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*The Bible
demands
a response*

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Please Don't Explain the Bible to Me

Its purpose was to confront people with the Word of God, not simply to explain God to the people

We all have pet hates. Mine include Welsh rugby fans, champion boxers who insist on referring to themselves in the third person, and the American habit of having little leather tassles on the end of shoelaces. I also have a particular theological hate: being told that a preacher is going to “explain the Bible” to me. Not that I don’t need the Bible explained to me. There are parts of it that I find quite obscure, and stories that are difficult to understand, such as the passages in the Old Testament that tell of terrifying massacres commanded by God. Then there are the questions about how to relate the Old Testament to the New, how to understand the New Testament use of the Old, etc., etc. All of these things I find difficult in differing degrees and I appreciate the help available from those who can explain them to me.

This is not what irritates me, however; rather it is the description of what happens from the pulpit on Sunday as “explaining the Bible.” Why is this so? Put simply, because such a description privileges the didactic content of the pulpit over the proclamatory, confrontational aspect of the declaration of the Word of God. When the preacher preaches, he should, if he is any good, explain the Bible to the extent that he communicates the content of the passage to his congregation and deepens their understanding of the text; but that is where his task begins, not where it ends.

This arises from the nature of the Bible itself. The Bible is not simply a book of information. It is not the equivalent of, say, a car maintenance manual or a travel guidebook. Sure, it contains God’s story, which is itself made up of a lot of facts, a lot of events, and

a lot of material that allows us to understand ourselves and the world around us; but it also confronts us with these things, demanding a response. It is God’s story, and that is something that involves us. For example, as 1 Corinthians tells us, when the cross is proclaimed, some think it is foolishness, some find it offensive, and some find it to be the power of God to salvation. For none of these groups is it simply an item of information. Thus we cannot extract the informational content of the Bible and claim that we have truly understood it. It is not enough to know that Christ died; it is not enough to know why Christ died; it is necessary to grasp that fact by faith, to know that Christ died for me and to cling to that as if my life depended upon it (which, indeed, it does).

Martin Luther, the great Reformer, put this nicely when he said that the whole of the Bible was made up of law and gospel. The law commands us to obey God and demands a response of perfect obedience, which we can never do in and of ourselves; the gospel tells us what Christ has done on our behalf and demands a response of faith, of total trusting commitment. In other words, the Bible can never be handled simply as a collection of facts or pieces of information; it must always be understood as God’s words to men and women, confronting us with his demands, and demanding a response from us.

In light of this, Luther also understood (correctly, I believe) that the preacher was not so much a teacher as a prophet. Sure, prophets teach; but there is an existential urgency, a confrontational aspect to their teaching that demands – and elicits – a particular response. When the prophets spoke in the Old



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Testament, they did not so much explain God to their audiences as actually speak the Word of God to people. They were God's heralds, confronting people with his demands. This provided the model for later preaching; not that such preaching was inspired in the same way as that of the prophets, but its purpose was to confront people with the Word of God, not simply to explain God to the people.

This has some immediate practical implications. Preaching is to be confrontational; it is to terminate in in-your-face applied doctrine that demands a response. Frankly, the use of overhead projectors, PowerPoint, etc., might be helpful in Sunday School classes, but when it comes to pulpit ministry, it is legitimate to ask what purpose these things serve. Do they facilitate the kind of prophetic confrontation that biblical preaching should embody? Or do they reflect rather an understanding of preaching which sees it primarily as explaining the Bible, as merely unlocking its informational content or teaching individuals to read the Bible better for themselves? If the purpose of preaching is seen as the latter, then we should abandon preaching immediately: there are plenty of books and CD-roms which help to explain the Bible a whole lot better than a forty-minute sermon every Sunday morning. If, however, Luther and company are right, if preaching is not "explaining the Bible" but rather proclaiming the Word of God in a prophetic way that confronts men and women with God's claim upon them and gives them no place to hide, then such innovations surely serve more to blunt the confrontation than to sharpen it. As with so many things in this world, the medium is the message.

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The Year of Our Lord



MATTHEW 13:52

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

James 4:15

As we enter into the New Year, many people begin to think about what it’s going to be like and about all that they hope to do. On the other hand, there are some who don’t dwell much on the future and who just prefer to take life as it comes. Some Christians may even feel that this is how it ought to be. They point to what we confess about God’s providence and they say that since He rules over creation and that nothing happens by chance, we should just leave what’s going to happen to Him.

This sounds quite pious, but the Bible never says that we can’t think about what’s coming and prepare for it. The Apostle Paul spoke often in his letters about the plans that he had made. For example, he told the Romans about how he hoped to visit them.

Thinking about what might happen and working so that things turn out positively is not necessarily an act of unbelief. As long as we do this with the right attitude and give God a place in our plans, we aren’t denying his sovereign rule over our lives.

James 4 encourages us to make our plans in this way, but not before describing what we *shouldn’t* do. We hear about business people who have such confidence in their plans that they are sure everything will go just the way they want. And of course, it’s not just in our work and business that we can think this; the same kind of attitude could

affect the plans we make in any part of our life.

The problem isn’t that we make these plans, but it’s when we don’t leave any room for unforeseen circumstances. It’s wrong for us to be so proud of ourselves that we are convinced everything is under control and that nothing will stop us from getting or doing what we want.

From time to time we need a reality check, and this is what comes next in James 4. The passage makes us think about the way things really are and about how little control we actually have over anything. None of us knows what’s going to happen tomorrow – never mind what’s going to happen all of next year!

Since we can’t foresee how our future is going to unfold, we can’t trust in ourselves for security. At the same time, we shouldn’t look to other people for this security either. Our bosses can’t guarantee our continued employment, nor can the government ensure that the economy will keep going nice and steady. While both our employer and the government will certainly impact our lives, there are so many things that are beyond their control, things that can change our lives quickly and significantly.

