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Many of us know that Job was exceedingly rich, owning seven thousand sheep. . .

Inside this issue

- What is Job Really All About?
- Be Prepared to Give an Answer
- Modesty





J. Visscher

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What is Job Really All About?

In the face of terrible sufferings for seemingly inscrutable reasons, Job persevered

Earlier in the spring of this year my wife and I went to hear a speech on the book of Job. The speaker was excellent: clear, direct, biblical, and pastoral. He addressed different aspects of this troubling but well-known book in a fine manner. All in all, it was an enriching experience.

Only, as happens more often when I listen to speeches, my mind began to churn away. I started to ask myself all sorts of questions and among them the main one was this: "What is the book of Job really all about?"

Is it about human suffering?

Now, the common answer is that this part of Holy Scripture is all about suffering. Many of us know the story. In it we are introduced to Job who is described as "blameless and upright" (1:1, 8). He is also very blessed having seven sons and three daughters. As well, he is exceedingly rich, owning seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and many servants. Indeed, we are even told "he was the greatest man among all the people of the East" (1:3). One would say today that Job "had it all."

Only he did not get to keep it all. As a matter of fact, one day the tide turned and the sky fell in. In quick succession Job was told that his oxen and donkeys had been stolen, then he received news that fire had come down from heaven and burned up his sheep and any number of his servants. Next, he was told that his camels had been taken away and that more servants had died. In one day Job went from being a very rich man to a very poor man.

But that was only the start of his troubles. For thereafter he was told that all of his sons and daughters had died in a terrible accident. A fierce wind had risen and caused the house in which they were partying to collapse on them. One moment his quiver was full with many strong and healthy children and the next moment it was empty, horribly empty. They were all gone. How heart wrenching!

Still, his troubles did not stop there. For to poverty and sorrow was soon added sickness. Several days later Job came down with some terrible skin disorder. Painful sores afflicted him "from the soles of his feet to the top of his head" (2:7). Job's life was filled with agony and overwhelmed with pain and discomfort.

In reaction to all of these misfortunes, Job's wife advised him to "curse God and die!" (2:9) Is that also what he did? Did he draw the conclusion from all of these awful blows that God must have it in for him and that he might as well vent his spleen against God and kill himself? No, Job refused to do so. He rebuked his wife and answered her with this searching question, "Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" (2:10)

Job also did more. He went on a prolonged search for the cause of all of his troubles. In the process he refused to acknowledge that he was some sort of special sinner who was being punished by God for some special, secret sins. He steadfastly maintained his integrity. He did not deny his faith. He did not turn his back on his God. In the face of terrible sufferings for seemingly inscrutable reasons, Job persevered.

As a result, many people insist that here we have the key to the book of Job. It is a book that teaches believers all through the ages just how they too are to



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respond and react to situations of distressing pain and deep sorrow. Job serves as a model for all Christians in trouble.

Is it about God’s sovereignty?

But is that true? For there are others who read this book and conclude that while suffering is surely a main element here, it does not hold the key to it. No, they insist that the key has to do with God’s sovereignty. In other words, as noble a sufferer as Job may have been, he should not be the main focus of our attention. Rather, the main focus belongs elsewhere. It belongs with God, with his rule and reign, with his power and majesty.

The basis for saying this has to do especially with the final chapters of this mysterious and majestic book. For so many chapters Job, as well as Job’s friends, occupy centre stage. They talk and talk. They philosophize. They accuse. They speculate. They complain. They grasp at this or that. They exhaust themselves, and their readers too, with their many words.

And then it is God’s turn. In the chapters 38 to 41, the Lord speaks. He speaks especially in the form of a barrage of questions. “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundations? . . . Who marked off its dimensions? Who shut up the seas behind doors? Have you ever given orders? . . . What is the way to the abode of light? . . . Have you entered the storehouses of the snow?” (38: 4, 5, 8, 12, 19, 22) On and on it goes and the longer it continues, the smaller Job and his friends become.

At the same time the longer that it continues, the greater and greater God becomes. For those who read these chapters know instinctively that He not only asks the questions but He also knows the answers. He knows! Only He knows, for only He rules supreme and is Lord of all.

Thus, on the basis of these final chapters, men say that this book is really all about God and about his sovereign will and rule. It teaches believers then and now that there comes a time in your life when the questions need to stop and you simply have to find your rest and peace in the certainty that God knows because God rules. Trust in Him and in his greatness.

In This Issue

Editorial – What is Job Really All About? — J. Visscher	374
Treasures, New and Old – Be Prepared to Give an Answer — J. Moesker	377
Are Christians Sinners or Not? (2) — W.L. Bredenhof	378
Ray of Sunshine — C. Gelms and P. Gelms	380
Modesty — T. Schouten	381
What’s New??? — E. Kampen	383
News Release – June 2008	384
Education Matters – Peregrine Survey — K. Sikkema	386
Press Releases – Classis Pacific East, Classis Niagara	388
Book Review — Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof	390
Letter to the Editor	391

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of Chatham, Ontario.

Fine, this too is both an appropriate and needed lesson for us as believers to learn. Sooner or later we need to turn our sufferings over to God.

Thus having examined a little these various views on the book of Job we need to ask, "So which is it? Is this book about suffering and the correct Christian response to it? Or, is this book about God and our submission, even in suffering, to his sovereign will? Or – and there's yet another thought - is it perhaps about both?"

Not withstanding the fact that these views appear to be among the most plausible options, let me be so bold as to suggest another approach to you. According to this approach, the book of Job is not in the first place about suffering nor is it primarily about God's sovereignty.

Or is it all about grace?

Now that sounds almost heretical, does it not? But bear with me for a moment. For there is another way to approach this book and that is to view it as a book that is really all about grace.

Sooner or later we need to turn our sufferings over to God

What is meant with that? Well, consider the opening chapters of this book, chapters that place this book in its wider context. What is going on there? Does it not open, after a brief introductory word about Job, with a conversation that goes on in heaven between the Lord and Satan?

What is that conversation all about? Some say that it is about Job. Or more correctly, it is about God who is boasting about Job. Wrong! It is really a conversation about the nature of God's work of grace in the life of Job. Just how good, how strong, how deep is this divine work of grace?

Is it true, as Satan alleges, that Job is no more than a fair weather friend of God? Is it so that Job merely says what he says and does what he does, because he knows who is buttering his bread? At bottom is he no more than "a rice Christian?"

