



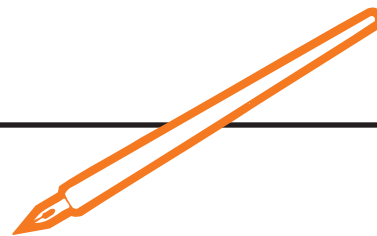
Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
VOLUME 45, NO. 23 NOVEMBER 15, 1996



*Visit to the
Free Reformed Churches
in South Africa*

By J. De Jong



A New Federation

Recently the Rev. W. den Hollander and I had the privilege to witness the proceedings of the first Synod of the United Reformed Churches of North America, held in Lynwood, Illinois, on October 1 and 2. Rev. den Hollander has submitted a report on the proceedings, so I will not describe the events or decisions of the meeting in this editorial. However, I believe that the formation of the new federation engenders some comments from our side, and I will make use of this editorial for this purpose.

The basis

We have every reason to be interested in the formation of this new federation since it represents that wing of the member churches in the Alliance of Reformed Churches that wanted to continue in the Reformed tradition, with a specifically Reformed church order. These churches have for the present held off on the formation of a united church that includes various churches from both a Reformed and Presbyterian background. And in itself this is a decision to be applauded. For it is wiser for churches with a common background to band together and solidify their bond before opening the doors to churches with a completely different background. After all, heritage and tradition are important elements in the functioning of the church. We acknowledge that God gathers His church through history, and He has led the Reformed churches in such a way that these churches have been preserved through many generations with their own unique identity.

This is not to say that we cannot include churches of Presbyterian background in the church gathering work of the Lord. Yet in so far as these churches seek to be faithful, they none the less have their distinct identity and traditions. A thoughtless and ill-prepared conglomeration of Reformed and Presbyterian churches will only produce a chaotic situation, and unity that is more fleeting than lasting. In our heritage God has provided gifts and treasures which others have received in lesser measure; in turn, we can acknowledge gifts in other traditions from which we can learn. Yet a consciousness of history and commonality is an important element in a federative bond.

The basis of the new federation is indeed common to ours: the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity. Here we can immediately acknowledge a common basis which commissions and enjoins us to seek and to continue to promote the unity of all true believers. There are at present four or five federations that have the same basis. Why cannot the differences among them be overcome and why cannot we as churches with a common background move towards the establishment of a United Reformed Church? The formation of this new federation of United Re-

formed Churches only presses this matter upon us with greater urgency.

The Church Order

In the articles recently published concerning the contact with the "Uniting Churches" I suggested that the Canadian Reformed churches move quickly to offer federative unity on the basis of the church order of 1914.¹ At the time it was generally believed that the adoption of a new church order would be a process of three to five years. Well, the churches have moved much more quickly than anticipated, since a new church order was adopted at this first synod of the United Reformed Churches. Thus, we have now moved to a position beyond the church order of 1914.

Does this mean that the offer of federative unity no longer applies? In my opinion, the offer must still stand, and we must reiterate our desire to pursue a federative unity with like-minded churches. That is the legacy of the Secession of 1834! However, since these churches have adopted a new church order, federative unity cannot be achieved without a thorough examination of the new church order, especially in those areas where we have a marked deviation from the essential pattern given to us in the Church Order of Dort.

These deviations are not insurmountable, but are significant enough to merit a thorough discussion. While there are overriding similarities, there are marked differences between the Church Order of Dort and this new church order. The kind of authority that the Church Order of Dort gives to the broader assemblies, including its disciplinary component, is found only in a lesser degree in the church order of the new federation.

Discipline

This can be explained by a review some comments made regarding the maintenance of proper discipline in the church. The new church order makes a categorical judgment: "No broader assembly shall have the power to depose an office-bearer or otherwise exercise church discipline since these powers belong to the Consistory." One might ask whether or not this phrasing shows overtones of an independent spirit. We would agree that the power to depose is fundamentally the right, duty and obligation of the local consistory. Yet, given the complexities of disciplinary situations, can one say that major assemblies cannot "otherwise exercise church discipline"? What about the case of a seminary professor who teaches false doctrine? And is there not involvement of classis in the deposition of a minister by the local church? The assemblies are involved in the exercise of church discipline, even though in most cases the decision lies with the local church. Dort never went so far as to say that suspension and deposition by a local church in cooper-

ation with a classis or regional synod is *ultra vires*, beyond the scope of a major assembly's power.²

In our church order, following the line of Dort, a minister can be deposed with the judgment of classis, along with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod. This puts a safeguard in place for ministers so that they are not suspended and deposed too easily. I wonder of some elements of this safeguard have not been lost in the new church order.

The role of the federation

As another example, take the following proposition which forms one of the "foundational principles of Reformed church government" published along with the new church order. Proposition seven reads: "Federative relationships do not belong to the essence or being of the church; rather they serve the well-being of the church. However, even though churches stand distinctly next to one another, they do not thereby stand disconnectedly alongside one another. Entrance into and departure from a federative relationship is strictly a voluntary matter."

Even though we can recognize positive elements in this statement, it does not capture the Reformed principles concerning a federation as accurately as might be expected. For a federation is strictly voluntary as far as entering it is concerned, but "departure from" is no longer a voluntary matter. Once committed, a church must honour its commitments, and cannot simply go its own way at its own prerogative! To be sure, there is no room for coercion in a Reformed church order. But there is room for the "settled and binding" decisions of the major assemblies, – a phrase which, incidentally, has also been dropped and revised in the new church order. And we may also add here that the distinction between the essence or being of the church and its well-being does not bring us much farther ahead. For wherever two local (true) churches are found, the duty and moral obligation to provide mutual assistance is part of the very essence and life blood of the church.

All this is only meant to show that we have some issues to discuss. While many elements of the church order have been retained (for which we must be grateful!) there are other (a lesser number of) elements that have been either ignored or forgotten. There is room for work!

Where from here?

Despite these initial reservations, I believe the task must go on and continue to urge the brothers to pursue the goal of federative unity, and then we think first of all of unity with our own federation. Proposals to work towards fraternal relations and federative unity with other Reformed churches, including the Canadian Reformed were voiced from the floor of the assembly more than once. Many of the brothers were also aware of the danger of a reactionary position, i.e. moving too far towards independency in the reaction to the hierarchical structures from which they have escaped.

We need to keep discussing especially with these brothers. This is a new and young federation which will be moving forward quickly to establish relationships with other churches. I can only reiterate the wish I had, with others, that the churches had at this stage formed a *provisional* federation, rather than an entirely new one. But this does not take away our obligation to pursue federative unity. The Lord in His mercy may yet grant that there is a continued convergence on issues of church order and government.



