

# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE  
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*To Work is to Serve*

Numbers

10:1-10



## Law and image of God

We have seen that preaching must always be preaching Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Christ means redemption for those who believe but condemnation for those who disobey Him. There is room for preaching the law only within the framework of preaching Christ. The law must flow forth from Christ. Commandments cannot save us. They cannot lead to conversion. They cannot give us a new heart. Therefore they must never become the road to salvation. Christ saves. He is the only and the complete Saviour. He saves by His atoning blood, granting the remission of sin, and by His Holy Spirit, working the regeneration of those for whom He died, renewing them to a new life.

This new, regenerated life makes the believer in Christ live again as image of God. Paul writes in Col. 3:9, 10: "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge *after the image of its creator.*" In v. 8 the apostle mentions "anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth." Also these the believer must "put away."

We make here an important discovery in connection with our topic. Being renewed (in knowledge) after the image of the Creator has everything to do with putting off the old sinful nature (literally: the old man) and putting on the new nature (literally: the new man), regenerated by the Spirit of Christ. So we see that being renewed after the image of God is connected with not lying anymore, not slandering, not living in anger, not being malicious anymore, and not speaking foul language. Being renewed after God's image means: always speaking the truth; always being faithful and reliable, decent, holy, and pure in your speaking. The very same requirement comes to us in the Ninth Commandment.

The same significant truth can be discovered in Ephesians 4:22-24ff.: "Put off your old nature (old man, J.G.) which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature (new man J.G.), *created after the likeness of God* in true righteousness and holiness." Paul continues: "Therefore, putting away falsehood, let everyone speak the truth with his neighbour . . . Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying. . . ."

The apostle writes further that the Christian believers must "be imitators of God, as beloved children," Ephesians 5:1. Being imitators of God and bearing His image means that "fornication and all impurity or covetousness must not

even be named among you, as is fitting among saints" Ephesians 5:3. Our conclusion can be that living as imitators of God and being renewed after His image means living in accordance with God's requirements as expressed, among others, in the Sixth, the Seventh, the Eighth and the Ninth Commandment.

These New Testament passages shed a clear light on the meaning of the law of God. Scripture is the book of God's Self-revelation. In His great and mighty works as well as in His words of truth as they are recorded in Scripture, God makes known to us who He is. Scripture reveals God's character, His nature. Scripture includes the law of the LORD in which He teaches His people how He wants them to live. Also the commandments reveal God's character.

An instructive book in this regard is *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, written by Walter C. Kaiser Jr. He points out how Scripture teaches that the holiness of God is the dominating ground for the commandments given to His covenant people, "Be holy, for I, the LORD, am holy." We find this ground constantly in Chapters 18-20, Leviticus. The law in these chapters is called "the Law of Holiness." Part III of Kaiser's book, dealing with the "Content of Old Testament Ethics," elaborates on holiness as the central motive in God's law. Holiness is the "Way of Life" for Israel. There must be "Holiness in the Family and Society," in "Regard for Life," in "Marriage and Sex," in "Wealth and Possessions," in "Obtaining and Using Truth," in "Motive and Heart."

The word holiness in itself the main and all encompassing term expressing the nature and character of God. God's holiness shows in His being the God of life, of faithfulness and truth, of purity and cleanliness, of reliability and trustworthiness.

God is holy. Israel is God's holy people. That is why Israel's way of life has to reflect God's holiness. Both the moral law and the many ceremonial commandments are given to Israel to impress God's holiness and the call for a holy life upon the people. Many animals could not serve as food because they were unclean. Touching a dead body of either animal or man would make an Israelite ceremonially unclean. There were a thousand and one little things in Israel's daily life that taught the people: keep yourselves clean and holy for the LORD, for He is holy.

Now these ceremonial laws, when maintained, produced an outward, ceremonial holiness, even though their aim was an inner as well as behavioral holiness for the LORD. The ceremonial laws have found their fulfillment in Christ. In fellowship with Christ, through His blood and Holy Spirit, true Christian believers receive a cleansing from sin,

from unholiness and, thus, an inner holiness that permeates their whole life. Christ works this holiness in them in their regeneration. This holiness in the fellowship with Christ is fed and maintained through constant submissive listening to the (preached) Word of the Lord. This inner holiness of the heart shows a lifestyle that is holy for God, in holy actions, in which the believer lives as image of God. This becomes clear when we look at some of the Ten Commandments.

God is the God of life. Therefore, life as His gift is meant to be lived in holiness for Him. Not in killing, but in protecting life. God's people show themselves imitators of God, living after His image. Murder, abortion, and its root, hatred, envy, and selfishness, belong to the devil. Those who practice murder and let themselves be led by hatred, show the image of the evil one, God's adversary.

God is holy. He is pure. There is no uncleanness in Him. Therefore, He forbids all unchastity, all sexual immorality, foul talk, dirty jokes, and so on. It is not hard to understand that living as image of God means living a holy, pure, and clean life with regard to sex.

God's holiness includes His great and absolute faithfulness. He is holy. Therefore He redeems and saves. Therefore He shows His helping, supporting love to His people. That is why God forbids unfaithfulness in marriage. Husband and wife show the image of God when they are faithful to each other in mutual love, in helping and supporting each other in faithful affection. Adultery and any form of unfaithfulness is not just transgressing a law. It is the opposite of showing the image of God, which is the image of Christ. And we add, that when husband and wife live in true communion with Christ, holy for the Lord, their marriage is safe and firm, even when there is a struggle because of differences in character, weaknesses on certain points, and sinfulness. Faith makes faithful.

God is the Maker of heaven and earth. Therefore, He is and remains the Owner. He also rules the whole universe. When God made man, He made them, male and female, in His image. He gave them dominion over the earth. Man did not become owner in the strict sense of the word. He became steward. In having dominion as steward, man showed himself image of God, using what God entrusted to Him

in the service of the LORD, developing and guarding the earth for Him, and making use of it at the same time, for the fulfillment of his task, as well as for the support of others. Therefore, stealing in any form is in radical conflict not only with the Eighth Commandment as such, but also with being image of God. He who steals does not acknowledge God as Owner, is not honest and does the opposite of serving the neighbour.

God is the God of truth. In Him is no lie. That is His holy nature. Being image of God will show in speaking the truth, in being reliable and trustworthy. Lying and deceiving, being dishonest, unreliable, and not trustworthy is the opposite of being like God. It is showing the image of the devil, the father of all lying. And we add again: lying is not well possible when one truly lives in holy fellowship with Christ.

From what is said here it will be evident to the reader that our sins come out much sharper and darker in the light of this connection between God's commandments and His holy character; the connection also between keeping His commandments and being renewed and living after His image, in the fellowship with Christ. Indeed, in this light sin becomes not just transgressing

of a commandment, but living in conflict with the holy nature of our heavenly Father and with living as His image. Sin against God's commandments becomes a not living out of Christ, a not living in His holy fellowship.

On the other hand, keeping God's commandments in thankful love for Him through faith becomes more and more the intense desire and a delight for those who are in Christ, who are renewed by the Holy Spirit after God's image in true knowledge, and in true righteousness and holiness. When we see that the law flows forth from Christ who renews His followers after His and His Father's image as this is also shown in the commandments, we understand our Catechism even better when it calls true repentance or conversion both a heartfelt sorrow as well as a heartfelt joy in Him through Christ, and a delight to live according to all His commandments, Lord's Day 33.

It is my wish that increased insight in the great value of God's Ten Commandments, also for our modern life may result in increased love for them since they come from Him, and shows who He is and how He wants us to be, and to behave to His honour and glory through Jesus Christ.



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By H.J.J. Feenstra

## BE WISE WITH WISDOM!

### Living wisely generation after generation – Proverbs 3:31 - 4:9

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*Wees wijs met de wijsheid*,  
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Translated by T.M.P. VanderVen

#### God and the Neighbour – Good and Evil (Proverbs 3:21 - 35)

This passage provides a beautiful illustration of the double love commandment. Focus on the LORD – He comes first! – and let yourself be guided by wisdom. You will notice how that benefits your relation with your neighbour. That is the thread that runs through this passage.

Wisdom guards against accidents resulting from impulsive action. Wisdom helps you to sleep peacefully. Wisdom causes you to look first around for your neighbour. You will discover the needs of the other, and you will start to help wherever you can.

You adopt a diaconal attitude over against those who need help. You should not postpone your help either. When someone finally, perhaps after much hesitation and struggle, comes to you for help, do not make him wait. Providing help may never be done from a position of power. Sensitivity prevents the emphasis of your role as rescuer.

Deal with each other in righteousness, in particular when there is a trust relationship. Do not betray that trust.

Do not hinder your neighbour by acting as a complainer or a quarreler. These proverbs admonish, Do not do that! Do not envy a man of violence. Force may impress some, some may even find its roughness and lack of couth attractive. Lamech from the family of Cain is the classic example. He portrays the man of the world who has found his niche without God and acts as if the whole world belongs to him. Mighty men, tyrants, despots, extortionists, these are all *men of violence*. Psalm 37 admonishes us not to envy those who in a wicked and godless manner pretend that the whole world is theirs. Look a little farther: the meek shall inherit the earth. That is what the Lord Jesus taught us in the sermon on the mount. That is what Psalm 37 already told us: *The righteous shall possess the land and dwell in it for ever*.

