

Clarion

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*The task of
the elders is to
safeguard the
Lord's Supper*

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Open Communion?

How should the church of Jesus Christ deal with guests at the Lord's Supper?

No longer quiet

For the longest time in my ministry the Lord's Supper was what you might call "the quiet sacrament." In other words, very few questions were asked about it and little or no controversy swirled around it.

Naturally, this differs quite a bit from the time of the sixteenth century when the Lord's Supper was the centre of a great deal of debate and disagreement. Why, it even led to more than a few wars!

At the same time this sacrament is also different from that other sacrament of holy baptism which has always attracted its share of fireworks. How much water, what's in the water, and who gets the water have been perennial issues. Over against all of this the Lord's Supper seemed to have become the mellow sacrament.

Yet that has changed! Once again there are churches also in our federation who struggle with this sacrament. They struggle not so much with what it means or how to interpret and understand it, as with how to administer it. Common cup, multiple cups, wine and/or grape juice, sitting at table or in the pew, all of these aspects are being debated.

Admission

And so is something else. It has to do with admission, specifically the admission of guests. When it comes to them, the question is whether or not to maintain a position of restricted (close) communion or move to one of open communion?

Now, it has to be said that this is not a loud debate at the moment. There are not a lot of people championing this cause in our circles but on occasion there are questions, and sometimes there are complaints, and even accusations. So before the questions multiply and the complaints turn shrill, it

may be of benefit to look a little closer at this matter. How should the church of Jesus Christ deal with guests at the Lord's Supper?

Different approaches – closed or open

A quick survey reveals that historically there have been three different answers to this question. Some churches such as the Roman Catholic Church and some Baptist and Lutheran churches have adopted a closed communion approach. This means that only members of that particular church or federation may partake of the sacrament and no others. In this approach the key to admission is being a member of that church and/or being the recipient of a particular practice of that church. For example, there are Baptist churches which insist that only those who have undergone complete water immersion are qualified to partake of the Supper.

Is the church after Pentecost not a body composed of peoples from all tribes and nations?

At the other end of the scale there is the more recent, and perhaps more prevalent, practice of open communion. It holds that all who consider themselves to be believers or Christians are welcome to participate. In this situation the local church leaves the matter of eating and drinking solely up to the conscience and responsibility of those who are present. All the guests who feel so inclined may join in. It does not matter what church they belong to, what their doctrinal views are, or what their lifestyle is like, it is up to them. If they partake, they and they alone, not the church, will have to answer for it.



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In between these extremes of closed and open communion, there is a third approach. It is not that widespread but it is practiced by any number of Reformed, Presbyterian, and other churches around the world. It is called "restricted" or "close" communion. It goes out from the perspective that admission to the sacrament is not just a matter of individual choice and responsibility. Also the local church and its office bearers must have a say in this matter. Indeed, the latter ultimately determine under what conditions guests may partake. The hosting church thus sets the conditions.

Restricted or close

Now even within the circle of those churches who practice restricted or close communion, conditions can and do vary. Some of these churches fence the table with a stern verbal warning and stress to both members and visitors that if they partake carelessly, they will bring judgment on themselves. They thus restrict verbally, but is that sufficient? Other churches in this camp insist on an interview with all guests and, depending on the result of that interview, admit or do not admit them. Still others request guests to read a written statement, answer a number of pertinent questions about their beliefs, lifestyle, and church membership and ask them to sign on the dotted line. After this they inform the home church that so and so has celebrated the sacrament with them. Then too there are a few churches like us in the Canadian Reformed federation who urge members to use written attestations or letters of testimony in order to secure admission as guests.

Which is biblical?

In light of these three different general approaches, the question may be asked, "Which approach is right? Which is most in line with what Scripture teaches? Which practice should a local church adopt and administer?"

Catholic – not closed

Well, let us consider the closed position. What is it saying? In the case of the Roman Catholic Church it is saying that only the Roman Church is the true church of Christ and those only those who are members of it may partake of his body and blood. Some other churches insist on the same exclusiveness and thus maintain the same restriction. They are saying "to partake you need to be on our church rolls."

Needless to say, there is something easy and convenient about this approach. No interviews are required, no letters need to be read and no announcements have to be made.

But is it in step with the biblical teaching about the church? Specifically, what does it say about the catholic, universal character of the church? Is the church after Pentecost not a body composed of peoples from all tribes and nations? Is it not on the march to that eschatological church depicted in Revelation 4, 5, and 21?

A careful study of the book of Acts points out that the apostles embraced believers in many places. They did not say to them, "First join the church in Jerusalem and then we will recognize you as fellow believers and admit you to the celebration of the Lord's Supper." At the Supper of our Lord room and opportunity must be made for all those who believe and confess the "catholic and undoubted Christian faith" (HC, LD 7, A. 22).

Holy – not open

If "closed" is not the way to go, what then about "open"? Is the matter of partaking not a matter of individual choice and responsibility? Should the Lord's Supper not be open to all?

Again, it may be pointed out that also this approach is easy for a local church. From time to time it may be accompanied with somewhat of a warning from the pulpit, but often even that does not happen. It is all up to you! And that's OK as far as many people are concerned. They will tell you that it is not the task of the church to judge anyone anyway.

True enough! Of course, judgment belongs to the Lord! Read Romans 14 and so forth.

But is that all there is to it? What about the fact that the Lord's Supper is supposed to be a holy meal (1 Cor 10:14-22; 1 Cor 11:17-34)? What else does it signify and seal but the broken body and shed blood of our Saviour (Matt 26:20-30; Mark 14:17-26, Luke 22:14-30; John 13:21-30)? In short, this Supper is no ordinary supper. It is a special, unique, singular, and spiritual supper.

