. It was at that time that I not only discovered magazines in our neighbourhood, but also in our own house. Dad gave some pretty sorry excuses for that, but even a 7 or 8 year old knows hypocrisy when he sees it. That was the beginning of my cynicism.

Even at that time, I knew there was something sinful about porn. It was wrong and God didn't like it. Until I hit puberty, I had no interest in pornography

except to hate it and burn it. I was the good Christian kid in my neighbourhood trying to tell my friends that what they were looking at was bad. At the same time, those magazines also reappeared in our house. When VCRs became household items, pornographic videos also polluted the television screen in our Canadian Reformed home. My Dad, a leader in the church, was still enslaved to porn. I confronted him about it, but he could not bring himself to confess that it was sinful and wrong. My cynicism only grew.

The Internet hurdled one of the great barriers in accessing pornography: the shame.

My real problems with pornography started when I was 14. One of my uncles offered to buy me a magazine and I went for it. Now it should be said that this uncle was what appeared to be a good Canadian Reformed man. He was the one who helped me to my first major dose of sexual sin. At that time, my Canadian Reformed school friends also discovered the perversion and so we bought, sold, and traded. Their fathers also proved to be a steady source for porn magazines. After a while I started having deep feelings of guilt. I knew all along that it was wrong. I knew that the Lord was not pleased with me and I knew that I was being a hypocrite by having those magazines and going to church and catechism. I couldn't live with it. I took my magazines out one night and threw them in the garbage bin of an apartment building. I vowed never again to spend any money on pornography. I wish that my story could end there, but sadly, it doesn't.

During my teenage years, I also struggled with pornography of the *Sports Illustrated* variety – perhaps not pornography as usually understood, but functionally (and Scripturally!) the same thing. The public library made these magazines available and resourceful teenagers with X-acto knives made short order of the pictures. Thankfully, I also had pangs of guilt over this and the pictures ended up in the garbage. It was also around this time that I did profession of faith, although somewhat half-heartedly as I look back now. But I still knew that my profession of faith meant that I had to fight against sin. I could not keep going back to porn.

After one final bout with porn which my Dad had brought into the house, I was okay for one or two years. I still struggled with lust, but I managed to keep away from porn. This was about the time that I met and later married my wife. I had hoped that marriage would solve all my problems with lust. I hadn't counted on the appearance of the Internet. The Internet hurdled one of the great barriers in accessing pornography: the shame. I never had the courage to walk into a store and buy a magazine or rent a video. I've always been afraid that someone will see me (not really thinking or caring, of course, that the Lord always sees). With the Internet that was all gone. Nobody would see. There was no accountability and there was easy access, just a mouse-click away. All that holds you back is self-control. Eventually, I had the guilt again and stopped. I confessed my sin before the Lord, but also to my wife. That was tough. I didn't know how she would take it. Let me tell you (if you haven't figured it out for yourself): porn is not a harmless sin. With this sin, you offend the Lord, but you also hurt your wife or if you're not yet married possibly also your future wife. If you want a surefire way to sabotage your marriage (even before it begins!), get into porn.

The struggle against pornography isn't easy, but there is hope with the Lord.

Overcoming porn


I'm thankful that though she was hurt by what I'd done, my wife was able to forgive me and help me. The Lord was merciful to me in more ways than one. I asked her to hold me accountable, check up on me on a regular basis. Sadly, I have backslidden a number of times. Each time was tough, also on our marriage. I've also spoken about this sin with a number of close male friends in the church, and finally found someone open enough to admit that he has the same struggles and has the same desire to fight against this deadly sin. I'm now accountable to my wife, but also to my friend, and he to me (and his wife). As a result, I'm very thankful that the struggle is easier. Prayer has also been an enormous source of strength in this struggle. I've always prayed for forgiveness. The words of

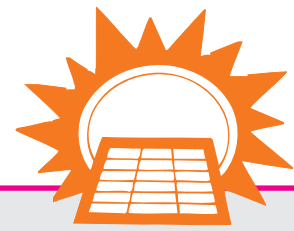
Psalms 51 have been my own on many occasions. I've prayed for a greater depth of faith and more self-control. For a greater hatred of sin. For a greater love for the Lord Jesus Christ. The struggle against pornography isn't easy, but there is hope with the Lord.

Beware of hypocrisy

Perhaps the saddest part of my story is the way that people in the church who were supposed to show moral leadership failed. Their hypocrisy was destructive. Hypocrisy always is that way. Hypocrisy breeds cynicism. And Satan laughs. So we come to my purpose for writing: stop Satan's laughter. You who are fathers, please, I plead with you, do not live a life of hypocrisy. You could potentially shove your children down the road to hell. Not all my friends were as blessed as me. With some of them, their cynicism (bred from their fathers' hypocrisy) resulted in their leaving the church and living full-blown lives of sin. Better to have a mill-stone hung around your neck! If this is your sin (as it has been mine), repent before the Lord and then also confess your sin to your family. They will love you and respect you for it in the long run. You who are leaders in our churches, please, I beg you, do not make light of this sin. Please realize that even if you do not, many men, young and old, in our churches are struggling (some more than others) with this horrific sin. Some of them live lives of blatant hypocrisy – these are not the families "on the edge"! Some are even office-bearers or hold other positions of respect. So preach against this loudly and boldly. Your preaching will speak, if not to the sin-deafened fathers, then (as it did for me) surely to the children. By God's grace, they will never forget the sinfulness of sin.

