

# Clarion

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Cessationism

Valour Training

Dietrich  
Bonhoeffer

Faithworks at  
Home: Timothy  
Christian  
School Grows



*Covenant Teacher's College. . .  
dedicated to educating teachers who may in turn  
"tell the next generation. . . ." Psalm 78*



Cl. Stam

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# Cessationism

*Who are we to deny or limit the sovereignty of God?*

Everyone, I suppose, knows that an “ism” usually is not very good. It’s nice to have things in common, for example, but that doesn’t mean we should be adherents of communism.

When we read the word “cessationism” we instinctively feel that something isn’t right. Cessationism is the belief that the special gifts (charismata) of the Holy Spirit, which functioned in the early Christian church, *ceased* with the demise of the apostles and the immediate disciples.

This matter recently came to the fore in our Dutch sister churches where there is currently much discussion about the functioning of the Holy Spirit in the church today. A special conference was held to discuss whether charismatic theology can be combined with Reformed spirituality.

Let me give a few more examples of this discussion. In 2004, a book was published by various ministers/leaders in our Dutch sister churches titled *Meer dan genoeg* (More Than Enough). In this book the writers warned against the growing influence of the charismatic movements.

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*We groan inwardly as we wait for a perfect world*

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This book was barely published and another book flew off the press (also 2004). This book was written by Rev. G. Hutten and has as title *Verrast door de Geest* (Surprised by the Spirit). In this book Rev. Hutten makes very clear that he disagrees with the idea of “cessationism” (wrong spelling, but that’s a minor point on a major issue) and, while he appreciates aspects of cessationism, he still has the opinion that “we read nowhere in the Bible that the promises about the miraculous working of the Spirit are only meant for the period of the beginning.”

In other words, these miracles and wonders are in reality still experienced today. At least, we may still expect these miracles to happen today. Hutten adds that cessationism has willy-nilly had many negative effects. We have to our detriment *restricted* the work of the Holy Spirit. (I guess he never heard of a book titled *The Spirit and the Bride*.)

## Charismata

What are these special gifts of the Holy Spirit that we have grossly neglected? Hutten refers us to Romans 12:6-8, where the following gifts are mentioned: prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing (money), leadership, and showing mercy. Hutten calls these the more *personal* gifts.

There are also *congregational* gifts. These are the real charismata. The others belong more in the realm of the fruit of the Spirit, but the charismata are very special for church life.

Hutten here follows the list given in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. He mentions wisdom (think of Solomon), knowledge, faith, healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in tongues, and the interpretation of tongues. The gifts that perhaps are the most spectacular are healings, prophesies, and speaking in tongues.

Hutten stresses that these gifts are not to be seen as permanent talents, but as special gifts of God which someone receives to pass on to others. These charismata are given freely by Christ in his grace to be used in love for up building of the congregation.

It is clear that within this framework cessationism is out of the door. The special gifts never really ceased and we may expect and utilize them today. It is to our great disadvantage as churches and believers that we have not had a sufficient eye for these gifts of the Spirit.



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I may joyfully divulge that I learned a lot from reading these two books. What I especially appreciated is that in both books the Holy Spirit is identified as the Spirit of Christ who leads us to Him, and Him alone, as our complete Saviour. Both books are deeply christological.

**God's sovereignty**

Now I have never slavishly followed the cessation theory. But I do believe that the Bible indicates that after the apostolic time the charismata indeed cease as a regular feature. When the revelation is completed, charismata are not functional as before. Is there biblical evidence for the cessation theory? I believe there is, and it should be carefully studied.

Often Mark 16:15-20 about the apostles going out, preaching, and performing signs, is used a proof-text against the cessation idea. But that passage speaks only about the apostolic time and notes, "...the disciples went out and preached everywhere and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it." This is not a promise that the charismata will always be with the church, but that the Lord used them (past tense) in the mission work of the early Christian church. They have now as such ceased. There are more texts to which I hope to return one day.

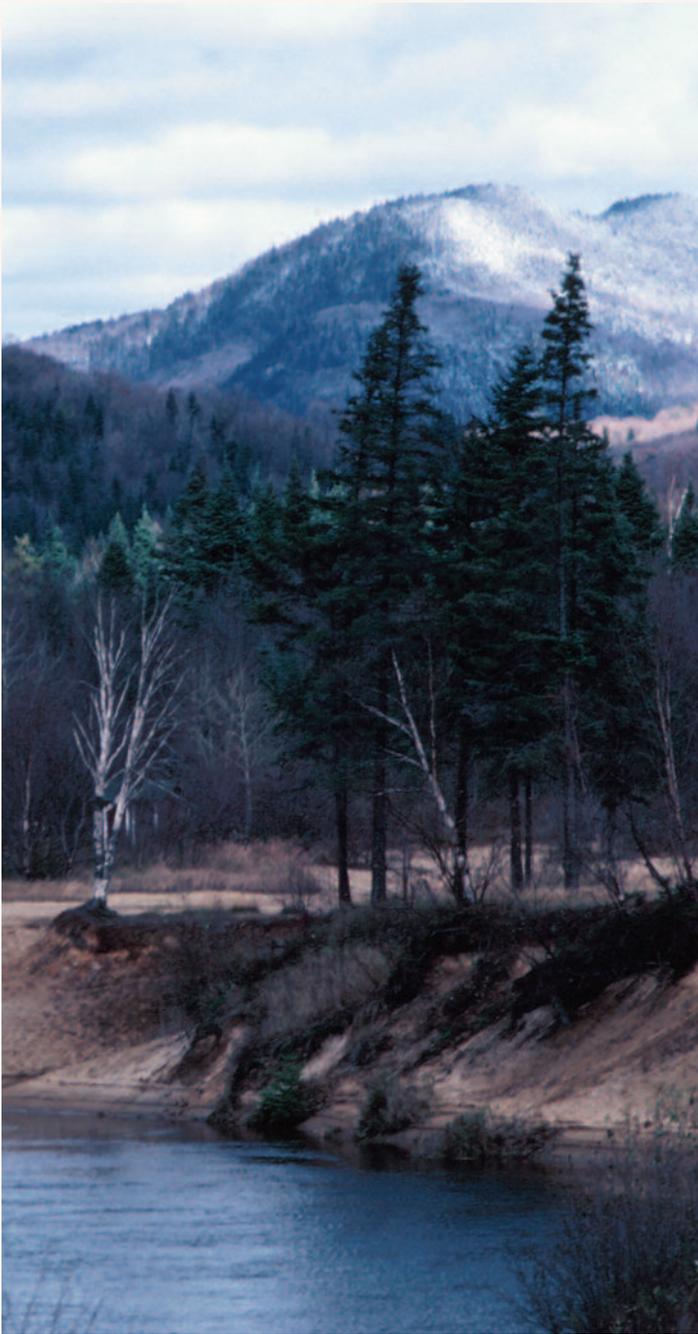
Indeed, the Spirit can bestow special gifts also today. Who are we to deny or limit the sovereignty of God? I do not doubt for a moment that miracles can and do occur at various times and in various places. I am not referring to Oral and Jimmy Roberts or Benny Hinn. Think, for example, of things that happened on the frontiers of the mission field. But that does not make the charismata a mark of the church.

**Creation groaning**

We must remember that the Bible clearly teaches us that we today still live *under the cross*. In this world we experience the effect and devastation of God's indignation over sin. All the incumbent misery flows forth from the sins which we have committed and do commit.

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As Paul writes, "...we know that the whole creation has been groaning," and he adds, "...we, ourselves, *who have the first fruits of the Spirit*, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:22-24). We have the first fruits of the Spirit. Yet we groan inwardly as we wait for a perfect world. Charismatics and Pentecostals alike promise you *instant* health and wealth, if you write out a sizeable check. But we realize that suffering and death are part of this life and that these will only be removed on the great day of Christ's coming.

