

Verbal abuse destroys the woman, even when there is no physical abuse. It is sin, and the sin is murder.

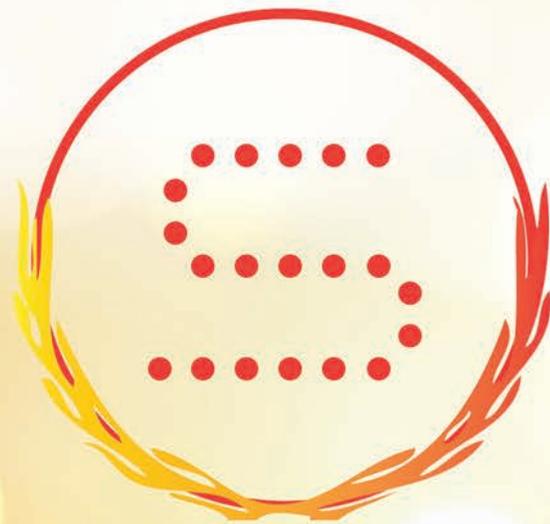
– Prof. David Engelsma in *The Abuse of Christian Women by Their Christian Husbands*

Just as the Psalms are vehicles of God's Word, mainstream songs are carriers of the world's philosophies.

– Lim Ruo Xi in *Honouring God in Music*

Grandparents must be around to help practically in the homes of their children with the raising of their grandchildren. They must joyfully give of their time, talents and remaining energy to help with the raising of the covenant family.

– Rev. Arie den Hartog in *Grandparents in the Covenant Home*



salt shakers

joel 3:16 matthew 5:16

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*Be ye holy;
for I am holy.*

1 P E T E R 1 : 1 6

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WELCOME TO THE 49TH ISSUE OF SALT SHAKERS!

Dear Readers,

The following letter from the Beacon Lights magazine staff reached our mailbox recently. As can be seen, reading is not a challenge confined to our shores but to the wider church also. The issues mentioned in the letter are certainly not foreign to us! We urge all our readers to give these matters serious consideration and share your thoughts with friends and family (and with us - both the Salt Shakers and Beacon Lights staff). The letter is copied below:

Dear promoters of reading,

We are contacting you on behalf of Beacon Lights magazine to invite you to join us in collaborating on a common goal that we all share: the promotion of reading in our churches and schools. It seems that we continually come up against the same challenges:

1. How do we reach the people we need to reach? The sad reality is that many in our churches do not read, not even a little bit. We can encourage the good discipline of reading through writing in our periodicals all we want, but when it comes down to it, the people that we are trying to reach the most (non-readers) are not going to see it because they are not reading in the first place.
2. Overcoming reading apathy. This is a generational problem. If children do not observe their parents reading in the home, they will be far less likely to be read as well.

We all know that the problem is real and must be remedied. The Beacon Lights staff sees great value in uniting our efforts. This should be an across the board effort, promoted by magazines, school boards, teachers, blogs, journals, newsletters, young people's societies, and books. Though important and part of the process, this cannot merely consist of creating a few extra advertisements for our respective magazines, books, blogs, etc. It must be an organic, boots on the ground effort if it is going to have the desired effect.

We would like to propose a first step in this effort. Make 2019 a "Year of Reading." Some initial ideas of how this could be implemented include:

1. The creation of a flyer to be placed in all church mailboxes, titled "What Can I Read?" This would include brief descriptions of all the magazines, journals, and blogs that are available for our church members to read and how they can subscribe to each.
2. Special magazine issues devoted to the discipline and importance of reading.
3. Promotion of reading by consistories at family visitation and societies and in bulletins and newsletters.
4. Reading programs in schools if they are not already in place (i.e. DEAR—"Drop everything and read").
5. An effort by teachers to bring our denominational reading resources into classrooms whenever possible.
6. Holding a meeting where all parties involved could discuss more ideas and make more concrete plans. If you are interested in joining us in this effort, please respond with your thoughts and interest level as we plan on organizing some meetings to discuss the best ways to move forward. We have sent this letter to the people and organizations included in the list on the next page. Please forward this letter to anyone you think we missed and include us on the email so that we can add them to the list.

In His service,

Ryan Kregel (Managing Editor) ryankregel@gmail.com, Dewey Engelsma (Editor) editor@beaconlights.org

AUGUSTINE'S CONFESSIONS

>>Aaron Lim



Aaron Lim is a member of CERC and is the editor of Salt Shakers.

Augustine's *Confessions* contain a doxology of the greatness of God and his grace in forgiving sins. It is a deeply personal confession in which he recounts the sins of his youth, God's sovereign grace in leading him to repentance, and the glory of God's salvation.

Book I reveals Augustine's invocation of God's praise, having realized the magnitude of his own sins and his total dependence on God. Augustine recounts how he disobeyed his parents in his youth- "I disobeyed them not because I had chosen a better way, but from a fondness for play, loving the honour of victory in the matches, and to have my ears tickled with lying fables" (50). But God gave him a godly mother, who, "with a pure heart in Thy faith, travailed in birth more lovingly for my eternal salvation" (50). Soon after he was brought to faith and repentance, and he gives God the glory for saving him – "Thou hast saved me from all my most mischievous ways" (52). He returns to learning, gives his disapproval of an ungodly education, and insists that we should learn "the eternal rules of everlasting salvation received from Thee" (53). We must

"learn to take pleasure in truth" (54).

In Book II, Augustine recalls his "past foulness", where he longed "to be satisfied with worldly things" (55). He confesses that he had "boiled over in my fornications", and "dragged away my unstable youth into the rough places of unchaste desires" (55). In God's providence, Augustine's poor father was able to "supply his son with all the necessaries for a far journey for the sake of his studies" (56). However, in his sinfulness Augustine goes on to commit theft and deceit with his friends, out of a "distaste for well-doing, and a lustiness of iniquity" (57). He confesses that he enjoyed "the theft and sin itself" (57). But in his mercy, God "hast put away from me these so wicked and nefarious acts of mine", and "melted away my sin as it were ice" (59). Therefore only with God there is "perfect rest, and life unchanging" (59).

Book III records Augustine's journey to Carthage and his snare in a sinful relationship. Because of his sin he "became infected with a foul disease" (61). During his studies there, he came into contact with Cicero's book, and claims that "this book, in truth, changed my affections, and turned my prayers to Thyself, O Lord and made me have other hopes and desires" (61). Then he was further led to the truth, where he decided to "direct my mind to the Holy Scriptures" (62). However, he fell into the error of the Manichaeans, who taught a false distinction between a material evil and a spiritual good. Augustine would later deny that there are two dualistic powers in the world,

and insist that God is "the only and true Creator and Ruler of the universe" (65). Having been brought back to the truth, Augustine would praise God for using his mother to draw his soul "out of profound darkness" (66).

In Book IV, Augustine recounts how he was initially "given to books of the horoscope-casters" (69), and later taught rhetoric in his native town. During his time there, his dear friend died, causing great grief to him. In his grief, Augustine left for Carthage once again, and soon found comfort and solace in his friends. He also found comfort in the eternal God, who "passeth not away" (73). Book V deals with Augustine's confession later on in his mature years. He confesses that God is merciful to all those who seek him in faith – "Let them, then, be converted and seek Thee; because not as they have forsaken their Creator hast Thou forsaken Thy creature" (79). God gives grace to the humble, and "hast respect unto the lowly, but the proud Thou knowest afar off" (80). Therefore, happy is the man if "knowing Thee he glorify Thee as God, and gives thanks, and becomes not vain in his thoughts" (81). Knowing the true God, Augustine is emboldened to defend his truth against the errors of his day, especially the Manichaeans.

Book VI recounts Augustine's striking discovery under the guidance of his mother and the other church fathers that the Scriptures are the Word of God. The Scriptures "were imparted unto mankind by the Spirit of the one true and most true God" (93). By

nature we “were too weak by unaided reason to find out the truth, and for this cause needed the authority of the holy writings” (93). Having been enlightened, he now desires to “forsake all the empty hopes and lying insanities of vain desires” (98). In Book VII, Augustine discusses his more mature knowledge of God and uses it to fight false doctrines. He calls God “the sovereign and only true God” (102). He also confesses that our “free will was the cause of our doing evil, and Thy righteous judgment of our suffering it” (104). God alone is “the highest and best good” (104). Book VIII describes Augustine’s struggle between his old

and new man. He says that although he delights in spiritual things, “very tenaciously was I held by the love of women” (116). Thus “did my two wills, one old and the other new, one carnal, the other spiritual, contend within me” (121). Praying to God, however, Augustine confessed that “by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart, - all the gloom of doubt vanished away” (127).

In Book IX, Augustine confesses that God is “good and merciful” because he “had respect unto the profoundness of my death, and removed from the bottom of my heart that abyss of

corruption” (129). God also brought him low and “didst straighten my crookedness, and smooth rough ways” (131). At this point, Augustine’s mother dies and he prays to God to “have her name remembered at Thy altar, which she had served without the omission of a single day” (141). Book X finally concludes Augustine’s confession that God alone is to be served because “my weakness [is] known unto Thee...I am a little one, but my Father liveth for ever, and my Defender is ‘sufficient’ for me” (143). The happy life, therefore, is “to rejoice unto Thee, in Thee, and for Thee” (151).

SCRIPTURE’S COVENANT YOUTH (XII): DAVID

>>Prof. Herman Hanko



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Although I have written about David’s youthful years, and although this column is devoted to covenant youth, I decided to write also of one incident

in David’s adult life, which is of great significance for us. I refer to the sin David committed with Bathsheba and against her husband, Uriah. You can read the history in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. You ought also to read Psalm 51 that was written after Nathan the prophet came to David and exposed David’s sin; and Psalm 32 that was written after David knew that God had forgiven him.

The sin of David began when he did not go with Joab and the army of Israel to fight against Ammon. Although he was the man God had chosen to subdue Israel’s enemies and extend the borders of Canaan, the land promised to Abraham and his seed, he chose to enjoy the luxuries of life in the palace in Jerusalem. He was in fact in bed during the day because he arose from his bed in the evening (2 Sam. 11:1-2).

He put into motion a series of events that led to his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, his neighbour’s wife. When he learned that she was pregnant, he decided to hide his sin from his household and from the nation over which he ruled. He summoned Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, from the battlefield to spend a few days home in the hopes that Bathsheba’s pregnancy could be ascribed to Uriah, a prominent soldier in Israel’s army.

