



Clarion

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Is Doubt Good?

By J. Geertsema

Doubting the truths of the Bible is seen as normal these days. One can read this in books and articles. Doubt and not-believing (the next step) are considered fully human in a time in which people no longer believe that anyone can know the truth. Thomas, one of the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, often serves as example of this human phenomenon of doubt. One can doubt the factual truths of the Word of God, for Thomas doubted the fact of the resurrection. Can doubting the truths of God's Word be good? Can one use the doubt and non-believing of Thomas as an example to defend our doubting? The answer to both questions has to be negative.

We shall first deal with the story in the Gospel of John where Thomas' doubting is mentioned. It will then become clear why we are not allowed to make use of Thomas' doubt to defend our doubt, and why doubting is sinful and wrong.

To begin with, in John 20:24-29 the apostle speaks about Thomas who did not want to believe that Christ Jesus had risen from the dead on the basis of the testimony of the other disciples. Thomas wanted to see with his own eyes.

However, we do not have here as such the story of "The doubt of Thomas." This would be a wrong title. In the immediately following verses, 30 and 31, the apostle John tells us that "Christ did many other signs in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book," that is, in his Gospel, "but," he says, "these things are written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, by believing, you may have life in His name." In other words, what John wrote about was the great works of Christ Jesus while on earth. Also in this little story in which Thomas with his disbelief has a place, John speaks about the work of Christ in the presence of His apostles. Christ is busy working the work of God. Here we have the story about Christ convincing Thomas of the truth, the true facts, concerning His resurrection in glorious newness. Christ did this and John wrote about it in order that we may believe. Let us give this story a closer look.

In the early evening of the day of His resurrection, Christ had appeared in the midst of the disciples while Thomas, presented here as one of the Twelve, was not present. The other disciples told him: "We have seen the Lord." This implied that He rose from the dead and was alive. Thomas reacted with stubborn unbelief. He did not want to be convinced by the testimony of the others. He wanted to see for himself, and not just see, but also touch and feel the

marks of the wounds. It had to be absolutely clear to him that what the others had seen was not a vision, not a spirit, or something of that nature. For how is it possible that a real person, with a true physical body that can be seen and touched, can be in a room one moment and can be gone the next moment? How is it possible that a real person of flesh and bones can just appear and disappear while all the doors are locked? To Thomas it sounded very much like the others had seen a vision or a spirit.

On the first day of the next week, the disciples were again in the house. This time Thomas was with them. Again the Lord Jesus entered while the doors were locked and suddenly He stood in their midst and said: "Peace to you." Immediately after this salutation of peace (this is the impression which the text gives) Christ came to Thomas with the message of peace, and thus with the peace itself. The purpose is clear: Thomas had to be convinced. Thomas had to believe in Christ Jesus as the risen One.

To reach that goal, the Lord said to Thomas: "Put your finger here, and see my hands." Thomas had said to the other disciples: "If I do not see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, I will not believe." Seeing was not enough. It had to be accompanied by touching and feeling the mark. In answer to this demand of Thomas, the Lord now told him to do exactly those things, though in a reverse order. Perhaps, the touching came first as the most important, most convincing proof. Thomas had said also: "And (if I do not) place my hand in His side, I will not believe." So Christ told him: "And come with your hand and put it in my side." Thomas had to feel also the scar of the wound made by the sword where it had pierced Christ's side. This touching and seeing was to prove that Christ Jesus was fully physically present and was the very same Lord Jesus who had been nailed to the cross and pierced with the sword. "And," so the Lord added, "do not be non-believing, but be believing."

We see here, in the first place, the intense loving care of Christ Jesus for Thomas, full of undeserved grace. There is some rebuke in what Christ does and says, but the rebuke is very mild. It is just as mild and forbearing and forgiving as with the others. Why was it so mild? This was because of the situation being so shortly after the death of Christ, when the disciples were still ignorant about the teaching of the Scriptures regarding Christ's death and resurrection.

In the second place, we notice here a difference with the way in which Christ dealt with the two men on the way

to Emmaus (Luke 24). The eyes of these two men were kept from recognizing the risen Lord. Christ first taught them how the Scriptures clearly spoke of the suffering and death and of the rising of the Messiah. In other words, before the two men of Emmaus could see and recognize the Lord with their physical eyes, they had to correctly know the prophetic teaching of the Scriptures. For them it was: first believe the Scriptures and then see and recognize. With Thomas it is the other way: first touch and see, and then believe. Why was there this difference in the way of working faith?

The answer is in v. 24. It says there that Thomas was one of the Twelve, one of the apostles. These apostles were chosen to be the eye and ear witnesses of all that Christ Jesus had done and spoken when on earth, and so to be the foundation of the church. This is clear, for instance, from the requirements as stated in Acts 1:21-22 for the election of an apostle in the place of Judas. As with the others Thomas had to be one who touched and saw and heard the Lord before and after His death and resurrection. The apostle John writes in his first epistle (1John 1:1) that he and the other apostles proclaimed "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands. . . ." Therefore, in bringing Thomas to faith through making him touch and see, Christ was busy with securing the firm foundation on which His church had to be built. There should not be a crack in this foundation. Christ could not allow one of the apostles, one of the eye and ear and hand witnesses, to deny the testimony of the others. This would totally undermine the witness of the others. Imagine that ten proclaimed: He died for our sins and He rose for our justification, and that one would go against that and proclaim: it is not true, it is a fantasy, a hallucination. If this had been the case, all modern critical unbelief would have had a basis in Thomas' critical counter-testimony.

However, Christ took care of things. He revealed Himself as the risen One also to Thomas. Thus the testimony of the eye and ear and hand witnesses was made unanimous. We see the first result of this work of self-revelation of Christ in Thomas' testimony, spoken in worship: "My Lord and my God." Hav-

ing seen and touched, he believed that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord, and that He is the eternal Son of God. Christ's resurrection is the clear proof that all that Christ had revealed and said before His death was true, completely true.

From all this it is evident that we cannot, on good grounds, compare our doubt today with the doubt of Thomas. Thomas was an apostle. He was and had to be eye and ear and hand witness of what Christ Jesus said and did. When Thomas did not believe, it was just after the death of Christ. Besides, Thomas did not doubt God's Word; he was ignorant about its meaning. Our situation is totally different. We live almost twenty centuries later. We have the whole Bible and in it both the Old Testament prophecy as well as the New Testament fulfillment presented to us in the unanimous testimony of all the apostolic hand and eye and ear witnesses.

This leads us to the second result of Christ's work here. Thomas' testimony: "My Lord and my God" is now basis for the faith of the church of all ages. It is the basis for the faith of all those who do not see with their eyes and touch with their hands, but yet believe because the Scriptures of both Testaments testify, and in them also

Thomas testifies: Jesus has risen. Therefore, He is Lord and God. He is truly the Saviour.

Thus we see in this text that the living Christ, according to the testimony of an eye and ear and hand witness, took care that the testimony about Him as the One who died as a payment, a ransom, for sin and who rose from the dead for our justification and sanctification would be unanimous. The foundation for His church does not show any cracks. Therefore, after this care and work of Christ, doubt regarding the factuality of His death and resurrection, and per consequence, of all that Christ spoke and did, may be human, even common, in an unbelieving environment, but must be characterized as sinful disobedience. The same is true with regard to non-believing. Certainly, the Lord will forgive also these sins, when we repent. However, we cannot call doubting what the Lord tells us in the Gospels through the eye and ear witnesses a good thing. Doubting and non-believing is an offense to Christ. Faith, God's work of grace, meets with a beatitude of Christ; "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." Blessed are those who believe also the testimony of Thomas as this was worked by the Lord Himself. **C**



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**Conference on
Reformed Ecumenical Action
April 3, 1993
Calgary, AB**

Federation of Confessionally United Churches

By J.D. Wielenga

"Scripture, Confession, History and the urgency of our own day and age require confessionally united churches to federate." Address this in 20 minutes. A tall order, and little time. We must not waste it. Yet I must begin with expressing appreciation for the initiative of the Independent Reformed churches to bring us together today to address this issue, and appreciation for formulating it in such a positive way: "Scripture, Confession, History and our time require federation." May this first province-wide contact be the first hesitant step to lead to confederation, for I am convinced, to turn to the topic, that Scripture does require it.

Scripture

To get the church into focus, do not look at people, but look at God. The church is: God at work. See, visualize, the Son of God gathering a people, from the beginning of the world, today, and on until the end. God at work on earth, gathering a people, one people, one church, and this church is one. John 10: one Shepherd gathering one flock; Eph.2: building a temple, one; Rev. 7: one multitude that no one can count, from all tribes and peoples and languages and nations, gathered out of the great tribulation by the Lamb before the throne of God; 1 Peter 2: a holy nation, one, among the many nations of this world, in which all take along their ethnic, cultural and historical distinctives; Eph. 2:14, 15: concerning the most distinct groups there were, Jews and Gentiles: God broke down the dividing wall between them to create them "into one new man." You hear

that? The church: one man, or with Rev. 12: one woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, God's new humanity, or with Gal. 6:16: the Israel of God, one people, like Rom. 11:17 speaks of the church of O.T. and N.T. as the one olive tree, to which all believers in Jesus Christ of all times belong, that one great multitude, together Christ's body, Eph. 1:22,23: the church which is His body. One body.