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Geertsema
Coeditors: J. De Jong, R.A. Schouten,
C. Van Dam, G.Ph. van Popta

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION
5621 - 51 Street
Taber, AB T1G 1K6
Fax: (403) 223-0149
E-Mail: 74124.1377@CompuServe.COM

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS: (subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

SUBSCRIPTION RATES	Regular	Air
FOR 1996	Mail	Mail
Canada*	\$33.00*	\$59.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$38.00	\$52.00
International	\$53.00	\$84.00

* Including 7% GST – No. R104293055
Advertisements: \$11.25 per column inch

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

Publications Mail Registration No. 1025
ISSN 0383-0438

IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – A New Federation — J. De Jong	510
Meditation – Be wise with wisdom! — H.J.J. Feenstra	513
First Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America, held on October 1 and 2, 1996 in Lynwood, Ill. — W. den Hollander, J. De Jong	514
Fraternal Greetings — J. De Jong	516
Church News	516
Federative or Local? A Wrong Dilemma — H. Boersma	517
Visit to the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa — J. Moesker	520
Press Review – A Poem for our Time — J. De Jong ...	523
“The Least of These My Brethren” — F.G. Oosterhoff	525
Press Releases – Classis Alberta/Manitoba, October 15, 16, 1996; Classis Ontario South September 11, 1996 in London, ON	526

A short cut?

Lately I have noticed a number of other voices in our circles offering suggestions concerning the progress of church unity. While discussion is always a good thing, I hope this does not lead to our churches working at odds with each other. Regional differences should not lead one to disparage or neglect the obligations of federative unity. A *new form* of local recognition is always to be seen as secondary to *existing* commitments. These must be honoured first of all. And engaging in local pulpit sharing or agreeing to accept one another's attestations may enhance a sense of unity on the local level, but will be damaging in the long run for the federative relationships. How? It puts in jeopardy the existing relationship of the one church with the other churches in the federation. Are other churches obligated to maintain a federative relationship with churches which on their own authority engage in cross-federative relationships?³ They have no moral obligation to continue to do so unless those churches give their first priority to the existing bonds. For example, a church may be concerned about the effect of a new cross-federative arrangement of another church on its own young people. Then for the sake of its own young people, the local consistory can qualify its recognition of the church which has entered into such an arrangement. A federation is only as strong as the mutual promises and commitments holding it together!

As I have stated previously, it will not help us to establish an initial *formal* recognition (including pulpit exchange and the recognition of attestations) before a target date for final or definitive recognition is established. This is a short cut which essentially relegates all outstanding issues to the area of indifferent or minor matters. Indeed, such a route will not work at all, since the discussion will have ended even before it gets started. The only effect of marginalizing external differences is to short circuit the road to true unity, and sacrifice one's own members and relationships on the altar of a supposed unity which lacks any potential and sound commitment to long term organizational bonding along federational lines.

How different was the spirit of 1892! The negotiations leading to the union of 1892 make clear that there can be no easy road towards federative unity. Ultimately it is an acknowledgment that churches have the moral obligation to unite on the basis of Scripture confession and a common order – one that remains true to the Reformed heritage. That order must safeguard the autonomy of the local church, but also the equality of the churches and the officers among each other! Anything less constitutes a breach of Reformed church polity, and only results in a "unity" which in the end will have no holding power.


To the task!

We have a noble task and a noble obligation in these times of tremen-

dous upheaval and realignment in the Reformed world. The United Reformed Churches is a new federation of churches that has been formed in opposition to the growing internal decay and apostasy in the CRC. These churches have taken a stand against having women in the preaching and ruling office, and against a hierarchical church government. We have much in common! May the Lord open new doors so that a way to a form of federative recognition and unity may be found.

¹This is essentially the old Church Order of 1914, published in the *Psalter Hymnal* of 1934. It was first published in the Acts in 1920, along with the German rendering for Classis Hackensack, and hence I referred to it as the Church Order of 1920.

²In the new church order, deposition of a minister can only occur with the *concurring advice* of classis. The question is how this "advice" is to be understood. According to the Church Order of Dort deposition can only take place with the judgement (Latin: *judicium*) of classis.

³The church order of the United Reformed Churches acknowledges this principle as well. Article 34 says: "The churches of a classis may, as a group, enter into ecumenical relations with an individual church or group of churches such as a classis or presbytery. Before entering into such relations, a classis must seek the concurring advice of a synod, thereby safeguarding the purity of the federation." One can question whether it is wise to allow these relationships on a classical level. Yet the point is well taken: the synod should decide and approve these relationships. 

What's inside?

The editorial, a report and the text of a speech all have to do with the formation of a new federation of churches, the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) formed by churches which have seceded from the CRC. The formation of the URCNA ought to bring home to us that we have an unfinished business before us. Twice (in 1963 and again in 1977) the Canadian Reformed Churches appealed to the CRC, its consistories and synods. We knew that actually we belonged with them, but we could not join them so long as they continued to embrace the GKN (Synodical). Our separate existence became all the more imperative as the CRC continued along a path towards a rejection of the authority of Scriptures. Now a remnant of faithful churches have seceded from the CRC. An unfinished business lies before us – a business that fizzled out two decades ago when the CRC would not listen. A beautiful business for it has to do with the unity of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dr. Hans Boersma, taking issue with recent articles by Dr. J. De Jong and the Rev. W.W.J. VanOene, continues the discussion on how local churches of different federations ought to give expression to the unity they have in Jesus Christ. (Dr. De Jong will respond to Dr. Boersma in the next issue.)

Dr. F. Oosterhoff once again brings before us the plight of brothers and sisters who are suffering for the faith in Jesus Christ.

In April, the Rev. J. Moesker visited our sister churches in South Africa on behalf of our churches. You'll find a report of that visit in these pages.

You will also find some reviews, releases and reader's contributions.

GvP

By H.J.J. Feenstra

BE WISE WITH WISDOM!

Venerable Wisdom – Proverbs 8

Originally published as
Wees wijs met de wijsheid,
 Woord en Wereld # 11
 Uitgeverij Woord en Wereld,
 Ermelo 1989
 Translated by T.M.P. VanderVen

“Spring brings her flowers.”
 “Life has its problems.”

What have these sentences in common? We find here a literary style figure known as personification: an object, an issue, a characteristic, a phenomenon is represented and described as a person. We find this type of style also in the Bible. Psalm 85 describes a meeting between *steadfast love* and *faithfulness*, who as two friends (*righteousness and peace*) will kiss each other. The words of the psalm draw a picture as if two people meet each other in the marketplace. Similarly, in Isaiah 59 we read, . . . *truth has fallen in the public square*. . . . We can rather vividly visualize the scene. All of these are examples of imagery, intended to bring the message in such a way that it will stay with us.