In addition, it is also a dangerous supper. Some church members in Corinth discovered that too late. In 1 Corinthians 10 the Apostle Paul warns the believers that they cannot eat from two different tables. You either eat from the Lord's Table and are blessed or you eat from the table of demons and are on the receiving end of "the Lord's jealousy" (1 Cor 10:22). In 1 Corinthians 11 he says that they should not be surprised by the fact that some of them are weak, sick, and that even a few have died. That's what happens

when you eat and drink casually and do not recognize the holy and special character of the body of the Lord (1 Cor 11:29).

In Corinth they practiced a form of open communion and the results were plain to see!

Catholic, holy – restricted

Where does this leave us? First, it leaves us with the need to acknowledge that the Lord's Supper is a meal for all true believers. Second, it tells us that this is a special meal that needs to be handled with great care.

Fine, but how does one work this out? The answer lies with the elders of the church! Paul says to the elders of the church at Ephesus and to elders everywhere, "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Elsewhere he says that it are the elders who "direct the affairs of the church" (1 Tim 5:17). Also, the writer of Hebrews tells us that "they keep watch over you as men who must give an account" (Heb 13:17).

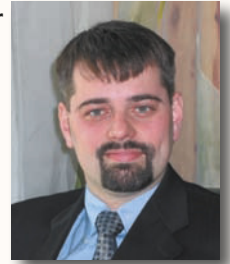
In light of these and other references, it remains exceedingly odd that there are churches out there who consider themselves biblically based but who have no elders. As for churches who have them, it stands to reason that they have been called to play a vital role in all of the affairs of the church, and that surely must include the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. How can something so special and so important fail to attract their attention? Do they not have a calling to promote its catholic character? Should they not be concerned about its holiness? How can they fail to protect, as much as they can, any and all from drinking judgment to themselves?

Summing-up

Hence it falls within the task of the elders to safeguard this sacrament. They are to keep watch over the members in their charge, admitting to it those in good standing. At the same time they are to see to it that the guests who are welcomed and received profess the Reformed faith and lead a godly life.

Two things then go hand in hand here. First, members and guests are to engage in a sincere searching of their hearts. Second, elders are to keep watch over the welfare of the flock and the holiness of the table of the Lord. Together it's a recipe for blessing!





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MATTHEW 13:52

Sacrificial Love Proves Genuine Faith (Part 2 of 3)

Serve One Another

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

Galatians 5:13

If the church at Rome was threatened by a lack of sacrificial love, as we saw last time, so was the church in Galatia. Some Jews in the church were insisting that the Gentiles had to become just like them if they wanted to be true believers. They insisted that everyone, like them, needed to be circumcised and needed to follow many other Old Testament laws and rituals.

In short, these holier-than-thou Jews were being domineering in their self-righteousness. They were lording it over one another. They wanted to be masters over one another in the church. As a result, the believers in Galatia were a contentious, miserable lot!

So Paul tells them to serve one another, just as Christ did for them. Consider what Paul had told them several verses earlier: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal 5:6).

Love, especially the sacrificial love that we learn from Christ, does not dominate. Rather, it serves. Consider how Jesus Himself became a servant. And it was love

that motivated Him to do so. It is because the Son of God loved me that He sacrificed Himself for me, Paul says in chapter 2: “The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (v 21).

In the original Greek version of Galatians 5:13, the emphasis is placed on this love. It says: “Through love serve one another.” In other words, sacrificial love is what will motivate us to serve one another.

But someone might ask: “Didn’t Christ come to set people free from servitude?” Yes, He did. He set us free from slavery to Satan and sin, so that we might become servants for Christ! And now Paul tells us, we who have become servants of Christ: “Through love you now need to make yourselves servants of one another.”

In Christ, freedom and servanthood are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they stand in the closest possible relationship to one another. As Christians then, we are both free in Christ and we are servants to one another. In fact, it is by being servants to one another that we fully experience the freedom that we have in Christ.



Illustration by Sheila Van Delft

Yes, it’s a mystery, and to many in this world it seems scandalous. But was there anything more scandalous than the death of the pure and holy Son of God for the salvation of wicked, rebellious, and worthless creatures, such as we once were?

Jesus Christ made Himself a servant in order to give us freedom. He did it, so that we who are now free may become servants to one another. Scandalous? Perhaps. But it’s the path to glory.

It was for Christ. And it is for all who long for his appearing. Do you doubt it? Serve one another, as Christ has served you, and you will see.



New Perspectives on the Church and Charismatic Gifts? (Part 2 of 2)

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This article was originally a public lecture at the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton, October 16, 2008.

1.3 What is the meaning of *charismata*?

With these fundamental biblical notions in mind, we may also gain a deeper perspective on the matter of experience and how it relates to the congregation of God. For also when we deal with the *charismata* this relational character of spiritual life is central, as is the fact that the Holy Spirit is so intensely related to Christ.

In the Paraclete texts in John 14-16 the personal character of the Spirit of truth, the Comforter, is emphasized.¹ There we find promises saying what He will be for the disciples and for the congregation after Jesus is taken away from them. Most specifically, it is made clear that the Paraclete resembles Jesus. In fact, all that is said about the Comforter elsewhere in the gospel is also said of Jesus.² The reality of the experience of the Comforter lies in our relationship with Christ by faith.³

Since Pentecost or the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we have the assurance of the continuation of the salvation that has come to us in Christ. That is how the gospels announce Pentecost. It is not strange that in this connection we hardly find any mention of the gifts of the Spirit. Compared to the fundamental promises in the gospels, it could be said that the *charismata* lie at the periphery of our personal Christian life, although they are of great importance to the church.⁴

What, then, is the function of spiritual gifts? Paul speaks about them in 1 Corinthians 12-14. I must summarize what we find there.⁵ *Charismata* are not qualities that provide some extra value to man; they are gifts in order to serve. The central idea is the word *oikodomè*, which means the building up of the church. When the *charismata* like glossolalia and prophesy are considered gifts that mostly serve our own personal

"experience," then that is contrary to how Paul speaks about these gifts. The apostle directed his warning precisely against the tendency that was disturbing the church in Corinth in which one believer would consider himself superior to another (see also 1 Cor. 1:7). Corinth needed a sound view of the body of Christ. And with all the spiritual gifts that were being pursued in the congregation, such a sound view was missing.⁶

