



Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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Thanksgiving

*An Outward
Piety*

*Shopping for
Peace of Mind*

Thankfulness is very important



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Frozen

There's always room for improvement but that begins with deep appreciation for what we have

The last time I wrote an editorial I mentioned that I wanted to come back to the topic of "frozen liturgy." Everywhere around us, it seems, churches are changing and adapting their liturgies to respond to the needs of modern people. But the Canreppers are frozen in time and stuck in the mud of archaic liturgy.

I have been accused in the past of being a "traditionalist." Sometimes I have been called a "liberal." As Rhett Butler said, "Who cares?" I am only trying to be myself and get away with it.

Someone suggested that the liturgy in our Reformed church services is "frozen." He had heard or read this somewhere, maybe in the *Clarion*, and it chilled him to the bone. In that context also the word "traditionalism" was used. Since I did not instantly warm up to the defrosting process, I, too, am a traditionalist.

There are those who would have me believe that "tradition" is evil. Remember Article 7 of the Belgic Confession. I heard that as churches we put tradition or custom on equal footing the divine Scriptures. As Reformed people we are more traditionalistic, someone suggested, than the Romanists. We have entered the winter of our discontent.

Tradition

Recently I read in an article that the word "tradition" actually has a positive meaning. I'll spare you the footnotes and my baptismal name. Often the word "tradition" is used to describe what we stubbornly hang on to even though it has become outmoded and unworkable. Traditionalism then means *obstinately hanging on to something that is actually passé*. Tsk. I wouldn't dare.

But the word "tradition" comes from the Latin *tradere* and means to pass on to future generations. Not hang on, but pass on. They don't teach Latin anymore at the Theological Seminary in Hamilton, but knowledge of this ancient language can sometimes be helpful for deeper analysis of things. For instance, you learn to distinguish between good and bad customs and you pass on to future generations what was rightly cherished by former generations. You discard the bad and pass on the good. That's what *tradition* really means. *Ipse dixit*.

My distinctly designed linguistic explanation did not satisfy anyone. We discard nothing and we pass on petrified portions of an ancient and not functioning liturgy. Nothing really changes.

Frozen liturgy?

Those who have many answers need to be asked a lot of questions. So I shifted my strategy into second gear and asked about this "frozen" liturgy I had heard and read about. What is "frozen" about our liturgy? I asked. I asked this in such a humble way that it was obvious that my next question would be about how we might unfreeze the liturgy. Perhaps a better verb is to "thaw out," but I was already flapping in the wind.

What is frozen? My strategy backfired. Our liturgy hasn't changed, someone said derisively, for six hundred years. It is frozen in time, around 1500, or thereabouts, in Geneva or Strasbourg. And he proceeded to enlighten me on the frozen parts.

I can only give you a summary of what was said. Let it suffice for now. Frozen? Our services are a one-man show. Women really have no contributing place in the services. We hear sermons in archaic language that usually does not come across. Most pastoral monologues are very repetitious and irrelevant. Children are grossly neglected. Anyone under fifty is chronically bored to death. Those over fifty are usually chronically sleeping. We sing only ancient psalms and hymns that all date back to the 1600s and there is no modern praise music. Instead of singing the blues, we need more beat and soul. No wonder we never attract "outsiders" because they get hindered by the ghostly Genevan tunes.

Outreach?

There is another problem, related to liturgy: we are not outreach-oriented. The threshold is too high, the sermons are too difficult, and the culture is clearly Dutch. We are an introverted bunch, not free of Reformed snobbism. There is little palpable outreach.

What? When I was a kid and our churches few, and our dollars even fewer, we sent out a missionary to Papua New Guinea in the 1950s. In that area we have two fellows working currently, one in other parts of

Indonesia, one Chinese minister in Vancouver, an urban missionary in Hamilton, and at least three missionaries in Brazil. We've had the *Voice of the Church* for years as well as *What Does the Bible Say*, on talk radio. We support mission among Arabs (Merf). No outreach, eh? Gimme a break.

Every year we organize VBS, we have summer camps for city kids, and many other projects are supported. Many young people participate in STMs. What is this nonsense of not being missionary-oriented? I am sure that more can be done, but let us not ignore what is being done by God's grace and with his blessing.

The organ is the perp

"Want more proof that our liturgy is frozen?" someone asked? By this time I was ready to immigrate to Jamaica and only managed a chilly nod. He said: *the organ!* The organ is the chief witness for the prosecution. The pipe is *the perp*. (Nancy Grace on CNN, *perp* is short for *perpetrator, ipse dixit*).

The pipe is the *perp*. We have taken this archaic, glorified *bagpipe* (which is what an organ is) and have made it into a shrine of accompaniment. Some churches have decided, he informed me, that *only* the organ may be used and not even another instrument *with* the organ. Well, if that doesn't take the DQ cake. That is a bad decision and untenable position. Blatant idolatry, I agree. By this time I was ready to dismantle the expensive, obtrusive bellows slat by slat, pipe by pipe and key by key. Sell it on eBay and buy a guitar.

The only instrument not mentioned in Psalm 150 is the organ. . . the only instrument we have. Now if that is not ridiculous, what is? I hastened to say that I love all 150 instruments, but it went unheard in the frigid air. Maybe he thought that I meant psalms instead of instruments. I am still wondering how we might compete with slick-packaged, superbly-orchestrated, celebrity-choreographed *forces de frappe*. One fellow in Holland toyed with the idea that we dismantle the pulpit and work the crowds from a stage. Alas, not every minister is a clown.

