

Clarion

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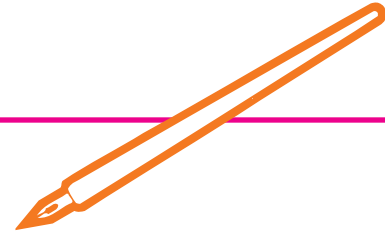
MAY 14, 1999

*Pentecost
and
Kosovo*



Numbers

10:1-10



Pentecost and Kosovo: Is there a link?

Pentecost and KOSOVO opposites?

What has Pentecost to do with Kosovo? Are they not each other's exact opposite? Pentecost is the feast of the church about Christ Jesus and his Holy Spirit. On the basis of his sacrifice for sin and after ascending to the heavenly throne, Christ Jesus received the Holy Spirit who had been promised to God's people. At Pentecost He gave the Spirit to his church to dwell in them (Acts 2:33).

This redemptive work of God is worth celebrating. Through his death our Lord had made atonement for sin. Sin is a destroying force. It turns God's good creation into a place full of evil. Sin, therefore, angers the Creator. But, now that sin was paid for and covered by Christ's blood, God's anger was appeased for every sinner who would embrace Christ in faith. The Spirit was given to work this faith and by dwelling in the believers to sanctify their hearts and lives in new service for God to his glory. Through the indwelling Spirit, the church was to live a new life and proclaim it to the world. The world has to hear and see that Christ Jesus saves the world from sin through his atoning blood and sanctifying Holy Spirit in the way of faith. Saved lives, holy through the Spirit of Christ, are to show the beginning of the total restoration that is coming with the return of Christ.

This gospel which paints a picture of the work of the Spirit of Christ and the Father in the life of believers is the very opposite of what we see in Yugoslavia, in Kosovo. There we see enormous misery and intense suffering. There life is broken down, shattered, crushed. People are groaning. What is the cause? The cause is evidently sin. It is the opposite of godly love that drives Milosevic and his people against the Albanians. But there is hatred in the Kosovo Liberation Army too, fighting for independence and freedom. This lack of love or rather fierce hatred has roots that are centuries long. And half a century of atheistic communism has not done much good either. How is it possible that one group of people, one clan, can do so much evil to another group or clan?

Kosovo is not alone. The same is seen in Sudan, Rwanda, Northern Ireland, the Middle East. All this hatred, hurting and murdering is obviously not from the Holy Spirit.

Pentecost reason for Kosovo?

On the one hand, Pentecost and Kosovo are each other's opposite. On the other hand, there is a connection between the two. This Kosovo is there because some twenty centuries ago God gave Pentecost with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Explaining God's work of salvation at Pentecost, Peter used an Old Testament prophecy. He said to the people: What you see and hear is the fulfilment of the words of the prophet Joel. Joel said two things. First, in the last days God will pour out his Spirit on all flesh, making people, old and

young, prophets. Prophets know God's words, live by them, and teach them. Second, Joel told of "blood and fire and vapors of smoke" (Acts 2:19-21). Blood, fire, and vapors of smoke spoke of war and destruction. A look at Yugoslavia and Kosovo shows exactly this: bloodied people hit by bullets and shrapnel of exploding bombs, fire from missiles dropped from the air, smoke from burning buildings.

"Blood, fire, vapors of smoke," with all the misery implied, are signs of the coming Day of the LORD. This Day is the Day of his wrath. These signs tell of God's judgments on a rebellious world. God is angry because He gave his Son and his Holy Spirit in order that people might believe in Him as their Saviour and be renewed by his Spirit. He who believes in Him will have life. But God's wrath remains on those who disobey the Son by not believing in Him (John 3:36).

In Romans 1, the apostle Paul speaks about the world of unbelief in his days. People were suppressing the truth of God in unrighteousness and refused to serve Him, even though God's power was manifest in creation. Paul saw God's wrath at work in that world. He saw how God gave them over to their own evil thinking, their own base mind and improper conduct. They became filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice, senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless (Rom 1:18-32).

Here we have an important aspect of what is happening in Yugoslavia. When people do not want to be saved from their sins by Christ and to live holy for God through the Holy Spirit, God can surrender them in his wrath to their own evil thinking, filled with hatred, malice, and murder. What Milosevic and his men (and women) are doing is terrible, just as terrible as what Hitler did, and Stalin, and Mao, and many others. It shows again to what human beings can come when God, in his wrath, gives them over to themselves in their own thinking. Blood and fire and smoke are signs of God's judgments. They point to the coming final judgment, because of disobedient unbelief. He who is not ruled by the Spirit of Christ, gives himself over to the dark, enslaving and destroying dominion of Satan. Christ called him "a liar" and "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).

The solution

Today's great western immoral moralist on the throne in America tries very hard to force his solution on Yugoslavia and Kosovo (while he neglects Sudan). However, can a blind and blemished humanistic moralism without Christ, without God's Word and Spirit, succeed? Or will this effort, under God's anger, explode into World War Three, as some expect it will? Let us hope and pray that it will not. But does our modern world deserve better? Do we in Canada deserve

better? Are the Albanians and the Serbs worse sinners than the Americans and the Canadians? Do we here live under God's favour because we are better? Is God's wrath far from the United States and Canada?

Yugoslavia shows us to what atrocities a guilty lost mankind without Christ Jesus can come, when the angry God surrenders people to their own thinking. But Yugoslavia is a sign on the wall for our entire world. What do we in North America see in our society? We see nations in which many abandon faith in Christ and a life guided by his Spirit. If we place our society in the light of Romans 1, we should notice here too the revelation of God's wrath in giving our society over to its own evil thinking. Our societies show a picture that is quite similar to that of the Roman empire in Paul's days. There is no war here. But our societies appear to give themselves more and more in the grip of ungodliness, immorality, selfishness, hatred. Kosovo is a warning; but so is North America. Look at the lying, the sexual immorality, the greed that North American man, who is without God's Spirit, comes to today. God works towards the great Day of Judgment. It is coming. He will come with his justice and wrath for the disobedient who hardened themselves in their sins. He will also come with salvation for those who persevered in faith. Everyone should listen to this urgent divine threat, with its accompanying promise for those who believe and repent: "Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy" (Rev 22:11). Here is sovereign grace and sovereign wrath, worked out in the way of growth in faith and of hardening in unbelief.

The definitive solution will come when Christ returns and cleanses God's earth from all evil. There is also a provisional solution for the meantime in the midst of the revelation of God's wrath in Yugoslavia, and not less in North America. This solution is that the church of Christ perseveres in the true faith and remains faithful to her Lord in holding on to the Word of his Spirit. In this way she can let the light of Christ shine in a dark lost world, calling to repentance with this gospel. May God give the same to his people in North America. C

What's inside?

Around this time of the year we remember the festival of Pentecost. Forty days after He ascended to heaven, our Lord Jesus Christ poured out the Holy Spirit upon the church. The meditation by the Rev. J. Louwse touches on the theme of Pentecost as does the editorial.

We continue publishing Mr. Peter Holtvluwer's series on Evangelicalism. In the last couple of instalments, he outlined some of the historical background. Now he begins examining the doctrines of this movement.

Dr. R. Faber introduces us to a lesser known reformer, John à Lasco. This faithful servant of Jesus Christ, born five hundred years ago in Lask, Poland, influenced Reformed church life in England, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Rev. J. VanRietschoten has made quite a study of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA). He has already written about this church in his column, "Observation Deck." This time he takes a close look at the RPCNA's application of the regulative principle.

Finally, the Rev. J. de Gelder provides us with a Hiliter and so updates us on various things happening here and there in the churches.

GvP



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IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – Pentecost and Kosovo: Is there a link? — J. Geertsema	222
Treasures, New and Old – First, Second, and Third Waves of the Holy Spirit? Really? — John Louwse	224
Evangelicalism – What do Evangelicals Believe (Part 3) — P.H. Holtvluwer	225
The Reformer John à Lasco (1499-1560) — R. Faber	229
Poem – Veni, Creator	231
The Hi-Liter — J. de Gelder	232
Observation Deck — J. VanRietschoten	234
Press Release	236
Our Little Magazine — Aunt Betty	236

By John Louwerse

First, Second, and Third Waves of the Holy Spirit? Really?

Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?