You see, there is a great contest being waged here. It is a contest that affects each and every believer through out the ages and it is all about the question, "Just how far and how great is this faith that God has worked in me? Just how solid is the redemption of Jesus Christ that is being applied to my life? Just how

immovable is the work that Holy Spirit is doing in me? Can it really stand up under all sorts of tests and trials? Can it really continue to exist in the face of suffering, pain, death and disaster? Who is right here? Is it God or Satan?"

There is a great contest being waged here

The answer that God gives us in the book of Job is that indeed his work of grace can stand and will stand every test and every trial. What the Lord of heaven and earth works in us through his Son and by his Spirit is a great and mighty work. It will prevail! It will last! It will triumph! Believers need not doubt and neither should they worry. It is as the Apostle Paul writes to the believers in Philippi, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (1:6).

Hence what is the key to understanding the book of Job? It is the realization that in this part of Holy Scripture our God is defending and demonstrating the solidity of his work of grace in the life of the believer.



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MATTHEW 13:52

Be Prepared to Give an Answer

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer. . . for the hope that you have.”

1 Peter 3:15

Are we always prepared to give others the reason for the hope that we have in Jesus Christ? Maybe you're like so many of us and you're not that open about your hope. You're afraid of other people's reactions. You feel uncertain of yourself. You're afraid that you won't be able to answer all the questions others might ask about the Bible.

Or maybe you're just ashamed to let others know what you believe because you figure they might laugh at you and put you down. "Hey guys, you know what he believes? He thinks the earth was created by God in six days!" Or, "Hey, can you believe she isn't coming with us to the beach because she wants to go to church instead?"

The people to whom Peter wrote his first letter didn't find it easy to give an answer for the hope they had either. They had only recently become Christians and left behind a pretty bad lifestyle. From 1 Peter 4:3 we know that they had lived in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry, just like everyone else around them. But now they had embraced Jesus Christ in faith and they had given up that immoral lifestyle.

The result was that the people they had previously associated

with thought it strange they no longer took part in their drunken and rollicking ways. And so they heaped abuse on these new Christians!

What advice does the Apostle Peter give to believers who are becoming afraid of others because of their Christian faith and life? To just keep quiet and blend in? No, he tells them they can overcome the fear of how people will react to their Christian life and words. And they can overcome it by holding fast to the truth that Christ their Saviour is Lord of all and everything. Peter says, "In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord" (1 Peter 3:15).

Those words are actually an allusion to an Old Testament passage, Isaiah 8:13. There the people of Judah had been threatening the Lord's prophet for speaking out against how they were living. But God told Isaiah not to be afraid of all the threats of the people. No, he has much more to fear from the almighty and holy One than he does from people who don't like what he's saying.

Today that means if we're giving testimony about the Lord in word or deed, we don't need to be afraid. The Lord is so much greater than any person; if we have Him on our side as Lord, then we need not fear anyone.

If you think about that, it should make you wonder how in the world we can be so worried or ashamed about what others will think, say, or do, if we show them what we stand for as Christians. If Christ is really our Lord, why ever be frightened of people? People are weak in comparison to Him who overcame the power of the devil and of death! Understanding that this is how things really stand helps to be fearless. It helps us to answer anyone who questions the reason for the hope we have.

In fact, setting apart Christ as Lord in our hearts should mean that our aim is also to see others acknowledge Christ as Lord and Saviour of their lives. And wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if through our way of living and speaking, and through our testimony about why we live the way we do, that others would be brought to Christ? It'd be an awesome thing if, when we arrived in heaven, there'd be someone waiting with open arms saying, "I want to thank you from the heart a million times over for not being afraid to act as a Christian and to speak with me about your hope. That's what helped to bring me here, to eternal glory and joy with the Lord!"





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Are Christians Sinners or Not? (Part 2 of 3)

In the last installment, we surveyed the history of the denial of the doctrine that Christians are at the same time justified and sinners. We noted that whereas the seeds were sown in Pietism and Methodism, the tree came to bear "fruit" with the Second Great Awakening and Charles G. Finney. We saw that, historically, the denial of this doctrine comes packaged in a system of theology that has problems with the Reformation doctrine of justification.

What we need to do now is look closely at what the Scriptures teach. Specifically, we need to carefully consider the crucial passages of Romans 6 and 7. The first thing we need to do is acknowledge that for us these are difficult passages. The book of Romans in general has some difficult parts. When we come to difficult passages, we need to remember some basic rules for reading and understanding the Bible.

Basic rules for Scripture interpretation

One of those basic rules is that we need to take into account the immediate context. Remember: a text without context is a pretext. All manner of trouble happens when we don't remember to look at the context. So, when we're here in Romans 6, we should be looking back to Romans 1-5.

In Romans 1-3, Paul makes the point that all mankind is under the curse of sin. At the end of chapter 3 and up till the end of chapter 5, Paul explains how we can be right before a holy and just God. It is only through faith in Christ. Justification, God's declaration of righteousness on account of Christ's work, comes to us by faith in the Saviour. So, in Romans 5, right before the chapter we're looking at right now, Paul is deeply in a discussion regarding justification. Then at the end of chapter 5, we find him teaching that grace abounds where sin abounds.

Via our union with Christ through faith, we are right with God

That is what leads to the question that we find at the beginning of chapter 6: "Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase?" Whenever Paul preached the free grace of God in Christ, legalistic folks would get up on their high horse and accuse Paul of being an antinomian, someone who opposes or undermines the law of God. They said, "If we're saved by grace and not by works, then people will live like the devil!" Paul takes this question seriously. What does the doctrine of justification have to say to how we

live? Does it mean that we can now just casually go on sinning as if nothing has changed?

Paul's answer is a strong negative: "By no means! Certainly not! May it never be!" Why does he answer so strongly? It all has to do with our union with Christ. He mentions baptism in verses 3 and 4. Baptism is the sacramental picture of our union with Christ. It is the sign and seal of that union. Baptism points us to the fact that we are joined to Him in his death and resurrection. It is the seal, the guarantee of these truths for those who believe.

The truth is we are united to Christ. In verse 5 Paul says that means that we are joined with Him in his death and will also be joined with Him in his resurrection. Verse 6 is the hinge on which this whole passage that we're looking at turns on. "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin. . . ." The key to understanding this is to remember the context. Chapter 5 spoke of justification – which speaks of how God regards us. So, when we read here that the our old nature was crucified with Christ through our union with Him, we understand that to mean that from God's perspective, there is nothing in us any longer that deserves the curse of eternal wrath and judgment. We

are no longer under the curse of sin, because Christ bore that curse for us and via our union with Him through faith, we are right with God. This is “the great exchange”: all of our sins were imputed to Christ and all his righteousness was imputed to us. The result is that God now regards us as He regards Christ: totally righteous. That is wonderful good news!

