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By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding He set the heavens in place.

Proverbs 3:19

Editing and Layout—Joshua S. Benton



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Our Hands, Our Feet, Our Mouths: A Brief History of Fund-Raising in Christian Reformed World Missions

By Timothy DeJonge

Introduction

In this paper I endeavor to review the **history of fund-raising** for the foreign mission agency of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), **Christian Reformed World Missions** (CRWM). This history is one marked by more **continuity** than discontinuity, both in **principle** and in **sources of funds**. The funds have always come from a variety of sources, including ministry shares (quotas), direct support from churches and individuals, and special gifts. CRWM has been based on the principle that the entire denomination bears the responsibility for supporting the missionaries, financially and otherwise. Furthermore, the responsibility for raising that support rests on a partnership between the administration of CRWM and the missionary staff. In this paper, I will first look at the early years when the trajectory for CRWM was established. I will also pay particular attention to a period in CRWM's history when this principle *appeared* to be threatened because of revisions to the fund-raising strategies.

The Beginning and Early Years of Missions

CRWM marks its birthⁱ with the beginning of the "Indian Missions." Henry Beets traces this history briefly in his book *The Christian Reformed Church*. Beets records that the Rev. T. M. Vanden Bosch was the first to be called "to preach the gospel to the heathen within our own borders," and that on 23 October 1889.ⁱⁱ Over the years, the CRC added mission outposts in the southwestern United States so that by the year 1912 there were no less than five posts and stations for work with Navajo and Zuni peoples.ⁱⁱⁱ

After the mission effort to the "Indians" had been established, some in the CRC began to call for an expansion of the missionary efforts to include fields overseas. One such voice in the CRC was none other than Henry Beets. As the editor of *The Banner*, Beets often wrote articles calling for increased mission efforts. In an editorial published 13 September 1917, Beets compared the CRC to the Reformed Church in America (RCA) in an attempt to motivate those in the CRC toward greater missionary zeal. Beets bemoaned the fact that the RCA had one hundred and forty missionaries abroad while the CRC had not even one official foreign field of mission.^{iv} That changed in 1920 when the synod of the CRC decided to pursue China as its first overseas

mission field. Three missionaries and their families arrived in China in November of 1920.^v

Funding in the Early Years

From the beginning, CRWM's ministries were the responsibility of the entire denomination. Individual missionaries were called and sent by churches to do the work of the whole denomination. This is the basic missionary principle that has been in place since the beginning and this principle has implications for the funding of the mission work. The funding system that obtained very early on was one in which money was collected through a variety of avenues. The main sources were the following: 1) synodically approved quotas, 2) salaries from calling and supporting churches, and 3) special offerings and other gifts, such as those from estates. Primary responsibility for raising these funds rested not on missionaries alone, but on those in administrative positions with assistance from the missionaries themselves.

The Report of the Board of Heathen Missions^{vi} to Synod 1922 reflects these three main sources of funding and the basic principle of shared responsibility. First, we have mention of calling and supporting churches:

Soon after the adjournment of the Synod of 1920, the necessary steps were taken toward the sending out [to China] of Revs. Huizenga and De Korne. The La Grave Ave. congregation declared itself responsible for the salary of Dr. Huizenga, and the Classis of Zeeland for that of Rev. De Korne. One church of the Zeeland Classis was, at our request appointed to be a calling church, responsible for the salary, and the First Church of Zeeland was chosen.^{vii}

The Board brought a recommendation before synod regarding the payment of quotas even in churches which have agreed to pay a missionary's salary:

We request your authorization for the *rule* that all churches assuming responsibility for salarying workers be asked to promise, in addition to the sum pledged for such salaries, to contribute their fair proportion or quota to the General Mission Fund. *Ground*: It is figured that a missionary's work, traveling expense for initial trips and furloughs, housing, etc., costs as much as his maintenance.^{viii}

The secretary of the Board, Henry Beets, whose duties included making appeals for funds, made this report about his work:

Practically every Sunday sermons with a missionary application were preached, and missionary addresses were given. At times as many as four audiences were addressed on one Sabbath . . . In many cases the consistory granted a free-will offering at the end of each service or address, and the offerings in quite a number of churches on Sundays, ran from \$100 to \$225, and in one case to \$275, on a Sabbath.^{ix}

From the beginning, then, we can see that the mission efforts of CRWM depended on funding from supporting churches, quotas, and special offerings with a good portion of responsibility for raising those funds resting on the shoulders of administrators (like Henry Beets). The Board happily reported that, despite the financial depression of the previous two years, their receipts for that period were more than the previous two-year period.^x

Early Funding Problems

One funding problem that the CRC faced in its early mission efforts was that they ran a deficit in their "Indian Field." A report to synod indicates that at the end of 1923, the Indian Mission Fund was \$12,037.33 overdrawn.^{xi} Henry Beets tried to correct this with focused fund-raising: "Recently he has tried to enroll 150 persons to help wipe out the deficit of our Indian Mission fund by contributing \$100 as a special gift for that purpose."^{xii} The 1926 report indicates that Beets was able to obtain in the neighborhood of \$7,500 for the purpose of canceling the debt,^{xiii} but by the end of 1929 the debt stood at \$43,554.11.^{xiv} The explanation given in 1926 for the debt: difficult financial conditions in the western U.S., and the fact that some of the special offerings that previously had been collected exclusively for Indian missions were being redirected to the China Field.^{xv}

This lack of funds hampered the missionary efforts on the Indian Field. The 1934 report reads: "On our Indian Field the usual work was carried on at our various stations, although it was seriously handicapped, as you may surmise, by the lack of funds."^{xvi} The situation was severe enough that Beets wrote a letter to all the churches which did not bring up their quotas during 1933:

The letter, after explaining the needs of the fields, and telling of the blessing of God on the work and the financial situation and the distressing deficit, stated: 'BUT WE CANNOT CONTINUE TO CARRY ON THIS WAY. And now to come to something definite: We appreciate all you have done in former years.

But last year while your congregation was expected to pay \$5.50 per family for Chinese and Indian work together, or a total of \$_____, according to the Yearbook for 1934, you paid in all for these causes \$_____. As we figure it, you ran short \$_____. In these shortages in so many churches lie the main causes of our desperate financial situation. Dear brethren, will you try hard, very hard, to do better this year, beginning right away?^{xvii}

This letter brought some results, but in 1936 the board of missions again brought the matter of quota shortcomings before Synod, urging them to exhort the churches to meet their obligation so that the mission bills could be paid.^{xviii} Thankfully, the debt was reduced to under \$8,000 by the end of 1936^{xix} and after that point it receives no further mention in the *Acts of Synod*.

Another early problem that CRWM faced in its fund-raising was a shortage of supporting churches which would agree to pay missionary salaries. For example, it was reported to Synod 1934 that two churches discontinued salary arrangements concerning their missionaries.^{xx} By 1941 it was bad enough that CRWM could report to Synod: "During recent years there has been noticeable a decided trend away from having congregations or groups of congregations support their own missionary."^{xxi}

In the cases mentioned above, we see clearly demonstrated the principle that the entire denomination is responsible for supplying the funds. We see that missionaries are not required to do their own fund-raising. In fact, in these cases it was often the administrator (Henry Beets) who took the lead in trying to secure the funds.

Continuity from the Early Years

The story of funding for CRWM is one of continuity. The trajectory set in the first 25 years was maintained throughout the decades that followed. Although it is outside the limits of this short paper to chronologically detail this continuity, a few things can be mentioned.

The main sources of funds remained stable, with quotas, direct support, and special offerings being the main categories. For example, John Vander Ploeg in *The Banner* in 1962 pleaded for people to make personal contributions and for churches to pay their quotas and to collect special offerings.^{xxii} And yet, as CRWM expanded and developed, it experienced some increasing sophistication in collecting funds. For example, one additional source of income which became significant over time was the receipt of funds from the sale of goods and property on the mission field.

The main joys and problems with funding remained fairly constant. Reports to Synod indicate that

there were years during which quota giving was not as it should have been or during which supporting churches did not contribute as much as they had pledged.^{xxii} And yet, on the whole the CRC demonstrated their commitment to foreign missions with the faithfulness of their support. CRWM was able to expand their ministries, and each year the sum total of contributions totaled more than the previous year.

The entire denomination remained committed to CRWM, although as the CRC grew there developed a greater need for clear communication between the local churches and the missionaries to maintain a sense of corporate ownership. With that in mind, Classis Northcentral Iowa overtured Synod in 1959 to instruct the Board of Missions to divide the costs of missionaries not covered by the quotas into “shares” that would enable churches of modest means to share directly in supporting a missionary. The grounds (in part) were that this would relate the missionary and field more closely to the churches and that greater contributions could then be expected.^{xxiii} An essentially identical overture was brought before Synod 1973 by Classis Chicago North for the purpose of “personalizing denominational foreign missions.”^{xxiv}

It is important to note that the principle of corporate responsibility for foreign missions remained unchanged. Missionaries received support from churches in the form of prayer and funds so that they could do the work that was the responsibility of the entire denomination. Missionaries were not required to plead their own case, but benefited from administrators in CRWM who worked hard to bring in the necessary funds.

A Revised Funding Approach

Despite the overwhelming continuity that characterizes the history of CRWM and its fund-raising, there is a period worth examining more closely for the apparent deviation from the norm. The context for this revision in CRWM’s funding approach was the 1980s, a period of great change both internationally and also in North American and CRC culture.^{xxv} Rising costs in Asia and inflation in Africa hampered missionary efforts. Denominational loyalty began to wane, and people felt freer to make donations to agencies not connected with the CRC.^{xxvi} Missionary candidates became less interested in long-term positions and more interested in short-term commitments. In addition, CRWM consistently received less quota money than the amount that was budgeted for them by synod, which made budgeting a difficult task.^{xxvii}

CRWM needed to find a way to navigate the changes that threatened their funding base. They did not want to make cuts in the budget, so they looked to improve their fund-raising. After taking a close look at the average cost of maintaining a missionary position and at their sources of funding as proportions of their budget,

CRWM formulated an overall plan, which became the CRWM Income Objectives and Strategies Plan (later referred to as the Support Plan).^{xxix} The plan contained thirteen strategies that applied to CRWM-USA, some of which are listed here: 1) promote prayer ministry, 2) strengthen the network of church representatives, 4) raise 50% of missionary support before departure, 6) raise capital funds before expenditure, 7) expand donor base, and 8) promote special events.

A letter from Dave Radius, the CRWM-USA director, to all CRWM-USA missionaries dated 7 August 1990 explains in detail the support plan as it came to be at that point in time.^{xxx} It is apparent that some reactions to the plan had already come in, shaping both the presentation and content of the material. This letter is written in a question and answer format and addresses a wide variety of the changes.

The change which proved to be most controversial was the one requiring missionaries to have 50% of their support raised before departure to their mission field. A number of Q&As were directed at this change, including the following:

Why is the policy of raising 50% of support before departure being instituted at this time?

As you are aware, there has been an increasing gap between the rate of expenditures and the amount of income. Our cash reserves were depleted at the beginning of this fiscal year causing us to borrow . . . The committee considered more drastic expense reduction measures to balance our budget but instead opted for finding new sources of revenue as well as protecting our current base of income . . . So before even thinking about any further cuts in expenses, the committee adopted this aggressive plan.

The letter assured the missionaries that the administrative staff was jointly committed with the missionaries to raising the support before departure. The hope was that this change in policy would bring a credible message to the supporters and the churches that their support is both urgent and necessary.

This question was also posed in the letter: “Is this program taking CRWM in the direction of a ‘faith’ mission where individual support becomes more important than church support?” The answer: “NO! While we will always rely by faith on a loving God who supplies our needs, we will always remain a church-based, church-supported, church-supervised mission agency.”

The Reaction

CRWM invited comments and suggestions on the support plan from its missionaries, committee members and regional representatives. Reactions came in, and they were mixed, but mostly negative. The Philip-pines field appealed the program because they anticipated that fund-raising could become a competitive ven-

ture among missionaries. Individual missionaries in various fields wrote letters voicing their concerns.^{xxxii} Some complaints were directed at the limits placed on the expenditure of capital funds, and some were directed at the policy requiring redirection of funds once a particular missionary had reached their fund-raising need for the year.

However, the major issue was the requirement that 50% of missionary support be raised before departure.^{xxxiii} No matter what CRWM said to reassure people, the sense was that they were moving toward a “faith mission.” The “before departure” provision was interpreted by missionaries as a penalty for them because a shortage of funds would affect them most directly. By this policy, CRWM meant to communicate urgency to supporters, but instead they communicated an implied threat to the missionaries.

Articles appeared in journals like *Missionary Monthly* and *The Banner*. Considering the “faith support” model, Roger S. Greenway writes: “I think of the physical, emotional, and financial cost of a system that requires missionary candidates to go from place to place appealing for money for up to two years before ever going to the field, and I shudder.”^{xxxiii} Greenway judges that the traditional Christian Reformed system of missionary support was the most efficient and cost-effective system ever devised to support missionaries. In contrast, he writes this in another article:

In my judgment the ‘faith support’ system is flawed in a fundamental way, and on the practical level it is unfair and demeaning to missionaries. The key issue is ownership of missions. Is missions the corporate responsibility of churches that by definition are apostolic institutions? Or is missions an enterprise belonging mainly to Christians who feel a special burden for it, and who by this token bear the responsibility for supporting it?^{xxxiv}

Because of his convictions that missions is a corporate responsibility, Greenway confesses that “recent moves in CRC circles toward adopting the ‘faith mission’ system of raising financial support” make him very uneasy.^{xxxv}

Ellen Monsma, a former missionary to Mali with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, writes: “I am concerned about the effect of these new policies on current and prospective missionaries.”^{xxxvi} She expresses concern that the public relations skills of missionaries would become the key to support rather than other essential qualities. She points to the problems that would arise if a missionary could not return to the field on time because their support was not raised. Monsma understands that World Missions felt it had no choice because of the failing quota system, but she ex-

presses concern that the new plan was shifting responsibility for fund-raising “from the whole denomination to the missionaries themselves.”