Galatians 3:2b

Have you ever experienced waves come over you? I am not talking about the waves of water on the shore of the sea. I am talking about the waves of the Holy Spirit. According to C. Peter Wagner, professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary School of World Mission, this century has seen three waves of the Holy Spirit. The first wave was the Pentecostal movement, the second wave the charismatic movement, and the third wave, the signs and wonders movement.¹ This third and last wave builds on the previous two waves. It is the third one – the last one – which has been sweeping up around us like a tidal wave in the last few decades of this century. With all three waves there has been a new burst of spiritual energy and activity. The latest burst is the most spectacular! People are seeking out the miraculous signs, be it holy laughter, holy shrieking, holy clapping, and even holy barking. People are also seeking out the miraculous wonders of healing of disease and sickness. The big wave today is the miraculous signs and wonders. If you have not been slain in the Spirit, if you have not broken out in holy laughter, then you may have missed the third wave!

But do we need these waves rolling over us, especially the latest one? Some would have us believe that we are not complete Christians – that we are less spiritual – unless we receive the Spirit in these waves. They say, “You must believe, but you must also receive the Spirit in one of these waves and preferably now the last.” Is this true? Must we experience one of these waves to be full and complete Christians? With this emphasis on these waves of the Spirit, we are left to feel as if we are *have-not Christians*, or *second rate Christians*. May we speak of having any such spectacular experience? No! All we speak of is a plain and simple faith in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Yet, may we separate the working of the Spirit from our simple faith in Christ? The apostle Paul asked the believers in the churches of Galatia, “Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?” When we read this letter, the answer is clear. We have received the Holy Spirit by *hearing with faith*. When you believe in Christ, when you have faith in Christ, you have received the Holy Spirit. When you have heard the Word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed, you are sealed in Him with the promised Holy Spirit. Indeed the simple faith in Christ, which is all that God requires, cannot be separated from the powerful working of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been given to us. He works faith in us. He makes us, by true faith, share in Christ and all his benefits!

The Holy Spirit sharpens our minds, strengthens our self-control and disciplines our emotions.


In the following chapter, we can read that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. All who truly profess the Son have the Spirit of the Son living in them. So much for the thoughts of those who are caught in the waves. They are misguided when they say that the wave of the Holy Spirit comes after you have come to faith in Christ.

The goal of the Spirit is not to produce in us some new type of spiritual or emotional high; rather, the Spirit’s presence and work in us is to bring us to Christ. Christ remains the focal point of the ministry of the Spirit. Let us then be filled with the Spirit of Christ. Moreover, let us in faith look to Christ alone and not be pushed over by the waves of this century. We are not looking for a special

experience of the Spirit! The thing to ask when others make bold claims about the gifts they have and the wonders they perform is this: Who is being glorified here? Man? Human experience? Or is the person and work of Jesus Christ in whom we believe receiving glory?

In faith, we must all focus on Him. We must truly believe in Jesus Christ and walk in obedience to Him. When we truly walk in obedience to Christ, we will then show the fruit of the Spirit. And what is the fruit of the Spirit? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. *Self-control!* The Spirit does not make us less fit for life and service in this world, but more fit. Rather than overriding our capabilities, the receiving of the Spirit sharpens our minds, strengthens our self-control and disciplines our emotions. Indeed the effect of the Spirit is the renewal of our minds to the praise and the glory of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ.

¹C. Peter Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit*, (Ann Arbour: Vine 1988), 15.

Rev. John Louwerse was the minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Houston B.C., but has very recently been installed in Fergus, Ontario. 

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Evangelicalism – What do Evangelicals Believe (Part 3)

By P. H. Holtvluwer

In the first two articles we discussed the history of Evangelicalism as it began in the English Revival of the eighteenth century and spilled over into the American Great Awakenings, and as it now presents itself to us today. In the following two articles we turn to examine what it is that Evangelicals believe. What are their doctrinal beliefs? What are they based on? How do we evaluate these beliefs? It is to these questions that we now turn and attempt to answer.

Complexity of the Evangelical world

When we are evaluating what it is that Evangelicals believe we must understand that we are not summarizing the totality of what every Evangelical confesses. What I mean is that because Evangelicals are made up of Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Reformed, Pentecostals, and now even Roman Catholics, not to mention groups which are outside of these churches and refer to themselves as Evangelical churches, Evangelicals will not all believe the same doctrines. Lutherans and Baptists will disagree on infant baptism, and Methodists will disagree with most Presbyterians on the freedom of the will. And there are other differences as well.

When we discuss what Evangelicals believe then we are referring to the doctrines which all of these groups hold in common. Evangelicals are a diverse group of individuals and yet they hold to a shared set of doctrines in such a way that they may be identified as a distinct group. (I refer you to the definition of Evangelicalism which I provided in the first article.) Think of it this way: in Canadian Reformed circles we have the Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort) to which we all profess adherence. The three Forms of Unity bind us together in the unity of the true faith. While we are all individ-

uals and have our own thoughts on certain matters pertaining to the Christian life, yet we all agree on the summary of the Christian faith as it is found in these confessions.

Similarly Evangelicals, while they have no such confessions to bind them together, nevertheless hold to a more or less stable set of beliefs to which they all agree even while they may reserve the right to interpret them in their own way. This set of beliefs can be described in various ways but to simplify the matter I have decided to follow historian David Bebbington's description of Evangelical beliefs. Bebbington organizes Evangelical beliefs under four headings: *conversionism, crucicentrism, biblicism, activism*.¹

The conversion experience could not stop short of producing a life of piety.

Conversionism

Conversionism is simply "the belief that lives need to be changed,"² and is one of the key characteristics that have long defined Evangelicalism. Throughout its history, preachers "urged their hearers to turn away from their sins in repentance and to Christ in faith."³ Typical conversion experiences included sincerity, agony, guilt, and immense relief. In Pietism and the revivalism of both Great Britain and North America there was a "desire for vibrant personal religion," and this translated into an emphasis being laid on "individually experienced conversion." The conversion experience became one of the well-known hallmarks of Evangelicalism.⁴

The actual doctrine which underlies the experience of conversion is that of justification by faith alone, which certainly is one of the central doctrines all

Evangelicals share. This doctrine of justification by faith can be described as follows:

Because human beings are estranged from God by their sinfulness, there is nothing they can do by themselves to win salvation. All human actions, even good works, are tainted by sin, and so there is no possibility of gaining merit in the sight of God. Hence salvation has to be received, not achieved. Jesus Christ has to be trusted as Saviour.⁵

Once this reality is discovered by a person, through the working of the Holy Spirit, then he would indeed repent and turn to Christ for salvation from sin, and in this way experience conversion.

Closely coupled with justification by faith is the emphasis on living a life of holiness. The conversion experience could not stop short of producing a life of piety. One eighteenth century Anglican vicar is quoted as saying, "faith is not understood, much less possessed, if it produces no more holiness than could possibly be any other way attained."⁶ Evangelical theologian David Bloesch, in an historical overview, notes the same emphasis:

At the same time an emphasis was placed on the Christian life that is not found in the mainstream of the Reformation. It was said that Christian practice is the cardinal evidence and consequence of a genuine faith, and if such practice is not visible in the lives of believers then this proves that they are in fact not justified. Yet the Pietists were always quick to affirm that a godly life does not itself procure the remission of sins, for this is already a reality in the person's life through his faith.⁷

Bloesch later quotes John Wesley, who emphasizes the point:

If we duly join faith and works in all our preaching, we shall not fail of a blessing. But of all preaching, what is usually called gospel preaching is

the most useless, if not the most mischievous; a dull, yea or lively, harangue on the suffering of Christ or salvation by faith without strongly inculcating holiness.⁸

In addition to the emphasis on a life of holiness, conversionism also includes the doctrine of the assurance of salvation. This doctrine arose in the Reformation in opposition to Rome and later to the Arminians, and is perhaps best summarized in the Canons of Dort chapters one and five. However, Evangelicals moved away from the Reformation teaching by putting the ground of the assurance of salvation not in the *content* of faith but rather in the *act of believing* itself. "Whereas the Reformers saw the ground of certainty in Jesus Christ himself and the promises of the Gospel,"⁹ Evangelicals such as Jonathan Edwards (of America) taught that, "Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination [so the Pietists] as by action." For John Wesley the "assurance of faith is a special gift which ordinarily occurs at the time of the new birth. This assurance derives from both the witness of the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit."¹⁰ This emphasis was one of the qualities which set Evangelicals apart from either the main-line Reformation or the Roman Catholics.¹¹

Thus conversion in the Reformed sense of the term is never simply a past action but is rather an ongoing process which indeed begins at some point but does not stop until we leave this life.

