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*Creation rejoices
because of the
deliverance promised
in the
risen Christ*



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Covenant: The Reformed Shibboleth?

The confessions do not speak of three covenants nor of dichotomy in the covenant of grace

Fighting between brothers

At the end of chapter 12 in the book of Judges we have one of those sad situations where God's people, after defeating an enemy, turned on each other. We are told that after the men of Gilead defeated the Ephraimites on the battlefield, they gained control of all the fords of the Jordan that an Ephraimite survivor would have to cross to get back home. We read, "And whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, 'Let me cross over,' the men of Gilead asked him, 'Are you an Ephraimite?' If he replied, 'No,' they said, 'All right, say "Shibboleth."' If he said 'Sibboleth,' because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan" (Judg 12:5, 6). To this day, the term "shibboleth" functions in the English language to describe a test word or pet phrase which reveals a person's sympathies.

When one peruses various brochures, articles, and websites, it is evident that in Reformed circles we still have this sort of testing of one another. The shibboleth is "covenant."¹ There are those who have positioned themselves at strategic points and to flush out all heretics they ask, "Say covenant." If someone does not say "covenant" exactly the way they think it should be said, there is no mercy. The label of heresy is quickly applied.

The supposed correct pronunciation

What is the way that one is supposed to say "covenant?" It begins with adhering to a three covenant view. The first covenant is called the covenant of redemption or the covenant of peace (*pactum salutis*). It is said that this was a covenant between the Father and the Son to save the elect. The second is the covenant of works before the fall, made between God and Adam. The third covenant is the covenant of grace, made only with the elect in Christ.

When it comes to the covenant of grace a further distinction is made. This is due to the fact that not all who are found within the covenant of grace end up believing the gospel. So, it is stated that the covenant of grace has to be considered in a broader and a narrower sense. Another way of expressing this is to speak of being in the covenant outwardly and inwardly. In the narrower sense, the covenant is made only with the elect. Only the elect are said to receive the substance of the covenant.

When reading about this, it is common to be constantly reminded that the three covenant view and the dichotomy in the covenant of grace is the position of classical Reformed theology. Names from Zacharias Ursinus to Abraham Kuyper are mentioned as being proponents of this view. This, it is stressed, is the Reformed consensus since the Reformation. Any other way of speaking about the covenant, especially if there is any hint of the word "condition," is seen as the equivalent of saying "shibboleth."

Accusation of mispronunciation

The history of the Canadian Reformed Churches has very much to do with being accused of saying "shibboleth" instead of "shibboleth" when it came to covenant. Not only are there historical bruises going back to The Netherlands,² there are also historical bruises going back to the first years of post war immigration when the immigrants were confronted with a Declaration of Principles which insisted that the right way to say "covenant" was to equate it with election.³ For this reason, there is immediate interest if "covenant" is held up as shibboleth, especially when one hears the mention of individuals that played a significant role in the developments that led to the Canadian Reformed Churches and they are put in the camp of those who say shibboleth when it comes to covenant.⁴



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Questioning the basic premise

Now in any argument, its strength lies in the accuracy of the basic premise. In this case we have to ask if it is true that there is a consensus that the only way to speak about the covenant is by holding the three covenant view, along with speaking of a dichotomy in the covenant of grace? Furthermore, is this consensus expressed in the church's confessions?

When we look at the history of the Reformed churches adhering to the Three Forms of Unity, we have to conclude this not so. To be sure, one is able to marshal a long list of names of men who spoke of three covenants and the dichotomy in the covenant of grace, but the pronouncements of theologians are not the pronouncements of the church. The position of the church is found in its confessions. The confessions do not speak of three covenants or of dichotomy in the covenant of grace. Not even all the Reformed theologians who have written about the matter are unanimous.

Diversity among theologians

In a most interesting essay on six Secession theologians who all immigrated to North America, Dr. Jelle Faber shows their diversity in thinking about the covenant. To be sure, some held the three covenant view. At the same time, we have a man like L.J. Hulst (1825-1922) who wrote at one time, after much study of the doctrine of the covenant and especially being influenced by the words of Deuteronomy 29:29 which speak about the secret and revealed will of God, "When I saw this, I abandoned that speculative idea of a covenant of grace from eternity and I descended to the covenant that God had established with Abraham and his descendants, Genesis 17. This is the covenant to which the entire Bible refers" ("American Secession Theologians and Baptism," p. 30).

Another example is F.M. TenHoor (1855-1934) who wrote, "Nowhere in Holy Scripture is it taught that the covenant of grace is established with Christ as the second party. Nowhere in Holy Scripture is Christ called Head of the covenant of grace. Since Christ is Surety and Mediator of the covenant, He cannot be the second party to it. . ." (Ibid, p. 35).

Hopefully one's interest will have been piqued to read this essay. The point at issue, however, is that there is evidence of lively theological discussion by these theologians and the way they talked was not treated as

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a shibboleth to test their orthodoxy. It seems that these men were not handcuffed by classic Reformed theology nor had their theological senses been dulled by some sort of alleged theological consensus.

Schilder and the Declaration of Principles

In connection with this it is both interesting and helpful to refer to the reaction of Dr. K. Schilder to the Declaration of Principles of the Protestant Reformed Church (1950/51). These had been formulated by Dr. H. Hoeksema (Ibid, p. 55-167). This Declaration was divisive in the way it alienated Dutch immigrants coming from the Liberated churches. Schilder's writing can be summed up as a plea not to make a certain covenant conception a shibboleth. He had experienced the stultifying effect of consensus argumentation regarding the covenant. He wrote,

When a synod began hacking with a Chinese scimitar, we were compelled to express ourselves in an exact formulation about the promise of the covenant of grace, over against a petrified groups-theology which did not know the Reformed fathers. . . In this way we were able to open the way to Helenius De Cock, which the Kuyperian diehards had blocked, and to break open again the path to the classic fathers, whose books had been made inaccessible. . . (Ibid, p. 92).

