

*The Priority of
Preaching*

*Widow's Tears
Dried*

*Principal
Evaluation*



*Maranatha Canadian Reformed
Church at Fergus Celebrates
Fifty Years!*

Mr. Jake Riemersma at the organ



G.H. Visscher

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The Priority of Preaching

The treasures of God's Word need to be unearthed in new, faithful, and delightful ways

The recent article¹ of Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff, I suspect, has promoted a considerable amount of discussion. Especially when we reflect on a decline in so many churches and numbers among us that are not so great either, it leads to the question: what do we do to enhance growth, maintain our stability, and continue to be a source of joy and delight for future generations?

The one answer that comes up in my mind has to do with the preaching. Worship, I believe, is more than preaching, and people need to be reminded that they gather not to receive but to give – to give glory to God. But yet, precisely, so that our lives might be lived every day under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and radiate every day with the glory of God, this central aspect of the worship service must surely be as good as it possibly can be.

Do we still give priority to the preaching?

Besides, do we not confess that God gathers his church by his Spirit and Word (LD 21)? That the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel (LD 25)? That the first mark of the true church is the pure preaching of the gospel (BC Art 29)? Do these expressions of our confessions, which so truly reflect the truth of the Word, not tell us that preaching must have priority, even absolute priority? I realize full well that in specific situations people sometimes leave for other reasons than the preaching, but is it not true that our strength should and can lie in the preaching? We have a tremendously rich heritage, with every kind of resource available to us, and very supportive communities; should our preaching not be the best in the entire world? Growth and numbers are in the

hand of the Lord, of course, but if we rightly handle the Word of truth and use the means of grace to the fullest possible extent, will this not lead to healthy, vibrant churches that are a joy and delight for her members and a testimony to the power of God?

And yet, I wonder: do we still give priority to the preaching?

The minister of the Word

It was once said of a preacher that "he does most of his pastoral work from the pulpit." The preacher first took offence. Was he not faithful in visiting too? But upon reflection he realized that this is no insult. Preaching is feeding the flock. It is shepherding the sheep. And the time to feed the sheep is when they are all together. In fact, if the shepherd does not feed the sheep when they are all together, the sheep start to scatter as they become hungry and begin to look for food elsewhere. Then the shepherd has a lot more work to do for he has to go and find them and feed them one by one.

Today the demands made on pastors are legion. The task of visiting families, seniors, youth, and wayward members has always been there for pastors. The same applies to the classes that need teaching and those in the hospital that need visiting. And what about the endless number of meetings, from council to consistory to classis and synod, and throw in the odd committee here and there!? And the paperwork... endless paperwork. In our day, there are new demands as well. It is surely beneficial that marriage and family problems are now receiving more help and attention; the higher degree of openness and accountability is much healthier. But this is all very taxing on those who are in the helping professions, pastors included. And so it means that if there is the conviction that preaching needs to have top priority, it means there will come a time in the pastor's busy weekly schedule when he will turn the phone off, stop



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the visits, and, barring unforeseen circumstances, just need to closet himself in his study. This is necessary, for sermon preparation is not something that can be done in a hurry. It requires much time for study, reflection, prayer, and meditation.

Now and then one hears mediocre preaching defended with the argument that, ultimately, it is up to the Spirit anyway to give growth to the seed that is sown. This kind of argumentation is faulty however. The books of the Bible are all instruments of the Holy Spirit. But what care and effort went into their writing! In an oral culture, the Lord Jesus carefully crafted his parables so that they might be passed on from mouth to mouth as portable messages of salvation and life. In an age of travel and letter-writing, the Apostle Paul was ever so eloquent as he strained to put forth the argumentation of each of his letters. The fact that the effectiveness of preaching does not rest on eloquence (1 Cor 2:1) does not mean eloquence is unnecessary.

The time to feed the sheep is when they are all together

The fact that the Spirit uses preaching is no excuse for mediocrity, but it is all the more reason for crafting those messages carefully and thoughtfully. Said one author: "If the ability to empower the Word does not lie in us, it is within our potential, alas, to obscure and becloud the truth of the Word. We can place stumbling blocks and unnecessary offences in the path that leads to faith in Jesus Christ. We can hinder the gospel's entrance into the human heart. . . . Preachers today can set up obstacles to the hearing of the Word in many different ways: by reducing the gospel to moralism, by self-righteous pride, by lazy sermon preparation, by turning the pulpit into a personal stage, by bad grammar, poor speaking, disregard of logic. Unable to empower the Word, ministers can still make it difficult for others to hear the Word."²

Good preaching is complex and its ingredients are many. At the risk of oversimplifying, I believe that there are two cardinal aspects. The first is that the pastor must have an ability to dig. Especially when the congregation consists also of seasoned members who have attended church their whole lives, it will not do to simply paraphrase Scripture; the treasures of God's Word need to be unearthed in new, faithful, and delightful ways. Blessed is the church that has a pastor who just loves to delve into the Word. The

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second is that the minister should be able to communicate the message with *passion*. Communication theorists actually tell us that twenty percent of communication is content, eighty percent is tone. What does that say about a preacher who reads off the gems in his manuscript in a manner more boring than a radio announcer? If the message has touched your heart, preach it as if the difference between heaven and hell depends on it. Because. . . it does.

