

Clarion

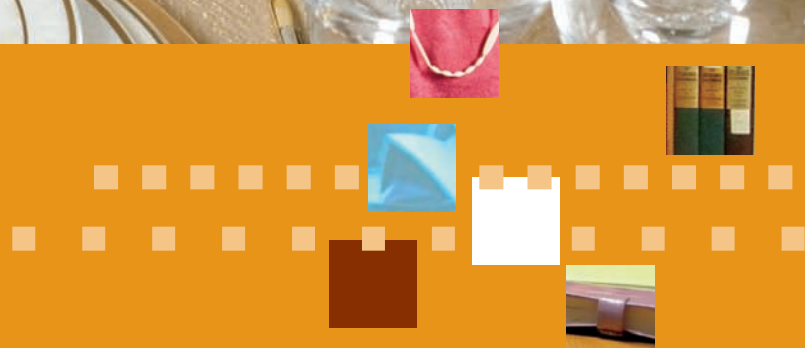


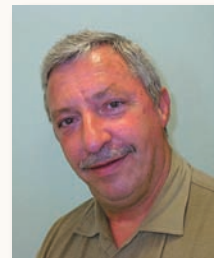
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*We have to be utensils
that are cleansed
and sanctified*

Inside this Issue

- Children at the Lord's Supper?
- Out of the China Cabinet





Rev. Klaas Stam is minister emeritus of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, Ontario
cstam@sourcecable.net

Children at the Lord's Supper? Are Reformed Church Services Child-Friendly?

The church services could be more child-friendly, I hear sometimes

I know, I know, this is an old and somewhat boring topic. But please bear with me for a few moments. The topic just keeps resurfacing and needs to be addressed on a regular basis. Lest anyone think that there is no clarity on this point.

Whenever someone ardently defends the necessity of *infant* baptism, as I did a few editorials ago, some lad or lass eagerly comes along to make a case for *infants* celebrating the Lord's Supper. If an infant must be baptized, should it not also have the legitimate access to the Lord's Supper? After all, fair is fair, what goes for the goose also goes for the gander. Right? Don't the two sacraments contain the same benefit?

And so it was in the early 1980s when I found myself in Tyler, Texas, at a Reconstructionist conference where infant baptism was presented as prime evidence of true reformation that I heard a speaker argue the case of *paedocommunion*, infants receiving communion in bread and wine. The latter simply flowed forth from the former. Infant baptism, fine, but then also paedocommunion.

Paedocommunion, eh? I usually avoid complicated words as being too stressful. But this is the word that says it exactly. Infants having communion, like adults. When I asked about the logistics of paedocommunion, I received skewed glances. Hush, Klaas. Parents can easily dip a finger into the wine and let a suckling be a suckling. Admittedly, the bread is more of an obstacle, but it could be ingested as a Gerber pudding of some sort. I'll leave the rest up to your imagination.

The liturgical position of children

Now Klaas would not dare raise this topic were it not for the fact that the topic is again a matter of sizzling debate in our Dutch sister churches. In *De Reformatie* of April 8, 2011 two articles were devoted to this matter. One article is in favour of paedocommunion, the other article is against paedocommunion. The discussion took place under the broader theme of *the place of the child* in the church (service).

Is there generally a feeling that children should be more personally addressed in the services? The church services could be more *child-friendly*, I hear sometimes. The sermon should become a story or at least contain a story that appeals to kids. Some ministers first have a mini-sermon for the youth, before a sermon for the adults. We are told that it is better to lead the children out before the serious preaching begins so that they do not become stunted in their spiritual development. Children love arts and crafts. Perhaps the minister should take some lessons from Mr. Dress-Up or the Muppets.

Children love simple songs and catchy tunes. "You do the hokey-pokey and you turn yourself around. . . ." When it comes to the hokey-pokey you cannot really use ghastly Genevan tunes. Let us face it, some say, if we don't change, we are losing the kids. Paedocommunion would be a great tool to involve the children more deeply in the church services. They would feel that they really do belong. They would no longer feel

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P. Holtvlüwer, E. Kampen, K. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:

Clarion, 57 Oakridge Drive South, St. Albert, AB T8N 7H2
E-Mail: veenendaal@shaw.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202



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discriminated against. I wonder if children really have such feelings or whether adults *think* that children have such feelings. In psychology that is called “projection.”

Perhaps the liturgical position of children merits broader attention and discussion. I do agree that preaching must be child-friendly. How? *First, explain what it says in the text.* Kids have that figured out in a jiffy. What does the text say? The preachers must use vibrant and compelling language so that both parents and children can picture what is being proclaimed. Simple examples are important, also for adults. My experience over many years is that if the parents are listening spell-bound, and even help their children by pointing to a word being explained, the children pick up on this and also pay more attention. I am more worried about unresponsive adults than distracted children. But, okay, these are only a few hair-brained thoughts, not an academic treatise.

What’s Inside

Issue 24 brings readers an editorial on the topic of paedocommunion, the practice of including children in the sacrament of Lord’s Supper. Rev. Klaas Stam discusses the reason that children do not attend Lord’s Supper in the Canadian Reformed Church.

Dr. James Visscher includes an article entitled “The Church: Who Needs It?” In an age of individualism and consumerism, how should we view the importance of church membership?

Dr. Arjan deVisser writes about a new initiative for Brampton church. They have established the Word & Spirit Reformed Study Centre, offering courses in the Christian faith and Reformed doctrine. Their minister, Rev. VanLuik, has also been mandated to spend part of his time in evangelistic outreach to people in the Greater Toronto Area.

Issue 24 includes the regular Treasures New and Old meditation and Education Matters column. We also have a book review, a press release, and a Mission News insert.

