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Congregationalism

Wise in Heart

*A Must for a
Faithful Pastor*



Catholicity makes you look beyond the local congregation



E. Kampen

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Congregationalism

We would do well to reflect how much Congregationalist thinking holds sway in our midst

"An attestation has been received for brother and sister VanAppeltree, with four baptized children." This type of announcement is heard regularly from Canadian Reformed pulpits. By that simple announcement, the congregation is made aware that it has gained some new members. The issuing and receiving of attestations is part of living together as a federation of churches. It is addressed specifically in Article 62 of the Church Order. This accepting and receiving of attestations is also addressed in the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship. It is spelled out in the fourth rule that "the churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate."

The process, however, is not as straightforward as it may appear when members of Canadian Reformed Churches seek to be joined to churches in federations with which we have contact. Accounts can be heard of people who submitted an attestation but who were required to attend membership classes and perhaps even make a public statement of faith before they were considered members. It should be noted that this is not done just with those who come from the Canadian Reformed Churches. It appears that in the United Reformed Churches at least, this may even be demanded from people coming to them from other churches within their own federation (See *Christian Renewal*, November 8, 2006, pp 16, 17).

Now when we see someone doing something differently, we should not immediately reject it. Upon reflection, we might find it to be something we could adopt as well. In this case, we might have the sense that a local church that follows this approach obviously takes the whole matter of membership very seriously. It would seem that insisting on this procedure would filter out the insincere and non-committed right from the start, sparing the congregation much trouble later on.

Some further reflection on this, however, gives reason to take issue with the practice. Whether it is

realized or not, this approach is evidence of congregationalism. Congregationalism places all the emphasis on the local congregation as the ultimate decision making body. Local congregations will associate with each other but what is decided when they meet together is no more than advice. Congregationalism wants nothing to do with even a hint of hierarchy, that is, a local congregation being ruled from the outside.

On the surface, this will appear similar to Reformed church polity. Does it not stress the autonomy of the local congregation, with the office bearers accountable to Christ? Reformed polity, however, is not only strongly anti-hierarchical with its stress on the autonomy of each congregation, but it is also strongly anti-independentistic. Reformed church polity in this respect reflects an awareness of the catholicity of the Church. Just as members in a congregation together form a body, with mutual obligations to serve one another and submit to one another, this also is extended to the way local churches should seek to live together. Catholicity by definition makes you look beyond just the local congregation. This is so not because there is a specific command to bond together but because all are driven by the same Spirit. When we see the role of the Spirit we can understand why we speak of churches federating with common consent. They do so willingly, not by compulsion. There is a mutual recognition and trust.

This sense of catholicity, with its mutual recognition and trust, is negated when local congregations decide that even those who come from churches with which they live in a common bond must be taught first and must make a profession of faith. It seems rather strange that churches will go under the same general name, but they will not accept a letter of testimony signed by the consistory of a church with which they live in fellowship. One wonders what will be next. Will each guest minister from within the federation need to undergo an examination by a local consistory before he would be allowed on the pulpit? If not, members could

argue the consistory is not consistent, measuring ministers with a different standard. And what about guests from other churches who are present on a day the congregation celebrates the Lord's Supper?

In light of this, insisting that newcomers, even from churches within the same federation, attend membership classes and make some statement to confirm their faith, is not something we should desire to imitate. It reflects a Congregationalist, not a Reformed, approach. When one considers how this makes each congregation a law unto itself, it can be seen how congregationalism is only a thinly disguised form of sectarianism. It is disguised because churches appear to stand united with others through a common name but that is where it ends.

At the same time, while it is easy to pick out a practice of others and analyze it because it is different, we would do well to reflect how much Congregationalist thinking holds sway in our midst. Local consistories may receive attestations due to living in a federation of churches, but do they also receive decisions the churches make in common via the broader assemblies, or do they see it as their task to do it all over again themselves? For example, is there a willingness to accept the conclusion of a Synod that another federation is faithful or do they see the need to accept the ministers or members from such a federation on a case by case basis, perhaps, in the case of ministers, seeing the need to subject them to a special screening interview?

Many other matters may come to mind where a consistory might claim local autonomy and responsibility as the reason for going its own way. It is so easy to appeal to the one pillar of Reformed polity, namely, the autonomy of the local church. One can stress emphatically that local office bearers have their responsibility and that they are guarding the holiness of the congregation. It is as tempting to do this when, in the opinion of a consistory, decisions go further than they would like or, when they do not go far enough. At that point, it is important to remember the other pillar, namely, anti-independentism.

The reader will understand that all this does not mean that local churches should not carefully scrutinize developments in the federation. At this time in history, however, the danger we face is not of slavishly following but of over-emphasizing autonomy. This does not bode well for the unity of a federation of churches, let alone for efforts for unity with other faithful federations.

While practices elsewhere alert us to congregationalism, we do well to examine how we measure up. The independent spirit of congregationalism departs from the spirit of Reformed polity which balances autonomy with catholicity not just in words but also in deeds.



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
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Wise in Heart

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Our Father has given us commandments to follow. His commandments outline for us the way of thankful obedience. He has delivered us and now He expects us to follow Him in thankfulness.

Of course, this is not easy for us to do. We still have to struggle against our sinful nature, which is not entirely done away with in this life. For that reason the Lord Jesus has commanded us to discipline and instruct each other. And He has also given us the office bearers to teach us and to watch over us.

It is a tendency of human nature, however, to be better at instructing than at listening to instruction. The Lord Jesus warned against this in Matthew 7:3. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" We so easily notice what others are doing wrong, but we are blind to the wrong that we ourselves do, even when someone points it out to us and teaches us.