By the Spirit and through Christ we await a new world where sin and all its consequences shall be no more. We may go from the cross to glory, from groaning to rejoicing. On that path the Holy Spirit will graciously give us all we need through Christ Jesus, gifts miraculous or mundane, but grace nevertheless.

Time and again the churches have to face the extremes of Anabaptism and radical Evangelicalism. This debate is not new. I'll stick with a healthy and balanced cessationism for now.

## Special Event Submissions

Submissions covering special events should be sent to the Copy Manager within two months of the event's date; there is a maximum length of 1000 words. If pictures of the event are available, please submit them with the article.

## Coming. . . in 2007

### *"You Were Asking?"*

is a new column that will be featured on the pages of *Clarion* this coming year. Send your questions concerning current issues faced by our churches today to the column coordinator, Rev. R. Aasman ([richard.aasman@canrc.org](mailto:richard.aasman@canrc.org)).

Th. E. Lodder



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# Valour Training



**MATTHEW 13:52**

*“Be strong and courageous... Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.”*

*Joshua 1:6-8*

There is an impassable river before you. You wouldn't even think of fording it, especially not when it is at flood stage and certainly not with thousands of others, except that God has said you must.

If you ever get across, you will face hostile nations with fortified cities and large armies. By comparison, you have only a small, inexperienced army. But God has told you to attack those armies, capture those cities, and inherit the land.

We can understand that with such a daunting challenge before him Joshua stood in need of this encouragement from the Lord: “Be strong and courageous.”

It is one thing to be ordered to do something. It is quite another to be given the tools to do it. If someone ordered you to hunt a bear and told you just to be strong and courageous about it, knowing full well that you didn't have the training or the gear to do so, you would not listen.

Is that the sort of thing God was asking of Joshua? After all, God didn't offer him any clues about how to bring thousands of people across a raging, swelling river. Nor did He provide him with an elaborate military strategy to meet the enemy on the other side.

But as we read further, we discover that Joshua's readiness for

a successful mission didn't rest on strategy and skill. Everything depended instead upon the total reliability of God's Word.

The Lord didn't merely tell Joshua to be strong and courageous. He also told him wherein his strength and courage lay. He said: “Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful” (Josh 1:7, 8). With God's sure and unshakable Word in his mouth and in his mind, Joshua would be successful!

God's call for us to fight the good fight of faith is at the same time a call to an unwavering adherence to his Word. It's a call to have his Word in our mouth and in our mind, so that we are able to do his will. God has continually called his servants to courage in the face of obstacles and opposition in this way.

In 2 Timothy 3, for example, Paul prepares Timothy to face the spiritual battle, which he himself has been busy fighting, by urging him: “Continue in what you have learned and have become

convinced of.” He appeals to him to hold on to the Scriptures in which he was taught since he was a little child (2 Tim 3:14, 15). He will be thoroughly equipped and well-trained, a strong and courageous man of God, if he remains unwavering in his obedience to God's Word!

What is true for those who lead God's people, like Joshua and Timothy, is true for the rest of God's people too. The promise for those whose mouths and hearts overflow with God's Word is that they will be saved. “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Rom 10:10).

The Lord Jesus Himself is the Word of God incarnate. He is the Word that needs to be near you, “in your mouth and in your heart” (Rom 10:8). Where He is present, there is true valour.

He is the greater Joshua who also faced a humanly impassable obstacle, the one between man and God. By his death and resurrection, however, He crossed over the torrent of sin and death, taking all his redeemed along, leading us in victory into the inheritance of his kingdom.

Be strong and courageous, then, by keeping your mouth and heart full of his Word!



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# Towards a Common Songbook (Part 12)

## The Intoxication Effect

Like strong wine the tunes of some songs can intoxicate the singers. So says John Calvin. Some Christians become musically "drunk" on the melodies and rhythms of certain songs. So much so that they might not even care about the words they are singing. Our eleventh and final guideline seeks to address that particular danger:

The melodies and harmonies of church music must be suitable for congregational singing, avoiding complicated rhythms, excessive syncopation, and a wide range of pitch.

Obviously all songs have melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and a range of pitch. For music sung in our worship services we must be careful about *complicated* rhythms, excessive syncopation, and a *wide range* of pitch.

Some songs are rejected by our joint committee because their rhythms are too complicated for the "average" congregation. That's a particular problem with contemporary Christian music since much of it is written for solo performing artists. Congregational singing, in contrast, requires the blending of hundreds of voices. Complicated rhythms prevent many members from joining their voices in congregational praise. One song with a complicated rhythm in the *Psalter Hymnal* is

#367, "Hark Ten Thousand Harps and Voices." Its series of sixteenth notes is too complicated for most singers (and organists). No wonder it is dropped in the revised 1987 version of the *Psalter Hymnal*.

But good rhythms make an otherwise dull tune more interesting and "singable." The *Psalter Hymnal* renders Psalm 42, "As the Hart, About to Falter," without any rhythm: every note (except for a few) is held for the same length of time. The *Book of Praise*, however, sets the melody in a more rhythmic pattern, following the composer's intent in the 1500s. In the *Book of Praise* version of "As the Hart," the word "as" is held twice as long as the next word, "the," and "hart" is also held longer. It sings like this: "dum-dee-dum." The rhythm of the entire first line can be rendered: "dum-dee-dum-dee-dee-dum-dum." Musically, this makes the melody much more interesting.

Yet rhythms may also be trite, overly repetitious, or simply too overpowering. "I Serve a Risen Savior" employs a repetitive rhythm which ends up overpowering the song (the words of that hymn also do not meet our criteria for biblical expression). Many "gospel songs" written during the "revivals" of the twentieth century employ repetitious and overpowering

rhythms. Singers get so carried away by the rhythm that they hardly think about the song's words. Think of the revival gospel hymn: "There Were Ninety and Nine." Musical manipulation of an "audience" has always been a powerful tool in the hands of an unscrupulous evangelist (watch Benny Hinn and others at work today). As Calvin says: beware of intoxicating music!

Syncopation refers to a particular kind of rhythm, where the rhythm accentuates the off beat, or falls on an unexpected beat. *Book of Praise* Psalm 47 is a good example of this: "Praise the LORD, ye lands! Nations clap your hands." The word "lands" is sung on a down beat and is immediately followed by the first syllable of "na-tions." And so it is in every line of that song. As the congregation sings these lines with that syncopated rhythm, the melody becomes all the more beautiful. And in that beauty God's praise is magnified. Syncopation often enhances a melody, but excessive syncopation renders a song difficult, if not impossible, for a congregation to sing. In our opinion none of the songs in either the *Psalter Hymnal* or the *Book of Praise* are excessively syncopated.

"Range of pitch" is another consideration for our selection of "singable" music in our churches.

In technical musical language this is called the "tessitura." Say that the lowest note in a particular song is the B-flat below middle C and the highest note is the high E-flat. That "range of pitch" would be too broad for most singers.

As a committee we also pay some attention to the "interval" (or "jump") from one note to the next note. Most singers will become discouraged if melodies jump too

much with wide intervals between notes. The most beloved songs in our churches have melodies with narrow intervals between the notes. For example, *Psalter Hymnal* #393, "Creator Spirit by Whose Aid," set to the tune "Melita" (used in *Book of Praise Hymn* 56, "Our Outer Nature Wastes Away"). In that familiar melody the widest interval from one note to the next is only three steps. Compare that to

the melodies of some hymns where successive notes jump six steps or more.

The main point is that we seek "singable" music in our common songbook. "If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?" (1 Cor 14:8) The notes and the rhythms of our church songs likewise must sound a "clear call" as we together praise our God.



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# Dietrich Bonhoeffer

## – The Cost of Discipleship (Part 2 of 3)

Much of Bonhoeffer's work was collected and edited by his close friend Eberhard Bethge, a former student and the author of the definitive Bonhoeffer biography. Bethge writes that Bonhoeffer's adult life can be divided into three phases: that of the theologian, the Christian, and the "man of his times."

