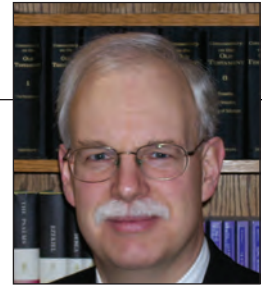




Clarion

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**GREAT COMMISSION
OR CREATION COMMISSION?**



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Good Manners

*An essential part of our being human is that
we live in a body*

Children often have a difficult time learning good manners. Parents have to be persistent to make their children say “please” and “thank you.” To get a child to say “please” may be a challenge, but it is usually not as difficult as the “thank you,” for once a child has what he or she wants, well, the “please” has accomplished its purpose. A child may have to be prompted, or even called back as he or she walks away, and be asked, “What do you say now?” A belated “thank you” may follow. It is a challenge to teach children good manners done spontaneously, without prompting.

This training in good manners can also be extended to our life as children of our heavenly Father. We need to be taught to say “please” and “thank you” for his spiritual gifts. We confess in Lord’s Day 45, Q/A 116 of the Heidelberg Catechism that “God will give his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask him for these gifts and thank him for them.” It takes some time for us to do that spontaneously, without prompting. Good manners, however, are not only to be shown for the spiritual gift of our salvation from sin. They are just as necessary for all the material gifts of life.

A creation ordinance

When you think it through, good manners of “please” and “thank you” for material gifts are something that are even more fundamental than with respect to the gifts of our salvation. They are rooted in the creation. In the Garden, after all, it was not yet necessary to say “please” and “thank you” for the gift of salvation, but it was necessary to say these words with respect to the gifts of creation. We might even say that good manners with respect to our material blessings are a creation ordinance.

The annual Thanksgiving holiday is a good occasion to bring this out. As the gospel is all about the spiritual benefits obtained by Christ and applied by the Spirit, it is easy to forget our original place in creation. An essential part of our being human is that we live in a body. Our bodily life is not something secondary. It is very much part of who we are, of how God made us. It is all part of the goodness of creation.

Disconnecting the physical and spiritual

When you let your mind scan the course of history, you see how often God’s children have disconnected the physical and the spiritual dimensions of life. Israel showed that in the way they uttered their “please” and “thank you” for material matters to the Baals, while at the same time serving the LORD. In a different twist on the same theme, the New Testament church has had to deal with dualistic thinking which downplayed the value of the life in the body. We can see this in the rise of monasticism in the late third century and its ascetic tendencies. This affected the thinking of the church for many centuries. We see it in our age in the way there can be the subtle suggestion that you really only serve the Lord if you are doing something directly for the furthering of his kingdom. In other words, you have to be involved in some sort of spiritual activity. All the emphasis falls on the so called “Great Commission,” the mandate the Lord Jesus gave to his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. The result is that the ordinary activities of life in this world are seen as too mundane and too materialistic for the truly spiritual person.

As we experience this spiritualizing trend in our time, we are in danger of losing one of the gains of the age of the Reformation, namely, the way it gave renewed

legitimacy to the routines of daily life in terms of marriage and work, and the enjoyment of the good things the earth brings forth. Luther showed that by leaving the monastic life and marrying. It showed up in the renewed valuing of daily work. This is reflected in the way the Catechism shows the sanctity of daily work when it expands on the third petition, "Your will be done," by speaking of everyone carrying out the duties of his office and calling. The text references point to the marriage relationship and doing our daily work (1 Cor 7:17-24; Eph 6:5-9).

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

How do we show our thankfulness for both material and spiritual blessings? As we approach the celebration of Thanksgiving Day, Rev. Eric Kampen addresses this question in his editorial. Likewise our Treasures New and Old meditation from Rev. David de Boer also focuses on this holiday.

Issue 20 includes an article, originally published in *Reformed Herald*, about the benefits of private devotions. We also have the second half of Dr. Arjan de Visser's review on *Center Church* by Tim Keller.

In news from the federation, there is a report from Toronto congregation's farewell to the Vanderheide family after many years of service in the PNG mission field. This issue also contains the first in a series of three Education Matters article on sports, a Canticle, two press releases, and a Mission News insert.

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Danger of over-spiritualizing

We need to realize that while there is always the danger of materialism, that is, of being obsessed with the material part of life, there is also the danger of over-spiritualizing life. As Christians, we should aim to live a balanced life. That means, we know the Great Commission but we also know the Creation Commission. We have been created as physical beings. God created mankind to be fruitful and subdue the earth, both very physical activities. The Great Commission has not cancelled the Creation Commission, as if we should be content to get by on the bare minimum just to fulfill the Great Commission. In fact, for the vast majority of church members, the Creation Commission is to be far more dominant than the Great Commission. We see this, for example, in Paul's words to the Thessalonian, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody" (1 Thess 4:11,12).

The ordinary activities of life in this world are seen as too mundane and too materialistic for the truly spiritual person

It is important to highlight that the Great Commission does not negate the Creation Commission. The Lord Jesus came to redeem life, which means that he also came to restore a proper view of the material part of life. He reinforced God is God of all of life, including the needs of our body, when he taught that an essential part of prayer is to be the petition, "Give us today our daily bread." He taught us to say "please" for our bodily needs. Interestingly enough, he placed this petition about our bodily needs before petitions of a more spiritual nature, namely, forgiveness of sins and being kept from temptation.

