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Clarion

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WHOSE TASK IS EVANGELISM?



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Reaching Out (Part 3)

We so easily create dilemmas where none exist

Organized or unorganized?

I ended my last editorial (“Reaching Out” Part 2) with the words, “Readers, just how good is your church team? Is it all defense? Is the offense nowhere in sight? Then bring on the offense. Strive for biblical balance!” By using words like “offense,” “defense,” and “biblical balance” I was trying to get across the message that reaching out is not a matter of either-or.

Often that is what we make it out to be. Some of us stress the need to “preserve” the truth and hence we are suspicious of “increase.” Others among us stress the need to “increase” the church and think that to “preserve” is an obstacle on the way to achieving that goal. All the while we forget that Lord’s Day 48 of the Heidelberg Catechism sees them as partners and not opponents, as two sides of one and the same coin. It all highlights the fact that we so easily create dilemmas where none exist.

The same applies to the distinction of “organized” and “unorganized.” When I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, and even beyond that, I was told by some that the church should not be involved in “organized” evangelism efforts. It should all come naturally. Believers should simply live as believers. They should just let their light shine. They should embrace their prophetic calling and work it out with gusto. Sounds good! And it is!

But then a rider was attached, namely that we don’t need anything else. In the church there should not be such things as organized evangelistic activities. Hands off local church! Leave it to the members! Do not go where you are not called to go.

Clergy or laity?

Still, this was not the only dilemma making the rounds in my youth. There was another and in some ways it was

akin to the old clergy-laity distinction that was so rampant in the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation. According to this view, only the ordained can really do evangelism. They took the words of our Lord at the end of the gospel of Matthew about making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them as applying only to the “eleven disciples” (Matt 28:16) and used them to supposedly prove that evangelism work is ordained work.

They did the same with the word “preaching.” They said that this too is something that only ordained folk can do, so hands off you people in the pew.

False dilemmas

Is this true? Can one drive a proper wedge between “organized” and “unorganized,” between “clergy” and “laity”? I would suggest to you that these are false and improper dilemmas.

For why does “organized” need to be pitted against “unorganized”? Can one not say that in truth these are two aspects or dimensions of one and the same calling? True, the members of the church should be witnesses to Christ in this world without having to be told, trained, and programmed. They should do what comes naturally to new people. But at the same time what is wrong with the church giving them some additional training? What is wrong with programs and efforts that compliment and supplement these things? Can and should the two not go hand in hand?

As for that other matter of clergy doing the heavy lifting when it comes to evangelism and the laity more or less standing on the sidelines, since when is that a biblical model? Those who say that the ending of Matthew’s gospel applies to the ordained only are over-reaching themselves. They overlook the fact that the last verse of

that ending reads, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (20). Are those words only for the eleven disciples, or for the ordained? I thought that these wonderful words of comfort applied to the whole church? You see, this ending is not about just some in the church. It is about all in the church.

Of course, that still leaves that word "preaching." How are we to understand it? Is it an exclusive word? One needs to be careful here. In Acts 8 we read about persecution in the church at Jerusalem and the result was that the believers were scattered. What did they do in such a dire situation? Acts 8:4 says that they "preached

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Throughout this year Dr. James Visscher has been writing editorials on the theme of "Reaching Out." In his third part, he writes about false dilemmas: asking *which* approach is correct when in reality we should do *everything* we can to spread the gospel.

This issue continues Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher's series on women in the church voting for officebearers. We also have another installment of Rev. Peter Holtvliwer's series on NAPARC, this time highlighting the RPCNA.

Recently Rev. Wes Bredenhof attended the Together for the Gospel (T4G) 2014 conference and he shares his observations with our readers. Issue 11 also includes a Treasures New and Old meditation, Clippings on Politics and Religion, and the You Asked column. We also include a letter to the editor, a book review, a Canticle, and a press release.

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the word wherever they went.” Interesting! While the apostles stayed behind in Jerusalem and hunkered down in their bunkers, the rank and file took it upon themselves to spread the Word. Was that permissible? Obviously, it was.

Do you see how care needs to be exercised here? While it is true that only some in the church are called to preach the Word in the setting of weekly worship, it is also true that the calling to make known the Good News rests with all who are in Christ. They may not be doing it in a deep, systematic or scholarly fashion, but bring it and spread it they must.

An organic approach

Perhaps now you are beginning to sense exactly where I am going with all this. What I want to stress is that the work of reaching out is a work that needs to be done on many fronts, in different ways, using all sorts of people. The minister has a calling to preach to the congregation about its responsibility to shine like stars in the universe, all the while holding out to the world “the word of Life” (Phil 2:15, 16). As well he needs to teach the youth of the church that they should be “walkie-talkies”

A truly effective evangelism program requires the involvement of different members, all sorts of different efforts, and lots of different talents

for Christ. The elders who visit the homes of the members need to encourage them to interact with and be there for their neighbours. The Christian school teacher should seek to hone and develop the talents of his or her students in order that they will become vibrant kingdom workers. Do you see how the one should complement the other? We are all to do what we can to promote the prophetic task of the church.

Educating the flock

At the same time there is a role here for special courses in evangelism and apologetics (defending the faith). Unfortunately in today’s world we are confronted not only with the pagan and the unbeliever, but also with the atheist, the agnostic, and the cult follower. Faced with the former we bring the gospel; faced with the latter we defend the gospel.

Indeed, the church leadership would do well to set aside some time every year doing more than just its regular work. Ecclesiastical maintenance is necessary but so is ecclesiastical stimulation. It should not settle for the status quo but be going on the offensive. It should be asking itself how it can better equip its members. “Do those under our care know how to explain the gospel in plain terms?” If not, we need to teach them. “Do the members of the flock know how to deal with the Mormon who knocks on their door or the secular humanist who is always poisoning their work environment?” If not, there is a skill here that needs to be taught.

Church library

Another aspect that may need some work is the church library. I may be wrong but it seems to me that all too many church libraries are dominated by the Francine Rivers and Janette Oke literary genre. It may entertain, but whether or not it always educates is another question.

In light of that it would be beneficial if church libraries carried more meat and less fluff. Every time I go to my local Christian bookstore I come away disappointed. If what is offered there is a reflection of the current state of Christianity in our land then we are in deep, deep trouble. Entertainment reading, prophetic speculation, feel good religion, endless self-help manuals, toys, and trinkets fill the shelves, but a good, informative, biblically based book is hardly to be found.

Hence here is a calling for church libraries. Identify, purchase, promote, and loan out stuff that feeds minds, shapes wills, fires up hearts, and moves feet.