The church, that is: God at work in Jesus Christ, creating into one, uniting, reconciling that which got separated by sin and devil. When God created mankind on earth, Genesis 5:1 says this: "male and female created He them, and He named them (plural, two) Man (singular, one)." Man, a two-oneness, for God is one, a three-oneness. God is love, oneness, unity, reconciliation of broken oneness.¹

A second aspect: how does this church, this one man, one flock, one multitude, one Israel of God, appear concretely in the visible reality of history. Well, that one multitude of Rev. 7 appears in Rev. 1 as seven independent individual lampstands, bound together by Christ walking in the midst of them, and as seven independent individual stars in His right hand (good exegesis identifies the 7 stars also as the seven churches of Asia Minor²). Note the togetherness of those local churches: a cluster of stars. Not seven hands of Christ with in each hand a star, but seven stars together in one hand. The one hand binds them together, like one foundation binds them together, Eph. 2:20: the foundation of the apostles and their word. Thousand local churches,

all built on one and the same foundation, the apostolic doctrine, as such bound together by that foundation. Indeed, "confessionally united!"

Each local church is a complete church, a star, a lampstand, the body of Christ, but it is not the whole church, not the total body. Each local church is a complete church, by virtue of its relationship to Christ, the only Bishop, and by virtue of its relationship to the apostles and their teachings, the Word of Christ. But precisely this direct relationship to Christ and His apostles makes each complete local church one with other local churches, all over the world; together stars in one hand, together in one circle of lampstands, together on one and the same foundation. In other words: God gathers His one church, His one flock, as local churches, organized under the presbyterium, the council, the assembly of the elders. In those individual local churches He gathers His one flock. The oneness of the flock is not broken or diminished when it is gathered in local independent churches. Therefore, these local churches will honour the oneness of the universal flock by acknowledging their bond together, their unity. Local churches are not called to create unity among themselves, but to *express and manifest* their *given* unity, created by Christ. Christ bound them together by His right hand, on His one apostolic foundation. It is an essential part of the apostles' teaching that churches, given to one another by Christ, must receive one another. Finding one another in the same one circle of lampstands, on the same one foundation, they must shake the hand

of communion (*koinonia*), thus acknowledging the oneness of the one flock, and they must join hands to cooperate together (*and that is to federate*) to help one another that all remain under the Word of Christ, that none slip from the one foundation, or disappear from the circle of lampstands, and support one another, for instance in financial needs, and in order to maintain unity in doctrine and in liturgy, all to preserve the unity of the one church of God, and to promote it. They were made to understand that what was true in the local body also applied to the total body of Christ, namely that the hand cannot say to the foot: I do not need you, and that the love of God in Christ which obligated them to use in self-denying and sacrificial love their gift for the upbuilding of the local body, obligated them to the same for the total body.

The N.T. shows that the local churches did recognize their common bond and unity in Christ. They joined the hand of communion and cooperation, cf. 1 Cor. 16.1; Rom. 15,26; Gal. 2,9.10; 2 Cor. 8,4.³ There was even regionally defined cooperation between them (Rom. 15,26), and they appointed together deputies for certain church-work which they had in common (2 Cor. 8,19,23). We must not say: we do not have to federate as confessionally united churches, for there is not a trace of federation in the N.T. with classes and synods and all; we may be free to do it, but it is not a divine ordinance. But this reasoning is more biblicalistic than biblical. It ignores that the N.T. shows us the local churches in communion and cooperation, all over their world, as a federation. No, you don't read the term, and you don't see our form, but you do read the reality. It was federation "avant la lettre" (Kamp-huis)⁴. When after the apostolic era, in the second century, when the apostles had gone, and in response to the circumstances of the time, the need arose for a more structured organization of the communion and cooperation of all the churches, the churches did not something new, but they simply continued in the line in which the apostles themselves had guided them. And the Lord has blessed that very much (Nicea, Chalcedon), although the way the churches went about it we call from our vantage point flawed, too hierarchical, too much clergy-dominated.

Some say: confessionally united churches are free to federate, the Bible

does not forbid it, and therefore they are also free to de-federate again if they so choose. The truth in this statement is that no church can ever be compelled to federate, it always is voluntary. But it is voluntary because it is a matter of love, not because it is not an obligation. Love is choosing in freedom, but love does obligate. The church exists by the love of God and consists of people who operate by the love of God poured out into them by the Spirit, love with its functions of faithfulness and self-denial and sacrifice. The church, that is: God at work, love at work, uniting and reconciling what got separated. No wonder there is no trace in the Bible of denominationalism, of churches picking and choosing with which churches to have communion and to cooperate for which purposes and for which not, along lines of particular distinctives. No trace of a federation for circumcising Jewish churches, next to a federation of non-circumcising Gentile churches, next to a federation of Apollos-minded churches, next to Peter-minded churches, with possible cross-denominational fellowships, shaking hands across the fence, but not working together in the same yard, for we are too different: better good neighbours than fighting brothers, more peace, more harmony, more ease. The tendencies of course were there, but they were vehemently opposed, Acts 15; 1 Cor. 11,19. Of course opposed, for denominationalism is obstruction of God's church-gathering work, characterized by abolishing walls of separation, gathering separated people into one new man. Denominationalism is *erecting* walls of separation. It is turning the church into a zoo where high fences keep natural enemies apart and maintain peace for all. Fences between churches allow us to speak civilly to one another over the fence, and occasionally work with them in some limited ways (John M. Frame)⁵. Better good neighbours across the fence, cross-denominational fellowship, than fighting family-members in the same yard.

To see the church, you have to focus on God, not on people. The church is God at work, love at work, working faith that works through love. The church, that is God turning the old zoo of separated wild animals into a fold of one united flock of sheep, His one new man, the new humanity. That is His might. That is His glory. Must we not seek His glory?

But, someone says, what is the gain for God if some of our churches and a segment of our membership refuse to unite? Then we create only one more split, one more denomination! They must learn from 1 Cor. 11:19, and understand that preserving unity with obstructionists of God's work cannot have priority over manifesting unity with promoters of God's work.

We must be honest, before God, and before one another. If confessionally united churches cannot manifest and organize their unity by federating, they must not say: there is no scriptural obligation, we are free to do it and free not to do it, and if we do it we are free again to undo it. They must say instead: there is a scriptural obligation, for there is the obligation of love. But we lack the love, we lack the faith that works through love. We cannot do it because we cannot deny ourselves and bring sacrifices. But if that is what we have to say, then the Bible says what Christ said to that one star in His hand: repent, you have abandoned the love you had at first, and you are in danger of losing your place among the other lampstands.

What does love require? It requires that confessionally united churches welcome one another with their non-confessional distinctives and idiosyncrasies and do not bind one another to them, although they will become subject of ongoing discussion, for we want to learn from one another and to be corrected by one another. They will understand that issues which do not scripturally warrant to *break* with a church or a federation, can never be lawful obstacles to *unite* with a church or a federation.⁶

Confession

Secondly, the common Reformed Confession requires federation. Briefly, Canons of Dort ch. II, par. 9: "... in due time the elect will be gathered into one, and there will always be a church of believers founded on the blood of Christ." There you have it: God at work, His sacrificial love in Christ gathering people into one, His Church, the House of love, on whose source (the blood of Christ) that house is founded.

Lord's Day 21 calls this same church the communion of saints in which believers all and every one are duty-bound (obligated by love) to use his gifts readily and cheerfully (voluntarily, not forced) for the benefit and well-being of the other members. Denominationalism and congregationalism obstruct this

duty. I cannot help my brother in another denomination if injustice is done to him. In the federation I can, via the major assemblies and church-visitors, for instance.

Art. 27,28 B.C. with the confessed ordinance of God that the individual believer must maintain the unity of the one church of God by joining the local church. He must not remain on his own. If it is an ordinance of God for the *individual* believer to maintain the unity of the church by not remaining on his own, it is of course also an ordinance for *all believers together* to maintain the unity of the church, through their local churches which then must not remain on their own. And that is how it was understood by the churches.

Art. 31 B.C. assumes the federation when it states that ministers of the Word in whatever place they are have equal power and authority for they are all servants of Christ the only universal Bishop and Head of the Church. The possibility for lording it over one another only occurs within a federation union.

