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Set Free for a Short Time

This binding of Satan does not mean he is no longer dangerous in this present age

On the final pages of Scripture there is a little line that speaks about Satan at the very end of history being set free for a short time. To be frank, this sounds a little scary. The world as we know it and have known it has demonstrated constant, terrible attacks by Satan. Reading of Revelation 2 and 3 describes the horrible suffering among the seven churches near the end of the first century AD: physical persecution and martyrdom, job loss, social alienation, etc. Further elaboration in the Book of Revelation speaks about the beast from the sea, the beast from the earth, and the great prostitute which symbolically point to such things as politics, culture, media, the entertainment industry, false religion, and their deadly attacks against God's people. We are well acquainted with these dark forces that are all around us in our world. One wonders whether it can get any worse. Apparently it can. We read in Revelation 20:3 which speaks about Satan at the end of the 1000 years: "After that, he must be set free for a short time." The following verses show how Satan will gather the nations from Gog and Magog to launch a vicious attack against the city of God.

Keep him from deceiving the nations

An obvious question is: why would God do this? However, before we figure out why, we need to know what this means. The context speaks of Satan being bound for the 1000 years. The 1000 years represents symbolically the entire history between the ascension and the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, we are living within the 1000 year reign of Christ. Satan is bound during this time. However, the binding of Satan does not mean he is no longer dangerous in

this present age. He is very dangerous. Peter writes, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). Our Lord also taught us to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matt 6:13). Satan is very much alive; he is on the prowl; he is dangerous. But if we look closely at Revelation 20, we see that the purpose of Jesus Christ binding Satan is "to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended."

We see in the Old Testament how for a long time the gospel was proclaimed almost exclusively to the one people of Israel. It was never God's intent to leave it that way. The Lord had said to Abraham, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 13:3). It is due to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, and then the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, that Satan is rendered powerless to prevent the spreading of the gospel throughout the whole world. Satan can still do a lot of damage and bring terrible pressure on both believer and unbeliever, but he can neither stop the spreading of the gospel nor stop the elect from coming to faith and being saved. In that sense he is bound for the 1000 years.

Proper world view

Understanding Revelation 20 should help us to develop a proper world view, one that is neither naive nor pessimistic. The power of Satan is clearly evident as we already mentioned. Our culture, the entertainment industry, and the media promote an immoral lifestyle that has little or no respect for God and his Word. In the public sphere of life, including



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politics and business, any dialogue about God and matters of faith is trivialized, mocked, and even punished. A politician who professes that he is a Christian who lives by the infallible Word of God is publicly dragged through the media and accused of being unfit to govern our nation. Anyone who publicly voices biblical views about sexuality is attacked in a variety of ways. Recently, in the pages of this magazine, Dr. C. Van Dam wrote a book review on *The Tyranny of Nice: How Canada Crushes Freedom in the Name of Human Rights*. He refers to the case of Pastor Stephen Boissoin: Boissoin wrote a letter to the editor denouncing education of children that teaches homosexuality is a safe, alternate lifestyle. What the Alberta Human Rights Commission has done subsequently to Boissoin makes a mockery of free speech and of free opinion. A number of recent articles in *MacLean's* have pulled no punches in decrying the unfair abuse of power by such Human Rights Commissions. On another note, in some western countries, Christian doctors, nurses, and teachers are disciplined if they speak to patients and students about matters of faith.

The evil one is very powerful. Let's not be naive. But let's not be pessimistic either. Thankfully we know that Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords who is running this world. He has absolute power from the Father and He uses it to gather, defend, and preserve his church. That is how we need to look at the world in which we live and to rest assured that faith in Jesus Christ means there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. This will help us to remain vigilant without panicking every time there is an attack against God, his Word and his people. We know we are to expect such things.

A short time

With a realistic view of the world in which we live, we may wonder whether there is any need for Satan to be set free for a short time. How much worse can it get, or should it get? The point is, as history comes to its close because the full number of the elect is nearly

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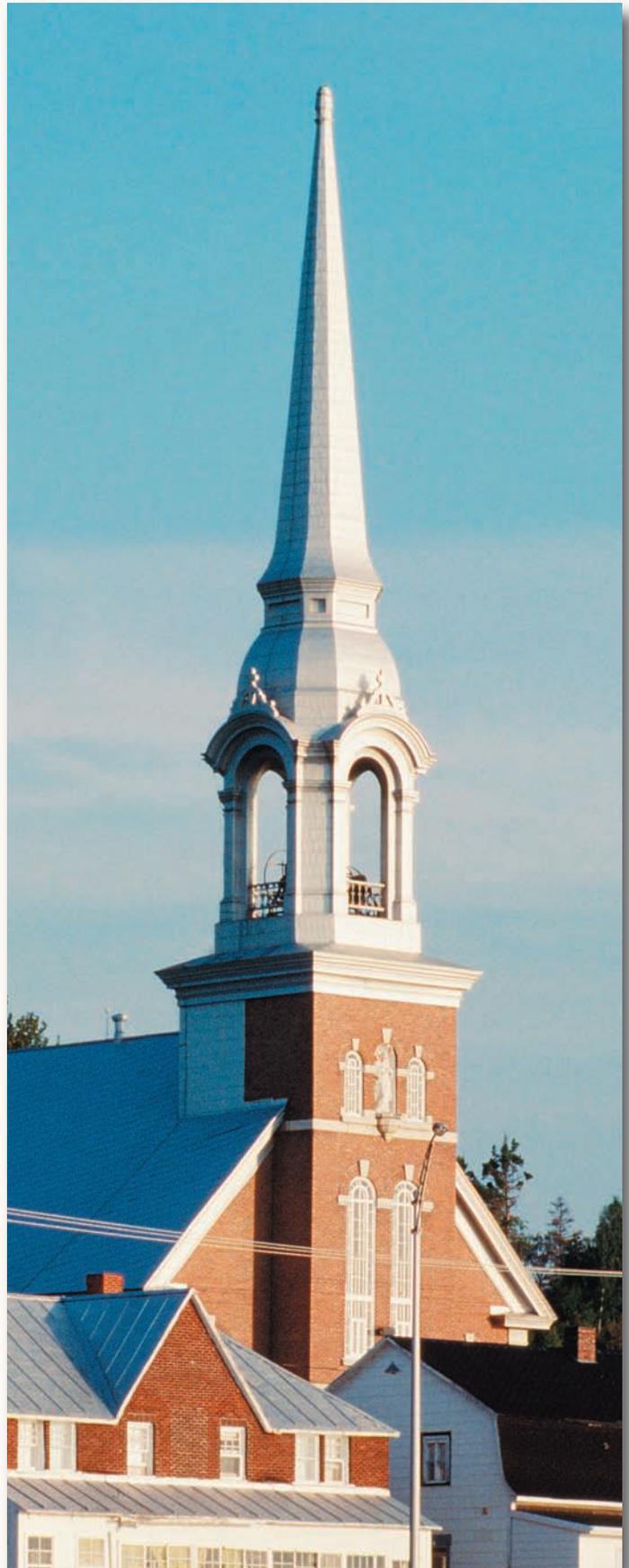
complete, the total and radical difference between the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of Christ will become crystal clear. It will become apparent who is for Christ and who is against Christ. Fencing-sitting will not be an option; it will not be possible. Satan will seize this final moment to exhibit his hatred against Christ and his church by gathering the unbelieving world in open hatred against the church. Disdain for Christians and the Bible, overt and subtle persecution, deepening of immorality and false religion will escalate. We see this already. It can get worse. While it is very unsettling for us as Christians, we

