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Clarion

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Whither the Netherlands?

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- *The Introduction of Evangelical Hymns in the Dutch Reformed Churches*
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By R. Aasman



Whither the Netherlands?

Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN)

Recent articles and letters in *Clarion* have been causing some concern among church members about the direction our sister churches are taking in the Netherlands. Since *Clarion* has fuelled this concern with its letters and articles which were submitted from various church members, *Clarion* bears a certain responsibility to address this. From different church members I detect a note of panic and deep apprehension about certain perceived practices and developments among our sister churches across the Atlantic Ocean. It is said that our sister churches no longer observe the Sunday as a day of rest and worship; the holiness of marriage is being undermined by illegitimate divorce; the liturgy is being corrupted by unscriptural hymns; the style of preaching puts man in the centre rather than follow the traditional redemptive historical approach to preaching; church relations with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* and *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken* suggest a more pluriform approach to church unity; General Synod Zuidhorn-2002 did not uphold the confessions. No one will deny that these are very serious charges.

I wonder if there are some caricatures being made – be it unwittingly done.

However it is clear from the various articles and letters submitted to *Clarion* that there is diverse opinion whether these alleged practices and developments are true. Moreover, I wonder if there are some caricatures being made – be it unwittingly done. Personally I have not been involved with developments in the Netherlands, and I have very little contact with the native land of my parents. That makes me all that much more inclined to draw conclusions only on the basis of published facts that come along official routes, rather than on the basis of personal testimonials and stories. I do not want to put my head into the sand when it comes to problems in our sister churches, but I do not want to jump to conclusions either because someone or some persons allege that these problems exist. What is the official word on these matters?

Synod Neerlandia 2001

Synod Neerlandia received a report from the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) along with a number of letters from Canadian Reformed churches. In these reports and letters a number of concerns were raised about our sister churches. We read Synod Neerlandia's re-

sponse to this in Article 80 of its Acts. While Synod Neerlandia did express some concerns, there was also a balance in the approach to our sister churches. The final consideration of Synod Neerlandia is most striking:

Synod agrees with the CRCA when it cautions not to put the GKN to greater scrutiny than the other churches in ecclesiastical fellowship but to remain fair when we are faced with the developments or changes in their church life. The fact that there are strong historic ties and that there are many personal contacts between friends and family in Canada and The Netherlands does not imply that church life in both federations must be identical. Without jeopardizing our responsibility as sister churches formulated in the first rule for ecclesiastical fellowship, the CanRC should respect the reality that throughout fifty years of church life, different developments take place.

In its recommendations, Synod Neerlandia concluded that the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship continues with the GKN while also mandating the committee (CRCA) to make a more thorough study of the concerns raised in the committee's own report. In other words, dear readers, we should wait to see what our committee will report to the next Synod – a report that should be coming out very soon – rather than jumping the gun and drawing conclusions based on some rumours or personal assessments of the situation in the Netherlands. In fact, if our churches learn of something that concerns them and they have made a careful examination of the facts, Synod Neerlandia invites them to draw the attention of the CRCA to such concerns (Consideration 4.6).


We also recognize that being different, as Synod Neerlandia pointed out, is not automatically wrong.

Some might feel that Synod Neerlandia's decision to deal with concerns about our sister churches in the Netherlands via the CRCA will lead to a bureaucratic hierarchy. But consider the alternative: individuals or individual churches drawing their own conclusions and taking action vis-à-vis our sister churches. We will have a complete mess on our hands as some of our churches take a completely different approach to relations with our sister churches in the Netherlands. We have a committee with proper rules for ecclesiastical fellowship (page 249 of the *Acts of Synod Neerlandia*) which will look at concerns along official lines and so advise our churches as to what is really going on in our sister churches.

Invitations to get involved

There have been calls for our churches to get involved in the debates and developments taking place in the Netherlands. I have received emails from the Netherlands with dire warnings about what is going on over there, and what we should be doing about it here in Canada. However, we must be careful with this. First, we have a committee which has taken our concerns to the sister churches in the Netherlands. Let them report to us their findings. Secondly, we must trust that our sister churches who subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and hold to the church order of Dort are doing the right thing until it is proven otherwise.

Prayer

It may be that the situation in the Netherlands among our sister churches is a dire one. At this time we are not certain. We also recognize that being different, as Synod Neerlandia pointed out, is not automatically wrong. Let us wait patiently for official reports to come to us. Meanwhile, let us pray for our sister churches in the Netherlands and hold to the trust that by the grace of God they will continue to hold to the authority of the Word of God, subscription to the Three Forms of Unity, and the observance of the Church Order of Dort. 

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What's inside?

Recent articles and letters in *Clarion* have been causing unrest among our church members regarding practices and developments within our sister churches in the Netherlands. The editorial takes a look at this and offers some words of caution.

Many people who visit a Canadian Reformed worship service are struck by the lack of hymns found in the *Book of Praise* and sung in the service. There are churches who sing no hymns whatsoever. But it is still a rarity to sing as few hymns as we do. Dr. Riemer Faber traces the historical background for this. Our brother promises three articles on this. The first is found in this issue.

One of our missionaries, Rev. W.L. Bredenhof, warns about consumer-oriented and seeker-friendly church movements. He does this from the particular point of view of mission work which is to the glory of God.

We have a press release from the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas which met with the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee in Flat Rock, North Carolina. It was submitted a bit late, but it is very interesting. It interacts clearly with some matters raised by previous synods for discussion between our churches and the RCUS.

The column *Press Review* is written by Rev. W.B. Slomp of Edmonton. His article deals with the important topic of grieving, particularly as it relates to children.

In this issue we have our regular columns, *Treasures, New and Old* and *Education Matters*, along with what is possibly one of the shortest letters to the editors we have ever had. Short and sweet I would call it.

RA



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By R.E. Pot

A Good Night's Sleep

"... for He grants sleep to those He loves." Psalm 127:2b

How well did you sleep last night? Are you getting enough sleep? Apparently at least 70 million North Americans have problems sleeping at some time in their lives. Millions of people, young as well as old, are having a tough time getting a good night's sleep. One expert says, "We are a dangerously sleep-deprived society." The results can be disastrous. Sleepy workers cause nuclear accidents and deadly oil spills. Sleepy drivers cause thousands of car crashes in Canada every year.

Why is it so hard for many people to have a good night's sleep? The frantic pace of life today explains much of it. There's more and more pressure to work a 24-hour day. Many people work from 5 to 9 instead of 9 to 5. They're on the job before sun-up, and until after sundown. Their days become longer and their nights become shorter. No wonder you end up with less sleep! You don't have time to sleep, because you are working. And when you do go to bed, you take your worries with you. You find sleep hard to come by because you are thinking about your work or worrying about tomorrow.

So what's at the bottom of this problem of sleep? It's your work and your attitude to your work. That's why sleeping problems can at bottom be spiritual problems. I'm not talking about sleeping problems caused by your neighbours' barking dog, the clockwork crying of your new-born baby, or a health problem of one kind or the other. I'm talking strictly about sleeping problems as a result of your work. There's a definite connection between your day's work and your night's sleep. If your day's work is too long or if it leaves you burdened with worries, it will steal time from your night's sleep. Sleepless nights can be caused by daily work!

