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*Pause to give thanks
for God's many blessings*



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What Drives the Agenda of the Church: Scripture or Culture?

Our fallen culture needs Christ to transform it

David F. Wells

Recently I was reading the newest book by David F. Wells called *The Courage to Be Protestant*. In it he made a number of statements that caught my eye about the relationship between Scripture and culture.

The first statement was this: "It is important to remember that culture does not give the church its agenda. All it gives the church is its context. The church's belief and mission come from the Word of God. . . It is not the culture that determines the church's priorities. It is not the (post)modern culture that should be telling it what to think. The principle here is *sola Scriptura*, not *sola cultura*" (p. 98).

The second statement came a little earlier in the book and in it Wells comments on a book written by Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *The Churching Of America 1776-1990*. He writes,

But what Stark and Finke said was that the content of the faith, its doctrine, had in the past been vital to the success of Christian churches and not, as the seeker-sensitive imagine, an impediment to success. Specifically, they argued that churches that flourish exhibit a high degree of distinction from the culture, of cognitive dissonance. . .

Churches that lose their distinction from the surrounding culture have failed and disappeared (pp. 55, 56).

Now, both of these statements made me think about what is happening in a lot of Evangelical and Reformed churches today. These churches are bending over backwards to the culture in which they live. They are convinced that in order to grow a church needs to be culturally adaptable and flexible. Hence

they accommodate both some of their doctrines as well as their practices to what they assume will bring them in step with the surrounding culture and thus increase their curb appeal.

Niebuhr's analysis

But is this the way we should go? Indeed, here we do well to stop for a moment and reflect on what the approach of the church should be to the culture in which the Lord has placed it. In this connection an instructive book was written back in 1951 by H. Richard Niebuhr called *Christ and Culture*. In it Niebuhr identified a number of different approaches taken to culture by the church throughout the centuries.

The first approach identified by Niebuhr is called "Christ Against Culture." This view regards the surrounding culture as a threat and an enemy and now what all good Christians who follow Christ must do is reject it, as well as to separate from it. Historically, this approach can be traced back to Tertullian in the early church era, to the monastics in the medieval church era, and to the Anabaptists in the Reformation church era.

The second approach mentioned by our author is called "the Christ of Culture" and under this heading is meant all of those who regard Christ and culture as being compatible and on friendly terms. They see no great tension between the two and are convinced that there is a lot of common ground here. Historically, the Gnostics in the early centuries, the liberal theologians, and the social gospel promoters of the nineteenth century have been put in this camp.



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Niebuhr called the third approach “Christ Above Culture” and by it he describes a Christ who is not against culture but who instead transcends it. At the same time Christ is viewed by some of the advocates of this view as using the best products of the culture as well as synthesizing them with the Christian faith. Some of the leading advocates here have been the church father Clement of Alexandria, the medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas, and the Anglican bishop Joseph Butler.

The fourth approach was summarized by Niebuhr under the heading of “Christ and Culture in Paradox.” What this means is that a Christian can best deal with the matters of Christ and culture by recognizing that we are living in two worlds, two realms, two kingdoms: the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of this world. Fundamentally, then, this approach is dualistic. Unlike the synthesists above, the dualists have a more negative view of culture and the sordidness of sin as it abounds there. Nevertheless, they make a valiant attempt to live with their feet in both worlds. Perhaps the most well-known proponent of this view is the German reformer Martin Luther.

The fifth and final approach that Niebuhr identifies is called by him “Christ the Transformer of Culture.” According to this view, culture is not something to be rejected, resisted, cherry-picked, or tolerated, rather it needs to be confronted and converted by the gospel of Christ. Among the advocates of this approach we have the great church father Augustine, as well as the great reformer John Calvin. One can also add the names of Jonathan Edwards and Abraham Kuyper to this list.

Now in identifying these five approaches it can be said that Niebuhr has done us a real service. Whether he has done so as accurately as possible is something for theologians and historians to consider and debate. For our purposes, however, he reminds us that there have been and continue to be these different ways of looking at the relationship between Christ and culture.

Which approach?

At the same time, however, we must also ask, “Which approach is now the most accurate? Which one is most in harmony with what the Scriptures teach? Do we identify most with the view that Christ opposes all culture, or that there is no profound difference between Christ and culture, or that here and there some elements in our culture that can be combined with Christ, or that we have no recourse but to live in two radically different worlds, or are we convinced that Christ really can and does change culture?”

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No doubt most of the Calvinists among us would side with the last position. At the same time I suspect that there would be some sympathy with the "Christ Against Culture" as well as the "Christ and Culture in Paradox" positions. Perhaps the thing that holds us back from a wholesale endorsement of the fifth view is that there is a degree of cultural optimism attached to it that we do not always share. Of course, we believe that on the final day Christ will transform everything, but just how much of that transforming will get done between now and then remains very much an open question.

Still, there is no doubt that there is a great deal that we would agree with here. There is much in human culture today that is stained and marred with sin. There is much that has to be rejected and repudiated. There is much that needs to be changed and transformed before it can be seen as an integral part of the kingdom of Christ. In short, our fallen culture needs Christ to transform it. Indeed, it needs Him desperately.

Catering to culture

But now the question arises, "Do we still believe this and proceed from out of this assumption?" As one looks around in the broader Christian community today both in Europe as well in North America, one cannot help but see so many churches catering to and capitulating to the prevailing secular culture. To cite some concrete examples, there is the issue of what the Bible says about homosexuality as a sin. There is the question of whether or not women can hold ruling positions in the church. There is the matter of modern worship style with its imported atmosphere, music, and style.