Thankfully we know that Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords who is running this world

need to keep two things in mind. First, this will only serve to make us see more clearly the difference between these two kingdoms. Secondly, this will make us turn more to our Lord Jesus Christ and know for certain that He will provide us with everything we need for body and soul, in life and death. He will keep the time of Satan's increased activity short for the sake of the elect. Within the context of this shockingly clear reality, it also becomes easier to deny oneself, take up one's cross and to follow Jesus.

Live bravely

We can expect attacks by the evil one and even intensification of those attacks. We can expect the hostility of an unbelieving world. But we can also expect the grace, love, and power of our Lord Jesus Christ to surround us at all times and in every situation. We should bravely face our opposition and continue to serve our King. We should also take the opportunities we have to witness to the world around us. The time is short and the lines are being drawn so clearly. Before the door is closed, seize the opportunity to share the good news of Jesus Christ with your neighbour.



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Pyrrhic Victory?



MATTHEW 13:52

“O Absalom, my son, my son!”
2 Samuel 18:33

Ever heard of a pyrrhic victory? It's victory, but at a great cost. The term comes from a Greek king, Pyrrhus, who said after a narrow defeat of the Romans, “Another victory like that and we're done.” Maybe like when you get a deal on eBay, but then pay \$30 in shipping and \$15 in brokerage fees. Suddenly it's not such a great deal.

You may wonder if in the end God's victory will ring hollow – like Pyrrhus'. Look at the Old Testament. God calls in the nations to deal with his rebellious people. The land flowing with milk and honey flows with blood and tears. The prophet Habakkuk (ch 1) laments that the cure seems worse than the disease. Look at the Last Day: rebel angels and humans will be cast into hell. Won't the mere existence of hell forever spoil the joy of heaven?

Look at the life of David. His son, Absalom, has rebelled against him. Just like with David's own infamous fall into sin, power has been arrogantly abused, matched with deception and intrigue. “Sow the wind, reap the whirlwind.” David has had to flee for his life.

Today in the Forests of Ephraim it's Gettysburg. Surprisingly, despite smaller forces, David is victorious! But it's a pyrrhic victory. While riding in the forest, Absalom loses his royal seat – his mule – and is killed, despite David's commands to keep him safe. Then, like ringing church bells, David's unending lament peals forth: “O my son

Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you.” David's men, we're told, slink back into camp, as if they had fled from battle in shame (2 Sam 19:3).

Some interpreters think David is being a little too sentimental. Joab, always the ruthless pragmatist, tells David to get on with life. He even tries to goad David out of his lament by accusing, “You love those who hate you, and hate those who love you” (19:6).

But is it too hard to see here in David, the man after God's own heart, some of God's own heart? The God who loves his children, too, even when they've been treasonous and treacherous, subversive and seditious? Christ weeps over hard-hearted Jerusalem, which He knew would shortly crucify Him. In Ezekiel 18 God declares that He has no delight in the death of the wicked.

We also see here in David's life a terrible tension. Absalom has committed high treason. That needs to be punished. In fact, as the king it is David's duty to see that justice is administered, even to his own children. But yet David is also the father who loves his son in a way that others, like Joab, don't understand.

Can those two be resolved? Justice and love? Will there always be one at the expense of the other? Will God's victory over evil, for that very reason, ring hollow? Not at all!

David can only cry out, “If only I had died instead of you.” Even if he

wanted to, David's a sinner in his own right. But our perfect Saviour can make that cry a reality! We are torn apart by the infinite tension of justice and love. But God divinely unites holy wrath and love at the cross! Justice and justification!

David's men steal back into the city, as men fleeing from battle. Will we steal into heaven? Will the great day of judgment, sinners thrown into hell, leave a bad taste in our mouth? There are no easy answers. C.S. Lewis, who said a few good things, once depicted hell as a tiny speck compared to the new creation. He's got a point. Heaven and hell are not proportional.

Here's a bit more: in the end, it's not the futile sobs of David that fill the earth. There's a Saviour, rejoicing over the rebels He has saved (Heb 2:13). There's a God who promises to wipe away every tear from our eyes. How would you comfort the weeping David? Ultimately, it's not our burden to carry. God promises not only to blot out the wicked, but also the tears of the righteous.

