

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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*The Lord
still cares deeply
about how we
worship*



Inside this issue

- Is There a Hell? ■ Instruction on Worship
- Canadian Reformed Home Registry





R. Aasman

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Is There a Hell?

Pinnock: "I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine"

People are quite willing to speak about hell, but only on their own terms. It has become a metaphor for harrowing, traumatic experiences. For instance, a soldier returning from Afghanistan might say, "It was pure hell fighting with the Taliban." However, hell as a literal, eternal place where unbelievers will weep and gnash their teeth is not something most people like to acknowledge. This has not been lost on churches and theologians who want to be amenable to human sensibilities.

Liberal theology does not hold to an infallible and authoritative Word of God and therefore advocates that there will be no hell or at least there will be no people in hell. This fits in with an old teaching known as "universalism" which believes that in the end everyone will be saved. After the Reformation another viewpoint known as "annihilationism" taught that there is no hell because the unsaved will cease to exist eternally. In more recent years a third viewpoint has emerged among evangelicals which really should have our attention. It is known as "conditional immortality." It also believes in the annihilation of the unsaved after the final judgment. Clark H. Pinnock of McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario writes in *The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent*: "I myself will take the position that the finally impenitent wicked suffer extinction and annihilation." Here is his reasoning:

Let me say at the outset that I consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine, a theological and moral enormity, a bad doctrine of the tradition which needs to be changed. How can Christians

possibly project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness whose ways include inflicting everlasting torture upon His creatures, however sinful they may have been? Surely a God who would do such a thing is more nearly like Satan than like God, at least by any ordinary moral standards, and by the gospel itself.

The argumentation is clearly emotional rather than scripturally based.

A key difference between universalists and annihilationists is that the latter do believe in the punishment of unbelievers. However, that punishment will be accomplished by ceasing to exist rather than being in eternal anguish in hell. Hence the name conditional immortality!

What does Scripture say?

Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke more than anyone else about hell. In Matthew 5:22 He said in connection with the sixth commandment: "But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." He uses here the word *Gehenna* which is a Hellenized transliteration of the Hebrew, "Hinnom Valley." This was a ravine just southwest of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It was a place of trash fires and perpetually burning rubbish and thus became an appropriate term for hell or the lake of fire where the devil, the two beasts, the great prostitute, demons, and all unbelievers will spend eternity weeping and gnashing their teeth. Some have suggested that all Jesus Christ's comments about hell and punishment were references to the suffering that the Jews would experience with the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. That is



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difficult to reconcile with Jesus Christ's parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25 or what He said at the end of that chapter: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." Punishment is real and it is eternal.

The Book of Revelation is very clear in its teaching about hell as a real and eternal place where the unsaved stay forever. We read in Revelation 14:9-11:

If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.

God's wrath will bring eternal torment on unbelievers. In Revelation 20 we read about Jesus Christ's 1000 year reign, his return, and the final judgment:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The lake of fire is another term for hell. It is also called the second death because it is the very opposite of life in the New Jerusalem where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and believers will have the right to the tree of life. Hell is a living, spiritual, and eternal death where man is separate from God and from his blessings.

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Why talk about it?

As Bible-believing people we accept the doctrine of hell as a place of eternal punishment. Our confessions uphold this doctrine. However, it is a difficult doctrine. For those who have a friend or family member that has turned away from Jesus Christ hell is a painful thing to contemplate. Do we need to talk about it? Can't we just acknowledge it is true and for the rest avoid the topic? Obviously we cannot. It is an essential part of Scripture and therefore deserves our attention. There are a few things that need to be considered. Why must we talk about hell and acknowledge its reality?

For those who have a friend or family member that has turned away from Jesus Christ, hell is a painful thing to contemplate

In the first place we are missing the point when we talk about how horrible hell is. What is really horrible is sin. What is really horrible is how people reject the gospel and throw dirt in the face of God's holiness as they recklessly pursue their sinful lifestyle. In this present life people show they want nothing to do with God. We must not underestimate this horrible affront to God. In hell they can continue to be separate from God and live in their sin. However, at that point it will be clearly impressed upon them that God is an all-consuming fire and his wrath has come upon those who reject Him and live in sin. Hell is a righteous recompense for sin. There is a warning here for everyone to recognize and confess the seriousness of our sins.

In the second place having a knowledge and understanding of hell will make us appreciate and understand what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. We all deserve hell. God in his awesome grace

sent his own Son into the world to pay for our sins and to experience the agony of hell for us. He became like the dog cast outside the gates of Jerusalem. He wept and gnashed his teeth and cried out forlornly to a God who at that moment did not answer Him. Jesus Christ went through hell for us so that we would never have to experience it. We need to know about hell to know about Jesus Christ and to reach out to Him in true faith and adoration.