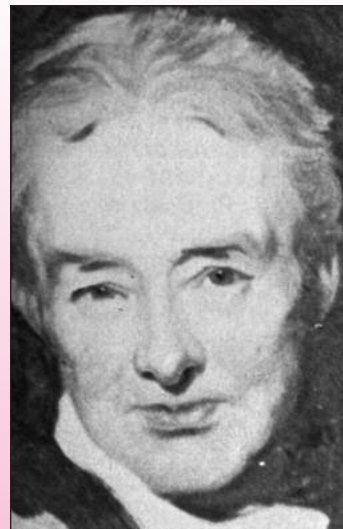
As for the timing of conversion, British Evangelicalism never had serious qualms over allowing for both sudden and gradual conversions, although various elements within the movement did stress at times the need for a sudden conversion. In general, though, Anglican Evangelicals did, in the words of Charles Simeon, "require nothing *sudden*."¹² Canadian Evangelicals, like their British counterparts, also do not over-emphasize a sudden conversion, for while fifty-four percent trace their conversion to a "specific experience," a full forty-five percent describe it as "gradual, over time."¹³

The means of conversion, however, has historically been a more contentious issue than that of its timing. The orthodox teaching of the Reformation clearly credited the Holy Spirit with the work of conversion, while nineteenth century Evangelicals moved away from this position. Apparently eager to increase the number of conversions, some began to teach that in conversion "the crucial factor is a person's will to be saved"¹⁴ and so a Pelagian or semi-Pelagian outlook reappeared in Arminian and Wesleyan religion.¹⁵ Today, Evangelicals are divided on this point, with some giving credit solely to the Holy Spirit for conversion and others allowing for the free choice of the will.

The last issue bound up with conversionism is the relation of conversion to baptism. Because there is a stress on the conversion experience, which involves the conscious choosing of a person for Jesus Christ (either in the Arminian sense or the Reformation sense of that phrase), many Evangelicals have difficulty with infant baptism. For most Evangelicals baptism is the sign and seal of their commitment to God, rather than God's promise to us, and usually comes on the heels of a conversion experience. Since infants cannot experience a conversion nor make a commitment of any kind, many Evangelicals balk at the idea of baptizing infants. However, other Evangelicals view infant baptism as a necessity, as a replacement of circumcision and then as a command from Christ. Here too there is a split opinion within the Evangelical camp.

Evaluation of conversionism

On the point of the conversion experience upon which Evangelicals put a great deal of stress, even if they are split as to whether it is a gradual process or an instantaneous event, the Reformed confessions speak differently. Lord's Day 33 of the Heidelberg Catechism is perhaps the most direct on this subject and there we confess that the "true repentance or conversion of man . . . is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new." This dying of the old nature and coming to life of the new is not instantaneous nor is it a process completed over time in this life, but instead it is for us a life-long endeavour. Evangelicals speak about having been converted. They consider conversion as a past event, whether it was an instant or a process whereas



William Wilberforce

Reformed people speak of an ongoing conversion. Lord's Day 33 equates conversion with repentance, which means that every day, even continually every day, we are to repent from our sins, grieve for those sins, and being forgiven those sins then joyfully turn and do good works. This turning from our sinful ways happens every day, since we sin every day. Thus conversion in the Reformed sense of the term is never simply a past action but is rather an ongoing process which indeed begins at some point but does not stop until we leave this life. In the confessions conversion is also called "regeneration," which in turn is equated with "sanctification." (See also Canons of Dort III/IV, 11,12; Belg. Conf. Art. 24, 35)

The doctrine of justification by faith alone which underlies the conversion experience for Evangelicals is, however, a perfectly Reformed doctrine as well. We hardly need to belabour the point, but I will refer you to Belgic Confession Articles 22, 24; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7, 24; and Canons of Dort I, 2,3,5; II, 5 wherein we find this doctrine spelled out. This is one of the doctrines we have in common with Evangelicals.

The Evangelical emphasis on living a life of holiness is also the same as it is in Scripture and the Reformed confessions. You can think in the first place of Leviticus 20:26, "You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." Our confessions speak of the same thing in Belgic Confession, Article 24, "[True faith] makes

him [a man] live a new life and frees him from the slavery of sin. Therefore it is not true that this justifying faith makes man indifferent to living a good and holy life." In the Reformed confessions, as I already mentioned, conversion is basically equivalent to sanctification, and sanctification is the process of becoming holy. Sanctification is the same thing as putting to death the old man and raising to life the new man within us. Thus for us Reformed people the ideas of "conversion" and "living a life of holiness" are one and the same. The life of holiness which Evangelicals refer to is basically the same as our life of thanksgiving which the Catechism explains in Lord's Days 32-52. I refer here once more to Lord's Day 33 and also to Lord's Day 44 for a clear statement of what a life of holiness entails. Lord's Day 32 puts the matter quite strongly by spelling out the great importance of such a life of holy living done in thankfulness to God for His salvation. No person who lives an unholy life, who is impenitent in his walk of life, can inherit the kingdom of God.

The assurance of salvation is also a Reformed doctrine, though as I mentioned the source of that assurance differs from what some Evangelicals believe. Whereas Methodists find their assurance in the act of believing in Christ, we find our assurance of salvation in Christ Himself, and all His merits. Our act of believing in Christ is not what assures us of salvation, but only what Christ has done gives us this assurance. Perhaps the clearest statement of this is in Canons of Dort V, 10,

This assurance is not produced by a certain private revelation besides or outside the Word, but by faith in the promises of God, . . . by the testimony of the Holy Spirit . . . that we are children and heirs of God, . . . and finally by the serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and good works.

The Canons here clearly place faith in the promises of God as the basis for our assurance of salvation so that it is the absolute reliability of God's promises which gives to us assurance of our salvation. Our faith may at times be shaky or weak, but God's promises continue to provide us with the needed assurance of salvation.

The Evangelical belief, at least on the part of some of them, that man can choose for Christ on his own or perhaps in conjunction with the work of the Holy Spirit is of course not in ac-

cordance with the Reformed confessions. We confess openly that the true faith we all have in Jesus Christ is worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, through the preaching of the Word (Heid. Cat., Lord's Day 7, Belg. Conf. Art. 22, 24). The Canons of Dort, III/IV, 10 are explicit on this point, "[The fact that some] who are called by the ministry of the gospel do come . . . is to be ascribed to God . . . He gives them faith and repentance." Then in Article 14, "Nor is it a gift in the sense that God confers only the power to believe and then awaits from man's free will the consent to believe or the act of believing . . . [rather He] brings about in man both the will to believe and the act of believing." Thus this tendency on the part of certain Evangelicals to put some stock in man's ability to come to faith on his own apart from the working of the Spirit must be rejected.

The basic activity of Evangelical activism is the evangelism of the world.

The last element in conversionism regarding the Evangelical tendency to reject infant baptism must also be identified as unscriptural and un-Reformed. The very clear line in Scripture, from Genesis through Revelation is that God has established a covenant with believers and their seed. Children were included in that covenant from the beginning (see Gen 17) and were promised to be included in the new covenant which was inaugurated by our Lord Jesus Christ (see prophecies in Jer 32:36-41; Ezek 27:15-28). Children received the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament and Colossians 2:12-14 tells us that baptism has now replaced circumcision and is thus the New Testament sign of

the covenant. It thus stands to reason that the baptism of infants would have been the most normal thing in the world for the New Testament Christians, which is why there is no direct command to baptize infants. In the context of the early New Testament church – largely made up of converted Jews – it was a given in those days that children would be included in the covenant. The Reformed faith has always upheld infant baptism as we confess in Belgic Confession, Article 33, 34, and in Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 26, 27.

Activism

Bebbington defines activism as "the expression of the gospel in effort,"¹⁶ which flows right out of the conversion experience. This is manifested in the desire and efforts to effect the conversions of others. Once a person has undergone conversion, has seen and experienced the most important thing that a person can experience, then that person actively seeks the conversion of others. The basic activity of Evangelical activism is the evangelism of the world, of all those who are not yet converted to faith in Jesus Christ. This evangelistic bend is accompanied by great zeal and enthusiasm for this task. To be converted is to seek the conversions of others, and to do that with vigour. This Evangelical characteristic was the driving force, humanly speaking, behind the great nineteenth and even twentieth century mission efforts. Today in Canada sixty-four percent of Evangelicals "agree strongly" that it is very important to encourage non-Christians to become Christians,¹⁷ and so it remains a strong characteristic of the modern movement.

