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Clarion

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THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT
IS A MYSTERY



Cornelis Van Dam
 Professor emeritus of
 Old Testament at the Canadian
 Reformed Theological Seminary
 in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

The Spirit as Intercessor

*This work of the Holy Spirit is a mystery
 and yet its reality cannot be denied*

The celebration of Pentecost provides an opportunity to reflect on the gift of the Holy Spirit and the many blessings we have in him. One of those blessings is that the Spirit intercedes for us with the Father. Of course we have Christ as our intercessor in heaven, seated at the Father's right hand (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 1 John 2:1). This fact is well-known. Perhaps less well-known is that we also have the Spirit as our intercessor. His intercession takes place in the context of our prayers and is of great comfort to God's children (Rom 8:26-27).

The Apostle Paul broaches the topic of the Spirit's intercession when he writes to the Christians at Rome about their hope in the midst of trial and suffering. Although believers have the first fruits of the Spirit, they groan inwardly. Yet, they have hope for they wait eagerly for the redemption of their bodies. It is something Christians hope for, because they do not as yet have this. "Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently" (Rom 8:23-25). And then the Apostle continues: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us" (v. 26). So, just as that hope for better things to come encourages and helps us, in a similar manner we can also derive comfort and encouragement from the Spirit and his work for he helps us.

Our weakness

In order to understand the intercessory work of the Spirit, we must see clearly why this help is needed. It is because of our weakness. "He helps us in our weakness" (v. 26). What is that weakness? The term used is a very general and comprehensive one. It can refer to both physical and spiritual weakness such as sickness and feeling inadequate. Indeed, one could say that this weakness is the result of the fall into sin. It is pervasive and affects every-

one. A key result of this weakness in the context of prayer is that we are no longer able to correctly understand or see through the issues that impact our lives. This limitation really shows up in our prayers. When trouble comes we can be less than sure what to ask the Lord. As the Apostle writes: "We do not know what we ought to pray for" (Rom 8:26). This inability to know what to pray for is not a sin, but it is a result of sin coming into the world.

One can think of many examples of this sort of situation developing. An unemployed person could be praying and praying for a certain job and not get it. Years later, looking back, he can begin to understand why the Lord did not respond to his prayer the way he had wanted it answered at the time. The Lord worked it all for good. The Lord understood his situation better than he did; the one praying had only a limited perspective and did not have the overall picture. Scripture also has examples of this sort of thing. A well-known instance concerns the Apostle Paul himself. He knew of his limitations with respect to what to ask for in prayer. Prior to writing Romans he had written the Corinthian Christians of his struggles with what he called "a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me." He desperately wanted to get rid of this hindrance. "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me." But that did not happen. The Lord said to him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." The Apostle accepted the thorn and realized God's purpose with it and learned to glory in it (2 Cor 12:7-10).

It is important to recognize that being perplexed and speechless before God's throne can happen to God's children. And when it does occur, there is in all the difficulty a beautiful dimension of comfort for believers. It is precisely in this context that Romans 8 speaks about the work of the Spirit on our behalf.

The Spirit Helps Us

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26). Since the Spirit *helps* us, the implication is that we are not excluded as the Spirit works for us. He does not do everything. He helps us. He joins in our praying. We are not passive bystanders. The original term which is translated as “help” is very colourful. It can call to mind the image of someone who cannot handle the load he is carrying. The burden

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How does the Spirit help us in our weakness? In Dr. Cornelis Van Dam’s Pentecost editorial, he writes about how the Holy Spirit intercedes for our prayers. The Treasures New and Old meditation from Rev. David de Boer is also written for Pentecost.

In this issue Dr. Wes Bredenhof wraps up his five-part series, “Outward Looking Church: Current Craze or Christ’s Commission?” He writes that the outward looking church has a heart for people in general – let us not create the false dilemma of needing to care for the inward church needs instead of or before the community around us!

Rev. Eric Kampen brings readers an article entitled “The History of Contact between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Church in the United States.”

Issue 10 features many of our regular columns: Education Matters, Clippings on Politics and Religion, Ray of Sunshine, and You Asked. There is also a book review, a press release, and a letter to the editor.

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Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
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ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER

Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J5
Email: veenendaal@telus.net

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION
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is too heavy. Then a helper comes to his aid and helps him carry it. So the Spirit can help us. He shares the burden with us, so to speak.

How does he do that? The Apostle writes: “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Rom 8:26). When we are at a loss what to pray for and we do not know anymore what’s what, when we cannot express our needs and desires anymore and are speechless, then the Spirit intercedes with groans that words cannot express. We however are not passive. For the Spirit helps us. How then does the Spirit intercede with those groans and sighs?

He does not do it independent of the believer. The Spirit is in our heart (John 14:16, 17) where he works (as the context of the suffering creation shows) the desire for liberation, the way out of this misery. Exactly what we need, or exactly what we want, is not clear to us and we cannot put it into words. But, we do something; we groan. We sigh for a way out! That is the fervent desire of our hearts. And that desire is the work of the Spirit. In this way, by means of the groaning and sighing of the troubled child of God, the Spirit is working and interceding for us. He is the author of the groans, but he uses us to bring expression to them. He does not do it independent of us.

This work of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. And yet its reality cannot be denied. One can be at a loss and not know anymore what to pray and all one could do is groan and sigh. Be encouraged by that. That is the work of the Spirit! He prompted those groans and sighs to come! One can say, well, those sighs still indicate that we know not what to pray for. Indeed. But, because those groans are the work of the Spirit in us, he fills those sighs and groans with content. For through them the Spirit speaks to the Father. Through them the Spirit intercedes for us!

Therefore, when children of God are perplexed and can only groan, then they can take heart! For in their groaning an intelligible prayer is ascending to the throne of grace. For the groans are the means of the Spirit to intercede for us. Through them our needs, our true and real needs are brought to the throne of grace. Yes, our real needs – for the Spirit knows what to pray for on our behalf.

The Spirit gets results

The intercession of the Spirit gets results, for he “intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will” (Rom 8:27). God understands the wordless groaning and sighing. He knows what they mean for he knows us. He “search-

es our hearts.” He knows the reason for those groans. He knows about our perplexities, discouragements, and questions for he searches our hearts. Furthermore, he “knows the mind of the Spirit” who by means of these groans intercedes for us. God can therefore read in the groans the specific detailed requests of the Spirit who intercedes on our behalf. In this way he hears about what we really need. And when God gets the message by means of the Spirit’s intercessory work, he approves of what he hears for it is in line with his will. As the Apostle wrote: “He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will” (Rom 8:27).

The Spirit who intercedes for us is also God and he knows the eternal purpose of God. He knows what God has in mind for each of his children. Therefore when the Spirit prays for us by means of our groaning, then that prayer is to the point. The Spirit can pray in agreement with God’s eternal will for us and God answers those specific requests of the Spirit in a positive way.

The privilege of the children of God

How privileged are the children of God! As we travel on our life journey through this world and go as creation does through trials and perplexities, we know we will always stay in touch with our Father who is in heaven. We will stay in touch by way of the prayers to his throne of grace. For, we have Jesus Christ, as our intercessor on high and our prayers therefore reach the throne of grace. But we also have an intercessor on earth, right in our hearts – the Spirit of Jesus Christ! And when we sigh and groan because we do not know anymore what to say, then the Spirit makes those groans into powerful prayers of intercession, prayers with definite content that go to Father’s throne. Prayers the Father cannot refuse for they are according to his will.

There is action on our behalf from heaven, when we are speechless, discouraged, and dumbfounded. The articulated prayers of the Holy Spirit go up for our well-being. Prayers that God hears, approves of, and will answer! It is indeed, it is true what the Apostle Paul wrote in another letter. God “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work in us” (Eph 3:20). Yes, for who would have thought of *two* intercessors? One in heaven, and one on earth? God did think of that! He knows us and he has provided accordingly, for he wants to see us make it through, to the time when infirmities and weaknesses are no more!





