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Presbyterians and Quakers Together

Why is it that when Presbyterians gather for prayer they look more like Quakers than heirs of the magisterial Reformation? To be sure, Presbyterian prayer meetings possess a little less spontaneity than the Quaker service since someone is assigned the opening and concluding prayer. But in between Presbyterians rely on the Spirit to lead much in the fashion of Quakers, with one person praying for this request, another for that, until the length of silence becomes unbearable and the designated supplicant utters the concluding prayer. Whatever allowances we might want to make for informal gatherings of the saints, surely the inheritors of a theological tradition that stresses decency and order might want to reconsider a spiritual discipline (the trendy way of putting it) that is inherently indecent and disorderly. Strong words those, but the pattern of informal gatherings of the saints for prolonged times of petitions has become so familiar to conservative Presbyterians that they seldom see how inappropriate it is to their beliefs (or they are afraid to voice objections because of the charges of impiety that will surely follow). So vituperative language may be in order to rouse contemporary Calvinists from their Spirit-led slumbers.

OF COURSE, SOME OF THE animus expressed here toward prayer meetings is simply the product of having grown up in an evangelical home. I can remember, with much pain, those gatherings of teenagers in the basement of our church, where each pimply-faced kid was expected to be vulnerable and reveal something fairly juicy that demanded prayer. If you offered no request, others could only assume that you were not sufficiently spiritual to be thinking about those in need or your own dependence on God. These small groups of prayer were good preparation for my senior year sociology class in high school, where forced intimacy also prevailed and charges of cynicism and insensitivity also followed my choked snickering at another person's self-disclosure of failure or woe. Rather than making me more sensitive, prayer meetings only made me more aware of how forced and fake "sharing" is outside the normal bonds of friendship and family, whether religious or secular. My insensitivity was so pronounced that instead of revealing something truly personal during sociology class' warm-up exercises, I commented on the cereal I had eaten that morning. For some reason, the gals didn't think my precious nugget about Life cereal compared with the problems they were having at home.

The funny thing about small group prayer is how little intimacy actually prevails. Most of the requests center on the body and its ailments – someone suffering from cancer, upcoming surgery for another church member, a parent afflicted with Alzheimer's, troubles with digestion. Heaven forbid that anyone would actually pray about two of the things for which Christ prayed in the Lord's Prayer, namely, forgiveness of sin and withstanding temptation. (Yes, he did mention daily bread, but modern day requests for the body make up much more than one-third of the total number of petitions, which means that we may be more concerned with physical needs than our Lord was.) In fact, what would be really intimate and personal would be asking for prayer in coping with the attractive new church member who makes you wish you were ten years younger, or mentioning a recent binge on the pint of New York Super Fudge that is no longer in the freezer. Which is only to say that we like requests that require some vulnerability, but nothing as messy as real sin and temptation.

BUT THE AGONY OF SMALL group prayer only begins with the time of taking requests, which can last longer than the actual time allotted for addressing God. If, like me, you would like to pray quietly during this time, you are frozen stiff when it comes time to pick someone to open and close the meeting. Some, like myself, especially dread having to open, since in the space of fifteen seconds you have to compose your thoughts, scan all the items for prayer and group them around certain themes (e.g., ear, nose and throat; joints; hearts and lungs), and craft a glibly reverent prayer. And since Presbyterians avoid using set forms, we have no guides for launching into this sea of material like that supplied in the simple form of the collect. Far better is it to be chosen the closer – that way

INSIDE

The *Nicotine Theological Journal* will likely be published four times a year. It is sponsored by the Old Life Theological Society, an association dedicated to recovering the riches of confessional Presbyterianism.

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you can hear everything else that has been prayed, tie up loose ends, and best of all, gain time to compose your thoughts. But the process of constructing your own prayer while others are engaging in free prayer raises real questions about the value of these meetings.