The elders

This is why councils need to do what they can to safeguard the preaching. It is the "duty of elders to assist the ministers of the Word with good counsel and advice and to supervise their doctrine and conduct" (CO Art 22). Surely high on this list is the task of reviewing the preaching. Precisely because of the tremendous responsibility of preaching, the elders ought to assist the minister in an encouraging way so that his preaching can, in so far as it depends on us, be as effective as possible. It really is in the best interest of the church. It is an investment in the future of the church. When the sheep are fed well and they are together as a group, there will be less need to run after them one by one to feed and direct them individually. Where there is good effective preaching today, there will be less need for pastoral attention in the future. Effective preaching reaps rich harvests in lives in due time; but ineffective proclamation will also reap what it sows.

It means that elders should also be sympathetic when it comes to the sermon making process. Sermon review is of little benefit when it consists of a string of comments made by all those around the table; in the churches, there are outlines available that consist of critical questions that need to be asked. And even when that is done, there is the question that the minister himself might ask: "Brothers, are there needs and issues that live in the congregation which you feel I do not sufficiently address?"

There are other ways in which councils can be supportive. While generally there is a good practice of allowing monthly pulpit exchanges, there is still the occasional reluctance for such. Do the elders really understand how much labour goes into effective preaching? Do they realize that it is actually possible to spend forty hours on two sermons? That alone is a full-time job. And then there are all the other aspects of pastoral life! A consistory that insists on having its minister on its own pulpit week after week soon won't be getting much quality from that pulpit. That's also

the reason, by the way, that I believe that any congregation having more than about 350 members should be giving serious consideration to calling a second minister; such are the demands of our time and the expectations of our people that no one can really adequately minister to these large congregations and still "have a life" (as my kids would say). If preaching has primacy, this will be seen as a necessity rather than a luxury.

In the business world, I am told, it is an established principle that managers need to do what no one else can do. What others can do, they should delegate. What no one else can do, they should do themselves. Well, there are a lot of things that ministers do that a lot of others in the congregation can do just as well. But preaching is one thing that no one else can do. Therefore he must emphasize that work and an understanding consistory should ensure that he is able to concentrate on it.

I need to come to an end. Allow me one pet peeve. I believe that consistories will be wise when they consider so many of their decisions in light of the fact that the preaching must have priority. One example of that is our public address systems. If preaching is number one, why is it that in too many places the sound system is simply a set of Radio Shack speakers loosely joined together with cheap wire? Is that fitting in churches that ascribe a priority to the spoken Word? If music is our top priority, let's spend it on the organ and piano. If curb appeal is our highest priority, spend it on the landscaping. If comfort, spend it on the pews. You understand, I think. The priority is preaching. Preaching has to do with hearing the sound of words. Should our sound systems therefore not be the best they possibly can be? Cut the budget on matters that are less important!

That's the kind of thing I mean. In order for preaching to have primacy, so many decisions in the church need to be made with the question in mind: does this enhance or detract from that preaching?

This, I suspect, is where we will rise or fall. With solid, refreshing, effective preaching, the Spirit of God may make our churches lively and blessed havens in a world gone mad. Without it, we will be as bland and as troubled as that world.

¹"How are We Doing? The Canadian Reformed Churches Today" *Clarion*, Volume 55, Issue 2, 42-45.

² James Daane, *Preaching with Confidence: A Theological Essay on the Power of the Pulpit* (Eerdmans, 1980) 45.



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Widow's Tears Dried



MATTHEW 13:52

“As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out – the only son of his mother and she was a widow.”

Luke 7:12

It's a scene of great contrast. The Lord Jesus with a large crowd of disciples, no doubt excitedly clamouring around the Teacher, approach the gate of Nain. And what meets them is an equally large crowd coming out of the town, only they are not excited. They are devastated. This crowd is in deep mourning because they go to bury a young man from their community. And he was the only son of his widowed mother.

The grief for the loss of such a young man would have already been heavy but it was particularly acute for this widow. Widows in Jesus' time were among the poorest of the land. Single women did not normally work for a living. A woman either lived under her father's protective care or her husband's and it was a great hardship when a married woman lost her husband. She not only lost her companion but her provider.

And now the widow of Nain lost her son, her one and only son. While grieving a dead husband, she could have at least taken comfort in a son who could put food on the table and provide for the two of them, but on this day also that source of comfort was taken from her – her only son had fallen dead!

There's a loss there that is hard to put into words and that we cannot really fathom unless we've experienced it personally. Just imagine losing your husband or your wife – and then your only

child! And if you were a widow in Bible times not only would the grief be so deep it could make you physically ill, not only would there be a lonely ache to see your beloved husband again or to hug your only son one more time, but on top of that your main source of income would also be gone! You literally had no one to care for you and put food on your table!

So the widow of Nain, on the day Jesus met her, was deeply distressed. And the Lord is deeply touched, “His heart went out to her and He said, ‘Don't cry!’” (v. 13). It's a very strong verb and speaks of a visceral response from the core of the Saviour's being, “Weep no longer, dear sister.” He is confronted at the gate of Nain with the acute and terrible effects of sin, with the misery of a life shattered by death and hammered by poverty and loneliness, and the Lord Jesus is intensely moved, “Dry your tears, my child.”

Brothers and sisters, you have a Saviour who cares passionately and deeply about every tear you shed, about every pang of loneliness you feel, about every ounce of pain you experience. Jesus Christ is not our aloof Saviour in heaven who is unaware of our feelings but He is our brother in the flesh who's been here on this earth, who's looked deeply into the eyes of the widow of Nain and understood her tremendous grief and suffering. He understands you

too and is moved with compassion to help you.