In the Bible, God has something to say about your attitude to your daily

work and your nightly sleep. He tells us in Psalm 127: "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labour in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain." There are different kinds of work. But a hard day's work doesn't guarantee anything. If God doesn't bless your work, your greatest plans won't succeed. You can work hard, but who's to say that you will succeed? What if the rain doesn't fall or the sun doesn't shine on your crops? What if your equipment breaks down and you can't get the job done for your customers?

It's not hard to see that these worries about work lead to sleepless nights! Your head hits the pillow, but instead of sweet dreams there's tossing and turning with thoughts of work, worries about tomorrow. The Bible says about a person with this attitude to work, that his life is "toil and anxious striving. . . all his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest" (Eccl 2:23). In other words, no sleep!

Do worries keep you awake at night? Life doesn't have to be like this. Jesus Christ came to take away the anxiety of this kind of life. Psalm 127 adds: "In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat – for He grants sleep to those He loves." For those whom God loves, it's different. They're given the gift of sleep. They don't have to spend sleepless nights worrying about daily toil.

Why? Because Christ came to save people from this empty way of life, from a slavery to vain days of toil and sleepless nights. Through faith in Christ, God the Ruler and Creator, who blesses work, is your loving Father. You still have to work. But you won't lose sleep over it. When your daily work is done, you won't worry about tomorrow. Because tomorrow is in the hands of God your Father. And heavenly Fa-

ther will take care of things. That doesn't mean that there will be no problems at work tomorrow. But it does mean that God your Father in Christ has it all under control.

Christ Himself said "Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life." Not about clothing, food, or drink, for "your heavenly Father knows that you need them. . . Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself" (Matt 6). No worries! Your focus in life is God's kingdom and his righteousness, and not your daily bread. So you can come home from work, hit the pillow, and sleep. Psalm 127 says it plainly: "He grants sleep to those He loves." You don't have to try to sing yourself to sleep. You can instead sing the words of Psalm 4:8 "I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety."

Experts write all kinds of books about sleeping problems, but they miss the main point: if you trust in the Lord for your work, there would be no worries, but sleep instead! God gives sleep to believers in Christ, to those He loves! Are you in danger of missing the point? What's the attitude that you have to your work? Do you trust in your Father in Christ to take care of you? Don't be a slave to a vicious cycle of work, where you work around the clock, trusting in yourself for success. Pray to your heavenly Father, and trust in Him to take care of you. And when you can't sleep, don't count sheep, but talk to the Good Shepherd, who takes away worries.

Work hard. Trust in God. And sleep well.



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The Introduction of Evangelical Hymns in the Dutch Reformed Churches: Developments in the Seventeenth Century¹

By R. Faber

Introduction

Often the theological issues which have troubled a denomination are reflected in its official psalter. The relatively young American and Canadian Reformed Churches possess a psalter, called *Book of Praise*, for which the principles of selection were formed during the history of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands. Anyone who compares the psalters of the various Reformed churches in North America will be struck by the relatively few hymns included in the *Book of Praise*, and may wish to learn the reasons for this restriction.

The historical aversion to songs not based on texts of Scripture in the Canadian Reformed Churches and their predecessors can be explained by tracing the developments in the three centuries which followed the Synod of Dordt in 1618. The theological issues in the Netherlands during that period may not be well-known to many English-language readers; they are relevant to our topic, however, since they affected the decisions in the nineteenth century to restrict severely the number of spiritual songs in the book of praise.

In three articles we shall describe the movement towards the introduction of spiritual songs in the Dutch Reformed Church (Hervormde Kerk) in the early nineteenth century and the reaction to them at the time of the Secession in 1834. In this context “spiritual songs” refers to songs composed not directly from texts of Scripture, and not intended in the first place for use in the worship services on Sunday. As we shall observe, there was increase in the composition and singing of spiritual

songs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This development affected attitudes towards the liturgy of the corporate worship, and caused the state-governed church to change the old edition of metrical psalms, and to introduce spiritual songs. The trend culminated in the publication of the *Evangelical Hymns (Evangelische Gezangen)* in 1805. We shall relate the causes for this trend, the main characteristics of the movement supporting the corporate singing of spiritual songs, and features of the *Evangelical Hymns*. It is hoped that this survey will serve to explain some of the differences in the psalters of modern Reformed denominations in North America by showing the principles inherited by the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Anyone who compares the psalters of the various Reformed churches in North America will be struck by the relatively few hymns included in the Book of Praise, and may wish to learn the reasons for this restriction.

In this first article we shall concentrate upon the social, theological, and ecclesiastical features of the Dutch Reformed Church of the seventeenth century – a period in history that is shared by several Reformed denominations on our continent.¹ After describing briefly the circumstances in the Netherlands at the beginning of that era, we shall illustrate the goals of the so-called Fur-

ther Reformation in reacting to the dead orthodoxy of the age. We’ll consider also the role Pietism played in advancing the trend towards the composition and singing of spiritual songs. We shall conclude this article with a summary of the pietist elements in the compositions of the time. In a second article we shall trace the history of the spiritual song in the eighteenth century, and the factors behind the decision in the Reformed Church to publish the *Evangelical Hymns*, while the third will relate the reaction to the use of the hymnbook in the Secession of 1834.

1. Circumstances in seventeenth century lowlands

For the Netherlands, the seventeenth century is the Golden Age. It dawned with the Union of Utrecht in 1579, when the lowlands were formed into an homogeneous, Protestant nation. One consequence of the union was economic prosperity. With it came an increase in creature-comforts for the masses, and the opportunity to pursue intellectual, civic and cultural goals. Confident in Calvinism at home, the Dutch became tolerant of other beliefs abroad. Unfortunately, however, while material wealth increased, morals and ethics declined.

Also following the Union of Utrecht the church became closely tied to the state. Municipal officers, mayors, and councils often controlled the appointment of ministers, and the state increasingly interfered in church discipline. Meanwhile the church became involved in matters of state. The church promoted the social, political, and cultural values, and so became secular.

Now that the Reformed Church was the official church of the state, the reformation of the lowlands seemed complete; there was a certain satisfaction in having achieved the goals defined in the previous generation. Moreover, the Synod of Dordt (1618) effected theological and ecclesiastical uniformity, which was further strengthened by the confessions and the church order.

Of course there were serious theological issues in the Netherlands, including the struggle against Arminianism. In dealing with heresies, however, many church leaders turned the teaching of Scripture into an excessively rational system. Intellectualism (that is, over-devotion to the use of reason) became the dominant force in theology, and there was an emphasis upon right doctrine. Faith was reduced to statements of theological truths formed by logic. This scholastic trend produced a lapsing of spiritual vitality and a rising of ethical emptiness. Believers lived their lives with little thought about true belief: one was born, married, and buried in the church.

2. The Further Reformation

Fortunately, there were Reformed believers who decried the growing formalism and responded to it. They wished that the Reformation of the previous generation would extend to their age. They did not wish merely to be baptized, married and buried in the church. In their view a further, continuing, and deepening reformation was required. The sixteenth-century Reformation had stopped short of producing the kind of moral change that Scripture demands. This movement to counteract the dead orthodoxy was called, in Dutch, “Nadere Reformatie.” Often translated as Further Reformation, the phrase means more detailed, thorough, and intimate reform. The Further Reformation is a movement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that, in reaction to the secularization of Christianity and the church, expressed the necessity of expanding and deepening the Reformation to all walks of life, both private and public. It was at this time that the saying first arose, “the Reformed church needs to be Reformed.”