David de Boer
Minister of the Canadian Reformed
Church at Chatham, Ontario
dmdeboer@sympatico.ca

Sound Like a Mighty Rushing Wind

“A sound like a mighty rushing wind. . .”

Acts 2:2

The open horizon of Chatham-Kent, Ontario is dotted with the silhouettes of tall windmills. At night you see the red lights of the windmills blinking everywhere. Whether or not you agree with the effectiveness of wind turbines, their presence testifies to the power of the wind. Moving air causes the blades of not just one but dozens of turbines to move, often at great speed. The wind, though invisible, is powerful. No wonder that Scripture uses the wind as an example of the work and power of the Spirit. We cannot see the wind, but we can see its effect. Likewise, we cannot see the Spirit, but the Spirit is powerful and we can see the effect of his work. When the Spirit came to the church at the feast of Pentecost, his arrival was signified, in part, by the sound of a mighty rushing wind. This was an announcement to the church that an invisible but powerful person had arrived. Jesus promised

that he would send the Spirit to be with the church in his place after his ascension. The Spirit would powerfully equip the church for her tasks of service and comfort the church in her afflictions.

The powerful effect of the invisible Spirit was confirmed through the visible actions of the apostles after Pentecost. Not only were the apostles able to perform mighty signs, such as the healing of the lame man at the temple gate, but more importantly they were different men. Frightened Peter who denied Jesus three times became a bold preacher who was not afraid of the threats of the Jewish leaders. Stephen, a man described as a man “known to be full of the Spirit,” preached without fear of the consequences, even though he was stoned to death by his hearers. The Apostle Paul, who once persecuted the church, became with Silas a man who “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6

ESV). As Paul preached the gospel he saw the power of the Spirit to work in people’s hearts through the Word of God (1 Thess 1:4-6).

At our commemoration of Pentecost we remember that Jesus sent us the powerful Spirit. We remember the “mighty, rushing wind” and think of the power of the Spirit in our own lives. The Spirit has been promised to me and to you. Though we do not see him, his power should be evident in our lives. We should be able to see the Spirit working in us. The Spirit makes us children of God in the mould of God’s only begotten Son (Gal 4:6) The Spirit leads us (Gal 5:18), helps us fight against the sinful nature (Gal 5:16) and produces fruit in us (Gal 5:22, 23). We keep in step with the Spirit and live by him (Gal 5:25). Praise God and our Saviour Jesus Christ for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The mighty rushing wind tells us how powerful he is in our lives. C

For Further Study

1. Why is a “mighty, rushing wind” a fitting symbol for the Holy Spirit?
2. Do you see the power of the Holy Spirit in your life? Where do you see it? Where do you not see it?
3. What are the tools or means that the Holy Spirit uses to do powerful things in the hearts of believers?

Outward Looking Church: Current Craze or Christ's Commission? (5)



Wes Bredenhof
Pastor of the Providence
Canadian Reformed Church,
Hamilton, Ontario
wbredenhof@bell.net

Revised from a presentation for the Spring Office Bearers Conference held March 22, 2014 in Burlington, ON.

Some possible objections and concerns

Someone might be thinking, "In our church communities, we're already so busy. It sounds like you're pushing more busyness. That's the last thing we need." To be clear, I am not saying that Scripture and our confessions are calling us to be busy with more programs or projects. For many of us, we *are* already too busy. There's something to the warning attributed to Corrie ten Boom: "Beware of the barrenness of a busy life." This is not about adding extra activities to our church agenda. Being an outward looking church is first and foremost a matter of attitude, perspective, or vision. How do we look at the world around us? Do we look at it with fear and suspicion or with godly compassion? How do we view the church's calling to the community? Do we even think about it? Even reflecting on and discussing these types of questions is a step in the right direction.

While that outward oriented attitude doesn't necessarily lead to more programs clogging up our weekly agenda, it will affect the way we do many things in the church. One example would be the church website. Is it designed with an outward looking perspective or does it communicate a ghetto mentality, i.e. this website is for a select few? Another example would be hospitality. There is a Reformed church in our area that exemplifies biblical hospitality. When you visit there, they take notice of you right away and they seek you out and welcome you. They make sure that you've found everything you need, including the nursery, a church bulletin, a song book, etc. Our family was visiting there a while back and for some reason we had to leave right away

afterwards. People from the church literally chased us down in the parking lot and invited us to come back in and join them from coffee and refreshments. Having a friendly eye for visitors on Sunday definitely indicates an outward looking church.

Now if a church wants to add a program to enhance its outreach, there certainly can't be any objection to that. All I'm saying is that the teaching of Scripture and our confessions does not necessarily compel us to add new projects and programs. It compels us to adjust our perspective and consider how that re-formed perspective might impact what we already do as a church.

Another person might be thinking, "We need to take care of the people inside the church first before we can start thinking about looking outward. Our first priority needs to be our brothers and sisters already in the church. This will distract us from our first priority." It sounds rather noble, perhaps even biblical. But there is a dilemma being created here where there need not be one. This dilemma was one of those false dilemmas addressed by Rev. Van Dooren over thirty years ago. Where an outward looking church originates is a heart for people in general. This is about engendering love for those around us, love which expresses itself in empathy, compassion, and respect. When a believer recognizes this as the teaching of Scripture, it affects how you deal with everybody, both outside *and* inside the church. You're going to have a heart, not only for your lost coworker, but also for your hurting sister two pews in front of you.

There are people who exemplify this in our churches already. In one of our neighbouring churches in Hamilton, there is a widow in her seventies who has a fantastic reputation for this. She has the big heart of our Saviour for her neighbours. She's not afraid of the unbelievers

around her. She gets to know them by delivering papers and striking up little conversations along the way. She finds out where they're hurting and tries to show love in word and deed. At appropriate moments, she shares the gospel with them. But none of that comes at the expense of the communion of saints. Within the church, she does the same thing. When someone in the church needs a meal or some babysitting, she's right there to offer. She shows the love of Christ and gives a helping hand or a listening ear, whatever is needed. In Acts we meet the believer named Dorcas, a lady "full of good works and charity." This woman in Hamilton is a modern-day Dorcas, outward looking, full of love for the lost, but also for her brothers and sisters. There's no dilemma because that kind of heart is the heart of our Saviour. Taking the instruction of Scripture seriously will mean that we're not only empathetic, compassionate, and respectful to the lost, but also to our brothers and sisters in the church. Aren't we Reformed folk fond of saying that *life is one*? This is another reason why being a healthy church is inextricably connected with being an outward looking church. If the love of our Saviour is not there for outsiders, it won't really be there in any meaningful way for insiders either. Healthy churches increasingly reflect the love of our Saviour.

A lot more could be said, but I'll end here and turn to my conclusion.

Conclusion

There is a profound irony in the history of our churches. At the very beginning, there was a question of what our churches would be called. The name "Canadian Reformed Churches" was eventually chosen because we wanted to be churches for Canada and for Canadians. It's fair to argue that we're called "Canadian Reformed" because we wanted to be outward looking from the beginning. How ironic it is that in our communities our churches have often been known as "the Dutch church" or "a Dutch church"! It's understandable in some sense, because our history is tied up with Dutch immigration and then this characterization becomes unavoidable. But this sometimes goes further and there is, at least in some places with some people, a perception that our church communities are virtually impenetrable Dutch ghettos. There's nothing wrong with having a Dutch heritage – that's who we are, we can't deny it and don't need to. Rather, it's the perception of being *impenetrable ghettos* that we want to work at addressing, especially when that perception is held among ourselves

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CHURCH NEWS

and considered to be a good thing. This is changing in some places and has been for a while already. There are Canadian Reformed churches where the church directory reveals a remarkable diversity of ethnic backgrounds. However, there is always room for growth. So the question I want to end with is: if Scripture and our confessions lead us in this direction, how do we guide our churches to be more outward looking?