For Jesus immediately acts upon his words, “Then He went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still” (v. 14). Isn't this a miracle of itself? Our Lord is not ashamed to connect his holiness with our sin and shame, with the very penalty of death – He voluntarily touches death! No one except close family would have touched the body with a ten-foot pole for fear of becoming unclean but Jesus puts his hand on the bier as if to say, “Stop moving – I've got business with this body of death!” This widow who has lost her only son will cry no longer because the Father sent his only Son to die also for her! The grief of a childless widow can be reversed because the Father was willing to give up his only Child to release her from her oppression!

The Lord commands and the dead man returns to life. But what comes next is Jesus' main concern, “...and Jesus gave him back to his mother.” The widow is restored! There will come a day when every believing mother who has lost a child of faith will receive that child back. Every father who has buried a son, every mother who has buried a daughter in the Lord will be fully comforted by the Lord. Your Saviour knows your sorrow and the restoration of the widow of Nain is a sure promise of your future restoration!

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Knowing God: Knowing the Father

Lesson 1: God, The Father of Creation

The aim of this second module in *Knowing God* is to reflect upon our experience of God and to grow in our understanding of Him as Father. There are four lessons in this course. Lesson one deals with God, the Father of creation. Lesson two with God, the Father of Jesus. Lesson three with God, the Father of the kingdom. Lesson four with God, the holy Trinity. This installment will focus on God, the Father of creation.

How do we know God exists?

When addressing the question "How do we know God exists?" begin by emphasizing that we cannot prove or disprove the existence of God in an absolute way. The Bible emphasizes this when it reminds us that "now we see but a poor reflection" (1 Cor 13:12). Only in the life to come will we see God face to face. Then stress that we can show that belief in God is not unreasonable. Point out that we can do this by reflecting on the things that we do know exist and that we have all experienced in one form or another. Concentrate on the following four areas:

- We all know about our own life and our own feelings and experiences,
- We all experience the joys and wonders of the world of which we are part,

- We all know of the story of salvation told in the Bible. We especially know much about Jesus, and
- We are all members of the church. We have all experienced its life and mission. We will probably have had some experience of the Holy Spirit. We will work together with God in promoting the values of his kingdom in the community in which we live.

Emphasize that Christians believe that God can be known from creation (e.g. Rom 1: 19, 20). Also stress that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is the source of all life and joy (cf. BC Art 1). Consequently, they also believe that the things listed in the four areas above reveals to us something of God. Just as a beautiful painting reveals something of the nature of the painter, so these things reveal to us of the nature of God. Stress that unbelievers who think that all these things just happen to exist have just as much explaining to do as Christians who believe that God is the source. Simply looking at the world in a scientific manner is insufficient.

Emphasize that believing in the God of the Bible is taking the mystery of creation seriously. To simply say that God does not exist without ever having reflected

about the life that exists is a rather superficial thing to do.

Learning from creation

Split your group into two smaller groups. Give each group a sheet of paper. Ask one group to draw up a list of the different things they have experienced in their lives that show that a loving creator made them. Ask the other group to draw up a list of different things they have experienced in the world that show a loving creator made the world. Now ask the first group to list on the reverse side of the paper the things they experienced in their lives that have made belief in a loving creator difficult. Ask the second group to draw up a list of things they have experienced in the world that have made belief in a loving creator difficult. Ask each group to make a presentation of its findings to the other. Ask them to imagine they are addressing people who are quite sceptical about God as the loving creator. Rather than report everything they have discussed, ask them to present one thing that they think is a very good way of demonstrating God's creative love and one way they would address one of the difficult areas of experience. Allow time for questions and discussion.

Reflecting on creation

Summarize what is written in the lesson handout, drawing out the main points of how Christians should relate to the creation:

- Creation reveals something of the nature of God, but
- Creation does not reveal everything of God's nature,
- We are not to worship creation or identify God with the

creation (as in some New Age beliefs), but

- We are stewards of creation, and
- We are to delight in what God has made.

Putting it into practice

Suggest that group members give some thought to the ways they use (or misuse) God's creation. Ask

all the group members to think about any changes they might make in their lifestyle. Explain that the next lesson will begin with some discussion of this.

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 "God, the Father of Jesus." Thanks for reading.



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High Notes in the History of the Hymns: "Now Thank We All our God"

Both the general and the immediate circumstances in which "Now Thank We All our God" was written give the hymn a special meaning. It was penned by Martin Rinckart (1586-1649), a Lutheran theologian, writer, and musician. He was appointed archdeacon in the church at Eilenburg in 1617, just before the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War, which pitted Protestants against Roman Catholics in one of the last major religious wars in Europe.

The rising tensions before the outbreak of war caused many people to take refuge within the fortifications of Eilenburg, with the consequence that hunger and disease spread rapidly there. While fellow pastors fell ill and died, the Pietist Rinckart continued to provide food, clothing, and moral support to the declining population. When the Plague broke out in Eilenburg, Rinckart was called upon to conduct as many as fifty funerals daily, including that of his first wife. In the midst of these tribulations "Now Thank We All our God" was written.

Now thank we all our God
With hearts, and hands, and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mother's arms
Has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.

Hymn 65:1

Rinckart wrote the poem as a short, two-stanza prayer to be sung by his children at the dinner-table. The phrase "with heart, and hands, and voices" may refer to the immediate circumstance of family devotions. The progression of thought, from gratitude in verse 1 ("thank") to petition in verse 2 ("may") and to praise in verse 3 ("praise"), reinforces the prayer-like quality of this *Tisch-gebet*, or "dinner-table prayer." A direct reference to the Plague and its horrible effects

may be found in the petitions of the second verse; they appear in the *Book of Praise* as follows:

And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills,
Of this world in the next.