Shortage of organists

I read in another magazine that there is a growing shortage of (good) organists in Europe and the United States. Constant practice is required to master modern tunes and current rhythms. Now in some places courses are being given and accreditation examinations held so that a chartered organist can get a full-time job as cantor-organist. Hmmm, cantor-organist, a new career, perhaps? I love cantering.

I know that some organists have simply packed it in. Too many variant styles, too much criticism, and all this while playing an old wheezer that is supposed to match cymbals, guitars, and trumpets? The same might



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
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happen to ministers who are expected to be polished comedians, Broadway stars, and accomplished orators. It's the all-in-one man show, the old vaudeville act, like the follies without the ladies. Forget it; the bar is too high, young men rather go into a pick-up than a pulpit. Landscaping is fun.

Let me quote a passage from an older colleague who is a former missionary with good credentials. The man is outreach oriented and internally liberal. He's my kind of guy. He lives in Holland and writes, "There are (more) drums and everywhere there is a piano. Amplifiers are also allowed. Sometimes you get blown away by the decibels which are produced. These items are used in 'special services.' What are special services really? Are not all services special? Will all the kids now take a Bible to church? Will they sing now? Will they pray? Are the sermons more appealing now?" (*De Reformatie*, vol. 82, nr. 27. April 14, 2007).

In some congregations the only thing that gets people excited is the *Beamer*. You can splash an instant *Book of Praise* on the impeccable, undecorated wall. Leave it to Beamer.

Reformed liturgy is not frozen

This is not all tongue-in-cheek. Perhaps with a lot of non-traditional stuff we are freezing out the older generation who has not gotten farther than Hank Snow. What about their comfort zone? Perhaps we could have special services for the youth, the elderly, crippled and the lame? There are applicable hymns for the handicapped e.g. "When you walk." Or maybe services for traditionalists who love to sing "give me that old-time religion." Please sit, if you are able.

As non-traditionalists frost at the mouth about necessary changes, I honestly wondered: where do you begin and end with innovations? All this is beside the point, really. *The point is: I do not believe for one moment that we have a frozen liturgy.* Some people may be frozen, but the Reformed liturgy is not. Things can be changed, if really proven necessary. That has always been the case, even if ecclesiastical mills turn slowly. Besides, most people appreciate the church life they have grown up in. What's wrong with that? You pass on what you love on scriptural basis and scrap the rest. That's real tradition.

When I was a kid, we had only forty psalms. The rest had not yet been properly translated and sanitized. When I was a kid, I thought that God only spoke Dutch. When I was a candidate with the right to speak an "edifying" word, we had only twenty-nine hymns. And even those were *verboden* in some churches. When I became a retired minister, we had 150 psalms, always being revised and at least sixty-five hymns with a (few) more coming. Throughout my life in our churches things were always changing and improving.

What's this about "frozen"? Nowadays sermons are shorter, warm greetings are given, and guests are

welcomed, even if there are none. We now have a *fragrance-free zone*. Old-timers would have a fit, if they knew. Printed liturgies are often handed out. See the feeble rays of sun-light. Where's the frost-bite?

Liturgical liposuction

I hasten to add that those who advocate change do so with sincere concern and love. They want to keep the church together, I accept and appreciate that. I also appreciate that I can sometimes be *sincerely mistaken*.

Let us watch out for mere liturgical liposuction. Sucking out the fat does not cure the heart. We all love the Reformed faith, I'm sure, and the preaching is central, of course, but why was I recently greeted after the service with "Thanks for keeping it short"? How central, really, is the preaching? Another stated: after twenty minutes you've said it all and worn out the attention span of the hearers. Twenty minutes is about the max, I suppose, while the rest is suicidal and counterproductive.

Twenty minutes, eh? The average hockey game lasts three hours and video games take up an entire evening. Why is time suddenly shortened in the worship services? I know that these are very different things. Someone told me that our young people feel *marginalized* in the church and a mass-exodus is at hand, as in other churches already taking place. "Can you hear the drums, Fernando?" But most of those who are beating the drums are *older* members; young people still have a lot of growing to do before utter disillusionment sets in. The drummers are the boomers.

Distinct and timely

I have always been open for good changes: inclusive language, congregational participation, integrated accompaniment, and low threshold parlance. Some have said: the man is conservative in his talk but liberal in his leaning. Others said: no, he's liberal in his talk, conservative in his leaning. Nobody knows, 'cept Jesus.

Nowadays I'm thankful if I can keep my balance. But I cannot operate under the polar ice of frozen liturgy. It is not even true. Our liturgy is distinct and timely and still relatively young and evolving despite its 500 years. There's always room for improvement but that begins with deep appreciation for what we have.

It's the good ol'summertime. Bored? Have you already reread that fine book from a venerable pastor and formidable preacher titled "*The Beauty of Reformed Liturgy*"? Note the title: the *Beauty* of Reformed Liturgy. I wonder what the pastor meant by the word "beauty."

Whatever you do, don't write me about all this. I've immigrated to Jamaica where mail delivery is almost non-existent. Nice, warm climate, though. Meanwhile, the chairman has built a cabin on Baffin Island. Write him. RR 1, Nunavut, where the Northern Lights are running wild in the land of the midnight sun. Me? I am trying to get a berth on the Jamaican bobsled team.

