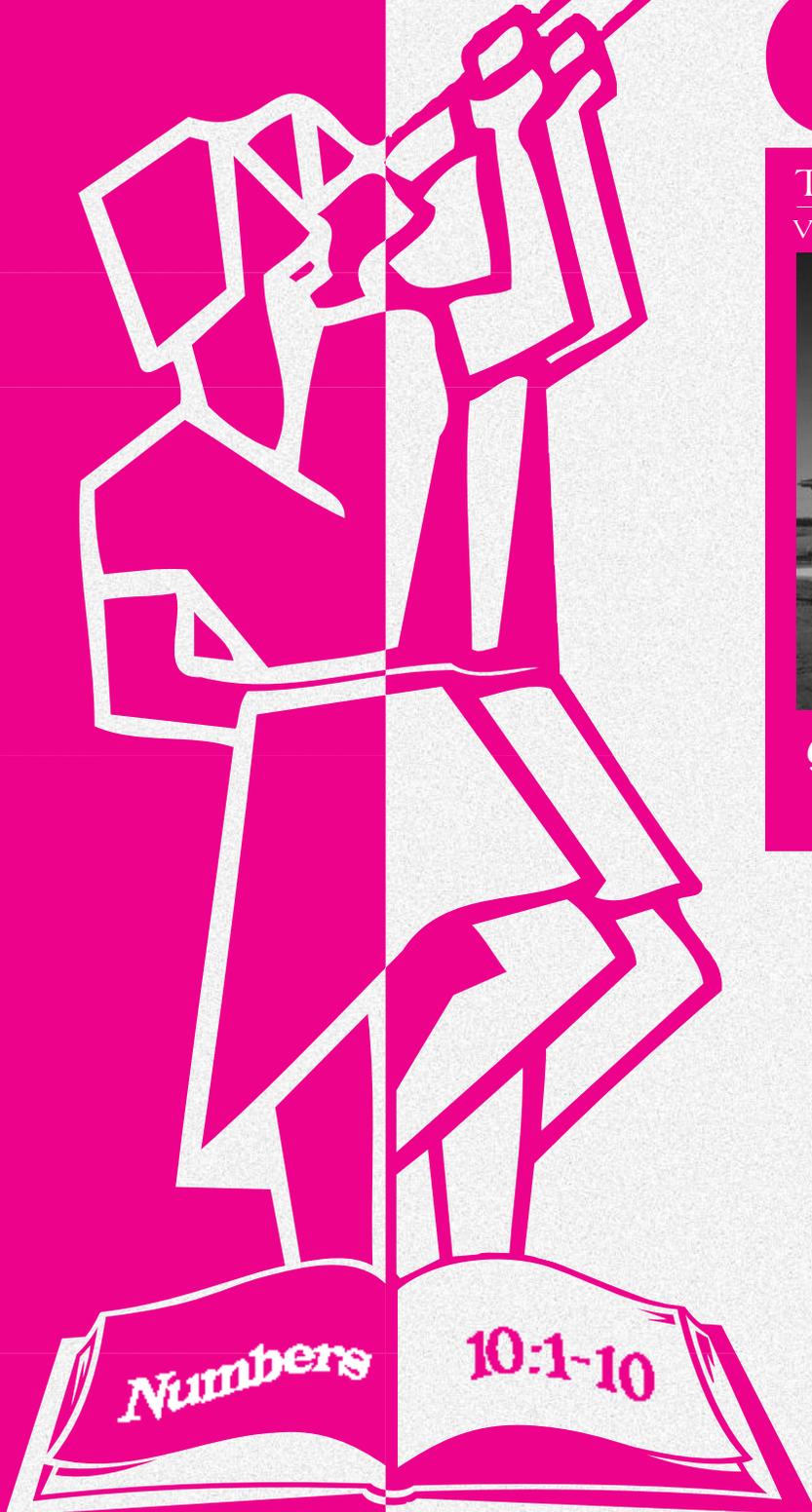


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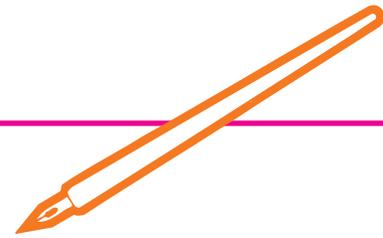
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
VOLUME 48, NO. 11 MAY 28, 1999



*Grace Canadian Reformed Church
Kerwood, Ontario*



By C. Van Dam



The Future of Reformed Education

The suggestion made earlier this year that teachers for our schools should be required to take at least some of their training at Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College has received mixed reactions. There is no need to repeat what was found in the original editorial.¹ What I would like to do here is to react to some of the comments made, and so attempt to move the discussion forward.

Apparent misunderstandings

It is understandable that an article that involves teachers should especially provoke responses from teachers. Let me begin by thanking those who wrote and allow me to clear up an apparent misunderstanding. Nowhere did I say that "there are not *nearly* enough *Reformed* teachers in our community to ensure our schools remain *Reformed*" and I regret the response that the "article is demeaning to teachers."² That was certainly not the intention. I am not attacking the present teachers. The question that lay at the heart of my concerns is and remains: "How do we ensure that the schools indeed remain faithful to the Reformed confessions?" My concern is orientated to the future and it is based on present trends in training and hiring practices. These trends will sooner or later impact on the nature of the education given.

Trends do matter!

It would be foolish to deny as a general statement that present trends do have an impact on the future. If they do, then why is it apparently difficult for some to see that if one hires mainly teachers who have only a secular professional preparatory education, this practice will sooner or later start affecting the Reformed character of the education given in our schools?

I am fully aware of the point made by several correspondents that in and of itself a teacher can be Reformed without a Reformed preparatory education. Many teachers of the first hour lacked such a preparation, but they have made an invaluable contribution often at considerable personal sacrifice in seeking to integrate the Reformed faith with their profession. In this way they have made up for the lack that they often keenly felt. It is true that one can be a Reformed teacher without formal Reformed training. But, that means that such teachers will have to do this integration by themselves in their spare time. This is obviously not the ideal scenario.

So, the point about being a Reformed teacher without Reformed training is only partially true. Some sort of Reformed integration needs to take place, be it before or after one's formal professional training.

However, to respond now to a plea for Reformed preparatory education with the comment that you can be a Reformed teacher without it, can amount to a cop-out. After all, this pre-

sent discussion is not taking place in a vacuum. We are no longer in the 1950s. We have by God's grace received a Reformed training centre for teachers which has been established at considerable sacrifice. What is worrisome with the present trend is that precisely that which many of the first teachers would have loved to have had – a Reformed teachers training – is now in some quarters more and more considered unnecessary or irrelevant for a variety of reasons.

Certification

An issue repeatedly raised is that teachers need certification. Could we not solve our problems by directing students to a Christian school whose teacher training program is recognized by the government? The only Christian institution which offers a complete Christian teacher training program and whose graduates can be certified by the provincial authorities is Trinity Western University. However, although this school has much to offer, it consciously chooses for the evangelical way and makes no pretension to be Reformed. Although evangelical and Reformed have much in common, there are also critical areas of difference that cannot be lightly bypassed and those studying at an evangelical school should take careful note of them. One such area is how one views the place of children in the church. Such an issue is major and has a profound impact also on how we regard the education of the children in our schools.³ Thus, if we want to safeguard the *Reformed* character of our schools, pointing our future teachers to Trinity Western as the place to go would not appear to be advisable.

But, is being Reformed and are the confessions *really* that important? Absolutely!

The blessing of the Reformed faith and confessions

The Reformed faith is a tremendous gift of God. We fervently believe that it best reflects what the Lord our God is teaching us in Scripture. For that reason we also love our Reformed confessions as they summarize the biblical religion and understanding of God's revelation. These confessions are not simply ecclesiastical reference points, necessary for office bearers to subscribe to. No, these confessions belong to all church members and the more one studies them the more one realizes what a debt of gratitude we owe to God for equipping men to frame the truths in these documents.

These faithful summaries of biblical teaching, do they not influence in a basic way our life outlook and practice? Are they not also *personal* statements of *commitment*? Our confessions speak of "I believe" and "we believe"! This is for real. This is a critical and normative part of the total picture

of how we view life in its fullness. After all, the Reformed faith has something to say for all of life.

All this means that what we believe must be integrated into what we do and, therefore also, in how and what we teach. We may use our confessions as a basic frame of reference in developing our teaching insights and programs. The Teachers' College has been busy with curriculum development to that end and undoubtedly every serious teacher is busy with this as well. Integrating the Reformed faith into teaching lies at the heart of Reformed teaching. Without it, our Reformed day schools would lose their reason for existence.⁴ We must therefore continue to insist on teachers whose training enables them to think through in a Reformed manner the challenges and joys of teaching.