Courses for the community

When it comes to moving feet, the question is also, “How can we move our church feet into the world and how can we move worldly feet into the church?” To that end I would recommend that your church take a serious look at an ever growing number of evangelism courses. These include: *A Gift from Heaven* (RET), *Christianity Explored* (The Good Book Company), *Emmaus Bible Course* (Emmaus Correspondence Center Canada), *Two Ways to Live* (Matthias Media), *9Marks* (led by Mark Dever).

Perhaps you noticed that The Alpha Course is not on the above list. This has to do with that the fact that while Nicky Gumbel, the founder, is an excellent communicator, his material has a definite Pentecostal-Arminian slant to it. It takes a considerable amount of serious editing for a Reformed church to do something meaningful with this material.

Indeed, all of the material that you come across for possible use will need to be carefully vetted and scrutinized. As always be discerning and evaluate it all, making sure that you have your Reformed confessional glasses on as you do so.

With that in mind you will also find a lot of material that can be helpful and that can form the basis for a great outreach course. One of the courses above that comes highly recommended is *Christianity Explored*. It is currently being used by a large and growing number of faithful Reformed and Presbyterian churches in different parts of the world.

Vacation Bible school

Another effort that churches should consider when it comes to their evangelism arsenal is vacation Bible school or VBS. Unlike the previous programs that target adults, this one has the needs of neighbourhood children in mind. It seeks to introduce them to the gospel using story and song, art and activities, kindness and gentleness.

*The calling to make known
the Good News
rests with all who are in Christ*

The drawback to VBS is that it is short. Most programs last only one week. Still, it is sometimes surprising what a difference a week can make in a young person's life. It is also great to see how it stimulates the army of volunteers that are needed to make something like this happen.

Greeters

Another but different part of the evangelistic picture has to do with greeters. I don't know about you but I have been to some Reformed churches as a visitor, both in Canada and elsewhere, and no one even offers a greeting or bothers to introduce themselves. At the same time some of these same churches spend a lot of money and make a lot of noise about doing evangelism. It is all a very odd, cold, and forbidding business.

What a shame too! Here is such a simple and obvious thing. All it takes is asking for some volunteers to step forward, come to church early, wear a smile, perhaps put on a Greeter tag, utter a word of welcome, and stick out a hand. In some cases they may also introduce strangers to that Sunday's host family. Is that so hard?

It's time to end and I have not even gotten around to mentioning literature distribution, live feed and radio broadcasting, reading rooms, and countless other things, but I hope that you are beginning to get the picture. A truly effective evangelism program requires the involvement of different members, all sorts of different efforts, and lots of different talents. It takes a multi-faceted approach and an all church effort.

If your church is doing this, that's great. If not, then it is time to pray and volunteer. If it is doing a little of this, find ways to do more.

May the Lord see fit to bless our churches and members in such a way that the light of the gospel shines ever brighter in our neighbourhoods.

C





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The Spirit of Truth is with Us Forever

"He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth."

(John 14:16-17)

It must have been with heavy hearts that the disciples heard Jesus speaking to them about his departure. How would they be able to continue after Jesus has left them? Jesus encourages them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1). Jesus is going to his Father and will prepare a place in his Father's mansion for all those who believe in him.

When Jesus comes to his Father in heaven, he will ask the Father to give to the disciples, to the church, another Counsellor to be with them forever. Jesus does not abandon his church but continues unfolding the grand plan of salvation. God will raise Jesus from the dead after he has brought the one and only sacrifice for sins on the cross, and then the risen Christ will take his place at God's right hand. He will speak to the Father and the Father will listen to his Son and send the Holy Spirit to the church on Pentecost.

The disciples will no longer have Jesus with them on earth but things will get even better and richer for them. There is progress in the history of salvation. The ascension of Jesus Christ and the completion of his ministry on earth means that now the way is open for more of the blessings of his work, in this case, the sending of his Spirit to his church (cf. John 16:7). Now the Spirit of Christ will be with his people forever. He will dwell in our hearts.

Jesus calls the Spirit a "Counselor" or "Paraclete," that is, someone who comes alongside the disciples in order to give them any help that they need. The Spirit is described as "another" Counsellor. At first the disciples had Jesus with them, but now they will receive his Spirit. He is different from Jesus, for he will be in their hearts and in the hearts of all believers. But his goal will be the same, namely, to help us in our life of faith in the Lord. He will be with us always to guide us in the truth of the gospel.

The Spirit who comes is the "Spirit of truth." Everything which the Spirit tells the disciples will be true and sure. He will teach the disciples all things, and will remind them of everything that Jesus said to them (John 14:26). The Spirit of truth will guide the disciples into all truth and understanding, and he will bring glory to Jesus Christ. While he was on earth, Jesus could not tell the disciples all that he had to say to them, for they could not bear it all nor were they able to understand it all. But the Spirit will make it known to them when he comes, being sent by the Father and the Son. This deeper understanding of the gospel of Christ and the truth of God has been revealed to us in the apostolic writings, the New Testament Scriptures.

What a comfort it is to know that also the church today in the

21st century has received the Spirit of truth to guide us and to be with us always. In this post-modern time of relativism and skepticism, we treasure the knowledge of the Spirit's work of renewal in our minds and in our hearts. He renews us so that we may know and understand the truth of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Jesus told his disciples that "the world cannot accept him [the Spirit of truth], because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you" (John 14:17). Similarly, the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth that believers in Jesus Christ have received "the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Cor 2:12). Those who do not have the Spirit regard the gospel as foolishness, but for us who believe, it is the power and glory of God!

As we celebrate the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost, let us encourage one another with the reality of his presence in our hearts. It is through the Spirit's working that we believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and have life and joy in God. Truly, Christ has fulfilled his promise to never leave his church, but to be with his body always, to the very end of the age. Let us go forward in faith with that rich comfort!





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Should Sisters Vote for Officebearers?

Does the Bible teach “the headship of man”?

Where does the Bible say that women should not vote?

Synod Burlington 2010 said that the Bible does not present any such decisive evidence.

Synod Carman 2013 however said in one of its final recommendations that “Synod Burlington 2010 erred in stating that the exegetical sections brought forward in both the majority and minority reports are ‘hardly relevant or decisive for the matter of women’s voting’” (Art 110, page 118).

That of course makes one curious as to what biblical evidence Carman considers so decisive. What do we find? Carman presents us with one paragraph of biblical material in Consideration 3.5. It reads in part:

Nine churches brought forward Biblical evidence regarding the headship of men and the position of women within the congregation. It can be summarized as follows: The Bible teaches that the man is the head of his wife (Genesis 2, Ephesians 5:22-33). The holy women in the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful by being submissive to their husbands (1 Peter 3:5). The Bible shows that this position of headship extends to the position of man and woman in the assembly of God’s people (1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33b-34; 1 Timothy 2:11-13).