In the last line of the poem the words "and shall be evermore" invite a final "amen."

Article Six of the Belgic Confession states that "the church may read and take instruction" from the apocryphal books of the Bible. During the seventeenth century the Lutheran Bible contained the apocrypha, including the book *Ecclesiasticus*, which provided Rinckart the textual inspiration for this hymn. In chapter 50:22-24 we read: "And now bless the God of all, who everywhere works great wonders, who fosters our growth from birth, and deals with us according to his mercy. May He give us gladness of heart, and may there be peace in our days, in Israel as in the days of old. May He entrust to us his mercy, and may He deliver us in our days." These words had direct relevance to those living during the Thirty Years' War.

The tune for "*Nun Danket Alle Gott*" was written by Johan Crüger (1598-1662), one of the most important chorale composers of the seventeenth century. As choir-leader at St. Nicholas' Lutheran Church in Berlin, Crüger promoted the improvement of congregational singing. He compiled many volumes of tunes and texts, especially *Praxis Pietatis Melica* (1647), which became the standard book of praise in the Lutheran churches during the seventeenth century. It contains the earliest surviving publication of "Now Thank We All our God."

Hymn 65

Text: Martin Rinckart, 1636

Tune: Johan Crüger, 1648

Translation: Catherine Winkworth, 1858

Original Function: Dinner-table prayer



Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878)

Of the approximately twelve English translations that have been made of this German poem, the most popular one is by Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878). Interested in education and social work, she wrote two biographies of founders of sisterhoods for the poor and sick. Winkworth spent a brief period in Germany and learned the country's language. She translated more than four hundred Pietist hymns into English and published a collection called *Lyra Germanica* in 1855. Winkworth rendered the German into English with particular attention to end-rhyme, word choice, and sound. The title that she gave to the translation of "Now Thank We All our God" is "The Chorus of God's Thankful Children."

In modern times the hymn has been sung at occasions other than the intended family devotions. Indeed, it appears to have taken on a national rather than private character. It was sung widely on "Victory in Europe Day," May 8, 1945, when World War II ended. From its lowly origins in a time of tribulation the hymn has grown into a grand, common expression of thanks.

PSALM 119:

A Newly Revised Metrical Version

27. How good it was for me to suffer pain
So that in all Your statutes You might school me.
The perfect law that You, O LORD, ordain
Exceeds all earthly riches. Let it rule me!
Your ordinances are my greatest gain,
For gold and silver can no longer fool me.

Yodh

28. LORD, You have fashioned me with Your own hands;
By You was I once moulded and created.
Give me then insight into Your commands,
That to Your law I may be dedicated.
All those who fear You shall applaud my stand;
Since in Your word I trust, they are elated.

29. I know, O LORD, Your judgments all are just;
In faithfulness You brought me tribulation.
As You have promised—and Your word I trust—
Now let your mercy be my consolation.
In Your compassion grant me life and rest:
Your law is my delight and exultation.

30. Let proud and godless men be put to shame,
For me they have with crafty guile subverted;
But Your decrees I'll ponder and proclaim.
May by my words the faithful be supported.
May I obey Your statutes without blame,
That far from me all shame may be averted.

Kaph

31. With longing I Your saving power invoke;
Your word gives hope that nothing can extinguish.
With failing eyes I for Your promise look:
"When will You comfort me and heal my anguish?"
Though I'm a wineskin shrivelled in the smoke,
I'll not forget Your laws as here I languish.

32. LORD, how long does Your servant have to wait?
When will I see Your punishment inflicted
On those who persecute me in their hate,
Whose wickedness seems to go undetected?
See how the proud for me their snares have set.
They flout Your law; Your word they have rejected.

33. All Your commandments shall securely stand;
LORD, help me, for by liars I am hounded.
Though they have almost swept me from the land,
I've kept Your law, in which my hope is founded.
In Your unfailing love my life defend,
That I may heed what You, LORD, have expounded.

Lamedh

34. Fixed in the heav'ns is Your eternal word;
Firm is Your promise through the generations.
The earth that You established has endured;
You are the faithful God of my salvation.
By Your appointment all stands firm, O LORD,
For You are served by all of Your creation.

35. If Your commands had not been my delight,
I would have perished here in my affliction.
Your precepts I will not forget or slight:
You have renewed my life by their direction.
LORD, I am Yours. Come, save me by Your might.
Your laws have I sought out for my instruction.

36. Though wicked men in ambush lie concealed
And are intent on plotting my destruction,
I will reflect on what You have revealed.
I see a limit set to all perfection;
But Your commands, which ever have prevailed,
Are boundless—without end, without restriction.

Mem

37. Oh, how I love the teachings of Your law!
I ponder them, all day in study spending.
Your precepts make me wiser than my foe,
For the support they give is never-ending.
Through them, I far more than my teachers know:
I have surpassed them all in understanding.

38. I have more insight than the old and grey,
All owing to the laws that I'm observing.
I keep my feet from every evil way
To honour Your commandments without swerving.
LORD, You Yourself have taught me not to stray;
So I walk on, a steady course preserving.

39. O LORD, how pleasing is Your steadfast word.
Sweet are Your promises of grace and favour,
Yes, nothing greater sweetness can afford—
Not even honey, sweet though be its savour.
Your statutes grant me wisdom as reward;
I therefore hate false ways and shun them ever.

