

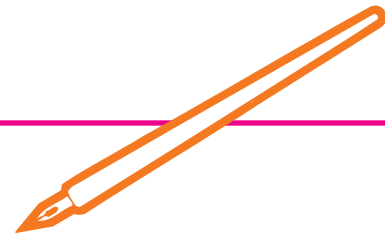
Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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Reformed Education





Sticks and Stones

There is an adage: sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me. At first glance, this seems to make a lot of sense. To be hit by a stick or stone can really hurt and cause serious damage. Words on the other hand, leave no visible wounds or scars. However on deeper reflection the old adage about sticks and stones really does not ring true. Words can hurt very deeply and cause profound damage. While some people seem to handle malicious words quite well, others are devastated and crippled spiritually when they hear that a friend or colleague or some other acquaintance has been spreading some gossip or slander behind their backs. How their heart and spirit aches, sometimes for days on end, as the memory of those words haunts them. The blow of malicious words can cause an invisible and inner pain which equals the blows of sticks and stones. Moreover, gossip, slander and judging someone rashly and unheard can also cause some very visible and physical trouble. For instance, gossip and slander against a businessman can result in people no longer wanting to do business with him. Suddenly, words uttered in idleness or in a moment of spite can destroy a person's livelihood, reputation and happiness.

A beautiful gift and the fall

The sad irony in all of this is that human speech is such a beautiful gift of God to his image in Paradise. Imagine life without speech. It is said that silence is golden. However it is only in certain situations that this is true. Imagine life without being able to pray to God and sing psalms and hymns to his praise and glory. Imagine falling in love without being able to say, "I love you." Imagine being a family and not being able to speak together as husband and wife, and parents and children. The ability to speak is God's precious gift which enhances our relationship with God and our neighbour. It is essential to being the image of God. Indeed, it is one of the things which distinguishes us from the animal world.

However, this most beautiful and rarest of gifts became the foothold by which Satan reached man and led him into sin. Remember what Christ said to unbelieving and rebellious Jews in John 8:44: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." You know the history of Genesis 3: Satan twisted and misrepresented the words of God and the man and woman allowed themselves to be caught up in his snare. They turned their backs on God and blatantly disobeyed Him. From that point onwards, Adam and Eve and all future generations began to reflect the father of lies in their speaking to and about one another. Once man's heart was pure and was the overflowing fountain of beautiful and edifying speech. But after the fall into sin, his heart became corrupt and there flowed from his mouth lies,

gossip, slander and all manner of spiteful and damaging words. A classic example of that is found in 1 Kings 21 where Jezebel, whose husband Ahab coveted a vineyard of Naboth, engaged two scoundrels to accuse Naboth falsely of cursing both God and the king. The result was that Naboth was executed and Ahab took over Naboth's vineyard. By means of slander, Naboth lost his life and his family's allotted inheritance in the promised land.

The horror of sins of the tongue

One would think that because of the horrendous nature of gossip, lying and other mean-spirited talk, there would be a high priority set on dealing with this sin and doing something to change it. Certainly our confessions do not take it lightly as we see in Lord's Day 43 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The catechism says firmly and powerfully: "I must avoid all lying and deceit as the devil's own works, under penalty of God's heavy wrath." This would also be addressed very clearly in the preaching. Similarly, the Form for Celebration of the Lord's Supper mentions in the list of those who should abstain from the table of the Lord: "all liars, backbiters and slanderers." And yet, the sad reality is that gossiping and lying goes on in Christian circles. It is even said: the really serious sins are killing, adultery and stealing. Perhaps most, if not all of us, are guilty of thinking at one time or another: a little bit of gossiping is not so serious.

The blow of malicious words can cause an invisible and inner pain which equals the blows of sticks and stones.

Gossip is a sin of the young and the old, both male and female. For some it is a bit of a hobby. As soon as some damaging information is gleaned, they are on the phone: did you hear who got fired for incompetence? Did you hear whose marriage is in trouble? Did you hear about the church member who got pulled over while under the influence? Such dialogue is done with real pleasure and enthusiasm. But what is the good of it? Are there noble reasons for such gossip and slander? All a person is doing is allowing evil to fill his or her heart and so reflect the image of the father of lies. And ultimately, what it is doing is revealing one's own inadequacy and lack of confidence: putting other people down and making them look bad is a way of compensating for one's own insecurity and desperately trying to look better than that person. In other words, no one is the winner in such situations. Gossip, slander and lying do damage to the person under discussion and to ourselves as we engage in this work of the devil. How much terrible damage it has done in families, in church, in school, at the workplace and in all kinds of relationships!

Renewal in Christ

Where do we turn for help? We go to the same place where we always go in dealing with the reality of sins in our lives. We go to Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself endured terrible slander. We read literally in Matthew 26:59 that the Jewish leaders “were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.” It is ironic that Jesus Christ’s life was so pure and holy, that all the false witnesses who came forward just could not make their accusations sound plausible. At last two witnesses came up with the feeble and completely twisted accusation that Jesus Christ had said he would tear the temple down. Through such

What’s inside?

This issue of *Clarion* is about education.

The first great commandment calls us to love God with all our mind – heart, soul, and mind. Dr. F. Oosterhoff writes about what this means for Reformed education.

Dr. R. Faber takes us back in history to teach us about Zwingli’s contribution to Reformed education. When we reflect on this topic, Zwingli’s name does not typically come to mind; however, as Dr. Faber demonstrates, Zwingli had some very foundational things to say about education.

Mr. Vandervan provides a third article on the theme focussing more specifically on what we as Canadian Reformed people are doing with our schools. He adds some very interesting statistics. The Lord has been good to us in enabling us to run 28 schools. Thousands of our youth have been taught in these schools. May the Lord crown the work that has been done, is being done, and yet to be done, with his indispensable blessing.

About a month ago, a new movie hit the silver screen, *The Prince of Egypt*. It’s an animated (read “cartoon”) production about Moses and the exodus from Egypt. A teacher from one of our schools, Mr. Keith Sikkema, reviews the movie.

The post-synod discussion continues. You will find two submissions relating to this.

Have a good day and enjoy the reading.


GvP

false accusations he was condemned and put to death. It is in Christ’s holy speech and in his dying under false accusations that we gain the assurance that he has paid for our sins of gossiping and slander and all unholy talk, and liberated us from the stranglehold of Satan, the father of lies. Also, we gain the ability through the Holy Spirit to begin reflecting Christ’s image of righteousness and holiness. When Paul writes in Ephesians 4:24, “put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” then the first thing he says is: “therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body.”

Clearly in Jesus Christ we are able to make a beginning in the fight against hurting one another by our spiteful words. How important it is to pray to God for his grace in the struggle against this sin. How important it is in our family life to instil in our children a love for the truth and a talk which brings us closer to God and builds up the life and reputation of our neighbour. Most importantly, it must be clear in our minds: gossip and similar hurtful talk is sin which is reprehensible in the sight of

God, but in Jesus Christ I can do something about it. By the grace of God we could effect such a tremendous change in our lives. We could make such a blessed change in the kind of talk which goes on in our home, in the church and school community, in our neighbourhood and at work. We could be known as someone who loves the truth and preserves the reputation of our neighbour. Others would quickly get the message from us: we do not want to hear any gossip or slander; and we do not even want to talk about someone if the purpose is simply to hurt and to revel in others’ troubles.

***The LORD detests lying lips,
but he delights in men
who are truthful
(Proverbs 12:22).***

Once only beautiful and edifying words came from the mouths of Adam and Eve. The same will happen in Paradise restored. In the meantime, let us experience a foretaste of that blessed day in the way that we talk about one another and to one another. 



