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FEATURE

I remember: Reflections on Christmas

by Jonathan Moore

I remember Christmastime as a child. I was not like your average child (in more ways than one, but lets not loose focus already...). I would get up late at night after my parents had fallen asleep and sneak out into the living room. But rather than sorting through the presents and devising clever ways of peeling back the wrapping paper (without leaving any clues), I'd turn on the tree lights, and lay down on the thick carpet. I'd stare at the ceiling in wonder, fascinated by the combinations of shapes and colors.

I remember how wonderful snow was as a child. The first snow was the best day of the fall. There was nothing like waking up to the sound of the snow plough coming down our street. My brother and I would slip our moonboots on over the bread sacks that covered our feet, and run out to our dead end street where the snowplows have left us the best possible beginning to the year's most amazing snow fort. As the big flakes keep coming down I watch them in wonder, "No two alike!? Really!? Wow!!"

So it's Christmas now, I'm 29, and I wonder where the wonder's gone. We chose not to put up any decorations this year, too much hassle and what the cats don't knock down they chew in half. Then there's the electric bill for the lights, but we'll chalk it up to being "green". I slip down the front stairs and slide down the sidewalk to clear off all the snow that's piled up on my car overnight. First snow of the year and I'm already looking forward to Spring.

When I was asked to write a column about Christmas, numerous topics sprung to mind. Should we say Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays? With all the consumerism, should we just call it Shopmas? The MTS in me

thought about expounding on the theological difficulties in dealing with God becoming a man, or examining the development of the Christmas holiday throughout church history. But I wondered if I was missing something, and I realized that I was missing what most of us are missing: wonder.

That is my challenge to you this Christmas, bring back the wonder. The next time someone says “Happy Holidays” to you, don’t question their religion. Instead wonder how it is that most of the world is celebrating something during this time of the year. The next time you stop at Meijer for a gallon of milk and wait ½ hour to check out, don’t judge America’s consumerism. Instead, wonder about a time of year where generosity overflows to friends, family, and the needy. As you sit with your congregation on Christmas Eve, stop judging the song’s weak theology or the preacher’s incorrect use of the four-page method. Look at the kids around you, witness their example, and bring back the wonder.

Remember again the play of Christmas lights on the ceiling. Remember the first snow. Remember the joy of celebration. Let go of your agendas and remember how a pregnant virgin gave birth to the God of all creation, who would live, die, and rise again for our salvation. Remember, and just sit, and wonder.

NEWS

November Town Halls

by Alex Snider

In November, CTS was privileged to hold two town hall meetings.

The first meeting, hosted by the Student Senate, was a forum on what the CRC would look like in 25 years. The panelists were CTS professors Dr. Lyle Bierma and Dr. John Bolt and Rev. Jerry Dykstra, the executive director of the CRCNA. The panel addressed topics such as the decline in membership, what a global CRC would look like, and the issue of homosexuality. After the formal questions posed by moderator Kyle Brooks, the floor was opened for questions from the audience.

The second meeting was hosted by the Center for Excellence in Preaching to talk about the book of the semester. This semester's book was Blood Brothers by Elias Chacour. Rev. Scott Hoezee, director of the CEP, moderated a panel of three delegates all of whom had experience with the Middle East. The panelists were Dr. Doug Howard, professor of history at Calvin College and a Ph. D in Ottoman history from Indiana University, Albert Hamstra, Special Projects Director for CRCWM and one of the founders of Hope Equals, and Micah Schuurman, 1st year M.Div student who spent a year teaching in Egypt. These panelists addressed prominent issues the book raised. Among other issues, they discussed the bad reputation Palestinians have in popular culture and how to begin talking about this issue with other Christians.

NEWS

In Brief

The headlines, just in case you missed them...

-According to climate change experts, koalas and penguins are among the species threatened with extinction.

-ExxonMobil to buy out XTO Energy for \$30 billion

-Tiger Woods embroiled in scandal as more and more alleged mistresses come forward

-Former GVSU football coach takes head job at Notre Dame.

FEATURE

The CRC in 25 Years

by Alex Snider

CTS Student Senate hosted a Town Hall meeting on November 11, the topic of which was the CRC in 25 years. The meeting was moderated by 1st year M.Div senator, Kyle Brooks. The panel consisted of Dr. Lyle Bierma and Dr. John Bolt, Systematic Theology professors at CTS, and Rev. Jerry Dykstra, Executive Director of the CRCNA. The panelists were given two minutes to answer a variety of questions posed by the moderator and a few from the audience.

