

Clarion

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*There is purpose
and meaning
to our daily work*

Inside this Issue

- *Off to Work?
Don't Forget Your Doctrine*
- *The King's March*





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Off to Work? Don't Forget Your Doctrine

*Whenever we labour, we are always serving
the Lord, as part of our life-encompassing
worship of him*

When I head off to work at the seminary I should have my briefcase in one hand and my lunch bag in the other. However, a couple of times I've arrived at the seminary only to realize that I forgot my lunch. Note to self: before you go to work, remember to take your lunch along.

Oh, and remember to take your doctrine along, too. Whether you work at home or away from home, whether you take a lunch or buy one, you simply must take your doctrine to work. "Doctrine?" you ask, "You mean, the Bible's teachings about God, salvation, and eternal life? Those teachings which are summarized in the confessions?" Yes, those doctrines. Pack your lunch bag with a tasty sandwich. But pack your heart with some solid doctrine. It will make your day that much more delightful.

In order to explore this idea in detail, let's follow the traditional six-fold division of dogmatic studies. The major topics are the doctrines of God, man, Christ, salvation, church, and the last things. Or if you prefer the more technical terms: theology, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. There's a lot to cover, so please bear with my brevity.

God

From the opening chapters of Scripture we learn that God worked. "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing" (Gen 2:2). The word used for "work" in that verse includes hands-on labour. It's also used for building a tabernacle (Exod 35:35) and plowing fields (Prov 24:27). And God continues to work. In fact, Jesus Christ said, "My Father is always at his

work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (John 5:17). Now, since it is not below the Creator's divine dignity to work, it stands to reason that we, mere creatures of the dust (Gen 2:7), should be willing to put in a hard day's work, too.

God also rejoices in his work. In the beginning, he surveyed his work of creation and saw that it was very good (Gen 1:31). Yet, even after the fall into sin, the Lord still rejoices in his works (Ps 104:31). Now, it's one thing to joyfully take care of a groaning creation, it is quite another to save stubborn, foolish sinners. Surely, the latter is more arduous than the former. Yet, the Lord delights in redeeming his chosen Zion, even though that same Zion does more than her fair share of ungrateful grumbling (Isa 62:5; 65:19; Jer 32:41; Zeph 3:17). So, since the Almighty takes delight in the none-too-easy work of redeeming us, surely we are encouraged to rejoice in our work – even when it's one of those days that is full of obstructions and frustrations.

Man

God put Adam, and later Eve, in the Garden of Eden to work (Gen 2:15). Simply put, living in Paradise was not a prelapsarian staycation for Adam and Eve. The Garden was big and beautiful, and there was plenty of work to be done, each day again. Interestingly enough, the word used for "work" in Genesis 2:15 is different than the one used earlier in the chapter to describe God's work. This time the word has a wide range of meanings which include to labour, to serve, and to worship. You can tie them all together as follows: whenever we labour, we are always serving the Lord,



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In This Issue

Guest Editorial – Off to Work? Don't Forget Your Doctrine
— J. Van Vliet..... 430

Treasures, New and Old – The King's March
— M. Jagt..... 434

Prayer as an Incense Offering (2)
— C. Van Dam 435

NIV2011 — C. Bouwman 438

Ecumena – March for Life: Speak up for those who cannot
speak for themselves!
— J. van Popta 441

Readers' Forum – "Childlike Reverence" in Prayer Only,
or in Music Also? 443

Cover photo courtesy Leanne Lodder

as part of our life-encompassing worship of him. He is the Master; we are the servants. That is simultaneously humbling and liberating. Each morning we head off to our daily duties – at home, school, or the workplace – and we do our very best. Yet at the end of the day we acknowledge that we are only the stewards and he is still the Owner of it all (Ps 24:1). Remembering that truth makes it easier to sleep at night, too (Ps 127:2b).

Not only were we created to work, but we are also commanded to work. In the fourth commandment the Lord instructs us to rest for one day but also to work for the other six. "Six days you shall labour and do all your work" (Exod 20:9). That is, after all, a divine command. Your Mom (or your wife) should not have to prod you out of bed in the morning. The Lord's fourth commandment should provide all the motivation you need.

At the same time, the overall tone of this command is tuned by the original mandate to rule over creation. As those created in God's image and likeness, we have a noble calling to fulfill each day as royal sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. The Catechism has

What's Inside

Our seventeenth issue of the year will be in your hands shortly before Labour Day. With that in mind, our guest editorial from Dr. Jason Van Vliet discusses work and doctrine: how our daily labour is an act of worship and thankfulness.

Part two of Dr. Cornelis Van Dam's "Prayer as an Incense Offering" focuses on the aroma of sacrifice. What does God demand of us today? What scent pleases him?

In their recent report the Committee for Bible Translation has rejected the new 2011 version of the NIV Bible. Rev. Clarence Bouwman discusses their reasons for doing so in this issue.

The Ecumena column reports on the recent March for Life held on May 10 in Ottawa. We also include Treasures New and Old, a Reader's Forum on Christian contemporary music, and a Mission News insert in Issue 17.

Laura Veenendaal

a nice way of lining this up. In Lord's Day 49, dealing with the third petition, we learn that "everyone" has "his office and calling." Next, in Lord's Day 50, dealing with the fourth petition, we learn our "care and labour" needs God's blessing. That order is significant. All our care and labour occurs under the God-given umbrella of our office and calling. So, whether your daily duties involve pouring cement or shaping the minds of young children, the task takes on more dignity if you think of it as a vocation, a calling from God, rather than just another job.

Of course, since the fall into sin, our vocations have been adversely affected by God's curse upon the ground. Whether you are a farmer or a framer, each day's labour contains more than enough thorns, thistles, and sweaty brows (Gen 3:17-19). However, let's be careful: the result of the fall does not define the nature of work. Work, in and of itself, is not equal parts perspiration and aggravation. Work itself is a joyful blessing. The burdensome part of work only came because we sinned, not because of what God created. So, the next time things go sideways at work, be sure to distinguish in your mind between work as created and working under the curse.

Christ

There is an intriguing verse at the very end of 1 Corinthians 15. The chapter is about death and the resurrection of the body. Part of it (vv. 51-57) is often read at the graveside. Yet surprisingly it ends on the topic of work. The relevant words are: "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain" (v. 58). What do death and daily labours have in common? In Ecclesiastes, the Preacher had no difficulty making the connection. He says that it is precisely death which seems to make our work so meaningless. At a certain point, he even hated the things for which he worked so hard because he realized that at his death he had to leave all his wealth to someone else, who may well foolishly squander it all (Eccl 2:17-18).

The last verse of 1 Corinthians 15 is the Christ-centred answer to the Preacher's exasperation. Christ, who arose from the death, took the sting out of death (v. 55) and simultaneously put the purpose back into work. Life's labours do not just tragically grind to a meaningless halt at the grave. Far from it! As surely as there will be a resurrection of the body one day, so certainly there is purpose and meaning to our daily duties today.

Above all, this is true because the work we do is now "the work of the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58). Whatever the name of our boss, whatever the title of our position, this doctrine applies to us all, both younger and older. So, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Col 3:23).

