



Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 55, No. 20 • September 29, 2006

*The Lord's
Supper and the
Mass*

Thankfulness

*Dietrich
Bonhoeffer –
Pastor, Disciple,
Martyr*

*The Lord's loyal love is evident in his
works of creation.*



N.H. Gootjes

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The Lord's Supper and the Mass

The meaning of the Lord's Supper has been disputed

The Sundays when the Lord's Supper is celebrated are always special. The reason is not that these services are more important than the regular worship services. In every service we adore the same God and Father in heaven, we are grateful for the same Jesus Christ our saviour, we realize that the same Holy Spirit works in us, and we consider an aspect of God's work in the preaching. The Supper itself functions against the background of the same promises and admonitions which can be heard in the preaching of the Word. However, there is a difference, for in the Supper God presents his grace to us in a tangible way. We can see, touch, and taste the salvation which Christ has obtained for us.

The difference concerning the meaning of the Lord's Supper is as strong today as it was in the sixteenth century

In the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ clarifies the core of our faith.¹ He shows us what God intended by sending Him into this world in order to save us from our sins. When we consider the meaning of this sacrament, we are filled with gratitude for the many aspects of God's work of salvation and we rejoice in our Saviour who gave us this Supper. Being reminded of God's work in Jesus Christ, we can only be thankful.

The dispute

At the same time it cannot be denied that there is another side to this sacrament: the meaning of the Lord's Supper has been disputed. Extensive debates

have taken place and the results can still be found in our confessions. In particular, the Heidelberg Catechism has seen the need to explain this sacrament extensively. Actually, in the section on the sacraments we find the lengthiest answers anywhere in the Catechism (Lord's Days 27-29).

And at the end of this section a question is brought up: what is the difference between the Lord's Supper and the Mass as celebrated by the Roman Catholics? In its answer, the Catechism places the Lord's Supper and the Mass in opposition, ending with the strong statement that the Mass in the Roman Catholic worship is "a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry." The Catechism rejects outright the Roman Catholic view of the Supper.

Many people are no longer comfortable with this statement. The question has been raised whether such harsh statements, which have their origin in heat of the debates between the Roman Catholics and the Reformed many centuries ago, should be maintained today. As the time when people are persecuted for their faith is past, should this rigorous statement still be part of our confession today? Do we need to continue this lengthy explanation and rejection in the Catechism, or can these sections be relegated to a footnote, kept only as a historical note? What should we do with these harsh statements?

When the Catechism made this bold statement on the Roman Catholic Mass, it added a reference in the footnotes. This reference has disappeared in our present edition, but among the original footnotes was included a note referring to a statement from the Council of Trent. The first chapter of this



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

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ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202
Subscriptions: clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca
Advertisements: clarionads@premierpublishing.ca
Website: www.premierpublishing.ca

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Subscription Rates for 2006	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*  	\$46.00*	\$ 75.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$55.00	\$ 70.00
International	\$82.00	\$120.00

*Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT
Advertisements: \$14.00 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$20.00 per column inch
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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada,  through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

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document brings us right to the heart of the issue, for the Council stated that it “teaches and openly and straightforwardly professes that in the blessed sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the perceptible species of bread and wine.”² This statement emphasizes with three words (“truly, really, and substantially”) how we should see the Lord’s Supper: in the Eucharist the substance of Jesus Christ’s body itself is given. And to make this statement totally unchangeable, a negative statement was added: “If anyone denies that the body and blood, together with soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, but says that Christ is present in the Sacrament only as in a sign or figure, or by his power: let him be anathema.”³ This is a long statement, but the meaning is obvious. It shows that the Roman Catholic Church taught, and still teaches, that a substantial change is taking place in both the bread and the wine every time the Mass is celebrated.

The dispute today

In our own *Book of Praise* this reference to the official documents has been deleted, but the documents are still available. Not only that, but the Roman Catholic Church maintains the doctrine expressed here. The difference concerning the meaning of the Lord’s Supper is as strong today as it was in the sixteenth century. It is regrettable, but this fundamental difference could not be resolved. That has consequences for the churches. It is still important today to teach that in the Lord’s Supper we are not confronted with a miraculous change, conveying a miraculous grace. Rather, the holy Supper is given to us as a repeated encouragement that Jesus Christ did fully pay for all our sins.

I was reminded of this footnote in the Catechism when our family enjoyed our vacation in Quebec. It is obvious that transubstantiation is maintained.

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Actually, it is so much a living issue that the development did not end here. Once transubstantiation was adopted with its view that Jesus Christ is really present in the host, other ideas were added. The first step, that Jesus Christ is really present in the host, leads to the second step, that Jesus Christ Himself is present wherever the host is present.⁴ The host actually presents Christ. This doctrine of Christ's real presence in the elements of the Supper is so important that Christ's real presence is even called the great difference between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants. Christians must adore the Christ particularly in the host, for there is his presence and power.

This has led to a special form of adoration of Christ, called "spending an hour to be with Jesus." What this means is that people are encouraged to spend one hour in the presence of the bread used in the Lord's Supper. Spending an hour with Jesus in the form of the host is a good work. Actually, it is presented as such a good work that it causes the forgiveness of a great number of sins.

This is followed by a shocking statement: Jesus "needs this gift of your hour to save souls." Here Jesus Christ is no longer recognized as the only Mediator, who has brought about forgiveness of sins for all who believe in Him. Rather, He needs the support of believers in order to acquire enough good works so that believing sinners can be saved. Salvation of sinners is achieved in the cooperation of Jesus Christ with the help of the believers. Particularly people who have time on their hand are encouraged to do this. Therefore retired people, seniors, and the unemployed are called to spend time with Jesus in the sacrament. When they do so, they will contribute to the saving of people.

Here the Lord's Supper is no longer God's gift by means of which He strengthens our faith. Rather, the adoration of the host is an opportunity for us to be generous to God. The sacrament is changed into a means for us to do good works for God, so that we are to contribute to the salvation of many.