The first period lasted until 1930/31, when Bonhoeffer studied in New York, where he experienced a conversion. The second continued through the 1930s. It was characterized by his participation in the church struggle (together with Karl Barth, Martin Niemöller, and others), his pastorate in London, and his work at the illegal Finkenwalde seminary. During this period he published his two most popular writings, *The Cost of*

*Discipleship and Life Together*. The third phase began around 1940 and lasted until his death in April 1945. His major work now was the *Ethics*, which remained unfinished at the time of his death. In these years he also introduced the ideas that would later be used to claim him as the father of various "progressive" theologies.

In this article I focus on the second period, giving special attention to his view of Scripture, his work at the seminary, and his book on discipleship, which contained his New Testament teachings at the seminary.

### Back to the sources

Bonhoeffer cherished his work at Finkenwalde. In 1935, at the end of the first term, he wrote to his students that the months spent

with them had constituted the fullest time of his life, both professionally and personally. At Finkenwalde he found the type of work to which he could give himself whole-heartedly. In view of the Nazification of the universities, he had already given up on the academic life and decided to concentrate on the practical work of pastoring. His concern continued to be with the church struggle and the seminary enabled him to prepare young men for service in the beleaguered Confessing Church. It also allowed him to put into practice his conviction that education for the pastorate should focus not only on the teaching of theological knowledge and preaching skills, but also on spiritual training. Important means of realizing that ideal were his

New Testament course on the Sermon on the Mount and discipleship and the organization of the Finkenwalde seminary as a religious community.

Two characteristics that stand out in Bonhoeffer's writings are his Christology and his submission to the authority of the Bible. With respect to the first, he puts great emphasis on the fact that in the Christian faith we do not meet with a mere set of ideas or a mere system of doctrine. Ideas and doctrinal systems require only intellectual assent, rather than personal commitment. In Christianity, however, we meet with a person, namely with the living Christ, the Son of God incarnate, who was crucified and rose from the dead. Christology therefore demands personal commitment, a concrete following of the person Jesus Christ. This is what the rich young ruler had to learn, and the repentant publicans, and all those who came to Jesus.

The second characteristic is Bonhoeffer's conviction that in the Bible we are given the actual Word of God and that this Word is reliable. It is true that he did not formally reject the historical-critical tradition of his training. Acceptance of it, he thought, was a matter of academic honesty. And so he could welcome even the bible-critical work of a man like Bultmann, even though he made it clear that he disagreed with Bultmann's conclusions. But if not formally abandoning this theoretical stance, Bonhoeffer in practice turned away from it.

Noteworthy in this connection is a letter of April 1936 to his brother-in-law Rüdiger Schleicher, who wondered how one could possibly live the Christian life in the twentieth-century world.

Bonhoeffer answered that the Bible alone is the answer to our questions and that we need to ask "persistently and humbly" in order to receive that answer. We have to be persistent in our prayer because God answers us only when we ask and we must be humble because God requires submission to his Word. This means that we are to read the Bible not as a human document but indeed receive it as God's Word to us. It also means that we let God determine the place where He is to be found.

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*We can never appeal to our confession or be saved simply on the ground that we have made it. Neither is the fact that we are members of a Church which has a right confession a claim to God's favour*

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That place is not at all pleasing to the natural man – for it is the place of the cross of Christ. It tells us that we are sinners who can be saved only because of Christ's sacrifice. It also tells us that those who want to find God must themselves take up the cross, as the Sermon on the Mount demands. This message, in short, is "strange" and contrary to our natural desires; yet it is the only answer to our questions.

Bonhoeffer asks his brother-in-law:

Is it . . . intelligible to you if I say I am not at any point willing to sacrifice the Bible as this strange word of God, that on the contrary, I ask with all my strength what God is trying to

say to us through it? Every other place outside the Bible has become too uncertain for me. . . . Since I have learned to read the Bible this way – which has not been long at all – it becomes more wonderful for me with each day. . . . You wouldn't believe how happy one is to find the way back from the wrong track of some theologies to this elemental thing.

It was with this conviction, which remained with him for the rest of his life, that Bonhoeffer did his work at Finkenwalde. It is evident in his writings of this period, including his work on discipleship.

### **The Sermon on the Mount**

*The Cost of Discipleship* consists of four parts. The first is about Jesus' call to his disciples and the implications of that call; the second deals with the Sermon on the Mount; the third with the sending of Jesus' disciples to preach the gospel in Israel; and the fourth with church and discipleship as described in Paul's letters. Although only one part concerns itself with the Sermon on the Mount proper, the entire book, as Bethge writes, owes its style and momentum to that Sermon.

Bonhoeffer's interest in the Sermon on the Mount predated his appointment at the seminary. He had already dealt with it during his pastorate in Spain in the late 1920s. At that time, however, he had still explained it in the conventional manner, which took the sting out of it. According to this interpretation, the Sermon described a life of sanctification that no mortal could attain and was therefore not to be applied in a literal sense. To do so would be legalistic. All Christ intended was to convince Christians of their

inability to keep God's law and so teach them that they had to rely on grace alone.

After his conversion, however, Bonhoeffer rejected this interpretation. He now began to stress the relationship between faith, obedience, and discipleship and to express the conviction that the Sermon on the Mount was to be taken literally. This was true for both the individual believer and the church. Both had to follow Christ not only in their words, but also, and especially, in their deeds.

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*God will not ask us in that day whether we were good Protestants, but whether we have done his will*

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Bonhoeffer did not elevate the Christian life above doctrinal faithfulness. Doctrine was more important than life. But this was not to say that the two could be separated. Nor was it to say that one would be justified by holding the right doctrine – any more than one would be justified by works. "We can never appeal to our confession or be saved simply on the ground that we have made it. Neither is the fact that we are members of a Church which has a right confession a claim to God's favour. . . . God will not ask us in that day whether we were good Protestants, but whether we have done his will."

Doctrinal orthodoxy, then, had to result in a life of discipleship. And this, Bonhoeffer feared, was lacking among many who called themselves Christians. It was lacking even within the Confessing

Church. Bonhoeffer supported that church throughout his life, but he found it increasingly necessary to speak out against its shortcomings. Especially distressing to him were the church's hesitation in openly denouncing the lies and abuses of Hitler's regime, its failure to give public support to those who were oppressed and persecuted – Jews and others – , and the fact that whenever it did speak up, it was always on its own behalf. "We confess that, although our Church is orthodox as far as her doctrine of grace is concerned," he wrote, "we are no longer sure that we are members of a Church which follows the Lord."

### **Costly grace**

The cause of the church's apostasy, Bonhoeffer believed, was the preaching of cheap grace. It was with this topic that he opened *The Cost of Discipleship*. He defined cheap grace as grace that is taught as a mere principle. Making forgiveness into a general truth, cheap grace teaches that those who give intellectual assent to the doctrine of forgiveness automatically receive remission of sins. In a church that preaches cheap grace "the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. . . . Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner." Opposed to this is the costly grace the Bible teaches. Costly grace is "the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. . . . It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and



*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

follows him." Such grace is the grace of discipleship, the grace that costs a man his life but that at the same time gives him the only true life.

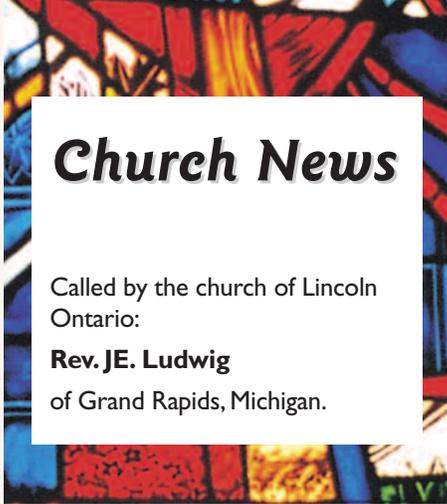
Cheap grace, Bonhoeffer writes, established itself in the medieval church. It was under the preaching of cheap grace that the world was "Christianized," while at the same time the Christian message was secularized. At the time of the Reformation Luther returned to the gospel of costly grace, but the Lutheran church soon forgot his message and example. The effect of the teaching of cheap grace became obvious in the collapse of

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*Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes*

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the Evangelical Church under Hitler. Bonhoeffer compares the three thousand Saxons Charlemagne put to death in his attempt to spread the gospel with the millions who have become "spiritual corpses" because of the message of cheap grace and concludes that that message has been the ruin of more Christians than any commandment of works. For cheap grace means disobedience, and disobedience is the enemy of faith.