This is the heart of the matter. The basic principle for CRWM had always been that the responsibility for raising support lies not with the missionaries alone, but with administrators as well. However, with the revisions to the policy it *seemed* that primary responsibility was shifting to the missionaries, and to this people objected.

(Almost) Taking a Step or Two Backward

CRWM found itself scrambling in an attempt to calm fears and to reassure missionaries and their supporters that missionaries were not being abandoned. And yet, the administrators themselves began to seriously question the new plan. Peter Borgdorff, the executive director of World Ministries at the time, read the communications that had been sent to missionaries in order to evaluate what they appeared to say about the missionary’s role in fund-raising. He writes in a memo to Dave Radius:

Throughout the materials I read this morning I find ambiguity (if not confusion) about whose responsibility it really is to ‘raise support’ . . . The ultimate issue is clear. Whose responsibility is it to raise funds? Who bears the consequences when funds are not forthcoming in a specific instance? The present policy and communication suggests that the responsibility is shared; but it really is not. The administration offers to assist/help the missionary, but the pressure is on the missionary to produce. Hence the accusation that CRWM has crossed over the line to a ‘faith mission’ approach.^{xxxvii}

Aware of the criticisms coming from missionaries and others, Borgdorff suggests that the only way to weather the criticisms is to be clear on their basic principle:

There is no doubt in my mind that the administration is primarily responsible for the raising of support with the assistance of the missionary staff. If we are saying it differently, the possibility is there that we also mean it differently. And that is what the critics want to know.

In response to a letter from a missionary, Sid Norman, another administrator, wrote a memo to Radius in which he admitted: “Sometimes I think we should junk the whole support program . . . and put all our energies into encouraging our missionaries to help us generate as much support as we can.”^{xxxviii} Here Norman is giving expression to the principle that fund-raising is a team effort between administrators and missionaries—a principle that was not meant to be abandoned with the adoption of the new support program.

Dave Radius drafted a lengthy letter (The Support Program—Revisited, 21 May 1991) to missionaries, committee members, and regional representatives which indicates the severity of the situation at the time:

As I review missionary mail over the last year, as I reflect on the numerous comments I have heard while traveling among the churches and as I review all of the minutes and memos that have gone out on the subject of the Support Program, I have come to the conclusion that we should take a step or two backward before going forward again.

This is probably the memo that should have been written two years ago, prior to the adoption of the Support Program. While we cannot turn the calendar back, I think we should try to reach a more acceptable consensus on how the mission should be supported. This is the purpose of this memo.

However, this draft of the memo was never sent out to the missionaries. Radius' colleagues in the office advised against backing away from the plan with which they had been working. An internal memo from Radius to six of his colleagues within the CRWM office dated 21 May 1991 reads in part:

Your sincere, straight-forward and honest advice has been heard regarding my recent Support Program memo. While each of you said it in different ways, I hear you. The memo has been distributed to the UAT and IAT and no further. It has been suggested that these issues, which I do not hear anyone saying are not legitimate, should be dealt with in the context of our strategic plans.

On 23 May 1991, a new letter which was very different in tone from the first was sent to missionaries. The title was changed from "The Support Plan—Revisited" to "The CRWM-USA Strategic Plan." Radius writes: "We are currently operating within the approved Income Strategies. The Strategic Plan looks at our current methods and suggests changes, if necessary, for the future." In this version of the letter, the plan is still the framework, and Radius invites comments for future revision. He also tries to reassure the missionaries: "One principle we should all agree on is that the CRCNA has committed itself to support its overseas missionary program." Conscious that people were accusing CRWM of abandoning this principle, Radius tries to reassure people that the intent of the program was not to move away from this principle, but to address the difficult financial situation that CRWM was facing.

A "Return" to the Fundamental Principle

Despite CRWM's best efforts at maintaining

their new plan, the backlash was so strong that the plan eventually had to be abandoned. In their report to Synod 1994, CRWM writes:

Difficult times and quota slippage brought about three years of debate within CRWM about the manner by which support should be raised for missionaries. The CRWM Committee has recently approved a plan entitled 'Principles and Guidelines for Raising Support.' The core of this document is recognition that neither the missionaries nor the mission administration has sole responsibility for challenging the churches to support world missions with their prayers, care, and financial resources. Rather, these two form a team covenanting together to form a partnership in which both perform their tasks to raise mission awareness and seek support to the best of their abilities.^{x1}

Partnership has since become a catch-word and the main focus of the way in which fund-raising is pursued in CRWM. Churches are partnered with missionaries, and missionaries and administrators partner together in fund-raising. In essence, this is a "return" to the basic principle that has been in place since the beginning, although this principle was never meant to be abandoned.

CRWM Fund-raising Today (2002)

To facilitate clear communication and a sense of corporate ownership, CRWM now annually produces a brochure which contains details of their ministry and their support needs. The most recent edition (2002) indicates that CRWM is now active in over 30 countries around the world. CRWM has about 82 career missionary units (150+ adults) and more than 140 short-term missionaries overseas. All of this is supported on a net budget of \$13.45 million for the 2002-03 fiscal year.^{x1i} A pie chart with the proposed income sources shows that 34.1% of their budget comes from ministry shares (quotas), 10.3% from field income, 6% from reserves, 4.8% from legacies, 2.3% from investment and miscellaneous sources, and 42.4% from above ministry share giving.

The importance of partnership is clear in the brochure: churches and missionaries are partners in missions. Churches are asked to support the missionaries through prayer, communication, gifts, Pentecost offerings, and special projects. In turn, missionaries are committed to prayer and communication, and to receiving and using the support gifts with gratitude and wisdom. Missionaries and administrators together challenge people to support the cause of foreign missions. CRWM sits as firmly as it ever has on the principle of corporate ownership.

And yet, because of a significant trend away from long-term missionary positions and toward short-

term positions, CRWM has instituted a different system of fund-raising for the two groups. Short-term partner missionaries do not receive salaries from CRWM; they raise their own support from churches and friends, support themselves, or are supported by a job in the country to which they go.^{xiii} On the other hand, if a long-term or career missionary's support is short any given month, CRWM has covenanted to continue to provide for their financial needs.

Conclusion

CRWM's fund-raising history is one of continuity, based on the principle of corporate ownership and relying on the prayers and financial support of the members of the CRC. Even in a period during which it appeared that this continuity was being threatened, the intention was not to abandon their basic principle. With God's blessing, CRWM—its administrators and missionaries—will be able to continue bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to the world on behalf of the entire denomination.

“An important missionary principle is at stake when missionaries start doing fund-raising. **Preaching the gospel and proclaiming the kingdom is the church's calling.** Missionaries who are sent by the church are doing our work . . . They are our hands, our feet, our mouths, because Christ has given us the commission not to one or two but to all of us. They must know at all times that they are sent by the church and that the church is behind them . . . They need our encouragement and assurance of loyal support, for Jesus' sake.”

Andrew Kuyvenhoven
The Banner, 16 June 1986

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Appendix

One of the first steps in this reevaluation process was to answer the question: "What does it cost to put a missionary on the field for one year?"^{xliii} This proved to be a difficult question to answer, given differing costs from field to field. For example, it was estimated^{xliiv} that for fiscal year 1992 it would cost \$89,215 to support a missionary couple in Japan and only \$38,502 to support a couple in Nigeria. The overall average for supporting a missionary couple in 1992 was estimated at \$56,645.

Another important task was to determine the percentages of the total support income which came from the various sources. Using fiscal year 1990 budget figures, the portion of the total cost that would come from quota giving was estimated at 48.7%, with the remainder coming from gifts and offerings (15.7%), field receipts (9.8%), foundations, grants, and estates (3.8%), and the "special missionary support program" (22%).^{xliv}

The anticipated trend for CRWM was that they would need to rely less on quota giving and more on the other sources, given that 1990 marked the first year in which quota giving comprised less than one-half of the support income. This placed more pressure on the others sources, including the "special missionary support program,"^{xlvi} which was the continuation of the traditional calling/supporting church model that had been in place for decades.

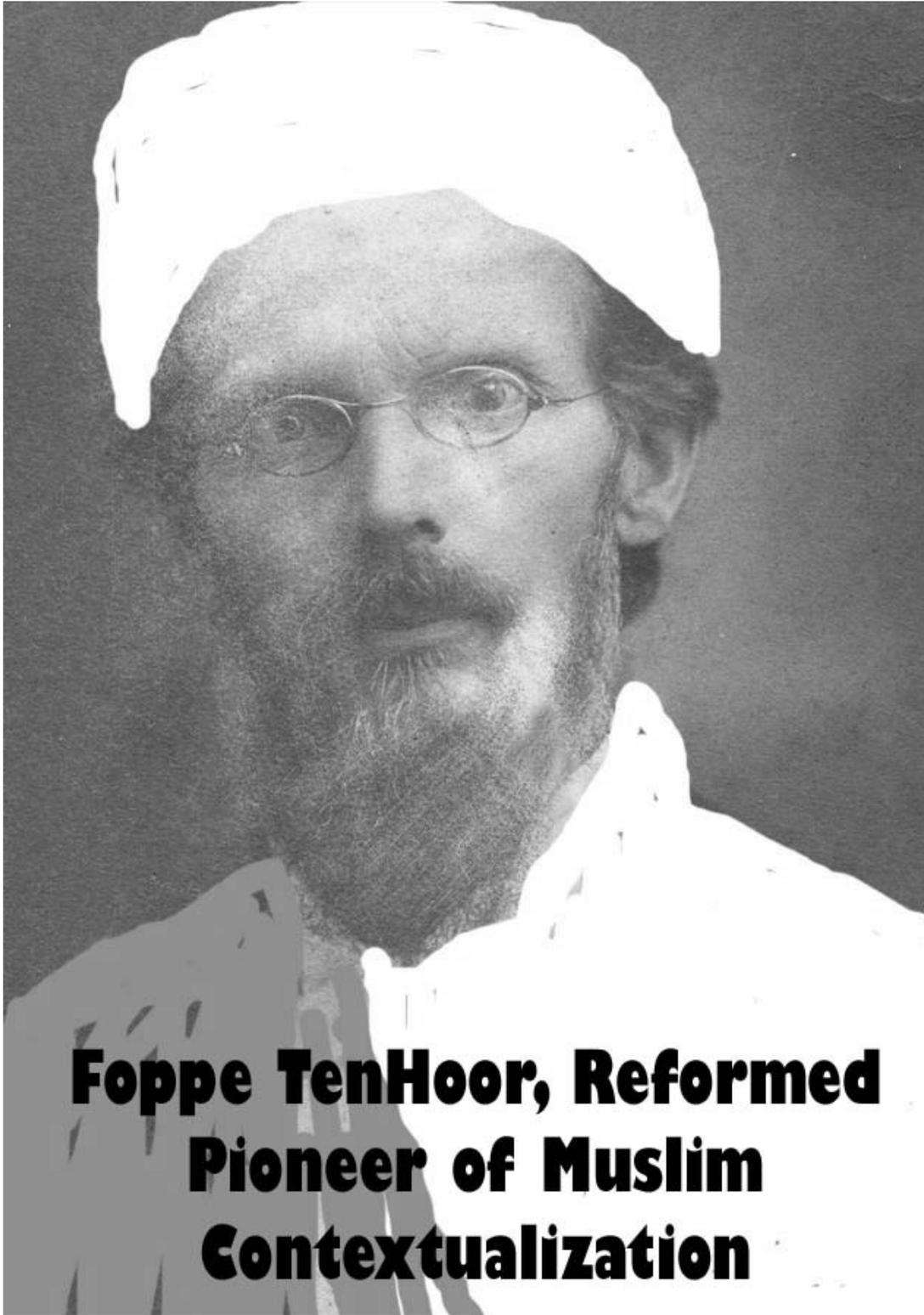
In addition, there was the issue of fund-raising competition between missionaries that could result from this policy. The appeal from the Philippines field addressed this potential problem and suggested that fund-raising could be "groupized" instead of individualized.