And God is enthroned above all this. He punishes and blesses, and thus makes separation, temporally as well as eternally.

From Scripture Proverbs 3:21 - 35  
Psalm 37  
Matthew 5:5  
Genesis 4:23 - 24  
Romans 12:9 - 21; 13:8 - 14

#### The Generation Gap (Proverbs 4:1 - 9)

The generation gap and generational conflict – these are well-known terms and well-known issues. Older

and younger people do not always relate to each other harmoniously, they are worlds apart. Older people – who are the youth of earlier times – at times seem to have forgotten their own youth. They do not understand their youthful contemporaries, and are of the opinion that today's youth are totally on the wrong track. Indeed, the wisdom of the Preacher is not always heeded, and the youth often ignore the older generation.

Proverbs 4 shows that there is no gap between one generation and the next, and that communication between generations is not characterized by conflict. These proverbs show how to build bridges from one generation to the next.

Indeed, wisdom bridges chasms. Wisdom removes conflicts. When wisdom is allowed to work, conflicts are prevented. Read carefully how the father-wisdom-teacher addresses his son, how he praises wisdom, how you have to work hard in order to master wisdom. But also listen when the father tells about his own youth and about his own father who, in turn, taught him wisdom.

Wisdom is passed on from father to son. There is no generation gap, the generations are linked. The grandfather addresses his grandson via the son and father, the forebears teach their descendants.

New church generations are formed by means of educating children and young people in God's wisdom. The Bible teaches that we should not

## What's inside?

Summer vacation is about over. The children will soon be back at school. Camping gear has been stored away. Photo albums are being updated. Summer tans will soon fade. Labour Day marks the transition from the holiday months to "back to work." Rev. D. Agema in "To work is to serve" gives us a biblical perspective on work.

Dr. DeJong concludes his series of articles on the question of the pursuit of federative unity. *Upcoming* issues will also include articles on this topic – by Rev. J. Visscher and Rev. W.W.J. van Oene.

Dr. Van Dam picks up the matter of Bible Translations by bringing forward some points not mentioned in earlier discussions.

You will also find several reports, reviews and reader contributions.

GvP

consider our children as *our* children, but as children of the previous generation church members. Our children are part of the continuing Church. We must tell the next generation of the great deeds of the LORD because these children are children of that previous generation, of those ancestors. Also those ancestors lived with and because of the glorious deeds of the LORD.

Proverbs 4 combines with Psalm 78 which speaks,  
*. . . things we have heard and known,  
 that our fathers have told us.  
 We will not hide them from **their children,**  
 but tell **the coming generation**  
 the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,*

*and the wonders which he has wrought.*

*Their children and the coming generation* refer to the same people. Wisdom is not inherited, wisdom is passed on!

From Scripture

Proverbs 4:1 - 9

Ecclesiastes 7:10

Psalm 78:1-4

## To Work is to Serve

By D.G.J. Agema

Ask two people about their daily work and how they feel about it, and it is very possible that you receive two totally different or even opposing answers. For some work is a pleasure. They go to work with joy. Their work is going well. For others it is difficult to be positive about their work. Their work is a burden. They do not go to work with joy or come home with a satisfied feeling, on the contrary, they look against it. Perhaps their work is too monotonous. Or, because their work does not seem to lead anywhere. Or, because they have a hard time to make ends meet even with all the work they do. Or, because they are too old to keep up with the changes in the work place. Some love their work, others struggle with it.

These different reactions are not typical for our time. Throughout history mankind has reflected on the meaning of work. Throughout history there have been people who loved their work and there have been people who struggled with it. Throughout the centuries there have been people who saw work as something positive, whereas others regarded it as a terrible evil. If you have seen paintings or posters by the socialist movement from the beginning of this century, you will have noticed the idealizing of labour. You see happy able-bodied men and women, happy families. Work was shown as a very worthwhile and fulfilling part of life. It was indeed seen as Paradise on earth. It was the Paradise of the working man, where everyone would work according to ability and receive according to need. However, within the Marxist movement there were also others. Take, for example, the ideas of Herbert Marcuse, who saw work as a neces-

sary evil, the sooner we get rid of it the better it is.

What is the meaning and function of work in our lives? The examples just described may seem far removed from our lives. But are they really? The attitudes mentioned can also be seen in our lives. Ask the question, what do you think about your work? The one will say, "I love it" the other will say, "I dislike it." The one has success and is able to get ahead in work, the next person has nothing but trouble and never seems to get ahead. The one uses his time well in his work, the other takes it easy, and yet another becomes a slave of his work. There is no single answer.

In fact, when we listen to the Bible to hear how the LORD speaks about work we also notice two elements. On the one hand we hear about work that is fulfilling and rewarding. We read about prosperity. On the other hand we read about forced labour, hard work, work that does not seem to bear fruit. There does not seem to be one answer in the Bible either.

One of the main verbs used in the O.T. which can be translated as "to work," also means "to serve." Work is service. A worker is a servant. That is a telling combination. Serving is not always easy. To be a servant can involve hard work and lead to questions such as, Why am I doing this? On the other hand it also reminds us that work is directed to someone else. When you serve you serve an other, e.g. a master. Work is therefore not seen as a purpose in itself, nor as something that puts man in the center, but it is seen as service directed to another.

In connecting work to serving, the Bible gives a very realistic picture of what it means to work. What I mean is



this: it shows us that work is not always easy. Work has its difficulties, breakdowns, mistakes etc. The Bible does not idealize work. On the other hand work is not brushed aside as totally useless either. Scripture teaches us that there is meaning to our work, even if it is difficult and wearisome. We are serving our God.

This teaches us that we should not judge work by how we feel about it, or whether we think we have success. Work should be evaluated on the basis of its function and place within the Kingdom of God. This is where the paths of the believers and the unbelievers depart when it comes to work. Both will agree that there can be joy and difficulty in work, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. But to see the proper place and function of work one must know the kingdom of God. To see the meaning of work we have to believe in the God who by His grace is restoring a fallen and broken world.

In Paradise there was work. Work is not the consequence of sin. Man had already received the task to serve God in the Garden of Eden. That work was fulfilling, it was blessed. Then comes the ugly reality of our sin. This creation

became subject to futility on account of man's disobedience. This fall into sin has greatly effected the work of man. Yes, the task to work remains, the call to serve God remains, only it becomes so much more difficult because of the consequences of sin. The LORD God said to man that his calling to work continued, but because of sin thorns and thistles would grow as well. Man's work would now cost a lot of trouble and toil.

At the same time the LORD God promised that He would restore this creation. The LORD God does not turn His back to this creation and to the labour of man. He reveals that He will redeem and renew this creation. He does this in Christ Jesus. By His death and resurrection the Lord Jesus has reconciled us to God. He restores us to a proper relationship with God. In the sight of God He covers the sins and shortcomings of my work. How does this salvation change our work? Does it mean that once you believe all your work will go well? We know better. The grace of God does not lift us out of this world, so that we have no work anymore, nor does it take away the troubles of this world, so that as believers we will never experience a breakdown or a disappointment. No, the grace of God is that He forgives our sins, that He covers our shortcomings and uses our labours for His purpose

and work. That is awesome (in the true sense of the word). Work done in honour of Him out of love for Him is useful to Him. I use the word *work* in a broad sense. It includes the work for which you get paid, and the work you do without receiving payment – work at home or away from home. He uses it to prepare glory for Himself. This is why, on the one hand, work can be difficult, as we still live in a broken world, and yet, on the other hand, it is meaningful. It may serve our God and Saviour and the coming of His Kingdom. Yes, our calling as believers is to work faithfully.

The LORD's teachings to Israel about work reflect this. The LORD redeemed His people from slavery and forced labour. He brought them into his own land. There they had to work. He forbade laziness, as well as becoming a slave of their work. Think of the laws regarding the Sabbath, the year of Jubilee. Yes, work had to be done, but not as a purpose in itself, Israel had to see it within the framework of God's kingdom. Israel's approach to work had to reflect the reality that the LORD had redeemed them from slavery to serve Him in gratitude. You find the same in the N.T. Paul is very direct. He writes that one who does not work shall not eat either (2 Thess. 3:10). On the other hand, he stresses that we must not work as men pleasers but as servants of

Christ (Eph. 6:6). We read that the work, done for the Lord will follow us (Rev. 14:13). The Lord God will reward it in the life hereafter.

We may conclude, therefore, that work is not to be seen and treated as a necessary evil. Because of the evil in this world work has become difficult, but work in itself is not evil. To work is a call we receive from the Lord. He calls us to service. He redeems us so that we can serve Him and our fellow men.

We do not unduly exalt work, nor do we disregard it as useless. Work for the Lord is meaningful. Our Christian approach to work and our manner of work should be recognizable to those around us. Life is one. Every day we live before the face of God. He calls us to do our work in obedience to Him and in dependence on Him. Also in our work we are to show what it means to belong to Christ. Laziness and dishonesty, to mention two examples, would run counter to this calling. If in our work we show honesty, dependability, love to others, and we do this all for the glory of God, then our work has lasting value. The Lord then uses our labours to build His kingdom.

