

Clarion

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READING CHRIST'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT



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The Inheritance and Worship

*We shall be in perfect communion
with God himself*

If a loved one dies, then at some date after the funeral the last will or testament of the one who has departed is read. This is an important and solemn occasion, an occasion no one of the family wants to miss out on. The inheritance is being divided.

Proclamation and inheritance

In a real way, our worship services on the Lord's Day are like that. After all, does the proclamation of the Word not tell us the riches that are ours because of Christ's death? He has died and therefore his will or testament can now be read and the inheritance he left be distributed! That is one of the reasons that makes our public worship an event we would not want to miss. The riches of the New Testament or covenant, which has superseded and displaced the old covenant, are here proclaimed. And we may rejoice in these riches!

Christ Jesus has died and that is, in the context of the inheritance, good news. For as Scripture points out, before a will can take effect, the one who made the will has to die. Well, Christ has died and as a result we have a great inheritance coming our way (Heb 9:15-17). He laid down his life, for he had to die – not only according to the normal rule governing wills or testaments, but also especially according to the rules governing the testament and will God made with man. According to the old covenant (the Old Testament), blood had to be shed for the atonement of sin (Exod 24:8); and according to the new covenant, it is the same. The blood of the covenant had to be poured out and it was poured out in Jesus Christ (Matt 26:28; Heb 9-10).

This is why Christ's death is so carefully documented in Scripture; without that death, the will could not go into effect. Yes, without that death the covenant cannot be executed. One senses that there is a very close relationship between "will," "testament," and "covenant." Indeed, they are all the same word in the Greek original of Hebrews 9:15-18, which deals with our topic, but this word is translated into different English terms according to the context.

Christ's death means that the riches of the new covenant are ours. The new covenant – for it is no longer the death and blood of animals that put the covenant into effect. Now the fulfilment of all these Old Testament shadows has come! The Son came to fulfill the role of testator, maker of the will. He "was made a little lower than the angels. . . so that he might taste death for everyone" (Heb 2:9). With his death he put the new testament or covenant into effect!

Celebrating the death

Christ's death forms the heart of the gospel and it is therefore a central focus of the preaching of the good news of Christ. It makes the Lord's Day a time of joy and celebration. Besides the proclamation of the Word, Christ also commanded that we remember and celebrate his death in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It may seem paradoxical to celebrate a death. To be sure, the Lord's Supper is a sober remembering of solemn facts: the horror of Christ's agony and suffering and death – a death is remembered. But, yet, it is also a joyous remembering! For the blood of the covenant has been poured out for forgiveness! Yes, but there is more. It is celebration and

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

This issue starts with an editorial from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam, "The Inheritance and Worship." Our worship services are our inheritance! For, as Dr. Van Dam writes, "does the proclamation of the Word not tell us the riches that are ours because of Christ's death? He has died and therefore his will or testament can now be read and the inheritance he left be distributed!"

The series, "Should Sisters Vote for Officebearers?" comes to a conclusion in this issue. In his third and final article, Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher addresses the question: Must all churches do the same?

From Winnipeg, Manitoba we have an article reporting on the mass band concert that took place in April. Readers will find regular columns Treasures New and Old and Education Matters. In addition, Issue 12 includes Clippings on Politics and Religion, the You Asked column, a Letter to the Editor and a Readers Forum article, as well as a book review.

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CHURCH NEWS

not a subdued gathering as when an estate is being split up. He through whose death the inheritance became our lives! The testator who died lives! "It was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Acts 2:24).

After all, he died in order to put into effect the provisions of his testament regarding our redemption. Therefore he laid down his life and therefore he took it up again (John 10:17-18). That is why remembering his death can be a celebration! He lives! He is himself the guarantee that those riches of the inheritance are ours. No one can prevent the benefits of the new covenant to come our way, for he who made the will and desires us to be rich through and in him, he lives! He lives to distribute his gifts of love! And no devil or demon can stop that distribution of his grace! Therefore we can be of good courage.

A rich inheritance

The riches flowing from Christ's death are many. There is first of all, as mentioned, the forgiveness of all our sins (Heb 9-10). This enormous and priceless treasure makes us right with holy God and qualifies us for sharing in the inheritance laid up for us as children of God (Col 1:11-14). As we read in the letter to the Romans: "If we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and coheirs with Christ" (Rom 8:17). It staggers the imagination to comprehend what that means – co-heirs with Christ. Let me just mention the following.

***Christ has died and as a result
we have a great inheritance
coming our way***

Christ is the heir of all things (Heb 1:2). With Christ we will therefore inherit the kingdom (Matt 25:34). "Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" (James 2:5). The kingdom that is coming in all perfection will encompass this world because the children of God, the meek, will inherit the earth on which we now live (Matt 5:5). It is this world, now in darkness that will one day be renewed (cf. Rom 8:19-23). Then we will rule with Christ (2 Tim 2:12).

But our inheritance is even greater than an earthly kingdom. When we are co-heirs with Christ then not only do we receive the kingdom, but God himself is our

portion, our inheritance. This was the inheritance that the Old Testament believers could already look forward to. As articulated in Psalm 73: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (vv. 25-26). And as the one struggling with the ruin of Jerusalem could confess: "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him" (Lam 3:24). The most beautiful part of the inheritance is to be with God for ever in glory to enjoy communion with him in perfect peace and bliss. All this boggles the mind. We will not only inherit the kingdom but we shall even be in perfect communion with God himself and see him (Ps 17:15; Rev 22:4). This is possible by being co-heirs with Christ who reveals the glory of the Father (John 1:18; 17:24; cf. Rom 8:17).

A sure inheritance

The wonder of worship on the Lord's Day is that this glorious gospel of the inheritance is proclaimed. Through the regular preaching of the Word, God the Holy Spirit confirms this message so that we are strengthened in our faith and can daily benefit from the tremendous encouragement and comfort this gospel gives. In his grace, God also uses the sacraments for that confirmation, especially in this context, the Lord's Supper. The inheritance is sure. The testator has died and he lives to give his continued blessing (cf. Luke 24:50-51). For that is another wonder of going to church to worship on the Lord's Day. We receive the blessing, such as "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

Heirs of the kingdom who even have God as their inheritance do not want to miss worship services. "Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'" (Heb 12:28-29). And as we worship, God in his grace confirms the inheritance through proclamation, sacrament, and blessing! Would you want to miss any of that?