Lastly, what fills the new paradise? The glory of God – and also the joy of God. We may have trouble with the existence of hell. The bigger question, however, is: how can God bear it? But Scripture says one day we will “enter the joy of our master” (Matt 25:21). If God has joy, so shall we. This is his gift. Nothing hollow or tainted, but divine joy, pure and true and full!

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Psalm-Singing Churches?

(Part 1 of 3)

When it comes to discussions about worship and liturgy, we sometimes hear the statement that we are psalm-singing churches. But what exactly does that mean? That's a good question because any church with Psalm 23 in its hymnal might be able to make the same claim – which would mean that a lot of churches are psalm-singing churches. However, that's not what we mean. We recognize quite readily that one psalm or even several snippets of psalms (as often happens in so-called praise and worship music) does not a psalm-singing church make. In this series of articles, I want to explore what it means to be psalm-singing churches. In my view, there are at least three components.

Psalms are God's Word

First, it means that the psalms are given priority in our singing because they are God's Word given to the church for singing. God Himself designed these songs to be sung by his people. The thoughtful minister will keep this priority in mind as he selects the music for public worship services. It's potentially problematic if hymns begin to predominate. On the other hand, one can never go wrong in selecting only psalms. The congregation may not appreciate it (for whatever reason) and it may not be wise, but there is nothing inherently wrong or unethical with singing only psalms. Quite the contrary!

There is a historical background to this and it stretches back to the Reformation and before. While the early Reformed churches in Europe were not exclusive psalmists, they did give the highest priority to the psalms and consequently the psalms made up the bulk of their congregational singing. In fact, the singing of uninspired hymns was rare to non-existent. In the old blue *Book of Praise* (1972), there was a quote from John Calvin on congregational singing at the front. Notice how Calvin appeals to the early church, particularly to Augustine:

As for public prayers, there are two kinds: the one consists simply of speech, the other of song. . . And indeed, we know from experience that singing has great strength and power to move and to set on fire the hearts of men in order that they may call upon God and praise him with a more vehement and more ardent zeal. It is to be remembered always that this singing should not be light or frivolous, but that it ought to have weight and majesty. . . Now, what Augustine says is true, namely that no one can sing anything worthy of God that he has not received from him. Therefore, even after we have carefully searched everywhere, we shall not find better or more appropriate songs to this end than the Psalms of David, inspired by the

Holy Spirit. And for this reason, when we sing them, we are assured that God puts the words in our mouth, as if He himself were singing through us to exalt his glory.

It is deeply regrettable that later editions of the *Book of Praise* dropped this quote.

In the years after the Reformation, the emphasis continued to be on psalm-singing, with some allowances made for hymns derived from Holy Scripture. This is readily evident in some of the early Dutch Reformed Synod decisions:

Synod of Dort, 1578, Article 76: "The Psalms of David in the edition of Petrus Dathenus, shall be in the Christian meetings of the Netherlands churches (as has been done until now) sung, abandoning the hymns which are not found in Holy Scripture."

Synod of Middelburg, 1581, Article 51: "Only the Psalms of David shall be sung in the church, omitting the hymns which one cannot find in Holy Scripture."

Synod of Gravenhage, 1586, Article 62: "The Psalms of David shall be sung in the churches, omitting the hymns which one does not find in Holy Scripture."

Synod of Dort, 1618-19, Session 162: "In the Church only the 150 Psalms of David shall be sung. The 10 Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Articles of Faith, the Songs of Mary, Zechariah, and

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Simeon, the hymn 'God who is our Father,' and so on, shall be left in the freedom of the churches, whether they want to use them or not, as they see fit. The rest of the songs shall be taken out of the church, and similarly any which have previously been imported into the church shall be omitted in the most decent way possible."

Despite these good intentions, by the early nineteenth century the Reformed churches had all but abandoned psalm-singing in favour of uninspired hymns. This was not an isolated development, but went hand-in-hand with an abandonment of the confessions and, indeed, of the gospel itself.

During the 1830s, a Reformation took place (known as the Secession or *Afscheiding*). As part of that Reformation, the practice of congregational psalm-singing was recovered. The synodical decisions quoted above were rediscovered and republished by men like Hendrik de Cock. In fact, some of the Secession leaders (such as de Cock) essentially went in the direction of exclusive psalmody. This is why some of the churches descended from the Secession hold that practice to this day – churches such as the Free Reformed and the Protestant Reformed.

Of course, the Canadian Reformed churches are also descended from the Secession.

However, we also have other elements in our pedigree (such as the Doleantie of 1886) and that partly explains why we are not exclusive psalmodists. Nevertheless, while allowing for biblical hymns, we continue the Reformed practice of giving priority to the psalms.

In the next instalment, we'll consider the second characteristic of psalm-singing churches.



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Can We Really Stop Sending Missionaries to Foreign Countries?

Over the last number of months we have seen a flurry of articles and letters to the editor on foreign missions in the *Clarion* as well as the *Christian Renewal*. Rev. Cl. Stam initiated some of this discussion posing a number of questions and drawing some tentative conclusions on the matter of foreign mission. In one editorial he concludes: "Mission work as we have known it may be coming to an end. Instead of sending missionaries to a foreign land, we may now have to support existing churches in a foreign land with whatever they need" (See *Clarion* Vol 57, No 24, 2008). Although the focal point of the article was the situation in Brazil, the statements were made to include foreign missions more generally. Coupled with those conclusions other issues also surfaced, including the danger in mission, the financial burden of going across continents to do mission, and the growing interest for local mission in our own cities. Having served as a missionary in Papua New Guinea (PNG), I would like to interact with this discussion – possibly serving as a voice for the foreign fields in general and PNG more specifically.

