

Clarion



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*Christian
weddings are
causes for
rejoicing and
celebrating!*

Inside this Issue

- The Reception Question
- Jesus Excommunicated





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The Reception Question

How much thought goes into our wedding receptions?

How much thought goes into our wedding receptions? I've been pondering that question for a number of years and now again as "wedding season" approaches. As a minister, I've had the honour of officiating at many weddings and most of the time being invited to the reception as well (but never to the Stag & Doe – I wonder why that is?). It's obvious that a great deal of thought goes into the ceremony: many months in advance the location is booked, the minister is asked, the best man and maid of honour are selected, musicians are approached, a text is chosen, dresses are picked out, and tuxedos are tried on. That one hour in the church is carefully choreographed to achieve the goal of a God-centred marriage of two of his children on their special day. But does the celebration which follows have the same goal? Do you leave the wedding reception with the same focus on the Lord's good gift of marriage and the wonder of his love in giving it as you had when leaving the service?

Good humour?

There is an understandable change of mood from the ceremony to the reception. The nervousness has died down for the wedding party (and parents!). The solemnity of that occasion is behind and now it is time to relax and have fun. This is a good thing and fits with our calling to enjoy the good gifts God gives us (see the book of Ecclesiastes, e.g. 11:7-10), but do we give thought to whether our fun and humour honour our Maker?

It's the *Herman* comics that first strike me, a staple in the programs at many of our receptions. Jim Unger knows how to make people laugh with his one-square snap-shots of life's humorous moments. They often reflect something of reality and we can laugh at ourselves in them, also a good thing. But when he sketches a marriage scene (the kind regularly chosen for the programs) then more often than not we find ourselves laughing at the very concept of marriage itself. His marriage spots consistently reflect a dysfunctional secular marriage and most certainly not a Christian

marriage. Husbands and wives are pictured at odds, with one wanting to be apart from the other. The husband is often a blundering loafer trying to escape the marriage and the wife often an unhappy, complaining hag. Many segments make reference to multiple divorces and re-marriages.

Do we really want to send the message that marriage is the pits? It's hard for the comic reader not to be left feeling rather jaded about marriage and come to think of it as a very *laughable* institution. The contrast is stark: earlier in church we were taught to think of marriage as God's *blessing* but in our dinner programs we learn to think about it as a *curse*. This simply doesn't jibe.

Marriage jokes

The unchristian humour is not only found in some program comics but also in what is presented live by some emcees and/or guests. It seems a regular feature for people to tell jokes which make fun of the God-given roles of wives or husbands or simply of marriage itself. Here are a couple of examples: "*It is said that husband is the head of the family – but remember that the wife is the neck!*" Or: "*Wife: why have you been reading our marriage certificate for an hour? Husband: I was just looking for the expiry date!*"

When I hear punch lines like these I can't help but think of the many struggling marriages (also within the church!) in which such sentiments are no joke. A number of our Christian marriages are under strain precisely because husband and wife either do not understand their God-given roles or refuse to obey the Lord's calling in this respect. Such jokes are no help to them and may even hurt them deeply.

I'm certain that no one intends this result, but the reality is that such jokes put down and demean the biblical roles of wife as submissive helper and husband as godly head and Christ-like leader. That kind of humour implies that those striving to be Christian husbands and wives are weird and abnormal, and

no one wants to be considered weird. It unwittingly encourages us to follow the approach of the world. We know the world is attacking marriage. Our own country is a leader in promoting gay marriage. Feminism and secularism have combined to make submission and headship dirty words. Unbelievers scoff at the notion of the wife "obeying" her husband as 1 Peter 3:6 teaches. Let's not follow their pattern or give it credibility with our jokes. Rather, let's use clean and intelligent humour which serves to retain and even promote the honour of God's good gift of marriage.

Toast & roast

One good development that I've noticed is the decrease of toast speeches which humiliate either the bride or groom. It used to be quite expected that the bridal couple would get verbally "roasted" by those conducting the toasts. There is a fine line between gently ribbing someone on account of their quirks, foibles, or peculiar habits and on the other hand exposing them to great shame and embarrassment with sordid tales of the past. The former is good humour; the latter is poor judgment. The one maintains a love and respect for the neighbour while the other hurts and is nasty. Also in our making fun (and let's include the games and skits which are often part of our entertainment) we need to remember the Lord's commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves and to do to them what we would have others

What's Inside

This issue begins with an editorial from Rev. Peter Holtvliuwer on wedding receptions. Much planning goes in to a wedding; as the "wedding season" approaches, Rev. Holtvliuwer asks us to consider how being children of God should shape these plans.

Dr. Wes Bredenhof writes an article about the 450th birthday of the Belgic Confession. Among dozens of confessions written during the Reformation, he explains why this one has stood the test of time.

We have a report on the mission work being done by the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. This issue also includes a report on the welcome of Rev. Rupke and his family to the Free Reformed Church at Southern River, Australia.

Readers will find a letter to the editor regarding changes to the hymn section of our *Book of Praise* as well as a response from Frank Ezinga. We also have a press release, and two regular columns: Treasures New and Old and Education Matters.

Laura Veenendaal



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do to ourselves. Ask yourself: how would I feel if this was being said of me (or done to me) at my wedding?

To the couple!

Another question worth asking when we write a toast to the bride or groom is: do we design it with God in mind? Of course, the purpose of the speech is to honour the bride or groom, usually a close friend of the toast-maker, and this has its place. Many times the speech focuses on funny things about the bride's past, or about how good a friend the groom has been and how important this person has been in the toast-maker's life. Because of the close bond between the friends, it can even be quite emotional, especially for the ladies. But most-often God is not mentioned until the very end, with a brief, "And I wish you the Lord's blessing in your married life." Such a wish is good but could we not do more with the speech to honour the Lord?