I didn't write this intending to be sensationalistic. I write from a sincere desire that our gracious God be glorified through a people who desire to live in holiness before Him. Even though our sins be so lecherous and vile, He will always forgive through his Son when we repent in true faith. This promise is for all of us, no matter what sins we struggle with. I sincerely pray that his Holy Spirit will so permeate our communion of saints that we can no longer speak about pornography so intimately as I have done. May that day hasten when such things are utterly foreign to us.

For obvious reasons, the author has requested that his name be withheld. 



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

Matthew 10: 29,30

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Lord created the heaven and the earth. And when everything was done, and everything was just the way He wanted it to be, the Lord made man, the crown of the creation. Man was made in God's image. He was a beautiful creation, for man was given abilities that the Lord had not given to any of the other creatures. Even after the fall into sin man continued to live with all these special abilities.

When we see the world now, it is not nearly as pleasant as it was when God had just made it. Because of the fall into sin, the world is polluted, and we see that all around us. But we can also see how awesome the creation of man has proven to be. Look at all the things that people have invented! We travel in a few hours from one continent to another. Some even travel into space and come back unhurt. We can make phone calls to any part of the world. With the help of TV and computers we can even see what is going on thousands of miles away. It seems there is hardly a limit to the possibilities. Children are being killed before they are born. Will babies be cloned too? Will man be able to do that? One thing we should never forget: all these inventions could be made only because the Lord laid the possibilities for them already in His creation.

The Lord often reminds us of His power. Even though man has invented many things, and keeps coming with new inventions, the Lord can still thoroughly confuse us. Ice storms, snow storms, thundershowers, floods, winds, downpours, tornadoes, earthquakes, and droughts, can upset the routines of life for days on end. And we cannot do anything to prevent those things from happening. Even though the weather forecasters may be able to predict the weather for five days in advance, nobody is able to influence the weather.

Although the Lord is in control of everything that happens in the world, man has become preoccupied with his own activities and forgets the Lord. Instead of honouring the Lord, man gives himself credit for all he does. The desire to do more and to become more powerful is always there. People have gone so far that they are even meddling with life and death. Do they try to be like God? It is scary to think of the future, for what will be next?

Fortunately we know that he who trusts in the Lord does not have to be scared. We know that nothing takes place outside God's sovereign control. The Lord will only let things go on as long as He wants them to go on. When his time is up, He will put a stop to it. That counts for everything that goes on in the world. Not only the big things that come in the newspapers, but also the small things that go on in our own lives.

In our own lives we may also sometimes think, "How long can this go on?" It may seem that we cannot bear it any longer. Thinking of tomorrow may make us scared, because we do not know if we can do what is required of us.

Our strength or health may be failing, or we might have other difficulties staring us in the face. How long can we still handle them? How much more can we bear?

But there again we may know that the Lord is in control. With his inventions man cannot go farther than the Lord allows him to go. Our suffering will not be more than we can handle. We are in His hands. And He is our heavenly Father. He watches us so carefully that He won't let a hair fall from our head without allowing it to go! And when He knows that we cannot handle it any more, it all will come to an end and He will take us up into His eternal glory.

We watch the happenings in the world with many questions and concerns. In our own lives we may have questions and concerns as well. But we can leave all our worries with the Lord. He is in charge. He is our Father, the Creator, and also our Saviour. When we put our trust in Him, all will be well with us! Let us give Him the praise and the glory now and forever!

*My faithful Saviour keeps me in His care;
Without my Father's will cannot a hair
Fall from my head; He shall for me prepare
A heavenly habitation.
All things must serve to further my salvation.
His Holy Spirit brings me consolation;
He makes me willing now with veneration
In hope His yoke to bear.*

Hymn 49 : 2

Birthdays in September:

8: Marsha Moesker

P.O. Box 164, Carman, MB R0G 0J0

11: Mary Vande Burgt

c/o Fam. Togeretz,
32570 Rossland Place, Abbotsford, BC V2T 1T7

14: Jerry Bontekoe

"ANCHOR HOME", 361 30 Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

25: Greg Aikema

7118 - 192 Street, RR 9, Surrey, BC V4N 3G6

29: Paul Dieleman

5785 Young Street, Apt. 704
Willowdale, ON M2M 4J2

It will be the 21st birthday for Marsha, the 42nd for Mary, the 34th for Jerry, the 10th for Greg and the 29th for Paul. Happy Birthdays to you all! Until next month,

Mrs.R.Ravensbergen
7462 Reg. Rd. 20, RR 1
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
e-mail: RWRavens@netcom.ca

By J. De Jong



A New Seminary

Not long ago we reported on the decisions of the ad hoc Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa with regard to their plans to open a seminary to ensure future ministers in their federation. A more recent edition of *Kompas* (February 1998) reports on the opening of the seminary. Rev. Arjan de Visser reports as follows:

On January 17, 1998, the theological training centre of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (VGKSA) was opened. The opening took place during a modest but festive occasion in the church building of the VGK of Pretoria.

