

Clarion



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It is only the gospel that can truly unite people

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- Lasting Beauty





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The Challenge of Multiculturalism

The western liberal ideal of peoples of different cultures living peaceably beside and among each other is being seriously challenged

Throughout much of the western world, society is now characterized by many different cultures living side by side. According to the 2006 Canadian census, allophones, that is those whose mother tongue is neither English nor French, accounted for one out of every five Canadians. The proportion of those born outside the country was the same. This is the first time that immigrants constituted such a high proportion of the population. This year's census will probably confirm this trend. More significantly, whereas traditionally the vast majority of immigrants have come from Europe, almost sixty per cent of the newcomers now came from Asia, including the Middle East. This means that the cultures brought into Canada by these immigrants were for the most part fundamentally different from those of Canada, since their religious foundations are not Christian. The dominant new religions in the Toronto area seem to be the Muslim and Sikh faiths and variations of that phenomenon are in evidence in all the major urban centres.

The futility of multiculturalism

Our current multicultural policy celebrates differences, with integration as a second priority. This approach presupposes the basic goodness of humanity, the equal value of all cultures, and the belief that the coexistence of totally different cultures presents no threat to national unity.

Yet, it is becoming painfully obvious on the other side of the Atlantic that this type of thinking is turning out to be a wishful dream. Indeed, some European nations are experiencing a growing sense of frustration and futility as they see immigrants not integrating but forming ghetto communities which essentially become little nations within the larger whole. As a result, people living in areas that are slowly being taken over by those

who do not speak their language no longer feel at home in their own city and move out. Often, as is evident especially in France, these urban areas with their self-imposed segregation suffer from high unemployment and are breeding grounds for extremists both politically and religiously. Islamic radicals are quick to make the most of such opportunities. Tensions mount in society and distrust and suspicion are sown. Things have thankfully not developed that far in Canada, but with every immigrant that refuses to integrate into society, a potential seed of discord is being sown. The indicators for the future are not encouraging when one considers that Muslims have already taken people and even a national magazine, *Maclean's*, to human rights tribunals on charges of subjecting Canadian Muslims to hatred and contempt. Tensions mount and more clashes can be expected between a culture with a Christian heritage and an Islamic population whose numbers and influence are rapidly expanding in the West.

Multiculturalism has clearly failed in Europe. This fact is so obvious that in the last year or so the German, British, and French heads of state have all bluntly admitted this reality. The western liberal ideal of peoples of different cultures living peaceably beside and among each other is being seriously challenged.

The tensions between the cultures, be they latent or open, show the ultimate futility of humanism trying to undo the curse which God had once placed on mankind at the time of the Tower of Babel. God had then confused their language so they could not understand each other in order to disperse people all over the globe (Gen 11:1-9). Different languages and cultures developed. No liberal secular immigration policy and no well-intentioned human desires can undo the divisions that God has put in place as a result of sin and the pride of man. Humanistic multicultural

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thinking is simply no sure or adequate foundation for overcoming this division and bringing different races, languages, and cultures together in lasting harmony and peace.

The only antidote to the cursed dispersion of Babel is the blessing of the Spirit of Pentecost. When God poured out his Spirit upon his church, he started to bring nations together. The gospel united them. Even though they all spoke different languages, they could all understand the gospel which was proclaimed to them (Acts 2:7-11). The curse of the Tower of Babel was being overcome by the gospel that bound them to the head of the new mankind, Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world (Acts 4:12). Only the gospel can truly serve to bring cultures together in a lasting unity. Therein lies the challenge of multiculturalism for Christians today.

What's Inside

In this issue's editorial Dr. Cornelis Van Dam discusses the challenge of multiculturalism. He writes that "the western liberal ideal of peoples of different cultures living peaceably beside and among each other is being seriously challenged." It is evidence of the fact that well-intentioned human desire cannot undo the effects of sin; only the gospel has such a power. Dr. Van Dam points out that multiculturalism has brought the mission field to our doors.

Dr. James Visscher examines the question of ministers being chairmen of their church councils. The congregations in the province of Ontario have had to address this issue due to changing legislation. But perhaps we should address this issue as a federation.

Dr. Wes Bredenhof writes about Guido de Brès' beliefs in Purgatory as part of an ongoing celebration of the 450th birthday of the Belgic Confession.

Continuing our series on the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, who is celebrating its seventy-fifth anniversary, this issue highlights foreign missions in the OPC.

In this issue readers will find two reviews: one from Dr. Theo Lodder on *Mostly Canticles* by Rev. George van Popta; the other from Dr. Frederika Oosterhoff on *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* by John Piper. We also have regular columns Treasures New and Old, Roadside Assistance and Ray of Sunshine as well as several letters to the editor.

Laura Veenendaal

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The opportunities

Multiculturalism offers us many opportunities to show something of Christian love and compassion to those who are strangers to the western world and its Christian heritage. Indeed, Scripture teaches us that this is our obligation. In Old Testament Israel a significant part of the population consisted of strangers and aliens. Although these people were culturally and ethnically different from Israel, God's people were told to take care of them in various ways (Deut 5:14; 14:28-29). God's law, however, differentiated between the strangers who wished to integrate into society and the foreigners who had no desire to do so. The former received preferential treatment. The latter did not (e.g., Deut 14:21). The only way to be fully accepted into the nation on an equal footing with the native born Israelite was to accept the God of Israel as the true God. Then the stranger or immigrant could attend the Passover (Exod 12:48-49; Num 9:14). In other words, their full assimilation into the nation depended on their accepting Israel's God.

We cannot undo the divisions that God has put in place as a result of sin and the pride of man

Now on one level this is an obvious requirement for Israel. After all, that nation was the chosen people of God, the church. Naturally you would have to worship the same God to be part of this people. No nation today can claim to be God's special people. There is, however, a basic principle that is applicable to today. The Canadian government as servant of God (Rom 13:4) and as inheritor of a rich Christian heritage has the duty to safeguard that heritage. This means that while it should protect the freedom of religion for those entering our country, it should also set limits to that freedom. Where the demands of a foreign religion transgress the norms of Canada as influenced by Christianity, they should be forbidden. That includes the rejection of such institutions as Sharia law and polygamy, both of which are to varying degrees accepted and tolerated in Europe. Such toleration can only serve to weaken the unity of a nation. Admission to Canada should entail a promise to comply with Western law and tradition wherever Islamic law clashes with it.