Nun

40. Your word is as a lamp unto my feet,
A lantern shining on the path before me.
I've sworn an oath and never will forget
Your righteous laws that of Your love assure me.
I am with grief and misery beset;
True to Your promise, comfort and restore me.

41. Accept, O LORD, my offerings of praise.
And let me by Your statutes be instructed.
Though I have been in danger countless days,
Your laws I've not forgotten or rejected.
My foe for me his snares and pitfalls lays,
But Your commandments I have not neglected.

42. Your testimonies are forever mine—
My heritage and permanent possession,
The joy that I shall in my heart enshrine—
And to their praise I ever give expression.
My heart to Your commandments I incline,
Right to the end upholding my confession.

Samekh

43. I hate the fickle and divided heart;
I love Your law and praise it with elation
You are my shield, my refuge, my support;
Your word is all my hope and expectation.
You evildoers, far from me depart,
That I may serve the God of my salvation.

44. Uphold me, LORD, and so my life sustain;
True to Your promise, grant me preservation.
Let me not hope and trust in You in vain,
For I rely on You for liberation.
Your statutes I will evermore maintain;
I turn to them in reverent meditation.

45. All who from Your decrees have gone astray
You will reject. In vain do they dissemble.
Like worthless dross You cast them all away;
The wicked You will put to shame and humble.
I fear the righteous judgments You display;
The dread of You, LORD, makes my body tremble.

Ayin

46. See how what I have done is just and right;
O LORD, to my oppressors do not leave me.
Ensure Your servant's welfare, God of might;
Let not the arrogant oppress and grieve me.
My eyes grow dim with watching day and night
For You to keep Your promise and relieve me.

47. Treat me according to Your love and grace
And guide me to the truth for which I'm yearning.
Help me gain insight into Your decrees
And teach Your servant what is most worth learning.
To let me grasp the justice of Your ways,
Open my eyes and make me more discerning.

48. It's time for You to act, LORD, and be bold;
Your holy law is being violated.
I prize it more than all the finest gold;
My love for Your commands is unabated.
In all my ways Your precepts I uphold;
The paths of falsehood I have ever hated.

Pe

49. How wonderful are Your decrees, O LORD;
I gladly keep them, for they are astounding.
As You unfold and open up Your word,
It shines Your light into my dark surroundings;
It even to the simple will award
Gifts of discernment and of understanding.

50. With open mouth I pant for Your commands
And to my deepest longing give expression.
To those who love Your name You grace extend;
Turn, then, to me as well in Your compassion.
Direct my footsteps. Help me to withstand
The power of sin and keep me from transgression.

51. Free me from man's iniquitous designs,
That I may serve You, by Your laws directed.
LORD, make Your face upon Your servant shine,
And by Your statutes let me be instructed.
While shedding streams of tears, I grieve and pine,
For Your commands are utterly neglected.

Tsadhe

52. LORD, You are upright and Your laws are just;
Your judgments You on righteousness have founded.
In Your decrees have I placed all my trust,
For they in faithfulness are firmly grounded.
My zeal consumes me, and I am distressed
When foes ignore the truth You have expounded.

to be continued. . . —+

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College Corner



Mr. Malcolm Wildeboer

Many members of our churches will remember Prof. and Mrs. Ohmann, who came to Canada when Prof. Ohmann was appointed to teach the Old Testament courses at our seminary in Hamilton. Recently we were notified that Mrs. Ohmann had passed away. When this issue was about to be printed, we were informed that Prof. Ohmann had passed away as well. An article in remembrance of him will be published in the next issue of Clarion.

From time to time special lectures are given at the Theological College. On November 18, Mr. Malcolm Wildeboer, who is an architect, gave a speech for the students and staff dealing with principles for church architecture. Of course, ministers are not specialists in this area, but many will during their active ministry be involved in a church building or church renovation project. Some understanding of the most important aspects of buildings used for worship will be beneficial. Mr. Wildeboer advocated the building of contemporary churches. He also discussed whether places of worship should be puritanical

spartan or whether the hall could have an artistic dimension. His speech was obviously not theological, but it was much appreciated by students who may be faced with this issue at one time or another during their ministry.

The College provided the venue for the Ministers' Workshop which was held on January 30. This meeting focused on the same sex legislation and the implications for ministers. Mr. Herman Faber approached the issue from the perspective of the law and Rev. Doug Vandeburgt from the perspective of the minister who is licensed to solemnize marriages. Discussing these issues was a sobering experience, but it was good to be aware of the issues and to be ready. In the same month, Dr. De Visser attended a symposium on worship, organized at Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids.

Dr. Van Dam had a busy season. In November he and his wife

travelled to Cyprus for a meeting of the International Council of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship. And at the beginning of this year the Theological College hosted a special series of four lectures presented by Dr. Van Dam. Originally these lectures were planned to be held at the College, but the attendance was so great that another venue needed to be found. Eventually the lectures were given in Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton. Dr. Van Dam elucidated from the perspective of the Old Testament several aspects of the work of elders as leaders of God's church. These meetings drew from 165 to 200 people. It was good to see so many people there. And the good news for both those who attended and for those who were unable to come is that there are plans for these lectures to be published in the near future.



Dr. Van Dam in Cyprus

Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Fergus Celebrates Fifty Years!

"I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations." (Ps 89:1)

On Friday, January 20, 2006, I was treated to a walk through the history of the existence of the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Fergus. What a history lesson that was! This festive evening was opened with the words of Psalm 89:1-18, which speak of God's faithfulness and steadfast love which He has made known also to us in the past fifty years. This Bible passage was very fitting and set the tone for our celebrations of the evening.

