

Drinking from my Saucer

*I've never made a fortune,
And it's probably too late now.
But I don't worry about that much,
I'm happy anyhow
And I go along life's way,
I'm reaping better than I sowed.
I'm drinking from my saucer,
'Cause my cup has overflowed.*

Recently I received an email that contained this particular poem. The author's name was not mentioned, however in this materialistic society the poem has a lot to say. In the past few weeks, we have been blessed with an abundance of rain from God's hand. How often do we complain or hear others bicker that the weather is miserable? Do we really take the time to 'stand in the rain' and count the abundant blessings which God showers on us?

Often we live our lives in such routine that we never spare thought about the small things in life which are often so very important. Do we take the time to thank God for His blessings, or worse, grumble and complain? In the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 12, Jesus tells us a parable about a rich man, but before he tells the parable he warns the people that

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Drinking from my Saucer (continued)

there are more important things in life than money. *"Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own (12:15)."* Jesus goes on to tell us how this rich man owns a fertile farm that produced an abundant crop. This harvest was so bountiful that his barns did not have room for all the crops! Solution – tear down the old barns and build new ones, bigger and better. When the rich man had done this he said to his friends, "Look what I have done, I have enough food stored away for years to come. Take it easy, eat, drink and be merry." But God looks down on this person and calls him a fool, for he will die that same night and then who will get everything he worked for?

In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus told His listeners, "For He [that is the Father] gives His sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike." Unbelieving farmers receive the same amount of rain as believing farmers. You might ask then, what's the difference? What's the use of being a believer? That's the question that is

asked by the author of Psalm 73. He saw that daily the riches of the wicked increase and in contrast his own sorrows increasing. But he came to a conclusion. What happens when God takes away their wealth? They have nothing! When severe drought strikes unbelieving farmers are often ruined financially. However a believing farmer has strength in the Lord, their riches are in heaven, and therefore with Job they can say, *"The Lord has given and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."*

So thank the Lord for your blessings. Give according to what you have received. Build up your riches in heaven. The fact that you can read this at all is a blessing in itself. You are more blessed than the two billion people who cannot read at all. So don't worry about tomorrow. Be thankful and trust in God and He will direct your path. Are you drinking from your saucer or are you too busy looking at someone else's?



*I haven't got a lot of riches,
And sometimes the going's tough
But I've got loving ones all around me,
And that makes me rich enough.
I thank God for his blessings,
And the mercies He's bestowed.
I'm drinking from my saucer,
'Cause my cup has overflowed.*

*I remember times when things went wrong,
My faith wore somewhat thin.
But all at once the dark clouds broke,
And the sun peeped through again.
So Lord, help me not to gripe,
About the tough rows I have hoed.
I'm drinking from my saucer,
'Cause my cup has overflowed.*

*And when God gives me strength and courage,
When the way grows steep and rough.
I'll not ask for other blessings,
I'm already blessed enough.
And may I never be too busy,
To help others bear their loads.
Then I'll keep drinking from my saucer,
'Cause my cup has overflowed.*

Julian Slobe

A PROMISE AND AN OBLIGATION

In 1 Kings 9 we read of the Lord's answer to Solomon's heartfelt prayer of thankfulness after the temple dedication. God had been faithful to His people and blessed them richly throughout the preparation and building of the temple and Solomon's own palace. All had gone according to plan and we don't read of any accidents happening. You could say that Solomon and the people were on Mt Gerizim because they were in a state of happiness.

The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream saying, *"I have heard your prayer and supplication that you have made before Me and I have set this house, which you have built, apart forever..."* and He gives His promise... *"And My eyes and My heart will be [with you] continually..."* The Lord also gives an obligation... *"If only... you and the people continue to serve Me by listening to My commandments and obeying the statutes which I,*

**In our club discussions,
is it "what we think"
or is it "what does God say ..."**

the Lord your God have commanded you... then I will continue to pour out my blessings on you and the people of Israel..." But... *if you want to go your own way then My curse will come forth".* There is a promise and an obligation; Solomon is called to be obedient. Will he humble himself to God's will or go his own way?

We too belong to God's covenant, and so as adopted sons and daughters we may share in Christ's benefits. But the same question can be asked of us as it was of Solomon: Will you continue to serve God? Today? Tomorrow? The next day? And in the future? How obedient are you?

What does obedience to God mean? It is not a matter of us deciding for ourselves what pleases the Lord and acting accordingly¹. No, obedience is measured by a neutral standard and that is God's Word, in particular His law. It is not a matter of how we compare with others, or how we measure up to the latest opinion poll, because God has clearly laid out in His Word what He desires of us, and obedience is a matter of adhering to that Word. It is not only a matter of **outward** conformity to these guidelines but also a matter of **inward** conformity. In Genesis 17:1 God said to Abraham when he was ninety-nine years old, *"I am Almighty God; walk before me and be blameless"*. We are to WALK before the Lord *"in integrity of heart."* (1 Kings 9:4)

This brings me to the subject of idolatry. What does God require of us in the second commandment? How can we obey Him as He has commanded us? We are not to make an image of God in any way, **NOR are we to worship Him in any other manner than He has commanded in His Word**². Are we living our lives the way **we think** is good enough or are we living our lives in humble obedience to God according to His Word? For example, in our club discussions is it "what we think" or is it "what does God say in His Word?" Do we humble ourselves to God's will or go our own way?