With respect to homosexuality in the church, the surrounding culture has been drinking deeply from the secular well of human rights and equal rights and would have us believe that any and every lifestyle that we humans adopt, including homosexuality, is acceptable and tolerable. And as for the Bible, it has now been re-interpreted by many as either mute on these points or else as being lovingly accepting. In this area, culture has completely pushed aside what Scripture teaches.

With regard to women in office, we have another hot button issue in which many churches and attendees see nothing wrong with women occupying the offices of pastor-elder and ruler-elder. Some have even become very vocal about these matters and deem all churches that disagree with them to be utterly out-of-step with both the Scriptures and the times. But what then shall

we do with the scriptural words of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15? What shall we do with those biblical references that go all the way back to Adam and Eve? No problem, we shall assign them all to the time-bound category and rule them out of order for today. Again, culture dominates over Scripture.

When it comes to the worship of the church, our prevailing culture is one of casualness, of informality, of light and breezy, and this too has consequences. The same goes for much of the music that is used in worship. Often the only thing that distinguishes rock music from worship music is the words. Much of the beat, the volume, the genre, and the manner of presentation have been taken over from the rock and rap concerts of the world. Where is the holiness, the order, and the awe that the Apostles Peter and Paul write about? Once more it would seem that what Scripture says hardly matters.

Culture wins?

Hence the prevailing impression is that when Christ and culture clash, or when the church and culture clash, it is culture that wins. Indeed, much of what calls itself Christianity is no longer firmly rooted and anchored in the inspiration and infallibility of the Word. The voice of the world matters more than the voice of God. Is it thus any wonder that the church in the West is rapidly losing its distinctive edge? It no longer confronts or challenges the culture because it has become so much a part of the culture.

And that will be the death of the church. Thinking historically for a moment, why did the churches of Asia Minor and North Africa cease to exist? Why is the church in Europe and North America living on the brink of extinction? Instead of confronting Western culture with Christ, the Transformer of Culture, it has exchanged Him for Christ, the Doormat of Culture. Where is the uniqueness of the church today?

A challenge!

Nevertheless, I do not want to end this editorial with an obituary and a lament, but with a challenge. And the challenge is this: let churches everywhere who claim to be ruled by Christ go back to the Word of Christ and proclaim the gospel of Christ to this world in rebellion against Christ. With deep love, great zeal, and sure hope, it is the task and calling of the church and its members to re-capture what it means to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. May our God give to his church in the West new boldness, deep conviction, and a mighty voice that dares to exclaim, now and always: "Thus says the Lord!"



P.H. Holtvlüwer



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Thankful for an Unshakable Kingdom



MATTHEW 13:52

“Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. . . .”

Hebrews 12:28

On Thanksgiving Day we pause to give thanks for God’s many blessings: food in the cupboard, crops in the field, a steady job, a loving family, caring friends, and a faithful church to be part of. What about giving thanks for receiving a kingdom?

Yes, a kingdom. You, I, and every believer are receiving a prince’s inheritance. In fact, it’s a kingdom that cannot be shaken! That means: a kingdom that cannot be disturbed by enemies or upset by disaster. It is secure and safe and strong forever and it is ours!

We need to focus on that kingdom, for the other blessings in this life are not unshakable. Food, shelter, clothing, safety, family, friendship, even participation in church life give us a taste of what is coming but they are neither perfect nor guaranteed.

The Hebrew Christians knew about this for some of them had been publicly persecuted, imprisoned, and stripped of their homes and possessions (Heb 10:32-34). There were years they had virtually no earthly blessings to give thanks for.

This is the Christian way. While the Lord often gives us many physical, emotional, and familial blessings, He also warns us to expect suffering and sorrow. The way of the disciple is the way of the Master and if the Master was ill-treated by the world, should we expect any less? If the Master had no place to call his home, should we expect to dwell in riches and ease?

Suffering has a way of finding every family. Our three sworn

enemies – the devil, the world, and our own flesh – are constantly conniving to ruin our faith. Is there a family in the church where the hand of sorrow has not been felt through the loss of a loved one, or the breaking away from the faith, or by way of illness or injury? Some families experience wave after wave of sorrow until others feel overwhelmed just by looking on. Some nearly get washed away by grief and torment. In such a year, in such a life, what is left to be thankful for?

That unshakable kingdom! It’s unshakable, immovable, unbending, unchanging, and eternal for the King who reigns is unchanging and eternal and completely invincible! Through faith in this King we enter already into his kingdom; as Hebrews 12:23 says, “You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” We have come to Him – past tense!

No attack of the Evil One can unseat our God. God is too powerful. No accusation of Satan against us can stand. The blood of Jesus has been sprinkled over us and God sees in us now only the innocence of his Son. We’re permanently covered! No broken relationship, no sudden death, no grave disappointment can wipe us out because the blood of Jesus has the power to renew, refresh, and resurrect both faith and life in his people! This King has underwritten his kingdom with the matchless

blood of his only begotten Son so that it cannot be shaken – ever!

And we are receiving it, says the Bible. We’ve got it today. Yet it’s also a process that’s unfolding, something whose fullness awaits the great tomorrow when our Lord returns. If material blessings be yours today, then be not distracted by the foretaste but look beyond those shakeable things to the everlasting kingdom you possess in Christ and let that be your joy!

And if you feel the weight of grief, illness, or loss of some kind then remember afresh what you already have and what you are coming into: a kingdom of peace, a realm of glory where sin is not known, where brokenness will be healed, where health will be restored, where all your losses become your gains as King Jesus rewards you in his grace (Matt 19:29).