Proverbs 10:8 speaks about the importance of accepting or receiving instruction. The wise in heart accept commands. To accept a command means to submit to the person who gives the command, which is something that is difficult for us by human nature. We have to pray constantly to the Lord that He may teach us to submit to Him and his commands (LD 48). We also need to be reminded that we ought to submit to each other (Ephesians 5).

The Lord gives us his commands so that we will follow Him in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The Lord's commands are good; they are designed to give us life and to keep us from straying into evil. But it is our nature to resist those commands because we do not like to submit to God. Nor do we like to submit to the office bearer or to the fellow believer who teaches us those commands or applies them to our life.

Proverbs 10:8 teaches that it is wise to accept commands. The commands referred to in this text are the Lord's commands first of all. The wise in heart accept these commands. The chattering fool who is mentioned in the second half of this text might give the appearance of wisdom with his many words, providing a bundle of excuses for his behaviour. But the person who is truly wise is willing to accept God's commands and listen to them, because he understands that this is good for his own spiritual well-being, besides being pleasing to God.

Many times the commands of God are conveyed to us through the office bearers and our fellow believers. It is the task of the office bearers to watch over the believers. Also, the believers are commanded to watch over each other. That is part of our task and calling as prophets, that we apply the Word of God to each other's lives.



MATTHEW 13:52

"The wise in heart accept commands."

Proverbs 10:8a

If we are not able to listen to and accept the instructions of the office bearers and our fellow believers, then we will not be helped in our spiritual growth. Nor will we as a congregation of believers be able to carry out our prophetic calling of applying God's Word to each others' lives. If we are always teaching and never listening, then the teaching has no effect.

The wise in heart accepts commands. We can find many excuses not to listen to instruction. Perhaps we are offended by the way it was conveyed. Or we stumble over the sins that the other person has done. Or we disagree with what was said. But the wise in heart accepts commands despite all these things. And he will be built up in the Lord's service. He will learn the spiritual virtue of submission, which will stand him in good stead in the Lord's service.

There is a reason why the "wise in heart" are contrasted with the chattering fool. The chattering fool puts up a smokescreen of words, which allows him to hide from instruction. But the wise in heart simply submits. Thus he learns to follow the path of the Lord, rather than the path he has carved out for himself. The paths we carve do not lead us to life; they lead us away from the path of life. The wise in heart follows the Lord's path by accepting his commands and this is the path of wisdom which leads to life.



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Knowing God: Knowing Jesus

Lesson 4: The Difference Jesus Makes

The first lesson about Knowing Jesus focused on who Jesus is, what He taught and did, and what difference He makes. This second lesson focused on what Jesus taught. This third lesson focused on why Jesus died. This fourth and last lesson of Knowing Jesus focuses on the difference Jesus makes.

Why Jesus is important

Begin by giving the participants a postcard and something to write with. Ask them to write a postcard to a friend saying as simply and concisely as possible the difference Jesus has made to their lives. Allow a maximum of five minutes for this. Then ask the people to read what they have written. You might want to summarize some of the differences Jesus makes on a large piece of paper.

Now build on what people shared by highlighting those things on the list in the lesson handout that people already have spoken about. Then move on to discuss things on the list that were not raised by the postcards.

- Jesus shows us what God is like and enables us to know the Father (John 1:18, 14:6-10, 20-21; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:3)
- Jesus enables us to be forgiven and make a new start (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 1 John 1:6-2:2)
- Jesus has conquered death and promises us that we shall be raised (John 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14)

- Jesus has promised us the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39; Acts 1:4-8, 2:33, 38-39; Romans 8:14-16, 26-27)
- Jesus promises to be with us at all times and in all circumstances (Matthew 28:18-20; John 14:18-23; Romans 8:35-39)
- Jesus shows us what it is like to be truly human and live life to the full. He received life as a gift from the Father and demonstrated what it is to be dependent on Him (Luke 7:34; John 1:14; 10:10)
- Jesus incorporates us into a new family, the church (Luke 8:19-21; Galatians 4:4-7; Ephesians 3:14-19; 1 Peter 2:9-10)
- Jesus has broken down the walls that divide individuals and communities (Galatians 3:27-29; Ephesians 2:8-22)
- Jesus has taught us to pray and still prays for us (Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-13; Hebrews 7:25)
- Jesus feeds and sustains us in our Christian journey (Matthew 11:28-30; John 6:35-40; John 15:4-11)
- Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth (Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 28:19-20).

Give people time to ask questions. Where you think it will be helpful, encourage the group to look up the Bible passages to reflect on them. Then ask the participants to turn their cards over and write a second note in which they say what aspects of who Jesus is, what He does, and what they hope to learn more about in the next few months. Invite people to read these to the group.

How should we respond to Jesus?

Remind the participants that in the course Knowing Jesus, they learned about who Jesus is, what He taught and did while on earth, what He has done through his death and resurrection, and why He is important. Now discuss with them how they should respond to Jesus.

Do this by reading Luke 1:26-38 together. Point out that believing involves receiving the Lord Jesus Christ in faith. Emphasize that when we do, Jesus comes to live in all who put their trust in Him (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27).

A challenge to discipleship

Point out that people who encountered Jesus in the gospels were called to come and follow and become Jesus' disciples. Explain that disciples are lifelong learners who are wholeheartedly committed to Jesus and his ways. They leave behind as well as follow. Then ask: does Jesus still call us to this leaving and wholehearted commitment today? Does He call every Christian to this total discipleship or just some people?