We can only find real security when we trust in our Lord and include Him in our plans. We express our faith in Him by saying with our text: “If it is the Lord’s will,

we will live and do this or that.” What’s going to happen in the future is ultimately not based on what any of us want, but it’s based on what the Lord wants for us. We can’t see the future, but the Lord sees everything that will happen and He directs it all according to his plan for our salvation. Christ rules over all creation for the sake of his church and because He loves us, we can trust in Him.

We can plan for the New Year, but we must also keep the Lord at the centre of our plans and of all that we’ll do to accomplish them. Trust in Him because the New Year will be his to guide as He knows best! We express our faith in this truth when we add the letters A.D. to the year 2009. These two letters represent the Latin phrase *Anno Domini* or “The Year of our Lord.”

So make your plans for this year, but don’t worry whether or not everything will work out the way that you planned. Worry robs us of the ability to enjoy the blessings that the Lord promises to grant us. Instead, give your future over to Christ and believe that since this year is his, we who are his will also be secure and blessed in his love. If we go forward into the New Year with this faith, then we can be joyful even when things are uncertain and even when circumstances in our lives go differently than we had planned or hoped.





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The Frequency of the Lord's Supper Celebration

(Part 4)

Previously we considered the scriptural, church historical, and confessional aspects relating to our subject and then spent some time thinking together about the spiritual benefits of celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently. In this concluding installment, we will respond to a couple common objections that have been raised against frequent communion and mention some practical matters worth bearing in mind.

Common objections

The Lord's Supper will no longer be special

One of the most common objections to celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently is that it will no longer be special. If we use this sacrament too often, it is argued, it will become commonplace and dull. In itself, this objection is quite weak. Donald M. Poundstone, tongue in cheek, sketches the following scenario. Someone approaches the minister and says:

You know pastor, your preaching is such a blessing to me – so helpful to my spiritual growth – that I really think we should have a sermon only, say, once every several months. That way, we'll appreciate your message so much more, and they'll never become commonplace or just an empty routine.
(*New Horizons*, April 1992)

We would hardly expect someone to speak this way about the preaching. Why do we then think this way about Lord's Supper, as if it is somehow thought to provide increased benefits from decreased use?¹

Participation in the Lord's Supper is like a nourishing meal: you need it constantly and frequently for the sake of your spiritual well being. Calvin puts it this way:

The spiritual bread is not given to us to eat our fill of it all at once, but rather, that having had some taste of its sweetness, we may long for it the more, and use it when it is offered to us. . . . So long as we remain in this mortal life, Jesus Christ is never communicated in such a way as to satiate our souls, but wills to be our constant nourishment.
(*Short Treatise on the Holy Supper*)

The principle of sola scriptura is threatened

There are also those who raise the concern that the Scriptures and the preaching thereof will suffer with the rise of frequent communion.² This concern should not be brushed off, but neither should we let it cloud the issue. Devaluing the reading and preaching of the Scriptures is a constant threat to the church, against which we must always guard ourselves. But there is also

the constant danger that we create false dilemmas.

The late Rev. G. VanDooren warned against this danger of viewing the sacraments as less important. "This sentiment is not completely absent among us. 'We can do without the sacraments, but not without the preaching.' Thus one is wiser than God."³ In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, we believe that "both the Word and the sacraments [are] intended to focus our faith on the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation" (Q/A 67). Furthermore, let us not forget what we affirm in the Belgic Confession: "It is beyond any doubt that Jesus Christ did not commend his sacraments to us in vain." For through them "He works in us all that He represents to us by these holy signs" (Art 35).

We must also beware of the opposite danger, namely that because of its infrequency the supper is treated "as a very extraordinary event for which one [has] to prepare in a very special way" (VanDooren, p. 40). For in this way the Lord's Supper is in effect elevated above the weekly preaching of the Word.

The preaching of Christ's Word, as the primary means by which God works faith in our hearts (Romans 10:14-17), must always remain central in worship that aims to be scriptural. The

celebration of the Lord's Supper must never displace or crowd out the preached Word, but it is a fitting *confirmation of the Word* that Christ both instituted and commanded us to use. The late Rev. Dr. Karel Deddens stated it well:

If the Lord's Supper were celebrated more often, we should not view such a change as an accommodation to "sacramentalists" who wish to place less emphasis on the service of the Word; rather, we should view it as an execution of Christ's command ("*Do this in remembrance of Me*") in which the relationship between the Word and sacrament can still be accorded full recognition.⁴

Practical considerations

Pastoral sensitivity is essential

John Calvin never had his wish fulfilled to have Lord's Supper at least weekly in Geneva (Dalbey, p. 27). This reformer demonstrated great pastoral sensitivity and humility in this matter. He believed that the churches were to strive to celebrate the Supper frequently, "so far as the capacity of the people will admit."⁵ It has been claimed, in fact, that "[a]t one time Calvin admitted that the congregations were not spiritually ready to celebrate the Eucharist weekly."⁶ Calvin did not want this matter to cause division. Michael Horton reminds us of this, too: "It is essential that this issue of frequency never become a matter of division among us, when the sacrament was given in part to preserve unity" (*Mid-America Journal of Theology*, Vol. 11, 2000).

The churches would be wise, then, not to rush headlong towards more frequent communion. Robert C. Rayburn rightly laments: "It is

regrettable indeed that this. . . central exercise of Christian devotion should also be the point at which Christians divide and contend, sometimes bitterly, with one another" (*O Come Let us Worship*, p. 255-6). The movement towards greater frequency should take place with due deliberation, patience and wisdom, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in submission to Christ's Word.⁷

Implementation ought to be carefully considered and wisely executed

Circumstances need to be considered

If Calvin had to deal with a particular set of circumstances which impeded its implementation, so did John Knox, whose desire for frequent communion "was often thwarted by the lack of sufficiently trained Protestant ministers" (Horton, p. 165). If there are particular circumstances that prevent our churches from implementing a more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper, we should not panic, but work patiently and diligently at addressing those circumstances.