This is a question of leadership. The calling of church leadership is to provide direction, to think big picture, to have an idea of what the church is and where and how it needs to be growing. In our personal spiritual growth, we should never be satisfied with the status quo. There is never a point in this age where we can say that we have arrived at the full measure of maturity in Christ. We believe that sanctification is a process. What is true for us as individual Christians is also true for us as the body of Christ in this age. We have not arrived. There is always a direction that we need to be moving in. If we are not growing in Christ, then we are backsliding. There is no neutral place where you're simply stagnant or static. The church is always going in one direction or another. The calling of office bearers is to lead the church in the direction indicated in God's Word.

But how? That really is another topic altogether. Let me suggest that it begins with being intentional. If we're convinced that Scripture and our confessions lead us in this direction, then perhaps our office bearers need to lay that out in some form and thereby lead our congregations in that direction. What form might that take? I would suggest that a vision or a vision statement might be helpful.¹ While the idea is new to our churches, our schools and other organizations have effectively made use of this concept for some time already. Mission boards also typically work with this sort of idea – why not churches? Without some intentionality about this, it's easy to hear it once or occasionally, and then forget about it. It then no longer factors into our discussions around the table about all kinds of issues. Having some intentionality and having that explicitly expressed in the form of a vision

statement has the potential to keep this aspect of the church's purpose before us at all times.

Another important aspect is prayer. Here too, the church must lead from the front. Our pastors need to remember to pray for the lost. We have to plead not only for *their* salvation, but also that *our* hearts would break for them in view of the eternity that awaits them if they do not repent and believe. Many of our members have family members who are lost – pray for them. Many of our members work with people or live next to people who are lost – pray for them. Pray also for opportunities to share the gospel with these lost folks God has providentially placed in our lives. We should also pray for God to give us more lost people that we can care about and share the gospel with. If this is regularly made a matter of public prayer in the church, then we might reasonably expect a trickle-down effect into the family and private prayers of our people. All these prayers will shape an outward looking church.

Unfortunately, we've only scratched the surface of this topic. I haven't addressed every angle with you. Yet I hope my goal has been attained and you've either been convinced of or reaffirmed in a conviction that the very nature of the church is outward looking. I'll let Rev. Van Dooren have the last word. He wrote of the necessity of the church of Christ being an "open church." That was his way of saying "outward looking." This is part of what he said about that and it bears repeating all these years later:

By the expression 'an open Church' we do not only stress that, according to her nature, the Church of Jesus Christ welcomes everyone who desires to join her in true faith but also that she looks around, opens her arms, 'goes out' to bring in the lost. In one word, the Church bears the image of her Saviour, Jesus Christ (*Get Out*, 9).

¹ For more on this see my *Setting Course: Sermons and Essays Shaping the Vision of a Local Church* (Hamilton: Providence Press, 2011).



The History of Contact between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Church in the United States



Eric Kampen
Minister of the
Canadian Reformed Church
at Orangeville, Ontario
eric.kampen@canrc.org

Déjà vu

The year 2001 was a breakthrough year for the Canadian Reformed Churches in terms of ecclesiastical relationships with other faithful churches in North America. In that year, the synod held in Neerlandia, AB officially established ecclesiastical fellowship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) after contact spanning nearly fifty years.¹ It also established ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS). The history of contact leading up to this spanned a mere fifteen years. This article will review the history of contact between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Church in the United States. It will bring out that the relationship was affected by the same attitudes that hindered the development of the relationship with the OPC while, at the same time, it benefitted from the lessons learned. Finally, it will bring out that the relationship lives under the same cloud as that with the OPC because the attitudes held by very few churches are allowed to dominate mandates given to the committee responsible for contact with the RCUS. Before relating that history, it will be helpful to place the RCUS in the bigger historical context.

History of the Reformed Church in the United States²

The RCUS has its historical roots in Germany. While Germany is usually associated with the Lutheran reformation, the teachings of John Calvin also made a great impact in different parts of that country. One example is the area around the city of Heidelberg, well known

because of the catechism published in that city in 1563. In the second half of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth century, there was much tension between the Lutherans and the Reformed in Germany. The Reformed believers experienced severe persecution. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth century saw immigration of Reformed people from German lands to America, with many settling in Pennsylvania. The first formal meeting of these German Reformed congregations was held in 1747. Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, there was a great deal of contact with the Dutch Reformed churches in America. These churches traced their origin back to the Dutch settlement at the beginning of the seventeenth century, in what today is New York City.

In the second half of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth century, the RCUS was affected by the same liberalism that troubled the Presbyterian Church and led to the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. In 1934, the larger part of the RCUS united with the Evangelical Synod of North America to become the Evangelical and Reformed Church. This new church later merged with the Congregational Christian Churches in 1957 to form the United Church of Christ. Only one classis, the Eureka Classis, with churches located mainly in the Dakotas, did not go along with this union in 1934. It saw itself as the continuation of the Reformed Church in the United States. In 1986, this classis dissolved to form the Synod of the RCUS.

Currently, there are four classes in the RCUS. In 2014, there were a total of forty-seven congregations and six mission works, with a total membership of 3764, of

which 2901 are communicant members. These congregations are widely scattered, from Pennsylvania to the American Midwest to California. Its confessional basis is the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. Its Constitution, which is comparable in function to our Church Order, is a blend of Reformed and Presbyterian polity.

History of contact

While there was some contact between the RCUS and the CanRC on an individual level beginning in 1984, it took on a more formal character in 1987, when the church at Carman took up contact with RCUS churches in North Dakota. The matter came to the attention of a general synod for the first time in 1992. Through the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA), that synod was informed that the RCUS synod, held in April of 1992, had decided to investigate establishing fraternal relations with the CanRC. It is worth noting that, while in a report published in *Clarion* in January of 1992 it was lamented that there seemed to be little initiative from the side of the RCUS in the relationship up until that time, the initiative for a formal relationship in the end came from the side of the RCUS. The synod mandated the CRCA to investigate the RCUS with a view to entering into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. As the church at Carman already had done much work, the CRCA was instructed to make use of their findings.

The report of the CRCA to the synod held in 1995 indicated that they had worked diligently on their mandate, but as they had not been able to complete it, the committee requested synod to renew the mandate. The report to the synod held in 1998 evaluated the RCUS in light of the three marks of the church as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession and concluded that the RCUS showed the marks of the true church. It, therefore, recommended entering into ecclesiastical fellowship. That synod, however, was not ready to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship. In light of the history of contact with the OPC, it is not surprising that particular attention was given to the manner of the supervision of the Lord's Table. Some questions arose about the practice of Sunday observance and the practice of erasing people from the membership roll rather than following the process of church discipline. The Committee was mandated "to resolve the matter of proper supervision of the Lord's Supper so that only those who confess the Reformed faith will be admitted," as well as to discuss

Sunday observance, seek clarification on the concept of erasure. Another issue was the membership of the RCUS in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), which at that time also had the Christian Reformed Church as a member.

The mandate given by the 1998 synod shows the same attitude evident in the relationship with the OPC, namely, that other church federations should do things and see things the same as the Canadian Reformed Churches. Other bodies were judged not by the Scriptures and the confessed norms as expressed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, but through the lens of Canadian Reformed history, practices, and terminology.³

The synod held in 1998, decided to reorganize the committees responsible for relations with other churches. The Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad was made responsible for all contacts outside the Americas. A new committee, called the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA), was established.