Putting it into practice

Remind the participants that just because this is the last meeting in this course, they should not forget to read the last and most exciting part of the gospel (Luke 19:45-24:53 or John 18:1-21:25).

If you would like to view the outline of this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. Thanks for reading.

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A Must for a Faithful Pastor

Pastors have a dizzying array of responsibilities. But for most of them, it comes down to two basic things: preaching and teaching. Every week, ministers are teaching their flocks through catechism, visits, and other means. Each Sunday, ministers preach and teach the Word of God from the pulpit. Within that task of preaching and teaching, we find a number of subsets. For instance, in 2 Timothy 4:2 we read, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching."

Despite this, it seems that when it comes to the ministry of the Word, some believers have somewhat of a different idea. Some believe that pastors, in their preaching and teaching, must only be positive. Ministers should speak the bare minimum (if that) about sin, God's holiness and wrath, and hell. They ought only to speak on positive themes of grace, hope, redemption, and the like.

People with such thinking are correct insofar as the Christian minister must speak on these positive things – for the Word of God itself demands it. Woe to the minister who does not make it his aim to have his congregation impressed with the wonders of our God and his Son Jesus Christ. But these people are wrong in saying that the faithful pastor will restrict himself to speaking on the positive

elements of the Christian faith. In fact, a faithful pastor must sometimes speak words that challenge or unsettle us. Here too, the Word of God demands this from the minister. Like Paul, ministers today have to preach the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

False teachers

Let's see how this works with one particular area of concern: false teachers. By "false teachers" we mean particularly those in broader Christian circles who are teaching things patently false, things that militate against the Word of God and the doctrine derived thereof in the confessions.

*A faithful pastor must
sometimes speak words
that challenge or unsettle
us*

There are those in our churches who say that pastors must not identify false teachers by name. They say that exposing false teachings and false teachers has no place in our worship services. The preaching should just stick to the Word of God and then especially to the positive parts.

What do we do with this? One's first inclination as a minister is to remember the promises that were

made at his ordination and installation. Every minister in our churches has signed a Form of Subscription. Though this form may differ to a small degree from one church to the next, it basically boils down to the same thing. Our pastors have promised that they will diligently teach and defend the truth found in the confessions of the church. But they go even further when they promise to not only reject all errors but to do *everything in their power* to oppose, refute, and prevent such errors. Therefore, when a minister mentions a certain false teaching from the pulpit and shows how it is in error and warns the congregation about it, he is simply keeping the promise he made when he became a minister of that church.

Of course, the question can be raised whether this is a legitimate promise to make. Does it fit with what the Scriptures teach about the office of a minister? Let's survey some passages that speak about ministers and false teaching.

What does the Bible say?

The most obvious place to start is in the so-called pastoral epistles. In 1 Timothy 1, Paul explicitly mentions two false teachers named Hymenaeus and Alexander. These men taught that the general resurrection was already past. This was regarded as a serious false teaching and Paul warned Timothy

about these men. In 1 Timothy 4, Paul speaks more about false teachers in general. In verse 6, he tells Timothy to instruct the believers about these false teachings. In other words, as a faithful pastor Timothy had to preach and teach the truth, but he also had to expose falsehood.

In 2 Timothy 2, Hymenaeus reappears with Philetus as those "who have strayed concerning the truth." In the following chapter, Paul describes again what false teachers will look like. Among other things they have a form of godliness, but deny its power (3:5). Then, in chapter 4, Paul instructs Timothy to be diligent in preaching – that includes convincing, rebuking, and exhorting. Why do these things have to be done? Because there will come those who cannot "endure sound doctrine." These false teachers will "turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables" (4:3-4). The task of convincing, rebuking, and exhorting is therefore connected with exposing and answering false teachers and protecting God's people from them.

In Titus, we find Paul telling the Cretan minister/missionary that an overseer has to be able, through sound doctrine, to be able to exhort and convict those who oppose it (1:9). Why? Because, says Paul, there are many false teachers, especially those who teach that a good Christian needs to be circumcised. The elders of the Cretan churches had to be men who could defend the truth and expose error for what it is.

Outside of the pastoral epistles, we have Romans 16:17-18, which teaches believers then and now to take note of those who cause divisions with their false teachings. Believers are called to take note of the false teachers and

avoid them! But how can we do that if those who are leaders in the church don't identify the false teachings and those promoting them?

Finally, we ought to take note of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Himself. In passages such as Matthew 16:5-12, our Saviour warned God's people about the scribes and Pharisees. In Revelation 2:20-23, Christ warned the church at Thyatira about a specific false teacher, a woman who had the nickname of Jezebel. If our Lord exposed false teachers, and if ministers are ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor 5:20), then it follows that these ministers will follow in his footsteps and do the same. Moreover, as noted above, this was done by the apostles and they in turn instructed the first generation of pastors to do the same.

Our pastors have promised that they will diligently teach and defend the truth found in the confessions of the church

The Scriptures are clear that ministers of the gospel are to publicly expose and refute error. To be sure, the faithful preaching and teaching of the Word does not centre on this. For all the passages mentioned above, we could probably line up several times more to show that the preaching of the good news of Christ is to be central. But it is exactly because the good news of Christ is so valuable and so treasured that we need to be sensitive and aware of false teaching and false teachers

who might endanger that good news. A good shepherd of the flock (1 Pet 5:2) is naturally going to warn the flock when they are in danger! The man who would not do this is a poor shepherd who does not really love the sheep. As a good shepherd, Paul warned the church at Ephesus that wolves would come in after his departure and that is why he didn't stop warning them "night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). All of this biblical data is why the Form for Ordination, in line with the Form for Subscription, mentions this as a duty of the minister: "He shall expose all errors and heresies as unfruitful works of darkness. . . ."