Tribal groupthink

I read recently an article in *TIMES Online* (December 27, 2008 issue) entitled: "As an Atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God" by Matthew Parris. Although the title struck me as interesting, the subtitle stole my attention. It read: "Missionaries, not aid money, are the solution to Africa's biggest problem – the crushing passivity of the people's mindset." Although Parris approaches the need for foreign missionaries from a humanistic point of view, his voice should still be heard. Parris grew up in Africa, but moved away for many years and only recently returned. He argues that Africa still needs missionaries. Drawing with rather broad strokes, he feels that Africa needs to be liberated from "tribal groupthink" or the tribal hierarchy which, as he states, "feeds into the 'big man' and gangster politics of the African city: the exaggerated respect for a swaggering leader and the (literal) inability to understand the whole idea of loyal opposition. . . ." In short, Parris is arguing that missionaries are the best corrective to this "big man" problem, a problem that is all too prevalent in PNG as well.

The power that these men crave and acquire is altogether crippling. Many leaders are venerated not because of their integrity as a leader, but their ability to secure – through whatever means – a powerful position as village councillor, mayor, governor, MP, or even Prime Minister. Once this position is secured there is little-to-no accountability, mostly because the position warrants a rather autocratic rule, or so the thinking goes. The result is corruption. Herein lies the connection to mission: the church is not immune to this, either. There are many so-called pastors rising to lead churches in PNG that are more bent on becoming that swaggering "big man" than the humble cross bearer of Christ. Sadly, more than once I have met church members from various churches who have confessed that they do not trust their pastor. The reason given is that he is a "big man" and power and corruption seem to trump his Christ-like ministry.

Meanwhile, there are fewer and fewer missionaries faithfully working within these churches, or mentoring these pastors to help restrain this strong cultural tide. And if we were to narrow the field to Reformed missionaries working

in PNG, we are merely a stock of grain in the PNG fields where the powerful "big man" idea still flourishes. To be sure, some will argue this is not the missionary's problem; it is the nationals' burden. But is it? If a young church is crippled under such a weight as the "tribal groupthink," has she been properly planted and nurtured? This still remains at least in part the burden of the missionaries.

Fear of evil spirits

Parris raises another issue that is crippling many parts of Africa and resonates within PNG as well and that is the fear of evil spirits. He argues that Africans deal with "anxiety – fear of evil spirits, of ancestors, of nature and the wild. . . of quite everyday things [which] strikes deep into the whole structure of rural African thought." All of this, he concludes, "is a great weight that grinds Africa to a halt." But herein lies his antidote to this problem: missionaries. Missionaries are still needed, for if we "remove Christian evangelism from the African equation [we] may leave the continent at the mercy of a malign fusion of Nike, the witch doctor, the mobile phone and the machete." We cannot ignore the irony. Here is an atheist calling us to continue in foreign mission work because he sees the great need, and we are questioning it. Neither can we ignore the fact that it has been a Reformed hallmark to see Christ's sovereignty over every area of life. Christ not only redeems individuals but also cultures, Kuyper strongly defended. Therefore, although Parris is not specifically rallying Reformed missionaries or workers to heed the call, this maybe exactly what developing countries still need.

Papua New Guinea is really no different than Africa when it comes to the fear of evil spirits. Many people, even many of our church members, are riddled with fear of the spirit world. This fear in PNG does not seem to be diminishing even after years of missionary activity. Far too often we interact with people who are enslaved to this fear and even more often we read stories of murders or brutal beatings in PNG due to sorcery. There are national brothers writing and teaching on the Lordship of Christ in dealing with this fear. However, their efforts may not be enough. They need to be supported by missionaries who are well trained and work alongside them to curb, by God's power, this growing fear of the spirit world.

Here is an atheist calling us to continue in foreign mission work because he sees the great need, and we are questioning it

Rise of false religions

Another issue that impacts Africa and no less PNG and many two-thirds world (developing) countries is the rise of Islam and other religions built on a works-righteousness salvation. There are at least three and possibly more *main* cults in PNG that are growing in membership. (This is excluding the growth of other movements like the Pentecostal movement and their "health and wealth" gospel, for example.) They are Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and Muslims. We should be clear here. These foreign religious groups are sending their "missionaries" to

proselytize PNG and are thus filling a void that we are meant to fill.

Let's begin with Islam. It is only beginning to plant its seeds in PNG, but presently Muslims are in both Port Moresby and Lae and possibly other city centres. A number of professors, for example, at the University of Technology in Lae are Muslim and working in that environment allows them to plant seeds among the aspiring leaders of tomorrow. Or, take the Jehovah's Witnesses. They are said to be diminishing in size in the Western world, but they are growing by leaps and bounds in the two-thirds world, and PNG is no exception. More than once we have noticed attendees of our services perusing Watch-Tower propaganda during the worship service. Many in PNG don't understand the pernicious, diabolic nature of JWs or any other false religions. This fact alone makes them easy prey for these well-organized and powerful cults. The fact remains, in PNG, and probably no less in many countries where the gospel has been for a hundred or more years already, there still remains a great need for the truth to be clearly and passionately proclaimed. One cannot discern the lie unless the truth is firmly founded in the heart by God's Spirit. The truth can only be taught through careful exposition of God's Word.

I find PNG to be at a very critical juncture when it comes to the progress of the gospel. In my estimation, the Lord has given us as Reformed churches a window of opportunity to go and preach to a population ready to hear the gospel. In fact, few countries in this day permit preachers to preach at a street corner and even fewer countries would draw a large audience when that preaching begins. Arguably, this divine

window of opportunity will not be endlessly opened for us. As fear breeds more fear and power breeds more power, so false religions breed more false believers and in the end the window is edged shut. If we are not prepared to *carpe diem* for Christ's sake, the country will begin to sink further into the mire of worshipping a lie and remain in the grip of numerous false religions. This growth would not be static and over time the government will bend under the pressure of these religions and ultimately deny the truth its room to roam. This is not an alarmist position; it is merely stating the inevitable, albeit a bit of a long-range forecast.