The simple directive regarding *glossolalia* as something that should be understood makes this clear. If nobody understands it, how can it build up? The tendency in Corinth to turn the special gift of glossolalia into something of extra value for him who has the gift completely shattered this.⁷ For that reason prophesy is more valuable, because there we find understandable language. It is clear that also with respect to prophesy the tendency to pursue something higher, or more, is condemned by Paul's teaching. A New Testament scholar, Ernst Käsemann, not exactly a Reformed theologian, said with regard to what is peculiar about the *charismata*, that there is a difference with heathen *pneumatiká* (originating from a demonic spirit), because what makes a charisma legitimate is not the fascination for the supernatural, but the building up of the congregation.⁸ In the congregation of Corinth the majority wanted to put themselves in the foreground by means of the manifestations of the Spirit. However, the *charismata* are given to make others come to the front.⁹

A Dutch charismatic theologian (Parmentier) gave a beautiful description of the *charismata*. He called them "the body functions of the church." Alas, he not does really focus on the building up of the congregation, but on the special spiritual possibilities of living by the Spirit.¹⁰ This tendency is characteristic in all sorts of publications about the gifts of the Spirit.

If we look at the broad range of gifts found in 1 Corinthians 12, in Romans 12 and in Ephesians 4, we clearly see how all of them are directed to the body

of Christ. As soon as someone pursues some gift as a means of higher personal spiritual experience, we hear Paul using the words "puffed up." The basic intention of Christ is to make it impossible for somebody to become fixated on his or her own gifts. For that reason Paul admonishes us "not to go beyond what is written, and that no one be puffed up for one man over against another. . . and what do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:6-7). The apostle's words in Colossians 2:18-19 flow in the same direction when he warns people who boast about the visions they have seen as if they were the manifestations of angels. Apparently Paul is not impressed, because he strongly stresses that we have to keep the connection with our Head, Christ! He even speaks of an unspiritual mind that puffs up such a man!

How reticent the apostle is when dealing with his own qualities. He could easily have boasted about his study, his addiction to the service of God, his being irreproachable according to the standard of the law and about the status of special gifts. However, all such things which he used to see as profit, he now considers as garbage because of Christ. Why? Because the knowledge of Christ, his Lord, surpasses all this (Phil 3:5-8). Faith in Christ and the grace of Christ are applied by the apostle as the benchmarks of his service. And *if* his service really was not in vain it is because, as he says, "Yet it was not I, but the grace of God that was with me" (1 Cor 15:10). Remember that this remark was directed deliberately at the Corinthians who were so preoccupied with the "enriching" possibilities of their charismata!

It is not by chance that in the biblical word *charisma* we find the word *charis* and that first of all it means "grace."

II. New Insights?

2.1 The problem of a real discussion

I announced this lecture as dealing with "new insight?" I did this because some remarks have to be made regarding the plea for a greater openness towards charismatic spirituality. In fact, the question before us is whether we need such openness. Discussions sometimes end with observations like: "The warnings are serious enough, and he apparently knows what he is talking about, but we need to have more openness for an extra filling of the Spirit."

We stand together on the basis of the Reformation's confession of grace alone, faith alone, the Scripture

alone, and Christ alone and if, in accepting this charismatic way of thinking, we lose this foundation, then that surely constitutes something that needs to be kept in mind.¹¹ And we do this not just to hold on to a conservative way of thinking or to what has traditionally been accepted as the truth in Reformed churches, but because there is a biblical benchmark to spiritual life. And for that reason, if we perceive that this influence has begun to penetrate truly reformed churches in The Netherlands – and in North America it will not be any different – we have a responsibility to test the spirits.

2.2 Focus on the charismatic experience

In order to focus on what is at stake and on what is to be distinguished, I will concentrate on what may be called a blind spot. In the history of both the Pentecostal Movement and the Charismatic Movement experience was first and only afterwards was there some theological reflection. Meanwhile, Pentecostal as well as Charismatic theologians have reached the conclusion that an exegetical foundation is lacking for the experience of a baptism with the Holy Spirit as a "second blessing." Instead, several "models" have been developed that safeguard this highest experience that was their point of departure, thereby trying to construct a different basis to it.¹² At the same time no one has come to the conclusion that the character of these cherished experiences themselves are open to be questioned.

Yet that is what happened a century ago in the history of the Pentecostal revival in Wales. Jessie Penn-Lewis, together with Evan Roberts, the leader of this revival, wrote a book *War on the Saints*.¹³ She warned against the seducing spiritual powers that can penetrate into one's mind when someone opens himself to receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. She did not go so far as to criticize the theological construction of a second blessing. In Pentecostal circles this book is generally condemned, but no one has ever really discussed what it says.

In the South-African branch of Pentecostalism, the Pentecostal dogma which insists that glossolalia is proof of having received the baptism with the Spirit is not accepted. They knew that glossolalia is a phenomenon that is also present in pagan and syncretistic religious movements and they realized that without the confession of salvation in Christ alone, this experience itself would arouse suspicion.

More generally, however, questions about charismatic experiences are rarely asked. This is the case even in the face of those miraculous healings that look more like occult miracles. Performances like those by T. B. Joshua from Nigeria, Benny Hinn and others belonging to the so-called Toronto Blessing call for the necessity to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. According to 1 John 4, this is not a call for theological discussion but for dealing with the question whether a certain phenomenon is from God or from the darkness.

It is not without reason that Paul warns us in 2 Corinthians 11 – the chapter where he also makes clear that Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light (v. 14) – against a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached and against receiving “a different spirit from the one you received or a different gospel from the one you accepted.” Does that warning mean nothing? The apostle’s fear is that exactly in this congregation in which so many were inclined to seek higher experiences, that perhaps, “as the serpent with its cunning deceived Eve, the minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Cor 11:3-4).