How shall we now live?

But how does that impact how we live? Remember, that’s Paul’s concern here. He wants to answer the objection that believing this is going to lead to evil living. He says that can’t happen! Because believers are no longer slaves to sin. They are united to Christ. Now what believers need to do in their daily walk of life is fix their eyes on Jesus. As it says in verse 11, we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. He is the one we’re joined to. The slavery and dominion of sin has been broken. Believers are now slaves of God, slaves of righteousness. That’s why Paul says in verse 14 that sin shall not be your master. To summarize the argument: God regards us as justified; we also have to regard ourselves in the same way when it comes to daily life. Be who you are!

The essence of all this is captured in Q/A 43 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The entire answer is basically a paraphrase of Romans 6:1-14. Because of Christ’s death, our old nature is crucified and put to death and buried with Him. The result? The evil desires of our flesh are no longer going to rule over us. There’s a new master that we serve and his name is Jesus. It’s in Him that we are right. It’s because of Him that we’re thankful and it’s through his power that we live our lives in such a way that we show ourselves thankful. We show that

we love Him and will be forever grateful to Him for all his benefits.

The greatest benefit we have received from Christ is peace with God. While we were enemies, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). Though previously we were at war with our Creator, Jesus Christ is our peace (Eph 2:14). All believers can know for certain that there is peace with God. The external battle is over and peace has come. But this is a peace which starts another war, a different war. We have peace with God, but now we face the struggle for holiness. Our justification leads us to battle for sanctification. Though the *curse* of sin has been conquered, there remains a struggle with the power of sin. Offering ourselves to God as sacrifices of thankfulness is not as easy as it sounds.

Romans 7

That brings us to Romans 7, particularly verses 13-25. In this chapter, Paul seems to be singing a different tune. This has confused many people. In 6:18 he said that Christians were set free from sin and are now slaves of righteousness. But now he says in verse 14 of chapter 7 that he is “unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.” He says that he can’t do the good he wants to do, but keeps doing evil. In verse 24, he says that he regards himself as a wretched man, a man who still needs to be rescued. This seems to contradict what he was saying in chapter 6. Of course, everyone will agree that there are no real contradictions in Scripture. So some believers read this passage and they conclude that Paul must be talking about a different time in his life. Chapter 7 was before he became a Christian. Or some say, chapter 7 is referring to a different kind of Christian, a carnal Christian. This is a sort of

spiritual autobiography and Paul made the move from being a carnal Christian to being a victorious Christian. He went from being a Romans 7 Christian to a Romans 8 Christian. Some say that also has to be our goal.

However, the long-established reading of this passage says something different. The Reformers and the Reformed churches followed the ancient reading of this passage which says that Paul was speaking in Romans 7 about himself at the very moment he was writing to the Roman believers. In other words, Paul is writing about the struggle faced by every believer. In every believer, remnants of the old nature remain and believers have to struggle and war against those remnants. While the *curse* of sin has been definitively dealt with in justification, the power of sin still has to be dealt with in sanctification. Another way of saying that is that justification is an accomplished event, but sanctification is an ongoing process. Or you could also say: the external war has been settled, there is peace with God, but the war within still rages and will rage until the day of our death or until the day Christ returns.

Let’s be clear that this battle is not between equals. It’s not that Christians are equal parts old nature and new nature. Rather, it’s the new nature against the remnants of the old nature. Further, Scripture is clear that the struggle against the old nature is one of progressive victory. So, even with what we read here in Romans 7, we have to be clear that acknowledging this struggle is not defeatism.

In the last installment, we’ll consider some of the reasons why we should read Romans 7 as describing a struggle that all Christians face.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Patricia Gelms

"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

Ephesians 4:1b, 2

"Be patient and wait your turn please!" How often do we need to be reminded of these words? It is so easy to be caught up with the business of life and become impatient. We live in a culture with an instant, drive-through, and "I want it now" lifestyle. Patience is not easily found. But the Bible tells us that our lives need to be marked by patience. Patience is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit. We will examine the fruit of patience in this article.

Let us first look at the meaning of patience. The Greek word translating patience literally means long-tempered. A patient person does not have a short fuse and does not easily lose his temper. A person with patience has a calm willingness to accept situations that are irritating or painful.

There are many examples of patience in the Bible. When we open our Bibles and look in Genesis 12: 2, 7 we can read about the promise God gave to Abram that He would make him into a great nation and give Canaan to his descendants. When God made this promise, Abraham and Sarah had no children. They had to wait past their child-bearing years before God gave them a son. In Hebrews 6:15 we read: "And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised." He had trusted God and patiently waited for Him to fulfill his promise.

The Lord also speaks very directly to us in 2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Now we must ask ourselves, how do we display this fruit of patience in our day to day activities? Do others see this fruit of patience in us?

We must see God's plan in all things. Let his will so direct our lives. For we know that God causes all things to work for the good of those who love Him. Pray for the times when your patience will be tested. Try to find other ways to deal with irritating or painful situations. We must bear our burdens and tests of patience in faith; waiting quietly and patiently for the salvation of the Lord.

May we all be encouraged by the words of James 5:7, 8 "Be patient, then brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its

valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."

Let us in hopeful prayer go forward, humbly acknowledging our many sins and weaknesses. Bear in mind that we all share in the same sinful nature. Be patient with one another's shortcomings. We can face any earthly circumstance with this confident assurance: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). Let us continue in our earthly task, whatever it may be, and so also look forward to that great and glorious day when Christ will return!

*How I would have despaired in my affliction
If I had not believed that in this life*

*The LORD would show His goodness, His protection;
I would have perished in my tears and strife.*

Wait for the LORD; be strong and undismayed.

The LORD is faithful. Why then be afraid?

Take courage, for His steadfast love is sure.

Wait for the LORD; His mercy shall endure.

Psalm 27:6

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Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday in this month of August. We hope you have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends and may our heavenly Father continue to bless you in this new year. Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. P. Gelms

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Modesty

Last month if you were driving down Highway #1 in Abbotsford, BC you would have seen a certain billboard. Mostly black, it had flames at the centre, and it asked the question, "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Along the left side was the darkened figure of a woman. The billboard was advertising for an event held nearby at the Tradex Exhibition Centre. It was called the Taboo Sex Show. I have no doubt that it was well attended.

This past week our free local newspaper was delivered as usual. Looking through its pages, it is quite striking what can be found in a family newspaper. Sexual images are everywhere. Provocative advertisements for fitness companies, lingerie and clothing stores, and even restaurants fill the pages. In other newspapers it is the same. You might have noticed that the latest ads stress the importance of "looking good for the summer." For example a recent SureSlim ad put it quite bluntly: "Summer is coming. Are you ready?" I suppose it must be a scary thought to hit the beach in a bikini with a few extra stomach rolls.