Besides a heavy emphasis on evangelism, activism includes also philanthropic causes, that is, doing good works within society at large. Historically many social causes were taken up

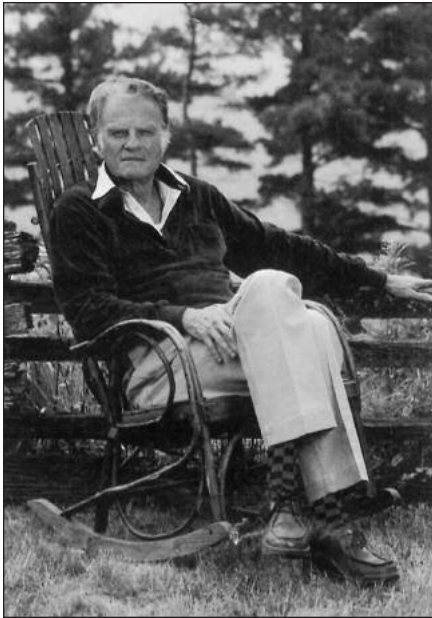


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Billy Graham

by the Evangelicals. The anti-slavery campaign led by William Wilberforce, the prison conditions improvement campaign led by John Howard, and the Salvation Army founded by William Booth are just some of the famous examples of Evangelicals putting their newly-found faith into action. The motive behind these causes is simply the desire to show love for God and to all men.

Evaluation of activism

The Evangelical stress on evangelism or mission has a positive side and a negative side. The positive side is that their zeal to spread the gospel and so be instrumental in bringing others to faith is commendable. It is in harmony with the Great Commission received by the church in Matthew 28:19-20 to "Go and make disciples of all nations . . ." The Canons of Dort also infer such a desire to spread the gospel when it speaks of the earnest call of the gospel in III/IV, 8, "But as many as are called by the gospel are earnestly called, for God earnestly and most sincerely reveals in His Word what is pleasing to Him, namely that those who are called should come to Him." If God is then pleased to earnestly call people by the preaching of the gospel, does it not naturally follow that we must endeavour to ring that call of the gospel out to all people? We may not then reject efforts to evangelize with objections like "Forget about it – it's not our task." The New Testament is clear and the confessions presuppose that the church

has a strong mandate to evangelize, and this may not be limited to foreign countries either.

The negative side of the Evangelical stress on evangelism is that it can be stressed at the expense of other doctrines which are as equally important to maintain such as those dealing with the church. The nineteenth century saw the rise of numerous mission societies, some of which were openly inter-denominational. But mission work should never be the work of "mission societies," but is properly the work of the local church, which Evangelicals also today can overlook.

The second element within activism, namely performing good works within society at large, is also something commendable on the part of Evangelicals. The basic and undisputable biblical command is to "love your neighbour as yourself," and this can be manifested in a number of different ways, including combatting the social evils of the day. I do not want to advocate a "Social Gospel" where all that is done with the good news of Jesus Christ is to try to make society a better place to live. That is not the point here at all. Rather, when the gospel is faithfully preached to the congregation and it in turn is earnestly worked with by the members of the church, then it will produce good works in the members of the church. And these good works may well be on the public, social level.

Our good deeds are to be seen by those in the world for the purpose of bringing glory to God and thereby winning our neighbour for Christ.

Some additional biblical support for doing good works for the benefit of people outside the church can be found in Matthew 5:13-16, where our Lord Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth [i.e. not of the church only] . . . you are the light of the world. . . . In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Our good deeds are to be seen by those in the world for the purpose of bringing glory to God and thereby winning our neighbour for Christ. The Apostle Peter also gives us direction here in 1 Peter

2:12, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." Here too our good works are to be on display for those around us, not to build up our own egos but only that they may glorify God. Thus good works may be done and indeed ought to be done where our worldly neighbours can see them.

In all this we must bear in mind what a good work is. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 33 tells us that a good work is one which is done out of true faith, in accordance with God's law, and dedicated to His glory. Therefore public deeds such as the anti-slavery campaign of William Wilberforce or John Howard's prison clean-up must agree with these criteria, and not be done simply out of a humanitarian love for the fellow man. In our day one of the great social evils is abortion, the mass killing of the unborn. We may take our cue from Evangelicals and work harder on this front so that God's name may receive the glory when people see in us the love for God and the neighbour.

¹David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989) p. 5.

²Ibid, p. 5.

³Ibid, p. 5.

⁴Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1993), p. 23.

⁵Bebbington, p.6.

⁶Henry Venn in Ibid, p. 6.

⁷Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology, Volume One: God, Authority, and Salvation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982) p. 232.

⁸John Wesley, quoted in Bloesch, Vol. 1, p. 233.

⁹Bloesch, Vol 1, p. 237.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 237. What is enclosed within square brackets is my addition.

¹¹Bebbington, p. 7.

¹²Ibid, p. 8. Italics his.

¹³George A. Rawlyk, *Is Jesus Your Personal Saviour? In Search of Canadian Evangelicalism in the 1990s* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996) p. 119.

¹⁴Bebbington, p. 8.

¹⁵Bloesch, Vol 1, p. 199.

¹⁶Bebbington, p. 3.

¹⁷G.A. Rawlyk, *Is Jesus Your Personal Saviour?* p. 123.

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The Reformer John à Lasco (1499-1560)

By R. Faber

Introduction

It was five hundred years ago that the Polish reformer John à Lasco was born.¹ Not restricting his activities to his native land, à Lasco played a considerable role in the life of Reformed churches in Germany, England, and the low countries. As a churchman who borrowed what he deemed best in Luther, Zwingli, Bucer and others, à Lasco sought to develop harmony between protestant groups rather than to advance his own ideas. À Lasco's international experiences afforded him a perspective upon the affairs of church and state that was appreciated by many. Wishing especially to apply Reformed doctrine to the life of the churches, à Lasco promoted the development towards the writing of confessions, church orders, and liturgies. While the position he assumed in these matters evoked opposition from hardened Anabaptists, Lutherans, and others, many of à Lasco's moderate formulations were adopted eventually in the now widely used professions of the Reformed faith. It will be worthwhile, therefore, to reflect upon the career and influence of à Lasco.

à Lasco sought to develop harmony between protestant groups rather than to advance new ideas.

À Lasco was well-connected: his uncle, also called John, was the archbishop of Gnesen in Poland, and his brothers were pursuing influential careers in politics and government. Enjoying his uncle's patronage and interest, à Lasco studied internationally before assuming ecclesiastical and diplomatic offices in Poland. But whereas the archbishop hoped that



John à Lasco

young John would succeed him, à Lasco was influenced by reform-minded thinkers, and he befriended Erasmus. In becoming leader of the Christian humanists in Poland, à Lasco developed a critical stance towards the established church, and also towards Lutheranism. Further compelled by political changes not favorable to his own prominent family, à Lasco decided that his future lay in western Europe. Thus in 1537 he quit Poland to undertake studies in the lowlands.

Emden

À Lasco's marriage to the daughter of a cloth-merchant in 1540 signaled his break with Roman Catholicism and put an end to the financial support he was receiving from the church. Two years later he accepted an invitation from Countess Anna to supervise the fledgling Reformed churches in East-Friesland, and the family moved to Emden. There, the modest changes included the removal of images from the churches and the appointing of elders.

As Superintendent of the churches scattered around Emden, à Lasco tried to forge some harmony between the ministers, who, like many of the believers, were of diverse theological backgrounds. To this end, à Lasco composed a simple catechism and a treatise on the Lord's Supper. He also produced the *Summary of the Doctrine of the East-Frisian Churches*, a crude collection of basic tenets drawn from the writings of Zwingli and Calvin. While the document contained remnants of Romanist teaching and therefore was criticized by Melancthon and others, it was the forerunner of a later, much-improved church order.

In 1549 political changes in East Friesland forced the Reformed believers into retreat. Under great pressure from Emperor Charles V, Countess Anna put into effect the Augsburg Interim. The terms of this decree, which was intended as a temporary arrangement of compromise between Reformers and Romanists, were such that à Lasco could not accept them in good conscience.