That friend is someone we love and who loves us. That friend is important to us and has been a help to us (and hopefully we to him or her) and who put this friend in our life? The Lord! Who made this friend the special person he or she is? Who arranged the circumstances of our life in such a way that we could meet and become friends with this individual? It would be good to publicly thank God for his gift and providential leading. This friend has meant so much to us and we want to share that with the guests to show respect – great! Let us do it in the style of the Holy Spirit who regularly highlights the good works of men all the while thanking God for what these brothers and sisters have done (see Philippians 1 or 1 Thessalonians 1). Commend the friend, credit the Lord.

The Lord's children

One of the noticeable changes in our wedding celebrations over the last fifteen years is the increased use of pictures and videos. Our digital age has made these things rather inexpensive and the technology is becoming quite sophisticated. At the reception, it is quite common to have a seven to ten minute video of both the bride and groom in their growing-up years. This is often cute and touching but I think we can do much more with this. I would like to challenge our budding video artists and power-point experts to consciously bring the Lord "into the picture."

What I mean is this: the bride and groom are not just two human beings in a sea of humanity – they are two of God's own children! For those baptized as infants, all their life they have been the object God's covenant love and providential care. The Lord has been busy providing for their needs – giving them Christian parents and friends and allowing them (in many cases) a Christian education. It is by the Lord's guiding and gifting that the bride and groom are who they are. Could the video not be set within that framework? Instead of just a presentation of loosely connected scenes in a person's

life where the focus is entirely on the person, the story could be told of how the Lord through the years shaped and molded his son and daughter to be the special people they are today. In this too the spot-light would still shine on the bridal couple but in such a way that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are praised for all the good that is found in them.

Sparkling wine

There is one last point which should give us the most pause for reflection, for it is often the most jarring when compared to the piety of the ceremony. Do we at our marriage feasts handle the gift of alcohol in a God-fearing way? Many wedding receptions feature a bar – an open bar, a cash bar, a ticketed bar, or some combination thereof. Sometimes it is used to raise money for the bridal couple. And it is always well-used. In fact, the problem is that it is too well-used by some of the guests! The pull toward it is strong, the line-ups are long, and the effects are obvious – manufactured giddiness, embarrassing silliness, and outright obnoxiousness as people move from tipsy to drunk. And then sometimes only twelve hours later (or less!) we sit piously together Sunday morning in church and even join each other at times around the Lord's Table too as if nothing happened. This, too, does not jibe with being a child of God.

Think of what it does to the reputation of God when his people party like the world. In fact, many times there are non-Christians or non-church members in attendance at our receptions – what must they think of us Christians? Of the church? Of Jesus Christ? The Lord does not condemn the drinking of wine or beer or other forms of alcohol but he does condemn drunkenness (Eph 5:18). Can we not think of ways to have fun – genuine amusement – that does not abuse alcohol and offend the Lord? Perhaps thought can be given to limiting alcohol to table wine or reducing the availability of alcoholic beverages or even going altogether without it. The Lord allows its moderate use but it's not like the Lord commands us to drink it! It is not a must. We are to be wary of what sparkles in the cup and goes down so smoothly (Prov 23:29-35). If there is temptation for some toward drunkenness, would it not be better to help keep our brothers and sisters from falling into sin by serving punch or pop or juices instead?

Without a doubt Christian weddings are causes for rejoicing and celebration! By all means, let's thoroughly enjoy them as gifts from our God and Redeemer! The Bible teaches us that our parties and celebrations are fully under the Lordship of Christ Jesus. There is a way to have good fun which fully honours his Lordship. Let's take up the challenge and make our wedding receptions all they can be!





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MATTHEW 13:52

"But he denied it, 'Woman, I don't know him,' he said."

Luke 22:57

Jesus Excommunicated

Each of Peter's three denials warrants careful study. Altogether the three are designed to isolate our Lord more and more in his suffering, but this first one was particularly painful. Understanding it overwhelms us, but may Jesus' love in the face of it overwhelm us even more!

After his capture, Jesus had been taken to the high priest's house for a speedy night-time trial. This rather palatial home was built in a square with an open courtyard in the centre. Jesus was being tried in one of the rooms that was open to the courtyard, so that those around the fire could more or less witness the trial. Peter had been let in by another disciple (likely John) who knew the servant girl at the door. Squatting around the fire with the others to stay warm, Peter was trying to look like he fitted in. But the servant girl who singled him out emphasized his connection to Jesus, "This man was with [Jesus]." Peter's response was, "Woman, I don't know him."

Was Peter fearing for his life? Not likely. Another disciple was there unharmed and had even helped him get in. Think back: an hour before, Peter had tried to defend Jesus with his sword. Peter had swung for the head, cutting off a man's ear. He meant business. But then Jesus had rebuked him and healed their enemy's ear. Of all things! Peter was stung. Being an emotional and impetuous man, it's not hard to imagine that he became angry. He felt rejected by Jesus and now he rejected Jesus in return. He vehemently denied his

association with Jesus, "Woman, I don't know him."


Did Peter not know who Jesus was? All Jerusalem knew Jesus! In fact, Peter's words were much stronger than a claim of ignorance. He actually echoed the Jewish excommunication formula. Its words were, "I (we) have never known you." These words of shunning amounted to saying, "You have no more place with us. We don't know you. For us, you don't exist." Peter says, "Woman, I don't know him." By saying this, Peter denies that he has any present love for Jesus. He won't acknowledge his Lord. He rejects him. He excommunicates Jesus from his life.

The Father in heaven thereby caused his precious Son to be more and more isolated in his sufferings. "He was despised and rejected by men" (Isa 53:3). It wasn't just the "friend" Judas who "lifted his heel against" Jesus (Ps 41:9), but Peter joined in. He joined the Sanhedrin in excommunicating and falsely condemning Jesus. Christ alone must save, without any help, while rejected.