From Scripture Psalm 85:11
 Isaiah 59:14

Wisdom as a figure

Often, wisdom is personified as a woman who has taken a place beside the city gates. Note where she has placed herself: she stands in the street, near a busy intersection with a lot of traffic. Right there, she calls the people, without exception. Everyone needs wisdom, everyone needs to learn to art of living. Indeed, everyone, kings and presidents, the great men of this earth, members of parliament and the city council, judges and lawyers. Yes, indeed, especially those who govern others.

Proverbs 8 speaks of the urgency of these things; and wisdom tells again what she is after: righteousness and justice must be found in this world. She forcefully underscores her trustworthiness and her value.

From Scripture Proverbs 8:1-4
 Proverbs 8:14-16
 Proverbs 8:7-11

The age of wisdom

Then she offers a completely new and exceedingly strong argument: her age. She is older than the creation of heaven and earth.

*The Lord created me . . .
 at the first, before the beginning of
 the earth.*

Ages ago I was made, she says, at the first, from eternity. Indeed, she has been made a long time ago, and therefore she is ancient. And that gives her authority, in the same way as a saying which reflects a great deal of experience has authority.

Perhaps we are not overly impressed by the argument of age. In our society, *being old* means often dilapidated and finished. The aide in a nursing home scolds the old man when he has not touched his food again. He might not have been issued a key to the nursing home, and when he comes home after hours, he is forced to request permission to enter his own home. An older person is not considered fully with it any longer. Someone once remarked, “In the past, an elderly person was someone who had almost arrived. Nowadays an elderly person is someone who is almost passé.”

What seems important today is being young, strong and fit. Exercise and fitness counts as most valuable, so much so that health is often no longer seen as a gift, and has turned into a cult.

Indeed, old age is not appreciated nowadays. Certainly, occasionally there is evidence of politeness, but it is questionable whether that is a sign of true respect. Proverbs 16 says,

*A hoary head is a crown of glory;
 it is gained in a righteous life.*

From the biblical descriptions we have the strong impression that the Israelite society had a great deal of respect for the elderly. King Reoboam would have been well advised to listen to the older advisers rather to the younger ones. Those older politicians were experienced in their craft. Remember how Proverbs 1 speaks of the youth who need to learn prudence and discretion.

The older one is, the greater the experience; those who are well tested have won respect. Age and experience may speak with authority. Indeed, the proverbs, those pithy sayings, are based on much experience.

It must be clear: the older the wisdom, the greater her authority. Eliphaz, who was presumably much older than Job, told him off:

“Are you the first man that was born?

Or were you brought forth before the hills?

Did Job pretend to be old enough to speak wise sayings? Although he certainly was not a mere youth, compared with Eliphaz he had no right to speak!

Contrast this with Madam Wisdom: what a venerable age. She was there even before the creation. She has seen everything, indeed. What a vast experience she has gathered, what a knowledge and insight she can boast of.

Incredible.

From Scripture Proverbs 8:22-32
 Proverbs 16:31
 1 Kings 12:6-11
 Proverbs 1:4
 Job 15:7

Created reality

Proverbs 8 does not provide a scientific world view, acceptable to such giants as Copernicus, Galileo, and today’s scientists. These words describe what you see when standing on the beach: the domed sky and the horizon which forms a semicircle.

Who can see farther, and with broader insight than Madam Wisdom? She has a good overview of and good insight in all things. She knows how things work. She watch reality coming into being as a most complex and artful whole of interrelated and interconnected parts, together forming the cosmos.

That word, *cosmos*, means *harmony*. Each creature with its own form, essence, and task is part of that great harmonious whole of God’s creation.

Again I refer to Proverbs 3:13-20, and Psalm 104. Read and consider these passages together with Proverbs 8. Has not God made all things in wisdom? Is

not the whole creation a product of His divine craftsmanship?

Thus, Proverbs 8 concludes with a passionate appeal to listen to this wisdom. That will make you happy, and that will make you watchful in the right manner. In this way you will find life; in truth, in this way life will return!

And note, that Psalm 104 abruptly ends with the destruction of the sinners.

*Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more!*

Rien Poortvliet in his *Noah's Ark* did not know what to do with these words. With these words, the psalmist expresses the thought that, although God's creation is beautiful indeed, it is not as it was from the beginning. Yet, we may look forward to the future. Settlement will come, because promises have been made about the return of perfect peace. Creation will again function with perfect purpose; all foolishness shall have been removed.

The psalms and the proverbs cry for salvation, they cry for the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. They call for faith in Him who is greater than Solomon; He who has been given us as Wisdom. His Spirit teaches us wisdom which saves. The joy with which wisdom witnessed God's creation activities, and her delight in the sons of men will return in Jesus Christ. Follow Him!

From Scripture

Proverbs 8
Psalm 104:24, 35 

First Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America

held on October 1 and 2, 1996 in Lynwood, Ill.

At 1:30 p.m. C.T. the Rev. E.J. Knott opened the meeting of delegates, leading it in devotions and singing. Roll call showed that 33 churches were represented by their delegates, indicating membership in the newly established federation. Upon proper examination of the credentials the meeting was declared constituted. As first act of this Synod the following officers were elected: Rev. E.J. Knott, chairman; Rev. R.A. Pontier, vice-chairman; Rev. J. Julien, clerk. Since there were no new requests from churches to be received and seated in the assembly, the chairman read the *Public Declaration of Agreement with the Three Forms of Unity* to which the delegates responded with their assent. In his opening words the chairman expressed the momentum of this meeting. He highlighted that their deliberations and decisions and direction would be watched by many. He exhorted the meeting to keep in mind the resolve and resolutions of the meeting recorded in Acts 15, which reported its decisions to the churches

with the words "*For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us. . .*"

During the preliminary discussions about the agenda it appeared that due to the earlier timing of the meeting not all churches had received the materials on time, enabling them to prepare themselves in their local councils. The meeting was urged to take this into consideration in their decision making on the various proposals and overtures. Upon the adoption of the agenda, one of the first acts of Synod was the final decision on a name for the federation. After some discussion in which several churches shared the sentiments of their local councils, a tally was taken of the most preferred among the four names that had been proposed. The name which by far outnumbered the other was **United Reformed Churches in North America**. This name was then officially adopted.

At its first meeting on November 16, 1995, the Fellowship of Uniting Reformed Churches in North America (held also in Lynwood, Ill), appointed as members of its Church Order Commit-

tee Rev. Joghinda Gangar, Rev. Jerome Julien, and Rev. Nelson Kloosterman, with the mandate to continue functioning in the preparation of a church order. Until the proposed church order was adopted, the churches agreed to base the new federation on the Church Order of 1934 (i.e. which actually was the 1914 Church Order with some minor amendments, cf. *The Church Order Commentary*, by I. Van Dellen and M. Monsma [3rd ed., 1954], pp. 374-385). Most of the time of this first Synod 1996, now, was spent on the *Report and Recommendations* submitted by this Church Order Committee. On the agenda were some overtures from various churches, seeking some improvements or corrections in the proposed Church Order. During the discussions on the floor the members of this committee were granted the privilege of the floor. Their great competence and faithful performance in this presentation made the discussion into an interesting and informative discourse on reformed Church Polity. This certainly was ob-

served with great delight by our Professor for Church Polity, Dr. J. DeJong!