At the same time, he made clear that the Liberated churches had not accepted any official covenant conception. In the whole discussion he repeatedly stressed the need to give each other room. No theologian, he said had a fully rounded off theory about the matter. He added,

And I do not like a church of clever theologians. The point in question is only this: may you dare to break a church apart for a dogmatic formula of Schilder which Hoeksema can attack, or one of Hoeksema which Schilder can attack, while indeed both in good conscience subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity. . . Both may stand amidst a crowd of brothers and sisters, who have learned to say: do not divide the church by academic wisdom which harp as on one point and overlooks another point which is just as true (Ibid, p. 154).

The true shibboleth regarding "covenant"

When one considers the history of the Canadian Reformed Churches, it is not surprising that there is discomfort when one hears of "covenant" as shibboleth, even though it seems to come up in a

different context.⁵ The history of the Reformed churches gives evidence of lively theological discussion about the covenant. However, to quote Schilder once more, "dogmatic differences are not yet confessional differences" (p. 161). This lively discussion is possible because the Three Forms of Unity are very sober when it comes to speaking of the covenant. It is striking that both the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism speak of covenant only when dealing with the sacraments. It does not form the overarching theological structure for these confessions. What proved fatal for the unity of the church, however, was when certain dogmatic constructions were elevated to the status of Shibboleth and anyone who did not follow these dogmatic constructions was dealt a spiritual death blow. When you raise one dogmatic position to a shibboleth, it is at great peril that anyone dares to argue for a different dogmatic position.

Focusing on the Mediator of the covenant

At the Jordan, forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed because they could not say "shibboleth." It is sad when how one says "covenant" is occasion for a blood bath between brothers, rather than making all focus on Christ, the mediator and surety of the covenant who established the covenant in his blood.

¹ Particularly prolific on this topic is R.S. Clark. For an example, see "Brief History of Covenant Theology" at <http://www.wscal.edu/clark/briefhistorycovteol.php> or "Baptism, Election, and the Covenant of Grace" (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship Inc.). For another example, see "The Evil Fruits of the Conditional Covenant (5): Baptismal Regeneration" by Russel J. Dykstra in the Standard Bearer, Volume 83 – Issue 14.

² For a good review of this history, see "The Liberation: Causes and Consequences" edited by C. VanDam (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1995).

³ A copy of this Declaration, as adopted by the Protestant Reformed Synod of 1951, can be found in "American Secession Theologians and Baptism" by Jelle Faber and "Extra-Scriptural Binding – A New Danger" by Klaas Schilder (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1996) p. 58ff.

⁴ E.g. "Brief History of Covenant Theology," which links the name of Dr. K. Schilder with those who have departed from the alleged consensus regarding the covenant.

⁵ Namely, discussions concerning the Federal Vision and the New Perspectives on Paul.



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An Easter Earthquake



MATTHEW 13:52

"There was a violent earthquake."
Matthew 28:2a

It wasn't the first one. On Good Friday too, "the earth shook and the rocks split" (Matt 27:51). On Easter Sunday, it happened again: "There was a violent earthquake." Why is this important for us to know?

In the beginning God created "the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1). God did not create a heaven alone, as the dwelling place for Himself and his angels. Nor did He create an earth alone, as the habitat for man amongst the rocks, the trees, and the animals. God created both. Nor did God allow heaven and earth to go their separate ways. The well-being of the two was tied together; each was created for the other. It's as we confess in Article 12 of the Belgic Confession, "We believe that the Father. . . has created. . . the heavens, the earth, and all creatures. . . [so that it might] serve its Creator."

The fall into sin drove a wedge between heaven and earth and so undid the bond between these two parts of God's creation. Hence it is that on this sinful earth there is nothing but futility; the Preacher reminds us in Ecclesiastes 1 that this earth by itself has no purpose. That reality is echoed by the Apostle Paul: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (Rom 8:22).

Yet that travail is due not only to the fact that the world is subjected to futility; it's also due to the fact that God's wrath against sin is experienced by the earth. As God punishes the sins of mankind, the sun, moon, and stars are forbidden to give their light; the earth trembles and is shaken out of its place (Isa 13:10, 13).

On account of this anger from God against sin, the creation longs for deliverance and it longs to be re-united with heaven. That is why when the Lord died on that Good Friday on the cross, creation reacted with trembling. "When [the living God] is angry, the earth trembles," Jeremiah had once said (10:10). On the cross, the wrath of God against sin was poured out on that one holy man and that man died, becoming – like all else – subject to decay. In horror, the earth responded in quaking: "The earth in silence, struck with fear/ Did from above Thy verdict hear" (Ps 76:4, *Book of Praise*). For there is no future. . . .

But "behold" (as Matthew literally has it), on the heels of Good Friday's shake came Easter Sunday's quake! The Christ, buried after the first quake, arose on the third day! This man was not subject to decay after all. One of God's creatures, who since the fall was given over to death and decay,

now rises out of the grave and now stands above death and decay.

Creation sees it and rejoices greatly because of the deliverance promised for it in the rising of Jesus Christ from the dead. Here is fulfilled what was spoken by the psalmist: "All the streams in joyous union/ Now clap their hands and praise accord/ The mountains join in glad communion/ And leap with joy before the Lord" (Ps 98:4, *Book of Praise*).