Salvation

It is clear that our Saviour Jesus Christ worked hard for our salvation. We may have to wipe the sweat from our brow from time to time. But that's nothing compared to what Christ did for us in the Garden of Gethsemane. "And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). And it only became worse on the cross.

The work that we do each day is part of our thankfulness for the salvation work that Christ did for us. Again, the Catechism has a nice way of lining this up. Daily work is explicitly mentioned three times in the Catechism: Lord's Day 42 ("work faithfully"), Lord's Day 49 ("carry out the duties of his office and calling"), and Lord's Day 50 ("our care and labour"). Notice which section all three are in: our thankfulness.

The work that we do each day is part of our thankfulness for the salvation work that Christ did for us

Too often we head off to work with certain goals in our mind. We work to save up for college. We work to pay off the mortgage. We work to build up a company. Whatever the case, we let a future goal motivate us in our present toil. Of course, it's not wrong to work with a set purpose in mind. But it is far more enjoyable if we begin by working *out of gratitude* before we start labouring *toward a goal*. Then your work ethic takes on this doctrinally sound tone: since my Saviour worked so inexpressibly hard for my salvation, I will work hard each day to show him how thankful I am.

Church

There is a common misunderstanding about the church. It is that Christ's church is put on pause when the worship service ends. And then, the pause button is released when we come back to worship next Sunday.

Such a notion is theologically incorrect. Christ is “an eternal King who cannot be without subjects” (BC 27), not on Mondays, Wednesdays, or Saturdays either. So, even when the worship services are over, the church still exists. This also means that on Monday morning we go off to our respective workplaces still knit closely together by the Holy Spirit as the one body of our ascended Lord Jesus Christ.

Allow me to illustrate the point. Early each morning work crews assemble in the yard of a landscaping company. Some take a truck, with mowers and weed-eaters, and off they go to do lawn maintenance. Other crews load up with stone, soil, and plant material. Off they go, blueprints in hand, to various construction projects. Each crew goes in a different direction to a different task. Still, they all work toward a common goal under one company banner (duly painted on the side of the trucks).

Sundays are something like those early mornings in the landscaping yard. On the Lord’s Day we load up our hearts with spiritual supplies, tools, instructions, and encouragements. Then, Monday morning we all head off, like different crews ready to tackle different tasks. Still, we all work under the one banner of Christ, serving his cause and his kingdom. In this sense, even if you don’t work with fellow church members, by faith you understand that your closest co-workers are the people who share a pew with you, not necessarily those who share a payroll with you.

Last things

Work does not last forever. Or does it? On the one hand, we need to uphold the truth Revelation 14:13. The voice from heaven said, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. . . . They will rest from their labour.” Our gracious God has so designed our future that all the sweat and curse-induced thistle-pulling does, one day, come to end. Thankfully so!

On the other hand, we need to uphold *all* the truth of Revelation 14:13. For the same voice continues, “They will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.” Certainly our deeds do not precede us into eternal life. We do not come before the throne of God with life’s labours in hand, seeking to claim some credit for them from our Creator. After all, even our best deeds are nothing more than filthy rags (Isa 64:6). Instead, we enter God’s throne room relying in faith on the perfect atoning work of our beloved Saviour Jesus Christ.

And yet, according to God’s own Word, our deeds – sanctified to be sure by the blood and Spirit of Christ – do follow us across the border line between this life and the next. It’s something to think about the next time you settle into yet another day of work. If today’s deeds will somehow become, by God’s grace, part of eternity’s glory. . . well, that sheds a different light on matters, doesn’t it?

Are you off to work now? Got your lunch? Good. Got your doctrine, too? Great. Have a most enjoyable day, as you give yourself fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. **C**





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MATTHEW 13:52

The King's March

"On the seventh day, they got up at daybreak and marched around the city seven times in the same manner, except that on that day they circled the city seven times."
(Joshua 6:15)

Have you ever studied a cross section? Maybe a mountain range with its layers, or an engine and its parts? It's a good way to learn how things work. In Joshua 6 we have a kind of cross section. God teaches his people how life is going to work in the Promised Land. It's not always going to be like Jericho, with the walls just falling down on top of themselves. But at Jericho the LORD makes things undeniably clear: we live by his power and his grace.

The Israelites are in a time of transition. They have lived in the wilderness for forty years. Where there was manna every day. Water from the rock. Their shirts and sandals did not wear out. Life is going to be different in Canaan. They are going to have to grow up, you could say. They will have to fight, and work the land. They will learn what it means to live within God's covenant, with its promises and demands. They will be tempted to worship the gods of the Canaanites, to trust in them.

But then there is Jericho. God first makes clear to them his awesome power. Life in the land is his gift. They can, they must, trust him. The Israelites are camped on the plain before Jericho. The oldest city on earth, it's been called. A beautiful oasis. It's also the guardian of one of the main ways into Canaan. The city was heavily fortified. In fact, the city itself was fairly small, just seven acres. It's

more of a fortress, a large castle – walls six feet thick. Jericho was the Fort Knox, the Minas Tirith of Canaan. A symbol of her power, her (supposed) invincibility. We read in Joshua 3 that the harvest had just happened. So the people of Jericho have plenty of food and water. The spring was actually inside the city.

Now here come the Israelites: a bunch of slaves, the children of slaves. What do they know about war? All they do is march around the city, once each day for six days, in complete silence, except for the blowing of ram's horns. And then seven times on the seventh day. Did the people of Jericho laugh at this strange group with their strange rituals? Did they think they were just going around in circles? Not likely, actually. In those days, do you know who would go on ceremonial marches like this? New kings. New pharaohs would march around a fortified wall as part of their coronation. In Canaanite myths, Baal is said to do something like this to assert his dominance.

It's not really the Israelites who are busy marching around, but the ark, and through the ark, the LORD himself. The Israelites and the people of Jericho knew what was going on here, with that ark circling the city each day. The only question was, was this just an empty boast? Was there truly a new king who was strong enough to bring his people into a new land?

In this sacred march, in the fall of Jericho, the LORD makes clear to his people what they need to live in his Promised Land: his authority, his kingship. That's what we have in Jesus Christ, too. His ministry also begins with authority. He drives out demons and devil with but a word. He forgives sin, saying to it, "Be gone!" His miracles are miracles of authority, his words are words of authority. And at Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, we have Jericho fulfilled. Mighty walls come falling down, apart from the slightest nudge we might give – walls of sin and misery, death and devilish power. Truly a promised land has been opened up to us, though we are former slaves.

And these Jerichos are a sign of what we all may enjoy, even thousands of years later. We are called to live within a new covenant, with its promises and demands. We are given new life where we are called to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. But let's look back, to Jericho, to Easter. It is the same resurrection power we enjoy! The great King's authority will be worked out in our lives, even when it might not be as obvious as Jericho or Easter morning. Let's fight the good fight every day. Let's look to the King of kings in confidence. Then we will also look to him in worship, for the new life he has established for us.





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Prayer as an Incense Offering (Part 2 of 3)

In the first article, we saw that prayer was like an incense offering and we ended with the question why the fragrance of this sacrifice was so important.