After the opening speech (by Prof. Herman de Jager) the five faculty members appointed by the Synod all signed the subscription form, by which they promised to be faithful to the Scriptures and the Reformed confession. The five faculty members are: Dr. Hannes Breytenbach (ecclesiology), Rev. Christo Heiberg (diaconology), Rev. Peter Nel, (New Testament), Rev. Eugene Viljoen (dogmatics and ethics) and Rev. Rob Visser (Old Testament). After this Rev. Rob Visser held an address on "Sarah's laugh and Old Testament science."

Drs. Max Hoeksema, lecturer in psychology and didactics at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in Holland (Liberated) read a congratulatory letter on behalf of Prof. C.J. de Ruiter, rector of the university. Prof. De Ruiter wrote that 'Kampen' wanted to maintain and strengthen the ties with the faculty in South Africa. Kampen also offered help with regard to the development and growth of the theological education program.

Rev. A. De Visser also conducted an interview with Rev. Rob Visser with regard to the opening of the College. De Visser says that Rev. Visser is convinced that there was no other alternative but to begin with their own training institution.

He reports on the interview with Rev. Visser as follows:

Rev. Visser: "Relative to other universities, Potchefstroom is fairly conservative. But we are concerned

about Potchefstroom, not so much because of the academic level, but because of the fact that in a subtle way a form of Scripture criticism is still being brought in. My overall impression is that Potchefstroom has good things, but also gives a kind of direction in the understanding of Scripture to which one would not want to entrust his students. Potchefstroom is not trustworthy enough for us.

In the past, students from South Africa went to Kampen to study. Rev. Visser says concerning this: "Practice has shown that this brings problems. The student becomes estranged from South Africa due to his long stay in Holland, and at the end of the day the chance is great that he remains permanently in Holland. If however the Lord gives us sons who want to become preachers, then we must surely train them and use them here."

A third reason for starting up their own theological institution is the social upheaval in South Africa: "The relationships are now different than before, the VGKSA has more contacts with people in other churches than ever before, and if the Lord wills, having our own seminary can mean something for the broader South African context."

De Visser asked about the level of training:

"The faculty are all regular congregational ministers that are only connected part time to the theological training. Can you guarantee a sufficient quality?"

Rev. Visser: "To guarantee the quality is difficult, but we are going to do our best to ensure sufficient quality. In the first place we have set up our curriculum in cooperation with people from Kampen and Hamilton. We have just had Drs. Max Hoeksema for one week from Kampen in order to help us with this. Secondly, we are working in such a way that each faculty member does not plan his curriculum by himself, but that each subject and each unit, indeed, each teaching

hour is planned and discussed. Every six months we get together for a week to prepare the plan of lessons for the coming semester. In the third place we will in any case invite a theologian from overseas to come and give some lectures and to help us with the 'screening' of the field of learning. In the fourth place there will be continuous contact with Kampen and/or Hamilton with regard to the relevant disciplines. The letter of Prof. De Ruiter read at the opening was very encouraging in this regard.

"How will the level of teaching compare with a training like that of Kampen?"

Rev. Visser: "I think that we can reach a level just under that of Kampen, but I do not believe that there will be a big difference."

Are your students going to be encouraged to take two years in Kampen or Hamilton at the end of their studies?

Rev. Visser: "This is difficult to say right now. This depends on the developments and of the advice we get from the visiting professors. But we are definitely going to consider this possibility."

Are you going to aim for official recognition with the authorities?

Rev. Visser: "Yes, we are going to try and get recognition on the level of the Master's degree. The Board of Governors have taken it upon themselves to try and get this recognition. For the rest we will remain an ecclesiastical training. We do not want financial support from the government."

What system of training are you going to apply, since the faculty are all part-time and all live at different places?

Rev. Visser: "We will be teaching at two places, namely, Pretoria and Bellville (West Cape). For this year the program is as follows: From January to May the three Transvaal faculty will give classes in the building of the Pretoria church four mornings per week. From May to August the student will live in Bellville,

where he will take lectures from the two faculty remaining in the Cape. For August to December there will again be classes in Pretoria.

Rev. Visser continues: "We are going to implement a four year training which consists of three and half years of normal training and one half year specialization in a specific area. All applicants will be required to have B.A. degree with level three Greek and Hebrew and one year of Latin. Perhaps it is good to mention that we also want to give guidance to students who are still busy with their B.A. languages, because then already some come into contact with Scripture critical tendencies." *What are your expectations with regard to the number of students?*

Rev. Visser: "At this stage we have one student coming out of our own churches. We expect that in the year 2000 two students will be added, and in 2001 still another. Then we will have four students out of our own churches. Besides this we have contact with two students out of other churches who are interested in coming to study with us,

and this while we have done nothing to advertise our institution!" *You will then also admit students from other churches?*


Rev. Visser: "Yes indeed, if they accept the Three Forms of Unity as their confession. Naturally due to the nature of the case there will be discussions on this, at which the Board of Governors will also be present. But this is definitely possible. If we are going to mean something for reformation in South Africa, then we will gladly do this. We will see how the Lord leads."