Conclusion

Here then we can begin to address the question of whether foreign missionaries are still needed. I cannot speak for any other country, but I will attempt to speak for PNG. In PNG alone we could do well to have fifty or more Reformed missionaries spread strategically throughout the country all boldly proclaiming the true gospel of salvation. This raises the inevitable question: should not our national brothers be doing this work of preaching and teaching, and not us? The answer is yes, they should. Generally, national pastors are more equipped to meet and understand their own people. But these national pastors still need to be trained and equipped in Reformed theology and practice, freed of the "big-man" syndrome and prepared to serve as humble, faithful servants of Christ. This takes years of training and mentoring. And even when hundreds are well-trained, missionaries are still

needed to work alongside them, mentoring, supporting, and assisting in the development of a strongly indigenous church federation. The partnership is critically important and one that is long-term. And it can be added, generally speaking, sending money and not missionaries serves only to weaken, not strengthen this partnership.

There still remains a great need for the truth to be clearly and passionately proclaimed

What about the argument that it is too expensive and too dangerous to send out missionaries? Thankfully, the progress of the gospel is not dependent on pragmatism, but the Spirit's power. Yes, practically speaking it is expensive, but so are church buildings and we build them as the need arises. And yes, it can be dangerous to serve in a foreign country that is developing. Therefore wisdom is needed here. For example, we don't send our missionaries into a civil war, or a coup d'état, and we do need to pull them out if an election is leaning towards intense rioting. But at the same time, we need to remember that it is the Lord who calls us to go and with that command comes the promise that He will be with us. "I will be with you always to the close of the age." This promise presupposes hardship. Mission work may exact a toll on one's health, family, and ultimately life, but should we expect any less? The world is a dangerous place for

the gospel and this is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it can be said that wherever we preach the gospel, danger or hardship or peril abound; and the absence of this might mean we are not preaching the full gospel or just as worrisome, not preaching the gospel at all to the lost!

Finally, what about the argument that the foreigner is now in our backyard? That is, has not the Lord brought the nations to our doorstep to be evangelized? Yes, He has. Local mission is as critically important as foreign mission. However, we should not get caught up in a false dilemma. The Bible does not distinguish between local and foreign missions. Mission work involves going to the ends of the earth whether that is Judea or Antioch or Lae or Hamilton. It is the Lord who opens doors and we must walk through those doors in faith and in obedience.

So in the end, we should not shrink back from the foreign field, but seek to meet its demand. With the wisdom and grace God provides we need to double our efforts in mission and go where He opens doors. PNG is one of those places and I am convinced it is not the only place that needs many more missionaries. Allow me to close with the words of Rev Bill Green, a United Reformed missionary serving in Costa Rica. He states, "I would like to challenge our pastors and elders to sound the call to their local congregations to 'send forth reapers' – I believe that there are willing workers waiting to be supported" (*Christian Renewal*, 27/11, Feb. 2009).



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director of ARPA Canada

Historic Event in Parliament: Dr. Van Dam Addresses MPs

In what may have been the first event of its kind, a Canadian Reformed minister and professor made a presentation on March 3 before leaders in Canada's Parliament. The event, organized by the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) Canada, was titled "God & Government: A Biblical Perspective on the Role of the State." It featured Dr. Cornelis Van Dam, Professor of Old Testament at the Theological College of Canadian Reformed Churches. Conservative MP Maurice Vellacott and Liberal MP John McKay co-sponsored the event, allowing us to hold it right in Parliament.

About fifteen MPs from the Conservative, Liberal, and New Democratic parties attended, along with one Senator and staff from the offices of MPs who weren't able to make it. Other organizations were also present at the event, including the directors of the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada and the Laurentian Leadership Centre. Given that this is the first event that we brought to Parliament we were very pleased with the number of leaders who attended.

Dr. Van Dam had a very difficult task. He had to communicate biblical truth to leaders in a secular nation. But as difficult as



Dr. C. Van Dam

this is, it is essential. As evidenced by the wide variety of parties represented at this event, many people call themselves Christians but apply their faith in very different ways. ARPA Canada chose this topic because we believe it is at the heart of most political decisions. Holding a faith in one's private life is not enough. It has to apply to every inch of God's creation, even in pluralist Canada. As "prophets, priests, and kings" we have a calling to bring the truth of God's Word to our leaders.

By all accounts, the presentation was a success. After a short introduction by Mark Penninga (Director of ARPA Canada) and MP Maurice Vellacott, Dr. Van Dam gave a powerful talk, based on Romans 13, which gave both theoretical and practical direction to the leaders in attendance. It examined the source of government's authority, the command for them to be "God's servants for good," and what it means to maintain justice and righteousness. The rest of the talk



Canadian Reformed Church of Ottawa Pastor George van Popta with MP Maurice Vellacott

emphasized the limits of civil government, especially as it relates to families and churches. The audience listened attentively and the speech clearly connected with many hearts. It led to a very good and extensive discussion between the MPs and Dr. Van Dam. Dr. Van Dam did an excellent job of answering their questions, emphasizing the need for them to measure their hearts and minds by the truth of God's Word.

The transcript of the talk was also printed as an attractive booklet and a copy was provided to each of the guests who attended. In the days that followed, a Member of Parliament distributed many more copies of this booklet to his colleagues, including our Prime Minister. The relevant subject of the booklet, along with the fact that it is written with our political leaders as the intended audience, will make it a very valuable resource for Reformed Christians who are interested in how our faith

applies in a secular country like Canada.

ARPA Canada is very grateful to all those who helped make this possible. In particular, we thank Dr. Van Dam for delivering a quality

talk, the sponsoring MPs (Maurice Vellacott and John McKay) for making this possible and going out of their way to make it an enjoyable day with lunch in Parliament and a tour of the area, and members from the Ottawa Canadian Reformed and Presbyterian Reformed Churches who helped out with accommodations, photography, and by attending. We are also very grateful to all those across Canada who encouraged their MPs to attend. Most of all, we thank our Father who gives us the freedom and opportunity to speak his truth in the capital of our nation.