The Church Order accommodates increased frequency

The Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches prescribes only a minimum requirement concerning the frequency of celebration. It states in Article 60: "The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated at least once every three months." In practice, most Canadian Reformed

Churches presently do so every two months. This is an indication of the direction the churches wish to go, that is, in the direction of more frequent communion.⁸

Greater use of Abbreviated Form

One of the circumstances that presently impedes Canadian Reformed Churches from celebrating the Lord's Supper more frequently is the length of the adopted Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper. According to Article 56 of our Church Order, this form *must* be used. We have an abbreviated form, but it is designated "For the Second Service." Perhaps this form could be used alternately with the longer form, at least for the time being.

Although the abbreviated form is designated "For the Second Service," this does not reflect its original purpose, which was so that churches could use it to celebrate the Lord's Supper more frequently.⁹ Perhaps this is the source of Dr. Deddens' suggestion: "As first step in [the direction of more frequent communion] would be allowing the use of a shorter form. It would be possible to alternate a simpler communion liturgy with the current longer form."¹⁰ This would have the further benefit of helping to "avoid the danger of laying too much emphasis on the ceremonies surrounding the sacrament, which could lead to a devaluation of the service of the Word."

Concluding remarks

The purpose of this study has been both to move forward the discussion about the increased frequency of communion and to consider the best way of implementing it. The growing

desire for it among the churches is well grounded in the Scriptures, Reformed confessions, and church history.

If the movement in this direction is to receive God's blessing, however, its implementation ought to be carefully considered and wisely executed, so that the accusation of heedless innovation does not stick and so that the unity and health of Christ's church is preserved and strengthened.

This is not to suggest that the churches should drag their feet in this matter. I do not know of more than one church within our federation that celebrates the Lord's Supper weekly. I do not know of any that celebrate it monthly. Already ten years have passed since one of our ministers wrote on this subject in this magazine and many more years since other ministers and professors among us have in their writings made similar appeals, not to mention John Calvin's centuries old plea. What are we waiting for? Is there something we know that they did not? Let the reader judge.

¹ Jeffrey Meyers also points out the absurdity of this reasoning in *The Lord's Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), page 214.

² E.g., Robert Grossman, "Weekly Communion and the Heresy of Sacramentalism," *Reformed Herald*, Parts I-III, December 2004-February 2005. In these articles the author uses an abrasive language and tone and makes sweeping claims and accusations that are simply unwarranted by the Scriptures, inconsistent with the Reformed Confessions, and unsubstantiated by the witness of church history. He unfairly brands those who promote a

more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper as guilty of the "heresy of sacramentalism." It is one thing to make the charge. It is quite another to make it stick.

³ G. VanDooren, *The Beauty of Reformed Liturgy* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Publishing, 1980), p. 38. An example of this is Grossman's statement that "one can be saved without the Sacraments (as was the thief on the cross) by believing God's Word, but one cannot be saved without the word which speaks saving faith to man's heart" (Dec 2004, p. 8). Later, again, he says something similar: "People can be and are saved through hearing the word of God without the use of the sacraments. But people are never saved through the use of the sacraments without the Word" (Ibid, p. 9). In the second article on this topic he conveys the same idea: "Unbelievers can receive the Sacraments a thousand times, they will still go to hell, but those who believe will be saved, whether they are baptized or not, and whether they have taken the Lord's Supper or not" (Jan 2005, p. 7). It comes back again in the third article, too: "Without the Sacraments, God's promises are still God's promises. Without the Sacraments, Christ's death still atones for our sins, etc." He even asserts that in spiritual worship the sacraments have a "minor role to play" (Feb 2005, p. 4-5). There is the danger of sacramentalism, but there is also the danger of anti-sacramentalism. If Grossman is not guilty of the latter, he certainly comes close.

⁴ K. Deddens, *Where Everything Points to Him*, Trans. Theodore Plantinga (Neerlandia, AB: Inheritance Publications, 1993 [1981]), p. 91. It is noteworthy that Luther, while in favour of celebrating the Lord's Supper frequently, was quite emphatic that the preaching of the Word remain central. According to Bard Thompson, Luther went so far as to propose "that Christians should not

assemble for worship unless a sermon were preached." In his instructions *Concerning the Ordering of Divine Worship in the Congregation*, Luther stated: "This is the sum of the matter: that everything shall be done so that the Word prevails. . . We can spare everything except the Word. We profit by nothing so much as by the Word. For the whole Scripture shows that the Word should have free course among Christians. And in Luke 10, Christ Himself says: 'One thing is needful' – that Mary sit at the feet of Christ and daily hear his Word" (Bard Thompson, Ed., *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. 98.). In saying this, he was not saying that the sacraments were dispensable, of course, as Grossman virtually does. The primacy of the Word in no way renders the sacraments optional additions.

⁵ John Calvin, *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper*, paragraph 29. In this connection, Mark Dalbey wisely suggests that church work towards "more frequent communion," rather than "weekly communion." (Lectures for DM 802 Christian Worship at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, MO, January 10-14 2005.)

⁶ Kilian McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), page 205.

⁷ On this point I agree with Robert Grossman that "careful discussion" on this matter at ecclesiastical assemblies would be beneficial (Part I, December 2004, p. 6).

⁸ Cf. P. Aasman, "Celebration of the Lord's Supper – How often?" in *Clarion*, February 21, 1997, p. 78.

⁹ G. VanRongen, *Our Reformed Church Service Book* (Neerlandia, AB: Inheritance Publications, 1995), p. 217-18.

¹⁰ Deddens, p. 91. Cf. Johan G. Tangelder, "Forms and the Lord's Supper", *Christian Renewal*, Vol. 23, No. 12, March 9, 2005: p. 18.