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Thanksgiving



MATTHEW 13:52

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Colossians 3:17

Thanksgiving Day is a national holiday. Canadians celebrate, giving thanks for crops and prosperity. We, too, give thanks for harvest and labour. We join in the celebration, giving thanks to God for his goodness, blessings, and gifts. God wants to be thanked. Thanksgiving, however, is not easy. When you give thanks you have to be thankful. Giving thanks is not just a matter of words; the words must come from the heart. Thankfulness is not a characteristic that you either have or don't have; nice if you have it, too bad if you don't. People whom we characterize as thankful people are not necessarily thankful Christians. There will be lots of thankful people; yet, the thankfulness that pleases God must be learned. Thanksgiving is not a matter of custom or character but of faith! Thanksgiving, true thanksgiving, that's something we can do only when we are filled with the Holy Spirit!

Among all the characteristics of faith, thankfulness should be first and foremost. Thankfulness is very important, the first fruit worked by the grace of God in our life. Thankfulness is the basic melody of the Christian life which the Apostle Paul expresses in Colossians 3, “As you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

Even if you're not a thankful person by nature, in character, God still wants you to be thankful.

Christians ought not to be unthankful people, always complaining, nagging, criticizing, always disappointed about this or that or the other thing. No, God's Word exhorts true believers: “And be thankful” (v 15). That does not come automatically; it must be learned and exercised as part of a Christian lifestyle! That's what the Apostle Paul holds up to us in this text: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him!” Then thankfulness comes from the heart. God wants us to be thankful in heart; then it will show in our words and deeds too.

Three times the Apostle Paul mentions thankfulness as the characteristic of a true believer. He does so in the context of his description of the changes taking place when someone comes to faith. Do not lie to each other, forgive each other, be humble, patient, gentle, etc., and be thankful! That's how you show your conversion, express your faith. Paul says in Colossians 1:3, “We always thank God, the Father, when we pray for you;” 1:12, “Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the

inheritance of the saints;” 2:7, “Rooted and built up in [Christ], strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness;” 4:2, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.” Thankfulness must be there in the heart and life of a true believer, thankfulness that's directed to God.

The word used here is *eucharistia*. I'm sure you recognize the word sometimes used for the Lord's Supper: Eucharist. The Lord's Supper is the meal of thankfulness. In the celebration we hear the expression, “the cup of blessing for which we give thanks.” Why? Because of the *eucharistia* for the work of Christ. The root of that word is the word *charis*, which is grace! Thankfulness is rooted in the grace of God. Thankfulness, literally, is speaking well of God's grace! God's grace works thankfulness, for his grace is a miracle and our whole life we live by grace. That's thanks to the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ!

At the Lord's Supper we are reminded that without his blood, without his cross, without the curse and God-forsakenness that He suffered, there would be no grace! Whatever we receive in life, we receive by grace. Christ's suffering and death made this possible. “He who did not spare

his own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us *all things*?" Behind everything we receive we have to see the cross of Golgotha, the wounds of the Lord Jesus, and the blood of Christ. That's what we must remember in our thanksgiving: it's all by grace in Christ that we received what we did!

Are you thankful in this way? Shall we take the time to be thankful by faith? Thankful for his grace, for his gift of love in Jesus Christ, for God's gift of a new day, a new life! Thankfully counting every blessing, one by one. Thankful, because as a Christian you look at the things that you have, not at the things that you don't have, for if that's what we dwell on, we can't be thankful. Then you'll be discontent and discontentment kills our thankfulness. Thankfulness also becomes superficial, shallow, when we're always looking at what is not good, what's disappointing, what's lacking, in our own life, in other people's lives, or in church life. Anxiety and lack of trust also will put a damper on our thankfulness.

When we're full of God's grace, however, we'll flow over with thankfulness. That's why it is good that we begin our Thanksgiving celebrations in God's house. For there we are reminded of the root of true thanksgiving, the *charis* of God, his grace in Jesus Christ! Then you'll give thanks for your peanut butter and jam sandwiches, realizing that our Lord Jesus Christ



earned them for you on the cross. You'll be thankful for the car you drive, remembering the wounds of our Saviour. Your thanksgiving also will increase for the baby the Lord gave you, seeing how it was sanctified in Christ and came to you, cleansed in his blood. You'll enjoy your health and strength, your hockey games and golf tournaments more than ever, because your joy is rooted and grounded in the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The price of the blood of Christ that was paid for your food and drink, for your clothing and houses, for your business and employment, for your medication and medical treatments, that price makes you eternally thankful. For it gives you more than temporary blessings; it

helps you use these gifts with a view to eternal life. Thankfulness will help you use them that way. Thankfulness will help you use God's gifts carefully and responsibly, generously and graciously! Thankfulness will help you use them for living expenses and entertainment choices that are pleasing before the Lord. Thankfulness will make your turkey more tasteful, your glass of wine more enjoyable, and your ice cream more special. Thankfulness will make your Thanksgiving celebration more meaningful. For all these gifts and blessings we place in the shadow of the cross of Christ, and over all these celebrations falls the light of the grace of God in Jesus Christ!



An Outward Piety (Part 1 of 3)

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The elders are beginning their annual home visits. Just what are they looking for? What message shall they leave with the addresses they visit? It's perhaps beneficial at this time of year for elders and congregation members alike to think about some of the challenges facing the elders who visit – and hence some of the challenges facing the families who are visited. Central to the visit, I'm convinced, must be one's understanding of who God actually is.

In a brief series of three articles, I invite the reader to come along on a visit to Jerusalem in the days of the prophet Isaiah. This first article describes and analyzes what the diligent office bearer could observe.