How are the congregations going to be affected by your work as faculty?

Rev. Visser: "This will have an effect, that's clear. The preparation for the classes and the giving of the lectures themselves will take much time. The faculty will also carry out the fruit of their work into the congregations, for example in the preaching."

We can be very thankful for the possibilities that God gives for increased theological training in a Reformed direction in the churches of South Africa. Also in Hamilton, we can only reiterate

our willingness to help out as much as possible. However, aside from some informal discussions, no formal correspondence has yet taken place between Hamilton and South Africa. It is remarkable how similar South Africa's approach is to ours, especially on the prerequisites for admission to the theological training. Certainly on that point the two institutions are very similar. It raises the question whether it would not be better to pool our resources rather than duplicate all the work. But this would also need careful consideration by both the faculty and the Board of Governors in Hamilton.

Clearly the idea of students studying abroad for a short period is one that the South Africans have not ruled out, and one that we too would welcome for serious consideration. For some time we have received students from Australia and this has only worked out to everyone's benefit! It would be good to get to know our South African sister federation as well, also through the avenue of meeting their students. May the Lord guide and bless the brothers in their endeavour! 

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Herewith I register a strong protest against what the Rev. G. Ph. van Popta wrote in the issue of June 12, 1998, namely:

It's actually amazing that while the Lord broke down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile two millennia ago – a half dozen or so confessionally Reformed churches manage to keep their barriers up.

In the first place: If this applies to others, he is at the wrong address with his (also otherwise faulty) comparison.

In the second place: If he wants it to apply to the Canadian Reformed Churches, by what are we putting up barriers condemned by the Lord? Confessional membership? Fencing the Lord's table?

What we need in the latter case is concrete, well-founded evidence, not vague and unaddressed insinuations.

W.W.J. Van Oene
Abbotsford, BC

Rev. George van Popta responds:

Actually, I had both other Reformed churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches in view when I wrote those lines.

Confessionally we are one with the Free Reformed, the Orthodox Christian Reformed, and the United Reformed. What is keeping us apart? What barriers are up which ought to have been knocked down long ago? There are no *confessional* divergencies keeping us


apart, only different *practices* and *emphases*. I would be surprised if the Rev. Van Oene were content with that. Here, it seems, the Canadian Reformed Churches are the most zealous in desiring unity and the United Reformed certainly indicate interest in unity. The Free Reformed and the Orthodox Christian Reformed, though, seem to be quite happy on their own, to hem in their distinctives, and co-exist with us.

But if we consider some of the decisions of our past General Synod, then, as I wrote, we are raising the bar too high. I refer the Rev. Van Oene to two decisions.

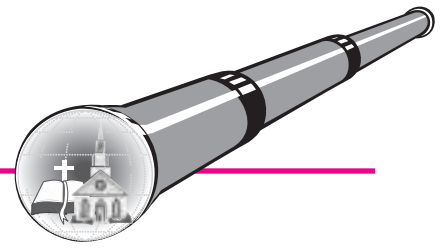
General Synod Fergus made a *practical* matter – how elders in an Orthodox Presbyterian Church admit guests to the Lord's supper table over which they have been charged with oversight – a final condition on whether or not we can enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC. How another church admits guests – whether the table is fenced by way of a verbal warning from the Word of God, or by way of attestations – is a church order matter. It is not a confessional matter. It's a matter of practice, not confession. We have made a church order matter

a final condition. That's an unwarranted barrier. (I would refer the Rev. Van Oene to the article of the Rev. J. Mulder, "A Conditional Offer" [47:14], in which he very cogently addresses this matter.)

General Synod Fergus also declined the invitations of the Reformed Church in the United States and the Reformed Church of Quebec to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship. One of the grounds in both cases was Sunday observance. How one works out the Fourth Commandment is an ethical matter. Historically, in the Reformed churches, Reformed believers have worked it out in different ways. Anyone reading for the first time John Calvin's *Institutes* on the Fourth Commandment will be surprised. Honesty demands that we acknowledge that there are differing views on this amongst us too. Rev. Van Oene knows that very well. I do not want to change the generally accepted way we work out the Fourth Commandment in our churches, but we should not elevate an ethical matter to function as a barrier to ecclesiastical fellowship.

In spite of the Rev. Van Oene's strong protest, I stand by what I wrote. — 

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address. They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length. Please include address and phone number.



Observation Deck

By J. VanRietschoten

The Form of Subscription and your little red light

In *Christian Renewal* (May 18, 1998 pg. 4), Mr. D. T. Maurina comments on matters before this year's synod of the Christian Reformed Church. One of the items was an overture to synod by Classis Thornapple Valley in suburban Grand Rapids. Classis overtured synod to appoint a study committee that would revise the statement in the Form of Subscription that *all the articles and points of doctrine set forth in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt fully agree with the Word of God* in order to reflect the fallibility of all human work.

