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*The Character
of the
Afternoon
Service*

*The Seventh
Commandment*

*The Voice
of the Church*



Walking Together through the Valley



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The Character of the Afternoon Service

The character of the afternoon service is supposed to be distinct from the morning service

Reformed people usually go to church twice on a Sunday. This is a good custom, characteristic of the Reformed tradition, going back to the days of the Reformation.

The Bible does not prescribe that the congregation should be called together twice for worship. However, in the Reformed tradition we have always been convinced that it is edifying for the congregation to meet again in the afternoon for a so-called “teaching service” (in Dutch: *leerdienst*).

I would encourage consistories to make a conscious effort to have Catechism preaching “ordinarily in the afternoon”

The character of the afternoon service is supposed to be distinct from the morning service. During the morning service the minister proclaims the gospel from a biblical passage. In the afternoon he has a more didactic sermon, proclaiming the doctrine of God’s Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism. In other words, in the morning the emphasis is on *proclaiming* the gospel, while in the afternoon the emphasis is on *teaching* the gospel (of course, these are no more than emphases – any good sermon will have elements of proclamation and teaching).

Over the years, however, the distinction between the morning service and the afternoon service has faded out more and more. The character of the afternoon service has become almost identical with the morning service. The liturgy is ninety percent the same. And as far as the preaching is concerned, I’m not sure that our Catechism preaching is always distinct from the “regular” preaching (I will come back to this point later on).

This is not a good development. If the afternoon service loses its distinct character, it loses its *raison d’être*. If our defence of the afternoon is no more than “going twice is better than going once,” I’m afraid that sooner or later people are going to say: I don’t buy that argument anymore.

We have to give our people a better reason for attending the afternoon service, and we have a good reason: in the afternoon you get something different – the same gospel, but from a more didactic and confessional perspective.

Historical development

It will be helpful to go start with a bit of history. In the early days after the Reformation the character of the afternoon service was clearly different from the morning service. In the very beginning, the afternoon service had the character of a public Catechism lesson. The minister asked questions and the children of the congregation had to give answers, as found in the Heidelberg Catechism. When the minister explained the teaching as summarized in the Catechism, he did not focus on just one Scripture



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passage, but he dealt with the various Scripture passages that are mentioned in every Lord's Day.

As church life in the Reformed tradition developed, the character of the afternoon service changed. First, the custom of having the children answer the questions disappeared (they were taught in Catechism class during the week). Second, in an effort to convince the congregation that the afternoon service was not a second-rate service, the liturgy was beefed up to be more similar to the liturgy of the morning service. Third, the Catechism sermon of the minister developed from a public Catechism lesson into a fully-fledged sermon or (as our Church Order describes it): proclamation of the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism.

The next step in the development was to be expected: sometimes, if the minister wanted to do an exchange with another minister, the congregation would get a Catechism sermon in the morning instead of the afternoon. More often, the congregation would not get a Catechism sermon at all, but two "free text sermons" instead.

The Canadian Reformed Churches have condoned this practice by changing the wording of the Church Order. Whereas the old version (the old Article 68) stipulated that Catechism preaching should take place "ordinarily in the afternoon service," the current version (Article 52) says no more than that it should happen "as a rule, once every Sunday..." In my opinion, this change was not an improvement.

I have the impression that consistories do not mind whether there is Catechism preaching or not, as long as there is a minister on the pulpit. Being an occasional preacher myself, I get phone calls from brother pulpit suppliers. I have never had one who tried to put pressure on me to preach a Catechism sermon during the afternoon service. As one brother told me: "Preach whatever you have, as long as we get you on the pulpit. We are beggars, so we can't be choosers!"

I do believe that consistories can be choosers! They have the right to request Catechism preaching once on a Sunday. And I would encourage consistories to make a conscious effort to have Catechism preaching "ordinarily in the afternoon," even if that phrase has been dropped from the Church Order.

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Catechism preaching

A related issue, and maybe a more difficult one, is the character of Catechism preaching as such. The single most important factor that determines the character of the afternoon service is the sermon. So the question is: what is a Catechism sermon and how does it differ from a regular sermon?

The difference is not that "the text" for the sermon is taken from the Catechism. The Heidelberg Catechism does not have the same status as the Word of God, so in my opinion a minister should never say "our text is taken from Lord's Day so and so." If it is to be preaching at all, it has to be proclamation of the Word.

On the other hand, the text of the Catechism should not be ignored either. Sometimes you hear Catechism sermons where the minister is in fact preaching on some passage of the Scriptures. The text of the Catechism is hardly used, or not used at all. In my opinion this is not Catechism preaching, but regular preaching disguised as Catechism preaching. I do not deny that such preaching can be very good and uplifting. In fact, I have heard wonderful sermons that belong to this category. But it is not Catechism preaching.

So what is Catechism preaching really? If I may offer some suggestions, I believe that Catechism preaching should have the following characteristics.

In the first place, Catechism preaching is preaching of the Word of God. Even if the preacher uses the text of Heidelberg Catechism as guideline, he is proclaiming the Word of God. He shows how the doctrine which is summarized in the respective Lord's Day is based on the Scriptures. Therefore he should use various Scripture passages. Even if he deals with one or two passages in more detail, it would still be prudent to refer to a variety of Scripture passages.

Second, the preacher uses the text of the Lord's Day – not as if it is "the text" for the sermon but in such a way that the rich content of the Catechism is used. The authors of the Catechism have done a remarkable job in formulating aspects of the Christian faith. It is hard to improve on their terminology. Why not use those well-crafted phrases to edify the congregation?

Third, Catechism preaching is pastoral in character. Once again, using the text of the Catechism will help the preacher to achieve this. The Catechism is very pastoral in character, very direct and personal. This characteristic needs to be carried through into Catechism preaching.

Fourth, the character of Catechism sermons should be a blend of historical-confessional and

contemporary. Many of the doctrines which are summarized in the Catechism are as relevant today as they were during the time of the Reformation. But this relevance needs to be demonstrated. Therefore, the Catechism preacher needs to study the background of the struggles of the time of the Reformation. At the same time, he needs to know current theological trends and debates, as well as the general religious climate of our time. More than in a regular sermon, the preacher could spend time in working through some of these issues.

Fifth, it would be beneficial to apply some flexibility in following the division into fifty-two Lord's Days. Although the Catechism is amazingly contemporary, it is clear that some issues have become less important, while others are not mentioned in the Catechism simply because they only emerged later during history. In some instances, then, it would be beneficial to condense a few Lord's Days into one sermon. For example, I don't think that it is necessary to have an annual sermon on the issue of swearing oaths (LD 37). I would suggest that Lord's Days 36 and 37 can be dealt with in one sermon. On the other hand, we could expand the discussion of a Lord's Day into two or three sermons if the issues are important today. It might be beneficial to spend more than one sermon on the work of the Holy Spirit (LD 20), views of eschatology, pre/post-millennialism (LD 22), marriage issues (LD 41), evangelism and mission (LD 48), to mention a few examples.