Okay, but how?

So, let's say that we grant the point that faithful pastors are, for the benefit of the whole congregation, to publicly identify, expose, and refute false teachings and teachers. That then brings us to the more practical matter of how. The first thing to consider is the appropriate time. Since we are in the area of doctrine (teaching), it is most natural to deal with false teachings in the catechism preaching. The nature of confessions also lends itself to this. One of the reasons why we have confessions is to defend and promote the truth of Scripture. The word "defence" implies false teachings which would attack the truth and so, in catechism preaching, one can expect a minister, from time to time, to expose and refute teachings that militate against what we confess. Catechism preaching is the most natural place to do this, but it may happen that a given Scripture text also naturally leads the preacher to expose and refute an existing error.

That brings us to the question of identifying false teachers and teachings that are threatening or attacking the truth of God's Word. There are literally thousands of false teachers in the world today, but not all of them are making inroads into the Canadian Reformed churches. Some errors are obviously errors, but others are subtler and ensnare people more easily. Pastors need to be aware of whom their sheep are getting their food from and whether that food is nourishing or whether it is poison. On the other hand, we also need to be aware that, historically speaking, Satan and his minions are unoriginal. Doctrinal errors and false teachings of the past creep up time and again. Contemplative spirituality, for instance, is simply regurgitated gnosticism or, at best, incipient gnosticism. Open theism is basically socinianism with another name. And so we could go on. The point is there is also value in mentioning errors of the past because more than likely these errors will reappear.

Finally, there is the perennial question of Matthew 18. Are ministers required to follow the route of Matthew 18 when dealing with false teachers? Do we first have to speak face to face with these false teachers before we can expose and refute them publicly? First, we should note that Matthew 18 does not apply to public matters. Most of us instinctively recognize that when we write a letter to the editor about some error we spot in an article. Moreover, we're

speaking here about false teachers. These are men and women who have written their books and articles and staked their ground. These are not weaker brothers and sisters who simply do not know better, who write and

Ministers of the gospel are to publicly expose and refute error

teach out of their ignorance and who are humbly waiting for us to instruct them in the truth. The congregation needs to be warned about false teachers and there is nothing that requires ministers to first address these men and women personally in the manner of Matthew 18. Besides, if that were the case, we would never be able to speak about Arius and his false teachings on the Trinity, since Arius is long dead.

A time to bark

Somewhere John Calvin is quoted as saying, "A dog barks when his master is attacked. I would be a coward if I saw that God's truth is attacked and yet would remain silent." Calvin was right. We could take it further and say that not only would such a pastor be a coward, he would also be a rotten shepherd who does not really love the sheep. To protect God's honour and to protect the sheep, a faithful pastor has to speak up when God's truth is



Church News

Called by the church of Langley (Willoughby Heights), British Columbia:

Rev. W.M. Wielenga

of Lynden, Washington, USA.

Called by the church of Surrey, British Columbia to serve as missionary in Brazil:

Rev. J. M. Van Spronsen

of Smithers, British Columbia.

attacked. Like Christ and the Apostle Paul, he has to name names and clearly indicate the errors that threaten. This is one way that the Lord Jesus will use to protect and advance the spiritual health of our churches.

To conclude, let me relate an anecdote. When I was a young(er) man, I was an avid fan of Norman Vincent Peale. In fact, at that time I was the typist for the bulletin of our local churches and, space permitting, I would often put quotes from Peale in the bulletin (please forgive me!). I believed Peale to be an orthodox Christian. That all changed when I took a trip to the Fraser Valley and sat under the preaching of a certain minister. As he was preaching, he mentioned a false teacher by the name of Norman Vincent Peale and he showed how Peale contradicts what we believe and confess. It unsettled me and shook me up, but it changed my mind and brought me back. I thank God for that faithful pastor. Today, I'm very grateful to serve alongside him in the same church. Let's pray that we continue to have pastors who faithfully carry out *all* the tasks that God gives them, including the exposing and refuting of errors and heresies.



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Parents, School, and Community in Plymouth (Part 2 of 2)



The previous submission reviewed some elements of family life in the community of Plymouth Plantation. It connected to previous articles about the roles of parents and the community in the Old and New Testaments and briefly traced the Pilgrims' background in Scrooby and why they left England and sojourned in The Netherlands before hazarding the trip across the Atlantic. We saw that Plymouth Plantation set out to be a godly community, based on scriptural principles, but faced many challenges. Particular attention was given to families, children, discipline, and education. This submission considers schooling in Plymouth and highlights some similarities and differences between its situation and ours.

Schools

In Plymouth, it was seen as the parents' task to teach their children to read the Scriptures. This posed a formidable challenge, however. The majority of Pilgrims were particularly poor, a teacher was hard to find, and many parents were illiterate themselves. When challenged about neglecting to have children taught reading and their catechism, Governor Bradford explained in 1624 that it was "for want of a fitt person or means hitherto to maintaine one . . . though we desire now to begin" (Willison, pp. 243, 384). Some

Pilgrims could afford it and actually hired a private teacher for their children.