STILL, YOU WANT TO PRAY IN A way that keeps you from sounding stupid or unspiritual, which means you have to think about what you are going to say to the Lord of the universe in front of these fervent Christians (providentially, since they are more enthusiastic than confessional they won't likely care if you sound stupid as long as you sound zealous). At the same time, you need to make sure you don't pray for the exact same thing as someone else. Nor would it be good to contradict another supplicant. But if you are thinking about your turn to pray, you are not exactly praying along with the other people as they pray. In fact, small group prayer appears to be self-defeating, since the whole point of these gatherings is to engage in a prolonged time of corporate prayer. And if each person is worried about what he is going to say, then the sense of corporateness is lost, and the meeting is really only a series of individual prayers. In effect, small group prayer provides a corporate setting for prayers that should really be part of private devotion. Which means that small group prayer – to use the contemporary worship vernacular – is far more horizontal than vertical. It's a way to help us to be close to others, not a very fitting environment for directing prayers to God. It's therapy, not piety.

IF, HOWEVER, PRAYER IS NOT about making ourselves vulnerable to others or displaying in spontaneous fashion our heartfelt trust in God, if it is actually, as the Shorter Catechism has it, "the offering up to God for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ," then perhaps a better version of small group prayer would be to read Scripture and then pray on the basis of what God's word reveals. Instead of acting like Quakers and letting the Spirit lead, Presbyterians should be relying upon the inscripturated word that is supposed to govern all things Reformed. A prayer meeting, Reformed style, should be a dialogue between God and his people, with Scripture reading, and then a prayer in response, another Scripture reading, and another prayer, and so on. At least this way, God would get some say in what his people are praying, and what is more, the requests might actually be for things revealed in the Bible – like perseverence, not health.

But even a truly Reformed prayer meeting would not permit enough time for preparation. It still relies on spontaneity and assumes that truly spiritual people should be able to pray publicly at the drop of a hat. This kind of thinking even haunts Presbyterians when they gather for corporate worship. Presbyterians in the pews want their ministers to pray a good and moving prayer extemporaneously. If he uses a written prayer then lots of people get jumpy. That's because a minister should be a real man of God, and real men of God don't need crutches when they pray. Thus, well intended, well constructed, and theologically sound prayers are supposed to proceed organically from the godly heart (even though these same ministers could never be entrusted to write a new creed or revise existing ones – "ours is not a creed-writing age"). Preparation, notes, or prayer books are telltale signs of the lukewarm heart.

THIS EXPLAINS, IN PART, THE Presbyterian attitude toward liturgies. Liturgy here refers to the regular or repeated use of forms, prayers, and readings in corporate worship. At the simplest level, of course, everyone in corporate worship uses a liturgy in the sense that they follow an order of worship rather habitually. In the purest sense of free worship, only Quakers and Pentecostals qualify since they wait upon the apparently unpredictable movement of the Spirit. But if an assembly of believers uses some set order, even if it is only ten praise songs followed by a sermon and prayer, then they are following a liturgy in the most general sense. Presbyterians do not oppose liturgies in this broad sense because if they did it would mean having to retype the entire bulletin every week, instead of simply inserting the selected hymns, Scripture readings, and sermon title. But they do oppose liturgies in the narrow sense and here they generally follow the argument developed by Charles Hodge. "The great objections to the use of liturgies

are," he wrote, "that the authoritative imposition of them is inconsistent with Christian liberty; that they never can be made to answer all the varieties of experience and occasions; and that they tend to formality, and cannot be an adequate substitute for the warm outgoings of the heart moved by the spirit of genuine devotion."

Since the *NTJ* is on record in favor of the regulative principle of worship, it would be hard to quarrel with Hodge's first reason that bishops or higher assemblies would be tyrannical in requiring all congregations to use the same forms and order of worship. And historically, this objection has carried the day, even when Presbyterian denominations have produced good liturgies and recommended them to ministers and sessions. Liberty of conscience has legitimately permitted Presbyterian congregations to follow their own patterns and customs.