More pictures can be found at www.arpacanada.ca



ARPA Canada Volunteer Gerry Kuik with MP Rick Norlock



G.H. Visscher

Graduates 2009

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As the academic year comes to an end once again, it is good to share with you some of the fruits of our labours. By fruits I am not referring to conferences attended, books we have written, or any other peripheral matter, but about that which is central to the life and purpose of the Theological College: the training of future ministers of the gospel. Three men will present themselves, D.V., to future classes for preparatory examinations and thus seek to become available for call. I will let them introduce themselves and in a future *Clarion* you will be able to read about other aspects of the 2008–2009 academic year. May the Lord bless these students and all of us as a federation of churches.

Ken Bergsma

"Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." (Prov. 19:21)

Born and raised in Carman, Manitoba, I (son of Auke and Wilma Bergsma) moved to the greener pastures of Ontario in 1995. It was here that I married Francine Medemblik (daughter of John and Rita Medemblik). For the next seven years I worked full time for the family run company Walinga Inc. Then, in the spring of 2002, it pleased the Lord to change the course of our lives, directing us toward the ministry of the Word. That fall, I began working on



completing my BA in Classical Studies at Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario. In September 2005, I began my studies at the Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario. At this point, our marriage had been blessed with five children, four boys and one girl. Since entering the College, we have been blessed with two more girls, for a total of seven children. As a family, we enjoy biking, hiking, reading, scrapbooking and quilting (the girls), hockey and soccer (the boys), as well as many other activities.

During the summer of 2008, I completed the Pastoral Training Program under the capable guidance of Rev. D.G.J. Agema in

the church at Fergus South (Maranatha). This was a rewarding and enlightening experience, one for which I am very thankful. This year, in June 2009, I hope to present myself for examination before Classis Ontario North and, the Lord willing, be declared eligible for call.

Ryan deJonge

My name is Ryan deJonge and I am the honoured husband of my wife, Ruth, and the happy father of my son, Matthew Benjamin. Ruth and I are approaching our second anniversary in June and by the time you read this our son will be approaching his first birthday, also in June.



I grew up as the son of Case and Trudy deJonge (still am, in fact) in the Greater Copetown Area (GCA), which encompasses a few dozen homes, a variety store, and a ballpark. Before moving to Brampton, where I currently live, I was a member of Ancaster CanRC. I grew up with no aspirations for ministry, but felt compelled to study for ministry halfway through university, switching from Engineering into Greek and Roman Studies. This change was quite providential, as it was at that time that I met my wife, Ruth, who was also studying Hebrew, Greek, and Latin at McMaster. It was a match made in dead language classes.

Ruth is from Chinese descent, and was attending a conservative Lutheran church at the time I met her. In time she embraced our Reformed doctrines and confession and joined Ancaster church. Before we married she began her short but enjoyable teaching career in the Grade 7/8 class at Credo Christian School in Woodbridge. She is now "making-home" for myself and looking after Matthew on a full-time basis.

When not in school during the past summers, I have plied the landscape construction trade and worked as a staff member at Campfire! Summer Bible Camp. This past summer I had the

privilege of interning for the PTP program under Rev. VanWoudenberg in Guelph CanRC. In spare time, Ruth and I like to read the occasional book and play the frequent board game, along with spending time with family and friends.

Rodney Vermeulen

Allow us to introduce ourselves. We are a family of nine: seven children, Stuart, Jared, Reuben, Bruce, Marc, Caleb, and Hannah; my wife Anita and myself, Rodney. We moved to Canada in July 2005 so that I could undertake studies at the Theological College. Anita was born and raised in The Netherlands and moved to Australia at the age of fourteen with her family. I was born and raised on the south coast of Western Australia. We met while we were both attending the same university and the same church. Anita became a registered nurse while I completed a Bachelor of Business degree, majoring in information systems. Anita took up work at a children's hospital upon completion of her study while I obtained a teaching position at the John Calvin Christian College in Armadale. Prior to being blessed with the birth of our eldest son,

Anita stopped working and has enjoyed being a full time mom since. After teaching for seven years, Anita and I took our family to the south coast where we went into business together with a brother and friend. God blessed our efforts and the business grew. After seven years we sold the business and the Lord opened the doors to allow me to pursue studies at the Theological College. This meant another move back to Armadale to complete language studies. Having completed those studies we made the move to Canada. My studies at the Theological College were blessed so that I could participate in the Pastoral Training Program last summer in the Bethel congregation in Toronto. This was an incredibly valuable learning experience.

What do we do in our spare time? Reading as well as card and board games are popular at our house. Anita loves scrapbooking and cooking. When we get the opportunity we love to visit the many beautiful conservation areas in the area. Last summer we enjoyed camping here in Ontario for the first time – and we are already hooked!



Derek Stoffels

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Cars, Kids, and Report Cards



Report cards are a big deal to many people and it is important to use them properly and positively. Proper use of report cards as they currently are requires starting out with correct answers to two questions: "Does God ever make a mistake?" and "Is everything God does good?" In connection with these questions the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30) is helpful.

The first thing to note is the context of the parable. It is in the middle of a section about the second coming of Christ. This gives the parable an eschatological direction. The basic message is that we have been entrusted with some of God's riches and when He returns we will be required to give account for what we did with the riches He entrusted to our care. God expects his blessings to be used and multiplied.

An easy to miss but key phrase in this parable is that the servants were each given talents *in accordance with their abilities*. I will come back to this later. It is important to realize that the talents in this parable are not like talents in a person. A person's talents are referred to in this parable as one's abilities. The talents represent opportunities for service; they are the call to obey God by doing the good works He created for us to do.

So what makes for a positive report card experience? Typical answers include high marks, good effort marks, or comments from your teacher that indicate that you did your best. But what about those children who do not get high

marks? Does that mean report card time can only be a negative experience for them and their parents? Can you have a good report card experience if you have marks like fifty-seven percent or forty-two percent? I would say yes if you have the proper understanding of who we are and if the forty-two percent was the result of the child doing their best. A forty-two percent only looks bad when the mark is the result of poor effort or if it is compared to another person's higher marks.