Small wonder then that the quake of Easter Sunday was "violent" compared to the shake of Good Friday. The earth now had reason to quake so greatly. For Christ's rising means that He has conquered sin and darkness. Yes, at his rising the bond between heaven and earth is restored once more. For did He not, because of his triumph on Calvary, ascend into heaven? Principally the world is no longer subjected to futility. In hope it may now look forward to being completely set free of its bondage to decay. In hope it may look forward to being totally renewed on the day of days.

What's more, this earth may look forward to the day when the heavens will open and He who now sits in the heavens will come to a cleansed and perfected earth, here to make his dwelling with man – heaven and earth united!





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I Can Lie to Myself: Self-Deception and Apologetics (Part 1 of 2)

This two-part series of articles was originally a presentation for the Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church. In preparing this material, I made grateful use of Greg Bahnsen's article The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception in Presuppositional Apologetics (Westminster Theological Journal 57 (1995): 1-31) – available on-line here: <http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/PA207.htm> Readers interested in a more technical treatment on this subject should consult Bahnsen's article and his dissertation on the same subject, A Conditional Resolution of the Apparent Paradox of Self-Deception, Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1978.

I first developed an interest in apologetics (the defence of the faith) while a university student in Edmonton some fifteen years ago. I had spent most of my primary and secondary education in a Christian school. I never heard the Christian faith being challenged in any meaningful way. When I began attending the University of Alberta, that all changed. Suddenly I was confronted with difficult questions about what I believed, about what the Bible says, and about the Christian worldview.

Providentially, in my second year of university I came across a book by Dr. Cornelius VanTil entitled *The Defense of the Faith*. This book literally changed everything for me. It remains an excellent overview of the biblical, Christian faith (the Reformed faith) and how it shapes our approach to defending the faith. After reading VanTil, I also came to study briefly with a former student and protégé of VanTil, Dr. Greg Bahnsen. Equipped with the tools provided from the Scriptures by men like VanTil and Bahnsen, I became much more confident in my interactions with students and professors in the university setting.

There are certain key concepts from the Scriptures that shape our approach to defending our faith to unbelievers

Later on, as I worked in evangelistic contexts before, during, and after my missionary service, I would also be able to use what I'd learned. These days I find myself using what I know about

apologetics mostly to answer the difficult questions of my children, especially my nine year old daughter: "But Dad, how do you know the Christian faith is true? How do you know the Bible is true?"

Those are the sorts of questions that apologetics equips us to answer. We're sometimes driven to the subject (as I was) by practical necessity. But there is also a biblical command with regards to apologetics. In 1 Peter 3:15, we read, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." We could also translate that more literally, "Always be prepared to do apologetics. . . ." Scripture is telling us to always be prepared to give a reasoned defence of our faith. Note first that this command is not something just for ministers and missionaries, but for all believers. Further, note what it says at the beginning of this verse about Christ as Lord. As we look to the subject of apologetics, Christ's Lordship has to be at the front of our minds. Concretely, that means that the Bible, Christ's Word, is what determines our apologetics. As we prepare to pull down strongholds and cast down

arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, we have to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:5. That happens through the Word.

The principle of *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone) is what sets Reformed apologetics apart from the other varieties out there. Non-Reformed schools of apologetics begin someplace else, typically with man and his natural reason. But when we come to apologetics as Reformed believers, we take our starting place with Scripture, just as we do with everything else.

As we do that, we'll find that there are certain key concepts from the Scriptures that shape our approach to defending our faith to unbelievers. In these two articles, I want to explore one of those key concepts – in fact, after the priority we give to the Bible, this is one of the most crucial elements of Reformed apologetics. If you don't have this straight, you will not have a distinctively Reformed approach to defending the faith.

This crucial element is self-deception. A simple, untechnical definition of self-deception: "Self-deception involves deception of the self, by the self, about the self, and for the sake of the self" (Greg Bahnsen). Unbelievers deceive themselves about themselves, about God, about Christ, about the world, about the judgment to come, and many other vital spiritual truths. Unbelievers are experts at pulling the wool over their own eyes. But before we get too self-righteous, all people do this. Anyone who is a sinful human being is an expert at self-deception.

Cultural manifestations of self-deception

That's why the concept of self-deception is so common, even outside of explicitly religious contexts. Think of some of the great works of literature produced over the centuries. Among the Greeks, *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles comes to mind. Shakespeare portrayed self-deception in *King Lear*. In Russian literature, Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* is a prime example. Closer to our own time and culture, C.S. Lewis captured both the literary and religious aspects of self-deception in the first of the *Chronicles of Narnia*, *the Magician's Nephew*:

Anyone who is a sinful human being is an expert at self-deception

... The longer and more beautifully the Lion sang, the harder Uncle Andrew tried to make himself believe that he could hear nothing but roaring. Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. Uncle Andrew did. He soon did hear nothing but roaring in Aslan's song.

In the area of film, we can think of Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*. In case you didn't catch it, the title for these articles comes from an old 80s pop song, *I Ain't Missing You*, by John Waite. Self-deception is a common theme in literature, film, music, and culture in general, to say nothing of its treatment by philosophers and theologians through the centuries.

This is a subject that has received its share of attention from those who study the field of apologetics. In 1985, Greg Bahnsen debated a renowned atheist scholar, Dr. Gordon Stein. In his introductory comments, Bahnsen agreed to concede to Stein all issues pertaining to *the Control of Ovarian Maturation in Japanese Whales*, the subject of Stein's doctoral dissertation and his area of scholarly expertise. Stein tried to turn the tables on Bahnsen by making a jab at Bahnsen's dissertation on self-deception. However, this backfired – because unlike Stein, Bahnsen's dissertation was extremely relevant to this debate and Bahnsen milked Stein's gaffe for all it was worth.