It's easy to see. Sexuality is everywhere. It can be seen in our newspapers, email accounts, TV shows, billboards, beer commercials, and many other places. It brings to mind an analogy that I'm sure most people have heard, which goes something like this: Sex is like a fire in a fireplace. When it's kept in the

fireplace, namely marriage, it is good, healthy, and beautiful. But once it gets out of the fireplace it will quickly be destructive. In our culture, it seems, sex has gotten out of the fireplace, into all the bedrooms, the living room, the kitchen, the playroom. . . it's burning the whole house down. It is revealing that there were flames on that billboard in Abbotsford. The fire of lust seems to grow bigger each passing day and month and year. Our culture is quickly being consumed.

1 Corinthians 10

I turn to 1 Corinthians 10. At first glance, it doesn't seem like it has anything to do with sexuality, lust, or with our focus, modesty. Paul instructs the Corinthians about eating food that they know has been sacrificed to idols. He gives a very strong command in verse 14. "Therefore, my dear friends," he says, "flee from idolatry." There are two very specific reasons that Paul says this and it is these reasons that really apply to our topic of modesty. The first reason is quite simple. Paul says it already in chapter 8 and then dwells on it again in chapter 10. In 8:9 he says, "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak." Then in 10:23-24 Paul writes, "Everything is permissible – but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible – but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others."

Essentially, this boils down to one thing: the Corinthians weren't to eat food that they knew had been sacrificed to idols because it could cause someone else to stumble. This principle can be directly applied to dressing modestly. It goes like this: "Don't wear clothes that you know might cause others to stumble!" It's actually quite simple. Many articles and books have been written with this very argument. So rather than dwelling on it any further, I'll just leave it at that.

The second reason

What I'd like to dwell on instead is the second reason that Paul gives the Corinthians for not eating food sacrificed to idols. This comes in 10:14-22. Let's hear what Paul has to say in verses 18-22:

Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

When reading this passage it is important to know what an idol is, and what "idolatry" is. The Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 45,

defines idolatry as "having or inventing something in which to put our trust instead of, or in addition to, the only true God who has revealed himself in his word." An idol therefore is something that people put their trust in other than God. The Corinthian Christians lived in a culture that put its trust in idols. Its people were idolaters. They had and invented many other gods. Corinth contained at least twelve temples and the most famous one was dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Those who put their trust in her practiced religious prostitution. This was perfectly acceptable in Corinth, which was widely known for its sexual immorality. The NIV Study Bible notes even tell us that "the Greek verb to 'corinthianize' came to mean 'to practice sexual immorality.'"

Of course, the members of the Christian church in Corinth did not engage in prostitution at the temple of Aphrodite – at least not to Paul's knowledge or he would have said something. But that they refrained from blatantly serving idols did not keep Paul silent. He did not even want the Corinthians to eat food that they knew had been sacrificed to the idols of Corinth (whichever ones they may have been). The reason for this is given in 10:20 and this really is the heart of the matter. Paul says, "The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons." Behind the idols of Corinth were demons! The Corinthians did not just worship Aphrodite – they served demons. Behind every false god is a demon, or demons. We can also read of this in the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 32:16-17, where Moses says about the future of God's people Israel: "They made him jealous with their foreign gods

and angered him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to demons, which are not God – gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear." Thus Paul warns against eating food sacrificed to idols. He did not want the Corinthians to be participants with demons.

Our culture is quickly being consumed

Now as we did with the first principle, about causing others to stumble, we can directly apply this second principle to the topic of modesty. In our present culture sexuality is front and centre, just as it was in the city of Corinth and the temple of Aphrodite. Sex is a god. It's an idol. It is something that our world "puts its trust in" other than God. I don't think we have to tiptoe around this – that we need to say, "Perhaps sex is a god." The first and second commandments still stand today. There are still gods and idols that we are not to serve or bow down to. It is just a matter of recognizing them for what they are. And so to name sex, or lust, as a god of our age seems very obvious. All around us it is visibly and openly displayed, celebrated, and worshipped. People really do think that it will bring fulfillment. Just as the Corinthians sought meaning in the worship of their idols, so the people of our time seek meaning in the idols of sex and lust. Behind these idols is the same thing as was behind the idols of Corinth: demons. And behind the demons, we know, is the devil himself. Satan is warring against the Lord and his anointed one and it is he who stokes the fires of lust. Sex

threatens to consume our culture and Satan is behind it. He wants this world. He wants us. He wants you. He wants your children. And his demons work feverishly to stoke the fire that already burns so hot.

Now, let's bring this all close to home. There's a fire burning outside. And as this fire burns, a young woman, Canadian Reformed, walks out of her father's house in a short skirt and a tight shirt. And the fire burns hotter. She goes to meet her friends at the lake and they bask on the beach in what one author calls "swimsuits that hide less than a decent pair of underwear would hide" (Rev. David Feddes, *Dress for Success. Back to God Hour*. May 4, 2003). And the fire burns hotter. Or, perhaps we should do this story again, but insert instead yourself, or your wife, or girlfriend, or daughter, or whoever you want to. The result is the same: the fire burns hotter.

It is a disquieting thing to think that we might be participating with demons – that we might be building the fires of lust rather than trying to put them out. So let's ensure that we don't. Let's ensure that we don't add to the fire that produced the billboard by Cole Road and the ads in our newspapers. As Christian women – and as the husbands, parents, and siblings of Christian women – let's together strive to put the fire out by dousing it with modesty. As a new summer is once again upon us, let's show our culture who we really are. For we know who the real God is. We participate, not with idols and demons, but with Jesus Christ. Through Him we have the eternal privilege of being temples of the true and living God. Let us strive to be a people who are dressed accordingly.



What's New???

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If some readers have been disappointed because this column does not appear as frequently as they would like, let me assure you that this is not due to lack of faithfulness on the part of those sending bulletins my way. To be sure, these bulletins indicate much activity in the congregation. The nature of this column, however, is not to look for what is "regular," but for what is "new." At the same time, some "regular" things do warrant a comment from time to time.

A number of items did catch my eye. As some items are representative of what can be found in various bulletins, the particular sources will not always be named but they will be brought out as food for thought and discussion.