Sixth, since Catechism preaching is supposed to have a stronger emphasis on teaching and instruction, I feel that this emphasis should also be reflected in the style of preaching. For example, the preacher could analyze the structure of a Catechism answer with the congregation, ask people to underline important words, etc. He could hand out an outline of his sermon which would allow people to make notes. On that same outline he could include a few important quotes from contemporary sources which he wants to discuss during his sermon. He could ask a probing question and ask the listeners to think about it for a minute. He could even use technologically advanced methods (overheads, power point, etc.), if that helps him to get his message across (just make sure that these tools do not distract more than they facilitate. . .).

In conclusion, it is great that our Reformed fathers instituted the afternoon service so that the congregation might be taught and instructed more thoroughly. Let us keep the original intention in mind and let our afternoon services have a distinct *teaching* quality.



C.A. Vermeulen



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MATTHEW 13:52

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, this is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: "The Lord bless you and keep you. . . ." Numbers 6:22, 23

Still today we hear the high priestly blessing from the pulpit – "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." This was a rich blessing for the Israelites, for by it they were assured of God's love and protection and care.

Although there are many riches in the content of this blessing, in this meditation I would like to draw your attention to the words that precede this blessing. The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, "This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them. . . ." That seems like a convoluted way for the blessing to come – the Lord told Moses to tell Aaron to tell the Israelites and only then comes the blessing. When God gave the law, then He spoke directly to his people from Mount Sinai. Why not also speak this rich and beautiful blessing directly to his beloved people? Why did God pass on the blessing in the way He did?

Firstly, the blessing had to come from Aaron and his sons, that is, the priests. Israel had to learn to receive this rich blessing from the office-bearers God had given them. The priests also had to bring sacrifices for the sins of the people. They were the ministers of reconciliation between the holy God and his people. That the blessing had to come from the priests was a constant reminder

that this blessing was completely undeserved, it was by grace alone.

In this way, God gave a foreshadow of the coming Messiah. God was preparing Israel to seek and find the fullness of blessing in the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. In Him is the fullness of the ministry of reconciliation – He made the one and only sacrifice for sins – and so in Him is also the fullness of blessing for his people. See then the riches in the last deed our Lord did as He departed from earth: "While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven" (Luke 24:51).

This explains why the blessing came through the priests and not directly from God. But note that God did not speak directly to Aaron either, rather, He spoke to Moses. This additional link shows that the requirement to bless the people was part of the law. The phrase "And the Lord said to Moses" is used more often in the first five books of the Bible to underline that what follows is part of God's revealed law. That God told Moses to tell the priests to bless Israel shows that the priests were required by law to bless the people of God. The decision to bless the people did not lie with the priests, so that the people had to grovel at their feet in the hope of receiving blessing from them. Rather, they were commanded by law to bless the people of God. It was their legal task, their obligation.

Consider in that light the work of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. He was born under the law and was perfectly obedient to the requirements of the law. That is why as High Priest He blessed the people after his resurrection. That was no whim on his part, but part of his task as priest. And because He remains our faithful High Priest in heaven today, we know that his blessing on us is guaranteed – it is written in the law.

That is why the apostles could include blessings in their letters for God's people. Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Blessings for God's people. Why? Because they knew of the faithful High Priest, who continues to bless God's people from heaven, in accordance with his task as revealed in the law of Moses.

The high-priestly blessing comes to you Sunday after Sunday. In its New Testament context, this blessing proclaims to you that God will preserve you in the fight against sin and Satan ("keep you"), that God is really interested in where you are at ("turn his face toward you"), that He will continue to be gracious to you, and give you true and lasting peace. And all that is really for us, as certainly as your faithful High Priest continues his work of blessing God's people from heaven. It is written in the law and our heavenly High Priest is faithful.



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Walking Together through the Valley (Part 4 of 4)

This seminar was recently presented by Mr. Ludwig in Carman, Manitoba

A procession of faith

When we reflect back on 1 Thessalonians 4 we find the basis for our grieving with hope is rooted in the fact that Jesus Christ died and rose again and as a result God will bring back with Jesus all who have died in Him. The dead will rise again! This is the central teaching of the gospel that is spoken of already in the beginning. In fact, these are God's first words in addressing our sinful state. First He curses the devil for his deceit and then He pronounces the resurrection of his Son. Only after He has proclaimed the gospel does God assign man back to the dust from where he came. This is significant in regards to the burial of the dead, as we do not abandon our loved ones to the grave. The graves of the righteous are sanctified (set apart) for the day of the renewal of all things in Jesus Christ. In the beginning, our bodies were formed out of the good earth God created, in our spiritual forefather Adam, and once again our bodies will be re-formed out of the good earth in our spiritual brother Jesus Christ. The hope of the gospel is hinged on the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the source and

pattern for our redemption. We find Christ's work in the center of the gospel. We confess we have everything in Christ.

This is not a new teaching for us. The church has confessed and taught this for centuries. The main thrust of the Protestant Reformation was the sufficiency or efficacy of Jesus' death and resurrection. As well as we know this truth, however, there are times when we are challenged to understand all the implications it has for our life and also for our death. In so-called mainstream churches the resurrection of the body is receiving less emphasis and perhaps is being replaced with a new teaching. A stronger emphasis on the spiritual, the immortal soul, replaces the solid teaching of a physical resurrection. A more cross-cultural and multi-faith integrated teaching of some type of new spiritual life beyond this one is being touted as more acceptable and comprehensible for people. There is a shifting away from the importance of the burial of the dead as a climactic part of the Christian pilgrimage. Many are turning to the alternative of cremation accompanied by a general scattering of the cremated remains in favourite natural settings. The body is continually being distanced from the funeral service in favour of a more prompt

disposition followed by memorial services. Slowly and subtly the reality of the resurrection is being exchanged for an inferior man-made teaching about where comfort can be found as we grieve the loss of our loved ones. In our North American culture we are standing on shifting ground as we examine this topic. It is important that we begin by climbing back onto the "rock" of solid scriptural teaching.

The truth we cling to

In Lord's Day 1 we confess that that our only comfort in life and death is that we belong *body and soul both in life and death* to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. Often, I believe, we are tempted to separate this teaching rather than appreciate the fullness of this continuing relationship with Christ. While I live or die I remain physically and spiritually Christ's possession. That has implications for my body not only while I live but also in death. David professes in Psalm 139 that even in the grave God is there for him and again in Psalm 16 that the Holy One would not see decay nor would he be abandoned to the grave. Jesus Christ was not left in the grave and as a result nor will we. We need to appreciate the rich continuum with our Lord also in our physical bodies. In Lord's Day 17 we confess

that the benefits of Christ's resurrection are threefold, first we share in his righteousness before God, second we are raised to a new life here and now as a righteous people, and third it is our *guarantee* of our glorious resurrection. This is not just a spiritual matter; it is also a physical one. Paul claims in 1 Corinthians 15 that this is a matter of first importance. The fact that Jesus Christ died, was buried, was raised on the third day, and appeared to many is the evidence and pattern for our own resurrection. It is also the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture. In Lord's Day 16 we read the cryptic response as to why Christ was buried. It is a testimony to the *fact* of his death. This stresses that we cannot gloss over the reality of physical death. It is the verity of his death that makes the resurrection significant and powerful. The catechism continues to apply this to our reality. We too will die in order to put an end to sin and gain entrance into eternal life. It is at the resurrection that Christ will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Phil 3:21). Wow, this is a powerful teaching! This is the truth we cling to in the face of death.

