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What's Inside

In a time that may be characterized by anguish and longing, Dr. Ted Van Raalte writes that Pentecost encourages believers with words of hope. We thank Dr. Van Raalte for preparing a guest editorial for us. Rev. Julius Van Spronsen has also written a Pentecost meditation for Treasures, New & Old.

Rev. Carl Van Dam reports on how current social distancing measures has affected worship services and ecclesiastical assemblies in his Church News Review column.

This issue spends a number of pages dedicated to an interaction between Dr. Ted Van Raalte and Dr. Bill DeJong on children, the church, public profession of faith, and the Lord's Supper. Issue 11 also has an article for Further Discussion and a press release.

Laura Veenendaal

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Sunday Alive:

The Spirit of Pentecost

Has this novel coronavirus made Sunday one of the worst days of your week? Sheltering in place, locked down, and lonely, Sunday has become the day that underlines our need for God and his people by the *absence* of normal worship.

Does the Holy Spirit do his work to the same degree without our corporate worship? Certainly he can, but I doubt that he normally does. Just ask persecuted Christians. Today true believers rightly sing Psalm 42 (*Book of Praise*),

As a deer will thirst in anguish
for refreshing water brooks,
so for you, O God, I languish,
so my soul for comfort looks
to the living God above.
How I thirst for his great love!
When shall I appear before him
and within his courts adore him?

But if that Psalm allows us to express our sorrow and longing, it also gives us words of hope, “Put your hope in God, believing/ he will still your refuge be/ I again shall see his face/ and extol him for his grace/ He will show his help and favour/ for he is my God and Saviour.” If the Sons of Korah could express such hope long ago, how much more we today! Thus, I write to encourage all Christians with a message about Pentecost – the coming of the Holy Spirit.

In Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that he loves Sundays, and that he has done so since the beginning of the world.

Further, I am certain that the Holy Spirit does not agree that online worship should become the “new normal.” No, the corporate worship of the church cannot be given up so easily. Sundays, corporate worship, and the Holy Spirit’s work are intricately tied together, and at this time of Pentecost I want to show this from Scripture for the glory of the Spirit of God and the encouragement of the church.

The Spirit on the first great Sunday

The Holy Spirit did not begin his work at Pentecost. We first read about the Holy Spirit in Genesis 1:2, “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” This statement indicates his readiness to impart order to the initial “earth” that was “formless and empty.” Over the next six days, the Spirit of God would make the earth suitable for human life, would give life, and then would care for the world that God was making. On the sixth day, he would perform his crowning work, breathing into man’s nostrils, as himself the very breath of life, to raise our dust to its feet (Gen 2:7).

When did this work of the Spirit begin? On the very first day of the world! What day was that? Count backwards from the seventh-day rest (Saturday) that God took when his creating

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work was completed and you will arrive at a Sunday as the first day of the world. Yes, indeed, the world began to be on a Sunday! What a blessed day is that first day of the week!

When Psalm 33:6 states that "by the Word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth," it is describing the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit, with the Son of God as his "Word" and the Spirit as the "breath of his mouth." The Spirit, then, was putting into effect the speaking of God. He was and is the creative person of the Trinity who gives life to the world, along with the order and complexity that are necessary for life to be. The Spirit did not give life for it to be simplified like it is now, with such a reduction of interactions and relationships. He made it orderly and complex, bursting with life in leaf, blade, flower, hatching eggs, newborn bunnies, and humans in God's image who would know their Creator and find their fullest life in worshipping him. He made us to know ourselves in relation to others – first to our God, then to other people.

After the fall into sin, when God told the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and hers," he was promising that his Holy Spirit would bring Eve and her seed back to him. In the times of the old covenant, the Spirit caused rebirth in the hearts of God's elect, gave the written Word, and equipped the prophets, priests, and kings. Far from being inactive, he was the power of God that renewed the earth (Ps 104:30) and renewed sinners' hearts (Ps 51:11; Isa 63:11), though his regenerating work was primarily among the Jews.

The Spirit on the second great Sunday

While the centre of the earth is probably red-hot, the centre of the *world* was white-hot, when our beloved Lord Jesus willingly bore the white-hot wrath of God against our sins. The cross is the centre of the world in so many ways. By it the Triune God set straight the out-of-kilter and upside-down world. He restored the lost Paradise, legally and fully bringing us back into his own presence.

To demonstrate the success of his Messiah Jesus, God raised him from the dead. How? By the Holy Spirit. "Just as Christ was raised from the dead *by the glory of the Father*, we too might live a new life" (Rom 6:4). Compare this text, if you like, to 1 Corinthians 6:14, 2 Corinthians 13:4, and Ephesians 1:19 to consider the suggestion that this glorious "power" of the Father refers especially to the Holy Spirit. Or, look at Ezekiel 33 and Revelation 11:11 to see how the Spirit repeats Genesis 2:7, putting the breath of life into dead bodies and dry bones to resurrect them. So too with his Messiah, our Lord. At the centre of the world the Holy Spirit gave the immortal, resurrected, paradisaical life to the righteous Son of Man.

When? When did the Spirit accomplish this glorious work? "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark ..." (John 20:1). Every Sunday has become for us a celebration of the resurrection of our Lord. We assemble before his glorious majesty.

The Spirit on the third great Sunday

And so, we come to Pentecost, the next magnificent work of the Spirit. He who raised the Head of the church then began to share the power and gifts of the Head with the body. "When the day of Pentecost was being fully accomplished, they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1). The Holy Spirit made the glory of Christ visible to the eye and the wonders of God audible to the ear, through the fiery tongues, the roaring wind, and the foreign languages. The Spirit was righting the upside-down and out-of-kilter world with the truth of the gospel, equipping the church to spread the message to all nations.

What does it mean that the day of Pentecost was being fulfilled? This was the Old Testament feast of weeks, seven weeks after the Passover (when Jesus died and was raised as the firstfruits). Pentecost was a feast of harvest. It reached the climax of its meaning when the Spirit of the risen Christ came upon the gathered church fifty days after Passover, forty days after Jesus had ascended into heaven.