The Catechism showed how large the difference was between Roman Catholic and Reformed doctrine on the issue of the Lord's Supper. However, it appears that since that time the gap has only widened.

¹On the Lord's Supper in general, see my article, "The Meaning of the Lord's Supper," *Koinonia* XIV, 1 (1993), 1-41.

²This translation is taken from John F. Clarkson, et al., *The Church Teaches*, (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers), 281. For the original Latin text, see H. Denzinger, A. A. Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Declarationum*, (ed. 33; Barcinone: Herder, 1965), 387.

³John F. Clarkson, et al., *The Church Teaches*, 286; Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion*, 389.

⁴The following is based on a statements made by Father Donald Arsenault, *Perpetual Eucharistic Adoration*, no date.

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Thankfulness



MATTHEW 13:52

“Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever.”

Psalm 136:26

Thank-ful-ness. The word itself suggests that there ought to be a certain abundance to our gratitude. It should be full to overflowing. Food to eat, clothes to wear, homes to live in, and incomes to spend, indeed all these things ought to be on our thanksgiving list. Yet the list should be longer than that; this is where Psalm 136 teaches us an important lesson.

Clearly Psalm 136 is a song of thanksgiving. The psalm begins with a triplet of gratefulness: “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. . . Give thanks to the God of gods. . . Give thanks to the Lord of lords” (vv. 1-3). The psalm also ends on the very same theme, “Give thanks to the God of heaven” (v. 26). Exhortations to give thanks are the matching bookends which keep the whole line of these praise-laden verses upright and in place.

Yet why give thanks? Twenty-six times in twenty-six verses the answer is repeated: *His love endures forever*. Sadly, the meaning of love has been hollowed out to the point of vacuity. Basically “to love” has come to mean little more than “to be nice.” People cannot fathom how discipline could ever be part of genuine love because discipline is not a nice experience. When married life is no longer nice, marriage vows are nixed.

Thankfully, the love of the Lord is so much more than mere niceness. In fact, in the year gone by, you might well point to a number of not so nice things that God put on your path. Perhaps you lost a job. Maybe you were not accepted into the college program that you wanted. There may have been sickness, strife, sorrow, or suffering. And we do confess that “all things come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand,” don’t we? So, what shall we conclude? Is the Lord’s love toward us fickle?

On the contrary! *His love endures forever*, sings the psalmist, over and over again. The Lord’s love is not characterized by fickleness but by forever-ness. Actually, if you want to pick a synonym for the love in this psalm, the best word would be *loyalty*, not niceness. True love is faithfulness, reliability, and sticking to your promises even when things are far less than nice.

As the verses 4-9 show, the Lord’s loyal love is evident in his works of creation. He alone created the heavens, the earth, the waters below, and the sun, moon, and stars above. Now look all around you. What do you see? After all these centuries, and even after the fall into sin, the heavens are still there. The earth and the oceans are still around. The sun,

moon and stars are still shining. You see evidence of the Lord’s loyal love in every corner of his created realm.

Also, as the verses 10-24 proclaim, the Lord’s loyal love shines forth from the pages of salvation history. The journey to the Promised Land was full of setbacks. Pharaoh and the mighty army of Egypt made a terrifying attempt to recapture their slave labour force. The desert sun threatened to dehydrate them. Food was scarce, water was in short supply. Other enemies blocked the way into the land flowing with milk and honey, Sihon king of the Amorites and Og king of Bashan. To sum up, the journey from Egypt to Canaan was not at all nice. Yet through it all the Lord’s love for his chosen people remained reliable. They received what they needed, when they needed it. And, in due time, they arrived in the Promised Land.

You also, and especially, see the Lord’s loyal love revealed in Jesus Christ. Witness the loyalty of the Father who did not even spare his only-begotten Son, but gave Him up for us all that we might not perish eternally but live in everlasting blessedness (Rom 8:32).

Witness the loyalty of the Son who remained true to his anointing as our Messiah. Even when his suffering intensified to the point of

being forsaken by his own, eternal Father, Christ did not abandon the salvific task at hand. Instead, He stayed the course of agony, all out of loyal love for us (John 15:9-13).

Witness the loyalty of the Holy Spirit, whom the Father and the Son sent to dwell in us. By rights the Holy Spirit could have given up on us a long time ago, stubborn people that we are. And yet our

Saviour has given us the Spirit of truth who remains with us forever (John 14:16, 17).

Our triune God is a thrice-full manifestation of steadfast love. And, privilege of privileges, you are baptized into the name of this loving God. Therefore, give thanks to the God of heaven. Yes, He gives food to every creature (v. 25), but He also does a whole lot more than

that. Give thanks to the Lord of lords because in every way, on every day, his love for us is steadfast in Jesus Christ. And, having received the enduring love of the Lord, our cup is always running over.

The Lord's eternal and loyal love. Our eager and abundant thank-ful-ness. The latter ought to flow forth from the former.



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Towards a Common Songbook (Part 8)

A Songbook of the Universal Church

We believe a "catholic," that is, "universal" church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ's church has existed since the beginning of time and it extends throughout the world. The music of the church must demonstrate this "universality." Thus the sixth guideline used by our committee in producing a common songbook:

The songs of the church must reflect and preserve the language of the church of all ages rather than accommodating current secular trends.

Of course, as our committee is selecting potential songs for our

new songbook, we try to keep all eleven guidelines in mind at the same time. Just because a hymn was traditionally used at some time in church history does not make it an acceptable hymn for our new songbook. It must also meet the other criteria for good church music. Yet, if the universal church through the ages has recognized a hymn's value, we weigh this factor in our consideration of that hymn.

We must avoid the tendency to choose songs which come only from one period in church history. The guideline emphasizes the songs of the church of *all ages*. In

this regard, the *Book of Praise* does better than the *Psalter Hymnal*.

Scanning through the hymn section of the *Book of Praise* (excluding those hymns which render portions of Scripture), about twenty percent of the hymns have words which date before 1000 A.D. Another fifteen percent have text written in the years 1000-1600 A.D. Thus, fully one-third of the hymns in that songbook derive from the years before 1600. In contrast, scanning fifty hymns in the *Psalter Hymnal* (#436 through #486), a full seventy percent are found to be written in the nineteenth century!