Laura Veenendaal

In This Issue

Editorial – Children at the Lord’s Supper?
Are Reformed Church Services Child-Friendly?
— K. Stam..... 570

Treasures, New and Old – Out of the China Cabinet
— R. Bredenhof 573

The Church: Who Needs It?
— J. Visscher 574

New Evangelism Initiatives by Brampton Canadian Reformed Church — A. de Visser 579

Education Matters – National Principals’ Conference 2011
— J. Jagersma 581

Book Review — Reviewed by C. Van Dam..... 584

Press Release – Classis Alberta..... 585

But, it may be a good topic: *the Liturgical Position of Children*. One of the two Dutch ministers in *De Reformatie* suggested a possible solution. He maintained that children need to make public profession of faith before they attend the supper, but he suggests that perhaps children profess their faith (or part of it) at a much younger age than is currently the case. It reminded me of the Roman Catholic confirmation that takes place before the first communion at a very young age. I've asked the question before: Is Romanism becoming popular again in some "Reformed" circles?

Before the communion there must be a preceding self-examination

Actually, the proposal to advance the date of (some kind of) a profession of sorts does not really address the underlying issue which is that children have the same right to the Lord's Supper as adults do. It becomes a case of teen-communion rather than infant communion. Infants are still being discriminated under this system.

Spiritual maturity is required

There is only one scriptural reason why infants and other children are not yet invited to the communion. "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup" (1 Cor 11:28).

Before the communion there must be a preceding self-examination. It is already difficult for believing

adults to do this properly. This self-examination requires a spiritual maturity. It is something that is not yet expected of infants or children who must still learn to "recognize the body."

When is the required spiritual maturity a reality? Should we seek to advance the moment of public profession of faith? I think that we must be very careful here. Our teenage years can be filled with great turmoil and clashing feelings. Some things are not properly sorted out until our late teens or early twenties. Much depends on the circumstances and character of the individual person. Only general guidelines can be given.

While both sacraments (baptism and communion) are signs and seals of the same benefits, yet their purpose and usage are not the same. While baptism speaks of our *admission* to God's people, the Lord's Supper speaks of our *continuation* in God's people. Baptism is not repeated, but communion is. Someone is born once but nurtured constantly. And therefore we have this (ongoing) self-examination.

To force-feed children bread and wine would be a matter of destructive ritualism. We would be saying to our infants: here, although you do not understand, suck and swallow! As if the ritual itself can save us. . . then we are smack back in the middle of the papal bosom where a tender child can be easily suffocated.

The less Reformed we are, the more Romanist we become. The way back is always shorter than the road ahead. Mind your step. C





Rev. Reuben Bredenhof is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at London, Ontario
reuben.bredenhof@canrc.org



MATTHEW 13:52

Out of the China Cabinet

"In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble." 2 Timothy 2:20

What are the contents of your average home? Go inside and you'll find sundry pieces of furniture, implements of different kinds, containers, and equipment. A house will contain many objects for daily living, for whatever task is at hand. Even God's house – the temple in Jerusalem – used to contain such things; there were golden utensils and bowls, tables and candle-stands. So it is for God's New Testament house, the church founded on Christ. Within it there are many "articles," says Paul in our text: "articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay."

Just who are those "articles" he's speaking about? In a way, we're all implements in God's house, made for doing the work of the Lord. But when Paul mentions these "articles," he's got someone specific in mind: the church leaders, particularly. In these letters to Timothy, the apostle is giving some theological "distance education," instruction in how the servants of the gospel are to conduct themselves.

It's that gospel, Paul said in verse 19, which is our solid foundation. The image of a foundation apparently gets Paul thinking about houses, because now he wants to say something about the instruments and tools that fill a house. He says that all servants of God are like articles or vessels found in the great house of the Master. Paul spoke of himself this way already in 2 Corinthians 4:7. There he's reflecting on the ministry of the gospel and he says, "We have this treasure in jars of clay." Next to the great glory of Christ and

his promise of salvation, an office bearer who works with that message is so feeble and so lowly. It's like storing your sparkling treasures in crumbling mud pots.

With the same comparison, Paul here makes a different point. He says in our text that the *kind* of jar you are is of great importance. Verse 20: "In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble." It's just like in our homes today, where we have those plastic containers for yesterday's leftovers, but then ceramic dishes for cooking, and glass bowls for serving, and maybe even silverware for special events – many kinds of vessels, for different purposes and occasions.

Now, is Paul simply saying that believers have varying tasks within the church, that some of us "articles" seem more prominent or important than others, yet that all are essential? That's probably not his point. Paul is calling on us *all* to be vessels of honour, to be those instruments of gold and silver in God's house. For see in verse 21 how he exhorts us to "cleanse" ourselves from dishonour, and how he calls each one to be holy and useful for the Master.

He says this because in Timothy's congregation there were corrupt people having a bad influence through their lifestyle and teaching. Paul speaks of Timothy being a gold or silver vessel in order to *contrast* with those other articles, those of wood or clay. Back then (just like today),

a container made of precious metal was reserved for special and noble uses, while a container of wood or clay was for menial purposes: maybe for handling household garbage, or throwing out human waste. Ignoble and contaminated, such articles would soon be ruined and then discarded.

"So cleanse yourself," Paul says to Timothy, to every office bearer – and yes, to every member of Christ's church! Flee every false teaching, and every evil desire. Don't be an instrument of impurity, a tool of little worth, but be a vessel of honour for the Lord. Show yourself to be made not of wood and clay, but of gold and silver. And not because you want to be placed in the china cabinet and there admired, behind glass and out of circulation. But because you want to be used! Ready even to be scuffed and scratched through constant service around the house, "prepared to do any good work" (v. 21).

It's then that we'll be "useful to the Master" (v. 21). Who's the Master? Look back at verse 19, "The Lord knows those who are his." Remember whom this house belongs to, who built this place; remember how he built the church upon himself. It's Jesus Christ, who's made it possible for the holy God to dwell among us once again.

No wonder then, we have to be those articles of gold and silver! And no wonder we have to be utensils that are cleansed and sanctified. Because the King himself – the Lord God – desires to take us in hand, and put us to work.





*Dr. James Visscher is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia
[.jvisscher@telus.net](mailto:jvisscher@telus.net)*

The Church: Who Needs It?

