

Clarion

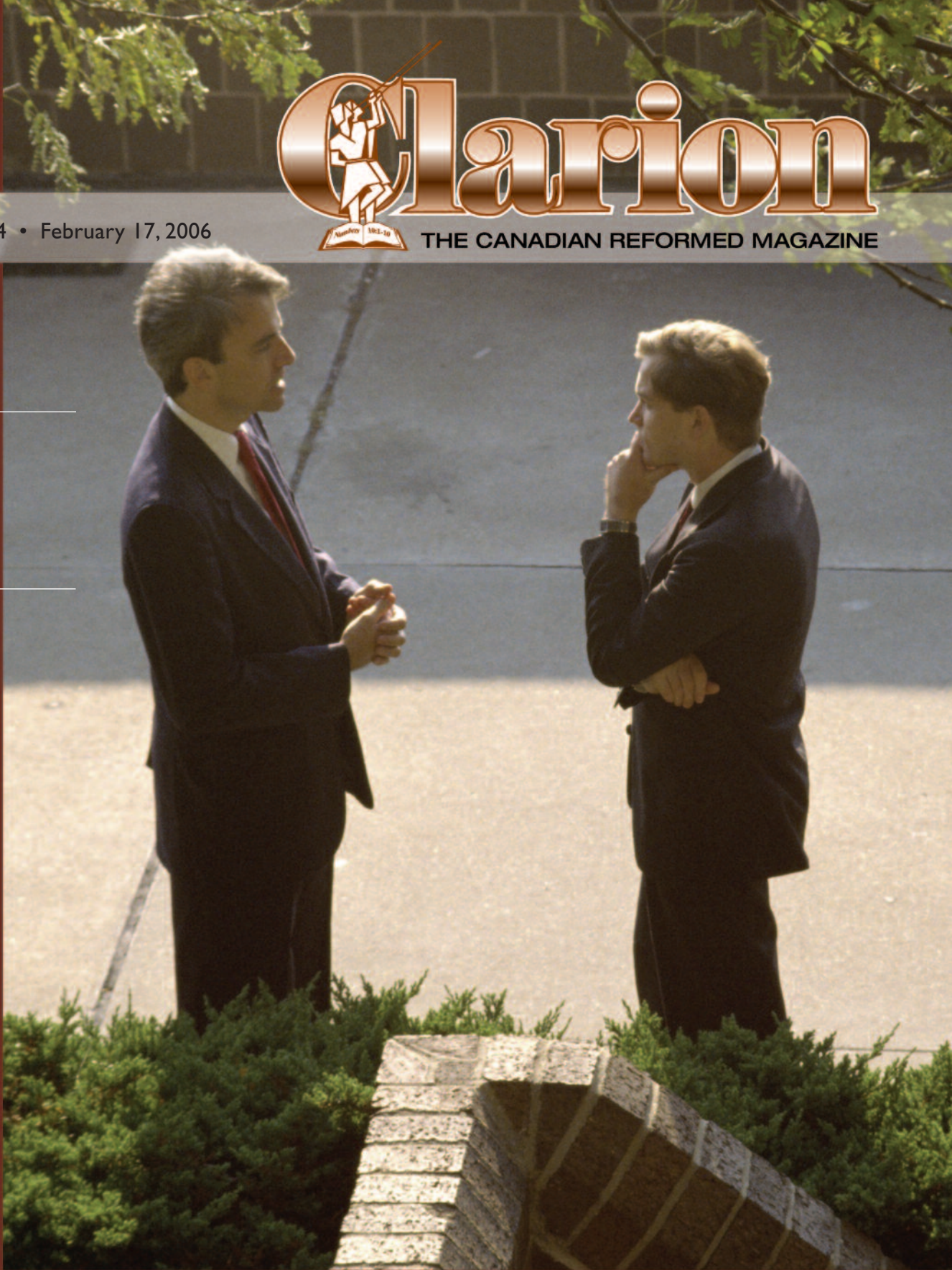
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*Christ's Glory
at a Wedding*

*What can We
Learn from
Reformed
Holland?*

*Parents,
School, and
Community in
the New
Testament*



How to Reach Out?



J. De Jong

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How to Reach Out?

Evangelism activities should be the result of a careful planning process.

The work of evangelism remains a challenge for the church. How do we reach out to the world around us? What sorts of programs do we use? Some suggest that we need to bring the church to the world. We need to tailor the church to seekers. But our strategy ought to be different! We need to bring the world to the church! In the parable of the great banquet, the master says to the servant: "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled!" (Luke 14:23).

We may be grateful for the projects that have been initiated in our churches. Over the years with increased opportunities in our church life, congregations have been developing and organising structured evangelism programs. However, there's still some disagreement concerning the way this is to be done. How do we become a missionary people?

Being communicators of the Word of life takes skill and training.

In this editorial I will offer a few suggestions with regard to the programs that churches should develop for outreach and evangelism which grew out of discussions with students in our course on evangelistics at the Theological College.

Planning

First, programs should exhibit adequate planning and preparation. Evangelism activities should not be done on a whim, but should be the result of a careful planning process. It is not a matter of loosely scattering some seeds, but of a prepared and structured approach to previously established target

groups, incorporating at the same time a detailed follow-up plan. For example, church evangelism workers should divide the community into various neighbourhoods or sections and then plan a projected set of activities for each defined neighbourhood.

Supervision

Furthermore, channels for supervision and oversight should be set in place. Here I am not referring to the supervision of the consistory over the church's organized evangelism programs, although that too is an important element in the process. I refer here to the team of workers who plan the activity from inception to follow-up. When members of the church retain control over the program, then you are not bringing the church to the world, but bringing people of the world to the church! There's no doubt that in the process one will meet with negative words and even at times unacceptable behaviour. But with members of the church controlling the program, they will pastorally deal with these sorts of situations as they arise.

Assigning tasks

Third, we need to retain some forms of division of labour in our approaches. Donald McGavern, who spearheaded the church growth movement at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, distinguished between sodalities and modalities. The sodality represented a mission team designed to win and bring people into the church. The modality was the corporate or group structure of the church that received the new members and made them feel welcome in the flock. I question whether we need such an elaborate distinction, but the blueprint itself is worth considering: we need front-line people and

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then a group of back-ups – helpers and assistants, receivers and welcomers.