When in the end Synod adopted the proposed Church Order (containing an Introduction with "Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government" and some sixty-five articles as part of the basis for its federation), the new federation had organized itself in the tradition of the reformed churches following the principles and practices established at the Reformed Synod of Dordt, 1618/1619. During the discussions, Synod paid ample attention to overtures and proposals dealing with certain articles of this Church Order, addressing e.g. equal representation of the member churches (rather than delegating through classis), voting procedures and percentage of majority, nature and usage of approbation from classis (e.g. call, ecumenical contacts), lapsing membership (defeated!), meaning and loyalty to membership in the federation, local freedoms in regard to articles about preparatory sermons, use of adopted forms, and the like, and the benefits and purposes for the life of the churches within a federation of churches! Throughout these discussions reference was made to existing practices in the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches, while also the return to a federational life along scriptural principles for Church Polity was pursued by committee members and delegates alike. Besides, upon the preparation and recommendation of the committee, Synod also adopted for its federation *Guidelines*, viz. for a Licensure Exam, for a Candidacy Exam, for an Ordination Exam, for a Colloquium Doctum, for use among the churches, together with some concept forms as credentials for meetings of classis and synods, certificates, and letter of call. Finally, for liturgical purposes, Synod adopted the liturgical forms and Subscription Form printed in the *Psalter Hymnal*, Centennial Edition (1957) for use among the churches. All of the above were adopted by almost unanimous votes! In regard to some of the critical sentiments expressed, Synod was reminded that changes and corrections or improvements can be made at any time in the future, by way of overtures and proposals to future synods. For some remaining matters and cosmetic changes Synod decided to maintain the present committee, suggesting the churches to present overtures to the next synod via the committee, so that the committee can come to the

next synod with its comments and recommendations.


Synod also gave ample attention to its desire to establish fraternal relations in its pursuit of ecclesiastical unity. For this purpose an overture was adopted to seek membership in the ICRC! As well, Synod discussed ways and means to reach out to those gatherings of CRC churches and other independent CRC's which either seceded or are in the process toward secession. In regard to those churches which sent observers (Can. Ref. Churches, RCUS), Synod made the decision to establish a Committee for Contact and Correspondence to facilitate outreach and promote ecclesiastical unity. At the time in the agenda at which fraternal delegates received the floor, Dr. J. DeJong addressed the assembly on behalf of the Can. Ref. Churches (see the text of his speech attached to this report), while the Rev. Sawtelle spoke for the RCUS.

Synod spent quite some time discussing matters of structure and incorporation. Although some investigatory work had been done by Canadian [our brother H. Faber] and US Attorneys, the deliberations clearly showed that more needs to be done. Even the question about the necessity for incorporation was answered in a divided manner (nearly dividing the opinions along national boundaries). Further, in connection with the different laws for incorporation, related issues such as across-border donations and other matters, needed more legal research. For that purpose a committee was struck consisting of churches which had been involved in these preliminary investigations. Other matters of structure and procedure settled by Synod were a division of the member churches into three classes, the temporary suspension of a few articles (dealing with the rule of convening a synod once every three years, the reception of churches into the federation before next year's synod).

The undersigned Canadian Reformed observers certainly felt very much at home in the midst of delegates whose express desire it was to be reformed churches, churches which returned in all their deliberations and decisions to the reformed faith, Confessions, and Church Polity, as based on the Holy Word of God! In the many conversations and discussions for which such a meeting gives ample opportunity, there was the repeated expression of the unity they perceived with us, the Canadian Reformed

Churches, and of the desire to pursue this unity by means of official deputies. Especially with those delegates which represented churches that are located in Canada we experienced progress and increased openness, thanks to our formal and informal contacts during the last few years; however, also among the American delegates we noticed greater awareness and understanding about the Can. Ref. Churches. Besides, it is also through the strong influence of Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Professor of Ethics at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, that the foundational principles, structures and reformed practices in church government display such a close affinity to those in our federation. This will be very conducive for future contacts and unity efforts! One decision, however, which seemed out of line with a reformed approach to the organization of a federation of churches was the appointment of a stated clerk. Rather than building up a permanent position again of a church official with an office, a secretary, a salary, one would have expected that Synod would have accepted the well-functioning system of a convening church preparing a synod and of an address church serving as contact address for inquiries.

That in all this the unity in the true faith is pursued, was clearly evident from the inspirational address on Psalm 122, given by Rev. Kloosterman in a special assembly convened for this purpose on the Tuesday-evening. This special gathering was exhorted to join in praises to the LORD for the way He has helped them during the previous years and up to this Synod: Eben Ezer! The churches were encouraged to celebrate the fact that they may be faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. Churches that desire to function according to God's Word are confessing churches, that seek the peace of Jerusalem in faithful confessions as well as in good order and holy polity! Among them unity and love must be cultivated by the proclamation of the gospel of God's mercy and justice, as this has become fulfilled in Jesus Christ, our Priest-King. Churches, therefore, that pursue such celebration and confession, are praying churches, praying for the preservation of all that makes for peace and concord!

W. den Hollander
J. De Jong 

Fraternal Greetings

(Text of the fraternal greetings passed on to the Synod of the United Reformed Churches of North America, held in Lynnwood IL on October 1 and 2, 1996. Slightly revised.)

Esteemed brothers and fellow workers!

It is a great honour and pleasure for us to be among you during this historic occasion, and we thank you for the invitation received through the clerk *pro tem*, Rev. A. Besteman. Our delegates have had the opportunity to visit you as members of the Alliance in years past, and we have always noticed your diligence, seriousness and resoluteness in the service of the Lord. We are happy to see that same sense of diligence and concord at this meeting, and we wish you every blessing as you work hard towards the organization of your church life. We can understand and appreciate the need for you to marshal your resources, and organize yourselves after a period of considerable conflict. We are grateful that you have come to the point of organizing yourselves as a federation, and we consider it a privilege to be a part of this monumental occasion.

At the same time, we do wish to stress that we are here for the promotion of Reformed ecumenicity! To paraphrase a word of Dr. K. Schilder, we do not think it wise if the number of Reformed "denominations" in North America is increased by the formation of a yet another Reformed denomination. You will also agree that we must aim for more than just the splintering of the CRC. Otherwise, how can we answer the criticism of those who are saying that secession is just the mood of the time? And we know that you too desire to promote the unity of Christ's church. We are therefore oriented to unity talks, even to corporate unity along national lines, should the talks progress well.