Yet, despite God's blessings, King Solomon and the people of Israel did indeed become unfaithful. Nevertheless, over against their unfaithfulness, we can see the faithfulness and mercy of the Lord's grace shining all the more brilliantly through the work of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ Roger Ellsworth/Welwyn Commentary Series/From Glory to Ruin/1 Kings simply explained/ Evangelical Press 2000

² Heidelberg Catechism/Lord's Day 36/QA 96

A PROMISE AND AN OBLIGATION (CONTINUED)

And we can't forget the final part of this chapter; Solomon completed many more building projects. He built many cities and fortified them, he strengthened Jerusalem's walls, he built storage cities and cities to keep chariots and he built a fleet of ships in a shipyard on the Red Sea. The kingdom was strong and well organised and it seems that no harm could come to the people. However, there was a very real danger that the king and the people would begin to trust in the strength of the kingdom instead of in the Lord's grace. And this would be a sin against the second commandment. If they made this

mistake, they would become estranged from the Lord and sin would be just around the corner. Let us remember that with all the blessings and strength the Lord gives us, we still have to remain humble before Him.

"May the Lord graciously incline our hearts to obey Him, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments to His honour and glory that all the nations will know that the Lord, and no one else, is God." (1 Kings 8:58)

John VanderWal

THE APOSTLES' CREED

The Apostles Creed "is by far the best popular summary of the Christian faith ever made within so brief a space" (Schaff, 1877, 31ff). A child can understand it and a scholar can still find delight in it. This creed has been developed throughout the history of the church and various changes have been made to contradict heresies that the church has faced. Before we start looking at the history of the creed and the changes that have been made we will answer the question: Why do we have creeds?

Why do we have Creeds?

To simplify this question this article will limit this question by defining creeds as those that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia hold to, namely; the Ecumenical Creeds (The Apostles', Nicene and the Athanasian Creeds) and the Reformation Creeds (The Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort).

The Ecumenical Creeds were developed in the early history of the church (in the first 6 centuries AD). They are the church's response to the big doctrinal debates of this time. They were developed so that it was written down clearly what the Bible says about the Trinity and the nature of Christ. These creeds summarise "the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, as necessary and sufficient for salvation" (Schaff, 1877, 30).

The Reformation Creeds were developed in the mid 16th and early 17th centuries and are a more enlarged summary of the Bible's teachings. They stress the authority of the Bible and the doctrines of sin and grace. The Belgic confession was made to explain the Reformed faith; the Heidelberg Catechism was made for instructing the youth and for guiding pastors and teachers, while the Canons of Dort were made in response to the Arminian movement of the Remonstrants.

In short the creeds were formulated in order to defend and protect the church from heresies.

When, Why and Where was the Apostles' Creed Formulated?

The Creed has no individual author but was authored by the early Christian church.

It was developed by the early church out of the practical need to have a confession that summarised the Christian faith. It was initially used by the church to teach converts and it was professed by them at their baptism. It was also used for private devotion and later was introduced into the public worship service.

The Apostles' Creed grew out of the confession of Peter in Matthew 16:16b "You are the

Christ, the Son of living God,” and the baptismal formula in Matthew 28:19b “...baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The confession of Peter formed the basis of the part of the creed concerning who Jesus Christ is. The baptismal formula determined the Trinitarian order and arrangement. The order of the creed also follows the order of God's own revelation, beginning with God and creation, then with Christ and His salvation, then the Holy Spirit and the church.

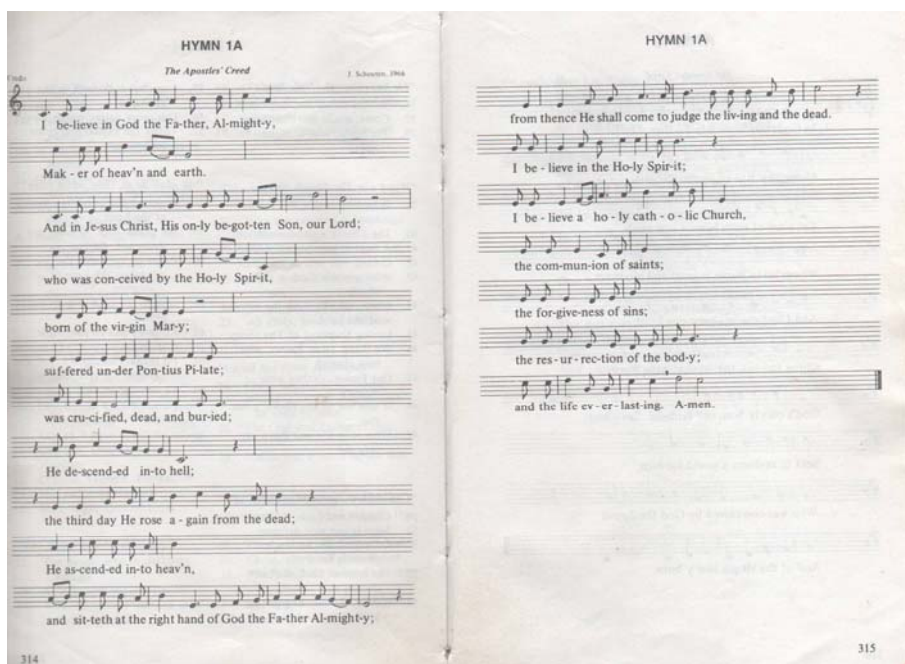
In the early church the Apostles' Creed had various forms with each congregation adapting it to suit their needs. However they all agreed on the essential articles of faith, the general order of arrangement and the focus on Christ's death and resurrection.