Once again, on what day of the week did Pentecost occur? You guessed it, a Sunday! Each Sunday is therefore a celebration of the Father beginning the creation, the Son rising from the dead, and the Spirit being given to bring in the nations. But, as we have seen, the Spirit of God was directly involved in each of these moments.

The Spirit at the end of the world

"And we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet" (1 Cor 15:52). Changed to what? Changed into people who are immortal, who have an imperishable, glorious, powerful, *spiritual* body (1 Cor 15:42-44). A spiritual body is a body filled with and directed by the Holy Spirit. He is given by our Lord Jesus, the last Adam, who "became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45).

Sometimes I muse how wonderful it would be if our Lord Jesus would also return on the first day of the week. While we are worshipping! Living in that moment of transformation will involve such a sudden transition, by the power of the Spirit. It will be like the sudden conversion of a sinner to Christ, magnified many times in glory.

O Day of Rest and Gladness

O Day of rest and gladness, O day of joy and light,
O balm of care and sadness, most beautiful, most bright;
On thee the high and lowly, through ages joined in tune,
Sing, Holy, Holy, Holy, to the great God Triune.

On thee, at the creation, the light first had its birth;
On thee, for our salvation, Christ rose from depths of earth;
On thee our Lord victorious the Spirit sent from heaven;
And thus on thee, most glorious, a triple light was given.

Today on weary nations the heavenly manna falls;
To holy convocations the silver trumpet calls,
Where gospel light is glowing with pure and radiant beams,
And living water flowing with soul-refreshing streams.

New graces ever gaining from this our day of rest,
We reach the rest remaining to spirits of the blest.
To Holy Ghost be praises, to Father, and to Son;
The Church her voice upraises to Thee, blest Three in One.


by Christopher Wordsworth, 1862
Psalter Hymnal 321; Trinity Psalter Hymnal 153

The Spirit in the church today

The Spirit of Christ, our Head, does not just make our individual bodies the temple of the Lord, but also the whole body of the church. Our unity in the Spirit is not something ephemeral. It is not merely an idea. It is a bodily reality. The church is one body, with all the members rejoicing and weeping together, helping each other, and using their gifts for the benefit and well-being of the other members, as it says in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. With the Spirit living in us and among us, we also are those who should not be neglecting to meet together, as it says in Hebrews 10:25.

Sunday alive! The Spirit of Pentecost

The Lord knows that our current moment is confusing and difficult for us. He gave his Spirit to comfort us at this time. But he also has a task for us: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture says, from within him will flow rivers of living water," that is, the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-9). Each Sunday is supposed to be a day of spiritual renewal in the midst of the body of Christ. As God's dwelling with us is reinforced in each worship service, we become more and more a spiritual people, people who are sources of life in this broken world. The rivers that flow out of us are like the rivers of Paradise, having a source hidden from the world, bubbling up afresh constantly, leading outwards to a world in need of a better order.

May our Father's gift of the Holy Spirit renew your life at this time also. I hope you anticipate a great outpouring of the Spirit when we may join together again in the normal patterns of worship. When we do, soak in the Gift who is the Giver. Find satisfaction in him. Let your Sunday be the day of life that God designed it to be from the beginning. He has made the Sunday even more life-giving through resurrection and Pentecost. It is the day of life. when God works (Gen 1), when the Lord Jesus works (Rev 1), when the Spirit works (Acts 2). The Spirit, who is life, has made Sunday alive. Let us be people of this thrice-blessed day, as the hymn, "O Day of Rest and Gladness," has it rightly. In stanza two this song includes Pentecost when it speaks of Sunday as the day that our victorious Lord sent his Spirit from heaven: "On thee [Sunday] at the creation, the light first had its birth/ On thee for our salvation, Christ rose from depths of earth/ On thee our Lord victorious, the Spirit sent from heaven/ And thus on thee, most glorious, a triple light was given." 

Our Divine Helper

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever." (John 14:16)


When the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, went up into heaven to prepare a place for everyone who believes in him, he did not leave his sheep on their own. Jesus announced his plan to his disciples before he died. He said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever."

The word Jesus uses for "asking" has the sense of letting the Father know that the agreed upon time had come for the next step of the divine plan of redemption. Jesus announced that when he stood in his glorified body before his Father in heaven and made his request, then his Father would give *"another Helper"* who would continue the work that Jesus had begun. The disciples could be sure that Christ Jesus is victorious because the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, and Peter recognized the fulfilment of Jesus' promises in his Pentecost sermon (cf. Acts 2:33).

The apostle John is the only New Testament writer to use the unique proper noun "Helper" (in Greek: *paraklete*) to refer to the Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The word "Helper" reveals to us that the Holy Spirit is working in our favour before the Father as an advocate through Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 8:26-27; 1 John 2:1). As our Helper, the Holy Spirit gives continual assistance to the church by comforting and counselling them. The Helper *comforts* us in the difficulties of life by pointing us to the victory of Jesus Christ, and *counsels* us in temptations by writing God's law on our hearts so that we want to live in thankfulness before God (cf. Jer 31:33).

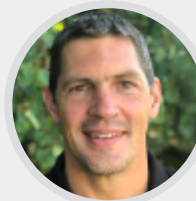
The work of Jesus Christ before Pentecost was *substitutionary* work that was done *for* us, but the work of pouring out his Spirit on Pentecost is *transforming* work that is visible *in* us. The signs accompanying Jesus's birth taught people to go to him for their salvation, but the signs accompanying the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost day were manifest right in the

bodies of those who received the Spirit. God wants us to enjoy the peace and life that Jesus Christ has obtained for us, and so he dwells within us to help us! He helps us fight against the desires of our sinful nature so that we may remain pure and holy temples of the Holy Spirit. When you are suffering, God knows your struggles from within. He hears your thoughts. He works through his Word to soften your hearts and teach you to trust in him. He helps you to love Jesus Christ and keep his commandments (John 14:15, 21).