There is every reason for us to propose this to you, since in many ways we have a common heritage. We share the

same basis and the same confessions. We all come from the Secession of 1834, and from the tradition of people like Rev. Hendrik de Cock, and A.C. Van Raalte in the 19th century, along with the great church men Kuyper, Bavinck and Rutgers. We have a close affinity to early Secession leaders in America, such as the Revs. G. Boer, L.J. Hulst, G.K. Hemkes. H. Beuker, and F.M. ten Hoor.

Allow me for good measure to mention one 20th century name as well. Often people take us as the "31ers" or "Schilder churches" – a group of churches that arise out of a Dutch conflict and out of a specifically Dutch world of thought. But that is not true! One of the church leaders who spearheaded ecclesiastical reform in the thirties in Holland was none other than Dr. J. Van Lonkhuizen, first minister in Alpine Avenue in Grand Rapids, and then at Chicago First for ten years. He was a great defender and promoter of the church polity of the *Doleantie* precisely in that period when the churches were leaving it, and he was an instrument used by the Lord to keep hierarchy out of the churches, also for us! Not only did he oppose hierarchy, he stressed at the same time the importance of a federative bond, and the moral obligation of the churches to help each other, also in matters of government and discipline. Well, Chicago is close by, and some of the older people in this area may even remember or be able to tell you something about the old Van Lonkhuizen, minister at the 14th Avenue church in the twenties.

A common heritage! Indeed, our thesis is that reformation always means going back to the roots, to the first principles, principles first laid down in the great Reformation of the 16th century. We share this background, also as it led to the adoption of the church order of Dort. All the more reason for us to keep in contact, and to learn from each other!

May God bless your meeting and lead your formation of churches in the ever greater knowledge of His ways!

J. De Jong




DECLINED the calls he received from the church at Ancaster, ON and the church at Coaldale, AB

Rev. Cl. Stam

of Hamilton, ON

* * *

THANK YOU BROTHERS AND SISTERS!

We wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the brothers and sisters who remembered our 25th anniversaries in holy wedlock and in the ministry of the gospel! Your best wishes, be they in person, or via a card or phone call, and other tokens of love were most encouraging to us!

We consider it a great privilege to have been involved in the ministry of the gospel for 25 years, of which the last 15 were spent at the Theological College. We are deeply appreciative of the support that we have received over the years and this most recent anniversary confirmed again the warm support of the communion of saints.

We marvel at the grace of God who allows us, mere vessels of clay, to be instrumental for His work in the task He has given us in the midst of the churches. It is our prayer that we may be involved in this work for many more years to His glory and honour and for the upbuilding of His church.

Dr. and Mrs. C. Van Dam

Federative or Local? A Wrong Dilemma

By H. Boersma

Does a local church have the authority to give expression to the unity which it has with a neighbouring church of our Lord Jesus Christ? Is such a local church permitted to decide on pulpit exchange, admission to the Lord's Supper, and recognition of church discipline? Or does it need approval at the federal level, from classis or perhaps even from general synod? This is a question that has come up in connection with the local contacts between various Reformed churches. Two articles in *Clarion* have recently addressed this question.¹ These articles address two of the above mentioned three points (preaching, Lord's Supper, and discipline): Dr. DeJong's article deals with the Lord's Supper, and Rev. VanOene's article with preaching. Both articles maintain that it would be wrong to establish relations of fellowship with other churches at a local level. In what follows I will discuss that position and explain why I believe this position to be untenable. First, I will deal with the article of Dr. DeJong, then with the article of Rev. VanOene, and finally I will come with a few additional suggestions.

All believers together

Dr. De Jong's article makes in many ways a beautiful word of praise on the unity of the church. The article rightly states, for instance, that the "one table of the Lord as ordained by Christ is an incentive for us to pursue true ecclesiastical unity . . ." The references to 1 Corinthians 11, to Ephesians 4, and to Colossians 2 are all very much to the point. It is true that the apostle in this latter chapter speaks of the unity of "the churches together," of the need "for all believers to be knit together in the bond of love." It is true that "all true believers" belong around the one table of the Lord. It is our Lord's prayer "that all the followers of the Lord may be one." This "refers to the churches together." All of this is beautiful language. All believers are called to sit around the same table. Churches of our Lord may not exclude each other from His table.

Reading all this, the conclusion would appear to follow that when a local church recognizes a neighbouring

church as a church which also serves its Lord and Master, and when it is noticed that in that church we find fellow believers with the same commitment to the truth of God, that then you indeed sit down at the same Lord's table together. After all, we just saw that this table was for "the churches together," that it was for "all true believers." This is the proper conclusion. It is also the conclusion that our most recent general synod came to when it stated: "The argument that recognizing a church as a true church implies having full Ecclesiastical Fellowship is confessionally warranted . . ."² Seeing a true church means that you must have ecclesiastical fellowship with it. That, according to Synod Abbotsford, is confessional language.

After the *Clarion* article has made all these beautiful statements about the unity of the church and about the unity at the Lord's table, the conclusion is not what one would expect. One would expect the following conclusion: Let a local church then exercise the unity which it has with a neighbouring true church. Instead, a different conclusion is drawn: "This implies that a local church should not establish relations of fellowship with other believers on its own." This conclusion does not follow from what was stated earlier on in the article. If we are talking about the unity of the churches together, and if we believe that all believers must be knit together in the bond of love, then why should we conclude that a local church should not exercise this unity at the Lord's table? The conclusion should be the opposite.

The reason for the conclusion of the *Clarion* article is probably that when the author reads in the Scriptures about the unity of the church, about the churches together, and about all believers being knit together, he immediately thinks of the federation. This is where I believe the argument gets derailed. The federation is a good thing, and we should be careful not to break it. But when unity of faith is experienced, in one and the same truth of the Scriptures, then this unity should also be expressed. Such spiritual unity of faith is not only there once the churches come together in a federation. Dr. S. Greijdanus, the well-known New

Testament theologian and leader of the Liberation (1944), has pointed out that spiritual unity "exists despite a lack of organized connections in district, province, country, or world." He also suggests that "the unity of the church does not require necessary official relations and a mutual organization of local churches into a minor, major, and even greater visible whole in region, dominion, and world."³ Spiritual unity, according to Dr. Greijdanus, exists even without or prior to a formal federative bond. A federation should be an expression of spiritual unity and may not stand in the way of such an expression of unity. If it were to do that, it would no longer be true to its function, which is to promote full unity. Then it would only promote a partial unity. To do full justice to the scriptural givens about the unity of the church, as those are rightly outlined by Dr. DeJong, one should not only at a federal level, but also at a local level give concrete shape to such unity. The hope and prayer may then be that the Lord will also bring the respective federations together.