Let's now get to the meat of our subject. We're going to look at what the Bible says about self-deception and then we'll consider how that biblical teaching shapes a Reformed approach to apologetics.

What the Bible says about self-deception

The theme of self-deception is found in many places in Scripture. It flows from a basic truth about human beings, a truth found in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Human beings have hearts that are inclined to deceit, to lying, and untruthfulness. Later in Jeremiah, in 37:9, we hear God warning the people of Judah, "Do not deceive yourselves, thinking, 'the Babylonians will surely leave us'" – implying that self-deception is certainly a possibility. In the little prophecy of Obadiah, we discover that self-deception is not just a

possibility but a reality. In verse 3, God says about Edom, "The pride of your heart has deceived you."

In the New Testament, we find that reality reaffirmed. In James 1:22 those who merely listen to the Word and don't do it are those who deceive themselves. In 1 Corinthians 3:18, those who think they are wise by the standards of this world are deceiving themselves and are warned to stop. In Galatians 6:3, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." And in 1 John 1:8, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

With a view to unbelief and our subject of defending the faith, Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1 also speak about self-deception, though perhaps it's not immediately obvious: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" When we look at this verse, the first thing we need to understand is that the word "fool" here is not an insult. Rather, it's an objective description of a certain type of person. In the Old Testament wisdom literature, a fool is someone who acts foolishly in a moral and spiritual sense. The foolish are those who reproach the righteous and blaspheme God. Strikingly, the foolish in the Old Testament are also usually part of God's covenant people. In other words, they know better. This unbelief that even exists among God's people is a specimen of self-deception.

David makes this disturbing observation that a certain kind of person (the fool) makes a claim that there is no God. Notice where this claim is made: in his heart. This self-deception isn't

necessarily announced out loud. In the context of these Psalms, it probably wouldn't be prudent to say such things publicly in Israel – the fool says it in his heart.

It's from out of the heart that one's lifestyle emerges. Verse 1 goes on to say, "They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good." In Matthew 15:19,

It's from out of the heart that one's lifestyle emerges

the Lord Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies." Then it only makes sense that David proceeds in Psalms 14 and 53 from what's going on in the heart to what's going on in the life. The fool says in his heart that there is no God and that among such people there are no good works. This serves to emphasize that this atheism is not an intellectual problem, but a moral one. Unbelieving mankind's problem is not a lack of information, but a twisted, degenerate, deceitful heart that results in reprehensible behaviour. Mankind's greatest need is not more information, more evidence, or more arguments, but rather a Saviour. We need one who can save us from ourselves, from our deceitful hearts and the wrath of God that those hearts incur.

The crucial passage: Romans 1:18-32

The Apostle Paul was well-trained in the Old Testament and

he would have been familiar with Psalms 14 and 53. He was also a missionary who regularly encountered unbelief, both among the Jews and the Gentiles. So, it should come as no surprise that the most significant passage about self-deception is found in the letters of Paul in Romans 1:18-32.

Some time ago, I was asked to go to the hospital to visit someone dying from cancer. This man had left our church many years ago and a family member asked me to speak with him. He was friendly enough and from the nurses I spoke with, he was definitely dying. But yet he denied that he had cancer. He didn't want to talk about cancer – he was sure that he was going home next week, that he wasn't dying. Yes, he admitted that he hadn't been feeling well; that was all because of a car accident last year. He was positively sure that he was going to be all right.

Similarly, when Hurricane Ike hit the Texas coast a while back, you could hear people on the news saying things like, "I don't believe it's coming. I think the weather reports are wrong." Many people chose to stay rather than evacuate, believing that either the storm wouldn't come at all, or if it did, it wouldn't actually be that bad.

Romans 1:18-32 portrays something very much like that. Verse 19 says, "What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them." Unbelievers are portrayed as knowing about God because God has been successful in revealing Himself to them. In other words, at some level, all people know that God exists.

Church News

However, verse 18 reveals that though people have this knowledge at some level, not all people acknowledge it. In fact, this verse says that many suppress the truth by their wickedness or unrighteousness. They deceive themselves about God. They actively push what they know about God under and they do this *in unrighteousness*. This underlines what we learned from Psalms 14 and 53. This is not an intellectual failure. It's not the case that they've missed some key evidence or not heard some key arguments, or perhaps they're just not smart enough to be Christians. Rather, this is a moral, ethical issue. According to verse 20, God's invisible attributes, which Paul isolates as God's eternal power and divine nature – they have been *clearly* seen and all this leaves everyone without excuse. Literally, in Greek it says that they are without an apologetic, without a reasonable defence for the position they've taken. That means that everyone comes before God's throne with responsibility for what they've done with the revelation given. And everyone comes before that throne with some revelation.

Verse 21 goes on to add that they knew God. Now that's an important expression which we ought not to gloss over. In verse 19 it speaks about unbelievers knowing *about* God, but here in verse 21, it says that they *know* God. This is significant. People say that there are no atheists in foxholes. Paul says that there are no atheists period. In the Bible, to know God is often synonymous with relating to Him or believing in Him, being persuaded of the

truth of his existence. That means that there's not only a suppression of knowledge about God, but also a suppression of some kind of belief in God. This "belief" (if we dare to call it that) is something along the lines of what we read about the demons in James 2:19. So, there's not only a suppression of facts about God, but also a suppression of persuasion about God's existence and relationship to the person as Creator and Judge.