Now beyond a doubt, these texts prove that a married man is to be the head of his wife. There can be no doubt either that throughout Old Testament men are described as having the authoritative and leadership roles and that in the New Testament too women should not have positions of authority over men in the church (1 Tim 2:11-13; cf. 1 Cor 11).

While all that is true, it should be clear, however, that one cannot conclude from a careful reading of the texts referenced above:

- a. that voting is a matter of having authority over a man
 - b. that voting is a matter in which a woman must be subject to her husband
 - c. or that every woman is subject to a man as her head.
- Regarding a, in the previous issue of *Clarion* I showed that voting is not a matter of governing, but simply participating in a process whereby officebearers govern. A church that maintains that a woman who votes is governing and therefore forbids it ought then also to forbid any woman from nominating officebearers, raising objections to officebearers, or even from speaking at a congregational meeting. In voting, a consistory simply asks each person for his/her preference and obligates itself to appoint accordingly. But because it is too cumbersome and less anonymous to ask everyone personally for their preference, a consistory asks its members to state their preference on a ballot. While relevant to the consistory’s act of governing, it is not itself the act of governing.

Regarding b, biblical headship as the Apostle Paul outlines it is really a matter of a Christian husband lovingly leading his wife. It does not necessarily involve issuing orders or decrees; nor does it mean that a woman cannot have an opinion or an approach that differs from her husband. Rather, it means that a husband sets the direction, priorities, and goals of a family in a way that is as decisive and caring as when Christ loves his church and sacrificially gives himself up for her (Eph 5:25). The Apostle Peter likewise urges men to live with their wives “in an understanding way, treating them with respect as the weaker vessel,” (1 Pet 3:7). So does this mean that a woman necessarily has to get her preference for an officebearer from her husband? Some might say so; most would not. In any case, one would be

hard-pressed to maintain that because of what Scripture says through these passages of Paul or Peter, a husband must tell his wife exactly what to say. The fact is: women often view other men differently than men do. I would thus submit that a considerate husband would inform his wife about his preferences, would suggest that she choose likewise, but then acknowledge that his wife is free to vote according to her own conscience, especially when she feels strongly about the men whom she is to recommend to the consistory.

A married man is to be the head of his wife

Regarding c, though Article 110 frequently references “the headship of man,” (Observation 2.3.2, Consideration 3.4, 3.5) one is hard-pressed to find exactly that concept in the Scriptures. The result of the fall is that Eve is to be further subjected to her husband who will rule over her (Gen 3:16). Paul and Peter tell wives to be subject to “your husbands” (Eph 5:22-24, Col 3:18; Titus 2:4-5; 1 Pet 3:1-5; cf 1 Cor 14:35); in five of the six times this phrase is used in the foregoing verses, the additional word “*idioi*” (their “own” husbands) is used to emphasize that this subjection has to do with being subject to their own husbands (and not the husbands of another woman). Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is urging wives to cover their heads; he is not saying that all women must cover their heads. The veil is the wedding veil; a woman who refuses to do so is dishonoring her head, namely, her husband.¹

One might ask: to what man is a single woman to be subject as her “head”? True, she is to “honour” her father and even to be subject to him – but a woman’s father is never described in Scripture as her “head.” One might also ask: to what man is a widow to be subject when her husband has died? True, she should be respectful of her officebearers and her father, if he is alive, but neither of those is ever described as her “head” either.

Yet Synod Carman wrote about “the headship of men” and that “this position of headship extends to the position of man and woman in the assembly of God’s people.” But what does this mean? It’s an important question because if there are women whom I am to be head over besides my wife, I need to know who she is so that I can exercise

such an authority. And a widow or single woman in the church must also know who their “heads” are so they can be subject to them. It seems though that while the Scriptures certainly teach “the headship of husbands,” and present us with a world in which men exercise a lot of leadership and authority, they do not know of the general comprehensive concept of “the headship of the man.”

So where does the idea of the “the headship of man” come from? I have a hunch. One church wrote the following in its bulletin in 2010:

Scripture does teach that particular women have to be in submission to particular fathers and husbands. That seems to be the meaning of 1 Cor. 11:3 where Paul writes that “the head of the woman is man”... The RSV translates “man” as “husband,” but as L. Selles explains in his Outline on 1 Corinthians, “the article before ‘man’ indicates that not a particular man, but what constitutes the genus, the class, ‘man’ is meant.” Often this will be a husband, but it may be a father or brother, in the case of widows it may be the elders of the church. We are dealing here with the principle of representative headship, which is a creation ordinance (1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13). The Church Order, because it has to do with authority, reflects and assumes that the male (whether head of a family or on his own as unmarried) is the head: the one governing and making binding decisions. A woman is always subject to man: either to her father, to her husband, or if she is a single adult or a widow, to her oldest son provided he is a communicant member in good standing or to her consistory.

Unfortunately and with all due respect, there is much that is wrong in this paragraph. The difficulty is caused by misunderstanding the purpose of a definite article in 1 Corinthians 11:3. The late Professor Selles once wrote that the article (“the man”) is present to denote “the genus, the class, ‘man.’”² But it is not so. Pardon me for being overly technical here, but the definite article is there before the word “head” because when Greek uses the verb “to be” it leaves both the subject and the object of the verb in the nominative and there is no other way to distinguish the subject from the object (predicate nominative) except by giving the subject the definite article. In this verse, for instance, the question is: did Paul write

- (a) “the man is the head of the woman” or
- (b) “the head is the man of the woman”?

Since “man” has an article (“the”), it is set out as the subject of the sentence;³ hence translation (a) is the correct one. Genus, class, or kind is not the issue at all. The idea put forth above that “a woman is always subject to man: either to her father, to her husband, or if she is a single adult or a widow, to her oldest son provided he is a communicant member in good standing or to her consistory” has no basis in Scripture. Yes, a woman should be subject to her father, her husband, or her officebearers, but the only one who is her head is her husband (if she is married). A woman is subject to one man alone as head – her husband. Biblically speaking, a single woman has no human head to which she is to be subject, and a single man has no woman who is subject to him! The headship of husbands is true; the general comprehensive headship of man is a myth.

Consideration 3.5 continues: “Acts 1:23-26 shows that the congregation was involved in the nomination of two brothers for the office of apostle. Acts 6:1-7 shows that the congregation was involved in the election of the seven.”

Biblically speaking, a single woman has no human head to which she is to be subject, and a single man has no woman who is subject to him!

