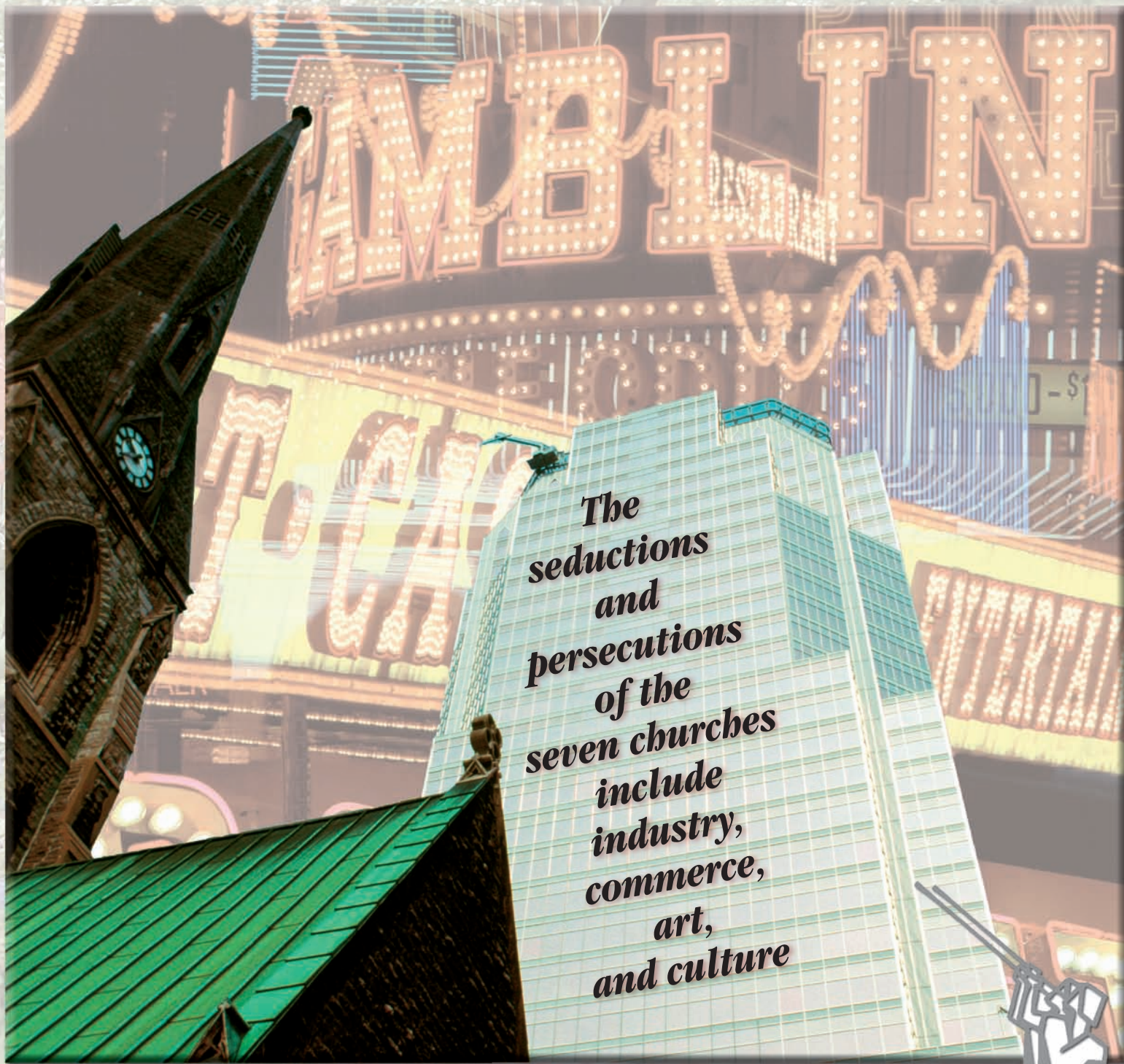


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*The
seductions
and
persecutions
of the
seven churches
include
industry,
commerce,
art,
and culture*

Inside this issue

- A Dangerous Woman ■ D.V.
- The Church Is Catholic





R. Aasman

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A Dangerous Woman

Oprah is one of the most influential people in the world

Recently I was visiting a congregation where I delivered a sermon from my series on the Book of Revelation. We were dealing with a passage on the great prostitute, also known as Babylon the Great. The great prostitute is not just one woman. In fact, she symbolizes many different persons and human institutions at different times and in different places. According to some, the great prostitute is the false church. Personally I have a great deal of appreciation for this interpretation but I am unable to leave it at that. Along with William Hendriksen and others, the great prostitute would also include industry, commerce, art, and culture which offer wealth, luxury, vice, and glamour that seduce and intoxicate people so that they are drawn away from the true worship of God. That seems to fit in with the specific examples found in Revelation 2 and 3 where the seductions and persecutions of the seven churches is a blend of religion and commerce.

Shortly after delivering the sermon which dealt with this seductive and destructive prostitute, a young lady from that congregation sent me an email with an extraction from Christianity.ca entitled: "The World's 'Most Dangerous' Spiritual Guru: Oprah Begins 10-Week Online New Age Class." I have never watched *The Oprah Winfrey Show* but I would have to be from another planet not to know that Oprah's show is a highly-rated talk show and that Oprah is one of the most influential people in the world. Her show focuses on literature, self-improvement, and spirituality. Therefore I was intrigued to see the connection between this article and my sermon.

New Age guru

Starting this past March, Oprah began a ten-week long online course on the best-selling book, *A New Earth*, by New Age guru, Eckhart Tolle. Oprah's attraction to New Age spirituality is well-documented, but rarely has Oprah shown more enthusiasm for a New Age guru than for Eckhart Tolle. The article in Christianity.ca gives some insight into this New Age guru:

Much like many other New Age systems, Eckhart's "spirituality" is a vague, ethereal blend of spiritual theories and ideas, gleaned from all of the world's major religions. Eckhart promises the attainment of "inner peace" and a higher state of consciousness by utilizing methods of meditation that plunge one into the "now." He also says that mankind is in a moment of crisis, in which the race must either achieve the next stage in its evolution by attaining "higher consciousness," or destroy itself and the planet.

If you know anything about the New Age movement, this sounds typical. But there are more sinister implications to Tolle's teaching:

The core of Eckhart's teaching is a religious relativism, in which he eschews all rigid doctrine or exclusive claims to truth as dangerous and manifestations of "egoic consciousness." "The moment you say 'only my belief' or 'our belief' is true, and you deny other people's beliefs, then you've adopted an ideology," Eckhart told the participants in Monday's online class. "And then religion becomes a closed door."