In the third place, knowing about hell and that many people will spend eternity in hell should galvanize every believer to seize every opportunity to evangelize. How can you have a co-worker, a neighbour, a friend who is an unbeliever and not share with them the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ? Can you watch someone slip away into eternal torment without at least trying to share with them the hope that is in you? Even the Book of Revelation, which is perceived as a book that speaks harshly about the eternal suffering of the wicked, has a strong evangelistic theme to it. In the very last lines of Revelation we hear the well-meant gospel offer: "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." The knowledge of hell should spur us all to seize the day and to share the gospel with people around us.

Jesus Christ went through hell for us so that we would never have to experience it

There is much more that can be said about the doctrine of hell. Hopefully enough has been said that we do not succumb to the modern theological trends that avoid talking about it. When we do that we will only detract from the glory of God and the salvation of sinners.



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Instruction on Worship



MATTHEW 13:52

“The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them, ‘When any of you brings an offering. . .’”

Leviticus 1:1-2

The book of Leviticus contains many rules and regulations, but the vast majority of them have little to do with what we would call personal morality. These rules and regulations have much more to do with liturgical acts of worship. Clearly, God instructed the people of Israel with great care and detail about how they should worship Him.

For example, the first chapter of Leviticus describes how the burnt offering was to be carefully prepared. The next six chapters then describe the guilt offering, the fellowship offering, and the sin offering. The whole book of Leviticus centres on chapter 16 in which God instructed Israel about how to celebrate the great Day of Atonement. The last chapters (23-25) are devoted to various instructions about the great feasts.

To be sure, there are chapters in Leviticus that deal with personal morality (notably chapters 19 and 20), but there is much more instruction on how to worship than on how to live. If one were to weigh all the material in the book of Exodus, he would discover a similar pattern.

This pattern would suggest to us a couple of things. First, when God renewed the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, while it was very important to God to instruct his people on how they should live as a holy people from day to day, it was even more important for God

to instruct them on how they should worship Him at the Tent of Meeting. A second conclusion that we can draw from this pattern is that how we should live as believers is a much simpler matter than how we should worship God.

Now, we do know that the two principles of life and worship must never be separated. God hates it when his people are scrupulous about observing the formal details of worship, but then give no effort in fighting against sin in their personal lives. For instance, this is the reason why God said such shocking words through the prophet Isaiah, “‘The multitude of your sacrifices – what are they to me?’ says the Lord. ‘I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals. . . Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations – I cannot bear your evil assemblies’” (1:11, 13). God consistently teaches us that when formal worship is pursued while personal morality is neglected, proper worship will fail because it is built on hypocrisy.

However, the other side of this matter must not be ignored. Today there are many who believe that it is very important that we show reverence to God by being morally pure. And moral purity is, of course, good and fitting for Christians. But sometimes people think very little about how the church should

worship God. Some may even despise the official, liturgical act of worship within the church.

The idea that organized religion is contrary to pure spirituality is quite strong among some Christians. Support for this viewpoint is sought in the words of the Lord Jesus to the Samaritan woman when He said, “God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). This text is interpreted by some people to mean that now we need to cut our worship services loose from regulations on how to worship. Instead, the thinking goes, let our worship services be spontaneous, free, and spiritual!

This is improper. The regulations of Leviticus are spiritual and true, for also this book was inspired by the Holy Spirit; and, what is more, the God who spoke through Moses is the same God who speaks through Jesus Christ. The Lord still cares deeply about how we worship! Thus we are challenged to discover how Christ has fulfilled the law so that the spirit and truth contained in the instructions on liturgical worship might be observed by us.

May believers everywhere think carefully about the church and may we worship God in her! And may the Christian church also reflect carefully on God’s instructions for worship, knowing that it is a matter of great concern to Him.



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Defending the Faith Today (Part 2)

Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Penguin, 2008). 293 pages

Timothy Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York. Established in 1989 with an initial attendance of about fifty, this church now draws some 5000 listeners each Sunday. It has also spawned more than a dozen daughter churches in metropolitan New York and contributed to the work of church planting worldwide. With its associate churches, Redeemer has illustrated the great opportunities that exist today for Scripture-based urban mission. At a time when many traditional churches in the western world are emptying, the new urban mission has experienced explosive growth, in New York and in cities across the globe. Keller writes that hundreds of orthodox-Christian churches have in recent years been planted in New York alone.

Keller's book is inspired by his work at Redeemer. His target audience there is different from that of more traditional churches. It is multiethnic and consists mainly of young urban professionals, two-thirds of them single and practically all of them drawn from a community of "skeptics, critics, and cynics." While attempting to understand their culture, Keller has withstood the temptation to buy

into it and accommodate his message accordingly. He has from the beginning preached "the orthodox, historic tenets of Christianity – the infallibility of the Bible, the deity of Christ, the necessity of regeneration (the new birth). . . ."