Art. 32 gives principles for establishing a certain order to maintain the body of the Church, the local body and the total body. A church-order, to promote and preserve unity and harmony and to keep all in obedience to God. The article warns not to order and regulate too much, like it is good not to confess too much, in order not to put undue stress on the unity of the church by binding the consciences where Scripture does not bind.⁷

History

Historically, churches which adopted this or similar Confessions, naturally developed Church Orders for living together in a federation, Church Orders which reflected what they confessed about the church. Every church order is a reflection of someone's ecclesiology. Church Order is confessed ecclesiology translated into rules of law.⁸ A Reformed Church Order therefore will always be anti-hierarchic, for we confess the independence of the local church as a complete church under Christ and the council of elders. And it is anti-independentistic, for we confess in the local churches the oneness of the one Church of God. A Reformed Church Order then will recognize the necessity of major assemblies in which the churches help one another and cooperate to maintain good order in the body of the church, the local and the total body, in the sense as confessed in

Art. 32 B.C. No wonder the Armenians fought tooth and nail to prevent the convening of a synod which they rightly feared would drive out their heresy for the sake of maintaining the integrity of the apostolic doctrine, the one foundation on which alone the church is one and united.

In 1558 the leaders of the unfederated Reformed churches in France met together and expressed their conviction that the greatest problems would arise, dividedness in doctrine as well as in discipline, if the churches would not be bound together under a common order and church-polity. The next year, 1559 they federated on the same Confession under a common Church Order.⁹

Even Congregationalists with their emphasis on the independence of the local congregation, acknowledged in New England, in 1648, in their Cambridge Platform, that all churches ought to have fellowship with one another and that synods are necessary whose decisions the churches are duty-bound to accept as binding if they were "consonant to the Word of God." It is regrettable that they failed to stipulate the annual or biennial regularity of synods. Their leading men, Thomas Hooker, John Eliot, warned their churches saying: "we must settle the consociation of churches or else we are undone and utterly lost."¹⁰ In vain. No regular synods were held and the congregational churches slid into dominocracy, every local minister like the minister of the local church at

Rome, a pope. We must learn from history, positively and negatively.

Our time

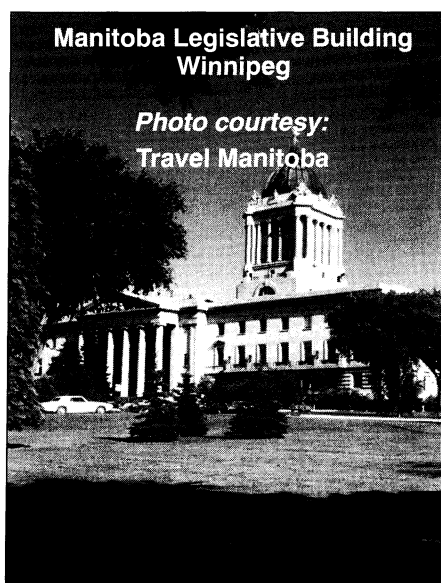
As to the fourth aspect, the urgency of our day and age to federate, this urgency is not different from the urgency the church felt after the apostolic era to organize their existing bond into a stronger structured federation, in order to manifest itself among the many nations as God's holy nation, to be able to effectively preserve the unity and the holiness of the body of the church against divisive power-struggles and against rising heresies. We may frown on the form of their "consociation," but surely, apart from it the church would have become "utterly undone," as all know who know the history.

A special feature of our day and age is that the world looks more and more like what it is by nature: a zoo of wild animals, natural enemies. All and everybody insist on their distinctives and thus their incompatibility to live together in peace and harmony: tribal wars, ethnic cleansings, language barriers, multi-culturalism (the undoing of Canada), marriage – and family breakdowns, feminism and male-chauvinism, you name it. The churches loose credibility and come across as hypocritical if they loudly lament and publicly prophesy against the world, while they themselves consociate only with churches of common distinctives, and feel incompatible to federate with churches of different distinctives. The urgency of our day and age require federation of confessionally united churches for the sake of the credibility of the gospel of the Kingdom, that this world may know (John 17, 21,23) that the Father sent the Son and set to work to gather into one, into one new man, the different and distinct warring tribes and peoples and languages. Federation is required that the world may know the power and the glory of the love of God in Jesus Christ, at work in the world.

Conclusion

Confessionally united churches are called to federate. They need not first negotiate their non-confessional distinctives and differences to see if they are compatible to live together in one federation, but the only thing left for them to do is to negotiate a mutually agreeable Church Order, based on their common confession about the church. They should not fear that in their united church the differences and distinc-

OUR COVER



tives are bound to threaten and disturb the harmony and unity, for they have in their Church Order the means in place to deal with them. That is what the fathers of Secession and Doleantie said to those who, before union, first wanted to deal with certain Kuyperian distinctives which they did not like. And the obedience of the fathers who united in 1892 was blessed by the Lord with the Synod of 1905 where the differences were resolved, at the proper place: *in* the church; by the proper means: the assemblies.

Churches considering federation must not ask: do we like one another, are we *alike* one another, compatible enough? They must ask, instead: do we have the *faith* that works through love, faithful, self-denying, sacrificial love, which is directly from God, and available through His Spirit whom He promised.

Seven stars in the right hand of Christ: they joined the hand of com-

munion and cooperation, not because they liked one another and were so much alike one another (in sin, most were), but they joined because they were bound together by the one hand of the Master: confessionally united. They only had to *let be* what was.

¹Dr. J. van Bruggen, *Emancipatie en Bijbel*, pp. 54, 55.

²Dr. J. van Bruggen, *Ambten in de Apostolische Kerk*, pp. 105,106.6

³Convincingly shown from these and other texts by J. Kamphuis in his excellent essay "Roeping en Recht tot Oefening van Kerkverband," in *Verkenningen III*, pp. 59-130, especially 102-126. Published by Oost-erbaan & Le Cointre, Goes.

⁴J. Kamphuis, *Verkenningen*, p. 69.

⁵John M. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion*, Baker Bookhouse, 1991, p. 58.

⁶Dr. M. te Velde, article in *De Reformatie*, Vol. 68:3, October 17, 1992.

⁷Rev. R. ter Beek gives a fine characterization of the Liberation of 1944, in *De Reformatie*, March 1992 (transl.): "The issue in the 'Liberation' was to be Reformed, to live

and to teach according to the Three Forms of Unity. The Synod forced you to conform to a teaching which was not with so many words to be found back in the Confession itself. You had to subscribe to a controversial interpretation of the Confession. The liberation from this extra binding was experienced as a liberation. We returned to the breadth of the Reformed Confession. That is a roomy and light house. There was at that time also an ecumenical outreach (April 1946, "to all Reformed confessors. . ."). Throughout subsequent history there were also warnings against new narrowness and new bindings."

⁸Dr. G.D.J. Dingemans, "Kerkorde als ecclesiologische vormgeving," in *Inleiding tot de studie van het Kerkrecht*, Kok, Kampen, p. 207.

⁹Dr. W. van 't Spijker, ". . . den hals buigende onder het jock Jesu Christi. . .," in *Bezielde Verband*, Van den Berg, Kampen, 1984, p. 219.

¹⁰Dr. D. Deddens, "Synoden bij Robert Parker en in de congregationalistische Kerkorden van 1648 en 1658," in *Bezielde Verband*, Van den Berg, Kampen, 1984, p.56.



NEWS MEDLEY

By W.W.J. VanOene



Oh, Oh! Did I ever get into hot water! I have been praising the sisters of Lincoln for their faithfulness and diligence in cutting UPC coupons and collecting so much money by means of that activity, and now it appears that I have thereby slighted the sisters of other congregations. At the back of one of the *Family Post* the following note was written:

"Several 'news medleys' ago I read that the Lincoln 'Cash for Trash' ladies were not sitting idle. Please be informed that the 'Cash for Trash' Committee consists of members of the Niagara Peninsula Churches. Also the 'Pie Bake' proceeds went to the John Calvin School (in Smithville). It also was an effort of all *four* churches to raise money. I wish you all the best and look forward to your next news medley. (Mrs.) UPC Snipper."

Undoubtedly our sister looked forward to the next medley because she expects to see therein a correction of the serious injustice done. (I'll be humble!), and hereby the correction has been made and humble apologies offered hereby. At least, I got a few copies of the *Family Post* out of the deal.

You know what? For a punishment and to achieve reconciliation with our sisters I shall send them an envelope with the UPC coupons that we have been cutting out for quite a few months. We always cut them out ourselves and all our diligent sisters have to do is sort them. It is little trouble to do it every time, and it saves our sisters quite some time, although they don't mind to come together for a chat and a cup of coffee, I'm sure.

There is another point at which I received a phone call pointing out what was perceived to be a serious mistake. In my response to Dr. Theodore Plantinga I used the term "to adjourn" in connection with general synods. A brother phoned me about this and stated that thereby I basically undermined all that I wrote about the temporary nature of synods. "To adjourn," he stated, means that the very same assembly comes together again at another time. It means only, he asserted, that the "business" is interrupted to be continued at another opportunity.