Although in this age of postmodernism religious uniformity is impossible to achieve in a western nation, history does teach us to be very careful in trying to bring together in an artificial unity what

does not belong together. A country and a people are strongest if they share a religious heritage. After Britain relinquished control of India in 1947, this country split largely along religious lines into mainly Hindu India, and predominantly Muslim Pakistan and Bangladesh. More recently, Yugoslavia has fallen apart into seven different countries; religion was an important factor in defining these nations, the latest being Muslim Kosovo getting its disputed independence from Serbia.

Today's multicultural reality offers us the opportunity to show Christian compassion and love to those who are strangers and aliens in our country. The highest degree of love that we can show is to share the gospel with them. This is the real challenge of multiculturalism. The mission field has moved into our backyard, or should I say front yard? It is most encouraging to see Canadian Reformed and United Reformed initiatives in this area within our nation. After all, the gospel is the only way to bridge cultural and ethnic divides. Only the Spirit of Christ can bind together into a true unity, the unity of the faith.

The new mankind

The church is the new mankind which God is raising up. Therein lies the true and lasting hope for the future. Multiculturalism on a humanistic basis can eventually destroy a country if enough diverse foreign populations with strong and different religious views shape the political landscape. The Europeans are beginning to realize this. We need to warn our own politicians about this threat as well.

Only the gospel can truly serve to bring cultures together in a lasting unity

But, when all has been said and done, ultimately it is only the gospel that can truly unite a people. Only the Spirit binds together and overcomes the Tower of Babel confusion! As Psalm 87 so eloquently notes, in God's one holy nation they will come from many different backgrounds, such as Egypt, Babylon, and Tyre. But they will all be recorded as born in Zion. This is the new humanity which God is raising up in the present world. It is the singular privilege of the church and its members to work for that unity as the Lord gives opportunity! May that great work of our God in raising up a new mankind encourage us to profile ourselves as belonging to this new mankind and to be active participants as the Lord gathers the innumerable multitude together from all the tribes and nations of the earth (Rev 5:9; 7:9).

C



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MATTHEW 13:52

“For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.”
1 Corinthians 15:53

Lasting Beauty

“How do I look?” That may very well be one of the most dangerous questions a wife can ask her husband. Depending on what she is wearing, there are times when a husband answers enthusiastically and promptly: “Lovely! Gorgeous!” But inevitably there are also times when the question must be cautiously approached, thoughtfully considered, and expertly diffused. The assessment of beauty can be so cruelly subjective.

We all have opinions of what is truly beautiful, according to our varying tastes. Nevertheless, God has given us expressions of unquestionable beauty. Flowers are one of those expressions. The Lord Jesus gives us a remarkable description of their beauty in Matthew 6:28-29, “See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.” Incredible! God clothes the flowers magnificently.

The wealth of floral imagery contained in the Bible is quite astonishing. In this imagery flowers are not only objects of beauty, they are also symbols of beauty. In the Song of Songs chapter 2 the beloved describes herself as a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley – a description her beloved immediately affirms.

In Exodus 25 God commands the lampstand for his dwelling place to be made of pure gold, with flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms. Solomon’s construction of the temple, described in 1 Kings 6 and 7, also includes flowers as an essential element. We read that the walls around the temple

were decorated with flowers. The inside of the temple was constructed with cedar and carved with open flowers. Even on the doors to the inner sanctuary, open flowers were carved and overlaid with gold. These images included in the dwelling place of God were a reference to Eden, where God had created a perfect place of unimaginable beauty.

The beauty of Eden was broken by man’s wilful disobedience and the introduction of sin. The symbolism of flowers reflects this change, moving beyond beauty to illustrate the brevity of life, culminating in death. There is beauty on earth, but it inevitably fades away. Life abounds, but it is soon over. Job laments: “Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure” (14:1-2). David writes: “As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more” (Ps 103:15).

This is imagery continued in the New Testament. James uses it to encourage those in humble circumstances, reminding them that the rich will pass away like a wild flower, scorched by the heat of sun. Peter uses the imagery to encourage believers who have faith in the Lord and who delight in his holy Word: “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever” (1 Pet 1:24-25). He points the believers ahead, reminding them that there is much in store for those who love the Lord.

This is precisely what Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 15:53. The Lord Jesus had spoken about how he clothes the grass with beautiful flowers, which themselves are clothed with beauty, and yet those flowers will quickly pass away. But God is preparing something wonderful and enduring for his children. The perishable and sinful nature that causes us so much pain and struggle will not continue forever. Daily we have to fight against the devil, the world, and especially ourselves, but there is an end in sight. Our troubles may seem unending, and our difficulties insurmountable. Yet the perishable will be changed! We will be clothed with a perfected nature and a perfected body, and that will be a gift of God which will endure forever.

If in this world God has created amazing beauty, what will the beauty of the world to come be like? Just imagine. The perishable will clothe itself with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality. This is God’s promise to those who love him.

The people of this world chase after and envy the beauty that does not last, a futile pursuit. Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting. But the fear of the Lord is what truly counts. As God’s beloved children we look forward to putting on the beauty of a perfected being that will last forever. We will be able to love God and each other perfectly. At that time any one of us may ask: ‘How do I look?’ We all know what answer we will hear.





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Who Should Preside?

Over the last number of years a certain development has taken place among the Canadian Reformed Churches in the Province of Ontario. If I have it right then the government passed a number of laws dealing with conflict of interest rules that also have a bearing on churches. What it means is that a minister, who is in the employ of a church, may not at the same time be the chairman of the governing body of that church. In other words, an employee cannot also act as an employer. Sounds logical!

Now, a number of churches have reacted to this by changing their structure in such a way that the minister is no longer the chairman of the church council (or the meeting of the deacons, the elders, and the minister). Instead the church council elects as chairman a member from its ranks who is not the minister or pastor. At the same time the minister remains the chairman of the consistory (or the body of elders), who supervise the doctrine and life of the members of the church.

Looking at all this as an outside observer (seeing that I serve in a different Canadian province which has not adopted the same rules that apply in Ontario), I am, however, still left to wonder. It is my understanding that biblically-speaking the real ruling body of the church is the consistory, or the elders. This means that actually the minister should resign as the chairman of the consistory, and not the church council.

A problem

Only there is a problem here. It has to do with Article 38 of the Church Order which states that "as a rule the ministers of the Word shall preside."

Hence it appears that the civil government of Ontario is saying that a minister, who is in the employ of the church, cannot be the presiding officer of the church. On the other hand, the Church Order requires that the minister has to hold that position and exercise it prerogatives.