One of the questions was about the decline in members the CRC has seen in the last 25 years. All of the panelists agreed that it probably wouldn't continue. The last big loss was after the decision regarding women in office. Dr. Bierma said that if there would be a break, it would most likely be over the issue of homosexuality.

Dovetailing off of that question, the next was if the CRC would ever have practicing homosexual pastors. The panel agreed that if this would happen, it wouldn't be in the next 25 years.

A question that is very relevant for the near future: Will the CRC and the RCA reunite? Rev. Jerry Dykstra answered first. He said that we would not, at least not structurally. He did, however, cite a lot of examples of joint ministries involving both denominations. In his opinion, joining the CRC and the RCA wouldn't be worth the effort. Dr. Bierma added something that I really liked. He explained what he called "ecumenical math" or " $1 + 1 = 3$." If we were to try and reunite the two denominations, instead of one denomination, we would end up with three. We would have a CRC group that wouldn't support the join, an RCA group that wouldn't support the join, and a group of the two that actually did join. Instead of being a unifying measure, it would cause more division.

Another good point was brought up by an audience member. He wanted the panel to address the issue of declining enrollment of Canadian students at CTS. Dr. Bolt attributed this decline to changes in candidacy requirements which means more Canadian students are choosing to study at schools closer to them. Rev. Dykstra brought up the issue of money. With the current economic climate, it's possible that some students can't afford to come into the US and study at CTS. The panelists agreed that this is an issue that needs to be addressed but there seems to be no clear idea of how to remedy this situation.

FEATURE

An Attempt at Non-Logical Discourse

by John Burden

Premise 1: The Christian religion revolves around the person of Jesus Christ.

Premise 2: The central teaching of Jesus Christ is the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5-7.

Premise 3: The teaching of the Christian Church is based on the teaching of Jesus.

Conclusion: The teaching of the Christian Church is based on the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5-7.

This doesn't seem true in the reformed tradition. Is the argument invalid? Unsound? Absurd?

What does the Heidelberg Catechism have to do with the Sermon on the Mount?

Why are we spending so much time with a document that neglects the Sermon on the Mount?

Why does our tradition have such a difficult time interpreting the Sermon the Mount? Is it because of the difficulty of living it out? Is Tolstoy's example too scary for us?

Maybe the Sermon on the Mount isn't for us. Perhaps it is just for the Mennonites.

I am sure I am being illogical. I need someone to set me straight.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

by **Mic Altena**

I would like to challenge the generalizations and labels that were used in the recent article "Learning 'Liberaleese'." Aside from being largely inaccurate (liberal, post-modern, relativistic, pluralistic and secular are all very different terms with very distinct worldviews), these labels are also toxic to our communities. Reducing individuals to a common denominator and placing them in groups devalues an individual's fundamental identity and in so doing deepens the divisions that characterize many of our communities by reinforcing inaccurate generalizations.

Instead of painting a picture of us apart from them (present in the article's disputable assumption that Christians are confounded by the so called "mainstream society"), let's paint a picture of mutual humanness. Together, as children of one God, may we join hands in solidarity as we prepare for the wedding feast that gathers every living creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea to sing, "Worthy is the Lamb."

ESSAY

Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Deeper Look

by **Micah Schuurman**

Many of you attended the Town Hall Meeting to discuss Blood Brothers, the story of a Palestinian growing up in occupied Israel. The focus of the meeting was a panel discussion involving Dr. Doug Howard, Rev. Albert Hamstra and myself. The three of us gave our general reactions to the book and answered a number of questions about how one should properly understand the book and its relationship with what is happening on the ground in Israel and the West Bank today.

The discussion was helpful in that it introduced attendees to a number of themes in the conflict which tend to receive little attention in the United States. However, there was little time to discuss broader themes of the conflict. Some people may have left the discussion wondering, "What now? Are we supposed to hate Israel?"

I do not pretend to have a comprehensive understanding of the conflict. My knowledge is limited. However, I can offer a few "big picture" themes that may help those of you who wish to understand more fully the Arab-

Israeli conflict.

Three themes dominate my perspective of the conflict: imperialism, divorce and marriage.

Regarding imperialism, it is helpful to compare Israel's control of Gaza and the West Bank to other situations in recent history. In brief, Israel wishes to set up a government in the West Bank and Gaza that is not hostile to Israel. Israel is seeking to do this by force, punishing the Gazans for having the audacity to vote for Hamas, and punishing the West Bank for its two Intifadas.