That message draws people. But it is also controversial, certainly in a sophisticated, postmodern urban society. In the first part of his book Keller discusses some of the objections to Christianity he has to deal with. His goal in this part is to demonstrate that there are no sufficient arguments for *rejecting* Christianity. In the second part of the book he moves on to show that there *are* sufficient reasons for believing it.

Religious polarization

Before turning to some of Keller's specific arguments, I will comment on his general approach. His book has been compared to C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and there are indeed many similarities. Keller more than once admits his indebtedness to the English apologist. He is writing, however, in postmodern times, in a religious situation which is different from that of the 1940s and 50s. In Lewis' days it was widely agreed that Christianity was dying out, whereas today there is evidence of explosive growth, especially among non-westerners, but also in

some pockets in the western world. But that is only one side of the religious scenario of our days. The other side is that in this very epoch of desecularization and religious expansion, religious skepticism and militant atheism also are growing apace. The world is getting more and less religious at the same time.

This makes the situation more volatile than it was some fifty years ago. Because both groups are growing fast, each feels threatened by the other and hostility increases. Respectful dialogue is rare. "We don't reason with the other side," Keller writes, "we only denounce." Christians have to admit this to their shame. In today's "culture wars" we tend to forget the biblical warning that the faith should be defended in a spirit of gentleness and respect. Christians should also, Keller reminds us, consider the reasons why such large sections of a formerly Christian society have turned their back on the faith. There is need for self-examination.

Dealing with skepticism and doubt

If Keller is aware of ever-increasing religious polarization, he also notes *similarities* between the two opposing groups. The most striking one is that, strange as it may seem, both are motivated by *belief* – atheists as much as Christians. And people who

believe encounter doubt – again, atheists as much as Christians. Rather than denying that this truth applies to them, Keller argues, Christians should take their own doubts seriously and at the same time pay serious attention to the doubts of others. “Only if you struggle long and hard with objections to your faith,” he writes, “will you be able to provide grounds for your beliefs to skeptics, including yourself, that are plausible.” It is this process that will make it possible for believers to respect, understand, and perhaps help skeptics.

The same advice, however, goes for the other side. If Christians must learn to look for reasons behind their faith, skeptics and atheists must recognize the role of faith underlying their reasoning and examine its grounds. For none of the many objections to Christianity can be empirically or logically proven. Statements such as “there is no God,” or “science has disproved Christianity,” or “there can’t be just one true religion” are incapable of demonstrative proof. They are based on belief. Much of Keller’s book is devoted to arguing this point. He concludes that it is inconsistent for a skeptic to require more justification for the Christian faith than for his own beliefs.

The question of proofs

Keller shows himself to be a man of his time also in his attack upon the typically *modernist* position that we can only be certain about anything, including the existence of God, if we have empirical, scientific proof for it. That position, although definitely outdated by now, is still held by militant atheists like Richard Dawkins and his associates and is

among the reasons why even some non-Christians thinkers have criticized the work of these men.

The objection to this modern scientism is threefold. Firstly, the argument is self-defeating, for it is impossible to prove *empirically* that empirical proof is needed before anything can be considered true. In short, the argument itself is based on belief. Secondly, science can deal only with what can be observed, measured, weighed, calculated; its field of inquiry is the natural world, the realm of matter,

We don't reason with the other side; we only denounce

not the supernatural and the spiritual. It can therefore prove neither the existence nor the non-existence of God. And thirdly, twentieth-century philosophers have drawn attention to the fact that science does not (and cannot) expect final proof even within its own realm. A scientific theory is verified not on the basis of absolute logical or empirical evidence, but because its explanatory and predictive power appears to be greater than the theory it replaces. Scientists, in sum, are looking not for airtight proofs, which can’t be had, but for the best “empirical fit.”

What goes for science goes for religion and other human knowledge. God alone is omniscient; we humans are finite and see reality as in a mirror, dimly. We live by faith. But the Christian faith is not unreasonable and to admit our finitude is not to endorse religious relativism. Just as scientists have the means to test

and evaluate a scientific theory (although unable to demonstrate its absolute truth), so believers are able to give grounds for their religious faith. In fact, they are called to do so. And the intellectual criteria for justifying belief in God are similar to those for justifying belief in a scientific theory. Summarizing the arguments of Oxford philosopher Richard Swinburne, Keller writes:

The view that there is a God. . . leads us to expect the things we observe – that there is a universe at all, that scientific laws operate within it, that it contains human beings with consciousness and with an indelible moral sense. The theory that there is no God. . . does not lead us to expect any of these things. Therefore, belief in God offers a better empirical fit, it explains and accounts for what we see better than the alternative account of things.