Hence, what should be done? Should the churches approach the government and request it to amend the

law? Or should the churches consider changing the Church Order to comply with the law?

(By the way, I do not think that making the minister the chairman of one governing body [the consistory] and not the other [the council], really solves the problem.)

So what to do?

A suggestion

My suggestion would be that we consider making the minister the chairman of neither. In short, let us change the Church Order and remove the stipulation that the minister has to chair the consistory meetings.

Now, why would I propose such a change? Actually, it has to do with my own experience as a minister for more than thirty-five years. During all of those years I have always functioned as the chairman of both council and consistory. But then when my present congregation became too large and it was decided to call a second minister, things had to change.

The Church Order speaks about equality among the ministers of the Word (see Article 17 CO). What this means is that Dort does not look with favour on the North American approach of having a senior minister and a junior minister in one and the same church. Instead, we opted for a co-pastoring model in which all the duties are shared, and that includes the duties connected to the chairing of meetings. In the new year my colleague will take over the reins of the church council for six months and I will preside over the consistory for the same length of time. Once that time period is over, we will switch chairs.

What this has meant is that for six months at a time I have not been chairing the consistory meetings but attending in the capacity of a fellow elder, albeit an elder who has been set aside for preaching and teaching. Hence for the first time in my ministry I have had the luxury of sitting back, listening, and participating, without the responsibility of being the chairman.

Church News

Examined by Classis Ontario West of June 15, 2011 and declared eligible for call:

Justin Roukema

Ted VanSpronsen

Called by the Living Word Canadian Reformed Church of Guelph, Ontario:

Candidate Ted VanSpronsen

Accepted the call to Smithville Canadian Reformed Church, Smithville, Ontario:

Rev. C. Bouwman

of Yarrow, British Columbia.

Change of Address:

Candidate J. Roukema

28 Brant County Road 22, Caledonia, ON N3W 2G9

Phone: 905-765-7035

Assessing a new experience

What has it been like? In short, it has been an eye-opener. It has allowed me the opportunity to prepare for a meeting without the burden of having to plan and organize the meeting. During the meeting, it has also allowed me to sit back quietly, listen carefully, and speak objectively. No longer did I have to introduce the matters to be discussed, direct the verbal traffic, urge the brothers to keep it short, and prod them to come to a conclusion. On the whole I looked forward to the meetings more, and when I came home, I could relax better.

And something else, no longer was I the lightning rod for those in the congregation who did not agree with a particular decision. And indeed, that is often what the minister becomes. A consistory makes a decision in a controversial matter and whose phone is ringing off the hook? A minister may be part of a larger decision-making body but who is deemed to be in charge and most responsible for a controversial decision?

More than once in my ministry a consistory has made a decision on a certain matter, even a decision that I personally did not favour, and members of the congregation held me responsible for it and roundly castigated me for not doing my duty. As some put it, "You as the minister should have overruled the elders. You should knock a few heads together in that consistory room. You should make sure that that brother never serves as an elder again." In Reformed circles,

we do not have the office of pope, but at times there are members who expect the minister to act in a decidedly papal manner.

Remove the sentence

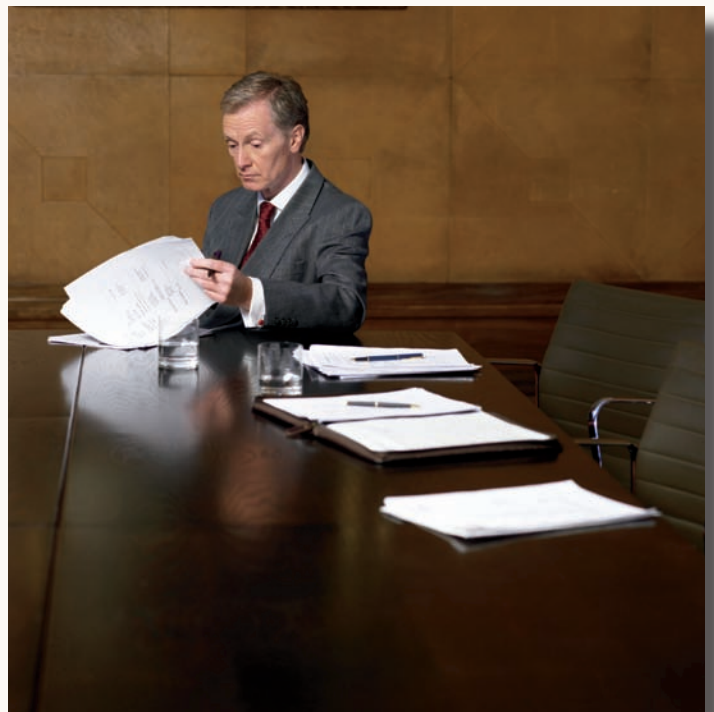
As the result of all this, I really do think that the sentence in Article 38 CO about the minister having to preside should go. Let the body of elders elect their own chairman. Long gone are the days when the minister was the only or even the most educated person in the room. If a particular consistory wants its minister to preside and he does not mind, then it should allow him to do so (and the churches in Ontario should lobby for a change of the law). On the other hand, if the minister would rather not preside and there are other brothers who are both willing and able, let them do so.

A further benefit

In addition to this being a course of action that will take some pressure off the minister, it will also do something else. It will help to foster the idea that the church is not the private preserve of one man or a "dominee-ocracy." It will also highlight the fact that the church is ruled by a body of men called "elders" who together discuss, weigh, and decide on matters that maintain and promote the well-being of the church.

At least that's my view.

C





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Guido de Brès and His Belief in Purgatory

This year marks the 450th birthday of the Belgic Confession. As part of our ongoing celebration of this milestone in Reformed confessional history, let me share with you a little known fact about the author, Guido de Brès. He believed in purgatory.

This came out when he was in prison in Tournai in the last weeks of his life. He and another Reformed pastor (Peregrin de la Grange) were initially imprisoned there and then shortly afterwards transferred to Valenciennes. While awaiting transfer, de Brès and de la Grange were visited by many people. He had become a sort of celebrity. He wrote, "I was visited by a large number of gentlemen, women, and young girls, who said that they wanted to see me because they had heard so much of Guy de Brès and had never seen him before."