But this did not work, for Uriah would not leave his fellow soldiers to spend time with his wife. He refused to go home. The result was that David ordered Uriah’s death in the battle against Ammon, and this was successfully accomplished.

As is so often common with the sinner, David refused to confess his sin to himself or to God. He tells of that in

Psalm 32: “While I kept guilty silence, my strength was spent in grief. Thy hand was heavy on me; my soul found no relief” (Psalter rendition of Psalm 32). This “guilty silence” continued until Nathan the prophet came to him and brought David to see his sin and confess it.

What needs emphasis here is that David was not a profligate sinner: he is said in many places in Scripture to be a man of God, a special servant of God and an unusual person who occupied a special place in God’s covenant. In fact, he was a special type of Christ and one who stood in the genealogical line of Christ. Psalm 89 says some wonderful things of what God promised David to whom would be given a son who would build God’s temple.

Scripture teaches us by David’s sin that the strongest and most important child of God is indeed prone to sin and would sin if it were not for God’s grace. He is totally depraved because he was born with a corrupt nature (vs. 5). I think we have a clue to this and to David’s recognition of this truth in Psalm 51 in which David prays, “Take not thy Holy Spirit from me” (vs. 11). He knew that without the Spirit any sin, not matter how heinous, was within his doing.

There is another point here that is important for us. God forgave David his sin. That is true from many passages in Scripture including Psalm 32 and from many other passages throughout the Scriptures. Nevertheless, forgiveness does not mean that God simply overlooks our sins. They are forgiven because God gave His own Son to die in our place. But He does not leave us without any consequences in our lives; He tells David that although he is forgiven, the sword will not be removed

“God is so merciful to us that even the “sword” which He sends into our lives He turns to our good, makes it chastisement, and uses it to prepare us for heaven.”

from David’s house.

This is necessary because David had given the enemy occasion to slander God and the cause of God in the world. The enemy could (and did) mock Israel because their most important leader was no better than they, but only an adulterer and a murderer. For His own name’s sake God had to send affliction on David as well as on any sinner.

And so he did. Ammon raped his sister Tamar, and Absalom murdered Ammon. Absalom committed a *coup d’etat* against his father. Adonijah made himself king apart from David’s consent. And both Amnon and Adonijah were killed for their treason.

It is well that we remember this. The Lord our God is a merciful God and freely pardons our sins. But we shall endure the consequences of our sin in our lives. God is so merciful to us that even the “sword” which He sends into our lives He turns to our good, makes it chastisement, and uses it to prepare us for heaven. But that does not alter the fact that we suffer affliction in our lives because of our sins.

A drunkard remains a drunkard all

his life, even though he may live a life of sobriety. A dope addict must live with a fried brain even though he has been delivered from this sin. Our sins reappear in our children – to our dismay. What a man sows he also reaps – even in the lives of God’s people.

But there is one more thing here that we must notice. After David’s sin, David was forgiven. There can be no doubt about that. But the fact is that after this dreadful sin, David’s effectiveness as a king was over. We read little more about him, except for his sin of numbering the people. That too is the price we pay for our sins.

Let us be ever on our guard against the temptations of Satan, who goes around as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Let us know and understand that we serve a righteous and holy God who will not let sin go unpunished, who does not take sin lightly as we so often do, and who is also a God of great mercy. It is a wonder of grace that we actually do make it to heaven. The righteous are scarcely saved, Peter says. *We just make it. We make it by the skin of our teeth. We stagger into heaven exhausted from a life of sin and corruption. We arrive only because of the greatness of the grace and love of our omnipotent God.*

To Him be the glory forever and ever.

ARE UNBELIEVERS IN GOD'S IMAGE? (VII)

>>Rev. Angus Stewart



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Last time, we saw that everything in all the three documents of the *Three Forms of Unity* (the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the *Canons of Dordt*) and all three creeds in the *Westminster Standards* (the *Westminster Confession*, the *Westminster Larger Catechism* and the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*) fit with our doctrine that only God's elect, redeemed and regenerated people are His likeness and image. But what about the creeds of other Reformed traditions?

Whereas the *Three Forms of Unity* and the *Westminster Standards* are relatively easy to obtain in the English-speaking world, many of the other Reformed creeds are harder to come by. The best and most comprehensive compilation is the four, superb volumes edited by James T. Dennison, Jr., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008-2014). The quotations below are taken from this work, with all the italics being supplied by me.

Hungarian Reformed

From the Hungarian Reformed, we will consider first *The Synod at Szikszó* (1568). In Article XII, the *imago dei* is not only defined in terms of spiritual "virtues," but also Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 are explicitly cited in the text of the English translation, and not merely in a footnote:

They err exceedingly who speak the nonsense that the image of God in which man was made was the future humanity of Christ, since it is the virtues that are communicated to men: righteousness, holiness, wisdom (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). And the first man is said to be the form of the future, not the image of man (3:151).

Not only do the *Documents of the Debrecen Synod* (1567) identify the divine likeness as "virtues," appealing to Ephesians 4:24, as does *The Synod at Szikszó*, but they also state that the *imago dei* was "lost" at the fall and only "restored" to, and "renewed" in, God's people in Christ by regeneration and sanctification:

First, since the image of God was *lost* by Adam, it was *restored* through the image of the infinite God, consubstantial and equal with the Father, i.e., Christ was made to us righteousness, life, truth, and sanctification; that is, He *restored our lost virtues* (1 Cor. 1; Col. 1-2; Eph. 1, 3; 1 Cor. 15). "Day by day, we are *renewed* more and more to His image through the Spirit of God" (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18). "Put on the

new man, who has been created in accordance with God" (Eph. 4:24) ... Therefore Christ, by the power of His deity, has *restored* the image of God, the *lost virtues* (3:17-18).

Scottish Reformed

Journeying from one end of the sixteenth-century European Reformed world to the other, we leave Hungary for Scotland. The *Scottish Confession* (1560), written by the six Johns, including John Knox, opposes original sin (an ethical category) to the divine image, proclaiming in Article III that through the fall the *imago dei* in man was "utterly defaced" and human beings became the devil's slaves: "By which transgression, commonly called original sin, was the image of God *utterly defaced* in man. And he and his posterity of nature became *enemies of God, slaves to Satan, and servants to sin* (Eph. 2; Rom. 5)" (2:189).

Twenty-one years after the 1560 *Scottish Confession* of the six Johns, we have *Craig's Catechism* (1581). Its author, John Craig (1512-1600), another John, served as the assistant to John Knox in St. Giles, Edinburgh, for nine years; a chaplain to King James VI of Scotland, later King James I of Great Britain and Ireland; and the moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on three occasions (1570, 1576 and 1581). *Craig's Catechism* was a Scottish staple for over sixty years, until the publication of the two *Westminster Catechisms* in 1647. This lengthy quotation demonstrates not only that the *imago dei* is a major theme

in *Craig's Catechism*, but also that it explicitly and antithetically teaches that only believers are in God's image. Clearly, unbelievers are in "the image of the serpent," if the old nature in the believer is so described.

Q. In whose image made He them? (Gen. 1:26)

A. In His own image.

Q. What is the image of God? (Eph. 4:24)

A. *Perfect uprightness* in body and soul ...

Q. What was the craft of Satan here?

A. He persuaded them that good was evil and evil was good.

Q. How could they be persuaded, having the image of God?

A. They had the image, but not the gift of constancy.

Q. *What things did they lose through their fall?* (Gen. 3:17)

A. *The favor and image of God*, with the use of the creatures.

Q. *What succeeded the loss of the favor and image of God?* (Gen. 3:14)

A. *The wrath of God and original sin.*

Q. What is original sin? (Rom. 5:19; 7)

A. *The corruption of our whole nature ...*

Q. *In what did their salvation stand?*

A. *In the remission of their sin and repairing of God's image.*

Q. What followed upon the repairing of God's image? (Rom. 7:5)

A. A continual battle both within and without.

Q. From whence does this battle proceed?

A. From *the two contrary images in mankind.*

Q. *What are these images?*

A. *The image of God and the image of the serpent* (3:545, 546, 549).

Other Reformed

Centred on the Alpine regions of France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany

and Austria, the Waldensians were a reform movement that God raised up in the later Middle Ages. In the sixteenth century, through the labours of William Farel and others, the Waldensians joined the Reformed branch of the Reformation.

In Article VIII, the *Waldensian Confession* (1662) declares, "That man, who was created pure and holy in God's image, by his own fault *deprived* himself of that blessed estate, having believed the lying words of the devil." Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 are among the proof texts cited (4:502). The text of the *Waldensian Confession* of 1655, upon which the 1662 version is based, is practically identical (4:439). The same teaching on the image of God is found in the *Waldensian Confession* of 1560, which also appeals to Ephesians 4:24 (2:220-221).

The *Large Emden Catechism* (1551) of East Frisia (now in north-west Germany) and written by the Polish Reformer John à Lasco, is even stronger. It proclaims that the likeness of God is "indisputably" "destroyed" and "lost" by the Fall:

Q. 81. How should I understand this?

R. [i.e., Response] *Indisputably, the image and likeness of God*, in which man was created in the beginning, along with all inclinations for good, *was lost in him.*

Q. 82. How should I understand this?

R. This image of God was in Adam in the beginning, by virtue of which he was immortal, holy, wise, and lord of the entire world, and thus was endowed with the freedom and ability to either completely execute or disregard the commandment of God. However, *the image of God in himself and in all of us he so destroyed by his sin*, that henceforth,

all offerings intended for goodness were utterly destroyed both in himself and in all of us (1:607).

The *Confession of the Spanish Congregation of London* (1560/61) in Chapter 3:1-2 explains that the image of God consists in spiritual "gifts" (2:375-376). Immediately after this comes "Chapter 4: On the Fall of Man; on the Faculty of the Human Will before and after the Original Sin, and the Penalties of It, and the Cause of Evil." Its first section explains that, though created as one who knew God in love, through the Fall, man is no longer "like God," but "in the image and likeness of the devil."