Little is known of the development of the creed in the first three centuries as the creed was committed to memory and not written down. This was due to fear of profanation and misconstruction by unbelievers as was done with the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, about which the Jews spread rumours of child sacrifices (crying babies had been heard) and cannibalism (“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood...” John 6:56) (Keizer, 1990). It was not written down until the church had triumphed over the Roman Empire. It was first written down by Marcellus (c. 336-341) over 30 years after Constantine proclaimed Christianity to be his official religion and signed the Edict of Milan, stopping the persecution of Christians. This is known as the Old Roman Form. At that time the most popular forms differed little and were close to the one we have now.

The Old Roman Form gained dominance due to its intrinsic excellence and because of Rome's status as the head church. The Old Roman Form was gradually enlarged by additions from other churches until the present day form was reached at the close of the seventh century. The Old Roman Form triumphed over all other forms in the eighth

century about the time when the bishops at Rome were pushing to conform the liturgies of the western churches to the Roman order.

The following describes the changes that the Apostles' Creed underwent from the Old Roman Form and the form as we have it today in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. The English translation of the Old Roman Form was made in the 19th century, so any changes due to modernisation of the English language, though noted, are not explained.



1. I believe in God the Father Almighty

1. I believe in God the Father Almighty
Creator of heaven and earth

The addition *Creator of heaven and earth* first appears at the close of the seventh century. However this phrase had been around for a long time in the Nicene Creed and all other eastern creeds in opposition to Gnostic and Marconian teachings which make a distinction between the true God and the Maker of the world.

2. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord;

2. *I believe* in Jesus Christ, His only-*begotten* Son, our Lord;

It is assumed that the change to *I believe* was made to make the sections of the creed more

THE APOSTLES' CREED (CONTINUED)

distinct. This separation of the sections is found in front of the articles about Jesus and the Holy Spirit in an old English version (possibly 10th century) of the Apostles' Creed (Rushdoony, 1968). The change to only-*begotten* was possibly made in order to contradict the Arian heresy which says the Son is created and may stem from the Nicene Creed.

3. Who was born by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary;

3. He was *conceived* by the Holy *Spirit*, born of the Virgin Mary;

The word born was changed to *conceived* due to the distinction between conception and birth which first appeared in the Sermones de Tempore.

4. Was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried;

4. *Suffered* under Pontius Pilate, was crucified *dead*, and buried; *He descended into Hell*.

The addition of *Suffered* could come from the Nicene Creed where the Greek word used there implies crucified. It is likely that the word *dead* was added to combat those who said Jesus had not died. The addition of *He descended into Hell* comes from the Aquilejan Creed or the Athanasian Creed and was put there in order to emphasise the suffering of Christ during both his life on earth and at his death.

5. The third day he rose from the dead;

5. *On* the third day *He arose* from the dead;

Just cosmetic changes.

6. He ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;

6. He ascended into heaven; and *sits at* the right hand of *God* the Father *Almighty*;

The additions of *God* and *Almighty* were done to conform to the first article. They first appear as part of the Apostles' Creed in a

Spanish version at the end of the eighth century.

7. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

7. From *there* *He* shall come to judge the *living* and the dead.

Just cosmetic changes.

8. And in the Holy Ghost;

8. *I believe* in the Holy *Spirit*;

It is assumed that the change to *I believe* was made to make the sections of the creed more distinct.

9. The Holy Church;

9. *I believe a Holy catholic Christian* Church, *The communion of saints*;

Again it is assumed that the change to *I believe* was made to make the sections of the creed more distinct. The addition of *catholic* was to bring it closer to the Nicene Creed and is first found near the close of the fourth century. However the addition of *Christian* was added during the times of the Reformation in early 16th century because people were confusing the word catholic as meaning the Roman church rather than the universal church of Christ. Luther replaced the word catholic with Christian in order to emphasise the break from the Roman Church (Faber, 1969) while others added the word Christian. *The communion of saints* was added near the end of the eighth century. The oldest commentators understood it to mean communion with the saints in heaven (Schaff, 1877) but afterwards the meaning was changed to describe the communion we have with each other in Christ (CRC, 1984, HC LD 21).