Establishing of contact

The report to the 2001 general synod indicated that the committee had met thirteen times and discussed matters extensively. This report can be found in the Acts of Synod Neerlandia 2001, pp 175-182. While it brings out that there are different practices and approaches, it confirmed the recommendation made to Synod 1998. The recommendations read as follows:

In the light of its research and contacts, this committee believes that it has fulfilled its mandate and that it has determined:

- That the matter of the Lord's Supper celebration has been resolved, since members and guests alike are admitted in accordance with Lord's Day 30.
- That the matter of Sunday observance has been sufficiently discussed and cannot be a bar to ecclesiastical fellowship,
- That the doctrine of the church has been adequately discussed, and though there may be differing views in the RCUS, the statements of the Catechism and the Belgic Confession alone are binding,
- That the concept of erasure has been satisfactorily clarified,
- That the CRCNA has been suspended from NAPARC with agreement of the RCUS, and the RCUS's membership in this body should not hinder our relationship with the RCUS at this time.

Therefore we acknowledge with thankfulness that the RCUS stands on the basis of Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity as a faithful Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We recommend that the Canadian Reformed Churches enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Church in the United States under the adopted rules.

A number of churches had written to the synod indicating matters that merited further discussion, such as admission to the Lord's Supper and Sunday observance, but they did not see these as impediments to fellowship. There were two churches that interacted with the report on the RCUS in a manner similar to that of the contact with the OPC. They considered it premature because the matter of admission to the Lord's Supper needed further discussion. Synod 2001 decided to enter in a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship.

How the relationship has developed

The 2001 decision to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship was not unequivocal, however. The voices of a few churches were turned into the voice of the federation as the committee was mandated to continue discussion on the matter of Lord's Day observance, serving the Lord's Supper to shut-ins, and a RCUS discussion paper on the unity of the church. Synod 2004 reintroduced the matter of the fencing of the Lord's Table.

The Acts of Synod 2007 indicate that the Committee felt it had discussed these matters sufficiently and asked the synod to consider their work completed. While some churches requested synod to retain these matters as part of the mandate, the synod concluded it did not need to specify them in the mandate but that "attention can continue to be given to the topics mentioned by the churches when necessary and appropriate."

When one peruses the Acts of the general synods held in 2010 and 2013, it is rather striking that at both synods, in response to a letter from just one church in each case, these synods reversed the direction of the 2007 general synod. The committee was mandated to continue addressing such issues as Lord's Day observance and fencing of the Lord's Table. By such mandates, synods give the impression that there is still not an unequivocal acceptance of the RCUS as a faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The voice of one or two churches again became the voice of the federation.

Conclusion

The history of contact between the CanRC and the RCUS has not had to travel as long and arduous a road as the history of contact with the OPC. In many ways, the contact with the OPC pioneered the way for contact with other faithful churches in North America. The road has also been easier because the RCUS shares the same confessional documents, which took away the need to do a comparison of different confessions both rooted in the Great Reformation. This, however, did not prevent questions about their understanding of the documents.

It is to be regretted, however, that synods continue to cast a shadow on the relationship by insisting on continued discussion on matters that have been discussed extensively over the years. On a personal level, I have been involved with the RCUS at the federation level from the very beginning, as the mandate to take up contact with the RCUS coincided with being appointed to the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad, the committee then responsible for all ecclesiastical contacts. I have been able to see the seriousness and sincerity of the brothers in the RCUS. It has been a privilege to see how the relationship has developed and flourished over the years. I have also felt awkward having to work with mandates that were not representative of the views in the federations as they cast doubt on the integrity and sincerity of the RCUS. The mandates convey an attitude of unbrotherly relentlessness to make others see things our way. At the annual committee meetings held in connection with NAPARC, the RCUS brothers have been very gracious. They are times to share developments in our respective federations and to encourage one another. The deep trust and respect that has developed over the years is also evident in the way the RCUS was able to take over pastoral care of the brothers and sisters of the Blue Bell congregation, when it was no longer viable to maintain it as an American Reformed Church due to members moving elsewhere.

When travelling to the US, one would do well to check the RCUS website (rcus.org) for the location of their congregations and join them for worship.

¹ See *Clarion* 2014 (Vol. 63) pages 522-526; 640-644; 674-5

² For detailed history, check the "History" tab at <http://www.rcus.org/>

³ This point had been made by Rev. Grossman in 1992. See Acts of Synod Lincoln, 1992, p. 150.



Cornelis Van Dam
 Professor emeritus of Old Testament
 at the Canadian Reformed Theological
 Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

The Niqab Kerfuffle

Zunera Ishaq, a Muslim Pakistani immigrant, is seeking Canadian citizenship. But she will only take the oath wearing a niqab. A niqab is a veil worn by some Muslim women in public. It covers the entire face except for the eyes. However, back in December, 2011, Canada banned face coverings for people swearing their oath of citizenship. Ishaq asked the Federal



Court to judge the legality of this ban and this court found that the policy was illegal and ordered it struck down. The Canadian government is appealing this ruling.

What are we to think of this? Zunera claims that covering her face is “mandatory to my faith” and “integral to the modesty that a Muslim woman must show.” Prime Minister Harper has said that covering one’s face while being sworn in is “not how we do things here” and is “offensive.”

Salim Mansur, a Muslim who teaches political science at the University of Western Ontario in London, wrote an enlightening article on this issue in the *National Post* of February 20, 2015. He notes that the claim that the niqab is required as a matter of religious belief is not true since “neither Islam, nor Hanafi rites or jurisprudence as part of Islamic belief, make such a requirement obligatory for Muslim women.” Wearing the niqab “is a modern custom turned into religious mandate and enforced by coercion in public by Muslim extremists in Pakistan and some other Muslim majority countries.” Indeed, Tarek Fatah, a founder of the Muslim Canadian Congress, even calls the niqab “the flag of Islamism” dictated by the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world and its equivalent in South Asia (*The Toronto Sun*, March 17, 2015).

Dr. Mansur notes that for Ishaq to receive constitutional protection would give credence to the claims of extremist Muslims that Muslims are under duress in Canada, which is not true. “This decision however sets a precedent for the argument that any imported custom that runs counter to Canadian values – bigamy, polygamy, female genital mutilation, child marriage, etc. – if shown to be religiously man-

dated should be protected under paragraph 2(a) and section 15(1) of the Charter, irrespective of how contrary or outrageous such custom might be in respect to traditions of most Canadians.” Mansur goes on to note that the courts should distinguish between religious beliefs and customary practices. In the same week that the Federal Court in Canada ruled the niqab ban unlawful, “India’s Supreme Court ruled that bigamy and polygamy is not protected under Article 25 of the Indian Constitution, which refers to freedom of conscience and religion.” The judges agreed that “bigamous marriage amongst Muslims is neither a religious practice nor a religious belief and certainly not a religious injunction or mandate.” This also holds true for the niqab.

If it is true, as the two Muslim experts quoted above say, that wearing the niqab is associated with Muslim extremists and even a flag of Islamism, as Fatah has put it, then it would be completely inappropriate and contradictory for someone wearing a niqab to be swearing the citizenship oath of allegiance to Canada’s Queen and laws. Symbols can be powerful and wearing the niqab can be turned into a political statement of opposition to the laws of the land and a yearning for Islamic Shariah law. When one makes the decision to immigrate to a country and join it as a full citizen, one must be prepared to accept the dominant culture of that country and in this case be prepared to take off the niqab for such an important ceremony.

It is noteworthy, and not surprising in light of the above, that France, which faces considerable pressure of Islamization, has banned all face coverings in 2010 with its “Act Prohibiting Concealment of the Face in Public Space.” Reasons for the legislation include security concerns and the social barriers created by such coverings within a society that relies on facial recognition and expression in communication. May it never need to come to this kind of federal law in Canada. A good first step for maintaining a reasonable perspective on this emotional issue is for the courts to distinguish between true religious beliefs as attested by the official historic sources of Islam and customary practices that have evolved. This approach would mean maintaining a ban on face covering for an official citizenship ceremony.