This is an article about being a member of a particular church. Does that strike you as odd? Old-fashioned? Irrelevant? A waste of time and money? After all, there may be a lot of stuff on the market about the church and even more stuff about being a Christian, but just how much attention is paid to church membership?

Church and Christian divorced

Let's face it, the tendency over the last number of decades has been to divorce the two. The church is one thing and being a Christian is quite another. At least that is how it comes across in the talk of many people. When they hear the word "church," they think of a building. Their minds conjure up the image of a stuffy, old edifice, filled with people dressed in fancy dresses and neat suits. They connect it with old fashioned hymns, a man on the pulpit who drones on and on, and an organ that alternately blares and blasts.

On the other hand, when many of these same people consider the word "Christian" (a real one, that is) they see something quite different. They picture before them a person who is vibrant, alive, and dynamic. They consider such a person alive because he or she has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Flowing out of that union are such activities as prayer, Scripture reading, meditation, and witnessing.

What we are thus left with is a set of conflicting impressions. In one corner we have the church which is more dead than alive. In the opposite corner we have Christians who are filled with energy. At least that seems to be the prevailing picture in the minds of many.

Yet we need to look beyond the picture and ask "Is it a true picture? Is this really the way that we are supposed to think about the church and the Christian?" Not if we go by what the Bible teaches. It does not pit the one against the other. It does not denigrate the one

and elevate the other. Rather it holds both in very high esteem. It sees them as intimately connected. It asserts that the church cannot be without Christians and Christians cannot be without the church. They belong together.

The truth of the matter is that we are not so far out when we speak of "church membership" or of the church being composed of member Christians. Strictly speaking, as we shall see in due time, the Bible even urges us to view church membership as a great privilege and a rich blessing.

Before we turn to that, however, we need to pay some more attention to the church. Why does it receive so much bad press today? Why do so many scorn it and others ignore it? Why is it treated with about as much loyalty as the local department store?

It has not always been that way. As a matter of fact, much of this negativism about the church is of relatively recent origin. More than one analyst sees it as a trend that began in the 1970s. Prior to that those who considered themselves Christians were still fairly church-minded. If they needed to be hospitalized and were asked for their denominational affiliation, they would invariably state: "Protestant" or "Roman Catholic." In the case of the former, they would be even more descriptive and volunteer without hesitation that they considered themselves to be either "Anglican," "United," "Presbyterian," "Baptist," "Pentecostal," or "Reformed." At the same time those who viewed themselves as "atheist" made that admission with a certain degree of hesitation, even embarrassment.

No longer! The world has changed! Today people play down the matter of church affiliation. In some cases they are even ashamed to admit that they belong to a particular federation or denomination. As proof of this consider only the modern trend of naming churches. Many use the word "community" and declare in big, bold letters that they are "The Community

Church News

Declined the call from the Cornerstone CanRC,
Hamilton, ON to serve as co-pastor:

Rev. John Louwerse
of Neerlandia, Alberta

Accepted the call to the Carman East CanRC:

Candidate Steven Vandevelde

Declined the call to the Chilliwack CanRC:

Rev. H. Alkema
of Houston, British Columbia

Church." If you want to know which denomination they belong to you have to read the fine print or ask the pastor. Only he knows and can give you the complete goods on this church.

What all of this testifies to is that we are living in a world of shifting paradigms. What kind of shifts am I referring to?

From denominationalism to trans-denominationalism

The first shift which is readily apparent is that over the last number of decades we have moved away from considering ourselves part of a certain denomination to part of the world-wide church of God. A number of factors have paved the way for this trend. In the first place, there is the impact of the ecumenical movement which gained steam after World War II. By bringing different churches together from all over the world and stressing their unity, it fostered the idea that Christians need to look beyond the local or national situation and develop an eye for the international one.

Secondly, theological instruction and literature supported and buttressed this drive towards organizational unity by teaching that your membership in the local church could not in any way compare with your membership in the universal church. Together with all true believers you needed to concentrate on being part of "the body of Christ," a biblical expression that was said to point to the larger, greater, and higher invisible church.

The Bible urges us to view church membership as a great privilege and a rich blessing

Thirdly, the rise of modern means of communication and transportation has aided and abetted this tendency to think in terms of the bigger picture. People used to read about people in other parts of the world. Now they step on a plane and visit them. Letters used to be the main means of communication and they took weeks and months. Now, by means of e-mail, you send a letter one minute and wait a few more and receive a reply, or else you can pick up the telephone and have instant contact. The world has shrunk, barriers have come down, and our thinking is done in more global terms.

Hence, we are left with a way of thinking that is very broad in terms of geography and theology. In and of itself that need not be all bad. The people of God have a calling to be truly ecumenical. They should have an eye for the big picture. There is also no reason for them to shun the modern means of transportation and communication. The problem is, however, that they are fixating on the big picture and no longer have an eye for the smaller picture. They take pride in thinking about the church in universal terms but become uncomfortable and self-conscious when they consider the church local. They are in a position of fundamental imbalance.

From the institutional to the subjective

A second shift that is discernible has to do with a shift away from the institutional to the subjective. What do I mean by that? It has reference to the fact that many Christians no longer deem their membership in a particular local church to be of much importance. What counts is personal fulfillment.

After all, ours is predominantly a subjective age. We do not think so much in terms of labels, structures, or historic identities. Our thinking is governed by feelings, emotions, and relationships. People do not so much ask "what is the truth?" as "what can this truth do for me?" Whether worship conforms in all respects to the will of God as revealed in the Bible does not so much matter as whether or not it grips you, moves you, and thrills you. The fact that you may be Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, or Pentecostal is of little importance as long as you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as your Saviour. This age stresses heart over mind.

Once again, as we noted with the first shift, this is not all bad news. It has to be admitted that the past was not perfect either. Then people all too often placed their hope and confidence in the church of which they

were a member instead of in the church's Lord. They placed more emphasis on having an organized system of doctrine than on living it out on a daily basis. Their minds were busy but their hearts often remained cold, their emotions untouched, and their attitudes unchanged.