Other provisions in the overture propose that the study committee modify the requirement that signers of the Form of Subscription, if they come to have some difficulty with a doctrine or doctrines in the creeds, will not speak or write about it until they have disclosed their sentiments to the proper authorities in the church for examination.*

The aim of this overture, according to Mr. Maurina's report, is to relieve elders and deacons from the duty to sign the Form. Elders and deacons are said to have no knowledge of the Confessions. They should not be required to subscribe to what they do not know or understand. Ministers and theologians should no longer be required to accept that the Confessions fully agree with Scripture. Ministers and theologians should only be bound to the Confessions *insofar* as these agree with Scripture. Mr. Maurina's article is well balanced and gives extensive information on the Form for Subscription. He also passes on information from the original movers of the overture as well as comments from persons for and against.

Mr. Maurina's article is necessary reading for all who want to know more about the purpose and history of the Form of Subscription. Members of the Canadian Reformed Churches should

read Mr. Maurina's article. For a number of years now in the Canadian Reformed Churches the occasional voice is heard striving for a similar change in the Form of Subscription as presented in the overture of Classis Thornapple Valley. Presently there are indications that the number of persons in our churches demanding changes to the Form of Subscription is growing.

Signing the Form of Subscription is a joy

Should a minister, professor of theology, elder or deacon have difficulty signing the Form? Signing the Form of Subscription is a joy. As minister of the Word, I personally have signed the Form. The Form protects me. The Form protects the congregation. The Form protects me as minister for by it the churches assure me that I have complete freedom to proclaim Christ, the Way, the Truth, the Life. No one shall limit my adherence to the full Word of God and the Reformed Confessions. By adopting the Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions the churches assure me that I may proclaim the full counsel of God unhindered. If any person or council demands that I preach contrary to this full counsel of God I only have to point to the Form of Subscription which I was requested to sign. There my evangelical freedom as preacher is found. I desire to know no other.

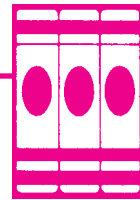
Let me relieve you of a false impression. Ministers and theologians are not hampered in their office by the Form. The Form of Subscription is not a strait-jacket. As preacher I rejoice in the fact that the churches demand from me nothing that is foreign to the Scriptures. The Form protects me. The Form of Subscription protects also the congregation. By signing the Form of Subscription we ministers, professors, elders and deacons, promise not to abuse our freedom. We promise not to overstep the boundaries of the holy Scriptures. We consider

the Reformed Confessions to be in agreement with the Scriptures and promise therefore not to exceed the bounds of the Reformed Confessions. Relieve us ministers from this vow and the pulpit becomes a free for all. The catechism class becomes a place of spiritual seduction. My coffee-klatch becomes furtive infiltration. You, brothers and sisters, with your children and grandchildren, are protected by the Form of Subscription. Let a little red light flame up in the back of your mind when you hear or read of devaluation of the Form of Subscription. You drive along the road and in the distance you see a red light. The light tells me to be alert. I must slow down, take precautions, find out. The danger may be of such a nature that I must detour around it in order to reach my destination safely.

In my catechism classes I always urged the young people of God's church to remember the little red light. I taught them the joy of the Form of Subscription. I showed them from history how deformation of the church is accelerated by defacing the Form of Subscription. I urge all in the churches to be alert. Do not allow anyone to rob you of your protection. Rejoice in the Form of Subscription. It affords your minister, the professors at the Theological College, the freedom to teach you the full and true Words of God.

The Form of Subscription does not stifle theological study. Theologians – not only professors, doctors, but also ministers – must as it were, eat the Scriptures. The more they know and digest the whole of the Bible, and not just the parts, the greater will be their confidence in the Reformed Confessions. Insufficient knowledge of the Bible breeds distrust of the Reformed Confessions. Faithful theological study will not result in contradiction with either the Bible nor the Reformed Confessions. Faithful pursuit of theology takes place under the enlightenment by the Holy Spirit, the very author of our Bible.

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G. Raymond, *How They Kept the Faith. The Tale of the Huguenots of Languedoc, Neerlandia, Alberta:* Inheritance Publications, paperback, 352 pp, \$14.95 CDN

By Margaret De Jong

This story of the 17th Century Huguenots of Languedoc opens with a nanny retelling her young charge, Eglantine, the vivacious heroine of the story, how it happened that she has come to be the adopted daughter of a Huguenot pastor and his wife. She explains how Eglantine's mother had been disowned by her father because of her marriage into a Roman Catholic family. After being widowed she returned to her Huguenot upbringing, and as a result her daughter, Eglantine's sister, is removed from her care and placed in a convent. Fearful that Eglantine, too will be placed in a convent her mother gives her up to the Huguenot family she has come to love dearly.

When the story opens the Huguenots are tolerated in France, but throughout the story the persecutions increase in intensity, finally driving believers from their homes and families.