Furthermore, during the summer of 1992, the CRWM did what they had been trying to avoid: they reduced their 1993 fiscal budget by 10 percent. They also had to cut twenty long-term missionary positions (ten of which were vacant): "This was a painful step because it required us to encourage three missionaries to retire in fiscal 1993 and to conclude the services of seven other missionaries in fiscal 1993."^{xlviii}

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- ⁱ CRWM marks June 15, 1888 as their official beginning, which is the date on which “the synod appointed the committee for heathen mission work and charged it with the task of sending missionaries” to Native Americans. (For a centennial summary see *Acts of Synod 1988*, p. 72.)
- ⁱⁱ Henry Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church: Its Roots, History, Schools and Mission Work* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1946), 145.
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Ibid.*, 147-8.
- ^{iv} Henry Beets, “Reformed Mission Zeal—and Ours.” *The Banner* (13 September 1917), 580.
- ^v Beets, *The Christian Reformed Church*, 153. (Earlier that same year, Johanna Veenstra had begun her work in Nigeria, though not officially through CRWM.)
- ^{vi} Synod 1924 approved changing the name of the board from “Board of Heathen Missions of the Christian Reformed Church” to that of “Christian Reformed Board of Missions” (p. 63). One of the stated grounds was that the name “heathen” is offensive to the Chinese. Also, “we are the only Board in America bearing such a peculiar name.”
- ^{vii} Christian Reformed Church in North America, *Acts of Synod 1922* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1922), 185.
- ^{viii} *Ibid.*, 196.
- ^{ix} *Ibid.*, 191-2.
- ^x *Ibid.*, 191.
- ^{xi} CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1924* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1924), 278.
- ^{xii} *Ibid.*, 272.
- ^{xiii} CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1926* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1926), 260.
- ^{xiv} CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1930* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1930), 256.
- ^{xv} CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1926*, 260.
- ^{xvi} CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1934* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1934), 226.
- ^{xvii} CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1934*, 233.
- ^{xviii} CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1936* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1936), 206.
- ^{xix} *Ibid.*, 194.
- ^{xx} CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1934*, 229 and 232.
- ^{xxi} John Vander Ploeg. “Insufficient Funds—for Missions!” *The Banner* (27 April 1962), 8-9.
- ^{xxii} The report to Synod 1973 (p. 148ff) actually includes a list of all the calling/supporting churches at the time—a practice that became much less common once the denomination became larger.
- ^{xxiii} CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1959* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publishing House, 1959), 511-512.
- ^{xxiv} CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1973* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1973), 726-727.
- ^{xxv} I am deeply indebted to Dave Radius at CRWM for giving me access to the documents which shaped this part of the paper.
- ^{xxvi} See Eugene Rubingh’s “Mission in the 80s: Will it Survive?” *The Banner* (28 March 1980), 4-5; and (4 April 1980), 12-13.
- ^{xxvii} People in the CRC have a long history of faithfulness to synodically approved non-denominational ministries like Wycliffe Translators, Mission India, etc.
- ^{xxviii} CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1987* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1987), 99.
- ^{xxix} The plan is detailed in the CRWM-USA minutes from 15 January 1990 and became the basis for the plan adopted at the annual meeting in February 1990.
- ^{xxx} A detailed explanation of the plan was first sent to missionaries on 31 May 1990. (The delay between February adoption of the plan and May was due to the need to coordinate with CRWM-Canada.) Responses to the 31 May explanation were invited because “there were still several major decisions needing closure.”
- ^{xxxi} The Philippines appeal is mentioned in the 12-14 February 1991 CRWM-USA committee minutes (91-16). I have also read a lengthy letter of complaint from a missionary in Japan dated 26 April 1991.
- ^{xxxii} These issues are raised in a letter from Radius dated 23 May 1991.
- ^{xxxiii} Roger Greenway. “Changes in Missionary Support: Something Good and Something Bad.” *Missionary Monthly* (November 1992), 10.
- ^{xxxiv} Greenway. “How Should Missionaries be Supported?” *The Outlook* (September 1993), 24.
- ^{xxxv} *Ibid.*
- ^{xxxvi} Ellen Monsma, “Missionaries: Our Second-class Citizens.” *The Banner* (28 October 1991), 12.

- xxxvii Memo dated 18 April 1991.
- xxxviii Memo dated 10 May 1991.
- xxxix United States Administrative Team (UAT) and International Administrative Team (IAT)
- xl CRCNA, *Agenda and Acts of Synod 1994* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publications, 1994), 101.
- xli This is a long way from the 1920s, when a fiscal year budget was under \$100,000!
- xlii CRCNA, *Acts of Synod 1998* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1998), 114.
- xliii CRWM internal memo from Sid Norman to Communication Department Directors, dated 30 January 1989, reads in part: “At our last meeting I was given an assignment. This is my initial attempt at producing an answer to the question.” However, a letter from Dave Radius dated 7 August 1990 states that the study of the “cost of a missionary” took over one year.
- xliv 21 May 1991 letter from Dave Radius, CRWM-USA director, sent to missionaries, committee members, and regional representatives.
- xlv These figures are from the first draft of a “Missionary Cost Proposal” attached to the 30 January 1989 memo.
- xlvi This information is contained in the first draft of a proposed brochure attached to the 30 January 1989 memo.
- xlvii Christian Reformed Church in North America, *Agenda and Acts of Synod 1993* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1993), 123.



**Foppe TenHoor, Reformed
Pioneer of Muslim
Contextualization**

Contributed by Dave Gifford

An Evaluation of the Present Denominational Ministry Structure of the CRCNA

By Ben Meyer, Chad Steenwyk, & Joel Ringma

Introduction:

The ministry structure of the Christian Reformed Church in North America is two-faceted. One facet deals primarily with ecclesiastical matters such as doctrine, ethical issues, church life, and practice. The other facet deals primarily with the governance of the agencies, institutions, and committees that CRCNA congregations have jointly undertaken. The first facet dealing with ecclesiastical matters involves the church assemblies: the Council, the Classis, and the Synod. The second facet, ministerial governance of the agencies, institutions, and committees of the CRC, is overseen by the Synod of the CRC, which gives authority to the synodically appointed Board of Trustees to carry out its work.¹ This paper will trace the historical development

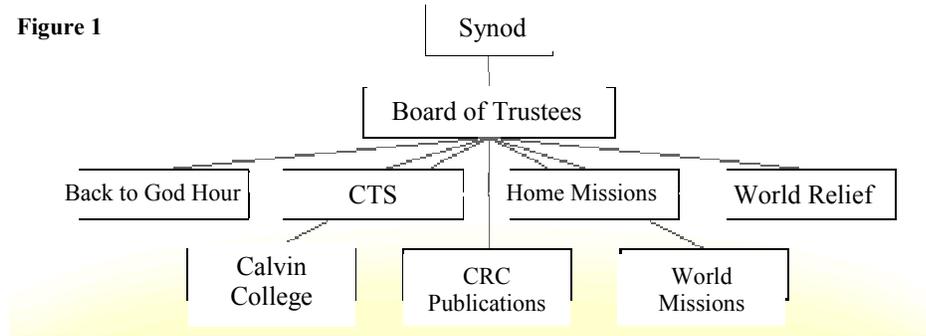
of the present denominational ministry structure, will evaluate the present structure of the agencies and institutions of the CRC by putting forth areas of strength and weakness, and will suggest

means of improvement for the governance of these agencies, institutions, and committees.

Historical Factors:

Currently, the Board of Trustees oversees the ministries (agencies and institutions) undertaken jointly by the CRCNA congregations. Synod, of course, still has final authority, but it acts primarily in the role of macro- (not micro-) management of these ministries. Hence, there are currently seven boards, each governing a particular agency or institution, with the authority to make the necessary decisions for their agency/institution.ⁱⁱ The Board of Trustees is the decision-making body that supervises the other seven boards (and committees)ⁱⁱⁱ including, “the planning, coordinating and integrating of their work,”^{iv} and reports annually to Synod. The structure is shown in figure one.^v

Figure 1



This current governance structure of the agencies and institutions of the CRCNA has not always existed. Synod has visited the issue of ministerial governance numerous times in the past 30 years. In 1971 the Synodical Interim Committee (SIC) was enlarged from three members to a regionally representative committee of twelve, enabling it to monitor coordination of denominational ministries.^{vi} In 1976, Synod instructed the agencies to do the work of coordination, with the SIC to promote this work.^{vii} 1981 saw a Review Committee insist to Synod that the SIC must, “exert more leadership to assure that agencies themselves vigorously pursue their tasks in coordination, planning, setting priorities, and evaluating results,” but synod did not provide the SIC with the authority to implement this.^{viii} In 1982,

Synod appointed the World Missions and Relief Commission. In 1985 the Board of World Minis-

tries is called into being, its executive director appointed the following year.^{ix} “Vision 21” is introduced in 1987, its foundational principles and guidelines assessed, and another committee is appointed to address remaining questions.^x The Board of Trustees (BOT) was itself created in 1991 combining the functions of both the Board of World Ministries and the SIC. The BOT developed from the work of the “Strategic Plan for Organizational Restructuring of the Agencies of the Christian Reformed Church in North America,”^{xi} which was entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing, coordinating, and integrating the work of its diverse denominational ministries.^{xiii} In 1997, the BOT adopted, and Synod endorsed, a Denominational Ministries Plan.^{xiii} This plan focused on detailed goals and objectives. In the revised Denominational Ministries Plan,^{xiv} there is greater focus on the CRC’s theological identity and core values, which arise out of the Board of Trustees’s contention that the church as a whole, particularly its agencies and institutions,

needs greater clarity about the CRC's identity and purpose.^{xv}

This ministries plan, then, articulates an identity statement titled "Central Affirmations of the Christian Faith from a Reformed Perspective." The purpose of this identity statement is to offer to all agency and institution personnel, board members, CRC leaders, and CRC members (1) a concise statement of what it means to be a Reformed Christian and Reformed church in North America today, and (2) an expanded biblical and theological foundation for the vision and mission and core values statements in this ministry plan.^{xvi} Synod 2001 adopted revisions in the Constitution and Bylaws for the Board of Trustees.^{xvii} Significant groups affected by these revisions include the Ministries Coordinating Council (MCC), the Ministries Policy Council (MPC) and the Ministries Administrative Council (MAC).^{xviii}

Evaluation

Much of the above history outlines steps made toward collaboration, sharing, and renewed common vision for ministries (agencies and institutions) within the CRC. What this brief history has not highlighted are some of the major struggles that this process of restructuring has brought to the surface. For example, basic missiological differences between the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) and Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) have had to be dealt with openly as a result of this restructuring.^{xix} CRC bureaucratic self-flagellation may be the cause of some of the restructuring as well.^{xx} Frustration regarding implementation of ever-new policies and structures may have perpetuated the need for more restructuring.^{xxi} Further, denominational upheaval during the 1990s may be another significant factor in restructuring.^{xxii}

While there are many strengths of the present ministry structure, we will deal with five of them in this evaluation. Those strengths can be stated as follows: (1) the present ministry structure enables the church to take its calling in mission seriously, (2) it provides a way for the church to genuinely struggle to maintain both the uniqueness of each agency's work and the necessity of inter-agency coordination, (3) it clarifies the particular tasks of the different parts of the body with regard to ecclesiastical matters and ministerial governance, (4) it shows a concern for maintaining a balance between efficiency and participation, and (5) it fosters a mindset of needing to be *semper reformanda*.

The first strength is that the CRCNA's present ministry structure enables the church to take its calling in mission seriously. For what reason would we as a

church go through all the hassle and headache of setting up, maintaining, and wanting to see thrive a ministry structure of this complexity and size? The answer is quite simple—we believe it is worth the effort so that more people can hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. We believe it is worth the effort to produce literature in several languages to build up believers in the faith. We believe it is worth the effort to train our young people for Christian vocation. In short, our ministry structure gives us a framework within which we can passionately yearn to see the Great Commission fulfilled.

Second, the present ministry structure also provides a way for the church to genuinely struggle to maintain both the uniqueness of each agency's work and the necessity of inter-agency coordination. Both values of uniqueness and coordination are highly prized. Yet when one value is over-emphasized the other can get marginalized. And so in 1999 we wisely did not adopt the recommendation before Synod that would have done away with our agency boards in favor of one big board that would have overseen the work of all the agencies and institutions of our church. Instead, we saw the merit of allowing each agency to govern its own affairs with its own board. On the other hand, our structure does not allow each board to operate independently of the others. Agency administrations must submit plans to the Ministries Administrative Council (MAC) before those plans can proceed on to their respective agency boards. And agency boards must submit their plans to the BOT before they are presented to the whole church at Synod. With this structure, then, we are able to carefully balance the unique concerns of our particular agencies as well as insist that they work in tandem with one another in areas of mutual interest and benefit. One agency executive director noted recently that the MAC is a significant improvement over the previous configuration involving the MCC and the MPC.

Third, our present ministry structure clarifies the particular tasks of the different parts of the body with regard to ecclesiastical matters and ministerial governance. It is clear that different parts of the body have different gifts and that different church bodies have different mandates. We have spent a lot of time delineating what falls within each particular mandate. A professor at Calvin can address curriculum concerns within his or her own department, or with his or her own academic dean. This professor does not need to involve MAC in such a discussion. In the same way, a delegate to Synod does not have the right to decide on which frequency the Back to God Hour will broadcast in Portuguese. Rather, the administration of the Back to God Hour, in coordination with its Portuguese broadcast minister and technical experts, can make such decisions. Finally, it should be noted that our present ministry structure allows our agencies and institutions to do the work of collective

ministry and the local churches to do their good and fitting ecclesiastical work in their own setting. In short, a type of ministerial sphere-sovereignty is at work here.

Fourth, our present ministry structure shows a concern for maintaining a balance between efficiency and participation. This aspect of our structure encourages broad participation but also realizes the necessity of moving forward at key moments in ministry. Church members can serve on denominational boards or work for denominational agencies. Synodical delegates may participate on the BOT for several years. On the other hand, these governing groups are made up of representatives: efficiency and forward movement need to be made as a core group of folks in each ministry area make key decisions.

Finally, we also posit a fifth strength of our current structure: it fosters a mindset of needing to be *semper reformanda*. Although the Gospel of Jesus Christ does not change, the way in which the church communicates that Gospel does. Because our world is ever-changing and the Gospel is ever-able to breath new life into any situation, we constantly struggle to be always reforming for the sake of being both faithful to God's Word and faithful to God's world so that the Gospel can go forth.

We must admit, however, that while the present ministry structure has many strengths, it is not without its weaknesses. Before we can even begin to address the weaknesses of the structure itself we must contemplate an underlying weakness we share as a church, individually and institutionally. This weakness is a suspicion within the church among agencies, church communities, and individuals. It must be recognized that our denomination is made up of fallen people. For that reason we tend to be suspicious of one another. We tend to think that the other person is seeking to gain personal advantage rather than the advantage of the whole body. Unfortunately, sometimes such suspicions are confirmed. Anytime change is proposed, the natural reaction of most is to approach it cautiously. We have yet to reach the point of being able to fully trust each other. Therefore, while any suggested improvements need to consider this lack of trust in its approach to change, it must also seek to dispel such suspicions.

With that said, we perceive the weaknesses directly related to the present ministry structure as follows: (1) it continues to lack effective coordination between the various bodies of the church, (2) it tends to add unnecessary bureaucratic layers to accomplish the church's goals, and (3) it has the potential to allow frequent appeals for change to interrupt the stability of the church and its ministry.