Evaluating our thankfulness

Now "please" should always be followed by "thank you." The question can be raised if we do that sufficiently, or whether we are more like children who have received what they wanted and run off without saying "thank you." Just to measure yourself in this, ask how you mark the occasion of "Thanksgiving." To be sure, ministers are expected to choose an appropriate passage from Scripture for Thanksgiving Sunday. But what do we do as families? Do we save the turkey for Christmas

because there are things to do and places to go while the weather is still quite pleasant? Thanksgiving, while not prescribed in Scripture as a formal holiday, is rooted in Christian faith and practice. Do we show any of that faith in practice in our family traditions?

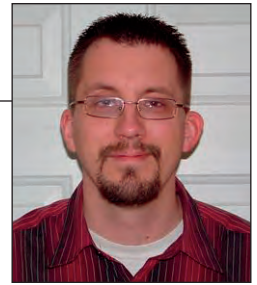
Thanksgiving, while not prescribed in Scripture as a formal holiday, is rooted in Christian faith and practice. Do we show any of that faith in practice in our family traditions?

Saying "thank you" to our heavenly Father, of course, is not to be limited to Thanksgiving. This day stands out because another season of planting, cultivating, growth, and harvesting has been completed. We have reason to say "thank you" to our heavenly Father for each meal we receive and all the good things of life on earth we may enjoy. Do we give daily thanks, or does that get passed over because, well, life is busy. There are things to do and places to go, so prayers after meals are rushed or non-existent? Further, does it happen that after our Father answered our "please" with great generosity, we got busy thinking how to use all we have to get maximum enjoyment out of it? Does it happen that at times we do say "thank you" rather absent-mindedly, and actually insincerely, because, with the many good things our Father has given us, we get less careful about how we keep his commands? For example, as we think about the abundant provision of material gifts, are we not so much thinking "thank you" but about the things we can do and the far flung more places we can visit, aware that those activities affect our ability to keep the command to "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . ." Is that using our blessings in a truly thankful way?

Show good manners

So, this Thanksgiving, let us reflect on our Christian manners. We need to be reminded to say "please" to our heavenly Father also for all our bodily needs. Our "please" should be followed by "thank you." Our heavenly Father does provide abundantly for all our bodily needs. Such thanksgiving may have our special attention at this time of the year, but it should also be evident throughout the year. In the end, thanksgiving for all our blessings really should be one of the characteristics of our Christian life. The annual Thanksgiving is a special time to show good manners and give thanks for our many blessings.





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A Dry Crust with Peace

"Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house of feasting with strife."

(Proverbs 17:1)

The fields around Chatham, Ontario contain crops of corn and soy beans. The wheat was harvested in July. The tomatoes are being taken off the fields and carted off to be made into paste and ketchup. The crops are not as good as they were last year in the Chatham area. Many farmers experienced record yields last year, when they used tractors and snow blowers to stack the corn in heaps, but this year the yield is less. There was too much water in the spring, and many of the seedlings drowned. Some fields were replanted too late to produce a good crop. While no one will go hungry here, there will be slightly less grain for the cattle, and the price of meat will go up. Should we then be less enthusiastic in our thanksgiving this year?

Proverbs 17:1 reminds us that wealth of material goods is not the only way to measure the success of a year. "Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house of feasting with strife." Even when we have little in the way of material possessions, we can enjoy other blessings. In fact, this proverb reminds us that there are things we should value higher than material goods. A person might be rich, yet desperately unhappy because he lacks peace and security in his life. On the other hand a person might be poor, yet enjoy other blessings with his family and friends in the presence of God. Although the harvest was not as good here as it was last year, we

mostly enjoy a comfortable life with a wide range of gifts.

How will we measure the success of this past year as we sit down with our families to give thanks together? Will we measure it by the headway we made on our mortgages or RR-SPs? Will we measure it by the quality of our life? Certainly we must give thanks for the incredible wealth we enjoy. We must not give in to the temptation to look in envy at others who are richer. God has given us so many material possessions to enjoy. Most of us own our own home and have a vehicle parked in the driveway. We have steady employment, we can afford Christian education for our children, and there is still enough left over for a week or two of vacation.

The author of Proverbs 17:1 does not say that a dry crust is something good to have. We would all rather enjoy more than a dry crust. Praise God that we enjoy muffins and bagels and waffles and soft rolls and fresh baked bread straight out of the bread-maker! By the measure of material goods it was a successful year, even though in some places the crops weren't so good, or in other places business was slow. We are so rich!

But there are other ways to measure the past year. Were you able to enjoy the riches God gave you? Was your enjoyment marred by strife or ill health or anxiety or guilt? Recent events in Syria and Egypt help

us to put our lives into the perspective of Proverbs 17:1. Injury, loss, and death have brought grief, insecurity, and fear to thousands in the Middle East. The poor and the wealthy alike experience unrest and disturbance. Many Egyptians or Syrians would give all they possess to enjoy the freedom, peace, and security that we take for granted. What does it matter then, if the harvest is poor here or the economy takes another slight downturn? Even the poorest among us will still enjoy relative peace. There will be food on the table, a warm place to sleep, and no fear of soldiers or rockets or chemical gas tearing apart your world while you sleep. Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house of feasting with strife.

There are other blessings to count than the food on the table and the numbers on the bank statement. Did the Lord bless your home with joy and love? Did he allow you to reach out in hospitality? Were you able to contribute to the coming of his kingdom? Did you watch your children grow and thrive? Perhaps you went backwards in your finances and are ending the year with less than you started. But in the meantime, how many other ways did God show his favour? Perhaps you ended the year with a great deal more than when you began, but did that increase really make it a "good year"? Consider Proverbs 17:1 as you give thanks this year.