**The Reformed faith
is a tremendous
gift of God.**

When we as parents train up our children, do we not seek the best for them? Should we not also seek the best as we entrust them to teachers outside the home? Should the Reformed emphasis of a believing Reformed home not be continued in the school? Our elementary and secondary day schools are humanly speaking so very important concerning our future as Reformed confessors. These schools will enable our students to study as Reformed Christians and make a contribution for God's kingdom in all of life. The day schools are of great importance for transmitting the Reformed world and life view. But that means that these schools need to be safeguarded by insisting on the best teacher training available! The Lord blesses and judges according to the means available. We would be shirking our responsibilities to entrust the future of our schools to what secular universities have to offer in teachers' training, but this is basically the situation now in far too many cases. That's not good enough for Reformed schools built up and maintained at tremendous costs. We should seek the very best for them.

Let's move ahead

In a country as vast as Canada the danger of latent regionalism is very real, and this is also evident when discussing the Teachers' College. But, let the West not lose interest in the Teacher's Col-

lege but along with others continue to provide the ongoing and necessary input to enable it to meet the present challenges. We all have much at stake here when we consider the great importance of our schools and the implications of transmitting Reformed principles from generation to generation. Let us not allow short term pragmatism of simply filling vacancies to determine our agenda, but let us keep in mind the larger picture.

The Teachers' College is presently going through considerable self-examination and change. Now is the time to maximize on the future potential of this school by giving positive input and effecting change that will serve the schools well for years to come. Positive suggestions on issues such as correspondence courses and enhancing the progress of curriculum development would undoubtedly be well received.

But also the school boards should get together and make some hard decisions as to whom they will hire in the future and present a common front with at least some minimal Reformed requirements. The present situation of each board apparently being concerned for the immediate short term require-

ments at the possible cost of Reformed qualifications will eventually hurt the cause of Reformed education.

Last, but not least, let's also support and encourage our teachers. Their task is very difficult and critically important. They work with our children five days a week. Much instruction and direction are given in those hours! The teachers need our ongoing prayers and full support.

¹"The Future of Canadian Reformed Schools" (*Clarion* Feb 5, 1999) 50-51.

²*Clarion*, April 2, 1999, p. 156; March 19, 1999, p. 129.

³For the differences between evangelical and Reformed, cf. C. Van Dam, "Reformed or Evangelical?", *Clarion*, October 25, 1991, pp. 470-471 (incorrectly attributed to J. Geertsema. See *Clarion* Nov 8, 1991, p. 496) and the forthcoming publication of the Burlington Reformed Study Centre, *The Challenge of Being Reformed Today* (1999).

⁴See further, J.L. Van Popta, "The Need for a Confessional Basis for Our Children's Education", *Clarion*, June 30, 1995, pp. 300-304; B. Holwerda, "Christian Parents, Christian Schools", *Christian Renewal*, March 25, 1996, pp. 10-12 (originally published in Dutch in B. Holwerda, *De betekenis van verbond en kerk voor huwelijk, gezin en jeugd* [1958], 89-102). C



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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Advertisements: \$11.75 per column inch

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Agreement No. 1377531
Registration No. 1025
ISSN 0383-0438

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By John Louwerse

At Evening, Morning and Noon: Constantly Calling on the LORD

*But I call to God; and the Lord saves me.
Evening, morning and noon I call out in distress,
and He hears my voice. Psalm 55:16*

When the going gets tough, the tough get going! This is not, however, true for King David when he wrote Psalm 55. Reading Psalm 55, we do not get the impression of a tough David, an aggressive David! Rather, we get quite the opposite impression! King David is going nowhere on his own! He is crying out to God. He is calling out to God: "Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my supplication." David is in need. Someone must care for him. He must be answered. David is overcome by his trouble. He is distraught by the noise of the enemy. The oppression of the wicked is too much for him. David is experiencing real calamity!

As we read in verse 9b, David sees violence and strife in the city. Day and night people prowl about on the city walls. Malice and abuse are within the city. Destructive forces are at work in the city. Threats and lies never leave its streets. In the midst of this, a friend has stabbed King David in the back. Yes, a friend has been caught up in all this trouble and strife. That is why David is so distraught, so very troubled. If it had been an enemy who had insulted him, he could have borne it. If it had been an adversary who had dealt so nastily with him, he could have hid. "But it is you, my friend," as he says in verse 13. "But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship, as we walked with the throng at the house of God."

What kind of friend was this? He spoke so smoothly. His words, smoother than butter; yet there was war in his heart. His words, softer than oil; yet they were drawn swords. Just who this friend was we do not know for sure. Some say it was Ahithophel, one of David's close advisors, who turned on him in Absalom's rebellion. Nevertheless, King David experiences this calamity. And David is not so tough! It is too much for

him! This calamity overwhelms him. He would like to escape reality. As David says: "O that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest – I would flee far away and stay in the desert."

Some brave men may delight in facing such terrible calamity, but not David. And yet David *keeps* going. David does not *get* going. He *keeps* going with the Lord God. He testifies, "But I call upon God and the Lord will save me, evening and morning and at noon, I utter my complaint and moan and He will hear my voice" (55:16,17). David keeps going with the Lord God. He goes with the Lord God, in the evening, and the morning and at noon.

David has a practice of praying in the evening and the morning and at noon. David is established in his prayer life. He does not start praying only when calamity and trouble come upon him. No, he has a stable prayer life. There is a pattern in his prayer life. These are the times he speaks with God! These are the times when he converses with his Creator and Redeemer. These are the times when he asks for God's grace and Spirit, to sustain him, to keep him going. There is nothing haphazard about his prayer life. There is nothing irregular about it at all. In the evening and morning and at noon, David prays. David is not alone among the Old Testament saints in having a consistent prayer life. Daniel, who came later, was no different. Daniel went on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks (Daniel 6:10,11). Those who wanted to trap Daniel found him making prayer and supplication before his God!

David too, prayed in the evening and morning and at noon. He started his day with prayer. For the people of Israel, the new day began in the evening. So David's first prayer of the day was in the evening. The next prayer was the following morning; the last prayer for the day

was at noon. David began his day with prayer, continued his day in prayer, and ended his day in prayer. When calamity struck in David's life, he did not start praying. He continued praying, calling on the Lord. And the Lord heard. As David writes: and the Lord saves me. . . . He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me. And as David says near the end of the Psalm: cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you, He will never let you fall. Indeed the Lord God is faithful! He is sure and reliable! He will not forsake us, as those so close around us may do. He is the anchor in our lives! But do we ask Him for what He has promised? Do we ask for his grace and Spirit to sustain us as we go through life's storms and tempests?

Do we ask Him in the morning and in the evening and at noon? Are we constantly calling on God in prayer? Or do we call on God just in the tough and troubled and trying times! Constant prayer is very important as we lead our busy lives. For only by constantly asking God in prayer will we receive his grace and Spirit to sustain in all situations of life, be they good or bad.

Rev. John Louwerse is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Fergus, Ontario.



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Evangelicalism – Evangelical Beliefs and an Evaluation (Part 4)

By P. H. Holtvluwer

In the previous article we began to outline the four 'isms' which make up the core beliefs of Evangelicalism – conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism. This time the latter two will have our attention, after which I offer an over-all assessment of these Evangelical beliefs.

Once we have an understanding of what Evangelicalism consists of, we hope to examine current trends within this movement in the next article.

Biblicism

Biblicism can be defined as a sincere and earnest devotion to the Bible. The Bible is seen as the ultimate authority which can be appealed to for truth and instruction in the way of salvation. This emphasis too comes directly out of the Reformation, where the likes of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli all reproached the Roman church for placing the interpretation of tradition and the teaching office of the church all on either the same level or even above the authority of the Bible. Wesley at one point expressed a desire which reflected his love for the Bible: "Let me be *homo unius libri* (man of one book)."¹

This emphasis on the Bible became quite poignant in the years following the First World War. I mentioned the last time that in the early twentieth century Evangelicalism had gone into decline due to, among other things, Bible criticism which tended to erode people's faith in the Bible. After the First World War a group of fundamental Evangelicals became vocal and put forward a strong belief in the Bible, a belief in the literal interpretation of the Bible. This was in strong reaction to the powerful biblical criticism of the day. Since that time this emphasis on believing in the Bible and seeing it as the authority to appeal to has remained with Evangelicals, and you will find today that biblicism in this sense has become one of the leading hallmarks of the movement.

Evaluation of Biblicism

As Reformed people we can only appreciate Evangelicalism's strong appeal to the Bible as God's authoritative Word (Belg. Conf. Art. 5,7). The problem with biblicism however, is that it generally ignores the confessions of the church when it claims to believe in the Bible alone. Of course, the Reformed also hold to the great *sola scriptura*, but in doing so we bind ourselves to a faithful confession of what Scripture teaches in the ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity. When Evangelicals bypass the confessions of the church, including also the early ecumenical creeds, then they essentially turn their back on what the Lord has been doing in the history of the church. Creeds and

confessions have arisen in the history of the church to set down the correct doctrine of the Christian faith. This was often done in response to heresy and confusion within the church and so the confessions are part of the church's defence strategy. Confessions are there for the benefit of the church, to guide us in a correct understanding of the faith. Ignoring the Creeds and insisting on a rigorous Bible-only theology apart from those Creeds will only open the door for those ancient heresies which the church once refuted in the Creeds to resurface. Insisting on believing in the Bible only, apart from the confessions, will only force Evangelicals to re-invent the wheel, as it were, when it faces challenges to biblical truths. Either that or the lack of confessions will lead to a

What's inside?