## Church News

Called by the church of Lincoln Ontario:

**Rev. JE. Ludwig**

of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

### Discipleship and obedience

Bonhoeffer devotes two separate chapters to the call to discipleship and, in connection therewith, to the relationship between faith and obedience. It is here that he makes the well-known statement that "only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes." This statement surprised his students who had been taught, in Bethge's words, to distinguish between faith and obedience: "First comes faith, faith, faith and then perhaps obedience." Wasn't Bonhoeffer denying the two great principles of the Reformation, *sola fide* and *sola gratia* – by faith alone and by grace alone?

Bonhoeffer agrees that faith must be placed before obedience, for it is faith that justifies, rather than acts of obedience. But he adds that it is not possible to make a chronological distinction between them. They are inextricably linked and the two propositions must therefore always be placed alongside each other: obedience to the call of Christ is the consequence of faith, but it is also its presupposition and condition. No one should therefore be surprised, Bonhoeffer warns, at his inability to believe if there is a part of his life where he consciously resists or disobeys Jesus' command. The two go together. "If the first half of the proposition stands alone, the believer is exposed to the danger of cheap grace, which is another word for damnation. If the second half stands alone, the believer is exposed to the danger of salvation through works, which is also another word for damnation."

The truth of *sola fide*, *sola gratia* remains. Simple obedience does

not imply a doctrine of human merit. "Obedience to the call of Jesus never lies within our own power. If, for instance, we give away all our possessions, that act is not in itself the obedience he demands. In fact, such a step might be the precise opposite of obedience to Jesus, for we might then be choosing a way of life for ourselves, some Christian ideal,

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*When Christ calls a man,  
he bids him come and die*

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or some ideal of Franciscan poverty. . . . The step into the situation where faith is possible is not an offer which we can make to Jesus, but always his gracious offer to us." As the work of Christ in the believer, faith and obedience, justification and sanctification are inseparable, and are gifts of grace. "Justification is the new creation of the new person, and sanctification is the preservation and protection of that person until the day of Jesus Christ."

### Discipleship and the cross

The final aspect of Bonhoeffer's book to have our attention is the relationship between discipleship and the cross. Because the believer is "in Christ," he shares in Christ's suffering. That suffering implies rejection, for Jesus was a despised Messiah and one is a disciple only by sharing in his rejection and cross. Cross-bearing begins with severing the ties that bind a person to this world. It is the dying of the old nature. "As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death – we give over our lives

to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

That death can take many forms. In the case of the first disciples it began by leaving their homes and work in order to follow Jesus; in the case of Luther it began by leaving the safety of the monastery and preaching the gospel in a hostile world. And the dying continues for the Christian. "Every day he encounters new temptations, and every day he must suffer anew for Jesus Christ's sake." Since it is a result of the believer's allegiance to Christ, suffering is not surprising, nor is it an unbearable burden. We can, Bonhoeffer writes, refuse to bear it:

But only to find that we have a still heavier burden to carry – a yoke of our own choosing, the yoke of our self. But Jesus invites all who travail and are heavy laden to throw off their own yoke and take his yoke upon them – and his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. . . . Under his yoke we are certain of his nearness and communion. It is he whom the disciple finds as he lifts up his cross.

Rather than being misery and desperation, therefore, discipleship under the cross is "peace and refreshment for the soul, it is the highest joy."



## D. Moes

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# reformedevangelism.com

## *Knowing God: Knowing Jesus*

### Lesson 1: Who is Jesus?

The course *Knowing God* contains four short courses for growing Christians. So far we have introduced the first two: *Living the gospel* (your oikos) and *knowing the Father*. We now introduce the third: *Knowing Jesus*.

It is important for new Christians to know who Jesus is, what He taught and did, and what difference He makes. New Christians need to deal with these questions not only for their own growth, but also to be equipped to witness to the reality of Christ in the world. The course *Knowing Jesus* looks at these fundamental questions through three lenses. First, it explores what the Scriptures say. Second, it looks at the witness of the church as it dealt with heresies and controversies. Third, it looks at how the church was influenced by its context.

#### **Who do you say that I am?**

In Matthew 16:13-17 we read that Jesus asked his disciples two questions: Who do people say I am? Who do you say I am? If a group of people is talking about Jesus, we might presume each is talking about the same person. This is not necessarily so. Even within the church people have different mental pictures of Jesus, different views of who He is and why He is important. In order to get the members of the group thinking

about their own view, ask them to think of the picture they had of Jesus as a child, as a teenager, before they became a Christian (if their journey to faith has been as an adult), and now. As the group shares, you will come across some incomplete or less helpful views of Jesus. Here are some of the possibilities:

- "Gentle Jesus meek and mild," who was there to bless when needed but never challenged views or made demands
- A good moral teacher
- A distant figure who lived in a world of stained glass windows
- A historical figure who may have been a spiritual teacher but quite unlike the claims the church has made for Him
- An "existentialist" Jesus who becomes whatever people need Him to be, someone about whom there are no absolutes
- A New Age Jesus, a spiritual guru who embodied the spark of divine life in everyone
- A Jesus about whom we can know almost nothing because the records can't be trusted
- A Jesus of popular literature and cinema. Different portrayals have suggested a fraudulent Jesus, a confused Jesus, a tempted and sinning Jesus, a magical Jesus. The possibilities are almost endless.

After this introductory exercise, look together at Mark 8:27-33. Notice the answers the disciples give to the two questions. People were interpreting Jesus in the light of their own experience. John the Baptist was a popular religious leader who had recently been killed; Jews believed that Elijah would return to herald the age of the Messiah, the dawn of the kingdom of God; one of the prophets, i.e., they recognized that Jesus was a leader of significance. Peter, however, says that Jesus is the Messiah, God's specially chosen and anointed One. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus says that this insight comes from God Himself. Jesus then goes on to teach his disciples about his suffering, his death, and his resurrection. In doing so, He is affirming the truth of Peter's statement but beginning to reinterpret the disciples' understanding of what it means to be the Messiah.

#### **What the church believes about Jesus**

The church's understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done did not happen overnight. Rather, the whole picture began to emerge as the church began to understand what God had revealed. First, there is the evidence of what Jesus

Himself did and said; then there is the evidence of his death and resurrection; add to this the experience of the disciples in the months and years that followed, what the Holy Spirit revealed through Paul and the other New Testament writers recorded in the Scriptures, what the Holy Spirit revealed to the church fathers, how the leaders of the church in the first five centuries defended the faith against heretical attacks and we eventually get to the statements about Jesus in the historic creeds. In other words, led by the Holy Spirit, the church came to affirm that Jesus was uniquely both fully human and fully God.

### Jesus is fully human

Ask the group what evidence there is that Jesus is fully human. Then go over the following information from the handout; be selective about which verses from the handout you deal with. Those interested can look up the rest of the evidence later.