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Not to be outdone, Oprah gave her own insight during the online course:

“Jesus,” said Oprah, “came to show us Christ-consciousness ... Jesus came to show us the way of the heart ... Jesus came to say, ‘Look I’m going to live in the body, in the human body and I’m going to show you how it’s done.’ These are some principles and some laws that you can use to live by to know that way.” She concluded, “I don’t believe that Jesus came to start Christianity.”

True to the New Age doctrine, religion is whatever you want it to be

“What Jesus said is much deeper than what you, how the church interprets it. There’s a depth to it. And it reflects your own depth when you read it. So there’s no conflict between this teaching, which is purely spiritual, and any religion.”

This fits in well with modern liberal theology which no longer focuses on atonement in the blood of Jesus Christ but on following the example of Jesus.

Out with the old

Eckhart and Oprah both make a contrast between “old” and “new” spirituality. Oprah said, “The old way is the hierarchy has the authority. Church authorities tell you how to worship in church and how to behave outside of church. The new spirituality is that you are your own best authority as you work to know and love yourself, you discover how to live a more spiritual life.” Clearly the doctrines of the church and supervision by the church are not compatible with this new spirituality. True to the New Age doctrine, religion is whatever you want it to be. In fact, if you want to be your own god and construct your own set of morals, that is your right. Man defines his own truth and his own reality. In fact, some would go so far to say that there is no sin except that of clinging to the old rugged cross.

It would be easy to scoff at the teachings of Eckhart and to dismiss it summarily. However, Eckhart’s book, *A New Earth*, has already sold 3.5 million copies worldwide, and people are tuning in to Oprah with great enthusiasm. We have a serious problem here.

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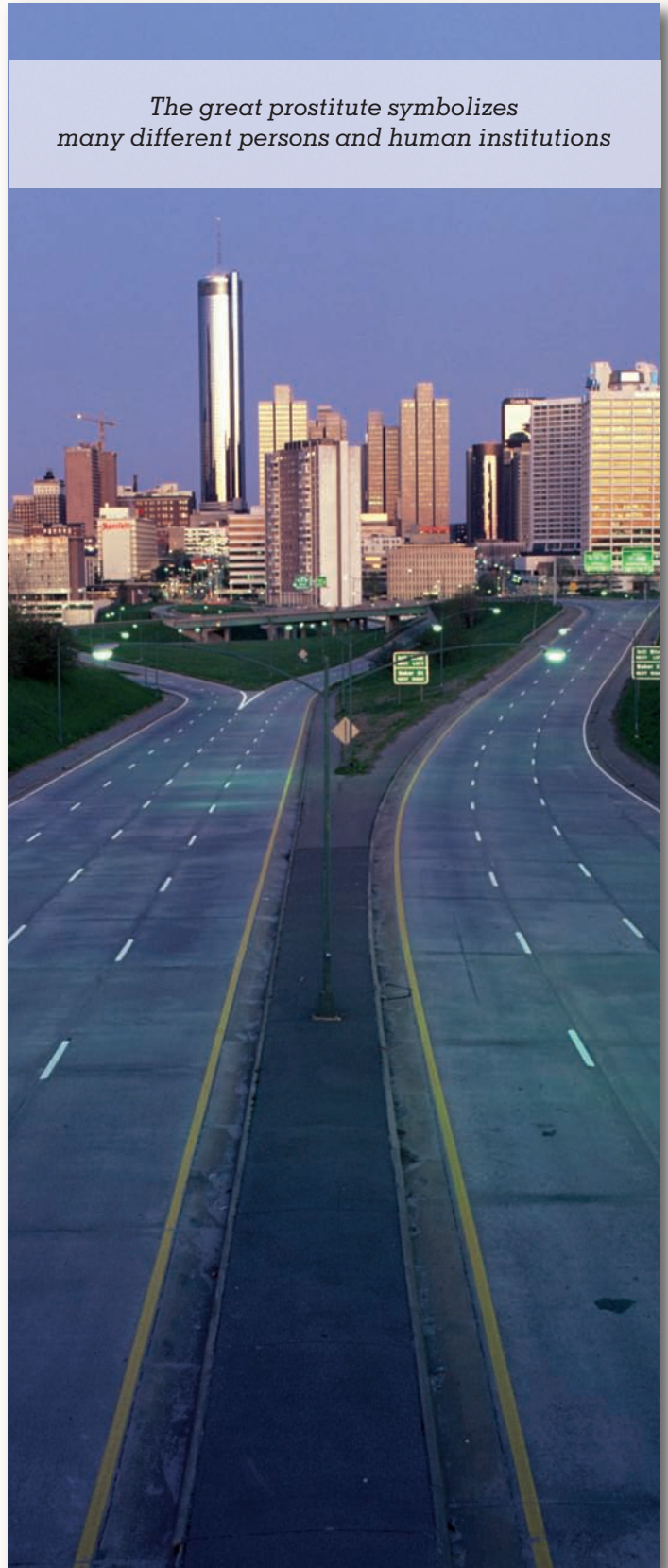
The great prostitute symbolizes many different persons and human institutions

A dangerous woman

One thing I am not trying to say is that Oprah is Babylon the Great. I wrote above: "The great prostitute is not just one woman. In fact, she symbolizes many different persons and human institutions at different times and in different places." But the teachings of Eckhart and Oprah certainly fall into the parameters of what is written in Revelation 17 about the great prostitute: "With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." We are talking spiritual adultery and intoxication. The world is besotted and intoxicated with the teachings and attractions of the great prostitute. She is one dangerous woman. Oprah, Eckhart, and the New Age spirituality are part of that great danger. This leads people away from the gospel of redemption in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Taking stock

One of Satan's and his allies' greatest tricks is the ability to deceive. That's a good reason for self-examination and taking stock of our lives. We can shake our heads sadly when we consider what is being taught in our world regarding religion. We can also complacently assume that as a Reformed church our church doctrine and government will keep us safe from New Age spirituality. However, considering the popularity of talk shows like Oprah and unpopularity of reading theological material and perhaps even the Bible, the seemingly spiritual and religious dialogue of New Age teachings can also intoxicate our minds and cause us to drift from the God-breathed Word that "is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16, 17). We need to stand on guard.