First, there is the standard phrase in many short reports that reads something like, "The agenda was adopted with some modification." I always wonder what the value of such a statement is. It is a standard feature of a meeting to adopt an agenda. It is also a standard feature that a provisional agenda is circulated ahead of time to prepare people for the meeting and this is fine tuned at the start of the meeting for adoption. In the end, it is not really necessary for a short report to even mention the adoption of the agenda. If there is a desire to

include it, one can simply say that "the agenda was established / adopted." If one wishes to maintain the phrase, at least let the readers in on the modifications.

Second, a short report of the meeting of the consistory with deacons in Elora read, "All were welcomed; a special welcome extended to the pre-confession students who were present as observers for the first two hours of the meeting." One might call this a "field trip" for catechism classes. It might be worth imitating by others as it gives the students a sense of how council meetings work and what is dealt with.

Third, an interesting item was gleaned from the Carman East bulletin of March 30. Rev. Holtvlüwer made some remarks regarding the minister acting as "Commissioner of oaths, notary public or magistrate." He wrote,

Over the last few months, I've had a number of people inquire of me whether I am legally permitted to sign documents related to citizenship papers or foreign passports. Mostly these documents specify that the signatory must be either a Commissioner of Oaths, a Notary Public or a Magistrate. Together we've wondered whether a minister is, because of his office, also qualified as one or more of these. After a

little research the conclusion became clear: I am none of the above. In fact, no minister simply by virtue of his office is qualified to sign in any of the above capacities. Each of those positions requires special application to the provincial government and such people are on file with them. If you require such a signature, you will need to look elsewhere, I'm afraid (try searching the internet). A minister, however, can still serve as a guarantor for Canadian Passport applications as well as those for a Permanent Resident Card (for Canada), so if you need me for either of those two things, feel free to call. I hope this clears up any confusion.

I am sure this will prove helpful for others as well. I could add that a minister must personally know a person at least two years before he is able to sign a passport application. So, if you live in a congregation where you just received a new minister, he can't help you for the first two years.

Finally, something that truly can be classified as "New" is the way some congregations are handling the calling of ministers to fill a vacancy. In one such congregation, the "Search Committee" wrote in the local bulletin, "...The search committee

is requesting your input in its search for a pastor and teacher who might possibly serve in this congregation. We have developed a questionnaire, in an attempt to become aware of what characteristics our congregation would like to see in a minister. The questionnaire will be placed in your mailboxes at the back of the church. It would be much appreciated if you can fill this questionnaire out as a family, and place it back in one of the committee member's mailboxes.

It would be appreciated if it could be completed and handed in by. . . ."

On the one hand, one can appreciate the openness of the process. At the same time, is it not asking the obvious, if one approaches it from a scriptural perspective? The Form for Ordination spells out the fourfold task of a minister, namely, ministry of the Word, administration of the sacraments, leading in public prayer, and ruling over the congregation with the elders (see pages 620-621, *Book of Praise*). If this

approach is followed through, it would only seem fair to inform any minister called to the congregation of the exact expectations expressed by the congregation in this survey. Perhaps in the name of complete openness, an ad could be placed in the *Clarion* listing what the congregation is looking for and asking interested ministers who think they qualify to send in a resume.

With this we conclude another "What's New?" May it have proved informative, edifying and enjoyable.



News Release – June 2008

Peter Lindhout retires as CEO of Christian Credit Union Ltd.

After twenty-one years of service, Peter Lindhout is retiring as CEO of Christian Credit Union effective June 30, 2008. John Veldkamp, Manager, Lending Services and Corporate Counsel, has been named as successor.

Under Peter's tenure, Christian Credit Union has grown to over \$133 million in assets. In addition the credit union services over \$41 million in off-balance sheet items. Highlights include:

- Christian Credit Union's 50th anniversary celebration held at Francis Winspear Centre for Music, Edmonton in 2002. The evening was capped off with



Peter Lindhout

- donations totaling \$500,000 to seven non-profit organizations.
- Alberta Credit Union of the Year in 2002
- Opening of the Lethbridge branch in 2003

- Construction of the new Edmonton branch in 2004
- Nine-time winner of Credit Union Central Alberta's Best Long Term Performance
- Over twenty million dollars in loans and commitments to non-profit organizations such as churches and schools

Peter comments, "With the Lord's blessing we have been able to accomplish many things. We have branch locations in Edmonton and Lethbridge and with automated services are now serving over 10,000 members throughout Alberta and increasingly throughout Canada. I am grateful for the support of dedicated staff, Board, and members." Peter continues, "The key success factors of Christian Credit Union are the



Edmonton branch

quality of members who tend to repay their debts and the quality of staff that have a great work ethic and attitude. These factors, combined with keeping costs down, have allowed for very efficient operations.”

John Veldkamp was born and raised in Edmonton. He obtained both a Bachelor of Commerce degree and a Bachelor of Laws degree at the University of Alberta. After practicing law for one and a half years, John joined Christian



John Veldkamp

Credit Union in 1999 as Commercial Loans Officer. In 2004, John was promoted to Manager, Lending Services, overseeing all the lending functions of Christian Credit Union. John looks forward to continuing Peter’s legacy of making a difference in the Reformed Christian Community.

For more information about Christian Credit Union log on to www.christiancu.ca or call John Veldkamp, CEO, toll free 1-877-426-0506.

Lethbridge branch



Derek Stoffels

Mr. Derek Stoffels is principal of the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed School in Smithers, British Columbia
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Peregrine Survey

Challenges

The chairman of William of Orange Christian School in Surrey, reflecting on blessings received and challenges ahead, expressed gratitude to our heavenly Father for all that had been achieved. It is in his strength that much could be accomplished and let us continue to keep the needs of [the school] in our prayers. This is important for board members; for reviewers of policy, operations, and procedures; for the treasurer; for the staff; and for the search for a capable and godly leader. May the Lord bless the leader they since appointed (Kent Dykstra) and continue the ongoing search for other leaders elsewhere. This chairman also alerted his readers to remain vigilant for pressures from outside our school society that encourage us to water down the Reformed Christian flavour of our curriculum and compromise with the world. This is also a matter that should be remembered in our prayers, that we may continue to have the freedom to educate our children in his ways without government interference. He referred to the controversial Peter and Murray Corren settlement agreement. This agreement stipulates that the Correns, a gay married couple, or groups identified by them, should be consulted about the presentation of gays in the school curriculum. When Vancouver Archbishop Raymand Roussin

objected to the deal because it took away from the primary consideration of parental rights to determine how their children receive instruction on matters of faith, Peter Corren condemned the archbishop's position as "a homophobic diatribe against Canadian society."