3. Pietism

The Further Reformation was part of a broader, international movement called Pietism. This movement also promoted the writing and singing of spiritual songs, and so is relevant to our

William Teellinck (1579-1629), Dutch Pietist.



treatment of Dutch evangelical hymns. The word “Pietism” derives from the Latin *pietas*, which means religious duty based on theological conviction. In the context of seventeenth century Christianity it means the practice of faith in the daily life of the individual and society. Sometimes restricted to a trend within German Lutheranism, the term is applied more broadly to developments in the Protestant faith in England, Holland and Germany. It is worthwhile to note its characteristics, as the spiritual songs, devotional writings and other literature produced by Pietists were translated and adopted widely in the Netherlands.

Believers lived their lives with little thought about true belief: one was born, married, and buried in the church.

Pietism did not consist of a single system of theology, nor did it maintain a special church polity or liturgy. In fact, it tended to devalue the importance of church institutions, confessions, church orders, and other “outward” features of the body of Christ. In reaction to formalism in doctrine and practice, Pietism focused on human virtues and the personal experience of faith. Pietists emphasized the inward response to God’s love; they preferred to discuss conversion and sanctification rather than justification. The Reformation had taught them to avoid complacency, and

they championed a total commitment to Christ and to everything that the new life in Him entails. To be sure, Pietism took different forms in different places, and its influences upon the Further Reformation in the Netherlands are complex; yet these characteristics marked the movement throughout Europe.

4. English Puritanism, German Pietism, and the Dutch Further Reformation

One influence upon the Further Reformation and a contributing factor to Pietism in the Netherlands is that of English Puritanism. Puritanism was a church-political movement in seventeenth century England which started with the desire to remove Roman Catholic elements from the church. It began as a reaction to the use of special garments in the worship services and to aspects of the liturgy, and grew into a desire to purify the church generally. What the Puritans especially shared with the continental pietists is an emphasis upon holy living in precise accordance with Scripture. Like the Puritans, Dutch pietists sought to improve the spiritual quality of family life, to counteract the abuses of the Sabbath-day, and to foster personal devotions through gatherings of believers. Many Puritan writings were translated into Dutch.

The relationship between Puritanism and the Further Reformation was developed also by the interaction of English and Dutch church leaders. The Anglo-Dutch theologian William Ames (1576-1633) was one of several writers who promoted Puritan teaching in the

Netherlands. Educated in England and indebted especially to William Perkins, Ames was the author of an influential treatise called *The Marrow of Theology*. There is much that can be said about the extent to which Ames' teaching is Reformed (including his concepts of the church and of the human will) and we shall mention only the one most relevant to our topic. In the opening sentence of *The Marrow of Theology* Ames defines theology as "the science of living for God." Theology does not consist of true statements about God as He has revealed himself, but of knowing how to live for Him. This definition reveals the emphasis upon experience and practice that marks much of the pietist literature of the time; it also shows the reaction to the scholastic approach to Scripture and its doctrine. Ames stresses the biblical basis for a life of piety. The proper response of each human being to the faith that has been granted is an important feature of Ames' writing. Thus the subjective, human element in faith becomes dominant in pietist literature. This stress upon the subjective is reflected in the contents of spiritual songs and evangelical hymns composed between 1650 and 1800.

A second factor behind pietistic tendencies in the Netherlands was German Pietism. It arose in response to the trend, in the Lutheran churches of northern Germany, of maintaining only a superficial, formal connection with the church. Believers held membership in the church and accepted the doctrines as taught by the confession, but used the means of grace only occasionally. In response to this development, German Pietists emphasized the need for every believer to rework his inner life. Thus rather than to focus on the reform of society and the church (as it occurred in the Netherlands), German Pietism concentrated upon the heart and soul of individual believers. As we shall observe in a later article, German Pietism affected Dutch church leaders in the eighteenth century especially, and the stress upon inner conversion is reflected in the poetry and songs of that age.

5. Features of Pietism in the Netherlands

Pietism in the Netherlands was formed also by the connection between revelation and faith made within the Reformed tradition. During the sixteenth-century Reformation the importance of living a pious life was stressed time and again, and was evidenced in the lives

and writings of Luther and Calvin. For the lowlands, the letters of Guido de Brès are exemplary of this feature: they reflect the biblical conviction that faith must be living. There are also other native influences, such as traces of medieval mysticism, and the sort of piety promoted by the Dutch humanist Erasmus. Also the inward religion of Anabaptists in the lowlands affected Reformed believers. Generally speaking, what provoked the Dutch pietists to write, preach, and lecture was the deadening of spiritual life in a well-established and affluent society, as we noted above. Thus there were good reasons for the movement to grow in the Netherlands. Almost imperceptibly, however, the subjective element in the life of faith received a disproportionate amount attention.

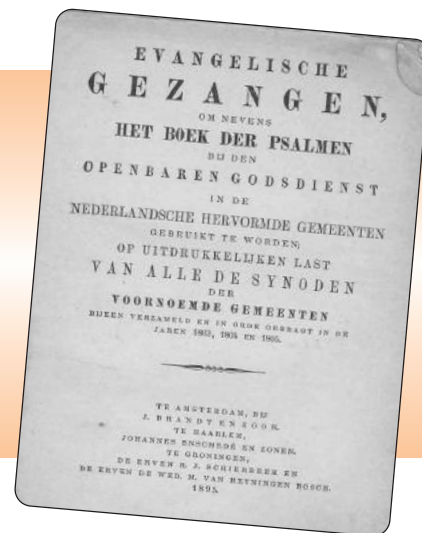
The subjective, human element in faith becomes dominant in pietist literature.

The so-called father of the Further Reformation was the Dutchman William Teellinck (1579-1629). Influenced by Puritanism, Teellinck led a deeply religious personal life, which was marked in later years by mystical overtones. He guided his family according to strict interpretation of Sabbath-keeping, occasional fasting, and self-denial. At the same time, however, Teellinck stressed the personal enjoyment of the believer's union with the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed, he sought to promote the harmony between the pious believer and the Lord God.

As a preacher known for sermons calling for repentance, Teellinck strove to reverse the trend towards dead orthodoxy. He also wrote treatises in which he castigated the spiritual deadness in the church, and the moral weaknesses of believers. Together with other pietists, Teellinck wished to correct the dry-as-dust orthodoxy and make it living, and so, satisfying. They did so by stressing the role of personal awareness and individual feeling (subjectivism) instead of the contemporary emphasis on truth apart from the human experience of it (objectivism).