Oops! I made a big mistake last time. I said that Pentecost happened forty days after Ascension Day. Hmm. . . . That should be "ten" days. Sorry about that.

We are happy to present you with a new issue of articles, opinions, news stories, and reviews. We hope you learn and enjoy.

In the editorial, Dr. Van Dam returns to the topic of Reformed education and the place of a Reformed Teachers' College.

Mr. Peter Holtvluwer continues to explore the Evangelical movement. In this installment, he continues to outline and evaluate Evangelicalism's core beliefs.

Watford Church moved a town or two over into Kerwood. They built a beautiful building. Mrs. Janssens tells us about the happy event.

Rockway Church recently had another good meeting with a neighbouring United Reformed Church. Mr. A. Siebring informs us in "The Courtship Continues" of what was said. The image of a "Courtship" is probably inappropriate to describe contacts between two congregations of different Reformed federations. After all, the church is the *bride* of Christ. However, we will not be picayune. With the brothers and sisters of Rockway and St. Catharines, we will express joy that they are growing closer together, and the hope that such happy developments unfold in other places too.

A recent press review generated some reader response. You'll find it in "Reader's Forum," together with a reply from Dr. De Jong.

Finally, we include a MERF news report. This time the focus is on the Church in the Sudan. May the Lord bless his people there as they are confronted by the powerful and often vicious force of Islam, and the gospel spread throughout the Middle East and Africa.

GvP

ready acceptance of old heresies, which indeed has been the case, for instance, in the Arminianism of John Wesley.

Let me be very clear on this point. I am not advocating a confessionism over against a biblicism, so that the confessions would override whatever Scripture says. The confessions remain human documents and thus fallible. However, it may also be said that the confessions are faithful summaries of what the Bible teaches. Simply put, the confessions mirror what Scripture itself teaches, and in that respect they ought to be cherished and worked with. If the confessions can be shown to be mistaken on a certain point then they should be changed. But if they remain as accurate and faithful summaries of biblical doctrines then they should be used to keep us faithful to Scripture. For the Evangelicals to throw the confessions overboard is only to risk drowning themselves in the muddy waters of heresy.

Simply put, the confessions mirror what Scripture itself teaches, and in that respect they ought to be cherished and worked with.

In addition, we have difficulty with Evangelicals in how they go about interpreting the Bible. Evangelicals are known for their great knowledge of many individual texts but at the same time they are often noted for their inability to see the unity in the Bible and how it all ties together. Quite often an undue stress is laid on the New Testament while the Old Testament is left in the shadows. Still, the fact that Evangelicals call the Bible God's authoritative word is something we can rejoice in.

Crucicentrism

Crucicentrism is "a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross."² For Evangelicals of all eras, "... the death of Christ is the central thing in the New Testament and in the Christian religion ..."³ The cross of Christ is the "fulcrum of a theological system"⁴ for Evangelicals, and to diminish this aspect is to misunderstand the movement. The idea of atonement runs strong in mainline Evangelicals. As an Evangelical once wrote, "... where there is no atonement there is no gospel."⁵ Christ's death was

Because Evangelicals do not have a fixed creed or confession, the different Evangelical organizations in the world will have differing sets of doctrines to which they give assent. Below is the statement of belief published by the World Evangelical Fellowship (in 1986) and since adopted by Regent College and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and serves as a "generic statement of Canadian Evangelicalism."⁸

1. The Holy Scriptures as originally given by God, divinely inspired, infallible, entirely trustworthy; and the only supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.
2. One God, eternally existent in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
3. Our Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His divine miracles, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His mediatorial work, and His personal return in power and glory.
4. The salvation of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith apart from works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit.
5. The Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the believer is enabled to live a holy life to witness and work for the Lord Jesus Christ.
6. The unity of the Spirit of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ.
7. The resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

viewed as a substitution for sinful mankind. "Human beings, they held, were so rebellious against God that a just penalty would have been death."⁶ Belief in and a cherishing of the death of Christ on the cross was the only way for sinful man to escape this penalty, and thus the cross of Christ became for the Evangelicals the focus of their conversion, the motivation for their activism, and the thing they highlighted in their biblicism.

While the cross remained the most important part of their theology, Evangelicals became divided over the issue whether all men would be saved or whether only the chosen ones would receive salvation. To put it in technical terms, will there be a general redemption of all men and an unlimited atonement, or will there be a particular and limited atonement? Many Evangelicals have compromised the Reformation doctrine and taken the Arminian approach of unlimited atonement, while there still are pockets of Calvinistic Evangelicals who believe in a limited atonement.

Evaluation of Crucicentrism

As Reformed believers we too place a high value on the cross of Christ. We are fond of saying that all the Scriptures point to Christ which makes Christ the focal point of the entire revelation. We also confess this in Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 6, Q/A 19. The problem with the Evangelical focus on this truth is that they do so to the detriment of many other significant doctrines in

the Bible. Since they shine the spotlight, as it were, on the one doctrine of the atoning sacrifice of Christ our Lord, many other doctrines fall into the shadows and are not perceived very clearly at all. While they are busy looking at the cross of Christ they largely ignore the church of Christ. While they have their eyes focussed on the saving work of Jesus Christ, they forget about the electing love of God the Father from before the foundation of the world. The doctrine of the atoning work of Christ must have a central place in our theology, but it must not block out the other doctrines which God has revealed to us.

As for unlimited atonement or limited atonement, the Canons of Dort are crystal clear on that point. The Bible presents us with the doctrine of election in no uncertain terms so that we must believe in a limited atonement (See also Belg. Conf. Art. 16).

Now that we have identified and explained the four 'isms' of Evangelicalism and offered some preliminary remarks on these beliefs, let me now proceed with an overall evaluation of Evangelicalism and its doctrines.

Matter of Over-Emphasis

One of the first impressions one gets of Evangelicalism concerning its doctrines is that for Evangelicals it is often a matter of emphasizing one doctrine above another. It is not the case, for the most part, that all Evangelicals believe only the four 'isms' which I have described, those and only those. Rather, Evangelicals will believe many

other things in addition to them (eg. Trinity, work of the Holy Spirit, sacraments) but what they do is to lay stress on what they would term the “key doctrines” of the Christian faith. They have narrowed down all the doctrines of Scripture and selected these four ‘isms’ as it were, to be the most important of all the scriptural doctrines. They place all the emphasis on *conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism* and their accompanying doctrines while they leave other scriptural doctrines in the background. The result of this is an imbalanced and incomplete picture of what the Christian faith should include. In this way, Evangelicalism is a misleading representation of the Christian faith.

We are therefore not free to emphasize certain doctrines over and above others to the detriment of other doctrines.

In the Great Commission in Matt 28:19-20, which I mentioned earlier, Jesus gave these instructions to His disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey *everything* I have commanded you.” We are therefore not free to emphasize certain doctrines over and above others to the detriment of other doctrines. We may not bring a bare-bones gospel to those we evangelize. Of course, we may begin with the elementary things of the gospel but we must not stop there. Think of Hebrews 6:1, “Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity. . . .” Thus the Evangelicals, while they have tried to fulfill the first half of the great commission, have fallen short in fulfilling the second half.

Prone to doctrinal change

I noted quite often in these last two articles that Evangelicals disagree on certain points of the four ‘isms,’ that there are wings or groups within the movement which believe certain things which others do not. I should also add to this that over the course of the history of the movement the nature of Evangelicalism has also changed and in fact continues to change depending on time and place. This is actually why it is so difficult to

get a handle on this movement because it is always in flux. For example, in the English Evangelical Revival in the eighteenth century as well as in nineteenth century America conversionism was highly stressed, whereas today in Canada biblicism receives more stress than conversionism. Some groups will stress activism more than biblicism, and the list can go on. The point is that Evangelicals are prone to doctrinal changes.

My criticism here is that Evangelicalism is prone to change because it has essentially ignored the constancy of the Reformed confessions. Evangelicalism was initially a reaction to the dead orthodoxy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and as is typical in reactionary movements, Evangelicals leaned over too far the other way and in so doing have only thrown out the baby with the bathwater. Indeed, a deadness had come upon many of the state churches, but it was not the fault of the confessions but of the failure of the clergy and the people to live up to the confessions. By rejecting the Reformed confessions and going back to “the Bible” (apart from the confessions), Evangelicals subjected themselves to every wind of doctrine that blows about. That is why very soon after the movement started Arminians found a place in its midst, and now in modern Canada it is to the point where Roman Catholics can even comfortably make up one-third of Evangelicals.⁷ Without a Reformed confession to guide them, to keep them to a faithful interpretation

of Scripture, the Evangelicals have been too easily influenced by multi-form doctrines which in essence seek to destroy a real Christian life.

Not truly biblical

Although Evangelicals pride themselves on a strong belief in the Bible, they yet fail to live up to many biblical doctrines. As mentioned earlier, many Evangelicals refuse to believe in God’s electing love or predestination. Many others also refuse to believe in original sin and man’s total depravity. They cannot accept the idea that man is totally and completely enslaved to sin and that if God had not given us the gift of faith in Jesus Christ no one could be saved.