Unclear understanding

Interestingly enough, we often start to fragment our thinking once the death of a loved one has occurred. I have often witnessed believing Christians assert, about their own death or the death of a loved one, that the body is just a "shell," it no longer is the person. A distancing quickly occurs from the physical reality of the body and a spiritual emphasis takes place. The reality that they are taken up

to the Lord spiritually sometimes cloaks the remaining body in a shroud of unreality and even disdain. There can be a lack of concern stated about what happens to the body, an unwillingness to consider the significance of the details of burial, and sometimes even a desire to separate the body from the funeral itself. In an attempt to be Christ-centred, the dead body of a loved one is set aside. I have even heard Christian brothers piously exclaim, "When I die you can throw my body

The hope of the gospel is hinged on the reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the source and pattern for our redemption

away, it is no longer of any use to me or anyone else!" or some Christian sisters say, "I don't want anyone to look at my body when I die, that's not me any more." Initially I saw this reaction is a coping mechanism, a way for an individual to try to come to terms with the anticipation of his own death or to come to terms with the stark reality of death as it is presented to them in the form of their loved one's body. I understand that this can be part of grief. We all desire to gain control of situations where we clearly feel out of control. Sorting out our relationship to the body of our loved one is difficult at the time of death. Yet, increasingly, I am being convinced that this resistance and uncomfortable reaction may be

rooted in an unclear understanding of the fullness and richness of the teaching of the resurrection of the dead. Sometimes our uncertainty in understanding something can cause us to push away from it rather than accept or embrace it. Let's explore this a little further.

The body and burial

Our Church Order does not give us a lot of help here. The simple statement in Article 65 moves the issue away from the church and into the lap of the family and suggests that the activities surrounding funeral arrangements should be conducted accordingly. At first glance I'm not even sure I know exactly what that means. However, I do understand where this response comes from. As a Protestant church we moved away from the teaching of Rome. The Roman Catholic Church had enshrouded the death and burial of the believer in elaborate rites and sacraments as a part of its works-based emphasis on achieving salvation. The importance of the offering of the mass for the dead as a means of imputing Christ's righteousness upon the deceased, the intercessory prayers to Mary and the saints on behalf of the deceased, the offering of incense, the sprinkling of holy water, the anointing of the body with oil, and the blessing of the burial site all serve to obscure Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and the sufficiency of his burial and resurrection for our salvation. One can see why the church fathers pushed away from all these ceremonial rites and man-made sacraments and stated that the church plays no official role in the burial of the dead. However, this has left a vacuum. The wisdom in

acknowledging that the Scriptures have not prescribed a specific order to the burial of the dead is offset by a vague reference of conducting matters in a way that is reflective of a family affair, not an ecclesiastical one. We might have to acknowledge here that the strength of this article is also its weakness. I think it is this vacuum that remains that causes us *not* to plumb the riches of the scriptural teaching in this regard.

The church at Corinth wrestled with this too. The Apostle Paul explains the logical consequences of down-playing, or worse, denying, the resurrection of the dead. If we do not hold fast to the resurrection of the dead in Christ we are of all men most to be pitied. Obscuring the reality of physical resurrection is an act of impoverishing and eventually denying the gospel. The Corinthians ask how to grasp the transformation of our decaying physical body into something far greater, an immortal body? Paul's response is quite practical. In the burial of our loved one's body we sow a seed to eternal life. There is nothing magical in this process, although for now it remains scientifically mysterious. A farmer sows seed in the soil in the expectation of growth and a harvest, not in expectation of the recreation of the seed. The farmer cannot make this seed grow; this is God's work and it will happen as He has ordained it. But the farmer may do it in faith (even unwittingly), expecting a result. Likewise when we bear the bodies of our loved ones to the grave, we do it in expectation of the resurrection to a new life. It is not based on our activity, on the exact place, or time, or words uttered. It is not based upon the blessing of a priest, or the result of an elaborate

rite; it is founded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ sanctifies the graves of the righteous and makes them a place of new life. Jesus Christ empowers the resurrection of our new immortal bodies on the last day. All we can do is *act* in faith. And the act of faith upon the death of our loved ones is to believe that it does make a difference what we do, that our actions should reflect what Jesus Christ has promised us regarding our physical body. Our dead bodies

Obscuring the reality of physical resurrection is an act of impoverishing and eventually denying the gospel

are not just human remains in need of disposition. They are not an obstacle to be overcome in order to receive God's grace and comfort. Remember Lord's Day 1; that I with my body in life and death belong to Jesus Christ. Jesus makes my body worthy of burial as a seed to eternal life! The concept of burial of the body in expectation of future glory is a scriptural teaching that is well rooted in the Old Testament. Let's have a look at some Old Testament examples.

Old Testament examples

I mentioned earlier that the first directive for our bodies return to the earth is given by God in Genesis 3, but only after the words of resurrection were spoken. God did not assign man to the grave until He first provided the way out. This is crucial as we see that from the beginning the act of burial has been connected with resurrection.

In fact, the original act of creation was linked with the earth as well. It isn't strange that God will resurrect our bodies out of a renewed earth, for that is how He created us in the first place. The Old Testament emphasis on burial is often linked with expectation of receiving the covenant promise of a new land for Israel. Abraham insisted on purchasing the cave of Machpelah for the burial of the body of his wife Sarah. The significance of Abraham owning the burial site in the land of promise was meaningful for the Israelites, as it pointed to fulfillment of God's promise regarding the land of Canaan as a heritage for his people Israel. Likewise, Jacob instructed that he not be buried in Egypt but be carried up to the cave of Machpelah to be buried with his family. This is not merely sentimental thinking, but also an expectation of a greater day. Also Joseph made the sons of Israel swear that they would carry his bones with them out of Egypt on the great day of liberation. This request for burial with his fathers also was made in faith, in full expectation of God's fulfillment of his promises. Most striking is the death of Moses, the servant of God, and a foreshadower of Jesus Christ. God allowed Moses to see the Promised Land with his eyes before he died and then buried him outside the Promised Land, enforcing his decree that Moses would not enter. The *fact* of his burial was revealed to the people of Israel but not the *site*, lest they figure they should be wiser than God and carry his body into the Promised Land. Moses would have to wait for the day of resurrection as the Lord had decreed. So we see that in the Old Testament believers were buried in expectation of God's fulfillment of his promises.