Talents and abilities

When we look at the servants in the parable we might be inclined to think that the servant given five talents is somehow better than the servants given the two or one talent. This is quite opposed to the parable's message, though. In the parable it is striking how the master responds to the first two servants in an identical manner. Word for word, expression for expression, his response and reward is identical. Both servants are seen in exactly the same way by the master. The master, *knowing their abilities*, gave each a certain number of talents. This is why the master was so angry with the servant who buried the talent in the ground. The master had taken each servant's abilities into account. To God what matters is not what you have but what you have done with what you have. This means that a forty-two percent or even a fifteen percent in school is something you can be proud of if it represents the best

possible use of the opportunities God created for you to use. In the context of schooling that means doing the best you possibly can.

The servant who received one talent had the gall to not only make excuses but to even blame his master. The bottom line was he rejected his master and refused to obey and serve Him. The master's answer was terrifying and noteworthy. This servant was thrown into hell.

So to sum up this section, we are to trust that God created us exactly as He wished us to be. If that means school is difficult for us God is aware of that. He does not make mistakes and all He does is good! It is not an excuse to do less than our best. When we look at our marks we need to make sure we do not compare to others and we are to ask, did I do my best? Then we are freed to properly use the report card.

I would now like to try and apply this by pursuing a fairly lengthy analogy. As with many analogies it is not going to work if stretched too far. I hope that I do not and I hope that you will not stretch it too far.

A one-ton Dodge van and a Toyota Yaris

Do any of you expect to be able to get comparable fuel efficiency and performance when driving a Toyota Yaris versus a one-ton Dodge van? I am sure you do not. The reasons why are clear. One is a small capacity light-weight car intended primarily for urban

environments. The other is a heavy-duty, large scale people mover, a work horse. It has the clearance to go down rough roads, the capacity to tow heavy trailers. To buy the one and expect it do what the other can do is foolishness.

Do we sometimes apply the logic described in the previous paragraph to the covenant children God has given us? As we receive each report card we have a chance to stop and think about what impressions we give and what purposes we use or misuse the report card for. We could ask ourselves and our spouses or friends, "Do we treat our children as though they are all one kind of car capable of the achieving the same things?" When report cards come home do we expect all the students to have marks that are closer to A than to D or F? Do our children think we expect that?

As an owner of a one-ton Dodge van I confess that I look longingly at the fuel efficiency of a Yaris. However, I know that to get that level of fuel efficiency I have to give up what I bought my van for. The Yaris simply cannot do what I need and want my vehicle to be able to do. Therefore I continue to own a one-ton van and to be glad about owning it. I could choose to say my van is no good at fuel efficiency and be unhappy about the gas bills or accept them as part of the package. The only logical choice is to accept the consequence of my needs and wants, make adjustments to my lifestyle, and make the best of it.

When we look at the covenant children God has entrusted to each of us we need to think about our expectations of them. Do we accept them as they have been given to us by God, or do we covet from them something they are not able to do? Do we expect our children to be as good at each of the various courses or skills as the other children are? Or do we recognize that God equips each child with the talents *and the challenges* that He has ordained for them?

Just as the government puts out fuel efficiency "report cards" for all vehicles, so a school is required to put out report cards for all students. We know what the fuel efficiency report card is measuring but do we know what the report card our child brings home is measuring?

The fuel efficiency report cards are indicators. For vehicles fuel efficiency can be established under optimum conditions to provide a benchmark number. Your own vehicle may never match up to those numbers exactly but it should be close. The report card gives a number for city and highway driving because the vehicle's performance varies based on the amount of stopping and starting that takes place. The numbers for the vehicles vary widely from twenty-five or more litres per 100 km to seven or eight litres per 100 km. What cannot be factored in are things like driving conditions, driving style, inflation level of the tires, etc. Each of these will affect the actual performance of the vehicle.

Report cards

A student's report card is in some ways similar to these fuel efficiency report cards. School report cards are in many ways only an indicator. They vary widely from a failing mark to an A⁺. There are marks for academic subjects and marks for less academic subjects (highway and city driving). However, unlike for vehicles, we cannot really establish a benchmark number for what each "model" of person should achieve. We have far too many variables to be able to do so. A student's abilities, motivation, interests, having a job or not having a job, involvement in extra-curricular activities or not, family support, family priorities, etc. all affect the mark that shows up on the report card. Many of these are beyond the school's control and should be.

To be able to use a report card correctly we need to have a clear idea of what we are after. If I want

to be able to move more than five people around I know I cannot look at the Yaris. I need to look at something bigger. To know how to use the report card appropriately you need to know what you are after. This may mean redefining success. Success is often defined in comparative terms such as doing at least as good as most people do. If I define my vehicle choice as having a fuel efficiency that is at least as good as those of the typical car but need and want the power and performance of a large Dodge I am setting myself up for failure. It is clearly unrealistic to expect that.

The same applies to people. Very few students are meant by God to be A⁺ students just like not all students are equipped by God to be good at sports or drawing, singing or hands-on activities. Every student's abilities are different. Some students need to work much harder than others to learn certain concepts, pieces of information, or wisdom. Some seem to be natural athletes while others have to work very hard to be able to compete well enough to not mess up every time. Some students need to work much harder to be able to draw well or to be able to serve powerful overhand serves in volleyball or run five kilometres in under twenty minutes. This is all a reflection of the differing gifts that God has given to each of his covenant children.

Does all this mean I think that any report card result is a good one? No. While there is lots of variety, there is also commonality. Just like all vehicles have a similar function and task, namely to transport people, all students have a similar task to develop their abilities and learn and train themselves to be prophets, priests, and kings. All have to aim to do their best. Some small cars have better mileage than other small cars because the manufacturer worked to maximize that aspect of the car's performance while another manufacturer worked to minimize the price. Some large vehicles are more capable of performing the

tasks I need than others because the manufacturer worked at power and capacity rather than appearance or quality of ride. Each person has a particular set of God-given abilities because God chose to equip them for a particular task.