The chairman of Fergus Maranatha (south), Mr. T. van Tol, gave an overview of the past fifty years, beginning with the institution of Fergus-Guelph on January 15, 1956, with a total of fifty-six members, including two elders and one deacon. We heard about the pastoral work of Rev. P. Kingma (1959-1964) and Rev. Van Beveren (1964-1969). Seven years after instituting, worship began in the newly built basement of the present day church building. Four years later the sanctuary was complete and worship continued there. Our chairman then walked us through the "Van Oene years" (1970-1985), during which several meeting rooms, an elevator, and a new entrance were added to the building. In 1974, 137 members left to form the church in Guelph. Our

chairman then walked us through the ministries of Rev. Stam (1985-1988), Rev. Huijgen (1990-1995), and Rev. Louwerse (1999-2005). During the time of Rev. Stam, the new pipe organ was completed. In 1984, many members left to institute the church in Elora and, together with members from Orangeville, a church in Grand Valley. During the time of Rev. Louwerse the church was divided into two congregations. Today Fergus North is pastored by Rev. W. Geurts, while Fergus Maranatha awaits the arrival of Rev. D. Agema. We could witness astounding growth by the grace of God during these fifty years, increasing from one small congregation to more than four!

We were reminded on this evening not to honour man's achievements, as they are so often fraught with shortcomings, lest we

should become proud. Instead, we ought to look at what God has done for us. He has provided faithful shepherds and has given growth. He has given willing hands to build and the desire to live together as a communion of saints. We were encouraged to place our hope and trust in Him for the future as well.

Our M.C., Mr. J.D. Gansekoele, welcomed the original charter members, who are still members today, as well as the past ministers and their wives who were among us this evening. These included Mrs. Kingma, Rev. and Mrs. Huijgen, Rev. and Mrs. Stam, and our minister emeritus and his wife, Rev. and Mrs. Van Oene. Following this, various Bible Study groups from both congregations presented their memories of a particular minister, by way of anecdote, poem, or skit. After each presentation, the



Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church building



Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene addressing the audience (without his gown on!)

ministers presented, by letter or in person, a brief address. We learned a lot of interesting things about each minister! Rev. Kingma was remembered for his hospitality, taking in Mr. and Mrs. C. Boot and family, who "arrived at their doorstep" on a Saturday evening. Rev. Van Beveren was known for his humour. Apparently, if you came into a meeting with your hat on, he'd ask, "Are your feet cold?" We heard about the Van Oene freezer containing "good BC meat" that was forwarded to Fergus with great pains and about Rev. Van Oene's talents as a sharp shooter. Apparently groundhogs were targeted from both the study as well as the consistory room windows! For many years Rev. Van Oene preached three sermons a Sunday, after Guelph had instituted on its own. Rev. Stam was remembered for his sense of humour. When we hosted the local Remembrance Day Sunday service, Rev. Stam received a phone call, inquiring whether his presentation was going to be in Dutch. "No," he replied, "it will be in Gaelic." Rev. Huijgen was remembered as the minister who didn't mind getting a little grease on his hands; he was at times the "mechanic." We were his first church in Canada and a special bond still remains. Rev. Louwerse was our last minister before our

split. He was the minister who changed the most while here, arriving as a bachelor and leaving as a husband and father.

Greetings and best wishes were received from delegates of our neighbouring churches. As well, best wishes were received from our local mayor, MPP, and MP, who highlighted the contributions of our "Dutch Community" to the life and culture of Centre Wellington County. We enjoyed the musical contributions of our local choir, "Te Deum Laudamus," as well as an organ interlude provided by Martin Jongsmma. Towards the end of the program a plaque and gift were presented with thanks to Mr. Jake

Riemersma, who celebrated fifty years on this evening as our church organist.

Rev. Geurts had the privilege of closing the evening in thanksgiving prayer. He also reminded us of our common beginnings; we share the same date of institution as the churches of Guelph and Brampton. He also took the opportunity to thank the 50th Anniversary Committee for their work in preparing for this evening.

After the lengthy but enjoyable program we enjoyed a social hour. One could see, especially on the faces of the senior members, great joy in being able to reminisce with former ministers, their wives, and previous members present this evening. What a testimony of the bond of faith which has remained over the years!

This evening certainly was a history lesson, bringing us quickly through the fifty years of the existence of our congregation. It was good to pause and to reflect on the blessings of the Lord given to our congregation in the past. We see his mighty hand at work and trust and pray that his hand may be upon us in blessing for the future.

Mrs. Van Oene and Mrs. R. Thalen share conversation, while Mr. and Mrs. C. Boot stand nearby



Ben Harsevoort

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Principal Evaluation



I was approached to write an article about principal evaluation that might inform *Clarion's* readership about the pitfalls and benefits or merits of such an evaluation. What would be prerequisites for this evaluation and how would it best be conducted? What standards would be used for measurement? Should principal evaluation be done in the context of school evaluation or independently? In a Reformed context, how should we go about evaluating the manager or the leader of the school?

There is great deal of professional literature regarding principal evaluation, much of it not germane to our local, parentally-controlled Christian schools. I will confine my research to three documents¹ related to schools similar to ours and offer some critique and commentary.

CSI model

The introduction to the booklet *Staff Evaluation* from Christian Schools International sets the foundation for evaluation within the context of Christian organizations. To understand and appreciate what the desired attributes and responsibilities for a principal ought to be, one should examine the nature of leadership in Christian organizations, and more particularly, in the Christian school. Paul says, "We have different gifts, according to the

grace given to us. . . if it is leadership, let him govern diligently" (Rom 12:6, 8).