This is not a good sampling of church music of all ages.

With hymns heavily weighted from the nineteenth century, another problem arises. Students of English literature know that era was impacted by Romanticism. The authors and poets of that day tend to write emotionally and subjectively; some even lean towards mysticism. This emphasis can be deadly for the Christian, whose hope in Christ is rooted in the *objective* works of God by which He has redeemed his people. By recommending the removal of many of these nineteenth century hymns and replacing them with hymns with more biblical texts (generally written in other eras of church history) our church music will be improved.

In line with guideline six, we are seeking good hymns which reflect the best of church music throughout the long history of the church. We find some of these in both church songbooks.

For example, in Hymn 46 of the *Book of Praise* we are singing words taken from the *Didache*. That earliest Christian work dates from within a couple of decades of the death of the Apostle John. In #414 of the *Psalter Hymnal* we are singing with Clement of Alexandria, one of the early Greek fathers of the church. And, yes, the light of the gospel was still burning, though greatly diminished, in the medieval Roman Catholic Church. That era of the church is represented by a twelfth century hymn authored by Bernard of Clairvaux. Through it

we praise our Saviour, whose "sacred head" was "wounded, with grief and shame weighed down" (PH #355). Hymn selections from other eras of church history are scattered throughout the two songbooks, including those written by St. Andrew of Crete (seventh century), John of Damascus (eighth century), Theodulph of Orleans (ninth century), etc.

Both songbooks contain only a handful of hymns written in the 1900s. Although we do not have to seek "equal representation" from among the centuries of church history, surely good hymns have been written somewhat recently. In the URC Songbook Committee some effort is being made to keep track of each song based upon the century in which it was written, to

help ensure a greater balance of hymns from the various centuries.

Where possible, as guideline six states, we must "reflect and preserve" the rich heritage of hymnody found within the church throughout the ages and from around the world. Not that these classic hymns become "museum pieces." Rather, these selections should enrich our singing and our worship today.

Our common songbook should not only be a songbook which derives *from* the universal church. Under the Lord's blessing, we hope it will be used *by* the universal church. It should be our prayer that the new songbook will be such a good songbook that other true churches around the world will want to use it!





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High Notes in the History of the Hymns: “O God, We Praise Thee”

Hymn 2 is one of the oldest songs in the second section of the *Book of Praise*. “Te Deum” is arguably the most famous hymn of the western church; it has been sung by many generations, in many places, and in many tongues.

While it is one of the most recognized Christian hymns, the origins of “Te Deum” are clouded by legend and uncertain evidence. Some specialists date the song to the second century, arguing that it is a Christian adaptation of an originally pagan song for the Roman emperor. Others think its beginnings lie in a second-century Greek hymn. An eighth-century legend, now viewed as untrue, holds that the hymn was composed on the occasion of Augustine’s conversion and baptism in 387 AD, when he and Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, spontaneously chanted this doxology.

On the strength of this legend, “Te Deum” has long been associated with the name of Ambrose, whose influence in the history of hymn-singing was considerable. However, careful examination of the meter in which the hymn was first published, and of its structure, has led experts to conclude that Ambrose is not the author of Hymn 2. A seventh-century manuscript from Ireland – where the tradition of hymn-singing was ancient and relatively unaffected – does not assign the hymn to any author, providing merely the title (in Latin), “Hymn for the Lord’s Day.”

In the late nineteenth century the argument was put forward that the author is Nicetas of Remesiana (Yugoslavia). Nicetas lived from about 335 until 414 in Romatiana, a city along a Roman military road leading from Constantinople to Belgrade. There he is reported to have spread the gospel among the

barbarians. Several early and authoritative manuscripts assign the hymn to Nicetas; from other sources we learn that Nicetas possessed the gift of writing hymns. Moreover, the content of the song agrees with both the subject and style of writings that are known to be by Nicetas. Thus, while certainty is lacking, the current consensus is that Nicetas composed at least part of Hymn 2.

O God, we praise Thee, we acknowledge Thee
as Lord.
Eternal Father, Thou are everywhere adored.
The cherubim and seraphim their homage show
Thee:
“O Thou Lord God of hosts art holy, holy, holy!
Both heav’n and earth are filled with Thy majestic
splendour.”
To Thee all angels loud and ceaseless praises
render.

Hymn 2:1

A careful look at the structure of the hymn reveals that it consists of three distinct parts; this partition has given rise to the plausible speculation that “Te Deum” is a compilation of three separate hymns. Part one consists of verses one and two in the close English translation by W. Helder in our *Book of Praise*; it dates to the middle of the third century AD. It includes the praise of angels (perhaps based on Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8) in verse one and the praise of the catholic church in verse two. The second verse ends with a confession of the Trinity; during the third

century it was especially to combat Arrianism that faith in the Triune God was professed:

. . . the Father, infinite in glory;
Thy true and only Son, worthy of veneration;
The Holy Spirit, source of strength and consolation.

Part two, which in the *Book of Praise* appears as verses three and four, signals a change in the addressee from God the Father to God the Son: "Thou, Christ, art King of glory, radiant is Thy throne." (As we shall observe below, the last line of verse four – "O save Thy people" – is addressed to God the Lord, and belongs to part three.) Whereas one may wonder about the biblical grounds for the direct address to the second Person of the Trinity especially in verse five, the practice of prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ, though not common, can be defended by references to Scripture. The martyr Stephen prays to the Lord Jesus in Acts 7:59; calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ appears in several New Testament passages (e.g. 1 Cor 1:1, 2); petition to the Saviour for his return occurs also (1 Cor 16:22, Rev 22:20). In several passages prayer or praise to the person of the eternal Saviour is associated with his work of creation, redemption, or return as judge (e.g. the Lamb who was slain, Rev 5:12). In Hymn 2 the emphasis on the Saviour's work forms part of the address:

Thou art enthroned in glory at God's own right hand
Till Thou shalt come as judge and we before Thee
stand.
We therefore pray Thee, grant thy help to those who
serve Thee,
With all Thy saints, O Lord, wilt Thou Thy servants
number;
O save Thy people, Thy inheritance remember!
(Hymn 2: 4)

Part three appears as verse five in our English translation. This part is based on texts chosen from Old Testament psalms. The attentive singer will have observed that several lines can be traced to specific Bible texts, as the following chart illustrates:

O save Thy people, Thy inheritance remember! –
Psalm 28:9

We bless Thee day by day, we praise Thy holy
Name;
Thy power and glory we from age to age acclaim. –
Psalm 145:12

Keep us from sin and lead us not into temptation.
Have mercy on us, Lord; hear Thou our
supplication. –
Psalm 123:3

Let us be with Thy grace and steadfast love
surrounded –
Psalm 33: 22

In Thee we've trusted; we shall never be
confounded –
Psalm 31:1

The Latin text of the hymn has been translated into several languages; well-known renditions appear in French and German – by Martin Luther, among others. There are at least two dozen English translations, including an early one by Thomas Cranmer for the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* and another by the poet Dryden. Throughout the Middle Ages a plain-chant melody accompanies the text, though it appears with many variations. The hymn has stood the test of time for several reasons. Its subject ranges widely, from adoration of God the Father, to profession of the Trinity, to expression of Christ's work of atonement. Its scope in time includes past, present, and future. Moving from doxology to petition, this hymn ends with the powerful assertion: "In Thee we've trusted; we shall never be confounded."



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Dietrich Bonhoeffer – Pastor, Disciple, Martyr 1906-1945

In February it was a hundred years ago that the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born. That centennial inspired a large number of articles, books, and conferences in remembrance of the life and work of this remarkable man. I think it is fitting that our magazine joins the world in remembering him, even if it is done somewhat belatedly.

Bonhoeffer was not a Reformed theologian. A Lutheran by birth, he received his theological education in the Bible-critical tradition and was subsequently influenced by Karl Barth and other members of the neo-orthodox school. The effect of these strains is noticeable in his theology. It has caused some of the post-war “progressive” and “death-of-God” theologians to claim him as the father of their movements – although by now it is widely admitted that they misinterpreted and exploited him. The fact remains, however, that Bible-critical influences are clearly evident in his theology.

Surprising as it may seem, there is also overwhelming evidence of Bonhoeffer’s submission to the scriptures and of his absolute trust in the certainty of God’s promises. It was this third strain that dominated his life, characterized his pastoral and ecclesiastical work, and determined his political stance. It enabled him to join the

struggle against both an apostate church and an anti-Christian political system and to continue that struggle until death. It is because of Bonhoeffer’s authentic, uncompromising, biblically-founded discipleship that he can still serve as an example and guide. I can put it more strongly: Reformed Christians cannot afford to ignore him and his work.

Youth and schooling

I hope to deal with some of Bonhoeffer’s writings in a later article. This article presents a brief biography.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born in Breslau, the sixth of eight children in an upper-middleclass family. When he was six years old, the family moved to Berlin, where his father was appointed professor of psychiatry and neurology. Dietrich’s ancestry on both his father’s and mother’s side included an array of lawyers, scientists, musicians, artists, and some well-known theologians. The family was deeply cultured and upheld, like so many upper-bourgeois families of the time, high moral ideals. That ingrained sense of *noblesse oblige* existed quite apart from church-membership. Although belonging to the Lutheran community, Dietrich’s parents, especially his father, were religiously liberal and the family

did not normally attend church services. Such religious instruction as the young Dietrich received in his youth came mainly from his mother, who in her youth had spent time at Herrnhut with the Moravian Brethren and adopted some of their ideals. The children’s governess from 1906-1923, Maria Horn, was a member of the Moravian brotherhood.

Dietrich studied theology first at Tübingen and then at the University of Berlin, where one of his teachers was the famous liberal theologian Adolf von Harnack. In 1927, at age 21, he concluded his studies with a doctoral dissertation entitled *Sanctorum Communio* (The Communion of Saints). Although too young to be ordained, he did preach, spending a year as an assistant pastor with a German congregation in Spain. In 1930 he submitted a postdoctoral dissertation and earned the licentiate for university teaching. He held a lectureship at the University of Berlin until 1936, when the Nazi government revoked his licence to teach. Meanwhile he had taken an eighteen-month leave of absence (1933-35) in order to take charge of two German congregations in London. For some years he had already been involved in the ecumenical movement and while in England

he strengthened the foreign contacts that he would appeal to in his struggle against the Nazification of the German church. He worked especially closely with George Bell, Anglican Bishop of Chichester and a leading figure in the ecumenical movement, who became a trusted friend.

The road of resistance

Soon after his rise to power in January 1933, Hitler began to pressure the German churches to get in line with his ideology. They had to follow his racist program by expelling Jewish Christians from the ordained ministry and were also told to centralize church government in accordance with the "Führer principle." Many churches and church members surrendered. Some did so quite willingly. The more radical among them formed the pro-Nazi "German Christian" movement in the German Evangelical Church, which had the support of a majority of the members.

From the beginning, however, there was also a group that opposed the Nazification of the church. This opposition transformed itself into the "Confessing Church" during the Barmen Synod of 1934. Barmen rejected Hitler's attempts to subject the church to the state, confessing that Jesus Christ is the church's owner and only ruler. Bonhoeffer supported the Barmen declaration and became one of the leaders in the Confessing Church. Throughout, he maintained that this was not a new church alongside the apostate one, but the lawful continuation of the German Evangelical Church. To the consternation of many, he would even write that "whoever

knowingly separates himself from the Confessing Church in Germany separates himself from salvation."

When Barmen was adopted, Bonhoeffer was still in England, but in 1935 his church called him home to lead one of its five illegal seminaries. These were organized to prepare graduates of regular seminaries for their work in the Confessing Church (for not a single university faculty of theology had joined Barmen). First located on the Baltic, Bonhoeffer's seminary soon moved further inland to Finkenwalde, near Stettin in Pomerania (now Poland). It was at Finkenwalde that Bonhoeffer did some of his most important work for the church. It was here also that he wrote what became his most popular work, *The Cost of Discipleship* (original title, *Nachfolge*). Another book dating from this period was *Life Together*, an account of the life and work of the Finkenwalde community.