The strong faith and courage of those who set their heart on the Lord and His promises is blessed and we stand amazed at the Lord's power in their lives. However, we also see the other side: the struggle and anguish of

those who are weaker in faith and the trials they go through. Woven throughout these main themes of persecution and endurance in faith we find the description of various personal relationships: especially that of the heroine and her beloved foster brother. From early on they were always linked together, but will their relationship endure through separation and persecution?

A criticism of this book is that the minor characters are introduced into the story too quickly making it necessary at times to leaf back to figure out the connections between the characters, especially as they are introduced at the beginning of the story. A list of characters with brief descriptions would have been very helpful.

If, however, the reader perseveres he or she will be rewarded with a book that is hard to put down and will contribute to making one truly thankful for the peace and freedom of religion that we enjoy in our lives today. Highly recommended for all from teenagers to adults.

John K. Pedersen, *Sincerity Meets the Truth*, (foreword by Michael S. Horton), Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, paperback, 56 pages, \$9.95 US

By Margaret De Jong

This short story, told in the style of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, is

meant as a warning against an easy going evangelical approach to religion. The pilgrim in this story is a man by the name of Sincerity, a member of Kindlove Reformed Church, and a respected citizen in the community called Evangelical Religion. The town was made of good people who wanted nothing to do with the neighbouring town of Badstuff. Everyone in Evangelical Religion lived an upstanding life.

When Rev. Faith-Not-His-Own from a Reformed Church of the town called Conviction comes to Kindlove Reformed as a guest preacher, the whole church is up in arms about the direct and accusing tone in his preaching. He is called judgmental and becomes the object of scorn. But some are really affected in a new way by his preaching.

Through this encounter Sincerity is led to a brief moment of self-reflection but he comes up supporting the status quo, and continuing to live a hypocritical lifestyle. The end result is disastrous for him, as it has eternal consequences. So the moral of the story is clear: we need to be on guard against hypocrisy, and an easy "everything goes," "God is love" religion.

Rev. Pedersen's short and engaging tale is a good reminder for us to hold to the truths of the Bible. Unfortunately, however, we should not go about our defense of Reformed truth in the way described here, since Rev. Faith-Not-His-Own's tone does end up being judgmental at points, and gets caught up in overkill.


One of the difficulties of us reading this book is that we are not completely

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The Form of Subscription is not a stick to hit with. How then shall we enforce the Form of Subscription? In the same way as all discipline and censure in the church is applied: always with care, discretion, wisdom, and love. If the matter is known because of conversation or correspondence, let us follow the well-

known rule of Matthew 18. And furthermore, the Church Order Article 73 gives the opportunity to elders and ministers to make use of question period in the consistory meeting. If, however, an office bearer publicizes material (including on the Internet as one CRC minister did) which he by his signature promised not

to publish, he knows beforehand what the result will be. He only has himself to blame. Let confidence in the Form of Subscription grow in the churches with love and gentleness.

*We can note with thankfulness that the recent Synod of the CRCNA did not adopt the overture. 

familiar with the author's context, and the story does not give us enough clues to shape that context. So we are left guessing exactly to whom the story applies. But Pedersen himself says in his foreword: "I see my own sinful nature in all of those who are 'unflatteringly' depicted in this story, and I pray that as I daily repent, I might emulate the characters of Faith-Not-His-Own and Hope Against Hope. I pray the same for you, my reader." Perhaps then its best just to apply it to ourselves and take the good out of it, even trying to outdo Rev. Faith-Not-His-Own in showing a spirit of love and compassion to all whom we meet. Heartily recommended!

Marjorie Bowen, *The Soldier of Virginia: a novel on George Washington*. Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1997 (200 pages; paperback; \$ 14.95 Can)

By Margaret Van der Velde

"... And who is Mr. Washington?" is probably a question that most readers would be able to answer. How could the French officer in charge of Fort le Boeuf in Canada have no inkling who stood before him at their first meeting? Was Washington not the first president of the United States of America? Indeed, that is the George Washington who is the leading character in Marjorie Bowen's *The Soldier of Virginia*. But Washington started his career as a land surveyor and only later did he rise to fame.

George Washington (1732-1799) lived during an exciting period of American history and was instrumental in bringing about American nationhood. The novel covers the years 1753/1754-1781 and thus fictionalizes the events leading up to the independence of the colonies and the creation of a new nation. The novel opens with the story of the struggles against the French, and then concludes with the fight for independence against the British some two decades later. The novel is by no means a dry history lesson, although some basic knowledge of American history is helpful when reading the novel.

Human relations and emotions are in the forefront of this novel and the

reader encounters everything from intrigue to loyalty and revenge to mercy. For example, the most moving scene occurs when Washington is trapped in a room with the wife of a traitor who has deserted Washington's army and the British are about to take West Point because of this one man's treachery.

Washington emerges from the pages of this novel as a very humane man, albeit with his own faults. Indeed, pride almost causes him to lose the woman he would like to marry. On the other hand, Washington frequently shows mercy to those in need of his protection. Thus he saves a young French family, despite the fact that the first battles he participated in were against the French. Later, when the colonies rise up against the British, the daughter of this family, raised by Washington, turns on him and marries an Englishman who tries to undermine Washington from within his own army. In the end, she too is shown mercy.