We confess that, man, at his creation, having received from the hand of God the powers of wisdom and the ability and will to *know*, love, and serve his Creator, persisting in his obedience (which is commonly called free will), received also a law (Gen. 2), in the obedience of which he exercised these admirable *gifts*; which, breaking by his own free will (Gen. [3]), at the same time was *marred from the image of God, and all the benefits that make him like God*. And from the state of being *wise, good, just, truthful, merciful, and holy* he was rendered *ignorant, evil, impious, a liar, and cruel, clothed in the image and likeness of the devil* toward whom he moved as he departed from God, with the *loss* of that holy liberty with which he was created (Eccl. 7; 2 Peter 2), and thus was made *a slave and servant of sin and of the devil* (2:376).

Conclusion

What shall we say after surveying these nine creeds (and others could have been cited to the same effect)? They only

ever speak of the image and likeness of God in terms of spiritual “virtues” and “gifts”, including knowledge, righteousness and holiness, the three terms used in the two key, biblical texts (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), which are either explicitly cited or presupposed in the confessions.

As with the *Three Forms of Unity* and the *Westminster Standards*, the *imago dei* in man is treated in these other Reformed creeds in three contexts: creation, the Fall and sanctification. First, the divine likeness is mentioned most frequently in connection with man’s creation in the beginning. Second, the image of God is variously described as having been “lost”, “destroyed” or “utterly defaced” at the Fall, so that mankind, partaking of “original sin”, became “wicked and perverse”, “enemies of God,” “slaves to Satan”, “servants to sin”, “the image of the serpent” and “the image and likeness of the devil”. Third, through our restoration or renewal in the image of Christ in regeneration

and sanctification, the elect alone are restored to the divine likeness by sovereign grace!

The *Three Forms of Unity*, the *Westminster Standards* and these other nine Reformed confessions only ever speak of God’s children, those in covenant fellowship with Him, as being in their Father’s image: Adam and Eve before the Fall, and believers in Christ after the Fall.

The documents of the *Three Forms of Unity* were written in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, with the delegates at the Synod of Dort, plus those invitees who were unable to attend, representing practically the whole of the Reformed world at that time. The Dutch Reformed, through their diaspora and missions, have used these creeds around the globe. The *Westminster Standards* are the confessional documents of Presbyterianism in the British Isles and on every continent. They are also the

basis for the Congregationalist *Savoy Declaration* (1658) and the *Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689), both of which maintain Westminster’s teaching on the *imago dei*. Add to this the two creeds of the Scottish Reformed before the *Westminster Standards* and the two confessions of the Hungarian Reformed, plus the creeds of the Waldensians in and around the Alps, the *Large Emden Catechism* (with its Frisian, German and Polish connections), and the *Confession of the Spanish Congregation of London* (with its English and Spanish links). None of these fifteen Reformed creeds speak of the *imago dei* in a “broader sense” or refer to unbelievers as bearing the divine image! Nor do the Congregationalist and Baptist confessions mentioned above.

The next instalment will consider the truth of the *imago dei* in connection with the five solas of the Reformation, DV.

AN EXAMPLE OF HOLINESS

>>Rev. Arie Den Hartog



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I am writing this for a youth magazine. Yet this article has special reference for those who are older in the church. These are those who are mature in the faith. They have learned much by experience and by trials which God has led them through in their lives. They also have been given an opportunity to show themselves steadfast in the faith through continuing for a number of years in the faith.

The book of Titus in the Bible has much to say about the subject of this article. “The aged men be sober, grave,

temperate, sound in faith, in charity and patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women (Tit. 2:2-4).

The children of the church are watching us. They must not only be instructed by the words of their teachers but also by their example of godliness and holiness. This is especially true of our life in the covenant home. These children are often our own covenant children in

our own homes. Besides our spouses in marriage and of course most of all, besides God who knows our hearts, our children know us better than anyone else. From day to day they live with us in our home. They soon will detect the sincerity of our godliness and whether our daily walk is truly holy as it should be as saints of God.

Aged saints of God in the church have a tremendous calling to the youthful members of the church. Inevitably, young and new members of the church will learn from the more senior members of the church. If the aged in the church are worldly and ungodly in their daily lives the young will (though wrongly) make excuses for their own personal sin and compromises in Christian living.

Holiness is one of the greatest virtues of God Himself. He has chosen us to be His people that we should be holy before Him. When we live a holy life, we glorify God and our Lord who has saved us at the great cost of His great sacrifice on the cross. In our life of holiness, we reflect the virtues of Christ in us.

When we think of holiness, we think first of all of perfection and goodness. No man can ever be holy except by the grace and Spirit of God. Holiness is love for God. Holiness is consecration and devotion to God. Holiness is separation from sin and worldliness. The apostle John writes, "Love not the world neither the things in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in Him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 Jn. 2:15-16). These are strong but absolutely true words, the judgment of God Himself who is the holy one.

Love for God arises from true godly humility in regards to the attitude we have concerning ourselves. This attitude is shown in that we hate and flee from sin. This will be evident in our personal and especially our home life. It will be obvious. Our children will see us regularly reading and studying the Word of God and taking the time to meditate on it. By the time we are mature saints of God we should have an established order in our life to make room for times of studying the word of God. Our children will see us often on our knees. In times of trials and sorrows they hear us crying earnestly to the Lord for help and hope and comfort. This is true holiness.

Holiness must be manifest in many ways in our lives. If we love God, we will also love His truth. We will then constantly be engaged in learning more and more of the truth of God through reading the Word of God, meditating on its truth, and striving to live according to it. Holiness is a principled life of godliness.

Holiness certainly includes love for the church. Aged saints have a profound love for the church. They know that the church is the house of God. They have learned what fountains of blessing are opened in the house of God through the preaching of the gospel. They yearn for the house of God as also the aged

Psalmist did for the house of God. "One thing have I desired of the Lord that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His temple" (Ps. 27:4). Likewise the aged saint Anna, mentioned in Luke 2 at the time of the presentation of Jesus in the temple. It is said concerning her that she departed not from the temple, serving the Lord day and night. What devotion to God!

The aged saints reveal their holiness and godliness by demonstrating what is the absolutely most important thing in their lives. They are not part of a sad group of confessing Christians in Singapore who have devoted themselves to pursuing careers, success and riches in this world as the most important thing in their lives. All they talk about is nice cars, beautiful apartments, well furnished, making more and more money and sacrificing even time for the study of God's word and worship in the house of God and the exercise of works of Christian charity.

How easy it is for elderly saints to teach the younger by the daily example of their lives to be carnal and worldly and materialistic. The scriptures warn that the love of money is the root of all evil. How sad when those who have been Christians for many years of their life already, by the grace of God, and contrary to this show the younger members of the church that money means everything in life and all kinds of compromises of Christian living and time for active involvement in the church have to be sacrificed for the pursuit of riches and glory in this life. They will sadly by their example teach the younger members of the church and even their own children what is most important in life.

"No man can ever be holy except by the grace and Spirit of God."

“What an influence the daily display of fervent and sincere Christian love and good works can be in our homes...”

We have seen young people joining the church in the days of their youth in America and well as in Singapore. They are full of enthusiasm and excitement because of confessed love for the Lord and for His truth. They seem to show the beauty of holiness in their lives. But in the course of the years of their life when they get older, the pursuit of the riches and glory and glorious careers in their lives takes over, and their love for God grows dim. And if there are children around and young people in the church that see them, they will

because of the sinful nature of these young people be tempted to follow their example.

In Ephesians 5, Paul warns us that covetousness is a form of idolatry. We have seen older Christians who by the wonderful grace of God were delivered from the folly and darkness of pagan idolatry. These in later life have forgotten the blessedness and glory of their salvation and have returned to an idolatry of a different sort, the idolatry of covetousness. How sad this is. Sometimes the greatest motivators which drive the trend to this kind of idolatry are parents of covenant children who are teaching their children perhaps not by words but definitely by their example to be materialistic and covetous in the whole of their lives.

Sometimes God by His grace gives the children an understanding of the vanity and hypocrisy of the lifestyles of their own parents. May God forbid that this kind of thing should happen in our

own families. What an awful judgment of God follows this when children leave the church and the Lord Himself in the days of their youth.

Holiness is manifesting the virtues of God of love and goodness and mercy and kindness and compassion and self-sacrifice in our daily lives. Do we show these in our attitude to our spouses and children in our homes? What an influence the daily display of fervent and sincere Christian love and good works can be in our homes on our children by the grace of God. What powerful affects can such life styles be on the youth in the church especially when they are going through trials and confused in their own lives.

May God help us to remain steadfast in His truth and in a life of holiness. And may our life of godliness be used in our homes and in the church for a mighty influence on new and young and dear saints of God.

HOLINESS AS YOUNG ADULTS (II)

>> Wee Gim Theng



Wee Gim Theng is a member of CERC.

In the last article we have established that the reason and motivation for one to live a life of holiness is primarily from the admonition given by the

Apostle Peter in 1 Pet. 1:15 and 16. It is because God is holy that we are called to be holy. As obedient children, we are therefore expected to live a holy life as unto the Lord. However, we realize that we are unable of ourselves to live a holy life. We need the power of His grace alone to live such a life.

In this article, we shall discuss some of the challenges faced by young Christian adults today in living a life of holiness. What I am going to discuss is by no

means an exhaustive list of challenges which I had gathered from some young adults in our church.

Social media / e-commerce/ computer gaming / digital marketing

Social media is ubiquitously used by young adults these days to socialise and keep up with their friends. Many young adults spend quite a sizeable proportion of their time socialising on various social media platforms.

Much time is spent each day reading posts, posting and commenting, liking, meeting people, or just saying “haha” or “lol”.

Young adults also spend much time browsing and shopping for items on the e-commerce websites. Online shopping is the rave of the time, spurred on by easy connectivity, convenience, cheap delivery charges and same-day or next-day delivery promises. Some, who are more entrepreneurial and internet savvy, would even set up their own e-commerce websites to earn a few bucks through sale of their own crafts and trinkets, etc.

Computer gaming has been a bane to many parents of school-going children. It can be a big problem for some young adults who spend much time playing computer games. The problem is not in playing some innocent games for relaxation. Some experts have blamed computer gaming to gender violent behaviours in some young adults. These people say that some games, where the gamer literally chooses the weapon and prowls from room to room seeking to ‘kill’ the enemies, have violent effects on the mind, especially when the actions of killing are done repeatedly. The portrayal of the gory scenes, through the animated killing scenes with blood splattering upon impact of shooting, can desensitise and embolden the gamers to commit physical violence in real life! Besides the potential problem of committing violence, there is the problem of ‘not properly redeeming’ one’s time. Gamers usually spend much time playing with other cyber players over the internet. Given the nature of the game, there is always an ever growing challenge to ‘better’ the previous scores, thus spurring the gamer to keep practicing until a state of near perfection is attained. To attain

this state, many hours have to be poured in to achieve gaming mastery.