As in all those instances which concern the use of terms, so this time I consulted my good old friend Daniel Webster. He seldom failed me in the past, so I approached him with

confidence that he would judge impartially. "Adjourn," he said, is "To cease activity for a time or finally; to close or suspend a legislative session or any formal meeting; to put off until another time."

It comforted me greatly that, according to him, "to adjourn" also means "to cease activity finally." I was not all that far out, was I? But seeing that the term could cause confusion, I shall avoid using it in connection with broader assemblies.

And now that we are busy with all sorts of questions anyway, we may as well pay attention to a letter received from the Rev. Hofford in connection with what I wrote in the previous news medley regarding Laurel's letter (and now I quote again from Lynden's consistory report) "re: the feasibility of establishing a classical resort in the United States of America." Rev. Hofford wrote me that I commented on this letter "in a way that reflects you did not have complete information." He enclosed a copy of the letter in his reaction to me.

In the first place, when I quote from bulletins I definitely do not have "complete information," for usually I have no access to letters sent to consistories. But when I quote, I trust that the consistories did present matters correctly and that I can go by their rendition of events or suggestions.

I do not know whether I am at liberty to insert the whole letter here. It would not be necessary either to do so. Let me confine myself to a few lines. It was addressed to "The Consistory at Denver." "We are writing to each of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the U.S., plus the American Reformed Church at Denver, to suggest a meeting of representatives from each of our churches. This idea was suggested to us by one of the elders of Denver some time ago. Furthermore, the official church visitors to Laurel suggested that we (American Churches) begin to think about our own classis and, eventually, federation."

In view of this, I do not think that this does "enable you to correct the allegation that it was our intention, 'in this manner to incorporate Denver.'" I am still convinced that in light of the decision by our latest general synod and the decisions by the latest Classis Alberta/Manitoba, Denver should not have been included, but that the result of the investigations going on should have been awaited first. The request, however, appears to have come from Denver and Denver is included in the whole endeavour the letter deals with. I fail to see that I made any unsubstantiated allegation that should be corrected. By the way, it is incorrect to speak of "Canadian Reformed Churches in the U.S." The American Reformed Churches temporarily "live in with" the federation of the Canadian Reformed Churches, but are and remain American Reformed Churches. We should use the correct terms.

Speaking of correct terms, a few months ago one of my best friends sent me a page from a regional *Church News* ("Kerkblad") appearing in the Netherlands. In reports of classes we read of "meeting of classis," and we read of "adoption of minutes of the previous meeting of classis." Because my reply to Dr. Plantinga was already in Winnipeg at that moment, I did not react to it any further. Since then, however, I paid some more attention to short reports I found in Dutch publications, and to my horror I discovered that there they also "adopt" the Acts of Particular Synods at the following Particular Synod! How un-Reformed, besides being practically impossible, for perhaps only a few of the members of such a synod were also members of the previous one. How in the world (or in the church) can they

judge whether these Acts are a correct rendering of the proceedings?

Even so I might not have commented on this if not something else had drawn my attention and caused some astonishment. I think that our Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad should pay attention to this and raise a warning voice when members of this committee attend the general synod of our Netherlands sister churches.

Under the heading "Divorce Must Be Mentioned in An Attestation" the press passed on a proposal to general synod by the latest Particular Synod of South Holland: "If a divorce took place, this must be mentioned in an attestation of departing church members, unless, in the judgment of the consistory, an eventual subsequent marriage is permitted on the ground of God's Word." We were further informed that "With one vote against this synod decided to propose to the forthcoming general synod to decide upon making this a rule."

A *general synod* making rules about what a *consistory* must mention in an attestation concerning a departing member? If you ask me, this would be sheer hierarchy.

It is a sad thing that the question of divorce comes up more and more frequently, also among us and among our sister churches. But it is totally out of line if a general synod should make a ruling on what must be mentioned in an attestation, which is a testimony concerning someone's doctrine and conduct. I hope not that the gain our sister churches reaped from the Liberation is gradually eroded and that more and more matters are drawn within an alleged jurisdiction of a general synod or broader assemblies in general. We could predict the outcome of such development with 100% accuracy.

Well, it is time that we deal with news from the churches, isn't it?

"The overture to divide into three Classes was not adopted," we read in the bulletin of Burlington South. That is too bad, I would say. The twenty-five churches of Ontario and the Eastern United States could easily be divided into three areas, each with eight churches. Then you get a classis of sixteen members (one with eighteen), and this is a sufficiently large number in my opinion.

When I read "The meeting is opened with singing Hymn 38:1,2, and reading from 1 Tim.3, after which the chairman opened with prayer," I ask: "Is this not what people call 'kicking in an open door'?" Or did someone close it again after the first opening?

Let's jump to Australia for a minute. Armadale reported receiving a "Letter from a brother in connection with smoking of consistory members. Brother will be answered in due time." When? When the smoking is completed? Or did they get help from Byford, that reported having sent a letter to "Albany Mission Committee accepting invitation to hose annual meeting of cooperating churches"?

Hurry back to Canada before we get burned or soaked. The bulletin of the Rehoboth Church (or should I say, as many consistories still do: "Of the Rehoboth Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington West"?) stated "The Bible course . . . is doing quite well. The ad which ran in February of 1993 has elicited another seven responses. This brings the total response to well over two hundred since the course was made available." Reason for thankfulness. Just sow the seed; the Day will reveal the fruit.

Sometimes, when never anything is mentioned of a specific congregation, members start waking up and come to the conclusion that this proves that I do not receive the bul-

letins. They are right. That's one of the reasons why the only thing I ever mentioned about the church at Ancaster (pardon me: "the Canadian Reformed Church at Ancaster") was taken from a neighbouring bulletin. Now, however, I received some information which prompts me to make up for some lost opportunities. One close to me knew that I would love to pass on that the plans to have a church building of their own have come much closer to realization.

Our readers may recall that a member donated some property, but that it seemed almost impossible to sever it and make it available for building purposes. "Numerous difficulties with building site severance and related proceedings caused indefinite postponement of a building start. We are pleased to report at this time that the major obstacles have all been removed and the severance has been achieved."

The four years of waiting gave the brothers an opportunity to view the growth of the congregation and to estimate future development. This resulted in changes to the original plans. Some difficulties have become greater in the course of these years, other fruits of the delay are positive. Now it is expected that the auditorium (we have no "sanctuaries" any more!) will provide seating accommodation for 450 people and that the Lord's Supper table "will seat approximately 40 people without loss of regular seating."

Estimated total cost? One million ninety-eight thousand dollars.

As I am informed further, so I will inform our readers.

From Rockway's church (excuse me: the Canadian Reformed Church at Rockway) we learn something about the latest Classis Ontario South. "We spent, it seems, hours trying to deal with appeals from people in A. who at one time were members of the church there; someone used the expression 'rule or ruin' to describe the attitude of the appeals."

I am still wondering why it was decided to deal with "appeals" from people who broke with the church. They have forfeited their right even to be heard, let alone that the time, money, and energy of churches and delegates from churches should be used on what they have to say. When one breaks with the church he thereby loses the right even to be heard, for, I repeat, there is never any valid reason for breaking with the church. Only in case someone has been excommunicated can I see justification for listening to and dealing with ONE appeal in the case. That's all. I am convinced that the churches owe it to themselves to eliminate any threat to a responsible use of time and resources.

In some churches it is still customary to have a brief message before the celebration of the Lord's Supper. I found some interesting remarks about that in the London bulletin, *The Pilgrim's Voice*. Rev. Ludwig wrote the following.

"We have decided to omit the 'sermonette' preceding the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the morning service. This is not so that your minister can be relieved of four sermonettes per year. The truth of the matter is that I would much rather make (=prepare, VO) a full sermon than a ten-minute speech. I just sink my teeth into a text and then I have to stop! Besides, 'Sermonettes are for Christianettes.'

"The real reason, however, for omitting the sermonette is that the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper acts as the sermon. . . . It has an introduction, explanation, application, conclusion, and all the other essential parts of a sermon. Secondly, from a liturgical point of view it is neither beautiful nor practical to have two speeches dealing with the same topic in one service."

Herewith we leave Ontario and move to Manitoba.

60TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

MR. and MRS. J. JONGS



Jacob and Henderikje Jongs (Venhuizen) hope to celebrate, the Lord willing, their 60th Wedding Anniversary on May 18, 1993.

Mom and Dad were married in Winsum Holland. They immigrated to Canada in 1951 with their 9 children. First to Coaldale, Alberta, where they worked in the sugar beets. Three years later they moved to B.C. where they started farming. Mom and Dad are living in Cloverdale. The Lord has blessed them in many ways.

May He continue to be with them.