How Dr. James K.A. Smith's Teachings May Impact Christian Education (1)

John Jagersma and
Derek Stoffels
Principal of Parkland
Immanuel Christian School
in Edmonton, Alberta
jjagersma@parklandimmanuel.ca

Principal of the Ebenezer
Canadian Reformed School in
Smithers, British Columbia
principal@ebenezerschool.com

A number of administrators from our schools had the opportunity to hear Dr. James Smith speak at a conference in Victoria this past fall. Dr. James Smith is a professor of philosophy at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI. He presented the topic of how people learn and come to commit to certain things such as faith.



The presentations were based on his book, *Imagining the Kingdom: How worship works*. In four one-hour speeches, Smith worked out how this might impact Christian education. The content of these speeches has been summarized into two articles for *Education Matters*. These speeches, and therefore this summary, are only samples of an argument developed in more detail and at length in his books.

Man is a lover

Smith began with the statement that every teaching strategy or decision is chosen/made because of what we think of the students, that is, what we think their nature is (unfortunately there may be a disconnect between what we say the nature of the student is and what we act on). He argues that western society has focussed too much on teaching to the mind when in fact people are not “brains on a stick.” Instead, Smith contends that man at his most basic level is a “lover” and not a thinker. By *lover* he means that man commits to things on the basis of the heart or on a vision of the “good life,” not on the basis of reasoning things out in the mind. In support of this, he cited Bible references and he cited Augustine’s

Confessions: “You (God) have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

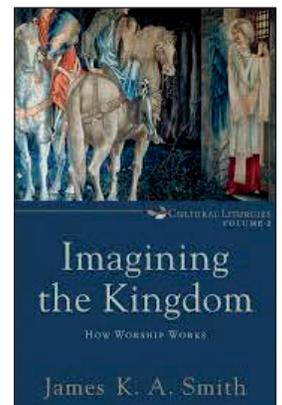
Smith gave an example of how we can believe something in our heads, but how in our actions we do not practice what we believe. This gap is highlighted in James 2. Most of us will recognize this gap as a reality in our own lives. As an example, we all readily acknowledge that we should have a very intentional plan to raise our children in God’s ways. The reality often is, though, that we are very busy, and we end up trying to tuck God into various places to fit around our busy lives. Smith quoted research as saying that only five percent of what we do is the result of thoughtful reflection and the rest is automatic (because it was learned and you no longer think about it).

Sin is loving the wrong

If we accept Smith’s contention about man being lovers, then, Smith says, the effect of sin is not that we become haters of God, but rather, lovers of wrong things in the wrong ways, i.e. idolatry. In his first book, *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith gives the examples of the shopping mall, sports, nationalism, materialism, etc. We substitute a non-biblical vision of the good life for the biblical vision of the good life.

The need for liturgies

The crux of his argument is that our *loves* are not something we simply choose; they are something that we need to train. We need to create habits in our lives



that develop a love in us towards the biblical version of the good life. Christian homes and schools need to become, in Smith's words, "incubators of virtues." Virtues are learned from virtuous people; so children need to be surrounded by virtuous people. We need to surround ourselves with habits that shape what we want to love. Smith uses the word *liturgies* for this. He defines liturgies as "love-shaping practices." He gives as an example the beautiful cathedrals of the Middle Ages. Worshipers were surrounded by a space carefully designed to focus attention on God. The stained glass windows depicted the virtuous people from history, the architecture directed attention to specific things, and the steeples turned eyes heavenward. More applicable to us are things like keeping Sunday as a dedicated day of rest, consistent devotional practices in the home, and so on.

Satan's liturgies

Unfortunately the devil works at this as well and creates liturgies directed to a distorted vision of a good life. Smith used the shopping mall as an example of a secular liturgy. The mall itself is like the church building, beautiful and airy, directing your attention in certain ways. The mannequins in the store windows are the people to imitate, replacing the stained glass windows of the cathedral. The mall is a carefully crafted experience designed to shape and appeal to your loves, not to your mind. Other possible examples are the so-called radicalization of Islam, the sports or recreation culture, Freedom 55 (retirement culture), beer commercials, and so on. All offer a version of the good life and all work powerfully to appeal to the heart, not to the head.

We need to surround ourselves with habits that shape what we want to love

Using the word *liturgies* for these practices or routines might sound odd, but if we think about the use of the word *liturgy* in the context of our worship service, the intent of the liturgy is to shape our hearts and minds towards a focus on worshipping God. (It is worth renewing our understanding of the liturgy of our churches so that we better understand what is going on.)

To try sum up his opening argument, Smith says that we cannot think our way to sanctification. We need to be

reached at the heart or at gut level to move our hearts toward God and to believe the vision that the good life is to rest in him. Homes, churches, and schools need to put/have in place routines or habits that shape and direct the love of God's covenant children. The Holy Spirit is the one who directs us to the practices and routines that will be effective in shaping the loves of his people. Head and heart need to work together in this.

Man is a story-teller

After laying the premise for his position, Smith expands on it by suggesting that we human beings are not only lovers, we are also story-tellers. We are more convinced by stories than by intellectual arguments. To prove his point, Smith uses the story of the film, *The King's Speech*.

The little things that happen in schools, in homerooms, soccer fields, and hallways, have a larger impact on the development of our students than the intellectual things that we try to teach them

The storyline of the film involves a young Prince George who overcomes a speech impediment and becomes the King of England. Early in his life, various causes for his stammer are sought. Some are biological as in a physical deformity. Others are intellectual as in the need to concentrate on saying the words. But the solution comes from an unconventional speech therapist, Lionel Logue, who befriends the young prince and learns his story. It's only by understanding his own story and the events that affected his early life that the prince can overcome his impediment and take his place as the leader of the country. The point of the story was to show that the mind is not enough. The implication is that learning needs to involve more than the mind. We need to train minds, but we also need to change hearts. The way to the heart is through the body, and the way to the body is through story. We absorb stories on a sub-conscious level, even without realizing it.

As you may have gathered, the way Smith uses the term "story" is much broader than the traditional meaning

of the term. Here, the word is not referring to something mythical or trivial; instead, it refers to a set of ideas and beliefs that run deeper than mere intellectual propositions. As an example, Smith asked William Cavanaugh's question, "How does the farm boy become persuaded that he must travel to another part of the world to kill people he knows nothing about?" The answer is not through intellectual arguments; it is instead through his story: the sum total of his experiences, which included rising before the Stars and Stripes every morning and chanting, "I pledge allegiance. . . ." In that way, through his body, the act of reciting, standing by and looking at the flag and so on, his heart is reached.

Explicit curriculum and implicit pedagogy

As a result, education cannot simply focus on intellectual development. Schools are not limited to the explicit curriculum; instead, they subtly persuade their students (and teachers!) through an "implicit pedagogy which can instil a whole cosmology." In other words, the little things that happen in schools, in homerooms, soccer fields, and hallways, have a larger impact on the development of our students than the intellectual things that we try to teach them. Some institutions recognize this. In the autobiography of General Stanley McChrystal, he recounts his days at his military academy, including the insistence of the commanding officers on the dress code: "For the next few minutes, the combat-seasoned colonel compared neglecting to wear collar stays with forget-

ting ammunition for our soldiers in combat. Focusing on even the small things, he reasoned, develops a leader who never neglects the critical ones."

If the small things, the "micro-practices," have macro-implications, it challenges us as educators and leaders. It means that we can tell, exhort, reason, and argue, but that the characters of our students will be shaped also, and maybe more, by their experiences in their surroundings – what Smith refers to as *liturgies*. The most powerful experiences, as he argued before, are those rich with symbolism, ceremony and meaning: the shopping mall, the hockey game, the church service.

Although this is a challenge, Smith sees it is also an opportunity. If we can consciously select the experiences that our students (or our children) have, we can influence their person much more than simply appealing to their intellects. It means that the smallest choices we make – in music, in mealtime traditions, in family vacations, in hobbies and leisure time – can play a critical role in shaping who we and our children are.