All is well

The elders of Israel could surely not complain about Israel's enthusiasm for the Lord's service. According to Isaiah 1:11, the people brought to God a "multitude of . . . sacrifices," so much so that the Lord had "more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals." "New moons, Sabbaths and convocations:" the people never missed, they were always there (1:13). Readily and frequently they "spread out [their] hands in prayer" (1:14). The office bearers observing the attendance

and participation of the people of God in their public worship services in Jerusalem could only be pleased with what they saw.

Those Old Testament burnt offerings were actually a profession of faith. The burnt offering symbolized that the child of God offered himself to the Lord as a living sacrifice. At the same time, the burnt offering pictured the gospel of Jesus Christ – for the worshiper would lay his hand on the head of the goat,

Think about some of the challenges facing the elders who visit

confess over it his sins, then slit the throat of the animal so that the animal would die in place of the sinner. Here was the gospel of Jesus Christ, sinner's substitute before God. That the people brought their offerings so faithfully surely spoke well of their faith in Jesus Christ! The elders of Israel could only be satisfied with the faith of the people. . . .

All is not well

Yet the Lord God was not pleased with his people. In fact, the Holy One of Israel expressed his revulsion. Isaiah 1:11-15: "The

multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me? . . . I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. . . I cannot bear your evil assemblies. . . I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen." Ouch!

Why was the Lord so thoroughly displeased? Try to distil the cause from the words the Holy Spirit made Isaiah speak:

- 2:6-8: ". . . your people, the house of Jacob. . . are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans. Their land is full of silver and gold; there is no end to their treasures. Their land is full of horses; there is no end to their chariots. Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made." Eastern religion, witchcraft, idolatry, consumerism manifested in horses, cars, boats – it was all there amongst the very same people who were so faithful in their temple attendance and proclamation of the gospel.
- 3:16: "The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, tripping along with mincing steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles."

Church News

Called by the church of
Winnipeg (Grace), Manitoba:

Rev. D. VandeBurgt
of Glanbrook, Ontario.

Accepted the call to the Free
Reformed Church of Pretoria
(Maranata), SA to serve as
missionary:

Rev. D.M. Boersma
of Denver, CO.

Declined the call to the church
of Lincoln, Ontario:

Rev. A.J. Pol
of Carman (West), Manitoba.

Called by the church of Owen
Sound, Ontario:

Rev. J. de Gelder
of Flamborough, Ontario.

Accepted the call by the church
of Smithers, BC to work as a
missionary in Prince George,
British Columbia:

Candidate J. Witteveen

Amazing: the same ladies who frequented the temple made a point of carrying themselves in a way that drew attention to their bodies.

- 3:18-24: Isaiah must mention "their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses and mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls." Here's an emphasis on the "outward adornment" (1 Pet 3:4), on style and being trendy; notice how complete the list is. You'd wonder, did the folk of Jerusalem know their Bibles as well as they knew what was cool? More, did they nurture their "inner self" as much as they doted on their outward selves?
- 5:8-25: the Holy Spirit faults the people for adding house to house and field to field (v 8), "rising early in the morning to run after their drinks" (v 11), who "have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine" (v 12), who "call evil good and good evil" and that's to say they tolerate and approve of corruption (v 20), who "are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks" (v 22). Here is consumerism at its worst, the pursuit of the life of luxury, with the best of houses and the latest in stereo and CDs, and the best from the wine cellar too. It's a picture of living lightly, with the

emphasis very much on the here and now and the buzz this life can offer.

It explains why the Lord was so thoroughly displeased.

Nominalism

The picture the Spirit draws of Israel is intriguing. This is God's people by covenant and the people know it. Very faithfully they assemble together Sabbath by Sabbath and outwardly they do all the right things in the temple – even exceeding the requirements of the law. But at the same time their conduct is so very worldly, so very much focused on the pleasures of today – the body, the houses, the horses and chariots (we'd say the cars and boats),

He has one foot in the church and the other in the world

clothes and fashion and drinks and parties. *This is nominalism* – where one calls oneself a child of God, an Israelite, a Christian, does the things a child of God ought to do (especially in relation to the Sunday), and even professes the faith. But in daily life he follows the conduct of the world; other than his behaviour in relation to the house of God, one would not pick him out as a Christian. He's "Christian" in name only; though he puts himself out as being a Christian, and a faithful one too, he has in reality embraced the conduct and attitudes and mindset of the world that disregards the

Lord God. In brief, he has one foot in the church and the other in the world. That's nominalism; the Holy Spirit wants us today to know that God's people in Isaiah's day were beset with this vice.

And a vice it is. That's why the Lord says He has "more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals," and He has "no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats" (1:11); in fact, that's why God's soul hates their feasts and God refuses to listen to their many prayers (1:14f). Repeatedly the Lord uttered his "woe" on those pious people who were so worldly (Isa 5).

Where from?

Where, one wonders, did Israel's nominalism come from? Given the people's faithful attendance at the worship services of the day, how could they couple their church attendance with such this-worldly attitudes and conduct as consumerism, emphasis on the body, partying, and the like? The Lord answers the question for us.

- 1:3, 4: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him." The people, says the Lord, do not rightly know God. His identity as "the Holy One of Israel" does not resonate in their hearts and that's why they've spurned Him.
- 3:8b: "their words and deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence." Their conduct does not take into account who God actually is.
- 5:13, 24: "My people will go into exile for lack of understanding. . . they have rejected the law of the Lord Almighty."

