

## Dreaming



One has those days when one dreams away the time, and my holiday provided precisely that opportunity. The holidays are long past, but the dream isn't; in fact, with the passage of time it slowly crystalizes.... Mind if I share?

### FIFA

I guess it all started with the Fifa cup last summer. Folk whose ancestors migrated to Canada several generations ago proudly sported flags supporting their favorite overseas team. You saw them everywhere: German flags, Italian colors, Dutch shades. In the Peninsula there are obviously many folk with roots in the Netherlands; the red, white and blue distinctives of the Dutch flag were everywhere. Even the parking lot of the Dutch church in town was awash in orange; a Dutch connection now embarrassed no one! It got me thinking. Is there anything else in our Dutch parentage that could make us proud enough to wear our colors boldly? The world cup is exciting enough to awaken our roots, but surely there's more in our heritage worth celebrating than Holland's excellence at soccer.

### Liberation

I know there is. 70 years ago this summer the Lord granted in the Netherlands an event that's become known as the Liberation of 1944. It's not to be confused with the Liberation of 1945, when with the assistance of Canadian soldiers the Netherlands was finally freed from German oppression - an event, by the way, we may not forget! The Liberation of 1944 described a release from a different sort of oppression, one where church leaders (in the form of a Synod) sought to hold people in bondage to a teaching simply not found in Holy Scripture. I wrote about this event in the previous *Bit to Read*, and need not repeat that material now. I'll only remind you of this essential element: the people who experienced the Liberation as a *liberation* did so because the event gave them the freedom again to take God's Word at face value. And that Word spoke so richly about the bond of love God sovereignly and graciously established with sinners; *He* claimed particular persons, no better than any other, to be His children-by-covenant. On the strength of *His* promise, these persons may dare to say: "I belong, with body and soul, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." That means in the ups and downs of daily life: "He preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head, indeed, all things must work together for my salvation." You'll recognize the language of Lord's Day 1 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. In fact, parents can teach their children on God's authority to get really personal when they recite Lord's Day 1, or Psalm 23: "the LORD is *my* shepherd." For believing parents and their children this glorious gospel is so comforting!

## We Belong!

This is the wealth that the fathers took along when they migrated to the New World. This is the wealth our parents sought to pass on to our generation, and it's the wealth we seek to pass on to those who follow us: *you belong!* We try to pass it on in the preaching of the gospel and the Catechism classes, try to pass on this perspective in the parenting of the home and in the education in our schools. Neither the present nor the future generation should doubt their identity; those after us should dare to join us in saying that we belong to Jesus Christ! It gives a perspective of comfort to all of life. It's a heritage that makes it worth flying some Dutch color! So there's the stuff that's floating through my mind as I left for my holidays....

## Envy

And as I was doing things I don't normally do, my thoughts went back to conversations and experiences of the past, and a golden thread began to tie the events together:

- A native of India I had met during my time in Australia connected with me during the past summer. He's currently running a seminary in Hyderabad and had just welcomed 47 new students on the day I spoke with him. Could I please, he begged, please come and teach the *Belgic Confession* and the *Canons of Dort* in his school? Why me, why a Canadian Reformed minister? His point: we want your heritage!
- Rev Dong has connections with numerous Christians in China, through very little effort of his own to find these contacts. Why do these Christians seek out Rev Dong? (There are, after all, numerous options available to them; many, many churches are busy in that vast land.) But they seek out Rev Dong because they hear a perspective in his work that they don't hear elsewhere – and that's the heritage we are so used to. The point: they want our heritage!
- A couple of years ago I wrote a piece in the pastoral column about a certain Rev Gelm Melo from the Philippines. He was in our midst looking for ways to tap into our Canadian Reformed heritage so that he could pass it on to folk in his homeland. Currently the Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, in conjunction with the Free Reformed Church of Baldivis (Australia) is satisfying Rev Melo's hunger for our heritage. And Providence has just sent Rev deGelder to the Philippines to teach for a few weeks. Same point: they want our heritage.
- Half a dozen years ago 4 Koreans spent 3 days in my office in Yarrow. Via the internet these men had discovered the heritage we take for granted, and now came to learn how we go about sharing that heritage through the preaching and teaching ministries of the church as well as through the training parents give their children at home and the education those children receive at school. Last month Rev Souman visited with (some of) these same men. Again, they want our heritage!
- I sat in Pastor Adriano's living room in Recife half a dozen years ago, and we got to talking about what shape the mission work in Brazil needed to take in the years to come. He was categorically insistent: no matter what shape that mission work takes, you (Canadians) must make it Priority #1 to pass on your heritage. Do not, he pleaded, leave us to discover it for ourselves; it's far too rich for that, and we need it now. Teach us, tell us, impress it on us! He went so far as to call for help in getting this across in the classroom.
- Within our sister churches in South Africa an emeritus minister (Rev Jopie vanderLinden) scanned the (English) volumes of his library into his computer, and via the internet began offering assistance to ministers across Africa who have no access to the books needed to make a sermon. He supplies them with distinctly reformed