Mankind's greatest need is not more information, more evidence, or more arguments, but rather a Saviour

All this wicked suppression, all this evil self-deception has a result: futility, aimlessness, purposelessness in thinking and the darkening of foolish hearts. Foolishness leads to idolatry, to sexual impurity, to shameful homosexual lusts and relations and perversion. Paul relates that unbelievers are given over to their depraved minds and we ought not to be surprised when we see wickedness, evil, greed, depravity, envy, murder, strife, and so forth taking place in their lives. We should actually be surprised when we don't see those things in the lives of unbelievers! Consistent unbelief results in all those things. Now of course, most unbelievers are not that consistent in their unbelief and for that we can be thankful!

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One more thing to note from Romans 1. In verse 32 we are told that unbelievers also know about God's righteous decrees. They know God's law – the same point is made in more detail in chapter 2. They also know that those who break God's law deserve death. In other words, they are also aware of the judgment that sin will receive. Deep within, every single human being knows that they are a creature of God, that they have broken God's law, and they will stand in judgment for that. But they suppress these truths in unrighteousness; they deceive themselves.

In the concluding installment, we'll consider what the Reformed confessions say about this subject and then consider the question of how to address unbelieving self-deception.



Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Patricia Gelms



Rob DeHaan

Where the music is playing you will see Rob DeHaan! When visiting at Anchor Home, Rob can be found relaxing in the living room enjoying some music with his earphones on. A typical day for Rob includes helping out with simple chores at Anchor; by clearing off the

table after meals or vacuuming. Cleaning out his room and making his bed are also part of his daily routine. Every other week the residents at Anchor Home go to a local indoor pool, where Rob thoroughly enjoys splashing in the water. In the warmer weather, Rob enjoys going outdoors and sitting on the deck with his radio, or going on the trampoline, and can now also be seen soaring on the new swing set that has been built for the residents. Weekly activities that Rob also participates in include Bible and Catechism classes. It is a joy to see how Rob makes the sound of music reflect in all he does. So, if you find yourself near Anchor Home in Beamsville, feel most welcomed to drop in and visit and shake Rob's hand as he celebrates his forty-fourth birthday. Even if it's a short visit, it is always most gladly appreciated!

Birthdays in May

Also sincere congratulations to the rest who are celebrating a birthday in May! May our heavenly Father continue to richly bless you in this new year.

- 1 **CLARENCE ZWIEP will be 55**
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 4 **DEBBIE VEENSTRA will be 35**
4238 2nd Concession Road, Sherkston, ON L0S 1R0
- 10 **ROB DEHAAN will be 44**
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
- 21 **EDDIE VANROOTSELAAR will be 16**
210 Indian Creek Road East,
- 30 **BERNIE DEVOS will be 34**
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

If you have somebody to add to our birthday list or contact information needs to be changed, please let us know:

548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
Phone: (905) 563-0380
Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



Anniversary Celebration to Commemorate Twenty-five Years of Ministry

Our MC for the evening was Art Hordyk, who opened the meeting with reading Romans 10:1-15 and prayer. We sang Psalm 27: 2, 3, and 6, accompanied by Geert Spyker on the organ and all were welcomed to this festive occasion. A special welcome was extended to Rev. G. Nederveen and his wife. The official part of this evening was held in the church and the second half was held in the fellowship hall. The program continued with a musical interlude provided by pianist Rachel Torenvliet and violinist Karen Spithoff, who treated us to a very enjoyable rendition of two well chosen hymns for this event, namely, "And can it be" and "How blessed are the feet."

Several delegates of neighbouring congregations were given the opportunity to speak a few congratulatory words to our pastor and his wife with the celebration of this milestone in his career as pastor and teacher. Rick Ludwig represented the Rehoboth congregation of Burlington-Waterdown. Charles VanDam spoke on behalf of the Flamborough congregation. Pastor John van Popta represented the Fellowship congregation of Burlington-South. Br. A. Bax spoke a few words of appreciation for the



work our pastor did in Brampton, his previous congregation.

The ladies choir sang a musical blessing to Rev. and Mrs. Nederveen using the words of a well known hymn, composed by John Rutter, commonly identified by its opening line, "The Lord bless you and keep you."

Herman Harsevoort, vice chairman of council, used one of Rev. Nederveen's recent sermons, specifically the one on Lords Day 31, which deals with the keys of

the kingdom, to illustrate how officebearers serve the congregation by offering its members guidance and direction. In doing so, sometimes a pastor also needs some direction in finding his way to everyone's home in a large city, like Burlington. So, on behalf of the congregation, he presented our minister and his wife with a GPS navigational system so that they could find their way around town without getting lost. Sr. W.S. Meerveld, the most



senior sister of the congregation, was invited to the podium to present a bouquet of flowers to our pastor's wife.

The microphone was then handed over to the Nederveens, who expressed their appreciation for the many cards and tokens of appreciation received from the Canadian Reformed community, as well as from the Ebenezer congregation. He thanked the musicians for their musical contributions to this evening and also expressed his gratitude his family for their unwavering support over the years. He remembered the congregation at Brampton for equipping him with wisdom and direction as he was just starting his ministry and for offering their continued support to this day. Lastly he summed up his comments by summarizing all of the congratulations in the words of a card he received recently; it read: "25 years of ministry is not an achievement, it is a gift from God." Our minister and his wife echo these sentiments and expressed the wish that the Lord may guide and keep us all as we continue to serve Him from the heart.

In bringing the official portion of the evening to a close, Dr. C. Van Dam spoke a few words of appreciation as three-fold representative; as colleague, as member of the congregation, and as member of the Senate of the Theological College in Hamilton.

He voiced his appreciation for the diligence with which his colleague laboured in the midst of the congregation. Also the work done by Mrs. Nederveen did not go unnoticed and has been appreciated. As a minister, Rev. Nederveen served as a faithful pastor in both congregations and they even shared a common ministry in the congregation of Brampton. Even some practical

advice was passed on from time to time, such as convincing Dr. Van Dam to buy his very own snowblower to clean his driveway. As member of the Senate he noted that his colleague served the various committees in the federation with distinction and with commitment. Before offering his closing prayer, Dr. Van Dam expressed the sincere wish that the Lord would continue to bless the Nederveen family as they continue to labour in the midst of the Ebenezer congregation.