In the next *Education Matters* column we will review the last two speeches, where Smith identified some concrete ways that teachers can form themselves and their students.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma akingma@ech.ca





William den Hollander
Minister emeritus of the
Bethel Canadian Reformed
Church of Toronto, Ontario
denhollanderw@gmail.com

Q

We know that the eternal reward of salvation to God's elect, is not by works but by the grace of God through faith alone.

In Belgic Confession Article 24 and in Heidelberg Catechism Question 63 God promises to reward good works in this life and the next. In Matthew 16:27 we read, "And then he will reward each person according to what they have done." In Romans 2:6 we also read, "God will repay each person according to what they have done." Similarly in Proverbs 24:12 we read, "Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?" In the Parable of the Pounds and the Parable of the Talents (Luke 19:11-27) and (Matt 25:14-30) each person is rewarded differently according to his deeds. We can also read, "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1).

Does the Bible teach that there will be different levels of rewards in heaven? Likewise, does the Bible teach that there will be different levels of punishment in hell?

A

Before going into the more specific details of the question, it is important to state first that all believers share in salvation and eternal life through grace, by faith in Jesus Christ. This salvation is the same for all. Whether a believer comes to faith and salvation

on his deathbed or has lived by faith throughout his life, the salvation he will inherit by faith in Christ will be the same (Matt 20:1-16). There will be no different conditions of salvation for different classes of people. By faith the saved share in the righteousness, salvation, and eternal life in Jesus Christ. There will be different degrees, however, of eternal blessedness (glory) and in the punishment of the unbelievers, of those not chosen to eternal life.

Indeed, it is especially in those places in Scripture that speak about the promised rewards that this can be observed. Although every reward is a gift of grace (LD 24), it does lead to different degrees of glory. These degrees will be determined by what is done in the body (Matt 5:12; 6:1, 4, 6, 18; 24:47). The rewards are given to those who served the Lord faithfully, to those who professed him and suffered for his sake, to those who did good works in love to Christ and for the neighbour, for service in his king-

dom, etc. This reward is in proportion to the works they have done (Matt 16:27; 19:29; 25:21, 23; Luke 6:38; 19:17, 19). Hence there will be a difference in status, in radiance, and in glory. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!'" Just as there has been a variety of gifts and a diversity of position in the church of Christ here on earth, so there will be a difference among the saints in positions and glory.

In my Catechism classes I used the well-known example of "the ten glasses of water" to explain the equality in salvation and the difference in the degrees in glory: fill ten glasses of different sizes with water; then each glass is filled to the brim with water. They're all full, yet there is a difference. That's how it will be in eternal life: a fullness of salvation and degrees of glory. They're all saved, but the glory of the Apostle Paul will be different than the glory of the criminal on the cross. The same will be the case with the punishment. No one can escape the judgment of God, because in Adam they all sinned and deserve eternal damnation. The Gentiles and unbelievers are without excuse, since all fall short of the glory of God; Romans 1:21, "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or gave thanks to him. . . ." Yet, as the Lord Jesus put

it, “It will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you” (i.e. Bethsaida, Chorazin, Capernaum, who knew the Word, the prophecies, and saw the mighty works of Christ, yet did not believe, Matt 11: 22, 24; cf. Luke 12:47, 48; 20:47).

Likewise, the people of the LORD who lived in the OT will be judged differently than those who lived in the NT dispensation; i.e. those growing up in the church under the

faithful preaching of the gospel, and who yet despised the grace of God and rejected the blood of Christ (Hebr 10:29). God will give to every man his due. “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12:2, 3).

Q

As brothers and sisters in the Lord many of us married couples may receive the rich blessing of having a family – covenant children. However from time to time we also are confronted with the reality of being infertile. This certainly is cause for pain. Yet we, as Christians, with the help of the LORD, learn to accept God’s will: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Rom 8:28). As time goes on, by the grace of God we learn to be content and are given strength to confess with the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:12, “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation,” and verse 13, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

1. When means as, i.e., in vitro fertilization are used, are we displaying discontentment?
2. Would you be willing to explain when and when not these means may be used? Especially since these means are often frowned upon in our reformed circles.

A

The matters presented in these questions are, indeed, among the more difficult “problems” some married couples have to deal with. A childless marriage has always been a cause of much sadness and sorrow, as examples in Old and New Testament illustrate (Rachel, Hanna, and Elizabeth). In many a marriage this is felt like a damper on an otherwise happy relationship. Although in times past it was experienced as a shame or inferiority or even a punishment of God, also without these erroneous ideas it often is a cause of suffering, of sorrow. As the question poses, “This certainly is a cause for pain!” Through much prayer and with the help of God’s Spirit and Word, and with the support of family

and fellow-believers also, contentment and acceptance and peace can be found in this situation of brokenness (as we can in other situations of suffering, such as the loss of a spouse, singleness, or serious illness). Fostering a child or adoption may be considered in such situations as well, while others may learn contentment by finding other purposes and pursuits for their married life. Marriage is good, also without children; a marriage in the Lord, with or without children, is not in vain!

In situations like these, however, we may call ourselves blessed for living in a time of great medical advancement in regard to situations of brokenness. The use of chemo therapy or radiation in the case of cancer, resorting to a C-section in a situation of complications at birth, or the use of a feeding tube, oxygen, or other

life supporting equipment, to mention a few “artificial” means and measures may be used with thankfulness and under God’s blessing. In the same vein, the advancement of artificial insemination and in vitro-fertilization within marriage is a blessing as well to couples that are dealing with infertility. It’s true that not every problem needs to be solved or can be solved, but rather be accepted in faith; and with contentment can be acknowledged as the wisdom and goodness of the Lord. Yet, using the (medical) means available for overcoming a problem may certainly be accepted in faith as well; it certainly should not be considered a display of discontentment.

Just because the use of means such as IVF must be done with keen discernment and discretion due to its possible pitfalls and wrong applications, does not mean that we should frown upon the use of it. IVF is a laboratory technique which is employed to fertilize an egg with a sperm cell, and the conceived embryo is then transferred into the uterus. Thus the fertilization does not occur inside, but outside the woman’s body. Whatever the problem may be which makes normal fertilization impossible, the “nature” that has become defective is given a helping hand between the beginning and concluding points. In the past this procedure has been more problematic than it is today. When I advised a childless couple twenty-five years ago that IVF was acceptable as *procedure*, yet without the forming of multiple embryos (some of which would be rejected and destroyed, others implanted and

resulting in miscarriage), the doctor in the fertility clinic expressed grave doubts about this approach (as statistically senseless); yet the Lord blessed the implantation of one embryo with the birth of a healthy child! Today such an approach has become more and more common and acceptable (also medically speaking).

As I already indicated in this example, there are restrictions that need to be observed. IVF should not be considered with the involvement of a third party; either a sperm donor or a surrogate mother. IVF should only be used *within* marriage. We also do not accept the use of IVF for gender selection, the selection of healthy children, neither do we approve of the freezing of embryos, supposedly for a second or third attempt (which either won’t be used, or discarded, or used for unethical medical procedures). Used in the right way, then, IVF may be a blessing for couples who would otherwise remain childless. They will use it, not for *personal* satisfaction and purposes primarily, but for a married life *in the Lord*, in the service of God!

*Is there something you've been wanting to know?
An answer you've been looking for?*

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. den Hollander
denhollanderw@gmail.com
23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0



Notice of Convocation:

General Synod 2016 is slated to be convened by the church at Dunnville on May 10th, 2016.

A prayer service will be held on Monday, May 9, 2016, at 7:30 PM, at the Dunnville Canadian Reformed Church building.

Synod Dunnville 2016 will commence on Tuesday, May 10, 2016, DV.