10. The forgiveness of sins;

10. The forgiveness of sins;

No change or additions have been made to this confession.

-
11. The resurrection of the body;
11. The resurrection of the body;

No change or additions have been made to this confession.

12. *And the life everlasting*

And the life everlasting was added from some North African forms of the creed.

As can be seen many of the changes to the creed have been due to additions from certain congregations, in response to heresies, and from other creeds which make a statement clearer or add an important statement. However throughout the centuries in which the Apostles' Creed was changed and adapted it has still remained the true confession of the Church. There have been times where sections of the Apostles' Creed have been interpreted wrongly in order to support heresies. However, this has not destroyed the value of the creed. It is interesting to note here that Rome's emphasis on works is not evident in the Apostles' Creed. This preservation is definitely not the work of

sinful man – the LORD has guarded this confession.

Conclusion

In conclusion the Apostles' Creed is a brief Biblical summary of all that is necessary and sufficient for us to believe for our salvation. It has been used by Christ to gather His church though its use as a teaching tool and baptismal confession for new believers. It was also used by Christ to defend His church against attacks from many heresies. As the confession came into regular use also in personal devotion and corporate worship it was also a tool used in the preservation of His church. Due to its inherent weakness because of its brevity it has been attacked by heresies who explained the confession using their heresies rather than the Bible. This is a strong admonition to always base our confessions and our explanation of them on Scripture. However there is still encouragement for us as Christ has preserved the creed as a true confession of the church – something that we can give sinful man no credit for.

Ruurd Offringa

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*Unless otherwise noted all factual information comes from Schaff (1877).

Editors note: The word “Christian” in the line, I believe a Holy Catholic Church, is a change that was not in the original version. In Canada this change has been adopted, but in Australia it is not. Hence you will not hear “I believe a Holy Catholic *Christian* Church” in our profession of faith in the afternoon church services.

THE OPPOSITE OF JOY

The believer cries out to the Lord for help

Summary of a sermon by Rev. W.G. de Vries on Psalm 124
(emeritus minister reformed church – liberated – at Zwolle-Centrum)

For some Christians faith is a formula for success. Whoever believes is always happy. Whoever believes doesn't know depression. Whoever believes is free from all kinds of diseases. Whoever believes doesn't know addiction. Whoever believes has a perfect life and reaches a state of completeness, perfection. And that is why the believers live happily ever after.

This is a 'keep smiling' Christianity which has many followers. The youth especially are attracted to this form of Christianity. A warm and convincing belief, an infectious joy that works enthusiasm, takes you out of yourself and lifts you into the clouds.

On the other hand there are the conventional churches, where everything is organised in a way we've been used to for decades, or even centuries. Set faces, stiff Christians, good old confessions, and professional framework. They all look like petrified, fossilised institutes, where spontaneity is lost and nothing is actually happening.

It's important to note that most of the people who are attracted to these 'free' congregations are people who do not feel at home in the 'established' churches. In fact, many of the people who join the 'free' churches are not unbelievers coming to faith, from outside the church, but mainly former church members of established churches. They continually search for the right church by emotional standards (physical happiness) rather than doctrine (spiritual happiness) circulating from one to another evangelical congregation.

However, the drive for perfection of some of these people leads other serious believers to despair. If real faith means that you're always happy, that you don't know depressions, don't know addiction and you can overcome physical and mental diseases, it is possible

that the serious believer who does not achieve this will end up in despair.

According to some evangelical groups, whoever does not find cure by prayer, does not have faith. They argue that the person who is down-hearted and is not able to get out of his situation lacks real faith. As a result, these down-hearted people are left in their misery and sink deeper in their grief and sorrow. Then, they say, this all happens because real faith is absent and with this judgement, people are sent home. This can lead to despair, fear of God and even suicide.

But how different God's Word is. God is long-suffering and merciful and not cruel and fanatical. Just take the book of Psalms. That is more real than this superficial and gaudy Christianity. That is why we look for comfort and encouragement in Psalm 142.

This psalm is credited to David who has been hunted like an animal in the mountains. The title reads: "*A Contemplation of David. A Prayer when he was in the cave.*" This is the cave of Adullam where all kinds of people went with their troubles and sorrows. In 1 Samuel 22: 1-3 it says, "*everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt and everyone who was discontented gathered [there].*" It was not a happy, cheerful group but a group who cried out in misery to the LORD and called upon the God of the covenant for help. They did not take vengeance on their enemies but instead bowed their heads before God's throne and composedly addressed God in prayer. They truly were believers, who placed their anxiety before God. Here the always-happy-Christian idea melts like snow before the sun. God promised to anoint David as king but his situation was so miserable that he fled from Saul to the cave; nevertheless, he knew how and where to address his complaints. This also is a way to express faith.

It was not a happy, cheerful group

... instead their heads were bowed before God's throne

Nowadays there is a lot of talk about the way we should express our faith, and this is good and necessary, but it is something completely different from being happy every day.