*Rev. D.G.J. Agema is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Attarcliffe, ON.*

## PRESS REVIEW

By C. Van Dam



# More Decisions from the Synod at Berkel and Rodenrijs

The following is a selection of decisions made at the synod of our Dutch sister churches which continues to meet in Berkel and Rodenrijs.

### **Ecclesiastical relations**

The synod decided on a number of general ecumenical guidelines that are also of interest to us, considering the consistorial contacts and discussions that are taking place with churches which have left the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). The synod decided that when local churches from different church federations have come to a mu-

tual recognition of each other as churches of Jesus Christ, then one can proceed to the next phase which includes among other things pulpit exchange. The synod also left the possibility open for periodic meetings of the consistories, combined congregational meetings, and combined Bible study. Classis approval is needed for pulpit exchange, accepting each other's members to the Lord's Table, combined worship services and combined Lord's Supper celebration.

Throughout the process of contact and discussion, the congregation should

be kept fully informed. Indeed, when important decisions are to be made, the input from the congregation is required. Also the Classis should be kept fully informed. Besides the types of decisions already mentioned as needing classical approval, the decision to recognize each other as a true church also requires classical approval. Classis in turn should be advised by deputies from the regional synod. Furthermore, the decision to exchange pulpits and to admit each other's members to Lord's Supper celebration can only be taken if the church in question is one with which there is

contact on the national level with deputies and it has been ascertained that these churches want to be faithful to the Scriptures and the Reformed Confessions. That means that practically speaking, pulpit exchange and mutual admission to the Lord's Table would only be possible with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk (sister churches of the Free Reformed Churches in North America).

The idea of a federation of church federations was greeted positively by synod as a good way of working towards ecclesiastical unity. However, no concrete decision on this point was made since the time was not considered ripe. (For more on this concept, see the Press Review in *Clarion*, June 14, 1996.)

Synod decided that contact with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken in order to seek unity would continue on the deputy level only if these churches declared themselves ready to go into the direction of removing the obstacles that now exist. According to the synod these obstacles include tolerance for deviation from the confessions, insufficient guarantees for a clear and unambiguous binding to the reformed doctrine, and the fact that the subscription form for ministers is not binding.

### Marriage form

Synod dealt with a request from the regional synod of Groningen to deal with objections that had been brought against the marriage form. In the end, synod decided that the objections had merit and that an alternate marriage form could be used while deputies to be appointed by synod would work further on the matter. Although it is not always easy to piece together all the facts from newspaper reports, it appears that motivations for synod to make its decision include the difficulties that members of the churches have with the present form, the wrong impressions that could be created by the current form among non-Christians attending a Reformed wedding and the need to update the form for our present age. In this way it is hoped that the marriage form would speak Biblically to our times about marriage.

Changes in the new provisional form include the following. The reference to Gen. 1:28 (be fruitful and multiply) is no longer included with the purpose of marriage but with that portion of the form that recounts the institution of marriage in paradise. Also the present reference under the purpose of

marriage that "the human race is to be continued and increased" has been changed to "Furthermore, man and wife shall be prepared to give heed to their calling to parenthood and so to be of service for the continuation of God's covenant." In this way synod apparently hoped that the (wrong) impression that the old form promoted the unbridled begetting of children could be countered. Another change in the new form is that the relationship is no longer described as the husband having authority over his wife. The form does however speak of the leadership role of the husband. A final change that can be mentioned here is that the new form describes the task of husband and wife differently when they are addressed about the duties of marriage. According to the old form the husband is to work faithfully in his daily calling so that he could support his family and help those in need and the wife is to take proper care of the family. In the new form man and wife are both told that they are to carry together the responsibility and the care for the family and to help others. This reflects the situation that the man is not always the breadwinner in the family.

Already there has been severe criticism of these changes, even from outside the Reformed Churches (Liberated). Accusations of giving it to the spirits of the age, especially feminism, have been made. Without the official text of the decisions (including the motivations), one can do no more at the moment but pass on the news that is available as objectively as possible.

### New missiological institute

More information was received about something which was mentioned the last time. The churches decided in synod to establish the Institute on Reformed Theological Training (IRTT) starting January 1, 1997. This Institute will have two components. It will continue the work of the experimental institute by the same name that has operated for about 3 years. For the past three summers this institute organized courses in English to equip those from Eastern Europe for the benefit of rebuilding the church there. This work will now be expanded. A second component is that the work of the Reformed Missiological Training (GMO for Gereformeerde Missiologische Opleiding) will be incorporated into IRTT. The GMO has been around for fifteen years and has helped equip (Dutch) people for missionary or mission aid work.

## A CORRECTION

### THE BLESSING ELDER.

In the Press Review published in the issue of June 14, 1996, I stated that the divisive issue of the blessing elder "was resolved with the decision to appoint a committee to evaluate and test the decision of the previous synod."

Rev. A. de Jager from Zwolle was so kind to write me that this was not accurate. From the material he sent me it became clear to me that the committee mentioned in the news article which I used (in *Nederlands Dagblad*, May 4, 1996) was not a committee to report to the next synod, but was an internal synodical committee that functioned in the decision making process of synod. My apologies for this error.

So what did Synod decide on this issue? It does not make much sense to quote the entire decision here in this correction notice for that would take far too much room and besides much additional background information would need to be given in order to understand the full decision properly. Let me summarize the matter thus. Synod agreed with some of the objections brought against the decision of the previous synod, but affirmed:

1. Also in a "reading service," the Lord is present with His blessing. This blessing gets liturgical form by an elder's speaking the blessing without changing the formulation.
2. This liturgical rule needs to be followed since the churches agreed to adhere to liturgical decisions of the General Synod (Art 65 of the Dutch C.O.).
3. In the exceptional circumstance that a "reading service" is conducted by one who is not an elder, it is preferable that the worship service be opened and closed by an elder.

Furthermore, Synod decided not to grant the requests to appoint deputies to study this matter further. Finally synod also decided that the remaining objections against the previous synod's decision form no hinderance for the present synod to take a decision which is basically a liturgical rule.

C. Van Dam

The synod will appoint eleven board members for the IRTT which will also get a missiologist/theologian to direct its development and work. The churches will be assessed a maximum three guilders per member.

## Israel

For the first time in about forty-five years, our Dutch sister churches have official ecclesiastical contact with a Jewish Christian congregation in Israel, the

Bat Zion congregation in Jerusalem where Rev. Ben Zvi is minister. In their report to synod, the deputies for relations with foreign churches recommended supporting this congregation. It subscribes to the Westminster Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt. Rev. Zvi used to be in the service of the Lutheran Church in Finland but he broke with it in 1994 because of Scripture criticism in that body. Most of the congregation followed their

minister. Rev. Zvi studied theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia where he studied, among others, under Dr. C. Van Til.

After meeting for eleven weeks, synod went on summer recess at the end of June. It will resume September 3 and hopes to finish its work by September 12.

(Source: Nederlands Dagblad)



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# Pursuing federative unity: obstacles, possibilities and strategies<sup>(3)</sup>

By J. DeJong

*Text of a speech (part 3 of three parts) that was held in various forms in the churches in Winnipeg, and the region of Classis Pacific from April 18 to April 26. The text has been adapted to include some points of discussion that arose in the meetings, and also to pass on elements that were neglected in addresses because of time limitations.*

## STRATEGIES

### 3.0 Strategies

In the previous articles we have considered both the obstacles to federative unity with the Fellowship churches, and the possibilities open to us. I now wish to look at various strategies towards achieving federative unity. I have already touched on some of these points, but we would like to consider some recent suggestions in this regard, and review the over-all approach that might best be followed.

#### 3.1 Federation of Federations?

In the Netherlands a proposal on federative unity has recently been put forward by Prof. W. Van 't Spijker, a proposal which has brought a new element into the discussions on ecumenicity. He has suggested that a loose federation of uniting churches be formed, one which incorporates several different federations.<sup>1</sup> He sees this as a temporary step towards full federative unity, and he sees this as a form of recognition which could facilitate the

process towards union. Generally this proposal received positive reactions also among our colleagues in the Liberated churches in Holland.<sup>2</sup> Van 't Spijker appeals to the historical precedents. He states that the situation of the churches in Holland after the Synod of Dort essentially demonstrated this kind of a model. A general synod was not held after 1619, and the various provinces were tied together in terms of a loose federation. Each group kept their own habits and customs, but recognized the other churches in the other "regional synods." It was not until after the Secession that the process of unification began, and that was a laborious process indeed.

The proposal regarding a loose federation has also surfaced on our continent. Rev. Tuininga has made a similar suggestion for the churches in Canada and America, and also added his opinion that the Canadian Reformed people would react with horror at such a proposal.<sup>3</sup> Others have also defended the notion of forming a United Reformed Church with existing Reformed and Presbyterian churches that seek to be faithful to God's Word. For them, the step of an initial federation may well be attractive.

On the whole I have certain misgivings concerning this proposal, at least in our situation.<sup>4</sup> I question the usefulness of this kind of a federation. Prof. M. Te Velde felt that it represents a positive step forward because it would

facilitate closer and more frequent discussions. I wonder whether this is necessarily so, and whether we cannot simply continue the discussions in the current form. Te Velde also made clear that several points would need to be worked out, as for example, attendance at the Lord's Supper.