This is especially the case in today's culture. Invariably in evangelism, people are going to come across serious social problems. In fact, some target groups, such as, for example, inner city neighbourhoods, will have a very high incidence of social, economic, and psychological problems: alcoholism, broken homes, marriage problems, youth rebellion, and so on. In a book published towards the end of his ministry, Rev. J. Arnold of Amersfoort, Holland raised the question: how do we deal with these sorts of situations in our evangelism efforts?¹ These problem situations are more common than ever in today's modern city. He suggested that we need support agencies to help deal with these situations. You cannot just tell people about the gospel and leave them with their broken homes, or broken marriages and families. You also do not help the situation by simply giving money to these people. Behind our "front-line workers" we need congregations which have organized support groups who meet regularly and who are ready to provide diaconal and spiritual assistance to problem afflicted situations. The outreach church is a diaconal church!

Promote involvement!

As a fourth point, churches should vary their chosen target groups according to the gifts and opportunities existing in the congregation. Often churches are content to carry out a particular pamphlet blitz in the neighbourhood of the church building. That is then regarded as the extent of the evangelism effort for another season. But we need more than a pamphlet blitz, although they have their place. Specifically chosen target groups need follow-up and invitations to programs held at the church should provide an additional pull for outsiders. Hosting discussion evenings on relevant social topics will also trigger greater community involvement. The real question here is: are we making use of the talent in the congregations, especially among those who have more time and opportunity to be involved in these activities?

Follow-up

Further, the church's outreach agencies need to be channels of healing and support as well. An evangelism team will be sure to have a network of back-up people to whom difficult situations can be referred: a lawyer, a doctor's office, social workers,

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and so on. With the announcement of the Word of life comes the will and desire to bring healing in life. To be sure, all churches are limited by budget constraints, broader obligations, and limited resources. But a caring church in a given community looks not only to the immediate neighbours (although they are included) but to the community as a whole. It asks the question: with the opportunities given to us and the resources we share, how can we be a light in this community, and with the Word, provide help in the best possible way?

Training

Target groups take on all forms and shapes today. Some are culturally conditioned, others socially conditioned. However, generally speaking, we have a more literate and articulate society than generations gone by. Both on our front lines and in our follow-up teams we need people who are “ready to give an answer to anyone who asks concerning the hope that is in you” and yet doing that “with reverence and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Our follow-up outreach requires people who will be able to interact with questions, oppositions, rebuttals, challenges, and so on. Paul says: “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone” (Col 4:6). Should not a component of our pre- and post-confession training also include a unit on how to interact with your neighbour in the world on the issues of the gospel?

Programs need to be evaluated in terms of their results.

Already in the thirties, J. Gresham Machen, the central figure surrounding the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, used the techniques of apologetic, argument and interaction in his radio addresses designed to reach outsiders.² Since his day we can point to a flood of literature dealing with defending the Christian faith against its “cultured despisers” or its implicitly prejudiced rejecters.³ Leading figures in this area were C.S. Lewis and F. Schaeffer (among others), and while in some respects one may dispute their approach and methods, they developed and also assisted others in developing the gifts of convincing opponents and refuting errors according to the principles of the Word of God.⁴

Being communicators of the Word of life takes skill and training. Should not our societies, Bible study groups and youth clubs, long devoted to training our members in knowledge, maturity and understanding, also serve as forums to develop the skills of discussion, interaction, and debate in dealing with the “outsiders” God puts on our path? (1 Thess 4:5).

God gives the growth

Lastly, programs need to be evaluated in terms of their results. We know it is never a matter of numbers in evangelism. Opposition to the gospel also implies that numbers may decline. Sometimes people leave after being a part of the church for a brief period. They become critical and dissatisfied. We cannot hide the *antithesis* of the gospel. Indeed, the message is specifically for those who by God’s grace can become like children, Matthew 18:4. However, at times our own programs can put up hindrances for people to remain in the church.

We do not need to bring the church to the world but the world to the church. However, in doing so, the church is and can be an *accommodating* people. That is something different than being a *compromising* people. Paul became a Jew to the Jews and a gentile to the gentiles, “all things to all people,” in order, as he says “that I might win some” (1 Cor 9:16). While retaining our Reformed identity we can and ought to introduce such adaptations in evangelism settings that facilitate bringing people a message they can understand and to which they can relate.

Forbearance

Evangelism is a challenging task, fraught with a good deal of danger, disappointments and trials. Finding one’s way is not always easy in uncharted waters. But we do make progress if in these areas we strive to be a hand and a foot to each other, and avoid entanglements which only foster an “ingrown” spirit. The church of Pentecost had the “goodwill of all the people” (Acts 2:47). Should not the Pentecost church of today strive for the same goal?

¹ J. Arnold, *Als de kerk kerk is*, (Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, Goes, 1986)

² See J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, (W.B. Eerdmans, Grand rapids, 1936) and *The Christian View of Man*, (The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1937)

³ The phrase is from F.D.E. Schleiermacher.

⁴ See C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Collins, London, 1955) and F. Schaeffer, *How should we then live?* (F.H. Revell, Old Tappan, N.J., 1976).



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Christ's Glory at a Wedding



MATTHEW 13:52

John 2:1-11

The revelation of Christ's glory at Cana takes place in a series of events. Jesus arrives in Galilee, having come from the south. At the river Jordan, John the Baptist had introduced Jesus as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. A few days later Jesus already had a gathering of disciples. What does Jesus do? He declares to these disciples in word and confirms in signs and wonders the glory of his messianic ministry. He performs his first sign at a marriage feast in Cana.

Why does Jesus reveal his glory at a wedding? John 2 should be read in the context of chapter 1. The first chapter of John's gospel clearly states how the Son of God, the Word made flesh, was involved in the creation of all things, including humanity. John 1 takes us back to Genesis 1 – from the beginning of recreation to the beginning of creation. Jesus Christ is involved in both.

Yet that's not where the connection ends! John 2 and Genesis 2 are similar in that they both tell us about a wedding. God's creative work culminates in the creation of woman and the institution of the first marriage. As one flesh, the first husband and wife are to fulfil their mandate as image of God, living to the praise of his glory in their marriage.