- He was born from the womb of a woman (Luke 2:5-7); acknowledge Mary as his mother
- He has a human lineage (Matt 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38)
- He grew and developed physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Luke 2:40, 52)
- He ate food (Luke 7:34; 14:1), experienced hunger and thirst (Luke 4:2), tiredness (John 4:6), and needed to sleep (Matt 8:24)
- He was limited by time and space (John 11:17)
- He felt human emotions: love (Mark 10:21), grief (Matt 14:12-13; John 11:35), compassion (Mark 1:41; 6:34), anger (Mark 3:5; 10:14), and surprise (Matt 8:10; Mark 6:6)
- He built relationships with disciples and friends (John 11:35; 15:15)
- He was dependent upon God and spent time in prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12)

- He suffered mental and physical pain (Luke 22:43-44; Mark 15:15-20)
- He died (Mark 15:37)

Point out that what we read in the gospels is backed up by the rest of the New Testament (Rom 1:3; 9:5; Gal 4:4; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 2:14; 1 John 4:2). Also be sure to point out that the New Testament makes it clear that Jesus was like us in every way, but without sin (Matt 4:1-11; John 8:29; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26-27; 1 Pet 2:22-23).

Ask the group why it is important that Jesus is fully human. In the discussion, draw out the following:

- He knows what it is like to be human; He understands us (Heb 4:15-16)
- It is central to the salvation He accomplished for us (more about this in lesson 3)
- Even though He was perfect and we struggle with sin, He offers us an example to follow (1 Pet 2:21)

Ask the people to spend a few minutes in groups discussing what it would mean to the following people that Jesus was fully human:

- someone recently bereaved
- someone unjustly accused
- someone made redundant.

### Jesus is fully divine

Despite his evident humanity, it became clear to the disciples that Jesus was more than simply a man. The evidence is cumulative. Ask the group what evidence there is that Jesus is fully divine. Then go over the following information from the handout. As before, be selective as to which verses from the handout you deal with. Those interested can look up the rest of the evidence later. Evidence from Jesus' ministry:

- He taught and healed with authority (Mark 1:22, 40-42)
- He claimed the right to forgive sins (Mark 2:3-12; Luke 7:36-50)
- He exercised power and authority over nature (Matt 8:23-27; 14:23-33)

- The demons recognized Him (Matt 8:28; Mark 1:24)
- He claimed superiority over divinely given laws and institutions like the Sabbath (Luke 6:5)
- He called God Father and Himself Son, indicating an equality and reciprocity in his relationship with God (Matt 11:25-27; John 5:19-23; 10:14-30)
- According to the gospels, He spoke of Himself in terms that might be interpreted as implying divinity and acknowledged this when others implied it (Matt 14:33; 16:16; 26:63-65; the "I am" sayings of John's gospel)
- He was acknowledged "Son of God" in his baptism and transfiguration (Matt 3:17; 17:5)
- The sign of the resurrection affirms and confirms his divinity
- The witness of the early church:
- They proclaimed and worshiped Him as Lord, a title usually reserved for God (Acts 2:36; Phil 2:5-11; Rom 10:13)
- John's gospel clearly teaches that He is God (John 1:1-4, 14, 18; 14:6-7; 20:28)
- He is regarded as creator of the universe and Saviour of his church (Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:1-2)
- Jesus uniquely reveals what God is like (Heb 1:3; Col 1:15)
- The Holy Spirit led the church to believe that no other did justice to who Jesus really is.

### Putting it into practice

Point out that if we want to grow in appreciation of Jesus, we should learn as much about Him as possible. Encourage the members of the group to read through either the gospel of Luke or the gospel of John. Assign Luke 1:1-6:49 or John 1:1-5:47 for next time.

If you would like to view the outline of this lesson, go to [www.reformedevangelism.com](http://www.reformedevangelism.com) and follow the links. Next time, I plan to introduce "What did Jesus teach?" Thanks for reading.



# Faithworks at Home: Timothy Christian School Grows

*This article integrates remarks made at the Grand Opening by Mr. Ed Vanderlaan, chairman of the school board at the time of purchase; Mr. Ron Nienhuis, treasurer of the school board at the time of purchase and present chairman; Mr. Henk Plug, principal of Timothy Christian School; and Mrs. Brigitte VanHuisstede, teacher at Timothy Christian School.*

To many readers of *Clarion*, the term "FaithWorks" has become synonymous with short-term mission trips to fairly distant locations, trips during which faith and works combine in an effort to assist the poor of North America. The term was coined, I believe, to forestall a possible perception of such trips as an effort to earn salvation by works of mercy; good works arise out of faith in Christ, out of thankfulness for his free gift of salvation. It's a wonderful term, really, expressing so pithily the dual thrust of the biblical Word to trust God and be busy with living before Him. That's why I adopt it as heading for this reflection on the 2005 move of Timothy Christian School from Queensdale Avenue to East 25th Street in Hamilton, a move that was celebrated at a grand opening at the new property on Saturday, June 10, 2006. Faith in God's providential care encouraged a tremendous work effort that received the Lord's blessing in every way.

In recent years it became obvious that the facilities on Queensdale Avenue no longer



provided adequate space for the instruction of some 200 students from the Hamilton, Ancaster, and Glanbrook Canadian Reformed congregations and the Hamilton United Reformed congregation. Large classes were squeezed into undersize rooms, the kindergarten class had to occupy two small rooms rather than a single large one, and double class requirements meant precious storage space had to be converted into small learning assistance rooms. Moreover, unlike the former property on StoneChurch Road, the Queensdale location had no available outdoor space to set up portables to ease the growing pains inside. In fact, lack of outdoor space presented its own challenges, with staggered recesses dividing staff and students from each other and a nearby park necessarily functioning as additional playground space (for which we thank the City of Hamilton). Nine

years ago, this property had answered the needs of the school when StoneChurch Road no longer did, and the Timothy community moved there gratefully. But the school population quite literally had outgrown Queensdale.

The summer of 2005 presented an opportunity for expansion when the Burkholder Public School was put up for sale. Empty since February, the building looked rather past its prime, but it was structurally sound and spacious. In addition, it sat on a large property. With only three weeks between the opening up of the tender and the deadline for decision, the school board went into high gear, conducting the necessary research, meeting multiple times a week, and presenting information to the membership. At a projected purchase price of \$1.9 million, necessitating a fund-raising drive of \$1 million, the potential project understandably caused some apprehension. Certainly, we

depended in faith on the Lord to provide, but we also knew that faith cannot be treated as a formula guaranteeing material blessing; responsibility weighed heavily. However, after due consideration and prayer, the tender was made and suddenly the busy-ness of the preceding three weeks came to a halt as we waited for a response. Then came word of the successful tender and the rate of activity immediately jumped. On the day of possession, a steady stream of people arrived at the neglected school to get their first actual look at what had been described and presented on screen at the membership meeting. What a task awaited! The building needed extensive renovations and a serious cleaning. With the former property not yet sold, there was an immediate need for money and voluntary labour.

Then something beautiful happened. The Lord raised up in the school community a heartfelt desire to contribute above and beyond the call of duty to prepare the school for occupation by Christmas. The sale of the Queensdale building, following hard on the heels of the Burkholder purchase, added pressure to the preparation plans. Astoundingly, within six weeks, the fund-raising drive had reached its target in pledges, with much of the money in hand. Within three months, the entire building had been turned inside out, with renovations complete and every inch of the building scrubbed to a shine: walls removed and rebuilt, floors relaid, offices overhauled, classrooms spruced up, bricks and vents and windows and toilets scoured. Through those three months, the spirit of cooperation and the willing sacrifice of time, energy, and money prevailed. To arrive on site was to see an outpouring of organizational talent, trades talent, food contributions, materials



*Principal: Mr. Henk Plug*

donations, and scrubbing vigour. Here, truly, was faithworks in action, at the level of an entire community. And we were all humbled by it, knowing no individual effort had accomplished this transformation. We had prayed and trusted that God would provide, but – with no merit on our part – He did more than provide; He showered blessings upon us. Just before the Christmas break, the students (and all the accompanying paraphernalia that comprises the educational effort) moved in and the year of our Lord 2006 began, for the Timothy community, in new facilities.