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By J.L. van Popta

Friends Forever

A friend loves at all times (Proverbs 17:17).

Friends are important to everyone. Friendship is central to community and society. It is pivotal to congregational life. It is essential in marriages. Without friends, life is tragically lonely. Human friendship is a beautiful gift of God.

A friend loves at all times. The Bible has much to say about friendship. The Psalms mention friends, friendship and friendliness often. The Book of Proverbs also speaks of friends. We can read about friendship in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Think of Proverbs 18:24: *A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* This is the friend, the kind of friend, mentioned in Proverbs 17:17. Our brothers can be, and often are, our best friends. I teach my children that they ought to consider their brothers and sister as their best friends: friends for life. Brothers, however, are not always loyal. Families do drift and rift apart. We, therefore, seek a better friend, a more loyal friend.

Proverbs 17:17 speaks of loyalty. A friend loves you in the midst of deepest troubles. A friend stands by you in difficult times. Friendship is a covenant. It is a relationship bound up in promises and obligations. It is a relationship of both commitment and action. Friendship is shown in this: undying loyalty, faithfulness to death. It is embodied in steadfast faithfulness and abiding love.

This is the friendship of David and Jonathan. Jonathan, heir apparent to the throne, stood aside for David, the Lord's anointed. Jonathan supported David as a friend, even to death. And David loved his friend to the end. David laments his friend's death with one of the most powerful funeral dirges in history. His song in 2 Samuel 1 is a heart-rending lament from the lips of a real friend. There David sings at the news of the death of his friend, *"I grieve for you Jonathan my brother; / You were very dear to me; / Your love for me was wonderful, / More wonderful than that of women."*

David is not suggesting that marital love is less than friendship. No, this underlines Jonathan's complete faithfulness and self-denying commitment to David, who was to take his place on Saul's throne. Jonathan was a friend who stuck closer than a brother.



Though he was no brother by blood, his spirit was joined to David's.

But friendship is a dangerous thing, for friends are not always loyal. We all have had the experience, I think, of being let down by friends. We expect

them to be there for us and they are not. Having many companions in good days does not guarantee that there will be any in times of trouble. Friends bring us great pain when they abandon us. Scripture speaks of this too. Think of Job's three friends. They were bound to Job in a covenant of friendship (Job 2:11). Yet these friends scolded and berated him when they should have comforted him and encouraged him. They accused him of sin when they should have stood by him in his innocence. Other failed friends come to mind. Thomas said that he would go to Jerusalem to die with his Lord. Peter also said that he would die for his Lord. Both ran away in their Lord's hour of need. Mark abandoned Paul. Demas, in love with this present world, left Paul.

But there is even more. Friends can turn on us. Those whom we trusted, become enemies. David experienced that when his friend Ahithophel joined Absalom in his rebellion against father David. Psalm 41:9 comes to mind: *Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.* David's son, the Lord Jesus Christ, quotes this Psalm when He spoke of Judas. His friend betrayed Him. His bosom friend sold Him for the price of a slave. Even as we sit at the Lord's Supper table we should remember that the Lord Jesus was taken away, betrayed by a friend. He was bound for our sins, because one of his friends had gone out into the night in order to carry out his schemes. A friend betrayed the Lord. Our Lord knows what betrayal is like. When your friends fail and leave you, know that your Lord Jesus Christ is the Friend who sticks closer than a brother. He knows betrayal. He is the Friend who loves at all times. He will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:6).

Rev. John L. van Popta is the minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Coaldale, Alberta.



To Love God with our Mind (Part 2)

By F.G. Oosterhoff

We are to love the Lord with all our mind. In this second article we will try to determine what these words tell us about the aims Reformed education must pursue. In dealing with the intellectual element in religion and life we must, as we saw last time, avoid two opposite dangers. One is that we stress the powers of the mind to the extent that reason becomes autonomous; the other that we become so disillusioned with reason's performance that we give up on the search for truth and make the emotions our guides, or else rely on media wisdom and public opinion. We are prone to adopt either one of the extremes of rationalism and irrationalism. In fact, because both are part of our postmodern world-view, it is not at all uncommon for us to follow both at the same time. But because the stronger trend in our days is toward the cult of unreason, I will concentrate on that aspect.

Home, school, and the Christian mind

When we speak of the cult of unreason we usually refer to such excesses as the New Age religion and the popularity of the occult. And when we look at its effects on education, we have in mind things like the removal of subjects (such as history and literature) that could serve as an antidote to the dominant world-view, and the dumbing-down of the curriculum in general. We blame the Ministries of Education for giving in to the spirit of the age, deplore the educational mess in our country, and try to limit the damage to our own schools by adding traditional courses and instituting higher academic standards than the Ministries demand.

I believe that adding traditional subjects and raising academic standards are good and necessary, but I am not convinced that they are a cure-all. Schools can try very hard to promote learning and create an interest in the

things of the mind, but unless they have the support of the home, they cannot accomplish a great deal. The proper mental habits and the proper love of learning must be formed at home, and at an early age, if they are to be formed at all. They must also be constantly reinforced at home.

Elementary and secondary schools are not vocational or trade schools. They exist to prepare children for a much wider and higher calling than simply the economic one.

This implies that we as adults must practise what we preach. If we want young people to learn to think as Christians and to see their education as a means to serve God, we must show them by our own behaviour that these goals are very much worth striving for. If we fail to act as role models, the risk is very real that children adopt other models, perhaps sports heroes or media celebrities, or simply turn to their peer group for guidance. And experience shows that once those patterns have developed it is almost impossible for the school and the parents to break them.

As the foregoing will have made clear, when I am speaking of a love of learning I am not concerned simply with the students' career prospects. It is nice when high standards and high marks allow them to get into the college or university of their choice, but this should not be the schools' and the parents' primary aim. And our schools should certainly not be seen as training places for a job or career. Elementary and secondary schools are not vocational or trade schools. They exist to prepare children for a much wider and higher call-

ing than simply the economic one. Children go to school because they must be acquainted with the character and history of their culture, develop their talents, and learn to discern the spirits, so that they will be able to serve God with their entire being, including their mind. And that service, as Calvin and Kuyper taught, is not for the church only, but also for the world, for both fall under the rule of Christ.

The training of the mind is as necessary for Christians in our days as it has ever been, for today many of the brightest secular intellects are devoted to the promotion of unbelief and unreason. And because of the modern means of communication, their ideas affect our young people, also when they go to a Christian school. They will affect them even more at college and university. Our schools exist to show children what is at stake in the battle of the spirits and to arm them for it.

Unless we form the minds of the children of the church, our anti-Christian culture, fed by a formidably powerful anti-Christian scholarship, will do it for us with the help of the omnipresent media.

This means, among other things, that they must be made aware of the battle as it was waged in the past. For although today's heresies often appear in a new dress, they are not really new, and in fighting them we do not have to reinvent the wheel and think of entirely new offensive and defensive systems. There are weapons and strategies to be discovered in the past, from ancient times onward. But to find them,

we must search for them. And that necessitates a thorough grounding not only in Bible and church history and the history of Reformed dogma (although that first of all), but also in literature, general history, and the history of various other academic subjects. Our students must know about these things – and so, indeed, must the rest of the community. We have no choice here. Unless we form the children’s minds, our anti-christian culture, fed by a formidably influential anti-christian scholarship, will do it for us with the help of the omnipresent media.

Evangelicalism and the Christian mind

There is a threat to the faith resulting from a simple *disinclination* to develop the mind. There is also the danger of a conscious *disregarding* of the mind in favour of the emotions, an attitude that can lead to the adoption of a full-fledged religious irrationalism. We now concentrate on that danger.