Among those visitors was Monsieur de Moulbay, the commander of the Tournai castle where de Brès was imprisoned. He came looking to debate points of theology with the pastor. He and others first tried to argue with de Brès about the invocation of Mary and other saints. De Brès stumped them with quotations from Scripture and Augustine. Their next attack came with the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, Jesus' mother. De Brès affirmed that he believed that she was always and still is a virgin – not an uncommon position among sixteenth century Reformers. This answer surprised his accusers.

Then de Moulbay alleged that de Brès did not believe in purgatory. This was his response and the follow-up conversation as reported by de Brès:

"Pardon me, sir, I do not belong to those who deny a purgatory. For I hold the blood of the Son of God to be the purgatory of the sins of those who repent and embrace this benefit by faith. But I do not recognize the burning and roasting of souls as held by the fables of the priests." Then he answered

me in anger, saying that I might as well deny that there is a hell. But I said that I held that there is a hell for the sinful and wicked, just as the Word of God teaches us, but that I did not hold to such a purgatory as the priests had invented because the Scriptures teach us nothing about it. Then they said that when I would be damned I would find out about hell. To which I responded to him that I have my Judge in heaven and he would judge altogether different – and concerning that I was confident because of his Word.

We read of nothing further between de Brès and de Moulbay. Immediately after this, de Brès and de la Grange were shipped out of Tournai on their way to Valenciennes. There the two Reformed pastors would be martyred for their faith.

Not an original method

I got to thinking about de Brès and his "belief in purgatory," as I was recently reading a late medieval letter. Wessel Gansfort was a Dutch theologian who lived about a century before de Brès. He was writing to Jacob Hoeck, another theologian. They had been arguing about the role of tradition and Scripture, specifically with regard to the issue of indulgences. Hoeck had asserted that the Bible said nothing for or against indulgences. Gansfort completely disagreed. He wrote,

In my opinion it was not the first Pope, Peter, but the Holy Spirit through Peter who issued the one and only permanent bull of indulgence. Peter testifies that this bull is permanent because it provides ample entrance into the kingdom of God and of our Saviour Jesus Christ. And Peter further testifies that the bull is the only one and adds, "Whoever lacks these things [the ten things enumerated in 2 Peter 1] is blind and feeling his way by hand and

has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins." Therefore no other bull is to be received or authorized which does not include this. Every other bull is superfluous and, therefore, Scripture does speak about indulgences, because it refers to ample entrance into the kingdom.

Gansfort was speaking about a different (but related) issue, but yet we find him using the same method as de Brès about a hundred years later: co-opting your opponent's terminology to score rhetorical points. Had de Brès read Gansfort? It's impossible to say. More likely, both Gansfort and de Brès were using a method of argument that had been developed by someone else in an earlier period. They knew that this method had power to persuade.

Purgatory in the Belgic Confession & Le Baston

De Brès used this line of argumentation concerning purgatory elsewhere. His first major book was also his most popular. *Le Baston de la Foy Chrestienne* (The Staff of the Christian Faith) appeared in 1558 and was a response to the most serious Roman Catholic theological errors. There is a chapter that deals with purgatory. De Brès first lists all the Scripture texts which refute the Roman Catholic doctrine. Then he begins presenting what the early church fathers taught. He provides straight quotations (in French) from Irenaeus, Jerome, Chrysostom, Ambrose, and most importantly, from Augustine. One of the quotes from Augustine comes from *The City of God* where he is interacting with the Platonist Porphyry. De Brès quotes Augustine noting that Porphyry, "refused to recognize that Christ is the Principle by whose incarnation we are purified." In the French translation given by de Brès the last part read, "*Par l'incarnation duquel nous sommes purgez.*" In the margin next to this quotation, de Brès added a note, "Jesus Christ is our purgatory."

That leads us back to the Belgic Confession. There is nothing explicit in the Confession about purgatory. However, there are two places where de Brès implicitly rejects the Roman Catholic and affirms the Reformed version of purgatory.

The first comes in Article 21, "The Satisfaction of Christ Our High Priest." De Brès wrote there of Christ "offering himself on the tree of the cross, where he poured out his precious blood to purge away our sins." In the original French we find "*la purification de nos*



pechez," literally: "the purification of our sins." But yet the thought is there of cleansing or purging and this is reflected in later Latin renditions that used the word *purgatio*. Jesus Christ is our purgatory, according to Article 21 of the Confession.

The second place is found in Article 34, "The Sacrament of Baptism." The Confession says that the blood of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, "washes and cleans our soul from sin." Again, the exact word in French related to purgatory (*purger*) was not used in the original, but the thought is there. Both the thought and the word are found a little bit further when de Brès wrote of how Christ gives us what is signified in baptism. The first thing mentioned is that he "washes, purges, and cleanses our souls of all filth and unrighteousness." Baptism is the sacrament that points us to the reality of Christ being our purgatory.

The Reformed version of purgatory is the biblical, comforting version. It speaks of the finished work of our Saviour as the only ground for our salvation. It speaks of Jesus Christ as the great High Priest who has done everything necessary to secure our well-being for today and into eternity. This was the firm conviction by which Guido de Brès lived and died. This is the firm conviction maintained by our Belgic Confession. Because it's soundly biblical, it ought to continue to be ours *and* it should be shared, especially with those who still hold to the counterfeit doctrine.



The account of Monsieur de Moulbay's visit with de Brès is found in *Procedures tenues a l'endroit de ceux la religion du pais bas* (Geneva: Jean Crespin, 1568), 29-33. The quote from the letter of Wessel Gansfort can be found in *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, ed. H.t.A. Oberman (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966), 103. The quote from Augustine is found in *Le baston de la foy chrestienne* (Geneva: Nicolas Barbier & Courtreau, 1558), 142.

The OPC at Seventy-Five: Foreign Missions

In the first installment of the report on the recent General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches, we related how the OPC commemorated seventy-five years of activity in home mission. In what follows you will read a summary of another key characteristic of the OPC: its commitment to fulfill the missionary calling of Matthew 28. Using a special presentation by the Foreign Missions Committee, the OPC paused to recall God's grace in their efforts to bring the Gospel to every tribe, tongue, and nation.

Foreign mission was a motivating factor in the formation of the OPC in 1936. Therefore one of the first general assemblies determined that it was "necessary for the OPC to establish its own foreign missionary agency." By 1938 the Foreign Missions Committee was formed; it remains highly active to this day.