Perhaps these developments are best described in terms of pendulum swings. We move back and forth stressing institutions then persons, knowledge then feelings, mind then heart, the cerebral then the subjective. There are times when we see only the one and have no eye for the other with the result that we find ourselves in a position of one-sidedness. We are quick to adopt an either-or mentality. Yet what we really need to do is aim for balance and equilibrium. Our commitment should be both institutional and personal, rational and relational.

From loyalty to consumerism

The third shift that needs our attention is one away from a mentality of loyalty to existing institutions to one that is consumer oriented and market driven. Again, to understand this it may be helpful to think of the past when people not only identified themselves with a certain church but also considered themselves very tied to it. They were proud of the fact that for decades, in some cases even centuries, their family had been Anglican or Reformed. To have your children baptized in the village church, to profess your faith there or be confirmed there, to be married there, and to be laid to rest in the cemetery behind it represented a way of life. It spoke of roots and love and loyalty. It said a great deal about you and your family.

Is that still the way it is? Perhaps in some of the rural places of this world, but for most people living as they do in the cities, it represents the picture of a by-gone age. Loyalty, especially to the church, is viewed by most as little more than a quaint relic. It has long been replaced. But by what? Why by the consuming, shopping mentality of the late twentieth century. Just like people draw up a shopping list, check the flyers for the best bargains and head for the nearest sales outlets, so many Christians identify their spiritual needs and then go looking for the church that can best meet them. There is very little of the old attitude, wherein you stuck with your church through thick and thin. There are not many who will fight for the traditions of the past or champion what they consider

to be the necessary changes to meet the future. Most people just walk. They do not want the hassle of having to defend something they hold dear or of pushing for improvements. No wonder a leading Canadian sociologist has said that the growth of evangelical Christianity, at least in Canada, is largely due to the "procreation and circulation of the saints."

Circulating saints

Yes, and how the saints do circulate. I was made mindful of this on annual basis. Every summer our family used to spend at least a few weeks at a favourite vacation spot in the interior of British Columbia, and there for about four or five years in a row we would meet the same family. The first year that we met they belonged to a Lutheran church. The second year they were Baptist because they liked the Sunday School program there better. The third year they were Alliance because that appealed more to their teenage children. The fourth year they were something else because they found the Alliance pastor too bossy.

Today people play down the matter of church affiliation

Was this family odd or exceptional? Hardly! If I look at the area where our family lives it seems to be a normal feature of church life. Evangelical Christians are shopping here, there, and everywhere. For a while they are in this church because the worship is fun, then they move to another because the pastor is so nice, then it is on to a church with a really good youth program, then they opt for a church that is into healing. They are constantly on the move. The result is that many never grow any roots. They do not stay in one church long enough. In one respect at least they seem intent on imitating their great forefather Abraham. He was a wandering Aramean, and they are doing the same. Only what he did to places, they are doing to churches.

Of course, in making these comments I may be creating the impression that I am all for the status quo, that Christians should never rock the boat and sever ties. But that is not so. There can be circumstances that force one to move on. That can vary from a church that tolerates corrupt leadership, to a church that no longer adheres to the truth of the gospel, to a church that fails

to hold its members accountable for their beliefs and behaviours, to a church that tolerates all manner of deviant sexual lifestyles. Sometimes people are forced out, at other times they have to leave for the sake of their spiritual survival. I do not question the legitimacy of such actions.

I do, however, question the conduct of those who call themselves Christians and have a consumer mentality towards the church. Why? Because I am convinced that this represents an unbiblical approach.

Individualism rejected

Some of you may be of the opinion that it makes little sense to turn to the Bible and expect it to be able to give an answer to the issue before us. After all, the Bible does not know about the phenomenon of different churches. In the days of the OT there was one church and it was identified with the nation of Israel. In the NT there was still one church even though Gentiles were later received into it. As a result such situations can hardly be compared to our times and it would be unrealistic for us to expect the Bible to utter the final word on this matter.

Before we buy into such an easy dismissal of the Bible's role, we would do well to plumb a little deeper. For while it is true that our times can not be equated with biblical times, it would be an oversimplification to think that the Bible has nothing to say on the issue at hand.

For starters, we need to realize that the biblical world was not the world of the rugged individualist. It may tell us about an Esau who loved the outdoors and was adept at hunting, but he is hardly proof that individualism was the accepted and admired approach to life. Anyone who is familiar with the world of the Middle East knows that individualism was not the norm. The norm was the family, the clan, the tribe, and the nation. The norm was the village and the town. Corporate solidarity was an accepted feature of life. Indeed, it is still that way in many parts of the world.

Indeed, have you ever asked yourself, "Why is it that people in the Western world are so disturbed about those stories in the Bible that refer to a whole family dying for the sins of one man?" We read about an Achan (Josh 7) who was stoned together with his sons and daughters, even his livestock, and we think it grossly unfair. We read in the Third Commandment about God punishing the sins of the fathers to the third

and fourth generations, and we want to cry "Foul!" Why do we react in this manner? By and large because we take a very individualistic approach to our humanity and to human conduct; whereas, in the world of the Bible there was much more of a stress on the social unit. People were never viewed in isolation. Why, their very names tied them to their fathers and clans. You were "Jacob, son of..." or Elisabeth, daughter of. . . ." You were "a member of the tribe of. . . ." In a way these relationships defined you as a human being.

Faith grows, matures, functions, and becomes evident within the context of the church community

What all of this means is that the lone ranger kind of Christian that is often presented as the model today in North America would have been viewed as a very strange species indeed by believers in Bible times. The idea that as a child of God you owe no loyalty or are not responsible for your fellow believers would have been considered absurd.

Personal faith and communal responsibility

So where does that leave us? Does the biblical rejection of individualism mean that faith is solely a group thing? Not at all, for what we need to realize is that while the Bible does not know of a faith that is individual, private, and flighty, it does know of a faith that is personal. Indeed, it speaks of a faith that is personal but which operates in a communal context.