Pietism, however, was exposed to several dangers. One was mysticism, that is, the belief that by means of devotion and surrender one can acquire the truth and so become one with God. Mystical elements include an opposition – even false distinction – between the inner life and the outer world, and a preference of the emotional to the rational. Some extreme pietist over-emphasized the difference between regenerate and unregenerate people, so that they appeared self-righteous in their piety. Others downplayed the importance of covenant obedience to God's law, stressing instead the freedom in the new covenant. As was noted earlier, there was also the danger that the instituted church was devalued, together with the biblically ordained offices, sacraments, church order, and liturgy. In their zeal to apply Scripture to every aspect of daily life, some pietists were given to biblicism, that is, taking passages of Scripture out of their immediate and general contexts and applying them as rules for particular situations. I mention these dangers because features of them occur in some of the poems and spiritual songs of

Cover Page of the Evangelische Gezangen (Evangelical Hymns), first published in 1805.



the time. To cite only one, namely mysticism, we note that some of the Moravian hymns were marked by excessively sweet, even erotic expressions of the mystical union of the believer with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The practical application of Scriptural teaching in daily life was an emphasis of Pietism that produced several real changes. Gatherings were held in order to assist one's experience and expression of the faith. Also devotional tracts such as accounts of conversion and collections of Christian poems and hymns were published.

The gatherings of believers, called conventicles, arose in response to the notion that the preaching of the gospel in the worship services was inadequate, marked as it was by formalism and directed in general at the masses. The conventicle, which was held on Sunday or on a week-day, gave opportunity for communal reflection upon and application of the sermons. Sometimes led by the minister, the gatherings focused upon the practical implementation of Scripture, and included the offering of free prayers (as opposed to the reading of form-prayers), catechetical instruction, mutual discipline, and the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Also the publication of devotional material was intended to counteract the apparent dead orthodoxy, by promoting genuine dedication to Christ. In this context the official psalter of the Dutch Reformed Church, which consisted of the metrical psalms as translated by Petrus Datheen, suffered critical scrutiny. The sixteenth-century wording of this edition was archaic and did not reflect the feelings of the age. The translation was steeped in traditional language, and lacked currency and vitality. It is not surprising to learn that no less than forty published attempts were made to improve the versification of Datheen. More telling is the fact that the singing of hymns and spiritual songs was very popular at Christian gatherings, so that a separation developed between what was sung during the worship services and what was sung at other occasions. What is more, Dutch Reformed believers were attracted to the compositions of Lutherans in Germany and of the Puritans in England. In the history of the Lutheran churches no strong distinction had been made between the singing of psalms and hymns, while it was at this time that England received some of its finest Christian hymns.

A good example of a seventeenth-century poet who composed spiritual songs to be sung at the society meetings of devout believers was the Dutchman Jodocus van Lodenstein (1620-1677). A poet-preacher with Puritan and pietist leanings, van Lodenstein was disturbed by the shallow religiosity and the spiritless worship services. He sometimes compared the problems in the Reformed Church of his day to those facing the Roman Catholic Church during the sixteenth century.

In his writing and preaching, van Lodenstein emphasized the importance of the enlightenment of the soul by the Holy Spirit, without which one cannot grasp the meaning of Scripture. Also in the poems and spiritual songs which he composed, van Lodenstein focused on the experience of the human heart in its relation to God. In 1676 he published a collection of poems and songs called *Uytspanningen*, in which these topics are expressed in verse. Divided into various parts, the book contains material based on Scripture (esp. the psalms), reflections on matters of the spirit, meditations, and expressions of contrition. His poetry was popular especially at the end of the seventeenth century.

In his writing and preaching, van Lodenstein emphasized the importance of the enlightenment of the soul by the Holy Spirit, without which one cannot grasp the meaning of Scripture.

6. Themes in Pietistic poetry and spiritual songs

Besides the poetry and spiritual songs of van Lodenstein, there were numerous publications, by other poets, of pietistic sentiment. The late seventeenth century witnessed the rise of Christian hymns and songs in Germany and England as well as the Netherlands, and these songs were transmitted easily in published form. We shall conclude this article with a mention of some themes and images that appear in them.

Unlike the Calvinist emphasis upon the doctrines of predestination, election, and justification, the pietist spiritual songs focus upon conversion and sanctification. Perceiving the faith from

the perspective of the individual believer rather than from the view of Scripture, many pietist songs have a strong subjective quality to them. Often they are responses to God's grace based upon man's experience of it rather than a glorification of God's mighty deeds of salvation. Some of the songs are marked by asceticism: strict self-denial for the sake of spiritual discipline. Other songs have modes of expression that are mystical, expressing the super-natural bond of love between the Saviour and the believer.

Occasionally, pietist songs are marked by the notion that God is present everywhere (deism), and that nature is a manifestation of Him. One will also discover the notion that the world consists of two contrasting realms of existence: the earthly kingdom subject to decay conflicts with the heavenly, spiritual kingdom. By means of certain images, the poems and songs appealed to the spirit of the times. The images of healing and sickness, of journey and rest, for example, can be found in the pietist songs. So too one finds depictions of the Lord Jesus Christ as pioneer of the faith, rather than Lord or judge.

The reader will understand that these themes and images reflect the concerns and aspirations of believers during the seventeenth century, as well as attempts to supplement or correct the Reformed faith as it was perceived at the time. The motivations for composing and singing spiritual songs arose in response to the social, ecclesiastical and theological movements of the age. The trend towards the singing of hymns and spiritual songs would continue into the eighteenth century, and would culminate in the publication of the *Evangelische Gezangen (Evangelical Hymns)* in 1805.

¹ The period covered in this article begins where "The First Psalters in the Dutch Reformed Churches" (*Clarion* 52.5 [2003], 113-116) ended, namely the decision at the Synod of Dordt in 1618 to employ the old testament Book of Psalms as put to verse by Petrus Datheen.



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For Whom is the Church?

By W.L. Bredenhof

Anthropocentrism – it’s a one dollar word with a simple meaning: man-centeredness. All of us should know that this is a problem with our natural human condition. We want the world to revolve around us. By nature, we find a world with God in the centre difficult to accept. This way of thinking is common enough in non-Christian circles. How sad it is, then, to see this way of thinking also accepted by many who claim the Name above every name. In one of his books, popular evangelical author Max Lucado penned the following:

God’s work in this world includes the creation and sustenance of a special people consecrated to Himself.

I’ve seen you stalking the malls, walking the aisles, searching for that extra-special gift. Stashing away a few dollars a month to buy him some lizard-skin boots; staring at a thousand rings to find her the best diamond; staying up all Christmas Eve, assembling the new bicycle.

Why do you do it? So her eyes will pop, his jaw will drop. To hear those words of disbelief: “You did this for me?”

And that is why God did it. Next time a sunrise steals your breath or a meadow of flowers leaves you speechless, remain that way.

Say nothing, and listen as heaven whispers, “Do you like it? I did it just for you.”¹

That sounds very nice and sweet. It appeals to our emotions. God’s acts of creation and providence exist just for us. Doesn’t that make us feel good? It might make us feel good, but it is not what Scripture teaches. In the Psalms (e.g. 8

and 19), for instance, we find that God’s work in this world is not for us, but for Him – for his glory!

God’s work in this world includes the creation and sustenance of a special people consecrated to Himself. In other words, God’s work includes the church. Here too, we often find people claiming that the church exists for the sake of man. This is often done with good intentions. There is a desire to stir up mission-mindedness in believers. So, to do so, the claim is made, with reference to certain Scripture passages, that the church has been placed on this earth to serve man. The church is for the world.