It is a sin to refuse to use one's gifts for the benefit and well-being of the other members

Along similar lines, concern has been expressed in Ontario that McGuinty's Liberal government is making a deliberate effort to undermine faith-based schools. It has recently withdrawn the only grant these schools received (a previously federally administered French language instruction grant, which amounted to perhaps \$5 or \$6 per student per year) and then made extra funds available to bolster French instruction at public schools. This fits with a very strong message from voters last year that public funding for faith-based schools is not welcome in Ontario. Ontario high schools also experience increased pressure at government inspections to conform to Ministry of Education course outlines. The inspector holds that it is not possible to do justice to the content of the courses of the

Ontario curriculum if Christian material is added within the allotted 110 hours per course. Meanwhile, in Alberta, Neerlandia will follow a long provincial trend and no longer receive any public transportation money for their buses anymore either. This amounts to a significantly larger sum than the Ontario French grant. Fees for elementary and high school education in western provinces tend to remain at less than half of what it costs in Ontario.

It is not only outside pressures that our schools must face, however. From conversations about schooling, it appears that the communion of saints is not always functioning as it ought to when it comes to the Lord's call for our covenant responsibility regarding the next generation. As a 24/7/365 call from the Lord, this responsibility may not be portrayed as limited to, but certainly would include formal education. At times there is division and mistrust, or even a rash condemnation of others, when people get frustrated about categories of brothers and sisters for not helping to shoulder this task. This could, for instance, be a category defined by age, or by seeking an alternative approach to day schools. It is not a sin to belong to a certain age group, or to home school, but it is a sin to refuse to use one's gifts for the benefit and well-being of the other members. It is interesting to calculate how much the average monthly contribution

per communicant member would have to be to keep the schools (both elementary and high schools) going with the current budget. Would it actually be over \$200, even in Ontario? One should not propagate to equally assess all communicant members for the schools, as the Lord endows each of us with different gifts and circumstances, but it would be an item we could encourage everyone to consider – also in view of Article 58, CO.

Website

Down under, John Calvin Christian College in Armadale has granted teacher Phil Houweling seven weeks of leave to set up “a special project to develop a website that shares Reformed teaching and learning resources.” The idea is to enhance, and make available to Reformed teachers around the globe, materials they may have prepared for their class in terms of articles, activities, questions, discussion points, and stimulating pictures and diagrams. It would be “a repository of teaching and learning resources where scriptural perspectives are clearly imbedded.” The plan is to also search for authors and graphic artists to help provide resources and make them look appealing and to potentially branch out into online discussion groups and continued on-line studies: “With God’s blessing this Reformed education website will serve teachers for years to come, further strengthening the scriptural foundations that underpin our schools.” In addition, it would be a worldwide demonstration of what it means to be a hand and a foot to each other. We look forward to meeting this brother and to the benefits his plan will have for English-speaking Reformed education everywhere.

Teacher training

The time for hiring teachers is hopefully behind us for another year. Several schools rejoice in the return of most of their current staff; others had to go through the time-consuming process of seeking to fill potential or real openings. Tongue-in-cheek, one school offered “mostly four day work weeks, competitive salaries, a good benefits package, small class sizes with angelic children, an expanded facility, a terrific staff, a supportive membership and Board and a comparatively low cost of living.” As this article is being completed, *Clarion*, as well as *Christian Renewal* continue to carry advertisements for teachers and principals.

The need for principals is acute, and the Ontario Principal’s Association (OPA) is actively looking into what it would take to attract more people to this role of increased service to our schools and to prepare them for it. At a recent OPA meeting, a show of hands revealed that about half of our principals had not actively pursued principalship before being asked to take the challenge. The League of Canadian Reformed School Societies in Ontario is also keenly interested in finding short-term and long-term solutions to this situation.

Teacher training as provided by Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College was bolstered by a recent Medieval Fundraiser Dinner/Theatre initiative of the Wellington Chapter of the CCRTC Alumni. The Guelph church building served as the locale for Lord Basil’s Castle as the alumni presented *Tourney’s End, A play in one Act*, by Deanna Smid. A fine dinner served medieval style (without cutlery), many guests in time-appropriate attire, and the play contributed to a most entertaining event highlighting the

CCRTC as “our college” and the need to replenish Lord Basil’s treasure chest.

Changes – or not

After due consideration, and with input from the stakeholders, the Board of ACRES (Attercliffe) decided not to “assume control of the Kindergarten program” but to advise “that the current system of the Canadian Reformed Kindergarten Society of Attercliffe remains intact” and “that coordination of events common to both Kindergarten and the ACRES education programs continues to be strengthened with effective dialogue.” It appears that cost implications have been the driving factor behind this decision.

The DACS membership (Orangeville) had previously voted to give its Board the green light to get all necessary paperwork and drawings in place to proceed with the expansion with more adequate washroom facilities and a gym if it so decided at a subsequent meeting. This meeting was held on March 20 and the result was to go ahead with building a gym and washroom facilities. Beautiful and functional though the addition will be, more beautiful was the unity of mind and cooperation displayed in the support for the project. The Council of the Township of Amaranth has proved itself to be particularly supportive of a speedy completion of this project. The Lord continues to bless this school, which is in its fortieth year of operation this year.

Maranatha (Fergus) may be packed with students, but is still considered spacious by Dutch standards. If it keeps its water flow in check and below a set level, and reports on it to the township authorities on an annual basis, it has permission to add more portables. The school also celebrates forty years of Reformed

education this spring. Emmanuel Christian High School occupies the same building and continues to experience growth as well. It will need to add a second grade nine class for the second year in a row. The school also brought the student orchestra under its umbrella, helping to provide a total of at least eighty-eight course offerings for 2008-2009. At the same time, rumour has it that one can join a newly formed school society in Guelph for as little as two dollars a year. People should not take this to mean that these fees are cast in stone, however.

We are near the end of another school year. This Peregrine Survey, as well as others, has given us a glimpse of things that are happening along the educational race in our schools across the country – and at times even around the world. Despite challenges and concerns of various kinds, we continue to see the blessings of the Lord on these efforts. There may be shrinkage or growth, there may be shortfalls or surpluses, there may be reason for sadness or joy, but in his fatherly care, He continues to provide. Let us then take courage and together with all the saints

continue to share our gifts and blessings in our common calling for bringing up the next generation in the fear of the Lord – whether within the walls of the school or beyond. May his Name be glorified.