What do I mean by that? Well, turn to the Book of Psalms and ask yourself, "What kind of faith does it reflect?" In part it reveals a faith that is deeply personal. It is replete with "I" – "I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart" (9:1), "I love you, O LORD, my strength" (18:1), "I have trusted in the LORD without wavering" (26:1), "I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever" (52:8), "I will extol the LORD with all my heart" (111:1), "I will praise the LORD all LORD life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live" (146:2).

At the same time, however, the same Book of Psalms reminds us time and again that this personal faith functions within a community of believers. Psalm 14 expresses the wish "that salvation for Israel would

come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!" (v. 7) Psalm 16 refers to "the saints who are in the land" (v. 3). In Psalm 22 David says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you" (v. 22). Psalm 48 makes it very plain that this God is not anyone's private property when it says "For this God is our God for ever and ever" (v. 14). Turn to Psalm 90 and you cannot help see that it is filled with the pronoun "us" – "teach us," "satisfy us," "make us glad," "may the favour of the LORD our God rest upon us."

What these passages, and many others, show us is that in the Old Testament part of the Bible the faith of believers lives and flourishes in the wider framework of the people of Israel. Believers have a living relationship with God and at the same time see themselves as belonging to and being part of the broader faith community. They do not consider themselves to be loners. They do not talk as if their faith is a purely private thing between them and God. No, they realize that their personal faith in God cannot be divorced from membership in the covenant nation.

What about the New Testament?

Now some may be inclined to dismiss this as "the OT picture" and insist that "the NT picture" is different. Yet a contrast here between OT and NT cannot be maintained. If anything the NT presents us with this same stress on personal faith and its communal connections. In Matthew 1:21 we are told that Mary's son will be called Jesus "because he will save his people from their sins." Elsewhere in the NT we are repeatedly reminded too that Jesus has not come to save loose, unconnected people. No, he has come to save "his people," "his flock," "his body," "his sheep," "his disciples."

A cursory look at the epistles in the NT reveals that most of Paul's are addressed to churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. If they are not addressed to churches, they are addressed to groups of believers scattered throughout Asia Minor (cf. Hebrews, James, Peter, Jude). The only letters that can be said to have an individual address are the ones that Paul wrote to Timothy; however, even those were not meant purely for his private consumption. Suffice it to say, therefore, that the NT is consistent with the OT when it comes to viewing faith as having a communal dimension to it.



At the same time the NT also makes it abundantly clear that faith is personal. Only those who believe in the Son will not perish but receive the gift of eternal life (John 3:16). Only those who share the faith of Abraham are the true children of Abraham (Rom 4:16). Only those who persevere in faith will receive what has been promised (Heb 10:36). In short, personal faith in the Saviour Jesus is a fundamental necessity if one is to be saved.

Yet such a faith does not operate in a vacuum. It is not something purely vertical. In other words, faith is not something private. It is not simply and only a word that defines a relationship that exists between you and God. No, faith grows, matures, functions, and becomes evident within the context of the church community.

So what about the church?

In the final analysis what this means is that it is not possible to play Christians off against the church. It is not biblical to assert that as a Christian you do not really need the church. Neither can you defend biblically the view that faith is purely a matter between you and God. If you consider yourself a Christian then you have a duty to join the church, to promote its fellowship, and to be part of its ministry to the world.



New Evangelism Initiatives by Brampton Canadian Reformed Church

Dr. Arjan de Visser is professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
arjan.devisser@canrc.org

An exciting new evangelism initiative has been launched by the Canadian Reformed Church of Brampton. Under the leadership of its minister, Rev. Matthew VanLuik, the small congregation has been looking into possibilities to spread the seed of the Word in the Greater Toronto Area.

During a recent meeting which was attended by the Brampton congregation as well as visitors from other CanRC and URC churches in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Rev. VanLuik announced two important initiatives. First, the Home Missions committee of the Brampton church has established the Word & Spirit Reformed Study Centre which will offer courses in the Christian faith and Reformed doctrine. On September 17 the Centre hit the digital airwaves with the launch of a new website.

Second, Rev. VanLuik has been mandated to spend part of his time to work on evangelistic outreach to people in the GTA. In order to give the work a boost, it was also decided to acquire the services of Justin Roukema, a recent graduate of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton. Justin will take over part of the preaching duties of Rev. VanLuik. While the contract offered to Justin Roukema is temporary to begin with, there is hope that the arrangement can be extended. Brampton is trying to find support among surrounding congregations for calling a second minister. This appears to be the only way to make sure that there is enough manpower for the evangelism project while at the same time making sure that the existing congregation is not neglected.

Provisionally, the plans for evangelistic outreach coincide with the plans for a new church building which is scheduled to be built within the foreseeable future. Originally located on the fringes of the GTA north of Pearson International Airport, the Brampton



Word and Spirit website

congregation now finds itself in the middle of sprawling new extensions. Through a favourable deal with a developer, the church will soon have a new building close to the newly built Mt Pleasant Go Station and thus be well connected to the rest of the city. The hope and expectation is that the new building can become a centre of evangelistic teaching and outreach in the north-western part of Toronto.

In his opening address Rev. VanLuik explained that there have been promising contacts with unchurched people in the Brampton area. A number of these contacts have sought instruction in the Christian faith and Rev. VanLuik has already been teaching a Reformed Doctrines Class to a group of mainly young people. There is a real sense, therefore, that the Lord may be opening a door for the gospel (Col 4:3) in the vast metropolitan area of Toronto.

This experience has given the congregation a growing awareness that the church has a duty with



Rev. VanLuik and Mr. Justin Roukema

and the mission statement of the Reformed Study Centre. Information about courses is also provided. In the future the site will also be used to promote the Reformed faith by posting literature, videos of sermons, seminars, and lectures.