Plymouth has been accused of not being very interested in education (Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England*, 1966, p. 98). This accusation may pertain especially to secondary education, or grammar schools, but is noteworthy because Calvin had stressed the importance of education, helping to lay it down as an ecclesiastical ordinance in 1541, to "raise up seed for the future so that the Church is not left desolate to our children," and to have men who could provide sound social, political, and economic leadership. For such men it would be necessary to be trained and educated beyond farming or basic trades.

The purpose of schooling was understood to be broader than just teaching children how to read, as was shown throughout New England. In nearby Puritan New Haven, for instance, the purpose for a school was formulated in a clearly Calvinist perspective for "the better trayning up of youth of this towne, that through God's Blessinge they may be fitted for public service hereafter, either in church or commonweale" (Morison, pp. 66, 67). The Massachusetts Bay Colony's General Court also

decreed in 1646 that steps should be taken to make education available for all:

It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the Scriptures, as in former times by keeping them in an unknown tongue, so in these latter times by persuading from the use of tongues, that so at least the true sense and meaning of the original might be clouded by false glosses of saint-seeming deceivers, that learning may not be buried in the grave of our fathers in the church and commonwealth, the Lord assisting our efforts. It is therefore ordered, that every township in this jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to the number of fifty householders, shall then forthwith appoint one within their town to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read. . . . and it is further ordered that where any town shall increase to the number of 100 families or householders, they shall set up a grammar school, the master thereof being able to instruct youth so far as they may be fitted for the university. . . (Wright & Fowler, pp. 86-87).



Photos – Margaret Petersen

Plymouth did not have a formal school for another twenty-five years. In 1671, it contracted a John Morton to teach the young how “to read and write & cast up accounts.” Although Cape Cod fisheries offset tuition somewhat, parents were not happy with the narrow curriculum Mr. Morton offered for their money. He was fired in 1672 and was replaced by a Mr. Corlet, a Harvard graduate who promptly added Greek and Latin to the curriculum. Such subjects were grammar school or college-preparation material and this change proved too much of a good thing. He resigned when told to stick to the basics of writing, ciphering, and reading the Bible. The community apparently felt a greater need for a proper *common* or elementary school than for a *grammar* school. The school finally started up again in 1699, but had to wait for a proper building till 1705.

Girls’ schools

It should be understood that these early schools were for boys only. Like their Puritan neighbours, the Pilgrim Fathers agreed that “education of girls was a vain and

idle thing. . . at best it was a silly affectation; at worst a danger to the established order. Women should mind their own business, and that business was cooking, spinning, washing, sweeping, and bearing children – often” (Willison, p. 385). In that frame of mind, girls could learn all essential skills at home. They did not get a school till the summer of 1795 – a century later ~~than the boys!~~

The purpose of schooling was understood to be broader than just teaching children how to read

Education and books were probably even seen as detrimental to girls and women. In 1645, a year before Massachusetts’ decree of general education, the Puritans readily believed that the wife of governor Hartford upon Connecticut had lost her reason.

. . . Giving herself wholly to reading and writing . . . if she had attended her household

affairs, and such things as belong to women, and not gone out of her way and calling to meddle in such things as are proper for men, whose minds are stronger, . . . she had kept her wits, and might have improved them usefully and honorably in the place God had set her (Louis B. Wright & Elaine W. Fowler, *English Colonization of North America*, 1968, pp. 85-86).

Role of the school

In addition to the increasingly recognized need for common literacy and the inability of illiterate parents to provide such education, the later call for a school in Plymouth had an element of shifting responsibilities. Aside perhaps from the need for catechism instruction, at first there hardly was a need for a school as we know it. For a time, the family and the community as a whole fulfilled the roles needed to teach the skills for survival. From the beginning, however, not all people in Plymouth were of the same Separatist conviction. The “Strangers,” or non-Saints, who had been allowed on the Mayflower for primarily economic reasons by filling the vessel to capacity, had different mind-sets and expectations. Later arrivals often had different ideas as well and, especially as social and theological differences increased, the school became the most suitable institution to help restore social connections (Demos, p. 144). One may surmise that modern resistance to independent schools would stem, at least in part, from the perception that they are divisive and interfere with the unifying social role of the public system.

The role of restoring community is often assigned to public as well as independent schools in our time.

Recently, a survey was conducted about reasons why parents would choose an independent school for their children. Among the possible answers, the researcher listed items such as to what extent the school's provision of *extended day activities*, *a supportive community*, *a sense of belonging*, and *meaning to their lives* played a role in their choice. A school does play a large social role, as a place where students meet and establish contacts that may remain intact for the rest of their lives, and where people meet, brainstorm, and network. However, what happens around schools by default is something else than assigning it that community-building role and incorporating it in school mission statements. Our community should not be defined by or around the school, but by the communion of saints.

Reflection

Today, we see how our situation has similarities and differences with that of the Pilgrims. When we consider the challenges faced by early settlers in Plymouth Colony, we may think of those encountered by Dutch immigrants in the 1940s and 1950s. There are parallels. There was poverty. There was a desire, but no money, for Reformed education. The Atlantic could be crossed more than once only by the wealthiest of settlers. Hard work was needed for mere survival. Yet, by 1950, the general standard of living went well beyond the stoutest expectations of the Pilgrims. While it took them fifty years to establish a fledgling school, which collapsed after only two years, most of our communities were blessed with enduring schools after only fifteen years. Health care had vastly improved and the infant mortality and death in childbirth had decreased

dramatically. The immigrations of the 1950s were not fuelled by persecution or cultural stress in the home land, but by political and economic motives, in addition, perhaps only occasionally, to an element of seeking to fill the earth and establish a church in the new land.