The Benefits of Private Devotions

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This article was originally published in Reformed Herald, magazine of the RCUS. It is re-published with permission.

How many seconds, minutes, or hours do you spend praying to God and reading, studying, or meditating upon God's Word? Or, are you like many young people who find it hard to find some quiet time to even get started in the Bible? Perhaps you have tried and tried, and still, the time spent privately and personally before your Lord does not seem so beneficial to you. Well, in this brief article I have been given the assignment to list the benefits we all should be receiving from our "private" or personal times before the Lord and his Word.

I will first then, briefly talk about why we should have a private time of devotion; Second, we will look at what or whom it is we should devote ourselves privately. Finally, we will talk about the benefits that you should expect from this time spent personally, privately, and quietly with your Lord.

Why have private devotions?

Because it is listed as one of those holy responsibilities or duties in our church constitutions: "Every member shall engage diligently in private devotions." Yes, and because, even as a "younger member," perhaps even as a confirmed young man or woman, you need to continue to grow in your being confirmed in your faith and in your Lord!

Indeed why? Because dear young men and women, to engage in "private devotions" or in the personal study of God's Word, in prayer and fellowship with your God, is something that all Christians should desire to do!

Yes, should *desire* to do, especially after they have diligently been faithful in attending to the preaching and teaching of God's Word from Sunday to Sunday. Listen up now: For from this chief means of grace, our hearts and minds should be energized or further challenged and encouraged to learn more of God, his ways, and our call-

ing to be Christians! Yes, I mean to say, that even as a young person, if you are not first of all diligently seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness through the faithful preaching and teaching of God's Word on his day, then you will certainly not know "why" you should engage in private devotions. Get this part of your Christian life right and you will most assuredly desire to further study God's Word and to spend some quiet time with him, alone in prayer and devotion.

Next, to what or to whom should you devote yourselves privately?

I know that you know this, but seriously, what do "private devotions" consist of, and to whom or what are we devoting ourselves privately? Brethren, yes, that includes you younger covenant folk. You are to devote or specifically set apart some time during the day or even the week, that you might spend time praying to God, reading his Word, and then meditating on or listening to his Word.

Whether you spend five minutes or fifteen minutes, that personal time (yes, that allotted or specifically set-aside time) should be spent in reading through God's holy Word. In studying and thinking about the sermon passage preached, or the Sunday school lessons taught, or the Heidelberg Questions and Answers for that week. "Devotion," or to devote one's self to something, such as time to personally commune with your Creator-Redeemer, is consecrating or dedicating a tiny or brief time-slot, in your "way-too-busy" schedule, or your "filled with me only" schedule so that you can actually converse and talk with God in prayer as you study and read his Word!

Wherefore dear younger brothers and sisters of the RCUS, if you are diligently engaged in preparing for and praying for your Sunday time of devotions with the Triune God in the corporate worship services and Bible

studies, you will find the time to privately devote or consecrate and give yourself some time to be with God in prayer and study.

Again, listen up here: For you know that all of us really do what we truly *want* to do, when we want to do it! Therefore if you really and truly desire to know God and his Son better, to learn more of God's ways and of your calling as a Christian, for his glory and your sanctification, you will find or make the time to privately spend some quiet time with God and his Word, communing with him, listening, petitioning, and thanking him.

Finally, what benefits should I expect?

What benefits should I expect from this time spent personally, privately, prayerfully, and quietly with my Lord and his Word?

The first of many benefits is that you will certainly grow in your knowledge and understanding of God and his ways. That is, you will grow in the grace and knowledge of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and thus, in your love for God and your neighbour. You will also see your life becoming conformed more and more unto the image of his dear Son. Likewise, you will learn more and more how you ought to defend the faith, or *stand up, stand up for Jesus as soldiers of the cross!* Moreover you will be fortified against the assaults and attacks of the wicked one, and your own easily deceived hearts.

What do "private devotions" consist of?

Furthermore, you will be saints or members of your Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, whom others desire to be around. That is, you will attract or have the right kind of friends wanting to hang out with you! Surely, from these private times before the Lord you will become more humble and meek, and thus, a greater witness to all whom God brings before you, whether they be your believing or "unbelieving" friends!

Truly then, you will also be filled with greater joy and hope in your Christian walk or sojourning. If you spend a little private time with your Lord in prayer, and in studying his Word, you will certainly desire, more and

more, to be with your Lord, or to spend even more time in his Word; you will begin to desire more and more to see him return on the clouds of glory.

Let's see, are there any other benefits that I may have forgotten? Well, if you are diligently disciplining yourself, setting aside some specific time for reflection, meditation, and prayer with God and his Word, you will most assuredly receive from our gracious God help, grace, and strength for the day-to-day spiritual warfare that all of you are daily engaged in, or should be engaged in. Yes, and you will be better equipped or more thoroughly equipped for every good work. Surely this is every Christian's desire. Surely this is every true believer's hope. Surely this is every church member's prayer and holy wish, both young and old.

Surely this is every Christian's desire

Wherefore once again, dear "younger" brothers and sisters in the Lord, as mentioned earlier, seeing that the benefits from engaging diligently in private devotions spring from or develop from diligently engaging in the means of grace that God has so graciously provided for us in the Sunday and/or mid-week services and studies, see to it that you first practice preparing to come before him in humble dependence and worthy worship. Then the benefits derived or gained from seeking God's kingdom and righteousness through a private, personal, set-aside time of prayer with him, and his Word, will indeed be absolutely manifold and immeasurable!