The first weakness is the lack of effective coordination between the various bodies and the church. This can be seen in the remaining disjunctions that exist,

for example, between CRWRC and CRWM or between Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) and CRHM. As each agency interprets the vision of the CRCNA in its own context they develop in ways that can and do clash with one another. Individuals involved have great passions for the work to which they are called and do not always submit to mandated cooperation that may affect their personal goals. Too often people refuse to comply when any proposal that is perceived as "from the top." We can also see this in the growing sense of congregationalism among our churches. They are engaging much more in their own mission efforts rather than joining together with the other churches in the CRCNA on the classical or denominational levels.

These trends are intimately linked with the second weakness; a tendency by the denomination to add unnecessary bureaucratic layers in its restructuring efforts. This is evident in the ministry structures discussions of the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Committee after committee was appointed to study and re-study denomination ministry structure. Many of the proposals add standing committees and/or governing boards as ways to seek more coordination. The 1999 proposal, for example, among other things, suggested another level at the classical level. As layers are heaped upon layer, more distance is created between the frontlines and denominational boards and authorities. At that time Dr. Roger Greenway expressed a fear which struck a chord in the hearts of many in the CRC, in a *Banner* article he wrote "I believe that such centralization of governing power will speed up congregationalism."^{xxxiii} As agency workers and congregations or individual members perceive that they have less connection to the decision-making processes, they will in the end seek to do their own thing, breaking down coordination efforts even more.

The third and final weakness we wish to discuss is the potential to allow frequent appeals for change to interrupt the stability of the church and its ministry. Within an organization the size of the CRCNA change does not only happen slowly, but also it is costly in terms of energy, resources, and moral. We have experienced much instability during the 70s, 80s and 90s at many levels in the denomination. Because of the high value the CRCNA places on participation, any appeal, proposal, or overture from a given ministry body must be taken seriously. On the one hand this can be a healthy process for the system. On the other hand it can sidetrack and bog down systems that are working rather well. Because we want to strive for excellence there is a danger for the organization to take on a personality of chronic perfectionism/orneriness. Just because we have the ability to change something does not mean we are obligated to do so at every opportunity.

Suggestions for Improvement

Changing the perceptions of the people in the pews and those officially involved in the various branches of the CRCNA will be the most difficult—but most crucial—step to future denominational ministry structuring. Organizationally a church is much different from any other organization, even other non-profit organizations. The Church is the Body of Christ; there is none other like it. Moreover, individuals have a personal stake in their church. Therefore, any changes within the church should be done at a slow and steady pace, giving the churches and individuals involved time to rebuild trust in the organization and its leaders.

How can we develop more trust within the CRCNA? First, clear and transparent communication is vital between the vertical and horizontal layers of the infrastructure. Admittedly, there is already a great deal of communication, especially between the agencies and individuals. But most people are barraged with mailings and most is ignored. Therefore, the focus must be on effective communication that is concise and clear. Second, there must be intentionality in developing relationships on individual and agency levels. This is being done already, but must be encouraged as a vital foundation for success. Third, the leadership of the CRCNA must be made up of individuals who can put people at ease—leaders must be approachable human beings. This includes honesty, authenticity, vulnerability, and a sense of humor. Finally, it must be recognized that there is an underlying spiritual problem: sin. Therefore, the denomination must make this a matter of prayer. Recognizing our brokenness demands reliance not on ourselves, but on God to put straight what we have made crooked.

It has been noted that the current structure takes the mission of the church seriously. To capitalize on this strength, how can it take its mission more seriously? Deliberately equipping people to participate in the framework and the ministries of the denomination will broaden the base of those invested. Individual pew-sitters must be brought into the process. The communicator's of denominational ministries should not take lightly the fact that the primary informational gatekeepers of congregations are the pastor and the church secretary. The church secretary monitors what makes it into each Sunday's bulletin—and no one should underestimate the effectiveness of a bulletin announcement to reach people in the pew. Also, pastors' passions tend to generate passions among church members.

To address the first weakness mentioned, how could the CRCNA develop more coordination? So many efforts have been made for coordination over the years and it is difficult to determine what has hindered success in the past. Regardless, covenant theology calls

us to be a community united in our work for God's Kingdom. Therefore, despite past failures, the goals of coordination and cooperation are still worthy ones; ones that the CRCNA must continue to press on toward.

In response to the unnecessary adding of bureaucratic layers: The church must pay attention to its current structure more carefully. Many channels already exist that are under-utilized or misused. When facing a perceived gap, hole, or problem in the current structure, it must be realized that a solution is not necessarily to add *more* to the structure of the denomination. Drawing real connections to ways congregations do take part in the process will highlight what is working already.

At this time in our denomination's history we need to settle down and establish stability and peace. The constant upheaval has interrupted the effectiveness of ministry. In order to regain our passion for ministry we should let the agencies do their work without interruption for a period of time, with the understanding that at the end of this period the structures would be thoroughly re-evaluated. This will allow the successes and problems to rise to the surface and be noted. With constant change a critical attitude, focusing on problems, is fostered and the successes are not duly noted, the Spirit is not glorified and the Body of Christ is not built up.

Conclusion

As a Reformed church the CRCNA is *semper reformanda*. Our world is constantly in flux and the church must remain effective and relevant in this environment. In this, the CRCNA must maintain its healthy resistance to allow the pendulum to swing too far in either the direction of centralization or congregationalism. Its change is best as a centering agent. However, as Al Wolters notes in *Creation Regained*, to be reforming is not a revolutionary overthrow of the current system, but a gradual change in the present situation. Many times it is not so much the *structure* that needs to be altered as the *direction* within that structure. The CRCNA needs to look at its process of "reforming" over the long term and in such a way it can realize the most effective reformation, even at a the level of denominational ministry structure.



End Notes

- i http://www.crcna.org/cr/crrs/crrs_synod_churchgov.htm
- ii http://www.crcna.org/cr/crrs/crrs_synod_churchgov.htm
- iii The Board of Trustees also supervises the work of committees appointed by synod, but this paper will not deal directly with this work.
- iv http://www.crcna.org/cr/crrs/crrs_synod_churchgov.htm
- v http://www.crcna.org/cr/crrs/crrs_synod_churchgov.htm
- vi *Acts of Synod*, 1991, Report 17-A, Page 620.
- vii Ibid.
- viii Ibid.
- ix Ibid.
- x Ibid.
- xi Ibid, 619.
- xii http://www.crcna.org/cr/crag/crag_ministryplan.htm
- xiii http://www.crcna.org/cr/crag/crag_ministryplan.htm
- xiv http://www.crcna.org/cr/crag/crag_ministryplan.htm
- xv Ibid.
- xvi Ibid.
- xvii *Acts of Synod 2001*, Article 65.I.B.1, page 519. The Agenda for Synod, 2001, outlines the Classification of agencies, committees, and institutions under the newly adopted Constitution:
1. Agencies:
 - a. The Back to God Hour/CRC-TV
 - b. CR Home Missions
 - c. CR World Missions
 - d. CR World Relief
 - e. CRC Loan Fund, Inc., U.S.
 - f. CRC Publications
 - g. Pastoral Ministries
 - h. Pensions and Insurance
 1. Committees:
 - a. Fund for Smaller Churches
 - b. Historical Committee
 - c. Interchurch Relations Committee
 - d. Sermons for Reading Services Committee
 - e. Youth-Ministry Committee
 - f. Such Additional Committees as synod may appoint
 1. Educational Institutions:
 - a. Calvin College
 - b. Calvin Theological Seminary
- xvii *Acts*, 2001, Pages 63, 69.
- xix The tension between collaboration and autonomy between these two organizations has a long tradition. The issues are not yet resolved even today.
- xx “Set up a committee....”
- xxi Some within the agencies themselves might suggest that the restructuring has too-often been called for and implemented from without. This results in a heavy-handed implementation, frustration by those on the front lines of ministry, little ownership of the new structures and cynicism towards any new policies. See “Our Ministry Structure: Must We Fix it?” by Dr. Roger Greenway, in *The Banner*, April 26, 1999 for part of the autonomy vs. centralization argument.
- xxii Significant membership loss over the issue of women in office, declined giving to denominational ministry shares, reduced denominational loyalty, the changing religious landscape at the turn of the 21st century and other factors have contributed to unrest in the denomination felt in the agencies and synod’s assessment of their effectiveness at achieving their mandates.
- xxiii Greenway, Roger S. “Our Ministry Structure: Must We Fix It?” *The Banner*, April 26, 1999, pg. 18.

Consuming Zeal

By Dave Gifford

It is becoming commonplace to hear people talk about churches in business terms. The impact of shopping and consumerism¹ on religion is obvious. This impact is clearly seen in book titles such as *Spiritual Marketplace*ⁱⁱ and *The Divine Supermarket: Shopping for God in America*.ⁱⁱⁱ What is less recognized is that American consumerism, typified by the act of shopping, has become the functional religion of choice for many Americans, even many of those openly affiliated with other religions.

Not all shoppers treat shopping as their religion, of course. But Paul Tillich defined faith as “the state of being ultimately concerned.”^{iv} That is, faith is our response to that which places unconditional demands on us and promises us ultimate fulfillment. Consumerism has been defined as the “inordinate concern . . . with the acquisition, consumption and/or possession of material goods and services.”^v To the extent that this “inordinate concern” becomes a person’s “ultimate concern,” it is his functional religion, whether he realizes it or not.

And most adherents of this consumer religion do *not* recognize themselves as such. While a few would openly profess such slogans as ‘born to shop’ and ‘shop till you drop,’ most are blissfully unaware of their attachment to shopping. David R. Loy, Professor of International Studies at Bunkyo University in Japan, says that “the Market is becoming the first truly world religion, binding all corners of the globe more and more tightly into a worldview and set of values whose religious role we overlook only because we insist on seeing them as ‘secular.’”^{vi} It is precisely this lack of awareness that makes it difficult to find primary sources in researching this phenomenon.^{vii}

Does consumerism exhibit the characteristics of a religion? How well-formed a religion is it? How well does it satisfy basic human needs? These are the questions I will be examining in this paper, on the basis of John Cooper’s “Components of a Well-Formed Religion.”^{viii} I will concentrate primarily on consumerism as a realityview, advertising as the revelatory vehicle for encountering the product as object of religious response, and the illusory nature of the benefits shopping holds out to the shopper. Nevertheless, I will comment briefly on how the other components of a well-formed religion are exhibited in the religion of shopping / consumerism.

I. Realityview

The shopping mall is the dominating metaphor in the realityview of consumerism. It represents a smorgasbord of choices through which one creates one’s own identity by adopting one or more of the ‘motifs’ advertised: “I shop, therefore I am.”

The shopping mall metaphor is an appropriate paradigm for postmodern philosophy, which rejects Modernism’s search for an overarching *meta-narrative* (a comprehensive worldview that accurately interprets all of life) and encourages the individual’s construction of personal narratives. One wonders if Protestantism’s emphasis on the individual’s right to interpret the Bible helped to pave the way for postmodernism’s insistence on the individual’s right to interpret life.

The metaphor of the shopping mall is so strong that it has influenced other institutions. In *Shopping Mall High School*, Arthur G. Powell explores how the shopping mall metaphor of self-creation has infiltrated education.^{ix} School curricula offer diverse classes to woo the student, and classes offer diverse class projects to choose from. These projects are considered ‘treaties’ between teachers and students. Schools compete for students, luring them in with special events, and teachers act as salespeople for their subjects. Powell laments that this view of education leads to a voluntary mentality of education, where graduation is the key but subject mastery is optional.

Ira Zepp explains that malls are mini *cosmos*, self-contained worlds, cosmic ‘centers’, and this is evidenced by their typically quadrilateral design and the frequency of words like ‘center’ and ‘crossings’ in their names (e.g. “Rivertown Crossings” and “Centerpoint Mall”).^x The intended effect of the shopping mall is to create a sacred space and time^{xi} in which ‘big picture’ questions and the outside world become irrelevant. In *The Malling of America*, William Kowinski writes, “Whatever you actually came here for is in the distant past. You’ve been floating here . . . for hours. But that’s the whole idea of this psychological structure: to turn off your mind and let you float . . .”^{xii} He also writes, “Enclosure and comfort control are designed to make the customer feel more comfortable and more secure inside the mall than in the outside world,”^{xiii} and he dedicates

an entire chapter, entitled “Prisoners of the Mall,” to the mind-bending effects this has on mall employees.

This deliberate disconnect from the outside world means that the religion of the mall cares little for questions of cosmology, origins and meaning. The adherent of consumer religion may draw these beliefs from other sources to fill out its incomplete picture of life. A person can have shopping as their functional religion while holding to cosmological beliefs extrapolated from other religions.

Another major feature of consumerism’s realityview is its dim view of humanity. It treats human beings as mere consumers. The problems of depersonalization and mass manipulation come up frequently in literature about consumerism and advertising.^{xiv} Regarding depersonalization Robert Banks writes that “we have moved from being citizens to primarily consumers. This contains the risk that people themselves will become commodities to be bought by advertising, and sometimes even sold off through the sale of mailing lists.”^{xv}

But while consumerism’s view of human beings is low, it is not inarticulate. The Stanford Research Institute has carefully categorized people in our society in a chart called the Values and Lifestyle System (VALS2). In this schema, people are divided into eight categories: Actualizers, Fulfilleds, Believers, Achievers, Strivers, Experiencers, Makers and Strugglers^{xvi} to be targeted appropriately by advertisers.

The very purpose of advertising reveals its deficient view of human beings and its deficient response to the human condition. The goal of advertising is to *create dissatisfaction with self* in order to sell products. Where other religions *address* the problems of the human condition, consumerism often *creates* new perceptions of need and *intensifies* the human predicament. It invents new needs that correspond (more or less) to the products it wishes to sell. And since these new needs can only be met by economic transactions, those without means are left ever more deprived and frustrated.

Advertising adds further elements of confusion by deliberately erasing the boundary between needs and desires, and by linking products with needs that have no logical connection to the products (e.g., using the sex drive to sell everything from chewing gum to palm pilots).