Watch Your Foot

"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God."

(Ecclesiastes 5:1)



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Idioms are catchy. The guy with his "nose in the air" obviously has a problem with humility. The person who "watches his foot" evidently doesn't. And that's literally what Solomon instructed Israel to do: "Watch your foot" when you approach the house of God. He urges an attitude of humility.

We realize that this "house" is where the God of heaven had his dwelling place on earth among the Old Testament people. Folk like you and me could come into his presence, folk with the same questions, challenges, and doubts: Are the bad things happening to me due to my sins? Is God angry with me? And just as often: Might good things be happening to me because I'm a better person than the widow next door?

Humility is rare in our fallen world; indeed, pride has a well-worn place in every heart. Yet we habitually go to church, regularly seek God in prayer, and always expect God to do us good. Who is God? He is in heaven, Solomon says (v. 2). The point of the location is that God is almighty, with nothing finite, creaturely, or earthly about him. Earth is his footstool, heaven can't contain him. In boundless mercy he condescended to establish a bond of love with people. The human race in satanic arrogance rebelled against God, and thereafter we've been victims to our pride. Yet in mercy beyond the boundless, God condescended again to reestablish his bond of love with rebels, and so adopted sinners to be his children. He

had a tabernacle built where he could live among the people of his choice. There he illustrated how a holy God could dwell among sinners – for lamb upon lamb was daily sacrificed for the sins of the people, and the priests and Levites never tired of explaining the message of these sacrifices, so telling the people of the coming Savior. The "house of God" was where grace was wonderfully proclaimed to people by nature full of self.

It's normal to come into God's presence with an attitude of "I'm OK." Or to expect that God will be impressed with my obvious devotion to him: "Lord, I come faithfully to church; you'll do me well, of course." Resolution: "Lord, I'm going to do my daily devotions more diligently, so I'm counting on you to make my marriage work better." We don't say it in so many words, but the thought is there: if I do *this*, God will do *that* – and so we attempt to manipulate God, make him do what we'd like. That's pride. That's why Solomon instructed the people: "Watch your foot when you go to God's house." Humility comes divinely required; you're not welcome without it!

I'm tempted to say that I'm humble as I go to church, bow my head in prayer, read the Bible, and as I relate in God's name to those around me. But I know: to say I'm humble is evidence of. . . pride. Sin lies so close at hand. How much we need the gospel of God's mercy in Jesus Christ!

And see how wonderful that gospel is! On the threshold of his teenage

years – when image means so much – Jesus entered the house of God in Jerusalem. And he listened, then asked questions (Luke 2:46). He came to hear. What did he learn? The message trumpeted at the temple was that the Lamb of God had to die for sin, and so fulfill every Old Testament sacrifice. To do that, Jesus had to be a perfect Lamb, free of pride. That is, as he prepared to meet the just God on Calvary, he needed to watch his foot. So he went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, but didn't come with many words, nor boast of his achievements, nor come with promises to twist God's arm and reduce the coming anguish. Instead, "he fell on his face" – talk about humility! His words conveyed the same attitude: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matt 26:39). We recognize the words of a dependent man, one with no sense of self-importance. He prayed this same prayer not once, not twice, but thrice – always seeking to listen, to learn, to submit to God.

Because of that obedience, God was pleased with the Son, and so he could be a perfect sacrifice for my sins of arrogance. That's the reason I can keep coming into God's presence. He receives my prayers, despite the insufficiency of my humility and the wretched abiding arrogance in my attitude, because Jesus perfectly watched his foot. In the strength of the Spirit I'll walk in his footsteps – and watch my foot.





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Should Sisters Vote for Officebearers?

Must all churches do the same?

Is a synod supposed to follow democratic procedures?

To what degree should a synod bother itself over how many churches are in favour or against a particular point on its agenda?

Synod Carman 2013 thought that at least with respect to the issue of women voting, this was important. Carman observes in Article 110 that nine churches appealed the decision of Synod Burlington Article 176; it also notes that at Synod Burlington “the majority of letters opposed women voting.” It further mentions in *consideration* 3.6 that of the thirty-four letters that Synod Burlington 2012 received, four were in favour of allowing women to vote and nineteen were explicitly against. Synod then went on to argue in the same paragraph that in a matter so contentious it is desirable that a synod listen to the preference of the churches.

There are a number of problems with this argument, however. For one thing, if there were thirty-four letters at Synod Burlington, four in favour and nineteen against, it would seem that of those thirty-four, there were eleven churches to whom it did not matter very strongly; furthermore, if there were fifty-four churches in the federation at the time, there were another twenty that never wrote in – presumably, it did not matter to them either. This means that to thirty-one out of fifty-four churches it apparently did not matter whether women participated in the election of officebearers. The line of reasoning of Synod Carman 2013 appears to fall apart therefore, because the majority of the churches did not feel strongly about the matter, and hence Burlington 2010 did exactly what the majority of the churches seem to have wanted: left the matter in the freedom of the churches.

Secondly, if this is the way a synod is going to make its decisions, should that not be clear to the churches beforehand so that they can be sure to “vote” on the matter?

But there is another difficulty with this argumentation – namely, the fact that it really should have no place at a Reformed synod. Rather than busying itself counting heads, attention should be paid to what is biblical, Reformed, and edifying to the churches. Reformed churches profess that they may not consider “the great multitude” to be of equal value with the Word of God (BC, Art. 7). Even if no church is in favour of something, and it is the clear teaching of Scripture, a synod should feel compelled to follow Scripture. And if something is not clearly contrary to Scripture and confession, what right does a synod have to forbid it? Besides, is it really right for churches to be telling a synod the way in which it would vote on given issues? If that is the nature of synod, why not simply hold a computerized referendum and save all the expense? Reformed churches have always seen their assemblies as deliberative bodies rather than representative. That means that churches ought to be presenting biblical and confessional argumentation of benefit to the members of synod, so that a synod can be what it is meant to be.

On this point as well, Synod Carman has gone off in a direction that is less than Reformed.

A matter that belongs to the churches in common?