The trend toward an anti-rational emotionalism is a fairly recent one in our Reformed community. In one form or another it has long characterized the evangelical movement on this continent, however, and in attempting to understand it we can benefit from the experiences of evangelical fellow-believers. Their history provides us with both examples, showing us the excesses to be avoided, and direct instruction. With the latter I refer to warnings which evangelical thinkers themselves have been issuing in recent years about the dangers of non-rational and irrational approaches to religion and life. Because the appeal of evangelicalism is growing among us, and because an uncritical adoption of its traditions will jeopardize the Reformed character of our schools, we should give attention to these warnings.

Before proceeding I want to make clear that the attention evangelicalism gives to the emotions constitutes, in my opinion, not only a weakness but also a strength. I think that many of us – also those who rightly reject much of its theology – have experienced evangelicalism’s appeal. Evangelical Christians at their best are open about their religion, they want to know Christ personally, they are anxious to spread the gospel, they are committed to their faith and truly want to live it. In these respects they can provide much-needed correctives to a Reformed tradition that has not always escaped the danger of

The greatest danger besetting American Evangelical Christianity is the danger of anti-intellectualism. The mind as to its greatest and deepest reaches is not cared for enough. This cannot take place apart from profound immersion for a period of years in the history of thought and the spirit. People are in a hurry to get out of the university and start earning money or serving the church or preaching the Gospel. They have no idea of the infinite value of spending years of leisure in conversing with the greatest minds and souls of the past, and thereby ripening and sharpening and enlarging their powers of thinking. *The result is that the arena of creative thinking is vacated to the enemy. . . .*

From an address which Charles Malik, Lebanese diplomat and Eastern Orthodox Christian, gave at the opening of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College in 1980. (Quoted by Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, p. 26. Emphases added.)

an orthodoxism which (in the words of Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck) puts its faith in its confessions rather than confessing its faith.

It is not surprising that especially young people, in their search for a religion that indeed makes a difference, have been inspired by the evangelical movement. But again, they are not the only ones to learn from it. The confrontation with evangelicalism has reminded many older people as well of the biblical truth that biblical knowledge is of no profit if it does not bear fruit in a Christian life. In that respect its influence has been altogether positive.

***If we are looking for
conclusive arguments
in favour of the
development of the
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televangelism should rank
high on our list.***

But among the dangers to which the evangelical mindset is prone – and that we must avoid at all costs – is the belief, firstly, that biblical doctrine can be subjected to the demands of the emotions, and secondly, that the Christian life can flourish while the Christian mind is put on hold. It is these dangers that evangelical thinkers have been warning us against, reminding us that doctrine and life are inseparable. In what follows, I will give a summary of the concerns of one such thinker.

An evangelical voice

The one I have chosen is the American historian Mark A. Noll, a leading

evangelical scholar who in 1994 published a best-selling work under the title *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Having informed the reader at the start of his book that “the scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind,” Noll goes on to show that at one time evangelicals did have a high regard for the role of the intellect, although their use of it was not always well directed. In the nineteenth century evangelical leaders tended to exalt reason, managed to harmonize religious doctrine with the science of their day, and used a scientific approach to the study of the Bible. Theologians and other professors provided empirical, scientific “proofs” of the truth of the Bible, of traditional ethics, and of the protestant world-view as a whole. The popularity of this rationalistic approach meant that little time was devoted to careful exegetical and dogmatic studies, or to a biblical analysis of intellectual, socio-political, and cultural trends.

The price to be paid for the lack of such studies became apparent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Darwinism and the higher biblical criticism took possession of American universities. Reason and mainstream science could now no longer be seen as allies of the faith. This development caught the evangelical community off-guard. Some people responded to the challenge by withdrawing from the world and the life of the intellect to concentrate on the cultivation of an inner spirituality. Others continued their alliance with science, but now, with the help of creation science, in an attempt to disprove the new scientific theories. At about the same time the so-called holiness movements, pentecostalism, and premillennialism spread. All these separate movements,

most of which had spiritualistic, biblicistic, and anti-intellectualistic tendencies in common, influenced mainstream evangelicalism.

Although Noll's critique of evangelicalism's anti-intellectualism is devastating, he has good things to say of the movement as well. He commends the evangelicals' sincerity and personal commitment, the sacrifices they make for mission and evangelism, their charity and zeal, and the fact that they place Christ at the centre of their religion and life. He adds, however, that they limit Christ's function to that of Saviour, rather than also confessing His cosmic rule. Indeed, their concern with the world is restricted to the saving of souls. The cultural influence of evangelicalism is therefore practically nil. Today's evangelicals, Noll says, continue the habit of their predecessors and still devote little effort to a serious analysis of socio-political, intellectual, and cultural issues. Activism and biblicism must fill the gap. During the Gulf War, for example, the run-away evangelical best-sellers did not reflect on the causes and background of the conflict, or on the moral issues involved, but simply offered dispensationalist explanations of how the war was fulfilling so-called end-time prophecy.


The tendency toward biblicism, emotionalism, and oversimplification, Noll warns, makes the evangelical movement vulnerable to the influence of biblical criticism. It also makes it easy for so-called charismatic leaders to take control of the movement, and it accounts for the otherwise incredible fact that televangelists who market the most bizarre perversions of the gospel can attract American Christians by the millions. Indeed, if we are looking for conclusive arguments in favour of developing the Christian mind, the phenomenon of American televangelism should rank high on our list. (It should not, of course, be the only one.)

The ongoing battle

Luther once said that he could be preaching Christ with all his might, but if he failed to attack the forces which at that particular time were setting themselves up against Christ's rule, he was not really preaching Him. Among the dominant anti-Christian forces he had to contend with in his days as we in ours (for as I said before, heresies don't die but are recycled), were an arrogant rationalism on the one hand, and an emotion-driven irrationalism on the other.

Both rationalists and anti-rationalists create a God in their own image. The former do it by means of their reasoning powers; the latter by consulting their emotions. But both lose sight of the God of the Bible, who infinitely transcends human thought and imagination.

Although these two heresies seem to be each other's opposite, Luther knew that the differences between them are more apparent than real. For both rationalists and anti-rationalists create a God in their own image. The former do it by the use of their reasoning powers, the latter by consulting their emotions. But both lose sight of the God of the Bible, who infinitely transcends human thought and imagination and can be known only because, and insofar as, He has chosen to reveal Himself. It was in struggling with the age-old temptation of creating God in man's image and of exalting human insights over the wisdom of God, that Luther and the other



CHURCH NEWS

CALLLED by the church of
Smithers, BC

Rev. M.H. Van Luik
of Chilliwack, BC


DECLINED the call to Aldergrove, BC

Rev. C. Van Spronsen
of Surrey, BC

Reformers re-asserted the principle of *sola scriptura*.

And it was to ensure that the truths of Scripture would continue to enlighten "the coming generations," that they and their followers promoted education and established schools. And let us not forget that in establishing these schools they had in mind not only the saving of souls, but also the restoration of their culture and the enlightening of the world. As Paul wrote to the Philipians (2:15), it is the function of Christians to shine as lights in the world or, as the NIV translates, "like stars in the universe" (Phil 2:15).

That same vision guided those who, when an anti-Christian modernism turned public schools into bastions of secularism, established their own Christian schools. It is up to us, their heirs, to keep the vision alive. For the warning still holds: unless we take care of the development of our children's minds, our culture will do it for us. And because the battle that is being waged is indeed a battle for the minds of the children of the church (and therefore also for the mind of our culture), our schools must continue to focus on the old question of the proper and improper use of reason. When searching for a biblical answer to that question, they can hardly avoid meeting up with the Reformers, who taught that reason must be rejected as a master but retained as a most valuable, indeed an indispensable servant.