Keller goes on to quote C. S. Lewis’ words, “I believe in God as I believe the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” Keller adds,

We should not try to “look into the sun,” as it were, demanding irrefutable proofs for God. Instead, we should “look at what the sun shows us.” Which account of the world has the most “explanatory power” to make sense of what we see in the world and in ourselves? We have a sense that the world is not the way it ought to be. We have a sense that we are very flawed and yet very great. We have a longing for love and beauty that nothing in this world can fulfill. We have a deep need to know meaning and purpose. Which worldview best accounts for these things?

And again: "Christians do not claim that their faith gives them omniscience or absolute knowledge of reality. Only God has that. But they believe that the Christian account of things – creation, fall, redemption, and restoration – makes most sense of the world." (The reader will realize that I have been dealing all along with *intellectual* reasons for the faith. Certainty of faith does exist, but is a divine gift, not the result of intellectual argument.)

Arguments

In giving answers to specific objections to the faith, Keller refers to these two major points: the role of belief in human reasoning and the fact that human beings, though they can certainly find truth, are creatures and cannot see reality as God sees it. With respect to the objection that no truth exists, for example, he points out that this statement is self-defeating.

Both sides are motivated by belief – atheists as much as Christians

For why, Keller asks, should I believe the person who says it? How could he or she credibly proclaim as truth that there is no truth? Obviously, this type of statement is based on wishful thinking, on "belief," not on logical or empirical proof. And the same applies to other objections such as that all religions lead to God, or that you can't take the Bible message literally, or that a God who judges cannot also be a God of love.

Keller has also had to answer more traditional objections to the faith. Perhaps the most pressing of these is the existence of evil. It is the age-old question how evil and human suffering in the world can be reconciled with the existence of a God who is both all-good and all-powerful. Attempting to answer the question, Keller mentions the following:

Belief in God offers a better empirical fit; it explains and accounts for what we see better than the alternative account of things

(1) We often admit that our suffering, agonizing as it may have been, has not been in vain. Isn't it possible that from God's point of view all suffering is ultimately for our good? If we have a God great enough to be angry at because He hasn't stopped the world's suffering, then we have a God great enough to allow it to continue for good reasons that we can't know. We can't have it both ways.

(2) Evil and suffering may be seen as evidence not for the non-existence, but for the existence of God. If we were simply the products of mindless evolution, as atheists claim, we should not worry about evil, since natural selection and the struggle for survival demand endless suffering: death and violence and the destruction of the weak by the strong. Nature being "red in tooth and claw," suffering is simply natural. If human beings find it unnatural, then they subscribe, consciously or

not, to an ethics whose origins cannot be natural but must be supernatural. And a supernatural ethics implies a supernatural law-giver.

Evil and suffering may be seen as evidence not for the non-existence, but for the existence of God

(3) The cross of Christ. In his Son, God Himself entered our suffering and pain so that "by His unspeakable anguish, pain, terror and agony" Christ might deliver his own "from the anguish and torment of hell" (HC, LD 16). When looking at the cross we may have no answer for the world's suffering, Keller writes, but we do learn that this suffering does not happen because of God's indifference and lack of love. "God is truly Immanuel – God with us – even in our worst suffering." We learn also that suffering does not have the last word. Good Friday was followed by Easter and will be followed by the restoration of all things. "The Biblical view of things is. . . not a future that is just a *consolation* for the life we never had but a *restoration* of the life [we] always wanted. This means that every horrible thing that ever happened will not only be undone and repaired but will in some way make the eventual glory and joy even greater." In the words of C.S. Lewis: "They say of some temporal suffering, 'No future bliss can make up for it,' not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory."

Creation and evolution

More could be said about Keller's apologetics, also about the arguments in the second part of the book, which I have left largely unexplored, but space is limited and I hope that I have written enough to whet the reader's appetite. I must add here that I do not expect everyone to agree with all that Keller wrote. A controversial point is his attitude toward evolution. Keller rejects the concept of evolution as an "All-Encompassing Theory" but thinks that God has "guided some kind of process of natural selection." In short, he reveals himself (in tune with the large majority of Christian apologists today) as a theistic evolutionist. Unsurprisingly, that has bothered a good many of his evangelical readers. I myself place a question mark here.

This is not to say that I have easy answers to the question as to how Genesis 1 and 2 are to be explained. Although "young-earth creationism" appears to be widely accepted among us these days, there is no Reformed consensus on

the issue, nor has there been in the past. Theologians of unsuspected orthodoxy such as Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Klaas Schilder, and others, both past and present, have considered the possibility of an old (or older) earth.¹ Nor does it seem that a consensus will easily be achieved. As Herman Bavinck wrote, no single person and not even a generation or an age may be able to resolve the questions that arise in connection with modern science; it is God who must, in the course of history, bring light into darkness.

And therefore, while questioning Keller's conclusion, I understand his reluctance to make dogmatic statements on the issue. And I fully agree with him that, when we are evangelizing, the question of origins should remain on the back burner. We certainly should not begin, he rightly warns, by asking the skeptical inquirer to decide on the different positions that have been and continue to be held by orthodox Christians on the matter. Rather, we should urge him or her to concentrate on the central claims of Christianity. Once these

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have been accepted in faith, the time may come to evaluate the various options regarding the meaning of Genesis 1.