The Lord Jesus manifests his glory at the marriage feast at Cana. The Son of God comes in the flesh to break the power of sin and

to restore the glory of the Lord over the whole earth, including the glory of the bond of marriage. That's why our Lord and Saviour, according to his God-ordained office and calling, attends a wedding to manifest his glory there. The Lord picks up the thread where it was broken.

God's ordained order from creation was: wedding day – marriage – family – church – the innumerable multitude. Christ maintains that order when He begins to restore what was broken apart and distorted through sin.

While attending a wedding in Cana of Galilee, Jesus is told by his mother that all the wine has been used up. Mary tells Jesus because she considers this a wonderful opportunity for Christ to reveal his messianic glory. Undoubtedly Mary remembered what the angel Gabriel had said concerning her son. Any moment now Jesus ought to make a public display of his messianic glory. Her impatience is starting to show. But Jesus wards her off; He cannot be governed by a human timetable or by the wishes of his mother. His messianic office will be determined by his Father's timing. Jesus speaks sharp words to his mother. He does not speak a word of endearment (mother), but of rebuke (woman), because He recognizes this as a temptation of the devil.

In Paradise Satan used a woman to mislead the first Adam

and now again he uses a woman in an attempt to steer the second Adam off course. According to God's redemptive plan, the hour has not yet come for a public and full manifestation of his glory. Christ can only restore ordinary life through his passion and death on the cross.

Jesus will perform a sign and a wonder in Cana. He changes the water into such fine wine that the master of ceremonies can't believe how good it tastes. Christ's glory is in his ability to change all things. He can change a liquid so that it becomes a different colour and nature. The liquid changes on the outside and on the inside. But the sign Jesus performs in Cana is not an end in itself. It is an indication of greater things to come.

This Jesus, who can convert water into wine, has the power to change ordinary life. He can make our life pure and harmonious. Christ's first sign reveals what He came to do. He does not take us out of ordinary life but He restores the true joy of living with God and one another. Jesus as the Son of God changes our corrupt nature and renews us after his image. The last sign Christ gave his church, the sacrament of Lord's Supper, encourages us to look to Christ for strength as we await the hour of his return. Christ does not transform the wine into his blood, but by this sign He shows how our lives are transformed to manifest his power and glory.



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 52

Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.



We have now come to the final petition of the Lord's Prayer, which Christ Himself taught us. It says, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Another way to say this is to ask God not to allow the evil one to separate us from Him.

This "evil one" is the devil, who is also called Satan. In Paradise he already tried to make Adam and Eve disobedient. And they even listened to him! They did not obey God, who had told them not to eat from the forbidden tree. When they did eat, sin entered this world. This sin is now in our hearts as well.

God promised Adam and Eve that He would save them. The Messiah would take the place of Adam and Eve and He would be obedient. He would make things good again.



God's people were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. But the devil was also waiting. Satan wanted to destroy the Messiah when He came. Sure enough, as soon as the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Satan tried to have Him killed, so that God's plan would fail. Later Satan attempted this many more times. Once he tried to make Jesus sin. This made Jesus very angry and the Lord Jesus told Satan to leave Him alone.

When Jesus' work on earth was done He went to heaven. This made Satan furious, because it was too late to make evil plans against Christ. Satan was no longer allowed to be in heaven.

So Satan thought up another plan. Jesus was now far away, but God's children were still on earth. Satan planned to rob God of his children in order to win over the Lord. Satan is still trying to do this today. He gives us the impression that life without God is much more fun. Satan wants us to believe that he would give us much more freedom to do things. We don't need to go to church every Sunday for Satan, either.

What Satan is trying to do is very evil! Therefore we should pray: "Lord, do not allow Satan to make me turn away from you." The Lord will listen to you. You must stay very close to the Lord!

The Lord's Prayer ends with the word "Amen." To say "amen" means that we know that God has heard our prayer. But there is more. It also means that we believe God the Father is our glorious king. We believe that all power comes to us from God alone. We believe that God has really listened to us.

The glorious meaning of the word "amen" is that the kingdom and the power and the glory belongs for ever to our God. Amen.



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What Can We Learn from Reformed Holland?

The situation in the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in Holland is a topic of considerable discussion among us. Generally, the talk focuses on three types of developments. They are, firstly, new approaches to hermeneutics, exegesis, and preaching; secondly, synodical statements on ethical matters such as divorce and remarriage and the Sunday as day of rest; and thirdly, the introduction of liturgical changes.

Often when here in Canada we read about these developments, our attitude is one of concern, even of criticism. That is understandable. The ways in which some (although relatively few) preachers try to popularize their sermons, for example, seem extravagant, and the changes in other areas often go against liberated-Reformed traditions as well. These traditions are dear to us. In fact, they often enjoy something like canonical status among us.

The concerns, then, are understandable. However, I am not sure that our criticisms are always well founded. Having followed developments in the Dutch churches fairly closely, I wonder if we are not misjudging at least some of the new approaches and as a result ignore developments and innovations that in fact merit our positive attention. We live in a period when modernism is being replaced by postmodernism. This means that our society is undergoing drastic changes, and these changes do not fail to affect the church. Answers that were

sufficient in the past may no longer be sufficient today. At the very least, they may have to be reformulated. Similarly, some of our liberated-Reformed traditions may have to be reconsidered. We all know the slogan, *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* – that is, the church that is reformed must continually be reformed.

Our society is undergoing drastic changes, and these changes do not fail to affect the church.

This truth, it seems to me, Reformed theologians in The Netherlands are taking to heart, and they try to act in accordance with it. They are re-evaluating some liberated-Reformed traditions and are at the same time proposing new answers to old questions. We will not necessarily agree with all the answers and re-evaluations. But we owe it to ourselves, to our churches, not in the last place to our young people, to give scrupulous attention to what is going on, and not to dismiss all innovations out of hand, declaring them wrong just because they are different from what we have been used to. We should follow the example of the people of Berea (Acts 10:11) and judge developments in the light of Scripture. To help us understand and evaluate what is going on in

Reformed Holland, I will occasionally introduce in this magazine one of the “issues” that play in the Dutch churches.

How are we to look at the church?