The meaning of the aroma

The scent or aroma of the incense offering had to be brought close to God. The fragrance of sacrifice played an important role with other offerings as well. When Noah sacrificed after the great flood, we read that the Lord smelled the “pleasing odour” of his sacrifices (Gen 8:21). The phrase “pleasing odour” occurs quite frequently in Leviticus and in Numbers. For example, it is used of the burnt offering of cattle (Lev 1:9), of smaller animals (Lev 1:13), and even of birds (Lev 1:17). With each offering we read “an offering by fire, a pleasing odour to the Lord.” Similarly with the cereal offering (Lev 2:2, 9, 12), the peace offering (Lev 3:5), and the sin offering (Lev 4:31). Indeed, with all sacrifices the odour is important. The verb used for the sacrifice of the whole burnt offering (Lev 1) emphasizes the fact that the sacrifice goes up in smoke and has a smell. This emphasis is also found with the cereal offering (Lev 2:2, 9), the peace offering (Lev 3:5), and the sin offering (Lev 4:31). In all cases, the verb for producing smoke and odour as well as the phrase “pleasing odour” is used. These features indicate something basic to sacrifice.

Literally the phrase “pleasing odour” means a smell or a scent of rest (or pleasantness). This is a smell that brings to rest. So, when the Lord smelled the sacrifice of Noah, or of his people Israel, then it was not the outward smell as such in which he rejoiced. No, he was brought to inner rest by the disposition and attitude shown by the bringing of the sacrifice – in the case of Noah by his gratitude and giving of what was available to God.

But more is involved in terms of God being brought to rest by the aroma of sacrifice. For God made sacrifice an integral part of the worship he demanded. It was

part of his service of reconciliation. Sacrifice spoke of substitution and atonement. Blood is a key element (Lev 17:11). Sacrifice as established by God ultimately pointed to his great gift of love in Christ.

These elements of giving in gratitude to God a precious gift and the element of atonement are found in or associated closely with the incense offering, as we shall see shortly. So, when the Lord savoured the sweet smell of the incense and took in its fragrance, then God rejoiced and it brought the Lord to inner rest and peace. After all, was this not part and parcel of the ministry of reconciliation which made it possible for him to dwell as holy God in the midst of a people which by nature was sinful? Did the offering of incense not speak of the good covenant relationship between him and Israel, for was all not well between Israel and God? They lived in covenant communion! He, in the midst of Israel, his people! The sweet smelling savour symbolized that reality and it was therefore an apt symbol of the prayers of Israel to their God. It indicated that there was peace and good covenant communion.

So by commanding that the incense be burned twice a day in the confines of the Holy Place, the Lord indicated that he wanted to savour the burnt incense constantly. It was to be a continuing symbol of the beautiful bond of peace between him and Israel. The living God in the midst of his people – a reality made possible because fellowship had been restored between God and man. The truth of the sweet fellowship was expressed in the aromatic fragrance of the incense offering.

Fellowship interrupted

That this is indeed all involved in the incense offering is clear from what, for example, happened later during Israel’s wandering in the desert. In Numbers 16 we read that Israel was still grumbling and murmuring against Moses and Aaron (yes and therefore against

God) even though Korah, Dathan, and Abiram had just been punished in a terrible way the day before by being swallowed up alive by the earth. Because of this constant sinful grumbling in spite of divine discipline, the Lord intervened and came down in glory to the tabernacle. He said to Moses: "Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once" (Num 16:45). The fellowship with God had been broken. There was only the stench of sin and iniquity and it hurt the holy nostrils of God. He was very angry and was ready to make an end to the whole stinking business! The aroma of sweet communion and fellowship was no more.

*Sacrifice as established by God
ultimately pointed to his great gift
of love in Christ*

What could Moses and Aaron do?! The Lord had told them to distance themselves from the congregation and he apparently gave Moses and Aaron no opportunity to pray for the people as they had done before on an earlier and similar occasion (Num 16:22). Moses then did the next best. He ordered Aaron to get the incense and burn it. He ordered Aaron to use that symbol of prayer. The sweet smelling savour of what the real communion of God and Israel can be like must be produced! The Lord must smell something different from the rebellion and sin. He must be reminded of the sweet savour of the prayers that he had in the past received from Israel, prayers that were possible because of the ministry of reconciliation, prayers symbolized by the burning of incense. So Aaron had taken his censer, gotten fire from the altar, and burned incense.

The Lord's glory filled the tabernacle and therefore Aaron could not enter there and so Aaron burned incense in his censer and ran and stood in the midst of Israel that was being consumed by the wrath of God. He stood among the living and the dead with the burning incense. The symbol of prayer for the peace of Zion, the high priestly incense offering, spoke of the atonement and communion with God and was therefore a sweet smelling savour in the midst of the foul odour of rebellion.

And the Lord responded. He wanted peace and covenant unity with Israel in righteousness. After all, he had ordained this offering. He stopped the plague (Num

16:48)! He had smelled the fragrant symbol of the prayer of peace and thanksgiving based on the ministry of reconciliation with shed blood. Yes, this peace was possible because of the service of atonement!

The sweet fragrance of prayer

So the incense offering was needed. It was something the Lord rejoiced in! The sweet smell of fellowship based on his redeeming work, the sweet smell of prayer. The Lord therefore demanded what the incense offering represented, namely, prayer. And Israel understood. It therefore became a custom that as the sign of their prayer was being offered in the morning and evening, people gathered outside the temple and prayed. We see this custom in the New Testament. Zechariah had been chosen by lot to burn incense in the temple. Then we read in Luke 1:10 "And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshippers were praying outside." The incense offering spoke of prayer. Another example is found in Acts 3:1. "Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour." This was the hour of the evening sacrifice and, therefore, also the incense sacrifice.

As the Lord demanded the sign of prayer, he certainly demands prayer itself from us. God wants to hear from us in prayer. Prayer is necessary. It is to be the fragrant savour of a glad and happy sinner who knows he has peace with God! Indeed, because it is to be the sweet savour of the covenant fellowship, it must be above all a prayer of thanksgiving.

God wants to hear from us in prayer

From God's point of view, how beautiful and wonderful for him when he sees us falling down before him in prayer – what a fruit of his salvation work. By nature we want to stand up against God. But God sees us, hands folded in prayer to him and so experiencing communion with him and expressing thanks by making use of that means of fellowship. God delights in that. It is an incense offering to him! It is the sweet savour he delights in amidst all the stench of sin that hurts and irritates him. So God sees results on his work of redemption: communion is possible between God and man.

Prayer must therefore occupy a central place in our life, for God rejoices in it and it reminds God continually of his beautiful work of redemption. From a

rotten and decaying world there is a people who know the Lord and experience the new life. Yes, a people who go to God in prayer and, as with the sacrifice of incense, give their best.

*Prayer must occupy a central place
in our lives*

For what is prayer? Is it not an opening of our hearts, and most hidden thoughts and secrets to God? Is it not a sacrifice of our lips in which we lay everything before him as sacrifice of gratitude? Now our gratitude to God can be shown in many ways, but it starts with prayer. That is the chief part of thankfulness as we confess in the Heidelberg Catechism (LD 45). Without prayer no true acts of thankfulness are possible. Yes and that is why it in particular is the

sweet savour of incense in which God delights. And therefore prayer is demanded by him.