In a word, the people of Israel, despite their faithful assembling together on the Sabbath, do not know their God, and so they do not take Him seriously in their daily living. It's this *lack of awareness of God's identity* that lets them come

to the temple with countless prayers and at the same time have no guilty conscience about their worldly conduct. Their thoughts are not filled with who God is and so they fill their thoughts instead with parties and becoming champions of drink and accumulating wealth and comfort.

It's quite OK to serve the Lord in the outward trappings of religiosity and embrace patterns of the world at the same time

So, when they are told that the Lord will certainly come with his judgment, they see no need to take Isaiah's warning seriously. "Let it approach," they taunt, "let the plan of the Holy One of Israel come, so we may know it" (5:19). They're sure: their God is quite content with them.

Illustration

King Uzziah may function as illustration of what Israel actually thought about the Lord God. As a king, Uzziah was eminently successful, to the point that he accumulated an enormous army and "his fame spread far and wide" (2 Chron 26:15). Without a great deal of imagination one can picture in one's mind the ladies Isaiah speaks of in chap 3 as tripping around Uzziah's courtyard.

There came the day when Uzziah got together with the priests of the temple. He took it upon

himself – though he was neither priest nor Levite – to enter "the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense" (v 16). God's law on the point was clear and the priests did not hesitate to tell him so; "it is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is for the priests." Rage exploded in the king at this admonition – and immediately "leprosy broke out on his forehead" (v 20). God was not to be mocked.

It begs the question: why did this king think he could enter the temple of the Lord and offer incense, though he well knew this was a task reserved for the priests? Here, ultimately, is self-styled worship of the Lord God. Uzziah was no heathen, was instead dedicated to the service of the Lord. But his thoughts of God were so shrivelled that he considered his own understanding of what constituted good service to God to be acceptable to God. It's the same perception of God that existed among the people: God is not so particular about how He is served. So it's quite OK to serve the Lord in the outward trappings of religiosity and embrace patterns of the world at the same time.

One wonders: what might the Lord God Himself think about it all? Was He pleased with outward piety? God's answer is the vision of Isaiah 6. R. C. Sproul has written a very helpful meditative commentary on this chapter in his book, *The Holiness of God*. I'd encourage the reader to obtain a copy and read it with care. For my part, I hope to come back to God's response next time.



For the director of music, with stringed instruments

A seven-year-old, up to a mother of six. Violin, viola, and cello players from across the country. Four months to over a dozen years experience. Two brilliant composer/directors. Vivaldi, Bach, Mozart, Handel, and Bizet. Genevan psalms. Just five days of rehearsals. The result? Two stellar concerts with a thirty-member orchestra!

This was the experience of many in the Fraser Valley in early July as brother and sister team Kent and Roxi Dykstra directed the first ever Canadian Reformed Strings Camp at Credo Christian High School with performances in the Langley and Yarrow church buildings. Participants came from not only from the lower mainland, but also the interior of British Columbia, as well as Lynden (Washington) and Alberta, and even four from Ontario (whose air travel was sponsored through corporate donations). The day before (July 2), Kent had been with these four, along with ten others, for a one-day music workshop at Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton, Ontario, arranged locally by Teny Visscher. An event reaching across the whole federation, and including some United Reformed people as well.

Kent Dykstra is a high-school science and music teacher at Parkland Immanuel in Edmonton and Roxi Dykstra is the principal

viola with the Prince George Symphony Orchestra and plans to begin graduate studies at Université de Montréal this fall. Having grown up in Houston, BC, both musicians, along with their four other brothers, attended Trinity Western University in Langley, Kent graduating with his music major and physics concentration, and Roxi with degrees in music and biology.

Throughout the week of July 3 to 7, Credo High was the scene of rehearsals, master classes, private lessons, chamber-music groups, meals, and Christian fellowship, with Kent and Roxi leading and teaching and their mother Jenny running things behind the scenes. Laser tag and swimming were arranged for a break on two

evenings. The youngest participants were released early and several others who worked during the day joined the older day-campers for rehearsal in the evenings. No music was provided in advance, as the directors first had to assess the level of the players. Given the wide range, they still pulled together a wonderful combination of Psalm arrangements, classic orchestral pieces, and chamber groups. As Kent explained at the concerts, the chamber quartets were the most challenging. There is no director and each instrument plays its own part; however, this also allowed for *the beginners to play Olde English Round* and the most advanced students to play quite challenging music such as *Rondo Alla Turca*





and the fourth movement of *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, both by Mozart.

With minimal advertisement and many other things for Canadian Reformed families to do on a Saturday evening (including several weddings), the first concert brought only about 100 people to the Langley church. One elderly gentleman came planning to sneak out the back if the music was poor decided after two songs that he was definitely going to stay! So that evening, and at church the next morning, the word spread, and Yarrow was packed with people of all ages, including visitors from all over the country. A few minutes before the concert, the musicians took their seats at the front, tuned up, practised a few measures, and then the concertmaster walked in to applause to prepare things for director Kent. (Roxi and he had taken turns the night before, but she couldn't be present for the Yarrow concert.)

Both concerts were breathtaking and God-glorifying. They played and we all enjoyed a portion of *Autumn* from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, the second movement of Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto #3*, the first movement of

Eine Kleine Nachtmusik by Mozart, *Pirates of the Caribbean* (!) plus about ten chamber music quartets. In addition, there were five string arrangements by Kent from the *Book of Praise*: Psalms 8, 17, 75, and 136, as well as Hymn 24. These were not simply harmonizations or accompaniments, but included variations both introducing and concluding the musical and textual themes. The congregation sang the Psalms with gusto and appreciation and ended the concert with a standing ovation after Psalm 8, expressing gratitude to Kent (and Roxi in absentia) for their creativity and direction, to the young musicians who developed and shared their talents, and to God who enriches our lives with

music and allows us to glorify Him in this way.