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D.V.



MATTHEW 13:52

“Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’”

James 4:15

D.V. Certainly you have seen these initials before! We expect to see them on invitations to events like weddings, anniversaries, and graduations. We hope to see them regularly in our church bulletins. But what do these initials “D.V.” really mean? They stand for the Latin words: *Deo Volente* – meaning, “God willing.” Or, as we may read in Scripture, “The Lord willing.”

This expression comes from the letter of James. In fact, this expression is sometimes called “the condition of James.” These are words which God says we ought to speak when planning for the future: the Lord willing! Yet how often do we actually say these words when making plans for the future? And when we write these words, how much thought goes into writing them?

The Scripture passage in which these words are found addresses the concern of making plans without acknowledging the Lord. Now, making plans for the future is part of our everyday life. Every day we make all sorts of plans. We make short-term plans like what to do on a Saturday afternoon; what housework will be done this week; which file to tackle first in the office; which homework assignment to do next. We also make long-term plans like that our summer vacation will be in July; that we’ll buy a new VW in

September; that I’ll propose marriage to my girlfriend next spring!

Good planning is part of a responsible life before our Lord God. But do we consciously make all our plans in the Lord? Do we realize that we can do nothing without his blessing? Do we factor the Lord God into our planning at all?

In his letter, James expresses concern about certain believers who did not consciously make all their plans in the Lord. There were these travelling businessmen who said, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money!” (v 13). They were so sure of what they were going to do. They were going to do it all and they would get rich doing it! Their success was guaranteed – nothing could go wrong for them. What boasting and bragging!

Where was the Lord God in all of this? Sure, they would mention Him, but more as an afterthought. For they could do it all themselves; they were self-made men. And how often don’t we admire such self-made men, those who are so sure about what they’re going to do?

But the Lord God says: “Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow” (v 14). And how true this is! We may have our plans, but a completely different situation can transpire. You may

have all your plans for tomorrow, but then you may be taken away by the Lord in the night. What is your life, really? As James writes: “You are a mist that appears a little while and then vanishes” (v 15). You and I are like mist – we are here and then we’re suddenly gone! For us, life is fleeting.

Yet we are surely in the hands of our Lord and Father. He gives us life. He sustains our life. He alone knows how things will unfold today and tomorrow, next week, next month, and next year! He is truly sovereign over all. Everything will happen according to his secret will. As believers, let us acknowledge this, time and again. We ought to say: “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that!”

We do not know what the Lord’s secret will is. We cannot look into the future. And so we must leave our lives in his capable hands. Sure, we must plan wisely for the future, but always remembering that the Lord God directs and guides in his way. He carries out his perfect plan and his plans include us.

Things may change for us as the days go by. But what God requires each day is obedience to his revealed will. Having done what we must do, we leave it to Him to bless our endeavours. Then we can thankfully say, “*Deo Volente!*”





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The Church Is Catholic (Part 1 of 2)

For many centuries the Christian church has been deeply convinced of the fact that it is "catholic." Through the Apostles' Creed believers have spoken of faith in the "holy catholic church" for centuries. When in 1980 our General Synod (of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken, trans.) declared that the text of the confessions of faith, as these were presented to the churches in 1971, can be viewed as a reliable rendering of what we confess as churches, the word "catholic" was again recognizable as a usable ecclesiastical word for Protestants.

For a long time it had been usual for Protestants to leave the word "catholic" to the Roman Catholics and to describe the church with the words "universal Christian (church)." "I believe (in) a holy, universal Christian church" sounded much more Protestant than the risky word "catholic." In sermons, especially ones about Lord's Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism, ministers could declare that we too, are "catholic" and that "the Catholics" would be better off calling themselves Roman Catholic, because that is what they really are. Nevertheless, in the church it sounded a little strange to use this term as part of our confession of

faith in this way. And many will still think so, in spite of the fact that unimpeachable scholars such as Prof. van Genderen and Rev. J.H. Velema worked on the new inter-church translation of the confessions of faith (for sale in bookshops since 1983).

In the year 381, the Council of Constantinople similarly confessed the catholicity of the church. The Confession of Nicea-Constantinople, which no less than the 12 Articles (Apostles' Creed) is one of our confessions, speaks, after all of "one holy, catholic and apostolic church." These characteristics of the church are for the church in Rome of the greatest importance of course. But this is no less so for the church of the Reformation, although discussion is called for about the way "catholicity" is spoken about, on both sides of the dividing line.

Through a couple of articles I would like to offer food for thought regarding the meaning that the word "catholic" has for us as Reformed believers and for our experience of being a church.

Not scared of "catholic"

For a long time, people have rendered the word "catholic" as "universal" or "universal

Christian." Luther had absolutely no love for the word "catholic" and replaced it with "Christian." That it came back into the Protestant dictionary in the twentieth century may well have been under the influence of the ecumenical rapprochement between Roman Catholics and Protestants. The "catholics" came a bit closer to us. At the same time, a sort of ecumenical acceptance seems to have grown from the fact that this word was the general title of the Church of Rome and that Protestants had no desire to fight for the use of the name.

Where people thought about the meaning of the word, however, they found they couldn't do without it and wound up saying that they as Protestants were also "catholic." By saying that they are "catholic" they express what others mean with the words "I believe (in) a holy, universal, Christian church."

For this reason, I would like to make an appeal to not be frightened by the old word "catholic." More important, however, than the word we use is the conviction that we ought not to ignore the *content* we confess when using the word. This is so because there are a few statements in our Protestant catholic

confession that make us feel a trifle uncomfortable in practice. These statements could nevertheless contain something very important concerning what the church of the Lord Jesus Christ really is. We should not too quickly be afraid of unexpected pitfalls, as we let the reason dawn upon us why the church of Christ is called "catholic." Maintaining our confession of faith has always had an element of nurture, and sometimes correction, in it! If we observe here how the confession, above all, intends to echo and to apply Holy Scripture, then we can resist the possible uncomfortable feeling which accompanies the use of the word "catholic."

The intention: the breadth of the church

One cannot draw a direct line from the word "catholic" in its confessional use to its use in the Bible. The word *katholikos* is a Greek word, to be sure: it can even be found in the New Testament. The only thing is, this word as it is used there says nothing specific about the church. In Acts 4:18 we read that the disciples received a command from the Jewish authorities to keep "totally" – using the word *katholou* – quiet and not to teach or speak in the name of Jesus. The meaning there is only the broad sense of "completely" or "totally."