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Evangelism according to the Scriptures (Part 1 of 3)

Evangelism is a topic which generates a variety of opinions among Reformed believers. On one side there are many who are *passionate* about evangelism. They are often disappointed, sometimes even frustrated, because they perceive that Reformed churches are too inward looking and too passive in fulfilling their evangelistic calling. On the other side there are many who are *reluctant* about evangelism. They fear that an emphasis on evangelism will cause the church to become more “evangelical” and less Reformed. They point to churches which are active in evangelism but Arminian in theology.

There is no doubt that both sides mean well and have valuable points to make. It is true that Reformed churches by and large do not have a strong performance record in terms of evangelism. On the other hand, it is also true that there is much outreach activity that does not reflect the full truth of the gospel. There is reason to be cautious.

In my opinion Reformed churches can be more effective and faithful in their evangelistic ministry without having to sacrifice anything in terms of Reformed identity. I am convinced that investing more time and effort in evangelistic ministry will

strengthen the church, provided it is done in a biblical way.

In a series of three articles I would like to make some suggestions with respect to the ministry of evangelism: (1) its Biblical basis, (2) the approach to evangelism which we have inherited from the Reformed tradition, (3) and the practice of evangelism.

Evangelism in the Old Testament

In order for us to get a biblical perspective on evangelism we have to start in the Old Testament. It is important to recognize that the people of Israel were set apart by the Lord to be a holy people and at the same time to be a light and a blessing to the nations around them.

The original calling of Abraham still applies today!

A foundational passage is Genesis 12:1-3, which tells us about the calling of Abraham. The Lord called him to leave his country, his people, and his father’s household and to go to the land the Lord would show him. The Lord promised Abraham that He would

make him into a great nation, that He would bless him, and that Abraham *would be a blessing*. The promise ends with these words: “. . .and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). We know that this blessing would ultimately be fulfilled in the coming of the Messiah. In Him the nations were to be blessed. This is a theme that is found throughout the Old Testament: the expectation of the Messiah who would come to restore God’s people and to whom the nations would come to receive salvation and an abundance of blessings.

But the fulfillment of this promise was not restricted to the work of the Messiah. Israel itself was intended and called to be a blessing to the nations. Israel was called to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation (Exod 19:6), set apart for the Lord and at the same time called to proclaim the glory of God to the nations around them. Throughout the Old Testament we read about the desire that other nations would acknowledge that Israel’s God is the only true God, good and merciful. We read about the young Israelite girl who was taken captive to the land of Aram and who told her mistress that there was a man of God in Samaria. We read how this led to the mighty commander Naaman coming to Israel and eventually

confessing "that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15).

The desire that the nations would join God's people in worshipping Him is reflected clearly in the Psalms. Psalm 67 starts with a prayer that God might be gracious to his people, bless them, and make his face shine upon them so "that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations" (v. 2). In these words the priestly benediction of Numbers 6 is quoted ("the Lord make his face shine upon you"). The desire is that the nations of the earth would share in this blessing: "May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth" (v. 4).

More passages from the Old Testament could be quoted, but we see an emerging pattern: in the first place, Israel is God's special people, his chosen nation. He dwells among them and they experience his blessings. In the second place, Israel is intended to be a blessing to the nations around them. God's people (should) have an intense desire that the nations would be able to see that life in the covenant is good, and that there will be a future during which the nations will come and join God's people to declare God's praises.

Evangelism in the New Testament

The New Testament reveals that the prophecies of the old covenant have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He has accomplished everything which the Saviour was called to do: acquiring for God's people forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. These blessings are not restricted to the

people of Israel. Before He ascended into heaven the Lord Jesus gave his disciples the great commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19).

The apostles went forth and proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ who was crucified and risen from the dead. Beginning from Jerusalem, they moved to Judea and Samaria and then other areas, calling everyone to repent and have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. People from different cultural and national backgrounds were incorporated into the church of Christ: Jews and Samaritans, Greeks and Romans, blacks and whites. God's people are recruited from all nations in the world.

Reformed churches can be more effective and faithful in their evangelistic ministry without having to sacrifice anything in terms of Reformed identity

The new covenant differs from the old covenant in many ways. But some things have not changed at all. Believers are still aliens and strangers in the world. They are still called out of the world to be a holy nation, yet they are called to live in the world as a blessing and a light to the people around them. The original calling of Abraham still applies today!

Among the passages that highlight this aspect Matthew 5:13-16 is well known: "You are the light of the world." Followers of Christ are called to let their light shine before men, "that they may see

your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." A similar passage is Philippians 2:14-16, where the Apostle Paul calls on believers to "shine like stars" among "a crooked and depraved generation."

The first epistle of Peter also speaks eloquently about the calling of Christians to be a light to the people around. The Apostle addresses Christians as "strangers in the world" (1:1) who have been "chosen" and called *out of the world* (1:2). At the same time he emphasizes their calling *in the world*: "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (2:9). Peter emphasizes both the "called-out" aspect and the "be-a-blessing" aspect of the Christian life.

1 Peter 2:11-12 reflects the same approach: "I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

It has been suggested by some that Christians are to witness by their walk of life only (not by verbally evangelizing others). In 1 Peter there is not really such a dilemma. The Christian walk of life is clearly important: Christian wives are called to win their unbelieving husbands by their godly behaviour (3:1). At the same time the Apostle exhorts Christians to speak up when there are opportunities. Peter says: "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (3:15).

We may draw the conclusion that a consistent picture emerges from both the Old and the New Testament: God's people are a chosen people, called out of the world, called to live a holy life that (by the grace of God) will be instrumental in winning over others to repent and join God's people. While Christians are citizens of another Kingdom, they are called to be a blessing to others in this world so that many more people would find salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Balanced approach

A balanced approach is needed. The church is called out of the world but the church is also called to let its light shine into the world. Sometimes the "separation-from-the-world" aspect is emphasized so strongly that the church lives in isolation from the broader society. The social network of believers is limited to the church network.