Funeral planning

What we do with the body of our loved one, or what we plan to have done with our own bodies upon death, is significant. Not that we have to assist God in any way to achieve his plan for our salvation, but to *show our faith*, to show we believe that God will do what He says. This has implications on the funeral planning itself, does it not? Will I allow my family to view my mortal remains or will I adamantly instruct them against doing it? We saw earlier that we confess that Christ was buried to prove he was dead. As difficult as it is to view the deceased body of one we love, it is a crucial confrontation in accepting the reality that someone has died. Our acceptance of that reality is also closely linked with the expectation that that person will rise again. There is not only a mental or sociological benefit to viewing the deceased, but also a spiritual benefit. Unfortunately, not all circumstances allow for this healthy confrontation. And how should we consider our interaction with others at this time? Will we allow for a time of visitation or is this a frivolous man-centred affair? There is a natural healthy reaction when faced with the shock of the death of a loved one to turn inward to a close circle of support. Yet, after a time, there is value to becoming re-socialized through the funeral process and to resume our place in a larger social context, most importantly as a member of the church of Christ and as such one who lives in solidarity with brothers and sisters in the Lord. It also allows *others* this healthy confrontation with the reality of the death and it provides opportunity for mutual support. The funeral service itself, planned by the pastor and the family, becomes an opportunity for preparation to go to

the grave, to address that “faith crossroads” between what is seen and what is unseen. And then the witness of faith in our procession to the grave suddenly becomes increasingly filled with importance. It is our last testimony to our family, to our friends, to our neighbours that we trust in God and we believe in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The burial of our bodies becomes the climactic evidence of our walk of faith. Again, this is not based on our actions, but on the rich promises in Jesus Christ that He has overcome death. This is a tangible and real activity,

It isn't strange that God will resurrect our bodies out of a renewed earth, for that is how He created us in the first place

proclaiming Christ's victory over the grave. How could we bury the bodies of our loved ones with any semblance of comfort unless we expect them to rise up? And if we do expect them to rise again, the cemetery becomes a victory ground, not a place of defeat that we feel ashamed to revisit. In fact, a visit to the cemetery keeps our faith in sharp focus, for right here on the last day my loved one, and possibly I myself, will rise again in this place. Then it is fitting to mark the grave, not with self bravado, but with the mark of a follower of Jesus Christ.

So we see that a meaningful Christian funeral process begins to take shape upon the death of a loved one. First an internal coming to grips with the facts and evidence of death, then a reaching out to others to receive support and

resume our place in the body of Christ, then a preparation for the solemn act of the burial of the dead, and then a *procession of faith* to the graveside, bearing witness to the expected return of Christ and the rising of the dead. It seems clear that this is an important faith experience to share with many, and not isolate to a few. It seems clear that it is a family matter that should be shared with the church of Christ. It also seems possible that it loses some of its value if it is not shared as a witness to our unbelieving neighbour, so that they too may experience the rich treasure of being in the midst of God's people as they confess the victory of Jesus Christ over the grave, in the very presence of an open grave. The Old Testament Preacher suggests there is a time for all things, including privacy and publicity. Our whole society will benefit from public Christian funerals.

I mentioned in the beginning that in the North American culture there is an increasing tendency towards cremation. I don't think anyone can claim a biblical norm for this practice and many could convincingly make such an argument for burial. We should be careful not to overstate an outright condemnation of it, however, for we also cannot be too bold in what Scripture does not say. I understand that there may be places in the world that this is the only reasonable way of dealing with this issue due to burial space limitations. We *must* maintain, however, the *significance* of the burial, even if it has to be cremated remains, as a significant act of faith and a tangible declaration of the expectation of the resurrection of the dead. One of the strengths of the church of Rome is that it does still declare the importance of Christian burial, even though their

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of Burlington-Waterdown,
Ontario.

thought process around it remains flawed with a works based approach. A "scattering of ashes" as a means of showing liberation of our loved ones from the bonds of this human existence denies the significance of the resurrection of the dead and the continued ownership of our bodies by our Lord. Once we close the door to the reality of physical resurrection we open the door to all kinds of fantastical new age experiences.

What about the funeral service itself? It is not an ecclesiastical affair. It would, however, be a strange occurrence if our funeral services became extremely different in character or content than our regular worship, for what message would we proclaim then? In life we worship in one way, yet in the face of death we find no solace there? On the other hand, the funeral service is arranged for a specific purpose. It is here where we in word, song, and prayer come to grips with the harsh reality of the death of a loved one and place that very tangible hurt and grief before the Lord. It is here that we should feel secure in expressing the real and often dramatic changes that will affect the family and close friends and even the

church community. It is here that we can also thank God for the gift of relationships and the life of the one who has died. A funeral service that does not acknowledge these things rings with empty and hollow words. For it is in the full realization and acknowledgement of the death of a loved one and the subsequent grief that it causes and our inability to save ourselves from this situation that we can truly turn to the Lord in our need and find solace in Christ's work. His death and resurrection was real and so the reality of the death and resurrection of our loved ones needs to be experienced as a real event. The funeral remains a service of hope and comfort for the living not for the dead.

Some have suggested that the presence of the deceased body at the service may obscure or hamper our focus in worshipping the Lord. Here is where we need to assert the position of the Church Order and differentiate the funeral service from the regular worship service.

The burial of our bodies becomes the climactic evidence of our walk of faith

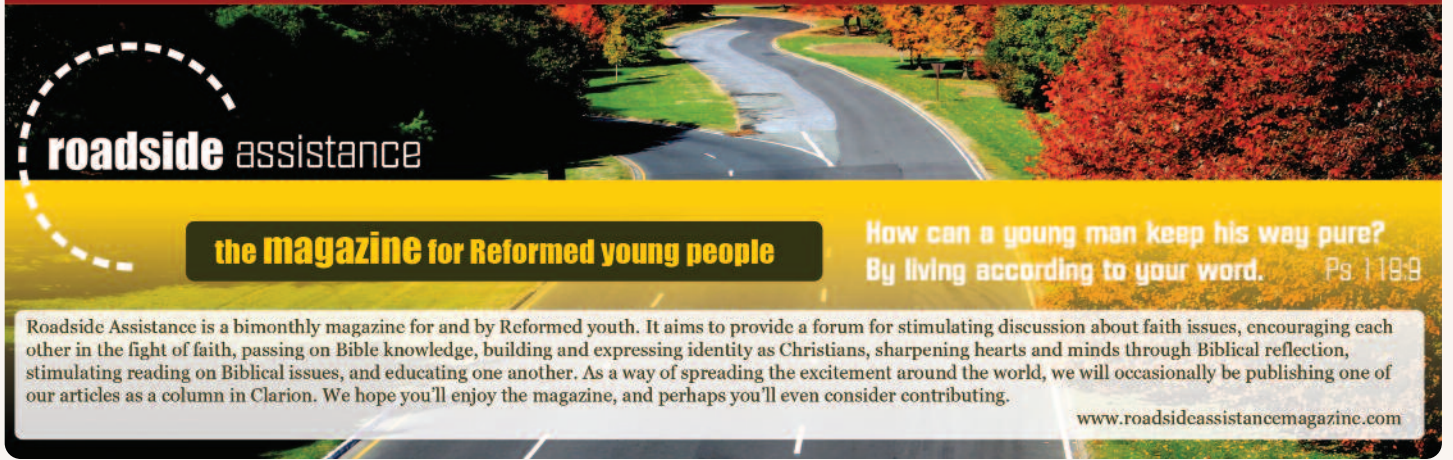
Just as a marriage ceremony has a particular focus, to prepare the bride and bridegroom for marriage and fulfill the legal requirement regarding marriage, so the funeral prepares the mourners for the significance of the burial. At the wedding we don't marginalize the wedding party for fear of not hearing the Word, but we understand that the Word places the marriage in proper context. Likewise, at the funeral service we acknowledge the necessity for the interruption of the procession to the grave to hear God's Word and

to be strengthened and encouraged and to place the burial in the context of the resurrection. It is fitting that this takes place in the assembly of God's people. In the body of Christ we share our burdens and we also assist each other. In this way we experience our solidarity in our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a solidarity that even overcomes death and the grave. Here we need to rightfully acknowledge our true family in the Lord.