What did the church of the first centuries want to do by applying this concept to the church of Christ? The first thing was that people wanted to make clear that the church was not only a local organization, but that it was a whole that transcended all local churches. The local churches are oriented to the breadth of the Christian church. One local

church was therefore also "catholic." It belonged to that one great whole.

What also was communicated by this usage was the confession that, in comparison with the national organization of God's people in Israel, something new had now come. The church of Jesus Christ is no longer limited to Israel, but exists in the whole world and comes from all nations.

A third aspect, which already can be found in church history in the language of the Bishop Cyrillus of Alexandria in the fifth century, more specifically indicates content. With the word "catholic," he meant that the church had received the *complete tradition* that it needed. It possesses all necessary doctrines, without distinction. As a consequence of this the church also shares in *complete salvation* through which all sins of body and soul are healed and through which all virtues and good works are brought forth. This "catholic church" shares in all spiritual gifts.

We ought not to be afraid of the word "catholic"

These various aspects of "catholic" transcend a purely geographical or historical understanding of catholicity. It is more than not being nationally or geographically restricted. It has significance for more than a certain century. In it there is the realization that the church has a universal significance. There is a missionary consciousness in it, communicating that the message from which the church lives ought to resound to the farthest ends of the earth. The name of the Lord



For a long time it had been usual for Protestants to leave the word "catholic" to the Roman Catholics. The photo shows a part of the St. Johnscathedral in 's-Hertogenbosch

(photo P.G.B. de Vries)

must be praised in song from where the sun rises to where it sets (see Psalm 113:2f) and that throughout all history.

To the heavens. . .

In what has been said above, there is clearly more than simply an indication of the size of the church. That is the first thing: the church is worldwide and at the same time it belongs to all centuries. Thus, it stretches across the boundaries of the world and across the boundaries of time. But there is also the infinitely deep dimension of real catholicity. The Dutch theologian, H. Berkhof, wrote a book in 1962 about the catholicity of the church and in it he connected the word catholic to the fullness which proceeds from Christ and makes its dwelling in the church. This sort of thought does justice to the meaning which has resounded in this word for centuries. If you replace the word "catholic" with "universal Christian," it sounds

too flat. The height of it has disappeared: the ascent heavenward, for Christ's sake, and the descending of God's angels via a ladder which descends to earth and reaches up to the heavens. You could say that the fullness of Christ, his person and work in service of the church, defines the church. For this reason it is catholic. It reaches as far as its Head, to whom all authority has been given in heaven and on earth.

I hope it will be useful now to indicate more precisely which conflict between Rome and the Reformation circles around the catholicity of the church.

Roman Catholic objections against Protestant Catholics

In the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic church emphasized that the church of the Reformation could not be catholic because the Reformation was limited to one part of the world, Europe, and then especially in the northern half. More than a thousand years before, Augustine had also used that argument in his struggle against the Donatist sect, which claimed to be the only true church in North Africa. A church which existed in only one area could not possibly be catholic, according to Augustine. Roman Catholic opponents of the Reformation also contended that the Roman Catholic Church was much bigger than the Reformation churches. How could a minority group be catholic? There is something worth considering in this argument. The Reformation has since spread across to all parts of the world, but the division

between churches of the Reformation could well be reason to re-examine our being-a-church-in-isolation in the light of the one catholic church of Christ.

We are finally, however, not really impressed by the size of the organization and numbers of the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformers observed that even the largest church can let its connection with the church of the apostles slip away. They reasoned as follows. False teachings and practices have meant that the Church of Rome has lost its continuity with the early church, while with the appearance of the Reformers, and the preaching of the apostolic gospel, the true church has become visible again.

Divisions between Protestants ought to stimulate us to re-examine our separate existences in the light of the one, catholic church of Christ

It is precisely that content of the gospel which is necessary in order to do justice to the catholic character of the church. The *being* of the church ought to be the same at all times. Liturgical vestments and forms, and a powerful organization, are no guarantee that the church is continuing to be the same church. A famous Roman Catholic theologian such as Hans Küng has clearly recognized this in our time. The principle of the

catholicity of the church lies in the identity of its essence.

Having established that the word catholic is not something exclusively Roman Catholic, I want to look at a number of biblical facts which make the meaning of catholicity clear. Even though the word catholicity cannot be found in the Bible, it is nonetheless a biblical word.

Christ, Head and Cornerstone of the church

The principle of the catholicity lies in the identity of the church. This is an important point. If the church is the body of Christ, and He is its Head, then this is decisive for the concrete details of the church's existence. A human body never has a different identity than its head. Even in a passport or in a driving license this is as clear as day. A photo of someone's head is sufficient to indicate the person involved.

If knowledge of Christ is decisive for the question of what is most essential for the church, then this can also be applied to the catholicity of the church. It is possible to speak of the "catholic" significance of Christ, even if this is not a normal use of language. Christ Jesus is not merely someone from a certain time or a certain place. When the Son of God becomes man, He remains the one in whom "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col 2:9). He is full of grace and truth; and from this fullness we have all received blessing upon blessing (John 1:14, 16). He does not have such limitations as we have! The range of Christ reaches as high as

the heavens. Therefore you cannot apprehend the reality of the church by merely human characteristics. Even when Christ takes on our flesh and blood, He is the one who can say: "Before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58). After his resurrection, He says boldly, as a lasting support for his own: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me" (Matt 28:18). For this reason, his disciples are also called to be witnesses "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 8:1).

The Lord Jesus does not belong to a certain people or certain country. Is He not the head of creation? The title "firstborn over all creation" (Col 1:15) points to his position as Lord of all creation, like the son of a king is clothed with honour in order to exercise government on behalf of the sovereign. After all, "All things were created by him and for him." In the same chapter, Colossians 1, Christ's high position is irrevocably bound with his being head of the body, the church (Col 1:18).

In its head the congregation has, thus, the link to the most universal, the most cosmic scope of its existence. The church is not just an institution in society which can be found in the telephone book. For the church there is the book of the majesty of God in which the length and the breadth of creation and the centuries of past and future are entrusted to us. The church breathes in this space of its Lord!

Nothing outside Him!

All this does not imply that the church of Christ can ascribe greatness to itself in the midst of the world. Absolutely not! The church is, after all, nothing without its head. Its eyes must remain fixed upon Him. The danger that

threatens the church is surely that it can want to become something of great significance in and of itself, apart from the Lord Jesus. The church must always be directed back to a living by faith. That is the narrow way, which for the church means not letting itself be turned away from the gospel which is heard and proclaimed, not letting itself be tempted to human speculations and philosophy.