Carman also noted a number of times that several churches considered the matter of women voting to be a “matter for the churches in common” (Observation 2.2.1). In its *Considerations* (3.2), Carman also reiterates that many synods have seen this matter as a “matter for the

churches in common.” Interestingly, Carman goes on to point out 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. This practice has the more authority because churches repeatedly stated that the matter was federational. To alter course would require an argument explaining why a new practice is necessary.

This is an odd line of reasoning. If something is wrongly held to be a matter of the churches in common and several synods reiterate that it is a matter of the churches in common, then the position that it is a matter of the churches in common is said to be even stronger. Here the issue is considered a matter of the churches in common not because so many churches have said so, nor because of some rationale (synod does not know what that rationale would be!) but because so many synods have said it so very often! So, does something that is untrue actually become true because it is said so often? And Carman then says: while we’re not too sure why we are on this track, if someone wants to get us off it, they will have

***Reformed churches have always seen
their assemblies as deliberative bodies
rather than representative***

to provide the rationale for that new practice. Otherwise, we’ll just keep doing what we’re doing regardless! I realize that Article 33 of the CO is behind this, which says that matters once decided may not be proposed without being substantiated by new grounds; but the fact is that Article 33 is often applied in a rather arbitrary manner – this issue is a case in point, as it is difficult to see what exactly were the substantial new grounds that allowed Carman to overturn the Burlington decision.

But that is not the only odd line of reasoning we find in Article 110. In *Consideration 3.7*, Carman 2013 notes that this matter has long divided the churches and that there is a need to build a broader consensus among the churches before changing the practice of male-only voting. And so Synod states that “if any of the churches,

after study, and based on biblical evidence, comes to the conclusion that the practice of male-only voting should be changed, this church ought to work on building a consensus among the churches by going the ecclesiastical way, through classis and regional synod, before the matter ends up at the table of general synod.”

But is this not a significant shift in church polity? A synod cannot have it both ways. If the issue of women voting is a matter of the churches in common, then according to our own church polity, it belongs at the broadest major assembly – general synod. Article 30 of the Church Order clearly states that “A major assembly shall deal with those matters only. . . which belong to its churches in common.” And if it is a matter of the churches in common, every classis or regional synod that would be asked to deal with this matter would actually be bound – by Article 30 its own Church Order – to declare the matter inadmissible, as it belongs at the assembly which deals with all matters in common – the general synod. I am sure it was not intended, but in this way, the decision of Carman 2013 will only frustrate those who disagree with its conclusions and tie the assemblies of the federation into hopeless knots.

There is another avenue.

And that is to simply acknowledge that female participation in the voting process is not a matter on which the Scriptures, confessions, or church order speak so unequivocally about that it has to be a matter of the churches in common.

The fact is that there are some things that a synod should not attempt to regulate. There are, for example, a variety of practices throughout the churches with respect to tie votes; some churches regulate that in such an instance, the elder brother will be chosen, some will cast a lot, and others might call for a re-vote. Wisely, synod has never been asked to regulate this matter but has left it in the freedom of the churches. Despite forty years of discussion, synods can obviously not decide this issue of women voting either, and thus it should not try to regulate the matter. Where a church is convinced that women can participate without jeopardizing the biblical position of the men and women under her supervision, a church should be allowed to do so. Where a church is not convinced, she should decide accordingly. Uniformity is not necessary for unity.

Also on the wider scene, there is merit in allowing freedom on the point. The fear is of course that if we allow women to vote now, we will be allowing them in office in subsequent years, and examples can be cited. But there are also other examples of federations where this is not the case. The logic does not always hold. The slope is not always slippery; sometimes it's not even a slope! If anywhere we might have expected that a federation would have reversed its approach because of this fear, it is with the United Reformed Churches; leaving the CRC because of women in office, they did not feel compelled to deny the sisters the privilege of voting, but left this in the freedom of the churches. Today, I understand, most URCNA churches follow that practice, and there is no controversy. So too many Presbyterian churches that we acknowledge do likewise.

*The fact is that there are some things
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Besides, what should guide us in this is Scripture alone. Some churches have rightly pointed out that today's culture should not drive the church's agenda. True, but the church's agenda should not be driven by a Canadian Reformed culture or tradition that we have developed over the decades either. Scripture alone. And those Scriptures speak clearly enough about the question of women in office, as I have argued elsewhere.¹ But that they forbid women from stating their preference regarding which men should serve in office, no one has really proven.

Conclusion

As a result then of these three articles on this matter, I would like to end with a challenge.

It really does not matter to me whether women vote for officebearers. In part, because I am male, and in part because it is not a major concern to the women who are close to me presently. I don't believe either that whether women vote nullifies any previous or future elections of

officebearers; local regulations do not obstruct the hand of God in directing his will for his church. But what does matter to me is when ecclesiastical assemblies begin to make decisions on the basis of premises that are neither scriptural nor Reformed. In the church of Jesus Christ, not every action needs to be biblically based. If everyone agrees that women should not vote and all are content with that, that's fine. If some churches wish to include the women, and others exclude – that's fine as well. Unity is not dependent on uniformity. But as soon as one church

*What should guide us in this is
Scripture alone*

or more begins to exercise the freedom that they believe they have, those who object need to ask the question: is there any biblical reason why we have to stop this? The fact that you might not like it is not sufficient. The fact that you might think it will lead to something else is not sufficient. Back in 1944 we agreed not to be bound by any assembly's decisions when they went beyond the truth of Scripture. We might complain that other federations are caving in to culture in their interpretation of Scripture, but we need to beware lest we cave in to a culture of our own creation over the last fifty years. Scripture alone is normative. So this is the challenge: where is the clear biblical data that should prevent a woman from offering her preference to her consistory when officebearers are being elected? I am convinced that the Scriptures do not permit a woman to have a leading authoritative role in the church, as I've shown elsewhere; but I see nothing in Scripture that forbids them from stating a preference in an election of officebearers. If we can provide conclusive evidence to that effect, the case is closed. If we don't, we have no choice but to leave the matter in the freedom of the churches.

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 in 2014.