Conclusion

In the end, I believe that we should not shrink back from the fullness and richness of our comfort in the resurrection of the dead in Christ Jesus. If we are unwilling to appreciate the richness of this promise in the face of death, as we plan the funerals for our loved ones and possibly pre-plan the details of our own funeral services we will present a weakened gospel. If we minimize and marginalize the place of the deceased body as the reason for the service, and we reduce the significance of the burial only as a duty of necessity, we will bear a poor witness to the completeness of our salvation. A buzz word in the funeral service profession currently is "Celebration of Life." For many this celebration will last only as long as the eulogy continues or the last glass is raised to toast the memory of a good friend. But for those in Jesus Christ the true celebration will be a celebration of life everlasting at the great banquet feast of our Lord, where Christ will be in the center and we will *physically* live in his presence. This is the gospel truth that we bear witness to as we make our way to the grave, so even at the grave we make our song "Alleluia, alleluia." In this knowledge the dead do rest in peace, in full expectation of the day of the Lord. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus!





roadside assistance

the magazine for Reformed young people

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word. Ps 119:9

Roadside Assistance is a bimonthly magazine for and by Reformed youth. It aims to provide a forum for stimulating discussion about faith issues, encouraging each other in the fight of faith, passing on Bible knowledge, building and expressing identity as Christians, sharpening hearts and minds through Biblical reflection, stimulating reading on Biblical issues, and educating one another. As a way of spreading the excitement around the world, we will occasionally be publishing one of our articles as a column in Clarion. We hope you'll enjoy the magazine, and perhaps you'll even consider contributing.

www.roadsideassistancemagazine.com

The Seventh Commandment

Lydia Pol

"You shall not commit adultery" (Deut 5:18). I look at the commandment and smile. I would never do that. Closing the Bible, I stand up and go outside. Time to go to the mall, check out some guys. . . or maybe if you're a guy this would be time to go to the beach, check out some girls.

From the models in the magazines to the actors and actresses in movies, we are taught to see no farther than the outside

Have you ever thought about the phrase "checking someone out"? You check things out at the library. You check things out at a check out counter. You check out a car. So maybe the phrase "check out" has different meanings. But have you noticed something? In each of these examples, when you say "checking out," you're talking about a *thing*, an object that you

can use and throw away when you're finished with it. You use it to fulfill your needs and then you get rid of it. So what are you saying when you say that you're "checking out" a person? What are you saying about that person's value in your eyes? Are you looking at their inside? Are you seeing beyond what they show the world?

What you are doing when you "check someone out" is called "depersonalization." To depersonalize someone is to lower their value from a human being to something you can use and discard. You lower their value from someone who is created in God's image to someone you can look at and judge based on their outward appearance. Maybe once you get to know them you realize that your first idea of them was wrong. But what about the people that you pass by on the street and never talk to again?

Now let's move beyond the phrase "checking out." You get the idea. We are not saying that it's wrong to think someone is good-looking. On the contrary, God gave

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Would watching R-rated movies and looking at pornography then also be breaking the seventh commandment?
2. Modesty in clothing: What turns guys on? (Guys only answer this). What turns girls on? (Girls only). Are you loving your neighbour when you dress immodestly?
3. Does it make a difference whether we tempt fellow Christians or non-Christians?

Look out for these questions and more at www.roadsideassistancemagazine.com

that person their good looks and there is nothing wrong with finding someone attractive. It becomes sin when you don't go any farther than that. From the models in the magazines to the actors and actresses in movies, we are taught to see no farther than the outside.

Feeding temptation is putting yourself in situations where you know you will be tempted and leaving yourself there

Is it possible that we as Christians have spent so much time being in the world that we are becoming of the world? How many times in a month do you watch PG-13 movies that contain graphic content? How about R-rated movies? And what about the books you read? If you feed yourself a steady diet of junk food, you will become physically unhealthy. In the same way, if you feed yourself a steady diet of trashy books and movies, you will become spiritually unhealthy. Not convinced yet? Have you ever tried praying in the middle of an R-rated movie? Have you ever thought about passing on the gospel to one of those "hot" people whom you look at and then pass without ever talking to them again?



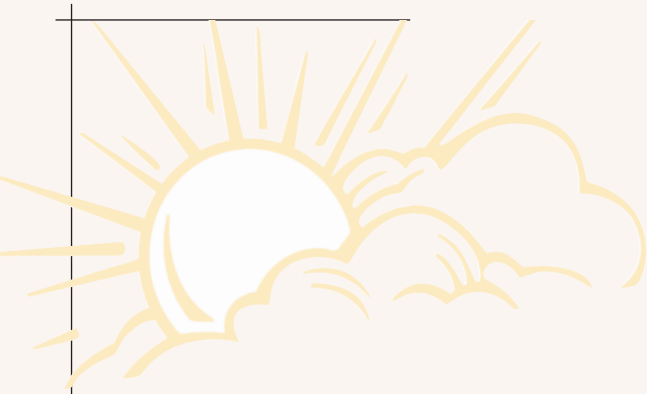
And what about you? Whether you have a boyfriend or girlfriend or not, eventually you will come into a situation where you will be tempted. Being tempted is not a sin. Jesus was tempted in the desert. The sin is giving in to temptation, or even just feeding it.

We all know what giving in to temptation is. Feeding temptation is something else. Feeding temptation is putting yourself in situations where you know you will be tempted and leaving yourself there. Tempting yourself to see what you can handle isn't pious, it's stupid. It's like walking

on thin ice to see how long it will take before it cracks and you fall in.

Temptation is unavoidable. Your response to temptation will depend on your relationship with God and on your knowledge of the situation. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body" (1 Cor 6:19-20). "The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body" (1 Cor 6:13).





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."
Philippians 4:6

Have you ever begun a new day with being anxious about something? Yes, in this broken world there is much to be anxious about. Closer to home, we can begin to look at our own sinful hearts, and there is much to be concerned about. How are we to go on in our day? What does Christ teach us to do?

Take time to open your Bibles and read from Matthew 6:25-34. Here the Lord instructs us not to worry about our lives; what we will eat or drink or our clothes. We are to keep our ears open, listening to the birds. Then we can be reminded of the sure knowledge that our heavenly Father feeds the birds and takes care of them. Are we not much more valuable than the birds? We, who have been created in his image! Matthew 6:27 says, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?"

The Apostle Paul in our text has written about many situations of life. There were many tensions and difficulties within the congregation at Philippi. Through these difficulties and anxieties, Paul continually points to the Lord Jesus as the source of our joy, deliverance, and thankfulness. How can we bring the beginning of an anxious day to a source of joy? We can only do this through our heavenly Father, with folded hands in prayer to Him. The Apostle Paul's advice is to turn our worries into prayers. Do we want to worry less? Then pray more! Whenever you start to worry, stop and pray.