Moreover, one of the conditions laid down by the Emperor was the expulsion of à Lasco. Concerned for the welfare of the churches under his supervision, à Lasco visited England briefly in order to assess, among other things, the possibility of finding refuge there.

London

Fortunately, in England ecclesiastical change was in the offing during the reign of the young Edward VI. The archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, was actively reforming the Church of England, and to that end welcomed the assistance of the continental Reformers. Within a year he appointed à Lasco Superintendent of the so-called Strangers Church in London, a collection of congregations consisting of Italian, French, and Dutch refugees of religious persecution on the continent. The decree of the Privy Council, which permitted the Strangers church legal non-conformity and the right to worship according to the "biblical and apostolic" custom, was intended to control the seemingly unorganized and potentially troublesome group of sojourners. At the same time, Cranmer could observe the church as a possible model for the Church of England.

à Lasco's moderate formulations were adopted eventually in the now widely used professions of the Reformed faith.

Aided by four ministers, à Lasco sought to unite the Reformed believers in doctrine and life. To this end he composed a confession of the Strangers Church, a treatise on the Reformed teaching and practice of the Lord's Supper, and a church order. In organizing the churches he was assisted ably by the prominent elder, Jan Utenhove, who also translated some of à Lasco's writings into Dutch and published a Dutch psalter for use in the worship services. One of the ministers, Marten Micronius, composed an influential abridged Dutch version of the Latin church order, and a widely used Dutch catechism. À Lasco himself organized regular meetings of the ministers and elders, oversaw the exercise of the sacraments and discipline, and effected decency and good order generally. Some have esti-

ated that membership in the congregations reached four thousand.

Uniting protestant groups into a pan-Reformed entity was à Lasco's goal from 1556-1560.

The somewhat unexpected accession to the throne by Mary Tudor in 1553 put a sudden end to the Strangers Church. Being Romanist, Mary rescinded the protestant decrees of her predecessor and ordered the congregations to disband. Accompanied by Utenhove and about 175 members of the congregation, à Lasco sails to Denmark, where the flock spends a miserable winter. Harassed by Lutherans wishing to impose their doctrine and practice of the Lord's Supper, the Reformed believers and their leader travel southwards, eventually reaching Emden. There à Lasco serves as minister of one of the congregations for a brief period, before moving in 1556 to Frankfurt-am-Main, where he leads a Dutch Reformed church.

Krakow

When John Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger learned that King Sigismund II was about to reform the church in Poland, they encouraged à Lasco to repatriate. The King's adherence to the principle of religious toleration was interpreted favorably, and à Lasco returned to Krakow in 1556. Before his arrival, Felix Cruciger, the leader of the few Reformed congregations, had already arranged a synod to unite the various protestant groups against the powerful Romanist church. In fact, unifying these groups into a pan-Reformed entity was à Lasco's main objective from 1556-1560.

Unfortunately, the unification of Reformed believers in Poland would not be achieved easily, for three reasons. First, there were considerable theological differences between the parties involved. At the numerous synods held to discuss divergences, it became clear that there was no doctrinal unity in such matters as the two sacraments, the Trinity, and the mediating work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the end, Lutherans, Calvinists, the Czech Brethren, and others, found little common ground. Second, numerous sectarians who pro-

moted their own teachings were confusing the situation in Poland. While John Calvin expressed genuine interest in the developments there, he could not be persuaded to come to Poland and provide theological leadership. Evidence suggests that à Lasco, who was a churchman rather than theologian, was not able to clear away the misleading teachings which clouded the theological picture. The third reason for the difficulty in unifying the protestants was the opposition of Roman Catholicism. Led by the Jesuits, and supported by the king, Polish Roman Catholics reacted to the trend of reform. And so it would not be until 1570, a decade after à Lasco's death, that a protestant union of sorts took place in Poland.

à Lasco was more a churchman than a theologian.

Nevertheless, à Lasco and other leaders advanced the Reformed faith in Poland in several ways. The now completed *Church Order* of the London Strangers Church was published to guide churches in Poland and elsewhere, and a translation of the Bible into Polish was undertaken. À Lasco worked towards the adoption of a Polish Confession, and promoted Reformed schools and seminaries. But in 1560, after a lengthy illness, the "naked servant of the naked Saviour Jesus Christ," as à Lasco described himself, died.

Conclusion: À Lasco's influence

It is clear that à Lasco's contributions to the young Reformed churches were limited by the unfortunate circumstances in which these often found themselves. In East Friesland the imposition of the Augsburg Interim hindered the churches around Emden so much that they did not flourish even in later years. In London, the Strangers church was driven underground when Queen Mary repealed the protestant policies of Edward VI. When the churches were re-established upon her death in 1559, they were much weakened. And in Poland à Lasco failed to unite protestant factions; the differences between them were so great that no united front could be formed against Roman Catholicism.

Despite these failures, however, the churches served by à Lasco did perform an important function in the latter

JOHN À LASCO

1499	Born in Lask, Poland
1514-1518	Studies in Vienna, Bologna, and Rome
1521	Ordained as Roman Catholic priest
1531	Appointed royal secretary in Krakow, Poland
1537	Travels and studies in western Europe
1540	Marriage ends financial support of Romanist church Moves to Emden, East-Friesland
1543	Appointed Superintendent of East-Frisian Reformed churches
1544	Publishes <i>Summary of the Doctrine of the East-Frisian Church</i>
1549	Augsburg Interim imposed in East-Friesland
1550	Settles in London, England Named Superintendent of the Strangers Churches by Edward VI
1551	Publishes the <i>Compendium of Doctrine</i>
1553	Accession of Mary Tudor suppresses Strangers Church Travels with parishioners to Denmark; harassed by Lutherans
1555	Publishes <i>Church Order</i> Returns briefly to Emden
1556	Repatriates; promotes Reformation in Poland Develops confession, debates Lutherans, Anabaptists and Romanists
1560	Dies in Pinczow, Poland

half of the sixteenth century. The Emden congregations provided ready support to Reformed believers “under the cross” of persecution in the lowlands. Similarly, the London church was regarded as a source of refuge and guidance by many who were hounded from the continent for their faith. When persecutions in their homelands were relaxed, the hundreds of Reformed believers who had sojourned in England returned to the continent enriched by their experience in London. For this reason the Strangers Church has been called the “mother and nursery” of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. And in Poland, the churches led by à Lasco provided a Reformed witness.

à Lasco contributed to the formation of liturgies, church orders, and confession.


On another level, à Lasco personally influenced a number of younger Reformers who were instrumental in the composition of the confessions and church orders. Among these was Zacharias Ursinus, author of the *Hei-*

delberg Catechism, whom à Lasco met in 1556. It has been suggested that themes, topics, or expressions in no less than thirty-five questions of the *Catechism* may be traced to the formulations of à Lasco and the other leaders of the London churches. Another was Guido de Brès, author of the *Belgic Confession*. Having spent several years

in London and in contact with à Lasco, de Brès was influenced by both the teachings and writings of the Polish Reformer. It has been pointed out, for example, that the theme of the comfort of the faith in times of persecution, which appears in the *Confession*, is prominent in the writings of à Lasco.

And then there was Marten Micronius, minister in one of the London congregations and collaborator of à Lasco. Especially for Reformed Churches in and from the Netherlands, Micronius’ work is important, because he provided the earliest Dutch-language church order and catechism, both of which were based on à Lasco’s work. The influential *Christelijke Ordinancien* (1554) was a shortened version of the London *Church Order*, while the *Kleyne Catechismus* (1552) borrowed heavily from à Lasco’s Latin catechism. To give but one example of the significance of the *Church Order*, we may note that, via Micronius’ translation, the doctrine and practice of church discipline, which à Lasco adopted from Martin Bucer and emphasized in London, became a hallmark of the Dutch Reformed Churches. In sum, à Lasco contributed to the formation of liturgies, church orders, and confessions, which would express the unity and structure of Reformed churches in the seventeenth century and beyond.

¹For J. Faber, on his seventy-fifth birthday.