But there is even more going on. We are being saved. For through Peter, even God joins in. Peter's words foreshadow what is about to happen as God the Father drives his Son out of the city gates and into the land of forsakenness. The Father in his justice is going to say, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoer!" Jesus will be excommunicated. He must be judged not only as a sinner but also an apostate, to bear the sins of Peter the apostate. Jesus is coming under the

very wrath that will forever keep lit the fires of hell – that divine justice which must remain perfect and exert itself against all evil. This is what Jesus underwent for our sakes.

How did Jesus respond? Just as Jesus reached out to Peter through the sound of the rooster, the look of his eyes, and the memory of his powerful words (Luke 22:61), so Jesus also reached out to the Father even in the midst of his God-forsaken suffering: "My God, my God." He thirsted after God's kingdom and his righteousness (John 19:28), and finally committed his spirit into the Father's hands (Luke 23:46). By his faith and obedience to the plan for our salvation he took away our sentence of excommunication and re-opened the way to God so that we who believe might nevermore be forsaken by God.

The suffering and death of Christ should overwhelm us not just because they were so horrible, but because this is what he had to endure to remove our guilt. We too spoke with Peter. We too deserted Christ. But "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Indeed, "Christ died for the ungodly" – that's us. We were "God's enemies" when he reconciled us to himself (Rom 5:6-10). Since this is so, we have nothing to fear when we are found to be in Christ by faith. He knows his own, intimately, from before the foundation of the world. He is reaching out to us even in our times of rejection, leaving the ninety-nine to find us and rescue us from excommunicating ourselves. His love overwhelms us and gathers us in. 



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Happy 450th Birthday to the Belgic Confession!

This year marks 450 years since the Belgic Confession was written by Guido (or Guy) de Brès. The Confession made its appearance late in 1561, famously being tossed over the castle walls at Tournai (or Doornik, as the Dutch call it). However, it is quite likely that the Confession was written already early that year. In his authoritative book on the Confession, Dr. N.H. Gootjes suggests that it may have been written already in February of 1561. It was most likely first printed on May 25, 1561.

Gootjes also believes that the Confession had been adopted by the Reformed churches in the area we know as Belgium even before it was printed. This is why the Confession uses the first person plural throughout, "We believe. . ." At subsequent synods, the authority of the Confession was confirmed and the text of the Confession was fine-tuned. This process continued up to the Synod of Dort and beyond. Today the Confession continues to be a living document and so is periodically tweaked in some of its details by churches that hold it. One of the classic examples is the original Confession's assertion that Paul was the author of Hebrews. That assertion has been removed from the Canadian Reformed edition.

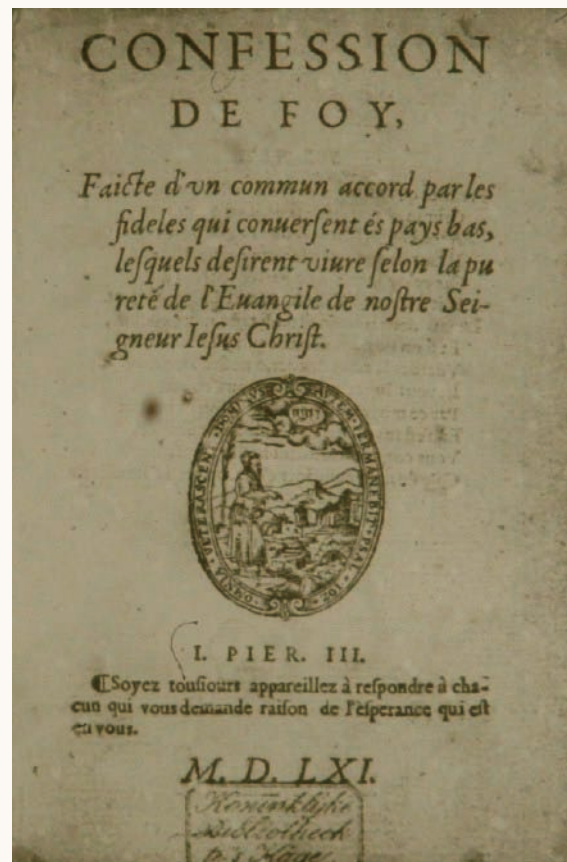
Following its publication, the Belgic Confession became widely accepted. It went through numerous printings and its first translation was into Dutch already in 1562. Within a century it had been translated into German, Latin, Greek, English, and Spanish. It quickly became one of the most widely held and respected Reformation confessions.

But why? That's a question not often asked. We sometimes take this confessional document for granted. Did you know there were *many* confessions and catechisms produced during the sixteenth-century Reformation? I'm not speaking of four or five or maybe ten. We're talking about *dozens*. Dutch scholar William Heijting produced two substantial volumes containing confessions just from the Reformation in The

Netherlands. So why did the Belgic Confession rise to the top and endure while all these others have mostly been forgotten? There are several factors.

What makes the Belgic Confession special?

First, as mentioned a moment ago, the Confession was accepted early on as the statement of faith of the Reformed churches in the Low Countries. It bore ecclesiastical authority from the start. It was and still is the defining confession of the Reformed churches of that region and churches that trace their lineage there.



Church News

Called by the Smithville Canadian Reformed Church, Smithville, Ontario:

Rev. C. Bouwman
of Yarrow, BC.

By “defining confession,” I mean that this is the starting point for what we together believe. The Heidelberg Catechism is primarily a teaching document, while the Canons of Dort are a sort of commentary on some points from the Confession and Catechism that were drawn into question by the Arminians. The Confession, on the other hand, defines what we believe corporately.

We sometimes take this confessional document for granted

It was never written as the personal confession of Guido de Brès – it always had a corporate character. It always represented the voice of the church, testifying of her faith to the authorities and the rest of the unbelieving world. With good reason, P.Y. DeJong titled his commentary, *The Church’s Witness to the World*. That was its design from the beginning.