Our community should not be defined by or around the school, but by the communion of saints

Our practice and application of biblical directives are not always the same as that of the Pilgrims. Like the Pilgrims, we understand that it is the parents' task to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord in the context of a supportive covenant community, but our application of that principle is different. We help each other to maintain a school, while some financially privileged Pilgrims

only hired a tutor for their own children. We probably deal differently with our children's anger and may not discipline them according to pastor John Robinson's advice. The option of capital punishment is no longer available in Canada for even the most heinous of crimes and certainly not for "cursing or smiting" one's parents. Pilgrims went much further in incorporating relatives and non-relatives or even convicts in their families than we would generally be prepared to. Many of us would hesitate to temporarily open our families to foster-children, even as Scripture speaks of households which appear to have included persons beyond immediate family members, and encourages welcoming the stranger and caring for orphans. In what ways are we doing better than they were, or were forced to? How well does the communion of saints operate today?

Our culture also comes with different practices. We may cringe when authorities take children out



of their families' homes because their particular style of Christian upbringing does not comply with the law. We rarely (if ever) hear of parents acknowledging their inability to care for a child and the need for the Canadian Reformed Home Registry seems limited. We wonder about the challenges of combining families; but in Plymouth it was common as parents died young and the children needed to survive. For us, it is both law and custom that boys as well as girls go to school, although the extent to which that happens continues to be a matter of public debate and political consideration. There is no doubt that the general need for numeracy and literacy is much higher now than ever before, but a good case can be made that our systems fail significant numbers of students because they do not fit the common mould. Our schools may cater to most of our children, but what are we going to do as a communion of saints for those that stretch our



resources with challenges, abilities, or talents that cannot be met or developed within the current structures?

Conclusion

There are, no doubt, other reflections that come to your mind when comparing our situation and our blessings with those of the Pilgrims. Sometimes, confrontation with choices of well-intended people in a different set of circumstances can help us see our own choices in another light. It may make us more tolerant and understanding of other options, rather than embracing our own way of doing things as the best and only way. We may use the other situation as a mirror, and realize how much, perhaps, we are influenced by the prevailing winds that determine what is acceptable in our society. We may also be grateful for the blessings we do have, and be encouraged to jointly shoulder the task the Lord gives to parents and their supportive covenant community.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article

Book Review

reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

***Too Good to Be True: Finding Hope in a World of Hype,* Michael Horton. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006)**

Additional Information: Hardcover, 186 pages, \$17.47 CDN

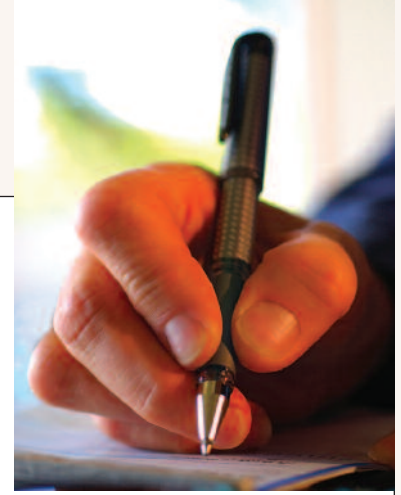
Brain tumours, strokes, miscarriages, depression, and suicide – these are all tragedies that many of us can speak about with some knowledge. Life is full of suffering. In the face of suffering, the world gives us so much empty hype – and it often spills into Christian circles as well. There are real problems, but there are no real solutions.

It's into this world that Michael Horton comes with a message of Christ-centred hope. Horton is well known as the host of the popular radio program "The White Horse Inn." He's also a professor at Westminster Seminary California and a minister in the United Reformed Churches. But before all those things he is a son, a husband, and a father. And it's in those capacities that he's encountered the varied tragedies mentioned above.

This book is remarkable for its insistence that good theology is necessary for hopeful comfort in the midst of tragedy. That may sound counter-intuitive. After all,

who wants theology when they're suffering? But Horton pastorally shows that this is the very thing we need. We need theology derived from the Word of God to direct us to Christ, not only in moments of crisis, but at every moment of our lives.

I've read a number of books by Mike Horton, but this is definitely his best one. If you or someone you know is experiencing some form of tragedy or suffering, please hear me out: you need to buy this book. Horton's medicine may be hard to swallow, but it will bring health – because it is the life-giving truth taught in God's Word. Highly recommended!



Letter to the Editor

It is, of course, no secret that the *Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)* in The Netherlands is our sister church.

What, perhaps, is less well known is the fact that a struggle is going on in those churches. Modern ideas and philosophies seem to have influenced many members there. The origin of much, if not all, of this backsliding is the fact that the extent of scriptural authority is being questioned, not only by members but also by some leaders.

I am quite amazed that in our church papers no mention is made of these deviations of Reformed doctrine. Other than a report by Rev. Huijgen some time ago – a report that was criticized as being incorrect – I do not remember ever reading an article dealing with the issues being discussed and the policies followed by some of the Dutch churches.

Recently a *landdag* was held, organized by concerned members. At that meeting three persons gave a lecture on topics dealing with the various divergences. The speeches do give a fair insight into the various topics being discussed, doubted or no longer believed by many church members there. They can be downloaded from the website <http://www.landelijkedag.nl/>

For those who do not understand Dutch I have attempted to translate the addresses. I shall be happy to forward them to whoever might be interested.

A very disturbing occurrence has been posted on the website of <http://www.eeninwaarheid.nl/>. It concerns a cabaret skit performed at the *schooldag* in Kampen (the yearly school day at the beginning of the new study year at the Theological University). I cannot label the skit any other way than blasphemous.