As Jesus comforted his disciples, he also comforts us. After taking his seat on the throne in heaven, he has come to us again by his Spirit and he is with us forever. As we keep in step with the Spirit, who guides us through God's Word, we may live with wisdom and thanksgiving in all the trials and joys of this life. We have a divine Helper who transforms our hearts. Praise God for the gift of the Holy Spirit. 

For further study

1. How do Peter's words in Acts 2:29-36 compare with Jesus's words in John 14:15-24?
2. What does Jesus's request to the Father reveal about God's plan?
3. Why did Jesus call the Holy Spirit "another" Helper?
4. How is Christ's work different from the Holy Spirit's work?
5. What does it mean for you that God dwells within you?



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Should We Separate Profession of Faith from Full Membership Vows?

At the tail end of 2019, I received my copy of *Children and the Church: Do Not Hinder Them*, edited by Dr. William den Hollander and Dr. Gerhard H. Visscher. The professors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, including me, as well as some pastors in the churches, are the authors. Most of the essays in the book stem from CRTS's 2019 conference on this topic. Members of the churches can have utmost confidence that this book will provide a true explanation of what God says in his Word about believers' children belonging to him and needing to receive the sign of this in baptism. I highly recommend the book. Truly!

I give my recommendation with but one hesitation. In my view, further discussion needs to occur regarding one of the essays in the book, entitled, "Growing Up into Christ: Renewing the Pathway to Maturity in the Church," written by Dr. Bill DeJong (45-71). His essay closes with a proposal for the "renewal" mentioned in his title, which is to admit children to the Lord's Supper at the age of ten. He brought forward this proposal at the 2019 CRTS conference and received feedback there. Subsequently, Dr. Cornelis Van Dam contributed a chapter to the book, called "Children, Passover, and Lord's Supper," in which he counters arguments for admitting children to the Lord's Supper (73-102; see esp. 92-6). Now that the book is

published, I would like to continue the discussion, so that if DeJong's proposal is to be adopted (I hope not), this will only happen after a fuller debate.

The proposal: to separate profession from full membership

It is not immediately clear that DeJong's proposal is contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions, but I am concerned that if his proposal were put into practice it would tend toward the breakdown of our Reformed identity as churches. Basically, he proposes that "baptized youth who have grown up in the church should be admitted to the Lord's table in Reformed churches at a much younger age than they presently are (i.e., age 17 to 19) *without simultaneously being assigned all the responsibilities of church membership*" (61, italics added). DeJong suggests that the age of ten would be appropriate for admittance to the Lord's Supper. However, "Membership vows should not be affirmed until the age of 18, at which point an individual can finally assume all the responsibilities of church membership" (68). In order to get children to the table earlier, he proposes a separation of one's profession of faith (around age ten, before the consistory only) from one's undertaking of full membership vows (not prior to age eighteen, before all the church). This is a novel approach,

to say the least. It fits with another regrettable approach that he and others are taking to admission to the Lord's Supper, namely, to lower the bar for admission.

Background to the proposal

As background to the proposal, DeJong writes about the delay of adulthood among adolescents and considers the impact this may be having on the church. He begins by interacting with a number of sociological studies about adolescence. These studies suggest that adolescents in the West reach adulthood at a much later age than in past centuries, while having a very vague idea about what they believe (their beliefs may be described as "moral therapeutic deism" and a "universal gnostic religious ethic" [pp. 52-3]). He next correlates these studies with an unusual approach to the Old Testament, wherein he envisions a development of the nation of Israel from its priestly stage to its kingly stage and then its prophetic stage. He concludes, "The progression from priest to king to prophet approximates some of the phases in developmental psychology" (p. 57). I do not think that sustained analysis can support these correlations; the whole exercise is rather associative and vague and its connections to the proposal itself are unclear.

The fundamental concern

The most foundational concern that I have with the proposal is its casual approach to the question of our children's biblical knowledge. DeJong states – but never argues the point – that "access to the Lord's table is provided, in God's gracious economy, not on the basis of theological, developmental, or cerebral proficiency, but simply on the basis of faith" (67). If this is true, his statement proves too much, for it would support admission to the table at the age of three or four, just as well as ten.¹ But he limits the application to ten-year-old children (approximately) in the next sentence: "To deny young adolescents access to the Lord's table on the grounds that their faith is inadequate or superficial is to convey a message that is as demoralizing as it is *unbiblical*" (67, italics added).

"Unbiblical," charges DeJong. This is serious. But he can only succeed in this claim by falsely separating the "trust" of faith from its "knowledge," indeed, divorcing the two. First, he argues that admission is only on the basis of faith, not "theological

proficiency." Then he argues that if we say such adolescent faith (stripped of a "knowledge" requirement) is "inadequate or superficial," we convey an *unbiblical* message. The truth is rather different, namely, that DeJong conveys an unbiblical message by rending the trust and knowledge that belong to true faith.

Lord's Day 7 on true faith

Reflecting Scripture, we rightly confess in Lord's Day 7, "True faith is a sure *knowledge* whereby I *accept as true* all that God has revealed to us in his Word. At the same time it is a firm confidence...." Notice that we don't confess that true faith is a "known surety," but a "sure knowledge." The defining noun is knowledge; in short "true faith is a ... *knowledge*," and it is the kind that is certain, and at the same time it has trust, for it is also a "firm confidence." Let us not separate what God has put together. We can and should distinguish knowledge and trust, but not separate them, and definitely not evacuate knowledge from faith. I am actually concerned that by defining faith without including knowledge, we drift towards the very view that DeJong says is true of the wider culture – moral therapeutic deism.

Confirmation under another name?

My concern first arose when I realized that DeJong's proposal was missing an account of catechesis. How can a Reformed pastor speak about admission to the Lord's Supper without addressing the question of the training that the youth must undergo prior to admission? This is practically unconscionable when one considers the historical Reformed understanding of the sequence from baptism to catechesis, then to profession, and then admission to the table. What DeJong is proposing is a move backwards, closer to the pre-Reformation and current Roman Catholic practice of "confirmation."