That focus will fill out your Thanksgiving Day every year, in every situation. And your thankful heart will be moved to worship your God in reverence and in awe, for who could have ever dreamed the kind of salvation He has given us? Who could ever have imagined the Creator sacrificing his Son in order to bequeath his kingdom to fallen creatures like us? May all our thanks-giving translate into everyday thanks-living!

Correction:

In Issue 17 it was mistakenly written that the tablets of the Ten Words were ground up, mixed with water, and drunk by the Israelites (Exodus 32). It was actually the golden calf that was ground up and put into Israel’s water as punishment.



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Defending the Faith Today (Part 3)

Antony Flew, *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind.* (Harper Collins, 2007). 222 pages.

Intellectual arguments cannot by themselves lead to a saving faith. That is the gift of the Holy Spirit alone. Intellectual arguments can, however, move an atheist to reconsider his beliefs and conclude that he may have been wrong. This happened to the English philosopher Antony Flew (1923), who for more than fifty years had been among the most influential twentieth-century atheistic philosophers. In 2004, however, at a conference in New York, he announced, to the horror of militant atheists worldwide, that he "now accepted the existence of a God."

Although renouncing his atheism, Flew has not become a Christian. His religious pilgrimage, he says, has been a pilgrimage not of faith but of reason, "an exercise in what is traditionally called natural theology." Taught by Socrates, he simply decided to "follow the argument wherever it leads." In his case the argument, which was based on scientific evidence, led to belief in "a self-existent, immutable, immaterial, omnipotent, omniscient Being" – a Being that he says is similar to "the God of Aristotle" (who in turn can be compared to the God of deism).

But although Flew does not believe in the God of the Bible, he also does not deny the possibility of either his existence or his self-revelation. The book under review contains (in an Appendix) a dialogue between Flew and New Testament scholar N. T. Wright entitled "The Self-Revelation of God in Human History." At the conclusion of this dialogue Flew states that he is "very much impressed with Bishop Wright's approach," even though he has not been fully convinced. But he does admit that divine revelation is not to be ruled out, since "you cannot limit the possibilities of omnipotence." He is not sure, however. As he states elsewhere in the book, while some people claim to have made contact with the Divine Mind, he has not been able to do so – at least not yet. But he adds, "Who knows what could happen next?"

Flew and the rebirth of Christian philosophy

Flew wrote his book with co-author Roy Abraham Varghese, a well-known Christian thinker who for years has explored the relationship between faith and science. In the book's Preface, Varghese takes pains to distinguish Flew from men like Richard Dawkins and his associates – the so-called "new atheists" of the present decade. These men, he observes, refuse to

play according to the rules and therefore have no place in the history of serious modern philosophy. They say little or nothing, for example, about the formal arguments for the existence of God, don't bother to account for the origin of a law-abiding and rationally accessible universe, and proclaim (at least Dawkins does) that it is science which must decide about the existence or non-existence of God. Their approach is sufficiently outdated and outrageous to have aroused the contempt of serious philosophers, both Christians and non-Christians. Flew belongs to that group of critics. He questioned the validity of the approach also before his "conversion."

Varghese's concern is to describe Flew's prominent place in the world of twentieth-century philosophy. There have been many other atheistic philosophers in his days – such as Nobel laureate Bertrand Russell, Sir Alfred Ayer, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Martin Heidegger (to name only the most famous). None of these, however, was specifically a philosopher of religion. Flew alone tackled the religious issue consistently and systematically and in the process, Varghese writes, he changed the framework of the discussion. He insisted, for example, that atheism was the default position, one that needed no defence. The burden of proof

rested with theism. But by thus challenging his Christian opponents, Flew in fact facilitated the rebirth of Christian analytical philosophy to which I referred in the first installment of this series.

It was especially North American and English Christians who responded to the challenge. A leader among the former was Reformed philosopher Alvin Plantinga, who proposed that theism (belief in God) is a properly basic belief, similar to belief in the reality of other basic things such as the existence of other minds, or of what you perceive around you, or of what you remember about certain events in the past. In all these cases you trust your cognitive faculties. It is true, you cannot prove the belief in question, but to disbelieve its truth would, generally speaking, be insanity. So it is with belief in God.

Meanwhile the American Thomist philosopher Ralph McNerny reasoned that belief in God is natural because of the order and law-abiding character of nature. This, McNerny said, makes the idea of God almost innate and thus poses a strong argument against atheism. "So, while Plantinga argued that theists did not bear the burden of proof," Flew writes, "McNerny went still further, holding that the burden of proof must fall on atheists." It was these reactions, then, that marked the beginning of the renaissance of Christian philosophy. That event did not remain unnoticed. In April 1966 *Time Magazine* had printed with big red letters on a black cover the question, "Is God Dead?" But by 1980 the reversal was well enough known for the same magazine to proclaim that "God is making a comeback" – most strikingly so among Anglo-American philosophers.

The mind of God

Flew tells us that he made his first public argument for atheism in 1950. Paradoxically, he adds, that paper was presented at the Oxford Socratic Club, chaired from 1942 to 1954 by "the redoubtable" C.S. Lewis, "the greatest Christian apologist of the last century." Flew's attendance at this club did not shake his atheist beliefs. That happened some decades later. But he did take to heart the Socratic maxim (to which Lewis also subscribed) that one ought to be relentless in following the evidence.