Historical precedent

Dr. DeJong's position on church unity and the Lord's table does not do justice to what traditionally has been the Reformed approach in these matters. It is true that in many ways we are treading new ground. There are – either for or against – not many situations that one could appeal to by way of precedent. The union of 1892 was implemented from the "top down" which was partly the reason why the Free Reformed Churches (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken) remained separate. For the rest, it is true that we have to search our way in a rather unique situation of various Reformed churches and denominations seeking realignment.

This does not mean that the idea of accepting people from outside our federation at the table of the Lord is something completely new. This has long been a recognized practice. The well-known authority on church polity, Dr. F.L. Rutgers, for instance, when discussing which guests should be admitted to the Lord's table, states:

It has never been made a rule in our churches for such cases that such

requests would simply be denied, and that thus no one would be admitted except those who are within the circle of those who are known by the consistory as members of the local church. That would indeed not be showing love and would be unbrotherly; and it would also be in conflict with the Christian confession of the unity of the church and of the communion of the saints. . . . Thus, on the one hand, all strangers must not be denied unconditionally; but, on the other hand (and this is of no less importance), all strangers must not be admitted unconditionally, merely on the basis of their own responsibility. . . . And therefore the churches in our country have always seen to it that the necessary supervision would come to its right as much as possible, when they for one occasion would admit to the Lord's Supper believers from elsewhere who remained in their midst temporarily.

This has been possible, and it still happens, even though the churches have not deliberately and formally adopted rules for it. . . . To set up rules for this, which give a formal decision covering every situation, is also impossible. . . ."⁴

Dr. Rutgers makes clear that a local church can decide to admit people to the table who do not belong to our denomination.⁵ Dr. Rutgers writes about individual visitors or guests. These generally are not very urgent situations. If local churches, after much discussion, have come to recognize each other as true churches, the situation becomes much more urgent, and the argument of Dr. Rutgers then becomes even more to the point.

I come to the conclusions, therefore, (1) that the argument of the *Clarion* article does not support its conclusions; and (2) that historical precedent pleads against the position taken in the article.

The dilemma

An additional point, which is not elaborated upon, but which is raised a few times by Dr. DeJong's article, is that the "requirements of the church order" would be at stake because we "are bound by federative commitments." This position is argued more fully by Rev. Van Oene. "No one is permitted to proceed independently," he maintains. He states that for a local church so to practise the unity of faith with another (non-Canadian Reformed) church means a betrayal of one's own federation. For churches to do this would, in his opinion, "mean that they break away from their own federa-

tion and form a (new) two-church federation of their own."

The article of Rev. Van Oene is entitled "A Federative or a Local Matter?" This title is significant. It implies that unification is either a local or a federal matter. It cannot be both. Churches *either* betray their own federation *or* they continue their efforts to take all the churches along. The article poses a dilemma for the readers, and they then have to make a choice: Do you favour the federative or do you favour the local approach? The article makes the assumption that there is this federative/local dilemma.

There are some important questions to be asked here. Why is it not possible to pursue both federative unity and local unity at the same time? Why is it not possible to exercise unity between two local churches, while at the same time making efforts to take all the churches along? Could the federative/local dilemma perhaps be a false dilemma? To find out we must analyze the arguments used against local churches having pulpit exchange without federative approval. The *Clarion* article argues that to do so would be against the church order. After all, the churches have "adopted certain conditions for living together" in a federation; they have "bound themselves" to the church order. The article maintains that to admit a non-Canadian Reformed minister on one of our pulpits violates article 4 of the church order. It should be carefully noted that this is the only argument brought forward: It is against article 4 of the church order, which states that one must be lawfully called to the ministry. This is a process in which classis is involved.

Standing alone

How strong is this one argument from article 4 of the church order? First of all, to my knowledge Rev. Van Oene's interpretation of this article is new. Dr. H. Bouwman already stated that the "consistory decides about admission to the pulpit," adding that "a minister may not preach [Dutch: *optreden*] in a different church, for example, a Hervormd or Lutheran church, without discussion with or permission of the consistory of the Reformed church."⁶ Also our own deputies for ecclesiastical unity have twice expressed their disagreement with the position now taken by Rev. Van Oene. In a discussion paper published in *Clarion* a few years ago, they explicitly state that after local churches have acknowledged of one another that they are true churches of the Lord, they may "consider drawing up an accord which provides for pulpit exchange and admission of their members to one another's

Holy Supper and recognizing one another's attestation (discipline)."⁷ When in January of this year, a committee from Classis Pacific asked these same deputies for advice about such an accord, the deputies wrote back:

. . . it is possible to have ministers from other church federations with which we as yet have no ecclesiastical fellowship to preach on our pulpits and vice versa. The terms on which this would be done (e.g. with or without 'blessing') was subject to local regulation. This has been recognized in the past, and has been practiced with at times greater, and at times lesser frequency, cf. F.L. Bos, *De Orde der kerk*, ('s Gravenhage, 1950) 71. The same applies to receiving guests from another church federation at the Lord's Supper, cf. *Ibid.*, 227-228. While these practices cannot be seen as against the Church Order, the tenor of the Church Order is that ministers of the word are primarily obligated to take care of their own flocks, and that deviations from this rule should be restricted to what is strictly necessary, or what is helpful for the promotion of the building of the church.

Thus, on no less than two occasions the federal deputies have stated that local churches do have the authority to allow non-Canadian Reformed ministers on the pulpit. Also Classis Pacific April 16, 1996 came to the conclusion that it is not against the church order to have pulpit exchange, admission to each other's Lord's Supper or recognition of each other's discipline. The article of Rev. Van Oene takes a position markedly different from that of the federal deputies and that of Classis Pacific. The former states that to proceed locally is against the church order; the latter disagree and state that it is not against the church order.

Article 4 CO

When we examine article 4 itself, we find that it does not at all deal with situations like the ones under discussion. It speaks only about the question who can be called to the office of minister of the Word. This is precisely what one would expect. The church order does not deal with every possible situation we could think of. It is simply a document for internal use, and does not deal with situations where you have two true churches living side by side without first expressing their unity in Christ. The church order gives regulations for proper church life and by its very nature does not deal with situations such as this one.

Somebody might ask: But could we not by analogy argue that article 4 applies also to ministers from outside our federation? This argument forgets some important factors: First, the minister involved in the pulpit exchange has already been examined by the assemblies of his own churches, which have a very similar church order. Should such an examination mean nothing at all to a local church when contemplating pulpit exchange?