How well have such imperialistic endeavors worked in recent history? In the years since WWII, the United States and Europe have pulled out of India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Vietnam, the Middle East and almost all of Africa. The Soviet Union's attempt to control Eastern Europe and central Asia (including Afghanistan) has come to an end. Indeed, people often forget that England pulled out of Israel in 1948 because it found that it was unable to control the restless population.

In recent history, only one nation comes close to succeeding in an imperialistic venture. China does indeed seem to be maintaining its grip on Tibet. Yet, even here, Tibet is hardly a success story. Internationally and domestically, Tibet remains a thorn in China's flesh.

This means that there is very little hope that Israel will be able to break the will of the Palestinian people through the use of force. Putting hope in the use of force to achieve imperialistic ends is nothing short of the severest idealism. You can't win hearts and minds through shock and awe.

Another theme in the conflict is that of divorce. Israelis and Palestinians share the same house. They want to be separated. But, the final details of the separation have yet to be decided.

When getting a divorce, the two parties understand the basic principles of bargaining. They start by demanding everything: "I want the house, I want the car, I want the dog, I want the frequent flyer miles, I want the bread box, I want the bookshelf..." Both sides claim as much as they possibly can, knowing that they will end up somewhere in the middle.

This is what Israel and Palestine are doing right now. They are both frantically searching for new things to "claim" now and then "give up" in the final deal. This is why Israel is so set on building and expanding settlements. Israel doesn't intend to keep all of the settlements. Most likely, they will pull out most of the settlements that are in the heart of the West Bank, keeping the ones that surround Jerusalem, effectively ensuring that Jerusalem will remain under exclusive Israeli control. In the final agreements, Israel will likely say something like, "Look, we pulled out some of the settlements. You can't expect us to give up all of our settlements. Let's meet half-way. It's only fair."

The same goes for suicide bombings and rocket attacks. Maintaining these attacks will give Palestine some leverage in the peace process. The Palestinian officials will be able to say, "Look, we'll stop the attacks, but you have to give us something in return... something big..."

This perspective is useful in understanding almost every nasty thing that the Palestinians and Israelis do to each other.

But, this perspective is not complete. While the illustration of a divorce is helpful, one must keep in mind that the Arab-Israeli conflict is also like a marriage, a very unhappy marriage.

Israel is half the size of the Netherlands. Yet, two people groups claim it as their home. Short of large-scale ethnic cleansing, both Palestinians and Israelis will have to live together, side by side until the end of the world. They share a common future. Either both sides will prosper or both sides will fail.

In war, both sides will fail. So long as war continues, both Gaza and the West Bank will continue to be practically uninhabitable. So long as war continues, Israelis will not feel secure. In peace, both sides will prosper. Israel will thrive with a nearly endless supply of cheap labor. In turn, Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank will thrive. At last they will be able to work, feed their families, and live relatively normal lives.

Israel and Palestine share a common fate. All hope for a positive future (short of Christ's return) lies in both sides recognizing this fact. Once they realize that they both stand to gain more by peace than by war, everyone will want peace.

These themes, imperialism, divorce, and marriage are not the only themes in the Arab-Israeli conflict. I have found these perspectives helpful and they have served me very well. Hopefully they can be of use to you as well.

EDITOR'S CORNER

Christmas

by **Kory Plockmeyer**

The snow is falling, Christmas lights are hung, and the advent candles burn brightly each Sunday morning. Amidst the hustle and bustle of Christmas parties, snowstorms, and final exams, we affirm one solid truth: Christ is born!

As we wind down the semester and look ahead to the coming of the New Year, I pray that each and every day of our lives we would let the Christ candle shine brightly, for its light is the Light of the world. Christ is born, let the earth rejoice!

Even as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, let us never forget that the story does not end with the manger. Following the manger we look forward to the cross, the empty tomb, and ascension on the clouds, and, ultimately, the return in glory. As we gaze with joy on the manger, I pray that we will look beyond the nativity scene to the day when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Merry Christmas from the Kerux Staff!

ESSAY

Pass-Fail Grades and the CTS Community

by **Braden Kok**

After sitting through a semester of seminary, I feel seminary should be graded on a pass-fail system with exception to those who need grades to continue on with their academic studies. I am not writing this article because I am looking to slack off in school, instead I personally believe that going to a pass-fail system would

actually promote a better education.