My question would be: what kind of a signal do you give to your congregation? And what kind of signal do you give to your young people? Te Velde is open about the fact that we must simply recognize the new reality that our young people would get to know each other and intermarry in the "small reformed community." And he admits that this could cause problems in maintaining church discipline. Some form of guideline would need to be established.<sup>5</sup> It is no wonder then that Te Velde suggests that the churches proceed with patience, caution and prayer. But if more convergence is needed before the churches can do this, why not simply continue to pursue full federation?

Another difficulty I have with the proposal is that it posits a formal vehicle for unity, but does not add much to the shaping of essential understanding. We can easily implement more formal and structured channels for discussion, but do we really enhance the process in this way? The Reformed rule is always: the less bureaucracy the better. In the period after 1886, the brothers used conferences, both of officers and members. Why not promote more informal



conferences which can then provide statements of initial agreement which can be forwarded to the various assemblies.

The arguments that Prof. Van 't Spijker puts forward in defense of his proposal are not always convincing. He says that his concept fits with the notion of the Reformed viewpoint concerning the relation between a local church and the church federation. Everything here is determined by the idea of *foedus*, covenant of grace. Yet I do not think the ecclesiastical usage of the term "federation" can be easily transferred to a loose organization of churches that each have their own different distinctive federations.

As a second argument he says that we all acknowledge each other within the sphere of the one covenant of God. "The covenant does not stop with the limitations of our own present church federations, a fact that is emphasized by our recognition of baptism administered outside of our own church."<sup>6</sup> Yet this attempt to stretch the line of the covenant beyond the line of the church is weak. For we do not recognize baptisms administered outside our church as baptism administered in the church. And our recognition of a baptism is not based on our assertion of its inherent validity. Recall what Augustine said in opposition to the Donatists, We do not call you to stop baptizing, but we call you to stop baptizing separately. He added, We acknowledge your office, but we do not acknowledge the *separation* of your office. In his view the Donatists were not part of the catholic church.

A third argument Van 't Spijker brings forward is that the thrust of Scripture, confession and church order does not justify the current situation with regard to the Dutch churches. And it is even less justified when you think in terms of the witness that the churches must bring in a totally secularized culture. Here I can only agree, also with regard to the North American context; but then I ask: does this point to the need of a federation of federations? Or should we not communally take a closer look at the norms of the confession as found in Article 28 BC? A conference or federation of federations is fine if it fosters unity; it is a detriment to all if it circumvents the revealed will of God concerning the way to true and lasting federative unity. That way is always: submission to the norms, and unity according to the call and norm of Art. 28, B.C.

A fourth argument brought forward by Prof. Van 't Spijker is that he sees this plan as something that is within reach, whereas by clear indication closer unity is at present not possible. But this again raises the question: why the one and not the other?

As a fifth argument, Van 't Spijker appeals to the situation in the Old Testament. He says "The Old Testament demonstrates a unity of the covenant of God even though the twelve tribes each illustrate a different life situation. But is this comparison legitimate? For the twelve tribes were the one Israel of God, despite all the differences between them. And even with the juncture between the ten tribes and the two tribes, the LORD still treated Israel as His people. But this cannot readily be transferred to the spiritual Israel of the New Testament. In Christ the dividing wall has been broken down! That is an attribute of the church in this day and age, not in the future.

There are many points of agreement in the proposal of Prof. Van 't Spijker. He warns against going by feelings, and he opposes placing all emphasis on: the unity of the heart. From someone with a Free Reformed perspective this is heart warming to read. But there are some areas that need closer attention, also from the ecclesiological perspective. True convergence can only begin to take place when there is communal understanding and agreement regarding the norms of Articles 27-29 of the Belgic Confession.

I can go along with a proposal like this, but only under some provisions which I have maintained in the previous articles. First, there must be some inherent recognition of the legitimacy of one's past history. With a confession of sin and weakness in that history, that should still be possible. Second, there should be an adopted program towards full federalational unity. You need a blueprint or skeleton framework with which to channel your discussions. The whole world of business and politics knows all about setting goals and then realizing them through disciplined negotiations. The same should be possible with us.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.2 Local or National?

This brings me to the question concerning the best way of proceeding with regard to discussions that have been taking place on a local level. Here and there some progress has been made, but the discussions are threatened with stagnation because there is uncertainty as to the way we must proceed. Some suggest greater co-operation at the local

level, even if the rest of the federation is not involved. Others suggest that we should proceed towards unity together as a federation of churches.

Now it will be clear from what I have written earlier that I am of the latter sentiment.<sup>8</sup> This is also the position taken by the Synod of Ommen 1993, and maintained by the Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity in Holland reporting to Synod Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996.<sup>9</sup> They suggest that no arrangements be made with respect to pulpit exchanges or admission to the Lord's Supper except on the federative level. Thus, all forms of local contact should be explored with the exception of these two more advanced possibilities: admission to the Lord's Supper and pulpit exchanges.

What if the local situation senses that it would be possible to move towards table fellowship and pulpit exchange? In my view this requires not only the approbation of classis, but also the input of the churches in common. Thus, we might propose a conditional classical approbation, that is an approbation which classis gives conditional upon the approbation of regional synod; regional synod in turn could give its approbation conditional upon the approbation of the general synod. Naturally the ideal to strive for is that the Fellowship Churches take the same step – all in accordance with the church order of 1920! We could then have a scenario very similar to 1892, that is, arrange to hold synods meeting in tandem, which would then in a process of mutual negotiation, iron out the last steps towards federative unity.

Such a process of federative negotiation would require the scrutiny of the local churches just to be sure that no strange elements would be introduced into the basis of the churches. But this can all be done within the confines of the church order of Dort, which holds decisions to be settled and binding, and permits the right of appeal in case one is aggrieved in his conscience.

### 3.3 The unity we desire

One of the dangers in the entire process towards unity is that local activities run ahead of the work on the federative level. Prof. J. Kamphuis has warned against local experiments, and the institution of local practices which end up only promoting a unity on the local level which comes at the cost of federative unity.<sup>10</sup> And I concur with these warnings, and would only reiterate them as being of more significance in the North American context. Our distances are broader than those in Holland, so there

is a temptation to think that a broader group of people really has no role or function within a local context. But that will not produce a lasting unity. It only has the danger of producing greater divisions.

We need to pursue a unity on the federative level which does not come at the cost of unity at the local level.<sup>11</sup> This means that local initiatives should have the approbation of classis. And classis cannot give its approbation to local initiatives unless certain specific parameters with regard to federative unity have been adopted. Already in 1959, Kamphuis said that this whole matter of federative involvement is simply a matter of loyalty to one another.<sup>12</sup> We must make it our aim to practice this loyalty first of all. Otherwise many local experiments will only lead to shipwreck.

The need for watchfulness on this point is all the greater since the federative initiatives of the former independent churches harbour a concept of federation somewhat different than our own. Their federative regulation is based primarily on voluntary co-operation. Our federative principle is based on obligatory co-operation, and on the duty to provide mutual help and assistance to one another as members of the body of Christ. Some of the independents have suggested: the local church shows the being of the church; the federation is non-essential, and only a matter of the well-being of the church. Or, as others have said: there is not direct reference to a federation in Scripture. We would suggest that the requirements for federative unity are given in Scripture. One may say that the way this is worked out, and the contours and further shape of that federation is left to human responsibility. But the requirements are clearly found in Scripture itself.<sup>13</sup>

These requirements form the true heartbeat of the churches of the Reformation. A loose form of federation is fundamentally switching tracks to another form of ecclesiastical existence. So the watchfulness and attentiveness to federative interests involves the duty of everyone, and requires the input of everyone.

For this is our heritage. The fundamental point of dispute in 1892 was what kind of a unity do we want. In effect, the process really began to move when from the side of the Christelijke Gereformeerde brothers there was the proposal for a substantial federative unity. The dissenters then said: but the local churches have not been involved. But that argument did not hold water, for all the proposals had been duly sent to the local churches. It was Kuyper who

pushed for a unity which would leave the local churches entirely free. He neglected the element of local involvement. It was the dissenters who promoted local involvement. But they had little regard for the necessary role of the broader assemblies. We can thank 1892 that it followed the right course: honouring the place of the local church, but at the same time insisting on a unity implemented and maintained at the federative level. To this legacy we are bound, and we should strive to the utmost to honour the gains of the past, and apply them in our efforts to achieve true federative unity today. Then and only then do we have hope for the future.

<sup>1</sup>I do not have a copy of Prof. Van 't Spijker's articles, which were first published in *De Wekker*. However, an extensive summary of Prof. Van 't Spijker's position is given by F. Tijssen in *Nederlands Dagblad*, June 7, 1995. Prof. Van 't Spijker responded to several reactions in *Nederlands Dagblad* June 22, 1995.

<sup>2</sup>The reaction of Rev. E.A. de Boer is to be found in *Nederlands Dagblad*, June 8, 1995; Prof. Te Velde reacted in *De Reformatie*, July 8 and July 22, 1995, (Vol 70, nos 41, 42). Prof. J. Kamphuis responded in articles in *Nader bekeken*, November and December 1995.