material, including anything from our churches he can lay his hands on. He currently has so many requests for help that recently a second man (Rev Eugene Viljoen) was devoted full time to assist with this work. A group in Lincoln has spearheaded support for this second man. The point is the same: across Africa there is enormous hunger for the very heritage we take for granted.

- The Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (appointed by our General Synod) receives periodically requests from who knows where for assistance in relation to the Reformed faith. This Committee has only very minimal ways at its disposal to provide assistance to those longing for the Reformed heritage.

### Lesson?

To me, these examples make clear that perhaps we need to fly our colors a bit more proudly. We're typically somewhat apologetic about our Dutch connection, and would much rather be known simply as Canadian churches. I absolutely want us to be known as a Canadian church, but I don't for a moment believe that we ought therefore to minimize the treasure that crossed the ocean with our (grand)parents. On the contrary, confessional standards of the Great Reformation as the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Belgic Confession* and the *Canons of Dort* have coursed down the rivers of Dutch Church History for centuries, and via the Secession of 1834, the Dolientie of 1886 and the Liberation of 1944 provided our parents with a depth of Scriptural insight that today is the envy of so many fellow Christians around the world. That depth of insight travelled the Atlantic in the luggage of our fathers – so that today that wealth is, by God's grace, *ours*. It's nothing to be ashamed of; it's instead reason to fly our Dutch colors with gratitude – and then to do all in our power to share that heritage with any and all who hunger to own it with us. And there's where the dreaming continues....

### Share?

How shall we go about sharing this wealth with the envious of the world's farthest corners? And what could we do to broadcast this wealth to others who don't know about it? I see some challenges here:

- Do we need to do more on the internet? If so, how does one get that going? And who finances it?
- Do we need to write more material that communicates the wealth of our heritage? If so, how do we make sure potential authors have the time they need do the required research and put pen to paper? Does that require realigning some expectations amongst our professors and ministers? If yes, how ought we to finance that? Or do we need to set aside a minister or three for the work of teaching internationally? Again, how do we organize that? Is there room for such a concept in the Church Order? Better: would such an effort be helpful in God's kingdom?
- How do we communicate to foreign cultures a heritage that has flowed through western (Dutch) culture? That may require more 'translation' than simply one of language. What's it take to make that happen?

### Window

The world has become rather small, inasmuch as one can today quickly get to places that took days or even months to access not all that long ago. That, of course, is due to air transport, plus (in many places) relatively open borders. As a result there's now an easily accessible window of opportunity in many countries of the world to speak about and spread the good news caught in the Confessions: *I belong!*

The world, however, is changing at a rapid rate, so quickly that today's windows of opportunity may be tightly closed tomorrow. If anything is to be done, it seems to me that we need to think and act on it sooner rather than later. My thought: we need some heads together over a Van Houtte coffee to do some brainstorming. Our orange colors shouldn't get stuffed into a closet. Good dreams need better endings than that.

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October 1, 2014