This view is confirmed by looking at schools like Yale, which has had a pass-fail system for the law school since 1960. Stanford followed Yale's example and this academic year Harvard has made the switch to pass-fail. Harvard stated that the reason for their switch was to "promote pedagogical excellence and innovation and further strengthen the intellectual community" (The Harvard Crimson). We can see that several major schools have made the switch to promote an environment that will further a better education.

I also asked students what their thoughts were about a pass-fail system and got a wide variety of response. Those who were against a pass-fail system had a couple of common themes among their responses. They brought up the point about going on for more school and needing a grade to do so. I agree with them as I stated earlier. The other common theme was that they needed a grade to fulfill an inner desire they have for being told they are doing a good job. I understand people like to be rewarded for their work, but at the same time I would hope that by this point they are not learning only to get good grades.

One person responded that grades do not matter as much to him, but he is learning because he wants to be properly equipped for when he goes into ministry, not to have an 'A' on his fridge. This person went on to say there would be less stress if it was pass-fail. He would not feel the need to have to maintain a certain GPA in order to keep a scholarship, but instead he could focus on learning the material and how it applies to his future ministry.

Another person brought up how there already are differing views among professors. The student felt he can put in 30 minutes of work on a paper and then spend 5 hours on another paper and get the same grade from the same professor. Then he pointed out that some professors remind us that in the grand scheme of things, grades do not matter. A church is not going to hire someone over another because they are better at parsing Hebrew verbs. The student then asked if one person more qualified for ministry if they receive an 'A' instead of someone who receives a 'C'.

An argument I found interesting was that we should make the switch to pass-fail because there is a difference between studying to get an 'A' and studying to know the material. The student mentioned the dilemma she faces: is it more important to get the good grade to maintain the scholarship or should she learn the material in way that will be beneficial to them and their ministry?

I understand some people will say that a lettered system is our best way of measuring the education of students. I feel this is a system that is coming to pass, and more people are looking at other systems like pass-fail, which have promoted better academic success.

Some say that students would become lazy and less willing to do their studies, thus just coasting through seminary. To them I would say when we leave this place we are not going to have a grading scale that is going to hold us accountable in ministry. Someday, if we are not doing our job properly we will be let go. So I would hope the people who are in seminary today are motivated to learn not by grades, but by the desire to become more equipped to serve God in his kingdom.

ON THE TOWN

The Pita House: Sami's Gyros - A Review

by **Jonathan Moore**

On the corner of Wealthy Street and Ethel Avenue stands a small corner store called The Pita House: Sami's Gyros. When we first walked in I was struck by the crazy character of the place. It looks like a gas station and sub shop ran the stop sign on Ethel Ave and hit an ethnic grocery and old time diner driving east on Wealthy. But don't let that scare you off, or you'll miss the unique and fascinating nature of the place.

As we walk in the door, to my right is a huge gumball machine. We walk through a small group of teal booths and tables, past a couple rows of Middle Eastern groceries, and take a look at the huge menu that displayed on the wall. Hmm... the place is named after the guy, so it only makes sense to try Sami's Gyro. I walk up to the sneeze guard that protects all the toppings and place my order. Sami's brother, Basel, runs this location. He takes a huge knife, walks over to the slow roaster and slices off some stripes of lamb and beef. My wife orders the chicken gyro and pays for the meal, about \$7 a piece.

As we walk back to a booth I note the tan linoleum tiles on the floor, and the standard white drop ceiling. We take our seats in a booth by the window looking out on wealthy street and dig in. My gyro was amazing (and still is as I finish it later in this evening while I write the column...) and my wife enjoys hers as well.

While we eat we note the wall of glass doors encasing drinks like your average 7/11. But we also notice the huge jars and cans of olives, crushed sesame seeds, cuscus, and tahini. The place is uncrowded, and despite it's mishmash of appearance, the odd combination gives it a real sense of authenticity.

I hit the bathroom on the way out and notice a wall full of rewards, not the least of which is "The Gold Townie Award" for the best Middle Eastern/Greek food in Grand Rapids for the last 8 years and running. So it's not just my imagination, this gyro really is that good, mmm... as is the hummus. So, the next time you think about hitting up the nearest national sub chain, think local. Go to The Pita House and grab a gyro to go, or take up a seat in one of the old timer booths, but my wife would want me to warn you, bring a coat, the window seats are a little chilly.

<http://www.thepitahouse.net/>

1450 Wealthy Street
Grand Rapids, MI 49506

Hours:

Sunday 11am-7pm

Monday - Wednesday 10:30am-9pm

Thursday - Saturday 10:30am-2am

ON THE TOWN

New Moon: A Twilight Wasted

by **David Bosscher**

Honestly, I had expected mediocrity from this film, but I had no idea it could be this bad.