Psalm 142 shows a great anxiety. David feels like he has been captured and placed in a dungeon; not physically captured by Saul but spiritually imprisoned. Therefore, he asks God why He let this happen and he addresses his complaints directly to God in prayer. That is why this Psalm is important to us today; just as David felt completely stuck in the cave, so people feel trapped in their lives today. They feel like there is no light in their life, as if they are living in a prison where they cannot smile or cry. But there is just one cry in their hearts: "Lead me out of this dungeon".

This is also an expression of faith. It is not only that feeling of warmth, but also of feeling dry and cold inside. With this feeling, this numbness, you turn to God and submit your anxiety to Him. This is a different gospel than being happy all the time and shouting 'Hallelujah!' It's the kind of Christianity that is drawn from the depth of the Psalms, fulfilled in Christ. This makes me think of His words on the cross: "*My God, My God why have You forsaken Me!*" Jesus Christ was truly deserted and abandoned by God. We profess that God will never abandon us, but this is something different from never feeling abandoned. This is what Paul meant when he said, "*Rejoice in the Lord always*". At the same time, he was in pain. He was in despair about his life. He lived under pressure and needed advice, but had confidence in God (2 Corinthians 1: 9) Like David, he addressed his complaints to God, "*When my spirit was overwhelmed within me [when every feeling of happiness is completely gone] then You knew my path.*" That is something the Holy Spirit taught David, and that is what He wants to teach us. It is about the 'hard way' one has to go sometimes.

Life can be a struggle for many people. This is revealed by mental and physical illnesses and even deadly diseases, whilst one has a heart attack, another suffers from cancer, and a third from a psychological disease. This life is "*no more than a constant death*" says the form for baptism. God's creation suffers in the way Paul speaks of in Romans 8, "*...the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs until now, not only that, but we also who have the first*

fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body". The way David, the father of Christ, knew the yearning for the Spirit, eagerly waiting for deliverance by the Lord. This was the path known by the Lord.

We profess that God will never abandon us, but this is something different from never feeling abandoned

God is always beside us, guiding us on our path through life. When we meet with trials and tribulations in life and our spirit longs for the LORD, then there is only one result. God will lead us out of the dungeon, the dungeon of loneliness, of mental and physical pain or psychological illness, even if we are not conscious of it at the time. For just as we once without knowing became part of God's covenant, so too we always belong to the covenant of grace. Believers become ill just like non-believers; they can have accidents, deadly diseases, psychological illness etc. It is part of our bodily existence. The LORD knows our path, no matter what is on our way, even if death is on our path. Therefore, do not be afraid, for David's prayer "*Set me free,*" will be answered. Sometimes the LORD will answer this prayer in this life, as He did with David, but this prayer can also be answered when we die and are set free eternally. It will happen in God's time, the best time, through Christ, who was completely forsaken so that we will never be forsaken again.

"Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name." David's trust in his Father was not put to shame. He was freed from the cave, the dungeon of exile and loneliness, his despair was broken through and he was able to praise the LORD. Even so, there were quite a few events in his life after this moment where David would have struggled or even fallen back into the dungeon of despair. For example, his son Ammon committed incest with his sister, the son who was born out of the affair with Bathsheba had to die, and his other son Absalom killed his brother. His

THE OPPOSITE OF JOY (CONTINUED)

family life was ruined and marked by incest and murder but David rested in the confidence that God knew his afflictions and would provide the strength to endure to the end.

And David ends the Psalm with "*the righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me.*" By this, he acknowledges that the praise here on earth does not end in the grave. In the perspective of faith we can say that above the graves there is a never-ending song in heaven. David is sure that it will happen even in the midst of his misery. And that is true faith.

This 'road' to God's inheritance for us is known by Him. It is a road through misery to our eternal dwelling-place, God's house. In the end, David praises the LORD for the good He has done to him. Whatever God does is good. That is something we too can say with confidence. It may be a hard road, with deep dungeons, yet it is a road of liberation, a road to eternal peace.

Moreover, the righteous will surround us also today and tomorrow, for God's people are around us in faith, hope and love. We can see this at times of marriage and death, for example. So, empathise with the people who do not feel comforted in the congregation of Christ, in the midst of God's people. No, we are not a perfect people, not without sin, but we are a people justified by the blood of Christ. This is what God wants in a community of people who are justified by faith. A community like the one in Psalm 22: "*in the midst of the assembly I will praise You.*" For this praise, you need the assembly, the assembly to whom God has promised the inheritance. Let us all be able to respond with the words of David (Psalm 18). "*The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.*"

Rita VanderWal

“THE POPE IS AN ANTICHRIST”

Hearing this statement in church, I sat up a bit straighter in the pew and listened closely. *The Pope the antichrist? That can't be true surely. I mean, I know the Roman Catholic church has got some of its doctrines pretty wrong, but at least he's a Christian, and stands up for a lot of Christian ideals. How exactly is the Pope the antichrist?*

The quote was part of a sermon delivered by Rev John McCallum of the St Georges Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, in Sydney. It was a sermon on Acts 2:41-42 speaking about the unity of the church. The exact quote was that "the Pope is just one expression of many different kinds of antichrist..."