Besides the Evangelical tendency to refuse to believe clear scriptural doctrines, many other doctrines end up becoming marginalized or even ignored altogether. Evangelicals, because of their stress on the individual and the conversion of the individual, tend to ignore the biblical concept of the people of God, the corporate body of Jesus Christ. They forget the Lord’s repeated promise, “I will be God to them and their descendants after them, and they will be my people” (Gen 17, *et al*). Our Lord Jesus is not just gathering together a loose collection of individuals but He is busy gathering together his church, the one body of Christ. Evangelicals tend to forget altogether about focussing on the local church and instead want to gather all individuals in the world into the invisible church.



But this is definitely not an idea found in Scripture. The Bible teaches us about one people of God, one church of Jesus Christ (John 10, 17) and this is the visible body of Christ. The local church is simply the local manifestation of the body of Christ. Our Belgic Confession clearly identifies the local church as the true church of Christ as distinguished from the false church. But Evangelicals have no concept of true and false church but instead are content to work with all like-minded Christians no matter what church they are from, thinking that they all belong to the so-called invisible church. They have a desire for unity but it cannot be said that they desire unity in the true faith, since they only hold to parts of the true faith, and not the whole of it. The Bible is God's Word, and God is one, and thus all the doctrines which God reveals in His Word must be adhered to. We are not free to pick and choose, for as Christ taught his disciples in the Great Commission, we must teach others to obey *all* that He has commanded us.

Robbed of the riches of God's Word

With only a very basic understanding of the central doctrines of the Bible, Evangelicals have robbed themselves of the riches of God's Word. The struggle for the assurance of salvation would have been much easier for British Evangelicals if only they had remembered the covenant which God has made with his people. While Evangelicalism indeed tends to turn the spotlight on the activity of man, that is, his response to the cross of Christ, it leaves in the shadows the activity of God. They fail to see his absolute sovereignty, his electing love, his preservation of the saints, his covenant with his people, all of which provide the believer with enormous guidance and comfort. Moreover, these very things, when perceived correctly, will also lead a believer into a

HELPFUL LITERATURE:

- 1) C. Bouwman, *Encounter With Evangelicals: For Better and For Worse* (Australia: The Una Sancta Foundation, 1993) (26 pages, available from your ILPB Representative)
Rev. Bouwman gives an introduction to and some historical background of Evangelicalism, especially as it came into Australia, but focuses largely on evaluating the movement itself. Helpful also is his discussion on how it has influenced the churches in Australia as well as the question and answer section included in Section Two of the booklet.
- 2) J. Visscher, "'Evangelical' and 'Reformed:' Synonyms, Antonyms, or Homonyms?" in *Clarion*, Vol 36, No.8,9 (April 17, May 8, 1987).
Rev. Visscher gives a succinct overview of the history of the movement and compares what it means to be an Evangelical with what it means to be Reformed. The positive section on what it means to be Reformed is particularly helpful.

life of thankfulness and holiness, which conforms more and more to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 12:1,2 *et al*). By consciously and deliberately turning away from the Reformed confessions, Evangelicals have only succeeded in devaluing their Christian faith.

**Evangelicalism
should serve as a
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Reformed not to lull
ourselves into a dull
and dead orthodoxy.**

The zeal for the Lord

While these are the weighty negative concerns of Evangelicalism, yet we would make a mistake in overlooking the positive factors of this movement. Evangelicalism should serve as a reminder to us Reformed not to lull ourselves into a dull and dead orthodoxy, as was the case in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. We should be spurred on by their activism to greater acts of service to God of our own. We

should turn our own magnifying glass upon ourselves, to see if we are living in conformity with both God's Word and the confessions. Does the vitality of Christian life, that burning zeal for God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit live within us as it seems to live within them? Is our devotion to God in line with what we profess of it in the confessions? Are we using and working with Scripture and the confessions as we ought? The Evangelicals have gone awry in many things, but they have this in their favour, that they live and show an earnest and strong desire for Christ and the Christian life, a fact which should provoke us to "never be lacking in zeal, but keep [our] spiritual fervour, serving the Lord" (Rom 12:12).

Mr. P.H. Holtvluwer is in his final year of studies at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton.

¹David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989) p.12.

²Ibid, p.3.

³James Denney, *The Death of Christ*. [1902] Edited by R.V.G. Tasker. (London: The Tynedale Press, 1951) p.156.

⁴Bebbington, p.15.

⁵Denney, p.157.

⁶Bebbington, p.15.

⁷This is according to G.A. Rawlyk's statistical survey in *Is Jesus Your Personal Saviour? In Search of Canadian Evangelicalism in the 1990s* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996) p.118.

⁸John Stackhouse, "More Than a Hyphen: Twentieth-Century Canadian Evangelicalism in Anglo-American Context," in George Rawlyk & Mark A. Noll, eds. *Amazing Grace*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994) p.379. NB. Whatever is enclosed in square brackets is my addition.



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Growing in Grace

On April 16th and 17th, 1999, a great milestone was reached for Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Kerwood (formerly Watford). The official opening of our new church building could take place. After years of planning and hard work, combined with many frustrations and setbacks, the building is now completed. The congregation embarked on this project in good harmony. It was a great blessing to see this combined effort come to completion.

On Friday evening the congregation and invited guests came together in large numbers. Brother John Boeringa was the MC. He read 2 Peter 1:1-11, and led in prayer. Our pastor and teacher, Rev. J. VanWoudenberg delivered a pastoral address based on 2 Peter 3:18. What follows is a summary.

About five years ago, the words of this text "Growing in Grace", were chosen for our building project. In the past few years we had experienced growth; hence, it became necessary to have larger facilities. The word "Grace" is derived from the name of our church, Grace Canadian Reformed Church. Our prayer was that this project would turn out to be a blessing for the congregation. Our prayers were answered – we now have a building much more suitable for all kinds of church activities.

The words "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" are engraved into the cornerstone. They are not only a statement, but also an exhortation from God towards us. Peter does not only speak of growing in grace, but also in knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Pay attention to the Word of God, and in that way you grow in knowledge, and also in grace, from which flows forth all the attributes of the Christian life. Let us as congregation resolve to use this new church building as we ought, hearing the exhortation of our God.



The new church building of the Canadian Reformed Church of Kerwood, Ontario.



The auditorium

Each time we walk past the cornerstone, entering or leaving the building, let us be reminded of the exhortation and be assured of God's continual blessing – until the great day of the fullness of God's grace.

After the address, the choir sang a number of songs, with the audience joining in from time to time, praising and glorifying the Lord for his rich blessings. Various societies, from the Kids Club to the Evergreen (Seniors) Club made presentations. A slide show and a video show-

ing the progress of the building project from start to finish was enjoyed by all.

Congratulatory remarks were offered by delegates of various neighbouring Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches. Congratulatory letters from other sister churches were read. As well, letters were received and read from our former ministers: the Rev. Messrs. W. Huizinga, P.K.A. DeBoer, M.H. VanLuik and D. Moes. A phone call was relayed from Dr. J. De Jong, and a fax from Br. and Sr. S. Schoon, of Assen, the Netherlands,

who were instrumental in obtaining Dutch funds for our building project.

This beautiful and festive evening was closed with the singing of Hymn 64 and thanksgiving to God. A social hour was then enjoyed.

The next day, Saturday, was set aside for the official ribbon cutting ceremony and unveiling of the cornerstone. The surrounding community was invited for this occasion, as were the local government officials. A symbolic

key was presented to our minister by the chairman of the building committee, John Janssens. Local representatives of the federal and provincial government spoke words of congratulation, and presented us with a Canadian and a Provincial flag. Some more words of appreciation and thanks were spoken for all the work that was done. The afternoon was closed in a Christian manner, after which we sang the National Anthem.

Everyone then went outside for the unveiling of the cornerstone. Sr. E. Boersema, our senior member, had the honour of performing this task. Back inside a beautiful cake made in the shape of the church building was shared by all.

It was a weekend of joy and thanksgiving for the congregation of Kerwood. To God be all the praise!

Mrs. Alie Janssens



Chairman of the building committee, John Janssens, presents the key to Rev. J. VanWoudenberg.



Mrs. E. Boersema, oldest member of the congregation unveiled the cornerstone. Right – Rev. John VanWoudenberg



The children of the Kid's Club singing.



The Courtship Continues

By Al Siebring

"There is no fundamental difference, either doctrinally or confessionally, between the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches." Those words might have been provocative a few years ago, but they were received with no dissent from either side in a recent joint meeting of Canadian Reformed and United Reformed congregations in Ontario's Niagara Peninsula. The meeting, held April 23rd in the Trinity Orthodox Reformed Church in St. Catharines, was a continuation of informal discussions begun several years ago between the Rockway Canadian Reformed Church and the Immanuel Orthodox Reformed Church (URC), both based in the St. Catharines area. More than 130 people, an equal mix from both congregations, attended the meeting.