Home address
17829 59 Avenue
Surrey, BC V3S 1P6

In Winnipeg "A congregational meeting was held at which we discussed the buying of a plot of land in South Transcona. After the consistory had deliberated on what was brought forward by the congregation, it decided to continue with the buy." I hope that it is a "buy" indeed. Total area? Five acres.

Taber's troubles (or, for the last time, should I say: the Canadian Reformed Church at Taber? Don't you see how silly it is to use that full expression all the time?) with finding or not finding a suitable meeting place are not yet over. "Because of lack of success in finding alternate suitable facilities for the worship services we will continue to meet at Parkside Manor."

The town of Taber rejected the offer the church made on a property and "came with a counter-offer of \$333,000.00 plus GST. It is decided to leave the matter for now in order to obtain more information."

Before we leave Alberta for British Columbia we have to pay some attention to Rev. R. Schouten's "State of the Church Address," given in February at the congregational meeting. From this "Address" it appears that the church at Calgary has been enjoying a steady growth. "By my calculations, this represents a growth rate of 19.8%. If we add in the four children known to be expected by families within the church in the next couple of months, we come to a growth of 24% in just one year!"

Rev. Schouten also paid attention to "another pressing need for this congregation is the availability of a safe, god-

ly, Christ-centered school for the children and young people of this congregation.

I have never been able to understand why in some of our large cities church membership is so small. Take Ottawa and Calgary, where hundreds of thousands of people are living that need to be housed, fed, transported, and taken care of in many other respects. There must be a possibility of earning a decent living there, no less than it appears possible in Carman or Neerlandia. It is therefore encouraging when the numbers increase and with the increase in numbers the possibilities.

Sad, on the other hand, was the item gleaned from Houston's bulletin: "A letter from the Canadian Reformed School Board of Houston, informing us that the school society has been disbanded, and that \$79,975.03 is donated to the church for the building fund." True, several members of Houston's church send their children to the Smithers school, but still it does remain a deplorable thing that the Houston society was disbanded, even though now the church could pay off mortgage and loan. When will there ever be a possibility to re-establish the society? And how long will it take before again a substantial amount has been brought together?

In Abbotsford the consistory reminded the congregation "that intercession in prayer during the services will be done only upon request, except in cases of birth and marriage, when it will be remembered regardless."

"Report of the Yarrow Church Development Committee is read . . . The committee places before council the request to institute a church in Yarrow. It is decided, in principle, to cooperate with this request." If I understand it well, we may expect a request for advice regarding institution at the classis scheduled for June.

In addition to this we mention from the Langley report that a meeting with the members living in a specific area was scheduled for April 28 "to receive your response to a proposal to begin worship services in the Kinsmen Hall in Aldergrove." As these lines are written well before the date of the scheduled meeting, we'll have to wait till next time for the outcome of the consultations.

Usually it is expected that members who go away for a week or a couple of weeks inform their section elders of their planned absence from the services. This applies not only to the days on which the Lord's Supper is celebrated but also to all the other Sundays. Frequently I read an urgent request to the members to let their section elder know of such absence. The brothers then do not have to ponder whether the absence of a member from the services is due to illness or absence or, perhaps, unfaithfulness and laxity.

What I never read before I now read in the Langley section of the *Church News*. "The elders were encouraged to inform their districts when they plan on an extended vacation." Yes, the knife cuts both ways, doesn't it?

A few more items from Australia.

The Armadale consistory received a letter from the Bedforddale consistory with the following proposal:

". . . to change the present rules as regards the churches of Armadale and Bedforddale, to embody the following provisions:

1. The two churches have a defined border; (the present border)
2. A pre-requisite to 'change church' is that a member moves house into the area of the other church; In that case the member has two choices:

- a) he may remain a member of the church he belongs to. This choice is always reversible to choice b.
- b) he may become a member of the church into whose area he is moving. This choice is never again reversible to choice a.

Consistory believes that such rules are of benefit in that they offer an opportunity for continuity of relationships (friends, relatives, study clubs, catechism classes, etc.) Experience with the recent border adjustment with the Kelm-scott Church proves that such relationships are an important factor in people's decision making – the vast majority in both churches remained where they were.

One relationship which is worthy of special mention, is that of officebearer. An elder or deacon who has worked for years in one particular congregation gets to know his people and their problems, and often gains their trust. It might well be of great benefit to the church and members concerned if he continued to be available for that office, even after shifting outside the border."

It is for the benefit of some of our Canadian churches who struggle with self-imposed difficulties because of borders that I quoted the above in full.

The Byford consistory discussed revision of the Church Order. "The meeting queried the wisdom of adopting a revised church order that speaks about a consistory (that excludes the deacons) when the Belgic Confession (Art.30) speaks of the "Council of the Church" that includes the deacons. Such double-speak is not edifying and will continue to cause problems."

Speaking of "double-speak" (I love that expression in this connection!), do you not think that it is extremely confusing when I read in a bulletin: "Council and Consistory meeting,"? The impression is given that here are two different bodies. Some time ago a member of one of the churches said to me: "I still don't know what is meant by "council" and by "consistory." Why not simply: "Meeting of the Consistory with the deacons and of the consistory alone"? IF, that is, there is the obstinate refusal to have the consistory consist of minister, elders *and* deacons, in accordance with the Belgic Confession.

A last point concerns the schools. Perhaps it is in vain, and perhaps I should have done it when we started having our schools, but I still want to plead for school uniforms. That I write now about it was prompted by a notice in the Australian district bulletin announcing a meeting "the reason for this is to seek society approval for the adoption of a new high school uniform."

They have school uniforms in Australia, and it would be good if we had them here as well. In the first place it would totally eliminate the competition about who has the nicest and most modern clothes; in the second place our students would be easily recognizable everywhere, and this would encourage them to show who they are; and in the third place it would save the parents money. There would also be less of a chance that a jacket is ripped off someone's back because a certain gang member wants that particular jacket. But, as said above, I am afraid that my pleading will fall on deaf ears.

Let it be so, as long as due attention is paid to all the other points raised.

Cheerio!
VO


On A and B

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND BENEDICTION

By W.W.J. VanOene

In his own peculiar way Mr. John de Vos reacted in a "Letter to the Editor" to what I wrote about the expression "Lift up Your Hearts." I can appreciate his humorous way of presenting his "views," although I must state that he misunderstood my remarks in this respect and, besides, gives a distorted picture of the issue at hand.

As his "Letter to the Editor" dealt with the invitation "Lift up your hearts to the Lord" as well as with announcements made in church, I'll pay attention to both these points.

Announcements

Since the "A" comes before the "B," we'll start with the question of announcements. It will be clear to our readers that such announcements are meant as are made either immediately prior to or during the worship services.

Here we must point out first of all a misconception regarding announcements in general.

It is frequently thought that when we speak of "announcing" something to the congregation, this means that an announcement must be made *from the pulpit*. This, however, is a misconception. "To announce something to the congregation" simply means that the congregation is informed about this particular matter, but it does not stipulate in any way how, when, and by what means this shall be done.

To my knowledge, there is no stipulation whatsoever that requires us to make any announcement from the pulpit. The only case I knew of was when the publication of the bans of marriage in British Columbia was still the equivalent of a marriage license. At that time the law stipulated that such publication should be done "in an audible voice during the divine worship service." I am not aware of any other such requirement, except, of course, the announcements contained in our Liturgical Forms.

An announcement to the congregation, that is: informing the congregation about specific matters can be made or done just as well by means of the weekly or bi-weekly bulletin, and I would advocate using this means exclusively, except in "emergency cases."

By such an "emergency case" I am not referring to the possibility that a secretary forgot to send in a notice of meeting for the bulletin, and now with a humble face and apologetic gestures appears in the consistory room before the service with the request to the brothers to have it announced to the (whole!) congregation (!) that "there will be a meeting of the . . . Society this evening at 8:00 o'clock, where the following topic will be discussed. . . ." Such would be an abuse of possibilities. Our good and negligent secretary should be given to understand that, since he knows exactly who the members are, he had better get on the phone and inform the members of the society individually.

Why should the whole congregation be bothered and be told about a meeting of a society of which perhaps more than 95% of the congregation are no members?

Announcements from the pulpit simply make conveniently use of the fact that practically the whole congregation is present during the service, but this is not a valid reason to burden the congregation with all sorts of announcements. At times I get such a long list of announcements that I remark: "Brothers, you almost don't need a sermon any more after all this." In practically all cases these announcements either were already included in the bulletin or could just as well be communicated to the congregation by means of it.

If a church has a standing rule that the consistory with the deacons shall meet every first Thursday of the month and the consistory alone every third Thursday of the month, and if this is clearly stated in the bulletin, or even well-known to the congregation, what need would there be to announce that "the consistory with the deacons will meet this coming Thursday evening at 8:00 o'clock in the consistory room."?