BUT HODGE'S OTHER REASONS need further scrutiny. His second argument – that liturgies cannot meet the variety of circumstances requiring prayer – is actually disproved by the practice of small group prayer meetings (not to mention the assumption about specificity in prayer that makes the Lord's Prayer unusable). Most of the requests made at such gatherings are almost always included in any number of the prayers that Reformed and Presbyterian ministers composed. For instance, the older *Psalter Hymnal* includes a prayer for the sick and spiritually distressed. It starts as follows:

Eternal and merciful God and Father, the eternal salvation of the living and the eternal life of the dying. You alone have life and death in your hands. You do continually care for us in such a way that neither health nor sickness, neither good nor evil can befall us; yes, not even a hair can fall from our heads without your will. You order all things for the good of believers

We beseech you to grant us the grace of the Holy Spirit that he may teach us to know truly our miseries and to bear patiently your chastisements, which as far as our merits are concerned might have been ten thousand time more severe. We know that they are not tokens of your wrath but of your fatherly love towards us, that we might not be condemned with the world. . .

Space prevents reprinting this prayer in its entirety. But since the majority of requests at small group gatherings are health related, this prayer would actually apply in most situations. What is more, it includes petitions for spiritual ailments as well, thus covering all those gathered who are unwilling to bare their souls.

STILL, SOME MAY OBJECT WITH Hodge that prayers should be specific. But the dangers of specificity are rarely evident to its proponents. For instance, there is the pastoral practice of using the pastoral prayer to announce an accident or birth that happened in the hours just before worship and so is unknown to most of the congregation. It runs something like this: "Lord, we pray for brother Harry, who now lies in a coma at the Bucks County Memorial Hospital, room 215, owing to an auto accident late last night. We hold up his family, who request that church members not visit Harry, and ask that you would be merciful to them in your providence." As much as a spate of announcements mid-service destroys the natural rhythm of worship, such praying can be equally disruptive. And what about when the pastor forgets to pray from the pulpit for the request made by one member even though he mentioned all the requests of others? Of course, prayer is not something that should be manipulated to soothe wounded feelings or maintain good relations. But what is the neglected person to think, that their request is chopped liver? And what does it say if a request goes unmentioned? Does it mean that God won't superintend and bless that situation? At the same time, why should petitions be more specific than praise and thanksgiving? If we thank God for forgiveness from sin, for his adopting love, for his sanctifying grace, why can't requests be equally general? God is supposed to answer all kinds of prayer, even the undecipherable groaning of our hearts. Could it be that the demand for specific prayer goes beyond what God requires?

The most enduring of Hodge's objections is the notion that read prayers are not "an adequate substitute for the warm outgoings of the heart moved by the spirit of genuine devotion." Here is the clincher for low church Protestants. A read prayer cannot be a sincere prayer, and that's because sincerity has to be conveyed in one's own words; it cannot rely on the language of others. The folly of this idea is practically self-evident and calls to mind the alliance between Presbyterians and Quakers mentioned at the outset. Carried to its logical conclusion, as it is with the left side of the liturgical/piety spectrum, this notion means that to express our deepest feelings for God we should not use English, or Latin, or any other known tongue; instead, we should devise our very own language. The problem is what happens when Pentecostals speak in tongues. So in some cases using inherited words is a good thing. What is more, some of the best prayers are ones that depend heavily on the language of Scripture or the rich idiom of the Shorter Catechism.

IN CONTRAST TO HODGE, JOHN Calvin taught that using forms for prayer was a fitting way to address God. He even constructed prayers to that end, many of which were used in Dutch Reformed family and corporate worship until the 1960s. Calvin wrote, "I highly approve of it that there be a certain form, from which the ministers be not allowed to vary: that first, some provision be made to help the simplicity and unskillfuness of some; secondly, that the consent and harmony of the churches one with another may

appear; and lastly, that the capricious giddiness and levity of such as affect innovations may be prevented. To which end I have showed that a catechism will be very useful. Therefore there ought to be a stated catechism, a stated form of prayer, and administration of the sacraments."