DeJong is familiar with the practice of confirmation (61-3) and knows that the Reformed put in place of it the public profession of faith (61). He even once mentions Calvin's view that "youth must first be catechized" (63), but at the end of the essay, as we have seen, he makes the false dilemma between the knowledge and trust of faith, then makes admission to the Lord's Supper dependent only on "faith," not on knowledge. He provides absolutely no account of when, how, or how much catechesis must occur. This is highly unfortunate,

¹Biblical reasons for not admitting children to the Lord's Supper were recently explained by Dr. Van Dam in this magazine. See Cornelis Van Dam, "Who Attends the Lord's Supper: *The Central Issue*," in four parts in *Clarion* 69:1 to 69:4 (four issues between Jan 10, 2020 and Feb 1, 2020).

especially when one considers the history of catechesis in our own tradition.

Reformed sequence of baptism, catechesis, profession

In the Palatinate church order, which came into place alongside our own Heidelberg Catechism in the year 1563, the catechism was printed *after* the Form for Baptism and *before* the Form for the Public Profession of Faith. In other words, the youth were to know the Heidelberg Catechism prior to their profession of faith, and thus prior to admission to the Lord's Supper. They had to memorize it and understand it. In a rare case, perhaps a child of ten could do that.

If, on DeJong's model, catechesis is to precede admission to the table, he will have to start his catechumens very young, perhaps at the age of five. If instead he would have catechesis follow profession of faith, we are back to Roman Catholic "confirmation." Which will it be?

In 1563, the preface to the Heidelberg Catechism faced this question head on. It stated, "This institution of catechism, which has its origin in the command of God himself, was maintained in the Christian church until the horrible Satan, through the Antichrist – the pope – abolished it ... and replaced it by his greasing and slap in the face and other abominations, which he called confirmation."²

Readers may wonder what this "greasing and slap in the face" have to do with confirmation. Admittedly, this language is sixteenth-century Protestant sarcasm. The "greasing" refers to the special anointing oil that was used when the bishop – this privilege was his alone – made the sign of the cross on the child's forehead at confirmation. The "slap in the face" (which could also be translated "ear-boxing") may refer to the laying on of hands, which the church had long associated with confirmation. Confirmation was supposed to provide an increase of the Holy Spirit. Reformers such as Melancthon, Bucer, and Calvin scorned these practices and argued that the early church had catechized instead.⁴

Early church compared to today

The practices of the early church were described by Hippolytus in the third century. The teaching of the catechumens was of prime importance, and he stated that they were to be instructed for three years, though more earnest students might shorten the time.

If we consider that since Hippolytus's time a great many more errors and heresies have arisen; if we consider that the Reformation brought about a wonderful increase in understanding salvation; and if we also consider that the state of education in the West is more specialized and, in many ways, more advanced than ever before, it would make sense that catechesis would *lengthen* compared to the early church, not shorten. Water has gone under the bridge doctrinally and historically; we cannot undo that but must learn from it.

Of course, one never stops learning, so when has the knowledge level for admission to the Lord's table been reached? The answer among us has been clear for a long time: when the *Reformed creeds* have been taught to our youth and new converts. Such teaching is not meant to make the faith complicated but precisely to protect the simplicity of the gospel. It equips our youth to recognize the subtlety of opposition in their own hearts and in so many sects around us.

We can now appreciate that the Reformed practice of catechizing, professing faith, and then being admitted to the Lord's Supper came about as a return to the practices of the early church and a correction to medieval-era confirmation and the neglect of catechizing. This is why the usual age for profession of faith seems to have been around fifteen years old.⁵

"Full membership" vows?

What about the separation of profession of faith from full membership vows that DeJong proposes? I find the term "full membership vows" misleading. It diminishes the covenant reality that the children and adolescents already enjoy. They are members already, fully; we call them "non-communicant members" (based on 1 Corinthians 7:14; Heidelberg Catechism,

²For a translation of this preface, see "Second Revised Draft Translation of the Heidelberg Catechism," submitted to the Canadian Reformed Churches in September 1976 by the Committee on the Translation of the Heidelberg Catechism.

³The boxing of the ears could also refer to a soft blow to the child's head, meant to symbolize the casting out of demons, but this, as I understand, was more likely to occur at baptism than confirmation.

⁴In response to the reformers, the Roman Catholic Council of Trent anathematized those who said that confirmation was new, and that in the early church it had been nothing more than a kind of catechism and profession.

⁵See Van Dam, "Who Attends the Lord's Supper," *Clarion* 69:4 (Feb 21, 2020), 100; and his essay in *Do Not Hinder Them*, 92–6.

Q/A 74). We even have a liturgical form for their excommunication, showing that they are members.

The term “full membership vows” unfortunately also tilts the characterization of church membership in the direction of voluntarism, as though the initiative to become full members were with us. And, given that this event is envisioned by DeJong to be the public vow, it will come to be regarded as weightier than the profession of faith before the consistory. This would be backwards – admission to the Lord’s Supper actually is the more wonderful thing! That’s why we have a liturgical form for the *public* profession of faith, wherein we thank God that “he instills in his children the desire publicly to profess their faith in him *in the presence of his holy church, in order that they may receive admission to the holy supper.*”

Here’s how the Reformed churches understood this: In the public profession of faith, we who were baptized as infants make the same baptism vows that those who come to faith as adults make at the time of their baptism.⁶ But, whereas adults thereby become members, baptized children already are members. God established their place in his covenant before they understood this.

Further, even prior to the public profession of faith the child is “called and obliged to a new obedience,” as we say in the Form for the Baptism of Infants. Thus, already prior to their profession of faith a child should participate in the privilege of having catechism instruction, in other activities, and in giving his or her firstfruits. Other privileges of communicant membership – admission to the Lord’s Supper, voting, eligibility for office (if male), and baptism of one’s children – are reserved for communicant members. Why? Precisely because all of these latter privileges require a mature knowledge and tested commitment in order to exercise their duties (see, e.g., 1 Cor 11:26–29).