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Islamic Kidnapping of Christian Girls

The horrific kidnapping of hundreds of mostly Christian school girls in Nigeria has riveted the world's attention on militant Islam. It is widely feared that these girls were abducted to serve as sex slaves for the militants who through this warfare of terror want to establish a pure Islamic state ruled by Islamic law (sharia). Countries have vigorously protested their brutal violence done in the name of Islam. But, as Tarek Fatah mentioned in the online edition of the *Toronto Sun* (May 6, 2014), "much of the Muslim world has remained mute about this outrage." There were some scattered protests from academics who insisted that Islam is a religion of peace. But is this true?

In the aforementioned article, Tarek Fatah, himself a Muslim, noted that the girls were Christians and that "both the exegesis of the Qur'an and reading of the Hadith literature speak of sex slavery of non-Muslim female POWs [prisoners of war] both during and after the life of Prophet Mohammed." Instead of acknowledging that such commandments and permissions are no longer applicable, Muslim leaders "choose doublespeak." Tarek Fatah then quoted from chapter four of the Qur'an as translated by a formidable Islamic scholar: "And forbidden to you are the wedded wives of other peoples, except those who have fallen into your hands (as prisoners of war): this is the law of Allah." The *Toronto Sun* article goes on to note that in his explanation, this scholar "goes to great lengths to justify and explain the rightfulness of such rape of non-Muslim POWs." Islam has never hesitated to use the sword and abductions to advance its cause and grow converts by coercion, even justifying capturing girls to reach their end.

Knowing this, one can begin to understand the silence of Muslim nations. Islamic governments are to a greater or lesser degree theocratic regimes with the desire to subject the nation to Islam and its Sharia laws. The examples of countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia come to mind, but also a place like Pakistan. Even though it has a constitution that allows for freedom of religion,

Christians are persecuted and blasphemy laws are used against them. Police and politicians generally turn a blind eye because they are Muslim first.

Historically Islam has expanded through warfare and the power of the sword. It still believes that this is the command of Allah. The historical record shows that Christianity is not clear of this transgression. Think of how the sword often accompanied the expansion of Christianity into Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire. But such a use of the power of the state to advance Christianity was not according to the Scriptures. Christ did not mandate the use of the sword to promote the gospel. The opposite is the case (cf. Matt 26:52). The church has the duty to call the elect together by the preaching of the gospel which is the sword of the Spirit. The struggle for the true religion is a spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10-20). The state has the duty to protect the well-being of all its citizens regardless of their religious commitment. Both the good grain and the weeds are to grow together to the day of judgment (Matt 13:36-42). As a servant of God it also has to ensure that the church and Christians have the freedom to do their office and calling (BC, Art 36).

The concept of freedom of religion and promoting the faith through peaceful means are foreign to the Muslim way of thinking. The Qur'an encourages and even mandates violence for the expansion of Islam. For example, in chapter (Surah) 9:5 the Qur'an, their holy book, exhorts that when the four months of grace for the non-Muslim to convert are over, "then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war)" (Ali translation). Note how the end justifies the means ("in every stratagem"). For the zealots that includes the kidnapping of innocent young girls. There is no Islamic justification for Muslim governments to condemn such atrocities. Such practices are consistent with the Qur'an and therefore cannot be condemned.

It is obvious from the above that Western democracies must do everything possible to prevent the promotion of sharia law which is largely based on the Qur'an in their jurisdictions. Islam is not peaceful when it comes to advancing the Muslim cause. Its ultimate goal is to conquer

the world and impose its theocratic ideals on all nations. Observing Muslims are thus under the obligation to help make this happen. This is not a fearmongering statement. It is the truth as proclaimed by Muslims themselves on the basis of the Qur'an (e.g., 8:39; 9:29-33). C

Helena Vanden Akker
Former ICS band member

Keystone Harmony

Recently I had the pleasure of being involved with the activities put on in Winnipeg by five schools: Parkland Immanuel Christian School (Edmonton, AB), Credo Christian High School (Langley, BC), Emmanuel Christian High School (Fergus, ON), Guido de Bres Christian High School (Hamilton, ON), and Immanuel Christian School (Winnipeg, MB). This mass band weekend took place from April 18-21 and involved approximately 210 students and six conductors all taking part in praising God who blessed them with their various musical talents.

The four schools from out of town arrived in Winnipeg Thursday night (with the exception of Guido which did not arrive until lunchtime on Friday due to a major accident on the highway) and were promptly picked up by their billets for the weekend. Guido arrived about an hour before all the afternoon activities began. This was not the only highway adventure, as the bus transporting the students from Credo broke down in Headingley on their way home, forcing the students to sleep in the ICS gym! Thankfully, other than those two setbacks, all went



The directors: Tim Nijenhuis, Rob Bonefaas, Emily Duker, Sarah Kingma, Kent Dijkstra, Steven deBoer

210 students from five high schools played for an audience of 900 and to many via livestream



well for the schools on their trips to and from Winnipeg.

After remembering the death of our Lord and Saviour on Good Friday morning in churches, students spent the afternoon in a photo scavenger hunt icebreaker around the area with the groups containing members from each of the schools. Several humorous stories were taken away from the hunt, such as the tale of a group stopping a police car in the middle of a busy street for a picture with the police officer inside, or of one group bursting into Tim Hortons asking if anyone there had a tattoo. After a hearty supper, the students set to work with a preliminary rehearsal of the mass band pieces.

Saturday was a more intense day with different sectionals going on throughout the day followed by a rehearsal as a mass band in the evening. This gave each section of the band a chance to work on their individual parts to better contribute to the musical sound as a whole.

The students got the opportunity to relax and be with their respective billets on Easter Sunday when we remembered the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Then came the big day! The students were blessed to have the opportunity to perform onstage in the majestic Centennial Concert Hall, and were provided with a technician from Quest Musique, who turned out to be the owner himself! The concert as a whole was very well done and had many highlights. Kent Dykstra's compositions are al-

ways a pleasure to listen to and to play (though it was a very different experience being in the audience for one instead of part of the band) and Psalm 72 was no exception. The band did a fantastic job with the arrangements of the different classical pieces (Overture 1812, The Planets, Pirates of the Caribbean), as it can be difficult to keep the same style as the original pieces. One highlight of the concert was Guido de Bres' concert band rendition of the popular song "Happy" where, in order to add to the mood, Mr. Nijenhuis revealed a surprise t-shirt with a grinning minion on the back (from the movie Despicable Me)! The common refrain among the students seemed to be that Winter of 1730 was the favourite piece, and with good reason! The piece had catchy themes with plenty of variety, and every instrument got its moment to shine.