The church is of course nothing without its Head

These are contraband. If that happens, then there is agreement with the "elements of the world" and not with Christ (Col 2:8). Such attention for itself, by itself, and its own possibilities of knowledge and experience make the church proud, blown up, full of empty air, so that our connection to the head is lost (Col 2:18, 19). These are dangers which threaten the church.

We ought to connect the greatness of the church, also when observing the dangers which threaten the church, with the word "catholic." As long as the word catholic points to Christ, we are



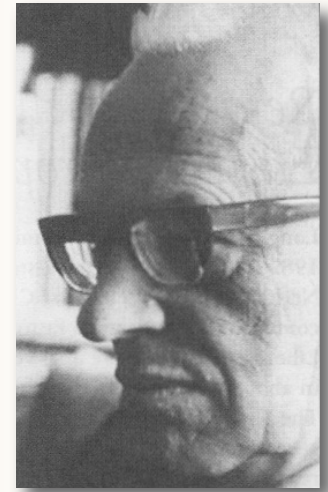
Liturgical vestments and forms, and a powerful organization, are no guarantee that the church continues to be the same church

safe. In Him there is space worldwide, without Him nothing but hot air.

When the New Testament speaks of the "world," *kosmos* in Greek, then the division between God and sin becomes visible. The "world" lies "under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). It does not know God (John 17:25). The church ought not to borrow anything from the world in that sense. If the church is catholic, and so has a worldwide orientation, then there is not any significance given to the "world" itself. Only the cross of Christ is central. The cross of Christ stood in the midst of this world (John 3:16-17; 2 Cor 5:19; 1 John 2:2). For this reason He is the Lord of history, because He is not only the lion of Judah but also the lamb that was slain (Rev 5:5). Therefore He is King into all eternity (Rev 11:15). His promise opens up the perspective of a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet 3:13).

Catholic and one

The significance of Christ ensures us that the church knows about earlier boundaries which have been broken through. The separation between Israel and the heathens has been removed in Him. It is striking how Paul, in the chapter in which he emphasizes this (Eph 2:11-22), says that this has come about in Christ and through his Spirit. Christ is the cornerstone of the catholic structure which becomes visible under the new covenant (Eph 2:20). When someone comes to faith in Him, the promises of the Old Covenant are fulfilled, including the promise that in Abraham all nations of the earth will be blessed. This is no catholic or ecumenical aim in itself, but rather what is involved is the



knowledge and the confession of salvation in Christ. At Pentecost, God's great works were spoken of in all languages (Acts 2:8-11). The way in which the catholic church experiences its identity is via a vital connection between the head and the members of the church. It is the bonds of faith in Christ, awakened and fed through the Word and through the Spirit.

It is possible that the church be spread across a very large area and that the members of the congregation not know each other at all. Nevertheless, there is an awareness of belonging to each other, of being one body of Christ in Him. In the New Testament we are struck by how the apostolic letters are often circulated to different congregations. What is important for one congregation is important for another. If there is poverty in Jerusalem, Greece takes up a collection. The abundance of the one part of the body automatically pours over to help the other part (2 Cor 8:14). It is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all (Eph 4:4-6). For this reason, all party spirit and heresies are strangers to the essence of the church (1 Cor 3:4f; 11:18-19).

See how the work of the Lord Jesus at Golgotha was directed at achieving unity! In his reconciliatory work, unity was brought back to that which had been torn apart and which is

continually threatened by divisions. Doesn't the Lord's Supper speak of this, this unity in his blood? That's why the apostles took so much trouble to prevent division in the church. The first official church "general synod" had to face this threat. The church leaders understood only too well that that such division was a threat to the very being of the catholic church (see Acts 15:8-9; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Philemon 16).

*You can't be a Christian
on a small scale with a
few like-minded people
like yourself*

All from Him

If we realize how close the bond is between Christ and his body, then it becomes clear how close the bond is between the being of the church and its catholic character. You cannot be a Christian on the small scale of a few like-minded people. Christ's scale is catholic: as wide as the world, as far as the ends of history, and, at the same time, so intensely involved with the heart of salvation in the person of the Lord Jesus Himself. This is the reason why the church is having difficulties in a time and in a society which is trying to push back the gospel to the periphery of

life. For the church it is only natural to open its doors wide to the world and to witness boldly concerning Him, who has the right to subject everything and everyone to his rule.

G.C. Berkouwer once said rightly that the catholicity of the church must be tested by its calling to be the light of the world. Why should we crawl back into our shells, if our head has the only message of healing which affects all mankind? And why should we be preoccupied in the world with things which pass away, without naming Him, who is eternal?

The heart conviction of Christians in this world ought indeed to be genuinely more catholic – more and more deeply conscious of Him in whom we believe. Is He not superior to everything else?

The catholicity of the church also has urgent consequences for the activities within the church. We hope to deal with this issue in a second article.

*This article was published in Lux
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Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Patricia Gelms

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

John 14:25-27

We have now come to the third fruit of the Spirit: peace. What is peace and how can this be a part of our lives?

Since we live by the Spirit, our lives must display the different fruits. We must overflow with love, from which we will also see much joy and peace. We feel and know joy because of what God has given us in Jesus Christ. Confidence in God will feed our joy. This knowledge and assurance of our faith will also give us peace.

Peace gives us a calming and humble heart. We have peace because we know that God is in full control of all things. We can trust that whatever comes our way, it will be used for our strengthening and to his glory.

Reflecting on our text; Jesus says to those who trust in Him, “Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (v 27b). There is absolutely no reason for a believer to be anxious or afraid. For Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He is supremely peaceful Himself and He gives his peace to those who are his. Even when He confronted Satan in the wilderness, Jesus had perfect peace, knowing his heavenly Father was continually with Him and would supply his every need.

When we look around the world we live in, there is not much peace. There are wars, earthquakes, and in general, much unrest. Yet in this unrest, we as Christians may live in the sure knowledge of God’s unchanging love. With Him we know peace. Let God’s peace guard your heart against any anxiety. Our citizenship is not here on earth, but in Christ’s kingdom. Let us rejoice and be full of joy and so let peace blossom within our hearts. May our lives so reflect living temples of the Holy Spirit; that our Counselor may work mightily within our hearts and so fill us with his peace.