All material for Synod should be sent to the attention of the Synod Organizing Committee at the address of the Canadian Reformed Church of Dunnville:

109 Inman Road, P.O. Box 51, Dunnville, ON N1A 2X1
Email: dunnvilleclerk@gmail.com

According to the GUIDELINES FOR GENERAL SYNOD all material for Synod should be received by the convening church (in digital format, and five paper copies) no later than six weeks prior to the convocation date of General Synod. Material received after this date shall ordinarily not be added to the agenda unless Synod is satisfied that the reasons given for later arrival are reasonable.



Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God

Timothy Keller, New York: Dutton, 2014

Additional Information: Hardcover, 336 pages, \$31.00



Wes Bredenhof
Pastor of the Providence
Canadian Reformed Church,
Hamilton, Ontario
wbredenhof@bell.net

There is a disturbing phenomenon we've seen in the last few years. It involves celebrity pastors and their fans. It seems these pastors can teach, write, and do anything they want and their fans (let's call them "fanboys") will defend them come what may. Certainly Tim Keller is a celebrity pastor with a "fanboy" following as well – there are some for whom the man can do no wrong. This is a dangerous way to regard sinful and fallible fellow human beings. However, one can also react wrongly in a different direction. Seeing a few significant problems with a popular writer, one might be inclined to write off everything he says. It's true that some "Christian" celebrities are so far gone that they *should* be written off – they are false teachers with a false gospel and believers need to be warned to stay clear, lest they be deceived and led astray. However, I am not convinced that Tim Keller falls into that category. Keller does have significant problems in some areas – I'm thinking especially of his openness to theistic evolution and his approach to apologetics – but he has also made helpful contributions in other areas.

This book on prayer is the best Keller book I've read so far. Prayer is a very easy thing to talk about ("I'll pray for you"), but an incredibly challenging thing to practice, particularly to practice biblically. Keller breaks down the topic in an easily understandable fashion. Undoubtedly one of his greatest strengths is a clear writing style and *Prayer* fully capitalizes on that strength.

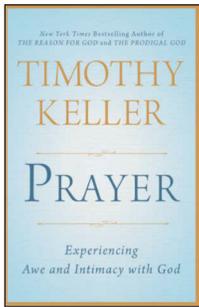
Keller wrote this book to help people understand and practice Christian prayer. His aim was to explain the theological, experiential, and methodological aspects of prayer and, for the most part, he succeeds. He draws from the Scriptures and especially from the Lord's Prayer and the Psalms ("the prayer book of the Bible"). However, he also builds on what previous generations have taught on prayer. This book is notable for its extensive use of Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Owen. Keller persuasively shows how these godly men of the past can still teach us today a lot about "experiencing awe and intimacy with God."

I especially appreciated Keller's basis on prayer as a response to God. In fact, he defines prayer as "personal communicative response to the knowledge of God" (45). Christians should listen to God speaking in his Word and then

prayer is the appropriate response. One's devotional life is therefore a two-way street. Though Keller himself doesn't say this, I would compare it to the covenantal dialogue we experience in public worship: God speaks through his Word and his people respond. It's the same with our private worship or devotions – it should have a conversational nature reflecting the relationship between you and your God.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this book is Keller's critique of contemplative spirituality and mystical prayer practices. He is rather vocal in criticizing those who would teach that prayer involves emptying the mind and escaping rationality. So, for example, he spends several paragraphs explaining how Roman Catholic author Thomas Merton contradicts biblical teaching on prayer (see pages 56-59). Practices like mantras, centering prayer, the Jesus prayer, and *lectio divina* are all censured to varying degrees by Keller. That does leave one a bit baffled, however, by the fact that the church that Keller pastors, Redeemer PCA in New York City, promotes *lectio divina* on its website. In the past, Redeemer has also offered classes in some of the practices that Keller warns readers about in this book.

Somewhat related to the foregoing, I also want to express some concern about a quote from Martin Luther. Luther wrote a little booklet entitled "A Simple Way to Pray" and Keller makes extensive use of it. Near the end of chapter 6, he mentions that Luther taught that one should always be alert and ready to hear the preaching of the Holy Spirit within. While in prayer, a believer can suddenly be overcome by good and edifying thoughts and then he or she should sit still and listen. Says Luther, "The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation." This is one of the *most abused quotes* of Luther. Authors like Sarah Young (in *Jesus Calling*) appeal to this quote to justify their belief that God has spoken directly to them. Luther was often given to very expressive and over-the-top language and I



doubt that he wished to provide support to the modern-day descendants of those Anabaptists who claimed to receive direct revelation from God. Instead, Luther's intent was to remind Christians of how we may sometimes receive illumination from the Spirit – he can sometimes enlighten our hearts and bring us to breakthroughs in our understanding of spiritual truths found in God's Word.

I'm convinced Keller knows this too: "Luther is talking about the eyes of our hearts being enlightened (Eph. 1:18) so that things we know with the mind become more fully rooted in our beings' core" (96). Yet, because this quote is so easily misunderstood with its use of the word "preach," I wish that Keller had explained more clearly that this is not speaking of extra-biblical revelation and gives no support to those, like Sarah Young, who claim that the Lord spoke to them in their quiet time.

This volume will answer a lot of the common questions that believers have about prayer. For instance, there

is a solid biblical answer for the oft-discussed question of whether we have the freedom to pray to our Lord Jesus or to the Holy Spirit (see pages 125-126). Another question: does prayer change things? If so, how does that relate to God's sovereignty (see pages 223-225)? Unfortunately, there are other questions that are left unanswered. I would have liked to see some discussion of the mechanics of corporate prayer. How exactly do we pray together in a group, such as in public worship? This is not often given much thought.

Keller's book on prayer is both readable and practical. Readers will come away with a good grasp of how to improve this aspect of their personal devotions so that they grow in their relationship with God through our Saviour Jesus. Remarkably, I found this book at my local Chapters bookstore – not at a Christian outlet. Though I'm still not a big fan of the author, I'm thankful that Keller's celebrity status helps books like this get out to a wider audience and I do hope that it will bless many readers with a better and more biblical understanding of this vitally important topic. 

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

In our recent article explaining the Carter Supreme Court decision on euthanasia and assisted suicide, we too quickly suggested that the use of Section 33 of the Charter (the notwithstanding clause) was not a long-term or realistic solution for this government to use. By adding specific ideas for what a new law could look like (a law which would allow for assisted suicide in limited circumstances, as required by the Supreme Court), we also created the impression that such a law is justifiable for this government to pursue. We apologize for the lack of principle and clarity.

The reality is that Parliament has the means to uphold the current law which bans all assisted suicide and euthanasia, as long as it has the courage to make use of Section 33 of the Charter. This is the very reason why such a section was added to our constitution – to give authority to Parliament to make law in spite of what the Supreme Court determines to be appropriate. As such, it should do so. Lives are at stake. The fact that this particular option – use of the notwithstanding clause – has to be renewed by future governments every five years does make defending life more challenging, but it does not make it impossible. If a future government chooses to not renew the use of Section

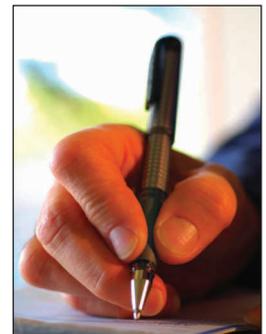
33 to uphold life, that would be its responsibility, not the current government's. The same could be said of any legislation.

This government has the ability to prohibit euthanasia and assisted suicide, and it should do so. If it is intent on crossing the sacred line of an absolute prohibition on allowing some people to kill other people, we can share our concerns but also legitimately suggest ideas for how to restrict the evil as much as possible. Suggestions for how to reduce the number of deaths are not inappropriate. And if we are living in a land where euthanasia is already legal, helping the government restrict it is laudable (similar to abortion today). But we aren't there yet. We can encourage this government to do the right thing and uphold the sixth commandment.

We have since published a policy report on this matter, available at www.ARPACanada.ca. We encourage *Clarion* readers to pray for our federal government as they wrestle with what to do about this issue.