Historically, the novel is quite accurate. And yet, readers might easily be confused by the sense of time portrayed in the novel. Most readers will find it difficult to remember that the actual events of the novel took place over a period of almost 30 years, because the novel does not deal with certain periods of Washington's life. For example, the fight for independence seems to last no more than a year or two, but in actuality it took some eight years.

Readers might not suspect that Marjorie Bowen (actually a pseudonym for Margaret Gabriel Long) was really a British author. The British are consistently viewed through the eyes of the Americans and the results are not very complimentary. Virtually every Briton in the novel is portrayed as arrogant, stubborn, and far too interested in life's pleasures.

The Soldier of Virginia was originally written in 1912, but readers should not find the writing style or vocabulary problematic. Bowen writes in a clear style and lets her characters tell much of the story in everyday language. Bowen incidentally was a prolific author and wrote numerous other historical novels and romances under the pseudonym Bowen, while she wrote historical crime novels under another pseudonym. It would have been nice if the publisher had included a short biography of Bowen, listing all her works under the various pseudonyms for those who would like to read more books by this author.

William R. Rang, *Salt in His Blood: The Life of Michael De Ruyter*. Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1996. 191 pages; \$ 10.95 Can.

By D. Gootjes

It is good to see a book for young people (10 and up?) about Michael (Michiel) de Ruyter, the 17th century Dutch sailor, who is still known as the foremost Dutch hero of the sea. The book describes De Ruyter's life, how he went to sea as a boy, became an admiral and died in the Lord.

Salt in His Blood is not in the first place an adventure story, recounting De Ruyter's triumphs and glorifying his bravery. The author sets out to show how Michael de Ruyter was guided by his faith in the Lord and trusted in his heavenly Father in all circumstances. The story, however, does not succeed in leading us 'into' the person of De Ruyter, or make us truly share in his joys and sorrows. The reader goes from event to event without ever being pulled into the story. Dry-eyed we read about the death of De Ruyter's first and second wife. His faith never really comes to life, either.

Readers with a love for history may find the story interesting, but I am afraid that many young people will quickly put the book down and find something else to do. A good initiative, but in my opinion not quite successful as a story.

H. Westerink, *A Sign of Faithfulness*. Translated by J. Mark Beach. Neerlandia, Alberta / Pella, Iowa: Inheritance Publications, 1997. 128 pp. \$ 9.95 Can.

By C. Bosch

"This book on baptism is a jewel. One seldom comes across a book that simultaneously matches such simplicity to profundity." Those are the words of J. Mark Beach, the translator of Westerink's work. I heartily concur! In his earlier work, *Call Upon Me*, the author dealt with personal prayer in a lucid and

thoroughly Scriptural manner. In his new book, he follows the same pattern and simply lets Scripture speak in thirteen concise and interesting chapters.

Westerink is a retired teacher of a Christian school in the Netherlands. His teaching skills did not retire with him however. He receives high marks in explaining the continuity as well as discontinuity between the old and new covenant. He never loses sight of his primary purpose, (expressed in the Author's Preface) "that we understand our baptism well, especially since many oppose the necessity of infant baptism." The author realizes that it is not uncommon for reformed people to question the validity of their own baptism. They are tempted to look for certainty of comfort in their hearts and lives rather than in the concrete promises of God's rich grace.

Westerink draws our attention to the trustworthiness of our covenant God, "from age to age the same." He excels in explaining the "language" of the sign and seal of God's covenant. He shows how God set the children of believers apart for himself in both the new as well as the old covenant dis-

persation. Says Westerink: "It is striking how again and again the Lord thinks specifically about the children of his people" (p. 45). God's people are a blessed people. "And the children of that people are blessed people."

Westerink's gives considerable attention not only to God's covenant promise but also to our obligations. In explaining the importance of faith within the covenant he draws on his pedagogical skills and asks some pointed questions. "Does the seal on a letter make the reception of that letter unnecessary so that the recipient need not pay attention to the content of the letter?" (p. 106). On the one hand, no one may withhold the water of baptism from such children as Christ took in His arms that he might bless them. On the other hand, "the unbeliever will be condemned even if he has been baptized in rivers of water, whether as a child or as an adult" (p. 107). Westerink shows that fulfilling our covenant obligations must not be a burden however. It is to be a joyful, thankful response to the wonder of God's covenant love for us in Jesus Christ. Our faith is nothing else but that we acknowledge the faithful-

ness of our God, ". . . nothing other than that we drink in the blessing of His grace, nothing other than that we are illuminated by the light of His countenance (Num. 6:25)" (p. 114).

This book should be found in every one of our homes. It would also serve as a wonderful study guide for use in study societies as well as catechism classes. It will be a welcome addition to a minister's library yet it may easily be read by a thirteen-year-old student. J. Mark Beach who is from Mid-America Reformed Seminary did excellent translation work. The Scripture quotations, with few exceptions are from The New King James Version. The reader is served with a handy "Scripture Index" which will be appreciated by all students of God's Word. The book has already made its way to Australia. I hope it will be gratefully received and eagerly read in many places. Don't leave your local Christian bookstore without it!