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

obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us



Press Releases

Press Release of Classis Pacific East, June 10, 2008, in Vernon, British Columbia

On behalf of the convening church of Vernon, Rev. J. Moesker read 1 Timothy 2 and requested those present to sing Hymn 58:1, 2. He led in prayer for God's blessing on the assembly. Welcome was extended to all present. It was noted that since the last classis, Rev. R.C. Janssen of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated) has accepted the call extended to him by the church of Abbotsford. Mention was made of the health circumstances of Prof. Dr. N. Gootjes in Hamilton. Prof. Dr. J. deJong's condition was also remembered.

The Lynden delegates reported that the credentials were in good order. The churches of Abbotsford and Lynden included instructions. Classis was declared constituted and the officers proposed by previous classis took their places. Classis proceeded with the following officers: chairman: Rev. R. A. Schouten as chairman, Rev.

Moesker as vice-chairman, and Rev. R. Ijbema as clerk. The agenda was established.

As the book containing the Form for Subscription was not present at the last classis, Rev. Ijbema duly signed this Form at this assembly. The Form adopted at Synod 2007 was used and Abbotsford church will include this Form in the Classis Subscription book.

An appeal from Mr. T. Kingma was put into discussion. A page with some minor corrections submitted by the brother subsequent to his appeal was received. Classis decided that this appeal was not admissible. The delegates of Lynden abstained from voting on this matter.

The church of Vernon presented an audit of the books of the Classis Fund treasurer, Br. R. Leyenhorst. It was reported that the financial records of the treasurer for the year 2007 were found to be in good order. The treasurer was discharged of his responsibility for the year audited, and his work was noted with gratitude.

The churches of classis were asked whether the ministry of the office bearers is being continued and whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. Delegates replied in the affirmative for all churches. It was also asked whether there are any matters in which consistories need the judgement and help of Classis. The consistory of Abbotsford asked Classis for advice in a matter of church discipline and advice was given. Advice was given to the church of Lynden concerning a pastoral matter. The church of Abbotsford requested that Rev. W. Wielenga be re-appointed as counsellor and this request was granted. The church of Abbotsford also requested Classis pulpit supply for one Sunday a month and this request was also granted.

Report of a church visit made to the Canadian Reformed Church of Aldergrove on May 22, 2008 by Revs. Ijbema and Moesker was presented. The report showed that life in this church is proceeding in a biblical and orderly way.

The church of Yarrow was appointed to be convening church for next classis and the date of that assembly was set for September 16, 2008 (alternate date: December 9, 2008). The following officers were appointed for that assembly: as chairman, Rev. Moesker, as vice-chairman Rev. Ijbema, and as clerk Rev. Wielenga. The following brothers were delegated to Regional Synod West November 4, 2008 in Carman: elders B. Kuik, C. deHaas with elders D. Schouten as first alternate and B. Vane as second alternate. The following ministers were delegated: R. Ijbema and C. Bouwman with W. Wielenga as first alternate and J. Moesker as second alternate.

Personal question period was not made use of and the chairman concluded with thankfulness that censure as per Article 34 of the Church Order was not required. The Acts of Classis were adopted and the Press Review approved for publication. The delegates sang Hymn 46 and after thanksgiving the chairman closed the assembly.

*J. Moesker,
vice-chairman at the time*

Press Release: Classis Niagara, June 18, 2008

On behalf of the convening church of Smithville, Rev. Souman called the meeting to order and read from Galatians 5:1-6:10. He requested the brothers and those present as visitors to sing from Psalm 66:1, 4. Rev. Souman asked the Lord in prayer for a blessing upon the meeting. He welcomed the brothers, including Br. Rolf Den Hollander, who was present for a preparatory examination to be declared eligible for call. Rev. Bouwers was welcomed as a fraternal delegate from the URCNA. Rev. Wynia was also present, having accepted the call of the church in Lincoln. The church in Smithville reported that all the delegates were present. Several of the churches included instructions with the credentials. The church in

Bluebell sent only one delegate. Rev. Souman was chairman, Rev. de Boer vice chair, and Rev. Kok clerk. Rev. Souman as chairman now remembered with the assembly that the churches in Attercliffe and Lincoln were blessed with ministers of the Word willing to take up the work in their midst. The church of Smithville was remembered with the departure of Rev. Souman to Willoughby Heights and the call to Rev. Bouwers of the URCNA of Jordan, Ontario. Dr. Gootjes of the Theological College in Hamilton was remembered with the difficulties in his health.

Br. Den Hollander submitted the required documentation for his examination. The necessary documents were present. Br. Den Hollander presented his sermon on Galatians 6:1-5. Classis met in closed session to discuss the sermon proposal and the report of examiners who assigned the brother his text. The sermon was judged to be satisfactory and sufficient to proceed with the examination. Br. Den Hollander re-entered the meeting, the meeting was declared to be in open session and, after a break, Rev. VanDam continued by examining the brother in Old Testament exegesis, focusing on the text of Hosea 2:14-23. Rev. Souman then examined Br. Den Hollander in New Testament exegesis, focusing on Acts 17:16-34. Rev. Kok examined the brother in Doctrine and Creeds. Opportunity was given for the members of Classis to ask questions of the brother. Classis re-entered closed session to discuss the examinations and decided to declare Br. Rolf den Hollander eligible for call after the brother promised not to teach or preach anything that is not in accordance with the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity. Those present sang from Psalm 134:1, 2, 3 and Rev. Kok gave thanks in prayer.

After lunch, Rev. Souman re-opened the meeting and Br. A. Schutten led in devotions from Psalm 134. The brothers sang from

Psalm 133:1, 2 and Br. Schutten led in prayer. Rev. Bouwers of the URCNA was given the floor to speak words of greeting on behalf of Classis Ontario of the URCNA. Rev. Bouwers encouraged the churches with the words of Ephesians 2:11ff and expressed hope that the two federations might continue to grow together. Rev. Souman responded with words of appreciation.

Rev. Souman asked the churches the questions in Article 44 C.O. All the churches answered that the ministry of the offices is being continued and that the decisions of the major assemblies are being maintained. The church of Attercliffe presented the necessary documents for the approval of the call extended to Rev. Huijgen and the call was approved. Installation of Rev. Huijgen will take place on July 13, 2008. D.V. Classis appointed the church of Dunnville/Wainfleet to represent the churches of Classis at this occasion.

The church in Lincoln requested a classis in August 2008 for the colloquium with Rev. Wynia. It was decided that the church of Spring Creek would convene the next classis on August 13, 2008. Advice was given concerning the colloquium.

The church in Smithville requested that Rev. Souman be released from his duties in Classis Niagara. The necessary documents were presented and Rev. Souman was honourably released. Rev. de Boer expressed thankfulness for the work that Rev. Souman was able to do and Rev. Souman responded with the wish that the Lord may continue to bless the churches in Classis Niagara. The neighbouring church of Grassie was appointed to represent the churches of Classis at the farewell service for Rev. Souman. The church of Smithville requested that Rev. VanDam be appointed councillor for Smithville. Classis agreed with this request.