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

Veni, Creator

*Come, Holy Ghost, the Maker, come;
Take in the souls of thine thy place;
Thou whom our hearts had being from,
Oh, fill them with thy heavenly grace.
Thou art that comfort from above
The Highest doth by gift impart;
Thou spring of life, a fire of love,
And the anointing Spirit art.*

*Thou in thy gifts art manifold;
God’s right-hand finger thou art, Lord;
The Father’s promise made of old,
Our tongues enriching by thy word.
Oh, give our blinded senses light;
Shed love into each heart of our,
And grant the body’s feeble plight
May be enabled by thy power.*

*Far from us drive away the foe,
And let a speedy peace ensue:
Our leader also be, that so
We every danger may eschew.
Let us be taught the blessed creed
Of Father, and of Son, by thee;
And how from both thou dost proceed,
That our belief it still may be.*

*To thee, the Father, and the Son
(Whom past and present times adore),
The One in Three and Three in One,
All glory be forevermore.*

Charlemagne (?). Translated by George Wither, 1623

THE HI-LITER

News from Here and There

By J. de Gelder

Ancaster

By the time you'll read this we will be well on our way towards the summer, but what Rev. Van Popta wrote in the Ancaster bulletin is still interesting:

Recently a few people have asked me what we are to think of the references to "Xmas." At first glance it looks offensive. It looks like "Christ" has been taken out of Christmas and replaced with an X. It makes us think of the unknown x of an algebraic equation. That would be offensive. However it is not as bad as it looks. The "X" represents the Greek letter CHI, the first letter of the name Christ. (A Greek CHI looks very much like our letter X.) Since early times the church used this as an abbreviation for the name of Christ. In English church history you will find the abbreviations Xtians, Xtianity, and Xmas (to be pronounced "Christians," "Christianity," and "Christmas" respectively). Other variations to be pronounced "Christmas" are X'tmas and Xstmas. "Xmas" would be an incorrect pronunciation.

Burlington Ebenezer

The consistory of Burlington *Ebenezer* discussed some procedures and regulations, and one thing the brothers decided was:

The consistory decided that any member leaving the congregation without an attestation to a sisterchurch will be announced as a withdrawal.

As such a clear and straightforward decision that may prevent some difficult discussions in the future. But it also evokes some questions, depending on how you would define a withdrawal. Does it mean: to stop being a member here? Or: to withdraw yourself from the church gathering work of the Lord Jesus Christ, as it occurs in this world according to Q/A 54 HC? In case the latter definition was meant, you wonder whether somewhat more justice should have been done to what we do confess with regard to the church in Lord's Day 21, and in Art.27 BC. Of course, if someone moves from Burlington, to, let's say Smithville, and he refuses to ask for his attestation, you could call that a withdrawal. But what if someone moves to an area in the world where we do not have a sister church, but his desire is to continue to serve the Lord, also in that area. He does cease to be a member of – in this case – Burlington *Ebenezer*. But does he also, by that very fact, turn his back to the church gathering work of Christ? Not necessarily, I would say. Sometimes it may be better to avoid the word "withdrawal."

Another thing the consistory of Burlington *Ebenezer* has discussed was the proper procedure of Baptism. We read:

At the Consistory Meeting of November 2, 1998, the consistory came to a consensus on

A. Why the father should present the baby for baptism;

B. Why only the parents should come to the front with the infant while their other children remain in the pew.

For A as well as for B a list of reasons was added in the bulletin. I will not go into this whole matter, but one sentence struck me. The consistory reasoned:

The concept "what is not necessarily forbidden is permitted" is offset by the Reformed principle: "what is not expressly commanded should be avoided."

I think that I understand the intention, but is it not a tricky formulation, "what is not expressly commanded should be avoided?" How Reformed is this principle? With this principle the Free Church of Scotland defends its disapproval of organs in the church. And on this basis one could even defend that we should not have infant baptism at all! Don't get me wrong, I am not advocating baptist views. I wholeheartedly believe that God's covenant is with the believers and their children, as we confess in Q/A 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism. But here the point is: should we indeed avoid what is not expressly commanded? I am not so sure.

With regard to decision B the consistory wrote, among other things:

The focus in baptism should be on the child receiving the sign and seal of the covenant whereby our gracious and faithful God ingrafts him/her into the church. Therefore, baptism is a congregational celebration of God's covenant faithfulness in which God should receive all the praise and attention. This should not be impeded by having the whole family stand together at the front so that the attention is drawn to them.

I was wondering: does "having the whole family (the believers and their children!) stand together at the front" indeed impede the fact that baptism is a congregational celebration of God's covenant faithfulness in which God should receive all the praise and attention? Why?

Brampton

Once in a while an old issue pops up again in council or consistory discussions, I read in the *Brampton Messenger* the following:

The council at one of its sessions discussed the significance of the handshake. It was agreed that the handshake before the service begins signifies that the minister does not enter the pulpit on his own authority, but that he is authorized to do so by the Consistory. And the handshake at the end signifies that he has fulfilled and finished his task. It does therefore not express agreement with every word he has said. If he does not proclaim the Word of God rightly then that serious matter has to be dealt with in a meeting of the Consistory.

I find this handshake also encouraging for the minister. It says something like "Reverend, you are not on your own. We as elders share with you, and support you in the

wonderful, but heavy responsibility to give spiritual guidance to God's people."

Langley

Some times you read about political decisions, court cases, developments in the field of public morals, and other matters that are threatening for our freedom as Christians, or that attack the Name of the Lord in our society. In the Church News of the Fraser Valley Rev. J. Visscher suggested:

It would be a good thing if a number of members formed a Public Affairs Committee that would monitor political and legal developments, alerting us about dangerous decisions, as well as supplying us with names and addresses where letters of protest can be sent.

An excellent suggestion, I think. Not only for Langley, but for all the churches. And in smaller congregations, located in one area people could combine their efforts in this field. In the past (15 or more years ago) there was in several churches an ARPA (which stood for Association for Reformed Political Action), or a political society with a different name. Today there is only one left, which is, as far as I know, sound asleep. Back then the focus was perhaps more on study, and some may have had the hope that one day it would be possible to participate in provincial, or even federal elections. Since this did never materialize, the whole idea of "political action" became just dry theory, and died a quiet death. Seeing the developments in our society, we should be ready for a creative revival.

Surrey

In the short report of a council meeting of *Maranatha* Church in Surrey it said:

Several letters are received from the membership regarding the use of communal cups from a sanitary perspective, versus individual cups for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In consideration of these concerns and others expressed verbally, previously, Council is considering how to proceed. Since this would mean quite a change it is decided to postpone a decision on this matter and allow for a time of reflection on the essence of one cup versus many, the concern over hygienics and how the membership can still participate as one body.

Recently this issue requires again the attention of various councils. In other churches it was discussed only a few years ago. Would it not be beneficial if somehow the study material, the reports, and information collected by those churches that have dealt with this, as well as the conclusions they have come to, with the grounds, would be available for others? You don't even have to come to the same decision *per se* – although that would be nice – but at least not every one would have to do all the groundwork over and over again.

Smithers

Another discussion about a liturgical matter took place in Smithers:

The singing of "*Ere zij God*" (Glory to God) after the Christmas service is discussed. After a lengthy discussion it is decided to continue with this tradition. The song will be printed in Dutch and English and made available to the congregation on Christmas Day. A letter will also be sent to the Standing Committee for the



DECLINED the call to
Houston, BC:

Rev. J.G. Slaa
of Elora, ON

Book of Praise, to request that this song be included in the future *Book of Praise*.

Australia

With regard to Mission the developments in our Australian sister churches are interesting, but not very clear yet, as to what the final direction will be. The federation is growing, but is still relatively small, and some churches are heading into different directions. The church at Armadale is still trying to live up to certain obligations in PNG; the church at Mount Nasura accepted some responsibilities in India, while the church at Kelmscott is focussing on Mission to Chinese people. Zeal for the missionary charge of the church is wonderful, but all these churches are looking for support from, and cooperation with the other churches.

Perhaps it's all possible, but I have the impression that right now this leads to competition, rather than to cooperation. One of the ministers wrote:

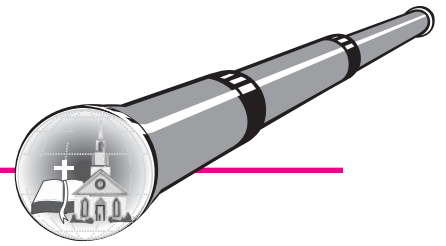
I am afraid that regarding the mission work we are at a stage in the bond of churches that "everyone does what is good in his own eyes."

Albany

In Australia the seasons are somewhat different from what we are used to, and the new work season for church and school starts after January. We read about interesting plans from the consistory in Albany:

In preparing ahead for the year 1999 consistory has decided once again to run a congregational project. We hope to do this during the first half of 1999. The project is run under the theme "God's house – Open house." When the holiday is finished and the club season will start again all families of the congregation will receive a congregational outline, which deals with this subject in detail.