Overall, the concert was extremely well done, and was a pleasure to watch. Thanks to Winnipeg's organizing committee and the six band conductors: Stephen deBoer from Fergus, Tim Nijenhuis from Guido, Sarah Kingma and Kent Dijkstra from Credo, Emily Duker from Edmonton, and Rob Bonefaas from Winnipeg for all their work to produce a very pleasant weekend for performers and audience alike. Praise be to God for granting the students the talents and the opportunity for such a concert in order to worship him! To him be the glory! Hallelujah! C



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Q Our federation of churches have agreed that “a day of prayer may be proclaimed by the churches appointed for that purpose by General Synod” (Art. 54 CO). General Synod 2010 appointed two churches, apparently not to proclaim a day of prayer, but to “implement the provisions of Art. 54 CO” (*Acts Synod 2013*, Art. 45). These churches report that they “were not called upon by the churches to organize a special day of prayer.” (Are they declining their appointment? Or are they saying no one asked?) Synod 2013 then considers these churches “have fulfilled their mandate” and decides to thank them for their report and to reappoint them “to implement Art. 54 CO as needed.”

This seems to be a misinterpretation and misapplication of the Church Order by the appointed churches as well as by Synod.

Question: is it the task of these churches to simply wait for a request, or are they appointed to be responsible to judge, to initiate and to proclaim a day of prayer where any church requested it or not?

A The *Acts* of General Synod Burlington 2010, Article 98, shows a good example of how Article 54 in the Church Order regarding “Days of Prayer” works. General Synod 2007 had appointed the churches of Edmonton-Providence and Burlington-Waterdown for the purpose of the *implementation* of Article 54 CO. They received the mandate, indeed, “to implement the provisions of Article 54 CO.” This means that when they received the request from the church at Cloverdale to proclaim a day of prayer “because of its concerns about the abuses of Canada’s Human Rights Commissions particularly against Christians who have spoken out about matters such as homosexuality,” they were called to judge whether this request complied with the “*provisions* of Article 54 CO.” Their judgment was very clear and concrete, saying “it does not fit the current requirements for a national day of prayer” as outlined in Article 54 CO. This article states that a day of prayer should be considered “in time of war, general calamities and other great affliction the presence of which is felt throughout the churches.” They also referred to a

statement by GS Chatham 2004, “These afflictions must be of an acute nature, of extreme severity and posing an immediate crisis for the life of the church and the nation” (*Acts* 2004, Art. 40, 4.4.).

These two churches, appointed by GS Burlington 2010, now reported to GS Carman 2013 that none of the churches came with a request for the proclamation of a day of prayer during the time between these two general synods. That’s all they have to report, for nothing else was required of them during this time, except to report the next GS of this fact. GS Carman reappointed them for that same purpose and with the same mandate “to implement the provisions of Art. 54 CO.” Indeed, all they have to do is wait for a request from one of the churches (which could be their own church too, of course!). If and when they do receive a request, it is their task to judge whether the need is there, remembering that in view of past requests it will have to be abundantly clear that such a special need exists. These are not the regular and general needs, serious though these might be (e.g. general decline, apostasy, abortion, euthanasia, etc.), but the great afflictions that are felt throughout the churches. These are the calamities that are evidence of God’s anger and displeasure over the

nation or the churches, requiring a special calling for humility, sobriety, and confession of sins and guilt, calling for a day of prayer (and fasting, I may add; cf. my previous column!) in which the churches come before the throne of grace and mercy as with one voice!

In short, there has been no misinterpretation or misapplication of the Church Order by these two churches or General Synod! To quote the late Rev. J.D. Wielenga in a letter to the editor of *Clarion* (Vol. 38, No. 23, p. 502),

One must not too quickly proclaim a Day of Prayer. The Synod of Rotterdam in 1887 deemed it necessary to warn the churches, when proclaiming a Day of Prayer, to remain within the limits intended by the C.O. The nature of such a day ought not to be “to bring a prayer which attracts extra attention, next to the weekly prayers of the congregation,” neither “to put before the Lord the chronic ills and needs in

which land and church and nation abound.” A Day of Prayer requires that the people “feel stricken in conscience by the majesty of God’s judgments,” and “together humble themselves before God in penitence.” One must not too quickly proclaim a day of prayer, for this would “lead to undervaluation of the weekly prayers and to a weakening of the institution of the Day of Prayer by over-use.”

C

*Is there something you've been wanting to know?
An answer you've been looking for?*

Ask us a question!

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The editorial about Call Fatigue (No. 10 May 23/14) presents indeed an all-round description of this aggravating problem and also sensible solutions, such as no call for five years or shortly after a previous one. The question is, however, will everyone consider such good advice and come to a consensus? (The attitude of “the Lord will provide” appears absent, for example, when “at classis” a letter of call is delivered). Although agreeing fully with every suggestion made in the article, would one more be permitted? For, in my opinion, actions speak louder than words. Therefore, it is suggested that ministers should not always take the full time allotted to them to make a decision. This especially applies when a call is extended without prior, personal contact or within the first five years and soon after declining a previous one or at an awkward time of the year. When ministers behave in this way, the suggested changes or improvements will no doubt soon follow.

To follow this advice may be offensive, rude, or insulting to some, but let’s be open, practical, and real. Why im-

press a calling congregation that any call at any time is taken seriously when the above mentioned considerations are not shown in the call itself? Why should a minister’s behaviour in the calling process be dictated by what others think and expect or by what is popular and most pleasing to others? Not only will the minister and his family benefit when he acts realistically in this way, but his congregation as well as the vacant churches are also well served. A very few ministers have already shown to act in this way. Similar attitudes and actions by others may, in my opinion, eventually improve the frustrating calling process we generally experience today.



*Yours in his service,
Dennis Teitsma, Winnipeg, MB*

*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

Maintaining the Parish: Biblical or Practical?