Intellectual arguments can move an atheist to reconsider his beliefs and conclude that he may have been wrong

The main cause of his growing disbelief in atheism, he says, was the world picture produced by modern science. He highlights three aspects of the world that he now believes point to a God, namely the fact that nature obeys laws, the existence of intelligently organized and purposeful life, and the existence of the universe itself. He pays attention to important developments in each of these three areas, such as the Big Bang theory, the discovery of the fine-tuning of the universe, and the discovery of the DNA structure in the late 1950s, as well as the outcome of subsequent DNA research.

With respect to the first point, the existence of the laws of nature, Flew observes that we see not merely regularities in nature, but

that these regularities are mathematically precise, universal, and tied together. Einstein spoke of this phenomenon as "reason incarnate" and explained its existence with reference to "the Mind of God." The same answer was given by practically all the "new physicists" of the early twentieth century.

Both Flew and Varghese stress this point. It is widely proclaimed, also by the new atheists, that real intellectuals – specifically scientists and philosophers – cannot honestly believe in the supernatural science and reason, they claim, have disproved God's existence. Richard Dawkins, for example, insists that Albert Einstein, though he spoke of an Infinite Intelligence and even used the word God in describing it, was in fact an atheist. Dawkins followed Flew here, who had earlier indeed described Einstein as an atheist. Later authors, however, refuted the charge and Flew blames Dawkins for ignoring the subsequent evidence. He quotes Einstein himself as saying that although he (Einstein) did not believe in a personal God, he was neither an atheist nor a pantheist. It was necessary on rational grounds, he insisted, to postulate a supernatural, infinite Intelligence.

And indeed, Flew observes, the orderliness and law-abiding character of nature pose an insurmountable problem for atheists.

The universe needs explaining

So do recent scientific discoveries such as the theory of the Big Bang and the fine-tuning of the universe. For Flew these discoveries constituted a turning point. He used to assume, he tells us, that the universe and its laws

were ultimate and fundamental, something to be accepted as “brute facts” – that is, facts that do not allow for an explanation. But that was only possible (or so he believed) if one assumed the universe to be eternal. The Big Bang theory showed that it had a beginning, which meant that an explanation of its existence was necessary after all. The discovery of the fine-tuning of the universe added to the atheists’ problems. As I have shown elsewhere,¹ many an atheist tried to avoid a theistic explanation by proposing such expedients as the existence of a *multiverse* – an infinite number of invisible parallel universes which,

The main cause of Flew’s growing disbelief in atheism was the world picture produced by modern science

because of their great number, would by mere accident include one universe that was fine-tuned for life, namely our own. And some try to get rid of the problems posed by the Big Bang evidence for a beginning by suggesting that the universe exists through an infinite repetition of Big Bangs and Big Crunches. They ignore the fact that such a hypothesis, even if it could be proven, does nothing to solve the atheists’ problem, since here too the question of an ultimate cause remains.

Flew’s answer to the multiverse hypothesis is that while it is logically possible for multiple universes with their own laws of nature to exist, this does not mean that they *in fact* exist. There is currently no evidence for a multiverse; it remains a speculative idea, and a rather desperate one at that. He quotes Richard Swinburne’s remark that “it is crazy to postulate a trillion. . . universes to explain the features of one universe, when postulating one entity (God) will do the job.” Flew himself compares the atheist attempt to the case of a school boy “whose teacher doesn’t believe a dog ate his homework, so he replaces the first version with the story that a pack of dogs – too many to count – ate his homework.” Not only have atheists failed to answer the question how the multiverse came into being and how the laws of nature arose, they have in fact greatly complicated things for themselves. “If the existence of one universe requires an explanation,” Flew argues, “multiple universes require a much bigger explanation: the problem is increased by the factor of whatever the total number of the universes is.” Again quoting Swinburne, he concludes that “the existence of a complex physical universe of finite or infinite time is something ‘too big’ for science to explain.”

In sum, science qua science cannot prove God’s existence. But it is also true that the laws of nature, the existence and nature of life, and the existence of the universe

itself can only be explained “in the light of an Intelligence that explains both its own existence and that of the world.”

Take and read

Flew has described in this book some of the important arguments of natural theology and he has done so in terms that the informed lay reader will be able to follow. I heartily recommend his book. I do so not merely because of its contents, as interesting as they are,

Flew’s experience clearly shows that science-based theistic arguments can be intellectually persuasive

but also and especially because Flew’s experience shows so clearly that science-based arguments against a materialistic, godless world picture can be intellectually persuasive. Christians ought to be aware of this fact and make use of the arguments. They must do so, as I mentioned before, both as a defensive strategy, in order to help fellow-believers deal with attacks on the faith, and as an offensive one, namely in attempts to convince unbelievers and skeptics of atheism’s absolute inability to explain the existence of the universe.

¹ See, e.g., “Modern Science and the Christian Faith,”² *Clarion*, May 23, ‘08.





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The Frequency of the Lord's Supper Celebration

(Part 1)

Introduction

One of the issues that has commanded a good deal of attention and study in recent years among Reformed and Presbyterian churches is the frequency of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In the Canadian Reformed Churches, too, some consideration has been given to the subject over the past decades.¹ The observation was made almost three decades ago already by the late Rev. G. VanDooren that "we by far do not follow the example of the ancient church as to the frequency of supper-celebrating" (*The Beauty of Reformed Liturgy*). Rev. Paul Aasman observed over a decade ago that "it is becoming increasingly so that people would like to see this sacrament enjoyed more often than it is presently the case in any of our churches" (p. 78). In light of growing interest and attention to this topic, not only within the Canadian Reformed Churches, but also among many churches with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship,² it is both worthwhile and necessary to explore this subject more closely.