Having contacts with un-churched people is frowned upon and considered to be dangerous.

God's people should have an intense desire that the nations would be able to see that life in the covenant is good

This is not what the Bible teaches us. The Apostle Paul assumes that believers have all kinds of contacts with outsiders. He does not exhort believers to avoid contact with unbelievers. He simply assumes that they have such contacts and he encourages them to "be wise in the way you act toward outsiders, making the most of every opportunity" (Col 4:5).

Sometimes, however, the missionary calling of the church is

overemphasized to the extent that the church is seen primarily as church-for-others. It is suggested that the church's main reason to exist is to be a mission to the world. The problem with this approach is that one forgets that the church is called to live a holy life, apart from the world. The church is not just a body of people that needs to increase in numbers – it also needs to be preserved. The Apostle Peter said on the day of Pentecost: "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation!" (Acts 2:40)

In the light of these considerations we may conclude that evangelism is one of the ministries which the Lord has given to his church. Every part of this statement is important: evangelism is a ministry given by the Lord (therefore we may not neglect it). It is a ministry given to the church (therefore the whole church is responsible). And it is one of the ministries which the Lord has given to the church (not the only one). The church has received a variety of ministries from the Lord: preaching, teaching, worship, pastoral supervision, diaconal help, and the spreading of the gospel in the world (mission and evangelism).

There is no doubt, then, that evangelism is an important calling of the church. Every local congregation should examine itself whether it is faithful in this calling. And the Canadian Reformed churches should examine themselves whether – as a federation – we are diligent and faithful in proclaiming the gospel to our fellow citizens in this country.

In the next article I hope to say more about the approach to evangelism which we have inherited from previous generations.



A Willoughby Welcome



As far as vacancies go ours wasn't too bad. It had been two years since Rev. Kampen left Willoughby Heights. For the most part our pulpit had been filled with the presence of local ministers. Yet we missed the consistency of our own pastor and we missed the cohesion only your own minister can bring to a congregation.

Installation

So on August 24, 2008 the air sparked with excitement. That day was the first of a new era: Rev. A. Souman would be installed as our new minister.

Rev. J. Visscher led the worship service explaining the comfort the Lord gives his people through special men. The pastor works with the congregation in rehearsal today, preparing for the great performance tomorrow at Christ's return.

Immediately following the installation service Brother P. deBoer recounted the calling process and acknowledged God's blessing to now receive Rev. Souman in our midst. Then Rev. Souman signed the subscription form promising to adhere to the three forms of unity.

That afternoon we could enjoy our first sermon by our new minister. Since he had never before had an opportunity to preach in Willoughby, this was a first for many of us. We were not disappointed. He taught us that the preaching of God's word is indispensable for the church because it is from God, shows the way of life, and equips us for life with God.

Welcome evening

The excitement was not over. On Friday, September 12 we came together to enjoy some light-hearted fellowship. The fun began early with the collection bags being passed around. They were full of *dropjes* and other *snoopies*. The bag made many rounds through the church, but when I checked on Sunday it was back to the old routine.

Peter deBoer gave a monologue on the crazy English language. Is our new minister Rev. "Sow-man" or "Sue-man?" What is the correct pronunciation?



A welcome gift of a GPS.



How can you say for sure in a language where you pour yourself a glass of sour lemonade? Pete had us in stitches as he wondered why if teachers taught why didn't preachers praught? If vegetarians eat vegetables, what do humanitarians eat? And why, if slim chance and fat chance mean the same thing, are wise man and wise guy complete opposites? He concluded that he was not qualified to confirm the correct pronunciation and he hoped Rev. Souman would enlighten us later.

The program moved on with the children's choir welcoming their new peers. In our small congregation the arrival of six children at once causes quite a stir.

Just in case anyone was getting bored stiff sister Kathleen Vanderleest got us moving with a stretch. Naming twelve things to do in BC to the tune of "The 12 Days of Christmas" she had everyone jumping up and down. Had they

realized the five weeks of rain would come over and over the Soumans might have reconsidered their move. But it's too late. They are here now!

In preparation for their arrival, the manse has been completely renovated. You would not recognize the old building with its facelift, nips and tucks and internal

cleansing. Sister Yvonne Jacobi read a poem detailing the project. Then Brother Jack Aikema called up members who had helped out along the way. In the end nearly the whole congregation was standing. Good thing not everyone helped or there would have been no one to take the picture!

After a few speeches by the Reverends VanVliet and Lodder, and a power point introducing the congregation, Rev. Souman spoke a few words. He cleared up the question of his name's pronunciation. It's "Sow-man," rhymes with "cow-man." He joked about being told to say only a "few" words noting his sermons tend to consist of many words. Apparently his name sounds like the Indonesian word for "eternity." Is that indicative of the length of his sermons? But seriously, it is better to have long sermons than no sermons. And we are glad to have Rev. Souman preaching them here.



Keith Sikkema

Mr. Keith Sikkema is principal of Dufferin Area Christian School in Orangeville, Ontario
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Peregrine Survey



It seems that new school years are always filled with new initiatives and ideas. This Peregrine Survey reflects that tendency for the 2008-2009 year.

Government impacts

The North American obesity epidemic is having its effects in the remotest corners of the Canadian Reformed world. Along with all schools in B.C., Smithers found itself mandated by the Ministry of Education to involve students in Daily Physical Activity (DPA). DPA is defined as "endurance, strength and/or flexibility activities done on a daily basis. For Kindergarten, schools must offer 15 minutes of DPA as part of students' educational program. For grades 1-8, schools must offer 30 minutes of DPA as part of students' education program. For grades 10-12, students must document and report a minimum of 150 minutes per week of physical activity, at a moderate to vigorous intensity, as part of their Graduation Transitions Program."