I live in the City of Hamilton where there are six Canadian Reformed churches: Cornerstone, Providence, Trinity, Ancaster, Flamborough, and Rehoboth, which extends into neighbouring Burlington where there are yet another two congregations: Fellowship and Ebenezer. Quite a blessing of the LORD! And this is not including the congregations of the URC in the area; Rehoboth, Zion, and Living Waters in Brant. Within these churches there are a growing number of people who do not attend their local church but drive to another, sometimes even passing yet another church! There are other areas with neighbouring churches close by where this may also be the case and anecdotal evidence tells me it is. For congregations that are more distant from others in the federation this will not be an issue that much concerns them. But for churches in which several congregations are within a relatively short distance this has become an increasing trend.

Each time a church has been instituted, a geographical description of its parish or area borders were drawn. Parish may not be a term that has been used much within our federation but is the correct description of how historically, the local church defines the area from which it gathers its members. We can look up the minutes of the consistories of the churches from which churches have split and we can find the description of the borders agreed to. These were also presented and approved at a classis. We can argue whether the border makes sense or if it should be redrawn because of changing patterns of where the members live, but that is not my point.

There is a growing development within the Canadian Reformed churches in which the concept of the church parish is being dismissed. Why do we think these agreements can be ignored and we can do what is right in our own eyes. Now, one may ask why this is an issue to be concerned about? Are there underlying reasons that this trend is being accepted? This development is arguably the result of the tacit acceptance of the doctrine of pluriformity or denominationalism or,

in the very least, of an individualism which ultimately does not account for God's revealed plan of working through his covenant people.

There are those who want to join the church with which they feel an affinity for. There may be any number of reasons for this, many of which may not always be articulated. They may like the minister elsewhere, or not like the one locally; they may like the demographics, the young people, the old people; or may prefer the perceived dominant views of the membership. Hopefully it is not because they wish to get away from some unresolved issue with other members or the consistory. There are all manner of justifications for doing what we want. In all of this we are failing to see the church as the work of Christ. Christ gathers his body locally. He gathers from all his people locally. With their strengths and weaknesses, with the talents that he has given. He does not gather from a certain demographic, a certain ethnicity, a certain background. We do not have churches for academics or students and one for the regular working man. We do not have churches for the wealthy and another for the poor. When the apostles established churches in the first century, they were churches of all who believed in the town or city. If ever there was a reason to set up separate churches for Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians it was in those early years. Paul teaches, as in the letter to the Galatians 3:28, that there is no Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free, all are one in Christ.

We may not establish churches for special purposes or programs such as outreach and evangelism. If it is a proper task of the church, it is the task of every church. We do not have special criteria for membership other than what Christ has given. We gather in obedience to Scripture as we work this out in the confessions and church order under the authority of the local consistory. In our historical context, a proper view of the church, or ecclesiology, was re-established in The Netherlands following the Secession of 1834, challenged by Abraham Kuyper's Doleantie of 1886 and the subsequent Union of

1892, and reasserted following the Liberation of 1944. This scriptural understanding is also one of the reasons why we absolutely reject any sort of incorporation of the church. We must account for the fact that the church is the work of God.

There are also negative practical consequences for not being obedient to God's plan. Churches are denied the talents of members who live in their area as we must be a hand and a foot to each other. To be a proper functioning body of Christ we need all of its parts and not allow for its dissection. We live in a time of increasing diversity of opinion within the churches. The first fifty years of the Canadian Reformed Churches has been an historical anomaly in the unity of mind we have experienced. In many ways this has been a great blessing as the churches grew and were established. We should still strive for unity under the confessions and Church Order. We should be able to discuss our differences and, as much as possible, try to come to a scripturally-based consensus. This basis and unity needs to be maintained and we must hold each other to it. We should not divide and gather with like-minded individuals. Then we are no longer the church but some sort of religious organisation. The differences will be exacerbated as one church is oriented one way and another thinks this way, yet another sees itself as more progressive, while another thinks it is more conservative. Either this will lead to a rupture of the federation or complacency as we drift into irrelevance in a sea of denominations. We should learn from the history of the Christian Reformed Church in their decline from orthodoxy to heterodoxy. As the demand to live according to their confessions waned some con-

gregations saw themselves as more "conservative" while other may even have seen themselves as more "charismatic" or some other "strain."

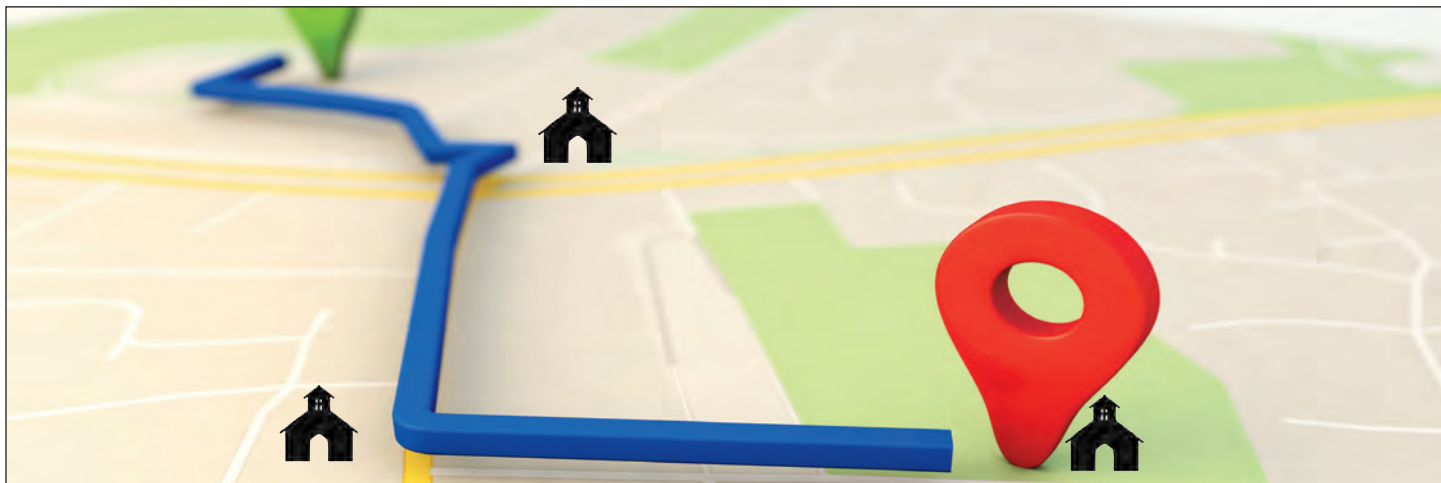
When our churches meet in classis they are asked if the decisions of the major assemblies are honoured ad Article 44. Amongst many other things, observing the agreements which we have bound ourselves to is part of this. We should challenge each other whether this is indeed the case when the delegates easily answer yes. This is not "lording it over each other" but merely the maintenance of what we have agreed to bind each other to.