And like the incense offering, our prayers must continue without end. As the sacrifice of incense was to be offered continually and just as the beautiful smell never left the mercy seat, so God demands our prayers continually. God's Word exhorts us: "pray continually" (1 Thess 5:17). Indeed, our life must be characterized by prayer, by the realization of the bond of peace we have with God and a making use of that reality. In this way we live in communion with him and show our thanks. God is then wellpleased. He forgives and forgets the stench of sin that can also foul our life.

This brings us to another element we need to consider about the incense offering. The One who gave the law about the incense offering is holy and he gave very precise rules for it.

To be continued 





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NIV2011

Over the fifty to sixty years of her existence, the Canadian Reformed Churches have three times changed the Bible translation recommended for use in the churches (and hence in homes). At the first synod back in 1954, the recent migrants decided to use the King James Version (KJV) in public worship. As the church membership became more proficient with the English language, awareness grew that the language of the KJV was so outdated as to be hard to understand. Consequently, a shift was made in 1971 to the Revised Standard Version (RSV) – even as it was recognized that this translation was not perfect. With the arrival of the New International Version in the 1980s (finalized in 1984), the churches decided in 1995 to recommend the use of NIV for public worship. It was felt that this translation rendered the Word of God in such contemporary English that any reader could grasp the same sense as a Hebrew or Greek reader could grasp in the original languages centuries ago. It seems to me that on the whole the NIV (1984) was well received in the churches. The newest version of the *Book of Praise* also draws its quotes from this NIV.

Development

Built into the translation method of the NIV was the intent to keep the translation in step with changes in the English language. The word “alien” in common English used to mean a “foreigner,” but in recent years (because of *ET*) the term now makes a reader think of a visitor from outer space. So it’s reasonable that the translation be updated so as to replace the word “alien” (in a passage such as Genesis 23:4) with the term “foreigner.” We all understand and appreciate the need for such updating. As a result a revised version of the NIV appeared last year, known popularly as the NIV2011. With the arrival of this new version, the NIV1984 is no longer available.

The revised version of the NIV had been announced some time ago, and so the previous Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches had mandated a

Committee for Bible Translation (CBT; our churches have had such a committee for decades) “to thoroughly evaluate the updated NIV translation when it is released in 2011 and to produce and send a report to the churches within nine months of the release date” (see *Acts*, Article 72). Recently the CBT produced the requested report. The interested can find it at: <http://canrc.org/?document=8120>.

The report’s conclusion? It’s a thumbs down.

Read this:

...though we found much of the 2011 NIV to be acceptable. . . our scales of judgment were tipped in the opposite direction particularly by those passages that concern the special offices in the church. Numerically speaking these passages are few, yet we recognize that they have a weighty effect on the life of the church in practical terms (p. 19).

Result: the Committee draws to the churches’ attention the fact that previous synods have already listed the New King James Version (NKJV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the English Standard Version (ESV) as acceptable translations for the churches to use. Unless, then, the CBT report is found to be badly flawed, we shall soon be moving to a new translation. . . again.

Flawed?

Is the report flawed in its rejection of the NIV2011? I do not believe it is. Consider the following evidence as it relates only to the issue (as the CBT mentions) of the offices of the church:

1. In the 1984 version, the NIV translated 2 Timothy 2:2 as, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to *reliable men* who will also be qualified to teach others.” The phrase “reliable men” translates accurately the Greek original, which is distinctly masculine in its formulation. The 2011 edition replaces the phrase “reliable men” with the gender-neutral phrase “reliable people” on the understanding

that the term “men” can sometimes (in Greek and in English) be used generically to refer to both genders. Our committee writes, “This is an unwarranted neutralizing of a text that ought to be gender-specific. The use of ‘people’ in this verse has the potential to be misleading in a consideration of the special offices of the church.” Good call, in my judgment.

2. As an example of a revised text our committee did not mention (they can’t, of course, mention them all), consider Romans 16:7. The NIV1984 has, “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles. . . .” The new rendition has changed the name “Junias” to “Junia.” We need to know: Greek names ending in *s* are commonly men’s names, while those ending in *a* are commonly women’s names. And yes, the Greek is such that one can indeed translate the name of the person concerned as either Junias (a man) or Junia (a woman). So what’s the issue? Consider the next phrase, “they are outstanding among the apostles.” That phrase could have two meanings, namely, the apostles think Andronicus and Junias/Junia are outstanding or Andronicus and Junias/Junia are outstanding in the ranks of the apostles. The latter possibility means that the Bible itself mentions a female apostle. And if a female could be an apostle back then, why can a female not be an office bearer today. . . . As it is, the Bible is emphatic in other places that sisters of the congregation are not to hold positions of authority or teach in church (cf 1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:12). And the Greek distinctly allows for the masculine name Junias. . . so why would the NIV2011 opt for the feminine name Junia? This text, and so many more, point up the new NIV’s practice of removing male-oriented details of meaning from the text of the Bible.¹

Given passages as these, I very much concur with the conclusion of our Committee on Bible Translation: this version ought not to be used in the churches.

More

You’ll recall the words I quoted earlier from the CBT report, that the passages referring to women in the special offices of the church are “numerically speaking . . . few.” That’s indeed true, when it comes to explicit

texts of the nature of those mentioned above. But there are countless other changes in the NIV2011 that have prepared the way for the thinking reflected in those “few” texts that explicitly promote opening the offices of the church to women. Consider. In the NIV2011,

- the so-called “singular *they*” is frequently used as a gender-neutral equivalent to the traditional “he;”
- terms as “people” and “humans” are often used to render Greek and Hebrew words that refer specifically to men or women;
- the Greek word *adelphoi* (meaning “brothers”) is frequently rendered with the English phrase “brothers and sisters;”
- the term “ancestors” regularly appears where the original languages speak of “forefathers.”

The grounds given for such gender-neutral language (instead of the prevalent male language of Scripture) is that the Bible actually wants its readers to think not just of “he” but of “he” and “she,” not just of “brothers” but of “brothers and sisters,” not just of “forefathers” but also of “foremothers” (which is cumbersome, and so it becomes “ancestors”). Given that the English language has changed in the last few decades to become far more sensitive to the inappropriateness of male-dominated word-choice, it is proper (argue the translators) that an updated version of Scripture also be more sensitive to the unseemliness of male-dominated vocabulary.

A faithful Bible translation needs to stay in step with changes in language

Now, I too think that one needs to stay in step with developments in language. We all agree that it will not do to speak seventeenth century English in today’s society. By extension, it will not do to speak 1970s English to today’s society (though, of course, it would be far more understandable). I readily grant, then, that a faithful Bible translation needs to stay in step with changes in language.