Schools in Alberta report the option of increased government funding in exchange for increased accountability. In fact, Alberta Education has announced that the per pupil government grant would be increased from sixty to seventy percent. This increase is linked to higher fiscal surpluses and gives reason for gratitude to God. The increased accountability means that it will be at the same level as other schools and requires participation in standardized educational surveys

and sharing the statistical outcomes of such surveys.

A local Ontario attempt to tap into *Swim to Survive* grants of the *Life Saving Society* (see <http://www.lifesavingsociety.com/default.asp>) ran into an obstacle when it became clear that the Minister of Education had expressly "mandated that their funds be appropriated for publicly funded schools only." Funding from the Ministry of Health may remain available, but one wonders whether Ontario's Ministry of Education is interested in sustaining the survival of private schools and their students.

Discussions and reflections

In Neerlandia, a discussion has been started to shift the responsibility for preparing and serving the Graduation Dinner from volunteers to the Grade 11 moms. This is common practice, they found, in many school societies and they'd like to give it a whirl. The staff is making an effort this year to learn more about the Four Markers of Reformed Education. The school critically revisited its implementation of a new French program after three years – and decided to return to the old program in grades 7-10 while making the three-year old materials useful in grades 4-6.

Edmonton's education committee held "a meeting to open communications with the 'home schoolers' within the community. There are three government

categories for home schooling and inside of each category there are different approaches. The school society would be hard pressed to put together one registered home school to serve all the Canadian Reformed home schooling families in the way that they each desire. The meeting went very well and all involved reached a common understanding." Other than what has been quoted, no specifics of that common understanding were shared.

In an earlier edition of the "Peregrine Survey," I reminisced with a board chairman on the need for allowing board members to finish their term. What about women on the board, however? The same chairman acknowledges that

A position on the board held by a woman should not be connected to, or compared to, an officebearer in the church. However, consider how closely we connect our homes, our schools, and the church. We expect that in a God-fearing family a man should take a leadership role. The form for solemnization of marriage is quite clear on that. We expect and defend on the basis of Scripture that men should take a leadership role in the church. Is it therefore too much of a stretch and unreasonable to expect men who vowed to take a leadership role in their homes, who vowed to do their utmost to teach or have their children taught in the doctrines of the church, to also give a good example in

Church News

Declined the call to Burlington-Waterdown, Ontario:

Rev. J. VanWoudenberg
of Guelph, Ontario.

Declined the call to Ancaster, Ontario:

Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer
of Carman (East) Manitoba.

Declined the call to the church of Owen Sound, Ontario:

Rev. R. Bredenhof
of St. Albert, Alberta.

Called by the church of Elora, Ontario:

Rev. C.J. VanderVelde
of Tintern, Ontario.

providing leadership when it comes to the covenantal education of their children?

It could be that in trying to provide a solution we mask the real problem. All too often the tasks are left in the hands of too few. At times men who have capabilities and potential, when asked to serve for a position on the board, decline for reasons that appear to lack substance. As men, we do well to examine our priorities and ask ourselves if we could be doing more.

One retiring board chairman clearly enjoyed his stint, and cites the following causes of this enjoyment:

Seeing God's grace at work amongst our children through the teachers. Seeing others use their talents and abilities for a common goal, the education of God's children. Seeing the reality of the many talents God has given, and how each board member has their own unique abilities. Working with a professional staff and principal. Getting to know board members, staff and principals across the region and beyond. Getting to know that there are many who have unique abilities and talents and that they are more than willing, sometimes eager, to use them for the benefit and well being of others.

Understanding more clearly and being thankful for the fact that there is a real common goal amongst the members for their children to grow in faith and knowledge of God.

In the same society, nominated prospective board members received the opportunity to introduce themselves, their talents, and their desire to tackle the challenges of school board membership.

Building

London reportedly obtained a "new" school building with all the facilities they could possibly wish for. Their original building was no longer adequate, but is expected to fetch enough money to pay for the new one and some needed repairs. Neerlandia gratefully reports great progress towards full completion and remodelling of its facilities: three classrooms in the old gym, a new gym, a kitchen/home economics room, washrooms/change-rooms, and a common area. Dufferin Area Christian School also sees good progress on its new gym with stage and change-rooms, servery, and computer lab.

A different kind of building is taking place in Washington, D.C. Harvard University and the District of Columbia jointly sponsor a one-year, \$2.7 million pilot project to encourage middle school students to do better in science, math, reading, attendance, and behaviour. There are 3300 students in the fifteen participating schools, and they can expect a bi-weekly payout of up to \$100 for doing well. In one school, the average first pay cheque amounted to \$43. Some students were disappointed and felt they deserved better. Others felt slighted, as they didn't need the money to do their best. Some said they would try harder for their next pay. Some chose to raise their hand more often in class, or talk less. One wonders what is being built here.

Among the Canadian Reformed Teachers Associations (CRTA), both east and west, such pilot projects would raise serious questions. How well will these students do when the grant money runs out? What sort of evolutionary and behaviourist stimulus-response thinking that takes this seriously is

at work here? What actually motivates us and our students to use the talents God gave in his service? Such reflections are frequently among the staple of CRTA conventions. The CRTA-West had its October 9-10 Convention in Regina this year, where the prairie teachers learned about Conflict Resolution and Peacemaking. It was characterized as a time to draw near to God in praise and devotion, giving thanks for the blessings of Reformed Education. The CRTA-East had its October 30-31 Convention in Smithville this year. Its theme was *Life in Abundance*. We hope to report on both conventions in more detail.