Of course, the whole enterprise had to do with buildings and properties only on one level. After all, if it were merely a matter of changing addresses, why didn't we all move to the local public school address and save ourselves much work? Why bother to maintain a principle established some forty-nine years ago at the founding of the Timothy School Society? As the slide show at the Grand Opening demonstrated, times change. Young faces get old, old buildings get older, and sheep no longer graze in schoolyards. Biblical principles, however, do not change, and the slide show testified to this also. For while the pictures of time slid in and out of view, the bottom right-hand corner of the screen maintained a steady display of the text embedded now in three successive Timothy buildings:

"Continue in what you have learned. . . through faith in Christ Jesus." Though the plaque had shifted its place, the truth it spoke remained and remains constant. Acknowledging the sovereignty of God over all of life, over all of curriculum and all our relationships, the people of God desire a school for their children where wisdom begins in the fear of the Lord. The new Timothy building brings joy, but our renewed communal commitment to providing covenant education for our children in the best possible way brings yet more joy.

So it was fitting that the Grand Opening also highlighted the children of the school. The youngest ones snipped the ribbon in twenty-three places simultaneously, while others had their old school / new school reminiscences recounted. The old school had beautiful trees – but also less beautiful bats and mice. The old school had air-conditioning – but it seemed to work in winter too. The new school has an elevator and stairs – but it's a long hike to the upstairs library for the little ones. The new school has lockers, space, more space ... and a gym: not a half-size gym, but a real, glorious, properly floored, beautifully painted, divisible, full-size gym with a stage that does not need to be used for storage. What's more, the windows of the ground-floor science room (yes, the science room! [There is also an art room]) remove to create an outdoor-service cafeteria – so handy for hotdogs on PlayDay (a PlayDay not divided between cramped school grounds and a nearby park). In short, is it any wonder that students, teachers, parents, and community members are delighted? Not just in our building, but in our God.

"I delight greatly in the LORD" (Isa 61:10), for "surely I have a delightful inheritance" (Ps 16:6).



# Farewell Evening for the Agema Family

Attercliffe congregation met on the evening of Friday June 9, 2006, to say farewell to a faithful minister of our congregation, Rev. Agema. We were privileged to listen to his sermons, have him teach our children catechism, and be our pastor for twenty years. We had the distinct advantage of many years of memories to draw from to arrange for an evening of fun and fellowship as we prepared to say "good-bye" to the Agemas.

Br. Marvin VanSpronsen was our Master of Ceremonies for the evening. After congregational singing, scripture reading, and prayer, each of the societies had an opportunity to express their appreciation for Rev. Agema and his family. This was done with humour and music, small gifts, and pictorial props. Much reminiscing and laughing was the result, with minister and congregation alike.

A gift from each family of the Attercliffe congregation was presented by Br. P. Oosterhoff and his grand-daughter, Kristy Oosterhoff in the form of a scrapbook. He first reminisced a little and showed his (and the congregation's) appreciation for the faithful work done by Rev. Agema over these last twenty years. He stressed that we must not forget the diligent efforts behind the scenes by Mrs. Agema, who definitely was an asset to her husband both in the church and in our local school.

Br. Henry Homan, on behalf of the Dunnville/Wainfleet congregation, thanked Rev. and Mrs. Agema for their service to their congregation, also when the decision was made to institute another church. A wonderful photo album of the entire congregation in scrapbook form was given as a memento.

The final presentation was given near the end of the evening, when to the surprise of many, four young men came walking down the aisle carrying a beautiful new canoe! The Agemas are a family who love the outdoors and this final gift would allow them to continue to pursue their love of canoeing! Who knows, maybe Rev. Agema could canoe along the Grand River right back into Attercliffe territory from time to time. Apparently there is a GPS attached to it so he doesn't get lost.

At last Rev. Agema was allowed the chance to speak. He expressed his thanks to the congregation for aiding him in his task for the last twenty years and for making their stay enjoyable. His wife, who was invaluable to him, was also thanked for her contributions over the years. After singing Psalm 135:6, 9, 10 and prayer we were invited into the basement for refreshments.

## Rev. Agema's Farewell Sunday

By Lloyd Kingma

Sunday, June 25, 2006 was farewell Sunday. Rev. Agema chose as text for the morning service Psalm 133. The book of Psalms contains every doctrine of Scripture, which is why the church is a Psalm-singing church. Here she sings of the miracle of





fellowship, of communion. Israel sang of it while they were together in Jerusalem, "It is pleasant. It is good how I want it to be." It had been different, as in the time of the judges and in the time of Saul. But in David's time it became good again; and Israel sings of this while they are together at the temple. The temple was a special place. There they offered sacrifices and blood flowed. It ended with the blessing and Israel departed in peace. We still sing of it today. We come together in visible physical fellowship under the preaching and the sacraments. We have communion as God's people by the blood of Christ. It's a gift and it is indeed "good and pleasant." As the oil used for Aaron's anointing is special, one of a kind which cannot be copied, so unique is this fellowship. As the dew kept Mount Hermon lush and green, so this fellowship kept Zion rich, green, and lush; as if the dew of Hermon descended on Mount Zion. This unity is lasting. Israel left Jerusalem with the Lord's blessing as a united people. We leave each worship service that way. That blessing carries our fellowship from here to the New Jerusalem.

As text for the afternoon service Rev. Agema chose Revelation 22:18-21. Revelation 22 describes the future, the kingship of Christ, all that is happening in heaven. John speaks about the Word, how the

church has to hold on to it, not taking from it or adding to it. This warning was the same as in the time of Moses. Moses spoke to Israel when they were to enter the Promised Land with the warning not to worship idols. John refers to the selective use of the Bible, changing parts of it to suit ourselves. This is a serious matter. It results in the plagues and the removal of our place in the city. We all have to apply this and it is the task of the minister to teach it. His prophecy has to be consistent with the whole counsel of God. Rev. Agema encouraged us to remain with the Word as we part. Don't add or take away from it. Christ says "I am coming soon" and respond with "Amen." It is true. Christ is coming. We pray for it. We long for it. We have travelled together for twenty

years and grew together. And we can continue because He continues. His grace goes with us. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ goes with God's people. Ministers change, but that grace remains. It has gone with us in the past twenty years. We will depart with that blessing again. That is God's eternal love. In conclusion the congregation responded by raising its voices to praise the Lord with the words of Psalm 150: "Sing His praises, Hallelujah!"

These services marked the end of Rev. Agema's official service as minister of the church of Attercliffe. On behalf of Counsel, Br. K. Linde addressed Rev. Agema and his family and requested that we sing together, "The LORD now bless you from above." The congregation was given opportunity to say farewell and to socialize during a coffee social.

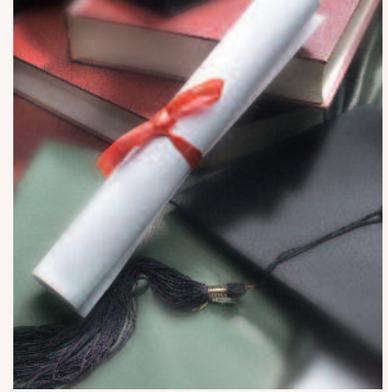
We have been blessed over the years with a faithful servant of the ministry. May he and his family continue to be a blessing in his new surroundings.



Reviewed by Keith Sikkema

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## Booklet Review



### ***Milestones as Steppingstones: Celebrating 25 years***

Additional Information:  
96 pages, \$20.

Part of the recent twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College, Covenant College or CCRTC for short, involved the presentation of a commemorative booklet. In her foreword, Mrs. Martha DeGelder, past chair of CCRTC, points out that the book means to engage the reader in thinking about Reformed education, to provide enjoyment, to enhance Reformed educational practice, and to instill gratitude to our covenant God. How does it succeed in simultaneously engaging, entertaining, enhancing, and in instilling gratitude?