First, the reference to Acts 1. Here there are several points to notice. Synod refers to “congregation.” But this is a pre-Pentecost passage. Can we speak then of a “congregation” or is this a loose company of believers who happen to be there on the day of the ascension? Who does the “nomination”? Is it the apostles who do so after Peter who spoke up, or the company of disciples, women, relatives of Jesus (1:13), and the 120 believers (1:15)? The text is not clear. Moreover, the passage is not about voting but about “casting lots” (1:26), which is a practice that never happens again after Pentecost. Besides, the whole passage is hardly relevant to Synod’s argument since Synod says that “the congregation was involved in the nomination of two brothers,” but the issue is not nomination of officebearers but voting for officebearers. To our knowledge, no church has ever ruled that a woman cannot recommend a brother to serve as an officebearer.⁴

DECLINED

Declined the call to the Launceston Free Reformed Church of Tasmania, Australia:

Rev. P. Aasman

missionary of the Ancaster CanRC serving at Streetlight Ministries

Declined the calls to Ebenezer CanRC of Burlington, ON and Immanuel CanRC of Edmonton, AB:

Rev. R. Vermeulen

of Glanbrook, ON

LICENSURE EXAMINATIONS SUSTAINED

Examined by Classis Ontario West of May 21-22, 2014 and granted permission to speak an edifying word in the churches:

Students: Johan Bruintjes, Rick Vanderhorst, Steve VanLeeuwen, Gerard Veurink, Randall Visscher

CANDIDACY EXAMINATIONS SUSTAINED

Examined by Classis Ontario West of May 21-22, 2014 and declared eligible for call:

Br. Gerrit Bruintjes

Br. Jeff Poort

Br. Tyler Vandergaag

CALLED

Called to serve as co-pastor of the Langley, BC CanRC:

Rev. D. Vandeburgt

of Burlington-Waterdown, ON

Called by the Grace CanRC of Kerwood, ON, and by the Grace CanRC of Winnipeg, MB:

Candidate Gerrit Bruintjes

Called by the Winnipeg-Redeemer CanRC of for mission work in Manitoba:

Candidate Tyler Vandergaag

CHURCH NEWS

Secondly, Synod refers to Acts 6:1-7 as it “shows that the congregation was involved in the election of the seven.” It is true that this passage shows that the “congregation” or “the group” (6:5) are involved in the choosing. But what proof is there that the women were not involved in this act of choosing? The issue had to do with “the Grecian widows”(6:1) who were not being treated fairly as part of the “group.” Are they then not part of this group that chooses? Especially when the issue had to do with women, it is hard to imagine that the women are

immediately left out. Yes, it's possible, but to say it is so is to speculate beyond Scripture. Moreover, when the Twelve speak to the group, they address them with a word that can be understood as referring to all the members of the community and thus could better be translated as "brothers and sisters."⁵ Again, the text is not supportive of the argument Synod wishes to make.

But Consideration 3.5 continues:

The Canadian Reformed Churches acknowledge in the Form For the Ordination of Elders and Deacons as well as in the Form For the Ordination (or Installation) of Ministers of the Word, that God calls brothers to the office through His congregation (p. 607 and 613 *Book of Praise*; emphasis added). Although the Bible does not spell out how this calling took place or how it should take place, it does indicate that the choosing happens within the assembly of God's people.

What Synod seeks to emphasize here is that the choosing process happens through the congregation and within the assembly of God's people. No one disputes this. What Synod had to prove, and failed to, was that these references prove that women are not part of this congregation or this assembly, or at least not part of the voting process within God's church.

What Synod sought to show was that there is exegetical material that is relevant and decisive for the matter of refusing female participation in the voting process of the church. Unfortunately, Synod failed to provide the churches with any such relevant and decisive material. Indeed, it could not because Synod Burlington 2010 was correct: there is no such decisive evidence.

No doubt, for many married women in the church, this matters little as they feel that they have a voice through their husbands. But what about the single women and the widows? Without clear, scriptural warrant a church has only succeeded to do what it should not do with anyone – marginalize them without justification.

¹ See G.H. Visscher "1 Timothy 2:12-15: Is Paul's Injunction about Women still Valid?" in *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today*. Forthcoming. Here I wrote:

With respect to clothing then, it is of interest that since the year 2000, a significant amount of new material has also been put forth by ancient historians which throws new light on the significance of women wearing veils in 1 Corinthians 11 (Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: the Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Eerdmans, 2003) 77-97; T.A.J. McGinn, *Prostitutes, Sexuality and the Law in Ancient Rome* (Oxford University Press, 1998) 162). This material suggests that at stake here was not the status of all women, but particularly married women. The veil that Paul speaks about is the wedding veil; and "the veiled head was the symbol of the modesty and chastity expected of a married woman" (Winter, 80). The wives praying and prophesying with their heads uncovered were following the practices of these "new" Roman women who were defying the traditional practices (Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Eerdmans, 2010) 520.) The "omission of the veil by a married woman was a sign of her 'withdrawing' herself from the marriage" (Winter, 81).

² L. Selles, 1 Corinthians in *Twenty One Outlines* (ILPB, 1996) 94.

³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Eerdmans, 1996) 43, cf. 45n25. See also *The Basics of New Testament Syntax* (Zondervan, 2000) 30-33.

⁴ It should be noted, by the way, that the wording of the synod is also unfortunate in Consideration 3.5 as a congregation does not nominate officebearers; this is the prerogative of the consistory with the deacons. It is more correct to say that the congregation is given the opportunity beforehand "to draw the attention of the consistory" (C.O., article 3) to brothers deemed fit, but it is the consistory or council that nominates such brothers for office.

⁵ See F.W. Danker *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT*. Third Edition. 2001.

⁶ It's interesting to note that the Synod decision refers to the sections of "both the majority and minority" as "relevant" and "decisive;" one wonders then: how so, since one is arguing for women's participation and the other arguing against? Either this decisive material should be in the majority report, in which case women can vote, or it is in the minority report in which case women cannot vote. Or it is in neither; in which case presumably the matter is best left in the freedom of the churches.





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NAPARC Neighbour – RPCNA (Part 4)

Note: This is the fourth in a series of articles on NAPARC. Having explained what NAPARC is and does, this and following articles aim to introduce the member churches.

Have you ever heard of the “Covenanters?” Or been through Pennsylvania and noticed an advertisement for a meeting of the Reformed Presbyterian Church? These are close “cousins” to the Associate Reformed Presbyterians and another of our NAPARC neighbours. Let’s get acquainted.

By the numbers

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) is a body of some 6,800 members (4700 communicant) forming ninety-three congregations, mainly in the United States.¹ The largest concentration is in the north-east, particularly in Pennsylvania. However, included in these numbers (and unusual for us) are five congregations in Japan, a fruit of their mission work! These ninety-three congregations are organized into seven presbyteries. The RPCNA is one of the five founding members of NAPARC (which was established in 1975).