We sang the first and third stanzas of Psalm 150 and in closing the evening Dr. Van Dam thanked the master of ceremonies for his leadership in organizing this very successful, commemorative evening.

The melody of the doxology in Hymn 6 still rang through the building as we made our way into the fellowship hall, where freshly brewed coffee and various samples of delicious baking awaited us. The remainder of the evening was filled with a social hour during which the guests could congratulate the Nederveens and take the opportunity to share some refreshments and fellowship.



Keith Sikkema

Mr. Keith Sikkema is principal of Dufferin Area Christian School in Orangeville, Ontario
ksikkema@istop.com



Peregrine Survey

Just what is it that makes Reformed Education “good” education? Is this the same as “quality” education? All schools would want to provide the best they can, and a quick survey of recent teacher ads in *Clarion* suggests that they are looking for traits like certification, experience, professionalism, character, high personal standards, submission to Scripture as summarized in the Reformed confessions, love for God and his covenant children, and church membership. Even if these traits are present in a high degree, we still realize that teachers, too, are not perfect, that they will have “bad days,” and that other factors play a role as well. Other contributing elements include, among others, facilities and materials; unity between home, church, and school; school atmosphere and morale; and the length of the school day and the school year. This Peregrine Survey picks up on elements of quality education, its delivery and reporting, staffing and teacher preparation, and related issues.

Professional development

Some Ontario schools have begun to implement professional portfolios to support staff and personal professional development. Professional portfolios are hard copy proofs of a teacher’s talents, and places where

they organize their thoughts and beliefs in the area of teaching and learning. They also provide insight in a teacher’s areas of interest and show a teacher’s self-reflection on what was good or what could have been better. They are autobiographical and identify items for development and dialogue. “Personal professional portfolios reflect the integration of faith and life which teachers embody as Reformed, Christian teachers; and which they wish to instill in their students. Teachers need to connect who they are with what they do.”

Also on the topic of professional development, the executive of the Canadian Reformed Teachers Association East (CRTA) and the Professional Development Committee (PDC) of the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies (LCRSS) met in March to help chart a common course. Among others, aspects of moral encouragement, physical provisions, contractual expectations, documentation, and reporting and dissemination were discussed. The event signals an exciting change in weight ascribed to professional development, along with the LCRSS’s Personnel Manual that is nearing completion. This occurs even as schools begin to implement higher expectations for their teachers’ in-service professional learning. As the

pressure of staff shortages appear to have eased, certainly in Ontario, there grows a higher expectation of securing the best equipped and most qualified staff to deliver quality Reformed education.

Alberta and BC reached an agreement to allow teachers with an “unrestricted independent school certificate” to teach in both provinces, requiring a government recognized four year post-secondary teacher training. For these provinces, the current training at our own Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College (CCRTC) will not suffice. CCRTC has begun the process of seeking government accreditation, but, for the time being, the benefits of CCRTC remain indirect for these schools. One BC principal writes:

Have you taken a look at the ads in *Clarion* lately? A quick observation shows that the need for teachers continues to outstrip the demand. In fact, I wonder whether the situation is becoming more urgent. Additionally, if our schools are to maintain their Reformed Christian character, then a supply of well-trained teachers with both a strong academic basis and a sound Christian perspective is critical. What must professional development programs include to address the on-going needs in our school? As such, four years of university

level training is not a luxury; neither is the Reformed Christian perspective. Regardless of the CCRTC issues, more young people need to look at teaching as a vocation, a career in which they may use *their* gifts so that a younger generation may develop *theirs*.

Neerlandia has considered allowing the option of hiring teachers from churches with which we maintain ecclesiastical fellowship. This was seen as a matter of principle to bring the policy of the church and the school into agreement, but it would also potentially help alleviate the difficulty experienced in hiring teachers. The downturn in the economy was seen as another potential encouragement for people to seek secure employment in education. Aside from faith commitment, training, qualification, and experience, one does wonder what sort of motivation makes for the best teachers.

School calendars

Labour Day is late this year and this generates a challenge for many schools to get enough school days in between Labour Day and the end of June. The notion is that education suffers if there are not enough school days or hours of instruction – and Departments of Education are keen to establish standards that reflect high expectations. Some boards have considered starting around September 1. For bussing arrangements, some Fraser Valley schools are part of a larger network with other Christian schools and their decision is reflected in a school start date of September 8, 2009. Feeder schools to Emmanuel Christian High School in Fergus also start on that day. The last day of school will likely be closer to the end of June than we may have grown accustomed to in the last couple of years.

Evaluating

Quality education should be reflected in the reports that children take home at the end of a term. John Calvin School (Yarrow) has introduced an e-report earlier this year, latching on to BceSIS

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(BC electronic Student Information Systems). This is an online system on which all student enrolment, attendance, academic progress data are stored and made accessible to a different extent for different people. In addition to inputting all their marks, staff had to generate a comment bank from which general and subject-specific report card comments could be chosen for each student. It will be interesting to see how this system will be able to satisfactorily manage the requirements of the ministry, the complexities of the curriculum and learning, accountability to the parents, and the specifics about each individual student. It turned out that comment writing proved to be a challenge.

Whether to evaluate or only to assess progress in Bible has been a point of discussion in several Ontario schools. In Fergus, one class was chosen to pilot assessment-only.