In September 1937 the government closed Finkenwalde and arrested twenty-seven of its former students. For some years Bonhoeffer continued the seminary's work by means of secret visits to the remaining students and graduates, most of who were working illegally in small parishes. (Eventually practically all of them would be forced to join the army and more than half would be killed in action.) Bonhoeffer also continued to make trips abroad on behalf of the ecumenical movement, informing foreign churches of the challenges the German brotherhood faced and asking for support. In 1939 he travelled to the United States where he was offered a position at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He had left Germany



Dietrich Bonhoeffer

because he expected to be called up for military service and knew that he could not and would not fight in Hitler's armies.

As soon as he arrived in New York, however, he realized that he had made a mistake in leaving his country and after only a few weeks he went back, arriving in Germany shortly before the outbreak of World War II. This is how he explained his decision to his American mentor Reinhold Niebuhr: "I shall have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people. . . Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose; but I cannot make this choice in security."

He never regretted his decision and later wrote from prison: "I am sure of God's hand and guidance. . . you must never doubt that I am thankful and glad to go the way which I am being led. My past life is abundantly full of God's mercy, and above all sin stands the forgiving love of the Crucified."

Imprisonment

As early as the 1930's a number of influential Germans, from both within and outside the military establishment, formed a resistance movement with as goal the removal of Adolf Hitler and his henchmen. One of Dietrich's brothers-in-law, Hans von Dohnanyi, was involved and asked for Dietrich's participation. As a member of the Evangelical Church which had always been characterized by strict obedience to the civil authorities, Dietrich at first refused. Resistance, he believed, was to be a matter of spiritual warfare, not of violence and the force of arms. Hitler's astounding successes of the late 1930's – the annexation of Austria, the conquest of the Sudetenland and soon of the rest of Czechoslovakia, the Munich conference – caused him to reconsider, however.

Another important reason was the *Kristallnacht* of November 9, 1938, when German mobs across the country destroyed Jewish stores and burned down synagogues, while the police stood idly by. Bonhoeffer now reached the conclusion that rather than restricting himself to simply helping the persecuted, he had to engage in battle with the force that did the persecuting. In his own words, it was not just his task to look after the victims of madmen who drove a motorcar into a crowded street, but to do all in his power to stop that motorcar itself. Resistance was a Christian duty. When he was reminded of the biblical warning that those who take up the sword perish by the sword, he answered that this consequence had to be accepted.

After his return from America, Bonhoeffer continued to work for his former students – by means of collective pastorates, visits, and correspondence. At the same time he engaged in various tasks for the resistance movement, both at home and abroad. He was placed on the staff of the Military Intelligence, which officially declared him indispensable so that, although drafted, he could avoid joining the army. His major qualification for joining the Military Intelligence had been that thanks to his ecumenical work he had established valuable foreign connections. While ostensibly working for the government's official secret service, he was able to communicate with these foreign contacts on behalf of the resistance, making secret inquiries about peace aims among the allies and providing information about the planned military coup.

Reformed Christians cannot afford to ignore him and his work

After the outbreak of war, these contacts were made mainly in neutral Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries. And so, although forbidden by the Gestapo to teach, preach, publish, and even to visit Berlin on work-related matters, he was able to continue to do his work on behalf of both the church and the resistance movement.

Bonhoeffer and some of his associates were also involved in efforts to help Jews escape into Switzerland. This was among the reasons for his arrest in April 1943. At the time there was no evidence

yet of his work with the resistance movement, but Bonhoeffer's case dragged on and his imprisonment would last until his death in April, 1945. For the first year and a half, he was kept in the military section of Tegel prison in Berlin. Conditions were at first very bad, but the situation improved when prison authorities and guards became aware of his connections with leading members of the Berlin government and of the German army. He was then granted freedom to correspond with his parents and others and to receive visitors.

Bonhoeffer's attitude toward his guards and fellow-inmates also helped. He was friendly and appeared totally at ease in prison, whatever the circumstances. He was allowed to act as an informal chaplain to those who were sentenced to death or needed encouragement for other reasons and to assist in administering first aid to the wounded in the frequent bombardments. Becoming popular among inmates and guards both, he was able to extend his outreach. The letters that were officially allowed were censored, but before long some of the guards he had befriended smuggled uncensored letters with coded secret messages into and out of his cell. A selection of his prison writings was later published and appears in English translation under the title *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Death

The resistance movement planned a final attack on Hitler for July 20, 1944. Like previous ones, it failed miserably and Bonhoeffer knew that this failure, and the discovery of incriminating papers the following September, signified the end of his hopes for release. In October 1944 he was transferred to

the dreaded Gestapo prison in Berlin, where he was kept for five months behind bars. The possibilities of contact with the outside world were now severely limited. In February 1945 the prison was destroyed in a bombardment and Bonhoeffer was moved to the concentration camp of Buchenwald. He spent seven weeks here in one of the camp bunkers. Fellow prisoners who survived the war have chronicled this period. Among them was Payne Best, an English intelligence officer who had been captured in 1939 and who wrote in connection with Bonhoeffer's stay in Buchenwald, "Bonhoeffer was all humility and sweetness; he always seemed to diffuse an atmosphere of happiness, of joy in every smallest event in life. . . He was one of the very few men I have ever met to whom his God was real and ever close to him."