So, the question must be asked: for whom is the church? If we read the first chapter of Ephesians, the answer seems to be clear enough. Among other places, we read it in Ephesians 1:11-12, “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, *that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.*” If we keep in mind that this epistle was written to the *Church* at Ephesus, then the conclusion is easily reached: the church exists for God and for his glory. The church exists so that God will be considered of utmost importance in the universe – that He will be respected and considered as weighty. Laying aside the more complicated questions of the relationship between election and the church, this conclusion is certainly a valid one. After all, isn’t the Westminster Shorter Catechism correct when it answers the question, “What is the chief end of man?” with the answer “To glorify God and enjoy him forever?” If that is true of individual human beings, how much more true would it not be for the church? So, in the most ultimate sense, the church exists for the glory of God.

Nevertheless, there are those Scripture passages which seem to indicate that there is at least some sense in which the church also exists for the world of sinful men. The passage to which reference is most commonly made is Genesis 12:3, where God promises Abraham, “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” He repeats this promise in Genesis 22:18, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. . . .” This does not indicate that Abraham himself was called to be actively involved with missionary work. What it does indicate is that God had a plan for the salvation of all the nations through the seed of Abraham – in other words, through the church.² God worked with the people of Israel in the Old Testament to eventually bring salvation to people from every corner of the earth. The Lord Jesus Himself recognized this when He said in John 4:22, “. . . salvation is of the Jews.” Today, we would say that salvation has come to us historically through the Church.

The normal pattern is that God’s salvation is mediated through the church.

The normal pattern is that God’s salvation is mediated through the church. That’s why we confess in the Belgic Confession, Article 28, that “there is no salvation outside of it [the church].” God’s plan for the salvation of sinful men centers on Christ’s work proclaimed through the church. Though God certainly does not *need* the church, she is the means that He has chosen to bring the gospel to the nations.

This perspective is reinforced with the well-beloved Psalm 87. This mission-oriented psalm portrays the beautiful image of Egypt (Rahab), Babylon,

Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia finding their home in Zion. All of these nations will find a place in God's holy city. Today, the Jerusalem from above is God's holy city. Today, through the ministry of the church, men and women from countless nations are finding their true homeland. God's redemptive work among them centres on Christ and his beloved bride, the church.

When a believer works faithfully in all his daily callings, he need feel no guilt if he is not directly involved with organized evangelism or mission.

Therefore, we may say that there is definitely a sense in which the church today exists for the world. But how do we relate this to what we concluded earlier from Paul's teaching in Ephesians? As long as we keep our eye on the fact that God is working through the church, the relationship is easily defined. The church ultimately exists for the glory of God. The church *also* exists for the salvation of man, just as the ark existed for the salvation of Noah and his family. When the church fulfills this secondary purpose for her existence, then she fulfills her primary purpose of giving more glory to God. Therefore, the two are antithetical. The church is for the world so that she can ultimately lift up God's Name in ever greater measures.

If we keep this in mind, we avoid the danger of anthropocentrism – man-centeredness. If we keep in mind that the glory of God is always our highest end, then we may avoid being shipwrecked on the rocks of the consumer-oriented seeker-friendly church movement south of the border. On the other hand, if we remain mindful that the church exists also for those outside, then we avoid an insular isolationism whereby we fail to explicitly reach out to others lost in the darkness with the good news of Christ our Saviour.

In connection with this, there is always the danger that this idea of the church existing for the world will be abused. It could be used to manipulate believers with guilt. Some have spoken of the danger of a new legalism. In other words, if you are not personally in-

involved with organized missions and evangelism, then you are not truly spiritual.³ Let us be clear that *the church* is called to mission – individual believers in the church have their own specific life-tasks in which they are called to shine brightly for the Lord Jesus Christ. When a believer works faithfully in all his daily callings, he need feel no guilt if he is not directly involved with organized evangelism or mission. Now even though the danger of abuse is there, we may not use that danger as an excuse to ignore a Scriptural truth. Thus, it remains for every church as a corporate whole to examine itself: does this church give maximal glory to God through her support or undertaking of mission in our own country and elsewhere? Could we do more?

To conclude, we must answer the question of "For whom is the Church?" with a "both. . . and." The church exists for both the world and God. However, we quickly qualify that by adding that the ultimate reason for the church's existence is for the glory of God. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ, the bridegroom. He came into this world to die for sinners. In Mark 10:45, He tells us why He came: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." In John 11, when the Lord Jesus healed his friend Lazarus, He clearly indicated that his ministry was for the glory of God (verse 4). In this case, what is true of the bridegroom is also true of the bride: they are both there for the salvation of men. But both also exist ultimately for the glory of God. "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph 3:21).

¹ Quoted in *Reader's Digest*, December 2002, p.49.

² "God's plan to redeem the world centred on Israel." *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective*, J. Herbert Kane, Baker, 1976, p.23.

³ "For the Praise of His Glory," Rev. E. Kampen, *Information*, February 21, 1998.

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Classis Ontario Central of June 13, 2003, has extended the period of eligibility for call of

Candidate Walter Geurts

by one year.

Eligible for call:

Candidate Walter Geurts

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Called by the church at Grassie, Ontario:

Rev. J.D. Louwerse

of Fergus, Ontario.

Declined the call from Carman East, Manitoba:

Rev. R.A. Schouten

of Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Classis Ontario West, on June 11, 2003, has granted

Mr. David de Boer

of Hamilton, Ontario, continued permission to speak an edifying word in the churches.

Examined by Classis Niagara on June 18, 2003, and declared eligible for ordination:

Candidate Edwer Dethan

The ordination will take place June 29, D.V., in Smithville, Ontario.



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Meeting of the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas and the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee in Flat Rock, North Carolina

By W. Gortemaker

On November 9, 2002, the delegates Bill Gortemaker, Art Poppe, and Rev. Klaas Jonker of the CCCA subcommittee (Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas) left snowy Winnipeg on a delayed flight to Minneapolis. Subsequent flights via Detroit to Greenville/Spartanburg, South Carolina, brought us to a more moderate climate.

Awaiting us at the latter airport were the brothers of the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee: Rev. Maynard Koerner, Rev. Ron Morris, Rev. Ron Potter, and Rev. George Syms. These brothers had rented a van, and together we drove north to Flat Rock, North Carolina, a distance of one hour.

We arrived at Bonclarken, an Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC) conference resort, in total darkness and light rainfall. Arrangements for lodging had been made, and after finding our keys in an envelope taped to the office door, we settled for the night in a place called Faith apartments. This was our home for the next four days. Despite the heavy rainfall and gusty winds, we slept well. We were unaware of the over forty-seven tornadoes causing havoc in south-eastern United States.

On Sunday morning the seven of us met for breakfast in the resort dining facilities. This became the routine in the following days; it was a real pleasure to be together with excellent food to boot.

We worshipped in Pinecrest ARPC just outside the resort, welcomed to their beautiful facilities by brothers

and sisters eager to know why seven guests showed up. The theme of the worship service, led by Rev. Charles Evans, was Scripture's Persecution Perspective, with John 14:18-16:4 as the Scripture passage. November 10 was designated International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church. An outline of the sermon was a helpful guide in listening to God's message through this eloquent speaker.