Interestingly, the website also explains that the name "Word and Spirit" goes back to the very first sermon that was preached when the church was instituted on January 15, 1956. The preacher was Rev. Gisbertus Van Dooren. The text passage from the Scriptures was Zechariah 4:6: "This is the word of the LORD. . . 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty."

The message of that very first sermon still provides inspiration after more than fifty-five years. As is stated on the website: "The congregation was asked to build the house of the LORD in Brampton. The church was to be a bright shining lamp that was fuelled by the Word and the Spirit of the Lord. The Word and Spirit Reformed Study Centre was created as an extension of this mandate. It is our hope and prayer that the people of Brampton may be touched by the Word and Spirit of the Lord."

May the Lord bless the courageous vision, diligence, and obedience of the Brampton church as plans for evangelistic outreach are being drafted and put into practice. May the Lord's people support this project with their prayers and financial contributions. No doubt, this is one of the most exciting developments in the Canadian Reformed Church life in recent years.



respect to the city where it is located. It raises an important question: Can we really abandon this city, or do we need to recognize the plight of the hundreds of thousands of people in this huge city who need to hear the gospel?

Recent experiences with the Reformed Doctrines Class indicate that there is a real hunger in the GTA for sound, biblical, and confessionally-based instruction. The vision for the Word & Spirit Reformed Study Centre is that it will offer courses at various levels, ranging from introductory courses to the Christian faith to intermediate as well as advanced courses. At the local level it may be possible to offer, for example, Bible story lessons for children in the neighbourhood or other activities for families in the area.

Since people of this time and age tend to check out a website before they visit a place, much energy has been invested in developing a good looking and well-functioning website (www.wordandspirit.ca). The website explains the identity of the Brampton church



Brampton Home Mission Committee: Josh and Dina Roodzant, Wilma Jairam, Annette Keep, Art Olij, Rev. VanLuik (Missing are: Laura Olij and Lorraine VanLuik)



Mr. John Jagersma is principal of Parkland Immanuel Christian School in Edmonton, Alberta
jjagersma@parklandimmanuel.ca

National Principals' Conference 2011

It was with some trepidation that I agreed to write an article reviewing the National Principals' Conference (NPC), held in Lynden, Washington, this past September. For starters, I am still a neophyte in the world of Christian educational leadership. Also, I had attended one other national conference and my brain hurt for days after, as it worked to process new concepts and terms that seemed familiar to the other educational leaders around the table but were Greek to me. Finally, I found the challenge of adequately shaping into words the quality and content of the various presentations quite daunting. Hopefully, I have written with enough clarity and detail to do justice to what was a fantastic, insightful, rewarding, and challenging conference.

The last several NPCs have focused on Christian worldview: both what it is, and how to defend it. Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, this year's keynote speaker, focused on how schools can move beyond Christian worldview to Christian character. What follows is a brief overview of his speech.

Kloosterman's challenge

The essence of the Christian worldview is the core of the Bible story: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. This perspective is what provides the context and content of Christian education. The facts, skills, and disciplines we teach are placed within the beliefs and values of our Christian worldview. Often in educational literature, and in past discussions on Christian education, the dilemma has been whether to teach the head, an approach focused on being *informative*, or the heart, an approach that seeks to be *formative*. Dr. Kloosterman stated that this was a false dilemma, and instead challenged us to consider education from the perspective of the eye. WorldVIEW is the lens through which we see our lives. From this perspective come our values, which lead to practices, and then behaviour. Matthew 6 speaks about the eye as being the lamp of the body. Rather than thinking of the



eye as receiving light, this text expresses how the eye radiates light through the body. In the same way our worldview should lead us to focus our education on the only goal that matters: authentic godly character.

After establishing the context for why Christian character should be our goal, Dr. Kloosterman moved on to address what was required to move from what is learned to what is lived. This discussion began with a focus on the moral person. How do we define a moral person? Often we do not move past the norm for our behaviour; however, consequences, motivations, and situations all influence one's character. If we do not move past the norm, then obedience is the ultimate goal. However obedience is not the end goal; the ultimate goal is to bring glory to God. If we do not move past the learned behaviour we can end up graduating students who know the Christian worldview, but who fail to practice it. He challenged us to focus on virtuous education.

Virtue is the capacity for acting in a way that is morally good. Virtue needs to be directed by norms, but the norms are not sufficient on their own. We need to incorporate into the process of education guided and accompanied opportunities to develop



habits and practices that will stand our students well in the future. Practices that develop virtue deserve a pivotal place in Christian education. By focusing on developing virtuous character in our schools we can generate the kind of behaviour in our students that rules may point toward, but which a rule-keeping mentality will never achieve. He did caution that practices alone are no better than ideas on their own; they need to be saturated by authenticity. This authenticity for students requires that teachers are also authentic in their teaching.

Dr. Kloosterman focused his wrap-up session on the challenge that our schools face between fulfilling the Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission. Are our schools focused on Christian education or mission? Rather than choosing one perspective or another, he presented a different perspective. Using the texts of Deuteronomy 4:6, Matthew 5:16, and 1 Peter 2:9-12 he suggested that our role as Christians in the New Testament is connected to the role

of Israel in the Old Testament: we need to be the light of the world! We must be obedient to the covenant, but not for obedience's sake. Rather, so that through our obedience the world around us will bring glory to God. Dr. Kloosterman's claim is that election, covenant, and the Torah all exist *for the world*.

To consider this perspective further he presented a four-step model for Christian education. The first step in developing our schools is to define our *identity* as Reformed Christians. From this identity we make decisions regarding what types of *activity* our students will participate in (important that we recognize this order or we move to a salvation by works). In activity, we focus on Christian ethics, and in so doing we express our identity in our activity. For example, we play school sports, study hard, and choose a career to bring glory to God. However when Christian education moves directly from activity to *God's glory* (the ultimate goal of Christian education) Dr. Kloosterman suggests we miss a stage: *Missionality*. Our activities

are not only done to praise God, but also so that the world around us may see our actions and praise God because of them.