The whole child

To make the report card useful more information is needed. Fuel efficiency is not the only factor just as the letter grade or percent is not the only factor. The report card may contain comments and effort indicators. These are helpful in seeing if the student has worked to maximize their performance. This helps the parent decide how to respond to the child. Maximizing performance has to be defined and it is crucial that it is not defined in comparison to any other student. It must be defined relative to the child God gave you and their particular God-given abilities. To maximize the child's performance parents may need to restrain other aspects of their being. Maybe a child is very social or very inclined to sports. To properly develop their abilities you need to know what their aptitudes are, which should be prioritized (prophet, priest, and king), what is realistic, and what impact their environment or culture is having on them.

The bottom line question is what does the report card do? Does it assign a value to the child? As parents we all probably wish, with varying degrees of intensity, that our children would come home with straight A report cards. Why is that? Is it because we measure using a standard that is wrong? Have we started with an improper conception of who this covenant child is?

Most people see a mark of fifty-seven percent and think, "Yikes, you barely passed!" However, if you define success as whatever the child's maximum effort allows them to achieve, fifty-seven percent *might* be a fantastic mark. For

instance, let's say a child really struggles to memorize things. They work really hard at it but it is simply very, very difficult for them to memorize information. When they get a test back that emphasized memory and score fifty-seven percent, then jump in the air and shout "Yahoo! Way to go! Fantastic!" Don't say, "Oh, good try, too bad you did not get a bit higher mark." Don't respond as though some shameful deed has just been done and talking about it needs to be avoided. The reason to celebrate is because they did well! They worked hard and got a fantastic mark. Sure, a one hundred percent is a higher number, but is it a better mark? Only if you like comparing apples and oranges or a one-ton Dodge van and a Toyota Yaris and pretending they are the same.

So to sum things up, when the report card comes home, please look at it in light of who God created your child to be. What abilities did He give and not give to each of your children? Celebrate the successes that that reflection brings out. The only cause to not celebrate is if the report card reflects a lack of effort on the part of your child.

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

Fuel Efficiency Tips

If I want to achieve maximum fuel efficiency from my vehicle I need to maintain it well. I can affect the fuel efficiency by keeping tire pressures at the proper level. By keeping the engine properly tuned I can improve my mileage. By avoiding a heavy foot on the gas I can improve my mileage. Each of these steps and others help bit by bit to maximize the fuel efficiency of any vehicle. How do I learn about these things though? I need to study up on it and think in terms of solutions not problems. So when we look at God's covenant children sitting around our table or coming home happily waving their report card or gloomily handing over their report card let us ask ourselves questions like:

What kind of child has God entrusted to us?

What are their abilities?

How do they learn?

What kind of help do they need?

Are we realistic in our expectations of them?

Are we "maintaining" them well?

Do we ensure they get enough support from us for their schooling?

Have we talked to them openly and repeatedly about doing their best?

Have we assured them and shown them that their value is not measured by a report card mark?

Are we careful to never convey to them the idea that we somehow think they just can't do school?

Do we provide them with proper guidelines for prioritizing life?

Do we provide them with a suitable place to work?

Do we make sure they get enough sleep?

Are we feeding them the right food?

Are we modelling and enforcing good time management: talent development?

Are we raising our children with an eternal perspective?

**Press Release for Classis
Pacific East of the
Canadian Reformed
Churches held March 10, 2009
in Abbotsford, BC**

The meeting was called to order by D. Vanderhorst of the church at Abbotsford. Those assembled sang from Psalm 16 and Psalm 25 was read from Scripture. Prayer was offered up. The delegates were welcomed.

The delegates from the church at Yarrow reported that the credentials were in good order, with all the churches duly represented. Classis was constituted. R. IJbema was appointed chairman; B. Wielenga, vice-chairman; and R. Schouten, clerk. The chairman thanked the convening church for the preparations made for the meeting. It was remembered that the church at Abbotsford is awaiting the arrival of Rev. R.C. Janssen in the summer; and Rev. J. Moesker has received a call from

the Canadian Reformed Church at Owen Sound, ON. The agenda was adopted.

Correspondence was received from the Western Classis of the Reformed Church in the United States in which Rev. T. Gruggett sent greetings on behalf of the RCUS classis. Rev. Moesker reported that he had sent greetings to the last Western Classis. Visits were reported, and received with thankfulness, to the churches at Aldergrove, Chilliwack, Lynden, Vernon, and Yarrow. Report was received from the classis treasurer and a good report from the church auditing the books of the treasurer (Vernon). The church at Yarrow reported that the archives (kept by the church at Abbotsford) were found to be in good order.

The chairman asked the questions as required by Article 44 of the Church Order (re the ministry of the office bearers, the decisions of the major assemblies, and the proper government of the church), to which each church

responded. Responses were positive to the first two questions. One church asked for some advice in a matter of liturgy.

The church at Aldergrove was appointed to convene the next classis on June 9, with September 1 as the alternate date. Officers were suggested for next classis. Various other appointments were made. Question period was not made use of. Under censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order, the chairman could conclude that all members of classis conducted themselves in a Christian and orderly manner at the meeting.

The Press Release was read and approved for publication in the Church News and on the website of the churches. A copy will also be sent to *Clarion*. The Acts of Classis were read and adopted. The assembly sang again from Psalm 16 and the chairman led in thanksgiving and prayer. The meeting was closed.

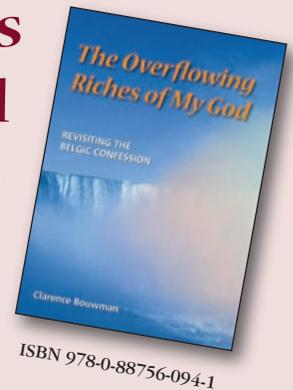
*For classis,
B. Wielenga*



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By Clarence Bouwman



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