Yes, I know, even though the benefits are manifold and immeasurable for us when we diligently have private devotions, sadly, many of us fall way short of this diligence. Let us all beg earnestly of our gracious God, that he might strengthen us in this holy practice.

To get started reaping some of these benefits listed, I encourage you to set aside some private, personal, quiet time to prayerfully read Psalms 1, 19, and 119. Then perhaps move on to the gospel according to John or one of the other gospel accounts. The Lord bless you all as you invest or commit some of your day or week in having private devotions.





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Tim Keller's Center Church – An Evaluation (Part 2)

We continue our evaluation of *Center Church*¹, an important book in which Tim Keller presents his theological vision for doing church-ministry in large cities. Part 5 is entitled *Cultural Engagement*. In this section Keller offers an overview of various approaches to the difficult question: What is a Christian's calling in society? Taking his point of departure in Niebuhr's analysis of different models (Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, etc.), Keller gives an update on more recent developments in the discussion, with a helpful summary of the recent "Two Kingdoms" debate between David VanDrunen and others.

Keller's own position is a blended insight approach: No model is perfect but some models are better than others (see diagram). Instead of defending your own model at all cost, rather be open to adapting and improving where necessary. In Keller's own words: "Enjoy the strengths of your position, admit the weaknesses, and borrow like crazy from the strengths of the others" (p. 242).

Although Keller does not profess allegiance to one single model, his sympathy appears to lie mostly with the transformationist model. This model is indebted to the work and thought of Abraham Kuyper. Like Kuyper, Keller sees "secular" work as an important way to serve Christ and his kingdom. Also like Kuyper, he expects much from the influence of Christians in the public square (which includes not just politics but all areas of life). It is good to see that Keller appreciates the work of the great Dutch theologian. At the same time, I hope that Keller will remember the lessons from the past. While Kuyper and his followers were able to gain considerable influence in Dutch society during the first half of the twentieth century, there was a dramatic decline of Christian influence in the government and culture of The

Netherlands during the second half of the same century. D.A. Carson (*Christ and Culture Revisited*) has attributed this sad development to a number of causes, including a weakening of the antithesis between belief and unbelief, and a loss of personal piety among Kuyper's followers.

I do not mention these things in order to suggest that Christians should live in isolation from society. I appreciate Kuyper's (and Keller's) desire to see Christians being involved in the public square, for "Through the blessing of the upright a city is exalted" (Prov 11:11). At the same time, as the righteous gain more influence in the city, they should take care that their hearts do not become ensnared by the world.



Missional

In part 6 Keller discusses the church's character as *Missional Community*. During the last fifteen years the word "missional" has become a buzzword in theological debates. Keller gives a good overview of the history of how the term has been used.

The problem is that people mean different things with "missional church." To one person it is just another way of saying that the church is called to be engaged in evangelism and mission. To another person it means that church people should get involved in the downtown area of the city and do good work among the poor. To Keller it means that the whole church should be mission-minded and that every activity should have an evangelistic aspect to it. Keller states that every part of the church should be outward facing, expecting the presence of nonbelievers and supporting laypeople in their ministry in the world (p. 24).

In my opinion Keller tends to overstate the case. Yes, the church has a missionary calling. But that does not mean that *every part* of the church should be outward facing. The church is called to be a witness of the truth and to urge outsiders to repentance and faith. But the church is also called to be a mother who nurtures her own children (think of Catechism teaching and diaconal care).² In other words, as much as the church is called to be hospitable and receive outsiders in her midst, the church is also a family of believers and it should not feel guilty if it reserves some "family time" for itself. Of course, we should not think of these two aspects as being in competition. Ideally, the task of nurturing the church's own members and the task of promoting the gospel among outsiders will complement each other.

I have similar reservations about Keller's claim that *every Christian* is expected to evangelize, follow up, nurture, and teach people the Word (p. 277). He refers to Michael Green's *Evangelism in the Early Church* to prove the point. I wish that Keller had taken note of John P. Dickson's recent study about mission-commitment in Paul's churches.³ Dickson has studied the New Testament evidence thoroughly and comes to the conclusion that there is a distinction between laypeople and office-bearers. While laypeople are expected to *promote* the gospel in word and deed, office-bearers are called to *proclaim* the gospel. With the Heidelberg Catechism we confess

that every believer is anointed to be a prophet (LD 12) but we also acknowledge that not everyone has the gift of teaching or instructing others in the Christian faith. Yet it is true that many of us are able to do more than we think. That is why training is important.

Despite my reservations I found this part of Keller's book instructive in many ways. I really appreciated the chapter on "Equipping people for missional living," especially the second half which has all kinds of excellent practical advice (p. 279-289).

Integrative Ministry

In Part 7, *Integrative Ministry*, Keller makes the point that the church has received a multi-faceted mandate from the Lord: Evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, etc. Ideally, the church should be balanced in fulfilling the various aspects of its mandate. Unfortunately, as Keller observes, every church tends to be naturally better at fulfilling some tasks and doing some kinds of ministry than others (p. 293).

Keller refers to Edmund Clowney as someone who presented a very helpful model for the integrative nature of the church's ministry (p. 294). Clowney identified three goals of church ministry: (1) worshipping God, (2) Christian nurture within the church, (3) witness to the world. Keller modifies Clowney's approach and presents a model with *four* ministry fronts (p. 293): 1. Connecting people to God through evangelism and worship, 2. Connecting people to one another through community and discipleship, 3. Connecting people to the city through mercy and justice, 4. Connecting people to culture through the integration of faith and work.