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*Charismata are not qualities that  
provide some extra value to man; they  
are gifts in order to serve*

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If we notice such blind spots, spots which are also blind and deaf to the warnings of the Holy Spirit in his Word, then we may also think of the Word of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23. There will be those in the last judgment that have prophesied in the name of Jesus, that have cast out demons, and that have performed many miracles, and yet they will be told plainly: “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”

I want to stress the fact that we are not dealing with excesses, but rather questioning the source from which these experiences come. We have the Scriptures that present us with the benchmark. We live in an age in which also theologically sound Reformed people accept without criticism all sorts of charismatic experiences, healings and exorcisms.

Many more examples could be given that give reason for concern. But I do not want to focus on the examples or excesses. I prefer to focus on “the sincere and pure devotion to Christ,” as well as on grace and faith.

There may be reason to criticize the spiritual condition of the church in our days, but the medicine that would build up the body of Christ must be found in the Spirit of Christ. The gifts He provides are situated nowhere else but there where the only Name given for salvation is heard and is known.

¹ See L. Floor, *Persoon en werk van de Heilige Geest*, Kampen 1988, 32f.

² See J. Veenhof, *De Parakleet. Enige beschouwingen over de Parakleet-belofte in het evangelie van Johannes en haar theologische betekenis*, Kampen 1986, 78.

³ W. van 't Spijker, *De Heilige Geest als Trooster*, Kampen 1986, 78.

⁴ In fact only Mark 16:17-18 deals with the gifts. Partly because of the discussion on the authenticity of Mark 16:9-10, these words are not given the first attention. See J.W. Maris, *Geloof en ervaring*, 224.

⁵ See a broader treatment in my *Geloof en ervaring*, 234-243. See also the analysis given by U. Brockhaus, *Charisma und Amt. Die paulinische Charismenlehre auf dem Hintergrund der frühchristlichen Gemeindefunktionen*, Wuppertal 1972

⁶ Cf. the divisions in Corinth (1-3), the questions about *gnosis* that puffs up (8), and the unspiritual way of using the Lord's Supper (10-11).

⁷ Of course there is more to be said about the function of glossolalia. See J.W. Maris, *De charismatische beweging en wij*, Bedum (Woord en wereld) 1996, 112.

⁸ Ernst Käsemann, 'Amt und Gemeinde im Neuen Testament,' in *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, Göttingen 1970⁶, (109-134), 112.

⁹ J.P. Versteeg, *Kijk op de kerk. De structuur van de gemeente volgens het Nieuwe Testament*, Kampen 1985, 17.

¹⁰ Parmentier, *Spiritus donorum*, 22, 26.

¹¹ A description of the main features of a charismatic spirituality, with a critical evaluation from Scripture, is to be found in a chapter 'Charismatisch signalement. Patronen in het charismatische denken in verleden en heden', in H. ten Brinke, J.W. Maris e.a., *Meer dan genoeg. Het verlangen naar meer van de Geest*, Barneveld 2004, 124-143.

¹² See e.g. Gordon D. Fee, 'Hermeneutics and Historical Precedent – a major problem in Pentecostal Hermeneutics', in R.P. Spittler (ed.), *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism*, Grand Rapids 1976; H. Lederle, *Treasures Old and New. Interpretations of "Spirit-Baptism" in the Charismatic Renewal Movement*, Peabody, Mass. 1988.

¹³ *War on the Saints*. Reprint of the unabridged edition (1912), Erith 1987 (first British paperback edition).





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A Bit of Church History

Canadian Reformed: where from and why?

In previous articles we've spent some time considering moments in church history that touched dramatically on the Canadian Reformed Churches. These included the Secession of 1834, the Doleantie of 1886 and the Union of 1892, and lastly the Liberation of 1944. The story should be completed with a brief introduction to the founding of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

To Canada

The economic situation in Holland after World War 2 was a mess, with little money and opportunity for work, and less housing. Nazism had also rattled the convictions of many who were historically Christian, so that the spiritual spine of The Netherlands was distinctly eroded. Add to this the fear of a perceived Communist threat rising in Eastern Europe. . . . These factors and so many more brought about a mass migration of Dutch people to the New World, be it the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, etc. In the decade from 1947 to 1957, some 100,000 Dutch people migrated to Canada alone. These migrants came from every ecclesiastical background that Holland had at the time – including, then, those who had joined the Liberation of 1944.

These Liberated people – ancestors for so many of us – took with them into the New World the things they held dear, including especially their faith in God and so their (Dutch) Bibles, confessions, and song book. More, their way of thinking was stamped by the heritage of the Secession, the Doleantie, the Union, and most recently the Liberation of 1944. With that heritage, these new migrants sought to find their way in a new land, a new language, and a new culture. The pressing question for these migrants was: where could they find a "church home"? That is: which existing North American church could they join? That, after all, was the mandate of their own confession: the Lord Jesus

Christ gathers a church from any race and nation (BC, Art 27) and since He's at work no one is permitted to stay separate from it, but all are instead "obliged to join it and unite with it" (Art 28). This was a confession many Liberated migrants were determined to take seriously.

At this point in the story I need to mention that Dr. Klaas Schilder had travelled to North America in 1939 and received a cordial welcome in the Christian Reformed Church (be it with some hesitation due to his criticism of the CRC's position on Rev. Herman Hoeksema and his Protestant Reformed Churches – see below). However, when he travelled to North America for a second visit shortly after the Liberation of 1944, the Christian Reformed Church emphatically rejected him. He was branded as a schismatic and the blame for the recent disruption in their Dutch sister churches was laid at his feet. Though Schilder sought to stimulate Christian Reformed leaders to investigate for themselves what actually happened in the Dutch churches during World War 2, the Christian Reformed leadership was not interested in doing so.