Next, the Confession has been recognized as a faithful and well-worded summary of the essential teachings of the Bible. It was developed with an eye to previous confessional writings produced by such Reformed pioneers as John Calvin and Theodore Beza. It’s also firmly grounded in the biblical teachings of the early church. Quotes and allusions from the church fathers are to be found everywhere. In other words,

It always represented the voice of the church, testifying of her faith to the authorities and the rest of the unbelieving world

the Reformed churches were not sucking this out of their thumbs. There was a deep respect for the tradition that respected the Bible. So the Belgic Confession has long been recognized as a clear, concise, and reliable guide to biblical truth.

Finally, the Confession has also endured because of its roots in the persecuted church. Those roots make it unique. It is the only one of the Three Forms of Unity forged in the fires of persecution and in the shadows

of martyrdom. None of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism died for their faith. Neither did any of the authors of the Canons of Dort. But on May 31, 1567, Guido de Brès was hung for “the cause of the Son of God” (as he was accustomed to say). As far as I’ve been able to determine, the Belgic Confession is the only officially adopted Reformed confession written by a martyr. Other Reformed martyrs did write confessions – there was the Guanabara Confession, written by four Reformed martyrs in Brazil in the sixteenth century – but none of those confessions were officially adopted by any church. This makes the Belgic Confession a unique document in our confessional library. It has brought Reformed believers close to the suffering church of the past. It brings us today also to the suffering church that endures crosses and trials for the sake of Christ. This too has contributed to its endurance.

Play it again!

The Belgic Confession is 450 years old! It has served us well, but only insofar as we have paid attention to it. The Catechism is heard each and every Sunday. Unfortunately, sometimes the Confession gathers dust. In his book *Credo*, Jaroslav Pelikan compares confessions to CDs. When CDs are stored they are inert and static. They can be handed down from parents to children without ever being used or heard. They suddenly become dynamic when placed in a CD player and the sounds of beautiful music issue forth from the speakers. Similarly, confessions only have value as they are “played,” as they are engaged and as their voice is heard through the coming generations. The 450th birthday of the Belgic Confession presents a great opportunity to “play it again.”

C



FRCSA Mission Work in South Africa

The mission work of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA) has come a long way from when it was started in the 1950s just after the first FRCSA was instituted. Initially it was mainly supported by the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated). This support has changed over time and currently responsibility for all mission work is vested within the FRCSA, while the churches in The Netherlands still do provide support. Donations are also received from some of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches in Australia, although these donations are not based on a fixed agreement.

The mission work by the FRCSA is driven by the following mission: "To establish a network of living churches across the Republic that will instil the unity of the Kingdom of God amongst a multi-lingual nation." The plan to achieve this mission incorporates the following highlights:

- The purpose of mission work – the planting of churches
- Achieving this purpose is based on:
 1. Identifying an area for expansion
 2. The calling of a missionary for the specific area
 3. Monitoring the development and progress of the mission work
- The approach to mission work
 1. Phase 1 – Planting
 2. Phase 2 – Care
 3. Phase 3 – Completion
 4. Phase 4 – After Care

We are thankful to report that all the planned expansion in the last two years has been blessed by the Lord in providing men to send out and spread the gospel.

Location of churches and mission posts

All mission work by the FRCSA in South Africa takes place around Pretoria and Cape Town, which are approximately 1400 km apart (see map).

In Pretoria

1. Pretoria – The older of the two original congregations having been established by emigrants arriving to South Africa in the 1950s and later. It has 425 members. Pretoria is an Afrikaans speaking congregation.
2. Maranata – The other FRCSA that has its origins in emigrants arriving in the 1950s. It is directly responsible for the entire mission work in the Pretoria area. The Maranata Church Council has appointed a Mission Board to manage the day to day running of everything. Maranata is an Afrikaans speaking congregation.
3. Mamelodi – A newly instituted church with its own minister, Rev. K.T. Mogale. There are 175 members and is a Sotho speaking congregation.
4. Nelmapius – A mission point reporting under Mamelodi. Rev. G.F. Minsi, together with a student, works here. This is a Sotho speaking congregation.
5. Akasia – A new mission point where Rev. D.M. Boersma works. Akasia is a mixed black/white environment and the intention is to plant a church representing the mixture using the English language.
6. Mission Point – This mission point lies north of Akasia and is where Rev. P.G. Boon works as a missionary. It is a Sotho speaking congregation.
7. Mission Point – Rev. J. Mhlanga works here as a missionary. This is a Sotho speaking congregation and is approximately forty kilometres from the Maranata congregation.
8. Central Mission Point – Rev. T. de Boer works as a missionary here. It is a Sotho speaking congregation which has come a long way. Growth over the years has been problematic. During 2011 a decision will be taken in regards to its future.



- 9. Instituted Congregation - Rev. B.A. Matlaela is its minister. This is a Sotho speaking congregation with 161 members.
- 10. New Mission Point – This new mission point is located in a very poor area with Rev. M.P. Magagula serving as missionary. It is a Sotho speaking congregation.

In Cape Town

- 11. Belville – The one Cape Town FRCSA congregation which was also instituted by emigrants from The Netherlands in the 1950s. It has 411 members and is situated approximately thirty kilometres from Cape Town city centre.
- 12. Belhar – The oldest of the mission points that became an instituted church only recently with Rev. P. Abrahams as its minister. This congregation has sixty-eight members.
- 13. Wesbank – Rev. C. van Wyk is the missionary for this mission point.
- 14. Leiden – This mission post has no missionary allocated at the moment, but is under the care of Belhar and Belville. Belville is hoping to fill this vacancy by 2012. Afrikaans is used in all the congregations around Cape Town.

Challenges

Some of the challenges involved in the mission program by the FRCSA:

- 1. It is a big program for the small bond of churches and requires a lot of manpower to run and oversee it all.
- 2. All mission work takes place in poor areas and under mostly poor people. This results in needy churches and needy students.
- 3. The FRCSA do not have their own theological training and catering for students from at least three languages is a daunting task.
- 4. Most of the funds (ninety-five percent) for the mission program come from overseas and is Euro based. Locally, the Rand is very volatile and the exchange rates tend to change drastically over time. This creates very serious concerns about the long term sustainability of the mission program.