In the first week of April 1945, shortly before the liberation of the camp (the American canons could already be heard in Buchenwald), Bonhoeffer and a number of other prisoners were sent on a transport to Flossenbürg, an extermination camp. Somehow their vehicle was sidetracked and ended up in Schönberg, a small village in Bavaria. Bonhoeffer and his fellow-passengers spent the night in a boarding school, where family members of resistance leaders were already imprisoned. The new group was taken to a classroom on the first floor. It was a very pleasant place with clean beds and the opportunity to congregate. There was no food, but compassionate neighbours came to the rescue. Bonhoeffer's group was a diverse one, containing men from practically every corner of Europe, including Payne Best and a

Russian air force officer by the name of Kokorin, a nephew of Molotov. A fellow prisoner later wrote to Dietrich's twin sister that Dietrich again "did a great deal to keep some of the weaker brethren from depression and anxiety. He spent a good deal of time with Wasily Wasiliew Kokorin . . . who was a delightful young man although an atheist. I think your brother divided his time with him between instilling the foundations of Christianity and learning Russian."

Resistance was a Christian duty

The day after their arrival, April 8, was a Sunday and his fellow-prisoners asked Bonhoeffer to lead a worship service. Afraid of offending non-protestants and the atheist Kokorin, he at first declined, but when all insisted he agreed and preached on the text of Isaiah 53, ". . . by his stripes we were healed." The women hoped to smuggle him yet into their part of the building so that he could repeat his message, but time was running out. He had barely finished his service when two men, members of the Gestapo, walked in saying, "Prisoner Bonhoeffer, make ready and come with us." This type of summons meant one thing only – death. Bonhoeffer had time to say goodbye to the members of his group. While leaving, he drew the Englishman aside, saying to him, "This is the end – for me the beginning of life," and asking him to deliver a message, if he could, to the Bishop of Chichester.

He was then transported to Flossenbürg and was hanged at

dawn the next morning together with other members of the resistance movement. The concentration camp physician, who was present at the execution, testifies that Bonhoeffer remained steadfast to the end. He wrote later, "Through the half-open door in one room of the huts I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer, before taking off his prison garb, kneeling on the floor in fervent prayer to his God. I was most deeply moved by the way this unusually likeable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued in a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God." Bonhoeffer was thirty-nine years old when he died.

Three other members of his immediate family were executed in the same month, namely Bonhoeffer's brother Klaus and his brothers-in-law Hans von Dohnanyi and Rüdiger Schleicher. Communication with Berlin was difficult and his parents would not hear of Dietrich's death until July 1945. Listening to the BBC on July 27, they heard an English voice saying: "We are gathered here in the presence of God to make thankful remembrance of the life and work of his servant Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who gave his life in faith and obedience to his holy Word. . . ."

In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, which was published in 1937, Bonhoeffer had written, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Less than ten years later, he sealed that profession with his life.

43rd Annual Women's League Day

June 21, the first day of summer! The sun was shining in a nearly cloudless sky, so it wasn't hard to believe that summer had officially arrived. Though summer is typically associated with family excursions and beach time, this day was set aside for the 43rd annual league day.

This year's location was set for lovely Lynden, Washington. The women met in a rented facility and were hosted by the ladies of Lynden American Reformed Church. Attendance was somewhat less than in previous years, perhaps because of the border crossing. Comments received by those who made the trek south and through, what for some was a bit of a line-up, were positive. It was worth the trip!

The main meeting room was arranged in table groups topped with flower-filled teapots bringing

some of the new season indoors. In this decorative setting the meeting began. Mrs. Stephanie Bareman, as one of the Lynden women's society leaders, greeted everyone and opened the day. Soon the harmony of women's voices filled the room singing Psalm 135. Once all the necessary announcements had been given, Mrs. Gertie VanLuik, the chair of Chilliwack women's society, introduced the speaker for the day, Dr. J. van Bruggen. Dr. van Bruggen is a retired professor from the Theological Seminary in Kampen, The Netherlands. He spoke on the topic, "My God is always Greater" (included elsewhere in this issue).

Before long, it seemed, it was time for coffee, tea, and those scrumptious treats that typically accompany such beverages. Then followed discussion groups. In years past the morning speech was



followed by a general discussion and a second topic and speaker were presented in the afternoon. After surveying the various societies earlier in the year, it seemed that most women were ready to try a different format. The way it was set up this year allowed more time to mentally digest and delve into one topic. Thus all the attendees were divided into ten discussion groups and dispersed among various rooms in the building.

Of course, as detailer of the day, I could not possibly share what took place in all these discussions, but assuming that our group was a





typical one, discussion went well. The group leader came armed unnecessarily with prepared questions, but there was no lack of thoughts to share. One point that had stood out for many of us was the stress on the proper perspective we must have in our relationship with God. It cannot be too casual, for we are but man before a great and mighty God. Does this reflect in our attitude, for example, as we pray? Why is it, we wondered, that most of us do not kneel when we pray? The answer was something we would continue to ponder as we returned to the large group.

These smaller groups were a great way to involve more women in sharing their thoughts and questions. The only negative may have come in the quick passage of time. Before we knew it, it was time to get together with everyone for lunch.

Before we took part in the richly laden tables, we were entertained by some women from the Aldergrove societies. A little piece entitled "Caesar Salad" made some of us a little wary of trying the real thing, but their performance in various genres certainly brought forth chuckles

from the crowd. Soon everyone's appetite was satiated with the delectable array of salads, wraps, fruits, veggies, and an abundance of various jello salads. Most of us still had room for the scrumptious dessert of chocolate trifle.

Our afternoon session was an opportunity for the speaker to answer questions that came out of the various small groups. Obviously his speech sparked a lot of discussion, for there were quite a number of points for him to cover. One of the things he stressed here was that we need to remember to listen and be open to learning from one another and from church

history. Also, before we evaluate someone else we must learn to first check our own spiritual attitude.

After Dr. van Bruggen capably responded to all our queries, it was time to conclude our day. Once again Mrs. Baremen came forward. With some "fancy" math calculations she shared with us the attendance statistics of the day. She noted that we even had three guests from foreign countries! A few thanks and final comments were shared, the League Day song, "Sing God's glory," was sung, and we closed in prayer.

As we lingered over afternoon beverages and snacks it was clear that it had been a successful day. Not only had the new format gone well, but more importantly, we as women of the church had received scriptural food for thought. At the close of what we call "Bible Study Season" it was good to be reminded of the proper focus that we all need in our lives all the time. Our God is always greater in all seasons, places, and activities!