At the Eastern CRTA Convention, the new CRTA magazine was launched in full colour and on glossy paper. As a professional magazine, it will be able to fill a void in sharing professional material and

stimulating professional development among the CRTA membership. The CRTA executive is to be commended for this launch. It also set high new expectations for the professional development of teachers. It plans to cooperate closely with the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies' ("the League's") Professional Development Committee (PDC) on these matters and suggests that it really should be self-regulating. The PDC itself reports that it has begun work on a

new professional development model and that it wants to work with the notion of contractual obligations for professional development and maintaining professional portfolios. This notion is propagated by the League's compensation committee in its proposed Personnel Manual. Among other noteworthy features of the new magazine, we find a discussion (with divergent views) on the topic of Competition. For anyone in the teaching profession, whether as a teacher or board or

committee member, the new CRTA magazine promises to be an enlightening read. May the Lord bless the efforts put into it!

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

Book Review

Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

***The Pearl of Christian Comfort*
Petrus Dathenus.
Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2005**

**Additional Information:
Paperback, 87 pages, \$9.50**

Whether we realize it or not, we Reformed folk owe a huge debt to Petrus Dathenus (1531-1588). Whenever we gather for worship in our churches, we sing the Psalms on tunes that Dathenus was instrumental in spreading around Europe. Most of our liturgical forms were put together by Dathenus. Through his Dutch translation, Dathenus was responsible for introducing the Heidelberg Catechism to the Reformed churches of The Netherlands. Our

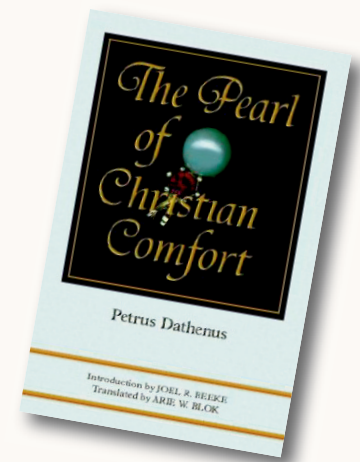
church order, too, is largely based on work by Dathenus and others.

Before becoming Reformed, Dathenus was a Carmelite monk in what is today Belgium. Some of the Carmelites became sympathetic to the Reformation – and were burned at the stake for it. This made an impression on Dathenus and was part of the means by which God converted him. He went on to become a Reformed pastor.

This is an important little (eighty-seven pages) book by Dathenus. It was originally written to instruct and comfort "all troubled hearts who are not properly able to distinguish between the law and the gospel." It takes the form of a dialogue between Dathenus and a young woman named Elizabeth. Elizabeth has just come back from church and is depressed because of what she heard. The minister preached

the curse of the law and this left Elizabeth in despair. Through the course of the book, Dathenus shows how the law is necessary (it points to Christ and guides our thankfulness), but also how the gospel really is good news for sinners.

The beauty of this book is in its simplicity. It's not a complicated theological book, but a simple, warm pastoral conversation. More than that, this little book is packed with Scripture. That makes it truly a "pearl" of Christian comfort. Highly recommended!





To the Editor of *Clarion*,

On page 569 you note to readers that as of January 2009 you will no longer publish the Acts of our classes.

The Acts of the various classes is one the features of *Clarion* that holds my subscription. It makes the *Clarion* a "Canadian Reformed magazine."

To publish only as an editor may see the necessity is giving the editors too much influence. Please reconsider this decision. I am afraid that your (not our) magazine will lose.

Regards,
Bill Heemskerk
Subscriber since 1983

From the Editor

At a recent *Clarion* meeting it was decided to stop publishing Press Releases from various classes and regional synods. Several contributing editors were instructed to go through these press releases and print, as well as comment, if need be, on any major decisions.

The two main reasons for this decision are:

- a) Often these Press Releases say very little but take up much valuable space;
- b) Press Releases in their entirety can be accessed on the federational website.

Br. Bill Heemskerk (above) wants us to keep printing them as has been done in the past. What is your opinion? Please let us know. (In order to give you time to get your opinions in, we will delay our decision for six months and then review it again.)

The Editor

Dear Editor,

Over the last few editions of *Clarion*, I have become very interested in the arguments that have started from the article written by Dr. de Visser. Statements that were made in the last article of *Clarion* by Rev. van Popta about the testing of the updated psalms and proposed hymns prompted me to write this letter.

I would like to share my thoughts in regards to the testing of the updated psalms and hymns in the worship service. Since birth I have belonged to a Canadian Reformed church. After reading and studying the arguments that have come forward on

this issue, I sometimes wonder whether I am part of a dysfunctional democratic judicial system.

Our church has a church order. In it we have Article 55, which states: "The metrical Psalms and Hymns adopted by general synod as well as the Hymns approved by general synod shall be sung in the worship service." To me this is clear and to the point. This article can have only one meaning. The psalms and hymns that we sing in church are to be the ones that have been approved by general synod. This means that not even a general synod has the right to ask or "allow" the churches to use unapproved or even not-yet-existing rhyming during the worship services. In order for a general synod to be allowed to do this and, consequently, for the churches to sing them during the worship services, Article 55 of the Church Order will first have to be changed. If our church were to be a democratic state and this article was a law, I'm sure no judge would have a problem to cast a guilty verdict if this law was transgressed. So why the grey area? Why the arguing?

To begin with I am thankful to state that our church is not a democracy. It is a theocracy with Our Lord Jesus Christ as the one head of the church. I am also thankful to state that our church federation has adopted a church order in order to maintain order and to insure that things were done in a Christian and brotherly way. I believe what has created the grey area, as to how we are to test the proposed hymns and subsequently the revised psalms, are the considerations made by general synod Smithers. "3.7 re 2.8: the last time hymns in our federation were tested they were sung in the worship services." It is clear from this consideration that Synod has used a past decision to set a precedent.

Now let us take into consideration as to why the testing of the hymns was done in the past. From what I have learned it was done out of necessity. The ministers and office bearers at the time had a difficult decision to make. During a transition of countries and languages, the translation of psalms

and hymns was a slow process. The selection of English hymns and psalms were few. It was a choice between silence in the worship service or testing. In this case testing was necessary.