Conclusion

The extensive mission program by the FRCSA is seen as a privilege to spread the gospel according to our Lord’s instructions. He has provided in the past and in him we trust for the future.



Free Reformed Church Southern River welcomes the Rev. Rupke Family

Welcome

Praise the LORD! Praise the name of the LORD; Praise Him, O you servants of the LORD! With these words of Psalm 135, we could begin our welcome to the Rev. Rupke family on the afternoon of Saturday, 30 April 2011. In opening, Br. D. Pot remembered with thankfulness how God has blessed our congregation with growth in numbers to the extent that we required a second minister. And God had so soon provided. Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good!

The ceremonies were ably mastered by Br. R. van Duyn, who explained how "welcome" literally meant "smiling." And we saw plenty of that during the afternoon of festivities!

Through song and speech, young and old could express gratitude to our Heavenly Father for his goodness. Rev. Veldman expressed a willing anticipation to share the teaching and pastoral care with his new colleague. Wisdom from the East had Rev. Rupke anticipating an annual October trek to the Apple Isle.

Matching children with mothers (even to the second generation) proved a challenge for our new minister, but he was ably assisted by his wife Erna and their sons, Tim and Douwe. Another ordeal was the men's club colloquium, yet three life-lines helped to allow the installation to proceed. The delicious olie-bollen, however, had us wondering what the real reason was for Rev. Rupke accepting the call. . . .

Installation

Fittingly, Sunday's preaching focused on "preaching." Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. During the morning installation service, Rev. Veldman emphasized that preaching is not to be focused on the itchy eared "seeker." A preacher's task is not to please men. Rather, in obedience to our Heavenly Sender, it is to direct us to the Almighty God whom we serve. To him alone we must be faithful to the end.



Beginning his ministry in Southern River, Rev. Rupke preached a complementary message in the afternoon. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. A true preacher will focus away from himself to Jesus Christ, with a message aimed not at the health and wealth of the people, but of forgiveness in Christ. All preachers are but earthen vessels, jars of clay, yet their weakness allows boasting as it gives proof of the power of God. May we, as mirrors, reflect his light.

One fact that struck this observer was that whilst an installation may focus on the minister's task, the congregation is no less exhorted in its duty. An apt reminder, as there are many more of us than them! Receive him with all joy. Take heed to receive the Word of God, which you shall hear from him, and accept his words, spoken according to the Holy Scriptures, not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God.

Pray often for your minister(s), show them tangible encouragement. Let them do their task joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no benefit to you. If you thus receive this servant from the Lord, the peace of God will come upon you, and you will inherit life through Christ. C



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Canticles

Race Completed, Battle Over

1. Race com - plet - ed, bat - tle ov - er, time for my de -
2. Fought the good fight, Je - sus' bat - tle, stayed the course right
3. Crown of right - eous - ness a - waits me which the right - eous
4. Not to me a - lone this hon - our, oth - ers, too, this
5. Christ my Lord, my great de - liv - erer, Sav - iour, King, who

par - ture near - I am yield - ed as an offering,
to the end - I have kept the faith de - liv - ered;
> judge, my Lord, will a - ward me on that great day,
crown have won - 'Tis for all who loved th'ap - pear - ance
sets me free - he will res - cue me from e - vil

but I go with - out a fear.
on my Lord I will de - pend.
> ev - er faith - ful to his word.
of the Fa - ther's on - ly Son.
for his king - dom, heav - en - ly.

6. Let us praise our God eternal,
bless him ever and again,
give him glory, now, forever,
for his grace. Amen, Amen.



Dr. Steve Sider has been involved in gifted education in both public and Christian school contexts. He was a teacher for fifteen years, completing his Master of Education and Ph.D. degrees before assuming a role as the Director of Teacher Education at Redeemer University College

Supporting the Needs of Gifted Students in Independent Schools

I was delighted to read the article on gifted learners by George and Sharon Hofsink in the June 4, 2010 volume of *Clarion*. In that article, they provide an excellent overview of the characteristics of gifted learners and some of the challenges which go along with providing a stimulating learning environment for them. They conclude with the probing question, "Should we not make it our aim to equip them for the unique challenges they face today so they are not too discouraged, disheartened, and/or disengaged to become tomorrow's leaders?"

In this article, I hope to extend the good work which the Hofsinks have begun in raising the issue of how we might support bright and gifted students in our schools. I will start by examining some further evidence as to why we need to pay special attention to these students. Second, I will provide some suggestions for how we may examine a framework for programming for gifted students. Lastly, I will provide some resources and strategies which will be helpful for gifted students, their parents, and their teachers.

Considerations on giftedness

Over the past few years, there has been an increasing interest in programming for gifted students in Christian schools. One of the conclusions of a study I led in 2006 on special education services in Ontario Christian schools was that Christian schools were doing very little for gifted students. When we examined the data, we discovered that Christian schools reported significantly fewer gifted students than public schools. Now, it is not likely that there are fewer gifted students in Christian schools than there are in public schools; instead, I suspect that the minimal identification of and programming for gifted students is largely due to limited awareness and limited access to resources and

programs. As a result, there has not been a significant commitment to pro-actively support the gifted student in the Christian school.

Yet, the growing interest around gifted students in Christian schools indicates that there is an increasing recognition of the challenges these children face. As well, parents of gifted students are questioning the limited support their children are receiving. There is also an increasing recognition of the contribution these children can make to churches, schools, workplaces, and society in general. And there seems to be an increased consideration of a mandate, not just to support those who have a learning disability, who are on the autism spectrum, or who have a behavioural exceptionality, but to support all students in the Christian school, including the gifted child. So what might we do for gifted students to encourage, hearten, and engage them?