Tim Keller



Comparing Keller and Clowney, it seems to me that Keller puts much more emphasis on the outward facing ministry of the church than does Clowney. Personally, I feel more at home with Clowney in this regard. Nevertheless, the four chapters in which Keller describes the four ministry fronts are interesting and instructive. The reader will find plenty of good insights here.

Organization

The last part of the book is entitled *Movement Dynamics*. Keller explains that a church that wants to grow needs to combine the strengths of an *institution* and a *movement*. In his own words, “organizations should have both institutional characteristics and movement dynamics” (p. 338). You need institutional characteristics in order to promote stability and unity. You need movement dynamics in order to create room for creative ideas and personal initiative.

Keller observes that it is difficult to maintain the right balance. Some church-plants are so rigidly organized that there is no room for creative initiatives. Other church-plants are so disorganized that things go off the rails quickly. Ideally, a church plant will have the characteristics of an “organized organism” (p. 344), a movement that is well-organized yet allows for dynamic growth. Keller observes that churches tend to become more institutionalized over time. For that reason, he feels that there should be a bias for the “movement” side of a church plant. Otherwise the church plant will lose its momentum.

From a biblical perspective, there is much to appreciate in Keller’s approach. The Lord’s apostles planted churches that were well organized (with elders and deacons leading the local congregations) but they also left ample room for the use of spiritual gifts. In his letter to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul uses the image of a body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, that grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Eph 4:16). Indeed, an organized organism!

In general, I have great respect for Keller’s desire to see new churches develop in urban areas. At the same time, it seems to me that he writes off existing churches

SUSTAINED CANDIDACY EXAMINATION

Examined by Classis Ontario West of September 11, 2013 and declared eligible for call: Calvin Vanderlinde and Theo Wierenga.

CALL EXTENDED

Called by the Winnipeg-Redeemer CanRC for mission work in Manitoba, by the Barrhead, Alberta Canadian Reformed Church and by the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church at Guelph, Ontario:

Candidate Calvin Vanderlinde

Called by the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton, Ontario to serve as co-pastor:

Rev. D. Wynia

of Lincoln, ON.

Called by the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church of Fergus, Ontario and the Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Kerwood, Ontario:

Candidate Theo Wierenga

CHURCH NEWS

too quickly when he says: “The way to renew the existing churches of a city is by planting new ones” (p. 360). I do not deny that church plants and evangelism projects can have a healthy effect on the well-being of existing churches and even a church federation as a whole. The problem is that Keller advocates an approach to renewing existing churches that is not found in the Bible. In the New Testament we encounter several struggling churches but never does the Lord recommend starting a new church on the other side of town as a means to revive the existing church. The more appropriate method for church renewal appears to be faithful preaching of the gospel, solid faith instruction, adequate pastoral care, Christian discipline, followed by repentance and faith. As I said, I have great respect for people like Keller who plant *new churches* in cities. But I have no less respect for ministers and churches who persevere in *old churches*, trying to breathe new life in urban communities that have lost their vigour.

Another aspect of Keller’s vision that warrants further debate is his plea for cooperation with churches of different backgrounds. His opinion may be summarized as follows: Although it is important to be loyal to your own theological distinctives, at a local level it is more important to work together with other churches even though they may have different theological beliefs (p. 369). As a practical implication, Keller’s church has given money and resources to churches of other denominations that are planting churches in New York, including Pentecostal and Baptist churches. Keller defends this approach by saying that no church can be everything to the city. Every church

has its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, “the city as a whole needs all kinds of churches” (p. 369).

In addition to this, Keller pleads with sending churches to allow new church plants in urban areas to develop a character that may be somewhat different from the character of the sending church itself. The sending church should not expect the new church plant to be a clone of itself. Keller regularly warns against sectarianism and “tribalism” “You must be willing to care for the kingdom even more than for your tribe” (358).

To a certain extent I can appreciate Keller’s warning against sectarianism and his fear that new church plants can be suffocated because of rigid oversight by the sending church. At the same time, I fear that he himself runs the risk of sacrificing confessional identity for the sake of perceived contextual relevance. A similar comment can be made with respect to cooperation with other churches. It is one thing to recognize that the Lord also uses the ministry of other churches for his good purposes. It is quite another thing to conclude that therefore we might as well join forces with such churches.

Having come to the end of the book, I realize that something has been missing all along. As Keller put together his “theological vision” for church ministry in big cities, his own confessions and church order did not play a significant role in the process. *Contextualization* figures prominently in the book. *Confessional allegiance* is much lower on the list of priorities. The implicit message of the book seems to be: Of course there are limits in how far you can go, but generally speaking if you have to choose between contextual and confessional, you go with contextual. I can see that this approach allows the “city-wide movement” to gain momentum. In the long run, however, it can have detrimental results because the movement will lack a strong identity. To say the same thing in a different way, I’m afraid that Tim Keller is more pragmatic than he probably realizes.



Conclusion

In conclusion, Tim Keller’s *Center Church* is an impressive book. If you are looking for a manual on church planting, you may be disappointed because it is not a “how to” book. However, if you are looking for well-informed and stimulating reflections on doing ministry in the city, this is a good book to read. At the same time, it needs to be read with discretion. As I have tried to show, Keller’s theological vision covers many important areas but it has some significant flaws as well.