¹See my articles "Faith and Science in the Reformed Tradition," 1-5, *Clarion*, Feb. 1-March 29, 2002, and "Klaas Schilder on Creation and Flood," 1, 2, *Clarion*, March 14, 28, 2003.



Canadian Reformed Home Registry

In September of 1993, the Canadian Reformed Home Registry officially began serving consistories across Canada by providing alternative homes for youths experiencing difficulty at home. Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church was initially the congregation and consistory that began this program. In the past year, the Canadian Reformed Church of Elora has taken over this task. We are thankful that this program is able to continue and that many teens and families may continue to be provided for. As of late 2007, the program has begun the reimplementation process.

In a particular family situation where all parties involved agree that the best interest of all is served if the youth would stay elsewhere for a specific time, the Registry may be able to provide the consistories with names and addresses of suitable placements. From the beginning it became apparent that many were unsure as to the role of the Registry. The purpose of this article is to clarify what it is that we are attempting to accomplish.

In situations where youths are experiencing difficulties, we believe that the Scriptures give us a mandate to assist as the communion of saints. Romans 12:13 refer to showing hospitality and 1 Peter states, "Practice hospitality



ungrudgingly to one another." As well, in Hebrews 13:2, it says "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." It was the Saviour Himself who stated in Matthew 24:35, in connection with those who inherit the kingdom, "For I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

It is clear that it is pleasing to the Lord to open our homes to brothers and sisters in need of a place to go. This is the basis for the Home Registry Program. We are all aware that we rely on family and friends especially within the immediate congregation, but with some incidents there is the need to broaden the area for care. There have been numerous occasions for such hospitality for youth who for some reason cannot remain in their own homes, at least for a time.

In order to illustrate, we have come up with several examples where the services of the Registry might be utilized.

- A young person, sixteen years of age, out of school and without a job, lives in a dysfunctional family where the parents have lost control over the other children who show no interest in church. The sixteen year old realizes the kind of life of the brothers and sisters is not right but has a difficult time finding friends and acceptance among the young people of the church. In addition, the youth is under constant pressure from the siblings and wants out of the situation. Parents agree that it would be good to move the youth out of this environment to

a different location to attend school or to find work. Parents are unable to support, but the deacons would help to find a home and provide support for a time.

- A youth, youngest of four, has some reactions to a marriage break-up of parents. Difficulties arise when the youth acts out physically and verbally at home and mother is unable to control the youth. No relatives live anywhere near; the consistory with the deacons and mother agree that moving to a farm setting and living in a structured family not too far away from the family home for a few months would benefit the youth. The consistory with the deacons of the youth's church will make arrangements and provide financial help and office bearers in the new location assume supervision.
- A youth has experienced physical or emotional abuse in the family setting. The youth finds it hard to live in the same home with the parent(s) that are abusing and is seeking attention. The youth contacts his/her consistory and a home is set up in a different town, while the issue is being dealt with.
- An eighteen-year-old youth who has some contact with the law has expressed a willingness and desire to change. Old friends, however, put pressure on him and he is unable to find meaningful friendships inside his church as he has a reputation as a trouble maker. A new start elsewhere is determined to be the best idea

by both parents/consistory and the youth agrees.

There are many other examples one could give, but these represent hypothetical cases. In situations where a request is made to the Canadian Reformed Home Registry by a consistory seeking a home, the Registry Committee meets to decide appropriateness, and where suitable, recommend a home.

It is important to understand that the Canadian Reformed Home Registry will only respond to requests for services from a local consistory. Typically a request for service would proceed in the following manner: consistories would identify a need in their congregation and contact the Registry Committee; the Committee would help to decide an appropriate match or home; the Chairman or Co-ordinator would relay the information back to the local appellant consistory and they would come to a decision whether or not to proceed with the placement. In this manner, the decision remains with the local consistory and the Registry only serves to assist as required.

In order to become a national service, there is still a need for suitable homes throughout the country. If you feel that you may be able to contribute to this work of mercy, please contact your consistory for the appropriate forms.

On behalf of the Registry Committee,

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Leave Your Coat

The carpenter I hired to help me restore an old farmhouse had just finished a rough first day on the job. A flat tire made him lose an hour of work, his electric saw quit, and now his ancient pickup truck refused to start. While I drove him home, he sat in stony silence.

On arriving, he invited me in to meet his family. As we stepped in the front door, he hung his heavy overcoat on a small coat rack. Then he paused, briefly touching the brass hook and folds in the coat with both hands. When he turned and entered the house, he underwent an amazing transformation. His tanned face was wreathed in smiles and he hugged his two small children and gave his wife a kiss.