The OPC undertook its first mission project in Manchuria, in the late 1930s. Other early mission fields included Japan (1938) and Korea (1946). The OPC next developed projects in Africa, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere. In the 1970s the Lord granted opportunities for missions in the Middle East; these began in Egypt and expanded to Cyprus and Kenya. Haiti became a focus in 2004, when ministers began to preach in villages there, and to instruct men in the basics of the Reformed understanding of Scripture. Today there are nine active fields, on several different continents. To get a sense of the extent of the OPC's commitment to foreign mission, one may note that currently there are seven missionaries in Uganda alone.

Recalling also the countless challenges which missionaries and their families faced, and

*Rev. Bruce Hunt at a
Korean fishing village*



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Gil (M.D.) and Marilyn Den Hartog
Ghinda, Ethiopia



Clarence and Dora Duff
Ghinda, Ethiopia



Grace Rietkerk, M.D.
Ghinda, Ethiopia



Anna Strikwerda, R.N.
Ghinda, Ethiopia



Egbert and Betty Andrews
Kaohsiung, Formosa



Richard and Polly Gaffin
Taichung, Formosa



John and Gertrude Johnstone
Taichung, Formosa



Arnold and Lorraine Kress
Sendai, Japan



Heber and Genie McIlwaine
Fukushima, Japan



David and Grace Moore
Tokyo, Japan



George and Fumi Uomoto
Nakayama New Town, Japan



Harvie and Dottie Conn
Seoul, Korea



Ralph and Joan English
Seoul, Korea



Ted and Grace Hard
Pusan, Korea



Bruce and Kathy Hunt
Pusan, Korea

7401 Old York Road, Phila., Pa. 19126 • 2170/13M


A 1970
promotion of
OPC's foreign
missions

Some missionaries developed special means to propagate the gospel. One, for example, set up his own printing press to publish Christian materials and to distribute

highlighting the plight of especially the native and American pastors laboring in Eritrea, members of the committee expressed gratitude to God for his providence in the lives of the many believers who served "in the field."

them to unbelievers. Others started Christian schools. One missionary described the joys and challenges of work in Port au Prince; another depicted the work in Japan, noting especially the afflictions that devastated country is experiencing. A third missionary emphasized the biblical charge: "declare God's glory to the nations," while a video interview with a retired medical doctor culminated in a heartfelt expression of thanks.

In fact, each of the missionaries stressed that to God alone should be praise and thanks. And so the Foreign Missions presentation ended with the request that we pray God to cause his Word to find fertile soil, to establish and strengthen his church, and to open doors to new fields.

On behalf of the Committee for Contact
with Churches in North America
Dr. Riemer Faber (convener)
Rev. Doug vandeBurgt (secretary) 



OPC pioneer missionary to Eritrea, the
Rev. Clarence Duff

Letter to the Editor

Reading some of the responses to the topic "women voting," I wanted to express my appreciation for Dr. Van Dam's write-up "The Slippery Slope." No, women should not be ministers or office bearers, but that is not the issue here. I have been given the gift of being single, and being female, I have no opportunity to cast my vote. There are many more like me in our churches, and even though I don't view my being single as a burden, it can be a challenge in the church setting. For single or widowed women not being able to vote can be another way of being "excluded," whether this is perceived or real.

Monique Graafland

To the Editor,

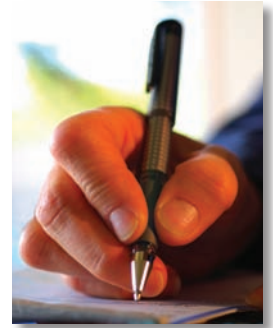
I would like to make a comment on an article written by Dr. C. Van Dam titled "Slippery Slope" (*Clarion*, Vol 60, No. 10, May 6, 2011).

This article deals with a decision that Synod Burlington made in 2010. I do not really want to interact with the Professor in regard to the specific issue of women voting. I have not really done a lot of study on it so I intend to leave this alone. My issue is with the comment Prof. Van Dam makes on page two in the second paragraph, in which he writes, "Given the fact that you can neither conclusively prove nor disprove that Scripture demands or forbids that women participate in the election process, Synod wisely decided to leave it in the freedom of the churches."

I question the wisdom of this decision, and even struggle with the Professor's statement, because in Proverbs 11:14 and in Proverbs 15:22 we read that in a multitude of councillors there is safety, in a multitude of councillors plans are established. This is exactly the reason why we come together to discuss issues affecting the churches, namely in a multitude of councillors there is safety. To leave it to the freedom of the churches does not bring closure, but confuses the discussion for when the churches have to deal with this. This is not giving direction but sowing confusion.

Rev. Bouwman in his book, *Spiritual Order for the Church* writes on this subject and he says, "From passages of Scripture such as these, one must conclude that it is foolish for a local congregation to be independent, set on going its own way and ignoring its neighbouring church. In other words, as churches too, we need each other in the decision making process, and so we do well

to listen to what the other has to say" (p. 118). I know that the churches had their say but where it looked for direction it did not find it in this decision.



With respect to the purpose of these major assemblies, he also says on page 115 of this book, "If the Lord has made churches one in faith, these churches express that unity by working together – and so encouraging uniformity of thinking and practise."

Therefore by this decision the Synod has not acted in the spirit of wisdom which puts the emphasis on the multitude making a decision of benefit to the churches; rather I wonder whether it acts to discourage uniformity of thinking and practise in the churches.

Further it is my conviction that where there is no clear answer in Scripture and the brothers are not able to convince each other from Scripture, that the status quo should be adopted until such a time as clear scriptural evidence is obtained by those who wish to change that status quo.

We should be careful when practises of old are changed. Good scriptural reasons are needed. Since it is clear that this synod decision could not find enough to convince all the brothers, how then are your churches supposed to do this?

Greg Spaanderman
Member of the Free Reformed Church of
West Albany, Australia

Response

Thank you, brother, for your letter. To further the discussion I only want to make one comment. Working together in a federation of churches does not necessitate uniformity of practice in all respects. For example, congregations today differ in liturgy and in the manner of celebrating the Lord's Supper. Can regulations governing election procedures not also be left to the discretion of the local church especially since such variety is attested in faithful Reformed and Presbyterian churches with whom we have a close relationship?

cvd

Dear Editor,

Rev. Paulin Bedard rejoices in the spread of Reformed doctrine among evangelicals (as reported on by Rev. John van Popta in his *Clarion* article "Young, Restless, Reformed") but is concerned about what he considers Bible-critical attitudes of some of the movement's leaders (see "Further Discussion," *Clarion*, June 3, 2011). He gives special attention to Redeemer's Tim Keller and, indirectly, to C.S. Lewis, who, as Bedard points out, has influenced Keller. While I appreciate and share Rev. Bedard's concern about departures from the truth, I do not believe that he has presented Keller's position fairly. A number of points could be mentioned but I will, for the sake of brevity, focus here on only one, namely Bedard's accusation that "According to Keller. . . hell is a state of mind, not a place where you are 'sent,'" adding that by stating this, Keller is "again contradicting Scripture."