CALVIN'S REASONS STAND IN marked contrast to contemporary Presbyterian attitudes toward prayer. They imply, in a politically incorrect way, that not everyone is equal when it comes to praying well. Even the idea that some prayers are better than others comes as a shock to folks who think sincerity matters more than quality of expression. And if not everyone is equal, then praying in public may be legitimately limited to those who pray well. Calvin also thought liturgical uniformity was desirable. Observing the diversity of "styles" within the Presbyterian fold only confirms Calvin's point. Any common Presbyterian liturgy would be an improvement upon the diversity that prevails under the "leading" of the Spirit or better, the idiosyncracies of taste. Finally, Calvin thought prayers could actually be silly and that good forms would prevent such silliness. Of course, if sincerity is the sole standard, dignity and beauty don't matter. But if prayers may actually displease God, then attention to proper form may be just as important as zeal.

Calvin stands in opposition to almost three centuries of Presbyterian practice under the influence of revivalism. Despite keen attention to precise doctrine and theological nuance, Presbyterians tolerate all manner of poor theology and spiritual vulgarity in prayer. But blaming evangelicals, a long and honorable tradition at the *NTJ*, will not explain everything since within the Westminster Standards themselves lurk doctrines that encourage subjective attitudes toward prayer. According to the Shorter Catechism, prayer is a means of grace, right along side preaching and the sacraments (88). But in the Heidelberg Catechism, prayer comes in the Third Part, Man's Gratitude (Q&A's 86-129), while preaching and the sacraments are in the Second Part, Man's Deliverance (Q&A's 12-85). Louis Berkhof explained the significance of this difference between Westminster and Heidelberg in his discussion of the means of grace. "Faith, conversion, and prayer," he wrote, "are first of all fruits of the grace of God, though they may in turn become instrumental in strengthening the spiritual life. They are not objective ordinances, but subjective conditions for the possession and enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant." For this reason, Berkhof corrected Presbyterians for adding prayer to preaching and sacraments as a means of grace. "Strictly speaking, only the Word and the sacraments can be regarded as means of grace, that is, as objective channels through which Christ has instituted in the Church, and to which He ordinarily binds Himself in the communication of His grace." (This may explain why the Westminster divines did not include a question and answer on how prayer becomes effectual the way they did for Word and sacrament.)

COULD IT BE, THEN, THAT THE Westminster divines were showing the affects of pietism? That's not entirely a stretch if English Puritanism itself was a parallel development to German pietism, even if far more tolerant of scholastic thought. Whatever the reason, the difference between the Shorter Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism on prayer shows a movement among Puritans away from the sixteenth-century and Continental Reformed habit of identifying grace with the objective work of God, rather than the later pietistic and evangelical custom of blurring the distinctions between subjective experience and holy ordinances. Prayer becomes a means of grace in the middle of the seventeenth century, and by the late nineteenth century it takes on a life of its own, receiving far more attention than the Lord's Supper (received at best once a month) and the Word preached (heard probably once a week).

THE POINT IS NOT THAT PRAYER is a bad thing, though small group prayer meetings may be. Instead, it is to restore what is a genuine privilege to its rightful place, alongside Word and sacrament. Prayer is a good thing. As the Heidelberg Catechism puts it, prayer "is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us" (Q&A 116). But it does not open the kingdom of heaven (preaching). Nor does it signify and seal God's promise to forgive our sins (Baptism and the Lord's Supper). As important as prayer is, participation in a prayer meeting may be less revealing than Word and sacrament about the piety of Christian persons. And if Presbyterians can come to their senses about prayer, they might abandon the Quaker practice of waiting for the Spirit, give up sitting in circles with their heads bowed, and thereby regain the stiffness and seriousness for which they are legendary.