They found themselves ecclesiastically alone in a foreign land

They refused to investigate and at the same time maintained their insistence that Schilder and the Liberated churches sinned against the Lord in liberating themselves from the hierarchy of the synodical yoke. This refusal, we note, is contrary to the will of God as confessed in Lord's Day 43 of the Heidelberg Catechism; in the ninth commandment God teaches that one must not "condemn or join in condemning anyone rashly and unheard."

Understandably, this refusal influenced the advice Schilder gave to those who migrated to North America. Instead of encouraging Liberated migrants to join the North American version of the Secession churches (ie, the Christian Reformed Church), he directed them to the Protestant Reformed Churches. These Protestant Reformed Churches, we should know, had splintered from the Christian Reformed Churches in 1924 under the leadership of Rev. Herman Hoeksema because the latter churches had adopted a Statement of Principles that paralleled the Pacification Formula adopted by Holland's Reformed Churches in 1905 (see previous article) – and Hoeksema (and others) rejected that Formula.

The first migrants

Among the first of the Liberated migrants to move to Canada was Mr. John deHaas. He ended up in the beet fields of southern Alberta, and joined the Christian Reformed Church of Nobleford. He requested his consistory to make work of investigating thoroughly what the Liberation of 1944 was all about and requested too that he (and other recent migrants who could not understand English) be permitted to read Dutch sermons originating from Liberated ministers. Both requests were denied. From this, Mr. deHaas concluded that his consistory implicitly took a stand against the Liberation and therefore implicitly agreed with the Synod's insistence on presumptive regeneration and deposition of Schilder (see the Liberation article for more on that story). Mr. deHaas, therefore, felt that he could not in good conscience remain a member of this church. Other recent migrants shared this conclusion and so they found themselves ecclesiastically alone in a foreign land.

Schilder's advice had been to seek contact with the Protestant Reformed Churches. There were, however, no Protestant Reformed Churches in Alberta (let alone Canada) at the time. More significant was the fact that Hoeksema was unhappy that Schilder did not agree with him completely in all his views on common grace and on his insistence that God's covenant was actually made only with the elect. So Hoeksema insisted that Liberated migrants be instructed in Protestant Reformed distinctives before they could be received into that church. Developments in Ontario (Chatham and Hamilton) made clear that at the end of the day there

Church News

Change in Worship Times and Location:

Beginning on July 4th, 2010, the worship services of the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church will be held at 11:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. in the facilities of the Langley Canadian Reformed Church.

By September, 2010, they hope to be holding services at 9:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. in their own new church building located at 2469 267 Street, Aldergrove.

Called and accepted the call to the Providence Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton, ON:

Rev. Dr. J. Smith

of the Free Reformed Church of Albany, Western Australia, to be set aside as a professor of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary.

New Address

New e-mail address for Carman West:
carmanwestclerk at gmail.com

The regular snail mail address remains the same:
Box 2009, Carman, MB R0G 0J0

Called by the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church of Tintern, ON:

Rev. P.H. Holtvliuwer

of Carman East, Manitoba

was no room in the Protestant Reformed Churches for those who wished to stay with the simple emphases of the Three Forms of Unity (instead of being compelled to read those documents through the glasses of Protestant Reformed theology). Mr. deHaas and those with him, then, decided they had no option but to institute a new church, one that satisfied the requirements of Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. This church was instituted in Lethbridge on April 16, 1950 and identified itself as the Free Reformed Church of Lethbridge.

In short order other Liberated migrants instituted churches, namely, in Edmonton (July 9, 1950), Neerlandia (August 6, 1950), and Georgetown, ON (August 13, 1950). Liberated migrants to Edmonton and Georgetown (now Brampton) could not bring themselves to join the Christian Reformed Churches of those towns and had learned from others that joining the Protestant Reformed Churches would involve going against their conscience on doctrinal points they had learned to love.

The institution of the Neerlandia church needs special mention, as the members of this congregation were not recent migrants; their parents had migrated decades earlier and belonged to the Christian Reformed Church. But they stayed abreast of

developments in The Netherlands, understood that Schilder's suspension had been contrary to the adopted Church Order, and so appealed to the Christian Reformed synod to investigate the split that had happened in The Netherlands. When the CRC Synod of 1950 refused to do so and yet continued sister relations with one group and not the other (and so implicitly condemned the Liberation), a number of members left the Neerlandia Christian Reformed Church and, in consultation with the Edmonton church, instituted a new church in their own community. Notice that here again the Christian Reformed Church refused to investigate what happened overseas and yet in reality passed judgement on the one group.

Federation

These four churches met together in the first Classis Canada in Lethbridge in November, 1950. On the agenda of this first meeting of the churches was (among other things) the matter of what it takes to be biblically faithful in this new land – and part of the answer was the decision to call the new churches the Canadian Reformed Churches. Further, this classis recognized the need to move as soon as possible to the use of the English language in the church services and the singing of English psalms. Yet the brothers did not wish to adopt liturgical material already existing in North America (including the Christian Reformed *Psalter Hymnal*), but determined to stay with the heritage they had taken with them. So began the long development to an *Anglo-Genevan Psalter* (also known as the *Book of Praise*), a project completed in 1972 and improved in the years since.

Growth

Besides the four churches present at that first classis, there was also a delegate from the "house congregation" in New Westminster, just outside Vancouver. With the increase of its numbers (due to some families moving from Lethbridge to the Fraser Valley), the church could be instituted in that locality on December 17, 1950. This formed the official beginning of the Canadian Reformed Churches in British Columbia. A second congregation in British Columbia was instituted in Houston on March 4, 1951.

Under the blessing of the Lord the church in New Westminster grew. In March 1954 a second church could be instituted in the Fraser Valley and is now known

as Cloverdale. A third church followed in Abbotsford in February, 1961, then Chilliwack in February, 1970, Langley in June, 1976, Lynden (Washington) in March, 1985, Willoughby Heights in January, 1990, Yarrow in June, 1993, and Aldergrove in January, 1994. Meanwhile, the large majority of New Westminster's membership moved to the east bank of the Fraser River and so the name of that congregation was changed to Surrey. This makes a current total of nine Canadian Reformed Churches in the Fraser Valley, with a total membership of some 3200 persons (of which some 1300 are children and young people). Smithers, meanwhile, was instituted in September, 1952 and Vernon in November, 1987. These twelve churches now form two classes, Classis Pacific West and Classis Pacific East.