Bedard's reference is to Chapter 5 of Keller's *The Reason for God*. This book deals with objections to Christianity by unbelievers, and the chapter in question focuses on the oft-heard question how a God of love can possibly assign people to the horrors of hell. (The chapter's title is, "How Can a Loving God Send People to Hell?") Those who raise the objection may agree that evil-doers like Nero or Hitler deserve hell, but are convinced that "normal people" like themselves deserve better. It is in this context that Keller quotes Lewis, who wrote, among other things, "There are only two kinds of people – those who say 'Thy will be done' to God or those to whom God in the end says, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell choose it. Without that self-choice it wouldn't be Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it" (Keller, p. 79, English version). And both Keller and Lewis make clear that hell is a place of torment, of horrible self-flagellation and mental pain, because it is being everlastingly removed from the source of all light and all love. I suggest that if that is a "state of mind," then states of mind can indeed be horrible

torture. (For Keller's arguments, and also for the statement that people choose hell themselves, I suggest reading of the relevant pages.)

I admit that Keller is not using traditional language here. But would traditional language be understood by his readers? After all, Keller is arguing with unbelievers, people who probably have little biblical knowledge. The same was true of Lewis. Both realize with Paul that we must be to the Jews a Jew and to the Greeks a Greek. By arguing with unbelievers on their own ground these two apologists have been able to convince many agnostics and unbelievers. They have also helped numberless Christians, even some in our own churches, who shared the questions the two authors try to answer.

I wonder if objections to writers like Keller and Lewis on this point are influenced by a tendency to read figurative language in the Bible literally. If so, it would be good to turn to John Calvin, who already attended to this type of problem. In his commentary on Matthew 3:12, Calvin dealt specifically with the question if we have to take the description of hell as punishment by fire, sulfur, brimstone, and worms literally. He answered it unhesitatingly in the negative, interpreting the entire biblical picture as figurative or metaphorical. "But this," one of his commentators writes, "is certainly not to say that Calvin regarded flaming fire and brimstone as what some of our contemporaries (even theological contemporaries) would naively call a 'mere metaphor,' meaning thereby that it means either nothing or almost nothing. For Calvin it meant the ultimate horror of separation from God, 'which we can neither imagine nor express properly. . . with our words'" (Roland M. Frye "Theological Use of Figurative Language" in Timothy George, ed., *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, pp. 178f.). Keller and Lewis, it seems to me, are on this point in full agreement with John Calvin.

Frederika Oosterhoff

*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.*



It's Not a Waste

By Harma-Mae Smit

Maybe you're just like me. Maybe you've hit a dead end and discovered whatever career or job or schooling you pursued wasn't for you. You're just not cut out for engineering (or nursing, or teaching). And the haunting question you're left with, as you attempt to switch directions and you look back over the last year (or two, or three years) of your life, is – "Was it all a waste?"

It's not a waste. Let me tell you what happened to me. I went into nursing straight out of high school and spent three years in it before I could face the fact it wasn't the career for me. I had spent three years slaving to pass each course, and there I was left with nothing. No degree, no career, and at least another three years in school if I wanted to do another program. I felt like I was starting back at square one. What had been the point of these years if it had all ended up in nothing?

But it wasn't a waste. On one hand, learning is almost never useless. Sure, I wouldn't be going into the hospital anytime soon and sticking needles into people's arms, but it's not useless to know how your body works and what you can do if something goes wrong. And more than that, I gained confidence. Coming out of high school I had been a nervous teenager overawed at the college life. Nursing taught me how to handle responsibility (which came in handy later as a day camp leader), talking in front of groups (we almost always had to present research to our class), and leadership skills (being able to tell patients and families what to do). Since going into nursing I'm less nervous when talking in groups such as Bible Study, taking on leadership roles such as being a day camp leader and helping with Young People's, and having confidence in myself as I branch out to try new things. These skills won't go away. You too may be worried

that you wasted your time, but may not be realizing what skills you've picked up and how they can help you in the future.

More than just the practical side of things, however, I've had to dismantle my trust in myself. I didn't realize it, but in high school I thought I had pretty much figured out how the world worked. I thought I could make a reasonable life plan and expect it to fall into place. What I didn't think enough about was: only God knows the plan for our lives. We can make a plan, but there's no guarantee it will happen. What I've had to learn now (sometimes slowly and painfully) is that God does not always tell us his plan. We may end up in a place very different than we thought we'd be.

Psalms 119:105 has helped me realize how essential a close walk with God is. It says God's Word is "a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." A lamp, as anyone who has ever walked in the darkness knows, only shows so much of the path in front of you. God doesn't show you your whole future either, but he will illumine enough for you to keep going.

Lastly, I've been learning to accept that God's plan is always best. If you had asked me what the best plan for my life was, I wouldn't have told you I'd want to start over again after three years of nursing school. But as Christians we believe God is turning everything to our good (Rom 8:28). How? I don't know yet, and may never. But God knows. Whenever I'm anxious I can cling to that. I don't know what I'm doing in life but God has a plan for me, and that plan includes each and every one of my stupid mistakes and sins. He's turning it into something that will glorify him. There is no better way my life could've turned out than as he planned, even if I had finished nursing. There is nothing better in life than to bring God glory.

C

Ray of Sunshine

by Corinne Gelms and
Patricia Gelms

We have many birthdays to celebrate this month. Birthdays often have us thinking about our great God and how he blesses us with life. Like the psalmist of Psalm 8, we too can stand in awe of God and his creative power. We have a mighty God, creator of the earth. He has the heavens in his control the whole earth and universe is his! This mighty God also thinks of us and gives us life and strength. God has us in his care and keeping. We are safe in him.

We thank the Lord for you and pray that he will give you a wonderful day in which to celebrate with family and friends. May the Lord bless and keep you and make his face to shine upon you. Continue to sing God's praises.