In the first place: there is no rule whatsoever that consistory meetings must be announced to the congregation; and in the second place, if it is published or known when meetings of the consistory are normally held, an announcement to that effect is a supererogatory work.

Sometimes I discover an opinion that a consistory meeting actually cannot be held legitimately if it has not been announced from the pulpit that one is scheduled for a certain day. Rest at ease, brothers, you do nothing illegal when meeting without the congregation being aware of it. The only reason for informing the congregation, as far as I can see it, is to make the congregation aware of the impending meeting and to enable it thus to remember the brothers in prayer, making intercession for them.

Announcements from the pulpit should be restricted to those concerning matters that, for one reason or another, could or should not be communicated via the bulletin *and that concern the congregation as a whole*.

Although I have not found or manufactured any scroll stating either this or the opposite, I would recommend and propagate a practice as outlined above.

On votum and benediction

With all his humour, brother de Vos gave a distorted picture of the real issue.

First of all: nowhere have I stated or implied that I consider "Lift up your hearts" less desirable." What I object to is: saying "Lift up your hearts to the Lord" whereas the preacher means: "Please rise."

It is simply ridiculous when our brother tries to make people smile when he speaks of stretching the knees so that

“the torso moves in upward direction, and then the heart comes along.” It may sound funny, but he as well as all of us know *that this is not the meaning at all*. Here he ridicules the whole point.

“To lift up one’s heart to the Lord” does not mean at all that we shall rise and from a sitting or lying down position shall come to a standing one. It has nothing to do with bringing our bodily heart to a somewhat higher level.

One can lift up one’s heart to the Lord while lying down, and many of God’s children who are bed-ridden do just that. And when the congregation is exhorted – at times in a very rapidly spoken sentence that is understandable only to the initiate who know what to expect – to lift up their hearts to the Lord, this does not mean at all that they should rise.

My point was and still is: If it is your intention that the congregation shall rise, *SAY THAT THEN!*

Recently I heard a minister say: “Please rise, and lift up your hearts to the Lord.” *That* was wholly proper, and that’s what I am after. *Say what you mean*, and make clear what you want.

Not in all churches the congregation remains seated until requested to rise. In more than one church it is still cus-

tomary that the congregation rises as soon as the minister is on the pulpit behind the lectern. In such cases the brothers and sisters are not burdened with a long list of announcements at that point. Votum and benediction are the only “actions,” followed by the singing of the first song, after which the congregation is seated.

It varies at which point “announcements” are made in those churches. Usually this is done just before the collection is taken.

Whether it is an improvement when announcements are made before the congregation is requested to rise? I think so, *if* announcements are to be made from the pulpit at all, that is! Announcements do not belong to the worship service, are no part of it. Then it is proper that making them (in exceptional cases) be done before the service commences.

It would be even more of an improvement if there were no announcements from the pulpit at all.

It would equally be an improvement if the congregation were clearly invited to rise, if they have not done so already as soon as the one who conducts the service is on the pulpit.

P.S. It is not “the family Jones,” but “the Jones family.” **C**

Identity and Religious Education – A Reaction

By J. Messelink

In the *Clarion* of March 12, 1993, Prof. J. Geertsema discusses at some length my lecture which I held in the Reformed Church at Burlington on November 26, 1992. He expresses appreciation for and agreement with what I said, but criticized my comments on two important points which I would like to discuss in this reaction.

Prof. Geertsema based his comments on a summary of my speech as it appeared in the school paper of the Timothy Canadian Reformed School in Hamilton. Obviously, it is always somewhat risky to make critical remarks about a summary which has been prepared outside the responsibility of the original speaker. The danger is not inconsiderable that criticism is levelled at the interpretation of the reporter and not at what was actually said. In his discussion Prof. Geertsema recognized this problem, but did not manage to evade it, as will become clear. Therefore, I regret that he did not wait for the publication of the complete text of my

address as it will be published in the *CRTA Magazine*. If that would have happened, I believe his comments would have been somewhat different in a number of instances.

Thinking of the Baptists? Under the heading *A matter of regeneration*, Prof. Geertsema writes,

This believing, this “faith” (i.e. the faith mentioned in the H.C., Q.A. 21), is said to come “by hearing the Word” and is linked to regeneration. Then it is said that God works regeneration or the miracle of faith. Again, who can disagree? However, I have a serious question when at this point it is asked “What is given?” and when on this point the answer is “We receive Christ – we are grafted into Him and become heir to all His benefits and gifts.” In the way this is presented, we have here the thinking of the Baptists and not of the Reformed covenant believer.

Children in the covenant do not *become* heirs of the covenant

when they are regenerated and become believers. Children in the covenant *are* heirs of the covenant and its promises in Christ from their conception and birth. And when they grow up, they, just as in the case with the adults, are called to appropriate (make their own property) what they have *in Christ*. Of course, this appropriating by faith that we and our children are called to do is only possible when the Holy Spirit works this appropriating in our hearts.

It is Baptist thinking, and not in agreement with Scripture, to say that we who are children in the covenant only then *become* heirs of the covenant when we are regenerated or become believers. Christ teaches covenant children and adults that they can lose what they have (have in promise; have in Christ) (p.104).

I fully agree with what is written here. And the remark that I would be guilty of

the thinking of the Baptists" would have been completely correct if only I would have indeed said what is put into my mouth by means of citations from the summary. However, nowhere in my address did I make these statements. The relevant passage in my address was written with the Canons of Dort, Chapter III/IV and the Form for Baptism open before me. An important point which arises when considering the religious education is the earlier question where faith comes from. In answer to this question I quoted a number of passages from the B.C. (Articles 22 and 24), and pointed to H.C., Q.A. 21. In particular I cited C.D., Chapter III/IV, Article 12 (The Divine Character of Regeneration) and Article 14 (Faith as a Gift of God). On the basis of these quotations I drew the conclusion that religious education can never be characterized as bringing out what is in there already, but must be characterized as instilling what by nature is not there at all.

I then continued,

What will now, in the heart of the believer, be instilled and infused; what will be given to the believer in his faith? Now, that can be said in one word: Christ. We are grafted into Him and we will be clothed with Him. All the salvation that He has obtained will be ours if we grow together with Him into one body.

At this point in the written text of my address I referred to Romans 11:17 and Galatians 3:27. I continued with this passage:

In one of the oldest, strongest, and most influential pedagogical documents of Dutch origin, namely our Form of Baptism for Infants, this is brought to expression in an unsurpassable way.

The copy of my speech which I used in Burlington included an extensive quotation from the Form of Baptism, beginning with "When we are baptized into the name of the son . . ." and ending with ". . . life eternal" (*Book of Praise*, p. 584). Because of time constraints I did not include this passage in my speech.

The passage from the summary which Prof. Geertsema criticized concerns a section which, as it were, is anchored between the Canons of Dort and the Form for Baptism. It would require quite some ingenuity in such a context to air Baptist thoughts. Moreover, for someone who only wishes to write in a Reformed manner this would be rather impossible!

CONGRATULATIONS



Br. and Sr. van der Heide and their daughter Karin

We like to add our congratulations to br. A. van der Heide, in Surrey, BC. He was given the honorary title of "Ridder in de Orde van Oranje-Nassau" by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands for his work as publisher of the Dutch-Canadian paper, the Windmill. This paper celebrates its 35th anniversary. Br. van der Heide also is busy with the publication of books about the Dutch Princess Margriet, about the formative years of the Princess Irene Brigade in the Second World War, and about Dutch people living in Canada and their involvement in the same war. In other words, br. van der Heide is busy with promoting the ties between Holland and Canada. Hereby the Reformed heritage is an important element for br. van der Heide. Our congratulations, br. van der Heide, on this token of appreciation from the Queen for your work.

For *Clarion*

J. Geertsema

However, it does not surprise me that a theologian comments on the particular formulation of the question, "What will be given to the believer in his faith?" I appreciate such comments, and I realize that much more ought to be said about this. But I cannot understand how, given the context and the text of my address, the accusation can be maintained that we hear in this passage "the thinking of the Baptists and not of the Reformed covenant believer." I hope that I have removed the impression with the readers of *Clarion* that a representative of the *Gereformeerde Pedagogisch Centrum* in the Netherlands spreads Baptist thoughts in Canada.

All this also implies that I agree with Prof. Geertsema when he writes

that "it is not the task of the school to make regeneration a special item or a subject that needs constant attention." Of course not; after all, we are not "oud-gereformeerd" (Netherlands Reformed) but Canadian Reformed (gereformeerd vrijgemaakt), and in our thinking about education and instruction we begin with God's covenant with His children.

The Dominant Factor. The second criticism of my address can be found under Prof. Geertsema's heading "What is the dominant factor that identifies our schools?" According to the summary used by Prof. Geertsema, I would have said, "The most important aspect of our children's education at a Reformed school is the development of the teacher as a believer."