A Framework for understanding giftedness

I was privileged to teach a number of congregated classes (i.e. all the students in the class were identified as gifted) for elementary gifted students early in my teaching career. One of these programs brought gifted students from across a school board together once per week for special programs and initiatives. Another program provided a full-time course of study for grade seven and eight gifted students for all of their subjects. In both of these cases, I was amazed at the limiting nature of the term "gifted." Too often, the term has simply been equated with a high Intelligence Quotient (IQ). Most public school boards require gifted students to test at the ninety-eighth or ninety-ninth percentile on an IQ test to be eligible for gifted programs. I found this process too constraining.

Let me illustrate by fast-forwarding a few years into a position I held as an administrator in an international Christian school. Barry (name has been changed) came to the school as a bilingual (French/English) student with very mediocre grades. We did some cognitive assessments and he placed in the average range. But then we witnessed his unique giftedness: he took high school Spanish and spent a number of holidays in Mexico with a Spanish host family (they claimed he had excellent Spanish); he spent a term in a sister school in Japan (his host family claimed he spoke native-like Japanese); and he travelled to Thailand for a three-week school exchange (his host family claimed he was speaking semi-fluent Thai at the end of the three weeks – he has since married a Thai girl). This young man would not have been identified as gifted under “normal rules” but was certainly gifted. I have met many other students who have helped expand my understanding of what it means to be gifted.

We should not fall into the trap of equating giftedness with intellectual superiority

For Christian schools, an understanding of gifts and stewardship should help us not fall into the same trap of equating giftedness with intellectual superiority. Christian schools might consider a broader understanding of what it means to be gifted and they should consider how we should nurture the stewardship of these abilities. Howard Gardner’s (1993) work in this area, although with problems and detractors, provides a broader understanding of how we might view intelligence. Gardner suggests that the cognitive abilities that children have should not be restricted to solely those measured through traditional psycho-educational assessments (i.e. IQ tests). Instead, Gardner suggests that we should consider intelligences in other areas such as interactions with others, self-awareness, and linguistic ability (see Gardner, 1993 for a complete list). Barry would certainly have measured high in the linguistic intelligence area. I pose Gardner’s thesis here to illustrate that we need to be careful to not be too restrictive by what we mean by gifted.

Resources and strategies

In this last section, I suggest a variety of methods and resources teachers and parents might think about to support the gifted child. In a school context, it is

important to consider a process of how we program appropriately for gifted students. All teachers can provide some support within the class for the gifted child; however, schools might consider out-of-class programs to support these students as well. Of course, broad consultation with parents, principal, teachers, and other key constituents needs to occur first to ensure support and appropriate resources are allocated.

Educational assessments can help identify gifted students but often involve expensive, external expertise. So, as a starting point, parents and teachers can work collaboratively to recognize high ability children and develop activities for them. In schools, this might mean providing enrichment activities in and out of class. Most Christian schools won’t be able to develop a full-time program for gifted students. However, weekly or monthly activities outside of the class, in which a gifted child works with other gifted children, would supplement those activities which a teacher can do in the regular classroom.

In considering supporting the gifted child it’s important to consider the idea of microscoping and telescoping: gifted children need support to consider topics which are broad and global (telescope) at the same time as providing opportunities to dig deep into topics (microscope). For example, a ten-year old child may have significant interest in issues of justice. S/he needs a parent or teacher to walk alongside him/her and help explore scriptural, historical, and geographical understandings of justice as well as to provide support for specific examples such as poverty in Haiti or the genocide in Rwanda. Parents and teachers also need to consider higher-level questions, beyond the “who?” and “what?” to the “why?” and “what if?” type questions.

The exploration of these ideas lends itself to Problem-Based Learning (PBL). Too often, teachers provide a project for gifted students and expect them to work on the project independently while the teacher focuses on other students. With PBL, the teacher acts more like a coach. S/he helps the child identify a problem (e.g. Why is the rate of teenage suicide in First Nations communities significantly higher than in other communities?), models how to investigate the problem (interviews, electronic database searches, etc.), and supports the child as s/he then takes these skills and dispositions and turns to investigate other issues.

Allow me an example to illustrate this approach. At one Christian school, a team of teachers decided to develop a program for gifted students. Teachers were asked to recommend students and we also

allowed students to self-select into the program. I met with the group of students (ten to twenty per year in a school of about 350) a number of times and also paired them with a teacher who had an interest in an area which the student identified as one of interest to investigate. I contacted university professors, professionals, and skilled workers in each of these areas so that every student had a teacher-mentor as well as a "professional" mentor. The student worked with these mentors throughout the year in investigating a problem and developing a potential solution or report on the issue. At the end of the year, they "defended" the report in front of parents, teachers, peers, and often the professional. The projects included music sonatas, environmentally-friendly houses, aviation reports, and recommendations on the use of corn syrup in drinks. Students were able to focus on the project in relevant subject areas, develop expertise in the area, and work with a number of mentors. . . a recipe for significant success.

Gifted children need support to consider topics which are broad and global (telescope) at the same time as providing opportunities to dig deep into topics (microscope)

Much of this article has focused on the gifted child in the school setting. Many of the same principles, however, apply to the home situation. Engaging a gifted child in activities which stimulate and enhance his/her interests is something that can be done in any home. There are many enrichment activities which are easily accessible for children and their parents and teachers. As you consider how to support gifted children in your home or in the Christian school, here are some resources which you will want to consider:

Centre for Education in Mathematics and Computing (University of Waterloo) <http://www.cemc.uwaterloo.ca/>. A great resource from the coordinators of the Gauss and Pascal math competitions. The website provides links to math-related activities for students in grades four through eight as well as secondary school.

Centre for Talented Youth (Johns Hopkins University) <http://cty.jhu.edu/>. The CTY provides many on-line resources for gifted students. As well, a large

international network is accessible where students can connect with researchers and other gifted students from around the world.