Be it socialising on social media, browsing on the e-commerce websites or computer gaming, young Christian adults who spent a great amount of time on these activities would very often have a sense of guilt for not spending time wisely, especially when there are deadlines to meet or at the expense of reading the Bible, preparing for Bible studies or for a church meeting. There may be other areas that you have been spending much of your time. As a general guide, even though the activity is a neutral one, spending inordinate amounts of time on an activity on a regular basis without self-control would usually render the activity to be an idol, replacing God as the centre of your life. You could be so absorbed by the activity that your first waking thoughts would be to participate in that activity. Or sometimes, the thought of doing the activity keeps plaguing your mind until you lay hands on it ... such is the strong magnetic pulling power that one may succumb to. Young people, beware of Satan’s ploy to distract you (especially the young men) to get you so engaged in gaming or some other activities, so much so that you can become enslaved to them and do not have much time for the Lord or to grow spiritually! Satan’s strategy is very simple ... it is not to distract you entirely from your calling to live a life of holiness, to grow spiritually and to serve God. His ploy is to render you ineffective in your Christian life and service so that what you do for the Lord is done with minuscule effort and not to the best of your ability. As a result, the Lord’s work inevitably suffers. Is this happening to you?

Through the world of the internet, social

media and digital marketing, where one is constantly bombarded by its worldly philosophies and sexual content, young adults are not only challenged to re-examine their Christian values, but are tempted to become promiscuous. The generally tolerated soft pornographic content portrayed in articles and pictures depicting the opposite sex in sexually-charged and lurid poses would tempt young adults to fall into the sins of the lusts of the eyes and flesh; and commit adultery in their hearts, breaking the 7th commandment.

Conformance to peer pressures

Young Christian adults also face with a lot of peer pressures to conform to the lifestyle of the world, such as clubbing, worldly entertainment (watching movies and TV, dancing, listening to worldly music), worldly pleasures, etc. The acceptance of clubbing and a worldly lifestyle as a social norm amongst many young Christian adults has become a source of pressure for conformance. Through relentless bombardment of the social media and internet, young Christian adults are also tempted not only to conform to the values and lifestyles of their friends but also to pursue worldly things and

“Through relentless bombardment... young Christian adults are also tempted not only to conform... but also to pursue worldly things”

pleasures at the expense of spiritual things. It is good to take heed to Rom. 12:2 which tells us “not to conform to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind ...”, and 2 Cor. 6:17 exhorts us to “come out from among them, and be ye separate”.

Working life

Eking out a living is by no means easy as young adults find out when they step into the working world. Besides the pressures of work, there are many challenges faced by young working Christian adults.

Work can become an obsession, especially when one is very career-minded and aspires to climb the corporate ladder. Sometimes it is difficult for one to ‘turn down’ the bosses’ demands so as to be seen in a good light. This can become one’s preoccupation. As a result, it can become a temptation to want to please the boss at the expense of one’s Christian principles in order to get better bonuses or have better promotion prospects. At times, there are tempting career development offers to work in another country where there is no Reformed Church. To succumb to the company’s pressure to take up the offer would have detrimental consequences on one’s spiritual and family well-being. There are also pressures to break the Sabbath

day and work on Sundays to please the bosses or to advance in one’s career.

Work can also affect young Christian women especially if they are career-minded and have the capacity for career advancement. It can be difficult for her to quit her job when her first child comes along. It is especially so if she likes her job. When the reality of having to change diapers, put up with the physical demands of a helpless baby, care for the family, loss of income, etc., start to sink, she can be tempted to disobey God’s word to be a keeper at home (Tit. 2:5). Without her husband’s active support and affirmation, she can easily compromise her calling and remain in the workforce.

In some instances, your colleagues or even bosses may ask you to lie to get out of a certain sticky situation. This can be very challenging for a Christian worker, especially when you are the most junior in the team/office. The situation is made worse if there are Christian colleagues who are willing to compromise their Christian principles. The temptation is to take the easy way out and break the 9th commandment so as to be seen to support the team.

Sometimes, the work culture in the office is to take shortcuts and do the minimum to get by. As Christians, it is not right to follow this kind of work culture, and yet there is the pressure to conform or be left out of the group or be ostracised. The Christian worker finds it difficult to live antithetically in the midst of ungodly company at work where people backbite, gossip, refuse to submit or are disrespectful to authority.

As Christians, our calling as workers in our workplace is to be good employees, always subjecting to our employers

“As Christians, our calling as workers in our workplace is to be good employees...”

with all fear, not only to the good and gentle but also to the froward (1 Pet. 2:18). We are to serve our employers as obedient servants, as unto Christ (Eph. 6:5). We are to exert ourselves to work and always do our best as unto the Lord. In no circumstance should we be blamed for slothfulness or cheating our employers of their resource, money or time. This is not only sinful, but it also tarnishes the name of our God. But giving in to the afore-mentioned pressures or temptations in order to be in the bosses’ good books is certainly not our calling as Christians. We must always do what is right and pleasing in God’s sight. As we advance in our career, we must not forget that we are first the servants of the most high God and then servants to our bosses. We are to please God rather than men. At any point in time when our bosses’ demands go against the grain of our calling/conviction, we must re-examine our situations and seek to obey God. Never should we allow our calling at work to override our fundamental calling as Christians.

To be continued...

“Work can become an obsession...”

FELLOWSHIP IN SINGING

>>Matthias Wee



Matthias Wee is a member of CERC.

What is biblical singing? What is its purpose, and what benefits does it bring to God's people? This article hopes to address these points.

What is Singing?

The verb “to sing” is defined as “to produce musical tones by means of the voice”. In the context of biblical singing, that would also include words. The activity of singing is deeply intertwined in the lives of God's people, and the Bible is full of examples of it. A search of the word “sing” brings up 102 distinct verses, and if we include the various tenses “singing”, “sang”, and “sung”, the number rises to 144, 59 of which are found in the Psalms alone! The list goes on if we include other descriptions of singing in the search criteria. It is evident that the Old and New Testament church sang — plentifully!

Biblical examples of singing are divided into two main categories. The first is in the corporate worship of God (e.g. Ps. 95:1 — “O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation”). The second is in a personal capacity, whether as an individual or as a group. Some examples

are the Israelite women singing about David's valour (1 Sam. 18:6-7) and Paul and Silas singing in prison at Philippi (Acts 16:25). Songs were sung in thanksgiving, to give praise to God for His various attributes, out of joy, to comfort, and to confess and express sorrow for sin and seek forgiveness. One question we can ask is — why?

Why Sing?

Why does the child of God sing? Does he or she even *need* to sing? After all, we have the preaching of the Word as the means of instruction, and prayer as the means by which we communicate with God.

The answer is a resounding “yes”. We sing because we *have* to and because we *want* to! Singing is a necessary element in corporate worship, which God Himself commands in Scripture. In Psalm 111:1, God through the psalmist commands, “Praise ye the LORD. I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation”. In the New Testament, Paul in Colossians 3:16 calls the church to sing in worship: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”. Singing in corporate worship is not optional or a matter of preference; the Word of God requires it.

We also *want* to sing. Singing can have many purposes, but its primary purpose is to praise God with the intent

to glorify His Name. The words “sing” and “praise” are often put together in the Bible, especially in the Psalms, as if praise is itself the definition of singing. One example is Psalm 47:6: “Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises”. The child of God *wants* to sing praises to God — he who has tasted the goodness of God in salvation; does he not want to burst out in joy and exultation, glorifying God for His mercy and grace? We think of Moses' song in Exodus 15 after Israel's deliverance through the Red Sea, and Mary's song in Luke 1 after realising her child was the promised Messiah. We think of the many Psalms that David wrote exulting God's Name in his deliverance from his enemies. There is indeed much reason to sing!

You may be wondering what the difference is between singing and prayer. Prayer can also convey praise, sorrow for sin, thanksgiving, and other similar expressions. In fact, both are elements of worship by which we respond to God speaking to us in His Word. One difference is that the melody in songs conveys the emotions of the words to a greater degree than prose can. This is not to say that singing is in any way superior to prayer — both are ordained means by which we worship God. But there is something unique in the ability of songs, set in appropriate tunes, to combine ideas and emotions and heighten them, which make it a unique, poetic, and powerful way of praising God.

We have to be careful though, because songs are prone to abuse. There is the

danger of emotionalism, when singing becomes purely an emotional release. A person can feel “touched by the Holy Spirit” and that he is praising God even if he sings heretical words. The emotion may be genuine; however, it is *not* of the Spirit, as the Holy Spirit always uses the truth of God’s Word. A poetic, well-written, doctrinally sound song with an appropriate melody brings about healthy emotions that the Holy Spirit uses to fill the mind of the singer, enabling him to praise God with his whole heart (Ps. 111:1).

Singing as Fellowship

Last, we deal with the subject of singing as fellowship. Singing is first and foremost fellowship with God.

In corporate worship, it is a form of spiritual dialogue with God in response to His Word. Singing is a response of praise, and we have examined that in the earlier section. But as we sing, we are also singing *to* each other. For example, in Psalter 255 (versification of Psalm 95) we sing:

*Now with joyful exultation
Let us sing Jehovah’s praise,
To the Rock of our salvation
Loud hosannas let us raise;*

Let *us* sing praise to Jehovah, the Rock of our salvation! We exhort one another to sing, even as we direct this praise to God. We rejoice together as a congregation, and as we hear those in the pews behind us singing with

gusto, we are reminded that indeed, let *me* sing praise to God; and the whole church rings with the beautiful voices of the congregation!

There are many other examples of singing as fellowship. We sing to instruct, to admonish, to encourage, to rejoice, to express sorrow... the list goes on. This is always primarily for the praise of God and for the edification of our fellow saints.

The child of God is one who sings. Let us use our voices to praise His Name, for He is the Rock of our salvation.

GRANDPARENTS IN THE COVENANT HOME

>>Rev. Arie Den Hartog



Rev. Arie Den Hartog is a minister emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. During his active ministry, he served as a missionary (1979-1986) and minister-on-loan (2002-2005) to Singapore.