The need to use contemporary English raises, though, a tricky question. It’s this: why do the Hebrew and the Greek texts of Scripture use (what we would call) male-oriented language? The standard answer is: that’s because the culture of the day was male dominated. We can grant that indeed the culture of

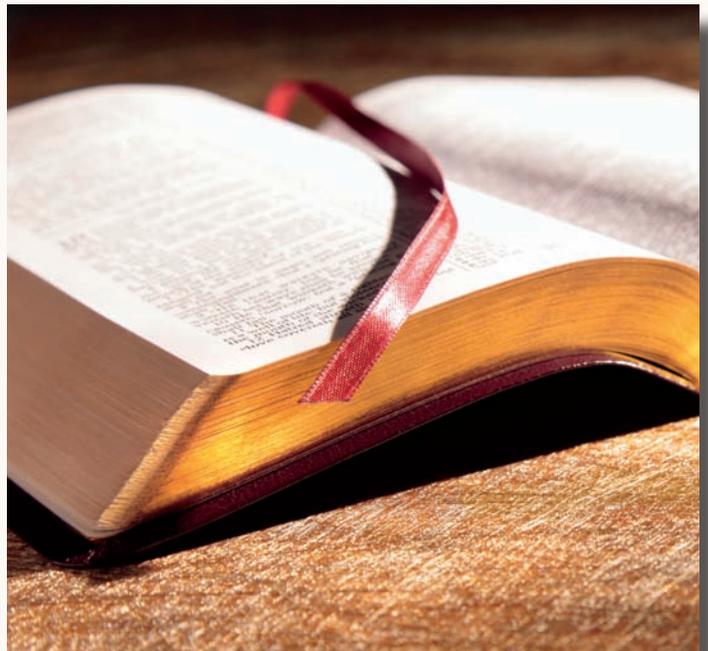
Bible times (be it Abraham's time or Paul's) was male dominated. But the fact that it was male dominated does not in itself mean that *therefore* Moses and Jeremiah and Luke and Paul chose vocabulary that sounds male dominated to our egalitarian-conditioned ears. After all, the writers of Scripture time and time again go out of their way to *counter* what was culturally acceptable. On the pages of Scripture women receive far more protection and esteem than was customary in secular society of the time. That's true in the writings of Moses (in contrast to the place accorded to women in Egypt) as well as in the days of Jesus (in contrast to the place the Jews commonly accorded to women). The point: if the Lord God had wanted his writers not to sound "male dominated" he would have seen to it that they formulate their thoughts in a manner distinct from the culture around them.

Deeper

Back, then, to the question of why the biblical text uses the pronoun "he" or "his" to refer to both genders when the reference is not to men only (eg, Leviticus 2:1). And why does the Bible use the term "brothers" when the reference obviously includes also the sisters (cf Philippians 3:1; 4:1)? That's because the Lord has created the human race in such a way that the man is the head and the woman is not. So much is the man, by God's ordinance, meant to be the head that his wife (and children) is included in the man; a reference to the head of the family (singular, male) includes his family.

If the Lord God had wanted his writers not to sound "male dominated" he would have seen to it that they formulate their thoughts in a manner distinct from the culture around them

When God, for example, established his covenant with Abraham, God did not form a bond of love simply with the individual Abraham, but with his wife Sarah also; she was included in Abraham from the start. Behind the Bible's use of male-oriented vocabulary lies God's revelation about the relation between male and female. Bible language isn't simply culturally conditioned; the language itself conveys a divinely established relationship between the two genders God created.



In fact, this Bible language should infuse the way we use language today – but that's another topic.

NIV2011

One practical application of the Lord's insistence on male-headship is that women are to be silent in the church and not to exercise authority over man (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12). Very rightly our Committee on Bible Translation draws attention to passages where the translation undermines this instruction. But if one embraces a translation that elsewhere corrodes the male-headship principle (by using the singular "they," replacing "brothers" with "brothers and sisters," etc), does one not ultimately *undermine the reasons why* Paul insists that women are not to serve in the special offices of the church? My point: my objections to the NIV2011 extend deeper than the "numerically speaking . . . few" texts that touch explicitly on the subject of the special offices. This translation has "let our culture shape the wording, instead of letting the wording of scripture shape our culture."² As a result, we'll end up reading the Bible through today's glasses – instead of evaluating today's culture through biblical glasses.

That, I think, is dangerous.

¹ As the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood put it in their *Evaluation of Gender Language in the 2011 Edition of the NIV*, available at <http://www.cbmw.org/niv-studies>.

² see http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=18&articleid=20110702_18_A15_CUTLIN491043.





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Ecumena

March for Life: Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves!

On May 10, many thousands of Canadian citizens took over the downtown core of Ottawa, in a peaceful protest: The March for Life. ARPA and Jubilee Church in Ottawa hosted a prayer service in a downtown church building. About 150 people were expected; some 300 Reformed church members and other Protestants came to hear a message from God's Word and to make supplication to him concerning the continuing killing of the unborn in our land, and to recommit to bringing a message of life and hope to our nation. Rev. John L. van Popta of Fellowship Church in Burlington led the prayer service. What follows is an edited text of his message. (The spoken form is retained throughout). He spoke on Proverbs 31:8-9:

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves,
for the rights of all who are destitute.

Speak up and judge fairly;
defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Friends, there is a series of lies perpetrated in the media that permeates our culture. It says that the matter of abortion is settled and that the law of the land cannot be changed. It says that abortion is strictly a private matter, which concerns only a woman and her doctor.

The problem is, there is no law. We know that the law as it stood was struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada a long time ago. But when it did that, it believed that the government would step in and rewrite the law in a way that it would withstand a court challenge.

No government has done so. The lie continues. Even the present government, the one most likely to, refuses to even consider a discussion. The controversy is considered "toxic." (We only need to think of the recent Alberta election to discover how toxic.)

There are MPs across party lines, however, that believe that some sort of legislation should be in place. One of the reasons for the *March for Life* is to encourage those MPs with the knowledge that there are tens of thousands, millions even, of ordinary citizens of this country who think that it is a travesty that harp seals have more justice than unborn children.

It is a cause for sorrow that so much of the Christian community of this country has little interest in social justice. And when it seems to be interested, it promotes boycotts of products made in Israel!

We read some passages from Psalms and Proverbs. There we read that there is a need to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. There is a place for the people of God to speak up.

The Bible of course doesn't foresee wide spread aborting of babies, but it speaks of justice to the poor. The poor are those people without means or citizenship. The poor are those afflicted with poverty, or those who were strangers, sojourners, and aliens. The sojourner was the person not of Israel, who lived among the people of God. Moses reminded the people to defend them. They were reminded that in Egypt that was their status. Their own previous status was their motivation for social justice. God says, "Take care those who cannot speak for themselves; take care of the widow, the orphan, the sojourner. Take care of the poor." The poor are those people without means and without citizenship.

Who more qualifies for that than babies denied personhood? You would think that having a discussion about when someone becomes a person, with the rights of protection would be valued by all. But as Public Safety Minister Vic Toews and Prime Minister Steven Harper showed recently, few in power have interest in speaking up for the poor. Not if it will deny you power. (Not much public safety for the unborn!)