(Endnotes)

¹ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

² I am indebted to J.W. Maris for this insight. See J.W. Maris, *De missie van een moeder* ([Series Apeldoornse Studies, nr. 50] Apeldoorn: Theologische Universiteit, 2008).

³ John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities: The shape, extent and background of early Christian mission* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). A popular edition was published under the title: *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission: Promoting the Gospel with More than our Lips* (Zondervan, 2010).



Farewell to the Vanderheide Family



On May 5, 2013, Bethel Congregation in Toronto was able to once again enjoy a light supper at the church – this time to bid farewell to the Vanderheide family. After spending many years of faithful service on the PNG mission field, they have returned to Australia to take up their task there.

Following an enjoyable meal with many of the members and visitors who joined us, we were called to the sanctuary for the more formal part of the evening. Brother Phil DeBoer, as the consistory liaison on the Foreign Mission Board, welcomed everyone present and opened the evening with prayer and singing of Hymn 12:1 and 14. He thanked our Heavenly Father for blessing the work that Br. VanderHeide was able to do on the Mission Field, especially in the capacity as Principal at the RCBC.

This was followed by Br. H. Kampen reading God's Word, namely the passage of Romans 10:1-15. Br. Kampen read some letters of encouragement and well wishes from the congregations of Brampton, Fergus, and Orangeville.

It was at this time that Wayne and Cheronne were able to give us their presentation that gave us an overview of the work they had the opportunity to be part of during the past ten years. The theme of their presentation was "Great is Thy Faithfulness." They wanted to stress that our attention should be focused on the LORD and the work that we are able to do in his service. All glory belongs to him.

Following the presentation, Rev. denHollander, minister emeritus of our congregation, said a few words of

encouragement and farewell to Wayne and Cheronne. He reminded them that letting go of the work in PNG needs to be done in the proper perspective – in light of Psalm 90. We must always remember that the good times and the difficult times are the Lord's works.



As the evening was drawing to a close, Hilary Veenstra, on behalf of the Mission Board, presented the VanderHeides with an iPad (as well as one of her personal pieces of art work). John Smid, as Chairman of the Mission Board spoke a few last word of thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father and wished Wayne and Cheronne God's blessing as they seek to determine how they may continue to employ their talents in his service as they settle back into life in Australia. The evening was brought to an end with the singing of Hymn 81:1, 2, 3, and 7.





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Provoking Reflection on the Christian and Sports (Part 1)

Sport is a very powerful element in societies around the world. People are transformed emotionally by it, and the extremes of rage and ecstasy are not at all uncommon with sports. An image from several years ago that has stayed with me is the one of the rescued Chilean miners. When they were finally rescued from deep underground, one came out of the capsule and immediately fell to his knees and prayed. Moments later, that same miner was shown lying on a stretcher clutching the Bible in one hand and waving the banner of his favourite football club in the other, his face beaming with joy.

Purpose

This article is intended to provoke reflection on how we think about sports, both professional sports and school sports, since our attitude often trickles down. I would like to point out that I will be making some generalizations and it will be up to you to determine to what extent the generalization applies to you or not and whether it is a fair generalization. Also, the tone of this article may appear quite negative towards sports, but my intention is to help us think about an area of life that exerts a lot of influence on many of us and that requires pointing out some of the negatives. An article by John Jagersma and published in *Reformed Perspective* (July 2008) is a more positive article focused on school sports specifically. For additional context, I coach sports, and my older children are actively involved in school sports.

Every sport, starting from the youngest ages and the simplest levels, is structured around identifying the winner. The Super Bowl, Stanley Cup, World Series, World Cup, Olympics, etc. are the pinnacle of sports but local tournaments, zone or district championships, provincials, and nationals all precede these. The existence of this focus on winning is crucial to understanding the

comments that follow in this article. If we are honest, a primary goal of sports is to win. For instance, during a game, we hear, “What’s the score?” or after a game, people’s first question often is, “Did you win?” or, more subtly, “How did you do?” The closer one gets to the point of winning a championship, the greater the pressure will be to compromise values. We have recently been reminded of this with Lance Armstrong’s “confession.” This is seen most clearly or easily in individual sports since there the outcome can most easily be manipulated. Doping in sports has been widespread for years, and an athlete that tests positive and insists he/she took no drugs is hardly believed. Winning is the name of the game. I do recognize that for many people involved in sports, the enjoyment of the game is also of significance and that at younger ages character development is an important emphasis for many parents and coaches.

Questions

So let’s take a look at a number of questions to help analyze our thoughts/belief about sports. The format of this article is a series of questions followed by comments. It is worth noting at the outset that we often view questions as only having a right or wrong answer. This is true for some factual questions; however, many questions will have answers with more variation in them.

Why do sports matches produce such a powerful impact or effect on people?

In Mitch Albom’s book, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, he shares an anecdote about a college sports match. The home team fans were yelling, “We are number one, we are number one!” A person stood up and yelled back, “What’s wrong with being number two?”

I suspect some people will read this anecdote and think, if you ask the question, you obviously don't understand sports. Being number one is the goal. Others may think, good question, what is wrong with being number two? In fact, what is wrong with being in last place? Others will say they are just cheering. The bottom line is that there is nothing wrong with being number two. In the Olympics sometimes you see people come in second and they are ecstatically happy. Other times the second place Olympian seems disappointed. Why do those different responses happen? A reason might be that the happy person believes they did their best and that is what makes them glad. Being number two is simply a bonus. Possibly, they are happy because they did not expect to do so well. The one who is not happy may be unhappy because he felt he

did not do his best, or because he is a poor sportsman, or maybe because he bases his happiness on a win-lose model, where "if I am not the winner I must be the loser." That last kind of thinking comes from a mindset that constantly compares itself to others. As a result, being number one is all that matters. Loser means more than having scored fewer points than the winner; it is a judgement of his person, his value as a human being.