The new assessment approach is to carefully monitor students' participation and to regularly record students' efforts. At report card time the parents will receive a narrative report

outlining their child's performance instead of a grade in Bible. Each month at the education committee we review the implementation of the new curriculum. So far, although the approach is noticeably a change, it has seemed to go well. We will keep you informed about this important development as the year goes on.

As part of the motivation for an assessment-only approach is very long term in scope, the intended purpose can only be fully evaluated fairly after a good portion of that long term has passed.

Quality education must not only be delivered, but also received. The DCS principal (Carman) reflected on complacency (a sense of self-satisfaction, a good-enough attitude, mediocrity) in the context of Proverbs 1, and pointed out that it is not acceptable for our children and our students.

This is not an issue that is easily fixed but there are things that we all can do to make changes. As a parent, how do we deal with this issue? We need to talk with our children and share with them the responsibility that they have to use their talents to the fullest. We need to ask, 'What did you learn in school today?' Never take 'nothing' for an answer. It is impossible to spend a large part of your day at school and learn 'nothing.' Use the weekly newsletter as a jumping off point for the conversation. Stay in tune with what is going on in your child's school life. If there is a topic in the newsletter that you could offer your expertise on, phone the school and offer to help. If you notice that your child has a major project to hand in, ask to see it first and offer your opinion. If you notice that your child has a test on Thursday, talk about the subject with them on Wednesday. Complement the good work or offer suggestions for improvement. If you noticed

that your child did an incredible amount of work on a certain project, let the teacher know. If you have questions about the schoolwork, phone the teacher. . . .

Outsiders may see us better than we do ourselves, and their honest evaluation may be a real eye opener. Consider being noted for giving a warm welcome to outsiders, for being seen as closely involved with one another and as a community in both church and school, as a practicing communion of saints in good days and bad, and as having a desire to be submissive to the Word of God. Consider also being portrayed as having fostered a lack of respect for teachers, for the Word of God, and for things material; consider being confronted with a perceived lack of reverence during prayer and Bible reading, and with a failure to live in appreciation of what we say we receive in gratitude. What would and should you do with such eye openers? Pray for one another, even as each one of our schools is faced with its own challenges.

Facilities

Finally, there are the facilities. Parkland Immanuel Christian School is moving forward with

facility expansion as it expects a twenty-five percent enrolment increase over the next five years. The society approved a motion to "proceed with the Legacy Project, which includes the construction of a school expansion, the renovation of the existing building, and the replacement of the septic system to a maximum cost of \$1.6 million."

Quality education must not only be delivered, but also received

By the end of 2008, \$580,000 had been received in donations and pledges towards this project. Emmanuel Christian High School in Fergus also sees the need for expanding its facilities in the near future. It has proposed to buy half the building of Maranatha Christian School, which it already occupies, and add the classrooms and facilities it needs to replace its portables. An exciting new development came about in nearby Guelph, as the "Guelph School Initiative" found a suitable building available on the market and voted ninety-one percent in

favour of purchasing it – with plans to begin their own school with close to 100 students in 2010. This would relieve overcrowding at Maranatha in Fergus and it is received as a gift from the Lord. In Flamborough, a vote for the proposed purchase of a 3.6 acre parcel of land adjacent to the existing property carried. At the time of writing some of the details remain to be sorted out. At ACRES in Attercliffe, the Board has formed a Future Needs Committee to consider requirements of Special Education and facilities for Science, Computer Technology, Phys Ed, and additional classroom space.

School societies everywhere wrestle with the need to provide the best education possible. Continue to pray for all those working towards this goal, and for all those who could be doing so, as it is only with the Lord's blessing that progress can be made.

*The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman
obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us*

Canadian Reformed Home Registry

*"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares..." Hebrews 13:2.
Along with other such words in Scripture, it is clear that it is pleasing to the Lord to open our homes to brothers and sisters in need of a place to go.*

The Elora Canadian Reformed Home Registry Committee is a service for young people between ages of approximately 10 and 20 who require a home away from home for a time.

Parents, consistory and young person would all agree that removal from the present situation is best, but where to go? This is where our progress has been focused on now. We are searching for homes available for the youths to live temporarily. If you can be of service in this, please contact your consistory with deacons. They will pass on to you forms to fill out, and will forward those forms to the Canadian Reformed Home Registry Committee. You will be contacted by the Home Registry Committee if and when there may be someone who requires your hospitality.

Thank you!

Contacts:

Coordinator: **Brian Niezen**, 519-848-3045 or bniezen@albedo.net
Secretary/Clerk: **Cobie Hutten**, 519-843-1830 or cobiejr@hotmail.com



Dear Editor,

I wonder what Rev. Eric Kampen is trying to convey with the latest "What's New???" found in the February 27 issue of *Clarion*. On a general note, I wonder if this column should not more accurately be entitled "Congregational News Commentary"? I have the feeling that some churches might be reluctant to send in their bulletins knowing that in all likelihood there will be an uninformed, critical commentary/opinion on a decision made.

Specifically and a case in point, is the commentary about Toronto's decision to have a projector in church. Rev. Kampen tells us he is perplexed about this apparent trend in our churches to use projectors. His reasoning is that we have audio in the sermons and we have visual in the sacraments. I think he is making a huge unwarranted leap to suggest that, for example, projecting songs on a screen so that congregational members may sing better detracts from or replaces the audio in the sermons. Or perhaps the suggestion is that if there is a Bible text displayed on the screen it will detract from the audio of the sermon. Or that having a projector at all detracts from the visibility of the sacraments. Furthermore, Rev. Kampen makes another huge leap in equating projectors with "dumb images." Dumb images are "worshipped" while a projector is a liturgy enhancer. There is quite a difference. What Rev. Kampen is perhaps doing is majoring in minors? I also got the impression that Rev. Kampen does not know exactly how Toronto will use this projector and that he condemned it outright without knowing all the facts. The fact is that projectors can be a wonderful supplement to a worship service if used properly.