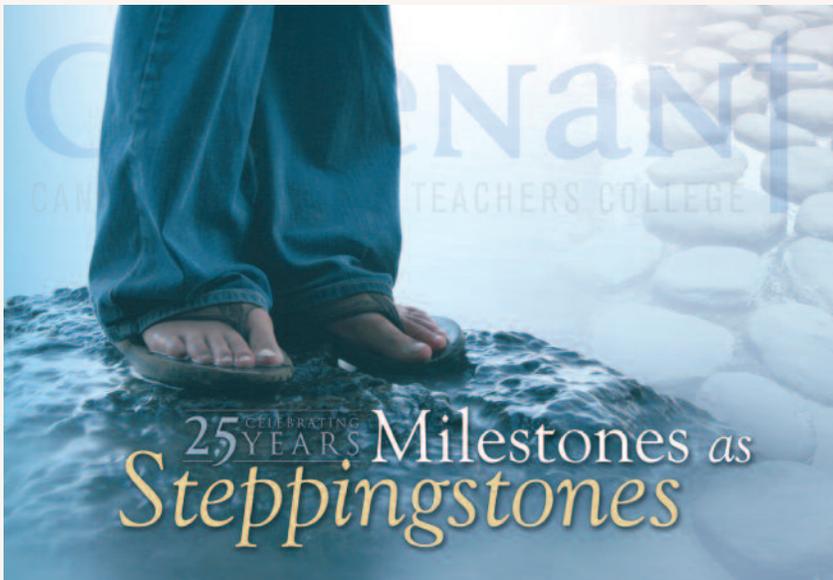
Rev. D.G.J. Agema is one of the part-time lecturers at Covenant. He explains how the motto of CCRTC, "tell the next generation" is the call of Psalm 78 for all God's covenant people to be involved in passing on his great deeds to their children. It is by teaching them about this that they will put their trust in God (rather than in themselves), that they will be equipped to discern, and that they may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ (Phil 1:10-11). CCRTC prepares teachers to teach covenant children according to Psalm 78. This contribution engages us in reflection on how we are and should be teaching and it instills gratitude for what we received.

Miss Judy Kingma is a full-time lecturer at CCRTC and captures key characteristics in the history of Reformed education. By characterizing 1954 to 1979 as "brick and mortar" years, she acknowledges the hard work and commitment that went into building schools. However, even in the 1970s, people realized that there was more to schools than buildings, desks, and textbooks. This led to a new focus for the years "beyond" and those years (after 1979) can be characterized by expansion and consolidation. Curriculum development began to take centre-stage, serious attempts were made to describe the character of Reformed education, and an awareness (and associated commitment) increased that children with special needs also have a place in the school. Four markers of Reformed education have been identified and help focus classroom practice and curriculum work: it is covenantal; it is confessional; it recognizes the antithesis; and it functions in unity of purpose of home, school, and church. The discussion is ongoing, there remains room for growth in including special needs students, and curriculum work continues to be an important agenda item. Reformed education has (had) to face hurdles, but Miss Kingma also expresses gratitude for what God gave. She invites readers to be involved in enhancing Reformed education, to go from the steppingstones we have received

from God, and to embrace his call to still move forward in faith.

CCRTC principal Dr. Christine van Halen-Faber eloquently highlights the history of CCRTC from its inception and small beginnings to today. She remembers with fondness the huge contribution of CCRTC's first principal, Tony VanderVen, and how the small beginnings of September, 1981, were humbly placed before the Lord in congregational prayers around the country. In these twenty-five years, the Lord has blessed CCRTC by preparing as many as 161 graduates specifically for Reformed schools, by providing in-service courses and workshops for teachers, and in a multitude of ways in which these functions can be enhanced. Its high standards for program quality and the ongoing need for new Reformed teachers and in-service training underline the justification for its existence and the need for ongoing development of its programs. Here is gratitude, here is an invitation to be engaged, and a prayer for your support:

It is our desire that with the prayerful support of many, Covenant College may continue to serve the Canadian Reformed schools by offering quality teacher education in obedience to God's Word. Under the Lord's guidance and with His blessing we look forward to many more years of service dedicated to educating teachers who may in turn "tell the next generation



the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord ... so that the next generation would know them" (Ps 78:4-6). (p. 44)

Mr. Bill Horsman retired as CCRTC lecturer a few years ago and briefly sketches what he learned at Covenant. The most important thing he learned is that all our effort is expended in order to serve God and our neighbour to the best of our ability. Other lessons learned include the importance of understanding what must be learned and how it is to be taught; an emphasis on conceptual understanding and self-regulated use of skills; the need for didactical presentation as well scaffolding and responding to students' learning; that students should actively construct meaning and make sense of what they learn; and, finally, the call for authentic tasks that call for problem solving or critical thinking, not just memory or reproduction.

Mr. Allard Gunnink has been a lecturer at CCRTC since 2004. He indicates that the need for Reformed schools is not always self-evident: every generation anew must think through its reasons for supporting them. In that context, he takes the reader on a journey about the nurturing character of Reformed schooling.

The school's academic focus must have a spiritual context (not only as instruction in godliness but also as the intentional formation of godly conduct) if the child's life of faith is to be nourished. Reacting to Pietism, Puritanism, and later Evangelicalism, Reformed teaching lost "the rich heritage of spiritual nurture so strongly promoted during the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries" (p. 57). In spiritual nurture, what is the role of the school beyond being a protective greenhouse? How can the school be more deliberate in preparing students for the Christian life in today's world? As phrased by the Fraser Valley schools, how is Christian education "not only a matter of standing in the truth, but. . . also a matter of seeking out and testing the truth"? Nurturing implies not only protection and nourishment, but also preparation for confrontation, spiritual development, and discernment. Along this line, the contribution concludes with a set of challenges and an invitation "to interact with these challenges as you articulate for yourselves the nurturing character of Reformed schooling. Continued reflection is vital for a parental school in its task of nurturing God's children" (p. 60).

In another contribution, Christine van Halen-Faber reflects on "Who are our teachers?" She describes the organization of the program at CCRTC, including brief descriptions of core course clusters: Religious studies, Education studies, Studies in educational psychology, Curriculum methods studies, Academic studies, and Teaching studies. After characterizing teaching as a "deeply relational activity" (p. 72), she ventures to identify five qualities of a teacher in our schools and how CCRTC seeks to develop those in beginning teachers: teachers are to be deeply committed to God and his work and Word; they need to be passionate about what they do; they are to do their work in humility; they are to be attentive; and they must be compassionate. A twenty-fifth anniversary is a time for reflection and review and the contribution identifies a number of challenges before the college. These challenges include accreditation, increasing in-service support for schools, recognizing the deep significance of the covenant relationship in which we are bound to God, and maintaining a humble and faithful stance in an increasingly secularized and relativistic environment. The warning to stay awake when using (Christian) resources that do not recognize the covenant is well placed. The milestone of an anniversary is also a steppingstone: "May Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College continue to take its place among our schools where teachers continue to equip themselves for a life of service to the praise of God's glory" (p. 78).

Throughout the book, vignettes are included of several CCRTC

alumni. It is not possible to name them all, but they are heart warming. They are enriching. They portray a sample of reflective practitioners with whom our schools are well served. They engage the reader in thinking about CCRTC's significance. They enhance the awe for what we received in and through the College and instill gratitude for what God gave. They express humility and dependence on God – in the words of Leslie Pinckney Hill's poem, *The Teacher*:

Lord, who am I to teach the way  
To little children day by day,  
So prone myself to go astray? . . .  
Oh, let the little children see  
The teacher leaning hard on  
Thee.

The layout and use of colour enhance the appearance of the book. On this graphic note, CCRTC has also taken the opportunity to redesign its logo. At first sight, the new logo is strikingly similar to the logo of the Ontario College of Teachers, as both have a square with a white swoosh going to the upper right corner signifying a path. The similarities are not surprising, as both wish to symbolize teaching the next generation. At Covenant, however, the swoosh also represents the covenant of love the Lord made with his people to whom our children belong. In Covenant's square, the book of learning alludes to Scripture and links to the old logo and the tagline reinforces the perspective and goals of CCRTC. Covenant may not be accredited, but it builds on the firmest of foundations and gives its students a grounding well beyond what the College of Teachers ever can or will require.