It is time we take notice of what is happening within our sister churches.

George Hart
Cambridge Ontario
shart@sentex.net

Dear Brother,

If you would go through the back issues of *Clarion* in 2005 and 2006 (Jan. 6, Feb. 17, March 3, April 28, July 7) you can see that we have dealt with the following issues in our Dutch sister churches: Scripture interpretation, hymns, marriage and divorce, Sunday, and Bible translation.

The Editor

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.



Press Release of Regional Synod East, November 8 and December 7, 2006, held at Rehoboth Church, Burlington, Ontario.

November 8, 2006: First session

Regional Synod had been convened by Burlington-Waterdown church. On behalf of the church, Rev. J. Huijgen called the meeting to order. He asked the brothers to sing Psalm 86:3 and 4, read Psalm 86 and, after speaking a few fitting words, led in prayer. Examination of the credentials showed that all four Ontario classes were appropriately represented. Rev. Huijgen wished the brothers well.

By election, Rev. D.G.J. Agema was chosen to serve as chairman, Rev. G.Ph. van Popta as vice-chairman, and Rev. M. Jagt as clerk. The *moderamen* were seated and then took a few moments to organize the agenda items.

On the agenda were several appeals by churches or members against various classical decisions, several overtures from classes, and a number of reports. Two rounds were given on each main agenda item to gauge the mood of the brothers on the various issues. Four advisory committees were struck, organized according to the delegates of the four classes represented. The agenda points were divided among the four committees in such a way that the brothers of each committee had never dealt at a classis level with the specific issues they were assigned. In this way the committees could take a fresh look at the issues.

By late morning the committees had their advices prepared so that

Synod could, again, meet in plenary session. Over the course of the day, several appeals were discussed and answered. Synod sincerely hopes and prays that the answers will be accepted and foster peace in the minds of the appellants and in the midst of the churches.

Bethel church of Toronto asked Synod for advice. Bethel church is our representative church for contact with the provincial government to facilitate our ministers being recognized as authorized to perform marriages. The man whom they had appointed to be their contact with the government is now a member of a United Reformed Church. Bethel church asked Synod for advice on this. Synod adopted the following advice:

1. Bethel church asks Regional Synod for advice in the matter of Br. C. Lindhout, now a member of a United Reformed Church, acting as liason with the office of the Registrar General for the Province of Ontario for the purpose of enabling our ministers to solemnize marriages.
2. Regional Synod notes that Regional Synod 1989 did not appoint specific individuals, but appointed Bethel church to be the representative church for the Canadian Reformed Churches in Ontario.
3. Regional Synod advises Bethel church that it does not find the *status quo* unacceptable. When Br. Lindhout signs the letters he does as authorized by Bethel church. However, Bethel church has the freedom to appoint someone else if it deems that advisable.

Regional Synod had received several overtures from various classes. Unfortunately, the

churches of the Regional Synod had not received the overtures in time to give them due consideration and provide comment to Regional Synod. To, as yet, give the churches time, Synod decided that it would adjourn until December 7. The clerk was instructed to notify the churches immediately of this decision.

As well, due to an oversight, the churches had not received a timely request to submit names of elders who could be delegated to General Synod Smithers, 2007. Regional Synod decided to leave the matter of the delegation to General Synod until the December 7 session. The clerk was instructed to notify the churches immediately of this decision and to ask the consistories to submit names of elders who would be available to be delegated to General Synod and to inform the clerk of Regional Synod of such names before December 7.

Several reports were received:

1. Brampton church reported that inspection of the Regional Synod archives revealed they are in good order.
2. The several deputies *ad* Church Order Article 48 reported that they had not been called upon for advice.
3. Covenant church at Grassie reported that the treasurer's books were audited and found to be in good order.
4. The Regional Synod treasurer, Br. D. Van Amerongen, submitted a report and proposed that the churches be assessed \$1.00 per communicant member. This proposal was adopted.

The Acts of the day were read and adopted. After an appropriate closing, the chairman adjourned Regional Synod until December 7, 2006.

December 7, 2006: Second session

On December 7, Regional Synod was reconvened. The chairman, Rev. Agema, called the meeting to order. He read Psalm 132 and spoke some words about the Psalm in light of the time of year. We sang stanzas 8, 9, and 10 of that Psalm. Roll call showed that all the delegates were present except Rev. J.G. Slaa who had phoned to say that he was prevented from driving to Burlington because of inclement weather.

The clerk, Rev. Jagt, reported on the mail that had come in. As stated above, because the churches had not received the overtures nor a request to submit names of elders available to be delegated to General Synod in time, the clerk of Regional Synod had invited the churches to comment on the overtures and submit names. It was noted that Regional Synod would only deal with letters from the churches interacting with these matters.

A few rounds of discussion were held on the overture of Classis Ontario West to have Regional Synod East ask General Synod to add to the *Book of Praise* a form for the installation of ministers set apart for the training to the ministry. As well a few rounds of discussion were held on the overtures of Classis Ontario West and Classis Central Ontario related to Church Order Article 63 (Marriage). Committees were struck to prepare advices for consideration by Regional Synod.

After lunch, the advisory committee re: overture for a new liturgical form presented its proposal. Regional Synod decided not to endorse the overture of Classis Ontario West to ask General Synod to include in the *Book of Praise* a liturgical form for the ordination or installation of

ministers set apart for training to the ministry.