Some say that you can't force people to join the church in their area. However, a church may not accept as members those who do not live in their parish. There is no difference in demanding obedience to this scriptural teaching than to any other.

We can conclude that it is not only practical to maintain the historical parish, but it is also a biblical demand. Churches must continue to hold each other accountable and demand observance of the established parishes by its membership.

For those who want to read more, there have been articles published about this topic before. In *Clarion*, there was an article written by Dr. J. DeJong in July 2000, there is also an excellent article translated by Jack Vanderveen on the SpindleWorks website entitled "A Borderline Case." I also recently became aware of another fine study by Rev. Dr. R.D. Anderson available on his site. One can also reference the Church Order commentary by VanDellen and Monsma.

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Not Two Kinds

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In my late teens, with older brothers toiling on the farm, I worked weekends in a clothing store selling anything from Levi-Strauss denim jeans to Wilson & Glenny virgin wool designer suits. Among others, the job also had me face questions about boundaries of composition, style, and decency. One case linked to Leviticus 19:19 (and its Deuteronomy 22:9-11 parallel): “You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material” (ESV). The first phrase was for my brothers, of course, but the second was for me: Apart from Levi-Strauss and Wilson & Glenny, most items of clothing contained *blends* of fibre. Was *peddling* it acceptable, if *wearing* it was not? My own wardrobe had mostly mixed materials: At school, a designer suit was socially insufferable, and, as denim was associated with Beatles and other revolutionaries, jeans would raise parental eyebrows. Seeking a solution, I found that some exegetes of Leviticus affirmed God’s authority as Supreme King, but then called the current relevance *obscure* or limited to *practical* aspects: Mixing fibres generates laundry issues and static electricity. With my mom’s Miele front loader, it became a non-issue, and I kept wearing and selling blends. My question lingered, however, until I stumbled on Rev. Klaas Schilder’s application of about half a century earlier. It was in line with Article 25 of the Belgic Confession, and in this article I incorporate important elements from his approach.

Schilder

One evening in 1919, Rev. Schilder spoke to promote Christian education. Sidestepping (but not ignoring) passages like Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 78, he focused on “not planting two kinds of seed” (*Om Woord en Kerk*, Vol. I, pp. 140-146). Clearly, in Leviticus, God just set his people free from slavery, and he wanted them to be wholly devoted to serve him only, as a holy people. That was the covenant, and, as promised to Abraham, through them all nations would be blessed – first by living as

shining lights under God’s care, and later through Christ. To let that light shine, however, between Israel and the Canaanites a clear distinction must be maintained, which allowed no contamination with sin-enslaving and wrath-incurring pagan practices. This was serious: God’s blessing required tangible holiness, and his wrath implied devotion to ruin (think Jericho, and Achan).

It is of interest that the 1917 Dutch Constitution had just sanctioned full recognition of and government funding for “Schools with the Bible.” The impact was visible in school enrolment statistics: In 1900, just over thirty percent of all Dutch students attended Christian schools; by 1920, nearly fifty percent did; and by 1940, it would climb to seventy percent (Algra, *Dispereertniet*, Vol. III, p. 398). However, in 1919, many children did not yet attend a Christian school – for various possible reasons. Decades of underfunding resulted in cramped, drafty, and often ill-equipped facilities and limited learning materials, often less-qualified teachers, longer travel times, and an adverse stigma. Some consciences may have been appeased by “turning out OK” with public school promotions of “civil and social virtues” (updated from earlier “Christian and social virtues”), or myths of tolerance and a “religiously neutral” program; some wavered perhaps because it was “beyond their meagre means;” and bitter school-related experiences may have contributed also. In short, there remained room for growth in Christian schools.

Enduring call

Schilder noted that God, as Creator of both the physical and the spiritual world, also addressed both. The antithesis of Genesis 3 came after the Fall, it remained when the woman’s seed mixed with Satan’s, the now violent earth needed to be purged in the Flood, and a very small remnant was saved. Later, rescued from bondage, Israel was physically set aside from pagans to support their spiritual devotion to God alone. The antithesis was further made

explicit with daily reminders in both temple worship and physical metaphors. Practical commands for the natural world exemplified the spiritual: Not mixing unequal parts (like cloth or seed) implied that God wanted the Israelites not to engage in *syncretism*. Mixing cloth meant more than static electricity, and mixing seeds went deeper than harvest-issues: Both joined metaphorically what should be separate, and so obliterated the antithesis, and it spelled wrath. Not mixing with pagans and their practices, avoiding syncretism and keeping the covenant, spelled blessing and life. Breaking the covenant led to the bread of adversity and to the water of affliction, or to exile as spiritual drought and to physical excommunication.

This has implications for the schools we choose for covenant children

This call to be holy could never be separated from raising children. Immediately after restating the law, Moses gave its imperative implications, as in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

That is: Love no other gods, but the Lord alone; take this to heart; teach your children; remind each other always, everywhere and in every way. Indeed, without these instructions and reminders, they would go astray. With the support of the community, it was the parents' holy obligation to teach their children how and why to be dedicated to their covenant God only. They faltered.

Today

After a seventy-year exile, some of the returned remnant devoutly studied the law, but a number of them came to cherish and follow its letter as though there

was merit and life in moralism. They missed the intent summed up before the exile by Micah as a call for acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with their God (6:8), or as a call for the heart rather than man-made rules, as Isaiah pointed out (29:13). Our Lord Jesus rejected the Pharisaic use of the law as a set of meritorious external-good-look rules, and re-established the law as a claim for whole-*hearted* commitment to God. To inherit eternal life, one must give up personal merit: Only those who put their trust and faith in Christ alone are righteous before God and live. The old law to love God and the neighbour remained; our devotion must not be to symbolic reminders (however valid they are), but our hearts should be lifted up to Christ. A life of thankfulness is not a mindless affair of following rules or traditions, but of grateful service and devotion to God with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength.