In the afternoon we intended to visit an OPC church about forty miles south of us, but rain and an enveloping dense fog made us decide to turn back; we did not wish to be caught at night time in worsening weather conditions. Rev. Potter and Rev. Syms know the area and thought it safer to return.

We had a most pleasant evening together – great fellowship and much laughter.

North of us the weather was more favourable. Not finding a Reformed church in that direction, however, we decided to go back to our Faith apartment. Rev. Syms had arranged for food for us in the apartment. Before enjoying our supper together, we listened to a sermon prepared and read by Rev. Jonker. Appropriately titled "Christ builds his Church," the sermon emphasized that Christ used the apostle Peter (rock) as the first stone on the foundation he had laid. He also uses us as instruments, as

living stones, in his church-gathering work. This work is not yet finished; it is a work in progress. We had a most pleasant evening together – great fellowship and much laughter.

On Monday, November 11, we officially met as appointed committees to deal with Synod Neerlandia 2001 Synod mandate. Rev. Jonker was acclaimed chairman for this meeting. Our mandate can be found in the Acts of Synod 2001, Article 59. It stipulates continued discussion with the RCUS on the following points:

4.2 – The Lord's Day Observance

The guideline we provided to the RCUS delegates prior to our discussions became our starting point:

"It should be emphasized that in line with the Reformed tradition we maximize our time with the Lord on his day. We should not be satisfied with a minimum of attending church once only. The maximization of our service is also expressed in the word "diligently" of Lord's Day 38. The RCUS constitution agrees with this in its article 180. The whole day should be devoted to God and his service. It can be further observed that the Canons of Dort have a high regard for the means of grace. We receive the benefits of Christ through these means. This confessed truth should make us fully devoted to the Lord's service on the Lord's Day, and attending church twice is in line with this confession. From our side, this issue should be discussed in a supporting way. We must not come across to



Faith apartments



*Mr. A. Poppe, Rev. K. Jonker, Rev. M. Koerner, Rev. R. Potter,
Rev. R. Morris, Rev. G. Syms*

the RCUS as if we are judging them to be in error on this matter. Both federations of churches are fighting for the same things!”

One service per Sunday has a historical background in the RCUS. Distance prevented the small RCUS congregations (after the 1934 separation) from coming on Sundays at various times. The practical result was that they gathered once a Sunday for an extended period of time, teaching and preaching to young and old in their congregations, usually from morning till early afternoon. The Heidelberg Catechism was taught to young members prior to or during the worship services. While two worship services are not prescribed in the Scriptures, the RCUS continues to worship the Lord together on His day for longer periods of time. Usually members of their congregations meet again for a study session during the evening.

It was agreed that how we maximize our devotion to the Lord on his day is an important facet in the life of the Christian. The RCUS brothers proposed to bring forward to their synod,

when approved by their Interchurch Relations Committee, a request regarding how to interpret Lord’s Day 38: “. . . that, especially on the day of rest, I diligently attend the church of God. . . .” It was emphasized that, for the sake of the Lord’s honour, both federations need one another’s help to maintain a biblical view of the day of rest, fully using the means of grace, that is, the Word of God.

One service per Sunday has a historical background in the RCUS.

4.4 The Lord’s Supper to Shut-ins.

For this issue, too, we again used our brief outline:

“In the Reformed Church the celebration of the Lord’s Supper always takes place in a worship service. The Lord’s Supper should be administered in an orderly way and not in a self-styled manner. Important references are Belgic Confession, Article 35, and

the Canadian Reformed Church Order (based on the one of Dort), Article 56. At the table the covenant community is assembled and the celebration is expressed together. The Lord’s Supper, of course, has individual aspects. However, we have to guard against too much emphasis on individual needs. The sacraments should not take on a life of their own. They are closely linked to the public preaching of the Word. A warning against the danger of sacramentalism is in place here. In their past history the RCUS had to fight sacramentalism. We are curious how often the Lord’s Supper is administered to shut-ins. Is it a very common practice?”

The practice in the RCUS is that, in some congregations, the Lord’s Supper is celebrated with long-term shut-ins under the supervision of the consistory. Office bearers and often some members of the congregation are in attendance and celebrate the Lord’s Supper with the shut-ins. This celebration usually occurs on the same Lord’s Day that the entire congregation partakes of the food and drink in remembrance of Him. We noted that this practice takes place in one of our own congregations in this manner: at the time the celebration is held, an elder and a deacon go to the shut-ins next door who are connected via closed circuit TV. In another congregation they have approved this method in principle, but have not yet exercised it.

4.5 Confessional Language in the Church Unity paper

The following guideline was used to start the discussion on this part of our mandate:

“We would like to know what the IRC committee meant when it wrote in its report to Synod 2002: ‘Your committee notes that regarding 4.5 the RCUS adopted the 5 principles contained in the church unity paper but not the paper itself (1999 Abstract p.42-49), which contains some language more in line with the Westminster Standards than the Three Forms of Unity. This is the concern of our Canadian Reformed brethren. Your Committee would welcome this discussion with our Canadian Reformed brethren as part of our mutual working together in ecclesiastical fellowship. Your Committee believes that the RCUS paper on church unity needs to be adopted as well as the principles but recognizes



Rev. G. Syms, Rev. M. Koerner, Rev. R. Potter, Rev. R. Morris, Rev. K. Jonker, Mr. A. Poppe.
Missing: Mr. W. Gortemaker (taking pictures)

that this paper will need some fine-tuning before it is presented to Synod.' We wish to ask the brothers what they have in mind when they speak about "fine-tuning."

The RCUS brothers explained that "fine-tuning" needs to be done to align the document more with their own adopted confession. The Interchurch Relations Committee will pursue this task and make its proposals to Synod for adoption.

Other points of discussion related to the following items:


- a. An experience related to our committee by a minister visiting an RCUS church, prompted a brief discussion on the admission of guests to the table of the Lord. While there is not a uniform practice in the RCUS, it was explained that they examine and admit guests in a way similar to that adopted by the URC. Attention was drawn to the use of attestations to prevent uncomfortable situations when requiring admission.
- b. Our committee added to the discussions the point of the concrete application of our ecclesiastical fel-

lowship. We have written to the applicable Canadian Reformed classes to take up contact with neighbouring RCUS classes to implement fraternal delegate exchanges. The RCUS brothers asked what status a fraternal delegate has at a Canadian Reformed classis. Does the fraternal delegate receive the privilege of the floor and does he partake in the discussions? We answered by referring to the local classical regulations which outline the participation of a fraternal delegate. Our churches need to be reminded that our relationship with the RCUS is a sister church relationship which includes the privilege of participating in the discussions.

- c. The RCUS brothers made us aware of the attack on the doctrine of justification by faith by various scholars in the U.S. ("The New Perspective on Paul"). They also pointed out that the "covenant of works" theology is gaining ground in Reformed circles (Prof. Norman Shepherd).
- d. Suggestions were made for youth exchanges across the border in

camp-like settings using educational formats. Contacts between the RCUS and Canadian Reformed Churches are presently being established. We again suggested that the RCUS make use of the Theological College in Hamilton for the theological training of their students. This would greatly enhance the active relationships we now enjoy.

- e. Recently a minister of our churches led a worship service in the RCUS Church in Minot, North Dakota, by invitation.