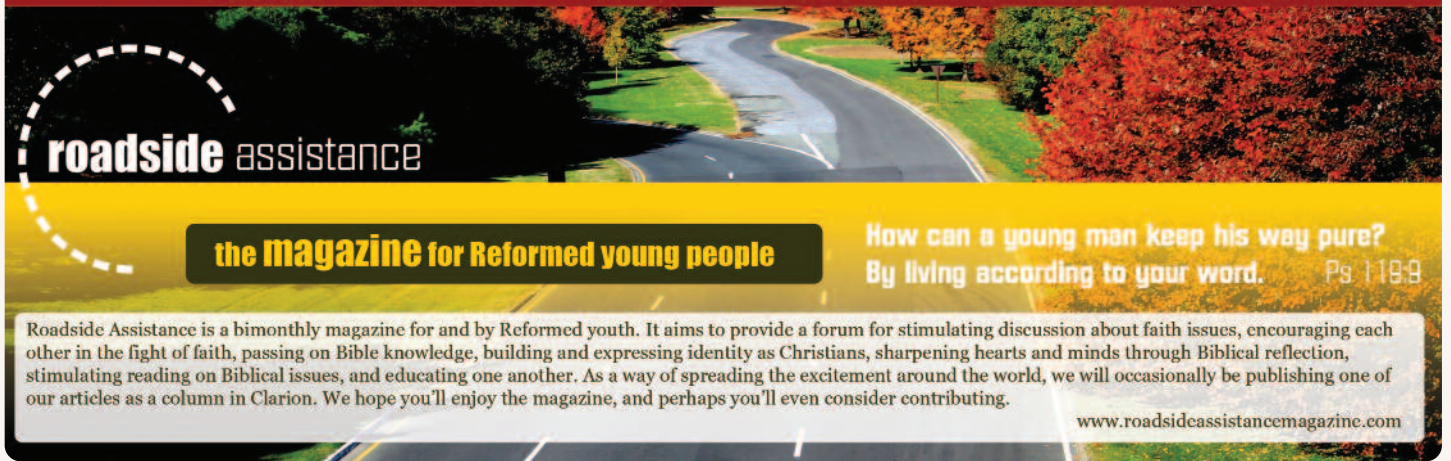
In his Psalm arranging, Kent especially demonstrates that rare talent of creatively working with 500-year-old music to make something beautiful and edifying. Kent and Roxi both, in their dedication, enthusiasm, diligence, and professionalism provided for a truly enriching experience for all participants, including both musicians and listeners. Many have expressed the desire to have this become an annual event, continuing to strengthen the bonds between string players from east to west. Let us all encourage and support those with musical interests and gifts to develop and employ them to the glory of God, not only in our homes and communities, but also in our worship.

Some comments from the players, young and old, from across Canada:

"We learned as much in those five days as in half a year of private lessons"

"A fantastic week that fully included, challenged, and inspired even the youngest."





roadside assistance

the magazine for Reformed young people

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word. Ps 119:9

Roadside Assistance is a bimonthly magazine for and by Reformed youth. It aims to provide a forum for stimulating discussion about faith issues, encouraging each other in the fight of faith, passing on Bible knowledge, building and expressing identity as Christians, sharpening hearts and minds through Biblical reflection, stimulating reading on Biblical issues, and educating one another. As a way of spreading the excitement around the world, we will occasionally be publishing one of our articles as a column in Clarion. We hope you'll enjoy the magazine, and perhaps you'll even consider contributing.

www.roadsideassistancemagazine.com

Shopping for Peace of Mind

Jim Fluit

"Canadians live in fear . . . But now there is an affordable answer." Those words are part of a sales pitch for a financial planning service and I've been hearing them over the radio for weeks. It was just background noise for a while, but then it suddenly startled me. Freedom from fear is being sold – and bought – without a second thought. It's a disturbing idea, but once I started listening for this theme in the media, I started to hear it everywhere.

One phrase that constantly appears is "peace of mind." This line has been selling us on everything from insurance policies to financial and legal services, safety devices, vehicles, and even a *Peace of Mind* "tension-releasing vapour bath." By marketing peace of mind, all of these ads – and many more – make the implicit promise that the purchase of a particular product or service will diffuse stress and grant freedom from fear.

This promise is being offered to consumers at every price range and with any type of purchase.

If only you have the money, you could buy enough peace of mind to cover virtually every aspect of your life, plus a thousand situations that you didn't even know you had to fear. This means freedom from worry about job security, grades at school, paying the bills, accidents, sicknesses and disabilities, physical pain, and even emotional pain. Life can be unpredictable,

Peace of mind is a promise that is hard to resist and that's why it's such an effective marketing tool

but advertising promises us a sense of security and serenity about the future. Peace of mind is a promise that is hard to resist and that's why it's such an effective marketing tool.

We need to realize that most ads, including the peace of mind type, are not exhibiting actual

goods and services. Yes, there is an actual product or service that is being sold, but the key selling point is not the actual product but a new lifestyle or a new attitude; a better approach to living. For example, with car liability insurance, the service offered is protection from legal charges if you accidentally injure or kill another person with your vehicle. A well-built car can offer protection for you and your passengers in the case of an accident. And using the right financial planning service could help you save enough money to actually buy the sports car of your dreams.