I resolved to think about it further. Although unlike in Victoria, he's safe from prosecution for such a statement (NSW rejected the possibility of a religious anti-vilification law) it is rather bold. If I was asked my opinion of the Pope, I would say "well as head of the

Catholic church he's obviously got some doctrines about Mary, the saints, etc. very wrong, however by standing firm on important issues such as abortion, contraception and homosexuals in the church, the Pope does do some good in the world, and increases exposure to Christian values in the world." But here I heard that the pope is an antichrist.

So why did Rev McCallum call the pope an antichrist? What is an antichrist? Well by definition antichrist just means "against Christ". There are four specific references to antichrist in the bible, all found in the epistles of John. The first reference is 1 John 2:18 "*Children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know it is the last hour.*" This seems to suggest that one antichrist will come, a specific opponent of Jesus Christ, and this is anticipated by 'many antichrists'. 1 John 2:22 defines antichrist as

one who “denies that Jesus is the Christ [and] denies the Father and the Son”. 1 John 4:3 refers to the ‘spirit of antichrist’ which they have ‘heard is coming and is now already in the world [which] does not confess that Jesus has come into the flesh’. So an antichrist is defined as one who is a denier of the deity of Jesus Christ.

2 John 7 gives a more specific reference: “For many deceivers go out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh... [these are] an antichrist.” So in the gospels of John antichrist relates to a rejection of Christ or heretical views relating to His teaching.

However ever since John wrote his letters, antichrist has been applied in a much wider way than John himself did. It has included all anti-god movements in scripture, and to any blasphemous persons or movements in history, and thus is now a broad term covering either persons or movements against God.³

So is the pope an antichrist? Perhaps not in the first sense of the term, as given in the first epistle of John. The pope believes and teaches the deity of Christ. But in the second sense, as instructing heretical views about Christ’s teaching, the Pope certainly is an antichrist. For in order to be saved you must believe in complete salvation through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ. (See for example Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 20, and LD 11.) But the Catholic Church, through its daily sacrifice of Jesus during mass, encouragement of prayer to saints, insistence on penance, and deification of Mary, certainly doesn’t believe or teach this. And by teaching these heresies to its members, the Catholic Church and the Pope who heads it is acting as a tool of Satan and is an antichrist.

What is my point in writing this article? Well, many people, me included, tend to look favourably on influential Christians in our society as increasing the status of Christianity, and showing the love of Christ to the world, even if some of their beliefs are wrong. The popes as head of a church with hundreds of

millions of members are often in the news. And they do a lot of good, for instance trying to end poverty in the third world. The previous pope, John Paul III was instrumental in ending the long hold of communism in Eastern

An antichrist is one who denies the deity of Jesus Christ

Europe. But the real truth is, by influencing people in society with their wrong doctrines, they are doing more harm than good. So we should not speak favourably of these people, instead we should be devoting our efforts to exposing them and their teachings as against scripture. And calling the pope antichrist might be harsh, but at least it draws our attention to the fact that he is working against God.

I’ll finish off with the full quote from Rev McCallum, as it is worth quoting:

...[the early church] continued steadfastly in the teachings of the apostles. There are certain marks of the church: worldwide, it is holy, it is all one, and it is all built on the teachings of the apostles. Anything outside apostolic teaching has no place in authentic Christian living or thinking...To think otherwise is the doctrine of the antichrist, and antichrist has many different forms, there are many antichrists, and the pope is just one expression of many different kinds of antichrist...

So keep this in mind, and remember that while every great man in the church has failings (Martin Luther still conducted Holy Supper wrong, and John Calvin tried to turn the city of Geneva into a totalitarian state), when ideas are as far from scripture as what the Pope teaches, they are not ‘of the church’ and then we must devote our efforts to working against them, not instead praising their better qualities.

Ben Schoof

¹ Tenney, M.C. ed. (1975). “Antichrist” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia of the Bible*

LIFE IN HAMILTON

Small, but significant...

Life at the Theological College of The Canadian Reformed Churches

In a little corner of this world, on the summit of a well watered plateau, in and among the houses of a bustling city, stands a small seemingly insignificant building. At the front of the building a sign tells us that the building is the 'Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches'. To most people this title means very little. If you ask someone in town where to find the Theological College, they would point you in a different direction. They would probably point you to the large McMaster University which has a Baptist seminary. They may also point you to the slightly smaller Redeemer College, which is linked to the Christian Reformed Church. Both of these are situated in Hamilton as well. So what is so significant about this small building in the Hamilton suburbia?

As the Lord's children, we believe that God gathers, defends and preserves His church throughout all generations. This small seemingly insignificant college, provides faithful servants to Christ's church as gathered in parts of North America, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Brazil and Africa. With hard work, men learn to fulfil their joyful task in the Lord's massive vineyard. Men learn to sow seed, pull out weeds and till the ground. But who teaches at this college? What sort of students attend the classes? What will happen in the future? These are the questions this article intends to touch on.