The second advisory committee, dealing with a proposal to amend Article 63 of the Church Order, presented its proposal. After discussion, Regional Synod decided to overture General Synod to change Article 63 of the Church Order as follows (changes italicized):

The Word of God teaches that marriage is a union between one man and one woman. The consistory shall ensure that the members of the congregation marry only in the Lord, and that the ministers – as authorized by the consistory – solemnize only such marriages as are in accordance with the Word of God.

The solemnization of a marriage may take place either in a private ceremony on in a public worship service. The adopted Form for the Solemnization of Marriage shall be used.

Under appointments, the following were made: Deputies *ad* Article 48 were appointed; Treasurer: Br. D. van Amerongen, 342 Russ Road, RR 1, Grimsby ON L3M 4E7; church to audit the books of the treasurer: Covenant church of Grassie; archives: Bethel church of Toronto; inspection of archives: Brampton church. Delegation to General Synod: Ministers: D.G.J. Agema, P.G. Feenstra, G. Nederveen, A. Souman, C.J. Vandervelde, J. Vanwoudenberg. Alternate ministers, in the following order: E. Kampen, R.E. Pot, J. de Gelder, M.H. Van Luik, W. Den Hollander, J.E. Ludwig. Elders: H. De Vries, J. G. Heyink, C.J. Nobels, G.J. Nordeman, E. Pol, F. Westrik. Alternate elders, in the following order: F. Stoffels, J. Bouwman, L. Lodder, F.C. Ludwig, A. Hordyk, G. Bos. Nomination to Board of Governors: G.Ph. van

Popta; alternates: C.J. Vandervelde, E. Kampen, D.G.J. Agema.

The next Regional Synod East will be convened by Maranatha church in Fergus on November 14, 2007.

The chairman concluded that censure was not needed. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved. Psalm 105:1, 2 was sung after which the chairman closed the meeting with prayer and thanksgiving.

G.Ph. van Popta
Vice-Chairman, e.t.

Press Release of Classis Manitoba of the Canadian Reformed Churches, convened on December 15, 2006 at the Carman East church building in Carman, Manitoba

1. Rev. P. H. Holtvlüwer opened the meeting by requesting the singing of Hymn 12:1, 5 and reading Isaiah 11. He then led in prayer.
2. The credentials were examined by the delegates from the convening church and reported to be in order. The church at Denver was only able to send one delegate.
3. Classis was declared constituted.
4. The following brothers were seated as executive officers: chairman: Rev. D.M. Boersma; vice-chairman: Rev. A.J. Pol; clerk: Rev. Holtvlüwer. The chairman wished Redeemer church strength in its efforts to call a minister of the Word and wished the Grace church what is needed from the Lord in their circumstances. The Deputies of Regional Synod, Rev. R.A. Schouten and Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar, were welcomed.
5. The agenda was adopted.

6. Reports

- a. The report of the Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry was discussed. It was decided that the fund would not yet be increased. A further decision can be made in September if necessary.
 - b. There was a church visitation report on a visit to the Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Winnipeg, October 26, 2006.
7. Instructions from the churches (Art. 33 C.O.)
- a. Request from Winnipeg Grace concerning the retirement of Rev. K. Jonker according to Article 13 C.O. Documents pertaining to this

request were received from the Grace consistory as well as from Rev. Jonker. The material was dealt with in closed session with only the Classis delegates and the Deputies of Regional Synod present. The request of the Grace consistory was approved unanimously with the concurring advice of the Deputies of Regional Synod. The delegates from the Grace church abstained from voting.

8. Letters will be sent informing the Grace consistory and Rev. Jonker of the decision of Classis.
9. Question period (Art. 44 C.O.) was held.

10. Appointments: convening church for the next classis: Carman West. Proposed date – March 23, 2007 at 3:00 p.m. Proposed officers for the next classis: chairman: Rev. Holtvlüwer; vice chairman: Rev. Boersma; clerk: Rev. Pol.
11. Personal Question period was held.
12. Opportunity for brotherly censure (Art. 34 C.O.) was not made use of.
13. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved.
14. After prayer by Rev. Boersma the meeting was closed.

For Classis Manitoba,
December 15, 2006

Rev. A.J. Pol
(vice-chairman at that time)



Clarion Advertisements

Advertisements:

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

BIRTHS

... You knitted me together in my mother's womb. ... Psalm 139: 13

LIVIA JAYNE SCHOLTENS

Born January 2, 2007

First-born child for **Adrian and Teri Scholtens**
1st grandchild for Wayne and Jane Oosterhoff
13th grandchild for Harry and Betty Scholtens
750 Ninth Avenue, Hamilton, ON L9C 6P6 or
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ADOPTIONS

For the LORD is good and His Love endures forever, His Faithfulness continues through all generations. Psalm 100:5

With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father who has entrusted another child to our care, we are very happy to announce the arrival of

CARA RAE DAWN

Born: August 25, 2001

Arrived in our home: September 30, 2006

Ed and Joanne DeRuiter

Dyllan and Janelle
deruiter@explornet.com

ANNIVERSARIES

50th Wedding Anniversary

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!
For his mercy endures forever.

Psalm 106:1

Through good times and bad times,
through sickness and health, the LORD, our
Covenant God and Father has given

COR and THEA VAN DRONGELEN (nee deBoer)

50 years of marriage on January 18, 2007.

The LORD is good indeed!

Congratulations from Bart and Christa Woelders,
and nephews and nieces

Piet and Rita deBoer, Jim and Marg Dykstra,
Harry and Marion deBoer, Karl and Maureen deBoer,
Harry and Martha deGelder, Douwe and Liz Agema,
Al deBoer, Charlie and Sonja deBoer,
Bob and Debbie Johnson