Of special interest to us Canadians is that they have four congregations in Ontario (mainly clustered in and around the Ottawa Valley), one in Quebec and one in Edmonton, Alberta. The CanRC and RPCNA have congregations close to each other in Ottawa, Kitchener/Guelph, and Edmonton.

Presbyterian covenanters

Members of the RPCNA, very much like those of the ARP, come largely from Scots-Irish stock. Their Irish roots, however, go back to a period earlier than that of the ARP, to the first part of the seventeenth century when Scottish-Presbyterians immigrated to Northern Ireland.

Throughout the seventeenth century in the British Isles, there was a pitched spiritual battle (with sometimes very painful physical consequences) with the Royal House of England and the Parliament for the right

to freedom of religion. The Anglican Church was (and remains) the State Church and in those early days following the Reformation, Presbyterians were not always allowed to worship according to their conscience. The State prohibited it. Fierce persecution arose in various places and a number of Reformed believers gave their lives as martyrs.

Thankfully, at certain points, temporary freedoms were attained in various “covenants” between the Presbyterians and the State. A major point in those covenants was the agreement that Jesus Christ is Lord of *both* Church and State and that the State has no business governing the internal affairs of the church. Eventually, a permanent right was achieved for Presbyterian believers and churches to worship according to their conscience in the Revolution Settlement of 1690.

However, this Settlement did not include the key point from the earlier covenants, namely the kingship of Jesus Christ over also the State. To this, a minority of Presbyterians strongly objected, insisting that the former covenants be honoured. So important was this conviction that they stood apart from the main body of Presbyterians and were referred to as the “Covenanters.” It is from this reforming act and desire to maintain the crown rights of King Jesus that these Scots-Irish Calvinists became known as “Reformed Presbyterian” believers.

Emigration out of Ireland to North America after this time led to the first Reformed Presbyterian congregation being organized on that continent in 1743. Reformed Presbyterians brought with them the worship of God with emphasis on preaching, Psalm-singing, and the Westminster Standards. They also brought loyalty to the covenants and to Christ whom they professed to be King of both Church and State.² By the late eighteenth century, a large number of these immigrants joined with the Associate Reformed Church (later known as the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church). A smaller group remained apart and continues to this day as the RPCNA.

Church life

What can you expect in a typical RP worship service? The main item will be an exposition of the Word of God, but you'll soon discover that the RPCNA sing only Psalms and use no musical accompaniment. Their song book has all 150 Psalms set both to traditional melodies (including, but not limited to, Scottish tunes) as well as some new compositions – and can these folks sing!

Similar to the ARP, the RPCNA has taken a strong stand against women serving in the teaching offices of the church, that is, the offices of elder and minister. However, they do not regard the office of deacon as a teaching office nor is it, in their system of government, an office which exercises oversight over the congregation. Interestingly, the office of deacon only became part of the RPCNA in the mid-nineteenth century³ at which time it was also made open to communicant sisters by the decision of a local session. However, this continues to be a point of discussion within the RPCNA churches just as it does within the ARPC.

Mission

How does an exclusive-Psalm-singing church (with no musical accompaniment!) do when it comes to evangelism and outreach? By God's grace, they do pretty well! According to their website, there are currently fifteen church plants or mission churches within the US, not to mention successful mission works in several foreign lands. That should be an encouragement to us who also love the Psalms. What brings God's people into his church is the pure preaching of his Word and when new Christians realize the wonder of singing the songs God himself gave the church, it is considered an added benefit, not a draw-back!

Aside from an active domestic outreach, the RPCNA supports mission work in Japan and other parts of Asia as well as in Cyprus and South Sudan. As part of these efforts, they also employ a mobile theological training team which moves to different parts of the world to provide seminary training to local students. This is less expensive and allows native students to more quickly put their training to use in their home culture.

Seminary training

As a denomination, the RPCNA has operated the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh

since 1810. Four full-time professors, together with several adjunct professors, serve the student body. RP ministers are largely drawn from this source. In addition, two "theological halls" operate under the oversight of presbyteries to provide more localized training in Japan and in Canada (specifically, Ottawa). The denomination also owns and oversees the running of Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, a Christian liberal arts institution.

If you would like to know more about the theological views of the RPCNA, check out their official magazine, *The Reformed Presbyterian Witness*. They also run their own publishing house, Crown & Covenant Publications (www.crownandcovenant.com), where a number of excellent resources can be found. Perhaps you've heard of a recent popular one: Rosario Butterfield's, *Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert*. Ever wonder how the Lord can convert the heart of a hardened unbeliever caught up in a destructive lifestyle (i.e. lesbianism)? This book will enlighten you!

Fellowship talks

Since 2007, our federation has been having constructive dialogue with the RPCNA toward ecclesiastical fellowship and much common ground has been discovered. The RPCNA has expressed an interest in developing such relationships and moving toward unity with churches of the same faith and practice. It is a blessing, then, that a meeting of synods has been agreed to between themselves and the ARPC, slated for June of 2015 in Bonclarken, South Carolina. As is apparent from the descriptions, these two churches have much in common, from history to confession to practice, and what a joy it would be if they could come even closer together!

Next time we hope to look at another Presbyterian cousin, the Presbyterian Church of America.

¹ The basic information for this article is a summary of the data found on the official RPCNA website (www.reformedpresbyterian.org) as well as in the annual reports of the RPCNA to NAPARC.

² <http://christchurchreformed.com/who-we-are/the-history-of-the-reformed-presbyterian-church-of-north-america-from-1528-to-2004/>

³ Ibid.



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Islamic Kidnapping of Christian Girls

The civilized world has been horrified by the mass kidnapping of about 276 Nigerian girls from an all-girl's school in Chibok, Borno State, on April 14 by a Muslim group called Boko Haram. Most of these girls were Christians. At the time of writing this article, international efforts were thankfully underway to try to rescue the victims. Thankfully much media attention has been directed to this atrocious event. It should however be realized that this appalling mass abduction is in a sense only the tip of the iceberg of the horrors facing Christian girls in several Islamic countries.

Pakistan is one such country. Recently (May 2, 2014) the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada issued a prayer alert to highlight this tragedy in Pakistan. This communique stated that:

Every year in Pakistan, as many as 700 Christian girls between the ages of 12 and 25 are kidnapped, forced to marry their abductors and forced to convert to Islam. In many cases, girls are forced to state they converted to Islam of their own will, allowing perpetrators to escape punishment. Under these circumstances, girls become victims of sexual abuse, domestic violence, rape and even sale into prostitution and human trafficking.