Our heavenly Father knows all our anxieties. He knows that as believers we can be anxious sometimes about some things. Yet, these anxieties must be turned into prayers. Our heavenly Father wants to be asked for all we may need for body and soul. In everything, the Father wants to see our dependence upon Him: in our personal life, at work or school, or our social life, in church, in absolutely everything. For He alone is the One who can bring the solutions. Therefore, ask Him!

Pour out your heart before Him, ". . . in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God" (Phil 4:6b). He is merciful and gracious to those who put their hope and trust in Him

alone! May we all begin each day anew in prayer to Him, for then we can hear the early morning birds sing and be reminded of his mercies new every day!

*Will anxious care or bitter sighing
At any time give true relief?
And what avails us our decrying
Each morning's evil, trouble, grief?
We only add to grief and stress
By discontent and bitterness.*

*Be still! What God in His good pleasure
To you in wisdom may impart
Is given you in perfect measure;
Thus be content within your heart.
To Him who chose us for His own
Our needs and wants are surely known.*

Hymn 48:2, 3

Birthdays in June:

- 4 **JAMES BUIKEMA will be 46**
c/o R. Feenstra
278 St. Catherine Street, PO Box 662
Smithville, ON LOR 2A0
- 20 **CHARLIE BEINTEMA will be 32**
29 Wilson Avenue, Chatham, ON N7L 1K8
- 28 **JIM WANDERS will be 46**
2142 Deerwood Drive, Burlington, ON N7L 2A9
- 29 **TOM VANDERZWAAG will be 54**
Anchor Home, 361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday in the month of July. May you all have a very enjoyable day together with your family and friends. Above all, may our heavenly Father bless you richly in this new year. Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East
RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
905-563-0380

The Voice of the Church



Introduction

"The Voice of the Church" radio broadcast has been in existence for over thirty-nine years. Its first message was broadcast on May 4, 1968 on KARI-AM in Blaine, Washington, USA. For the last twenty-nine years, the Voice of the Church has been recorded and produced by the Canadian Reformed Broadcasting Association (CRBA). This radio evangelism program is based in Burlington, Ontario and it is produced on behalf of the supporting churches, which currently number twenty-four in total. At the moment, four radio stations carry our weekly program and the meditations are now also broadcast in MP3 format on the Internet at www.sermonaudio.com/votc.

Executive

The CRBA executive meets six to eight times per year to ensure that meditations have been prepared and that the production of the weekly broadcast continues uninterrupted. Presently the executive consists of chairman Pete deBruin, secretary Cecile deWalle, treasurer Andrew Westrik, and technical producer Harpert VanderWel.

Mandate of the CRBA and the VOC

The mandate of the CRBA is to promote the message of the

gospel via the radio broadcast and the Internet. Supporting churches are assessed per communicant member in order to pay for the recording and production of the weekly broadcast. The income generated by this assessment pays for the production but does not pay for radio time. Each radio station that carries the broadcast invoices the supporting churches in that area without involving the CRBA.

Production

The process starts with obtaining meditations from the participating ministers/students. These messages are recorded by our reader at the recording studio in Burlington and are used to fit into a fifteen minute broadcast. The recorded messages are combined with suitable music to complete each weekly broadcast. Churches and/or home mission committees are invited to place announcements at the end of each broadcast. Programs such as VBS, Bible study programs, and choir concerts have been advertised on the weekly broadcast. All broadcasts are simulcast on the same weekend on radio stations WDCX-FM, CIMJ-FM, CFOK-AM, and CFAM-AM. One radio station hosts our broadcast on Saturdays as well (WDCX-FM). Each program ends with an announcement that identifies the sponsoring committee or church. The titles of the weekly meditations are

uploaded to our website and emailed to various church bulletin editors as well as to the executive.

Recent developments

A number of years ago our mandate was amended to include students at our Theological College who have entered into their third or fourth year of study to prepare meditations for the Voice of the Church. Ministers in the United Reformed Church Federation (URC) have also been found willing to contribute and supply us with meditations from time to time. Our website www.voiceofthechurch.org contains pertinent information about the work of the CRBA and its evangelism outreach radio program. Responses to the radio broadcast come to us via the regular mail, email, or via our website. As a broadcasting organization, the CRBA was invited in 2002 to become a member of www.sermonaudio.com, a website that features Christian programming, including numerous meditations, sermons, and speeches. Since that time, our weekly meditations aired on the broadcast have also been uploaded on this site and are downloadable from our webpage at www.sermonaudio.com/votc. This site publishes monthly reports on the number of downloads of our meditations and supplies us with updated statistics at regular intervals.

Statistics

- 190 meditations have been uploaded to our www.sermonaudio.com/votc page
- 7,854 meditations have been listened to (streamed and downloaded)
- 20 meditations have been downloaded and emailed to friends
- 27,942 total sermon page views (hits) have been logged
- 8,162 visitors have visited our homepage
- Total downloads:
2002: May – December: 311
2003: January – December: 1,274
2004: January – December: 1,502
2005: January – December: 1,989
2006: January – December: 2,564
2007: January – April: 507

Observations

We wish to express our appreciation to the authors of the meditations that have so faithfully supported this radio ministry over the years, as well as the twenty-four congregations that currently support it financially. We also mention the faithful listeners who continue to request copies of our meditations and some who have sent regular monetary donations to help us offset our expenses. Lastly, we are grateful to the diligent committee members who continue to give of their time and talents in making sure that, year after year, the production of this broadcast runs smoothly and effectively.



Conclusion

The Voice of the Church definitely has an audience and over the many years of its existence has been allowed to sow the seed of the Good News. In doing so, the CRBA endeavours to fulfill its God-given mandate to proclaim his Name, individually and collectively. We plan to do so as long as we receive the cooperation of the ministers who need to provide us with meditations for this weekly program. We also solicit the prayerful and financial support of the congregations, for we realize that we may continue to do this work on their behalf. Please remember this important work of radio evangelism in your prayers so that the seed may fall in rich soil and bear much fruit. *Soli Deo Gloria!!*

CONTACT:

The Voice of the Church

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Burlington, ON, Canada L7R 4K5

You may also contact the CRBA Executive at their personal email addresses:

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Secretary: Cecile deWalle
bcdewalle@3web.com

Treasurer: Andrew Westrik
awestrik@fcpremier.com

Producer: Harpert VanderWel
audiopro@voiceofthechurch.org

Mark Veenman

Mark Veenman is chairman of the education committee of MCS in Fergus, Ontario. He is also a piano technician in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario
apollopiano@bellnet.ca



The Advantages of a Collaborative Approach to Professional Development

The following document is intended to demonstrate the obligation of an education committee in a Reformed school to take a leadership role in promoting the advantages of a collaborative approach to professional development. The specific professional development opportunity initiated by the faculty and education committee at Maranatha Christian School (MCS) in Fergus, Ontario and provided by the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College (CCRTC) is Bible Education, but the objectives could be applied to other subject fields and to the development of a comprehensive and unified approach to professional development in general.