Who teaches what at the small college?

You may recall that the name of the small dog of Asterix and Obelix is 'Dogmatix'. Well, this name, actually spelled 'Dogmatics', is one of the four main departments (group of subjects) at the Theological College. It includes the subjects 'dogmatics' itself (study of doctrines); ethics; philosophy and symbolics (study of the creeds and confessions). The experienced Professor Gootjes teaches these subjects. He deals with very specific topics and delves into their tiny components before coming to a well considered conclusion.

The second department carries the name: 'New Testament Studies'. The lively, jumping Prof Visscher, with his booming voice, teaches these subjects. There are various subjects dealing with the New Testament, from Greek to background studies to interpretation. There are often lively discussions held in class on topics such as 'may a female become a deacon' to a debate whether the NT scholar, N.T. Wright is actually right or anti-right.

The very knowledgeable Van Dam teaches the Old Testament subjects. He drills the students with the ancient languages of the Old Testament, namely Hebrew and Aramaic. He also teaches all other subjects related to the OT, including the customs of the ancient people, the main lines of thinking in the OT and a general overview of all the books.

The final department is termed 'Diaconiology'. This department has the well structured Prof De Visser as teacher, with his fresh approaches and practical ideas. His subjects include Homiletics (about preaching); Liturgics (about the worship service); Catechetics (about catechism instruction); Poimenics (about pastoral care in the congregations); Missiology (about mission work); World Religions and Church History.

There are also subjects at the college that require other teachers and professors. There is a public speaking course taught by a professional. Finally there is Church Polity, dealing with the church order. This subject is taught by Rev de Gelder, a minister in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Who are students at the small college and what do they get up to?

Of course the Theological College does not just have professors and teachers. Without the student body, no college could remain in existence. There were about 16 students in the college during the past academic year (September to May). These students had quite



a variety of nationalities, which included Canadian, Korean, Russian, South African, Sudanese and even several Australians. There was also quite a variety of ages among the students. Although the majority were in their 20s, there were also the older students with large families of up to seven children. But whether old or young, rich or poor, Greek or Jew, all these students study together in a brotherly way, and all desire the beautiful task in service to the churches. Every day these men sit with their laptops in class and type furiously to catch every drop of honey that drips from the mouths of the professors.

Before coming to the college, the students have all completed undergraduate studies for a minimum of three years. The students are recommended to do a large range of subjects, but among these, there are also certain required subjects. These required subjects include Philosophy, Ancient History, English, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Some thrive on the languages, many find them rather difficult. But with hard work and perseverance most students manage to do quite well.

Apart from study, most of the students relax a little and exercise as well. Some of the students spend time with their spouses and family. Some read a book, or sit and talk for a while. Some hit a small table tennis ball from one side of the table to the other. Some are involved in chasing and demolishing the bats that tend to nest inside the college building. Some help out when other

students need furniture shifted or when it needs to be stored. Some yodel in a just recently started little choir that gets together once a week. Some even eat at the college and exceptionally even sleep at the college.

Looking ahead...

No one knows what the future has in store for us. Will persecution break out, will hardship increase? Will the church survive and remain faithful? Will the believers be able to continue to serve the Lord in all of life?

Each one of us has a calling in life. Each one of us is called to serve God to the maximum of his or her capacity. The Lord does not want us to squander our gifts. Whether we become a doctor, a policeman, a bricklayer or a plumber we all have the calling to serve our Saviour. But who can help us in serving God in all these jobs? Who can guide us in the often trying task of being a truly Christian doctor or bricklayer? This is where the task of the minister comes in. They are there to help the flock of Christ serve their Shepherd. Christ will continue to guide His church. He calls faithful men to fulfil the special offices to help all members of Christ's church fulfil their task in the office of all believers. Men are called to help the members of the congregation fulfil their tasks as prophets, priests and kings; to glorify our God and Father.

Young men, do you feel you can take up the noble task of teaching and guiding Christ's flock? The odds are you do not feel you can! But, frankly, who does feel they can do such a task? Thankfully we know that it is not our own strength that really counts. God calls men to the task of ministry and equips men to do this task. The harvest is plentiful, the workers are few. Come to Hamilton and learn to be a worker in the Lord's vineyard!

Cornelis Kleyn

JOY, JOY, JOY!

Are you joyful? Sure, we're all happy when the good times come, but what happens when circumstances arise in our lives that we are not too happy with? Does the joy disappear? I would not be wrong in saying that our joy is so often influenced by our circumstances. "I was having such a good week until..." or "I'm having a bad day because ..."