Photo courtesy Chris van Popta

I want to spend a few moments encouraging you today to see how the Scriptures often direct our attention to the poor. One of the first steps in the "psychology of oppression" is to deny personhood to someone. Think of times of war. Italians in WW2 were *WOPS*; the Japanese *Japs*. Germans were *Krauts*. The Germans considered Jews to be subhuman vermin. So also today, the unborn are not persons, but "products of conception," just "bio-mass." Their bodies, at death, not corpses, but "hazardous bio-medical waste."

But the church is called upon to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Think only of Jesus' inaugural sermon quoting Isaiah "I've come to preach good news to the poor. Liberty for captives."

Poor are not only those poor in possessions. They are poor in liberty. The gospel proclaims liberty for captives. Think of those unjustly imprisoned, or those in prison for the sake of the gospel. They understand liberty and its value. Behind walls and gates and bolts and bars they have limited rights, few privileges, no voice. Who speaks for those in the prison industrial complex? Who will speak against prisons for profit?

And what of the elderly? They have little liberty of movement. Or the disabled? Few pay attention to them. What about the ill? Whatever our success, riches, fame, we are poor when sickness comes. Naaman was powerful, important, successful, wealthy, but when illness came he too needed God's grace. Jesus' grace was prodigious to the sick. He truly was the prodigal son. Spending all he had. He offered gracious garments of health for those in the tattered garments of illness. By his stripes we were healed. The blows that fell to him brought us healing. But our society thinks of euthanasia as a cure for suffering.

Others are needy of mind: troubled, broken, psychotic. Our society is marked by mental, emotional, spiritual brokenness of the highest order. People

tormented by guilt, fear, voices, delusions. They need people to speak for them. Speak up and judge fairly. Defend their rights. Too many end up homeless and on our city streets.

So many need spiritual deliverance. They are troubled, twisted, tormented in imaginations, nerves, body. Think of the wild man of Gadara. He was met by Jesus. He was tormented, but after meeting Jesus, Mark says he was "in his right mind." We may not be able to miraculously heal the tormented, but we can speak for them.

Some are needy in spirit. Their faith flags. Their resolve to be faithful to Jesus falters. Who speaks for them? And what of the seeker? Is there room for them in our lives?

And the poor in knowledge; the lost. Do we truly share our riches with them? And the needy in heart: those who need the softening balm of the gospel. Do we have room for them? John the Baptist wasn't shy with Herod. Nor was Jesus shy with the promiscuous woman at the well. Nor with corrupt Zaccheus. He called a traitor, Matthew the tax collector, to follow him.

And there are those poor in friends. Think of Paul abandoned by his friends but one: Onesiphorus, who ministered to him when all gave up on him. He spoke up for Paul. Jesus abandoned by his disciples. But there was Ebed Melech the Ethiopian, who ministered to Jeremiah when he was friendless, fainting, thirsty, hungry. He was rescued. Some one spoke up for him. What about us? Will we be an Ebed Melech? An

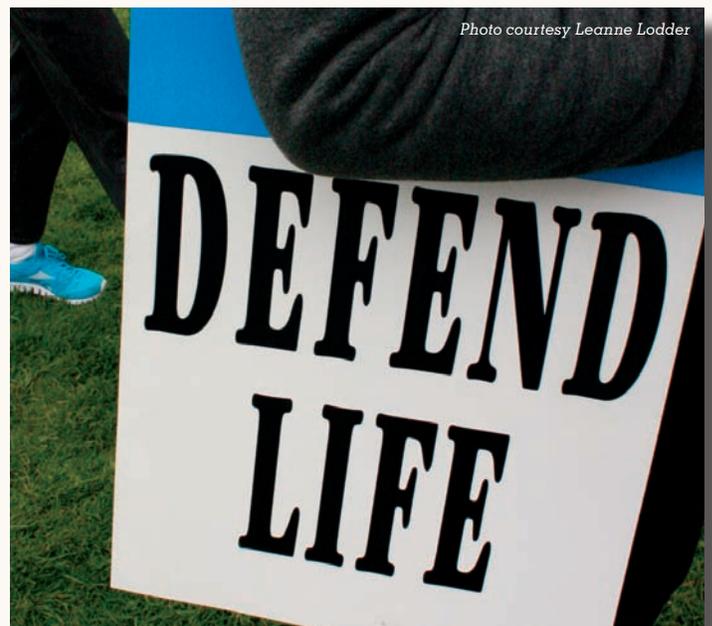


Photo courtesy Leanne Lodder

Onesiphorus? A faithful Luke? A diligent Timothy?
A dear friend?

What about all those poor in hope? Do we reach out with human platitudes? Or powerful words of heavenly hope? Do we care for those at our gates or at our feet? The hungry in our communities, the homeless in our streets?

Speak up and judge fairly. Defend the rights of the poor and needy. Today as you go out to march, you are fulfilling this mandate: To speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; to speak up for the destitute, for the sojourner, for the non-citizen, for the non-person.

For the unborn.



Readers' Forum

“Childlike Reverence” in Prayer Only, or in Music Also?

With Lord's Day 46 of the Heidelberg Catechism, we confess in Question and Answer 120, "Why has Christ commanded us to address God as our Father? To awaken in us at the very beginning of our prayer that childlike reverence. . . ."

Not too long ago I heard a sermon on Lord's Day 46 in which the minister stated, "Don't think of God's majesty in an earthly manner. Coming to God is not common but special, because God is not a common being, He is the Holy God and we are sinful people!" This Lord's Day is aimed at prayer, but can it, and should it, be applied to the music we listen to in our leisure time as well?

A while ago I read an article written by Rev. J. Witteveen called, "Some Thoughts on Contemporary Christian Music (Part 1)," which you can find on the web under "Reformed Outfitters." In his article he writes, "I hadn't realized that this genre of music even existed, but when it was introduced to me, I found myself

devouring it. And that music came from a surprising source – the American hip-hop culture." Furthermore, he wrote,

I was introduced to the music of men like Lecrae, Shai Linne, Tedashii, Timothy Brindle, Trip Lee, and Sho Baraka. And the more I listened to their songs, the more impressed I became. Hip-hop and rap music had been a genre that I had avoided completely, since so much of its message is totally opposed to the Christian faith. When I thought of rap music, I thought of musicians who reveled in wickedness, boasted of evil, and extolled the virtues of a Godless lifestyle. But imagine my surprise when I heard songs like this one, from Shai Linne's latest album, "The Attributes of God."

Then the lyrics of the song "All Consuming Fire" by Shai Linne are quoted. Rev. Witteveen classifies the words of this song as "unashamedly theological."

Simply put, I would not hesitate to recommend any of Shai Linne's albums to Reformed, Christian people, young or old. Musically speaking, the style may not be your cup of tea; but there's no denying the quality of the production, the originality of the musical accompaniment, and the centrality of God's glory to the message of the lyrics. This is music that glorifies God and edifies His people.

I'm sure that Rev. Witteveen meant well; however, after listening to some of the songs of these artists I came to the conclusion that this kind of music is not my "cup of tea"! Without being disrespectful, is God pleased with this – is this his cup of tea? Would God embrace this kind of music as a "fragrant aroma" offered to him with "childlike reverence"? In the Belgic Confession, Article 1, we confess that "there is only one God," and that "he is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good." Wow, that makes me tremble, as it should! Would it not at least be somewhat disrespectful to address God with such "music," even when the lyrics are "unashamedly theological"? Let's read on.