Let’s not diminish the sacraments


Since each celebration of the Lord’s Supper functions as a confirmation of God’s covenant which was sealed in baptism, both sacraments represent the fulness of the promises of the Triune God. If instruction about the meaning of our baptism is stunted, we diminish its value. If the bar for admission to the table is lowered, we diminish its value. These are holy things, and the church’s solemn duty is to uphold the holiness of the things of God.

Sifting unto maturity

Finally, there is a sifting of the heart that occurs during adolescence. In my view – and in the view of society at large – adult commitment is not required of those who have not yet emerged from adolescence. Only after that sifting and testing process has been navigated and, by the grace of God, the fruits of faith in word and deed are evident at the end of it, do we proceed to ask our youth to profess their faith publicly and join the mature believers at the Lord’s table. We want to see that their faith-and-life response is well established. I think this is the right procedure and I see this pattern assumed in Scripture (see 1 Cor 13:11).

One of the reasons DeJong gives for earlier admission to the Lord’s Supper is to give parents and teachers help in disciplining the children of the church. Presumably the parents can point to participation in the Lord’s Supper, with its enormous benefits and serious obligations, to lend weight to their admonitions to their adolescents. The problem with this is that the children can very well respond that the parents and teachers are holding them to standards of which they know next to nothing, since they have yet to be instructed in them.

Conclusion

Although I appreciate some thinking “outside the box,” I hope that DeJong’s proposal will not be adopted. It seems to me that it represents a step backwards, back towards Roman Catholic practices and away from the maturity of faith that we expect among ourselves as people of the book of God. I pray that our love for our Reformed identity would not diminish but grow. Let us continue steadfastly, “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:28; cf. Eph 4:13; Heb 5:14). 

⁶See my own essay in the book, *Do Not Hinder Them*, 155.



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Were the Early Reformers Reformed?

A Response to Ted VanRaalte

When I presented, and then published, some thoughts about child development and ways in which Reformed churches in particular might better minister to adolescents in the church, I was hoping and praying it would generate discussion. I'm therefore deeply gratified that my colleague Ted Van Raalte found my contribution to *Children and the Church: "Do Not Hinder Them"* (Hamilton: Lucerna, 2019) worthy of engagement, and I want to thank him at the outset for his substantial interaction.

Dr. Van Raalte is chiefly concerned with my recommendation that we, in the Canadian Reformed Churches at least, consider admitting adolescents to the Lord's table at a younger age than we typically do (i.e., between seventeen and twenty). Van Raalte does not mince words in alleging that my proposal would tend towards "the breakdown of our Reformed identity as churches" and represent a return, in fact, to "Roman Catholic practices." Van Raalte faults my proposal for, among other things, a mistaken notion of faith and an inadequate account of catechesis. In what follows, I will engage his critique.

A child of ten

Regrettably, Dr. Van Raalte misrepresents my position by stating that I recommend that youth should be admitted to the Lord's table at the age of ten.¹ My proposal is actually far more modest (and innocuous!) – namely, that baptized youth who've grown

up in the church should be admitted "at a much younger age than they presently are" (i.e., younger than seventeen). Had he noticed this key formulation in my proposal, I suspect his alarm would have diminished considerably.²

I do reference the age of ten a few times in my paper, and quite deliberately, because it is the only age John Calvin mentions in this connection. "A child of ten," Calvin wrote, "would present himself to the church to declare his confession of faith, would be examined in each article, and answer to each" (*Inst.* 4.19.13). Towards the end of the paper, I acknowledge that a "child of ten" (deliberately invoking Calvin's language) is "unprepared" to assume all the responsibilities of communicant church membership such as voting for elders. Though I'm open to the possibility, nowhere do I recommend the age of ten as a target age for admission to the Lord's table.

I must admit it was somewhat breathtaking to be accused, precisely when referencing John Calvin's position, of holding a view which, if implemented, would tend toward "the breakdown of our Reformed identity" and a return to "Roman Catholic practices." My recommendation is essentially a plea to *reconsider* the universal practice of the early reformers to admit young adolescents to the Lord's table. In addition to Calvin, who thought a child was sufficiently suited for the Lord's Supper at the age of ten, Martin Bucer believed a child could participate upon reaching "the age of reason" – namely, between the ages of ten

¹Van Raalte repeatedly uses the noun "children" to depict my recommendation whereas I often wrote about "youth," "young people," or "adolescents."

²Certainly not to the same degree or in the same way, but the late Dr. Karel Deddens made a similar plea decades ago: "But one thing is certain: from the hour of baptism the demand for confessions calls to be fulfilled. Therefore any unnecessary delay is wrong" (emphasis added; see Deddens, "May Children Partake of the Lord's Supper" *Clarion* 35:21 [October 17, 1986] 423).

and twelve.³ F. L. Rutgers noted that in the “southern countries” children between the ages of ten and twelve were admitted to the Lord’s table.⁴

It is not the case, as is sometimes assumed and alleged, that such children were expected to master the contents of the *larger* Reformation catechisms. *The Catechism of the Church of Geneva* (1541), for example, which had 373 questions, was “suitable for the instructing of children from the ages of ten to fifteen” though a much smaller catechism, i.e., *The Little Catechism* (1553) which had only sixteen questions, was used to prepare “young children before admission to Holy Communion.”⁵

Though formal catechism teaching was occasionally offered for older children, parents in The Netherlands, for example, vowed in their baptismal promises to instruct their children in the aforesaid doctrine when they came to the “years of discretion,” i.e., seven years old, the age when Roman Catholic children were expected to begin doing penance.⁶ In the Dutch refugee church of London, pastored by Jan Laski, “all children above the age of five were enrolled in special catechism classes.”⁷

It is thought that in The Netherlands, as in the Palatinate where the Heidelberg Catechism was produced, children typically professed their faith when they were fourteen.⁸ Though it is unclear when, the minimum age for profession of faith in The Netherlands was eventually raised to sixteen.⁹ In every single instance, however, adolescents younger than seventeen were being admitted to the Lord’s table in the early Reformation period.