<sup>3</sup>I think it was rightly pointed out by Rev. C. Van Spronsen that this is an exaggeration. We do not need to react with horror, for there are enough other things in the world to which we can react with that sentiment. But we should react with reason and caution.

<sup>4</sup>It is important to keep in mind that Van 't Spijker's proposal concerns the relations between the Dutch churches, and is not at all directed to the North American context.

<sup>5</sup>One version of that small Reformed persuasion would include not only what we call the Free Reformed churches, but also the churches outside the confederation, the *Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken*, cf "Door denken over een federatie" *De Reformatie*, Vol. 70, #42, (July 22, 1995), 830-834.

<sup>6</sup>W. Van 't Spijker, "Niet gevoel maar belijdenis basis voor eenheid" *Nederlands Dagblad* June 22, 1995.

<sup>7</sup>There have been many reactions to the proposals of Van 't Spijker. Prof. Te Velde essentially agrees and suggest the formation of an ad hoc consultation committee for the purpose of growing together. Prof. J. Kamphuis is also in agreement but at present suggests limiting the umbrella organization to the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*. He is hes-



CALLLED by the Church at Orangeville, ON

**Rev. R. Aasman**

of Edmonton, AB (Providence)

\*\*\*

ACCEPTED a call by the Church at Calgary, AB

**Candidate R.J. Eikelboom**

\*\*\*

With thanks to God, the church at Taber has begun worshipping in its new building located at the corner of 55th Street and 38th Avenue, Taber, AB

itant about including the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*. Here Te Velde also has his hesitations, although they are not as strong.

<sup>8</sup>See my article "Local or national?" *Clarion* Vol. 44, # 9 (May 5, 1995) 202-204

<sup>9</sup>This Synod opened on April 10, 1996 in Berkel en Rodenrijs.

<sup>10</sup>In *Nader bekeken*, January 1996, 10

<sup>11</sup>This is also the approach taken by the Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity now reporting to the General Synod 1996 in Holland, cf A. De Snoo, "Het verschil tussen eenheid en kerkelijke eenheid: 500 manuren" *De Reformatie*, Vol 71, #20 (Feb 24, 1996), 403ff.

<sup>12</sup>J. Kamphuis, "Samenbindings kracht in Eindhoven" III *De Reformatie*, Vol 34, #6 (November 8, 1958), 45ff. He says: "dat is een zaak van trouw aan elkaar," 61. Later he says: you must honour your commitments to the church federation, cf "Drie vragen" Vol 34, #37 (June 20, 1959), 296-297

<sup>13</sup>H.J. Schilder, "De vrijmaking als bewaring van het kerkverband" *De Reformatie* Vol 31, #3, (October 15, 1955) 17-18 Schilder says: "De nadere regeling, de concrete vorm van onze kerkverbands oefening daar zegt de Schrift niets van, dat alles mogen wij vrijwillig aangaan." p. 18.

## RAY OF SUNSHINE



Change of Address for **Fenny Kuik**

New Address is: 140 Foch Avenue  
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# Which Bible translation? (first of two parts)

By C. Van Dam

The topic I have been asked to speak about<sup>1</sup> is of great importance. Which Bible translation should be used in the churches? How is the Word of God, originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, to be read in a comprehensible way to the congregation today? In dealing with this topic within the time available, I propose that we first briefly consider past history with respect to this topic in the midst of the churches, secondly look at the options that are now being discussed, and finally come to some conclusions.

## A brief look at the past

The history of the use of a particular Bible translation in the churches has not been an easy one. Back in 1954 when the first synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches convened in southern Manitoba, it was decided to use the King James Version (KJV). A key consideration against the Revised Standard Version (RSV) was that it originated from the circle of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA which had a liberal character. Synod also took note of the fact that severe criticisms had been lodged against this translation by orthodox groups. A key consideration in favour of the King James Version was that its faithfulness to Scripture (“Schriftgelovig karakter”) was beyond doubt (Acta 1954, Art. 71).

However, as the KJV became less and less appealing because of its antiquated language, requests came from the churches to consider the RSV for use in the churches. Synod Orangeville (1968) therefore appointed a committee to study the matter (Acts 1968, Art. 45) and the next Synod at New Westminster cautiously decided that “no valid reasons have been adduced why the RSV should be declared unacceptable for use by the Churches” (Acts 1971, Art. 33). The next two committees appointed by subsequent synods to continue studying the RSV, sent recommendations for change to the RSV

Bible Committee and concluded that there were unscriptural influences in the RSV.<sup>2</sup> Synod each time decided to maintain the use of the RSV in the churches, along with the KJV.<sup>3</sup> It was however clear that some churches continued to experience difficulties with the RSV as an acceptable translation and these churches sent overtures to Synod Coaldale (1977). This situation resulted in the appointment of a committee to compare the KJV, RSV, NASB (New American Standard Bible) and NIV (New International Version).<sup>4</sup> The committee concluded that if the RSV presented problems, the churches should be free to use the KJV, NASB or NIV. Synod Smithville (1980) decided to leave only the use of the KJV and NASB in the freedom of the churches and continued in the line of earlier synodical decisions recommending the RSV to the churches.<sup>5</sup> Also this synod had received correspondence from the churches expressing their concern about the RSV.

## Concerns about the RSV

What were the concerns about the RSV that refused to go away? It is good for us to briefly consider them for we tend to get used to what we are familiar with and eventually we do not want to hear anything negative about it. That is also what has gradually happened with the RSV in the churches. Unless we are willing to listen to the criticisms voiced in the past against the RSV, we could be in danger of simply preferring the RSV out of a sense of traditionalism and refusing to change out of a sense of conservatism.

Let me pass on a selection of these concerns.<sup>6</sup> I will keep it very simple and non-technical.

a. Too often (although certainly not always) the RSV refers to the Holy Spirit using a neuter pronoun, rather than a personal one.<sup>7</sup> For example in Eph. 1:13-14 we read in the RSV that the Ephesians “were sealed with the

promised Holy Spirit, which is the guarantee of our inheritance.” That should read “who is the guarantee of our inheritance.” The Holy Spirit is a person. He is the guarantee of our inheritance. The Spirit is not an impersonal entity to be referred to by “which,” a pronoun used for referring to things.<sup>8</sup> (Cf., e.g., Heid. Cat., LD 20). Other examples of an impersonal reference to the Spirit are Rom. 5:5; 8:11; 1 Cor. 2:12; 6:19; Titus 3:6; 1 John 3:24.<sup>9</sup> The NASB, NIV, and NKJV do not misrepresent the Holy Spirit this way.<sup>10</sup>

b. The RSV does not always exhibit the respect for the Hebrew text of the Old Testament that it should, but too easily makes changes in the traditional text. The NASB, NIV, and NKJV show a much greater respect for the Hebrew text.

c. The unity of the Old and New Testament is not always reflected in the RSV. Rather the RSV creates unnecessary tension between certain OT passages and their being quoted in the NT. The RSV translates the original passage or quotation in such a way that the Bible reader cannot readily see that one is dealing with quotations or references to the OT passage in the NT. For example, God’s promise to Abram in Gen. 12:3 reads in the RSV in part that “by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves”; but when this passage is quoted in Gal. 3:8, we read “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” There is no good reason to have such a difference between the Old Testament passage and when it is quoted in the New Testament. On this and other such cases the NASB, NIV, and NKJV are much better, for by the translating the unity of Scripture comes out much more clearly for the reader.<sup>11</sup>

d. Sometimes we see in the RSV the influence of modern critical scholarship in the Old Testament. Some examples are the following. The RSV translates Gen. 11:1 “Now the whole earth had one language and few

words." This rendering suggests that language evolved over a period of time from simple to complex and that early in history the vocabulary was limited. Such a conclusion is however unwarranted and the NIV rendering "Now the whole world had one language and a common speech" is much better. The NASB and NKJV are similar to the NIV.

Other examples include Joshua 10:12 where the sun and moon are addressed by Joshua as "thou," a pronoun reserved in the RSV for God. Thus the RSV implies that Joshua recognized the sun and moon as gods. But there is no Biblical justification for this. In Psalm 51:18, the RSV has David praying "rebuild the walls of Jerusalem." That should be "build the walls of Jerusalem" as in the NASB, NIV, and NKJV. The RSV rendering betrays the conviction that this must be a very late Psalm, post-exilic, when Jerusalem had been destroyed. The reason for this view is that the Psalm has a developed theology of sin and forgiveness, something which could not have been around in the days of David. Again, there is no Biblical warrant for this understanding and the NASB, NIV, and NKJV give no offense in this regard.

e. Finally, it can be mentioned that the RSV sometimes introduces unnecessary contradictions in the way a passage is rendered. In Gen. 9:20 the RSV translates that "Noah was the first tiller of the soil." But this contradicts Gen. 4:2 which tells us that Cain tilled the ground earlier. Again the NASB, NIV, and NKJV renderings do not give that objection. They render in the sense that Noah proceeded to, or started to till the soil (after the flood).