Pakistan's Christian minority, accounting for approximately 1.6% of the population, is one of the poorest, most vulnerable groups in Pakistani society, suffering from high levels of intolerance and persecution within the country. High poverty rates have negatively impacted Christian girls, forcing them to work as domestic servants where they suffer abuse, harassment, forced conversion to Islam and even murder.

The severe intolerance towards the Christian minority in Pakistan has intensified the plight of Christian girls as it discourages reporting cases of forced marriage and conversion and prevents justice from being achieved. Where cases of forced marriage and conversion have been reported, police have shown blatant disregard for the criminal justice sys-

tem – and if cases make it into court, girls remain in the custody of their abductor during court proceedings. In many instances, girls are forced to say they entered the marriage voluntarily and chose to convert to Islam. As a result, attempts to free girls from forced marriages are often unsuccessful.

After visiting Pakistan this month, Canada's Ambassador for Religious Freedom, Andrew Bennett stated, "We remain very concerned by repeated incidents of religiously motivated violence in Pakistan and the callous disregard of extremists for the rights of individuals of all faiths to practise their religion in peace and security." Bennett also announced two projects aimed at promoting religious freedom in Pakistan, which will be supported by Canada's Religious Freedom Fund:

- The Leaders of Influence Initiative has been created to advocate for positive change in Pakistan's policymaking institutions, and to encourage Pakistan to fulfill its obligations under international human rights law.
- The State of Minorities and Freedom of Religion in Pakistan has been created to document cases of religious persecution and to create awareness of the situation of religious minorities in Pakistan.

It is good to see that there is a growing awareness of the problem and that Canada's Ambassador for Religious Freedom is active in this area.

Another country is Egypt where "more than 500 Christian girls have been reported kidnapped in Egypt since the revolution began in January 2011, with the age of the girls kidnapped usually being between 12 and 14." The Christian Post.com (April 17) goes on to note that:

Some reports have indicated that they are being taken by Salafists, a conservative branch of Islam, who then forcibly convert them to Islam and marry them to Muslim men. The documented cases of kidnappings has been compiled by the nongovernmental Christian organization Association of Victims of Abduction and

Enforced Disappearance (AVAED), which says that Salafist sheiks are behind nearly all of the abductions with the help of government officials.

“In every Egyptian province there is a Salafist association which handles the kidnapping of Christian girls. They have homes everywhere where they keep them. If we inform the police where the kidnapped girl is being kept, they inform the Salafists, who then move her away to another home and then we lose all trace of her,” AVAED’s founder Ebram Louis said in a statement. . . .

“Abducting and converting Coptic girls to Islam. . . is an organized and preplanned process by associations

and organizations inside Egypt with domestic and Arab funding as the main role in seducing and luring Coptic girls is carried through cunning, deceit and enticement or through force if required,” according to Magdy Khalil of the Middle East Freedom Forum.

A sickening aspect of these abductions is that the governments involved do very little about it and do not stand up to Islamic militants. Although constitutionally they are to protect the freedom of religion, the reality is far from it and Christians suffer dearly, also Christian girls. And the Islamic world is largely silent. More about that next time.

C

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editors,

Please allow me to submit a brief response to Br. Kok’s letter of April 11.

In his fourth paragraph Br. Kok outlines why he feels that Synods Carman’s recommendation 4.1, is valid. He says “We need to go all the way back to 1980 when a proposal to leave the matter in the freedom of the churches, supported by Article 22 CO – was defeated. This decision was never appealed and subsequent Synods have consistently taken the same approach.” Br. Kok concludes the paragraph by stating that “therefore the first recommendation is fully supported.”

Yet, Synod in 3.3.2 states that:

None of the synodical pronouncements mentioned above have explained why the churches have considered this matter as belonging to the churches in common. But over the years this was the commonly accepted practice. The process has the more authority because churches repeatedly stated that the matter was federalional.

Synod freely admits that it has no explanation or foundation for this opinion, and repeating it does not give it any.

Both Recommendations 4.1 and 4.2 in the Acts are not

recommendations at all. They are comments or observations. Synod does not make a recommendation or convey a decision in either of these statements.

Regarding the final (and only) recommendation, Br. Kok states that in the past it was the men who voted. This is true; it was the custom or practice. However customs do not receive authority simply by being accepted or repeated. No synod has ever decided that this is how it should or must be. It was never an official norm, and Synod 2013 does not provide any reason why it should be established as the norm. Many past customs or practices have changed, and if this one is to be maintained a valid foundational argument for its retention must be provided.

As Br. Kok repeats – “stating something does not in itself make it so.”

Issues in God’s church are not determined by our opinion.

Harry Harsevoort, Hamilton, ON



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

C

Together for the Gospel 2014



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I recently had the pleasure of attending the Together for the Gospel (T4G) conference in Louisville, Kentucky. In attendance were nearly 8,000 people, many of whom were pastors or aspiring pastors. I'm confident that the vast majority would identify themselves as part of the New Calvinism (or "Young, Restless, and Reformed"). They would probably want to use the adjective "Reformed" to describe themselves. Ecclesiastically, the attendees were from all over the map. The vast majority, however, were Southern Baptists (some 3,000 apparently). There were also Pentecostals, Presbyterians, Anglicans, and a host of people belonging to independent churches with no wider affiliation. All these folks gathered together for a two-and-a-half day marathon of mostly solid biblical teaching. This was the first time that I'd attended this biennial conference. Let me share my general impressions.

Highlights

The definite highlight of this conference was the teaching. The speakers were uniformly excellent: Albert Mohler, Thabiti Anyabwile, David Platt, John MacArthur, John Piper, Mark Dever, Ligon Duncan, Matt Chandler, and Kevin DeYoung. They each spoke for about an hour. The theme of the conference was "Unashamed" and it had to do with the church's evangelistic task. If I would recommend just one of the speeches, it would be Kevin DeYoung's. You can find it online at t4g.org. He spoke on the relationship between biblical inerrancy and evangelism. It was a powerful defense of a high view of the Bible. He argued that Jesus' view of the Bible was that it was the inerrant Word, the Word that cannot be broken (John 10:35). If you deny the inerrancy of Scripture, you not only abandon the great Princeton theologians Hodge and Warfield, but also Jesus. DeYoung has just come out with a book on biblical inerrancy as well, *Taking God at His Word*. While I haven't yet read it, it is getting great reviews.

On the Wednesday of the conference, I attended a luncheon for Canadians. This was held at a local Baptist church and there were at least 100 of us in attendance. It was an opportunity to network, and also listen to a panel

discussion about some of the challenges facing Christians specifically in our Canadian context.