Using texts such as John 3:16, participants were reminded of our calling to love the world as God did, with sacrificial solidarity amid covenantal differentness. We are called to live in the world for the world, that the watching world may glorify their Creator and our Father. This perspective on Christian education means altering the home-church-school triangle which we commonly refer to as a basis of our schools. Instead of a closed triangle, we need to consider the world around the triangle, and be prepared to have our students interact with the challenges of the world in a safe and age-appropriate manner.

The presentation ended with the exhortation for us as educators to seek world-loving exercises for our students, to consider how we talk and pray about the world, and to show those around us the better way. The obedience for God's people must be God-defined and world-directed.

All in all, Kloosterman presented well-constructed and thought-provoking speeches that led to much reflection and discussion among all of us as principals, and will certainly receive further consideration.

Stoffels' history

An appropriate bookend to a speech that addressed where we should go in education was Mr. Derek Stoffels' presentation on

the history of Canadian Reformed schools. Mr. Stoffels is completing a Masters with a focus on this topic, and presented findings from his research. The presentation walked through some of the presuppositions that went into the work, the history of Reformed education in The Netherlands, and the reasons and perceived reasons for why Canadian and American Reformed Schools were founded. He also shared some of the findings of a recent Cardus report on the alignment between the stated motivations and actual outcomes of Christian schooling (well worth a perusal: <http://www.cardus.ca/research/education/>). A more detailed summary of Mr. Stoffels' excellent presentation will appear in a future *Clarion* article.

Other presentations

On Monday evening an experienced administrator from "down under," Mr. Alwyn Terpstra, presented curriculum work that the schools in Australia have undertaken over the past ten years. Their focus has been on ensuring that a Reformed Christian worldview permeates all the courses that they offer. To make sure that these changes would last, they used an approach that focused on the lesson, unit, and year planning which their teachers undertake annually. This was made more manageable through an elaborate computer program that allowed teachers to build their plans from curriculum and Christian outcomes that are embedded in the program. Mr.




Terpstra walked the administrators through the whole process, and provided a clear insight into the professional development structure and approach used by the schools in Australia.

On the Tuesday evening Mr. Paul Schouten, a past Credo elementary school board member and representative to the Credo Christian High School Board in the Fraser Valley, presented on the role of the school board. His central focus was on the relationship between the school board and three specific groups: the community, the staff, and the principal. His suggestion that Board presidents should take their principals out for lunch on a regular basis was particularly well received by the administrators in attendance, but he had many other wise words to say as well. The importance of clear communication was stressed, as well as the need to cultivate and develop relationships between all three groups. Mr. Schouten also brought forward the need for long range planning: if school boards

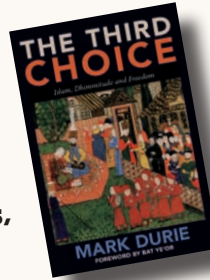
are going to be leaders they need to know where they are going. It was beneficial for us as administrators to be given a detailed and balanced view into the challenging task of being a school board member.

The conference concluded with a number of workshops on topics such as assessment, school vision, professional development, and long-range planning. Besides all the presentations and workshops, it was also a rich blessing to simply be together as Christian principals: singing and doing devotions together, debating and discussing together, and encouraging and mentoring each other. All in all, it was a very thought-provoking and enriching conference.

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 Arthur Kingma abkingma@kwic.com. 

Cornelis Van Dam

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam is professor emeritus of Old Testament at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
cvdam@canrc.org



Mark Durie. *The Third Choice: Islam, Dhimmitude and Freedom*. Deror Books, 2010

Additional Information: Paperback, 270 pages, about \$20

According to a 2011 Pew research report, *The Future of the Global Muslim Population* (page 137), "Canada's Muslim population is expected to nearly triple, climbing from 940,000 in 2010 to 2.7 million in 2030." (In 1991, the total Muslim population was just over 250,000.) A growing concern for Canada's security is the fact that "there is a subgroup among Muslims, I call Islamists, who come here with the intention of destroying the social fabric of the country. That is very unusual for an immigrant group and will be more of a problem in the future." These are words spoken by someone who should know, Tarek Fatah, founder of the Muslim Canadian Congress (as reported in the January 31, 2011 issue of the *National Post*). Not surprisingly, in a CBC interview broadcast on September 8, 2011, Prime Minister Harper named Islamicism as the biggest security threat facing Canada.

In light of facts such as these, it is imperative that we be well informed about Islam and what it stands for. This is not to raise unnecessary alarm, but simply to face reality. In Canada's urban centres the chance of having a Muslim neighbour has increased substantially and one must be prepared to understand and love such a neighbour as a Christian. But in order to understand, one must have a good basic knowledge of what Islam is all about.

This book by Mark Durie is an excellent description of what Islam and living under Islamic rule entails. His account is sober, well-balanced, and scholarly, but it is also very clear and is not hindered with sensationalism and alarmism. Furthermore, he is rightly not concerned about political correctness which, as he illustrates in the book, tends to obscure the facts.

The "third choice" mentioned in the title of the book refers to the Muslim practice of offering non-Muslim peoples under *jihad* conditions three choices: conversion to Islam, the sword, or *dhimma*. *Dhimma* is the imposition of a theologically-driven political and social system which degrades and demeans the oppressed, but also, as Durie argues, the Islamic oppressor. Dhimmitude is the experience and condition of those who are subject to *dhimma* or, to put it somewhat differently, live under the provisions of *Sharia* law.

After showing the enormous impact that Mohammed's life and example have had on the development of Islam, Durie illustrates in considerable detail how the doctrines of *jihad* and *dhimma* are viewed by Muslims and experienced by non-Muslims.

He quotes extensively from authoritative Islamic sources and also shows that the use of deception is not unknown in furthering the cause of Islam.