Grandparents have a significant role in the covenant home. Those who are come to this stage of life ought to realize this. This role can be the source of great blessing and joy. It also involves a serious calling and responsibility. God’s

covenant mercy extends farther than only one generation. God is pleased to continue His covenant to succeeding generations. The covenant family in the church of the New Testament sometimes has present in it at one time three or even four generations. This is an amazing thing! On the day of Pentecost it was declared that God’s promise is to believers and their children even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The Word of God has many passages in it that allude to the succeeding generations in the covenant among the God-fearing. After its beautiful description of the covenant home, Psalm 128 concludes with the promise of God: “The LORD shall bless thee out of Zion (the New Testament Church); and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life. Yea,

thou shalt see thy children’s children, and peace upon Israel.”

In Psalm 78, the inspired Psalmist exhorts fathers (and grandfathers) to instruct their children in the fear of the Lord. New generations arise in the covenant home and they must be instructed. “We will not hide them (the commandments of the Lord) from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done... which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep

His commandments” (Psalm 78:4-7). Count if you will, the number of generations mentioned in this passage. After these words the Psalmist warns about the serious consequences which follow when fathers and grandfathers fail in their God-given calling. God’s chastisement will fall upon His people. They will be cut off in their generations. Yet the Lord will surely preserve His covenant with His elect people.

In the New Testament we also have examples of the so called multi-tier family in the church, where several generations live together. The family where the evangelist Timothy was raised included a godly grandmother as well as a godly mother. It seemed that the father was either absent or pagan. In spite of this, God’s covenant was preserved by the Lord in a wonderful way. See 2 Timothy 1: 5 and 2 Timothy 3:14-17. Timothy inherited spiritually by the grace of God the legacy of the faith of his mother as well as his grandmother.

In Titus 2, the various generations are instructed. The aged women are exhorted to teach the younger women to love their husbands and to love their children. The aged men are to be held in high regard by the children; and their godly instruction and discipline are to be submitted to.

According to the natural instinct which God has put in man from creation, men and women love their own children in a very special way. They take pride in their children more than in anything else in the world and are greatly offended when their children are judged and condemned by the world in which they live. It is common that this natural affection extends to grandchildren. But because of man’s depraved nature, this

natural affection is thoroughly carnal and worldly and motivated by sinful pride and ambition. According to God’s law, He visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children unto the third and fourth generation. The failure of man in raising a new generation contributes greatly to the evils of society among its youth. Society as a result loses all of its cohesion between the generations. In the nominal church, God’s covenant is forsaken and forgotten. Man is self-centered and proud and egotistical and consumed with concern only for his own welfare and personal enrichment and glory in the world. His days are cut off by God. He is destroyed in his generations. Therefore, every generation grows worse and worse.

No church in this world will ever continue to be spiritually strong when there is no concern about coming generations. The boasting of vast world-wide evangelism campaigns will come to nothing when there is neglect of the new generations that arise. The church that does not repent of this evil will soon be in the state of spiritual decline and apostasy. After a wave of excitement and enthusiasm and numerical growth it will decline and soon disappear from the earth. Very soon those who attend the worship services will only be the gray-headed. Children and young people will be gone. Their joy and laughter will no longer be heard. They will be lost to worldliness of life and ungodliness and even to total agnosticism. How very serious this is!

In the faithful covenant home and with the blessing of God there must be and will be a great difference. Godly married couples to whom God graciously gives covenant children must be concerned not only about their own homes but the

homes and family which these children will establish in later life for themselves. Grandparents will be concerned about their children’s children and assist in teaching them the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of His truth. The Lord will pour out His blessing. There will be the great joy of the play and the laughter of covenant children. Few things in this life give greater joy and pleasure.

Psalm 128 speaks of the blessedness of the covenant home as culminating in the great joy and blessing of seeing one’s children’s children and peace upon the Israel of God. The apostle John in one of his letters says it in this way: “I have no greater joy than to see that my children walk in the truth”.

The senior generation in the church must guard against the sins of self-indulgence and self-pleasure. For the God-fearing, senior years are for more than endless vacations and world cruises, and visiting exotic places before one dies. It will be a generation that does not spend hour after hour and day after day sunbathing on the beach. This kind of life is worldliness, no less than the worldliness that destroys the youth in the early years of their lives.

Grandparents have a great calling in the church. It should be the case that they have gained spiritual wisdom and strength in the years of their life.

"The senior generation in the church must guard against the sins of self-indulgence and self-pleasure."

**“Grandparents...
have a special calling
to contribute to
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They have learned even from their own falls and sinful weakness in the battles against sin and apostasy in the church. This wisdom must guide them in their lives and be evident in a life of holiness and devotion to God and the cause of His kingdom to the very end of their lives. Godly grandparents must support parents in the home in warning about the power of sin and the great temptations of the world. Grandparents must be an example of unwavering faithfulness and steadfastness in the truth of the Word of God for the great benefit of succeeding generations. In the times of many afflictions which often come with old age, they must show their genuine and sincere faith in God. They must be examples of trusting in the mercies of God and testifying of the strength of the Lord in their lives. This is not an easy calling. It takes a lot of grace. Old age in the church should be a time when grandparents live in such a way that they are worthy of honour and respect. This is the time for them to leave a legacy of faith.

Sometimes by this time of life people have been able to amass large sums of wealth in the providence of God through retirement programs and annuities and such like. Those who have been able to do this ought not to proudly imagine that they have gained

their wealth by their own wisdom and power. Rather they must give God the glory as the One who gave them power to get wealth in this world. Godly grandparents will not imagine that they have the freedom to spend their monies as they please. Grandparents, especially those entrusted with great wealth, have a special calling to contribute to the church and to Christian education for covenant children as well as to the evangelism of the church. They must be willing to make personal sacrifices and to give liberally, cheerfully and joyfully. This is more important than merely passing down material wealth to children who may or may not benefit spiritually from the inheritance of their parents. Remember that our Lord used the example of the widow's mite who was probably aged and destitute herself. Yet she cast in all her living to the treasury for the support of the church and of the poor.

Grandparents must be around to help practically in the homes of their children with the raising of their grandchildren. They must joyfully give of their time, talents and remaining energy to help with the raising of the covenant family. In Bible times and in other cultures than our own, grandparents often lived with their children and their grandchildren in the same house. In these homes, by the grace of God there was care for each other, from one generation to the others. Even from a practical perspective, raising a covenant family is a daunting task. It can be wearying and exhausting to young mothers. Fathers often need to work long hours to earn enough to maintain their homes and pay for Christian school tuition. Therefore in the course of daily life in the home, many opportunities will arise for grandparents to help in practical as well as spiritual ways. In this way children

will learn to honour and respect their grandparents. Grandparents have a deep sense of purpose in their lives in the days of their old age when perhaps they have retired from their full-time earthly occupations.

God-fearing grandparents must love their children and their grandchildren fervently and sincerely. They must seek to be of great influence in the lives of their children even after these children have grown up and married and have homes of their own. Grandparents can be the source of great encouragement to young mothers in that they do not forsake their duties in the home for secular careers of the world. The calling of grandparents continues even unto the day of their death. They have great influence through their tender loving embrace and sober godly example in their lives before their grandchildren.

After many years of enjoying the underserved faith and blessing of God merited by the Lord Jesus Christ, what reason we have accumulated for a life of thankfulness. We have the solemn calling and obligation to speak of the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord in our whole life from our youth to old age. By doing this, we encourage new generations and our lives will be an occasion for the praise of God and thanksgiving to Him. Listen once more to the words of one of the Psalms that speak specifically of old age and the later years of our life and pilgrimage on this earth. After the Psalmist has testified of the goodness and mercies of the Lord from the days of his youth and his strength in old age, he utters this earnest prayer: “Now also when I am old and greyheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come.” (Ps. 71: 18).

BOOK REVIEW: LESS THAN THE LEAST

>> Tang Jee Fung

Who is Cornelius Hanko?

Yes. Most of us know him as the father of our dear Professor Herman Hanko.

What do you know about him?

Like me, you probably do not know much about him, until you read this book—which is the fruit of the editing of his prepared memoirs, and tape-recorded interviews with the editor, Karen Van Baren, Professor Hanko's daughter, whom some of us personally know.

Chapters 1-6 of the book help you get acquainted with Reverend Cornelius Hanko, and give the backdrop of the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches as well. You'll find many interesting incidents and anecdotes recorded, often with dry humour. The Dutch culture is clearly manifested in the lives of the pioneers of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America.

What is the value of reading the story of Reverend Cornelius Hanko?

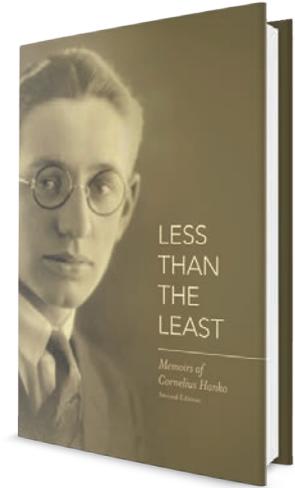
The preface by Professor Herman Hanko puts it this way:

“...his ministry spanned almost all of the sometimes turbulent history of the Protestant Reformed Churches...He was deeply involved in the controversies over common grace, which formed the occasion for the beginning of the Protestant Reformed Churches. He was also in the troubled controversies of the 1940s and 1950s when the denomination was split over the question of the conditional theology.”

As you read chapters 7-10, you understand better the controversy of 1924, and what it means to our fellow saints in America. Chapters 22 and 23 record the painful schism of 1953, and its aftermath. Having gone through the divorce and remarriage split in our denomination, I can weep with our American brethren who wept. Many of us have gone through at least one split, and still bear the scars from the controversies. But God ordains all things for our good. As a result of such controversies, we grow in a better understanding of the truths of God, and hold dearly these truths, even as we struggle to defend them. We faltered, often, and God taught us, ‘My grace is sufficient for you’. We experienced what it felt like to be forsaken, alone, and in turmoil. Yet, through it all, we experienced a deeper sense of the presence and upholding grace of our sovereign Almighty God.

It strikes me as I read the book that in so many ways, we share many similar life stories and experiences with the saints in the PR churches, and so we can learn much from what they have gone through and learnt.