In closed session the church of Spring Creek asked for advice. Advice was given.

A proposal from the church of Smithville was discussed regarding the regulations of General Synod. Classis adopted the proposal of the church of Smithville and will propose to Regional Synod that the regulations of General Synod require all material reports to be discussed by the churches no later than six months prior to the convocation of General Synod.

In closed session the reports of the church visitors were read. The chairman expressed thankfulness for the reports and for the work of the Lord which continues in the churches. The suggested officers for the next classis are Rev. VanDam chairman, Rev. Kok clerk, and Rev. de Boer vice chair. Spring Creek was requested to invite fraternal delegates to the next classis. Rev. Kok was appointed as

a deputy for examination to replace Rev. Souman.

Opportunity was given for questions and the chairman concluded that there was no need for censure ad Article 34 C.O. After the adoption of the Acts and the approval of the Press Release, Rev. de Boer asked the brothers to sing from Psalm 47:1, 3 and led in prayer. The chairman thanked the brothers and declared Classis closed.

Dave de Boer, Clerk at the time

Book Review

Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

Cornelius VanTil: Reformed Apologist and Churchman, John R. Muether (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008).

Additional Information: Hardcover, 288 pages, \$16.11

My greatest teacher and influence has been a man I never met. When he died in 1987 at the age of 91, I was a mere fourteen years old. But though he was dead, he continued (and continues) to speak through his many writings and recordings. In my third year of university I encountered his *The Defense of the Faith* and it rocked my world. Cornelius VanTil deeply impressed me with his passion for the Reformed faith and his eagerness to apply that faith in the area of apologetics (the defence of the faith).

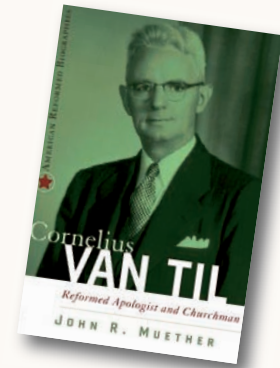
For many years, the only dedicated biography available on VanTil was one written by William White and published in 1979, *VanTil: Defender of the Faith*. It was authorized by VanTil and, while interesting and warmly written, it was not exactly an arms-length picture of the man. Moreover, there were both linguistic and factual mistakes that compromised the integrity of the work.

With the publication of Muether's book, we finally have a sympathetic-critical biography of VanTil. While Muether clearly appreciates VanTil and his insights, he also acknowledges his flaws and humanity. He portrays a man whose aim was to be *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re* (gentle in manner, strong in substance), but one who didn't always succeed. We see VanTil as a redeemed sinner who combined his theological prowess with a simple and child-like faith in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, Muether draws out some interesting and hitherto-unknown (at least to this reviewer) details of VanTil's life. For instance, he discusses whether or not C. S. Lewis read VanTil (see page 138). He discusses VanTil's regard for Klaas Schilder (page 177). An elderly VanTil was interviewed about his

If Muether is now the definitive biography of Cornelius VanTil, Greg L. Bahnsen's *VanTil's Apologetic: Readings and Analysis* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1998) continues to be the definitive presentation of his theology and apologetics. Highly recommended as a companion volume!

Rev. W.L. Bredenhof is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia
wbredenh@telus.net



perspective on the direction the Christian Reformed Church (the church of his youth and early adulthood) had taken up until the late 1970s (page 177) – his remarks display a lifetime of learned wisdom. Throughout we also get a taste of VanTil's sense of humour.

Above all, Muether carefully expounds the central theme of VanTil's life and thought: the push for consistency: "Consistency lay at the heart of what it meant for VanTil to be Reformed" (p 234). He works out that theme in both VanTil's work as a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary and as one of the founding fathers of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Muether succeeds in driving home why VanTil still matters for Reformed believers some twenty years after his death.

Dear Rev. Stam:

Re: post-apostolic charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit

This query letter was sparked by your editorial "Salvation by Electric Touch" in the June 6, 2008 issue of *Clarion*. Would you be interested in publishing a reply to it? The reply would demonstrate from contemporary Christian sources that supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit did not cease with the apostles but continued after them, disappearing gradually during the ante-Nicene period.

My reply to "Salvation by Electric Touch" would be two-pronged. First, that article relies exclusively on the New Testament, where the apostles were the main participants, saying little about ordinary Christians such as those after the apostles. To make the statement that "special gifts as feature of the church indeed ceased with the apostolic time," we must consult the writings of Christians who lived in the period immediately after them, which my reply would do. Moreover, the original editorial relies too heavily in my opinion on arguments from silence and it mistakes absence of evidence for evidence of absence. Again, my reply would examine the evidence supplied by ancient post-apostolic Christian writers, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Arnobius of Sicca. Theophilus of Antioch and Origen mentioned supernatural gifts of the Spirit as gradually fading out over the centuries, although still current in their own day. To know what happened after the apostles, we must examine documents written after the apostles.

The New Testament is an account of Jesus and the apostles, with other people being referred to only insofar as they relate to them. We cannot expect a comprehensive treatment of anyone peripheral when a writer is concentrating only on events in the lives of the main characters. Moreover, the New Testament limits itself to the first century, which means that it does not record charismata or other phenomena after that era. Thus, using only the Bible in an effort to depict the post-apostolic age is like using the writings of an eighteenth century author to learn about details of the two world wars or September 11,

2001. The New Testament is wonderful as far as it goes, but it does not even attempt to describe a church without or after the apostles.

I am not a member of a Pentecostal denomination but of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada who has been studying and writing about early Christianity for many years. I seek to promote knowledge of the early church, not advance a charismatic agenda in our own day. Although the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is in principle open to charismata, it does not make them the centre of our worship services or ministries.



Yours truly,
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Response

Thanks to David Brattston for his reply. He makes a valid point that is worth examining.

My library is all packed away in boxes, because we are moving, so I cannot at this time consult any sources. We'll save that for later.

As main response right now, I'd like to emphasize that my editorial looked for *scriptural* evidence that the charismata are ongoing. I am sure that there are many instances in church history which can be mentioned to show that spiritual gifts also were evident in later times, if you wish, even up to today. Church history is not decisive; Scripture is.

It is of interest to note that indeed, as David mentions, some church fathers saw the "spiritual gifts gradually fading out."

This matter deserves some more attention. So stay tuned.

Cl. Stam

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.