Henry M. Lewis *SC88*

Evangelicals and Catholics Apart

Books & Culture is one of the most recent additions to the *Christianity Today* empire. It strives to be a Christian version of the *New York Review of Books*. (Does that mean Carol Stream, Illinois, the home of *CT*'s editorial offices, is the Christian version of New York City?) To the new publication's credit, *B&C* runs a wide selection of reviews on books covering an equally broad variety of topics by a diverse range of authors. *B&C*'s width can also be annoying, since it is not always clear the criteria by which editors choose authors. Sometimes essays on ephemeral topics appear from writers in *CT*'s stable, authors who would not likely be published in the *New York Review*, let alone *CT*'s cross-suburbia rival, the *Christian Century*. Other times they go outside the *B&C* network to grab heavyweights like the historian of the American South, Eugene D. Genovese, or the political philosopher, Jean Bethke Elshtain. And it is the discrepancy between these two levels of authors that often makes *B&C* disorienting. Sometimes it feels like editorial affirmative action when it combines authors with such different exposure. It would be much more preferable to read Elshtain's reaction to a pay-for-view Sara McLachlan concert than a relatively unknown evangelical author who happens to be friendly with the folks at CTI write on the gourmet coffee craze. But we digress.

B&C IS ANNOYING FOR OTHER reasons as well. In a recent issue (Sept/Oct, 1999) the editors decided to use rather glibly the female third-person singular pronoun instead of the generic male equivalent or the clunkier "he/she," "her/his." It started in the editorial by John Wilson on the debate between pro and anti-intelligent design authors. Wilson used this arresting phrase, "imagination that allows a person to step outside herself." There it is. Generic third-person singular feminine now appears to be the editorial policy at *B&C*. But Wilson's use was also glaring because of the flip flop he performed in the same column. After having used the generic "one" or "oneself in the preceding paragraph – "an effort to examine one's own position from the outside" – he resorted to the gendered "herself" in the phrase just quoted. It would have been equally easy to write, "imagination that allows a person to step outside *oneself*." Why not choose one pronoun and stick with it? But why use "her" at all? It was sort of clever when the *Reformed Journal* used "she" and "her" a decade ago, a time when "he/she" was becoming incredibly onerous and "she" was a novel escape. But to decide upon "her" now appears to be more evidence of the cultural lag that generally afflicts evangelicals – about fifteen years later they come around and use what had been cutting edge now that it has been domesticated.

BUT THE ANNOYANCE OF THIS editorial policy was even more glaring in Cornelius Plantinga's review essay on recent books about preaching. Here the use of third-person feminine singular moves from a fairly trifling hangnail to a migraine headache because the appropriate sex for individual preachers is, as they like to say, contested. Here are two sentences from Plantinga's lead paragraph that indicate where the rest of the review goes: "The preacher has been busy all week with weddings, funerals and youth retreats, and on Sunday morning *she* isn't ready to preach. Miraculously, *her* rough sermon arises in its might and gathers people to God" (emphasis *NTJ*'s).

With that choice of pronouns, Plantinga and the folks at *B&C* have taken off the gloves and chosen the women's liberationist side of the ordination debate. Never mind that Plantinga himself is in a communion, the Christian Reformed Church, that has come to ordain women at considerable cost (e.g, poor theological reasoning, shoddy biblical exegesis, and sneaky revisions to church order). Never mind as well that evangelicals of the Billy Graham variety have been late comers to the idea of women's ordination. Despite all of the controverted points that still surround the issue, *B&C* has not only made a debatable editorial decision but also has openly declared its allegiance with those churches that ordain women. If you didn't know better, you would think this an unusually gutsy move, aside from the fact that most of the editorial staff at *CT* worship in communions where the ordination of women is a fait accompli. And given *CT*'s concern about marketing, image, and profits, you can't help but wonder if the editors and publishers responsible for *B&C* are ignorant of this practice's divisiveness. It wouldn't be surprising if the editorial staff at *CT* no longer mix in circles where opponents of women's ordination surface.

EXCEPT, OF COURSE, WHEN they gather at meetings to discuss unity among Catholics and Protestants. And therein hangs a tale. As many will recall, *CT* gave favorable coverage to "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," a document hailed as a breakthrough in the historically antagonistic relations between American conservative Protestants and Rome. Some Reformed objected to ECT because of what appeared to be the statement's fudging on justification. To be sure, ECT did not pretend to paper over all differences between Catholics and evangelicals. But could the ordination of women be a more obvious difference? And if the folks at *CT* wanted to refrain from offending their Catholic brothers, wouldn't it be reasonable to use different personal pronouns at least when describing

preaching?