As Reverend Hanko chronicled the ups and downs in his life, against the backdrop of world events and schisms and troubles in the churches, you will see God's sovereign and particular grace in his life, and in the life of the churches, and be greatly encouraged. At the same time, we are reminded of the fact that this world is not our home, and we are but pilgrims in this valley of tears.



Many of us have heard or read Reverend Herman Hoeksema, but we do not know him as a person. This book gives you a different perspective of one of the founding fathers of the PRCA, and helps you understand why he was so loved and respected.

The other chapters of the book each has its unique value.

In chapter 14, Reverend Hanko wrote of the difficulties, problems and sudden deaths in the congregations. It was during the Great Depression, and the people, including the pastors, suffered financial difficulties. There were also the drought and dust storms in 1934, followed by the grasshoppers, which devoured the entire crop, then torrential rains which caused a great deal of destruction. There are times in our Christian life that trials and difficulties come in waves, one after another, and we wonder when we will see the light at the end of the tunnel...

Reverend Hanko embarked on a

World Tour in 1975, during which he visited Singapore. You can read of his experience in chapter 27.

Chapter 30 is written by Karen Van Baren, in which she completes the

life story of Reverend Hanko, faithful and struggling, as he finished his race. Many photographs are included, which greatly enhance the value of the book, for a picture is worth a thousand words.

I enjoyed the appendices at the end of the book too, especially appendices 2 and 7, and am greatly edified by them.

May our LORD bless and edify you, as you read 'Less than the Least'.

HONOURING GOD IN MUSIC

>> Lim Ruo Xi



Lim Ruo Xi is a member of CERC.

Music is one of the creations of God that brings great pleasure in its engagement. Most people would associate it with entertainment today, but as Christians, we know that the main purpose of music is to glorify God. However, in spite of that knowledge, the way we steward the gift of music is often riddled with sin because of our sinful natures. The consequences of this imperfect stewardship can be far-reaching not just for ourselves, but for others as well. It is thus necessary to look at how we can honour God in music for the sake of our testimonies, our spiritual health, and our neighbour.

It is clear from the Bible that music's main purpose is to bring glory to God. There are many passages that illustrate this, but the idea is most prominent in the book of Psalms — it is a songbook in itself. The fact that God has graciously given us the words which we can use to praise Him says much about

the way we are to worship Him. The church was exhorted to sing psalms (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16, James 5:13), and Paul and Silas were noted to have sung to God even in jail (Acts 16:25). Since music exists primarily for His sake and not ours, we really ought to worship God with music in the way He has prescribed. The Reformation restored psalm-singing from biblical days to the church through the Psalter, and we should honour God by continuing in this tradition, never to allow hymns or contemporary Christian songs into the worship service. It will also be beneficial to sing psalters in one's personal devotions as well.

Apart from the singing of psalms, instruments are also featured in the worship of God in the Bible. The harp and psaltery are frequently mentioned, and there is even reference to a ten-stringed instrument (Ps. 33:2). This indicates that the use of instruments in worship is not wrong, and there are practical applications for us in this respect. If one has musical talents, one can play the piano or organ for worship services and also provide the music for a church wedding for the edification of the church.

So far, music for worship in our church is Reformed and informed by the

Bible. However, our personal use of music is not regulated and needs to be discussed. Enjoying music personally is not wrong, even though music in the Bible is mentioned in the context of worship. However, it is susceptible to external influences and is an area in which our testimony can be harmed.

It goes without saying that the bulk of mainstream music with lyrics is dishonouring to God in its content. Just as the Psalms are vehicles of God's Word, mainstream songs are carriers of the world's philosophies. Catchy tunes and beats are used as hooks for the listener, so that even if he is not drawn to the often repetitive lyrics, he becomes agreeable to its message through the music. In fact, it is common for one to hate the lyrics to a song and yet continue to listen to it because the music is too attractive to ignore. Also, many people today listen to songs passively, without thinking deeply about the messages and whether they align with their beliefs. As the redeemed people of Christ, we must not allow such behaviour to affect our testimony.

Some may argue that they listen to such music without actually processing the meaning behind the lyrics, and are just in it for the music. However, while this may not have any direct effect on

your spirituality, this behaviour bears the appearance of evil to others and may stumble those who listen to lyrics. Since we are explicitly commanded to avoid the appearance of evil (1 Thess. 5:22) and to not stumble our brethren (Rom. 14:13), we ought to avoid music with anti-Christian lyrics. The case is the same for music with foreign lyrics. While one can listen to a song with ungodly lyrics without actually knowing the meaning, a brother may witness one's enjoyment of that piece of music and be tempted to do the same, though he already knows the lyrics. Here, the principle of restraining one's liberty to avoid stumbling a brother must be applied. Pastor Lanning once said in the confession of faith class that even if one did not know that one has caused a brother to stumble, that person has sinned and must repent of it

once he realises it.

When it comes to instrumental music, one also needs to practise discernment. Some would argue that it is abstract and should be all right to listen to, but I would argue that precisely because it is abstract, it can mean different things to different people, and to some, it will not be beneficial. For example, trance music can cause an altered state of consciousness in the listener due to its inherent musical properties. It is often associated with drugs because it was developed in the 1990s to replicate the effects of ecstasy without any side effects (Ori Uplift). There is also music that evokes a certain mood or encourages sensuality, like club music. Such music is not beneficial for listening, whether or not one is tempted to behave inappropriately. Thus, when it comes

to the personal use of music, we must examine our hearts and see if we are negatively affected, and also take care not to hurt our testimony or stumble another.

In all, we must seek to honour the Lord in our engagement with music in church or at home. It is easier said than done, and we cannot do it with our own strength, but we can ask God to give us grace. May the Lord grant us discernment and humility in this area.

Reference

Ori Uplift: Beautiful Uplifting Trance, Vocal Trance, Progressive, Balearic Trance, & Chill-out w/ Biblical Lyrics. Trance & Ecstasy: Why the Association? <http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/uri/abouttrance/ecstasy.php>

THOUGHTS ON TRAVELLING

>> Cheryl Lim



Cheryl Lim is a confessing young adult in CERC.

The June holidays are just round the corner, and many of us will be making (or have already made) plans to travel. With the increasing affluence of our society, it is not uncommon for families and individuals to take one, two or even more holiday trips each year. In light of these, perhaps it would be worthwhile for us to consider what the Bible says about travelling and some of the issues

pertaining to it. As far as possible, I will attempt to shed the light of Scripture on this topic, but some of the writings will also include my personal views and inclinations. Hence I have titled this piece: "Thoughts on Travelling".

At the outset, it would be appropriate to assert that to travel or take a vacation is not evil. The apostle Paul declares: "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim. 4:4-5). The child of God may legitimately go on a holiday and enjoy the good gifts of God in His creation. Solomon too, in his wisdom, writes, "And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all

his labour, it is the gift of God" (Ecc. 3:13). Man may truly enjoy the fruit of his labours (including travelling), using it moderately and receiving it as from the hand of God. Unfortunately, as with many other good gifts of God, sinful man is inclined to abuse the gift of vacation and engage in it wickedly. As children of a holy God, we do well to examine ourselves in some of these areas concerning travelling.

Motive(s) for Travelling

Ponder for a moment: why do we travel? We live in a society that is pleasure-crazy. A society that pursues pleasure as an end in itself. To what extent have we been influenced by such a life-view? If travelling consumes us and we divorce

it from our Christian calling to serve and glorify God, then we are guilty of immoderation and excess. If we seek travelling for travelling's sake and not as a means to help us in our pilgrimage, then we abuse God's gift to us. We are warned that in the last days — “men shall be lovers of their own selves” (2 Tim. 3:2). It is easy for us to get carried away with pursuing travels merely to gratify ourselves.

To guard against such a pitfall, let us take heed to our calling to perform all things to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). In travelling, do we seek to use the break so that we may better serve God upon returning? Or to help us grow in our walk and relationship with God? Is it intended to lead us to praising our Creator as we enjoy the marvellous sights on earth? Do we acknowledge Him as the giver of this gift and duly afford thanksgiving? May we have the glory of God at the forefront of our minds as we make travel plans.

Communion with God

In our vacations, we may take a break from some aspects of our earthly callings, as, for example, studying or working. But are we also sometimes inclined to take a vacation from God? To take a vacation from our eternal calling to be citizens of the kingdom of Heaven? On a holiday, our daily routines are disrupted and this could interfere with our quiet times of devotions and prayer. There may be a certain haste to visit the many attractions and places of interest, or we may be excessively wearied by travel and all its excitement. And so the temptation to take a vacation from communion with God presents itself. When travelling with believing friends and family, a delightful remedy is to plan for group devotions. A roster could

even be drawn up ahead of time so that different individuals may prepare to lead. Group singing, meditation on God's word and sharing of reflections are a wonderful way to fellowship.

That being said, personal devotions ought not to be neglected either, certainly not even at youth retreats or church camps. We may not simply drift along with the spiritual activities that have been planned, giving no heed to our *personal* walk. There is no other way around this apart from faithful diligence. Get up earlier, or start the day's events later; it must be worked into our schedules. The psalmist's experience is instructive: “Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word” (Ps. 119:148). Rising early, he gave himself to the meditation of God's Word. Let us strive to emulate such behaviour.

Sabbath Observance

Sabbath desecration is oftentimes a snare for us who travel. It is a subject of much contention and debate, but let us be subject to the instruction of Scripture regarding this. Is it necessary to attend church while on vacation? A resounding yes! The words of the prophet Isaiah cut at the heart of the matter: “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, and holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thy own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, not speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD...” (Isa. 58:13, 14). So do the words of our Heidelberg Catechism: “...that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear His word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon

the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor...” (LD 38, Q&A 103). I believe these quotes are also adequate responses to whether or not listening to recorded sermons or worshipping God in creation are appropriate substitutes. Often, the excuse is heard, “Oh, but it's only for one or two Sundays of the year; I can be found in church on the other 50 Lord's Days”. Really, would we say anything similar with regard to the 3rd or 7th commandments? This implies then, that in the planning of our travels that span over a Sunday, we actively and deliberately work our schedules around church attendance and Sabbath-keeping.