Back at T4G, there was also an opportunity to attend a break-out session. I attended the one led by Albert Mohler and Ligon Duncan, again on the topic of biblical inerrancy and evangelism. Mohler and Duncan drove the point home further: if you give up on the inerrancy of Scripture, you eventually give up any reason to evangelize. The doctrine of inerrancy is not theoretical – it bears on what will be preached and how. Mohler noted that nothing is more important for evangelism than that high view of the Bible which includes inerrancy. Duncan spoke for some time on 2 Timothy 3:16 and defended the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture as the basis for inerrancy. He made the insightful observation that in Christ's parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, it was the man in hell who said that Scripture is not sufficient.

Six panel sessions were held. For me, the most interesting was the discussion with Sam Allberry, author of the book *Is God Anti-gay?* The panellists took a compassionate, yet biblically faithful approach to the topic of homosexuality. Allberry commented at one point, "There is a sense in which none of us are straight. We are all warped." Another great discussion was the panel featuring John Piper on the holiness and sanctification. I will never forget Piper's words: "If you want to live in sin, you're going to hell." Indeed, it was stressed that without holiness no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14).

Another great feature of this conference was the free books. All the attendees received 14 free books. This alone made it worthwhile! There were lots of good titles, none of which I've read before. You can expect to see some reviews in the months to come.

Fellowship

Then there was the fellowship. I had the opportunity to meet with some friends from Facebook, but also make some new friends. In fact, when I first sat down at the conference, I happened to sit beside a PCA missiologist. I actually reviewed one of his books some years ago. We

had lots to talk about! Throughout the time in Louisville and on my way back home, I had lots of great conversations with people from all over the place with all kinds of different backgrounds.

All in all, I had a positive experience at T4G. It was a blessing to attend – I found a lot of edification and encouragement and I would definitely consider attending again.

Concerns

That said, I do have a couple of reservations or concerns. There was singing, lots of singing. There is no getting away from the fact that it is spine-tingling to hear thousands of men singing “In Christ Alone” and other solid songs. Bob Kauflin (of Sovereign Grace Music) led the singing and he did so merely with a piano. There were no drums or guitars. The music was tastefully done and almost all the songs had solid theological content and depth. I was impressed in that regard.

They saved John Piper’s talk for the end of the conference. Now Piper had a lot of good to say. He reminded us of the connection between predestination and human instrumentality in evangelism and mission. However, some of his Baptist colours were showing in his treatment of Romans 9 and the relationship between covenant promises and election. Towards the end, he spoke of his father and his work as an itinerant revivalistic evangelist. He described how his father would do the altar call at his revival meetings. Piper began singing, “Softly and Tenderly, Jesus is Calling.” While many New Calvinists mock it, he maintained that this is a good hymn that reminds of how we should plead for people to come to Christ. This is debatable – after all, does this hymn reflect the missionary preaching of the apostles in the New Testament? Then after Piper finished, Bob Kauflin started playing this hymn and the conference sang it. After one or two more songs, Mohler came on stage. He thanked some of the key people who organized this year’s T4G. Then he encouraged everybody to turn to their neighbour and pray for them. In itself, there’s nothing wrong with that. But while that was going on, Kauflin was playing the mood music, tears began flowing, and some people were wailing loudly. Mohler encouraged us to share the gospel with the unbelievers who might be present. It momentarily had the feel of a revival-type meeting, if not a Pentecostal worship service.

So much good was said during this conference. There was so much faithful, biblical teaching. I don’t want to take away from that at all. But what I realized is that John Piper



was correct when, a while ago, he spoke at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and said that the New Calvinism includes both charismatics and non-charismatics. It seems to me that the charismatics may even be dominant. Perhaps not in terms of spiritual gifts and continuationism, but definitely in the style of worship. Moreover, and this Piper didn’t say, American revivalism is still in play or at least its effects are still in evidence. How odd that a pastors’ conference would feature a quasi-altar call! Back during the First Great Awakening, there were those who were critical of the displays of emotion and other excesses. Some of the revivalists argued that their opponents were simply unregenerated. Have we really moved beyond Gilbert Tennent’s “The Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry”? That’s not to say that there aren’t unregenerate pastors. I’m sure there are, maybe even among us. But if there would be any place where you would not expect to see them present it surely must be at a conference called “Together for the Gospel.”

Conclusion

In short, this was definitely a conference oriented to the so-called “New Calvinism.” There’s much to appreciate about these folks. They have a great love for the gospel, even if that gospel is sometimes truncated with a defective view of the covenant on some key points. They have a high view of God’s Word as inerrant. They desire that God be glorified. They have a great burden for the lost and compassion for the broken or struggling. They do also emphasize the importance of the local church and its ministry. I stand with them on those points. For the rest, I hope and pray that “always reforming” is a reality that we see more and more, not only with them, but also with us. **C**



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Jesus Our Saviour

1. Je - sus, our Sa - viour! Christ, our Re - dee - mer!
 2. Our sins are grie - vous. Your blood is pre - cious.
 3. You paid our ran - som. You bought our free - dom.
 4. Je - sus, the Al - pha! Christ, the O - me - ga!

How great your love: you came for us.
 It ful - ly paid for all our wrong.
 You shat - tered all the de - vil's might.
 Our Lord and King for - ev - er - more.

You bore the wrath of God and felt his fear - some rod.
 You died up - on the tree to set your peo - ple free.
 You are the awe - some king. To you all praise we bring.
 All praise to you a - lone. You sit up - on the throne.

Your love for us is mea - sure - less.
 We ev - er - more to you be - long.
 Our thanks as - cend to heav - en's height.
 You are the one whom we a - dore.

Text: George Ph. van Popta, © 2014
 Tune: Schleisiche Volkslieder, 1842; Harmony: Hymnary.org

ST. ELIZABETH
 5 5 8 6 6 8



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Q

What role can and should fasting have in a Christian's life? Are we missing out on something if we do not fast?

A

"Fasting" had a prominent place in the OT, when the LORD raised his still immature people with various commands and decrees as part of his ceremonial laws (Gal 4:3). Fasting, then, was *commanded* especially on the Day of Atonement, when the Israelites had to "deny themselves," [NIV, literally] by *fasting* (Lev 16:29). They had to humble themselves with confession of sins, with prayers, and deny themselves whatever was pleasing and enjoyable for their body. Later on the Pharisees increased such fasting as a way of earning the LORD's favour (as the RCC did in developing a practice of fasting for similar purposes, as merit, or as good works). We confess, however, in Belgic Confession Article 25, "That the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ. . . . In the mean time we still use the testimonies taken from the law and the prophets, both to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel and *to order our life* in all honesty, according to God's will and to his glory."