Afterward he walked with me to see me out.

We passed his coat on the coat rack and my curiosity got the better of me. I asked him about what I had seen him do earlier.



"Oh, that's where I leave my troubles," he replied. "I know I can't help having troubles on the job, but one thing's for sure – troubles don't belong in the house with my wife and the children. You know, troubles are just like an overcoat. They hang heavy on your shoulders. I imagine I take them off and just lay them away every night when I come home. It's just like taking off my coat and leaving it here. Then in the morning I pick them up again." He paused. "Funny thing is," he smiled, "When I come out in the morning to put on my coat, it doesn't seem near as heavy as what I remember it was the night before."

Jesus said: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28)

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Modesty Matters

Jenny van de Kamp

Modesty: what thoughts or images does that word conjure up in your mind? Let's face it: we live in a sensuality-saturated culture, where women's clothing – or lack thereof – is on public display in TV ads, on billboards, on posters. . . everywhere. What on earth are we Christian young people, especially girls, supposed to do under the assault of immodesty and overt sexuality? We cannot just go along with the flow of the cultural current. Let's dig into this whole issue together and have a look at what guidance is offered by Scripture.

When it comes to gourmet cooking, any chef will tell you that presentation is everything. That last phrase is also applicable to the clothes we wear. Why? Because our outfits project an image to others around us; and, whether we realize it or not, the impression people receive from our choice of garments is often a very profound one. If a girl is dressed in a modest outfit, the visual impact is considerably different than if that same girl was revealing as much of her body as possible. The first instance sends a message that the girl respects herself and wants

others to respect her and her boundaries, while the second outfit would convey a boy-toy mentality and a selfish desire for attention. Girls teach guys how to treat them through their clothing choices.

Modesty and faith

Another question that needs asking: do your clothes positively reflect your Christian faith? Think about this scenario for a moment – a scantily clad female walks into church. I can guarantee you that the first thought of anyone who sees her – guy or girl – will definitely *not* be "she sees her body as a temple of the Holy Spirit." Our clothes reveal our attitude toward God and his commands. In 1 Timothy 2:9 we read: "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety." Immodest clothes can be a strong hint to what lies in the heart. Admittedly, some girls are naïve about the messages they are sending out and do not intend to portray such an attitude about themselves, toward others, or toward God. Please realize this, girls; it is very important to know that what we wear conveys an unspoken, but nonetheless

powerful communication to anyone we interact with.

The deluge of immodesty is permeating our own Christian circles; let's not kid ourselves here. As much as we would like to say and think that it is not a problem in our churches, we cannot escape the reality of our sensual environment. It does not take much looking to find a girl dressed in a tight, revealing top and a short skirt during a Sunday service, or low rider jeans and a cleavage-revealing shirt during a youth gathering or a Young People's Society meeting. So, why is it a problem? It is in style and we want to follow the current fashion trends, do we not? This has been beaten to death, but it needs to be repeated: men and boys are visually stimulated. Any girl wearing clothes that call attention to her figure is presenting a serious temptation even to the most dedicated and godly man, single or married. A young man who is "enjoying the scenery" is fuelling a sinful motivation within a girl and is encouraging her to keep up her act. She knows she looks attractive. His response to her appearance and her own pride spur her on.

Culture tells us that we should do and wear whatever we want because it makes us feel good. This falls in direct opposition to a Christ-like attitude of consideration and looking out for the interests of others (Phil 2:4). Are you being considerate when you are making it easy for young men to fall into sin, or stoking a young woman's sinful pride? Girls, let us not be a stumbling block to our brothers in Christ who have to fight very hard to avert their eyes and guard against lust and impure thoughts. Do not let pride get in the way of consideration for others. Guys, encourage the girls to dress modestly and do not reward those who are seeking your attention in a sinful way: keep on fighting against immodest thoughts and desires. Both the young men and young women in church must work together to stem the tide of sensual images and fashions that are infiltrating into our churches.

What shall we wear?

So, what shall we wear? How shall we react to immodesty? Instead of listening to the secular culture, we should heed what our Lord tells us; after all, we are not our own, we belong, *body and soul*, to Jesus Christ (HC, LD 1, emphasis added). Galatians 5:24 reads, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires." Many of the issues within the modesty debate are rooted in our sinful nature: pride, lust, selfishness, and disrespect. There is much guidance in the pages of Holy Scripture, both for girls and boys about modesty and purity. Read on.

For the men in church, the modesty issue has more to do with thoughts than with clothing, but nevertheless, guys are definitely

affected by the immodesty of women. In Matthew 5:28 Jesus warns men, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." That's a strong statement! If you see an immodest advertisement on a poster or a scantily clad girl walking down the sidewalk, turn your eyes away and fight the temptation to start fantasizing. Try Job's method: "I have made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl" (Job 31:1). Do your best to encourage and respect your sisters in Christ who are dressing modestly. Above all, look to the Lord for help and strength in your battle against immodest thoughts and desires.