West Point Bridge Contest <http://bridgecontest.usma.edu/>. Sponsored by the U.S. Military Academy, this virtual bridge building contest is a great opportunity for gifted students (ages thirteen and up) to develop an understanding of physics and engineering.

FIRST Robotics (and related activities for younger students) <http://www.firstroboticscanada.org/site/index.php>. Starting at the age of six using Lego and progressing to high school robotics, For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) is an amazing, hands-on opportunity for students.

Association for Bright Children <http://www.abcontario.ca>. Most provinces have very active ABC offices. These are great places to check for on-line and face-to-face resources.

Advanced Placement <http://www.ap.ca/>. This American-based program provides opportunities for secondary school students to take university-level courses which many Canadian universities consider for first year credit.

Renzulli Learning <http://demo.renzullilearning.com/main.aspx>. This website contains many activities for gifted students as well as a portfolio function to allow them to track the work they have done.

References

Gardner, Howard (1983; 1993) *Frames of Mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*, New York: Basic Books.

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.



Note from Education Matters:

Parents who wish to read more of Dr. Sider's work could request from us a copy of his unpublished research study entitled *Findings of the 2005-2006 Study of Special Education in Christian Schools in Ontario* (2006).

Send an e-mail to akingma@echs.ca

Letter to the Editor

In his explanation about the "Changes to the Hymn Section" (Vol. 60, #10, May 6, 2011), Frank Ezinga makes valuable concluding remarks, useful suggestions, and he offers practical advice. Nevertheless, he appears to regard the *Book of Praise* as just one among many of so-called Christian song books in the world. Instead, it is a specifically *Reformed* song book for public worship and distinctly congregational unison singing. Rather than identifying the *Genevan Psalter* as the exemplary origin, he builds on the Dutch version. It may be hurtful to Dutch pride, but that translation grossly mistreated the tunes' character, mode, rhythm, and construction. The resulting damage is still bothersome and negatively influencing a truly reformatory development. Calvin's example of hymns clearly shows versification of scripture passages and tunes that applied the Genevan criteria for congregational singing (Hymns 11, 17, 18, 22, 63). Not once does the author consider these two basic points in his discussion of the background history of our *Book of Praise*, an expressively Reformed Anglo Genevan Psalter. How is that possible? Perhaps that is precisely the point in this day and age when a desire dominates for more so-called "involved, upbeat, pleasing, and dynamic songs." Therefore, "Calvin's example" is only given lip service.

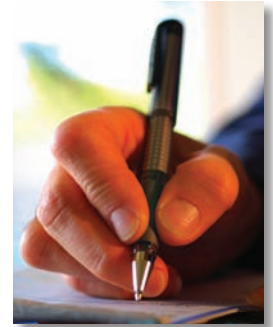
The explanation of the changes to Hymn 30 contradicts the musical notation, because the rhythm, prescribed by the addition of bar lines, does not coincide with the word rhythm. Moreover the time signature makes no sense. The presentation of the music in the Augment (#4), however, fits the English as well as the original German texts. Moreover, that notation is at a more comfortable pitch; one whole tone lower. Being based on a Latin song, the absence of time-signature and bar-lines is also more proper. In conjunction with a congregational pulse on the longer note, a notation of quarter and half notes is more appropriate than half and whole notes. The use of two notation systems is confusing and makes little or no sense (see also Hymns 2, 12, 31B, 42, 47, 63).

The change or introduction of the tune shown in Hymn 31A is clearly in violation of the committee's own, self-imposed guideline number 11, namely, "The melodies and harmonies of church music must be suitable for congregational singing, avoiding complicated rhythms, excessive syncopation, and a wide range of pitch," for it shows all of these problems. It will not stimulate but discourage participation.

Using the most original notation can sooner be a mistake than a welcome correction.

After all, most religious songs have been originally composed, written, and published for four-voice choirs and not specifically for congregational singing in unison. Even most Psalm harmonizations are still written for four-voice choirs, except the harmonization by George Stam (1968). Ezinga also mentions the *Liedboek der Kerken* (1973) as a result of what he identifies as a "global restoration." This collection contributed to the adoption of more than 400 hymns in our Dutch sister churches. This will no doubt lead to a slow demise of congregational singing of God's inspired Word in public worship.

The new Hymn 48 replaces the old tune of "*Ick wil my gaen vertroosten*," 1539 (Hymn 37). The new tune is written in the key of D-major and it shows an overly dominating fifth. Apparently these are two "qualifications"? Nevertheless, the song fails to reach its key-note, its conclusion or final point of rest. Moreover, the large and sentimental jumps discourage participation by all worshipers. Calvin's goal was participation by everyone in offering lips in public worship expected by our Creator and Redeemer (Heb 13:15). As truly reformatory churches, should not that goal be ours as well?



Dennis Teitsma

Response

First I would like to thank Br. Teitsma for his reaction to my article. His interaction provides an opportunity to clarify some aspects of the changed music in the APV version of the *Book of Praise*.

Br. Teitsma correctly raises the point that the singing in our Reformed churches is characterized by unison singing. Both the Psalm tunes and the hymn tunes in the new *Book of Praise* support this principle. The musical notation underlines that – only the melody line without harmony. For the comments regarding versification of scripture passages in the hymns, I would like to refer to the articles that Dr. A. de Visser wrote in *Clarion*, vol. 59 nos. 9 and 10, under the title "Schilder's Views Regarding the Reformed Hymnary."

The Reformers intended to give the song back to the congregation. Tunes that were composed in the Reformed tradition were written with the

congregation in mind. The Reformed churches sang in unison and our churches have continued that practise until today. Tunes that are composed during and after the Reformation are generally suitable for unison singing par excellence. Hymns 30 and 31A are prime examples of that. The comments that Br. Teitsma makes about Hymn 30 are understandable. Based on today's expectations of how we would write a song today, this tune has some unusual characteristics. Understanding the composer's intentions and experiencing the impact of this Reformed notation gives an extra dimension to this hymn and, by its inclusion, to the hymn section of the *Book of Praise* as a whole. (The incorrect time signature has been addressed in recent reprints of the *Book of Praise*.)