Leadership, as explained in Scripture, is a gift or capability to be used to equip others for ministry and for building up the body of Christ. In Christian schools, God provides leaders to help teachers educate children well. While all people lead others to some degree, God equips certain people especially for leadership. Furthermore, Scripture indicates that those persons possessing leadership ability are to be acknowledged and are to exercise this gift within and for the body. Paul tells the Ephesians that leaders (teachers, pastors, administrators) ought to use their gift "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:12). Some believe God's model of a good elder or "overseer" applies in some ways to Christian school leaders; these overseers will be "above reproach. . . self-controlled, able to teach."

The principal's primary supervisory responsibility is to serve the people in the organization to help them accomplish their tasks. The service that Christian leaders provide is nurture, a caring and feeding of the individual or group. The major focus of a leader's supervision is to assist followers and help them grow. In situations where

individuals do not grow within the body, the leader needs to direct and correct. The responsibility to exhort and admonish is inherent in the leader's task.

All of the principles of evaluation normally applied to teachers apply to principals as well. The focus of an evaluation for administrators ought to be on improvement. It ought to be regular, fair, comprehensive, and direct. It ought to follow the principles of Matthew 18. It ought to be based on a clear job description, so that whoever evaluates the educational leader of the school is not doing it arbitrarily but on the basis of previously decided written responsibilities of the administrator. It ought to consist of multiple viewpoints (board members, education committee members, teachers, etc.). It ought to include both written comments and a face-to-face meeting with the people who employ the leader. All persons who make observations should "speak the truth in love" for the benefit of the school leader. And its success ought to be measured against the prime goal of enhancing Christian education in the school.

School boards must make clear distinctions between the role of the Board and the role of the principal. Board members sometimes make the mistake of "administering" the daily functions of the school; principals sometimes decide policy

when they should be insisting that the Board make policy. The Board must put in place policies that best carry out the purpose of the school; it should not administer the policies. Administrators should insist that they themselves will implement the policies set by the Board. The Board ought to make these distinctions clear in establishing its job description for the principal. If a school does not have a written job description for its leader, it ought to form one soon, with the help of the administrator. The job description ought to include statements about administration, educational leadership, spiritual leadership, staff supervision and leadership, instructional leadership, student leadership, facility and site leadership, board leadership, education committee leadership, community leadership, etc.

Who is responsible for evaluating the principal? Certainly the Board is responsible overall, but it may include in its process Education Committee questionnaires, faculty questionnaires, etc. How a school decides to evaluate its administrator depends somewhat on the size of the school and the Board's policies for evaluation. Almost all schools use either of the following models for evaluating

the administrator, essentially different in the number of people involved in the evaluation:

1. Evaluation by a few

In this procedure the Board appoints a committee of three people to evaluate the administrator. This committee makes all the observations, compares the work of the administrator to the criteria for the position, interviews the administrator, and keeps the written record of the evaluation. This committee provides the full board with a general summary of the committee's evaluation.

2. Evaluation by many

In this procedure the Board may appoint a committee to conduct the evaluation, but many people participate in observing and evaluating the work of the administrator.

Board members must realize that the evaluation of the principal is designed to enhance the quality of administration in the school; it is not an occasion to get things off one's chest. Personal matters ought to be handled personally, according to Matthew 18.

OACS model

The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools and the Ontario Christian School Administrators Association published a handbook

Church News

Called by the church at Willoughby Heights, Langley, British Columbia:

Rev. J. Van Woudenberg of Guelph, Ontario.

Declined the call to Kelmscott, WA, Australia:

Rev. D.W. Vandeburgt of Glanbrook, Ontario.

Call approved

After a colloquium (cf. Article 5.B.2, C.O.) on March 28, 2006, Classis Pacific West approved the call extended to Rev. C. Macleod. He will be installed in Smithers on April 23, 2006, D.V., as a missionary for work among the native people of NW British Columbia. He previously served as minister of the Free Church of Scotland in the Western Isles Presbytery among the congregation of North Uist, Grimsay and Berneray.

in 1995 dealing with evaluation of Christian School Administrators. The title of the document, *Growth in Christian Leadership*, is indicative of their model for principal evaluation. They assert that principals need continuous development and renewal in their professional competence and educational insights. The board, through the evaluation process, can challenge the principal to explore new areas. They state that the challenge to grow is scriptural and cite numerous references to support their position. However, I believe that many of their references do not support their call for continuous growth in competence. Let me cite some examples.

"Paul, in his letter to Timothy, makes it quite clear that being an 'overseer' is a 'noble task.' This 'noble task' requires evaluation by the school board on a regular basis." Paul indeed makes it clear



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that being an overseer is a noble task, but to follow with the sentence that this noble task requires evaluation by the school board on a regular basis seems to me to be most inappropriate. Paul is specifically speaking about the office of overseers or bishops or elders in the church. Further, he does not suggest any evaluation process for them.

"The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that if the body (Christian school community) is to speak the truth and grow in the Lord educationally (Eph 4:15-16) members must 'encourage one another and build each other up' (Thess 5:11)." The Scriptures indeed make it clear that it is the task of the body to build up and encourage, but, in my mind, that is not a metaphor for formative and summative evaluation. The Ephesians text speaks specifically of growth in the unity of faith, not of growth in competence.