### Studies and decisions

In view of items like the above, it is understandable that churches asked for a study of the NASB, NIV, and NKJV. The first committee mandated to do this recommended already in 1980 that the KJV, NASB and NIV be left in the freedom of the churches if the RSV met with insurmountable objections. Synod Smithville 1980 however wanted to maintain the RSV in the churches in spite of the problems associated with it, but granted the use of the KJV and NASB if the RSV met with insurmountable objections (*Acts 1980*, Art. 111). The NASB however never caught on. Anyone who has used it on a regular basis over a period of time can understand why. This translation, although helpful for the sake of comparison, is

not suitable for use in church. It is too literal and stilted and does not flow. Therefore, even though this translation could have been adopted by any of the churches since 1980, no church opted for this possibility as far as I know.

Meanwhile, the complete NIV which had appeared in 1978 and the NKJV which came a year later were becoming more and more known by those in the churches who used these translations for their personal use. It was also clear that the New RSV, the successor to the RSV, was unacceptable. Overtures from the churches resulted in Synod 1992 giving the Committee for Bible Translations the mandate "to do a comparative study of the NASB, NIV, and NKJV . . . in order to determine which translation can be positively recommended for use by the churches" (*Acts 1992*, Art. 35). The result of this committee's work was a report to General Synod Abbotsford 1995 which appeared as a book of 253 pages entitled *NASB, NIV, or NKJV: Which Version Now?*. The committee wrestled with the issue as thoroughly as the time frame and resources allowed and were initially not at all hopeful that one translation could be recommended to the churches. On studying the matter, members of the committee backed away from initial negative impressions they had of the NIV. Such negative impressions were based in part on the work of an earlier synodical committee.<sup>12</sup> However, as work on studying the NIV proceeded, the committee grew in appreciation for the care and integrity with which this new and fresh translation had been done. The result was that the committee advised that synod "recommend the New International Version for use within the churches." Synod decided to do so. Synod also decided to "leave it in the freedom of the churches if they feel compelled to use another translation" (*Acts 1995*, Art. 72). I understand this decision to mean, another translation of the three that were studied by the committee, namely, NASB and NKJV. After all these were the other translations that were dealt with in the report as mandated by the previous Synod.

We are now at the stage where the churches are discussing these Acts of Synod and making their decisions.

### Options

#### *THE RSV*

In the discussions that are taking place, the suggestion is sometimes

made that we stick with the RSV. While such a suggestion is understandable, given the widespread use this translation has enjoyed, some reflection will however show that remaining with the RSV is not a very good option. The Committee on Bible Translations in their extensive report have shown that the NASB, NIV, and NKJV are all better translations than the RSV. A Committee of our sister churches in Australia had come to the same decision five years earlier in 1990. Is only the best not good enough when it comes to conveying the Word of God to the congregation? Why would one want to stick with something inferior when better versions are available?

This question is all the more compelling when one realizes that whereas the RSV finds its origin in the liberal National Council of Churches of Christ, the sponsorship and translation of the NASB, NIV, and NKJV is associated with those who are fully committed to the infallibility and divine authorship of Holy Scripture. Indeed, all translators who worked on the NIV and NKJV had to subscribe to a document affirming this commitment. Not surprisingly, whereas two earlier synodical committees (which reported respectively in 1974 and 1977) concluded that there was evidence of unscriptural influence in the RSV, such a conclusion could not be made with respect to the NASB, NIV, and NKJV.

Especially those churches which had grave concerns about the RSV and conveyed such sentiments to past general synods can now be thankful that they have another option. It is difficult to justify sticking with the RSV when extensive study reports made from within our own circles both in Australia and in Canada show that the NASB, NIV, and NKJV are all better than the RSV.

#### *NASB AND NKJV*

If the RSV should then be abandoned, we are left with the NASB, NIV, and NKJV. We have already seen that the NASB never really caught on in our circles in spite of the fact that it was available for adoption since 1980. The translation is too literal and thus unsuitable for worship and easy comprehension. Neither the Committee nor Synod Abbotsford 1995 could positively recommend the NKJV. Why is that?

Very briefly, two key reasons are as follows. Firstly, the NKJV, like the NASB, falls short in terms of readability and clarity. Part of the difficulty is that

the NKJV is to be considered a new edition of the KJV. For that reason, the structure and language of the KJV are retained as much as possible. In a promotional brochure called *Statement of Purpose* the publisher states that "this edition shall not corrupt nor diminish the original translation . . . so that a reader of this edition may follow without confusion a reading of the original edition from the pulpit." The result is an English that is neither fresh and modern nor Elizabethan but an awkward combination of the two.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, the NKJV is designed for an audience that wishes to cling to the KJV. Many of its idiosyncrasies stem from this concern. Another consequence is that the same Greek text that was used for the KJV (the Textus Receptus) has to be used for the NKJV. With this decision all progress made in understanding the history of the text of the NT is essentially brushed aside. This is unjustifiable.<sup>14</sup> And so because the NKJV is aimed at an audience quite

unlike what one finds in the Canadian Reformed churches (where there is not a clinging to the KJV simply because it is old), this translation is not really suitable for us. A faithful fresh translation is better.<sup>15</sup>

*Next time: what about the NIV?*

<sup>1</sup>This material (slightly revised for publication) was delivered as a speech to a meeting of the Fellowship of Canadian Reformed University Students in Burlington on March 22, 1996.

<sup>2</sup>*Acts 1974*, Art. 182; *Acts 1977*, Art. 104.

<sup>3</sup>*Acts 1974*, Art. 182; *Acts 1977*, Art. 104.

<sup>4</sup>*Acts 1977*, Art. 105.

<sup>5</sup>*Acts 1980*, Art. 111.

<sup>6</sup>For a more complete listing see *Committee on Bible Translations Report to General Synod Abbotsford 1995*, 109-126.

<sup>7</sup>Correct translations also exist as, e.g., in Acts 5:23, Rom. 8:16, 26, and 2 Tim. 1:14.

<sup>8</sup>We find the use of "which" referring to people in the KJV because at that time this was proper English. Such usage today is archaic at best. Yet the RSV maintained this usage in the passages mentioned above in its 1971 revision.

<sup>9</sup>On the other hand the RSV renders references to the Holy Spirit correctly in passages like Acts 5:32; Rom. 8:16, 26; 1 Cor. 12:11; Eph. 4:30; 2 Tim. 1:14.


<sup>10</sup>There is one exception. The NASB uses the impersonal relative for the Holy Spirit in 1 John 3:24. This is incomprehensible given their use of the personal reference to the Holy Spirit elsewhere. Could this be a slip?

<sup>11</sup>Other examples include: Gen. 18:18 (Gal. 3:8); Gen. 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 (Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:16); Deut. 6:4 (Mk. 12:29); 32:43 (Rom. 15:10); Ps. 45:6[7] (Heb. 1:8); Ps. 109:8 (Acts 1:20).

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Acts 1980, Art. 111.

<sup>13</sup>For examples of old fashioned diction and awkward style, see Committee on Bible Translations, *Report to Synod Abbotsford 1995*, 72-74, 91-94.

<sup>14</sup>It is widely acknowledged, for example, that there is not sufficient evidence to include the reading of 1 John 5:7-8 (as in the KJV) in the NT. There are also difficulties in the text of Revelation. See Committee on Bible Translations, *Report to Synod Abbotsford 1995*, 19-21, 93.

<sup>15</sup>See also the excerpt from the report of the Bible Translations Committee published in *Clarion*, "For Whom is the New King James Version," *Clarion* 44:8 (1995) 185-187. 

## Middle East Reformed Fellowship

# NEWS from MERF-CANADA

### MERF's Gospel broadcasting expands

Powerful short wave transmitters, which the former South African authorities used for political ends, have now become available for Gospel broadcasting in the Arabic language. The transmitters have the capability of providing clear signals throughout Africa, the Middle East and Europe. MERF's Gospel messages are scheduled to be aired twice a week over these transmitters, as of August 1996. Also in the next few months, MERF plans to add two more weekly broadcasts to its present three which are aired via the powerful medium wave (AM) transmitters of Radio Monte Carlo to the Middle East and North Africa.

### Sudan Update

During the past few months, the Sudan People Liberation Army has suc-

ceeded in forcing the government troops to abandon several of their strategic strongholds in the south and east of the country. This has somewhat distracted the Muslim authorities from continuing their pressures against several of the Christian tribal areas in the extreme south. Reports indicate that many thousands of refugees returned to their villages and fields, especially in the areas bordering Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Most of these tend to be women and older men. Church attendance in some of those areas continues to expand. Many of the families, however, have not been able to track down the whereabouts of their young men. Many are presumed dead or forced to join the rebel army. Even though relief supplies are now more easily provided through Kenya and Uganda, most of the returning refugees continue to suffer from lack of food

and lack of medical care. Church leaders have expressed concern over the spread of tuberculosis. The Muslim authorities continue to obstruct the efforts of Christian relief agencies seeking to expand the mobility of their medical care units among southerners.