Psalm 8:1, 3, 5

*O LORD, our Lord, yours be all adoration.
How glorious is your name in all creation!
You have displayed your majesty on high;
your glory reaches far above the sky.*

*LORD, when my gaze upon the heaven lingers,
on moon and stars, the work of you own fingers,
O what is man that you should think of him,
the son of man that you should care for him?*

*You have appointed him as lord and master
of bird and beast in forest, field, and pasture;
of all the fish and creatures of the sea.
O lord, how great is your name's majesty!*



Birthdays in August:

- 4 **TERENCE BERENDS** will be 35
6528 1st Line
RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4
- 5 **PHILIP SCHUURMAN** will be 52
1156 Diltz Road
Dunnville, ON N1A 2W2
- 9 **ROSE MALDA** will be 54
Mt. Nemo Christian Nursing Home
RR 2, Milton, ON L9T 2X6
- 18 **FENNY KUIK** will be 59
140 Foch Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R2C 5H7



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 LOR 2A0
Phone: 905-957-0380
Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



Dr. Frederika Oosterhoff is
a historian in
Hamilton, Ontario
fgo@quickclic.net

John Piper on Thinking

John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Crossway, 2010)

Additional Information:

ISBN-13: 978-1-4335-2071-6, 222 pages

"The chief end of man," the Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us, "is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." A question that is often asked today concerns the relative role of the heart and of the mind in glorifying and enjoying God. Some Christians place much stress on the mind, on thinking and reasoning and logic. Concerned about attacks upon the Bible by unbelieving scientists and other secular trend-setters, they defend the faith by means of arguments. This approach, which is widely followed also in Reformed circles, falls within the category of apologetics (the reasoned defence of the faith) and worldview analysis.

The approach has biblical warrant. We are to love God with our mind (Matt 22:37) and must be prepared to give the reasons for the hope we have (1 Pet 3:15). When they are in discussion with unbelieving intellectuals, Christians should be able to debate with them on their ground. They owe this not only to the unbelievers themselves, but also to fellow-believers. In this tradition there is, however, the danger of intellectualism: of concentrating on the head and forgetting about the role of the heart. In view of this danger, other Christians downplay the role of thinking and instead stress the absolute pre-eminence of the affections, of feeling, doing, and experiencing – in short, of the heart. Although an important correction, this type of thinking runs the danger of anti-intellectualism.

Well-known evangelical author John Piper disagrees with these alternatives. In his new book *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (2010), Piper rejects "either-or" approaches in the matter of head and heart, thinking and feeling, reason and faith. For him it is a matter of "both-and." While convinced of the dangers of intellectualism, he just as strongly rejects anti-intellectualism, pointing out that the use of the mind is essential in the life of faith and discipleship. Rigorous thinking is "a necessary, God-ordained means of knowing God" and provides "the kindling for the fires of the heart." Such thinking does not of course allow for neutrality and intellectual pride. The gospel demands God-centred, biblical, non-autonomous thinking, the sort of thinking that seeks reasons to treasure and desire God above all things.

The Christian mind

Piper is the pastor for preaching and vision at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis and has authored several books, including such bestsellers as *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (3rd ed. 2003), and *Don't Waste Your Life* (2003). A Calvinist evangelical and a staunch believer in biblical infallibility, he is widely read also in Reformed circles.

The book now under review has a foreword by historian Mark A. Noll, a long-time friend and a fellow-evangelical. Noll himself has written about the need for deep, rigorous Christian thinking, most notably so in his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994). His concern there was with the weaknesses in evangelical thinking in the realms of "high culture," such as philosophy, politics, economic theory, historical inquiry, linguistics, literary theory, the history of science, social theory, and the arts; in short, all the disciplines within the range of advanced, specialized, first-order modern scholarship. Quoting a Lebanese Christian scholar, Noll reminded his readers that "at the heart of the crisis in Western civilization lies the state of the mind and the spirit of the universities." And therefore, "For the sake of greater effectiveness in witnessing to Jesus Christ Himself, as well as for their own sakes, the Evangelicals cannot afford to keep on living on the periphery of responsible intellectual existence" (*The Scandal*, pp. 25/6). (Noll tells us in the Preface to Piper's book that he is preparing a sequel to *The Scandal*. Entitled *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*, it is scheduled to appear later this summer.)

Whether or not Piper agrees with Noll's message, his book is not about Noll's type of high-level academic thinking. Unlike Noll, he also does not deal with controversial topics such as the debate on Genesis 1. But neither does he express distrust of modern learning and modern science. His message is of a different nature and applies to all believers, to non-academics as much as to academics. Even though he stresses the importance of thinking, his intention is at no point, as he assures us in the Introduction, to prove the superiority of intellectuals and establish the need for degrees. Nor is it to encourage intellectual endeavours like apologetics or worldview analysis. His concern is with the need for Spirit-enabled thinking *in understanding the gospel*, and that need is shared by learned and unlearned alike. Such thinking is a means (and an indispensable one at that) which God has

given to all those who seek him, no matter the level of their education.

With respect to the head *versus* heart controversy, Piper admits that the mind, while indispensable, is the servant of the heart. We are to worship and love God and to enjoy him, and this is first of all a matter of the heart. But empty emotionalism threatens if such love and joy are not awakened by true knowledge of who God really is. Though factual knowledge does not save, it is indispensable. Believers must know and study the contents of the Bible, for how can they believe and love a God they don't know; a God whose revelation they do not bother to read and try to understand?