"Principals need continuous development and renewal in their professional competence and educational insights. The challenge to grow is scriptural. In Romans 15:14 Paul says, 'I, myself, am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.'" The text does not support the assertion. In fact, with emphasis added, it refutes it. I, myself, am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are *full of goodness, complete in knowledge, and competent* to instruct one another (emphasis mine). One who is full, complete, and competent need not be evaluated for growth.

I am not suggesting here that one ought not to evaluate administrators. I am merely stating that the texts quoted in the

document do not support the premises attributed to them. The procedure seems to adopt a continuous growth model, very popular in many circles. Think of those in sales, where their targets for performance increase every year. There is little notion here of saying to an employee that we are satisfied with his or her performance; there is always room for improvement. The scriptural model, it seems to me, calls for continuous growth in faith, not in competence.

LCRSS model

The League of Canadian Reformed School Societies in Ontario charged a School Evaluation Organization Committee to propose a procedure for *Formal Assessment of the Principal*, a report which was presented to the League in September 2003. The Committee used the OCSAA policy as a resource document in formulating their report. They recommend, among other things, that a formal evaluation take place every three years, that the Board appoint an ad hoc committee for that purpose,

Evaluation of the principal is designed to enhance the quality of administration in the school; it is not an occasion to get things off one's chest

and that one of the tools involved in the process will be questionnaires to be completed by Board members, Education

Committee members, and staff. Among the stipulations for the procedure is the understanding that any serious personal concerns have been addressed with the person(s) involved before appearing on a questionnaire, according to the rule of Matthew 18. The questionnaires in the documents include questions that are not really a function of the competency of the principal, but that is a small matter that could be easily corrected.

Concluding comments

Certainly principals should be evaluated, as most people are in their jobs. I think that the position is somewhat unique and the evaluation process should recognize that. In a sense, principals are evaluated at every Board meeting and there is a general understood sense of competency related to the day to day functioning of the school. Many people have an anecdotal sense of the principal's competence or lack thereof. Nevertheless, a process should be implemented so that there is a summative record that clearly indicates the Board's formal opinion of the principal's professional competence.

I believe that there are some important principles for effective evaluation. First, evaluation should always be done against a known standard, against known expectations. It is difficult to evaluate someone for whom there is no job description. Second, I strongly believe that people should be evaluated by those to whom they are accountable. As students are evaluated by teachers to whom they are accountable, and teachers are evaluated by the principal to whom they are accountable, so principals should be evaluated by

the Board to whom they are accountable. We do not have our teachers evaluated by their students, neither do we circulate questionnaires amongst the student body to evaluate teacher competency. The Board may need to make some use of questionnaires, but I believe that they have at least the potential to be problematic. They place teachers in a potentially awkward position to have to make evaluative comments about a

person to whom they are accountable. They also open the door to potential abuse of the Matthew 18 principle, regardless of the up-front warnings against such action.

Principals should be evaluated regularly and professionally so that they can be effectively supported in their leadership of the school communities they serve. May Christian school principals continue to serve diligently,

joyfully, and competently. And may our school communities continue to have high regard for those who labour faithfully amongst us as Christian leaders.

¹ *Staff Evaluation*, Christian Schools International, 1994
Growth in Christian Leadership, Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools, 1995.
Proposed Formal Assessment of the Principal, LCRSS, 2003



Advertisements:

Announcements of Weddings, Anniversaries (with Open House) should be submitted six weeks in advance.

BIRTHS

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

God has richly blessed our family again with the birth of another son, whom we have named

JONAH HERMAN HARSEVOORT

Born January 2, 2006 to **Rick and Alicia Harsevoort**
 A brother for *Reuben*

13th grandchild for (J.) Herman and Jane Harsevoort
 2nd grandchild for Geraldine Bosscher
 74 GrassyPlain Drive, Mount Hope, ON LOR 1W0



With joy and thankfulness to our Heavenly Father for entrusting to us one of His covenant children, we announce the birth of our daughter

MEGAN LEANNE

Born on October 22, 2005
 and named after her oma, Margaret Stam

Hendrik and Anne-Marie Van Iperen
 22 Swayze Court, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0



For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Psalm 139:13-14a

We thank the Lord for enriching our marriage with the precious gift of our daughter

EMILY MARGARET

Born on December 16, 2005
Rob and Karla Kuizenga (Boeve)
 Box 522, Carman, MB R0G 0J0

"Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? Exodus 15:11
 We praise the name of the LORD as we joyfully announce the birth of our fourth covenant child

MICAH BARUCH

Who is like the LORD? Blessed is He!

Micah was born at home at 11:15 p.m. on March 4, 2006
 He weighed 4.625 kg. He measured 57 cm.

Ken and Tamara Wieske

Chaim (1996), *Kyrie* (2000), and *Natália* (2003)
 CP 5184 Vera Cruz, km 10 Aldeia, R. Lídia Delgado do Prado, 333
 Camaragibe, PE Brazil 54.786-580

Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who only does wondrous things! Psalm 72:18



With thankfulness to our heavenly Father, we joyfully announce the birth of our son and brother

JOSEPH WILLIAM

Born January 3, 2006
Gerard and Jocelyn Kottelenberg

Amy and Allison
 RR 2, Orangeville, ON L9W 2Y9



With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father, we are pleased to announce the arrival of our son

DENVER MALACHI

Born December 14, 2005
Marc and Cheryl Linde (nee Bysterveld)
Dalia, Dane, Aubree
 7th grandchild for Jerry and Maja Bysterveld
 21st grandchild for Harm and Co Linde