Tom Zietsma
Stoney Creek, Ontario

Response

I appreciate that Br. Zietsma took up the suggestion to write in reaction to my remarks about the audio/visual enhancement. It is good to discuss this matter.

First, I received an email from a member in the church at Toronto who assured me that they have "not gone the way of audio/visual enhancement during the worship service. The equipment to be installed will only be used at other meetings and presentations." This clarifies the situation as far as Toronto is concerned.

Second, it appears that Br. Zietsma is ascribing things to me I did not say when he writes, "he is making a huge unwarranted leap to suggest that. . . projecting songs on a screen. . . detracts from or replaces the audio in the sermons. Or perhaps the suggestion is that if there is a Bible text displayed on the screen it will detract from the audio of the sermon. Or that having a projector at all detracts from the visibility of the sacraments." I simply said, "We have the audio in the preaching." It seems to me that audio enhancement is sufficiently dealt with by giving the minister a good microphone or making sure a church building has good acoustics.

Third, I would suggest that Br. Zietsma misreads Lord's Day 35 regarding "dumb images." The Catechism refers to them not in the sense of being worshipped but as "books for the laity," that is, teaching devices for the church members. The Catechism is pointing here to the Lutheran practice in the time of the Reformation, as they still tolerated images in the churches as teaching aids. The Catechism resolutely rejects them. In light of what we confess in Lord's Day 35, the manner of worship is not a minor matter.

In sum, the trademark of a Reformed worship service is its simplicity. The Spirit uses the preaching of the Word and the sacraments to work and strengthen faith. Man's efforts to enhance or supplement have a knack of ultimately becoming a detriment.

Rev. E. Kampen

Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.

Reviewed by C. Van Dam

Kathy Shaidle and Pete Vere, *The Tyranny of Nice: How Canada Crushes Freedom in the Name of Human Rights* With an introduction by Mark Steyn. Toronto: Interim Publishing, 2008

Additional Information:
xiii + 82 pages, \$10.00 CDN,
available from
<http://www.tyrannyofnice.com/>

This book should be read. It exposes in clear detail what is happening in Canada with respect to our freedoms. Back in the 1970s Canada's human rights commissions were established to deal with discrimination in areas such as housing or employment. That was fair enough. However, these commissions are now being used to restrict freedom of expression and religion. Part of Section 13.1 of the federal Human Rights Act states that it is discriminatory for anyone to say or write anything "that is likely to expose a person or persons to hatred or contempt." Similar words can be found in provincial human rights statutes. Note it only needs to be "likely" that someone could be exposed to hatred or contempt by whatever someone happens to say or write. The point in dispute does not need to be proven. It is under this provision that countless misery has resulted with people being hauled before a human rights tribunal simply because what they said or wrote could result in hatred or contempt against someone. The one bringing the complaint pays nothing, has little to prove except that what the person said or did *could* result in hatred, and makes use of a commission where no complaint which has been

accepted for investigation has ever been denied. On the other hand, the accused has to pay all his legal fees, does not have the benefit of the kind of protection that a normal court of law would provide, and has very little hope of being put in the right. This book illustrates the gross injustice that is being perpetrated in the name of human rights with commissions often violating their own guidelines for fairness.

By way of illustration, *The Tyranny of Nice* deals with the high profile cases of Muslim complaints against Ezra Levant over publishing cartoons of Mohammed and Maclean's for publishing an excerpt from Mark Steyn's book. The former complaint was withdrawn and the Canadian Human Rights Commission decided not to take up the complaint against Maclean's and dismissed it.

As Christians we need to be vigilant to be prepared to fight for freedom of expression and religion. In June 2002, Albertan Pastor Stephen Boissoin's letter to the editor was published in a local Red Deer paper. This letter denounced the indoctrination of children in the public schools with the notion that homosexuality was a safe and alternate lifestyle. A complaint was lodged against Boissoin with the Alberta Human Rights Commission and six years later this pastor was convicted of exposing homosexuals to hatred for essentially abiding by biblical truth. The process has cost him about \$250,000.00 in expenses, plus court costs of \$2,000.00, as well as a fine of \$5,000.00 to be paid to the complainant, even though he was not a direct "victim" of the letter. On top of this, the Human Rights Commission ordered Boissoin to publish a written apology to the complainant and placed a life-long

ban on Boissoin from making any "disparaging" comments about homosexuality in any form, including from the pulpit. Since the term "disparaging" can be interpreted to mean anything that might hurt someone's feelings, Boissoin's freedom to speak and preach has been severely and unjustly curtailed.

At the root of the problem are the human rights commissions and the legislation that governs them. At the very least section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act, as well as similar sections in provincial legislation, should be removed. Actually all the human rights commissions should be completely overhauled or done away with. We do not need them to address the type of issues raised in Boissoin's case. We already have hate-crime legislation across Canada which can take care of such matters. His case should properly have gone to the courts that enforce these laws. There he would at least have been presumed innocent until proven guilty and a higher standard of proof would have been required for a conviction.

The Boissoin case is being appealed in court in the hope that his freedoms of expression and religion and those of all Canadians can be restored. Those wishing to donate to this cause can support the work of the ECP Centre (<http://www.ecpcentre.com/>) which is involved in the appeal.

Much more could be mentioned. I only gave some examples. Read the book and get involved! The ECP Centre and ARPA (<http://www.arpacanada.ca/>) would be good places to start. And don't forget to write your Member of Parliament and ask that at the very least section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act be repealed.