Michael Starkey, in *Born to Shop*, lists several “cultural icons” which represent further facets of the worldview of consumerism: The net curtain [the fence], which represents individualism; the wallet, which represents prosperity; the new car, which represents success; the supermarket shelf, which represents freedom of choice; and the credit card, which represents instant gratification.^{xvii}

Another notable facet of the consumerism realityview is its *technologism*, an optimism that technology

will continue to enhance human life and rectify human shortcomings.

II. Object(s) of Religious Response

The religion of shopping is polytheistic and parasitical in nature. It is *polytheistic* in that it holds up an endless succession of products and services as objects of religious response. Each person chooses his or her own Ground of Being from the pantheon of products advertised through the media. Modern advertising can market any product or service as an ultimate concern.

Shopping is also *parasitical* in that it often feeds on ultimate commitments formed elsewhere. In a sense, advertising strengthens shopping-as-religion by capitalizing on other religions and lifestyles. Whatever becomes the public’s momentary interest (e.g. angels, post-September 11 patriotism, ‘What would Jesus do?’) immediately gets packaged and marketed.

Thus the degree to which shopping has a well-formed object of religious response depends on the particular object being promoted. A person who ‘worships’ classic literature or religious music probably has a more ultimately satisfying object of religious response than does a person who worships cigars or perfumes. But in the end, whether the advertiser offers the *NIV Study Bible* or GAP jeans, the object of religious response is always reduced to the status of merchandise to be manufactured, packaged and consumed. Thus an irony exists in which the very act of presenting an item for ‘consumption’ (the intended religious response) undermines its claim on the purchaser (worshiper) because it is placed in the market alongside tens of thousands of other items with the same claim. And purchase price is not a reliable indicator of value either, because purchase price reflects the law of supply and demand. Today’s hot item will probably be found in next month’s bargain bin.

III. Relation Between the Person and the Religious Object(s)

A. Encountering the Object(s)

The objects of shopping devotion are primarily revealed, of course, through advertising. In a society where public prayer and the display of the Ten Commandments, nativity scenes, etc, are curtailed or even prohibited in the public arena, consumer religion is ever expanding the promulgation of its objects of worship. James B. Twitchell notes that in 1997, \$200 billion was spent on advertising.^{xviii}

Anthropologist Paco Underhill acts as a consultant to stores across the United States. His job is to study the dynamic interaction between customers and the retail environment. He points out that America is “over-retailed” and that advertising enters every home through the mail, the television, the radio, the newspaper and the computer. Product placements appear everything

from movies to clothes to drinking cups. Underhill writes, “You almost have to make an effort to avoid shopping today.”^{xxix}

James B. Twitchell, in his book *Lead Us Into Temptation*, cleverly catalogues the religious overtones in much modern advertising in a chapter entitled “The Language of Things: Advertising and the Rhetoric of Salvation.” He says that advertising is “the gospel of redemption in the fallen world of capitalism . . . it attempts “to breach the gap between us and objects by providing a systematic order *and* a promise of salvation.”^{xxx} For example, he notes the plethora of magical characters which inhabit ads, from the Jolly Green Giant to the Energizer Bunny.^{xxxi} He also notes that advertisements use the language of providence (“You’re in good hands”), creation (“We bring good things to life”), petitionary prayer (“You asked for it, you got it—Toyota”), self-worth (“I’m worth it”) and gratitude (“Thanks, Delco”).^{xxxi}

The revelatory process extends into the store or the mall, the actual place of worship. Paco Underhill describes the store itself as a commercial.^{xxiii} Signs and special displays of products represent one last revelatory link in a chain that extends from the home of the shopper to the very altar (shelf or display) of the object of religious response.

This brings us to the topic of the shopping mall as a sacred space. I have already noted the quadrilateral design and the ‘center’ imagery in mall names. Theologian and phenomenologist of religion Ira G. Zepp, Jr. wrote the definitive study on the religious overtones of the mall, *The New Religious Image of Urban America: The Shopping Mall As Ceremonial Center*. In his book Zepp notes more connections between the mall and the sacred:

- The center court of the mall, acting as a “sacred pivot,” containing some combination of circles, crosses, squares, banners, art, sculpture and vegetation. These areas are usually characterized by special lighting, whether with a skylight or with multiple, bright ceiling lamps. The center courts of malls correspond to the altar of a sanctuary’s cathedral.^{xiv}
- The presence of water, in the form of pools, fountains and artificial waterfalls. Water is symbolic of life.^{xxv}
- The presence of “the regenerative force of vegetation.” Trees and other foliage are rarely artificial in malls. Plants are bred to be green year-round. Mall names often incorporate nature imagery (e.g. “Woodland Mall”).^{xxvi}
- The annual cycle of mall events, which revolves around national, religious and family holidays and resembles a church’s liturgical year.^{xxvii}
- The similarities between mall design and cathedral design: imposing facades; high ceilings and skylights

that suggest transcendence; the overwhelming sensory experience of sights, sounds and smells; the experience of a climate-controlled sanctuary from the tensions and pressures of life.^{xxviii}

Robert Banks, whose interest is in creating a Christian theology of shopping, summarizes Zepp’s study. He writes,

“Shopping . . . appeals to certain quasi-religious longings. The experience can give a brief, if limited, sense of transcendence by helping people to ‘get out of themselves’ and enter a different, almost magical, world. Shopping malls in particular seek to stimulate this through their expansive designs, exotic colors, lofty ceilings and uplifting music.”^{xxix}

He notes that “the most influential figure in the early development of enclosed shopping malls was James Rouse, a lay Christian with an articulate theological understanding of malls’ communal and religious character.”^{xxx}

Advertising and retail design are elaborate sciences which have been carefully and meticulously honed in the twentieth century. It is not surprising that this component of religion is the most well-formed and the most clearly articulated in the religion of shopping.

B. Responses to the Object

1. Personal Commitment

This aspect of religion is poorly-formed in the religion of consumerism. The basic orientation which shoppers are expected to have toward their object of devotion is simply *desire*. Because the objects of religious response are impersonal products, there is no sense of intellectual assent or personal trust involved (other than brand loyalty, a rapidly vanishing phenomenon). Because the religion of shopping is polytheistic, it tolerates multiple and conflicting commitments. Because advertising depends on illusion (see below), one’s personal commitment to shopping is often poorly recognized. In addition, shopping has its deviants: kleptomaniacs^{xxxi} and shopaholics.^{xxxii}

2. Expressions of Commitment in Life

A. Directed to the Object

Likewise, this desire for the object is expressed in very limited ways: desire the object, make a pilgrimage to the mall or store where the object resides, sacrifice money for the object, use or display the object. One’s commitment to the object suddenly vanishes the moment one has it—once the honeymoon experience of shopping wears off, the object loses its magical quality,^{xxxiii} and the high priests of advertising present new objects of veneration for the disenchanting worshipper’s

consideration.

B. *Expressions Throughout Life in the World*

Shopping-as-religion affects the consumer/worshiper's interaction with the world in two primary ways. First, there is something which s/he must do to continue practicing this religion: either work to make money or borrow money on credit. The latter practice has created the serious problem debt in the United States.

Second, there are two levels on which proselytizing is done. Advertisers themselves attempt to attract new devotees at home and abroad. David R. Loy writes,

“What is most impressive about market values from a religious perspective is not their ‘naturalness’ but how extraordinarily effective and persuasive their conversion techniques are. As a philosophy teacher, I know that whatever I can do with my students a few hours during a week is practically useless against the proselytizing influences that assail them outside class—the attractive (often hypnotic) advertising messages on television and radio and in magazines and buses, etc., which constantly urge them to ‘buy *me* if you want to be happy.”^{xxxiv}

The missionary work extends to the third world, where transnational companies export Western fast food and soft drinks, Western fashions, Western culture and Western values.^{xxxv}

The other form of proselytizing is done by customers themselves. They excitedly tell others about their favorite stores and most recent shopping bargains. They also become walking billboards (or tracts), voluntarily wearing items of clothing with brand names prominently displayed on them.

IV. Benefits of Relationship With the Object

A. Locus of Benefits

It is this component of religion which brings out the weaknesses of the religion of the market. First, its benefits are only for this life. The Afterlife is simply not in view. In the same way that it piggybacks on the cosmology of other religions, so it relies on other religions to provide answers concerning personal and universal eschatology.

Second, consumerism depends on promises (e. g. of a sense of identity, or the dream of a better life), and it does not ultimately keep these promises.

John Kavanaugh explains that since the promises of friendship, pride and happiness that products offer are empty, consumers are never fulfilled. He adds,

“Thus the seller drives us to greater purchasing

with even more extravagantly concocted promises: more commodities as the solution to anxiety stimulated by media manipulation. Consumption, consequently, is not just an economic factor. It emerges as a “way of life.” It is an addiction.”^{xxxvi}

In a similar vein, David R. Loy writes, “Comparisons that have been made over time and between societies show that there is little difference in self-reported happiness. The fact that we in the developed world are now consuming so much more does not seem to be having much effect on our happiness.”^{xxxvii}

Loy then contrasts this with his own Buddhist faith, which teaches that “the insatiable desires of the ego-self are the source of the frustration and lack of peace that we experience in our daily lives.”^{xxxviii} His conclusion is that “the market is not just an economic system but a religion—yet not a very good one, for it can thrive only by promising a secular salvation that it never quite supplies.”^{xxxix}

B. Source of Benefits

According to consumerism the individual buys her salvation with the money she has worked to earn. It is primarily a religion of personal achievement. However, according to Robert Banks, there is a small space for grace: “The quest for bargains . . . promises people the experience of a kind of material ‘grace.’ What could be more exciting than discovering something you really want that hardly costs anything?”^{xl}

V. Knowledge, Wisdom and Truth

Consumerism is not well-formed in this category because it does not offer faith-content. Rather, it suppresses truth. Consumerism is based on the ability of the advertiser to convince the shopper of his need for the product. This need is usually either exaggerated (desires presented as ‘needs’) or completely manufactured. Were the truth to be known, the advertiser's spell over the consumer would be broken. Paco Underhill writes, “If we went in stores only when we needed to buy something, and if once there we bought only what we needed, the economy would collapse, boom.”^{xli}

Colin Campbell calls modern consumerism “self-illusory hedonism.” He says it “is characterized by a longing to experience in reality those pleasures created and enjoyed in imagination, a longing which results in the ceaseless consumption of novelty.”^{xlii}

VI. Personal Affections and Dispositions

I noted above that advertising creates a dissatis-

faction with self. Bill Mason lists a number of emotions which advertisers manipulate, including fear (e.g. “Aren’t you glad you use Dial?”—you might be ostracized by your friends if you don’t!), jealousy (“keeping up with the Joneses”), hope, and the love parents have for their children (“Mommy, buy me another Pokemon!”).^{xliii}

I have also noted that one’s love for the object and one’s hope for future dissipate almost as soon as one acquires the object of one’s desire. Thus, the affective side of consumerism is a burden imposed on the consumer and is limited exclusively to the period prior to purchase.

VII. Character, Morality and Ethics

I have already noted the limited life commitment required of the worshiper. The religion of shopping does not aim to inculcate any virtues in its adherents other than that of being good shoppers and not displaying behavior conducive to a shopping environment. Other than that, “The Customer Is Always Right.”

Consumerism engenders behavior which is detrimental to the environment: consumers voraciously ‘consume’ the world’s resources and pollute the ecosystem with refuse. David R. Loy believes that the eventual collapse of our world’s environment might be good for traditional world religions. It will show expose market capitalism as a deficient ‘religion’ which destroys the eco-system.^{xliv}

VIII. Community

Malls claim to be community centers. They attract everyone from adolescents who come to socialize (“mallrats”) to the elderly, who find in malls a safe, comfortable environment in which to escape loneliness. And, “In general they lend themselves to a more casual and egalitarian approach to shopping that fits our less formal and less elitist culture.”^{xlv}

But Robert Banks, summarizing the observations of William Kowinski, says that malls cannot be called ‘town centers’ except with major qualifications:

“They are very middle-class institutions, which are not generally located near or patronized by blue-collar people. Space in the mall is not open to all who wish to enter it but is policed by security staff, who ensure that undesirable people are asked to leave. . . . Generally speaking public meetings cannot be held in a mall, literature cannot be handed out, movie or film cameras cannot be used, and evangelism cannot be overtly conducted. In these and other ways, malls limit the democratic rights of citizens.”^{xlvi}

Ira Zepp goes so far as to say that “Some regional malls even pride themselves on being located out of reach of an urban transit system. Of course, this is

code language for being free of the poor, the riff-raff, and other undesirables.” (Zepp, 29).

At best, malls and stores create an artificial sense of community in which people need not interact with each other. And malls and large stores have at times contributed to the decay of community by stealing the clientele of small local businesses.

IX. Culture and Tradition

Consumer religion has not created a lasting or meaningful culture. William Kowinski complains of an effect of shopping malls which he calls “plastiphobia, or the fear of being enclosed in a cocoon of blandness.” A young man told him, “I saw all the people and what we were all doing there . . . I was in a plastic place with plastic people buying plastic products with plastic charge cards. I had to escape.”^{xlvii}

The only sense of cohesion consumerism brings to our culture is the familiarity of brand-name products and advertising jingles. These jingles are replacing the dominance once held by the language of the King James Bible in our cultural collective memory. James Twitchell offers a brief but insightful look at *Seinfeld*, a television show which capitalized on product recognition for comedic effect.^{xlviii} He also mentions the curious game of *Adverteasing*, where players match jingles and slogans with products. “Why was it so popular?” he asks. “It was one of the few games the whole family could play.”^{xlix}

Conclusion

Consumerism, epitomized in the modern shopping mall, is a poorly-formed religion in most areas. Its realityview must piggyback on the cosmologies of other religions to be complete; its objects of religious response are undermined by their status as merchandise; it requires little commitment on the part of the consumer/worshiper; the benefits it promises them are temporary and are rarely fulfilled by the product; it relies on the suppression of knowledge to manipulate the consumer; it produces negative affections in its adherents; it engenders a morality which is detrimental to the environment; it does not foster genuine community; it does not create a lasting or meaningful culture or traditions.