May we conclude with these words: “May the grace and peace of God the Father be with you all.”

*Let peace be found within your walls
And in your palaces repose;
May blessings be conferred on those
Who dwell within your favoured halls.
For friends and brethren I will say,
“Let peace abide in you for aye;
May nought disturb you now or ever.”
By reason of God’s temple fair
And for the mercy proffered there,
I will invoke your good for ever.*

Psalms 122:3

Birthdays in July:

- 4 **JAMES BUIKEMA** will be 47
c/o R. Feenstra
278 Street, Catherine Street
PO Box 662, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0
- 20 **CHARLIE BEINTEMA** will be 33
29 Wilson Avenue, Chatham, ON N7L 1K8
- 28 **JIM WANDERS** will be 47
2142 Deerwood Drive, Burlington, ON N7L 2A9
- 14 **SARAH VANDERGUGTEN** will be 13
23 Jane Street, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0
- 29 **TOM VANDERZWAAG** will be 55
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

Congratulations to you all celebrating a birthday this month. May our heavenly Father grant you an enjoyable day together with your family and friends. Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. P. Gelms
548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
Phone: 905-563-0380
Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



Congratulations to Professor Gerhard H. Visscher, Ph.D.

Tuesday, May 20, 2008 was an important day for Professor G. H. Visscher personally and for the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches as an institution of learning. On that day our professor of New Testament studies, and principal of the College, successfully defended his thesis proposal at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. This was the last step in fulfilment of the required studies to obtain

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. For the past ten years, Rev. Visscher has been enrolled in part-time Ph.D. studies in the Department of Religious Studies at McMaster University. In this program he took numerous courses, underwent comprehensive examinations, and wrote his dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Westerholm.

The Board of Governors had delegated me, as its chairman, to

attend this special event. The defence lasted about two hours; Br. Visscher was quizzed on his dissertation entitled *Abraham, Faith, and Works: The Role of Romans 4 in the Discussion Concerning the New Perspective on Paul*. To give you a sense of what the thesis was about I include the Abstract, which is a summary of the thesis. It reads:

Since 1977, scholars associated with the New Perspective of



Signing the necessary documents after the thesis defence. Left to right: Dr. Stephen Westerholm, Dr. Adele Reinhartz, Prof. Visscher, and Dr. John Weaver.

Paul have suggested that Paul was misread by many during and after the Reformation period as they too often equated those whom they thought to be in error in their times with those whom Paul opposed. According to such New Perspective scholars, Judaism knew much more of grace than has generally been realized, and hence, Paul was opposing not works in general but specific works (often referred to as "boundary markers") which served to distinguish Jew from non-Jew. This involves a reinterpretation of Paul.

Those opposing this reinterpretation of Paul have suggested that it is especially Paul's words in Romans 4 which prove that this reinterpretation proposed by New Perspective scholars fails. This thesis reexamines Paul's argument in Romans 4, asking whether New Perspective or more traditional scholars provide the more convincing interpretation of Paul's words.

The writings of five New Perspective scholars are discussed, followed by the writings of five opponents of the New Perspective position. Thereafter, the context of Romans 4 is examined by reviewing the background of Romans, the argument of the prior chapters, and the relation between Romans 3:27-31 and



A light-hearted moment after the defence.
Left to right: Prof. Jakob Geertsema, Dr. G.H. Visscher, and Dr. S. Westerholm.
Mrs. Teny Visscher is hidden in the background.

Romans 4. By then examining Romans 4 at length, the conclusion is drawn that while the New Perspective position presents some helpful insights, it fails to do justice not only to Paul's words in Romans 4:1-8 but also to the rest of the chapter, 4:9-25. While Paul does speak about the relationship between Jew and Gentile, his emphasis falls on the absence of works (in the traditional sense) on the part of Abraham and those who follow in "the footsteps" of the faith of Abraham, whether they be Jew or Gentile.

From this summary one gets a sense of the complexity of the study that requires studious interaction with various scholars. As a result there were some tough questions to be answered and one of the examiners was even one of

the New Perspective scholars. It was encouraging to hear that this scholar conceded a major point which Prof. Visscher had critiqued in his thesis. His defence of his Doctor of Philosophy thesis went well and it was the crowning chapter on many years of study. His dissertation is an important contribution on the study of Paul.

While the actual conferring of his Ph. D. degree will take place later on this year at a convocation, Prof. Visscher is, as of now, officially Dr. Visscher. We applaud him on this accomplishment and for the Theological College, as an institution of learning, it is good to have another "doctor" on board.

On behalf of the Board of Governors: congratulations, Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher.

Rev. Gijsbert Nederveen
Chairman of the Board

Smithers Heartily Welcomes Their New Pastor and His Family

Installation Sunday

April 27 marks a day in which a new chapter in the Canadian Reformed Church at Smithers began. Sunday morning began with a sermon by Rev. J Witteveen. The message was based on the conversion of Saul. Humanly speaking, he was the last one anyone in the New Testament church would have picked as an advocate for the gospel. However, we learn from this passage that God chooses the means by which his gospel is proclaimed and we are exhorted in this passage never to question God, but rather to surrender the more fully to his will. After the message, Rev. James Slaa was installed as the new pastor of the church in Smithers

The afternoon sermon was his first sermon as pastor of the church of Smithers and Rev. Slaa brought forth the message of salvation preaching on Psalm 92. How truly good it is to praise the Lord. It is good for our God, but it is also good for us. It helps us in our relationship to each other. This Psalm is a psalm for the Sabbath day and we are encouraged to sing praise on the day of the Lord. The theme for the sermon was: "It is good to proclaim God's Name." He showed how it is our job on the Sabbath to praise the Lord, because of his praiseworthiness. We do not

come to tell of our deeds, but to recall his mighty deeds. Psalm 92 was created after deliverance from Egypt. We are called to sing because the Lord has given us eternal rest. Today we may celebrate the complete redemption in Jesus Christ. This song guides us how we are to praise God in our walk and talk. We are in every hour to be devoted to our God. Rev. Slaa revealed that leading the congregation in praising the Lord is an awesome task. We are to teach the youth to praise the Lord, to proclaim his Word. This is evidence of faith. The growth of this faith does develop maturity and this is our thankfulness. The renewal of our life is only by God's grace and therefore the righteous do flourish like the palm tree and the cedars of Lebanon. They bear much fruit because they rest on the Word of God.