The evening was also a follow-up to a similar get-together held almost a year ago in Wellandport, Ontario, in which two "elder statesmen" of the two federations traced the respective histories of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches, and urged closer cooperation between the two federations. At that initial meeting, sponsored by the Rockway congregation, Professors J. Faber and P.Y. DeJong urged the two local churches to continue a path they likened to a "courtship" – a period of getting to know one another better on a local level (please see *Clarion*, Feb. 19, Mar. 5, 19, 1999).

At the most recent meeting, also sponsored by the Rockway consistory, Rev. John Bouwers of the Immanuel Church presented a discussion paper on the "Doctrine of the Church".* Rockway's Rev. G. Wieske chaired the evening, and he began by saying "it's time to demolish the caricatures and misconceptions" the two groups have about one another.

Rev. Bouwers is part of a committee of Synodical Deputies appointed by the (General) Synods of both federations to explore possible church union, and the paper was initially written for that committee. Based in large measure on Articles 27, 28, and 29 of the Belgic Confession, the paper focussed on the

identity, visibility, unity and activity of the church throughout the ages. The church, Bouwers said, is composed of the "recipients of God's covenant promises" who throughout history have been united in their confession of Christ. While universal in nature, that universality must be seen in balance with the visibility of local churches. As part of that balance, Bouwers warned against too strong an emphasis on the "Church Universal" while ignoring local churches. That, he said, would leave a "nebulous reality". At the same time, he warned against federative or local church exclusivism – the idea that a particular church or federation could consider itself Christ's "one true church". That, he said, "goes back to the error of pre-Reformation Rome. Just because we may consider ourselves a true church of Christ doesn't mean that you cannot (also) be (a true church)."

However, Bouwers said, ecclesiastical developments in this century have led to a situation where the church "does manifest a certain pluriformity of existence" where faithful local churches, in close physical proximity to one another, don't formally recognize one another or have ecclesiastical fellowship together." This ought not to be," said Bouwers. "It is sin."

But any move toward unity, either locally or federatively, "must be based in the truth of God's Word, and nothing less", said Bouwers. He suggested the two federations can readily recognize one another as displaying the marks of the church, (the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and church discipline), and "we who hold to the same confessions need to be one for the sake of our witness to the world." The activity of the church, said Bouwers, must be "central to what we call 'kingdom work'. And working toward church unity is part of this – it's not just a matter of 'gezelligheid' (a Dutch word akin to 'coziness'), – it is seeking to be faithful to our calling."

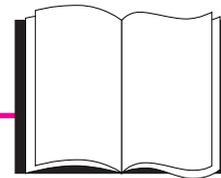
In a question period following the presentation, some members of the audience wondered out loud what the

differences were between the two federations. Bouwers responded that "there is no fundamental difference, either doctrinally or confessionally, between the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches". However, he conceded there were differences of practice between the two federations, and even within local churches of each group. These matters of local and federative practice are still under review as part of the ongoing discussions among the Synodical Deputies.

There were hints at the meeting that the two local churches might not wait for Synodical approval before engaging in more extensive local contact. One practical impediment to local unity looms large, especially in the Southern Ontario context. In the early 1990s, the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church and Rehoboth URC (then still an "independent CRC"), both in Hamilton, agreed to pulpit exchanges and full local recognition of one another. But there is nothing in the Canadian Reformed Church Order allowing local churches to take that kind of step, and Classis Ontario South (Canadian Reformed) ruled that the "statement of recognition" could not be realized. Rev. Wieske is hoping that won't happen this time, since it would effectively prevent the relationship from moving beyond the "courtship" stage to something more substantial. He said his council might have to "bite the bullet" on the issue of local relations. "Admittedly, there is no provision in our Church Order for the kind of relations we're envisioning (with Immanuel)", said Rev. Wieske, "but we would look to the Lord and hope that He would provide the means for us to express our unity locally".

At the close of the meeting, about 70 people from both congregations continued their "get acquainted" session with a time of coffee fellowship, a practice one elder from Immanuel called "at least as important as the formal meeting itself."

* This will be published in a forthcoming *Clarion*. 



INTRODUCING NEW HYMNS

I believe that our *Book of Praise* is inadequate for a church which professes to seek unity, so it is with great interest that I read Dr. De Jong's "Hymns in Dispute". The Canadian and American Reformed Churches have been in North America for close to fifty years now, yet we share very few hymns with other Christians on the continent. Because of important doctrinal differences, we cannot join federally with these Christians. Yet we have the same Lord and Saviour. One way to show at least some unity is to sing some of the same psalms and hymns.

Therefore, like our brothers and sisters in the Netherlands we too, should look at adding psalms and hymns to our *Book of Praise*. Unfortunately, any such changes take years in our system of church government, as illustrated by the confusion in the Dutch Churches. Which begs the question, "Is there not a better way to introduce new psalms and hymns in our worship services?"

When I was in elementary school, our teacher drilled us in the proper method of church government. We were told that Christ is the head of the church, then the local consistory, then classis, and finally the Regional and General Synods. We were told that if the General Synod dictated what to do in the local congregations, this would be hierarchical. In other words, change must start at the grassroots level. Now I understand that as a federation we have decided to do things in a similar way, and for this reason we have adopted a Church Order which can only be changed at the General Synod. But what if something is not prescribed in the church order? Isn't the local consistory free to do it their own way? After all, there are two ways we can lose our freedom in Christ. The first is for a General Synod to dictate a certain practice or teaching to the local congregations such as was done in 1944. The second is to restrict certain practices or teach-

ings which do not go against Scripture and the Confessions.

So if local churches are free to adopt changes as long as they don't go against the church order, shouldn't any local church which wishes to sing additional psalms and hymns be free to do so? After all, while our Church Order in Article 55 states that we must sing the psalms and hymns from the *Book of Praise*, it nowhere states that we are limited to only the *Book of Praise*. Someone may say that it has always been understood to mean only the *Book of Praise*. However, we cannot go by what is understood, or by what was intended, but must go by what it says. Otherwise it's open to anyone's idea of what was understood or intended. If local churches would adopt additional songs and continue to sing songs from the *Book of Praise*, they would not be out of order. On the contrary, they would introduce in an orderly way additional songs into our *Book of Praise*, since certain songs would show themselves to be praiseworthy and would likely be sung in several congregations. It would then be a simple step for Synod to include them into new editions of the *Book of Praise*. It would seem that this would be a much more orderly way of introducing additional songs than the confusion they are experiencing in the Dutch churches. We should be willing to learn from the mistakes of others.

Fritz Douma
Abbotsford, BC

PSALMS ONLY!

The article "Hymns in Dispute" in a recent *Clarion* underscored the fact that hymnody in the Reformed church needs to be seriously addressed. The situation in the Dutch churches illustrates how hymnody is, so to speak, an "open canon." If you have ten hymns then why not a hundred? Is not subjectivism in the church a clear and present danger?

Dr. De Jong seems to be of the opinion that it is our task carefully to incor-

porate more hymns. But what is the scriptural basis for doing this? The church must have clear biblical grounds for singing uninspired (unspiritual) songs in the worship service. It is imperative that we be absolutely certain of God's approval for this practice (Deut 12:8, 32).

It is known that the hymns mentioned in the New Testament are not what we call hymns today. Apparently they were selections from the Book of Psalms. For example, the Lord's Supper hymn (Mark 14:26) was Psalm 115-118 the traditional close of the Passover meal. John Calvin in his *Institutes* (III.XX.32) quotes Augustine regarding the practice at Carthage "of singing hymns from the Book of Psalms." The Greek Bible known by Paul had classified the 150 Psalms as Psalms, hymns and songs (Eph 5:19) It seems likely that Paul was encouraging the use of the entire Psalm book for the praising of God and for instruction of the godly (Col 3:16).

Do we regularly sing all 150 Psalms authorized by Christ Himself (Luke 24:44)? Some Psalms are rarely sung which may be partly due to the almost un-singable melodies they are set to. But even more significant is that for every hymn sung in the service, one less Psalm is sung. Therefore the space left for Psalms in the service tend to be for the most popular ones. Therefore it makes sense to use only the most well-sung melodies for all the Psalms. Better still, we should consider the experts in English Psalm singing which happens to be our sister church, the Free Church of Scotland. They have developed an extremely practical metrical system to Psalm singing.

Now that there is a pause in the adoption of more hymns, this is an ideal time to restudy the practice of using man-made hymns in the reformed worship service.