Mark Penninga and André Schutten

ARPA Canada 



But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel; Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your savior.

Isaiah 43:1-3a

Birthdays are a great time in our lives aren't they? We are able to celebrate many birthdays in our family and we make them fun times for the whole family. The birthday person is made to feel super special all day and the best part of the day comes at supper time when the birthday person enjoys the meal he or she specifically requested. We enjoy birthdays in our family because life comes from God and life is to be celebrated. Our lives are important because we belong to the Lord; he has created us in our mothers' wombs and he has determined the course of our lives. Even more than that God has set us free from the power of sin, he has redeemed us. Praise the Lord for his saving work! Thank the Lord for claiming us and calling us by name.

I wish you a wonderful day when your birthday arrives. May you enjoy a time of fellowship and love from your family and friends.

June Birthdays

- 17 JOAN KOERSELMAN will be 58**
2113-16 Avenue
Coaldale, AB T1M 1J8
- 20 LARS HUIJGEN will be 24**
85950 Canborough Road
RR 1, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W1
- 26 DEVON NIEZEN will be 15**
454 St. George Street E,
Fergus, ON N1M 1K8
- 30 BEVERLY BREUKELMAN will be 53**
19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4



A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

If there are any address or other changes that I need to be aware of please let me know as soon as possible.

Patricia Gelms
5080 Airport Road East, Mount Hope, ON L0R 1W0
henri.trish@sympatico.ca
905-692-0084



Press Release of Classis Manitoba held on March 27, 2015 at the Canadian Reformed Church at Carman West

Opening

On behalf of the Canadian Reformed Church at Carman West, Dr. A.J. Pol opened the meeting by reading Romans 10:1-13 and led in prayer. He requested the singing of Psalm 67. He welcomed all present, particularly the fraternal delegate, Rev. Todd De Rooy. As memorabilia it was noted that both the call extended to Rev. Schouten by the Winnipeg Grace congregation as well as the call extended to Rev. Swets by Winnipeg Redeemer to serve as missionary for Mission Manitoba were declined. It was also noted that Denver American Reformed Church is now vacant. Br. W. Gortemaker, who has served classis as a deputy for contact with neighbouring classes/presbyteries and is now seriously ill, was also remembered.

Examination of credentials and constitution of Classis

The credentials of the delegates were examined by the brothers from the Carman West Canadian Reformed Church and reported to be in order. All the churches were properly represented by the primary delegates. Classis was declared constituted.

Appointment of executive officers

The suggested officer from Classis Manitoba January, 2015, Rev. J. Poppe, was appointed as president. Nominated and appointed to serve as vice-president was Br. Darren Kuik and as clerk Br. Wayne Versteeg. The president thanked the convening church for the organization of Classis.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted with one additional item of correspondence.

Seating of fraternal delegates

Rev. Todd De Rooy from the Redeemer United Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa was welcomed and seated as fraternal delegate. He was informed that he had all privileges of the floor except voting. Candidate David Winkel was present as an observer.

Reports

The treasurer for Classis Manitoba, Br. Henry Veldman from the church at Carman East, submitted his report and since there is a healthy balance in the account, an assessment of \$5 per communicant member is recommended for 2015, down from the \$10 in the previous year. Travel reimbursement is set at 49 cents/km. Gratitude was expressed for the report received.

The church appointed for inspecting the books of the treasurer, Carman West, reported that two brothers examined the books and found them to be in good order. The report was received with gratitude.

The church appointed for inspecting the Classis archives, Winnipeg Redeemer, reported that two brothers examined the archives and found them to be in good order. It was noted that corrections were necessary on two documents. The report was received with gratitude.

The Deputy for Contact with the Manitoba Provincial Government reported that during this past year, there have been no requests to make arrangements for ministers from outside of the province of Manitoba to solemnize marriages and to the best of their knowledge, there are no other provincial matters of ecclesiastical importance to the churches to bring to our attention at this time. This report was received for information.

In closed session, church visitation reports were given of visits held at the Canadian Reformed Churches at Carman East, Carman West, Winnipeg Grace, and Winnipeg Redeemer. It was noted with gratitude that all reports could conclude with thankfulness that things are being done according to the Word of God, that the office-bearers are fulfilling the duties of their office and calling faithfully and that the Church Order is being observed. Each church was brought before the Lord in prayer by one of the delegates following the respective reports. The church visitation to Denver American Reformed Church has not yet taken place.

Proposals and/or instructions from the churches (Art. 33, CO)

Overtures from Winnipeg Redeemer recommending increased involvement of the home church in the support of theological students, and recommending that they be examined in their home classis were tabled for discussion. The proposals originally presented at a previous Classis meeting held on September 19, 2014 were clarified and

adjusted as per the feedback received at that time and Classis decided to approve the overtures to be sent on to Regional Synod West 2015.

Question period (Art. 44 CO)

The president asked the questions according to Article 44 of the Church Order. Each of the churches indicated that the ministry of the office-bearers was being continued, and the decisions of the major assemblies were being honoured. The church at Winnipeg Grace requested advice in a matter of discipline. Classis then entered closed session to deal with this request. Concurring advice was given to Winnipeg Grace. Rev. S. Vandeveld led in intercessory prayer.

Letter of appeal from a brother

The letter of appeal sent by the brother is deemed inadmissible by Classis.

Addresses by fraternal delegates

Notification was received from the Providence Reformed Church in Winnipeg of the URCNA expressing regret that they were unable to have any delegates in attendance. A letter of greeting from the Providence URC delegate was read by the president expressing thankfulness for the unity between Providence URC and the Canadian/American Reformed Churches of Classis Manitoba. Rev. Todd De Rooy of the Redeemer United Reformed Church in Orange City, Iowa was given the opportunity to address Classis on behalf of Classis Central US. He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be here. He gave an update on Divine Hope Reformed Seminary, a prison ministry taking place in several institutions in Illinois and Indiana. The Lord is blessing this work of spreading the gospel. Classis Central US is re-evaluating its process of church planting with a view to establishing more church plants. He also gave a brief update on the work of CERCU within the URC. He gave encouragement to the Canadian/American Reformed churches as fellow holders of the message of the saving work of Jesus Christ. The president responded with fitting words. Dr. A.J. Pol brought these churches as well as the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC and Northern Plains Classis of the RCUS before the Lord in intercessory prayer.

Correspondence

A letter was received from Rev. R.J. Kampen expressing his appreciation for the time and experience he had working in Classis Manitoba as well as encouragement in the continuing work and a desire for the continuing grace of God for the churches of Classis Manitoba.

Invitation to meeting of the Presbytery of the Dakotas April 7, 2015 is to be passed on to the newly appointed deputies noted in the next article. A letter of introduction and greeting will be sent on behalf of Classis Manitoba.

Invitation and agenda was received from Classis Central US of the URCNA to classis meeting scheduled for April 13, 2015 is to be passed on to the newly appointed deputies noted in the next article. A letter of introduction and greeting will be sent on behalf of Classis Manitoba.

Appointments

Classis Manitoba appointed Brs. Ron Vanderzwaag of Carman West and Jacob Kuik of Winnipeg Redeemer as Deputies for Contact with Neighbouring Classes/Presbyteries with Br. Peter Veenendaal of Winnipeg Redeemer as alternate.

The church of Denver will serve as the convening church for the next classis. Winnipeg Grace will serve as host church. It will be convened, D.V., on June 26, 2015 (or, if deemed not necessary then, September 25, 2015). The suggested president for next classis is Rev. S. Vandeveld.

Personal question period

This was not made use of.

Brotherly censure (Art. 34 CO)

With gratitude it was deemed not necessary.

Adoption of the Acts and approval of the Press Release

The Acts were read and adopted and the Press Release approved for publication.

Closing

The president closed the meeting by leading in prayer.

For Classis Manitoba,
Darren Kuik,
Vice-president at that time **C**