Faith and catechesis

Dr. Van Raalte questions my claim that what the Lord’s Supper requires is simply faith in Christ and then faults me for not substantiating my claim, as if it were dubitable. I will now happily refer Van Raalte to a shared doctrinal standard, the Heidelberg Catechism, which in Lord’s Day 30, Question and Answer 81 indicates that the Lord’s table is set for those “who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins and yet *trust* that these are forgiven them,” and who “desire more

and more to strengthen their *faith*” (cf. LD 25, 28, 29). For biblical warrant, I would of course appeal to Galatians 2, where Paul upbraids Peter for adding to faith in Christ other requirements for table fellowship (see especially v.15).

Dr. Van Raalte then abruptly abandons his claim that *faith itself* is insufficient for participation at the Lord’s table to insist instead that what is required is a certain *kind* of faith. For a moment it seems as if we’re agreeing, though Van Raalte alleges

that I’ve diminished the knowledge component of faith. This is odd, given that my position does not vary considerably from that of the early reformers – namely, that in order to commune one should ordinarily be familiar with the contents of a Reformation catechism (i.e., the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Sacraments). Not one of the early reformers thought such familiarity was an impossible feat for a young adolescent. Why would Dr. Van Raalte?

Relatedly, Van Raalte faults me for failing to provide an account of catechesis. This too is puzzling, given that, earlier in my paper, I devoted significant attention to catechesis and

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³ See Amy Nelson Burnett, “Confirmation and Christian Fellowship: Martin Bucer on Commitment to the Church,” *Church History* 64:2 (Jun. 1995) 208 and 212. This reference and those that follow were provided in my chapter.

⁴ F.L. Rutgers, *Kerkelijke Adviezen II* (Kampen: Kok, 1922) 69.

⁵ Thomas F. Torrance, *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996) 4, 238. *The Little Catechism*, subtitled, “The Manner to examine Children, before they are admitted to the Lord’s Supper,” was added to the Geneva Catechism in 1553. Moreover, the Polish theologian Jan Laski (1499-1560) wrote a catechism (translated into Dutch) with 250 questions and answers, though only forty questions had to be answered satisfactorily to be admitted to communion (See Verboom, “The Heidelberg Catechism in the Netherlands,” 14, and George Ella, “Jan Laski the Pan-European Reformer” *MBS Texte* 19 [2004] 7).

⁶ Wim Verboom, “The Heidelberg Catechism in the Netherlands” in *The Church’s Book of Comfort* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2009) 131, 133.

⁷ Ella, “Jan Laski the Pan-European Reformer,” 7.

⁸ See Verboom, “The Heidelberg Catechism: A Catechetical Tool” in Payne and Heck, *A Faith Worth Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2013) 232n12 and “The Heidelberg Catechism in the Netherlands,” 138.

⁹ Verboom, “The Heidelberg Catechism in the Netherlands,” 138.

concluded with five ways to enhance it. Among my recommendations, in fact, is to translate the important “head knowledge” imparted in catechesis into “heart knowledge” by accenting character formation. Moreover, in numerous places throughout my paper, I provide evidence that the early reformers who favoured admitting to the Lord’s table those as young as ten or twelve were also insistent on catechesis. Why would Van Raalte assume that the admission of young adolescents to the Lord’s table implies a denigration of catechesis?

It seems that Van Raalte, in fact, has a very miserly view of catechesis – namely, information imparted in a classroom. “If, on DeJong’s model,” he writes, “catechesis is to precede admission to the table, he will have to start his catechumens very young, perhaps at age of five.” But what is so remarkable about this? Couldn’t parents teach a five-year-old to pray the Lord’s Prayer and to learn the Ten Commandments? Perhaps my model implies a more vigorous catechesis, which includes not just classroom education but apprenticing, mentoring, and modelling at home and church.

Full membership vows and ecumenicity

Van Raalte also objects to my proposal that admission to the Lord’s table should be separated from “full membership vows.” To me this is a necessary implication were churches to return to the practice of the early reformers. Though a young adolescent might be sufficiently mature to be admitted to the Lord’s table, it does not follow that she or he is also equipped to vote for elders or approve the church’s operating budget. This is an issue with which many Reformed churches must grapple. Someone kindly referred me to this information, provided at the official website (see opc.org) of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, with whom the Canadian Reformed have “sister-church” relations:

What would be an appropriate age (or perhaps earliest age) for a child to make a confession of faith? The Bible specifies no age, but based on Jesus’ own “coming out” (Luke 2:41–49), which is consistent with traditional Jewish practice, age 12 or 13 seems to be a good norm. Some precocious children are capable of a credible profession of faith before age 10.


So how does one mark the moment when a communing adolescent is permitted to vote? I recommended a particular approach only because it is already practiced in other Reformed churches – namely, having communing adolescents

affirm membership vows once they reach the age eighteen. Quite apart from voting or communing, baptized members are fully members of God’s covenant community though some responsibilities of their membership are withheld until they reach sufficient maturity to fulfil them.

Valuing the sacraments

Finally, Dr. Van Raalte concludes his critique of my position and his defense of the status quo practice in Canadian Reformed churches with a mysterious reference to a “sifting and testing” process during adolescence. I’m unsure to what dynamic he is alluding and whether it is psychological or scriptural. It is true that adolescence is marked by some instability in terms of identity formation, and some skepticism toward the teaching of authorities, parental or ecclesiastical. This only reinforces my question: Why would the church want to bar such youth, in a crucial season of their development, from participating in the Lord’s Supper? Such an impulse, in my mind, betrays an impoverished view of the Lord’s Supper as a means of grace. Especially adolescents could benefit from the nourishment the Lord’s Supper provides. It would help form their identity as those who belong to Christ, body and soul, both in life and death.