Rick Duker,
Edmonton, Alberta

A NOTE ON HYMNS : RESPONSE to brothers Douma and Duker

By J. De Jong

At the request of the editor who wanted some interaction on the issues raised in *Reader's Forum* I may offer a brief response to the contributions of the brothers Douma and Duker. I cannot deal with all points raised in them, but wish to bring forward the following:

Br. Douma begins by asserting his belief that the Book of Praise is inadequate for a church professing to seek unity. I should like to know why such a position is taken, since I do not think we have anything in the book of which we need to be ashamed. I say this not just to commend the many hours of labour that the compilers and versifiers have put into this book, but more especially because the collection of both psalms and hymns gives a good representative picture of what a *Reformed* psalter looks like. Its chief mark is a visible and conscious alignment with the *early church*. Indeed, one might argue that in our adopted psalm melodies we have links even to the church of the Old Testament and its songs of worship.¹

It has never been the aim of the Reformed churches in Canada to share as many hymns as possible with other Christians on our continent. In fact, in rejecting the idea of an eclectic hymnal I was arguing against precisely that sort of criterion being applied to the composition of a hymnal. Rather, as I see it, if and when the hymn project of our churches is continued, then we need to opt for the same principle that has guided the committee up till now, namely, a close adherence to the texts of Scripture, and conscious alignment with the faithful and Scripturally acceptable hymns of the early church.²

As for the question of church polity raised by brother Douma, he would do well to remember that our forebears were not only watchful of the danger of hierarchy, by which the government of the churches would end up in the hands of one or a few people. They were as equally afraid of the danger of independentism, by which each church would go its own way, and implement its own wishes and desires with regard to order and liturgy irrespective of what the rest of the churches with which they were aligned were doing. Such a loose collection of churches, with a wide margin of liturgical freedom for the local church is more characteristic of the Presbyterian than the Reformed system of church government. The Reformed churches in the continental tradition have always sought to maintain a high degree of uniformity in public worship because worship not only is governed by Scriptural principles, but is a key factor identifying the character and creedal position of the churches. In order to practise a living and vibrant unity we should seek to maintain that as far as the use of the church book is concerned, the liturgy is a matter of the churches in common. Uniformity in liturgy is a barometer of our identity and cohesiveness as a federation of distinctly Reformed churches, and as such, that uniformity is worth maintaining as long as it does not degenerate into meaningless rituals and formalistic exercises from which many church members become estranged. The church officers have an important role here in training and guiding the flock.

Br. Douma's reading of Art 55 CO offers a novel twist to the article which, I admit, never entered my mind. And I'm quite sure that not one of our standard commentators would have dared to posit such a view. We should indeed

go by "what it says" but that clearly implies not taking it as a license to none the less introduce all kinds of other hymns alongside those adopted by a general synod. Let's try to avoid the situation where every church can do what is right in its own eyes. That's precisely why we have agreed to bind ourselves to the provisions of a church order!

This does not mean that we cannot sing any other songs than those in the Book of Praise in other contexts. Our Christian freedom allows us both to listen to and to sing different songs, including those which we share in common with other Christians. Scripture calls us to meditate on that which is lovely and pure, Philippians 4:4. But a central rule is: is the song Scriptural and does it accurately and completely reflect Scriptural truth? And if we contemplate making additions to the hymn section of our church book, more criteria come into play.

Br. Duker takes us down another pathway which I'm afraid will also lead to odd entanglements. He suggests that my opinion is that we should carefully incorporate more hymns. But that was not really the point of my article. I can accept the decision made on this by our last synod (which I referred to in my article), but simply wanted to bring out that I do not think our brothers in Holland can be faulted for embarking on such a project. Do not forget that the 1981 hymn section of the *Gereformeerde Kerkboek* had 36 hymns compared to our 65. So there was some justification for the churches in Holland to look at this matter, and conceivably our own hymnal could have played a role both in igniting this project and in providing some ideas for the selection process.

Why does Brother Duker label our hymns as "un-inspired" (with the added qualifier "unspiritual" and "man-made"), and all this in distinction from our psalms? If one recalls the guidelines for the selection of hymns which our synods have articulated, there is no justification for these epithets. Following these guidelines the compilers have for the most part concentrated on setting distinct passages of Scripture to music. In that sense, our hymns are no less man-made than our psalms, especially if you recall that also the rhyming of the psalms involves the work of versifiers who have had to select and craft their lines from what in most cases are longer, more elaborate pieces of scriptural poetry.

The use of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 to defend a position of exclusive psalmody is a matter that requires more discussion than I have space for here. Let me only say that these texts should and cannot be used as a basis for a *binding* statement on such an issue. The words "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" are open to varying interpretations, and cannot be strictly taken as a reference to the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament.³ It would contravene the rule of freedom of exegesis to bind oneself to a particular practice strictly on the basis of these two references in the New Testament to psalmody in public worship. After all, the worship of the New Testament is one of maturity and freedom. Paul warns that we have been called to freedom, and should not return to a yoke of slavery (Gal 5:1).

I cannot comment on what Br. Duker called the "extremely practical metrical system of psalm singing" as found in the Free Church of Scotland, except to say that such a remark does beg the question as to what criterion he is applying in setting the psalms to metre.⁴ Perhaps even more questionable is the (rather unfounded) assertion that a selection of the songs in the Book of Praise are "almost un-singable melodies" (sic). What we have discovered in our

home is that, with the help of a recorder and a couple of voices more talented than mine, a melody which at first appears almost “unsingable” (sic) is sung quite well after you have gone through it a number of times.⁵ I would suggest that we don’t give up on learning to sing the psalms, but try to ‘get into’ them, and this all the more when you realize that with our psalter the church today seeks integral and organic alignment with its *deepest roots*. The more one does so, in my view of things, the less one will complain how difficult the tunes are to sing. After all, should not the church of the *evening hour* remember the songs sung at its cradle? Should not the church that has spread far to the *west* remember its hour of birth in the *east*?

¹As far as the melodies are concerned, musicologists point to the typically *eastern* flavour and roots of the Genevan tunes.

²The principle adopted by our churches is found in the *Acts of Synod Orangeville 1968*, Art. 87, p.30 and *Acts Synod Toronto, 1974*, Art. 159, p. 63. In my view, hymns clearly reflecting the *doctrine* of Scripture could be used in public worship as well. For example, the ancient Prudentius hymn “Of the Father’s Love Begotten” (4th Century) is said by the evangelical church historian Mark Noll to express “in lyric form what the ecclesiastical councils ham-

mered out in doctrinal propositions: Jesus is fully divine, coequal with the Father (harking back to the Nicene Creed), and fully human, being born as a baby (anticipating the Chalcedonian Definition),” cf. Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points. Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, (Grand Rapids: Baker 1997) 65. The hymn appeared on the inside cover of the year- end edition of *Clarion* in 1997.

³See for example E. K. Simpson’s commentary on Ephesians, where, on chapter 5:19, he says: “The first title suggests the Davidic psalter, the second effusions of praise, the third hymns of a general description, confined only by the epithet *pneumatikais* to a devotional sphere.” This leads him to state: “. . . let their exultation of soul give birth to thanksgivings and the voice of melody couched in the language of the Hebrew Psalter, or in canticles and lyrics resonant with spiritual joy.” cf E.K. Simpson and F.F. Bruce, *The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians*, [NICNT] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977): 125. While Simpson highlights a certain priority on the Hebrew Psalter (which ought to be maintained) he does not limit the meaning of the text to only the songs of that psalter.

⁴See in this connection the remarks made by br Dennis Teitsma in the April issue of *Reformed Perspective*, page 4.

⁵Our children have been taught at school to sing their assigned songs at a *brisk tempo*, removing unnecessarily long rests which break up the meaning of the sentences. A rule we can recommend!



Go Forth, My Heart!

Go forth, my heart, and seek for praise,
On these delightful summer days,
In what thy God bestows!
How rich the garden’s beauties be,
How lavishly for me and thee
It doth its charms disclose!

The forest stands in leafy pride,
The earth is veiled on every side
With garb of freshest green;
The tulip and narcissus here
More wondrous in their pomp appear
Than Solomon was seen.

The lark floats high before the breeze,
The dove toward the forest-trees
From covert speeds along;
The song-enriched nightingale,
In ecstasy, fills hill and dale
And mount and plain with song.

The hen her tiny flock enfolds,
The stork his dwelling builds and holds,
The swallow feeds her brood;
The lightsome stag, the bounding roe,
Skipping from upland refuge, go
To depths of grassy food.

The brawling brook adown the plain
Lines its fair margin fresh again
With myrtle-shadows deep;
The meadows green relieve the eye,
And echo with the glad cry
Of shepherds and their sheep.

The never-weary tribe of bees
Now here, now there, in blossoming trees
Find booty far and near;
The sturdy juices of the vine
For sweetness and for strength combine
The pilgrim’s toil to cheer.

The wheat lifts rank its ears of gold
To fill with joy both young and old,
Who learn the name to praise
Of him who doth incessant pour
From heavenly love a matchless store
Upon our sinful race.

And shall I, can I, dumb remain?
No, every power shall sing again
To God, who loves us best.
Come, let me sing! All nature sings,
And all within me tribute brings
Streaming from out my breast.

Methinks, if here thou art so fair,
And sufferest a love so rare
To poor earth’s sons be given,
What gladness shall hereafter rise
In rich pavilion of the skies,
And golden tower of heaven!

What lofty pleasure, glory bright,
In Jesus’ garden shall delight!
How shall the chorus ring,
When thousand thousand seraphim
With one consenting voice and hymn
Their Alleluia sing!

Oh, were I there! Oh that, thine own,
I stood, dear God, before thy throne,
Bearing the victor’s palm!
There would I like the angel-choir
Still sound thy worthy praises higher,
With many a glorious psalm.