I begin with a recent article by Dr. Barend Kamphuis, professor of systematic theology at the Theological University in Kampen. The article has as title “*Kerk, van boven en van beneden*” (“Church, from above and from below”).¹

Kamphuis begins by stating that in the history of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) there has been much talk about the church. People used to discuss at great length, for example, the differences between the true and the false church; they asked whether one could speak of the invisible church; and they wondered if there could be more than one true church in any location. Then, in the 1980s, the churches were confronted with the views of a minister (the Rev. Hoorn) who taught that one cannot speak of believers outside the one true church. In addition, there was the much-debated issue as to whether people who did not belong to the liberated churches could be admitted as members of liberated-Reformed organizations. Often the answer was negative.

The climax in these discussions was reached in the early 1990s. Since that time, Kamphuis observes, there has been considerable quiet on the issue.

Fatigue seems to have set in. Indeed, today many people are rather ashamed of what they now see as their church's radical views about the church in the past. And they realize that they have received little in return. All too often there is a vague idea today that the church is perhaps not all that relevant. Far more important, after all, is the individual's personal bond with Christ.

Above and below

Kamphuis disagrees with the conclusion about the church's irrelevance and tries to explain how we can speak about the church in a better way, one that avoids both the radicalism of the past and the relativism of the present. He says that we can think of the church in terms of "from above" and "from below." The Dutch theologian H. Berkhof, he writes, was one of those who looked at the church especially "from below." This meant that he saw it primarily as the work of man, rather than of God. What is attractive in this view, Kamphuis says, is that one does not begin with big words about the church, but looks at it in its empirical, every-day existence, warts and all.

But while admitting that the approach can serve as a corrective, Kamphuis does not want to subscribe to Berkhof's view, which he says ignores what is most important about the church, namely its relationship with God. Kamphuis is quick to add, however, that the opposite approach creates problems as well. One can read pages and pages of beautiful words about the church but remain altogether unclear as to what all that has to do with the real, everyday church of which one is a member. The tension inherent in

the view "from above" can lead to the exclusion of the concrete congregation. The true church becomes then the *invisible* one, as it exists in God's counsel and before God's eyes. The concrete, visible church is only a shadow of that ideal church, one of its many imperfect historical realizations. This view informs the ecclesiology of Abraham Kuyper.

Even though God wants to live within it, the church never transcends its sinfulness.

The liberated churches have always rejected that ecclesiology. But if we look at the concrete, everyday, visible church "from above," Kamphuis points out, we run also into difficulties. A classical example of such an ecclesiology is that of Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholics speak of four central characteristics of the church, namely unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. These characteristics Rome applies without further ado to the visible church as it is united under the bishop of Rome. The Reformers were right when they rejected this doctrine and replaced it with their confession that the church is true only if it displays the so-called "marks of the church." We have to decide from Scripture, they pointed out, whether the church we speak of really is the church of Christ. We must ask: Does this church obey Christ? Does it preach the gospel? Does it administer the sacraments as the Lord instituted them? Does church discipline function in the right manner? Only when all this is

indeed the case can we truly speak of the church in the biblical sense.

But it is not only the Roman Catholics, Kamphuis continues, who connect a view "from above" directly with the visible church. The ecclesiology that for years held sway among liberated Reformed people went in the same direction. This was implicit in the emphasis that was placed on the visibility of the one true church, where Christ gathers the believers and where the believers obediently come together. It is true that a man like K. Schilder stressed the dynamic character of the church, warning that the church remains church only in continuing obedience to Christ. But in practice the connection of the view "from above" with the existing, visible church could result in the canonization of that church. Once that happens there is no longer a critical distance. The church itself becomes the measuring rod and criticism has to go underground, with all the evil consequences thereof. All the great words about the church lose their content, because they do not fit the actual situation. Is that perhaps the reason, Kamphuis asks, why it has become so quiet in the Reformed community around the church?

Avoiding the dilemma

Both views of the church, Kamphuis concludes, have their drawbacks, and we must therefore leave the dilemma behind us. We must, instead, combine the two views. In the church we witness the work of God, which is holy and good and unassailable. The church is really God's people, body of Christ, dwelling place of the Spirit. Here we have beautiful words about the church that we cannot and may not relinquish, because

the Bible itself teaches them. But in the church we encounter also the work of man, which is all too often unholy and evil and vulnerable. The reality is and remains that these two, God's work and the work of man, are interwoven.

The wonder of this duality, of this interweaving of "above" and "below," the eternal and the historical, does not apply only to the church. We meet it, Kamphuis reminds us, also in the doctrine of the Bible, which is both Word of God and word of man. We meet it in the doctrine of election and providence, which speaks of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We meet it in Christology, where we confess that Christ is God and man in one person. We meet it in the doctrine of salvation, for does not the Bible tell us: ". . . Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil 2:12, 13)? In all these cases, just as in that of the church, "above" and "below" are held together.

We have to keep in mind the possibility that human action in the church goes in a direction that is different from God's action. It is of course true that in Christ, God and man never stand opposed to each other. But it is possible that at certain moments we see Christ standing over against the congregation. "I am about to spit you out of my mouth," He even says to the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:16).

The Spirit's work

There is a difference between the "above" and "below" in Christology on the one hand and in the doctrine of the church on the other. In Christ the unity of God and man is that of the one

person. Christ became as one of us, but without sin. In the church we must see the duality differently, namely within the framework of the Spirit's action. Within that framework the human element can remain fully human with all its weakness and vulnerability and sin and yet be taken up into the service of God. Something similar, Kamphuis says, applies to our faith. It is a gift of God, a work of the Spirit, and we can only give thanks for it. At the same time, however, it remains fully our faith. It is not the Spirit who believes in us, but it is truly we ourselves who believe. We believe in a manner that is in agreement with our person and character: our weakness is the weakness of our faith, our sins affect our faith. In believing, we do not transcend our creaturely limitations or our sinfulness.

And so it is with the church. Psalm 87 sings of Jerusalem, "Glorious things are said of you, O city of God." Glorious things are said of the church as well. But the Bible also says terrible things about Jerusalem, where innocent blood is shed and God's Name blasphemed and God's judgment carried out. And about the church terrible things are also sometimes to be said. Even though God wants to live within it, the church never transcends its sinfulness. That is why especially in the church there can be so much suffering and pain. If it was only a human institution, conflicts within the church would not have to hurt more than conflicts in (for example) the chess club. Conflicts and disappointments in the church, however, have a direct connection to our relation with God. For it is in the church that we learn to know God, where we hear

the gospel of Christ, and where the congregation prays and sings together in the unity of the Spirit. Suffering in the church therefore goes much deeper than suffering in other communities. It affects us existentially. It can even threaten our faith. It is not for nothing that God speaks with compassion of those who mourn in Zion (Isa 61:3). He knows of the pain we can suffer precisely in the church.