Dr. F. G. Oosterhoff is a retired teacher of history living in Hamilton, Ontario. 



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By T.M.P. Vanderven



Reformed Education

Canadian Reformed Schools across Canada

What are they?

Canadian Reformed schools are independent, parental Christian day-schools, operated by Canadian Reformed School Societies. These school societies have been established by members of the Canadian Reformed Churches so that their children may receive instruction that is in agreement with the beliefs and values of the homes. Therefore, the students attending these schools come primarily from families who belong to the Canadian Reformed Churches.

The Canadian Reformed Churches trace their roots to the Great Reformation of the 16th century, and in particular to the father of Calvinism, John Calvin. The international General Synod of Dordrecht (The Netherlands, 1618-1619) consolidated the doctrinal and organizational statements of the Reformed Churches. These 400-year old documents form to this day the theological basis of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and are known as The Three Forms of Unity: the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism.

In addition, the Canadian Reformed Churches have adopted the three ecumenical creeds: the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. These documents date from the 4th and 5th centuries of the early Christian Church.

The organizational statement of the Canadian Reformed Churches is known as the *Church Order*. Much of this document deals with church matters, of course. However, Article 58 deals with schools, and it reads:

The council of the Church shall ensure that the parents, to the best of their ability, have their children attend a school where the instruction given is in harmony with the Word of God as the Church has summarized it in her Confessions.

Together with the baptismal vow made by members who bring their child for baptism these statements show the close link between the church, the home, and the school with respect to the education of the children of the church. As part of their baptismal vow, parents promise before the Lord and his holy congregation that they, as father and mother, will instruct their child in the doctrine of the Old and New Testament as taught in the church of which they are members – home education and instruction. Further, they also promise to have their child instructed in that doctrine to the utmost of their power – catechetical and school instruction. Thus it is clear that the education of the children of parents belonging to the Canadian Reformed Churches is considered of great importance.

As members of the Canadian Reformed Churches we confess that the whole world is Christ's, and that therefore all of education must be dedicated to the service of the God who created heaven and earth. Therefore Canadian Reformed School Societies maintain that all education is God-centred, and we reject the idea that some education is religious, and some is neutral or value-neutral. Education is a mandate given to Christian parents by God himself. Parents carry the primary responsibility for the education of their children. In order to fulfil this mandate, these parents have founded schools. School societies were established as early as 1951 and the first Canadian Reformed day school opened its doors in 1955: William of Orange Christian School, New Westminster. At present, there are Canadian Reformed schools in the Provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario. American Reformed schools are operating in Blue Bell (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Denver, Colorado, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. (See Box 1).

These parent-controlled schools are, next to the family and the church community, vital means by which the Reformed world and life view can and must be taught to the children. These schools seek to inculcate Christian values which are rooted in firm biblical principles; values that acknowledge the crucial importance of the family, and that instill a desire to serve one's country. A Reformed world and life view does not concern itself with religious matters only, leaving matters such as geography and history, language and science, mathematics and health education aside as being of lesser importance. A Reformed world and life view properly includes an awareness of the community, the province, the country, and indeed the whole world, since all of these are rightfully God's domain. Supporters of Reformed schools do not segregate themselves, but consider themselves fully part of their society, recognizing that all things are the Lord's. In short, Canadian Reformed education seeks to instill in its students the sense of calling to serve God, his Church, and contribute to the society of which they are part.

Educational principles of Canadian Reformed Schools

Especially in their contact with provincial governments, the Canadian Reformed School Societies have developed a view of education, based on principles such as these:

- Education cannot be divorced from religious convictions, principles and values.
- Reformed education maintains that parents – in obedience to the divine mandate – retain the full primary responsibility for the education of their children, and therefore claim the prior right to choose the desirable form of education for them.
- Reformed education is based on the bond between home, school,

and church, recognizing the unique interaction between home, school, and church as the essential first “school” for life.

- Reformed education seeks to educate the whole child, i.e. , it seeks to develop the ethical and moral, as well as the aesthetic, physical, and intellectual dimensions of each child, so that they may love and serve their Creator and their neighbour with their whole heart, soul, and mind.
- Reformed education seeks to provide its students with an understanding of the nature and purpose of life, as well as with knowledge and skills which will enable them to live and work as children of their heavenly Father in today’s society, and to contribute to that society.
- Reformed education seeks to present a comprehensive view of the world in all its expressions, recognizing it as God’s creation, with as purpose God’s glorification,

and as ultimate destiny the great restoration when God will restore the whole of creation to its former glory and perfection.

These principles are the basis for the description of Reformed education as you may find in the handbook of a Reformed school. An example of such a description follows here:

Since God requires that his people be educated according to his Word (Deut. 6 : 6, 7; Psalm 78 : 1 - 4), members of local Canadian Reformed Churches have established independent schools to assist parents in the fulfilment of the promises they make at the baptismal font, so that there may be harmony between the teachings of the Church, and those of the home and the school.

Reformed education aims to realize this assistance by endeavouring to equip its students to employ their talents in the service of God and his Kingdom. Therefore

BOX I

	Date School Opening	Students	Grades	Teachers f/t	p/t
Schools in Alberta:					
Coaldale Christian School, Coaldale	1974	136	K-9	8	3
“Covenant” Canadian Reformed School, Neerlandia	1977	177	1-12	12	2
Parkland Immanuel Christian School, Edmonton	1977	200	K-12	12	3
Tyndale Christian School, Calgary	1994	20	1-8	1	1
Schools in British Columbia:					
Credo Christian Elementary School, Langley	1986	142	K-7	9	–
Credo Christian High School, Langley	1978	366	8-12	24	2
“Ebenezer” Canadian Reformed School, Smithers	1969	142	1-12	10	1
John Calvin School, Chilliwack	1970	246	K-7	11	2
Trinity Christian School, Vernon	1994	26	1-7	2	–
William of Orange Christian School	1955	96	1-7	4	2
Schools in Manitoba					
Dufferin Christian School, Carman	1973	218	K-12	11	10
Immanuel Christian School, Winnipeg	1976	197	K-12	13	–
Schools in Ontario					
ACRES Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Elementary School, Attercliffe	1995	132	1-8	6	5
Covenant Christian School, Millgrove	1987	118	1-8	6	1
Covenant Christian School, London	1976	49	1-8	4	1
Credo Christian School, Brampton	1979	86	1-8	4	5
Dufferin Area Christian School, Orangeville	1967	94	K-8	5	2
Eben-Ezer Canadian Reformed School, Chatham	1973	89	K-8	4	2
Guido de Bres High School, Hamilton	1975	310	8-12	25	3
John Calvin Christian School, Burlington	1962	154	1-8	9	1
John Calvin School, Smithville	1964	250	1-8	14	–
Maranatha & Emmanuel Christian Schools, Fergus	1967/77	230	1-10	14	–
Owen Sound Canadian Reformed School, Owen Sound	1994	26	1-8	1	11
Timothy Canadian Reformed School, Hamilton	1973	191	K-8	7	9
Schools in the USA:					
“Dr. K. Schilder” American Reformed School, Grand Rapids	1977	31	1-12	3	4
Reformation American Reformed School, Blue Bell	1990	15	1-11	3	
Heritage Christian School, Denver, CO	1992	19	1-12	2	

Information taken from the CRTA Teachers’ Directory, 1998-1999, September 1998

the basis for the instruction at a Reformed school may be summarized as follows:

1. The entire curriculum will be taught in obedience to the Holy Scriptures, the infallible Word of God, as confessed in the creeds of the Canadian Reformed Churches.
2. The teaching in every subject will take into account that the students are heirs of the Covenant established by God between Himself and the believers. As covenant children, these students are under God's care and protection, and are called to obedient service in all areas of life.
3. Each subject in the curriculum will have as its point of departure the cultural mandate as it is enunciated in Genesis 1:28, and elaborated upon throughout the entire Scriptures.
4. Since this cultural mandate is to be exercised in a world which is lost in the misery and guilt incurred by man's fall into sin, but which in principle has been redeemed by Christ, the aim of all instruction will be to equip the students as Christians for their various tasks in this world.