Plato, a Greek philosopher, once wrote, "Through foolishness they, the people, deceived themselves into thinking that there was no right or wrong in music, that it was to be judged good or bad by the pleasure it gave" (*The Secret Power of Music*, p.189). The question arises, when does something become Christian by merely "Christianizing" the terminology and placing Christ's name in front of it? Are we not to call the lost out of the culture (world) to repentance and righteousness, rather than imitate the culture (world)?

The Bible plainly states that music is not neutral. Christians are instructed to use a certain kind of music to worship God and to build up the Christian life. God clearly specifies what kind of music is right, which we can conclude from Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." But can't we do all of this with CC rap and hip-hop you may ask? Not according to Alan Ives, a former rock and roller. He says, "We can never portray the peace of the Lord with wild, discordant, violent sounds. We can never speak of the love of God with hateful music, the goodness of the Lord with bad music, the majesty of God with low class music, the power of God with puny music, the wisdom of God with stupid music, the holiness of God with unholy music. We can never speak of godliness with ungodly music, of heavenly things with earthly, sensual and devilish music."

I wonder if it is appropriate to "evangelize" rap listeners with a Christianized rap approach? I wonder

if rap is the appropriate forum for the "faith once delivered to the saints," and the spreading of the glorious gospel of free grace? Are we compelled to evangelize via every entertainment forum? Would it be a sin to not use rap to evangelize, to reach others?

God says in Romans 12:2, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that ye may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." Furthermore, in Ezekiel 22:26 we read, "Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean."

One standard we can use in regard to art or cultural issues in general is found in Philippians 4:8. "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." I find so few of those virtues named by the apostle to be present in rap, musically and / or lyrically. Also we need to ask ourselves, who are we to please when we listen to CCM? Let's assume that the music is accompanied by "unashamedly theological" lyrics; the fact still remains that the music itself is displeasing to God as it shows no "childlike reverence." I find the words of 1 Thessalonians 2:4 very convincing for the argument, "but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak (*listen to, or sing*) not as pleasing man, but God who examines our hearts."

In October 2006, John Piper (the name may sound somewhat familiar to you as you may find some of his work in your church library) invited rap artist Curtis "the Voice" Allen to perform in the Bethlehem Baptist Church. The significance of this event is that it legitimized the so-called holy hip hop movement among New Calvinists. The fact that a leading theologian of New Calvinism had publicly given his blessing to rap music in the church was a symbolic event that opened the floodgates. If Piper was in favor of rap artists performing in the church, who could be against it? The close relationship between John Piper and rap artist LeCrae is illustrated by the fact that their respective organizations, Desiring God Ministries and Reach Records, have been collaborating for a number of years. Associated with Reach Records is a group of rap artists known as 116 Clique (pronounced one-one-six click). The Clique is a hip hop group that takes its name from Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to every one who believes." Members of 116 Clique include LeCrae, Trip Lee, J'Son, Sho Baraka, Tedashii, Pro,

KB, and non Reach members Shai Linne, Flame, and Cam (some of which are promoted by Rev. Witteveen in his abovementioned article). In January 2011, John Piper interviewed rap artist LeCrae at the Passion Conference. Piper asked LeCrae to explain what he and his friends at Reach Records want to see God do through their music. Piper then publicly prayed for LaCrae's rap ministry. John Piper undoubtedly stands at the centre of the holy hip hop movement. The aim of the movement is to redeem a hip hop culture for Christ. But this is wrong thinking, for Christ died to redeem a people for God, *not* to redeem the *sinful culture* of this world. The claim that the lyrics of holy hip hop are deeply theological does not stand up to scrutiny. The idea that such gatherings can be used to teach God's word is patently untrue. How sad that a church leader of John Piper's standing, with his vast knowledge of Scripture, cannot see the evil of hip hop culture and its harmful effect on young people.

Rev. Witteveen writes in his article, "Simply put, I would not hesitate to recommend any of Shai Linne's albums to Reformed, Christian people, young or old." Personally I rather have our leaders say, "Simply put, I would not hesitate to *not* recommend any of these artists and their music to any Christian people, young or old."

Now I would like to share with you an excerpt from an article from Peter Masters, pastor of London's famous Metropolitan Tabernacle, where Spurgeon once preached. The article is entitled, "The Merger of Calvinism with Worldliness." It reads as follows,

When I was a youngster and newly saved, it seemed as if the chief goal of all zealous Christians, whether Calvinistic or Arminian, was consecration. Sermons, books and conferences stressed this in the spirit of Romans 12.1-2, where the beseeching apostle calls believers to present their bodies a living sacrifice, and not to be conformed to this world. The heart was challenged and stirred. Christ was to be Lord of one's life, and self must be surrendered on the altar of service for him. But now, it appears, there is a new Calvinism, with new Calvinists, which has swept the old objectives aside. A recent book, *Young, Restless, Reformed*, by Collin Hansen tells the story of how a so-called Calvinistic resurgence has captured the imaginations of thousands of young people in the USA, and this book has been reviewed with great enthusiasm in well-known magazines in the UK, such as *Banner of Truth*, *Evangelical Times*, and *Reformation Today*. This writer [Peter Masters], however, was very deeply saddened to read it, because it describes a seriously distorted Calvinism falling far, far short of an authentic life

of obedience to a sovereign God. If this kind of Calvinism prospers, then genuine biblical piety will be under attack as never before. The author of the book is a young man (around 26 when he wrote it) who grew up in a Christian family and trained in secular journalism. We are indebted to him for the readable and wide-reaching survey he gives of this new phenomenon, but the scene is certainly not a happy one. The author begins by describing the "Passion," a conference at Atlanta in 2007, where 21,000 young people reveled in contemporary music, and listened to speakers such as John Piper proclaiming Calvinistic sentiments. And this picture is repeated many times through the book – large conferences being described at which the syncretism of worldly, sensation-stirring, high-decibel, rhythmic music, is mixed with Calvinistic doctrine. We are told of thunderous music, thousands of raised hands, "Christian" hip-hop and rap lyrics (the examples seeming inept and awkward in construction) uniting the doctrines of grace with the immoral drug-induced musical forms of worldly culture. Resolved is the brainchild of a member of Dr. John MacArthur's pastoral staff, gathering thousands of young people annually, and featuring the usual mix of Calvinism and extreme charismatic-style worship. Young people are encouraged to feel the very same sensational nervous impact of loud rhythmic music on the body that they would experience in a large, worldly pop concert, complete with replicated lighting and atmosphere. At the same time they reflect on predestination and election. Worldly culture provides the bodily, emotional feelings, into which Christian thoughts are infused and floated. Biblical sentiments are harnessed to carnal entertainment. (Pictures of this conference on their website betray the totally worldly, show business atmosphere created by the organizers.) Truly proclaimed, the sovereignty of God must include consecration, reverence, sincere obedience to his will, and separation from the world. You cannot have Puritan soteriology (*doctrine of salvation*) without Puritan sanctification. You should not entice people to Calvinistic (or any) preaching by using worldly bait. We hope that young people in this movement will grasp the implications of the doctrines better than their teachers, and come away from the compromises. But there is a looming disaster in promoting this new form of Calvinism. Putting a Christian message in such a musical form, like rap, hip-hop, does not elevate the form but degrades the message to the level already established in the culture by that form. In using the world's genres

of music, it blurs the gap between worldly Satanic values and divine ones.