We will begin by taking note of what the Scriptures teach on the matter. In future articles, Lord willing, we will consider some of the church historical and confessional aspects. We will conclude by addressing the

spiritual benefits, common objections, and finally the pastoral and practical factors that need to be borne in mind.

The Old Testament

The most obvious Old Testament connection to Lord's Supper is the Passover. The Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, in fact, during the Passover (Matt 26:17-19; Luke 22:1-15). The question arises, naturally: why did the believers begin celebrating communion so frequently if the Passover was only celebrated once a year?

There is no shortage of literature exploring the link between the Passover and the Lord's Supper. A fairly thorough-going and helpful treatment is provided by I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*. Perhaps the best way to state it is that "the Passover is a type of the heavenly banquet while the Lord's Supper is the anticipation of the heavenly banquet" (p. 80). The Lord's Supper is more a transformation than a continuation of the Passover (p. 107), for "Jesus took the Passover meal and proceeded to give a new significance to it as a meal whose repetition by his followers would enable them to remember him" (p. 143).

Interestingly, C. John Collins makes the case that frequent

communion should be the norm for the church by making the connection, not only with the Passover, but also with the Old Testament peace offering. He argues that "the common problem of why we should celebrate the Eucharist more than once a year is settled if we see it as a peace offering—in fact, we can see why frequent communion should be the norm for the church."³

Recognizing that there are obvious connections between the Lord's Supper and the Passover, Collins points out, is "not the same . . . as saying that the Passover is the sole interpretive backcloth for the Eucharist, and it is striking that NT authors do not use the Passover in that way."⁴ Remembering this might help move the discussion of frequency of communion forward.

While the Old Testament gives important background for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the necessity of its frequent celebration is established primarily from the New Testament.

Acts

After the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit among the believers, the Lord's Supper was routinely celebrated, at that time designated "the breaking of bread." Luke provides this account: "They devoted themselves to the apostles'

teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).⁵

This celebration was a usual component in the Lord's Day worship of the believers. Luke writes later: "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread" (Acts 20:7).

1 Corinthians 11

In what the Apostle Paul says here to the Corinthian believers about the Lord's Supper, he assumes that it is a regular part of what they do "when they come together"⁶: "In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you. . ." (v. 18). A couple verses later he uses the same phrase: "When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat. . ." (v. 20). Later again he talks about "whenever⁷ you eat this bread and drink this cup. . ." (v. 26).⁸

We will turn next time to a consideration of the frequency of communion from a church historical perspective.

¹ Writing of the practice in the Canadian Reformed Churches, P. Aasman stated the following in 1997: "Only one generation ago, it was the case with nearly every church that the Lord's Supper was celebrated quarterly. This is the minimum requirement of the Church Order. It states that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated 'at least once every three months' (Article 60). Many churches in our federation have reviewed this matter and have concluded that it would be better to have Communion more frequently. Usually, the decision is then made to [celebrate] this sacrament every other month." ("Celebration of the Lord's Supper – How often?" *Clarion*, February 21, 1997, p. 78.)

² Among these are the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Jack D. Kineer, "Worship in Practice," *New Horizons*, December 1998:4 and Donald M. Poundstone, "More Frequent Observance of the Lord's Supper," *New Horizons*, April 1992:9-10), the United Reformed Churches in North America (Johan G. Tangelder, "Forms and the Lord's Supper," *Christian Renewal*, Vol. 23, No. 12, March 9, 2005:18), and the Reformed Church of

the United States (Robert Grossman, "Weekly Communion and the Heresy of Sacramentalism," *Reformed Herald*, Parts I-III, December 2004-February 2005).

³ C. John Collins, "The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice," *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004), p. 11. While not conclusive, this notion is certainly worth exploring.

⁴ *Ibid.* He adds here: "It is also striking that none of the early Christian writers before Origen (ca. AD 185-254) makes an explicit association between the Eucharist and the Passover."

⁵ Although there are those who suggest something other than what appears to be the plain meaning, their arguments are unconvincing, for example, Aasman, pages 78-79. Aasman disagrees with commentators like S.J. Kistemaker and F.F. Bruce and follows H. Leitzmann and O. Cullman. In *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin sees no need to belabor the interpretation of this passage and simply concludes that "[t]hus it became the unvarying rule that no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving" (4.17.44). Moreover, in his commentary on this passage Calvin states that here Luke is reckoning with "things wherein the public estate of the Church is contained." Luke is expressing, here, Calvin maintains, "four marks whereby the true and natural face of the Church may be judged." Luke's account in Acts 20:7 seems to confirm this. So I remain respectfully unconvinced of Aasman's claim that 1 Corinthians 11 is "the only direct datum relating to the frequency of communion." A good treatment of this question is also found in Marshall, pages 108ff, 123ff.

⁶ Greek: *sunerchomenone humone*, used in verses 18 and 20. The verb is again used in Paul's summation in verse 33.

⁷ Greek: *ean*, in some translations "as often as" (ESV, NASB)

⁸ Marshall, pages 108ff supports this view



The Great Commission – and Urban Missions

Go, baptize, teach, and. . .

Paul Murphy, in the course of an evangelism seminar for Reformed folk in the Fraser Valley, British Columbia, Canada, unpacked the Great Commission in an incisive and compelling way. The seminar consisted of two evening sessions and a morning breakfast/workshop. In the first presentation Mr. Murphy dwelt on the importance of fully understanding and appreciating the Great Commission. It speaks of *all* authority, *all* nations, *all* things, and *all* ways. Christ's charge to the disciples was not left to them as an option they could take or leave: it was a command that determines the nature, the flavour, and the reason for the existing of Christian churches then and now. Fortunately, Pastor Murphy detected increased interest in evangelism amongst Reformed congregations! This seminar certainly did not detract from that interest as the speaker led us in these thought-provoking sessions.