Then follows the question, may we only attend churches from the same denomination? I hesitate to make a rule out of this, but I draw the reader's attention to a few considerations. First, consider why we have our membership in the church that we do. Is it not because we believe that it has the purest manifestation of the three marks of a true church (Belgic Confession, Art. 29)? And because we are best nourished in this church and affiliated ones? And it is where we may best glorify God in our Sabbath worship? Second, consider how our sinful natures will react once granted some leeway in this matter. As with so many issues in our Christian life, it is akin to opening the gates for our feet to go sprinting towards that which is clearly sin, all the while screaming at the top of our lungs, “Christian Liberty!” At first, a somewhat faithful church. Then perhaps, any church will do. And then, perhaps just a recorded sermon if attending a church does not fit with our travel plans. And soon, what is prolonged absence from church attendance in order to “travel the world”? Let us be wary.

For the Christian traveller, the Sabbath day shapes our vacations. It rules out certain vacation spots. It limits vacation time. It disrupts our plans. And yet, I think to myself, when we get to Heaven, we will be witnesses of beauty so wonderful that nothing on earth can compare with. Will we then pursue the beauties of this temporal earth to such an extent that we “give up” on the true beauty that will be present in Heaven?

Conclusion

The Lord has blessed us with the enjoyable gift of travelling. Let us seek to use it for His glory. On vacation or not, we are the children of God and must live as such. From this calling there is no vacation.

After-note: It is of the author's opinion

that visits to sister-churches or their events (e.g. British Reformed Fellowship Family Conference, PRCA youth retreats) make splendid vacation plans. They allow for proper Sabbath observance, while serving to strengthen the bonds of unity. CERC is also welcoming of friends and visitors to our church and the various activities planned throughout the year.

DAILY HONOURING

>> Marcus Boon



Marcus Boon is a member of CERC.

Who is the first person that comes to mind when you need help or a listening ear? Of course it is your parents! They are the ones who can understand you, having brought you up from the moment you were born. Even worldly philosophy understands that blood is thicker than water. Having experienced such love from our parents, are we then becoming ungrateful and selfish, taking them for granted?

Yes, I know there are cases of abusive parents, hitting their children for no good reason, but even then, we are called to honour and love them, not only the good and gentle, but also the froward (1 Pet. 2:18). Having said that, there are also true stories in which the love of a mother caught the world's attention. During the aftermath of an

earthquake, the body of a woman was uncovered in an awkward position, as though she intentionally moved herself in that position for a reason. Yes, that's right, huddled in her arms was her infant, and she sacrificed herself while using her body as a shield to protect her baby from the falling debris. Her efforts were not in vain, as her child was kept alive because of the mother's heroic act. Or in another case, a sick mother refused to undergo treatment because doing so would result in the termination of her pregnancy, and in the end she sacrificed her own life after the baby was born because her love for her child moved her to take the risk of a much needed treatment at a later date. However, such acts of love are not true love and not acts of good works, because they are done not to glorify God. They are in vain in themselves, done merely out of human affection but not out of the love of God.

Therefore, the most important way to honour our parents is to love Christ and be rooted in Christ's love. This is, in fact, the only way. There is no other way. “But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the

hope of salvation” (1 Thess. 5:8). To love and honour our parents, we first of all must have faith in Jehovah, knowing that it is Christ who first loved us, giving us everything we have, including our parents, to guide us along in our pilgrim's journey to heaven. We must obey and love our parents, knowing that God has placed them in our life's journey as a picture of our heavenly Father's tender love for us. Psalm 103:13 says, “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him”. Proverbs 3:12 says, “For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth”.

To honour our parents means that we take heed to their admonitions, chastisements, and words. We obey them not grudgingly, but with delight, even if it means doing things that we dislike to do. How often do we drag our feet when our parents instruct us to do our homework or our daily household chores and have to be scolded for not obeying immediately. We must pray to God for the grace to remove any bitterness in our hearts, because it displeases God when we disobey our parents. When we disobey our parents,

we are in fact disobeying God and dishonouring our parents. We must also take heed to our parents' advice seriously, because they are much wiser in their years of age and have a lifetime of experience to share with us. We will benefit both spiritually and physically when we listen to their advice. For example, I am sure your parents advised you to eat your vegetables when you were young, even though you disliked them, and to finish your bitter medicine when you were sick. How much it benefits us. How much more so if they advise us on spiritual things. Proverbs 1:8-9 says, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck".

One of the most important things to do to honour our parents is to daily pray for them and their well-being. We too, of course, must also take care of their well-being and honour them.

For example, in our daily lives we must encourage our mother or father when they are feeling down and let them know how much we love them and cheer them up. Even a simple "I love you" or "I will be praying for you", or reciting your favourite Bible verse to encourage them, will definitely lift their spirits, because it is God's way, and God will definitely work in their hearts and our hearts to comfort us even in the most painful times. You may also like to ask your parents if they need anything to make their lives easier and save up money to buy the things that they need, or maybe even surprise them if you already know what they need without asking. Thoughtfulness is an attribute you must have to honour your parents. It also goes without saying that we must help out in the household chores and do additional ones without being told to ease their burden. Helping your parents to buy groceries and carrying stuff for your parents works fine too. We can also save

the best dishes for our parents during meal times and buy their favourite food using our own pocket money when they are too tired to cook, or maybe even make their favourite hot/cold drinks on a daily basis.

In conclusion, we must honour our parents by first of all honouring God and showing the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. Also, with the spiritual advice given by our parents, our lives may be prolonged if it be God's will, based on God's Word in Exodus 20:12: "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee".

Thank you to all the parents and my own as well. God bless.

THE ABUSE OF CHRISTIAN WOMEN BY THEIR CHRISTIAN HUSBANDS

>> Prof. David Engelsma



Prof. David Engelsma is a professor emeritus of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. He was Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies from 1988 to 2008, and has been an ordained minister since 1963.

Introduction

Reformed Christians, both the laity and the officebearers, must become aware of the evil of abuse in marriages in their fellowship. They must judge it to be the gross, destructive sin that it is. They must deal with it in the right way, delivering the abusive husband from his sin and delivering the abused wife from her misery.

I address the abuse of wives by their husbands. This is not because there are no instances of the abuse of husbands by their wives. There are. But women

are far more likely to be abused by their husband. The experience of every pastor will confirm this. Besides, what is said about abused wives will apply also to abused husbands in most respects.

There may be disagreement with aspects of this article. There should be no disagreement with the assertion that abuse is a real problem in the Reformed community, including those of which we are members. It is killing some wives, as also the children in these homes. There are abusive husbands who are under the wrath of God at present and who will be damned, if they do not

repent.

The evil is not only a concern to other churches, but also to our own.

The Nature of Abuse

Abuse is a husband's deliberate, continuing, systematic, relentless destruction of his wife, whether her soul or her body, and usually both. Abuse is not necessarily physical, although invariably there is at least the threat of physical abuse. Often, abuse takes the form of the psychological and emotional destruction of the woman by name-calling, criticism, and belittling. Such is the unrelenting degradation that it convinces the wife that she has no redeeming quality, whether in the kitchen or in the bedroom.

By abuse, I do not mean, and no one means, the occasional outburst of anger, or other unkind treatment of one's wife. These actions are sinful, but they do not constitute abuse. Abuse is a pattern of marital life.

Verbal abuse destroys the woman, even when there is no physical abuse. It is sin, and the sin is murder. It is violation of the sixth commandment of the law of God, "Thou shalt not kill." Lord's Day 40 of the Heidelberg Catechism explains the sixth commandment thus: "that I neither in thought, nor in word or look, much less in deed, revile, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor". The positive requirement is that we "love our neighbor as ourselves, to show patience, peace, meekness, mercy, and kindness towards him [or her], and, so far as we have power...prevent his hurt".

The biblical basis of the Catechism's inclusion of reviling and insulting

words — "verbal abuse!" — in the sin of murder is 1 Corinthians 5:11 and 6:1. According to 1 Corinthians 6:10, no reviler, that is, verbal abuser, "shall inherit the kingdom of God".

Because the children witness the abuse of their mother, and are terrified by it, the abusive husband on his part is the murderer of his entire family.

What folly! For "he that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hateth his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church (Eph. 5:28, 29). The explanation of this folly is that the husband, at least, the husband in the church, confuses his headship with absolute lordship as though he is entitled to his wife and may do with her as he pleases.

The truth is that the husband is "head," not dictator, or tyrant. He may not treat his wife as he pleases but as Christ treated, and treats, His wife, the church (Eph. 5:25). This is love — a love that gives oneself to and on behalf of the wife. This is love that not only does not abuse, but also that does not even *use*. It nourishes and cherishes.

The Calling of the Church

The church must treat the sin of abuse, as it treats all other sins, by strong, sharp, pointed preaching. This preaching exhorts the positive calling of the husband in marriage, but also exposes and condemns the sin of abuse. It promises the reward of grace to the man who lives with his wife in love. It also threatens hell and damnation to the impenitent, abusive husband. Such preaching will hold before the husband the behaviour of Christ towards His church, which marriage is the real marriage and the model for our own

marriages (Eph. 5). It will call the man to speak lovingly to his wife, as Solomon spoke to his wife: "Thou art fair, my love" (Song 1:15, 16). The believing woman will gladly submit to such a husband. The Christian husband does not abuse his wife into submission; he *loves* her into submission.

The Reformed institution and practice of family visitation is another means by which the church discovers abuse and deals with it. The elders must make inquiry into the condition of the marriages in their fellowship, by pointed questions about headship and abuse, about submission and rebellion. Where necessary, they must resolutely follow up on instances of weaknesses.

In the church, all the members have a calling to help with regard to abuse that comes to their attention. Often, an abused wife will first reveal her distress to another female in the congregation. This female must exercise the office of believer and help her sister. Likely, she will call on the pastor for his aid. The pastor must then take hold of the sin, comforting the abused woman, which includes believing her, and confronting the abusive husband. He must see to it that the husband does not punish his wife with an increase of abuse, because of her call for help to another member of the church or to the pastor. The refusal of a member or of the pastor to give help, perhaps out of fear of the consequences for himself, is despicable cowardice. Refusing to help the abused woman, he refuses to help Christ Jesus (Matt. 10:40-42).

Deliverance

Important as deliverance of the abused wife is, prevention of abuse is equally as important. Even though she dates

a young man in the church, a young woman must be on her guard against marrying an abusive man. He will show himself to be abusive by attempting to control her, by speaking cruelly to her or about her, and simply by not being loving to her. He may even hurt her physically in anger: hitting, pinching, becoming enraged, threatening violence. If she sees signs of abuse, she should break off her relationship with him. Quickly!