Another item of distressing news is the confirmation of organized slavery efforts. Southern Sudanese boys and girls are being abducted and sold out as farm and domestic workers for Northern Muslim families and landlords. Most are nine to sixteen years old. A southern Sudanese lawyer has confirmed, however, that with the help of pastors and evangelists he was able to track down three children who were abducted and sold when they were merely six years old. One freed child was abducted for almost two years. The government does not officially approve such practices. Yet no disciplinary actions have been

taken against government officials or army officers involved in them. A team of church workers are actively searching for “enslaved” southern children. They are receiving help from northerners involved in human rights endeavours. In most cases it seemed that the “slaves” were subjected to Islamic indoctrination. All the southern young men abducted and forced to join the army of the northern government are being pressured to Islamize. Two evangelists, now giving priority to helping these young men retain their commitment to the Christian faith, are reporting encouraging results. Their efforts to organize groups for Bible study and prayers in the northern provinces are restoring many to Christ’s fold.

### Saudi believers are being built up in Christ through the Gospel broadcasts

Saudi Arabia continues to be one of the most closed and antagonistic countries to the Christian faith. Its application of the Muslim “shari’a” (law) is most brutal. The royal family, propped up and supported by the West, use the Islamic laws to suppress and eliminate every kind of threat. They claim to be the chief guardians of pure Islam. No religion or ideology, other than the ruler’s version of Islam is recognized or allowed any freedom whatsoever in the country.

The official Saudi media (radio, TV, newspapers and magazines) regularly attacks the Christian religion as false and infidel. They constantly parade “Christian” converts to Islam from different parts of the world who willingly and proudly offer their public testimonies to Islamic “truth.”

Despite the tyrannical nature of the Saudi regime, the Gospel has a growing impact on the lives of a number of Saudis. The Lord is using the longing of the people for freedom and their disenchantment with Islam to consider the Gospel alternative. Saudis from every region of the country are not only listening to the proclamation of God’s Word over the airwaves, but also are becoming more bold in expressing their interest in following Christ. MERF’s broadcasts are designed not only to stimulate trust in Christ among listeners but also to continue to nourish the young believers and strengthen their faith. M. H. of Riyadh, the Saudi capital, is now under the personal care of other Arab believers, with whom he corresponds regularly. Here are excerpts from one of his last letters: “*A heartfelt greeting to you in the name of the Lord Redeemer. . . . I ask God, the Father of our Lord Jesus to preserve and strengthen you all as you seek to instruct our people in the way of the Saviour. . . . As you know, the Lord has visited me*

*by His grace and quickened my conscience to hear the truth and trust the only Saviour of mankind. . . . I enjoy my daily reading and study of the Word. The broadcasts continue to be a regular encouragement and comfort to my loneliness. . . . Continue to pray for me and help me as I seek to grow. . . .”*

### Thank you for your continued support!

MERF is very grateful for the continued support it receives from MERF-Canada. We thank the Lord for the many opportunities He still gives to bring the Good News in the Middle East. Please remember the needs of persecuted believers in your prayers. May the work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship bear much fruit so that many may still come to know the only Saviour in whose name alone there is salvation!

If you would like to make a personal donation please make your cheque payable to MERF-Canada and send it to

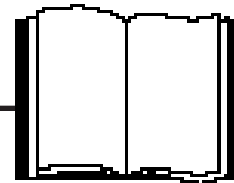
MERF-Canada  
1225 Highway 5, R.R. #1  
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

On behalf of MERF-Canada,  
Rev. J. Mulder, chairman  
Mrs. J. Van Dam, secretary



## READER’S FORUM

By Herman Bosscher



# A Plea for Continued Discussion about Bible Translations

Now that Synod Abbotsford decided to recommend the NIV for use within the churches, I would like to make a few remarks concerning this decision and in particular of what members of the Committee for Bible Translations (CBT) had to say in the course of time.

To begin with, in the Sept. 22, 1995 (p. 424) issues of *Clarion* is an article by one of the members of the CBT under the heading; “In defense of Synod’s recommendation of the NIV.” In this article we are told, “The NIV is closer in style

and form to the RSV than any other English version, according to Robert C. Bratcher, author of the ‘Good News for Modern Man, Today’s English Version’ (TEV).” I am not sure what is meant by “style and form,” but I find the NIV of a complete different style than the RSV especially the NIV’s approach to sexuality, and numerous omissions and/or additions. Now I must admit not to have read Bratcher’s book, but I did read what Prof. Van Bruggen writes in his book, “The future of the Bible” on this matter:

“Between the KJV together with the RSV and the NASB, and the NIV together with the TEV and the Living Bible, there is a difference concerning faithfulness to the form chosen by the author.” I fully agree with the conclusion of Van Bruggen. It is further argued that for the sake of uniformity in the churches, the switch from the RSV to the NIV should be made as soon as possible for a great many in the pew are already reading the NIV and that number is growing. Schools are handing out NIV’s at

graduations, couples are receiving NIV's as wedding Bibles, on behalf of consistories I presume. It sounds like a foer-gone conclusion! All that is left to do is to adopt officially what unofficially is common practice already!

Then in the year end issue of *Clarion* the editor writes also in defense of the NIV: "If this decision is rescinded, many churches will not agree and it will cause quite a storm, so for the sake of uniformity it is best we accept the decision of Synod." Having followed the most interesting and informative discussion concerning Bible translations in *Clarion*, it came as a surprise to me to read in *Clarion* Feb. 9, 1996 a note of the editor "to consider the discussions concerning the Bible translation closed." No reason given! Now I have always thought dialogue to be an excellent way of informing the church membership on important issues and certainly on Bible translations. While I am on the subject, I have a question for the editors. What in their opinion is more important: filling the pages of *Clarion* with lengthy reports of ministers leaving one church and arriving at another church, High School graduations and women league day meetings and the like, sometimes 4-6 months after the fact, or informing the church community about the pros and cons of a Bible translation? More so now that it becomes evident that not everyone is happy with the decision of Synod. To be sure, there are other things to discuss than the elimination of Thee and Thou in the NIV. As one of the older generation, I have difficulty with what is stated under II in the Committee's report P.16: "The NIV is a fresh translation of the Bible. Unlike the NASB and the KJV, which are revisions of existing translations, the NIV has been willing to look at the text anew and follow it rather than tradition if necessary." This is an important point, we are told for "while not neglecting how previous generations have understood the Word, it is still the Word that is normative and not the understanding of previous generations." What is suggested here is, as I understand it, that previous generations may, partly, have misinterpreted God's Word, but now have the NIV with its fresh look there is a translation "that may spark a renewed interest in personal Bible reading and study among young and old and stimulate anew the exploring of the treasures of God's Word" P.17. It will be interesting to

watch this "renewed stimulation" to happen. I have always believed what the Bible says to be God's Word. But now I am not sure anymore. It is, as it were, previous generations with their limited understanding of the Word, were a people led to believe that the Bible says something which in fact it did not say.

Previous generations for more than three centuries have understood Thomas to be faithless, when he said "unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails and place my hand in His side I WILL NOT BELIEVE" (John 20:25). When the Lord see Thomas, the first thing He tells him is to "Put your finger here and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be the FAITHLESS BUT BELIEVING." But now we come to realize that we have misunderstood or misinterpreted this portion of God's Word, for what it really says here is simply that Thomas is told "Stop doubting and believe."

One of the fundamental pillars of our faith has been what is called in Dutch "Het nochtans des geloofs," but with the new translation of the NIV, by translators who have been willing to look at the text anew, this is undermined to a great extent.

Previous generations have understood God's Word to say that "Sarah by faith received power to conceive even when she was past age, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. (Heb. 11:11). However now that we have the NIV "a translation which takes all of Scripture into account and is true to the Word of God" (Pg.123) this verse was misinterpreted by previous generations, for it should have read: "By faith Abraham, though he was past age, was enabled to become a father." In Phil. 2 we read about our Lord Jesus who made Himself a man of no reputation (KJV), to one who emptied Himself (RSV), to one who made Himself nothing (NIV). Soon, for the sake of uniformity of pulpit and pew, we might be greeted: "Grace and fellowship be to you."

And what of all the omissions and or additions in the NIV all for the sake of lucid English? My concern is, did God consider it important to have it in the Bible? If not, He would have omitted it, or to say it with Scripture, we should not add, nor take away from what is written (Rev. 22).

Here lies the difficulty I have with the NIV. Does it enhance the spiritual understanding of God's Word? Prof.

Van Bruggen says in his book: "Formerly the central question was what was translated, today the central question is for whom it is translated." (p. 28) These are words to remember when reading the NIV. Prof. Van Bruggen also realized that the KJV to be antiquated and that it should be improved for the 20th Century but as a translation he says it is the most reliable (p. 192) unlike Synod's consideration F (p. 37) of the Acts "that a testing period is deemed not necessary since the CBT has already studied the NIV thoroughly." Perhaps we would do well to take the advice of Prof. Holwerda to heart: "We honour the Bible translators most, when we test the translation for a period of time."

As a footnote: I am grateful that many churches at least in Classis Pacific, have avoided the projected "storm" where a real storm may be brewing. . . . meanwhile casting a wary eye towards the horizon, (2000).