All seven delegates at this meeting very much enjoyed the congenial, brotherly atmosphere that pervaded the discussions on existing differences. The fellowship experienced as we worked and relaxed together developed the bond of unity and bodes well for continuing relationships. The Lord of the church brought us together to seek his will and way for our life in the church, to the honour and glory of the triune God. We thank Him for this opportunity to meet together and for the riches of the bond of faith. 

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

With regards to colleague C. Van Spronsen's letter in *Clarion* of May 23, "Yes, you are wrong!" I'd like to give my heartfelt "amen" to it.

G. Wieske
Hamilton, Ontario

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address.
They should be 300 words or less.
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By Bill Slomp



Recently Rev. R. Aasman and I, together with our wives, attended a Grief Seminar, sponsored by Park Memorial Ltd. of Edmonton. The speaker was Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., an internationally respected author, educator and practical clinical thanatologist. He serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition Fort Collins, Colorado, and is a consultant to hospices, funeral homes, school and hospitals across North America. He spoke about grief especially as it concerns children. As part of his presentation he dealt with the ten common myths of childhood grief, as contained in his book, *Healing the Bereaved Child*, (Companion Press, 1996).

In my experience there are many misconceptions about proper grieving in our circles as well. One of the latest trends is to make mourning more of a private affair for family and very close friends only. The reason given is that they do not want to have their emotions publicly displayed. Scriptures, however, teach us that death is still our last enemy (1 Cor 15: 26). They do not teach that a public display of grief is wrong. It is true that for a believer who dies in the Lord a wonderful heritage awaits him or her. However for those left behind it is a sad thing, especially if it is someone who is taken in the prime of his or her life. Dr. Wolfelt counsels openness in the grieving process especially as it concerns children. He writes:

What follows is a list of grief myths we as a society tend to pass along to our grieving children. Sometimes these myths seem harmless, but I have found that when adults (and subsequently the children in their care) internalize them, they can quickly become hurdles to healing.

1. Grief and mourning are the same experience.

People tend to use the words "grief" and "mourning" interchangeably. However, there is an important distinction between the two – a distinction that becomes all the more critical for adults who would like to help grieving children.

Grief represents the thoughts and feelings that are experienced *within* children when someone they love dies. *Mourning*, on the other hand,

means taking the internal experience of grief and expressing it *outside* oneself. Another way to think of mourning is "grief gone public," or "sharing one's grief with others."

We often refer to children as "forgotten mourners." Why? Because though children grieve, we as a society often do not encourage them to mourn.

2. Children only grieve for a short time.

Bereaved children don't "bounce back right away" after the death of someone loved. Still, many adults simply do not understand that grief and mourning are processes, not events.

I continue to read in professional texts comments like, "If the child's grief symptoms persist past six months, he or she should be referred for professional assistance." Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. Around six months after a death, it is not unusual to see *more*, not fewer, visible signs of mourning in a child. This is largely because for children, grief gets intertwined with the developmental process. If I'm just five years old when I first come to grief, that grief will change for me as I mature and begin to understand it with more cognitive depth.

So how long should a child's grief last? If ideal conditions exist (which they rarely do) and the child is actively mourning with the support of caring adults and family members, active mourning can still take 3-4 years. And even that lucky child will encounter intermittent mourning as he develops and reintegrates his grief experience.

3. A child's grief proceeds in predictable, orderly stages.

Have you ever heard a well-meaning but misinformed person say of a bereaved child, "He's in stage two." If only it were that simple! People use the "stages of grief" to try to make sense of an experience that isn't as orderly and predictable as we would like it to be.

The concept of "stages" was popularized in 1969 with the publication of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' landmark text *On Death and Dying*. Kubler-

Ross never intended that people should interpret her "five stages of dying" literally. However, many people have done just that, not only with the process of dying, but with the processes of bereavement, grief, and mourning as well.

No two children are alike. No two children will grieve in the same way. As caring adults, we only get ourselves in trouble when we try to prescribe what a child's grief and mourning experience should be.

4. Infants and toddlers are too young to grieve and mourn.

In my experience, any child old enough to love is old enough to grieve and mourn. In fact, I see children as young as eighteen months old in my counseling center.

Infants and toddlers are certainly capable of giving and receiving love. While they cannot verbally teach us about their grief, they protest their losses in a variety of ways. A few practical examples are regressive behaviors, sleep disturbances and explosive emotions.

Unless we support and nurture infants and toddlers when they are confronted with the loss of a primary relationship, they can develop a lack of trust in the world around them. Holding, hugging, and playing with them are the primary ways in which we can attempt to help these young children. We can also teach the parents of bereaved infants and toddlers how best to care for them.

5. Parents don't have to mourn for their children to mourn.

My experience has taught me that parents and other significant adults in a child's life have the biggest influence on the child's own grief experiences. The problem comes when these parents, however loving and well-intentioned, try to conceal their own grief and mourning from their children in an attempt to protect them from more pain. This is a mistake. Modeling is a primary way in which children learn.

Children instinctively love and try to emulate their parents. So when the parents deny their own grief, they teach their children to do the very same thing. When Mom or Dad is

openly sad, children learn that mourning is OK and that the sadness everyone is feeling is not their fault.

One of the most loving things we can do as grieving adults is allow ourselves to mourn; the first step in helping grieving children is to help ourselves. In fact, our ongoing ability to give and receive love *depends* on our willingness to mourn in healthy ways.

6. Bereaved children grow to be maladjusted adults.

Grieving children can heal and grow with early intervention and compassionate care. Historical research may have us believe otherwise. Since the 1930s, numerous studies have attempted to establish relationships between childhood bereavement and later adult “mental illness” (depression, psychosis, sociopathic behavior). More recently, however, analyses of the research literature have questioned these results because of methodological problems with the studies.

Still people perpetuate this myth. You may have witnessed this when adults approach bereaved children with this patronizing attitude: “You poor child. You will be forever maimed by this experience.”

I repeat: Bereaved children are not damaged goods. In my own experience, if adults create conditions that allow a child to mourn in healthy ways, there’s no reason for the self-fulfilling prophecy that the child will be irreparably harmed by the death. I do agree that grieving children are at risk for emotional problems, but only if they are not given compassion and support in their grief journeys. If we create conditions that help children mourn well, they’ll go on to live and love well.

7. Children are better off if they don’t attend funerals.

Adults who have internalized this myth create an environment that prematurely moves children away from grief and mourning. The funeral provides a structure that allows and encourages both adults and children to comfort each other, openly mourn and honor the life of the person who has died.

Children, who after all are mourners too, should have the same opportunity to attend funerals as any other member of the family. They should be encouraged to attend, but never forced. I emphasize the word “encouraged” because some chil-

dren are anxious when experiencing something unknown to them. Through gentle encouragement, loving adults can help bereaved children know they will be supported during this naturally sad and frightening time in their young lives. The funeral can even provide an opportunity for children to express their unique relationship with the person who has died by including a ritual of their own during the service.

8. Children who cry too much are being weak and harming themselves in the long run.

Crying is the body’s natural and cleansing response to sadness. It helps children release internal tensions and allows them to communicate a need to be comforted.