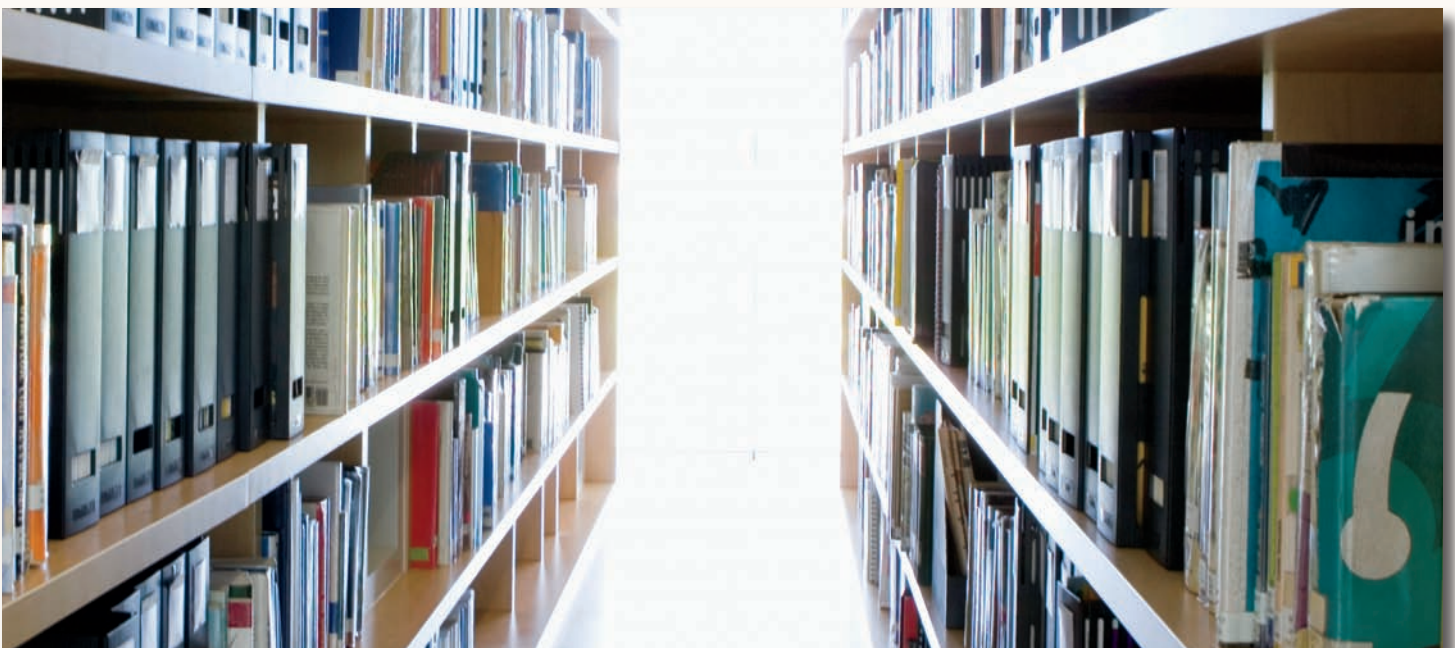
Anti-intellectualism

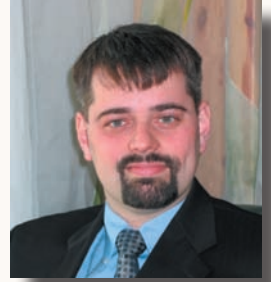
Piper gives a good deal of attention to the prevailing anti-intellectualism in the history of American evangelicalism. He quotes the remark by the early twentieth-century evangelist Billy Sunday (who expressed the feelings, he believes, of many evangelical Christians): "If I had a million dollars I'd give \$999,999 to the church and \$1 to education." What was widely believed in Sunday's time is still widely believed today. Postmodern relativism and pragmatism in fact underscore the message that knowledge and study and serious thinking have little or nothing to do with true faith.

In this connection Piper mentions some Bible texts that are often used as "pillars of anti-intellectualism." Among them are Luke 10:21, where Jesus gives thanks that God has "hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children," and 1 Corinthians 1:19, 20, where Paul reminds his readers that God "will destroy the wisdom of the wise" and has "made foolish the wisdom of this world." There are similar warnings about "knowledge" and "the wisdom of this world" elsewhere in the Bible – for example in 1 Corinthians 3:19, Colossians 2:8, and Romans 1:28.

Nevertheless, as Piper concludes, the overwhelming message of the Bible is that knowing the truth is crucial. This demands a diligent use of the mind, always with the realization that proper *understanding* is God's gift. After all, Satan also believes the facts of the Bible and trembles. The use of the mind is necessary and indispensable, but it is not decisive. Decisive is the work of the Holy Spirit's regenerating power. That alone gives certainty. Piper reminds us at the same time that the "wise and learned" of Luke 10 are not necessarily the educated, but the self-reliant and proud. And pride is no respecter of persons; the uneducated are not immune to it. And conversely, highly educated Christians can be found among the "little children" – namely among those who know that they have nothing to contribute to their salvation and are utterly dependent on the cross.

C





Dr. Theo Lodder is pastor of Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church at Surrey, BC and recently completed a doctoral dissertation on church music thlodder@telus.net

Mostly Canticles, George Ph. van Popta, 2010

Additional Information: Soft cover, \$20.00, 57 pages. Available from mostlycanticles@gmail.com and www.lulu.com

From Canada's capital city comes a truly national offering of song and visual art, *Mostly Canticles*. The pastor of Ottawa's Jubilee Church, Rev. George van Popta, assembled this music book with the contribution of over twenty Reformed Christian artists from across the country (mostly elementary and high school students), who provide the accompanying visual illustrations. What a creative way of presenting a collection of twenty-two (mostly) canticles which he has recently penned and produced! Readers of *Clarion* will recognize the canticles which have appeared in its pages over the years.

The black and white art captures compellingly how Christian students appropriate and visualize these powerful biblical themes. The pleasing cover art by Evelyn Nieuwenhuis tops it off well. Fittingly, all the profits raised will go towards the Ambassadors Christian School in Ottawa, whose doors are scheduled to open this autumn. This alone makes it worth the purchase.

Rev. van Popta defines a canticle in his preface as "a hymn based on a passage of Scripture other than a psalm." He is to be commended for taking a variety of such Bible passages with themes that are central to its message and putting them to poetry and song. Included is a song about creation, the song of Moses and Miriam, Jonah's prayer, the song of the angels at Jesus' birth, four servant songs, a variety of canticles based on the Revelation to John, and a number of others. The collection concludes with two traditional Latin hymns in English translation, addressed to the Holy Spirit. Informative notes are also provided, explaining each canticle and identifying the artist of each accompanying illustration.

As for the musical settings, all of which are in four-part harmony, almost half are Genevans, three have been composed by Brampton church organist Chris J. Nobels, and the others are mostly familiar choral harmonizations from other collections. It is great to see Canadian Reformed musicians, such as Mr. Nobels, make their foray into musical composition. Hopefully many more such church musicians will have the

courage to develop and share their musical creativity for the praise of God!

Ideal for Christian families and schools, musicians and choirs, this music book offers solidly biblical, God-praising and faith-deepening songs that can be used in a variety of settings for worship and praise, meditation and celebration. If these canticles catch on, perhaps some of them will eventually be considered for inclusion in the *Book of Praise*, as the one on the Lord's Prayer has been in the 2010 provisional edition. As usual, that will be for the churches to decide in consultation with expert evaluation.

Purchase one or more if you can; you can even obtain a file download for less than half the price. It's a worthwhile artistic contribution both from and for our church and school communities and supports a worthwhile cause!