. . . Make disciples!

Yes, we must go and evangelize – but not only that: the great commission is not only focused on saving souls, though certainly, the converted *need to be baptized!* However, even though the baptism

of a converted individual may be cause for great celebration, it is not the *only* focus of the Great Commission. The new convert also needs to be taught sound doctrine and be subjected to confessional rigor – yet even *that* is not the be all and end all! The problem and the challenge of the Great Commission is that none of these actions per se (go, baptize, teach) hit the drift of the text squarely on the head: it is not the going, not the baptizing, not the teaching, but it is *the making of disciples* that is the driving force and momentum of the Great Commission! While these are the means, the making of disciples is the end.

Go

It is important to appreciate Christ's radical departure in the Great Commission from the Old Testament instruction to stay separate from surrounding nations. In Deuteronomy 4 the Israelites were told that they were strangers and aliens and as such they were not to mind the business of the pagans surrounding them. Even geographical separation emphasized the command not to intermix with their neighbours: zero tolerance for multiculturalism. The idea was that nations would come and see and get the picture of God living with his people and so learn

from their privileged position. In the New Testament this radically changes. *Go out!* Be a light *in the world!* Just mind the antithesis: now it matters not *where* you live – but *how* you live! We may be Canadians, or Americans, or Australians, but our going is determined by the beat of a different drummer! Therefore, as an outgoing people, evangelism and (urban) missions are essential to the identity of Reformed churches.

Baptize

Baptizing is also a means, not an end, contrary to many practices in contemporary evangelism. A decision to follow Christ requires substantial follow-up. If somebody is not baptized into membership of a church, they ought not to be considered Christian: that is what the Great Commission implies.

Teach

Among Reformed Christians, Christian education is a must. Day schools are a given and Christian home schoolers create excellent models and contexts of intentional, focused learning. More, we may freely enjoy the blessing of sound scriptural preaching. Our children receive catechetical instruction from the get-go. The question is: *what are we doing with all that teaching? Are we cul-de-sacs and*

keeping it to ourselves, or conduits, passing it on? The Great Commission directs us to be thoroughfares: pass it on! Share! We need to strive to be a spark – “to get the fire going!” That’s God’s intent, so that we may be a blessing to others. Our communities need to have the same feel as the Sea of Galilee: it is a fine resort area, including a beautiful, refreshing, cool lake, always fed by fresh, oxygen rich water. With greenery all around, it attracts people.

We cannot expect evangelistic fervour to come from a program

The Sea of Galilee empties itself into the Jordan River which ends up in the Dead Sea. There is no outflow there. The water stays – and stinks. It is oily, greasy, disgusting, and stagnant. It just sits there. Tepid. Neither warm and soothing, nor cold and refreshing. How is the atmosphere in your community? Vibrant?

I am with you

Our loving Lord provides the confidence we need to carry out the Great Commission. After Christ had received “all authority,” He proceeded to delegate it, so that it is now possible for us to make disciples. What started with a handful of disciples grew into a power and a movement that helped turn the Roman Empire upside down. That same power is at work in the world today: Christianity is

the number one world religion. The presence and power of King Jesus can surely be our confidence.

Evangelism by proxy?

Pastor Murphy commended us for doing what we’ve been told: pay and pray for the work of mission and evangelism. He also encouraged us to walk the talk – not to leave that up to the clergy, much less to those few in the Evangelism Committee. In order to bring this about, we need to change our attitude towards evangelism on a heart level. We cannot expect evangelistic fervour to come from a program. Rather, it is a change of heart that will result in vibrant evangelistic church communities. If evangelism becomes part of a to-do list, we miss the point. Evangelism needs to be a thread in the daily fabric of everyone’s life: in a 300 member church there are 300 evangelists, even though there may be only six members in the Evangelism Committee. . . .

Message

Being able to give an effective testimony of the hope that lives within us is crucial for effective evangelism. Pastor Murphy emphasized that our approach needs to be *message-centred*, rather than *method-centered*: the goal of evangelism is not in the first place to save souls: only God can do that. Our focus should be God-centred, as He needs to be glorified through the fulfilling of the Great Commission. And so, with Timothy, we were instructed and reminded to keep the pattern of sound teaching (2 Tim 1:13), comprised of the message about

God (Who is He?), Man (in the shadow of the curse, drawn and saved by costly grace), Christ (who became the God-Man for our sake), which demands a repentant response (Acts 3:26). The message is clear: we turn or we burn. Repentance is not just mental assent, but trusting in God for eternal rest. If this is not mentioned in our conversations with our unbelieving acquaintances, we miss the point of the way, and the truth of the life in Christ (John 14:6).

Means and messenger

Practically, we have already so many things at our disposal: there is no need to re-invent the evangelism wheel. If the message is the hub, then the spokes make up the means. And how we can and must pray! We need to pray for our own heart, for opportunities, for specific individuals, for eyes of faith, for boldness, for truth, for patience, and for the capacity to guide our neighbours to be disciples of Christ. And what about the law of God? Eighty-five percent of confessing Christians do not know the Ten Commandments!

Our approach needs to be message-centred, rather than method-centered

These are crucial; why should we feel any urgency to be saved if we do not realize our state of lost-ness in ourselves? And what about the means of stories? Everybody loves a good story – even soap opera addicts: they should read and

The Dead Sea



know about David and Bathsheba! The gospels are teeming with stories and parables and miracle healings and demon exorcisms and Jesus – who loved outcasts. The widow. The leper. The women. The tax collector. These are important stories for all of us recovering Pharisees. Once we place ourselves into those stories we become like beggars, showing other beggars where to find food that satisfies!