Those are the actual, tangible benefits, but the ads will allude to something else. Their real focus isn't the advantages of a certain legal status, or a better financial position, or a higher crash safety rating. The ads won't emphasize the physical position that we are in as much as the way that we see ourselves and our position in the world. It's amazing how many vehicle-rated ads will show happy, beautiful people cruising down a

scenic parkway with the wind in their hair. Regardless of the product being sold, the main selling-point is a healthy approach to life and a serene attitude about the future – peace of mind and happiness.

The language of advertising assumes that an ideal financial, material, and legal position will truly bestow real freedom and real peace. And the fact is that, in spite of the abundance of cute stories which insist that the best things in life are free, the peace of mind tagline is working as a marketing tool. We can't simply blame this sad trend on others. I'd like to believe that every church-goer is immune to fear-based marketing, but we aren't. This is *our* problem too. This is a lie that we want to believe.

This is why we have to reject the rose-colored rhetoric of advertising. This doesn't mean that we should simply stop buying and selling, even if that were possible. It means that we have to be aware that ads typically promise a lot more than they can deliver. It's something we always have to be on guard against. We may all agree that money can't buy happiness, but when we have daily exposure to dozens of ads showing attractive, smiling, successful people consuming Product X, it does make an impact. We have to be aware of these dangers when we are exposed to ads and also when we create ads for exposure to others.

There is true peace and real happiness, but it can't be bought and it doesn't come easily. The peace that Christ offers us is not protection from difficulties. It is the courage to move forward even though we know very well that there will be trials ahead. The

reality of life is that there will always be pain and uncertainty regardless of what you own or who you are. This reality is not an obstacle that we have to overcome – it is the context in which a life of faith is lived.

We have to reject the rose-coloured rhetoric of advertising

The Apostle Paul encourages the church in Philippi with these words, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests before God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your

hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Paul doesn't offer any promises of safety or comfort. In this passage, it actually seems more that he is *assuming* that the church will go through difficult times. He doesn't offer escape, but he encourages perseverance. Paul reminds his fellow believers that our Lord will give us the capacity to deal with the trials that come our way.

The call to trust in God's promises instead of in our own abilities is a simple message, but it's not an easy lesson to actually apply. This is not a quick fix; it'll be a lifelong battle for every believer, but we should always have hope when we see this sharp contrast: while the world offers us a false promise of peace at an "affordable" price, Jesus Christ offers us *true* peace as a free gift.



Reviewed by Th.E. Lodder

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Doing Right: Practicing Ethical Principles

David W. Gill. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 2004).

While preaching my way through the Ten Commandments again I came across this book by David Gill. Preachers are always thankful to discover quality material like this on the ten words. Gill combines scriptural investigation with contemporary application of God's commands, encouraging the reader to reflect critically on his own ethical principles and choices.

I will use his chapter on the eighth commandment entitled "Stuff Stewarding" to give you a sample of his treatment. He introduces the commandment by

citing a few classic interpretations, including Luther, Calvin, and Rabbi André Chouraqui. Then he systematically works through the biblical teaching on stealing. This brings him to a discussion of why theft is wrong and why we are tempted to steal.

Next, he lays out a "biblical theology of things" which acknowledges as primary the awareness that God is the owner of everything. "If the first concern of economic thinking is to serve God," writes Gill, "the second is to serve and care for our neighbours." *Koinos* (sharing in common) needs to replace *idios* (thinking in terms of "my own," the root of our term *idiot*). He also helps us think through our perceptions towards wealth and poverty in a truly biblical manner.

Gill's short list of "How many ways can we steal?" includes:

- keeping the change we receive from a cashier when we have been given too much
- taking office supplies for personal use
- failing to work during time for which we are being paid
- underpaying employees
- presenting someone else's ideas or creations as our own or failing to give credit where it is due

The more complex issues surrounding economic theory, wages and prices, taxes, charitable contributions, gambling, reparations and lifestyle choices also receive his attention.

This book offers preachers, teachers, Bible study participants, and many others – any Christian reader who is eager to learn and grow – a biblical, contemporary, thought-provoking, and action-inducing look at doing right.



Press Releases

Press Release of Classis Northern Ontario, June 15, 2007

Rev. J. VanWoudenberg, on behalf of the convening church, called the meeting of the delegates to order. He requested the singing of Psalm 119:5, 6, read from 1 John 2:18-28, spoke some words about this passage, and led in prayer. After the credentials were found to be in good order, the moderamen took their place: Rev. D.G.J. Agema as

chairman, Rev. C. Vermeulen as clerk, and Rev. VanWoudenberg as vice-chairman. The chairman thanked the convening church for its work, mentioned some items of memorabilia, and highlighted the upcoming vacancies in the churches of Elora and Owen Sound.

With all the documentation in place, Classis granted Rev. Vermeulen most honourable release from classis to enable him to take up his new charge in Darling

Downs. The chairman expressed thankfulness to Rev. Vermeulen for all the work that he did in classis and wished him the Lord's rich blessings in his new charge.

With all the documentation in place Classis approved the call from Grand Valley to Rev. P.G. Feenstra. The chairman expressed thankfulness to Rev. Feenstra for all the work that he did in classis since the beginning of his ministry in this classical region.

Church visitation reports of visits to the churches of Grand Valley, Owen Sound, and Fergus North were received with thankfulness.

A report from an elder of the church of Guelph who was delegated to visit a synod of L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ) was also received with thankfulness.

The church of Guelph requested and received advice regarding a discipline matter.