The Lord Jesus disagreed with the demands of the Pharisees, where he says in Luke 5:34, "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?" Yet, then he does add, "But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast." Here the Lord Jesus does *not* give a new "command" for fasting for the time when he will have ascended into heaven; no, he predicts and prophesies that the NT believers will fast *spontaneously*. They're no longer immature children who require commands, but as mature believers they will know how to please the Father and when to do his will and order their life, including a time of fasting.

We see how the Lord Jesus observed that in the future of his church gathering work there would be times again in which fasting will be appropriate. There will be days when the circumstances of war, calamity, fam-

ine, deformation, or persecution, will cause sadness and sorrow, which almost "*naturally*" (spiritually speaking) will lead to a time of special prayers and fasting. Again they will deny themselves the joys and pleasures for the body; they won't have any interest in fun and entertainment, in "bread and games." In those days the Holy Spirit will lead them by the instructions and truth of the OT practices to a time of sobriety, of humility, and of prayer and fasting.

In the NT dispensation such times are *not* commanded but believers will be moved by the Spirit spontaneously. The NT church could also *proclaim* the need for such days, as the church in the sixteenth and seventeenth century did during times of persecution following the Great Reformation, or the church of the nineteenth century under similar circumstances. Calvin, in his *Institutes*, writes extensively about this [Bk. IV, Ch. XII, par. 19-21]. The Synod of Dort, 1618-1619, acknowledged the need for such special days in its Church Order (cf. our CO, Art 54), recommending that churches be called to observe such a special day of prayer! At such an occasion it would be highly appropriate again to accompany such special prayer with a time of fasting. At such an occasion we would do well to heed the Lord Jesus' words in Matthew 6:17, "But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face [i.e. act normal!], so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Is there something you've been wanting to know?

An answer you've been looking for?

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. den Hollander
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The Song of Sonnets

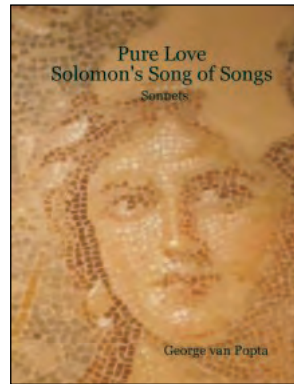
**Pure Love: Solomon's Song of Songs,
George van Popta, self-published, 2014**

Additional Information: 49 pp, \$9.55

The Puritan Stephen Gosson, in *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579), argued that poetry (indeed all literature) is an evil temptation. It is the song of the sirens, the magician's trick, the sweet poison. Yet there have been other voices, including the Protestant writer Sir Philip Sidney, who replied to Gosson in *A Defence of Poetry* that literature is not a poison, but "a medicine of cherries." It is both entertaining and edifying. Sidney practiced what he preached. He not only wrote sonnets, but also worked on versifying the Psalms (a project continued by his sister).

It seems George van Popta's sonnet collection stems from similar aspirations. The twenty-four sonnets in *Pure Love* are a translation of the *Song of Songs*. Each sonnet is accompanied by a reference to the original verses as well as by an image of a painting (many of them Pre-Raphaelite). It would have been nice to have the entire verses printed beside the sonnets, as part of the fun is seeing how the translation reworks the original.

I enjoyed reading the sonnets, particularly since van Popta has a good sense of rhythm, and rarely contorts the syntax to make it scan properly. There are plenty of felicitous expressions to admire (e.g., 24.1-2), and even some clever rhymes (e.g., cinnamon/Lebanon in Sonnet 12). But don't expect the same level of eroticism as in the Bible. For instance, the extended description of palm climbing



in chapter 7:7-8 becomes merely, "I want to hold you close, within my arms" (19.12). In a similar vein, metaphors are often literalized or worked out, so that "his banner over me is love" becomes the more prolix, "His banner o'er my head proclaims his love" (4.10).

In the end, I got the sense that van Popta made the most of a poetic form that is surprisingly unsuited for this kind of translation. One would think that sonnets are a natural choice – they're the most romantic type of poem we have. Yet a sonnet is essentially an extended pick-up line, a somewhat corny attempt at persuading someone that because you're clever and witty you deserve to be pitied or loved. A great sonnet will pose a problem, then construct a counter-argument, and finally provide a surprise in the rhyming couplet. Because Van Popta follows the narrative of the *Song of Songs* and is forced to include multiple voices in most sonnets (the lover, the beloved, the friends), it takes some effort to see why the material in any particular sonnet belongs together.

If one can ignore this structural weakness, *Pure Love* is an audacious experiment at interpreting the Bible not through a commentary, but through a poetic rewriting. For that, van Popta is to be commended. One hopes that one day he will also share some sonnets he wrote directly for his wife.



ILPB Inter League Publication Board

April 24, 2014, Belwood, ON

Present for the board, Dick Nijenhuis (chair), Michelle Helder and Dianne Westrik, representatives of the Women's League, and new board member, Dan VanderVeen. Present for the Administration Committee, Paul DeBoer (Coordinator), new member Brandie Swaving (Treasurer), Henrietta Lodder (Sales), Cathy Jonker (Administrator). Not present Ingrid VanderGaag (Marketing).

ILPB Chairman, Dick Nijenhuis opened our spring meeting with scripture reading and prayer, and a welcome to all.

Due to change of sales rep from Marsha Hoeksema, who has retired, to Henrietta Lodder, inventory has been relocated and will be further consolidated in the near future. Appropriate insurance has been set in place.

Progress report shows that we have published *Outlines on Esther* by Rev. G. Wieske, as well as *Shining like Stars, A workbook on Philippians* by Rev. G.Ph. Van Popta; eight more books in editing stages.

Marketing reviewed. New catalogue has been updated on the website. Since May 2012 when website sales

began, more than \$5,000 in sales has been processed through the www.ilpb.ca website. New advertisement has been placed in *Clarion*. The book club is open to new members, including church libraries.

Finances are in good order. Past due accounts have been contacted, and funds have been trickling in. Balance sheet and Income statement reviewed. New computer has been acquired for sales.

Sales report shows sales were down slightly compared to the previous year.

Board updated the Administration Committee on books being worked on. Policy manual is nearing completion. Book cover and style changes were discussed. An updated cover style will be adopted. Policy manual will reflect changes. Bible translation will remain NIV 1984, or NKJV, NASB, or ESV. Overdue customers will not be permitted to order until their account is settled.

General discussion period was held.

Next combined meeting planned for November 6, 2014. Press release was read and approved. Paul Deboer closed in prayer expressing thankfulness for the work the ILPB has been able to do and cooperation ILPB continues to receive from the many authors and supporting volunteers.

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