Welcome evening

In the evening the church building was packed to capacity as our congregation as well as many guests from the Bulkley Valley and elsewhere attended as we welcomed our new pastor and his family. The MC for the evening was Randy Dykstra, who opened the evening with the reading of Ephesians 4: 1-16 and prayer. Everyone was welcomed and quite fittingly sang "Great is Thy

Faithfulness" to our God, who has blessed us so richly in providing us with a new pastor and teacher. On behalf of the council Henry Penninga officially welcomed the pastor and his wife, he quoted the passage from Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news. . ." and so it is a beautiful thing to once again have our own minister. Steve Onderwater introduced the new family to the congregation, including letting us in on all their hobbies and interests. Children from the Ebenezer school sang "Be glorified" and "Welcome to the Family" to welcome the Slaas. As is the tradition, the pastor's new colleagues from the Houston church and the Smithers and Telkwa URC churches were invited to speak and they all expressed a hearty welcome to the pastor and his family. Rev. Slagter from the Bethel URC in Smithers quoted Hebrews 13, "May God equip you with everything good that you may do his will." He also noted that he already felt a bond with Pastor Slaa as they were both wearing dark suits, with a yellow shirt and coordinating ties. Rev. Alkema also enthusiastically welcomed this new colleague to the Bulkley Valley and pointed out that they must already be on the same wavelength. He drew our attention

over to the Psalm boards at the front of the church and pointed out that four out of the six Psalms were the same ones he had chosen for Houston to sing that afternoon. As well, they had chosen the same passage for the Bible reading.

The Women's Morning Bible Study also welcomed the Slaas and one of their regular attendees gave a very lively intro to the Bulkley Valley; she came up with many convincing arguments why "the people in dis place are CaRazy" and upon further examination there has been found to be truth to that statement. Some examples: an eight thousand dollar snowmobile in a five hundred dollar truck, Carharts and Crocs are formal attire, the local dump is more popular than Wal-mart for good deals, etc., and by the way the church has 182 committees all of which have three or four members. Currently there are eighty-one openings, so yes you actually are welcome to this CaRazy town!

The Choir of Smithers/Houston church sang a number of very beautiful songs and then were joined by the youth of the Houston church to sing "Lift your voices with joyful song." The new pastor and his wife were also invited to join the choir. Smithers Young People Society presented a PowerPoint presentation of all the sights to see and activities available in Smithers and the Bulkley Valley. Most likely enough to convince Pastor Slaa not to accept a call for many years. Men from the Smithers Men's Bible Study groups sang a number of songs including "Now thank we all our God" and "How deep the Fathers Love for us." Smithers Women's Society was represented by Judy Hofsink who brought to light some very interesting facts about our congregation. Of the 432 members, there are 298 different names. J names are the most



popular, Richard in its various forms is the most popular name, and the age ranges from ninety-seven right down to two days. Januarys are statistically proven to be the coldest month as there are more birthdays in October than any other month. There are five people having a birthday on October 3. We boast three sets



of twins and one eight year old just turned two this February?! The gathering of these statistics is to show that despite all the committees, some people still have time to kill.

Various churches from the federation sent letters of congratulations, including the Slaas' former church of Kerwood. The MC then proceeded to give a brief outline of some of the recommendations of the "Linguistic Subcommittee" what followed was a brief introduction to Smithers attractions in the new "phoenetically enhanced language" so we westerners could better communicate with the new easterners. This was quite hilarious.

Pastor Slaa was given opportunity to say a few words and he expressed a deep appreciation for the hearty welcome they received. He also expressed on behalf of his wife deep gratitude for the home they could arrive to that was recently renovated and stocked with all the necessities. Appreciation was given for the designer, planner, construction workers, cleaners, and stockers. The minister and his family already feel a connection to this congregation and thanked us all for the great welcome and encouraging words. Pastor Slaa expressed that he is looking forward to serving this congregation and it is his prayer that he may give true spiritual food and instruction to his new congregation.

After we sang Hymn 45, Richard Barendregt closed the evening with thanksgiving prayer. A time of refreshments and fellowship followed. This day we experienced once again the blessings of God in our lives. Praise Him for His goodness to us.



Derek Stoffels

Mr. Derek Stoffels is principal of the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed School in Smithers, British Columbia principal@ebenezerschool.com



To Think or Not to Think? (Part 2 of 2)

In the first part of this article, I introduced five stages many Christian schools across this continent have experienced. Generally speaking, these stages show a spiritual decline in the school. The previous article ended with me wrestling with the idea of using much class time so that our school's students could be spectators at basketball provincials held here in Smithers.

Think about things – an example

To make clear for people that do not know me well, I am not opposed to sports. I initiated and coached the badminton club last year and am coaching them again this year. I have run the climbing club for many years and have recently started driving long distances and sitting all day in school gyms to watch volleyball or badminton matches. I anticipate doing this for quite a few years to come. I walk/run about five kilometres to school everyday. I played hockey for six or seven years and played on high school volleyball and basketball teams and in a very competitive industrial league for volleyball while attending university. Once a week I play fairly competitive badminton in the evening. I don't have television so I seldom watch televised sports, nor do I follow professional sports. So while I am

far from a sports "fanatic" I am certainly not an opponent of sports. However, to be honest, I would not be disappointed either if we did not have school teams. That is because in the big picture sports, like wealth, good health, etc., all melt away as the essential obedience and service comes into sharper focus.

As I considered the questions I listed in earlier paragraphs it seemed most pertinent or relevant to spend the most time and energy thinking about the place of sports in our school and schools in general. It is clear to me that in many schools and for many people sports take on too significant a role. It becomes the non-curricular activity sanctioned and promoted by the school. Other activities that are equally valuable are not sanctioned or promoted because fewer students like them or they are more difficult to deliver. Sports often gain that position because culturally it is a major influence and because there are many positive aspects to being involved in sports.

Just like there is nothing wrong with marriage, money, books, magazines, technology, or the Internet, etc, you cannot say there is anything wrong with sports. The problem is when we allow things to go out of balance in our life or have the wrong motivation for doing it. The love of money is wrong, buying/looking at certain

magazines is wrong, searching for and viewing certain things on the Internet is wrong, distorting or violating marriage is wrong, and making sports our life is wrong.