It will be clear that Reformed schools try to implement a very important and far-reaching mandate. On whose shoulders does this work fall? First of all on those of the parents, and more generally on those of the whole community since as a Communion of Saints we care for each other. The home and the church community are the first places where children learn what it means to live as Christians. The Reformed school is the next important place. As the children move up through the school, it increases even more in social importance. Within our Reformed schools the work of Christian instruction and education falls on the shoulders of the teachers. They have to create in their own classroom that desirable environment for their students that will make Re-

BOX II

SUMMARY TABLE:

No. of schools:	28
Estimated no. of students:	3726
Estimated no. of full-time teachers:	228
Estimated no. of part-time teachers:	66
Estimated no. of board and committee members:	200
No. of volunteers:	unknown
Estimated annual cost:	\$ 11,000,000
Estimated cost per student per year:	\$ 3000

formed education possible. It is within the classroom – not just in documents and handbooks—under the guidance of teachers committed to these Reformed principles – not just by a committee's decisions or a board's instruction – that Reformed education comes alive. As Reformed parents are the key to truly Reformed education, so Reformed teachers are the key to truly Reformed schooling.

We pray that our covenant God will continue to provide us with opportunities and means to fulfil our biblical obligation to educate our covenant children in the fear of his Name at home, within the church community, and at our Reformed schools.

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Huldrych Zwingli on Reformed Instruction

By R. Faber

Introduction

It is easy to overlook Huldrych Zwingli's contribution to Reformed education. He established no school system in Switzerland, was not involved in the founding of new universities, and wrote no textbooks. His unfortunate death in 1531 cut short any intention Zwingli may have had to compose a handbook on education. Considered one of the driving forces behind the reformation of the church in Switzerland, Zwingli is not widely credited for that country's educational reform.

However, while Zwingli may not have affected the development of Reformed education in Switzerland directly, he did provide some significant contributions to this important enterprise. For example, in the city of Zurich he undertook to restructure the two schools associated with the Great Minster church. He also pioneered the activities of the so-called "Prophecy", a daily gathering of Bible experts who expounded the Scriptures and contributed to a Swiss-German translation. And, not least, Zwingli composed a little treatise called "On the Education of the Youth."

"On the Education of the Youth" first appeared in Latin in 1523, then in revised form in German, and later in other languages. Whereas critics deem it a loose collection of personal observations about raising teenagers, the treatise in fact contains a clear summary of the biblical principles supporting Christian education. More precisely, it is one of the first treatises to discuss nurture of the young from an explicitly Reformed point of view. And "On the Education of the Youth" makes an eloquent case for the role of education in developing the moral as well as intellectual qualities of the young. In what follows we shall relate some of the key observations Zwingli makes about the basis of Reformed instruction, the formation of an upright moral character,



and the service to others that should result from proper nurture.

The very things studied by humans reveal that there is someone superior to them and their learning, namely God.

"On the Education of the Youth" (1523)

The full title of the treatise is "On the Upbringing and Education of Youth in Good Manners and Christian Discipline."¹ As the words "good manners" and "Christian discipline" suggest, it concerns proper behaviour and morals, and so goes beyond formal upbringing in school. Zwingli was convinced that learning should not be viewed as unrelated to action: education concerns a person's subsequent deeds. The author addresses the work to his teenaged stepson, Gerold Meyer, and the personal tone suggests that Zwingli is concerned about the upbringing of this young person in particular. It should also be noted that Zwingli was restructuring the gram-

mar school and the theological college of the Great Minster church when he composed the treatise; he uses the opportunity to make comments upon training in such schools. Moreover, he composes the treatise in such a way that it interests a broad readership.

"On the Education of the Youth" is divided into three sections: 1) "how the tender mind of youth is to be instructed in the things of God", that is, Reformed principles supporting nurture and education; 2) "how [the youth] is to be instructed in the things which concern itself", i.e., the manner in which a young person develops as a Christian; and 3) "how [the youth] is to be instructed in conduct towards others", or Christian behaviour in social contexts. Zwingli does not prescribe a formal course of study, but sketches "certain precepts which would be wholesome and helpful for both body and soul and which would serve to the advancement of virtue and piety (102-3)." While some of the precepts concern scholastic education and training for the ministry in particular, most affect the formation of a Christian character and intellect.

To be instructed in the things of God

The first section of the treatise contains a number of concise statements about the premises of Reformed instruction. It begins with a candid evaluation of the subject: while education is very important, it cannot lead to saving faith. "It is beyond our human capacity to bring the hearts of men to faith in the one God (104)" by means of learning, "even though we had an eloquence surpassing that of Pericles," the famous Athenian orator. The human mind cannot reveal the path to salvation, for ". . . blinded by human folly the mind cannot of itself attain to the deep counsel of divine grace (107)." Only God can turn the hearts of sinners to Christ, and He does so by the power of the Holy Spirit. In fact, even those who have been saved

by the righteousness of Christ are incapable of complete knowledge and “as long as we are absent from the Lord in this mortal body we cannot be free from temptations (107).” While the humanist holds that education may contribute to increased piety and even salvation, the reformer holds that all learning is subject to the grace of God. Therefore all those who would be truly learned should “pray that he who alone can give faith will illuminate by his Spirit those whom we instruct in his Word (104).”

The value of education is revealed also by Christian faith. For while in learning as “in most things the human mind depends upon the external senses (107)”, faith is “the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is a firm confidence worked in the heart by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. By faith we accept as true all that God has revealed in his Word, and by faith we understand that God created the world out of nothing by his word (Hebrews 11:3). In sum, our “faith and confidence in Christ can derive only from God (107)”; no amount of human wisdom can instill it. And since the Holy Spirit employs the Bible to work faith, “we should learn the Gospel with all exactness and diligence (108),” to learn from it “what services will be most pleasing to God” and how “to be profitable to all” (108).”

A humble and thirsting spirit is needed to receive the instruction of Scripture.

To demonstrate further that knowledge depends upon the providence of God, Zwingli states that the object of learning is the universe and all that it contains. As the created order, the universe is subservient to the Creator. When we study the elements that make up the universe, “we learn that all these things are changing and destructible, but that he who conjoined them ... is necessarily unchanging and immutable (104).” Thus the very things studied by humans reveal that there is someone superior to them and their learning, namely God. As human creatures fashioned by the eternal, omnipotent God, mortals should be humbled rather than exalted in their learning. In studying things brought into existence by the word of God, we are “taught that all things are ordained by the providence of God (104).” Wisdom is

Cover illustration of the 1524 edition of On the Education of Youth



not to be sought in human philosophies, for they are as mortal and fallible as the people who conceive them. Rather, since all the objects of human enquiry are in the hands of God, “if we desire wisdom or learning, we are taught to ask it of Him alone (105)” and to seek it in his infallible Word.