End Notes

- i I will use the terms ‘consumerism’ and ‘shopping’ interchangeably throughout this paper. The former (defined below) looks at the topic as a societal phenomenon. The latter concentrates on the actual expression of consumerism in daily life.
- ii Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
- iii Malise Ruthven, *The Divine Supermarket: Shopping for God in America*. (New York: William Morrow and Co, 1989).
- iv Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith*. New York: Harper Colophon Books), 1-2.
- v Craig M. Gay, “Consumerism,” *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life*. Eds. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 220.
- vi David R. Loy, “The Religion of the Market,” *Journal of the Academy of Religion*. 1997, 65 (2): 275.
- vii The closest I came to finding primary sources was Lee Knapp’s account from the perspective of a convert to Christianity from shopping religion in “Shopping For the Real Me,” *Christianity Today*. 1999, 43 (13): 66-73, and the many interviews in William Kowinski’s first person account of his journey through numerous malls in *The Malling of America.: An Inside Look at the Great Consumer Paradise*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1985).
- viii John Cooper, “The Structure of a Well-Formed Religion.” Class handout for Philosophy of Religion, Calvin Theological Seminary, Spring 2002.
- ix Arthur G. Powell, *The Shopping Mall High School*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985).
- x Ira G. Zepp, *The New Religious Image of Urban America: The Shopping Mall as Ceremonial Center*. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, Inc, 1986), 13; 33-38.
- xi See the Table of Contents in Ira G. Zepp, *The New Religious Image of Urban America: The Shopping Mall as Ceremonial Center*. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, Inc, 1986).
- xii William Severini Kowinski, *The Malling of America.: An Inside Look at the Great Consumer Paradise*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1985), 340.
- xiii Ibid, 344-5.
- xiv For a helpful introductory article on advertising and manipulation, see Richard Pollay and R. Paul Stevens, “Advertising,” *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life*. Eds. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 23-7.
- xv Robert Banks, “Shopping,” *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life*. Eds. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 888.
- xvi For an explanation of the VALS2 system and a description of the eight categories, see James B. Twitchell, *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 77-80.
- xvii Mike Starkey, *Born to Shop*. (Eastbourne UK: Monarch Publications, 1989), 220.
- xviii James B. Twitchell, *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 50.
- xix Paco Underhill, *Why We Buy*. (New York: Simon and Schister, 1999). This book offers a fascinating glimpse at the extent to which retail environments are manipulated to enhance customer spending.
- xx James B. Twitchell, *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 57.
- xxi Ibid, 57. Cf. the extensive catalog of characters, separated by categories, on pp. 68-9.
- xxii Ibid, 70.
- xxiii Paco Underhill, *Why We Buy*. (New York: Simon and Schister, 1999), 55.
- xxiv Ira G. Zepp, *The New Religious Image of Urban America: The Shopping Mall as Ceremonial Center*. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, Inc, 1986), 53-7.
- xxv Ibid, 57-60.
- xxvi Ibid, 60-63.
- xxvii Ibid, 107-117.
- xxviii Ibid, 126-137.
- xxix Robert Banks, “Shopping,” *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-to-Z Guide to Following*

Christ in Every Aspect of Life. Eds. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 887-8.

xxx Robert Banks, "Shopping Malls," *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life*. Eds. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 892. Ira Zepp devotes an entire chapter to James Rouse's life and influence in *The New Religious Image of Urban America: The Shopping Mall as Ceremonial Center*. (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, Inc, 1986).

xxxi James B. Twitchell, *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 254-6.

xxxii Ibid, 249-252.

xxxiii Twitchell notes the magical enchantment marketers wish to endow their products with. Ibid, 56ff.

xxxiv David R. Loy, "The Religion of the Market," *Journal of the Academy of Religion*. 1997, 65 (2): 278.

xxxv Mike Starkey, *Born to Shop*. (Eastbourne UK: Monarch Publications, 1989), 193ff.

xxxvi John Francis Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance*. (Maryknoll, MD: Orbis, 1982), 23-4.

xxxvii David R. Loy, "The Religion of the Market," *Journal of the Academy of Religion*. 1997, 65 (2): 288.

xxxviii Ibid.

xxxix Ibid, 289.

xl Robert Banks, "Shopping", *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life*. Eds. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 888.

xli Paco Underhill, *Why We Buy*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 31.

xlii Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*. (New York: Blackwell, 1987), 205.

xliiii Bill Mason, "The Myth of Consumerism," Accessed on May 1, 2002 from <http://www.cs.ucr.edu/~wmason/myth.html>

xliv David R. Loy, "The Religion of the Market," *Journal of the Academy of Religion*. 1997, 65 (2):276.

xlv Robert Banks, "Shopping Malls", *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life*. Eds. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 890.

xlvi Robert Banks, "Shopping Malls", *The Complete Book of Everyday Christianity: An A-to-Z Guide to Following Christ in Every Aspect of Life*. Eds. Robert Banks and R. Paul Stevens (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 893.

xlvii William Severini Kowinski, *The Mall of America.: An Inside Look at the Great Consumer Paradise*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1985), 339.

xlviii James B. Twitchell, *Lead Us Into Temptation: The Triumph of American Materialism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 84-7.

xlix Ibid, 53.

Thy Kingdom Come....

A sermon by Lisa Vander Leek

Zechariah 8:1-8 Matthew 6:9-13 Lord's Day 48

Lord's Day 48; Q&A 123: *What does the second request mean?*

A: *Your kingdom come* means,
Rule us by your word and spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you.
Keep your church strong, and add to it.
Destroy the devil's work; destroy every force which revolts against you and every conspiracy against your Word.
Do this until your kingdom is so complete and perfect that in it you are all in all.

Thy kingdom come... how often have we prayed these words? I'm sure more times than any of us can count. They are familiar words that just roll off our tongue... and... In these words we pray for God to bring the kingdom – but do we really mean these words that we pray – Do we really want the Kingdom to come...?

Certainly every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we look forward to the coming of the kingdom. In the words of Paul, as often as we eat the bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the Lord's death – *until he comes* – indeed the Lord's Supper is understood in the Christian church as a foretaste of the final messianic banquet in the new age, when God's kingdom will come in its fullness. Then God's work in the world will be brought to completion. But it probably is an honest question whether any of us really wants to attend that final banquet – *at least right now*. I'm not so sure that we are willing or ready for the kingdom of God to come...

We are comfortable people, and for the most part we are quite content – we like our life just the way it is... sure we may have problems in our marriage, our finances may be a little tight, our children a little rowdy, and there are always family issues – but overall we are quite content with the way things are – there may be problems but despite all of them we still enjoy our family and friends, we still love our spouses though they may irritate us occasionally, we have jobs that keep us busy and a faith that sustains even the rougher moments, and for the most part we are not ready for this life to be over.

And so we may routinely pray for the kingdom to come, but in our heart of hearts we would probably add a *come...* BUT NOT YET! And we think to ourselves that, well, there are lots of things I would like to do yet... I'd like to travel and see the world, I'd like to get married and find out what that is like – I'd really like to have children God – or finish school, or have a chance to grow up and be an adult – I kinda like this life God and

well I'm not ready to give it up quite yet. We like life here on earth – life is good! So we pray “Thy Kingdom Come, Oh Lord – *someday* – but maybe not just now!”

But the problem is: we need the kingdom to come – we need to pray for it...and not just because that is how Christ taught us to pray – BUT BECAUSE OUR WORLD NEEDS IT. When we look beyond our lives, and our hopes and dreams, and look to how the rest of the world lives, and the pain and turmoil around us we realize that our world needs the kingdom of God to come. There are starving children, countries devastated by war, polluted rivers, endangered species...and the list goes on and on. And when we take a close look at our own lives we realize that on the surface life may look good, but as we dig deeper the dirt comes out and our skeletons haunt us. We see how really fallen we are and how fallen our world is. We see the need for creation to be re-gained – for all things to be made good again. We see that the world and we need it.

And that is what Israel saw in their world. They saw the despair in their world. They were a ragged bunch of refugees. They had managed to survive the Babylonian destruction of their country. Some had just spent years in exile in Babylonia; others had been allowed to stay in Palestine. But now the exiled had returned and they were all living in the desolated land they once called home. All of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were in desperate straits. Their temple was still a burned-out ruin. Their city walls were nothing but heaps of rubble. Drought had withered their crops, and hunger was rampant. Israel's glory days haunted them - days of abundance during the reign of David and Solomon. But now they no longer even had a king or a government. They were just a tiny, impoverished sub-province in the vast Persian Empire. Their life was a matter of grubbing for the basic necessities of life, so it is no wonder that they heard Zechariah gladly when he preached this passage to them about the coming of the kingdom of God. He

preached the true kingdom. A kingdom of life, and a kingdom built right here on earth. *They needed something better – and that is still true for most of the people on this earth. Israel heard the hope of Zechariah’s prophecy. They knew the need for the new kingdom. Israel saw the hope of the new future.* Let’s look at Zechariah 8: 3-5 again:

This is what the LORD says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth... Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there.

What is the kingdom of God, according to the prophet Zechariah? Elizabeth Archteimer in a sermon on the kingdom exclaims that Zechariah’s image is that of a public park! It is a park where old people are no longer cold and lonely and ill and senile, but participants in a community. It is a public park where the elderly can sit together and bask in the sun, and talk and laugh over the good old days in full vigor and clear mind and satisfaction of life. The kingdom of God is a public park where little children can run and play in its squares, in safety and fun and delight. It is a place where no pervert is waiting to lure one of them away with offers of candy; where no drug pusher is lurking to tempt the older children to try a brightly colored pill. It is a place where no child is abused or unwanted or malnourished, and where there is not even a bully among the group, shoving and taunting the littler ones until they break into tears. The kingdom of God, says Zechariah, is a public park where the streets are safe for children. It is a place where there are no hungry tummies, no scraped knees. It is a place of hope, of freedom, of peace, of glory. It is a vision of how the world is supposed to be.

The stark reality is that things here are not the way it is supposed to be – we are like the Israelites standing among the rubble of the world weeping in agony, and yet rejoicing in the hope of the future painted by Zechariah. But, Congregation of our Lord, we have one up, so to speak, on Israel. *You see, the Kingdom of God envisioned by Zechariah and Israel is not some never-never land in the sweet by and by. No the kingdom of God is here on earth and it is now. It came that night when that one child was born in the city of Bethlehem.* It began when God himself, incarnate in that child, drew near to us and took up his dwelling in our midst...it began when that one child, grown up, died on a cross and was raised by his father and became the victor over all the evil and violence, all the ugliness and death that haunt our communities. Christ won the battle at Cal-

vary. He brings the kingdom of God and he will bring it until all of life is transformed to accord with the will and purpose of God. Or in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism - until God is all in all. Therefore when we pray the Lord’s Prayer we do not say “thy kingdom come in heaven...” We pray thy kingdom come on earth... It is saying: “God continue to press on toward the time when this soiled, everyday, common land of ours will become the good place that you intended it in the beginning to be.”

The kingdom is here, but it has not yet come in its fullness and brilliance...and even in all our comfort and love of life we see the despair of this world – the agony and the pain and so we pray “thy kingdom come.” So that is what we are praying for – we are asking God to continue to bring his kingdom... a kingdom that desperately needs to be realized. We must pray for the kingdom of God...

BUT THERE IS MORE! ASKING ISN’T ENOUGH! We must pray it with our mouths, of course, but also with our lives. WE MUST PRAY WITH OUR LIVES. For In praying for the coming of the kingdom we are not just asking God to act, but also for the grace for us to act also. If our lives are going in one direction and our prayers in another, we are split personalities – unhealthy human beings... Simply praying the words doesn’t get us off the hook; we need to live what we pray. The means our whole style of living must adopt the color, shape, values, joys and music of the new Kingdom.

So first of all in praying for the coming of the Kingdom we are not only responding to Christ’s victory and asking God to continue to bring his kingdom, but we are also submitting to God. Therefore the first thing we ask is, as the HC states, “*Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you.*” We ask God to direct all of our living – all that we think, say, and do. If he directs then everything will be done for His glory and for the Kingdom. We cannot do it on our own – there is no way. We are sinful creatures and love to do our own thing...like the two-year-old asserting herself with an indignant “NO! I DO IT MYSELF!” We sure like to try – but we can’t. Only God can rule us in such a way that everything we think, say and do all ahs the goal of the kingdom in mind. So until we cease making decisions apart from his will given to us in the scriptures and revealed by the Spirit we aren’t going to get very far. He gives us the Bible to direct us, and feed us. He gives us his Word in written form that reveals his will for the world and our lives. But he doesn’t stop there, he also gives us his Spirit so that we may clearly see and understand what he gives us in his word – we need both. The mystery and blessing is simply this: that the fire of our enthusiasm to follow God is kindled only in Jesus Christ. He not only keeps our eyes on the road;

he delivers us to our destination. Until we stop thinking that anything goes and start asking what God wants, nothing is going to change – we can't depend on our own good character and upright morals – it doesn't work that way – We need God to direct us, and he does it through his word and Spirit. Only in God can this be accomplished – The happy public park envisioned by Zechariah in his prophecy depends on something else – it depends on the fact that God DWELLS in the midst of the city and orders and rules its life; vs. 3 “This is what the LORD says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem...” and vs. 8, “I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.” God's people – being ruled by Him, submitting to his will as made know in scripture and his Spirit.