Perhaps you can remember that in the past we had similar projects. In 1995 we had a project focussing on the preaching (Sound and Response). Throughout the year 1997 we dealt with a theme "Building Stronger Families." The aim of these projects is that as congregation together we deal with a specific subject in order to e



Observation Deck

By J. VanRietschoten

THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA (RPCNA) (continued)

Are you a *Rechabite*?

Rechabites were people blessed with a special promise from God (Jer 35). The Rechabites were faithful to the commands of their forefather. The LORD God used the faithfulness of the Rechabites to contrast the unfaithfulness of his people Israel. Jonadab the son of Rechab, their father, had commanded his children that they should maintain a strict nomadic lifestyle and that they were never to drink wine. So when the LORD commanded Jeremiah to invite the Rechabites into one of the rooms of the house of God they refused to drink the wine Jeremiah set before them. Then the LORD said to his people:

“Will you not receive instruction and listen to my words?” says the LORD. “The command which Jonadab the son of Rechab gave to his sons, to drink no wine, has been kept; and they drink none to this day, for they have obeyed their father’s command.” . . . But to the house of the Rechabites Jeremiah said, “Thus says the LORD . . . because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father, . . . therefore . . . Jonadab the son of Rechab shall never lack a man to stand before me.”

In the previous two issues of “Observation Deck” we tried to become better acquainted with a church federation which should be close to our heart, the RPCNA. In the course of the second article I mentioned two distinctives of the RPCNA: exclusive psalmody and no instrumental accompaniment of the singing. With respect to church unity in worship these two distinctives are for the RPCNA a must. Are these commands of the fathers of the RPCNA comparable to the commands of Jonadab the son of Rechab?

Were the commands of Jonadab to his sons tradition or were they divine commands?

The first thing we must note is that although the LORD praised the Rechabites and set them as an example of faithfulness, the LORD did not make the command of Jonadab a divine command for his people.

The second item we must note is that the Rechabites from their side did not refuse to come to the house of God. They did not maintain that it was impossible for them to worship God in the temple of God because God should still dwell in a tent. Neither did they refuse to have communal

worship with the rest of the people even though feasts at the temple involved the drinking of wine.

The third item which we must take note of is that the Rechabites were received in communal worship even though they refused to drink the wine with them at feasts of the LORD (Deut 14:26).

Application

Now let us apply this to the two distinctives which prevent the brothers in the RPCNA to have communal worship with their brothers in other faithful Reformed churches where biblical hymns and musical accompaniment are accepted and in use. The first question we must ask ourselves is whether these two distinctives are divine commands or whether they are faithful Rechabite obedience to the tradition of their fathers?

Where do we turn to answer this question?

To answer this question we could turn to the many articles in which presbyterian authors have maintained that it is a divine command to sing only Psalms and not to use instruments in worship. These however are not official pronouncements of the RPCNA. We do well to turn to *The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*. In section F we find *The Directory for the Worship of God adopted in 1945*. In paragraph One on page F-1 under *General Directions* we find the following pronouncement:

Worship is to be offered only in accordance with his appointment, and in harmony with the Scriptural principle that whatsoever is not commanded in the worship of God is forbidden. Worship is acceptable only as it is offered in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

This general direction is broadened in *Parts of Public Worship* found on page F-3, paragraph One, and it reads in part:

The Psalms of the Bible, by reason of their excellence and their Divine inspiration and appointment are to be sung in the worship of God, to the exclusion of all songs and hymns of human composition. They are to be sung without the accompaniment of instruments, inasmuch as these are not authorized in the New Testament.

Yes, we are close

Let us first acknowledge that the manner of worship in the RPCNA is very close to the manner of worship in the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). The *Book of Praise* of the CanRC reflects this. Ever since the work on the *Book*

of Praise was started in the Fifties, successive Synods gave instruction to translate the *Genevan Psalter* and limited the hymns to biblical hymns. A difference is that the CanRC have approved some time-tested biblical hymns which are not immediate rhymings of Bible passages.

The greater difference is the use or non-use of instruments is worship.

The CanRC use instruments to accompany the congregational singing in worship. The RPCNA forbid the use of instruments. In the pronouncements quoted above, the RPCNA presents arguments. The first was “whatsoever is not commanded in the worship of God is forbidden.” The second was “instruments . . . are not authorized in the New Testament.” These are negative arguments witnessed by the repeated negative “not.” This negative approach to the biblical manner of worship reminds us more of an Anabaptist approach to Scripture than the approach to Scripture practised in the Reformed churches. It is on this negative principle that the Anabaptists and Baptists base their denial of the baptism of the infant children of believers.

The RPCNA goes farther than the Westminster Confession.

In forbidding the use of instruments in worship on the basis of a negative approach to Scripture the RPCNA in her *Subordinate Standards* goes farther than in her *Standards: The Westminster Confession (WCF)* and *the Catechisms*. In chap. 21.5 the WCF instructs the “singing of psalms with grace in the heart” but does not mention a word about musical instruments. The argumentation of the WCF and Larger Catechism is positive and not negative.

The Testimony of the RPCNA attempts to offer positive argumentation.

You may remember that since 1980 the RPCNA have parallel to the WCF the so-called *Testimony*. Where WCF 21.5 does not forbid the use of musical accompaniment to the singing in worship, the Testimony, in parallel art. 6 (p. A-63), adds a new section. In this section we find, besides a continued negative argument, an attempt to offer a positive argument.

Art. 6. The Psalms are to be sung without the accompaniment of instruments, which are not part of the New Testament pattern of worship. Musical instruments were commanded for use with the offering of sacrifices in the Old Testament temple worship. **The death of Christ being the perfect and final sacrifice brought an end to this way of worship.** There is neither command for nor example of the use of musical instruments in the words or practice of Christ and the apostles. The command of the New Testament is to offer the sacrifice of praise- the fruit of our lips (Num 10:10; 2 Chron 29:25-30; Heb 9:12; Heb 13:15).

I highlighted one sentence

The highlighted sentence is the core of the attempt to present a positive argument. Immediately we must ask the question: Did the death of Christ indeed bring an end to the instrumental accompaniment of the singing in worship?

Christ fulfilled the shadows of the Old Covenant and brought the reality or substance (Heb 10:1). The sacrifices

ordained under the Old Covenant were shadows. These ceased for He who cast his shadow forward has come. The reality is here. Were musical instruments shadows of Christ? Certainly not. The sound of musical instruments in praise of God’s salvation runs through the whole of the Scriptures. The *Book of Revelation* repeatedly reveals to us how the praise of God’s salvation in Christ is accompanied by instruments. Would that which is acceptable to God in heavenly worship be forbidden by God to his people in worship of Him on earth?

Was the instrumental accompaniment limited to the singing at the sacrifices in the temple?

The *Books of the Chronicles* show that instruments accompanied the singing in worship other than at the sacrifices. In 1 Chronicles 15 we read that the ark of God was placed in a tent at Jerusalem while the Tabernacle and the altar (1 Chron 21:29) were still at Gibeon. The sacrifices were offered at Gibeon and not before the ark at Jerusalem. Yet, “David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brothers as singers to sing joyful songs, accompanied by musical instruments: lyres, harps and cymbals” (1 Chron 15:16 NIV).

Are the texts added to the Testimony, Art. 6 applicable?

In Numbers 10:10 the trumpets are the two silver trumpets of the priests. These trumpets had a special function. Besides being blown over the sacrifice the silver trumpets had many functions. Among these were the signal to be sounded at times of war, to call a solemn assembly, or to herald the Year of Jubilee. The two trumpets were ordained through Moses. The harps, cymbals, and horns, etc., were ordered by David.

2 Chronicles 29:25-30 shows us the instruments accompanying the singing at the sacrifice *and continuing the accompaniment after the sacrifices had stopped* (v. 30).

Hebrews 9:12 reveals Christ entering the Holy Place in heaven with his own blood thus securing an eternal redemption. Earlier we saw that this fulfilment of Christ in heaven fulfilled the shadows. The instruments did not belong to the shadows as reading all of Hebrews 9 and 10 bears out.