But there is still the other side as well. The miracle and beauty of the church is that within it the divine and the human, the unassailable and the vulnerable are closely connected. That is why we can still play a role in the church. Yes, there is every reason to be critical of human work in the church. But there is also every reason to praise God for his work within it. God has come very close to us. In the church the reality of the Immanuel-promise is evident: God is truly with us. It is therefore possible to continue speaking about the miracle of the church.

Summary

In this article, Kamphuis concludes, he tries to resume the discussion about the church by following an approach that combines the views "from above" and "from below." In his opinion an approach that restricts itself to only the "below" or only the "above" is risky. It is typical of the church that within it the two come together. This is best understood with reference to the work of the Holy Spirit. If the character of the church's duality is kept in mind, we are able to explain both its weakness and sinfulness and its glory.

¹It appeared in the Dutch periodical *De Reformatie*, July 30, 2005, pp. 77-79.

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Knowing God: Living the Gospel

Lesson 4: Building Stepping Stones or Bridges to Faith

In the first three installments we introduced the *oikos* principle of evangelism, showed how you could discover your own *oikos* or network of relationships, and how you could pray for and serve your *oikos*. In this installment we want to talk about building stepping stones or bridges to faith.

How did it go?

It will be helpful to begin this lesson by having the groups discuss their experiences in discovering, praying for, and serving their *oikos*. These experiences should also include any failures. Be sure to emphasize that one of the objectives of the first three lessons was to build missional habits and character. Have the groups discuss questions like: (1) Have there been any significant answers to prayer? (2) Have they been able to keep to the discipline of praying regularly? (3) How have they served in the way or ways they planned last time? (4) Has anything happened in them or others as a result of the serving? My own experience is that we need to ask others and ourselves these questions to encourage others and ourselves to persevere in discovering, praying, and serving our *oikos*. If we don't, our enthusiasm will wane very quickly.

Once the groups have discussed these questions, have them share some of their experiences with the whole group.

Witness and stepping stones

In 1 Peter 3:15 we read, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander." Discuss this passage with the group. Point out that while everyone may not have the spiritual gift of being an evangelist, every Christian is called to be a witness to the hope he or she has. As we pray for and serve our *oikos*, members of our *oikos* may begin to ask us questions. When they do, we should be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us. In addition we should be able to share what God has done or is doing in our lives.

A very effective way to get a handle on what it means to give a reason for the hope that is in us or to share what God has done or is doing in your life is to have members of the group role play these verses. One is a Christian

while the other is a member of your *oikos* for whom you have been praying. The latter is going to ask questions about the hope in the Christian or what God has been or is doing in the life of the Christian. Because role-play may be difficult for some, give people permission to pass or just talk about the passage as it applies to their situation.

Once you have role-played and talked about 1 Peter 3:15 and 16, discuss the significance of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 for building stepping stones or bridges to faith. In these verses Paul writes:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (although I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Point out that when we witness we should begin where other people are. Once we have found this point, we build stepping stones or bridges to speak about the Christian faith in a more intentional and focused manner.

Building stepping stones or bridges to faith

Have the members of the group look through the following list of stepping stones to faith and put a check mark by each one they think they could build for someone in their *oikos*. The suggestions include: telling part of your story, lending a book, tape, or video, helping someone, inviting

someone to a service or group event, and sharing the gospel. Have the members of the group do the same with stepping stones for groups. The suggestions include: open house night, bowling, family fun day, guest night, question time, having a meal together, hosting an issue evening, and having an open house night.

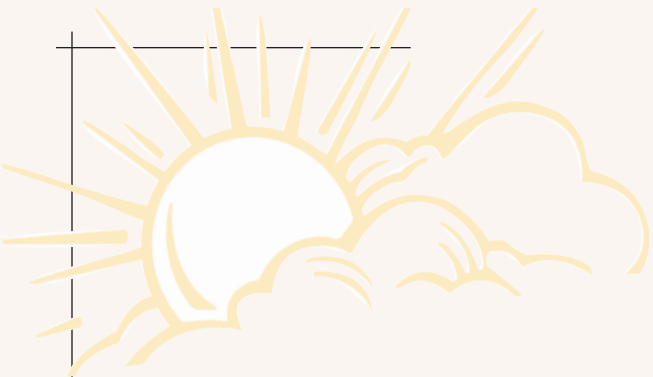
Be sure to be specific in your planning. Remember that stepping stones need to be built where people are, not where you would like them to be. Keep in mind that the aim is not to see people converted in one evening, but to build on and strengthen an existing contact and to see people move a few steps further.

Putting it into practice

Continue to pray for people on your *oikos*. Continue to serve your *oikos*. Look for opportunities to build personal stepping stones or bridges to the faith.

The following passages deal with sharing the faith and are helpful to read: John 1:35-42, John 2:1-11, John 4:1-26, Acts 3:1-10, Acts 8:27-40, Acts 9:10-19, Acts 19:8-12, and Philippians 2:1-13.

If you would like to view the outline of this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. Next time, we plan to introduce a new course called "Knowing the Father." Thanks for reading.



Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

"I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." Psalm 40:8

Psalm 40 is a beautiful psalm which portrays a message of guidance for all of mankind. David strongly wanted to do God's will in all of his life. He realized the Lord's goodness and so the Holy Spirit moved him to want to do the will of his Father. He acknowledges the many wonders the Lord has done and wants nothing more than to please and obey God. Similar words are also written in Hebrews 10:5-10. When Christ came into the world He also said, "I have come to do your will, O God." By Christ doing the will of his Father, we have now become holy. Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins so that we may now have the riches of eternal life given to us. Christ gave us the Holy Spirit so that we may also pray like David did and to have that desire to do the will of God. In ourselves we want always to do what we think is best. Yet the Lord knows what lives in our hearts.

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, it is understandable that Jesus responded with

the Lord's Prayer. He knew we couldn't do the Lord's will on our own, so he taught the disciples the words: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The words spoken by David in verse 8 of our text are not very popular words in the world we live in. Our society has become very sinful and no longer sees the need to do the will of the Lord. Everybody does what is pleasing in their own eyes.