Conclusion

I’m thankful that Dr. Van Raalte engaged my arguments in a substantial way. I envisioned some resistance to my proposal to reconsider the discarded practices of the early reformers and was very heartened by the warm reception it received when I presented it at the seminary conference. What I did not imagine was an allegation that my proposal, if adopted, would “tend toward the breakdown of our Reformed identity” and represent a “step backwards to Roman Catholic practices.” Does Dr. Van Raalte allege the same of Dr. Erik Watkins, who contributed a chapter to the same volume, and those OPC and URCNA colleagues who hold a view similar to mine? As much as his allegation pains me, it puzzles me more. 



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Impact of COVID-19 on Ecclesiastical Assemblies


The outbreak of COVID-19 has affected church life locally in a major way. In person worship has been suspended until the recommendations of health officials once again give the green light to larger gatherings. Most congregations have implemented some form of livestreaming or prerecording of services and/or sermons. It is certainly not the same as normal worship services, but we are thankful that modern technology makes it possible to reach many people at once while they are dispersed in their homes. We greatly lament the loss that is felt in no longer being able to worship the Lord together as a corporate body. Psalms 42 and 84 speak powerfully to us in our present context. How we long to worship God together, hear his Word proclaimed to us directly, pray together, sing together, and give Christian alms for the poor. May the Lord use these circumstances to warm our hearts in a new way for the tremendous blessing of corporate worship.

The measures which have been taken to contain the spread of the virus have also impacted the meeting of ecclesiastical assemblies. The spring and summer months are popular times for these assemblies to meet. In Presbyterian circles, they generally meet every year in May or June. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church has postponed their synod from June to August.

The Free Church of Scotland (FCS) has decided to constitute its general assembly in May but will only be meeting on the Monday evening to conduct some essential business using Zoom. In a video on the FCS YouTube channel posted on April 24, 2020, moderator Rev. Donnie G. Macdonald explains that it is hoped that the general assembly will be able to resume its work in October but he realized that there are no guarantees that this will be possible. The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCC) has likewise decided to constitute its general assembly on May 18, 2020 using teleconference but then would likely suspend until early October. The FCC website notes that suspending rather than adjourning the assembly gives a greater degree of flexibility should it not be possible to meet in October.

Other Presbyterian churches have decided to simply postpone their general assembly until 2021. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church website notes that both “meeting-size restrictions” and the closing of the campus of Eastern University necessitated the decision to postpone the convening of the 87th General Assembly until June 2021.

The Aquila Report, in an article written by Brad Isabel, a ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), reported on April 14, 2020 that the 48th General Assembly of the PCA scheduled for this summer was postponed until 2021. Mr. Isabel notes that this unprecedented decision gives rise to some important questions about ecclesiastical assemblies. One of the reasons why the assembly could not be rescheduled for later in the year (aside from the uncertainty as to when things would return to normal) is due to the sheer size of the assembly. Another venue for so many people cannot be found so quickly. The PCA has about 400,000 members and, in theory at least, “about 5000 teaching elders and more than 3000 ruling elders could attend.” This is because every teaching elder and two ruling elders from each congregation may attend an assembly. Mr. Isabel feels it may be worth considering a system of delegated attendance rather than elders from each church as this would not only reduce costs but, more importantly, would ensure “parity of the two classes of elders” at the assembly. The PCA is also currently undergoing internal struggles with respect to “gay Christian” issues. Overtures relating to this matter have been received but will now not be able to be dealt with. It is unknown how this lack of a general assembly will affect the PCA going forward.

We pray that the Lord will give us all patience and faithfulness as we go through these strange and troubling times together. 



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To the Editor,

I much appreciated the article by Dr. J. Van Vliet on "Every Congregation's Battle: Sexual Temptation." Working in the field of addiction medicine for many years, sexual addictions are classified as "Process Addictions" (in the secular world). Scripturally, in the parable of the prodigal son, after returning from a "wild" life the son returns to his father and states, "I have sinned against heaven and against you." Dr. Van Vliet makes many excellent recommendations in terms of a congregational action plan. There is the responsibility of everyone as well: pastors, office bearers, and parents are in the action plan. I have three further comments:

1: If there is someone in the home or in the congregation that we are aware of having difficulty with a sexual temptation and acting out sexually, how are those that are aware of this to motivate that one from the stage of precontemplation to contemplation, then preparation for doing something about the fact, and into an action phase. Precontemplation is a phase of *denial*, which includes blaming, justifying, entitlement, etc., as well the desire just to make one feel better. Contemplation is a stage of ambivalence (am I really that bad or do I really need help). Preparation is actively seeking help and then moving into the action phase. This is where parents, spouses, pastors, and office bearers can play a significant role in terms of encouragement and seeking help.

2: So where does one go for help. Sexual temptation and acting out (porn, extramarital affairs, premarital sex, masturbation, etc.) are all done in *isolation*. Help is sought in community, using support groups and accountability partners (sponsor). In the twelve-step program the first word in step one is "we." One heals in connection, with the help of others. The two support groups that I would recommend:

A: Life Renewal is a faith-based, Christ-centred twelve-step program that is recommended for those struggling with addictions, relationship issues, complex (childhood) abuse and other abuse issues, and also sexual acting out. This program was initiated in our churches a number of years ago and is active in

many churches in Ontario as well as out west. This program has taken much of the material from Freedom Session (Pastor Ken Dyck, Surrey, BC). It has been modified somewhat into a grace-focussed recovery program.

B: Celebrate recovery is also a faith-based recovery program, initiated by Pastor Rick Warren and the church at Saddleback California.

C: Secular twelve-step recovery programs and SLAA groups.

3: What has to change in those who act out sexually? I will use the acronym "BATS."