Having presented the argument that Scripture should be the starting point for a discussion of education, Zwingli next considers what the Bible reveals about man’s ability to learn. In reading Scripture the student first learns about the human will in its original and natural state: “. . . how he transgressed the commandment of God and became a prey to death, how by his transgression he infected and corrupted his offspring – the whole human race (105).” This leads to the acknowledgement that original and actual sins affect one’s ability to learn and know. Stating the doctrine of the depravity of fallen man bluntly, Zwingli notes that “whether we will or not we can do nothing but evil (106).” What is more, Zwingli reminds us, “God requires of us a perfect righteousness, but we are corrupted and full of sin (106).” It is obvious that man cannot attain to the righteousness of God. No amount of learning can achieve what God requires of us. “Therefore,” Zwingli concludes, “we have no choice but to give up ourselves into the hand of God, to abandon ourselves entirely to his grace (106).”

Moving then to the doctrine of redemption, Zwingli notes that “the right-

eousness of Christ, put forth for us who are sinful and lost, releases us from sin and the guilt and suffering of sin and makes us worthy before God (106).” The redeeming sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ gives education new meaning and purpose. For He has been made “our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Being born anew in Christ the redeemed sinner seeks to live for God, and to know Him by studying his inspired Word and the world He created. Confident in the saving work of Christ, the believer is enabled by the Holy Spirit to employ education for the proper goals of serving God and fellow humans. For “where God works, you need have no fear that things will not be done rightly (107).”

To be instructed in the things which concern itself

Part two of the treatise deals with how the youth “is to be instructed in the things which concern itself.” Here Zwingli argues that the teenager who has grasped the importance of the biblical basis for all training will undertake to regulate his whole being according to Scripture, so that he might be “righteous in life and as nearly like God as possible (108).” Before one can behave rightly before others, one must live rightly before God. To do so, the youth reads the Bible constantly and like an athlete “exercises himself day and night in the Word of God (108).” And as the

treatise is directed also at those who aspire to the office of ministry, it advocates the study of Scripture in the original languages. In whatever language the Bible is read, however, such study should not be undertaken lightly; “a humble and thirsting spirit (109)” is needed to receive the instruction of Scripture. The *fear* of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

Having emphasized the biblical basis for all moral and intellectual development, Zwingli next states that in the Bible the youth “will everywhere find patterns of right conduct, that is he will find Christ himself (109).” Since the central message of the Bible is the gospel of salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ is the focus of the Book. The Bible presents Him first and foremost as the Saviour of the world, but also as the only perfect human character whom no-one can emulate fully but all should aspire to follow. Perhaps influenced here by Erasmus’ frequent portrayal of Jesus Christ as the paragon of Christian piety, Zwingli tells the teenager that Christ is “the perfect exemplar of all virtues (109)”, adding that “so far as human frailty allows, [the youth] must venture to manifest some part of the virtues of Christ. . . . He will learn of Christ both in speech and in silence, each at the proper time (109).”

Service to others is the most important consequence of proper instruction.

Much of the second part of the treatise consists of specific advice to teenagers such as Gerold Meyer. But Zwingli’s injunctions apply also to adults, and though he deals with simple and obvious matters, he is careful to note the significance of them. And keen to have a scriptural basis for his advice, Zwingli alludes especially to the pastoral exhortations of the apostle Paul. Accordingly, he advocates self-discipline in the consumption of alcohol, the eating of food, and the wearing of clothes. Regarding the first, Zwingli writes: “superfluity of wine is something which the young man must avoid like poison (111).” And one should not “give free rein to a voracious appetite (beyond what is necessary for life) (111).” Those who “seek fame by way of expensive apparel” and “who make a daily display of new clothes”, says Zwingli, “are not Christians. For while

they arrange themselves after this fashion, they allow the destitute to perish with cold and hunger (112).” In writing about the mundane matters of drink, food and clothing, Zwingli is concerned more about the soul than the body: “the spirit itself must be sound and ordered (110).” And “in all these things [the youth] must study moderation, that what he does may serve the truth and not merely please men (110).”

The youth should direct his thoughts according to the norms of Scripture.

To be instructed in conduct towards others

The last section of “On the Education of the Youth” concerns “conduct towards others.” In this part Zwingli wishes to convince his readers that service to others is the most important consequence of proper instruction. From the perspective of our selfish modern age, Zwingli’s emphasis upon the altruistic goals of education is worthy of further consideration. He begins with the biblical basis for this conviction: we must “first consider the fact that Christ gave himself up to death on our behalf and became ours: therefore we ought to give up ourselves for the good of all men, not thinking that we are our own, but that we belong to others (113).” The youth who has studied the Bible “will do good to others, but he will never hold it against them, for that was the way of Christ (117).” Formal education and nurture in the home should prepare the youth “serve the Christian community, the common good, the state and individuals (113).”

Here Zwingli makes it clear that for him Reformed instruction should aim especially at forming a Christian character. He is not so much concerned with formal education or ideal disciplines of study; instead, he provides examples of right action that result from the study of Scripture. In so doing, Zwingli addresses three aspects of one’s public conduct: behaviour, speech and thought.

The believer who has studied Scripture knows his duties to all others and especially to the members of the household of faith. He views the fellowship of believers “as one household or family, indeed as one body, in which all members rejoice and suffer together and help one another, so that what happens to one happens to all (114).” He re-

joices with those who rejoice, and weeps with those who weep. Again giving advice to adults as well as adolescents, Zwingli reminds his readers that “when a neighbour is in trouble, we ought not to allow anything to hinder us from going . . . We should be the first there and the last away, and we must exert ourselves to weigh the hurt, treating it and removing it and proffering counsel (115).” Having the mind of Christ, the believer strives to serve others by being faithful, just, honourable, and constant.

Just as one’s actions should be carefully considered, so too one’s speech should be weighed. The heart declares itself in speech; one’s speech ought to be guarded, lest it contain any deceit or falsehood. After all, “the Christian is commanded to speak the truth to his neighbour (116)”, and “a man who is inconsistent in his speech cannot be trusted (116).” Moreover, speech should not be idle; conversations “should all be of a kind to profit those with whom we live. If we have to reprove or punish, we ought to do it wisely and wittily, and so good humouredly and considerately that we not only drive away the offence but win over the offender, binding him more closely to us (116).” Like actions, speech is to be employed for the benefit of others.

Learning is subject to faith, without which it is of no avail.

Thought controls actions and speech; the youth should be careful, therefore, to weigh his thoughts. For if one’s “speech be empty and untruthful and inconsistent, it is a sure sign that things are far worse inwardly (116).” And our actions must not “pretend to be other than the heart (117)”, for then we would be hypocrites. In short, the youth should direct his thoughts according to the norms of Scripture. “Where that is done, he will be a rule to himself. And acting rightly he will never be lifted up or cast down. He will increase daily, but he will see to it that he himself decreases (117).” Not corrupted by selfish thoughts, the youth will serve others in all he says and does.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us summarize Zwingli’s views on Reformed instruction as expressed in “On the Education of the Youth.” The Swiss reformer begins with the compelling argument that the


principles of instruction should be carefully worked out and explicitly stated first. Without the proper basis, both general nurture and formal education are meaningless. And the only proper basis, Zwingli repeatedly states, is Scripture. One must understand and believe fully all the teaching of the Bible before one can consider the function of instruction. Thus from the depravity of the fallen man and original sin to the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, the effect of biblical teaching upon education must be articulated. Learning is subject to faith, without which it is of no avail.

According to Zwingli, the ultimate object of all learning is "Christ and

Him crucified." And as the message of the Gospel is to be found only in the Bible, the Bible should provide the focus of all instruction. The student who seeks true wisdom must seek the Lord Jesus Christ and his teaching. For Zwingli, then, "education" is much broader than formal schooling or academic study. Besides intellectual advancement, Reformed instruction concerns the inculcation of the biblical virtues of righteousness, holiness and self-control. Not only one's life before God, but also one's conduct in the presence of others should be marked by such virtues. Dedicating his entire life to the glory of God and

the service of others, the Reformed student seeks to apply the Word of God in his life. Of course, Zwingli concludes, this can only be done by the grace of God. For this reason he ends the treatise with this prayer: "may God so lead you through the things of this world that you may never be separated from him (118)."