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*By the blessing of the Lord the  
Canadian Reformed Churches  
have received a vital place in the  
Canadian mosaic*  
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Of course, a parallel growth happened in Ontario, where the single congregation of Georgetown spawned some two dozen more churches in the province over the years. Interesting though it might be to tabulate the development of one church after another, I shall pass the temptation by in favour of drawing to the reader's attention the abundant mercy of God in multiplying the single congregation of 1950 to its current twenty-eight congregations in Ontario alone. Meanwhile, the three churches of Alberta mentioned earlier have multiplied to their current eight, while in the course of the years four churches have appeared in Manitoba. Altogether in Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia there are currently a total of fifty Canadian Reformed Churches (plus four American Reformed Churches south of the border), for a total membership of nearly 17,000 persons.

The blessings are evident, however, not only in the number and spread of the churches, nor in their total membership. For the Lord in his goodness has granted much faithfulness in the churches in response to the covenant He established with his own. As a direct fruit of the Liberation, fathers and mothers over the years have seen the need to sacrifice so much for the establishment and maintenance of Bible-based

schools, with as result that the vast majority of the youth of the churches can supplement their home-based training with a complementary education in Canadian Reformed schools. Similarly, there is widespread recognition amongst the membership of the churches (older and younger alike) that present and future generations desperately need biblically faithful



preaching, and so the churches have established and maintained a Theological College in Hamilton. At this Theological Seminary four professors currently prepare some sixteen students for the ministry. And what more shall I say? I could speak of mission work, political action and instruction, journalism, outreach work, and so much more. By the blessing of the Lord the Canadian Reformed Churches have received a vital place in the Canadian mosaic.

Why??

Nothing happens by chance. The triumphant Christ ascended into heaven to direct world history according to the plan ordained by the Father (see Revelation 5). In his wisdom He led things in such a way that persons from The Netherlands would migrate to Canada. More, the persons He directed to Canada included those whose spiritual heritage was formed through the Secession of 1834, the Doleantie of 1886, the Union of 1892, and the Liberation of 1944. This heritage was characterized by a deep awareness that the sovereign God was pleased to claim sinners for Himself in a covenant of love, so that undeserving sinners might call God "Father" and know themselves his children for Jesus' sake. As this God was Lord of all of life, every step of every day is taken in his presence and directed to his glory.

Hence this question: why would the Lord God want persons with this heritage in Canada? And why should we be allowed to be carriers of this heritage?

No one, of course, can answer the question in full detail, for no one knows the mind of God. But this much is clear: since all God does has a purpose, it follows that He *wants* this heritage in Canada for the benefit of this nation. And He in wisdom was pleased to make *us* carriers of this legacy! That in turn means that we need to *treasure* this heritage, and *live it out* in our families and in our community.

The point is important. For better or worse, we carry our "Reformed-ness" with a measure of embarrassment. Given that our heritage is scripturally grounded, and given that it has come to us through much struggle and anguish (and even bloodshed), we do well to be proud (in the scriptural sense) of what the Lord has entrusted to us, and then make a point of demonstrating that pride through the way we wear our birthright. To be Reformed in Canada is a privilege!





Canticles

How Deep is Jesus' Love for Me

Rev. George van Popta is minister
of the Jubilee Canadian Reformed
Church at Ottawa, Ontario
gvanpopta@gmail.com

1. How deep is Je - sus' love for me. He died a - lone, on Cal - va - ry.
2. He told His friends He had to die: "The Son of Man they'll cru - ci - fy."
3. A wo - man came in - to the room and poured on Him some rich per - fume
4. Then Ju - das went out to the priests. A plan to - ge - ther they did piece.
5. Pass - o - ver Lamb, pre - pared for all, His friends to ta - ble He did call.

He died to set the sin - ners free of whom I am the worst.
The priests and el - ders were so sly, they plot - ted Je - sus' death.
and so pre - pared Him for His tomb, for He would soon be dead.
For thir - ty coins he would re - lease the Lord in - to their hands.
But the be - tray - er had the gall to leave for his dark work.

6. As they were eating, Christ took bread.
He broke it and His friends He fed.
"It is My body," Jesus said –
"Broken to death for you."

7. He took a cup and thanked the Lord.
He gave the wine for them outpoured.
"The covenant will be restored
when My own blood is shed."

8. He went out to Gethsemane.
He asked his friends, "Please watch with Me."
But the two sons of Zebedee
and Peter fell asleep.

9. Sadness and sorrow filled His soul.
The pain and anguish took their toll.
Why was there no one to console
our Saviour as He grieved?

10. Then Christ got up and to them said,
"Look, now the Son of Man's betrayed."
Strengthened by prayer and unafraid
He faced the wicked crowd.

11. Judas had said that he would kiss
the One whom they were then to seize.
It would be dark among the trees,
but he the sign would give.

12. They laid their hands on our dear Lord,
arrested Him with rope and sword.
The Lord let them take Him toward
suffering, pain and death.

13. As wicked men led Him away
His friends did only fear display.
They ran away in their dismay.
They all forsook their Lord.

14. Then at the palace of the priest
the suff'ring of our Lord increased.
They angry blows on Him unleashed
and spat into His face.

15. Peter the Rock, he witnessed all
from just outside the high priest's hall.
He swore that he could not recall
having met Jesus Christ.

16. Three times did he deny the Lord.
And then the rooster's crow he heard.
In his mind's ear he heard the word:
"You will deny me thrice."

17. When morning came the priests convened.
"Jesus must die!" they all decreed.
But for their foul plan to succeed
they needed Pilate's help.

18. To Pontius Pilate He was sent.
There Jesus' dignity was rent.
The Roman soldiers did torment
our Saviour and our Lord.