The churches of Owen Sound and Elora requested counsellors as well as pulpit supply once per month for the duration of the vacancies. Classis granted these requests and as such appointed Rev. Agema as counsellor of the church of Owen Sound and Rev. W. Geurts as counsellor of the church of Elora.

The following appointments were made regarding the next classis: convening church: Orangeville, suggested date: September 21, 2007; suggested officers: chairman: Rev. Feenstra, clerk: Rev. Agema, vice-chairman: Rev. VanWoudenberg.

An email from Rev. B. Westerveld of the ERQ was read in which he expressed regret that he could not attend the classis as an observer and wished the Lord's blessings upon Classis.

Rev. Heiberg, observer from Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches, extended greetings. He expressed appreciation for the contacts and the hope for closer relationships in the future. He requested prayer for the upcoming general synod of the United Reformed Churches. He stressed the importance of constantly examining ourselves and constantly reforming. He encouraged the expectation of rich blessings from the Lord. The

chairman responded with appropriate words.

Classis mandated the convening church for the next classis to invite observers to the next classis from Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches and the ERQ. The convening church was also instructed to send observers to the next classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches and the next synod of the ERQ. The church of Fergus North was appointed to represent Classis at the farewell of Rev. Vermeulen and the church of Orangeville was appointed to represent Classis at the installation of Rev. Feenstra as minister of Grand Valley. Rev. Vermeulen expressed thanks for the help and encouragement he has received as minister in this classical area through the years. He also wished upon the churches the Lord's ongoing blessings.

After adoption of the Acts, approval of the Press Release, singing of Psalm 108:1, 2, and prayer, Classis was closed.

*Rev. J. VanWoudenberg
(clerk, e.t.)*

Acts and Press Release of Classis Contracta of the Canadian Reformed Churches of Classis Pacific West held at Langley, British Columbia, July 4, 2007

Rev. James Visscher, minister of the convening church at Langley, opened with the reading of Ephesians 4. He led in prayer, remembering also the church at Willoughby Heights which had recently called Rev. Anton Souman of Smithville.

The credentials were reviewed. Present were a minister and an elder each of the convening church, of the neighbouring church at

Cloverdale, and of the calling church, and Rev. Julius VanSpronsen. Appointed as chairman was Rev. Visscher, and as clerk, Rev. Theo Lodder.

Classis contracta was convened upon the request of the Smithers church since their minister, Rev. VanSpronsen, had accepted the call to be sent out as missionary in Brazil by the Maranatha Church at Surrey. The letter of call was reviewed. The letter of acceptance was read. A letter from the Maranatha church to the Smithers church regarding date and time of transfer was also read. A certificate of release and ecclesiastical attestation was provided by Smithers. A letter from Surrey regarding announcements of the date of installation was also discussed and deemed sufficient.

Classis contracta agreed that Br. VanSpronsen would be released of his task as minister at Smithers on August 1, 2007 so that he could be installed as Surrey's missionary on August 17, 2007.

Elder John DeHaas (Langley) was requested to represent Classis at his installation, Elder Siebe DeJong (Cloverdale) serving as alternate.

Classis will offer monthly pulpit supply to Smithers, assuming that Smithers will come with an official request in October.

The chairman spoke words of congratulations and encouragement to Rev. VanSpronsen and the Maranatha church. Question period was held. One of the delegates noted what a privilege it is for Br. VanSpronsen to work in a field in which his father, Rev. C. VanSpronsen, had laboured for many years. The chairman asked the clerk to close the meeting with prayer.

*For this classis contracta,
Theo Lodder, clerk*





Letter to the Editor

In the What's New??? column of the August 3 issue of *Clarion*, I am somewhat surprised and saddened that Rev. Kampen seems to advocate congregations voting on certain issues. I was always taught, and am convinced, that congregations only vote for persons, like ministers, elders, or deacons, and not on issues.

In the present congregation of which I have been a member for over fifty years, I do not recall that the congregation ever voted on an issue. That is where democracy creeps into the church. Christ, the Head of the church, has given the elected brothers the mandate that they together rule over the congregation in *all things*. This is made very clear in the Form of Ordination for elders, deacons, and ministers.

Now, it is very wise of a council to hear the congregation about particular issues. In such a meeting everyone present has the opportunity to express his or her opinion. It is the task and duty of council, based on that information together with other relative points, to make a responsible decision and they should not turn that responsibility over to the congregation by having them vote on it. Democracy, although far from perfect, is one of the better ways to rule a country, but it should have no place in the church.

In the Form of Ordination based on 2 Timothy 3, we read: "To do their work well as shepherds of God's flock, the overseers should train themselves in godliness and diligently search the scriptures,

which are profitable in every respect, that the man of God may be equipped for every good work."

We should keep in mind our rich Reformed heritage. Having congregations vote on issues is not part of that heritage.

I would appreciate it if others would express their opinion on this matter, it is an issue worthy to be dealt with.

*Thank you,
Arend Harke, St. Albert, AB*

Response

It is always gratifying to know that what one writes is read by others. At the same time, it also becomes apparent that what is assumed as self-evident in the eyes of the author is not always so in the eyes of the reader. I can assure Br. Harke that I am not at all advocating "congregations voting on certain issues." The decision referred to the way things are done at council and consistory meetings. For the sake of clarity, the exact wording was as follows: "It is decided with regard to our council and consistory meetings that abstentions in voting will not be counted among the votes cast on a particular issue and a majority will be determined with reference to the votes cast."

Rev. E. Kampen

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.