Biblical dress code

Even though the Bible does not give girls a specific modesty dress code (skirts must be so long, sleeves must be at least this long, and so on), it does offer us much insight. "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, *clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature*" (emphasis added). This passage, Romans 13:13-14, does not mention midriff-baring tops and low cut necklines, but nonetheless the message is clear. As was discussed earlier, immodest clothes do not reflect Christ or the fruit of the Spirit, but are indicative of pride and lack of consideration for the struggles of others. Fellow sisters in the Lord, don't be overly proud of your body and show it off to get unhealthy attention, but let your beauty come from within you. "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment. . . instead, it

should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (1 Pet 3:3-4). In regards to your actual clothes, set some standards for yourself. You may need to check through your wardrobe and clean out some articles of clothing. For some suggestions and pointers, take a look at the books on the suggested reading list.

Against the current

The issue of modesty is not one that we can lightly pass over or dismiss altogether; issues of sin and purity are at stake. Even though the culture is shouting that we should ignore and brush aside "harsh rules," God does not promote that. Ever since man has fallen into sin, God has established standards for covering ourselves; it is for our own good and the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We cannot just slide along with the crowd as if nothing is wrong with its toxic messages of sensuality. This article merely scratches the surface and I encourage all readers to explore further on your own. Search the Bible for other timeless truths and have a look at the books listed here for more discussions on modesty and purity.

Further Reading:

Arterburn, Stephen and Fred Stoeker. *Every Young Man's Battle* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Waterbrook Press, 2002).

Ethridge, Shannon and Stephen Arturburn. *Every Young Woman's Battle* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Waterbrook Press, 2004).

Gresh, Dannah. *The Secret Keeper: The Delicate Power of Modesty* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 2005).



Forty-fifth Annual Fraser Valley Women's League Day, June 19th, 2008, Cloverdale, BC

The morning started off a little grey and dreary, but inside the Cloverdale church foyer, the atmosphere was anything but. Old friends greeted each other warmly, new friendships were being made, and we were all enjoying the atmosphere of fellowship, eagerly anticipating the morning's topic entitled, "Grace in an Ungracious World."

We were warmly (and humorously) welcomed by Ann Bysterveld. Who knew so many of our surnames rhymed let alone could be used in a sentence? We were warned there would be no "Bickering and Houwelling, we Shouten have our cell phones on, and if we needed use of the facilities, DeLeuws were down the hall."

Our topic was capably presented by Jacoba Lyenhorst and Leslie Scholtens. Their three points were: 1) What is grace, 2) Grace at home and grace in the church, and 3) Grace in the world.

Jacoba spoke first on what is grace and why talk about it. She immediately acknowledged that grace is a very broad topic and they had found it challenging to narrow the topic down. She gave a number of definitions including "charm or attractiveness;" or the word can be used as an adjective as in a graceful ballerina. We say grace as in a prayer. But for Christians, the topic of grace goes deeper. The word "grace" appears in the Old Testament thirty-eight times and in the New Testament 128 times in many different forms. Grace is

difficult for humans to understand. The world's attitude is "you get what you pay for" and "you don't get something for nothing." But God loves us for who we are. God's grace is amazing; not ordinary and not predictable. We Christians don't get what we deserve. She pointed out that Jesus amazed and offended people by sitting with sinners and disregarding the hierarchy of his day. This free gift of grace is lavished on us abundantly. The concept of grace is the key difference between Christianity and all other religions.

Leslie went on to say that grace (like charity) begins in the home. We need to be instruments of grace to others. Of course this does not come without its difficulties, as being gracious to others may leave us vulnerable. Grace allows us to be different. It allows us to be real with each other. We should be able to express our differences in our homes without fear of being hurt. With grace in our homes, we should be able to confess our sins to one another. Grace also allows us to be candid with one another and to remember that we all fall short of the glory of God. We are reminded that grace does not mean without punishment or consequences. As Christians, we disapprove of the sin, but not the sinner. So what does a gracious home look like? Inside a gracious home, the words "I'm sorry" are spoken. There's always room for "one more." One more hug, one more sleepover, one more person around the table.

Jacoba finished the speech by asking "What impact can I have in this world?" We are reminded to remember that the world is watching. For example, Martin Luther King instructed his followers to extend grace to the officers and mobs who persecuted them and led by example. The Amish community also responded with grace to the men who killed the school girls. Likewise, a minister who lost his son in the Columbine shootings extended forgiveness to those who killed him. Here at home, we can reach out to our neighbours by saying "hello" and smiling. Learn their names. Bring them Christmas baking and a card. Sponsor a child. Respond politely to telemarketers. Show love to those that disagree with you.

In conclusion, we are all amazing in that we forget God's grace. We need reminders and we are reminded to pray. Remember that Jesus knows what we are going through as evidenced in Hebrews 4:14-16, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."