New Moon, the second film based on Stephenie Meyer's four-book Twilight series, picks up right where the first film left off with no recap whatsoever. The story begins with Bella Swan approaching her 18th birthday

and, after an unfortunate turn of events at her birthday party, her vampire boyfriend, Edward, decides it best to desert Bella for her own safety. Consequently, this leaves her to fall into despair and into the shirtless, muscle-bound arms of Jacob, an emo werewolf. What follows is less than compelling

Before getting into my take on this film, I would like to point out that I have no problem with romantic films and have enjoyed many. Romantic drama can be a very good thing. That having been said, this film was a cinematic abortion.

First off, the plot is slow and nonsensical. Very little actually happens, that which does happen is left without sufficient explanation, and anything potentially exciting in the story is hurried and unfulfilling. This created an odd combination of deep emotion into which the audience is supposed to be pulled and events that are only shown to us on a surface level. The result is a film that is both painful to observe and borderline self-parody. As if this weren't enough to ensure the audience's agony, the acting in New Moon is either atrocious or non-existent (I can't decide which). Not a single character was convincing on any level and I couldn't help but see Bella as a stoned version of Peppermint Patty from the Peanuts comics.

The only conclusion I can draw from this is that those responsible for New Moon must despise moviegoers. Read the book if you must, but avoid this film at all costs; your eyes and ears will thank you.

RECIPE

Pumpkin Muffins with Chocolate Chips

from the kitchen of Sara Bosscher

Makes: 12-15ish muffins

2 eggs
1 c. canned pumpkin
1/4 c. vegetable oil
1/4 c. applesauce (or another 1/4 c. oil)
1-1/2 c. flour
scant 1 c. white sugar
1 t. baking soda
1 t. baking powder
1/4-1/2 t. salt
1/2 t. ground cinnamon
1/4 t. ground nutmeg
1 c. chocolate chips

- 1) Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line muffin tin with paper liners or spray.
- 2) In large bowl beat wet ingredients well with an electric mixer.
- 3) In another bowl combine dry ingredients (except chocolate chips). Gradually mix the dry into the wet with mixer.
- 4) Fold in chocolate chips and spoon into muffin cups, a little more than 3/4 full.
- 5) Bake 20-25 minutes until tops are springy (my oven does 23 minutes). Cool on wire rack.

RECIPE

Traditional Christmas Cookies

from the kitchen of Sara Bosscher

1 c. butter, softened
1 ½ c. white sugar
2 eggs
2 t. vanilla
3 c. flour
1 slightly heaping t. baking powder
½ t. salt
frosting: 1 c. powdered sugar, 2 T. hot water

- 1) Cream butter and sugar. Beat in eggs and vanilla.
- 2) Mix flour, baking powder, and salt. Add to wet mixture.
- 3) In covered bowl or plastic wrap, let the dough set a couple hours or overnight.

- 4) Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Grease cookie sheet(s).
- 5) Sprinkle a little flour on the counter and with a rolling pin flatten dough to 1/4-1/2 inch thick. If it is too hard to roll out easily, set it in front of a heating vent or on top of a warm oven for 15 minutes.
- 6) Cut out with cookie cutters. Bake 8 minutes or until edges of cookies are barely brown.
- 7) Cool on wax paper or wire rack.
- 8) While cooling, mix together the frosting in a small bowl. You can add food coloring to smaller amounts or just drizzle with plain white.

RECIPE

Walnut Pumpkin Pie

from the kitchen of Micah Schuurman

1 graham cracker pie crust
1 (15oz) can pumpkin
1 (14oz) can sweetened condensed milk
1 egg
1 1/4 tsp cinnamon (divided--part in filling and part on top)
1/2 tsp each ginger, nutmeg, and salt
1/4 cup packed brown sugar
2 Tbsp flour
2 Tbsp butter or margarine
3/4 cup walnuts

Heat oven to 425 degrees. In mixing bowl, combine pumpkin, sweetened condensed milk, egg, and 3/4 tsp cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and salt; mix well. Turn into pie crust. Bake 15 min. During this 15 min, in small bowl combine sugar, flour and 1/2 tsp cinnamon; cut in margarine until crumbly. Remove pie after 15 min and reduce oven temperature to 350. Sprinkle walnut mixture evenly over pie. Bake 40-50 min until knife inserted 1 inch from edge comes out clean. Cool. Enjoy!!!

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