May we all keep this in mind through the summer as we continue with personal and family Bible study and as we begin the new "study season" in the fall.



Dr. J. van Bruggen is professor emeritus of New Testament studies from the Theological University of Kampen, The Netherlands

My God is Always Greater (Part 1 of 2)

My message today is about the greatness of our God. We don't speak today about an impersonal issue, for I am his creation; He is a personal God. He is not, however, one of many persons. He is the only one, the Almighty, the unique and incomparable one. He is my God and He is your God. Considering the implications of this should make us silent with wonder.

God is living in an inaccessible light

Searching for the image of God

My God lives in an inaccessible light. You can not look at the sun without becoming blinded. The sun, however, is only a shadow of the light of the creation that is around Him, my God. I can not even see that light. It would mean my death. How impossible it is for me to see Him who is living in that light, who was there right at the beginning of the creation, and who is the fountain of all other lights, including the sun.

When we gather for Bible study we speak a lot about God the Lord. Not always directly. Sometimes we argue about issues and the problems of the day. But He stands at the background in our discussions; we try to find out his will and opinion in these discussions. Directly or indirectly we are always seeking the approval of our Lord.

Therefore we study the Bible and discuss the different books and passages therein. In the books of the Bible we hear his voice and

read about his deeds. The study of the Bible forms not only the centre of our services on the Lord's Day, but it is also of vital importance in our study meetings as men and women and younger people.

I don't know if we are always aware of the fact that there is permanently a certain idea about God in our minds. We have certain ideas about what He is and feels and about what his opinion will be. Of course we know that our imaginations of the Almighty are not complete and sometimes very defective, but nevertheless they function in our prayers and in our discussions.

We have certain ideas about what God is and feels and about what his opinion will be

More than once we say, perhaps inadvertently, something about what we think God will think. For example: "I can't imagine that our choice of church would be that important to the heavenly God," or: "I can't imagine that God would prohibit divorce when you are married to such an impossible person!" or: "I am sure that at the end of time God will be gracious to all mankind; isn't He unconditional in his love?"

The idea that we have about God lends some decisiveness to our point of view. Doubt and uncertainty are seemingly not

welcome in our study societies! We demand solutions; everything has to fit with our idea of God. The image we form of Him is often a hidden persuader. And more than once we select only those Bible passages that are best suited to our ideas about Him.

Statues prohibited!

How justified, however, is it to have an idea about God that dominates our thoughts and discussions?

In God's law we find a commandment that prohibits us from making graven images of our God. We are forbidden from exchanging the real and living God for our idea about Him and about his feelings and opinions.

One of the most typical and specific characteristics of the religion of Israel is that there were to be no statues or images of Him. And that was a very shocking law. Every religion had statues and images and temples to house the statues. What is a house without an inhabitant? Imagine how strange and peculiar the people of Israel were. They wandered through the desert with an empty tent! There was some furniture in that tabernacle, but no statue, no god. Similarly, there was a house for God in Jerusalem in which nobody – no statue – was living. In the time of Jesus thousands of people came to visit that unique, magnificent, but empty temple. How strange for a people. Didn't they have any idea about who their god was? Their temple was like a ghost house!

Only a voice!

Why did God make such a law, so different from other nations? Why did Israel have to have a temple without a statue? What was God's purpose in this commandment?

Moses has given a broad explanation of this phenomenon. We can find his explanation in Deuteronomy 4. The people of Israel stood at the foot of the smoking and quaking Mount Sinai. The Lord descended from heaven and became very close to them. They heard his roaring voice and they trembled. They received the Ten Commandments. But they didn't see a figure of God.

The empty temple is a reminder of how the history of Israel started. There was the penetrating voice and there were the mighty deeds in Egypt and in the desert. What god has ever guided his people out of the land of slavery through ten mighty public acts and what god ever guided them along a temporary path through the menacing sea? There was, however, no figure or statue that could be seen. Therefore, oh Israel, listen to the voice of the Lord but be aware at the same time that He is hidden from your eyes and that you can't form any idea about Him. He is far beyond the reach of your imagination!

The magnificent stature

Is our God not a person but only an abstract voice without personality, without hands and eyes? Is our God too vague for images, like the air? You can't make an image of the air. The air is too volatile to be represented in a statue. Is our God so elusive?

In our time many Christians are indeed living with the image of a god without any personality. He is only power and influence, no voice. To these people prayer is no longer speaking in a certain direction to a certain person, the King on his throne. Prayer becomes no more than an inward attitude, a feeling of closeness with something

indefinite. In fact, to modern Christians God gets only a certain form in our spirituality.

The Bible, however, teaches us about a living God with a magnificent appearance. Moses doesn't say that we are not allowed to make statues because God does not *have* a stature, but because we didn't see that stature. Of course God has a stature, or figure. He is acting with his mighty arm and his eyes are investigating our inner being.

Three points make clear that our God has a figure or stature:

1. In the beginning God created mankind according to his image. How can you make a living statue of God if He didn't have any stature at all?
2. The same Moses who taught the people not to make statues was permitted to see something of the stature of the Lord. God covered Moses' eyes at that moment, but nevertheless he was allowed to see the backside of the passing figure of the Lord.
3. Although God's eyes are everywhere and nothing is hidden before Him, there are certain angels that are closer to his eyes and face than we are. So there is distance and nearness.

All this makes clear that God is not everywhere in the same way as the air is everywhere. He really has an abode in the highest heaven. The heavens are his throne and the earth is his footstool. Our God is not everywhere and nowhere.

Our God is hidden in an inaccessible light. No human being ever saw Him and therefore it is impossible that any one of us should see his hidden face. He, the eternal one, is for us the unimaginable. He is far beyond our imagination. We can not form an idea about Him. The only thing we can do is to adore Him and praise his name!

Bowing with empty hands

Church News

Called (as a second call) by the church of Aldergrove, BC:

R.A. Schouten

of Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Called and accepted the call to the Free Reformed Church at Kelmescott, Australia:

M. Retief

of the Vrye Gereformeerde Kerk of South Africa.