Further Discussion

The Gifts of the Spirit and the Early Christian Church

Some time ago I published a few articles defending the notion of "cessationism," namely that the special gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased with the time of the apostles. I did not entirely discount the occurrence of these gifts in later times, for who can limit the work and power of the Holy Spirit, but I did write that the Spirit intended these gifts only for the apostolic time.

David Brattston from Nova Scotia was so kind as to respond to these articles. David was concerned that my articles were based only on biblical evidence and did not take in account the (many) testimonies that these gifts continued *after* the apostolic time. He is of the opinion that "we have to consult the writings of Christians who lived immediately after the apostles." We have "to examine the evidence supplied by ancient post-apostolic Christian writers, such as Justin Martyr, Irenaus, Tertullian, Arnobius of Sicca, Theophilus of Antioch, and Origen." So the history of the early Christian church should play a role when determining whether cessationism is correct, or not.

I replied in the July 18 *Clarion* that David makes a valid point. A more exhaustive and more convincing study on this point would take into account the history

of the early Christian church. We should note that such studies have been conducted and have been published.

I also replied that my editorial looked for "*scriptural* evidence that the charismata are ongoing." I wrote to David, "*Church history is not decisive; Scripture is.*" There are many things that happened in church history that are not based on Scripture, or even are against Scripture, and the existence of these matters even through the ages do not prove that they are proper.

The early Christian Church

But, okay, let us look closer at the early Christian church in this respect. Scholars in the field immediately present us with a problem, as scholars are wont to do: *what exactly is the time frame covered by the early Christian church?*

This is an important matter because it determines whether the employment of spiritual gifts falls inside or (just) outside the era of the early Christian church. This apparently has some bearing on their validity.

In my understanding, the matter is important for another reason. The time of the early Christian church was a *transitional* time when the Canon of the Bible was not yet established. In a transitional time one may yet expect certain special gifts of the

Spirit to be manifest. But when the Bible books have been completed and fully recognized by the church, the charismata are not required as before and are slated to disappear.

One might say that the history of the *early* church starts with the Ascension of Christ and Pentecost. But when does it end? Some suggest that it formally ended around 325 A.D. with the enthronement of the Emperor Constantine and the decisions of the Council of Nicea, when the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was defended and upheld.

Others suggest that the time of the early Church ends with the Council Chalcedon in 451 A.D. when the teaching about two natures of Christ was maintained. The time difference between these two councils is over 100 years and a lot can change or disappear in the course of a century.

Accepted writings

There are some personal accounts of how the early Christians displayed the gifts of the Spirit. But these are not plentiful and are not presented as normative. It is important to note this carefully.

I do not have the time or opportunity to study extensively all the writings of the *early church fathers*. David Brattston has done so and is quite prepared to provide us with an article in this respect. He also wants to demonstrate from

contemporary Christians sources that "supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit did not cease with the apostles." This will lead us too far afoot.

Instead of examining early Christian writers, I looked at two important documents accepted by and used in the early Christian church. The first one is the *Didache* (the teaching, used as kind of catechism for instruction), probably from the late first century, and it does not mention the spiritual gifts at all. You'd expect this to be the case, if the charismata were all-important.

The second document which I consulted is *Pastor Hermas*, basically an anonymous Christian text commonly thought to be from the second century. Though its origin and function today is disputed, the *Pastor Hermas* document was of significant

impact on the early church. We note that this document, too, does not elaborate on spiritual gifts and their importance in the church.

We have here two important sources from the first and second century A.D. which had considerable influence in the early church but which do not insist on the existence and use of spiritual gifts. The accepted writings in the early church are largely silent on charismata. Those who do write about the spiritual gifts in the early church do so generally without describing many specific events. See also the book of B.B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, which I heartily recommend to all our readers.

Sola Scriptura

David Brattston writes that "using only the Bible in an effort to depict the post-exilic age is like

using the writings of an eighteenth century author to learn about details of the two world wars or September 11." This sounds pertinent, but is in fact a misconception.

We do not study the Bible in the light of things that may or may not have followed it, but we study the Bible on its own merits. Everything that may follow and become history is to be considered through the lens of the Scriptures, not vice-versa.

We confess that "we may not consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with the divine Scriptures; nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all. . ." (BC, Art 7).

We are no longer in a transitional time. We have the full Word of God. We call this with the church of old: *tota Scriptura*. And because we have the full Word of God, we need nothing more. It is also *sola Scriptura*, only the Scriptures.

Certainly we must take church history into account, when dealing with important matters. Often we have from (church) history only a partial and a biased picture, however. The truth is above all. To evaluate matters in the early Christian church we need to go first and foremost to the Bible.

From time to time Clarion will publish longer responses to articles received. The decision as to which responses to publish will rest with the Editor.