19. The gov'nor found no fault in Him
and yet our Lord did he condemn
to crucifixion death so grim.
He died for all our sins.

20. He died to set all sinners free.
He rescued us on Calvary.
He has redeemed both you and me.
How deep is Jesus' love.

Ray of Sunshine

Corinne Gelms and
Patricia Gelms

*"The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.
The LORD is good to all; He has compassion on all He has made.
My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.
Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever
Psalm 145:8, 9, 21*

All praise and thanks be to our heavenly Father. He has made us and we are his. He cares for each one of us in so many wonderful ways. Our God is rich in love and shows tenderness to all He has made. Praise his holy Name! We may also share in his goodness this month by celebrating many birthdays. We welcome Janine Kamstra to the birthday list and wish you a very enjoyable day as you celebrate your twenty-fifth birthday. Congratulations to all who are celebrating this month and may you continue to see God's goodness in your lives.

We can praise his goodness in the singing of Psalm 145:1

*I will exalt Thee, O my God and King,
And bless Thy Name forever as I sing;
Yes, daily blessing Thee, I will adore
And praise Thy holy Name forevermore.
Great is the LORD and worthy of all honor;
His greatness is unsearchable for wonder.
His acts are praised by ev'ry generation,
His handiworks acclaimed with veneration.*



Janine lives at home with her family and attends the Canadian Reformed Church in Flamborough. Janine is the oldest in her family and has three younger brothers. When she was a year and a half she had a brain tumor removed.

Janine goes to the Dundas Learning Centre three days a week. On Thursday evenings she goes to Friendship Club. When she is at home she keeps herself busy organizing and doing various crafts and colouring pages, playing games on the computer, and loving the family cat and dog. Each summer Janine looks forward to going to Anchor Camp. She also loves helping mom with the grocery shopping every week. Janine is a happy young lady and loves visiting with family and

friends and going shopping. Janine is very excited about her birthday Open House on Saturday, July 31, 2010 at Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church on Dynes Road in Burlington from 2:00 - 4:00 PM.

Birthdays in July

- 4 **JAMES BUIKEMA will be 49**
653 Broad Street, West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 14 **SARAH VANDERGUGTEN will be 15**
23 Jane Street, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
- 20 **CHARLIE BEINTEMA will be 35**
29 Wilson Avenue, Chatham, ON N7L 1K8
- 28 **JIM WANDERS will be 49**
2142 Deerwood Drive, Burlington, ON N7L 2A9
- 29 **JANINE KAMSTRA will be 25**
532 Moxley Road N, R R 2, Dundas, ON L9H 5E2
- 29 **TOM VANDERZWAAG will be 57**
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

A note to all parents and caregivers

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of please let us know as soon as possible.

You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms
8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
Phone: 905-957-0380
Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



Letter to the Editor

Re: Catechesis: Cutting Edge Technique

Thanks for your editorial article on Catechesis as well as a previous article on Technology – our family enjoyed them.

Hooray for Catechism teaching and teachers! I'm so pleased our denomination encourages these classes. As our youngest child has just completed Catechism classes and professed her faith, our driving to classes, sipping on coffee at a local coffee shop during the duration of the class, and discussing the class on the way home comes to an end after seventeen years.

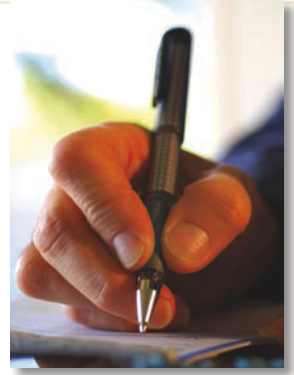
Although my kids nor I always enjoyed each class nor saw the benefit at all times, we all learned a lot from these classes, especially during the pre-confession year. One of our children had a tradition of going to a local pizzeria after each pre-confession class with a group to discuss points of doctrine. With Bibles open on the table, they delved into "presumptive regeneration" while sipping on pop and munching pizza. These classes have given her and

others the opportunity to know what they believe and what the church's doctrine is. Another child would drive home with me charged by the enthusiasm of her teacher's faith life and how he so vividly showed his love for the Lord to the students.

As my workplace has employees from other Reformed denominations, I realize how vital teaching catechism is. Even young people I've volunteered with at a Christian organization admit that they are unsure what the doctrine of their denomination is and what they stand for even after they have professed their faith.

So here's a note of encouragement to keep on teaching Catechism and being on the cutting edge with emphasizing catechism classes. May we all encourage each other to continue to learn about God and further his Kingdom.

Name withheld upon request.



*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.*



reviewed by Wes Bredenhof

Rev. Wes Bredenhof is pastor of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario
wbredenhof@bell.net

The Defense of the Faith (Fourth Edition),
Cornelius Van Til, edited by K. Scott Oliphint,
Phillipsburg: P&R, 1955 (2008)

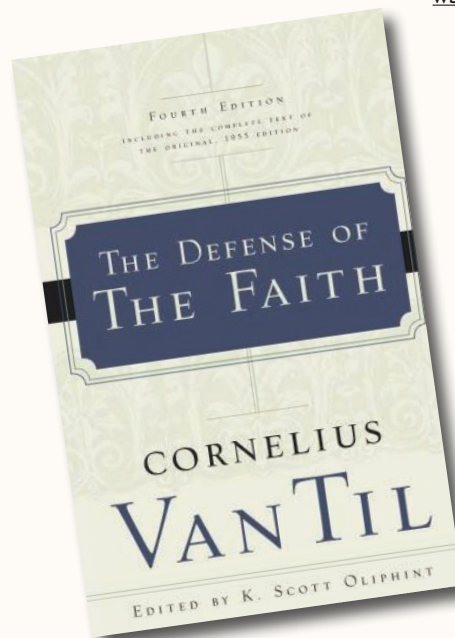
Paperback, 428 pages, \$19.99 USD

"I regard Christianity as the most fatal and seductive lie that has ever yet existed – as the greatest and most impious lie." Thus spoke the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche towards the end of the nineteenth century. Although few in our postmodern age will be as blunt about it as Nietzsche, attitudes such as his still exist. Unbelief continues to challenge truth just as it did 100 or even 2000 years ago. Regrettably, there has not been much of a Reformed attempt at turning the tables on unbelief, at least not in my own immediate (Canadian Reformed) background. However, today's situation is different and today one increasingly reads about apologetics (the study of the defense of the Christian faith).