WHATEVER THIS DECISION BY *B&C* may show about its editors' respect for Catholic convictions, it does demonstrate just how thin the togetherness between Catholics and Evangelicals is. Aside from matters of soteriology, which are significant, ordination and authority in the church are particularly weighty differences between Rome and Carol Stream. To put it simply, Catholics believe priestcraft and hierarchy are good things, while evangelicals oppose them as superstitious and man-made. For the latter, whatever is from God is good, and everything else is suspicious. This means, as Nathan Hatch showed in *The Democratization of American Christianity*, that evangelicals operate according to a simplistic political philosophy that questions all human authority, even legitimate ones, like magistrates, parents, and ministers. Such radicalism explains why American evangelicals have been at the forefront of political revolution, anti-clericalism, and women's ordination. To be sure, they always come around and say they don't mean to be as revolutionary as they are, for example, by trying to retain male headship in the home, the authority of parents over children, or the legitimacy of the United States' government. But evangelicals have never been fans of the clergy and have led most efforts to limit the authority of those who minister the word.

Ironically, then, confessional Protestants, like Presbyterians, Reformed and Lutherans, have (or should have) a similar regard for special office as that of Roman Catholics. Indeed, those who believe pastors have legitimate authority in the church will find more common ground with the defenders of hierarchy in the Catholic Church who recognize the value of the work priests do, than with egalitarian evangelicals who think any Tom, Dick or Mary is capable of ministering the Word and does so whenever he or she witnesses or shares. The problem, of course, is that the confessionalists are the ones pointing out the discrepancies between Catholics and Protestants on justification by faith (even though Catholics at least ask the right question – "how can I be right with God?", rather than "how can I experience greater fulfillment?"). For many confessionalists, that difference is insurmountable. But as the editorial policies of *B&C* make clear, the differences between mainstream evangelicals open to Rome are no less great than those separating Catholics and confessional Protestants. In fact, given the radical character of American evangelicalism, the obstacles between evangelicals and Catholics may be even higher than those among Christians, whether they be Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anglican, or Reformed, who believe that church membership is not a matter of indifference but necessary (ordinarily) for salvation.

Allen Rich *SC88*

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39 Alexander Hall

If You're Not Dutch, You're Much

H. L. Mencken was not a religious man but he did give considerable attention to religion. He even wrote a catechism to explain his reluctant attachment to America.

Q. If you find so much that is unworthy of reverence in the United States, then why do you live here?

A. Why do men go to zoos?

In the spirit of Mencken's catechetical instincts we offer the following – the havoc that the politics of identity play with northern European ethnics. Consider, for instance the plight of the Irish in the United States. As the University of California, Berkeley historian, David A. Hollinger, has remarked, "American multi-culturalism accomplished in short order a task that centuries of British imperial power could not complete: the making of the Irish indistinguishable from the English."

A SIMILAR DYNAMIC HAS BEEN at work in the historically Dutch communion, the Christian Reformed Church. The denomination's more progressive elements have been intent on making the church less ethnic and more open to minorities. It is indeed curious to see another ethnic group with a history of some hostility to the English, identify themselves as Anglo. But that is what happens when you adopt the language of the English. The "Anglo" majority in the Dutch CRC, we learn, needs to reach out to Koreans, Vietnamese, Blacks, and Native Americans, even though the real Anglo minority in the church are not keen on counting members by the categories supplied by the Census Bureau but prefer the older Reformed method of tallying up families or households. It used to be amusing to watch the Anglo leader of conservatives (until he left for the United Reformed Churches), Bob Godfrey, challenge Dutch multiculturalists to be more Dutch and less American in their theology and practice. How dare that sensitivity to the real Anglo minority in the CRC should ever lead the church in more conservative directions (a point well made by Michael Novak in *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*).