But while I bear life’s burden still,
With cheerful mind and voice I will
No longer hide thy grace.
My heart shall ever more and more
Thy goodness and thy love adore
Here and in every place.

Help now, and on my spirit pour
Thy heavenly blessing evermore,
That, like a flower, to thee
I may, through summer of thy grace,
In my soul’s garden all my days
The holy fruitage bear.

Choose me to bloom in Paradise,
And, till in death I close my eyes,
Let soul and body thrive;
Being to thee and to thy praise,
To thee alone, my life-long days,
In earth and heaven, alive.

Paul Gerhardt, 1651.
Translated from the German
by James Waddell Alexander,
D.D., 1849

Middle East Reformed Fellowship

NEWS from MERF-Canada

“Dalilu el-Hayyat” MERF’s new additional weekly broadcast

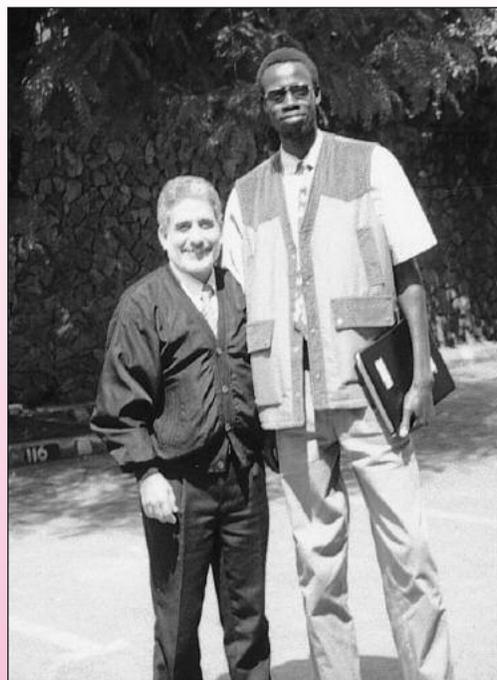
“Dalilu el-Hayyat,” the title of the new series of Gospel broadcasts, means “The Guide of Life”. It is composed of readings from Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and other Old Testament poetry and prose on different subjects. The concept of the series is to provide New Testament meaning and fulfillment for Old Testament poetic and other literary passages. Due to the fact that Arabic and Hebrew are sister Semitic languages, the Arabic translation of the Old Testament preserves the literary nature of the original Hebrew text.

“Dalilu el-Hayyat” emphasizes not just the Semitic literary beauty of Scriptures but also their abiding redemptive historical depth as they focus on God’s eternal plan of salvation. MERF’s broadcasting team is very encouraged by the listeners’ response to the new series. F.H., of northern Lebanon writes: “I have been refreshed in mind and spirit by the hearing of God’s word of life. . . . I ask that you kindly mail to me the text of each one of these broadcasts. . . .”

99th study term at JCC

During the second half of January, John Calvin Centre in Larnaca hosted MERF’s 99th study term in the Augustine Program of biblical training. The trainees were pastors from Syria, Egypt and Sudan. Rev. Ian McClean of Ireland served as the term’s guest instructor. He lectured on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church and also on the Reformed perspective on soteriology. Dr. Istafanous, MERF’s Chairman, lectured on the importance and relevance of confessional teaching in the Church. Rev. Victor Atallah, MERF’s General Director, lectured on the redemptive historical nature of Sabbath-keeping and the administration of the sacraments in the Church.

Rev. Atallah with one of the instructors of the first mobile team for training evangelists in Southern Sudan.



The study term was characterized by lively interaction between the guest trainees and the instructors with in-depth discussions. The program was closed with a workshop by Rev. Atallah on the responsibility of pastors in actively promoting evangelistic zeal in the congregation and in training gifted church members for the task of one-to-one evangelism. Rev. Hany Aziz, pastor of the Shubra-Sharqiya congregation, speaking on behalf of the participating trainees at the closing program, said: “We are all grateful for the refreshing experience we have enjoyed through this period. We have been energized not just by the biblical and theological instruction we have received but also by the fellowship we enjoyed. We return to our churches and different ministries with renewed vision and zeal in the work of the Lord.”

Training Sudanese evangelists

The first team of trainers for evangelists in South Sudan have started their work in four areas: Nasir, Akobo, Torit and Ayod. The team is composed of one minister and an elder trained as a teacher. About 85 young men have been enrolled in all four areas to short seminars on the foundational basis of the Christian faith. Another team composed of three theologically trained young men – Abram Makith, Palino Shoul and Tut Mai – have been appointed for service as trainees in South Sudan. They will receive special training in Cairo, Larnaca and Nairobi to prepare for the task of training lay evangelists in central Sudan.

In the meantime, MERF’s local Committee in Northern Sudan has appointed two more theologically trained young men to provide elder and deacon training for the growing



Sudanese refugees filling containers with water.

number of congregations in the areas under government control in East Sudan. MERF's local Committee in SPLA "liberated" areas has also brought to the fore the biblical training needs of the growing Reformed community among the Nuer in Western Ethiopia, which is estimated to number more than 850,000 people. Almost all of the pastors there have received no formal theological training. Moreover, more than 300 evangelists actively working among their own people in Western Ethiopia have received no biblical or theological training whatsoever. Unlike their Sudanese brethren, most of these evangelists and some of the lay pastors are also illiterate.

Abram Makith, speaking about his training mission in south Sudan says: "I was encouraged to attend a USA seminary for higher theological training. An American friend was making final arrangements for my financial package. In my heart I did not feel good about the whole affair. My conscience pricked me about those plans every time I thought of my family and my people whom I have not seen for over six years. Now I have much peace and I am content that the training I have received is more than sufficient for the needs of the churches in our suffering nation."

Fanatic Islamic leader angered by the Gospel's impact in Sudan

Dr. Hassan Turabi is the most powerful figure among the leadership of the Northern Sudanese government.

He masterminded the Islamic dominated military coup d'état which brought to power the present regime. El-Sadek El-Mahdy, his brother in-law, served as prime minister of Sudan prior to the coup d'état. El-Mahdy escaped house arrest and joined the leadership of secularist opposition in neighboring countries. He describes Turabi as "a ruthless power hungry Islamic ideologue." Turabi's own words confirm that.

In a news conference with the international media at the end of March, Turabi lashed out at "those enemies of Islam who are hampering the purifica-

tion of the nation from infidelity and religious ignorance." He went on to accuse outside forces of encouraging the spread of Christianity, especially among African Sudanese. He added: "A major portion of the tribal leadership of these people have sold their people out to a religion which will keep them in ignorance, darkness, slavery and misery. . . . Had they accepted our offer to embrace God's only true religion (Islam), their people would have been far better off now and the nation would have become unified and prosperous. Only Islam could do away with the all the problems of the African nations. Most of these problems exist because of the importation of Christianity into Africa."

Dr. Turabi admitted not only that African Sudanese have increasingly opted for Christianity, but also that defections from Islam are occurring in both the South and North of Sudan. He claimed, however, that in time his Islamic movement would succeed in reversing the situation.

Continued need in the Sudan

Please keep the Church in the Sudan in your prayers. While adherence to "Christianity" is on the increase in the country, much work is needed in the years to come to give sufficient biblical instruction to those identified as Christian within the Reformed churches. Also, continue to pray for MERF's efforts to provide regular diaconal aid to the needy Southern Sudanese brethren. Even though Sudan is



The choir of the Nuer tribe congregation in their Refugee camp in Northern Kenya.

The chairman of MERF, Dr. Istafanous, and his wife beside the meeting place of the Nuer congregation.



not much in the international news these days, the economic needs of the brethren there are still tremendous.

MERF-Canada's contribution for 1998

As can be seen from the accompanying graph, contributions increased dramatically during this past year. Our total income in 1998 was \$281,207.36. \$142,704 was received from churches, \$63,113 from individuals, \$18,000 from businesses and organizations and \$57,369 from the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund.

During this past year MERF-Canada sent \$94,000 to MERF in Cyprus to assist with the costs of radio broadcasting and biblical training; \$174,375 was

designated to help relieve the suffering in the Sudan.

MERF-Canada is extremely grateful for your continuing and generous support.

Thank you very much

We will end this newsletter by quoting from a letter we received recently from MERF in Cyprus.

Dear Friends,

Enclosed are two receipts for the funds you sent for biblical training, radio broadcasting and relief of the suffering in the Sudan. We thank you very much on behalf of all who are being blessed by your support.

MERF is very involved in supporting the Reformed community across the vast, war torn country of the Sudan. The

Fellowship has three local Sudanese committees – one in the north and east of the country, another in the center and west and a third in the area outside government control in southeast Sudan.

Please continue to pray for Sudanese Reformed people who seem to know much of the Lord's blessing despite the pressures and deprivation they face. MERF supports with funds like yours families which have food, medical and shelter needs through the local MERF Committees which operate under the oversight of local church bodies.