Parents must carefully scrutinize their daughter's suitor with a view to spotting abusive characteristics. Marrying in the Lord includes more than marrying a boy from the church.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

For the woman who finds herself

married to an abusive man, there is deliverance. There is also deliverance for the abusive husband. If he is to escape damnation for hating his nearest neighbour — his wife — and if he is to live the basic Christian life of loving his neighbour — his wife — he must be brought to repentance. The elders of the church, as well as fellow believers, must admonish him. If necessary, the elders must discipline him, to the point of excommunication.

Deliverance of the abused wife consists of compassionate help by the church, usually given by the pastor. He must listen to her; he must believe her; he must encourage her with the gospel of Jesus Christ. If her husband is also a member of the church, he must guide the consistory in firm admonition of the abusive husband, which is more than a brief rebuke in order to send the

man quickly back to his wife, so that he can continue his abuse, and probably increase its severity.

In some cases, the evil behaviour of the husband has contributing psychological causes that require the ministrations of a competent counsellor, preferably a Christian.

Spousal abuse is an abomination to God and the church!

This article is, in the main, a summary of a booklet on the subject of abuse by myself presently being published by the Byron Center PRC and by the RFPA. Copies of the booklet are available from the Byron Center PRC c/o Harlow Kuiper at hkuiper44@msn.com or c/o Sid Miedema at sid@1800lastbid.com and from the RFPA at www.rfpa.org

REFORMED POLEMICS (III): REFORMED POLEMICS FOR THE YOUTH

>> Lim Yang Zhi



Lim Yang Zhi is a confessing young adult in CERC.

Reformed polemics for the believer has been the subject of two previous articles in the *Salt Shakers*. Now we come to the polemics *for the believing youth*.

STOP: Do not skip this article. Yes, polemics seems quite far off for youths, doesn't it? What does it have to do with youths? Perhaps you do not see yourself

doing polemics in your life; and, I sense some of you might think that you do not have the intellectual ability for polemics.

Any of us (adults included) may have these thoughts, because we think, to condemn the lie swiftly and decisively, polemics merely involves an elite level of writing, speaking, and intellectual gifts; all of which can only be found in professors, ministers, and a few men in the congregation that will probably be office-bearers.

I beg to differ. Polemics does involve good writing and speaking skills, as well as intellectual ability; but those do not define polemics. What makes

polemics, polemics, is *love for the truth*. When we love the truth, we condemn the lie to preserve the truth.

Therefore, any expression of that love for the truth by going against the lie is a form of polemics. That expression is polemics for the youth; I give three examples of that expression.

Personal Polemics, First

Rev. Langerak wrote about this in the previous article: *He must first all be engaged in the battle with sin in his own heart and life.... Daily the believer must put off the old man and put on the new man, a kind of personal polemics.*

**“... we will defend
the truth and
condemn the lie only
when we love the
truth in our hearts.”**

Why is personal polemics, polemics?

Personal polemics — putting off the old man and putting on the new man — involves the heart. Only a heart that loves the truth will submit to the truth that teaches us to mortify our sins and yield ourselves to God (Rom. 6:13).

As we said earlier, all polemics involves the heart: we will defend the truth and condemn the lie only when we love the truth in our hearts. Notice in both polemics the love for the truth in condemning the lie, which includes the sin of our hearts. Therefore, personal polemics is polemics.

Notice, too, how one cannot be without the other; how attempting to engage in polemics but hardly engaging in mortifying our old man and yielding ourselves to God does not work. Doing one without the other is what Jesus calls noticing that speck of dust in a person's eye (the lie) when you have the giant beam in your eye (your old man) — hypocrisy, in other words (Matt. 7:3-5).

The call to youths, then, is to be polemical within ourselves. We have already described this polemics as

mortifying our sins and yielding ourselves to God. This polemics is also self-examination, something we discussed in last year's youth camp. Think about the areas we learned to examine ourselves; have you been examining those areas?

Also, our spiritual disciplines — devotions, prayer, reading, and memorization — teach us to discern what is right and wrong. That discernment will help us when we meet Christian classmates who practice an ungodly lifestyle. Do you discern? DV, we will discuss these disciplines in our workshops this year.

Not least among these personal polemics is the instruction of our parents. How many arguments we had with our parents are about our sins in the home? Do we listen to our parents, apologise to them, and change for the better (spiritually)?

Personal polemics is polemics; personal polemics is *your* polemics as youths.

Polemics in Witnessing

There is polemics in your heart; and there is polemics in your witness.

The very nature of witnessing requires polemics. Witnessing is bringing the gospel to unbelievers. Of course, the gospel brings the good tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. But no one can bring those good tidings without showing the *need* for it — the need being our *unbelief* and *wickedness*. If we do not identify and strike down the unbelief and spiritual corruption of the unbeliever to whom we witness, the heart of the gospel would not be conveyed to the unbeliever. Witnessing involves polemics.

Witnessing is also bringing the Reformed faith to other Christians who hold to a corrupted version of the truth. What would we say if our Christian colleagues and classmates notice in us the Reformed distinctives we hold to and ask, “So you don't believe in ____?” (Think *contemporary music in worship, evolution, pre-millennialism, etc.*)? Either we ignore the question, or we say, “No I don't; I believe these are unbiblical. Let me explain why.” Witnessing involves polemics.

The call to youths is to be polemical in your witness. Of course, that means first of all you must witness. Don't shrug your shoulders when classmates ask you why you live this or that way or believe in God. Be ready to tell them plainly you believe and live this way because God says this is what we must believe and do. When such conversations begin, be prepared to tell them about what you believe is wrong and why you believe it is wrong. Peter was ready to condemn the Jews for crucifying Jesus (Act. 2:23); so was Stephen (Act. 7:51-53). Are you?

To be ready to give proper polemics in

**“The call to youths
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Don't shrug your
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our witness is not easy. The questions asked by unbelievers and other Christians will catch us off-guard: *What would you do if your son decides to be homosexual?* I was caught off-guard with this question in the army. How would you answer? Are you ready to do polemics in your answer?

Polemics in our Public Confession

Polemics in our hearts; polemics in our witnessing; and now, we find polemics in our public confession of faith.

Have you noticed it in the second question: *Have you resolved by the grace of God to adhere to this doctrine; to reject*

all heresies repugnant thereto; and to lead a new, godly life? In other words, the question is: *Will you be polemical?*

Notice that the question asks about being polemical *doctrinally*. Will you study the Word and Reformed faith (*this doctrine*), so that you know what the lie (*heresy*) is and be ready to reject it? Notice, too, that the question asks about being polemical *practically*. When you lead *a new, godly life*, you destroy that *old, ungodly life* first. So, really, the question is asking: do you practice personal polemics?

Will you be polemical? Polemics is for the believing youth. As shown, it

is required in our daily lives, whether or not you write or speak well, and whether or not you have intellectual gifts likened to ministers.

We said at the beginning that to be polemical starts first with love for the truth. I add to that what the second question says: to be polemical starts with that love, by the grace of God. To be polemical takes the grace of God; it is a resolve by the grace of God, as the question states.

So, be polemical, in these ways and more. Do it by God's grace, to God's glory.

RIDDLE OF THE ISSUE

SEEK ME NOT EXTERNALLY, WHERE THERE IS NONE TO BE SEEN;
 BUT FIND ME INTERNALLY - YOUR VERY OWN HEART WITHIN.
 USE ME CORRECTLY (THE ONLY WAY TO);
 USE ME NOT WRONGLY, AND BE LIKE THE FOOL.
 FIND ME ON A SHIP, BOTH IN THE STORM AND IN THE CALM,
 IN WATER OR FIRE, WITH GOD, THERE'S NO NEED FOR ALARM.
 CONCLUDE WITH ME, AND YOU SHALL BE
 SAFE FROM THE SNARE - OR ELSE, BEWARE.

*Hint: I am a mental state; a feeling that, apart from God, is sinful.
 (Answer to last issue's riddle: a worm (Genesis 32:28; Isaiah 41:14))*



News from the Churches

Singapore

On 8 April 2018, CERC rejoiced with three families on the baptism of their covenant children – Micah, son of Paul and Anthea, Jedidiah, son of Kong Wee and Dorcas as well as Lydia, daughter of Cornelius and Jemima Joy.

CERC will be electing new office-bearers on 30 June to replace two elders and one deacon who are finishing their term come this June. We pray that God will provide CERC with willing men who serve in the offices of Elder and Deacon.

Kolkata

A delegation consisting of Elder Leong and Elder Chan travelled to Kolkata in the last week of April to conduct Baptism and COF interview together with Pastor Emmanuel. CERC Kolkata Fellowship requested for baptism of eight adults and four children, and ten Confessions of Faith. We thank God for His continued blessing in the mission work in Kolkata.

Philippines

On 1 April 2018, Berean young adults and young people hosted a youth conference held in Provident Village. The theme was “The Power of the Gospel”. Four speeches were given by Rev. Trinidad, Rev. Smit, Rev. Kleyn, and Rev. Ibe.

On 12 June 2018, The Classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines is scheduled to meet in the Berean PRC. The Classis has three meetings each year.

From 10-22 June 2018, Rev. Leovy Trinidad will be travelling to the USA to attend the Synod of the PRCA as the delegate and representative of the PRCP.

From June to July, Rev. and Leah Holstege and family will be taking a six-week furlough to the USA. The furlough will include attending Synod, giving presentations of mission work, vacation time, preaching in the PRCA churches, etc.



Yang Zhi & Nicole were united in holy matrimony on March 3



One of the recent additions to CERC - Micayla Tang, with her parents Daniel & Isa



A group of CERC members, regular worshippers & newcomers at a dinner fellowship with the Den Hartogs



Jedidiah Lee, Lydia Boon & Micah Liu with their parents & siblings on baptism day



Another newborn - Sonya, daughter of Ivan & Elisa Chew, snoozing with her baby seal



Team games at CERC's "Old School Sports Day"

Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

We are a Reformed Church that holds to the doctrines of the Reformation as they are expressed in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt.

Place of Worship
11, Jalan Mesin #04-00
Standard Industrial Building
Singapore 368813

Time of Worship
Morning Service:
9:30am to 11:00am
Afternoon Service:
2:00pm to 3:00pm

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