WE WERE REMINDED OF THESE ironies upon the delivery of a recent issue of the *Banner* (July 5, 1999)

devoted to Synod 1999. One of the side bars ran the headline, "Ethnic Advisors Watch Over Synod." Aside from the poor choice of words – why does Synod need ethnic oversight if God already supplies it? – the report listed the names of the advisors. No Dutch speakers were included. Instead the committee consisted of Blacks, Native-Americans, Hispanics and Korean Americans. According to the report, these hyphenated Christian Reformed liked what they saw and heard, especially that ethnic delegates were present this year and were afforded the opportunity to speak. It didn't seem to bother anyone, either the ethnic advisors, or the Dutch-American reporter, that the only language spoken at Synod, or used to conduct denomination business was the tongue of the hegemonic English.

But this irony was insignificant compared to the one that came with a later issue (Sept. 27, 1999) of the *Banner* devoted to the question of ethnic identity in the CRC. It's bad enough that the Dutch had to give up their language, but now they are also feeling the need to give up their religious practices in order to make room for today's North American minorities. On the magazine's cover was a photograph of different kinds of shoes – wood, moccasins, sandals, sneakers – you get the point – under the caption, "Leaving Our Shoes at the Door." The accompanying essays came from Dutch, Korean-American, Hispanic, and Native American Christian Reformed. As it turns out, only the Dutch need to leave their shoes behind. For the other ethnics, their shoes are too much a part of their cultural identity. Leaving them behind would mean giving up their ethnicity. For Korean Americans, who stress days of prayer, fasting, and emphasize "a daily, intimate, personal relationship with the Lord," the Dutch stress on theological orthodoxy and the cultural mandate required some negotiation. For Hispanic Christian Reformed, whose contemporary worship includes clapping, dancing, and spontaneity under the "Spirit's leading" ("It's ethnocentric," the writer admitted, "but for us it's also the right way to do things"), the Dutch liturgy of psalms and theologically heavy sermons posed another obstacle to cultural diversity. But for the Dutch-American Christian Reformed, the older ways of the denomination are "arrogant and judgmental" because the real measure of spiritual faithfulness is God's word, not "adherence to a number of practices that have served us well in the past." (Could it be they served the CRC well because they were faithful to God's word?)

THE INCONSISTENCY HERE IS almost as large as European condescension. When Dutch Calvinists were part of the non-Anglo minority in the United States, they were attached to their wooden shoes and the various elements of Reformed piety that went with them. But now that they have been assimilated and are part of the Anglo majority, they have to display the kind of cosmopolitan paternalism that pities ethnics and embraces outsider cultural expressions about as naturally as African Americans play Blue Grass. When the Anglo-American majority directed such paternalism at the Dutch, the latter rightly took offense. But in the same way that the Dutch have left behind the rich yet provincial setting of the ghetto for the bland utopia of suburban convenience, so they have forgotten the genuine difficulties that minority groups face in an effort to feel ethnics' pain.

SOMETHING ELSE DUTCH Calvinists have forgotten is that when they left their churches for other communions they did not try to make Presbyterians use the *Psalter Hymnal* or force the ministers of Willow Creek Community Church to say long prayers. Nor did they try to make their English-speaking neighbors learn Dutch. When they left behind Dutch-American communities for the larger Anglo world they adopted the ways of that world because they wanted out of ethnic constraints. Those who stayed knew that the best way to preserve a cultural heritage was by forming and maintaining Dutch institutions and ties. And that's because culture is a lot thicker than persuading Anglo-Americans to wear wooden shoes and suck on Queen Wilhemeena mints during the sermon on Cultural Heritage of the Nations Sunday. But again, because Dutch-Americans are now suburbanized, what passes for culture at Taco Bell and Wal Mart also constitutes cultural diversity in the CRC. It is much easier for Dutch-Americans living in suburban Grand Rapids to give up their wooden shoes than for Native-American Christian Reformed to relinquish their mocassins. That's because the wooden shoes don't fit; they're ornamental.