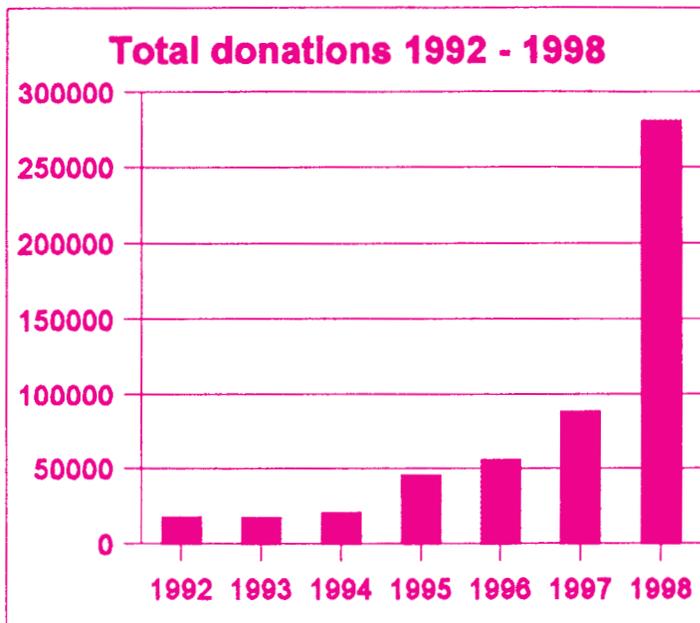
At present MERF also supports 111 pastors and lay evangelists throughout the Sudan. But the Reformed communities in the Sudan, which number approximately 1.8 million people, desperately need trained spiritual leaders. We and they appreciate your continued prayers and support for the efforts under way to meet some of those needs which will probably require many years of hard work to insure that the churches have enough biblical instruction to secure them in the Reformed faith.

May the Lord richly reward you for your practical expression of love to these brethren.

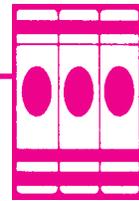
*Sincerely in Christ,
Mrs. Lisa Atallah*

If you would like to make a personal donation please make your cheque payable to MERF-Canada and send it to:
MERF-Canada
1225 Highway 5, R.R. #1
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

Yours in His service,
Rev. J. Mulder, chairman
Mrs. J. Van Dam, secretary



Reviewed by G. Nederveen



Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide, revised edition 1988.
Gary R. Collins. Word Publishing (ISBN 0-8499-3124-X) paperback; \$32.00 CDN

Dr. Gary R. Collins is a licensed psychologist with a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Purdue University. He has published numerous scientific and popular articles. Dr. Collins was chairman of the division of counselling and professor of psychology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

This is indeed a comprehensive counselling handbook of 771 pages. Its usefulness lies in the fact that the author uses simple language that any lay person in the area of counselling can readily understand. Dr. Collins treats a wide range of topics. Each chapter begins with a case history and introduction followed by a consideration of what the Bible says about the problem. This leads to a survey of causes, effects, counselling considerations, and suggested ways to prevent the problem. Many Scripture references are found in the footnotes, a real help for all office bearers.

A division of the contents is as follows:

- Part 1 **Introductory Issues:** The church and counselling; The counsellor and counselling; The core of counselling; The community and counselling; The crises in counselling.
- Part 2 **Personal Issues:** Anxiety, Loneliness; Depression; Anger; Guilt.
- Part 3 **Developmental Issues:** Child rearing and parental guidance; Adolescence; Young adulthood; Middle Age; The later years.
- Part 4 **Interpersonal Issues:** Interpersonal relationships; Sex apart from marriage; Sex within

marriage; Homosexuality; Violence and abuse.

- Part 5 **Identity Issues:** Inferiority and self-esteem; Physical illness; Grief; Singleness; Choosing a marriage partner.
- Part 6 **Family Issues:** Premarital counselling; Marital problems; Pregnancy Issues; Family problems; Divorce and remarriage.
- Part 7 **Other Issues:** Mental disorder; Alcoholism; Addictions; Financial counselling; Vocational counselling.
- Part 8 **Concluding Issues:** Spiritual issues; Other problems; Counselling and counsellor.

This excellent book is highly recommended as a resource manual. Every church library should have a copy, and each office bearer is well served to have a personal copy.

Confess Your Faith! Andrew J. Pol. Inter-League Publication Board, London, Ont.; paperback; \$4.75 CDN

The Rev. Andrew Pol has written a booklet to assist teaching pre-confession students. As point of departure he has used the four questions of the Form for Public Profession of Faith. The main structure of the booklet (pp. 5-31) is in the format of review questions with references to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. The next section (pp. 32-44) contains all the Scripture verses to be memorized. These verses are first listed in the RSV, then repeated in the NIV. The double printing of the texts is, no doubt, to aid churches who still use the RSV and those who have switched to the NIV.

Possibly the best way to give some indication of what the booklet is about is by way of some examples. The numbers refer to the section in which it is found:

- 1.1.12 Does the Holy Spirit still inspire people nowadays? Rev 22:18; BC, Art. 7
- 1.4.7 Explain the relation between providence and sin. BC, Art. 13; CD, Chap. V, Art. 1-8
- 2.2.2 Was bloodshed and death part of creation before the fall into sin? Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12; 8:20-23
- 3.2.5 Does forsaking the world and crucifying our old nature mean we may not associate at all with unbelievers? Matt 5:13-16; 2 Cor 6:14-7:1; Psa 1:1; Prov 4:14; 24:1; 1 Cor 15:33
- 4.4.1 What does the Church Order stipulate regarding worship services? CO, Art. 52. Cf. Ex 20:8-11; Lev 23:3; *Acts 20:7; Heb 10:23-25.* (An italicised text is assigned as memory work.)

In general, the questions are designed to make the person do some research and to stimulate discussion. I must admit that I do not understand the relevance of questions 1.2.13 and 14 where the student is expected to list articles in the Belgic Confession confronting Roman Catholic and Anabaptist teachings. For the rest, I am quite happy with the scope of the booklet and the relevance of the questions. Under section "Election and reprobation" I was pleased to see references to Matthew 22:14 and Acts 2:47b, but missed 1 Peter 2:8 in questions 1.4.15 and 16.

With this publication I.L.P.B has made available another source to consult and/or assign to those young members who are preparing to make public profession of faith. However, its use goes beyond that. It seems to me that this booklet would also function well for societies to follow during one of their sessions as a "refresher course".



OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers

Mother's Day has been and gone. What did you give your Mom for that special day? Did you give her a big box of chocolates or a bunch of flowers? Or did you give her breakfast in bed? I'm sure that whatever she gave you, she really loved it. Especially if it came with a big hug and a big kiss! And I'm also sure that you really love your Mom because she is your Mom. So remember that you have to give her big hugs and kisses all the time, not just on Mother's Day.

Lots of love
Aunt Betty

Trees

Trees always play an important role in history. Match these trees with the incidents below:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Cedar, 1 Kings 6:2,9 | a. Good shade like oak and poplar |
| 2. Oak, 2 Samuel 18:9 | b. Jesus used to teach a lesson |
| 3. Fir, Psalm 104:17 | c. Elijah sat under when he fled from Jezebel |
| 4. Sycamore, Luke 19:1-4 | d. Use in building the Temple |
| 5. Mustard, Mark 4:30-32 | e. Jesus used to illustrate growth of His kingdom |
| 6. Terebinth, Hosea 4:13 | f. Absalom caught his head in one |
| 7. Broom, 1 Kings 19:2-4 | g. Stocks built nests in |
| 8. Fig, Matthew 24:32 | h. Zacchaeus climbed to see Jesus |



FROM THE MAILBOX

Welcome to *Sherene Barendregt*, who is five years old and wrote me her own letter. You'll have to write again, Sherene, and tell me when your birthday is. Bye for now.

Hello to *Nadine Barendregt*. Thank you for your letter. How is your new house? Is it bigger than your last house? It must be lots of fun having to put away all your toys and clothes, and then finding them all again. Do you help your Mom with her housework? Write again, won't you, Nadine.

And I got a huge envelope of letters from all the students of Grade Four at the John Calvin School in Smithville, Ontario. It was part of their Language Arts and Church Life studies. It really did fill my mailbox. As I did once before, I will make a puzzle, and you will have to find your names in the puzzle.

Prepared especially for Grade Four,
John Calvin School, Smithville, Ontario

A X C B R T S P J K L -
C B E P H M
B L Z M R E H P O T -
S I R H C N E
O P U E N Q R J S I O Z C -
S K L L
M N B A O P L A W R E N C E -
Q R I
S L Y D N A R S -
T E U O V W Z A S
A R M B C F H O I -
H T J G K L P S
Q B E R I C R N R T S T E R -
I C A
U E R V W X Y S Z A B -
C O D E F B

FIND:	Miss Ravensbergen	Justin	Stephanie
George	Randy	Scott	Matthew
Karissa	Jennifer	Jason D	Christo-
pher Troy	Jeremy	Amanda	Rachel
Eric R	Danielle	Michelle	Eric A
Arynn	Steven	Melissa B	Kristina
Jason S	Heather	Ryan	Melissa H
Lawrence	Benjamin	Albert	