Prof. Geertsema asks, Why all the emphasis must be placed on the spiritual life, the "spirituality of the teacher." The emphasis should remain on the Reformed character of the contents of the teaching. I do not see this shift in emphasis from the contents of the education to the spirituality of the teachers as progress or as a positive development (p.104).

Neither do I. I am sorry, but the sentence which Prof. Geertsema quotes does not appear in my speech, neither do I advocate anywhere at all such a shift in emphasis. I might be satisfied with this rebuttal and refer to the to-be-published text of my speech. But since not all readers of *Clarion* (unfortunately) subscribe to the *CRTA Magazine*, it is better to say some more. I do this also because I believe there is more to say about the dominant factor that identified our Reformed schools as is done by Prof. Geertsema.


I define "identity" as the sum of the recognizable characteristics by which Reformed schools distinguish themselves from other schools. This "sum" can be described by means of three aspects.

In the first place the ideological aspect. Usually this is succinctly summarized in the basis of the school: Holy Scriptures and the Confessions.

In the second place there is the form aspect. The ideological aspect must become visible and recognizable in a variety of concrete elements, for instance: hiring policies, the curriculum, the textbooks used in the school, the name of the school, admission policies, etc. The content of education, the importance of which was emphasized by Prof. Geertsema, is an element within this aspect.

In the third place there is the aspect of the school's activities. The ideological aspect should not only be expressed in a recognizable manner in the various organizational forms of education, but it ought to be expressed also in all actions on behalf of the school. Some examples: the manner in which the Board and the staff deal with each other, the manner in which staff members treat each other, the manner in which the children treat each other, etc.

In my speech I paid particular attention to the first aspect. After all, that aspect determines the Reformed character of a school in the first place. This ideological aspect ought to be as consistent with the other two aspects as



CHURCH NEWS

DECLINED to Smithers, BC for Home Mission

Rev. P. Aasman
of Grand Valley, ON

NEW PHONE NUMBER

Rev. J. DeGelder
Phone home: (416) 957-1291
Study: (416) 957-1980
Fax: (416) 957-1980

NEW ADDRESS:
Canadian Reformed Church
at Vernon, BC
RR 5-S2-C57
V1T 6L8

possible, and ought to be consistently applied in these other aspects. Considering this description of the concept "identity," I am not sure how to understand Prof. Geertsema's claim that "our identity is our confession, the truth of God's Word as we confess it." I do not wish to delete anything from this confession as basis, but I do believe that this description is rather narrow and insufficient. Government officials and others in the Netherlands would immediately retort to such a description with, "That is quite easily stated, but show in the practice of education that this statement indeed matters, and make this recognizable and visible in the actual activities of the school."

It is my conviction that it is only possible to apply these principles concretely if they have become "life and blood" for all those working in and for the school, the teachers in particular. If this is not the case, a situation may arise in which all is well with the basis of the school, in which the school may boast a soundly Reformed curriculum, and in which people deal with each other in a most humane manner, and yet the Reformed character is undermined (hollowed out) from within. I consider this, for all sorts of reason, a realistic danger which threatens Re-

formed education. Therefore I pointed in the part of my speech which dealt with identity to the importance of the faithful, believing teacher. I quote:

Although the development of (Reformed) documents is meaningful – and I do so myself fervently – and although practical action, originating from the identity, is recommendable, it does not reach the heart of our identity.

Once more, that heart, the essence, that is you as carriers and, hopefully, as propagators of the essence of Reformed teaching.

From this viewpoint I draw an obvious conclusion: "Working on the identity of your teaching means primarily working on yourself, on the deepening of your own faith and your Reformed vision on upbringing and education."

I do not think that this has anything to do with a shift from the content of education to such a thing like the spirituality of the teacher. I am repeating here the simple, Reformed wisdom that our classrooms need truly believing Reformed teachers.

Religious Education – Geloofs-opvoeding. This understanding is also of importance for the contribution which the school makes to the religious education of the children (the same applies to moral education). The second half of my speech dealt with religious education. Prof. Geertsema acknowledges that teachers can be instruments in the hands of the Lord "to work faith in the heart of the students." In addition, he observes that "if they do not live what they confess, the confession as mark of identity becomes a hollow, empty sticker" (p.104). However, this insight is not translated into practical suggestions for education. In my address I tried to do just that, be it only briefly; and I tried to do this without jeopardizing in any way the importance of building the scriptural content of education.

Calvin taught me that *doctrina* and *disciplina*, doctrine and life, ought to be one. That indeed is the mandate for all believers. This unity is of even greater importance in the religious education. Those who believe that religious education involves only the transmission of solidly Reformed content, do not allow themselves to be used in a suitable manner as means in the hands of the Lord to work faith in the hearts of the students. Such a religious education demands in the same measure modelling, to be readable letters of Christ for the

children, in order to show the significance of Gospel to the educators in the undreds of little things in the family and at school. In more technical jargon: teachers must create opportunities for identification.

In summary, Religious education at school includes the transmission of content and living a life of faith based on God's Word. In education the one cannot exist without the other. This insight highlights again the simple Reformed wisdom that our classrooms need truly faithful Reformed believers to teach our children. The concluding paragraphs of my Burlington speech were written on the basis of this conviction.


Working on the identity of a Reformed school and training the children in godliness means also learning yourself and working at yourself as a believing teacher. How? By constantly creating more depth in

your life of faith, by Bible study, and in prayer. This is an essential prerequisite for your work at the Reformed school. Religious education by superficial Christians, or working on one's identity without living the Reformed foundations of the school is not possible. More than in any other profession – apart from that of minister – teachers possess, in a Reformed elementary school, a framework in which this can happen in a professional manner. I refer to the preparation for Bible teaching, and church history.

Teachers at the Canadian Reformed schools find themselves in the unique situation that they are forced, professionally, to study the Bible constantly and intensively. Those of you who teach in these schools, do you experience this as an advantage and do you use it to its

fullest advantage in your own life of faith?

A teacher who lives out of faith does not keep his conviction in his heart, but lets it shine out into all the great and small spontaneous occurrences in the class. These happenings are quite relevant to religious education: the prayer in the class after a general discussion about, for example, the tragic plane accident in Amsterdam; the discussion regarding trust in God when there is a marvellous rainbow; the admonishing of the "bully of the class" in a private discussion.

I hope that the insights described in this *Reaction* may contribute to the growth of Reformed education in Canada. May all those who work there do so faithfully, wisely, and professionally, under God's blessings. 

A Brief Response

Br. Messelink asks for a reaction from my side. In the first place, my response in Clarion to what he said in our midst was not only based on the report in Clarion and in the Bulletin of the Timothy school, but also on what I heard myself at the meeting in Burlington. I was not the only one who reacted there to what Br. Messelink said.

In the second place, regarding what is said under the heading "Thinking of the Baptists," I am happy with the reaction of Br. Messelink. It is good to discuss these matters. It keeps us aware of the difference between Reformed and Baptist on the point of the position of children in the covenant and, connected with it, a different approach and a different emphasis. In general, the Baptist's approach is that of the believers baptism and his emphasis is on the need for regeneration, and therewith on the subjective experience of the individual. The basic question becomes here: are you born again? Our Reformed approach is that God establishes His covenant with His people, including the children, and that God now comes to His people, both adult and child, with the demand of living out of faith, in humble obedience to what He says in His Word, whereby this obedience must show in all aspects of life. Certainly, regeneration is absolutely

necessary for seeing and entering God's kingdom, but it is God's work, not a command for us. When Christ speaks about regeneration to Nicodemus (John 3), He states a fact but does not give a command. Obedience of faith, that is what God commands us. He wants us to live by what He says in our daily life, in our relations, in our church membership, in the education of His covenant children, and so on. God and His Word are central, and for that reason also the confession. I am thankful that br. Messelink and I agree here. And that misunderstanding herewith is taken away. Perhaps the whole speech could be printed not only in the CRTA magazine, but also in ours.

In the third place, the matter of the teacher and the identity of the school. I am in agreement with br. Messelink on the unity of doctrine and life, or the oneness of hearing – teaching and doing. I am also fully with him on the necessity that the teacher in a Reformed school must be, with heart and soul, a believing Reformed teacher. And I am again thankful and happy that br. Messelink says that the way he stressed the importance of the Reformed teacher does not have "anything to do with a shift from the content of education to such a thing like the spirituality of the teacher."