Introduction

Most professional associations and trade guilds offer opportunities for professional development on a regular basis. A cursory glance at professions and trades common in Europe and North America will quickly indicate to what degree various professions value professional development. Real Estate agents are constantly honing their skills with professional development to improve their service and selling abilities. Specialized medical

doctors, family practitioners, and nurses constantly develop their skills and improve their service. Public school teachers also spend much time in the summer months and at other times developing their skills in teaching such rapidly changing courses as evolutionary biology and postmodern ethics. Moreover, in such inveterate, ancient trades as metalworking, glassmaking, and stonecutting, which have seen little real technological advancement in hundreds of years, there is still a guild structure offering training and mentorship.¹ The tradesman's improving skills were rewarded with changes in his rank and consequently his wage: apprentice to craftsman, journeyman, master, and grandmaster. What can be seen in all of these professions is a desire to improve the skills of professionals, develop uniform standards in the profession, and offer opportunities for mentorship. In our view, the education committee of a Reformed school is obliged to take a leadership role in promoting professional development generally and the article that follows conveys the advantages of a collaborative approach to professional development.

Our foundation

At the fall combined faculty/education committee meeting we were overwhelmed by the teachers' request for in-house professional development – this collaboration reflects the faculty's dedication to their own continuing education. We applaud their initiative in this whole process; this paper will illustrate – almost as an afterthought – why we so strongly concur that collaborative professional development is beneficial for teachers, administrations, schools, and especially for children.

At Reformed schools effective Bible teaching and spiritual instruction are demonstrably the most important duties performed by teachers; all other subject fields, while very important in their own right, are taught through the lens of biblical instruction. This implies that teachers themselves need to have an ever-deepening love for and understanding of Scripture in order to be able to convey this effectively to their students in all areas across the curriculum. Therefore, the desire to develop skills in this subject field simply reflects the importance of honing existing skills and developing a school-wide consistency in, and

approach to, the most important subject that is taught at Reformed schools. As has been stated by the Preacher, "If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success" (Eccl 10:10).

We feel very confident that the CCRTC's in-house professional development opportunity this summer – when the Rev. D.G.J. Agema will be teaching a short course: "A Reformed Perspective on Bible Instruction" – will excite and embolden and will sharpen skills in pulling the golden, Reformed, historical-redemptive thread through Scripture. This will enable an improvement in how our covenantal youth are inspired toward a higher standard of godliness. It is also our goal to promote grade to grade consistency within the framework of a "whole-school" approach to Bible instruction. The CCRTC is thrilled with the opportunity to lead this professional development. The education committee is thrilled to be able to grant the request for in-house professional development and offer it to teachers from surrounding schools in Ontario.

Some Principles for Professional Development²

We readily admit that the principles of professional development in general represent a challenge to some aspects of conventional practices; professional development for teachers is no different. Each proposed principle below may therefore represent a challenge to some aspect of present practice and makes reference to the specific example of Bible instruction currently under discussion:

1. *Professional development offers a meaningful engagement with ideas, with materials, and with*

colleagues. This principle acknowledges teachers' sometimes limited access to the resources of a subject. Thus, a well-designed professional development event will actively engage teachers in the study of a foundational field in which they are engaged every day; will enlarge teachers' access to Reformed resources and theological ideas and concepts; and will establish mechanisms of support among teachers (as an example, forging a professional relationship with instructors at the CCRTC). It is thus we will hope to establish one of the cornerstones of professional development: mentorship.

2. *Professional development takes account of the contexts of teaching and the experience of teachers.* Having focused study groups, or forging long-term partnerships with the CCRTC and other organizations/individuals, and developing similar modes of professional development afford teachers a means of (re)discovering new (or old) ideas. This principle thus challenges the "one size fits all" mode of formal professional development; there is no single approach to any field. However, a collaborative approach to professional development will begin to address the fit between new ideas and old habits, or between new ideas and present circumstances. Or, as we like to say at MCS, it addresses the fit between being theologically Reformed and academically progressive.
3. *Professional development encourages a unified collaborative approach.* In the pursuit of high quality Reformed schools, consensus has not proven to be an overstated virtue. Dissent, at its

extreme, may spur on a type of paralysis in the school corporation, but shared commitments among membership, board/committees, and faculty enable teachers to take bold action. Close collaborations and long-term partnerships with individuals, or with organizations like the CCRTC, provide a unique opportunity to develop professionally and to do so by taking a collaborative approach, or "spoke in the wheel" approach, to teaching.

4. *Professional development places classroom practice in the larger context of school practice.* Approaching professional development collectively allows us to take a unified approach to teaching Bible in Reformed Schools. It is a principle grounded in a "big picture" perspective on the purposes and practices of teaching, and provides teachers a means of seeing the connections between the students' classroom experiences, the teachers' classroom practice, and the school-wide practice. This is a challenge to a narrowly "technical" view of professional development that depends heavily on the accumulation of specific individual technical skills and challenges a tendency for boards and administrators to treat teachers exclusively as classroom decision makers independent of larger patterns, developments, and long-term school goals. In sum, professional development partnerships with institutions like the CCRTC provide for us a means to implement skills at the individual classroom level in a way that promotes a unified, school-wide approach to the subject field.

5. *Professional development prepares teachers (as well as students) to use the subject matter in their lives.* Without denying that there are times when individual skill training is indeed appropriate, this collaborative approach to professional development envisions a model based more persuasively on the conviction that true knowledge belongs exclusively to God. In view of our weakness, also our weak knowledge, professional development provides the possibility for teachers to re-examine their Reformed beliefs and the history of redemption in collaboration with other teachers and instructors from institutions like the CCRTC with the conviction that a consistent grade to grade progression in Bible instruction is a more convincing method of teaching. Our strength does not derive from the teachers' willingness to consume knowledge, but rather from our capacity to present a unified approach to teaching Bible and to positively or negatively assess the "knowledge" claimed by others (Calvin claimed that his "knowledge" was no knowledge at all – it reflected a knowledge inherited from the Word³). Collaborative approaches to this most important subject field in Reformed schools and the ensuing broader Reformed perspectives offered by team professional development will likely result in a more critical look at accepted truths of teaching.
6. *The governance of professional development ensures administrative restraint and a balance between the interests of parents and school society on one hand, and the interests of the faculty on the other.* Politically speaking, the

teaching field in Reformed schools is affected by the ebbing and flowing influences of two distinguishable bodies: the membership (represented by the board and its committees) and the faculty. Many schools fluctuate, sometimes rapidly, between dictatorial and laissez-faire models of governance. In the dictatorial management model, teachers play few leadership roles, also in terms of professional development. In the laissez-faire model of governance we have a confused and leaderless approach to professional development resulting in a turbulent grade to grade progression in Bible instruction. By *collaborating* in professional development we seek out the middle road to effective governance which balances the interests of the school society and its board and committees with the professional goals of the faculty.