For us as Christians we may still treasure Psalm 40 in our hearts. Often we may ask ourselves, what is God's will for us in our lives? How do I know if I am obeying God's will? God's will is that we be washed by the blood of Christ and renewed through the Spirit of Christ. We are to lead a holy life and strive to obey God's commandments in everything. The more we read the Bible, the more we will understand the Lord's will in our lives. John 6:40 says, "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life; and I will raise Him up at

the last day." The Lord simply wants us to believe in Jesus as our Mediator and complete Saviour. This means that we have to ask God daily to give us the faith to want to obey his will. We have to look away from ourselves and look to Christ above.

This would be a very difficult thing to do if we were left to ourselves. We like to complain quickly or we do things because we have to, not because we want to listen to God. Quite often we are not happy with our place in this life and we let people hear about how unhappy we are. We know what the Lord wants from us and yet we go our own way. The Lord wants our full obedience. When we ask God to help us, He will send his Holy Spirit to guide us. Only then can we say "Thy will is my delight" (Ps 40:8a).

In heaven there is perfect order and everything points to the Lord. All the angels serve to glorify God. They all know their task and place and carry out their duties willingly. The Lord Jesus used the phrase "as it is in heaven" as an example for us – the faithfulness and obedience as shown by the servants in heaven. We must show our willingness to serve the Lord; the angels should learn from us, for we are the children of God while they are the servants of God. The Lord wants to be served not just by angels in heaven but by his children here on earth, for whom Jesus had to die.

Let us always remember to pray for the Lord to work in us so that we may daily be renewed to do his will. We have to fight against our sinful nature so we can deny our own will. God's will alone is good, for He wants our eternal salvation. Praise be to Him alone for his unflinching love and mercy!

*No sacrifice didst Thou, O LORD, require;
Thou gavest me an open ear.
Then I said, "Lo, I now appear;
To do Thy will, O God, is my desire.
Take Thou my life and mould it;
I come, the book foretold it;
'Tis written in its roll.
Thy will is my delight;
I cherish day and night
Thy law in heart and soul."*

Psalm 40:3

Birthdays in March:

- 3 TREVOR HOF SINK will be 28**
C106 8920 165th Street
Edmonton, AB T5R 2R9

- 10 JAMES BOONE will turn 10**
1020 Abbeydale Drive, NE
Calgary, AB T2A 6H5
- 12 GERRY EELHART will be 44**
c/o Mr. & Mrs. Peter Eelhart
305, 10041-149 Street, Summit Village
Edmonton, AB T5P 4V7
- 15 JIM VANDERHEIDEN will be 47**
653 Broad Street West
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 18 ROSALYN KUIK will be 32**
68 Lynn Lake Drive
Winnipeg, MB R2C 4N7

Congratulations to all who are celebrating a birthday in the month of March. May you all have a very enjoyable day together with your family and friends. May our heavenly Father bless you in this new year with good health and much happiness.

Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms & Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
905-563-0380



Keith Sikkema



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Parents, School, and Community in the New Testament (Part 2 of 2)

(Part 1 appeared in *Clarion*, Volume 54, Issue 13, on June 24, 2005)

In the first article ("Parents, School, and Community in the Old Testament") I wrote that our time generates questions and alternatives that challenge our traditions. There is also a shift in our perception of what the role of the school ought to be. Such developments generate discussion and, sometimes, tensions and even discord. We must find scriptural principles to understand the parameters within which to work and to respond to the challenges.

In the Old Testament we found that it was primarily the task of the parents to bring up their offspring. That was natural and was also explicitly decreed. The covenant community was to maintain an environment in which parents could do their tasks and to contribute to that task in a supportive, directive, and even disciplinary or punitive way. In this submission, I briefly sketch Jewish education after the Exile and then draw from the New Testament what the Lord teaches us about the education of our children.

Synagogues

During and after the Babylonian Exile (586-537 B.C.) synagogues sprang up among the Jews as popular meeting places or sanctuaries for worship, for the government of civil life, and for learning about the Torah and its

interpretation and application. Without there being an explicit command to have them, Jesus accepted the institution and often taught in them. On his missionary journeys Paul also first sought out the synagogues to proclaim the gospel.

It is imperative that the family is an environment in which children actually can be taught and raised in the fear of the Lord.

In keeping with the parents' primary responsibility, parents taught the young people a trade or household skills as well as Scripture knowledge and morals. In the synagogue boys learned the three R's and Hebrew. Another discipline, called "Life," focused on the application of the Torah – apparently in response to a decline of parental instruction and the influence of Greek culture. This culture was propagated by the Greek and Roman occupying powers and by the Hellenist schools. Wealthy Greek and Roman parents might have a nurse to look after their children and even hire a tutor. Finally, rabbis had a

recognized position as teaching agents and role models, whether in association with or apart from the synagogue. Students were expected to emulate their teacher (Luke 6:40; 1 Thess 1:5-8).

Formal schools likely arose as an extension of synagogues. In the apocryphal Wisdom of Jesus Ben Sirach 51:23, written around 175 B.C., we read about a "House-of-the-book," or school: "Come close to me, you uninstructed, take your place in my school." Some assert that Jewish schools were started in 130 B.C. by high priest and king John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.). Yet others praise Joshua Ben Gamala for his high priestly decree of 63 A.D. that "teachers should be appointed in every province and in every city, and children about the age of six or seven placed in their charge." Of course, the Jewish practice is not normative for our time.

New Testament

The Lord Jesus Christ, our chief Prophet, Priest, and King, showed a concern for and interest in children, the family, and the respective roles of its members. At a wedding He changed water into wine (John 2); He called children to Himself, took them in his arms, and blessed them (Matt 19:14; Mark 10:14-16; Luke 18:15-18); and He assigned John to provide for his

widowed mother Mary (John 19:25-27). Jesus did not hesitate to set children as an example for his opponents (Matt 11:25; 18:3; Luke 10:21), to express how precious they are (Mark 9:37), or to take a metaphor from their play (Matt 11:17). Later Paul maintained the parental task to teach and bring up their children (Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:20-21; 1 Tim 5:10) and doing a good job of it is among the qualifications for elders (1 Tim 3:4, 12; Tit 1:6). Clearly these instructions were for the well-being of the church and an integral part of the message of salvation.