This way of thinking points to a fundamental danger of competition. Competition is based on the model of one winner and lots of losers. Can you compete without the thought and goal of beating the other team? How many teams have gone out and maintained the goal of simply doing their best without resorting to making winning their true goal? Society has tried to make competition "nicer"



by providing levels, like being the division or conference champions although you did not become overall champion. The very name “consolation rounds,” however, suggests a significant level of grief associated with losing. What do you do when you lose the consolation round? Are you then inconsolable? At some point, some team is coming in dead last and people simply don’t have much in the way of words of encouragement for them. They feel a kind of embarrassment for them. The feeling of “you lost and that is not good” is what comes through no matter how careful or kind people are. Being second or third last is no great glory either, but how often don’t we take comfort, albeit pretty hollow comfort, in the fact that at least we weren’t dead last.

Can a coach, player, parent, or fan uphold multiple goals such as glorifying God, winning, getting fit, giving equal weight, all at the same time? (I know I appear to be making the assumption that winning cannot be glorifying God. Feel free to explore that question on your own. I do not make that assumption.)

We typically number our goals and prioritize them. We live in a culture that rewards winners and pays little attention to losers. When we are not yet competitive, it is theoretically possible to hold multiple goals simultaneously, but that possibility changes very quickly as the stakes rise, even at the level of young children. We have probably all heard stories of parents behaving badly at their children’s games or of very competitive preschool or primary school aged children.

Generally speaking high school sports, as I have experienced them as a player (years ago!) and currently as a spectator, have been very positive; nonetheless, the central place of winning comes up again and again. I am thinking of the careful point-counting by both players and spectators, criticism of the referee, rolled eyes, finger-pointing, medal ceremonies, etc. Another example is how the various school teams report how they did on their weekend play days or tournaments. If the team won a majority of the games played, they announce something like, “We played four games and won all of them,” or “We won three of the four games.” If they lost the majority of games they report, “We played and had fun”

(typically said with an apologetic or awkward smile and hesitation). Without reading too deeply into comments, there indisputably appears to be some level of shame at reporting that your team lost more games than they won. What does that suggest as being the goal of the team?

I doubt that God is glorified by our winning just as I doubt that he is shamed by our losing. He is glorified by us putting him first, and I think that the way we do that in sport is to remove winning as the goal and to make doing our very best in accordance with the greatest commandment (Matt 22) as the goal. I believe that it is impossible to hold the goals of winning and glorifying God equally; and going further, I think that many of us need to intentionally create a large distance between them to ensure that winning does not overtake the only goal worth holding. I am prepared to go further yet, and to say that winning may not be your goal. Even allowing talk of winning and losing is in my opinion harmful to the goal of glorifying God by doing your best. Hard words, but bear with me if you will.

Charles Spurgeon in his devotion for January 7 (*Morning by Morning*) talks about what it means to live for Christ (Phil 1:21). That devotion is well worth reading in connection with this point.

What would be lost from participating in sports if winning was removed as a goal?

Many fans would say that the intensity of the game would be lost. The desire to win, they argue, drives players beyond their limits and results in fantastic memorable moments from sport. The desire to win, however, also leads to cheating, dirty play, theatrics, pushing the limits, and the intentions of the rules. If doing our absolute best in accordance with the greatest commandment were our goal, I think the intensity of the game would be increased and the game more enjoyable to watch and to play.

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@echs.ca





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Canticle

Laodicea

Revelation 3:14-22

1. These are the words of him who speaks the truth,
2. "I coun- sel you to buy from me fine gold
3. "To him who o - ver - comes, I give the right

the faith - ful wit - ness and e - ter - nal A - men.
and clothes to cov - er up your shame - ful nude - ness.
to sit with me up - on my throne, ex - alt - ed.

"I am the ru - ler of the whole cre - a - tion,
I give you salve to heal you of your blind - ness.
I was vic - to - rious and in heav - en seat - ed

the Sov - ereign Lord of heav - en and the earth:
Re - pent, re - turn to me and be con - soled.
next to my Fa - ther and his glo - rious might.

Text: Revelation 3:14-22; vers. George Ph. van Popta, © 2013
Tune: Geneva, 1551; Arrangement Chris J. Nobels © 2013

GENEVAN 51

I know your deeds, they are luke - warm to me.
 Those whom I love I warn and dis - ci - pline.
 Have you an ear? Then lis - ten to the word

I spit you from my mouth - I am dis - gus - ted.
 I stand out - side your door and I am knock - ing.
 voiced by the Spir - it to the Chris - tian church - es:

You say, 'I'm rich!' Your life is van - i - ty.
 Un - lock the gate and I will en - ter in!
 'En - sure you hear the vows of Christ, your Lord.

You boast and brag but you are poor and na - ked.
 I will sit down and join with you in eat - ing.
 His gos - pel prom - ise stands through - out the a - ges.'"

Press Release of the Classis Contracta of the Canadian Reformed Churches of Classis Pacific West, September 10, 2013 at Surrey (Maranatha), BC at 8:00 p.m.