Conclusion

We must examine the ways in which the orchestration of professional development communicates a total view of children, the school, teaching, and teacher development. Professional development has historically tended to center on individual improvements rather than on a school-wide approach to teaching and learning Bible. A collaborative and balanced approach to professional development might more readily harmonize support for the board's initiatives with those initiated by teachers individually. In sum, what we wish to accomplish through this historic, in-house professional development opportunity with the CCRTC is not only the improvement of Bible instruction and the skills of our professional teachers, but also, and just as importantly, the development of consistency in all

grades in Bible instruction. This collaborative approach to professional development will give our teachers a forum in which they develop their skills professionally and engage meaningfully with ideas and materials; will empower teachers to develop mentor relationships with other teachers and professionals in institutions like the CCRTC; will begin to develop a consistent means of teaching Bible; and will balance the interests of the school society, board, the children, and the faculty. We would encourage other school boards and education committees in our church federations' Reformed schools to take similar initiatives in their approach to professional development generally and in the field of Bible instruction specifically.

¹ Completely destroyed in the firestorms of February 1945, the eighteenth century baroque Protestant 'Frauenkirche' in Dresden, Germany was successfully rebuilt between 1994 and 2005 and is a prime modern example of the continued importance of skills development, training, and mentorship offered in the guilds of these respective, ancient European trades.

² The following are commonly accepted principles of professional development in the teaching industry and have been thoroughly modified and applied to the current topic of collaborative professional development.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book First, Chapt. 1, Sect. 1

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
ouwman@cornerstoneschool.us

Dear Editor:

In reaction to Dr. F. Oosterhoff's Letter to the Editor published in *Clarion* of March 16, 2007, allow me to say a few words in reply. Because of space limitation for letters to the editor it will be incomplete and fragmentary. Please consider it written by way of discussion and not in an antagonistic manner. First I will answer the objections voiced by Dr. Oosterhoff.

1. "No qualifications are made and. . . no grounds are given." Indeed, this would require much more space than is available in a Letter to the Editor. I merely wanted to point to the sources where such grounds can be found.
2. ". . . speeches by men who are already in opposition . . . a website that is outspoken in its criticism. . . ." Dr. Oosterhoff here seems to imply that the opposition and the criticism are unjustified because these speeches are made by men who are already in opposition. Is that a good reason to condemn them? Should we not rather look at the contents of the speeches? The phrase "already in opposition" is slightly confusing. Already prior to what?
3. ". . . only the arguments of the accusers, not those of the accused." True. I do not know of any websites that respond to these accusations. If any exist I'd be happy to visit them. On the sites of the "accusers" we do find at least some critical responses. But a repeated complaint of the owners is that criticism received is not directed to the arguments presented.
4. ". . . this complaint (of the absence of information) is not based on fact." Certainly, there have been articles dealing with the theological developments in The Netherlands. My concern, and perhaps I should have been more specific, is with the current practices in some congregations, with events such, for instance, as occurred in Kampen Noord, and the reasons therefore.
5. ". . . bad influence and 'modern ideas and philosophies.'" Prof. De Bruijne is also aware of this danger as, I am sure, is Dr. Oosterhoff. She reports on De Bruijne's writing: "Today, however, our society is post-Christian and pluralistic, and the wind of a postmodernist relativism freely enters the church through its open windows." And next: ". . . De Bruijne believes that we cannot ignore it if we do not want to add to the deterioration of the Christian lifestyle." While we are in agreement as to the danger, it appears that we have different visions concerning the extent to which this danger has been ignored in practical church life. Apparently Prof. De Bruijne also notices deterioration of the Christian lifestyle. It's there, and he does not want to add to that.

6. Dr. Oosterhoff writes that "among other things. . . we do not rely on hearsay." I agree. But most of the knowledge anyone of us possesses comes from information supplied by others. When names are mentioned, pronouncements quoted with reference to work and page, official documents quoted or reproduced, I can scarcely doubt the reliability of the communication. Nor is *eeninwaarheid* the only voice where these complaints are heard. Besides them and the "*landelijkedag*" we find the "*vijfhoek*"; "*gereformeerd blijven*" where eight ministers of the GKv voice their concerns and mention diminishing scriptural authority. Then there are "*kampennoord-ichthus*," *gereformeerd.info* and *reformanda*. True, these sites at time copy material from one another and the same name may appear on more than one site, but they also have original material and most have some articles in the English language. Indeed, my information does rely on these sources and on messages I receive from the few personal contacts I still have in The Netherlands. I do not think it is less reliable than the information obtained by Dr. Oosterhoff.
7. Re: articles written by Dr. Oosterhoff in *Clarion*. This gives me an opportunity to say that I do admire her knowledge and insight. I enjoy reading her writings. Also the series on Prof. de Bruijne's theology is clear and instructive. Yet, here we seem to arrive at a different conclusion. I feel much closer to the opinion of Dr. Wilschut, mentioned at the end of the series. The dangers of De Bruijne's theology may be recognized, subjectifying is mentioned. These dangers, however, seem to have been underestimated. Certainly I will not attempt to prove her wrong. I simply believe that Dr. Oosterhoff has approached the matter on a higher, more intellectual level. The things I read concern the acts and attitudes of local churches and ordinary church members. Let me quote a remark from a member in The Netherlands, not connected to the concerned ones, but himself unhappy with the direction the churches are taking (although actually here defending the perceptions of synod) - translated: "That we see liberated people who are less punctual regarding Sunday observance has nothing to do with the vision of synod. . . ." Yes, but it seems to show a lack of discipline prevailing here and there.



Finally, I am sincere when I say that I can copy sister Oosterhoff's words: I may have been wrong after all. Should it be proven that the information from The Netherlands is wrong, inaccurate, or unjust, I also will gladly admit it. For I wholeheartedly agree that we need to know the truth. But I believe that these things must be looked into. The GKv are our sister churches. We accept their attestations. We have a responsibility to know what the issues are and how they are dealt with. For at some time a decision may have to be made.

Respectfully,
George Hart , Cambridge, ON
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Letter to the Editor

It disappoints me that there was an article published from Dr. Oosterhoff about tradition vs. changes in the church (Dealing with Disagreements in the Church, Part 1). It looks to me that Dr. Oosterhoff is ashamed of the rich / biblical traditions we have in our Reformed churches. By translating the "verontrusten" as objectors, Dr. Oosterhoff creates a negative impression about the group of people who wants to keep the church free from unbiblical changes. In the light of their actions we better call those people concerned.

Already in the first paragraph the tone is set to put a negative impression on those people, with using

words like "complaining," "opposition," etc.

The church does not have to lower their "walls and thresholds" to worship the Lord. The question with this kind of remarks should be, do we worship for our own interest or are we worshipping the Lord?

As Rev. Beach wrote it very clearly:

The modern Reformed person needs to be reminded that the God who revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush did so by first telling him, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Can we relate to the Psalmist's words, Psalm 95, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." Or, Psalm 2, "Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling." The author of Hebrews reminds New Testament believers that "since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." Large segments of the church today have entirely lost this vision of God. They divest Him of holiness as they invest Him with an extra dose of love; the result is that he becomes a play-thing. But a holy God is not a play-thing.

Let us keep this in mind when we discuss certain matters in our churches. This is also true for publishing articles about changes in worship and liturgy.

A. Van de Bruinhorst
Winkler, Manitoba

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.