The covenantal context of education in the Old Testament was not abandoned in the New Testament. Jewish children still learned from their parents, their peers, and their surroundings. They were still expected to ask questions of their fathers, elders, and rabbis. People were not so much amazed that twelve-year-old Jesus asked questions, but with *what* he asked, and with his understanding (Luke 2:47). When Jesus rebuked his disciples for sending away the parents with their children, He blessed the children and asserted that they did belong to the covenant. The gospel was for them as well: The kingdom of God belongs to such as these, He said (Gen 17:7; see Acts 2:39). Paul even declared that the old circumcision had been replaced by a new one, in Christ, as signified in baptism (Col 2:11). Rather than signifying that the person may be cut from the covenant promises if he does not keep its obligations, the new sacrament signifies being buried and raised with Christ to a new life and all its benefits.

Families

Jewish families knew the educational task of parents, but believers from the Gentiles needed to be instructed in this as they were brought back from their pagan ignorance to the knowledge of the one and only true God (Rom 1). For education this implied that although it was a status symbol to hire a pedagogue to raise one's children, parents must love and bring up their own offspring and take it seriously (Eph 6:4; Col 3:21). Again in line with the Old Testament, the children must obey their parents (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16, 29; 30:6).

We cannot possibly delegate to institutions all the dynamic interactions and relationships that have a place in the community responsibility for bringing up the next generation.

For us as much as for the early church, it is imperative that the family is an environment in which children can actually be taught and raised in the fear of the Lord. Jesus maintained that marriage should be kept intact and Paul unmistakably has the family's well-being and proper order in mind (Matt 5:31-32; 19:3; Mark 10:2; Luke 16:18; Rom 7:21; 1 Cor 7; Eph 5:22 ff; Col 3:18 ff; 1 Tim 5; Tit 2). The importance of the family is underlined when the healed

Gerasene must first tell his family what Jesus has just done for him; the parents' faith allows the whole household to be baptized (Mark 5; Acts 16:31-34). Furthermore, the strong bond of the family stands out when one will follow Jesus, or when the division He brings splits families (Luke 9:61; 12:52-53). It is by no means only from our observations of broken families that we learn that they should remain intact. The very fact that these things get addressed in the gospels and apostolic letters to the churches implies that it is in the church's interest that families receive the support of the communion of saints, also in remaining intact and equipped for raising children. This is underlined in baptism, as it takes place in the church and the parents answer the questions before many witnesses.

Church

Since Christians are dispersed as a community living *amongst*, rather than *separate from* other members of society, their families may become islands on their own. However, the Christian community is characterized by the communion of saints. Families are not little islands, Peter implies, but Christians are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God to declare his praises (1 Pet 2:9-10). He calls God's people to "Love the brotherhood of believers, to fear God, and to honour the king" (2:17). When speaking of persevering in love and good deeds, the author of Hebrews tells us not to give up meeting together, but to encourage one another (10:24-25). Also, 1 John 3:14, 19-20 addresses how children

of God love one another, just as Christ loved them first.

Building up the body of Christ is central in the New Testament as being of benefit to the church and being a sign of belonging to Christ. The concept encompasses all of life and cannot exclude education. Paul commends Timothy for taking a genuine interest in the Philippians' welfare while, conversely, everyone looks out for his own interest, not those of Jesus Christ (Phil 3:21). To the Romans Paul writes about loving each other sincerely as members of one body (Rom 12-14); to the Corinthians he writes about the unity of God's people and using their gifts as a living part of the body (1 Cor 11, 12-14); he exhorts the Galatians to do good to all, but especially to the household of the believers (6:10); and the Ephesians must seek unity in the body of Christ (Eph 4). Rev. Kok's meditation on Leviticus 12:1-8 (*Clarion*, Volume 53, Issue 20) stresses the centrality of the church over the family in the New Testament because of Christ: "Salvation does not come by procreation, it does not come in clannish behaviour. Salvation is by God's grace in Jesus Christ, signed and sealed in the baptism in the midst of Christ's church. The water of baptism is thicker than blood."

On occasion we may think that we have many of our bases covered as far as education and communal responsibility goes. We

have kindergartens, we have elementary and high schools, and we maintain a teachers' college and a theological college. While these are all highly valuable, to think that we are all set would be a huge mistake. We cannot possibly delegate to institutions all the dynamic interactions and relationships that have a place in the community responsibility for bringing up the next generation. There remains a personal call for everyone to love their brothers and sisters on a daily basis, in whatever situation, and regardless of age.

Aside from the parental teaching task, the church receives a significant educational role in the New Testament. This role is to teach the nations about salvation (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8) and also to instruct its members, warning them of wolves that might enter the sheepfold (Acts 20:29-31; Eph 4:11-16; 2 Tim 4:1-2; Titus 1:9; 1 Pet 5:4-5). We see this take place both in mission and evangelism projects and also in the regular preaching and catechism instruction. Those in positions of leadership must also be good role models: if, for instance, they cannot rule their own household well, how can they rule the church of God (1 Tim 3:5; see also Titus 1:7)?

In conclusion

Scripture assigns to parents the role of bringing up their children as a covenant responsibility. It also

demands that they do this in the context of a supportive and involved covenant community. Parents, with the help of the supporting community, are free to organize educational events or institutions to communally address aspects of their tasks. However, these events or institutions never take away from the primary parental role; nor can a community assume that these events or institutions are the complete answer to its supportive responsibility. Parents remain responsible and always have a profound interest in making sure that the schools teach in line with what they promised they would teach. Parents may not insularly avoid the support and involvement of others.

The church also has a teaching task, both towards its members, for instance in preaching and catechism classes, and in evangelizing and mission. This task is distinct from that of parents and does not really incorporate everything we have traditionally assigned to the school.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman at obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us



Letter to the Editor

Women's Voting: Privilege and Duty or Democracy?

In *Clarion* Issue 22, October 28, 2005, Br. Edward Salomons makes some interesting statements when it comes to women's voting and democracy. He writes, "Therefore, if our churches are not technically a democracy they are effectively a democracy."