Next, in asking ‘thy kingdom come’ we ask, as the HC reads, “Keep your church strong and add to it...” God gathers his people; vs. 7 & 8: This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.” God says he will bring them. And so when we pray this we ask God to gather his people. And only God can enable his church to grow – only he can gather the people. BUT he uses his church to do it. He calls us to bring the message of the good news of the kingdom to all people; Romans 10:13-15

... “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

It is the church's job to preach the news to the nations and let them hear the news and nurturing them for kingdom service. The church is not the kingdom although its members belong to the kingdom; as a community the church has the signs and foretastes of the kingdom. It is the agency of the kingdom but not the result. And the agency has the purpose of proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom: to preach and teach God's word, administer the sacraments, engage in public prayer, and help the needy. The NT church in Acts 2:42,

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Notice, it was God who added to their number, God, not the church, but God. The church did the work of the kingdom, but the only deciding factor was God's actions. By God's own choosing, workers are indispensable as agents, and yet only God can enable his church to grow...

So far we have acknowledge that we must be ruled by God's Word and Spirit, and that we must work as agents of the kingdom, BUT, in doing this we must daily engage in battle with the devil. We need to recognize that we live in a world still in revolt and conspiracy against the kingdom. Christ is the victor, but there is still a battle going on.

Take for example **D-day and V-day**. In June 1944, the allied armies broke through the Atlantic Wall's fortresses. They paid a costly price, but they established a beachhead in Europe that they never surrendered again. That was D-Day, the time of the successful invasion. Then we knew that the battle was won. And Hitler knew it too. Yet the war was not finished until May 1945... there was time still between D-day and V-day in which battles still needed to be fought, but the major battle had been won!.

The church is praying between the D-day of God's invasion and the V-day of his total victory. The liberation has begun! And so we pray for the continual coming of the kingdom... and so again our kingdom prayer means that we pray “*Destroy the devil's work; destroy every force which revolts against you and every conspiracy against your Word.*” Destroy, demolish, annihilate the Devil, is what we pray. These are tough words to use in prayer, but that's what it takes to bring the kingdom and re-establish goodness in the world. Ephesians 6:12,

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

In order to destroy the devil's work, we must recognize the evidence of the work, and challenge ourselves and each other to do battle in the power of the Lord. We cannot do it on our own. We need the strength of God, Eph 6 again, “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.” Only Christ, the victor, has the power to defeat. So stand firm in the Lord. That's what David did when Goliath challenged the armies of Israel. All Israel trembled as they faced Goliath and the philistines day after day. They failed to recognize the devil in the Philistines Kingdom facing them, and they failed to trust the true source of their

strength. But David, a young shepherd boy, stood firm in the Lord and declared, 1 Samuel 17
You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head.... for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands.

That is how the battle must be fought. In Christ, we are more than conquerors. And so, as we Pray *thy kingdom come*, we stand firm in the Lord against all evil.

And, most importantly, people of God, when we pray *thy kingdom come* we hope. We hope for the day when God's kingdom will be realized. That celebrated day when all things will be made new. The day when every tear will be wiped away, death will be no more, and there will be no more mourning, or crying, or pain. The day when all of creation will be made new. With the apostle Paul "we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." And "not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly (Rom 8). In other words, we pray for the coming of the kingdom. We live through the present, and we live and pray by waiting, longing and groaning in hope for the perfection of the kingdom. And this we will do, and pray until that glorious day when Christ comes again, and his kingdom is so complete and perfect that in it God is all in all.

And so we must hope and pray and live. Our world needs it – Christ commands it. So, people of God, pray. Pray with your lives and with your mouths for the coming of the kingdom. Live lives ruled by God; lives devoted to the work of the kingdom; lives which bring the message of the kingdom to the nations; lives that stand firm in the Lord. And most importantly, pray until that celebrated day when all things are made new, and all pain and suffering cease. Pray, thy Kingdom come with joy and anticipation... Come quickly Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Let us Pray,

Our father in heaven, Holy is your Name; send your kingdom Lord, now and for all time. Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you. Keep your church strong, and add to it. Destroy the devil's work; destroy every force which revolts against you and every conspiracy against your Word. Do this until your kingdom is so complete and perfect that in it you are all in all. Amen.



Worship Leadership & The Office of Evangelist

By Paul Ryan

To the membership of the Christian Reformed Church it is no surprise that the area of worship has undergone significant change in the last ten to fifteen years. With the rise of the Praise & Worship movement, worship has seen great transformation, renewal, and deep reflection. Among these changes, there has been a modification in the style and methods of *leadership*. Worship leadership, which historically has been in the arena of the minister of the Word, has seen great diversification in the inclusion of lay participation. And at the same time, a role commonly referred to as Worship Leader, has developed out of the traditional duties of the minister of the Word. What is the conception of Worship leadership in the CRC? What is the relationship between the Worship Leader and the minister of the Word? Should a worship leader be ordained, and if so, to what office?

Conceptions of worship leadership within the CRC

The Complete Library of Christian Worship notes a redirection of worship leadership in the CRC: "Worship leadership is increasingly diverse, with lay members involved in leading prayers and sometimes in service as liturgist for complete sections of the service. In a few congregations the minister only preaches; the rest of the service is led by lay members . . ." ^{xi} This diversification is also supported by a denominational study: "Today, increasing numbers of CRC members are involved in worship planning and leadership. The leadership role of the pastor is not diminished but becomes more complex and behind the scenes. Worship committees hardly existed in 1968, but in the 1990 survey by the CRC Worship Committee, 87 percent of Christian Reformed congregations had committees involved in various aspects of planning worship." ⁱⁱ

Along with this diversification in leadership and planning, the CRC has also seen the development of new staff positions related to worship. In 1996, *Reformed Worship* featured an article that outlined major changes in Christian Reformed worship in the previous ten years. In this article Howard Vanderwell, a CRC minister, describes the progression of the changing role of church musicians: "In the last ten years, we've moved from 'she's head organist,' to 'she's organist and choir director,' to 'she's director of music,' to 'she's worship coordinator,' and tacitly now she is perceived as a pas-

toral musician. That is a very fundamental change and approach to that role." ⁱⁱⁱ And again from the denominational study committee: "Many churches reported liturgists other than the pastor *regularly* reading Scripture (25 percent), leading the congregational prayer (13 percent), or taking most of the service except for the sermon (10 percent). . . Many churches are consciously nurturing the gifts within the congregation for leadership in prayer and music. . ." ^{iv}

What for years has been considered the role of the minister of the Word is now being delegated to a more specialized ministry position known as a Worship Leader or in some churches, a Worship Coordinator. Edith Bajema, herself a Worship Coordinator in the CRC, accounts for this development:

Ten years ago the minister chose everything for our worship. That began to change when we attempted to introduce more contemporary worship. We added a worship planner and leader position, which eventually became permanent. And we began to develop worship teams that would be trained by the worship coordinator. That's about where we are now, though we still have a music director who oversees the scheduling of all the teams and who does a fair amount of leading himself." ^v

From this evidence, it appears that in the Christian Reformed churches a new role is developing alongside the Minister of the Word due to increased responsibility in worship planning and preparation. Furthermore, out of a desire to cultivate gifts within the congregation, more and more churches are beginning with lay leadership and working toward staff positions of Worship Leader or Worship Coordinator.

The call to pastoral responsibility and leadership for Worship Leaders

According to Christian Reformed church order the minister of the Word is to conduct the worship services. ^{vi} This role is widely understood to include (1) the delivery of the sermon, (2) leadership involving official acts of ministry and (3), along with the elders, ultimate oversight of the worship services. ^{vii} While this definition in no way precludes the participation of lay leadership, it is reasonable to conclude, in virtue of the task

being given to the Minister of the Word, that an essential element of worship leadership is that it is *pastoral*. Many within the CRC have noted this. For example, Grace Moes and Collen Reinder, who share the position of director of worship for Community CRC of Meadowvale, in Mississauga, Ontario, hit upon three important areas of pastoral leadership in reference to worship coordinating: Christian maturity, administration, and congregational insight. They write, “The worship director holds a crucial position, one that requires a mature Christian who has at least some musical expertise and who is able to give leadership not only to the anticipated worship team but to the entire ministry of worship. Ideally, the worship director is a committed member of the congregation (one year or more), familiar with its history and dynamic and with the philosophy and vision of the leadership.”^{viii}

John Witvliet, director of the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, himself, strongly emphasizes the pastoral role of worship leadership in an article entitled “More Than Technique.” He writes, “We need to see planning and leading worship as pastoral tasks . . . As worship leaders, we have the important and terrifying task of placing words of prayer on people’s lips. It happens every time we choose a song or write a hymn. We also have the holy task of being stewards of God’s Word. Our choices of scripture and themes for worship represent a degree of control over people’s spiritual diets, over how they feed on the bread of life.”^{ix} In addition to this, Witvliet relates several characteristics that are true for pastoral worship leaders. First, pastoral worship leaders have “a love of learning” demonstrated through diligence of study, continued growth, and discernment. Second, they demonstrate “a pastoral heart” that seeks to know the names and faces of a congregation, looks for and develops the gifts of the congregation, and regularly prays for those whom he or she leads. And third, a pastoral worship leader embodies “a spirit of infectious joy.”^x

Finally, the denominational resource, *Authentic Worship in a Changing Culture*, underlines the above pastoral traits of worship leadership. It reads, “Those who lead the prayers of the people should be spiritually mature, fervent, discerning as to the needs of the congregation, and spiritually respected by the congregation.”^{xi}

Should worship leaders serving in such a capacity be ordained?

In light of the pastoral nature of worship leadership and its increasing understanding within congregations, worship leadership in the CRC is beginning to blur the distinction between the ordained and non-ordained. Emily Brink relates this present climate in an article on the trends of Christian Reformed worship:

different congregational members

speaking God’s greeting, offering an assurance of pardon (if there is a service of confession), and offering a parting blessing. In increasing numbers of Christian Reformed congregations, the only role left for an ordained minister in public worship is to deliver the sermon. . . The CRC faces a situation where, in worship, the traditional lines between ordained and unordained leadership are being erased. . . [It] is the ordained leaders who are called to do the primary work of preaching the Gospel, administering the sacraments, engaging in the service of prayer, and shepherding the people of God in the Christian life. The tension for worship leadership roles inherent in the distinction between ordination of ministers and those ordained by virtue of their baptism and gifts will continue to challenge the church.^{xii}

The Meaning of Ordination

In order to answer the question of whether or not pastoral Worship Leaders should be ordained, it is important to take a look at recent developments from the Synod of 2001 that draw from the CRC’s rich tradition of a theology of ordination.^{xiii} First, Synod explained that “Ordination is the church’s way to recognize and enact the relationship of leadership.” This relationship is characterized by two aspects, (1) a calling of the Lord in which Christ entrusts his authority to a leader in order to exercise pastoral responsibility over a congregation, and (2) a recognition and trust of the congregation that the Lord has given such a leader his authority over them. Leaders, therefore, “are those who have both the call of Christ and the call of the people.” This ordination of leaders further includes the recognition that the individual exhibits “appropriate excellencies for ministry” and it contains in it “a call to a role of pastoral responsibility.”

With this understanding of ordination it appears reasonable and within good order that Worship Leaders *may* be ordained within the Christian Reformed Church. If a Worship Leader exercises authority in a church by “placing words of prayer on people’s lips,”^{xiv} develops trust among a congregation by familiarizing herself with the “history and dynamic” of the congregation^{xv}, demonstrates care over the church by being “discerning as to the needs of the congregation”^{xvi} and devotes herself to a joyful and diligent growth in the study of her role, it seems healthy and good for the Worship Leader and the broader church to recognize both a call from God and the congregation to serve in this pastoral function.

Worship leadership and the offices of the church

Synod of 2001 explains that “Ordination is appropriate when, and only when, a person is called to pas-

toral leadership within the church. ‘Pastoral’ is here understood to embrace the functions of all the offices, including deacons, elders, evangelists, and ministers of the Word.^{xxvii} If pastoral Worship Leaders should be ordained, as it is argued above, to what office should they be ordained?

First, consider the office of the *minister of the Word*. Church order in Article 11 explains the chief calling of this office: “The calling of a minister of the Word is to proclaim, explain, and apply Holy Scripture in order to gather in and build up the members of the church of Jesus Christ.”^{xxviii} In addition to this, Article 12 describes the duties of the minister of the Word:

“A minister of the Word serving as pastor of a congregation shall preach the Word, administer the sacraments, conduct public worship services, catechize the youth, and train members for Christian service. He, with the elders, shall supervise the congregation and his fellow office bearers, exercise admonition and discipline, and see to it that everything is done decently and in order. He, with the elders, shall exercise pastoral care over the congregation, and engage in and promote the work of evangelism.”^{xxix}

If a Worship Leader is serving pastorally many of the duties described above could fall under the umbrella of worship leadership. Obviously, the area of conducting public worship services would be carried out, but also the training of members for Christian service, involvement in pastoral care, and the promotion of evangelism could be initiated by a conscientious Worship Leader. The scope of the tasks on a congregational level, however, is not likely to be undertaken. The focus of a Worship Leader is more specific relating to the event of worship and to those whom the leader plans and prepares the liturgy. What is more, it is understood that the minister of the Word should have completed a Masters of Divinity (M.Div.).^{xx} Certainly, Worship Leaders should pursue theological education on some level, but is it necessary for them to pursue an M.Div.? Is it necessary for them to acquire the level of preaching, to gain knowledge of the biblical languages, and to exegete scripture to the extent of that which a minister of the Word needs in order to bring God’s Word to the congregation on a weekly basis? The answer would seem to be “no.” In short, the specific role of worship leadership does not address the broad scope and full understanding that is assigned to the minister of the Word in the CRC. Therefore, a Worship Leader should not be ordained to this office.