Dr. Riemer Faber is professor of classics at the University of Waterloo.

¹An English translation of this Latin treatise appears in G.W. Bromiley, ed., *Library of Christian Classics Vol. 24: Zwingli and Bullinger* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 102-118. Quotations derive from this edition. 

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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.

The number of articles in *Clarion* complaining about the fencing of the Lord's table have increased in the last months. The "Year-End" issue of *Clarion* brought the discussion to the point where I felt it necessary to respond. Particularly the rather disconcerting article from the hand of J. Visscher entitled "Access to the Table."

The author refers to the Acts of Synod 1998. In the case of the OPC, Synod added the words "a general verbal warning is not sufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith and confirmation of a godly walk is required" (Acts, art. 130) and in the case of the ERQ, the committee has to deal with "the fencing of the Lord's Table and the possible different practices among the various congregations" (Acts, art. 97) and in the case of the RCUS the committee has "to resolve the matter of proper supervision of the Lord's Supper so that only those who confess the Reformed faith will be admitted" (Acts, art. 51).

Is the author facetious when he asks, "Are we turning the matter of access to the Table into the Fourth Mark of the True Church?" I'm almost certain he is aware that this matter is already dealt with under the second and third marks. He later even posits the concern that "we are going further than Scripture itself does" in, what I would understand to mean that Synod would supposedly be binding these churches suprascripturally to a specific practice. However in a previous article dealing with the same topic (The Acts of General Synod 1998 – An Overview, *Clarion* volume 47:24, Nov. 27, 1998) he correctly stated that "How it (OPC) does so (by means of more than a verbal warning) is not specified."

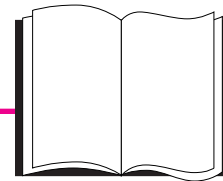
He further states "I am not arguing for an unsupervised table. Personally I have always been quite happy with our Canadian Reformed Churches practice." Then I would ask,

why do you accept a practice that you appear to believe is "going further than Scripture" which Synod may not ask others to adopt? Is it ok for others to have an unsupervised table, but do we need to adhere to a higher standard?

The answer, it seems to me, is in the article but is ignored, when it is agreed that the elders are to "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which He obtained with the blood of His own son" (Acts 20:28) and to "maintain the holiness of the church and her sacraments." Can that be done sufficiently by a verbal warning? Of course not! How do verbal warnings and/or self testimonials from the visitor meet the scriptural criteria? The elders have to act in a manner that gives them the ability to maintain the responsibility scripture gives them. That must be the practise in the Canadian Reformed Churches and elsewhere. The C.O. and the confessions speak according to scripture do they not?

Are the Canadian Reformed Churches being inconsistent as previously suggested by J. Mulder (*Clarion* Vol. 47:14) and J. Werkman (*Clarion* Vol. 47:24)? Yes, I believe so, but not only in this regard. Should offers not be conditional? Is there something wrong with correcting an error? Well there are more errors to correct, are there not? Synod Coaldale 1977 started us on a wrong tangent. We (and also Synods) need to acknowledge the error of our ways. Just because a Synod said the divergencies were sufficiently dealt with does not make it so. Are we not guilty of first setting our agenda and then trying to arrange the facts to make them support it?

*Ed Helder
Wellandport, ON *



Unity? Uniformity? Unanimity?

By E. Tams

The debate continues. Is what keeps us apart from the OPC a matter of obedience to the confessions? Or are the issues of a more practical nature? The proponents of the various positions defend themselves well. I am thankful that we have a forum where we can discuss these issues. The Canadian Reformed Churches have drawn the line – or is it the curtain?

For unity / ecclesiastical fellowship to be realized with the OPC there must be uniformity. Was this necessary? Apparently the delegates to General Synod Fergus, unanimously decided it was. With this decision, the delegates bound the OPC to a particular method of supervising the Lord's Table, replacing the agreement which was reached by the committee mandated by General Synod Abbotsford: "to work towards formalizing a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship . . ." (Acts 1995, Art 106 VI D 1). This committee undertook its task using as a basis for their discussions our churches' grateful acknowledgement that the OPC has demonstrated her commitment to be faithful to the scripture and in defending the Reformed heritage (Acts 1995, Art 106 VI B).

The conclusion of this agreement deserves further attention because it provides the background for this discussion. The Committee for Contact with the OPC (CCOPC) further points out that, "it may be added that these statements are not intended to prevent further discussions. Rather, it is agreed that there is a need to continue to discuss the differences in Confession and in Church polity which can take place within the relation of ecclesiastical fellowship." The CEIR of the OPC on their part state, "we look forward to the next General Synod of Canadian Reformed Churches in 1998 with the expectation that, in view of this agreement, it will act to establish a bond of ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC in which we can continue to discuss our differences as churches, and so, if God grants, arrive at a more perfect unity in doctrine, policy, and life."

Within the proposed agreement we had the principles which had been accepted by the committees of two faithful federations as a basis to continue

discussions within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship, which is the relationship we were seeking. This is an important distinction, for this is different from joining together in one church federation and living under the same church confessions and church order. In a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship members of each federation, remain bound to the confessions and church political documents of the federation to which they belong. By entering into ecclesiastical fellowship we do not bind one another to each other's documents. Rather, we enter a relationship whereby we accept one another as a work of the risen Lord, maintaining visibly the unity of the church.

We are speaking here of the Church of God. General Synod 1977 decided, "with thankfulness to recognize the OPC as a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ." Twenty-two years later General Synod 1998 declared with regard to this decision and subsequent appeals, "That no new grounds for declaring previous decisions contrary to Scripture and confession, and church order have been brought forward. Moreover, that the differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards are not such that they prevent ecclesiastical fellowship but they are divergencies about which there can continue to be discussions among those who belong to the Reformed Churches" (Art 130, VI, C, Act 98). In other words, Synod says that the divergencies are not lawful impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship unless they are of such a nature that they must be considered impediments to recognizing the OPC as a true church. General Synod 1998 once again acknowledged the desire of the OPC to be faithful to the scriptures and in defending the Reformed heritage.

Differences among us should not be something of which we are afraid. Neither should they be avoided. Rather they should be accepted as necessary, to keep us sharp. They should be welcomed and dealt with in a manner fitting the Church of God. Not with high-handed superiority, but gently in love. We may not expect, much less demand, unanimity on every issue. Let us acknowledge that

through discussion we can come to a fuller understanding of what God's word teaches about certain matters. Consider the principle found in Romans 14. After all, we are bound by scripture and confessions, are we not? Or are we bound by particular interpretations and views of the scripture and confessions? This is a necessary distinction.

As churches, we are currently engaged in church unity discussions with, among others, the OPC, the ERQ, and the URCNA. What can these churches realistically expect from us? Unanimity? Uniformity? Unity? We must come to terms with this point. The theologians from all federations will continue to debate the issues. Yet, to some extent they will do this far removed from life in the pew. We no longer live in this world in isolation from each other. Our sons are dating their daughters and visa versa. Us and them? Sounds silly, doesn't it? This is not a battle between the Israelites and the Canaanites. This is not a battle at all, is it? We recognize the worldwide church gathering work of Jesus Christ in each other. As churches, we have a responsibility to our members to speak clearly about the essential matters. We must show leadership with respect to how to treat one another as brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, and how to assist one another in word and deed. We also have a responsibility to acknowledge that we will not get unanimity on all points, and when we are unable to convince each other, to go forward in love. Let us take over the statements found in the Press release, concerning church unity discussions between Canadian Reformed Churches and URCNA: "Further we mutually agreed that while these matters and perceptions must be addressed, this discussion should take place within a context in which our focus will be on all that unites us" (*Clarion*, Oct 30/98, page 531).