Behaviours have to change. This means living a balanced life with arising and going to bed at the same time of day and at the same time as one's spouse. Eating meals at appropriate times, as well as exercise, time for reading Scripture, and prayer. If cravings or urges occur, positive habits should be used such as listening to good music or even a sermon. Also, introducing software for children's phones and computers to filter pornography, as well as limiting time on phones and not allowing children to take them to bed. A behaviour of predictability and accountability should be endorsed. In the above programs I have heard it said, "look good, smell good, be predictable."


Attitudes have to change. There should be an attitude of surrender to one's Lord and Saviour. "I cannot do this alone." There should be an attitude of humility and a desire to follow the lead of others who have gone before. Certain biases may have to change, as well as dealing with resentments.

Thinking may have to change. Catastrophic thinking and negative thinking have to be dealt with. Thinking about past hurts and resentments will have to be worked on, in a healing manner. Also, futuristic thinking is not a good place to go. That does not mean one cannot plan ahead; one cannot plan the outcome. That is left to the Lord. Resentments occur related to past hurts, as well as with unmet expectations

Spiritual change: There has to be a spiritual change, that one cannot do this on their own and needs to surrender their whole life to their Lord and Saviour. One has to learn to put into practice the spiritual gifts as mentioned in Galatians 5:22. These

are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; this rather than hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, factions, and envy. This spiritual change is a process and can take time; however, it becomes life-changing and is a necessity for all to recover. In Life Renewal, much is focused on in terms of the surrender process, dealing with life's inventory and resentments, looking at character defects and shortcomings, and making amends and living day by day in a spiritual manner. I would suggest that all pastors and office bearers take a critical look at this support group and even take the program, not only to benefit themselves but to help other struggling brothers and sisters.

4: I have seen on many occasions that in the field of addiction medicine, drug or alcohol addicts have difficulty with sexually acting out, particularly with stimulant addicts (ie cocaine). Thus, if there is sexual acting out, then one may also have to look further into other addictions, as well as other mental health issue.

I trust that this may help those who are struggling with the shame of sexual temptation / acting out. The Lord can use shame to motivate one into recovery. One final remark. In Gerald May's book, *Addiction and Grace*, he makes a classic remark: "To be alive is to be addicted, to be addicted is to stand in the need of grace." 

Yours in Christ,

Gary Veenman, MD, Diplomate ABAM



You are invited

to send us your most thought provoking questions
to explore in our **You Asked** column.

Please send questions to **William den Hollander**, *Minister emeritus*
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Press Release of Classis Central Ontario held on March 13, 2020 at the convening church of Burlington Ebenezer

1. Opening: After the singing of Psalm 84:1, 2, Rev. Roukema opened with the reading of Psalm 84, a brief meditation on it, and with prayer.
2. Memorabilia: 2.1. Rev. J. van Popta – final sermon to be preached April 19, 2020. 2.2. Rev. Geertsema – in palliative care. 2.3. Fellowship CanRC – called Rev. Bill Boekestein of the Immanuel Fellowship Reformed Church at Kalamazoo, Michigan.
3. The credentials were examined and found to be in order.
4. Appointments: The following officers were appointed for Classis: 4.1. Chairman: Rev. Hilmer Jagersma. 4.2. Vice-chairman: Elder Dave Dykstra. 4.3. Clerk: Rev. Jake Torenvliet.
5. Classis was declared to be constituted.
6. The Agenda was approved and adopted.
7. Licensure examinations (Art 21 CO): Anson Van Delden. 7.1. Credentials were examined and in order. 7.2. Sermon proposal was on Psalm 121. 7.2.1. Proposal was deemed to be adequate to continue the examination. 7.3. Examination of Doctrine and Creeds. 7.3.1. Following the examination, Classis determined that br. VanDelden had sustained the examination, and he was given consent to preach an edifying word in the churches conditional on the completion of his second year, for the period of one year from May 2020 to May 2021, after which he can request an extension for another year. He also promised not to preach or teach anything contrary to the Word of God and the Three Forms of Unity.
8. Question period according to Article 44 CO. 8.1. All churches were asked “whether the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured, and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of Classis for the proper government of their church.” All churches, except two, answered in the affirmative to the first two questions, and one church asked for advice. 8.1.1. Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church is appealing to General Synod 2022 the decision of Regional Synod East 2019 regarding guest ministers from non-sister churches (RSE 2019 Acts, Article 11). 8.1.2. Redemption Canadian Reformed Church is appealing to General Synod 2022 the decision of Regional Synod East 2019 regarding commemorative services (RSE 2019 Acts, Article 10). 8.1.3. Blessings Christian Church is overturing Synod 2022, given the response of Synod 2019 (see General Synod Acts, Article 64) to its request for revision, to return to the original formulation in the questions for baptism and profession of faith services, re: “articles of the Christian faith” and is appealing the decisions of Regional Synod East 2019 regarding guest ministers from non-sister churches (Acts, Article 11) and commemorative services (Acts, Article 10). 8.2. Blessings Christian Church requests advice on accepting the former members of the Stanley Avenue Baptist church into membership in Blessings Christian Church. The advice given was favourable for this.
9. Proposals or instructions of the churches. 9.1. Rehoboth Overture to GS2022 to remove cap of 100 hymns. 9.1.1. The overture was unanimously adopted.
10. Correspondence received. 10.1. An appeal from the Orangeville Canadian Reformed Church was received. 10.1.1. The appeal is declared inadmissible.
11. Appointments: 11.1. Suggested officers for the next classis: Chairman: Rev. Jake Torenvliet; Vice-Chairman: Elder delegate from the convening church; Clerk: Rev. Clarence VanderVelde.
12. Convening church for the next classis: Fellowship. 12.1. Suggested date for next classis: June 5, 2020.
13. Question Period was utilized.
14. Censure according to Art. 34 CO was not needed.
15. The Acts and Press Release were read and approved.
16. Closing: After the reading of Philippians 2:1-4, and the singing of Hymn 71:1,2, the chairman closed in prayer.

On behalf of Classis,
Vice-chairman **Dave Dykstra**