And what about inviting people to our radically God-centred worship services? Yes, we may have to stop playing Dutch Bingo – but that's little sacrifice compared to the power of drawing people under the preaching of the Word! And how we need to simply practice hospitality! Ever been a stranger in a church and shunned throughout your stay? How did that feel? The bottom line is that

we need to make a heart investment, showing sincere interest in visitors.

Maintenance or missionary?

In the minds of most people our churches rate as maintenance churches. We are firmly institutionalized. Lost, seeking, or newly converted people have to work hard to fit into our way of "doing church." The challenge Pastor Murphy outlined for the breakfast meeting attendants was that we need to integrate and balance the *maintaining* (the in-reach – looking after each other, encouraging, visiting, etc.) and the *outgoing*. We need to come to grips with the fact that apart from worship, *mission* is the reason for a church's existence. It can't be an added thing and we need to be very self-conscious about that part of our identity.

All in all, Pastor Murphy gave us much food for thought and incentive for action. May God bless Him in New York as much as He may bless us here in Canada in our own spheres of influence: family, work, and neighbourhood.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion and summary, a quote from *Urban Missions*, a booklet written by Pastor Murphy.

The new frontiers in missions are in our cities. Missiologists call this phenomenon "missions in reverse." What they mean by that is that missions used to be done by sending people far away and overseas (and often that is still necessary). Now, however, the Lord who calls His Church to go and make disciples of *all nations* is bringing those nations right to our doorstep, in cities. For example, in one zip code in NYC there are 143 different nations represented! What an opportunity for the Gospel! . . . Cities now, more than ever, are where the Church needs to focus her attention. Take that strategic route and I believe we will not only reach the nations of the world but also extend the Kingdom of Jesus our Lord and Savior.

For the Evangelism Committee
at Cloverdale,
Heres Snijder

Pastor Murphy is pastor of Messiah's Reformed Fellowship in New York City, New York pastor@merfnyc.org. Sermons can be accessed at merfnyc.sermonaudio.com.



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A Website for Reformed Teachers: www.reformedteacher.net

At the largest ever gathering of Reformed teachers in Australia, the www.reformedteacher.net website was officially launched on July 23, in the sleepy town of Katanning. Although launched “down under,” this site aims to share high quality, pedagogically sound, Reformed teaching and professional development resources with Reformed teachers around the globe. Through this site, Christian teaching resources will be made more accessible and usable for Reformed educators, as well as providing a portal through which teachers can access professional development materials and connect with “sister” schools and colleagues through discussion groups. In short, the Lord willing, this site was established with the aim of equipping teachers in the beautiful task of educating covenantal children.

The need

Most of the commercially produced teaching resources available to teachers clearly lack a scriptural basis. Rather than providing an adjunct of scriptural content to secular material, Reformed teachers need to present resources that deliberately and positively promote a wholly scriptural worldview. In the words of a metaphor that I recently heard,

Reformed schooling (and resources too) is not to be like a “neutral” cake with Reformed icing on top, or where bits of Reformed content is evident like raisins in a raisin loaf; instead, like banana bread in which the banana permeates the whole loaf, biblical thinking must permeate our schools and radiate its unmistakable fragrance in every aspect of the school’s culture. The reformedteacher.net site is therefore designed to be a repository of such “banana bread” in which scripturally-based perspectives clearly permeate the material. Resources posted on this site will include teaching strategies, activities for students, scriptural outcomes, focus questions, and discussion points.

Sharing resources

Undoubtedly great teaching resources already abound within our schools. With some polishing up, these resources can be made available and be of great benefit to other teachers via this site.

In time, the teaching resource repository will grow to host resources ranging from social/political issues to scientific and economic topics. Resources that guide our students to understandings of current political debates and the biblical view on ethical issues such as stem cell

research, the environmental movement, and global warming will be invaluable for teachers of students in higher year levels, while teaching resources dealing with health and physical education focusing on our bodies being temples of the Holy Spirit may be more suitable for lower grades. Resources that assist students to discern the error of evolution will be valuable to all science units. Sound Christian advice on career choices and budgeting will greatly assist in business/economic courses. Bible studies and church history lesson materials will clearly be beneficial to all our schools.

All resources must meet certain criteria and have a similar organization and structure. These criteria can be viewed online by visiting the “Sharing Teaching Resources” link on the main page. It will also be helpful to look in the teaching resource repository at other resources that have been uploaded as an example of what is expected. At present the resource repository is only a “smoke screen and mirrors” site. In other words the real searching functionality and the repository side of things still need to be developed.

To ensure that the resources meet high standards and clearly present a scriptural and Reformed

worldview, all resources will be scrutinized and edited by a qualified editorial committee prior to being uploaded to the website.

Professional development

Within the professional development area of the site, you can launch into (well, not entirely just yet) discussion groups, view lectures from Reformed educators, see what's happening at Reformed teachers conferences, or even sign up and complete professional development modules towards a Reformed teacher's diploma.

In order to grow as a Reformed teacher, you need to be continually involved in professional development. You need to be reflective of your own teaching practice and strive to find ways to improve. Building and maintaining a solid knowledge base, well founded in Scripture and the Reformed faith is not only invaluable but essential for teachers in Reformed schools. This area of www.reformedteacher.net aims to further equip teachers in their professional development journey as a Christian educator.

Why the butterfly?

You may be wondering about our logo and why a butterfly features prominently.