Dutch Calvinists also used to know that there was a difference between culture and worship (cult). Granted, to worship in unison requires using one language and the introduction of English services among second-generation Dutch raised questions about the cultural aspects of liturgy. Still, Dutch Calvinists knew that their order of worship was not a Dutch phenomenon since Catholics in the Netherlands used a different liturgy from their Reformed neighbors. The CRC's worship, then, was supposed to be based on the word of God, given expression in the most fitting cultural expressions of Dutch culture. It was not a cultural preference for immigrants from the Netherlands. But now that the CRC can't give good theological reasons for Reformed liturgy, worship becomes a cultural expression as easily abandoned as cigar smoking during consistory meetings. Still, it's not at all clear why assimilated Dutch Calvinists should have to make room in worship for the practices of assimilated Hispanics. Unless, of course, the

politics of cultural diversity determines that you, as part of America's European heritage, are a victimizer and oppressor, and therefore need to renounce your inherently oppressive ways. Even if at one time those liturgical ways were deemed pleasing to God, the gods of cultural sensitivity demand stranger (and blander) fire.

THESE OBSERVATIONS IN NO way settle the difficulties that attend a communion like the CRC which is trying admirably to minister to people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Nor should these reflections be read to suggest approval of America's melting pot ideal. In fact, the experience of Dutch Calvinists in the CRC and German Lutherans in the Missouri Synod teaches that the WASP culture of the United States made significant demands upon all minorities, even those who came from northern Europe.

But recent developments in the CRC also show that the tactic of cultural assimilation, even when performed by former minorities, is no better than the strategy of cultural separation. We think it's actually worse. Indeed, the history of Dutch Calvinism in America may teach the paradoxical lesson that the stronger a Christian's ethnic identity, the firmer his religious beliefs and practices. And that paradox only confirms the lesson of creation and the resurrection that you don't have a human person with only a spirit; you also need a body. And just as rich culture needs to be embodied and given freedom to flourish in its peculiar expressions, so rich religion needs more than simply theological beliefs; it needs to come to expression in specific practices and those practices need to have sufficient room to find their best idiom. For good and sometimes ill, Dutch Calvinism was Dutch. But without its ethnic identity the CRC's Calvinism is not much.

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Second Hand Smoke

The following is something of a departure for this column, which is typically devoted to obscure and amusing depictions of smoke or drink. Still, this advice to covenant children preparing for confirmation, which comes from the Reformed Church in the U.S., Heidelberg Catechism, Twentieth Century Edition *(1902), may actually be fitting wisdom for Christian life in which the pleasures of alcohol and tobacco receive their due appreciation.*

We require a high degree of fitness for confirmation, namely, an intelligent, sincere and unreserved taking of three most searching and far-reaching vows in the name of the holy Trinity.

Then, too, this fitness for confirmation may be called a "change of heart," though this is only another name for conversion. This change is not sudden, but runs through years. You have not had any wonderful religious experiences, such as you hear about in others; but the Holy Ghost has done much in you in a very quiet way.

Nor need you doubt your conversion, your change of heart, because you cannot tell the day when it took place, as many profess to do. It did not take place in a day, or you might tell it. It is the growth of years (Mark 4:26-28), and therefore all the more reliable. You cannot tell when you learned to walk, talk, think and work. You do not know when you learned to love your earthly father, much less the heavenly.

This is the Reformed doctrine of "getting religion." We get religion, not in bulk but little by little. Just as we get natural life and strength, so spiritual life and strength, day by day.

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Offer Still As Good As Book

Supplies are limited, but not that limited. The premium announced in the last issue of the *NTJ* is still available. Anyone who gives a one-year subscription to two new readers, or who renews his own subscription and gives another, will receive a copy of D. G. Hart's *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America*, which is not yet back in print. So send us the names and addresses of new subscribers, along with a check for $14 and you will receive a paperback copy of this award-winning book. Remember, the *NTJ* makes a great Winter Solstice gift.

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