Children may repress their tears (and other emotional releases) either because they have internalized adult demands for repressing feelings, or they have observed that the adults around them repress their own tears. Unfortunately, many adults associate tears of grief with personal inadequacy and weakness. When bereaved children cry, adults often feel helpless. Out of a wish to protect the children (and themselves) from pain, well-meaning, misinformed adults often discourage crying through comments like, “You need to be strong for your mother,” or “Tears won’t bring him back,” and “He wouldn’t want you to cry.”

Tears are not a sign of weakness in children *or* adults. In fact, when grieving children share tears they are indicating their willingness to do the work of mourning. As loving adults, we can better assist children by crying ourselves when we feel the need to.

9. Children are too young to understand death and religious beliefs about death.

Perhaps you have heard an adult say, “I’ll just tell them he’s gone to Heaven and that will take care of it.” If only it were that simple! As one eight-year-old girl asked me, “If Grandpa is in Heaven, why did we put him in the ground?” Teaching abstract concepts about death and religion is no easy task, but it’s one we must take seriously as we try to help bereaved children.

It is true that children are too young to *completely* understand death and the religious and spiritual belief systems surrounding death. Only over time will children assimilate

these beliefs, and this developmental limitation must be respected. But no matter the specific beliefs of the family, the child must first be helped to understand that the person has died and cannot come back.

Many children naturally become frightened when they hear that after death people go to some poorly defined place (such as “the sky”) for some poorly defined reason. For example, several times after a child has died I have learned that the surviving children – siblings and friends – had been told by their parents or church pastor that God needed a little boy or girl in heaven, so the child was “taken.” I have counseled several children who were counting the days until they too would be “taken.”

As adults, we needn’t feel guilty or ashamed if we cannot give specific definitions of God and Heaven, or what happens after death. Openness to mystery is valuable not only in teaching about death, but in teaching anything about life. On the other hand neither should we offer what may frighten or confuse children.

10. We should help children get over their grief.

Healthy mourning necessarily takes a long time – months, years and even lifetimes. In fact, children never overcome grief; they live with it and work to reconcile themselves to it.

As the grieving child goes about his work of mourning, he begins to realize that life will be different without the person who died. Hope for a continued life emerges as the child is able to make commitments to the future realizing the dead person will never be forgotten, yet knowing that his life can and will move forward.

No, children do not get over grief; they learn to live with it. Those who think the goal is to “resolve” children’s grief become destructive to the healing process.

These ten common myths of grief, when internalized, all too often come between the grieving child and healing. Being surrounded by adults who believe in these myths invariability results in a heightened sense of isolation and alienation in grieving children. A lack of support in the work of mourning destroys much of the grieving child’s capacity to enjoy life, living and loving. Grieving children will experience the healing they deserve only when as individuals and as a society, are able to dispel these myths.





An Introduction to C.A.R.E.'s Review and Editing Committee

By Karen Dieleman

In Ontario, matters which the Canadian Reformed schools or school societies have in common are discussed for mutual benefit by representatives from each society in an association known as the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies in Ontario. From its inception, the League has maintained a subcommittee known as CARE, an acronym which basically defines the committee: Curriculum Assistance to Reformed Education. CARE's mandate as described in the League's by-laws is "to structure curriculum development and refinement, to publish results of its work, to monitor the practical suitability of its work in the classroom and to publish annually a report of its activities." In various ways, CARE has been carrying on its activities of curriculum assistance and development for many years, reporting regularly to the League on its work.

... how can we ensure that the curriculum projects we develop or supervise attain the highest possible quality. . . .

Recently, however, members of CARE have been reflecting on the curriculum development projects currently under their supervision. A key question for the committee has become: how can we ensure that the curriculum projects we develop or supervise attain the highest possible quality in terms of Reformed character, thematic focus, accuracy, methodology, suitability for the classroom, professional nature, and all the other matters to be considered in Reformed curriculum development? Even supposing we had the time to conduct a thorough review of all projects ourselves, could we gain sufficient distance from our own projects to pro-

duce a valid assessment? Consideration of these questions led CARE to establish this past year its own sub-committee, the Review and Editing Committee (REC).

In the scope of the larger picture of curriculum work, REC would take its place as follows:

- Curriculum Review (assessment of needs prior to curriculum writing)
- Curriculum Development (including field testing and ongoing revisions and improvements)
- Review and Editing Committee (possibly leading to further revisions)
- Curriculum Implementation

REC would be composed on an ad-hoc basis, as determined by CARE for a particular curriculum project, with the following composition of members:

1. A subject expert
2. A representative from the Ontario Principals' Association
3. An experienced (ex-)teacher
- 4/5. Two representatives from CARE

Each member of REC would work individually to review a given curriculum according to a specific set of tasks or questions, different for each member. (Example questions: Are the themes of the document biblically informed? consistent with Reformed principles? Does the curriculum flow from or fit with the Reformed school's educational aims? Do the lesson plans sufficiently emphasize themes or concepts rather than facts? Does the curriculum clearly explain its methodology? Does the final report take into account evaluation

forms submitted by teachers doing the field-testing of the units?) The members would then share their reviews together and write a final report. This final report would be submitted to CARE, who would share the committee's response with the curriculum writer(s) and monitor the revision process.

...the first exercise of the Review and Editing Committee has resulted in a positive contribution to the work of curriculum development for our Reformed schools.

With this framework in mind, CARE set about finding the first members to constitute a Review and Editing Committee, to review one strand of the Church History curriculum for grades 1-4 which is currently being written by Miss Judy Kingma under the League's direction and CARE's supervision. CARE is now happy to be able to report that some six months after the distribution of the curriculum (four binders of material!) to the various committee members, REC submitted a very favourable report to CARE. In addition, the process itself went extremely well. The members of REC studied the curriculum independently, each according to their set of questions, and then met to share their critiques and recommendations and

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agree on matters for inclusion in the final report. The final report totalled five pages of commentary and nine pages of detailed appendices. We share with you two excerpted paragraphs here:

As one of the foundational courses being taught at our schools, it is important that [the] content and presentation [of the Church History curriculum] are well thought out and articulated. Over the years, this has been a noted weakness within our schools and many teachers lacked either the time and/or the expertise to correct the situation. Even where subject specialists could be found within a local school, the conceptual framework in which all lessons across the grades could find their place and purpose was lacking. This document provides that conceptual framework. While it takes some time

and careful thought to build the conceptual framework in one's own mind, the payoff for one's understanding of Church History and for one's ability to teach the material effectively from a thematic perspective is very high. This is one of the strengths of this project.

Evidence of much thorough research and detailed investigation of the topics is obvious. It is good that educational aims for this discipline are now clearly and concisely stated for all to read and understand. While it may take some mental work to digest the quantity of material included in this document and how it serves to meet the subject-specific aims outlined therein, it takes much less effort to acknowledge that this curriculum can serve

to meet the greater aims of the school itself.

CARE members have studied the report in its entirety and believe it to be comprehensive and professional, and indicative of a very thorough review process. We are grateful to the members of the committee for their time and work. CARE will give further support to the curriculum writer during the revision process. With thankfulness, then, we share with you that the first exercise of the Review and Editing Committee has resulted in a positive contribution to the work of curriculum development for our Reformed schools.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teacher's Association-East. Please email any educational articles or questions to abkingma@kwic.com.