With covenant community support, and in view of their baptismal vows, New Testament parents are leery to send their children unprepared to a street or a cyber gate or a school that would *distract* them from being holy. Godly parents are supported with prayers and finances and reminders when they plant covenantal seed at home, and avoid having others add worldly weeds at school; or when they dress their children in holy cloth at home and oppose godless fibre elsewhere. Rather than repeating aged excuses, these parents know that public schools distort the antithesis to man-made opposites. These schools prohibit serving God, confessing him as the Creator and Christ as the Saviour of the world, and they do not pursue the unity of purpose between home *and* church *and* school. When God wants our lives to be saturated with love for and dedication to him *with all our heart and mind and soul and might*, there are no exceptions.

Finally

Schilder was also quite aware that some think they can leave the "Christian part" of education to others. Apart from presuming that it can be teased out as a separate rather than a fully integrated component, that too, would be mixing seeds and blending fibres. Children would quickly note the deadly hypocrisy of their parents' mouth proclaiming one thing and their actions another. How would they be trained in godliness and Christian

character if it is not pursued at home? How would they be able to discern and choose in a way that pleases God, as they explore their life's options for action if it is not supported at home? It is not impossible, but someone would not be acting responsibly.

A life of thankfulness is not a mindless affair of following rules or traditions, but of grateful service and devotion to God with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength

For Israel, the prohibition to mix seeds or fibres was a reminder of God's call to be devoted to him alone, and not to mix messages. The principle of being holy remains, along with a call to live by the Spirit and to keep the command to love. This has implications for the schools we choose for covenant children; for having home, church,

and school united in purpose; and for our commitment to help those for whom it is a challenge. How would the Lord have us raise the children he has given us, how would he have them schooled, and how would he have us help each other when there are challenges? Nearly a century after Schilder's speech, funding for our schools may not be forthcoming or it may be curtailed, and neither the teachers nor the schools have attained perfection, but the antithetical call to oppose syncretism remains. In gratitude for our salvation in Christ, let us lift up our hearts to him, be clothed with him, and carefully and explicitly stress the single kind of covenant principles he showed us to teach and have our children taught. Which seed will we plant, which message will we peddle, and which cloth will we have our children wear?

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma akingma@ech.ca.



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***Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship*, John MacArthur. Nashville: Nelson Books, 2013**

Additional Information: Hardcover, 352 pages, \$22.99 USD

Although this is a great read, I hummed and hawed about writing a review. After all, I reasoned, I don't know too many people who would be susceptible to the types of errors exposed in this book. I thought that most of the people I know, inside my church and elsewhere, are discerning enough to realize that the teachings exposed in this book are gospel-denying and soul-threatening. But some friends demurred. Some friends insisted that I write this review because they know people who are being lured by these sorts of teachings. Moreover, it could very well be that I'm over-estimating the level of discernment around me.

What sorts of false teachings are being addressed in this book? The basic thrust of *Strange Fire* is to address the error known as continuationism. Reformed believers are cessationists – this means that we believe that the apostolic gifts (including speaking in tongues) ceased at the end or shortly after the end of the apostolic era. Continuationism, on the other hand, maintains that these gifts continue. We should expect to see miracles, including healings and speaking in tongues in our present day. This is the view held by Pentecostals and charismatics – as well as by a few others. A false teaching that often goes hand in hand with this is the so-called Prosperity Gospel. This is the teaching that the good news is that Jesus wants to bless you with health and wealth. Popular proponents of these false teachings include Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, and Joyce Meyer. This book deftly exposes these teachings as false and does so with the Word of God.

John MacArthur is a well-known preacher and writer. He has been the pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California since 1969. This is not his first book on the topic. Back in the early 1990s, he wrote *Charismatic Chaos*. Unfortunately, since then, the popularity of these teachings has grown significantly. In the early 1990s, these views were widely considered to be on the fringe of American Christianity. This was not only because of the positions taken on spiritual gifts, but also because of



other doctrinal issues, especially unorthodox views of the Trinity. In the early 1990s, you could not typically find books by men like Creflo Dollar or T.D. Jakes in your average vanilla Christian bookstore. Today, they're everywhere and nobody seems to care. That does make *Strange Fire* an even more important book for our day.

The basic argument of the book is simple: continuationism is an assault on the sufficiency of the Word of God. MacArthur doesn't just say it, he shows it. He gives numerous examples of how continuationists are turning people away from the Scriptures as the only authoritative source of divine revelation. He explains how the Bible itself speaks of its own sufficiency. Not only should we not expect charismatic gifts, we do not need them, because the Holy Spirit has given us something far better: the written Word of God.

As he prosecutes his case, MacArthur helpfully deals with a number of side issues. What about using spiritual gifts just for your own spiritual edification? He tackles that in chapter 4. What about the popular book by Sarah Young, *Jesus Calling*? She says that she received these devotional messages straight from Jesus. She wanted more than the Bible and "Jesus" gave it to her. MacArthur deals with Young in chapter 6. And then what about some of the "New Calvinists" who hold to continuationist views? There are men like Mark Driscoll, D. A. Carson, and John Piper who fall into that category. MacArthur respectfully addresses them in chapter 12, "An Open Letter to My Continuationist Friends."

I appreciated this book especially because of the author's commitment to a high view of Scripture. I applaud his boldness in applying Scripture to this contentious issue and also, most importantly, showing us how the gospel is at stake with this. He has been attacked and maligned for his stand, but from a Reformed point of view, we can do nothing but encourage him to continue standing fast on this issue. Yes, MacArthur has his own theological blind-spots. I wish he were Reformed in his views of baptism and eschatology, for instance. However, I didn't detect any of those blind-spots in this book. So, until some more consistent and confessionally Reformed author comes with something better, *this* is the book that I will be recommending to everyone on this issue. **C**