Elder Will Faber opens the meeting on behalf of the convening church at Maranatha Surrey. He reads 2 Thessalonians 3, and after the singing of Psalm 67, he leads in prayer, and speaks some words of welcome, including a brief history of the mission work over the past forty-three years until the present day.

The credentials confirm that those present have been duly appointed. The church at Cloverdale is represented by Elder Pete Schouten and Pastor Theo Lodder; the Maranatha Church at Surrey is represented by Elder Will Faber and Elder Albert van der Heide; and the church at Willoughby Heights is represented by Elder Jack Aikema and Pastor Anthon Souman. This being so, brother Faber declares the meeting of this classis contracta constituted.

Since Rev. Lodder was chairman of the last classis, the meeting appoints Rev. Souman as chairman. Rev. Lodder is appointed as clerk, since someone notices his computer. The proposed agenda is adopted.

A letter is received from the Maranatha church, requesting the approval of the release of Rev. Julius VanSpronsen and Rev. Kenneth Wieske from the church at Maranatha-Surrey. The Maranatha church confirms that all the following documents are in order: the letters of call to the respective missionaries from the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church back in April; the letters of acceptance from both missionaries; a letter from Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church, agreeing to the date and time of assumption of responsibility for both missionaries and their families at 0001 hours PST, September 1, 2013, and indicating that their installation will take place on September 29, 2013 at 2:30 p.m. at Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church; certificates of release and ecclesiastical attestations of doctrine and conduct from Maranatha with the declaration that the Rev. Julius M. VanSpronsen and the Rev. Kenneth E. Wieske will be (in retrospect, have been) honourably released as of September

1, 2013. Classis Pacific West therewith approves the release of these brothers from their call to the Maranatha Church, grants them honourable release from their duties in Classis Pacific West as of that date, and provides them each with a classical certificate of release.

The chairman speaks words of gratitude for the work that the Lord has allowed the Maranatha church to do over the years in the work of mission. Although there is some sadness about the devolvement of the Maranatha church from this work, there is also thanksgiving that the work in Brazil may continue under the auspices of the Aldergrove church. There is also recognition that there are numerous opportunities for the Maranatha church to continue to bear witness to God's name, especially here in the city of Surrey and in Greater Vancouver.

Elder Albert van der Heide of the Maranatha church takes the opportunity to reminisce about the early history of the mission work, when it was taken up by the churches at New Westminster and Aldergrove (which later became Cloverdale). He also shares some interesting facts about the early history of Mission Aid, citing a fascinating document entitled "Cows for Korea," which outlines the early beginnings of what later became Mission Aid Brazil, undertaken by the church at Cloverdale. Elder Pete Schouten of Cloverdale also mentions that the Church at New Westminster (as Maranatha was called, and where it was located, at the time) supported the work of the Dutch churches for mission work in China prior to supporting the mission work in Papua New Guinea (via Toronto), and later Brazil.

It is noted that the installation and welcome evening for the missionaries will take place at Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church on the Lord's Day of September 29, 2013, Lord willing.

The chairman concludes with appreciation that censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order is not necessary. The Acts are adopted and a press release is approved. Rev. Souman leads in prayer and declares the meeting closed.

*For classis contracta,
Theo Lodder
Clerk, this lovely summer evening*

**Press Release of Classis Niagara
September 11, 2013
Held in the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed
Church of Tintern**

At the appointed time a delegate from the consistory of the convening church (Tintern) opened the meeting in a fitting Christian manner. The credentials were examined and found to be in good order, with one anomaly pledged to be corrected. Classis was constituted, the executive was seated, and the agenda was adopted.

In agreement with the Church Order, the churches were asked whether the ministry of the office bearers was being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies were being honoured, and whether assistance was required in any matter of church government. All churches answered satisfactorily. One church requested assistance in matters of discipline, which was granted. The church of Dunnville requested that classical pulpit supply be allowed for Blue Bell while Dunnville continues to consider what is the right way forward for the spiritual wellbeing of the members living in Blue Bell. This request was granted.

Upon request of the church of Dunnville, Classis decided that correspondence relating to Classis may now freely include modern technology. The Regulations of Classis will be amended accordingly.

A letter was received from the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the RCUS, indicating regret that they could not attend our meeting and inviting us to send a delegate

to their next classis. Classis sees merit in having a delegate represent Classis Niagara at the next RCUS classis, and makes an appointment accordingly.

Under Reports it was noted that no inspection of classis archives has occurred. The books of the classis treasurer have been audited and found to be in good order. A new rate is set for the churches' assessment to cover classis expenses for the coming year. In relation to the Fund for Needy Churches, it's reported that no church has requested assistance.

Appointed as convening church for next classis is Attercliffe, on December 11 (with March 19 as alternative date). Appointments were made for church visitors and examination organizers. To Regional Synod the following were delegated to attend: Brs. C. Bouwman, D. Wynia (alt: P. Holtvlüwer and J. vanWoudenberg); Brs. R. Hummel, K. Jager (alt: K. Bergsma and J. Hulleman). Outgoing classis treasurer, Br. D. vanAmerongen Sr, was reappointed for the coming year. Br. P. Holtvlüwer was delegated to attend the next URC classis.

After opportunity was given for Question Period, the chairman expressed that in his opinion the delegates had behaved in such a way that no censure was required. This was noted with gratitude.

The Acts of Classis were read and adopted, as was the Press Release.

Rev. Holtvlüwer led the assembly in concluding devotions and prayer, and closed the meeting.

*For Classis,
C Bouwman, vice chairman*