If we forget our history, we are doomed to repeat it. But to use past decisions to justify our actions today is a step in the wrong direction. If our church was a state, based on this train of thought, the law could no longer be upheld. The law would be changed, updated, or swept into the dustbin of history. The past decision was made out of necessity. I am thankful that I was raised using the current *Book*

of Praise. A collection of psalms and hymns that allow us as Christians to praise and thank the Lord for what He has done for us. Now that we have such an abundance of songs, I would like to pose this question: why has it become necessary to test the proposed hymns and updated psalms during the worship service? Let us as Christians remain humble and allow things to follow their proper course, in order to maintain good order and remain faithful to our God until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Yours in Christ,
Steve VanOene*

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*

Press Release

Press Release of the meeting of the combined committees of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose a common church order held November 11-12, 2008 at the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed in Burlington, ON

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema, and Mr. Harry Van Gorp representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC).

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Romans 13:1-7, and prayer.

The minutes of the August 22-24, 2006 and October 27, 2007 meetings were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next two days.

The respective 2007 General Synods of the two federations had adopted the recommendation to present to the churches the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) and the four-column comparison report for discussion and evaluation. Official communications regarding the PJCO is to proceed from and through consistories to the PJCO Committee. Further, that the Committee be authorized to hold no more than eight regional conferences to present and discuss various provisions of the PJCO. So far, the Committee received letters from seven Canadian Reformed churches and two United Reformed churches. Regional conferences have been held so far in Ancaster, ON; Abbotsford, BC; Edmonton, AB; Lethbridge, AB; Winnipeg, MB. All conferences were well attended with good representation from consistories and interested members of both the URCNA and CanRC. Requests were received from consistories in the United States for similar conferences to be conducted there.

Most of the time of the two-day meeting of the combined committee was dedicated to the letters received from the nine consistories and the comments and feedback from the conferences. It was decided to set up and maintain a two-column document with the original 2007 PJCO in the one column and a proposed 2010 PJCO in the second column for easy comparison. The second column would reflect changes made as a result of input from the churches. The input received covered a wide spectrum of the PJCO and it is not possible in a press release to provide all the details of the discussions and decisions. The following are some of the main points.

The status and function of the Foundational Principles were questioned. It is to be understood that they function as a basis for the Church Order and are also meant to be didactic in nature. To prevent the suggestion that they also have a quasi confessional function it was decided to change the name to "Foundational Statements" and to

change the first line in Article 58 to "These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, having been adopted by common consent, shall be observed diligently." Scripture references were added to other articles in the Foundational Statements and some factual and spelling errors were corrected.

The requirement of subscription to the Three Forms of Unity by office bearers was added to Article 2 and removed from the individual articles dealing with the offices.

Article 4a, Theological Education, may require revision, but it is impossible to finalize this article at this time. The Theological Education Committee will need to provide input.

Article 7, An ordained Minister without a Congregation Entering the Federation, was changed to make a distinction between ministers coming from a federation with which ecclesiastical fellowship is maintained and those from federations not in ecclesiastical fellowship.

The provisions in articles 17 and 25d regarding the duties of the elders to "promote confessionally Reformed schooling at all levels" and for classis to inquire whether "confessionally Reformed schooling is wholeheartedly promoted" resulted in a considerable reaction and requests for clarification. Other than to drop the adjective "wholeheartedly" from art. 25d, it was decided to leave the wording as is. The phrase "at all levels" is to be seen as a general directive. It is arbitrary to restrict to a specific level of education such as primary or secondary.

Article 21c included the requirement for each delegate to broader assemblies "to indicate his agreement with the Form of Subscription." It was agreed to

delete this sentence from the article. It is to be considered that the churches delegate these men. The broader assemblies do not have the authority to ask this question nor to discipline those who might be at odds with the Form of Subscription.

In order to clarify the intent of Art 31 Ecumenical Relations, it was decided to divide the article into two sections. The first section deals with ecumenical relations on the local level, while the second deals with ecclesiastical fellowship with other federations.

Regret was expressed that both Synod Smithers 2007 and Synod Schererville 2007 expressed an opinion regarding Article 35 Psalms and Hymns without the benefit of the rationale of a majority report.

Several consistory letters questioned the wording of Article 41 Admission to the Lord's Supper. Also at the conferences this article received a lot of attention. All feedback was duly considered by the committee and some changes were agreed to. The article now reads: "The consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord's Supper. To that end, the consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those members who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Visitors may be admitted to the Lord's Supper provided that the consistory has secured confirmation, by means of letter of testimony or interview, regarding proper profession of faith, their godly walk of life, and their biblical church membership."

It was agreed that Article 55 Appeals and Procedures does not belong in the section dealing with discipline. It will be put under the division of Assemblies. This will result in a renumbering of the

subsequent articles. Also specific references to appendices by number will be removed from the church order.

The wording in several other articles were changed to provide clarity and to prevent misinterpretation, without changing the original intent of those articles. The committee has been made aware of additional correspondence coming from the churches which may result in further changes to the PJCO.

Some discussion took place about the appropriateness of organizing churches as a corporation. It is not clear if this belongs to the mandate of the committee. Since it is of concern among the churches this matter deserves the attention of CERCU and the coordinators of the CanRC. They will be informed accordingly.

Work on regulations for synod, credentials for delegates to broader assemblies, and appendices was assigned and will be on the agenda of the next meeting of the committee.

To complete the mandate given by the respective synods, the committee agreed to dates for additional regional conferences. The churches that requested these conferences will be contacted.

The committee set up a web site which has the Proposed Joint Church Order and the 4-column comparison report available for downloading in preparation for the regional conferences. The address is <http://sites.google.com/site/churchorderpjco>.

Following prayer of praise and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father for the work that could be accomplished in brotherly harmony Dr. Kloosterman closed the meeting.

*For the committee,
Gerard J. Nordeman*