"To all who love Reformed education – past, present and future," the editors of *Milestones* as

*Steppingstones* put together a worthy publication to celebrate twenty-five years of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College. A review can but highlight some of the contents of the book, but it is impossible to capture all its wealth. The authors wonderfully accomplished the goal expressed in its foreword. Reading it, you'll be filled with gratitude for what God gave in CCRTC; you'll be engaged in thinking along for your local school or system-wide; you'll be entertained; and you'll be moved to do your part in enhancing Reformed education.

This booklet can be purchased by contacting the college ([covenant@covenantteacherscollege.com](mailto:covenant@covenantteacherscollege.com) or (905)385-0634), CCRTC Publishers (1576 Upper James P.O. Box 30026, Hamilton, ON, L9B 2Y5), or your local CCRTC governor.

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



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## Letter to the Editor



### Letter to the Editor

I feel compelled to express disappointment as it relates to the letter to the editor (October 12, 2006) by br. Aubrey Vandergaag. My disappointment is not because br. Vandergaag disagrees with the decision of Synod, but because his disagreement leads him to make serious accusations against Synod. He implies that the synods of the Canadian Reformed Church are acting in a hierarchical and dictatorial manner toward the local churches and claims that matters have come to Synod's table in an illegitimate manner.

In his letter br. Vandergaag outlines a local situation of how a personal appeal made its way from consistory through to the various broader assemblies. As an experienced office-bearer, my brother knows that this is precisely the manner in which a personal appeal must be dealt with, according to Article 31 of the Church Order. So why does he confuse the matter by implying that the personal appeal went directly to Synod? He does this when he states that there is "no direct channel from a church member to the major assemblies." This quote is taken from the summary of Rev. Van Oene's commentary regarding Article 30 and it has nothing to do with the particular situation. Rather, the point is that the appeal in question *did* follow the correct church orderly route and was legitimately presented at the table of Synod Chatham.

Br. Vandergaag continues his assault by implying that our synods have acted hierarchically. He asks the rhetorical question: "What will Synods 'dictate' to the local congregations next?" and then provides a quotation from Rutgers about the dangers of hierarchy. Is this a fair and brotherly

implication? Because our brother doesn't agree with Synod or accept the grounds provided in a decision, does that make it unlawful or hierarchical?

Both Synod Neerlandia and Synod Chatham have stated and affirmed what is taught in the Scriptures and reflected in our confessions. Article 35 of the Belgic Confession teaches that "Christ has instituted earthly and visible bread as a sacrament of His body and wine as a sacrament of His blood" (emphasis mine). Past synods have maintained this as biblical truth and indicated to the churches that "since the confessions are normative in the churches, Synod considers that wine should be used at the Lord's Supper" (c.f. Considerations 4.2).

Synod has not, however, dictated how the churches are to administer the wine or how to deal with individual exceptions, as that is left to the wisdom of the local church (c.f. Consideration 4.4). Rather, Synod upholds the *biblical principle* of the use of wine and leaves each church to determine how to put this into *practice*. Any fears of hierarchy are unfounded and unfair; rather, Synod has appropriately let the Scripture as we confess it dictate the principles of how we are to live. If br. Vandergaag could submit to this, then the writings of Rev. Stam would provide practical ways to deal with an individual with addictions while faithfully maintaining the communal and festive drink of the Lord's Supper.

Wayne Pleiter  
Darling Downs, Western Australia

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

## Press Release for Classis Northern Ontario, convened on September 22 at Fergus Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church

On behalf of the convening church of Fergus Maranatha Rev. D. G.J. Agema called the meeting to order. He requested all present to join in the singing of Psalm 65:1, 6. He read Revelation 1:9-20 and highlighted the glory and majesty of the Lord as head of the church. The work to be done at classis is subservient to Christ's rule. Rev. Agema led in prayer, asking the Lord for his blessing. In his opening remarks he noted several major changes in the classis. The ministers present for the first time at classis were welcomed. He also mentioned that since the last classis Rev. P. Aasman accepted the call to Ancaster as missionary for Streetlight ministries. He also noted that Rev. J. VanWoudenberg recently declined a call from the church at Lincoln.

Since the credentials, as examined by the church at Fergus North, were found to be in good order, Classis was constituted. The following officers served Classis: chairman Rev. VanWoudenberg, vice-chairman Rev. P.G. Feenstra, clerk Rev. W. Geurts.

In his opening remarks Rev. VanWoudenberg thanked the convening church for the work done in preparation. He also congratulated Rev. C. Vermeulen with the birth of a son.

After a number of items were added, the proposed agenda for Classis was adopted. The subscription form was read and signed by the Reverends Agema, E. Kampen, and M. VanLuik. The chairman noted with thankfulness that the brothers without hesitation could sign this form.

The following reports were received:

- From the church visitors who visited the church at Brampton

- From the church at Orangeville regarding the inspection of the archives of Classis Northern Ontario
- From the Classical Treasurer (Fred Hoekstra). A recommendation that the churches be assessed \$2.00 per communicant was adopted.
- From the church at Owen Sound auditing the Books of the Classical Treasurer
- From the church at Guelph regarding Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry. Classis adopted the recommendation that there be no assessment.
- From the Committee for Needy Churches. The recommendation that there be no assessment for 2007 was adopted.
- From the church of Fergus auditing the books of the Fund for Needy Churches.

The above-mentioned reports were received with gratitude.

Question period according to Article 44 of the Church Order was held. None of the churches requested the help or judgment of Classis for the proper government of their congregation.

An appeal from a brother and sister of one of the churches was dealt with in closed session.

The church of Grand Valley requested release of its minister Rev. Aasman. This release was granted. Thankfulness was expressed to the Lord and appreciation was conveyed to Rev. Aasman for the work that he did while minister within this classis. Classis granted the request that Rev. Kampen be appointed as counsellor and that pulpit supply as organized through classis be permitted for one Sunday per month.

A letter was received from Rev. Ben Westerveld, chairman of the Interchurch Committee of ERQ, with greetings from the churches in the ERQ.

The following appointments were made: For examinations: Committee of Examiners: P. Feenstra, J. VanWoudenberg;

Exegesis Old Testament: M. VanLuik; Exegesis New Testament: J. VanWoudenberg; Knowledge of Scripture: C. Vermeulen; Doctrine and Creeds: P. Feenstra; Church History: E. Kampen; Ethics: C. Vermeulen; Church Polity: W. Geurts; Diaconology: D. Agema; Church Visitors: D. Agema, P. Feenstra (convenor), J. VanWoudenberg, M. VanLuik. All other appointments according to Article 7a of the regulations remained the same.

The mileage for Classis was set at 35 cents per km.

The church at Grand Valley was appointed convening church for the next classis, to be convened December 22, 2006, at 9:00 a.m. The suggested officers for the next classis: chairman Rev. Vermeulen; vice-chairman Rev. Geurts; clerk Rev. VanWoudenberg.

The following ministers were appointed as delegates to Regional Synod East, November 8, 2006: D. Agema, J. VanWoudenberg. As alternates: C. Vermeulen and M. VanLuik (in that order). The following elders were appointed as delegates: C. Nobels, P. Van Grootheest. As alternates G. Bos and A. VanSyndenborgh (in that order).

The church at Grand Valley was appointed to invite observers from URC and ERQ to the next classis and to attend the next classis of the URCNA.

Question period was held. The church of Guelph gave notice of its desire to begin a house congregation in the Kitchener/Waterloo area. The delegates at Classis were requested to take this matter back to their respective councils to provide further input.

Censure According to Art. 34 C.O. was not necessary.

Classis agreed that the Acts and Press Release be approved by the executive of Classis.

The chairman requested the singing of Ps. 24:1, 5. Rev. Feenstra closed in prayer.