In the end, I decided that as a high-school we would attend the opening game (which our team was playing in – and played very well). I decided this taking into account my ambivalence towards school sports and the knowledge that a significant portion of the school community's feelings towards school sports are different than mine. I also weighed the impact on school spirit, particularly for the boys. Most importantly, though, I considered whether deciding to attend a game would go against our vision statement. If we had attended multiple games as a school organized event and allowed the event to overwhelm the daily life of the school, I think it would have gone against our vision statement. Not in the short term maybe but in the longer-term. Attending one game shows that sports is one part of life but should not override daily life. Attending one game acknowledges that God has given physical, mental, and spiritual talents that can be developed in sports and it gives us a chance to see and refer to the gracious gifts of God in this area without overemphasizing them. At least that is my hope and prayer.

Broader application

Having observed the provincials, I ask people to think about and ask questions about what they saw. When is enough reached? When are we conforming to the culture of the world instead of shining, quietly and brightly, the light of the gospel? For those who think that I am not quite reasonable in my asking of questions, I would like to share with you some changes I have noticed that are related to sports in ECRS. (Similar changes took place at Guido de Brès when I was a high school student. There is nothing new under the sun!) Prior to the introduction of school sports teams, virtually all parents bought their children inexpensive runners. Students wore ECRS t-shirts and whatever shorts they had. After the sports program was up and running, students began showing up in more and more expensive runners, fancier shorts, etc. The ECRS t-shirt was quickly replaced by team uniforms. Matching shorts were next. Then the particular style or cut of uniform was not good enough. For some students school marks have definitely been lower as a result of school sports.

There have also been benefits from having school sports. The benefits are simply harder to see and attribute to sports. There are benefits like improved leadership skills, better sportsmanship, more self-discipline, relationships and relational skills built among team members that D.V. will continue in positive ways down through the years. At the provincials, though, I wondered what might be the next steps for the teams. Will it be matching warm-up suits, warm-up shirts and game shirts, matching labelled sports bags, desire for a more aggressive logo? I couldn't

help but wonder about the girls serving as hosts for each team as well. Is this necessary? To me there is a need for awareness on these things and openness to discussion about them. What is necessary and good? What is too much? How do you have the discussion positively?

We must think carefully about each decision that we make

It is hard to say at what step you have gone too far. There is not anything wrong with any of the steps necessarily. But it is certain that at some point we go too far. For each individual the tipping point, or point at which they slide from one stage to the next, may come at a different time. But somewhere along the line we will slide from Stage 1 to Stage 2 to Stage 3 to Stage 4 to Stage 5. Somewhere along the line we will focus less on Christ and more on man. Somewhere along the line our Christian practice will take a back seat to our desires or wants. Somewhere along the line we will conform instead of be transformed. Thinking about all that we do is necessary so that, conscious of what we are doing, we avoid the destructive consequences of conforming. The devil, aided by our weakness and the world, knows the best way to lead us astray. As Screwtape, the senior devil, wrote in C. S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, "The safest road to Hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts." Screwtape is writing here to another devil, Wormwood, advising him how to

lead a person astray. Make it a gentle easy road. Lull them into thinking all is well, that it is okay. Get rid of the idea that anyone should suggest limits matter.

Necessary tensions of thought

Gaylen Byker, the president of Calvin College, in his inaugural speech entitled "An Embarrassment of Riches" said the following:

Those of us who are inheritors of the culture and Reformed tradition that was transplanted to North America from The Netherlands are well accustomed to the tensions of which I will speak today. I take my title for this address, "The Embarrassment of Riches," from a masterwork of the same name by Harvard historian Simon Schama. In "The Embarrassment of Riches" Schama illustrates in great detail how tension fostered the rise of the Dutch Golden Age of the seventeenth century. He describes how this small Calvinistic country became the wealthiest on earth and the "arbiter of the world" by embracing the unresolved dilemma, the enduring tension, between being wealthy and being moral. He concludes that it was the wrestling with the dilemma, the embracing, if you will, of this tension that produced an era of flourishing art and education, republican government, tolerance, and public works projects of unprecedented scale.

Schama identifies what he terms "the moral geography of the Dutch mind" in this tension-packed passage:

[It – the Dutch mind – was] adrift between the fear of the deluge and the hope of moral salvage, in the tidal ebb and flow between worldliness and homeliness, between the gratification of appetite and its denial, between the conditional consecration of wealth and perdition in its surfeit. . . . To be Dutch. . . was to live in a perpetual present participle, to cohabit with the unsettled. . . . To be Dutch still means coming to terms with the moral ambiguities of materialism in their own idiosyncratic but inescapable ways: through the daily living of it. . . .

Schama's language is a bit hard to follow but I think it highlights very nicely how our lives of faith are to

be lived. We need to think about all that we do because that is how we know where we are in our growth as Christians. It is part of the self-examination each of us is supposed to be ceaselessly engaged in. There is a constant tension to be arrived at, a pulling from God and a pulling from our weakness. If we do not think about each decision we make we are setting ourselves up to follow the pattern of weakness and sin and drift away from the way God has shown us in his word. What it ultimately means is that we are to embrace a never-ending restlessness in trying to assess our walk of life.

Hopefully in this article using an example like sports has not made it harder for people to see the point. Please remember that

my point is not that school sports cause people or schools to slide away from faithful living; I don't believe that has happened and hope it never does. *My point* is simply that we must think carefully about each decision that we make including involvement in sports. As we do that we see more and more where our lives need to change, where we have raised idols, where we have opted to ignore God's call to us. By thinking carefully about what we do and why we are doing we are living the responsible Christian life. Or to quote C. S. Lewis again: "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else" (*Is Theology Poetry?*).




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

WEDDINGS

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:14

With joy and thankfulness to the Lord,
Phil and Henriette Hoeksema are pleased to announce the upcoming marriage of our daughter

CASSANDRA LYNN HOEKSEMA

to

JASON DANIEL VANDERMEULEN

son of Tom and Rita Vandermeulen. The ceremony will take place, D.V., on July 25, 2008 at 11:00 am in the Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton, AB.

Rev. W.B. Slomp officiating.

Future address: 19 Primrose Street, Devon, AB T9G 1P9

He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. Micah 4:2b

Mr. and Mrs. Frank and Dawn Ludwig joyfully announce the upcoming marriage of their daughter

CRYSTAL DAWN LUDWIG

to

DAVID NEIL DEJONG

son of Dr. and Mrs. Jack and Margaret DeJong.

The ceremony will take place on Saturday, July 12th, 2008 at 1 pm in the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton.

Dr. G.H. Visscher officiating.

Future Address: 54 Sanders Blvd, Unit 3, Hamilton, ON L8S 3J6