Br. Messelink writes that he did not say in his speech: "The most important aspect of our children's education at a Reformed school is the development of the teacher as believer." This is possible with regard to the exact formulation. However, at the meeting in Burlington we discussed this very point that the Reformed teacher was named the "most important" element in the identity of the Reformed school. It was on this point that others and I disagreed with Dr. Messelink. And I still think that the contents of what is taught, which is basically the teaching or doctrine of God's Word as we confess this for all teaching in a Reformed school is and has to be the dominant factor. This gives form and contents to the thinking and teaching of the teacher. He is the necessary instrument that brings this truth of God's Word across to the children, but only instrument. That is why not the person of the teacher but the truth is "the most important" element. It is the same as in the church. Not the minister or the elder, but the truth of God's Word is in the center, and the minister on the pulpit and the elder at the family visitation are instruments, ministers, of that Word.

J. Geertsema 

By Aunt Betty



Hello Busy Beavers,

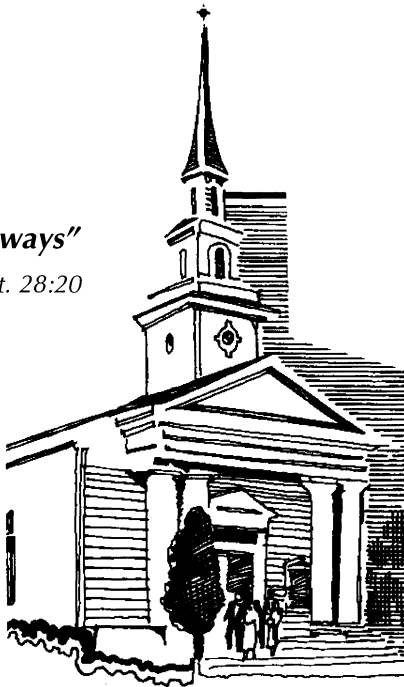
Ascension Day

What a wonderful day for the Lord Jesus!
He went to live for always with His Father, in heavenly
majesty and glory!

And this was His wonderful *good-bye promise* to His disciples:

"I am with you always"

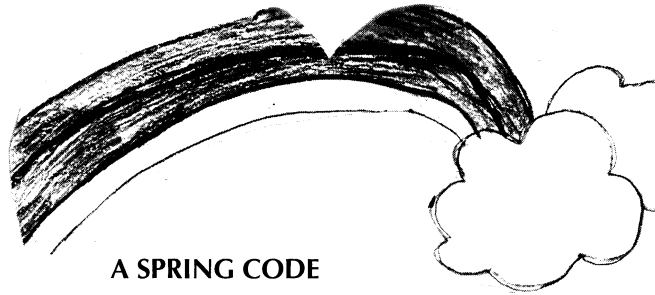
Matt. 28:20



Can you fill in the blanks? Helps are given

1. "... His name shall be called" _____ (which means, God with us).
2. God is with us at our _____ 2 Chron. 13:12
3. . . . I am with you I am your God I will _____ you. . . . Isa. 41:10,13
4. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of _____, I fear no _____; for _____ art with me. . . . Ps. 23:4
5. I keep the LORD always before _____; in Thy presence there is fulness of _____ Ps. 16:8,11
6. But the Lord stood by _____ and gave me _____ 2 Tim. 4:17
7. Jesus answered him, "If a man _____ me, he will keep my _____, and my _____ will love him, and we will come to him and make our _____ with him. John 14:23
8. Every word of God proves _____ Prov. 30:5a

Quiz Time!



A SPRING CODE

| | | |
|-------|--------|--------|
| A - 1 | H - 8 | O - 15 |
| C - 3 | I - 9 | P - 16 |
| E - 5 | M - 13 | R - 18 |
| G - 7 | N - 14 | S - 19 |

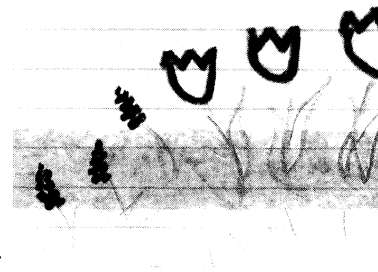
by Busy Beaver
Esther Snyder

19 16 18 9 14 7 8 1 19 3 15 13 5 !



ACROSTIC POEM

Sprouting plants,
Pretty flowers,
Rainy days,
It's superb!
No more ice and snow,
Green grass and great weather!



by Busy Beaver Cheryl Jelsma

WORD SEARCH ON BIRDS

by Busy Beaver *Lee-Ann Beintema*

Words to find:

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| bone | B | V | W | A | S | R | D | W | G | C | A | B |
| feather | K | R | X | W | J | E | J | I | X | S | A | E |
| head | L | B | A | O | C | H | L | N | N | E | T | A |
| hair | M | L | U | R | N | T | K | G | I | N | A | K |
| wings | C | C | Z | M | B | A | C | S | I | V | E | S |
| fly | J | F | A | S | G | E | L | D | K | W | H | R |
| branch | I | R | I | A | H | F | H | G | Y | T | O | O |
| leaves | O | H | C | E | P | E | U | G | N | O | T | J |
| eyes | N | S | I | I | A | G | A | M | L | C | X | R |
| beak | R | J | D | D | L | B | E | B | S | I | D | N |
| legs | W | M | K | R | L | K | L | I | M | Y | R | C |
| claws | S | P | H | L | Q | U | A | P | W | F | E | C |
| Blue Jays | E | R | C | N | E | O | N | E | X | G | P | D |
| tongue | Y | F | N | J | T | A | T | C | B | C | P | O |
| worms | F | L | A | U | U | Z | U | B | H | K | U | R |
| eat | L | Y | R | S | T | X | F | E | Y | E | S | H |
| supper | S | Y | B | Q | R | V | S | Z | S | I | U | W |
| dinner | L | W | F | I | K | L | L | E | A | V | E | S |
| lunch | U | W | S | I | X | Z | A | B | B | O | N | E |
| milk | | | | | | | | | | | | |

SPRING HAS SPRUNG

Spring has sprung
The birds are here,
Listen to them singing,
Blackbirds, yellow birds,
bluebirds, too, sing their carols
Sweetly to you.
Spring has sprung
The birds are here
Listen to them singing.

by Busy Beavers
Tim and Michelle Hordyk

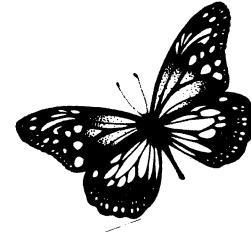


HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU

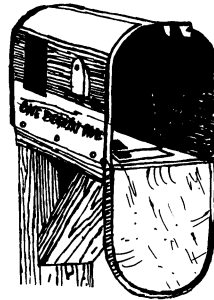
Very best wishes for a super day celebrating your June birthday with your family and friends.

May our heavenly Father bless and guide you all each day in the year ahead.

JUNE!!!



| | | | |
|-----------------------|----|----------------------|----|
| Erin Welfing | 4 | | |
| Esther Snijder | 5 | | |
| Sharon Bartels | 6 | Jennifer VanderVelde | 18 |
| Rebecca Kruisselbrink | 6 | Ivan Sikkema | 20 |
| Laura Bol | 7 | Kent Van Vliet | 20 |
| Felicia Oosterhoff | 8 | Esther Leyenhorst | 21 |
| Kayla Koopmans | 9 | Evelene Plug | 27 |
| Lee-Anne Vanderwoerd | 9 | Natasha Van Veen | 27 |
| Vanessa Aikema | 10 | Ben Bartels | 28 |
| Mark Alkema | 11 | Bradley Bartels | 28 |
| Eric Vanderriendt | 12 | Tracy Lynn Malda | 29 |
| Karen DeBoer | 17 | Melissa DeBoersap | 30 |



From the Mailbox

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club *Trevor Vandervelde*. We hope you'll enjoy joining in all our Busy Beaver activities. Sounds to me as if your sports and collections keep you quite busy! Thanks for the riddles, Trevor.

Welcome to the Club, *Jodi Wemekamp*. You are lucky to have your friend close by! And you have a great teacher, too! Thanks for sharing, Jodi.

Welcome to the Club, *Lorelle Barendregt*. Thank you for your letter and the pretty journal, too! We hope you'll really enjoy being in our Club, Lorelle.

Sounds to me as if you had lots of fun in your March break *Alyssa Lodder*. Is your dog learning to be obedient too, Alyssa? Thanks for the letter and the puzzle, too.

Thanks for sharing all the "goodies," *Trina Jelsma*. Did you have a fun March break, too? Are you playing baseball this spring, Trina?

I see you have been very busy keeping the other Busy Beavers busy, *Cheryl Jelsma*. Thank you for sharing. What sports are you playing at school, Cheryl?

Have fun going to your uncle's wedding next month, *Marcia Rook*. Will you enjoy the trip down and back? Sounds to me as if you're good at sewing, Marcia. Keep up the good work!

Did you have a good birthday, *Miranda Barendregt*? And are you used to your glasses already? Thank you for the pretty spring journal. I hope you enjoyed making it as much as I enjoyed reading it, Miranda!

Busy Beavers, I will send a reward to all of you who send me the answers to the Ascension Day quiz.

Love to you all,
Aunt Betty **C**