"But," I hear you say, "I can't be joyful *all* the time! We all get our down days don't we? I can't help it that I get my bad moods! It runs in the family!" Or perhaps for some of us it is a little more serious. Something may have happened in our life that causes us to worry and as we ponder over it again

I still hear you saying, "But I can't just be happy all the time, life gets pretty tough sometimes!" That's right. God doesn't promise life to be easy. Life on earth is meant to be full of trials and temptations and we will suffer the consequences of sin here on earth. Our faith will be tested, perhaps even to the point where we cry out, "God, where are You in this difficult time of my life?" Yet God's Word reminds us again and again to have joy, to be joyful in various trials (James 1:2-4) and to take pleasure in infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions and distresses for Christ's sake (2 Cor 12:10). Take another look at Phillipians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice!" This verse does not say, "Rejoice in

it is possible to go through life's ups and downs with joy in our hearts.

and again, it slowly begins to steal more and more of the joy out of life.

Let's have a look at what God has to say about joy. Psalm 118:24 says, "This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." Isn't this telling us to enjoy life? Phillipians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice!" Isn't that telling us to live joyfully? Psalm 5:11, "...all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name be joyful in You". Do you really rejoice in the Lord *always*, and *ever* shout for joy because of what He has done? Are you really joyful in your love for God and in His love for you? Do you really believe you can have joy, no matter how dire life's circumstances, by simply trusting God and loving Him?



the Lord when you're happy with life's circumstances, again I say rejoice". No, God is telling us to rejoice in Him *always*.

What I'm trying to illustrate is that it *is* possible to go through life's ups and downs with a sense of joy in our hearts. The trials of life may sadden us, but our joy doesn't have to disappear. If you don't believe me, take a look at Isaiah 12:3, 61:10, Psalm 21:1 and 51:12. Yes, with confidence in our salvation through Christ we can experience true joy. Not by our own strength, but as a gift from the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), a gift freely given to those who believe. Joy is not something we can achieve through our own efforts (John 15:5). Think about it. No matter how hard we try, we can't force ourselves to become joyful people! Sure, most of us want to

be seen as happy, so we try our hardest to put on a smile and be brave even in the most difficult of times. But often, as soon as no one is around to see us, our brave faces and fake smiles fade away and we break down, defeated. The joy we thought we had wasn't true joy to start with. It wasn't the joy of the Holy Spirit.

"But", you might ask, "what's wrong with putting on a brave face and flashing a joyous smile even if we don't always feel joyful?" Nothing is wrong with this as such, but it can be so much simpler than this! We can have true joy; joy that is surely ours; joy that arises in our hearts because of the Holy Spirit who dwells there! In a book titled: "Seven things that steal your joy", I read how Christians so often become frustrated with themselves for trying to achieve joy by their own strength, meanwhile failing to understand that joy is designed as a gift of grace. If we lean on God with our whole being to guide us through life, we will experience real joy. Yes, there is always the option of forced smiles and brave faces, but why not experience true joy and flash a smile that truly reflects what is dwelling in your heart?

I wish to make it abundantly clear that the aim of this article is not to force you all to start smiling a little more and begin striving to become wonderfully happy and joyful people for the rest of your lives. Far from it! This article is as much about joy as it is about grace. In fact, if it wasn't for God's saving grace and the gift of the Spirit in our hearts, we wouldn't even know the meaning of joy. And this is where our joy stems from!

So do you still think it's impossible to always be joyful? Just remember, it is when we feel weak in ourselves that God's strength is made perfect (2 Corinthians 12:10). When we lack joy, it is God's power

that will make us strong! "Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). Yes, through the power of the Holy Spirit we can bear the fruit of joy. And a heart full of true joy will give us strength each day. We may not be joyful about everything that is happening in our

life, but we don't have to let the circumstances that we are in give us a miserable life.

And you know what else we should keep in

mind? Satan is working hard to steal the joy from our lives. He knows how to knock us down, he knows our weak points, he knows how affected we are by the circumstances in life and how he can use our circumstances to make us miserable. He also wants to prevent us from using our Christian joy as a witness to unbelievers. Above all, He knows that the joy of the Lord is our strength, and he will do anything to take away that strength.

In John 15, Christ spoke to His disciples about abiding in Him, the True Vine, and He then stated: "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (vs. 11). Imagine that! Joy that remains in us and joy that is full! Through abiding in Christ and in His love we will be joyful! In God's presence we have the fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11)!

So no matter where you are in life, no matter what has happened to you or a loved one, no matter how bad your day or week was... the gift of true joy can be yours. Take it, with hearts wide open. As Moses prayed in Psalm 90:14, so we can also pray: "Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy that we may rejoice and be glad all our days".

Clare Bergsma

Reference

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JOY is designed as
a gift of grace.

Aim:

Romans 12:2 teaches all of God's people:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

This magazine will encourage its readers to earnestly contend for the faith, and to think and act biblically, in the good traditions of the Church of all ages. Its basis is God's word, as the Church confesses in the Three Forms of Unity. It is intended for the younger members of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and is produced in co-operation with the Una Sancta. Subscription to the Contender is automatic with subscription to the Una Sancta.

It is not meant to be exclusively for unmarried members who still attend the Youth Bible Study Clubs, but for all those who fit within the loose parameters of 16 to 30 years of age.

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