What are we to make of this? Are our churches succumbing to the "spirit of the age"? What exactly is democracy? Much can be learned about the roots of democracy by what David Hall writes in his book *Saviour or Servant? Putting Government In Its Place*. Hall introduces comments from Rev. Steve Wilkins about how British theorist, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), introduced democracy and whose thinking became the basis for our modern humanist governments. Wilkins describes Hobbes' thoughts with these words: "The people could not be trusted with freedom. When men lost faith in the sovereign rule of God, they make their rulers 'sovereigns' and insist that the state impose order over men by regulating and legislating every area of life. . . . Hobbes said the only way for society to exist with order and prosperity was to erect a 'common power' and the only way to erect such a power is to confer all their strength upon one man, or one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices unto one will" (p. 255).

The philosophical arguments of Hobbes and others in support of democracy, embraced by our western society, will certainly support the idea that voting (erecting a common power) becomes an act of ruling and therefore women should not be allowed to vote in the church. Here I see elements of democracy creeping into church government. This line of thinking diminishes the proper concept of biblical headship (leading with the Word of God) and can lead one to compensate for this error by resorting to hierarchialism, i.e., refusing to let the sisters express a preference. I have heard it said that letting the sisters vote would not be prudent; this response has a ring of fear to it. Perhaps from one who knows the pitfalls of democracy or one who has accepted democracy "technically or effectively" for church government. Then the question should be asked, are we being lead by the Spirit or the vote?

Hall continues, "While it is thoroughly legitimate to give the people some voice, the *vox populi* is not the same as the *vox dei*. Even the best of democracies are fallible; majorities are often wrong" (p. 254). Hall makes it clear that the voice of the people is not the same as the voice of God and that democracy is a distorted product of the Reformation which preceded it.

Some of our own theologians seem to have understood this distinction well when it comes to a proper understanding of the vote. Rev. G. VanDooren writes, "We do not speak here about the right to be elected. We believe that the Bible is quite clear in that. But does this have to mean that they [sisters] are not even allowed to express their preference for a certain minister-to-be-called, for nominated elders and deacons?" (*Before Many Witnesses*, p. 62)

Rev. W.W.J. VanOene also comments on the fear aspect expressed by some with regards to allowing the sisters to vote. He says, "They fear that granting our sisters the right to take part in the election will lead towards opening the office to them as well. Besides, they say, taking part in elections is an act of government, and that is not in their province...Fear is a bad counselor, and if the sisters have the right to take part, fear may not hold us back from recognizing this right and giving them the opportunity to exercise it" (*With Common Consent*, p. 18).

Nowhere in our Church Order or confessions do we read of a restriction for sisters to vote, although synods have denied this privilege to them. When the vote is understood correctly, as an expression of preference, which is the case when choosing office bearers from a list which the consistory has already put forth, we do not need to feel threatened. Rev. Cl. Stam, in his editorial in *Clarion*, Issue 15, July 22, 2005, is correct in asking the question "Why is this privilege withheld from the communicant sisters in the church?"

Aubrey Vandergaag

Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.

Letter to the Editor

Women's Voting Privileges

The letters of the Brs. Bosman and Salomons (*Clarion* Issue 22, Oct. 28, 2005) tackle Rev. Stam's veracity in his article "Headship" (Issue 15, July 22, 2005). Apparently he (Stam) has to learn a thing or two about interpreting Ephesians 5 when he writes: "Headship is not an inalienable right"; his appeal to the attentive reader falls on deaf ears as they take issue with "this government [of the church] is never given into the hands of sinful mortals."

Of course not! The church's government is in the hands of the head of the church, Jesus Christ, and council governs by his grace. Office bearers are called upon to serve the flock, given in to their care through the election by male (and hopefully in the foreseeable future by female) confessing members of the congregation.

Ron Bosman writes about "right-to-vote" and "power of headship." Rights? Neither man nor woman has any rights. Christians may exercise their privileges by God's grace alone!

In my humble opinion there are two items at stake with the issue of woman voting. The first is voting versus governing and the second is male/female equality.

The argument that voting equals governing (stated and re-stated by both brothers) has been put to rest decades ago. "Governing" is, by definition, direction and control exercised over the actions of its members (College Dictionary). Voting, by definition, is "a formal expression of opinion (or choice) made by an individual or body of individuals," or "to express or signify will or choice in a matter (e.g. casting a ballot)."

How can anyone say that these definitions are the same? Have the brothers not read/studied what has been published about this matter in the past? Allow me to refresh your memory with only two decisions. First, the Smithville Synod of 1980 stated clearly that voting for office bearers is *not* a form of governing and consequently "rejected this as a ground for withholding of voting privileges from women." Second, General Synod Ommen 1993 of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands stated that

"participation in the voting for the election of office bearers in the congregation of Christ should no longer be withheld from the communicant sisters." Seeing voting as a form of governing, writes Rev. Stam, "is, really, an untenable position."

Concerning the Christian view of the woman/man relationship let's indeed look at "headship." Headship is defined as leadership; good leaders consult rather than dictate. Headship does not equal power, but a *distinction* between men and women. This distinction is expressed in marriage, but does *not* mean that our sisters-in-the-Lord are to be excluded from all activities in the church! (See Acts 5:14; 12:12; 16:13, 14, 40).

Secondly, men and women experience the *same* saving grace of God. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, *male nor female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28); ... "heirs with you of the gracious gift of life" (1 Pet 3:7). Scripture teaches *equality* of man and woman before the Lord. Br. Salomons refers to 1 Corinthians 14 but interprets this chapter in his own way. This chapter deals with *speaking in tongues*, not with filling out a ballot. A woman in the congregation should be silent "in the office of teaching and ruling or governing (see 1 Tim. 2). If she is not allowed to speak 'silently' in voting, when is she allowed to speak at all?" (asks Rev. Folkerts in *Diakonia*, Vol. 9, No. 2)

If 1) men and women are equal before the Lord, 2) voting is not an act of governing, and 3) sisters, having made profession of faith, belong to the congregation, why, I ask with Rev. Stam, is this *privilege* of voting withheld from the communicant sisters in the church? What are we afraid of? That it will lead automatically to women in office? Are we, as council and church members, influenced by fear rather than faith? There is a distinct difference between co-operating (in voting) and governing in office. Indeed, Scripture wants our sisters to be governed but not to govern. Twenty-five years after Synod Coaldale (1977), writes Rev. Stam, we are not one step further. "Time is running out."

Peter Koning,
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