Yes the debate goes on, and it must. But may our responsibility to address matters of mutual concern never supercede our responsibility to live together in unity.

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The Prince of Egypt: Moses?

By Keith Sikkema

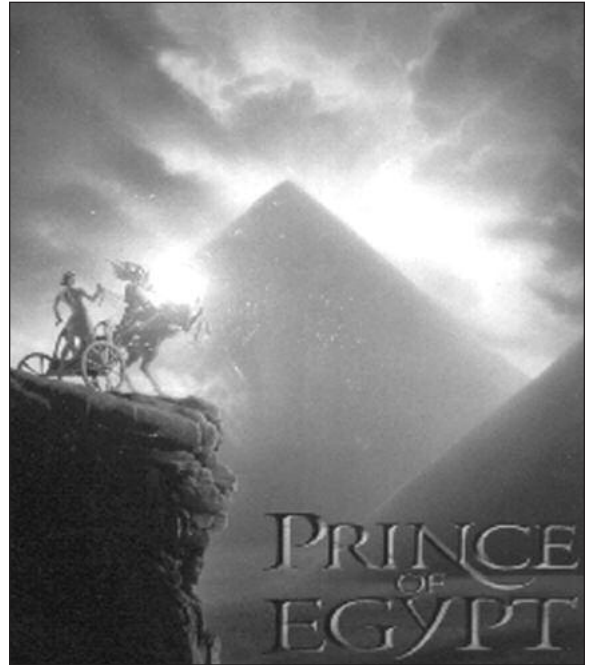
Steven Spielberg's acclaimed animation of Moses, *The Prince of Egypt*, benefited from input of evangelical leaders like James Dobson, Billy Graham, and others. While admitting "some artistic license," producers believe the film is faithful to Scripture. Critics glory that it has "the most spectacular animation ever put on film,"¹ "artistry that adds a new dimension to scenes like the Burning Bush . . .,"² and that it is "aesthetically, morally, and even theologically a good movie."³

Christian reviewers downplay or justify the film's inaccuracies. This "downside is compensated for by the beauty and power with which it presents what the Bible does say. And the best part of the film is its unflinching portrayal of God;"² "Writers . . . took artistic license where they needed to build a tighter, more compelling picture. . . ." ³ Reviewers say: "The awe-inspiring desert vistas, the gargantuan Egyptian monuments, and landscapes that dwarf the tiny human beings create a sense of infinity that . . . helps set a distinctly religious tone;"² "Those who worked on (it) recognized the sacred nature of the source material and responded with awe."³ The critics conclude: "*The Prince of Egypt* . . . may play a providential role in bringing a biblical world-view into the public imagination;"³ ". . . the central tenets of our faith were treated as sacred;" "(Its) level of sophistication raises it . . . to a satisfying and thought-provoking movie for adults."²

Teachers have learned that Bible stories should be faithful to Scripture (Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18), God-centered, and Christ-centered, and must show the redemptive historical line from the Old to the New Testament. The book of Exodus shows how God triumphantly fulfilled his covenant promises to Abraham (Exod 2:24; Heb 11:8-29) by freeing his people from the house of bondage and destruction (Exod 1:9,10,22; 6:1-8;15:1-21), in order that

ultimately Christ could come and sinners be saved. This called for a covenantal response of thankfulness, the rule for which was given at Sinai (Exod 20:2). Though using Moses as his instrument, God mercifully worked this deliverance despite him (Exod 2:11-14; 3:11-4:17; Acts 7:17-34) and despite the Israelites (Acts 7:35-43; Heb 3, 4). Similarly, while his and our enemies drown in their guilt before God, He also saves us, despite ourselves, by his abundant grace from the bondage of sin and Satan, and leads us through to a new life of thankfulness, joy, and glory (Col 2:6-15; Heb 2:14-18; Lord's Day 19). Stories that claim to be faithful to Scripture but are not, and that fail to bring out these perspectives, miss the mark.

It is only through his self-revelation that we fully know God. The Word must be studied first (Deut 6:1-9) and only then can illustrations and visual aids that are not burdened by secular connotations support it – as Dr. Van Dam has pointed out to teachers.⁴ Rev. J. L. van Popta wrote⁵ that people dramatize reality to entertain and to present a message. Actors perform well when they experience their character. In child-centered education, as well as in new hermeneutics, symbols, stories, and experience are more important than accuracy. New hermeneutics holds that we only receive God's revelation when we experience it, and effectively denies Scripture as God's self-revelation. This dovetails in Bible drama, which adds to Scripture in word and action. Drama is always inaccurate; attacks the historical character of God's redemptive acts; is man-centered, not



Christ-centered; purports that faith comes by experience rather than by hearing; depreciates the sacraments; and attacks the objective character and authority of the Word of God. Later, Rev. Van Popta concluded that Reformed "Bible curriculum should be word and story oriented, with image and music playing a secondary and ancillary role. . . . We should not get the students to act out the Bible stories as if their experience will enhance the meaning. Nor should we use Bible story videos. . . ."⁶

The inaccuracies, additions, and deletions in *The Prince of Egypt* are too numerous for me to mention them all, but they underline the validity of concerns with Biblical films and drama. In the film, the basket holding Moses bobs through frightful dangers before Pharaoh's wife rescues it. Moses commits elaborate mischief with his "brother" Rameses. He frees a Midianite slave-girl, Tzipora, who later returns the favor by rescuing him out of a well, and marries him in a pagan feast. Moses

pushes an abusive Egyptian slave-driver off a towering scaffold in full view of many workers, and does not bury him. People play God as they speak his Words and symbols suggest God's presence. Moses meets Pharaoh Rameses with Tzipora and is apologetic to Pharaoh Rameses for betraying his friendship with his demand, "Let my (Moses') people go!" The consecration of the first-born, the institution of the Passover, the perspective to Christ, and the covenant context are absent. The Song of Moses and Miriam is replaced by a New-Age-like song, "There can be miracles when you believe . . ." Rameses groans, "Moses . . ." across the sea, and Moses replies, "Good-bye, my friend. . . ."

Not surprisingly, as far as the message is concerned, the film-makers tried to "kill that kind of preachy thing. That was something we worked very hard to do," said one co-director of the



film.¹ It is disappointing that Christian reviewers were blinded by the spectacular artistry of this film and gave it a recommendation it does not deserve. Should we be entertained by a film that adulterates the Truth?

Notes:


¹John Douglas, "A Biblical Effort," *The Grand Rapids Press*, December 18, 1998, *The Weekend* pp. 4-6.

²Barbara Curtis, "Prince of Egypt," *Christian Renewal*, November 30, 1998, p. 14.

³Gene Edward Veith, "Of Biblical Proportions," *WORLD*, December 19, 1998, p. 24.

⁴cf. Dr. C. van Dam, "Education in the Word (. . .)," *Clarion*, December 1988, pp. 524-525; January 2, 1989, pp. 8-9; January 20, pp. 31-32.

⁵Rev. J. L. van Popta, "May My Four Sons (. . .)?" *Clarion*, November 3, 1995, pp. 510-513.

⁶Rev. J. L. van Popta, "Bible Instruction in our Schools," *Bible Instruction and curriculum: Proceedings of the Bible History Conference*, August 1996. Ed. C. van Halen-Faber. Hamilton, ON: CARE, 1997, pp. 30-37. 

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