Rev. C. Bosch is minister of the Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington, Ontario.



REFLECTIONS

By B. Krol

"Caretaker" of the Church

Not long ago I met one. A custodian by calling, not by occupation alone. It was obvious immediately. It's easy to spot. A broad smile is his welcome. His care is for the whole church – the building and the people.

Let me tell you about our church custodian.

Someone came to the church asking to see the church steeple. A tour was given. And that person was seen in church this past Sunday. There's more to tell. There are the pastoral conversations, the prayers for those in distress, the writing down of addresses of passersby for the evangelism committee, the tending of the sick and the handicapped, the care for the lonely and elderly.

For a time I took three boys, triplets, to church. Although they didn't under-

stand the sermon, they never missed a service. The custodian let them ring the church bells. He did more for their spiritual wellbeing than I was able to do.

Some custodians are worth their weight in gold. But they are not paid in gold. At least not on this earth. The custodian's job can be a thankless one. There is often little appreciation for the work that is done. And that can be discouraging. But often they represent the "face of the church" even more so than the elders or the minister. Some churches fail to appreciate the "office" of custodian. They think that it does not matter too much. Set up some chairs, scrub the floors, have the coffee ready on time. . . . But sometimes the custodian engages in more pastoral conversations than the elder, and more contacts for spreading the gospel than

the committee appointed for it. All this is above and beyond the job description.

If your church is looking for a custodian, look for one with a warm smile and a heart for the Lord. The right choice of custodian can become a blessing for the whole church. You could say that church growth begins with the custodian. The custodian forms the first impression for the newcomer. And often the first impression determines whether that visitor will be back.

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Press Release of Classis Contracta Alberta-Manitoba, June 23 1998 held in Calgary.

On behalf of the convening church at Calgary, Rev. R.J. Eikelboom called the meeting to order just after 10.00 am. He read Ephesians 4:1-16 and lead in prayer. He welcomed the brothers present and informed them that the churches were duly informed of this meeting.

The credentials were examined and found to be in good order. Elder H. Lubbers was appointed chairman, and Rev. Eikelboom was appointed clerk.

The agenda was adopted.

Classis then proceeded to examine the documents presented by the churches at Carman and Coaldale in connection with the calls extended to the Revs. J. Moesker and J.L. van Popta respectively. All documents were found to be in good order, and consequently classis thankfully approved both calls. The Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg was appointed to represent classis at the installation of Rev. Moesker, and the church at Taber was appointed to represent classis at the installation of Rev. van Popta.

Upon the request of the church at Denver, Rev. R. Aasman was appointed as their counsellor.

During question period it was asked whether all requests for classis to deal with particular matters should not really be made in writing. It is confirmed that this should indeed be done.

After the Acts were adopted, the clerk was instructed to prepare a press release. The chairman observed that censure was not necessary, and he closed the meeting in prayer.

For classis Alberta-Manitoba of June 23 1998,
Rev. Eikelboom, clerk.

CLARION

ADVERTISEMENTS

Births

With great joy and thankfulness to our heavenly Father that has blessed us with the birth of our first child. His name is

MITCHELL WAYNE

Born May 20, 1998

Ron and Lorrie Bos

RR 5, Embro, ON N0J 1J0

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:16

We thank the Lord for blessing us with our first child, a daughter, whom we have named

VANESSA JOANNE

Born on June 18, 1998

Pete and Chandra Vanderboom (nee Meerstra)

First grandchild for Femmie VanderBoom

Third grandchild for Ben and Nancy Meerstra

First great-grandchild for Mr. and Mrs. J.M. VanderBoom

329 Rawdon Street, Brantford, ON N3S 6H7

With thankfulness to our heavenly Father who has made all things well, we joyfully announce the birth of

WARREN CHAD BEICHTER

Born July 2, 1998

A brother for *Nathan, Marlena and Sheldon*

Juergen and Joyce Beichter (nee Veenendaal)

Box 393, Carman, MB R0G 0J0

We give thanks to our Father in heaven for blessing us with the precious gift of our second child, a son

JAMIE HARMEN VICTOR

Born April 10, 1998

Wayne and Hilda Bartels (nee Scholtens)

A sister for *Jessica*

3rd grandchild for Harry and Betty Scholtens

2nd grandchild for Henry and Nancy Bartels

3160 Kirk Road West, RR 2

Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0

We give thanks and praise to our heavenly Father who has blessed our family with the birth of our son

NICHOLAS AARON

Born June 3, 1998

Ron and Marcia Faber (nee Veldman)

A brother for *Kara, Jeremy and Michael*

578 Bertrand Drive, Lynden, WA 98264 USA

For the LORD is good and His love endures forever, His faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 100:5

We praise our God for blessing our family with another covenant child

BRADEN JOEL

Born July 2, 1998

Albert and Melanie Kasper (nee DeGelder)

A brother for *Larissa, Janelle, Colin and Nathan*

P.O. Box 242, Waterdown, ON L0R 2H0