Durie's discussion of how non-Muslims have lived and continue to live under Muslim rule is an eye-opener. It is also very helpful in understanding past history (such as the Armenian genocide) as well as current events and trends. Although the rise of European powers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was instrumental in setting aside many restrictions on non-Muslims living in Muslim countries, the trend is now the reverse. There is for example, open and intensifying persecution against Christians in Islamic countries often accompanied by unspeakable atrocities. The silence from the West and its mainline media is frequently deafening. Indeed, Durie shows clearly that in too many cases Western leaders are actually voluntarily submitting to the worldview of dhimmitude, praising Islam as a religion of peace when it is not so, and even outrageously affirming the moral superiority of Islam (with the implication of the inferiority of the West and its Christian heritage). One notices the same attitude in our mass media. Any news coverage on Muslims is done very carefully and negative manifestations of *Sharia* law such as honour killings when they occur are often reported as domestic disputes. The media often takes more care with reporting on Muslims and their faith than it does with Christians and their convictions.

With respect to the world stage, the large and powerful Muslim voting block at the United Nations does everything possible to protect and further the interests of Islam. Indeed, efforts continue to be made at the UN to make criticizing Islam illegal (under the guise of fighting Islamophobia or defamation of Islam). If this trend continues, the slogans of Muslim triumphalism and their "inevitable victory" over the rest of the world will not seem so far-fetched.

This book is very timely. It is a must-read and a wake-up call for an often complacent West. Durie has written it in order to promote an open and honest dealing with the realities of Islam. But he wants the discussion of the truth about Islam which his book so graphically details to be accompanied with Christian love. Such a discussion, also in the public square, will likely become more and more necessary for keeping the freedoms we enjoy as Christians as we face the increasing challenges of Islam.

This book is highly recommended!



Press Release of Classis Alberta of October 11, 2011 held by Video Conference

Opening

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. R. Aasman called the meeting to order. He read from Romans 5: 1-11, led in prayer, and requested that Hymn 76: 1, 4 be sung. In prayer he asked a blessing over this meeting.

In his memorabilia Rev. Aasman mentioned that since the last Classis David Winkel served as an intern in Providence, that Rev. J. Louwerse was called to Barrhead and to Armadale, Australia and that now he has a call to Hamilton, Ontario, and that Rev. D. Poppe received a call to Rockingham, Australia. It was also mentioned that Rev. M. van Beveren, who just turned 90, has moved to Richmond Hill and that Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar is now enjoying retirement. Barrhead has extended calls to the Revs. J. Louwerse and J. VanWoudenberg, who have declined their calls. He also mentioned that Dr. C. Van Dam is now retired as professor of CRTS, the ongoing illnesses of the Profs. N. Gootjes, J. deJong, and the passing away of Sister Geertsema.

The church at Providence, Edmonton reported that the credentials are in good order.

Constitution of Classis

The classis was declared constituted, and the following officers take their place: Rev. J. Louwerse chairman; Rev. W.B. Slomp, vice chairman; Rev. D. Poppe, clerk.

After the adoption of the Agenda the chairman welcomed the delegates in the video centers of Barrhead, Calgary and Edmonton. The agenda is adopted.

Reports

Classis Treasurer Report received with thankfulness. Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry. Currently there are no needy students. Because of the centralization of the needy students fund this committee is no longer needed. The archives will be sent to the classis archivist.

A report from Committee for Financial Aid to Needy churches received with thankfulness.

Church Visitors Reports to the churches at Calgary, Neerlandia, Edmonton Immanuel, Barrhead, Edmonton Providence, St. Albert, and Taber were made. They were received with thankfulness.

Question period ad Art. 44 C.O.

The question period is held and the churches answer the first two questions in the affirmative and the third in the negative.

Correspondence

The church at Barrhead requested pulpit supply on a monthly basis. This request was granted. Rev. W.

B. Slomp is appointed to arrange. The delegates from Barrhead expressed their appreciation for this.

Appointments

Convening church for next classis: Neerlandia, December 13, 2011, with March 13, 2012 as alternate date.
Suggested executive officers for next classis:
Chairman: Rev. A.B. Roukema
Vice-Chairman: Rev. J. Louwerse
Clerk: Rev. W.B. Slomp
Appointment of Deputies and Standing Committees
Treasurer: J. Buitenbos
Church for the Auditing of the Books of the
Treasurer: St. Albert
Church for Care of the Archives: Edmonton
Providence
Church to Inspect the Classical Archives: Edmonton
Immanuel
Church Visitors: the Revs. R. Aasman, J. Louwerse, W.B. Slomp (conv.), H. Kalkman, M. Jagt, D. Poppe
Committee for Examinations: the Revs. R. Aasman, W.B. Slomp

Examiners:

1. Exegesis O.T.: Rev. R. Aasman
 2. Exegesis N.T.: Rev. J. Louwerse
 3. Knowledge of Scripture: Rev. A. B. Roukema
 4. Doctrine and creeds: Rev. W. B. Slomp
 5. Church history: Rev. H. Kalkman
 6. Ethics: Rev. D. Poppe
 7. Church polity: Rev. H. Kalkman
 8. Dianconiology: Rev. M. Jagt
- Committee for Financial Aid to Needy Churches: C. DeBoer, W. Noot, J. VanderDeen
Deputy for Contact with Provincial Government: Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar
Appointment of Observer to the RCUS: the Revs. J. Poppe, M. Jagt
Appointment of Observer to the URCNA: Rev. J. Louwerse
Appointment of Delegates to Regional Synod Oct. 31, 2011 starting at 7:30 PM to be convened by Edmonton Immanuel at Aldergrove. The following brothers are elected and appointed:
Elders: B. Wierenga, B. VanRaalte. Alternates: S. Oostenbrug, R.Veldkamp, in that order.
Ministers: the Revs. D. Poppe, W.B. Slomp.
Alternates: Rev. J. Louwerse, M. Jagt in that order.
Personal Question Period is not made use of.
Brotherly Censure (Art 34 CO).
Adoption of the Acts and Press Release.

Closing

The acts are read and adopted. The Press Release is read and approved. Rev. W. B. Slomp leads in closing prayer.