Second, the ministers involved are preachers serving true churches which have the faithful proclamation of the gospel. To make this comment is not as superfluous as it perhaps may seem. There are two paragraphs in the *Clarion* article comparing pulpit exchange with the Free Reformed or Orthodox Reformed Churches to pulpit exchange with the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk; a church whose overall position is similar to that of the United Church of Canada). The article comments how the Dutch Reformed Church still has not returned to the true service of the Lord. Is it really necessary to make these comments in the context of a discussion about possible pulpit exchange with other faithful Reformed Churches? None of our churches is considering pulpit exchange with a local United Church of Canada. These kinds of comparisons are beside the point; they muddy the waters. They could even be experienced as offensive by Free Reformed and Orthodox Reformed readers. The discussion should remain focused on the question: how to pursue unity with churches of which we know that they are true churches of our Lord.

Third, article 4 deals with ministers who come into our federation as a whole. When a new minister is called by one of our churches, this affects the entire federation. Therefore it is a matter that belongs to the churches in common. When the Aldergrove council invites a Free Reformed minister to come onto its pulpit, this affects our own church more immediately than it does the rest of the federation. It will affect the federation only at a later stage, as I hope to show when I come to the third part of my article. Only at that point will the contact with the Free Reformed Churches become a matter belonging to the churches in common. The *Clarion* article does not argue why and how pulpit exchange would as such affect the federation as a whole. Thus, the one argument that is brought forward against pulpit exchange is not convincing.

Again, there is no denying the value of our federative agreements. To play out the federative against the local level, however, would lead the churches on a

wrong path. The major assemblies of the federation have a role: They function in matters which could not be finished in the minor assembly or which belong to the churches in common. However, to say that we must practice our federative loyalty "first of all" (Dr. DeJong),⁸ or to say that "our first responsibilities are toward our own federation" (Rev. VanOene) absolutizes one denomination and ignores the work which our Lord does elsewhere.⁹ Our first responsibilities are toward our Lord. Within His catholic church it is possible to further unity both at a local and at a federative level. The federative/local dilemma is not a correct dilemma.

Overcoming the dilemma

How can we overcome this dilemma? There are several ways. Dr. Vischer has recently made an interesting proposal for an Association of Reformed Churches (ARCH). This could do justice to the unity that is already experienced on the local level, and it would also continue to try any further unity at the federative level. Another voice well worth considering is that of Dr. M. te Velde, Professor of Church Polity at the Theological University in Kampen (of our Dutch sister churches). His essay on this matter was published first in *De Reformatie* and subsequently in a book.¹⁰ I quote Prof. te Velde as he distinguishes four stages:

- 1 *discussion*
- 2 *cooperation (e.g., pulpit exchange, combined church services)*
- 3 *integration (integrated church life without having a complete merger)*
- 4 *union (also federally)*
*In each of those stages, church order and federation have their own significance.*¹¹

In stage 1, Prof. te Velde writes, matters such as differences in church order and other possible difficult hurdles must be discussed. In stage 2, Prof. te Velde writes, more needs to be done. I quote Prof. te Velde as follows:

If local agreement emerges, along with the recognition that there are no more differences that prohibit ecclesiastical unity, a number of things can be done together:

- *pulpit exchange;*
- *mutual admission to the Lord's Supper;*
- *every now and again combined church services;*
- *cooperation in catechism instruction;*
- *the same with Bible study groups;*
- *visiting one another's classis.*¹²

About stage 3, Prof. te Velde writes the following: "An even further stage is that

of an association. Two congregations in different federations come to actual integration, while the national federation is not that far yet. Such a congregation then becomes a combi-congregation."¹³ Prof. te Velde works out in detail how such a combi-congregation could be established and how it could function. In stage 4 the two federations become one. In this connection, Prof. te Velde pleads for flexibility in the acceptance of certain church political arrangements.

It will be noted that this approach of Prof. te Velde takes the good Reformed principle of starting at the "bottom," at the grass roots. A number of our Canadian Reformed Churches have, in their discussions, come to the conclusion of stage 1 and now feel that they are called to embark on stage 2. If it is true what I have tried to argue, namely, that there is no local/federative dilemma, then it remains up to local churches to give concrete shape to the unity which they already have with neighbouring churches of our Lord.

Notes:

¹J. DeJong, "Church Unity and the Lord's Table," *Clarion* 45 (Sept. 6, 1996), pp. 390-91; W.W.J. VanOene, "A Federative or a Local Matter?" *Clarion* 45 (Sept. 6, 1996), pp. 398-99.

²*Acts General Synod 1995 of the Canadian Reformed Churches*, p. 71.

³S. Greijdanus, "Scriptural Principles Concerning Broader Assemblies," in Jack DeJong, ed., *Bound Yet Free: Readings in Reformed Church Polity* (Winnipeg: Premier, 1995), p. 36. This entire essay is a "must read" and sheds important light on the present discussion.

⁴F.L. Rutgers, *Kerkelijke adviezen* (Kampen: Kok, 1922), II, 160-62.

⁵Cf. also H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerd kerkrecht: Het recht der kerken in de praktijk*, 3rd ed. (Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1985), II, 390-92.

⁶H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerd kerkrecht*, I, 484.

⁷"Pursuing Ecclesiastical Unity: A Discussion-paper on the mandate given by Synod Lincoln to Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity," *Clarion* 43 (Feb 11, 1994) 66.

⁸J. DeJong, "Pursuing Federative Unity: Obstacles, Possibilities and Strategies," *Clarion* 45 (August 23, 1996), 374.

⁹Again, to see the federation not as "first" but as of less importance than the local church is the standard Reformed position. Dr. Greijdanus comments: "The external connection or organization of the churches mutually at various places is a matter of secondary or even more remote importance. It is not the main issue by far" ("Scriptural Principles," p. 37).

¹⁰M. te Velde, "Kerkorde en kerkverband in kerkelijke samensprekingen," in *De Reformatie* 66 (July 6, 1991); and in P.J. Trimp, ed., *Kerkelijk samenspreken: Hoe gaat dat in zijn werk?* (n.p.: Gereformeerd Sociaal en Economisch Verband, [1992]). In what follows, I will quote from the latter publication.

¹¹te Velde, "Kerkorde en kerkverband," pp. 30-31.

¹²te Velde, "Kerkorde en kerkverband," pp. 34-35.

¹³te Velde, "Kerkorde en kerkverband," p. 35.