That's indeed the content of the second commandment in a nutshell. Don't make statues, but bow before the living one, not visible but more real than anything in heaven and upon earth! This second commandment is very topical today. We are living in a Christianity where a certain form of meditation and vague prayer is always present, but what is missing more and more is the physical posture of kneeling. When you lower yourself on your knees, you become aware that you are praying before a personal God who is the Almighty and who is your Father in heaven. Your prayers have a destination. Therefore your body needs a posture that is fitting to that direction. You cannot kneel before air, but you can do it before a person! The second commandment teaches us that during this kneeling before his throne we are kneeling before a niche that seems to be empty. We don't see any stature at all and we are not allowed to fill in this niche with our own imagination about God. Hands off! You have to kneel before your Creator with empty hands, bowing and listening.

So it is good symbolism when you start your Bible study praying with empty hands, palms turned up before you fold them, waiting for the Lord to fill them.

Mass Band Concert 2006

A big event was about to happen: the second Mass Band Concert hosted by Parkland Immanuel Christian School (PICS) featuring three bands from Western Canada and one from the United States.

Dufferin Christian School (Carman, MB) arrived Wednesday evening. The next day these students enjoyed the day at West Edmonton Mall's Waterpark. An evening of basketball and volleyball was hosted by Parkland Immanuel Senior Band.

Thursday evening Cornerstone Christian School Band (Lynden, WA) arrived.

Credo Christian School Band (BC) arrived Friday morning. They had performed in Neerlandia on Thursday evening.

The Big Day

After having breakfast with their hosts, all four bands met at PICS at 8:30 a.m. for their journey to the Baptist church building for practice. They went back to the school at lunchtime for some soup, buns, and ice-cream. Then back to the Baptist church for a couple more hours of practice, after which the students were given a few relaxing hours to roam West Edmonton Mall or go home and relax.

The concert started at 7:30 p.m.; there was great anticipation from all, but especially the students. One hundred and forty-two students all dressed in their own unique school colors; what a beautiful sight!

Andrew Wallace opened by reading Psalm 105:1-6, which was



echoed by the band playing and the audience singing an arrangement written and directed by Kent Dykstra. Three more mass pieces were played: "Instant Concert" by H. Walters, directed by Kent Dykstra; "The Traveler" by F. Buchter, directed by Otto Bouwman; and "Kentucky 1900" by C. Grundman, directed by Otto Bowman.

We then enjoyed some individual pieces. PICS Jr. Band (director Kent Dykstra) played an arrangement of "This Little Light of Mine" and "Rockin' Rondeau" by Chuck Elledge. Cornerstone Christian School (directed by Otto Bowman) played "Novena" by James Swearingen. Dufferin Christian School (directed by Andy Huisman) played "You Raise Me Up" arranged by Michael Brown and "Beyond the Horizon" by Ted Ricketts. PICS Sr. Band (directed by Kent Dykstra) added some variety with the singing of Psalm 98 and "Here We Are to Worship" arranged by Tim Nijenhuis. Danielle Vanderveen sang a solo called "Unto Your Name." Cheryl Tams played a beautiful solo oboe piece

called "Gabriel's Oboe," composed by Enrico Morricone for the film "The Mission." Credo Christian School (directed by Heres Snijder) played "Fiddler on the Roof" by Jerry Bock and arranged by Calvin Cluster and "Baby Elephant Walk" by Henry Mancini. They also sang "Full Control" by David Poortman.

The students then joined together to play four final mass pieces: "Themes from Pirates of the Caribbean" by K. Badelt, directed by Andy Huisman; "Highlights from the Lord of the Rings" by H. Shore, directed by Heres Snijder; "In the Winter of 1730" by J. Swearingen, directed by Andy Huisman; and "Triumphant Spirit" by Timothy Johnson, directed by Heres Snijder. The final mass piece featured Hymn 10 and was accompanied with the audience singing verses 1, 9, and 10.

We would also like to thank all those who made this evening a success. It is a great joy to see and hear our students use their talents in music or singing to honour and glorify the Lord.

Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

***The Purity Principle:
God's Safeguards for Life's
Dangerous Trails,
Randy Alcorn
(Sisters: Multnomah, 2003).***

Additional Information:
Hardcover, 93 pages, \$9.99 US.

We live in a highly sexualized culture. I don't think I need to argue that point. Nor do I need to argue that this has impacted our churches. We would be kidding ourselves if we thought that things like addiction to pornography, marital infidelity, pre-marital fornication, and other such things don't happen in our circles. We need to get this plague out in the open and talk about it. Someone once said that sin is like fungus: it grows best in the dark. This book will help shine some light on sexual sin.

Randy Alcorn is a fairly well known Christian author. He is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries. He's written a number of fiction and non-fiction books and is perhaps best known as a pro-life activist.

But with this book, Alcorn wanted to take on the issue of sexual purity. He does it by developing what he calls the "purity principle" out of various Proverbs. Essentially, the purity principle is this: sexual infidelity in any form is stupid. Now of course, like I said, he doesn't leave it at that. He develops the thought in connection with many other Bible passages and applications. As he does this, Alcorn is readable and engaging. He anticipates objections and rationalizations and his honesty is disarming. Also, you might note that this is not a long book – which may be helpful for those not used to reading lengthy tomes.

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I have just one small criticism of this book and it's the fact that Alcorn doesn't really develop his purity principle out of any connection to Christ. Sure, he speaks about Christ extensively later in the book, but he does not really begin with Christ. Nevertheless, this is a book that needs a wide distribution in our churches. Men: go out and buy this book for yourselves – even if you don't think you have a problem with lust or sexual impurity. Women: if your husbands won't buy this book, go out and buy it for them and encourage them to read it – and read it yourself. Buy it for your children, especially your sons and grandsons. We need to start taking sexual purity seriously. This book is a good place to start. And, after reading this book, www.settingcaptivefree.com might be a good place to continue, especially for those struggling with pornography.

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