As you know, butterflies undergo amazing transformations changing from egg, to larva (caterpillar), to pupa, to a beautiful flying adult. This amazing transformation is testimony to our awesome God, who is both Designer and Creator. The notion of metamorphosis, or change, is what www.reformedteacher.net seeks to bring about in teachers who use and contribute to this site.

Though a butterfly that emerges from the cocoon is still the same creature as the caterpillar, and Reformed education too represents unchangeable norms founded on Scripture, the delivery and means of delivery change just like a butterfly undergoes change. The teacher also must grow and develop, undergoing metamorphosis from a teacher-in-training to an experienced teacher contributing powerfully and positively to the growth and development of their students and also at times other teachers.

This metamorphosis doesn't happen overnight but takes place through experience and ongoing professional development. Sharing resources with other Reformed educators around the globe is a very positive and powerful way that teachers can

contribute to the cause of Reformed education by being a hand and foot to each other.

The careful observer of the butterfly logo's wings will also notice the following: Calvin's emblem (a heart in an outstretched hand offered to God), the Cross of Christ (the heart of the gospel), a communications tower (representing the delivery means of this site through the Internet), and a pen and paper (representing the work of the students and the productive outcome of this site).

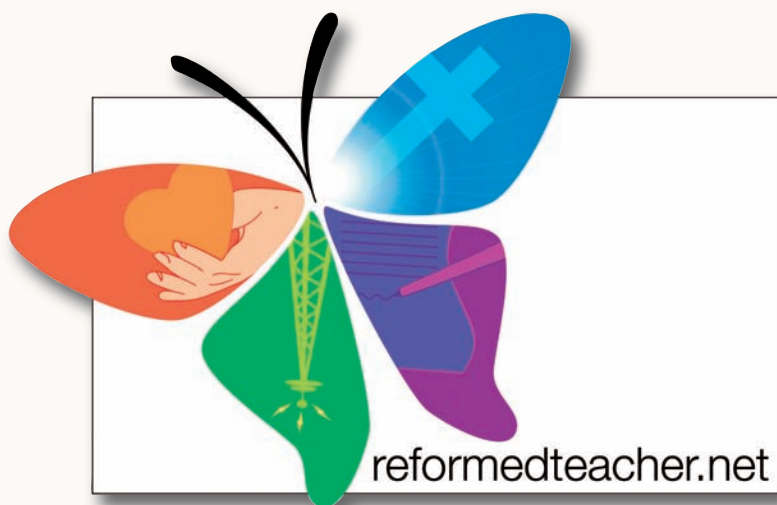
Are you able to assist?

If you are an educator and you have teaching resources that will serve the cause of Reformed education in other schools please consider submitting these to the site. If you have other skills, for example, in web development or graphic design or in whatever capacity you think you may be able to assist in the development of this site please e-mail: info@reformedteacher.net.

Although this site is far from fully developed, please visit the site and register online (under the teacher professional development page). Thought it is intended for teachers, other interested persons within our church communities are also welcome to visit and view the materials online.

With God's blessing, this site will serve teachers for years to come, further strengthening the scriptural foundations that underpin our schools.

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



Letter to the Editor

It is with interest that I read the article written by Dr. de Visser entitled "A Revised Psalter" found in Volume 57, No. 14 of *Clarion*.

There are a few things mentioned in this article to which I would like to draw your attention, and I would also question some of what Dr. DeVisser writes in this article.

I found it very interesting that Dr. de Visser (or perhaps the comment by Synod 2007) says our *Book of Praise* uses out-of-date wording. What I would like to know is what ever happened to parents (and also teachers at school) explaining the meaning of some of these "out-of-date" words? Is it not part of our "Reformed duty" first of all as parents to teach our children as they are reading, learning, or memorizing certain words, phrases, psalms, or texts to explain to them what is meant?

It seems to me to be rather a "cop-out" to have to simplify the words so that, as Dr. de Visser states, "We can bridge the gap by way of modernizing the language in the *Book of Praise* and the psalter more specifically." I also question then whether or not our ministers also need to "simplify" their sermons, so that the people can better understand what is being said? Do we not learn more from perhaps having to look up words in the dictionary and finding out what they mean, than just using simpler language? I would almost think that we are better educated today to understand what we are reading and singing, than perhaps those Christians of twenty or fifty years ago.

Dr. de Visser also says "it is important that the youth of the church should be able to sing the Psalms in language which they can take to heart." Does he mean that all of the youth of the past fifty years have not been able to take the

Psalms to heart because of the language? I beg to differ. If this argument were to have to carry weight, we might need another rhyming every fifty years. I have however, never heard of older people complaining of not understanding a two hundred year old rhyming, or that it did not "speak" to them very much.

The third reason Dr. de Visser mentions is that a revision would "enhance the chances that other churches in North America would incorporate Anglo-Genevan psalms in their songbooks." Is that what we are looking for? Are we compromising our psalter on the *chance* that they will incorporate our psalms? I think we are driving down a very dangerous road if these are the reasons for revision. I see rather the opposite happening, namely that some among us seem to be dangerously eager to take over what is found around us instead of the other way around.

I certainly do not discredit the work of Dr. Helder and others who have put many hours into revision of psalms over the years, but I do highly question the need for such drastic changes. Perhaps we need to take three steps back and re-think the need of all of these changes in our churches. I think sometimes that the "archaic" language and ways were much closer to the original than we may think.

In conclusion I would like to quote an old saying, which I am sure is familiar to many, "If it ain't broke, why fix it??"

Yours in Christ,
Irene Bultena,
Fergus, Ontario



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.