There is an alternative way of praising God, so let's do it the right way, the way which is pleasing to him. Let's do so in harmony with Ephesians 5:19, "speaking (*singing, listening*) to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." Some genres of music are just too much of the world to be redeemed, and discretion being the better part of valour, the Christian would be better off just avoiding it completely.

So I ask you, "childlike reverence" in prayer only, or in music also? I think God may have given us the answer to that question in Psalm 2:11, where we read, "Worship the Lord with reverence and rejoice with *trembling*."

Brotherly greetings
Case Burger

Response

The issue of music can be a contentious one, and that fact became obvious to me when I received responses to my article on both sides of the issue; one response said I was too harsh on Christian contemporary music, the other said just the opposite. I would like to address several of the points that Br. Burger made in his article.

First of all, Br. Burger writes that "Christ died to redeem a people for God, not to redeem the sinful culture of this world." He goes on to say, "Some genres of music are just too much of the world to be redeemed, and. . . the Christian would be better off just avoiding it completely."

I am compelled to point out that I never spoke about "redeeming" genres of music in my article for Reformed Outfitters. But on the one hand Br. Burger says that Christ didn't come to redeem a sinful culture, and on the other hand he says that some genres of music are too worldly to be redeemed. Does this mean that some genres are not so worldly that they cannot be redeemed? If so, what are they?

I would agree that there are standards that we must use when considering what kind of music we will employ in our songs. I agree that there are certain genres of music that, in and of themselves, do not bring glory to God, because of the world-view that they represent, the world-view upon which they are built. There are two genres in particular that I'll mention as examples – one is "death metal," a sub-genre of heavy metal, and the other is "free jazz," an "avant-garde" offshoot of more mainstream jazz music. These are two very different genres of music, obviously. But both are built upon a distinctly anti-Christian world-view, in

the form of the music itself, even leaving their lyrics completely out of the equation. In the very make-up of the music, both of these forms (and I could mention others, but have chosen the two which are most obvious to me) are explicitly opposed to the Christian faith.

However, I also believe that context has a lot to do with whether a musical form is worthy of being enjoyed by Christians, and used to praise our God. For example, jazz as a musical form originated in a cultural setting that was completely antithetical to the Christian faith. As it originally existed, in its original context, jazz was a genre of music that would not have been appropriate for Christians to listen to or perform. However, as a genre, jazz developed over the decades. It was removed from its original context, and it evolved into a "serious" form of music, music to be listened to quietly, music to be pondered, music to provoke thought. Jazz went from the brothel to the coffee house to the concert hall, and in doing so, the very music changed. I am not speaking of a change in form; I'm speaking of a change in context. This, I believe, makes all the difference.

The same is true for hip-hop music. Hip-hop, or rap music, has a long history. Its recent roots go back to the African-American church, and a particular style of preaching that was very rhythmic and musical. Over time, the genre we now know as rap, or hip-hop, developed, and what became popular was, to say the least, not glorifying to God. In its original context, as a form of expression most often used to glorify the performer, especially in relation to other rival performers, rap music is unacceptable for the Christian, and should be avoided. However, when removed from its original context, the genre itself changes. And so, I must ask: is it the form of the music itself that is evil, or is it the subject matter of the songs themselves? Is rap music, as a form of musical expression, inherently irreverent and disrespectful?

On this, Br. Burger and I disagree, and I believe that arguing about this is somewhat akin to arguing which colour brings more glory to God – purple or blue. You say it's irreverent, I say it's reverent, and our conclusions are both entirely subjective. What characterizes reverence? Is it rhythm, or lack thereof? Is it speed? Is it volume? Cultures and individuals differ in their appreciation of all of these aspects of music. The issue of the worthiness of musical genres is not entirely black and white; between those black and white extremes (which I alluded to earlier), there are plenty of shades of grey. On these we may disagree, but try as we might, objective criteria for judgement are difficult to come by.

The Greek philosopher Plato may have believed that there is an "ideal" form of music, because of the nature of his philosophy, which claimed that there is an

ideal form of everything that exists beyond the human senses, a spiritual form which the physical could never attain. However, when it comes to music, it's simply not that cut and dried.

The final point I would like to address is Br. Burger's assertion that "the claim that the lyrics of holy hip hop are deeply theological does not stand up to scrutiny." Br. Burger makes this assertion, but provides no evidence to back this statement up. I could list a number of songs that have a very strong, sound, theological underpinning, but given the fact that this entire issue of *Clarion* is not dedicated to this topic, I will have to

refrain. Suffice it to say, there is much evidence to the contrary, and if the reader is interested in examples, I can provide them.

In conclusion, I stand by my original positive evaluation of the music being produced by the Christian rap artists I named in the original article (this is not a blanket endorsement for all Christian rap music), and I thank Br. Burger for his comments and the opportunity to respond to them.

In Christ the King,
Pastor Jim Witteveen
Prince George, BC 



ADVERTISEMENT NOTICE:

Announcements of Weddings, Anniversaries (especially those with an Open House) should be submitted six weeks in advance.

BIRTHS

I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I have asked Him. Samuel 1:27

With much joy we Thank God for entrusting us with another one of His covenant children

SAMUEL HERMAN

We Praise God that all things are well.

Proud parents: **Herman and Jolene DeHaan (nee Schulenberg)**

Excited Sister: *Kaitlyn, Konnor†*

Samuel is the 10th Grandchild for John and Joanne Schulenberg and the 22nd for Griet Schurrman

7854 Canborough Road, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W1



Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. Nehemiah 9:5b

With thankfulness and praise to the Lord our God, We

Jonathan and Andrea Bax

joyfully announce the birth of our son

BRODY ADRIAN

July 8, 2012

A little brother for *Megan*

4th grandchild for Archie and Ria Bax

4th grandchild for Gijsbert and Annie Nederveen

90th great-grandchild for Beppe Grietje Bouwman

4192 Thomas Alton Blvd., Burlington, ON L7M 0M6

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. Psalm 139:14

We thank the Lord who has richly blessed us with another one of His covenant children, a daughter

ADDISON ALCYIA

Born on June 20, 2012

Ben and Rachel Helder

A sister for *Emmalyne, Isaac, Daeton*

14th grandchild for Ed and Alice Helder

21st grandchild for Harry and Janet Ludwig

19 Ridge Road West, Grimsby, ON L3M 4E7



You know how I in safe seclusion was made with delicate precision.

Psalm 139:8 (POB)

With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father we joyfully announce the arrival of one of His own covenant children whom He has entrusted to our care

DECLAN JOHN

Born June 13, 2012 to

Chris and Amanda DeBoer

A little brother for *Titus*

38th grandchild for Dirkje DeBoer

27th grandchild for John and Mary VanderHoeven

167 Thoms Crescent, Newmarket, ON L3Y 1C9