Hymn 31A can be found in song books of Reformed churches around the world. (On that note: I am not building on a "Dutch version" – I have considered the global development of church music, primarily in the Reformed churches, as I explained during the workshops.) Br. Teitsma refers to guideline 11 and concludes that this tune does not stimulate but discourages participation. I have been made aware that this tune was enthusiastically sung by Reformed school children in Canada recently, and

that, when properly introduced, Canadian Reformed congregations sing this tune with gusto.

I have to disagree with Br. Teitsma when it comes to the four-voice harmonies for the Psalms: most books used at the organs and pianos in our churches on Sunday are not suitable for choirs. (Goudimel editions being an exception.)

Hymn 48 has some unique musical characteristics, as Br. Teitsma correctly points out. Also here, these characteristics bring another unique element to our *Book of Praise*. Yet, the "large jumps" that Br. Teitsma refers to are not larger than in several other hymns in the *Book of Praise*. This Hymn 48 is from the English hymnody that includes e.g. "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Hymn 5) and "The Church's one Foundation" (Hymn 52). Their track record in our churches is an encouragement in participation, and there are good reasons to assume that Hymn 48 will continue this tradition.

Br. Teitsma also warns for possible results of adopting a significant number of hymns. I wholeheartedly agree with him. We may be thankful that Synod Chatham set our limit at 100 hymns, "since Psalms have a predominant place in the liturgy of the Reformed churches."

Frank Ezinga

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.





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Finally! A new collection of preludes and choral-harmonizations for the Genevan Psalms! For many years organists and pianists in the Canadian Reformed Churches have been using old Dutch collections such as Worp, Stam, and Landsman. Now a new collection of preludes and harmonizations has been published and this time the book has been published in Canada.

The author of the new collection of preludes and chorales is Dick Sanderman, a well-known Dutch organist and hymnologist. The original Dutch version of the book was published in 2004. The production of the English version was overseen by Frank Ezinga, organist in the Canadian Reformed Church in Langley, B.C.

Being an occasional church accompanist myself, I am thankful that this new collection of preludes and harmonizations is available. The preludes are fresh and interesting, with lots of variety in character and style. For some of the Psalms only one prelude is provided, but in many cases there are two preludes, or a prelude and a short intonation. The playing level is average to slightly above average. I am confident that the more challenging preludes are playable for the average accompanist provided you are willing to put in some extra effort.

The harmonizations are interesting as well. The style is somewhat contemporary but still classic and pleasant to the ear. I also appreciate the fact that Sanderman is not dogmatic about some of the issues that organists sometimes have strong opinions about. One such issue is the question regarding accidentals (example: Psalm 3, second line, second last note:



should it be a G or a G sharp?). In such cases Sanderman writes a harmonization that allows for either one of the options.

Another interesting feature of Sanderman's chorale settings is that he fills the pauses between the lines with connecting chords. This takes away uncertainty regarding the length of the rest between the lines and it helps the congregation to keep going with the rhythmic flow.

Is this book is a book for organists only? Having played through the book on my piano at home, I believe that most of the preludes can be played on a piano as well, provided you are a little bit flexible and versatile (for example, sometimes playing a bass note an octave higher). The same applies to the harmonizations: They are written in such a way that the use of the organ pedal is not mandatory, thus allowing for use at the piano as well.

In sum, I applaud the publication of this new collection of preludes and harmonizations for the Genevan Psalms. As far as I know, it is the first time that a collection of preludes and choral-harmonizations for the Genevan Psalms has been published in North America. Accolades for Frank Ezinga who negotiated this venture with the original author! In the Preface Dick Sanderman writes: "I am most honoured that the Canadian Reformed Churches intend to use this book during the services of worship." I would recommend that all organists and pianists in our federation buy a copy of this book and that every Canadian Reformed church acquire a few copies to be placed at the church organ and/or piano.

Given the classy outlook and the sturdy quality, it is amazing that the book is on the market for such a good price. Warmly recommended!



Press Release of the Combined Meeting of the Canadian Reformed Co-ordinators for Church Unity (CCU) and the United Reformed Sub-committee of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU), April 27, 2011

The combined meeting was held at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario on April 27, 2011. From the CanRC, the Revs. William den Hollander and Clarence J. VanderVelde attended. From the URCNA, the Revs. John Bouwers, Peter Vellenga, and Harry Zekveld attended.

The main purpose of our meeting was to continue working with the statement in the letter of URCNA Synod London that we are "committed to expressing our unity in concrete and discernable ways." The URCNA brothers spoke of the desire of their ecumenical relations committee to pursue the possibility of regional conferences among URC classes where the focus would be first of all internal, with a view to the challenges and responsibility to pursue ecumenical relations generally, and then, secondly, a focus on relations with the Canadian Reformed with a view to growing in familiarity and alleviating outstanding concerns. The Canadian Reformed brethren have expressed their willingness to make representatives available for such

dialogue – particularly among the United Reformed Churches in the United States that are less familiar with them.

In another attempt to work with the challenge of the lack of familiarity with Canadian Reformed Churches among American URCs, the CanRC brothers expressed their desire to meet with the whole URC CERCU committee (with representatives from each URC classis). The URC men agreed to pursue the possibility of such a meeting in conjunction with the meetings of NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council) in Atlanta this coming fall. Among NAPARC churches themselves there is presently some discussion about the viability of pursuing a broader, umbrella form of unity among varying federations of churches. Both the URC and the CanRC delegates expressed the concern that such would be short of the ideal of organic unity but suggested that the idea should not be completely discounted, especially if it might possibly be seen as a stepping-stone to more complete unity in the years to come, so long as the goal is kept before the churches.

The brothers reminded each other that in spite of the challenges of moving forward ecumenically, we should be mindful of the progress that has been attained to date. There is much for which to be thankful.



Note from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

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