Hebrews 13:15 speaks of the fruit of our lips as a sacrifice to God. No mention is made of forbidden instruments. To conclude from this verse that instruments are forbidden is reading something into the text. Neither should we argue from the spurious principle that whatever is not commanded in the New Testament is forbidden. Such an argument should be foreign to a Reformed church.

There is a similarity between no use of instruments in worship and the wine and tents of the Rechabites.

The RPCNA is to be praised for sticking to the traditions, the commands, of their fathers. The RPCNA, however, would do well to no longer maintain that this tradition is a divine command. Like the wine and tents of the Rechabites the use or non-use of instruments in worship should not bring division. From the side of us, their brethren who use instruments in worship, the RPCNA should not be slighted or shunned for their being faithful to the commands of their fathers. If we take the biblical teaching concerning the Rechabites to heart we are a step closer to unity in worship.





Press Release of Classis Pacific West of April 13, 1999.

On behalf of the convening church, the Church at Langley, Rev. J. Visscher read from Ephesians 2:1-10 and asked the brothers to sing from Psalm 108:1,2. He then led in prayer.

He welcomed all the delegates. In the way of memorabilia he noted that Rev. J. Louwerse had accepted the call extended by the Church at Fergus, the Church at Houston has extended a call to Rev. J. Slaa of Elora, the Church at Smithers had extended a call to Rev. R. Aasman of Edmonton, which he subsequently declined. The Boersema family in Brazil is also remembered.

The Church at Houston reported on the credentials and stated that they were found to be in good order. Two churches had instructions.

The classis was declared constituted and the following officers were appointed:

Chairman: Rev. E. Kampen.
Vice-chairman: Rev. J. Louwerse.
Clerk: Rev. J. Huijgen.

The agenda was updated and adopted.

The Church at Houston requests the release of their minister, the Rev. J. Louwerse, with a view to his acceptance of the call of the church at Fergus ON. The required documents are presented and found to be in good order.

Rev. Louwerse will be released from his duties in classis Pacific West on April 26, 1999. Rev. J. Huijgen is appointed to represent classis at the farewell evening of Rev. Louwerse.

Reports from Church visitations to Houston, Langley, Smithers, Surrey, and Willoughby Heights were read. They were gratefully received. A report from the treasurer was received. A report on the inspection of the archives was received. A report on the Needy Church Fund was received.

Question Period according to article 44 C.0 was held. The Churches of Houston and Smithers request and receive advice on several matters of discipline.

The following appointments were made:

- a) The convening Church for the next Classis: the Church of Smithers B.C.
Place: Cloverdale
Date: June 15, 1999,
alt. Oct 5, 1999.
- b) The proposed executive:
Chairman: Rev. J. Huigen.
Vice-chairman: Rev. C. Vanspronsen.
Clerk: Rev. J. Visscher.
Committee for Examinations: Rev. C. VanSpronsen and Rev. J. Visscher.
Examiners: Exegesis OT –
Rev. E. Kampen.
Exegesis NT – Rev. C. VanSpronsen.
Doctrine and Creeds –
Rev. J. Visscher.

Knowledge of HS –

Rev. J. Huijgen.

Church History – Rev. J. Visscher.

Church Polity – Rev. E. Kampen.

Ethics – Rev. J. Huijgen.

Diaconology – Rev. J. Huijgen.

d) Church Visitors – Revs J. Huijgen, E. Kampen, C. VanSpronsen, (c) J. Visscher.

e) Church for the Archives – Smithers.

f) Church for the inspection of the Archives – Houston.

g) Treasurer – Mrs. B. Meints.

h) Audit Church – Smithers.

i) Committee on Financial Aid to Theological Students – M. VanDriel, C. VanDelft, J. Winkel (c)

j) Committee of Financial help to Needy Churches – H. Leyenhorst, P. Vandergugten (c), H. VanDelden.

k) Deputy for Preaching Arrangements Vacant Churches –
Rev. E. Kampen.

l) Counselor for Vacant Churches –
Rev. E. Kampen for Houston.

Question Period was made use of. Censure ad art. 34 was not needed.

The Acts were adopted and the Press released was approved.

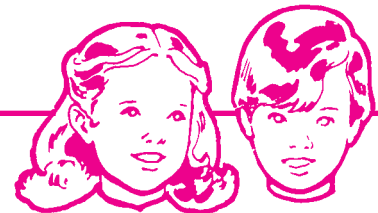
The Chairman requested the brothers to sing Psalm 124:1,2,3 and led in prayer. The classis was closed.

For Classis Pacific West
Rev. J. Louwerse, vice-chairman, e.t



OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers

Last time, we imagined a country where we would like to live. This time, imagine being an animal, one of those beautiful animals which God created at the beginning of the world. Imagine being a lion, king of the forest; or pretend to be a tiny little ant. Just imagine being a dolphin, being able to frolick in the water all day, or being a bird, soaring over the part of the world where you belong. Or would you rather be a dog or a cat, being kept as a pet all your life.

Just imagine.

Lots of love, Aunt Betty



Horse and Horse things

By Busy Beaver *Shawna Bethlehem*

E F C Q O F N R T V I Q J W X M Y B K C Z -
 S U W A
 A F I E S M V G W X J N I A D A F -
 T U Y T X Z C S
 S D P L B X T Y U Z C K M G E N -
 N W X Z V E G L A
 A G B L L K Z Y H C O O R I H E O V F K -
 P L Q E D
 D D A C Z I P Q S A L L P J K S S J M R N -
 S O A D
 D G I R C J E U W D T S T L M R D F L E F G -
 G D L
 L L E H J X B S Y B S F U S Q W A D H Z G -
 M Q R E
 E N U K F M O P E G H V A P B E C H F O M N -
 S O B
 S A D B E M C T F H R G C W X I K Y J L -
 P R U P L
 P M O L N A K I Q J Q R V S T A L L I O N -
 S W E A

FIND:	Fillies	Colts	Stallions
Mares	Foals	Geldings	Bridles
Saddles	Bits	Girths	Saddle
Blankets	Reins	Stirrups	Leadropes
Manes	Tails	Hoofs	

Unscramble the 12 Disciples

By Busy Beaver *Suzanne DeHaas*

TAWHTME _____
 NEDWAR _____
 UJSDA RSOICATI _____
 LORMAHWBOTE _____
 ONISM _____
 RETPE _____
 EJSAM _____
 HNOJ _____
 SMEAJ _____
 DUHETAASD _____
 LIHPIP _____
 MHSOAT _____

The Books of the Bible

By Busy Beaver *Hannah and Jessica Bergsma*

The Books of the Old Testament that starts with J:

The last two books of the Bible:

The first four books of the New Testament:



FROM THE MAILBOX

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Ashley Van Spronsen*. Does your red fish have a name? I'm glad you enjoy helping your Dad plant flowers, and I think Mom would love the daffodils that you pick for her. Write again, won't you, Ashley.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Chantelle Tuininga*. Do you see lots of your nephew and niece? I will put a little advertisement in Our Little Magazine for a pen pal for you. It is a lot of fun having a pen pal, especially if they live in a different country. Write and tell me about your pen pal, won't you, Chantelle.

Welcome also to *Jessica Bethlehem*. Thank you for your letter and puzzle. Thanks also for your photo. It will join all the others in my book. I hope to hear from you again.

Another welcome goes to *Jessica Bergsma*. I'm really glad that you find it fun reading the *Clarion* and doing the puzzles. Write me a short story to put into Our Little Magazine, Jessica. I love to read too. I bet it was fun helping to build the fort at school. Did you have lots of fun skating? Bye for now, Jessica.

Hello, *Hannah Bergsma*. Did you have fun staying with your cousins? I hope that nobody fell and hurt themselves when you went skating. And was the Percussion Concert really fun. Till next time, Hannah.

Hi to *Suzanne DeHaas*. Thank you for your letter and puzzles. It must be fun having such a big family, and also with nephews and nieces. Did your Dad and sister have a fun time in Quebec? Do you play a lot with all your animals? Bye, Suzanne.

Thank you, *Amanda Vanderhoeven*, for your letter and puzzle. You really do have a lot of family don't you, as well as nephews and a niece. They are a lot of fun, aren't they? And you even have family in Holland. That's a long way away, isn't it? Write again, won't you, Amanda.

I received a letter from a Busy Beaver, but you did not give me your name. You told me that you have a little sister called Amy Rose and that you are turning ten on September 2. Could you please write to me and tell me your name, so that I can put that into my book. Thank you.