In North America, already in the 1800s, Reformed scholars such as B. B. Warfield were making efforts at defending the faith from the encroaching unbelief. These efforts would culminate in the seminal work of Cornelius Van Til. Van Til was born in The Netherlands in 1895 and immigrated to the US at a young age. He eventually became a Christian Reformed pastor and later joined the Orthodox Presbyterian Church when he became professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. It was in that capacity that he wrote most of his works. The most important of these has undoubtedly been his 1955 book, *The Defense of the Faith*. This is now the fourth edition and it restores the unabridged 1955 text. It differs from the third edition in that it deals more extensively with Van Til's critics, especially those in the Christian Reformed Church, and this makes for a bulkier volume.

The Defense of the Faith presents in detail the principles underlying Van Til's approach to defending the Christian faith. The most important of these principles is that our method of defending the faith should be in line with our theology. It will not do for Reformed people to be arguing for the truth of Christianity with Roman Catholic or Arminian methods. Reformed theologians need a Reformed approach in everything they set their hands to – that is the abiding and most important contribution of Van Til.

Van Til's approach is often called "presuppositional apologetics." It is "presuppositional" because it is based on the "presupposition" or assumption that Scripture is true. It begins with the truth of what God reveals in his Word and then proceeds to present that



truth in a scriptural way to the unbeliever without any compromise. The unbeliever must be shown that life apart from God is foolishness – all the time realizing that it is the Holy Spirit, not our good arguments, which may convince the unbeliever and turn him to Christ. Would it be too much to say that Van Til's approach is *the* Reformed approach to apologetics, at least in its basic principles? Read the book and judge for yourself. It should be pointed out, however, that *The Defense of the Faith* is at times heavy reading. Van Til sometimes used philosophical or theological terms which may not be familiar to the average reader. This new edition includes annotations written by Scott Oliphint. These should shed light on most of the unfamiliar terms, as well as persons whose significance has become more obscure since Van Til's day. Another improvement comes in the way of a thorough index – something missing from the third edition.

Cornelius Van Til passed away in 1987, but his importance remains, for he emphasized the need for a Reformed defense of the faith. In this emphasis, he always insisted that he was saying nothing new; he was only repeating what he had been taught about the priority of Scripture by such giants as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. We must always start with Scripture in everything – whether it is in theology or apologetics or anything else for that matter. We need this emphasis also today as we live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. It is only this basic teaching which will give us what Van Til calls "nuclear firepower" for the war in which we find ourselves. **C**

Press Release of the meeting of the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches held May 27, 2010

The meeting was opened by Dr. G. Nederveen. He read Psalm 146 and led in prayer. G. Nordeman, K. Veldkamp, and B. Hordyk were absent with notice.

The Minutes of the meeting of January 28, 2010 were approved. The new governors appointed by the recently held Synod, Rev. R. Aasman and Rev. J. Ludwig, submitted letters indicating they had accepted their positions. They also signed a Statement of Compliance. The following were elected to serve as executive: Chair: Rev. R. Aasman; Vice: K. Veldkamp; Secretary: Dr. A. J. Pol; Treasurer: H. Kampen. Words of appreciation were spoken to the retiring Board members, Dr. G. Nederveen and Rev. R. A. Schouten, who then left the meeting.

The Board noted with gratitude that Dr. J. VanVliet and Dr. J. Smith had accepted their appointments to the departments of Dogmatology and Old Testament respectively. The process has begun to move Dr. Smith and his family to the Hamilton area during the summer. The Lord willing, they will arrive sometime in August. With respect to the appointment of Dr. Smith, it is noted that he has served the Church at Albany for only five years after a vacancy of four years. As the churches may express thankfulness for having the vacancy at the College filled, it would also be fitting to remember the needs of the church at Albany in its upcoming vacancy.

Rev. J. DeGelder requested to be released from his appointment as lecturer in Church Polity due to the need to reduce his workload outside his congregation. The Board accepted his request and noted with appreciation the seven years he taught Church Polity. A letter of appreciation will be sent to Rev. DeGelder as

well as to the Council of the Church at Flamborough for giving their minister the opportunity to teach at the College. The Board was informed that Dr. Nelson Kloosterman is available on a part-time basis to teach Church Polity. He is well qualified to teach this course, being very familiar with Reformed Church Polity. In 1991 he obtained his Th.D. from the Theological University of the Reformed Churches (liberated) in Kampen, The Netherlands, with a dissertation on *Scandalum Infirmorum et Communio Sanctorum: The Relation between Christian Liberty and Neighbor Love in the Church*. In addition to co-editing and writing numerous articles for the *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, and writing for various church magazines, Dr. Kloosterman has translated and published several books, including *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life*, and *Responsible Conduct: Principles of Christian Ethics*, by J. Douma; *Preaching and the History of Salvation*, by C. Trimp; and *Saved By Grace: The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*, by Herman Bavinck.

He has also served many years on the Joint Church Order Committee. The Board appointed Dr. Kloosterman as lecturer in Church Polity at our Theological College for the next academic year.

The Board received reports from various committees. It was noted that the application to the Association of Theological Schools will be formally dealt with at a meeting of ATS to be held in June in Montreal. Membership in this Association has been pursued with a view to doing a comprehensive internal review of the College, as mandated by Synod Smithers 2007.

The next meeting was scheduled for September 9, 2010. Rev. R. Aasman led in prayer after which he closed the meeting.

On behalf of the Board,
Rev. E. Kampen 