Second, we may examine the office of *elder*. In Article 52, church order outlines the elders’ responsibility for the services of worship:

(1) The consistory shall regulate the worship services. (2) The consistory shall see to it that the synodically approved Bible versions, liturgical forms, and songs are used, and that the principles and elements of the order of worship approved by synod are observed. (3) The consistory shall see to it that if liturgical forms are adapted, these adaptations conform to synodical guidelines and that if choirs or others sing in the worship service, they observe the synodical regulations governing the content of the hymns and anthems sung. These regulations shall also apply when supplementary hymns are sung by the congregation.^{xxi}

In light of this article, it appears that a church would be served well by a Worship Leader ordained as an elder. His knowledge of worship and the music and arts related to worship would be a great aid to the consistory’s responsibility.

The full function of elders, however, in Article 25b is explained more broadly: “The elders, with the minister(s), shall oversee the doctrine and life of the members of the congregation and fellow office bearers, shall exercise admonition and discipline along with pastoral care in the congregation, shall participate in and promote evangelism, and shall defend the faith.”^{xxii}

Here, as in the office of minister of the Word, the role of worship leadership is too narrow to fill the office of elder.

Third, we may propose the office of *deacon*. “The deacons shall represent and administer the mercy of Christ to all people, especially to those who belong to the community of believers, and shall stimulate the members of Christ’s church to faithful, obedient stewardship of their resources on behalf of the needy – all with words of biblical encouragement and testimony which assure the unity of the word and deed.”^{xxiii}

Though a pastoral understanding of the role of worship leadership could include and should include the principles of mercy and encourage service, the office of deacon, rather than being too broad like the offices of minister of the Word and elder, outlines a very different set of tasks than would be expected of a Worship Leader.

Worship leadership and the office of evangelist.

Finally, it is in the newly expanded office of evangelist where the role of a pastoral Worship Leader finds its home and its greatest freedom. Though the office carries the title “evangelist,” the Synod of 2001 broadened the understanding to include “the character of pastoral extension.”^{xxiv} This perception of the office finds root in Acts 6, where “the pattern for the ordination of church leadership is established for us.”^{xxv} Here,

the apostles are found to be overwhelmed with the ministry of caring for the Greek-speaking portion of the church while attempting to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles set apart, by the laying on of hands, seven godly men who were filled with the Spirit and with wisdom.^{xxvi} These men who were set apart waited tables, but their specific role does not limit the established general principle of setting apart leaders for specialized functions.

Therefore, just as “Evangelists extend . . . the ministry of organized congregations into specialized areas,” so other specialized areas such as “youth ministry, education, pastoral care, [and] *worship*” can be perceived by churches as extensions of pastoral ministry (*italics mine*).^{xxvii} Additionally, “These ministry positions may be identified by titles that indicate their ministry distinctiveness, such as chaplain, pastor of education, pastor of youth, minister of congregational life, and so forth.” In the case of worship leadership, the Worship Leader may assume the title of Worship Pastor, which more appropriately represents his role and can aid in the congregation’s perception of his pastoral function.

Finally, Article 23a of the church order reads, “The evangelist shall be acknowledged as an elder of his calling church with corresponding privileges and responsibilities. His work as elder shall normally be limited to that which pertains to his function as evangelist.”^{xxviii} The Worship Leader under this office, therefore, can participate fully in the activities of the consistory in regulating and guarding the liturgy without being burdened with the broader responsibilities of eldership.

Conclusion

Ordination to any office in the church is a great responsibility. “It is a recognition and enactment of a pastoral relationship between Christ and the church, mediated in a certain leader. As such it should not be entered into lightly.”^{xxix} Ordination carries with it the authority of Christ and the trust of the congregation. Therefore, wisely the church guards the practice well by establishing requirements for *character, knowledge, and skills*.^{xxx} No Worship Leader, however, if she senses the call of God upon her life and is affirmed in her calling by a local congregation, should hesitate to seek ordination under the office of evangelist. Worship leadership is a pastoral role and as such it should be celebrated and recognized on a congregational and broader church level. And ministers of the Word, in the midst of a changing atmosphere of worship, should welcome the role and experience greater freedom in time devoted to prayer and preaching the gospel. Ultimately they, along with the council, will watch with delight as their brother or sister excels in his or her area of giftedness, drawing the congregation closer to God in worship.



Writer's Block Blues

By Joshua S. Benton

In preparation of writing a sermon, I got stuck. Now, writing is the fundamental tool to begin a sermon. If one cannot write, then one cannot create a sermon. I soon found out that I am not the only one to have this problem. Now, this topic came about on a usually dreary Monday morning, as dreary as Monday mornings are, a light of hope came to mind. As we were discussing in our prayer group, it can be hard to start writing a sermon for that Sunday. Usually, it begins to be hammered out Friday afternoon and finished either Saturday night or early Sunday morning. These are the dreaded symptoms of writer's block. Sadly at one point or another writer's block has infected everyone. And so, here I sit, to tell you about how to combat this dreaded disease of nothingness, that nothingness that permeates at the worst times to write papers, lesson plans and sermons. Even though my muse has struck late, she has left early and once more, in the depth of night, I too have had a relapse of writers block. Isn't it ironic? I'm sitting in front of my computer. I have some water, some munchies, and classical music playing. I'm set to write, but all I can think about is that I don't know what to write.

And then it happens. Somewhere in my mind of minds, an air blues guitar slowly strums *Ba dum de dum de dum de dum Ba dum de dum*. An imaginary BB King appears not so sweetly singing "I'm in front of my computer" *Ba dum de dum* "With nothing to write" *Ba dum de dum* "I got a paper due in the morning" *Ba dum de dum*, "I got a sermon Sunday night," *Ba dum de dum* "I try pen and paper, but their an awful team, I start to scream" *de dum de dum Ba dum de dum* "I got the blues, oh...I got the writer's block blues..."

My muse plays the air guitar, but never does it dictate.

When I was in fourth grade my teacher, Mr. Boreman, would assign us to write every morning. Just write. We could write about our day, about yesterday, about what we wanted to do tomorrow. But we had to write. When one kid or another didn't know what to write about, he would tell them to write about anything and just let it flow from there.

The problem being is that all my imaginative thoughts run through one great hose, flowing from some beautiful stream of consciousness. And someone, somewhere has kinked that hose. I have asked many people about how to combat writer's block and in return, I've

been bombarded with stories and suggestions.

I have heard the story of Winston Churchill as he stood before an easel and blank canvas. In this story, he was in his own backyard or somewhere in the woods, trying to paint. The canvas, I've been told, was huge, spacious, white and towering above him, showing him no mercy. Out of the blue, a famous artist chose to stop by and visit Mr. Churchill. The famous artist, knowing exactly what was happening, took one of Mr. Churchill's brushes, dipped it into the red paint, and slashed the canvas, making it bleed. Mr. Churchill said that he saw the canvas cowering before him. He attacked the canvas with all manners of colors. I have tried that, only to have to use glass cleaner to wipe off the mess on the computer's monitor. That approach has never worked for me.

An English professor told me that two things helped Nathaniel Hawthorne. I only remember one. Hawthorne would constantly keep a journal about everything. My professor said that one day he thought it'd be interesting to write a story about a woman with a scarlet A on her clothes. He conceived and composed the book along the hillside behind his home in Concord, MA. I have tried both ideas. I've kept a small journal of things, of ideas, of daily gripes and complaints, but lately all my entries have been about how I don't know what to write about. I've tried walking in the woods. The essayist Annie Dillard does this in *Pilgrim at Tinkers Creek*.

One time I thought I had an epiphany, but I was wrong.

I had been walking in the woods, just before sunset, to fill out a sermon outline I knew would never make it past the monitor on my screen, when I spotted a squirrel emerge and sit on a log. He was perched on his haunches and his arms were pulled into his chest with only his hands, holding a nut, showing. The squirrel was brown. His bushy tail perched behind it. He had little black eyes, like sunglasses, and was eating a nut. The squirrel looked at me. I looked at it. Our eyes locked.

Something happened; I don't know what. All these thoughts popped into my head, ideas I had never considered before. It was as if the squirrel and I exchanged minds, that we were exchanging something, something that no one else in the world would ever experience. Ideas upon ideas emerged. I could have written a thousand and one books, short stories, plays and ser-

mons The squirrel was startled by footsteps in the woods, crunching the fallen autumn leaves. The squirrel grabbed his nut and fled, breaking our connection. I stood still, being amazed. After a bit I threw up my hands in defeat. "Great!" I shouted. "Annie Dillard get's a weasel but all I get a squirrel!" Hawthorn's approach of walking in the woods doesn't work for me. I still suffer from writer's block.

I hate suffering from writer's block. I could gladly handle Athlete's foot. I'd take on the flu or a cold. But with writer's block, there seems to be no cure, you must wait it out like a virus, like you just have to wait out mono. It's just there, plaguing you, making you tired and weak in the mind, causing all sorts of self-doubts and confusions. It fills me with a pain of nothingness. It is truly hard to describe nothing, but I feel the pain of the absence of something. I struggle and push, push and struggle. My mind just won't go into contractions and bare me words.

I ask myself "Am I good enough?" "Am I just fooling myself?" I yell to the clouds, to the sky "Where is my inspiration? Where is my muse?" Yet, what can you do, when your muse is on vacation? What can you do when this sickness referred to as writer's block sets in? I want a new muse. I am too impatient to wait for my old one. I want one that is more proficient. I want one that won't allow coughing and sputterings of words to occur.

How can you go on with coughings and sputterings of words? How can you deal with false starts? How do you write when you can't write what you want to write?

I have always wondered what Emerson and Thoreau thought when they couldn't write. Thoreau didn't write *Walden* at Walden Pond, nor did he write it after his two year stay there; in fact, he started writing it about a year after leaving his small experiment. Emerson, too, had problems in writing. Some years back, I had the privilege to view an original manuscript, written by his own hand. It had so many cross outs, scratches and false starts as I have had on my computer. It is just that I know how to operate the delete button. Emerson never had a delete button.

It seems that the greatest aid to keeping writer's block is the delete button. I don't know how many wonderful, insightful, Nobel Prize winning pieces I have deleted with the push of just one button. The delete button is the fuel to the fire of writer's block. It is like cold and dampness aiding the growth of fungi; like bad conditions of hot and cold air aiding tornadoes. The delete button is the ever present enemy of the writer. The delete button is for quitters. I use it all the time. I know I have the power to stop, to get up and leave. I also know I have the option to chicken out. I don't know how to stop using it. There, then, is the rub. There is the way out.

When I learn how to stop using the delete button, I can then overcome my writer's block.

Essayist Anne Lamott says that we must approach it Bird by Bird. She tells the story of how when she was a child, her younger brother had a paper due that day on birds. It was early in the morning and he was crying over his notebook. Not one word written. Her father lovingly placed his arm around her younger brother and said, "We'll just have to take it bird by bird." We just have to take it verse by verse, line by line, verb by verb. As we deal with one thing at a time, it grows to an even greater piece. Yet, I can't even get one verb, one line, one verse or even one stinking little budgie onto my monitor.

Maybe I should try Mr. Boreman's advice to just write what comes to mind.

Here we go.

Bagheera is staring at me. His yellow embroidered eyes are starring at me. I have a small beanie baby of Disney's Bagheera from The Jungle Book. I always have him on my computer's monitor. And by my keyboard is the Pirate Tigger, eye patch and wooden sword smiles, ready to pounce on the first inclination, the first symptom of writer's block, poised and ready, tail swooshing. And my stuffed pig, Kosher, looks almost depressed, head down, arms hung low, that he can't get me out of my slump.

No, It is Bagheera that will aide me. He's the character in The Jungle Book who has smarts. He's intelligent (not too much, but not too little). He's quick (he knows when to strike and when to stay hidden). And he's a panther, a wonderful wild cat that is strong, smart and fast—just like a writer should be. Our words should be as Bagheera is—strong, smart and fast. Further more, our words should lift those up who need to be lifted, as Bagheera lifted up Mougli. We should know our material and present it with wit and intelligence, as Bagheera spoke with Mougli.

We should write well and we should do so in a proficient manner (for proficiency is the Calvinists way). Sometimes I wish I could have a Calvin and Hobbes experience. Not John Calvin but the little six-year old Calvin and his stuffed tiger Hobbes, a cartoon by Bill Watterson. This stuffed tiger comes to life and shares life with him. Not only that, but Hobbes also allows Calvin to think. Not just hum-drum everyday thinking, but actual-deep-insight-to-the-world type of thinking. Why can't Bagheera do that for me? Or Kosher the pig, or even Tigger? Mainly because this is reality.

Well, that didn't work that well.

The scary but real truth is, is that writer's block can't be stopped by a pill or a spray. It can't be stopped by the removal of the delete button. It can't be fixed by relying on a stuffed cat. The only real way to combat writer's block is to prepare for it. There is something

else I learned from Emerson and Thoreau—constantly write. This is why Hawthorne kept a journal, I found out. He was always writing. Hawthorne knew that if you stop writing it will be hard to start again.

Writing is like any athletic event. You must practice for it and stretch your muscles (in this case your mind). Runners who wish to run in a marathon don't show up on the day of the race and begin to run the marathon. No, they begin months ahead of time running and stretching, getting their body used to the whole ordeal. The same is true for the writer and writer's block, for a runner too will feel pains when they haven't stretched before running and who haven't been practicing. Writers, like runners, will feel the pain of nothingness, the pain of writer's block, when they sit down to write and haven't practiced. These famous writers did not one day decide to write a book, but wrote constantly so that he was ready to write when it came time. No body can write a paper or a book or a poem or even a sermon on the first try; just like a runner can't run a marathon on the first try with out practicing and running. 10 minutes a week of mental stretching helps in such an amazing way. 10 minutes a day makes the mental muscles limber and ready for action. The feet of the mind, poised at the starting blocks, ready to run the mental race of writing. Runners get side pains, while we get writer's block. As runners approach an on coming race or marathon, they approach it step by step. And so, we must approach writing, day by day, bird by bird and verb by verb.

For Further Reading

Bird by Bird: Some instructions on writing and life, Anne Lamott
Anchor, 1995

On Writing Well, William K. Zinnser
Harper Resources 25th Edition, 2001