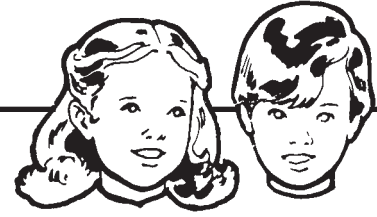
EDITOR'S NOTE – The note in the Feb. 9, 1996 *Clarion*, to which Mr. Bosscher refers, did not close all discussions on Bible translations; rather, it closed a very specific discussion. As proof that the discussion as such was not closed, I refer to the article by Dr. R. Faber, "William Tyndale as Translator of the Bible" (May 17, 1996). Further, this and upcoming issues of *Clarion* will contain more articles on Bible Translations.

Mr. Bosscher also asks what, in the opinion of the editors of *Clarion*, is more important: All sorts of reports about installations, league days, graduations, etc., or articles about Bible Translations? This is a false dilemma. Both are important. We need theological articles, but we also need public interest articles. *Clarion* tries to provide that variety. The root of the Christian life is doctrine. We cannot live without doctrine. But it is also good to read about the fruit of the doctrine, the Christian life – hence the space given to reports on graduations and league days.

The views expressed in Reader's Forum are not necessarily those of the editorial committee or the publisher. Submissions should not exceed 900 words. Those published may be edited for style or length.

# OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



## Dear Busy Beavers,

By the time you read this, you will either be in school, or enjoying your last week of holidays. I hope that you all had a wonderful time with your families. I enjoyed reading the letters you wrote this summer. It was interesting to read about your summer plans and other plans you have.

May God be with you as you begin a new school year. May your studies go well, and I hope you learn and grow a lot this year.

Enjoy the puzzles!

## Quiz Time!

### TREES

Match these trees with the happenings below.

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Cedar, 1 Kings 6:29   | a. Good shade like oak and poplar.               |
| 2. Oak, 2 Samuel 18:9    | b. Jesus used to teach a lesson.                 |
| 3. Fir, Psalm 104:17     | c. Elijah sat under when he fled from Jezebel.   |
| 4. Sycamore, Luke 19:1-4 | d. Used in building the Temple.                  |
| 5. Mustard, Mark 4:30-32 | e. Jesus used to show the growth of His Kingdom. |
| 6. Terebinth, Hosea 4:13 | f. Absalom caught his head in one.               |
| 7. Broom, 1 Kings 19:2-4 | g. Storks built nests in.                        |
| 8. Fig, Matthew 24:32    | h. Zacchaeus climbed to see Jesus.               |

### NAME PLEASE!

- This good man shed tears for Paul.
- Paul's first convert in Greece.
- Peter stayed in his home during his visit to Joppa.
- He introduced Paul to the Lord's disciples.
- The most favoured of women.
- He amazed the people with his magic.
- This evangelist rode in a chariot.
- He had his right ear cut off.
- The man chosen to fill the vacancy among the Twelve.
- The man to whom Luke addressed his two books.

(answers at end)



## ANIMAL WORD SEARCH

by Busy Beaver Suzanna Vegter

C H E E T A H A C D G R F E L A H W W T  
 A B N D O G B H D G A D B I Z Y X W O U  
 T D H B R I N O R D C G I R A F F E C R  
 E H O H X S F B O F R O G F E C D M K T  
 C E G N S B E A R G B G Y S H E D A R L  
 X H C O H A C F I S H B D A C D E F A E  
 Z E L E P H A N T X Y H G Y I K L M H N  
 Y L W H P B K X Y Z D N O Q O R T E S E  
 W T Y Z R R Z A C B B I R D S S O S W S  
 U R Z R A E B D R D D S X Z Y X Y U S U  
 A U X H D E E R I S E R D I S R H I N O  
 R A T S B I D D C S X B B D S I R N O M

### Can you find these hidden animal words?

- |       |         |        |         |          |
|-------|---------|--------|---------|----------|
| frog  | fish    | birds  | giraffe | elephant |
| rhino | cheetah | rat    | dog     | cat      |
| hog   | cow     | deer   | whale   | mouse    |
| shark | bear    | turtle |         |          |

Here's a puzzle to get you into a school mood!

### UNSCRAMBLE THE FOLLOWING SCHOOL WORDS!

by Busy Beaver Sarah Schulenberg

- cholso \_\_\_\_\_
- cielpn \_\_\_\_\_
- e pn \_\_\_\_\_
- esarer \_\_\_\_\_
- cesinec \_\_\_\_\_
- lbakc-bdrao \_\_\_\_\_
- htma \_\_\_\_\_
- gmarmre \_\_\_\_\_
- aethcre \_\_\_\_\_
- dsutnets \_\_\_\_\_
- okobs \_\_\_\_\_
- enhcrf \_\_\_\_\_
- eksd \_\_\_\_\_
- hsranpere \_\_\_\_\_
- ablets \_\_\_\_\_
- hciars \_\_\_\_\_
- albls \_\_\_\_\_
- tsirsa \_\_\_\_\_
- lascs \_\_\_\_\_
- calsrsomo \_\_\_\_\_



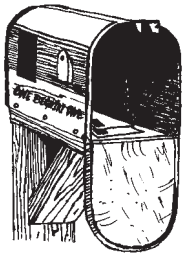
## HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Happy Birthday to all these Busy Beavers who celebrate their birthdays in September. May the Lord bless you in the coming year in whatever you do. I hope you have a really good time celebrating with family and friends.

Jordan Lodder	September 1	Tineke Bouma	11
Lydia Penninga	1	Nicole Alderliesten	11
Jessica Verhelst	2	Gerald Bartels	20
Kyle Lodder	4	Chelsea Kampen	20
Anthony Nijenhuis	4	Sarah Schulenberg	22
Jonathan Janssens	8	Christa Raap	23
Adena Feenstra	9	Danielle deJong	26
Danyse Buitenwerf	10	Breanne Meyer	28
Joanne Jans	11		

Crystal VanOmmen and Ellie Van Es would like an penpal!  
Here are the addresses:

Crystal VanOmmen	Ellie VanEs
P.O. Box 132	4136 Locust Lane
28 Gier St.	RR#2, Beamsville, ON
Grand Valley, ON	L0R 1B2
L0N 1G0	



### FROM THE MAILBOX

Hello, *Diana Nobel*. How was your holiday in Manitoba this summer? And to answer your questions, yes, I do have brothers and sisters, and I had a wonderful holiday this summer. Hope to hear from you soon, Diana. Bye.

Hi, *Crystal VanOmmen*. Would you like to be a member of the Busy Beaver Club? Could you send me your birthday? Then I can put your name on the birthday list, too. If you want to have a penpal, why don't you write the other Busy Beaver whose address is in this column? Then you both will have a penpal. Bye, Crystal.

Hello, *Sarah Schulenberg*. It sure sounds like you have been busy this summer! Where did you go camping? Can you talk some Dutch now, that you had visitors from Holland at your house for a month? Bye, Sarah.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Hannah Bergsma*. Wow, your brother must be a pretty smart baby if he can already say your name! How did your team do this summer, playing soccer? Did you pass the ball a lot? I hope you like Grade 2. Bye, Hannah.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Suzanna Vegter*. Thanks for the word search. It fit very well in the column this time. Do you help take care of your baby sister? Hope to hear from you again, Suzanna. Bye.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Ellie VanEs*. I hope you'll send me some codes and crossword puzzles to put in this column. Could you also send me your birthday, so I can put your name on the birthday list? Hope to hear from you soon, Ellie, Bye.

Hi, *Pauline Boeve*. It was interesting to read what you plan to do when you get older. It sounds like you were busy helping out on the farm while your dad was laid up. I hope you have a good school year. Bye, Pauline. (Thanks for the poems.)

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Amanda Vanderhoeven*. What's your new school like? How many people are in your family? I hope you enjoy reading the *Clarion* and doing the puzzles. Bye, Amanda.

Hi, *Virginia Jager*. I enjoyed reading your letter. Can you tell your friend that if she'd like to join the club to write on her own. You had an exciting time at the family picnic! Where did you see the man who needed help? Bye, Virginia.

Answers to Name Please!

Theophilus  
1. Timothy, 2. Stephanus, 3. Simon, 4. Barnabas, 5. Mary, 6. Simon of Samaria, 7. Philip, 8. Malchus, 9. Matthias, 10.

I hope you all have a good start to your new school year!

Love, Aunt Betty

## CLARION

### ADVERTISEMENTS

#### *Births*

Our family has been richly blessed by God with the birth of a baby girl

**HANNAH AIMEE**

Born on July 18, 1996.

A sister for *Lorelle* and *Jocelyn*.

**Henry and Corrie Klos**

596 Bertrand Drive, Lynden, WA 98264

With thankfulness to the Lord we announce the birth of our fourth son,

**SEAN WILLIAM**

Born July 5, 1996

A brother for *Joel*, *Michael* and *David*

**Henry and Kim Kieneker**

Cloverdale, BC

In His own miraculous way, God has entrusted into our care another daughter. We named her

**LEASA KAREN AIKEMA**

We pray for His guidance over her.

**Richard and Heather Aikema**

*Jeanne and Matthew*

With thankfulness to the Lord, we joyfully announce the birth of our daughter

**CHANELLE JENNIFER**

Born July 2, 1996

**Cor and Debbie DeBoer** (nee Jongsma)

A sister for *Crystal*

2103 McCollum Road, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0