Visit to the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa

By J. Moesker

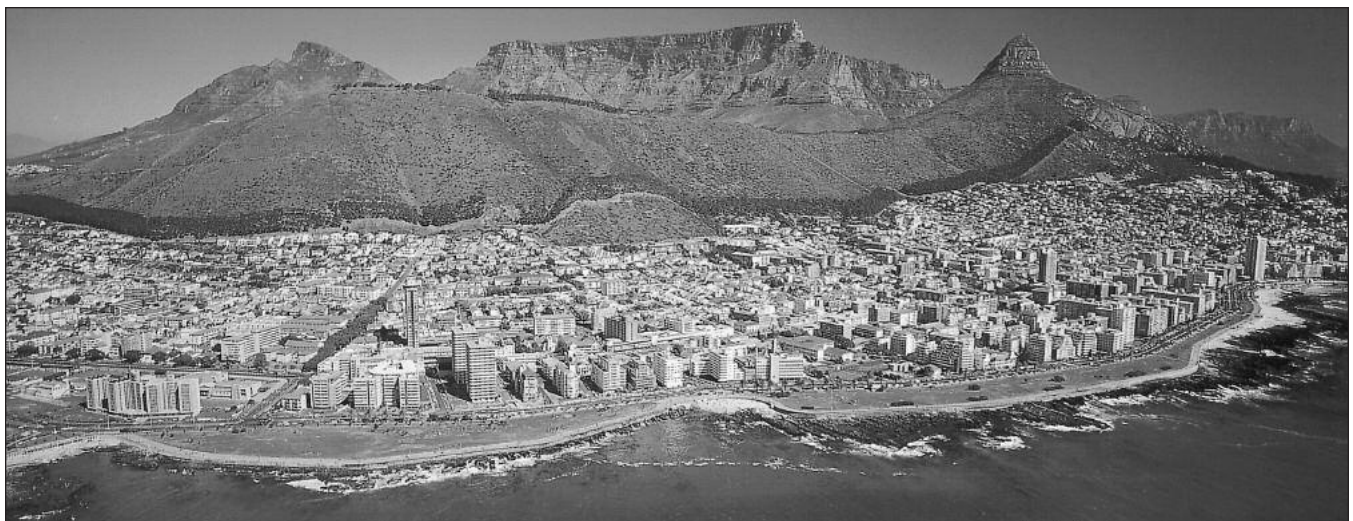
My wife and I were recently privileged to make a trip to South Africa. My trip was originally arranged to attend the Synod April 1996 of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. However, after the trip had been arranged, Synod was postponed until August 1996. It was decided to proceed with the visit, but now with the objective to visit the four churches belonging to the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, including some mission churches if possible. This would be a more "grass-roots" type of contact which, it was felt, could bring the contact even closer than a speech at a broader assembly. My wife accompanied me on a sort of nostalgia tour. We were married and started our life together in South Africa. We were therefore the more curious as to what we would find there. What follows are a few experiences and impressions of the country and of our sister churches within that country.

After a twenty-three hour trip from Vancouver (plus waits in Amsterdam and Johannesburg) we arrived in Capetown, near the southern tip of the African continent, where Atlantic and Indian Oceans meet. We were billeted with the Van't Foort family in Bellville,

a suburb of Capetown where our sister church is located. The scenery was magnificent, especially with Table Mountain as backdrop to the city, and the ocean on the other side. The variety of vegetation was quite striking. An amazing variety of subtropical vegetation! Many types of bushes and plants are unique to the Cape and found nowhere else in the world. What was also striking was the variety of people around the city. All races. It is obvious when you walk down any street in the city why South Africa has been called "Rainbow Nation." And what was good to see was the equality. No apartheid, though the effects of that system, gone since the elections of 1994, still linger. People of various races still basically live in their own suburbs. Bellville was almost completely white, while Belhar was almost completely coloured. Also the contrast in living standards was still very much present. Bellville was a well-kept white suburb much like any middle-class suburb in North America. The black and coloured people were generally of lower living standard, many still living in shantytowns. I visited Crossroads, a black shantytown where houses are made of scraps of lumber and cardboard, and where most people are un-

employed. The ANC government is working hard to improve the living conditions of the coloured and black people. Most of the shacks in Crossroads have water and sewer and electricity available now. But living conditions are still appalling for many in South Africa. Poverty seems always to be just around the next corner. It isn't uncommon to have people at a traffic light, usually black (though I also saw a white man), begging from you as you wait for the light to change.

In spite of the contrast in living conditions, though, the same faith is shared by the brothers and sisters of the various races in Capetown. On Sunday morning, April 2, 1996, we worshipped at the mission church located in Belhar. Belhar is a coloured (mixed race) suburb. The worship service there, led by the missionary Rev. E. L. Van't Foort, was very similar to ours. The language used was Afrikaans, a Dutch-like language unique to South Africa and also still preferred by many coloured people in the Cape region. The liturgy was similar to that used here, and psalms were sung to the Genevan tunes, as well as some hymns. The content of the sermon was relevant to the Belhar circumstances, and the minister began his sermon by portraying



Cape Peninsula, South Africa



Pretoria

the struggle of a young Christian who is pressured by peers to take “dagga” (marijuana). After the service was over, I was given the opportunity to speak a few words of Christian greeting on behalf of the sister churches in Canada, and I was asked to convey similar greetings from Belhar to Canada.

We attended the evening service in the Bellville congregation. Rev. E. Viljoen led the service, also in Afrikaans. This pastor was forced out of the large Dutch Reformed Church when he refused to ordain women to office, and became minister in the church of Capetown (see *Clarion* of May 3, 1996). He delivered a very Christ-centered and practical sermon about what is confessed in Lord’s Day 40 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. A number of the people of Belhar church also attended the evening service in Bellville. After the service I was given opportunity to show some slides and speak about the Canadian Reformed Churches. There was quite a bit of interest concerning church life here.

On our last day in Capetown, we visited the Christian School located behind the Free Reformed Church in Belleville. This school has 48 students from both Belleville and Belhar, and three full-time teachers. We spoke to the first four grades about Canada and school life in Canada. There are similarities and the education system is very similar to the Canadian one. All schools in South Africa, however, require students to wear uniforms and the school year is, of course, different from ours. I also believe that the South African schools are more disciplined.

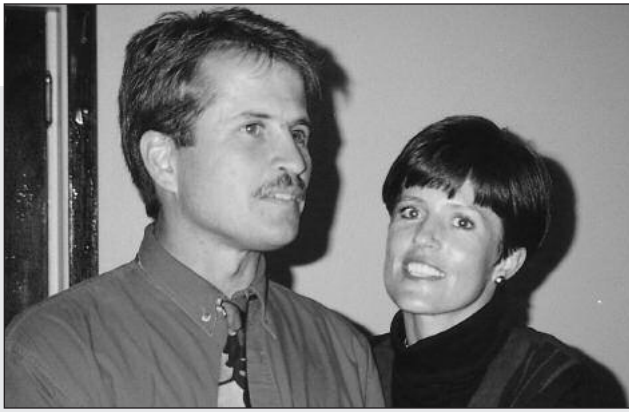
Our next stop was Johannesburg. We were billeted there at the home of Rev. C.F. Heiberg. He and his family were forced out of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1994, along with a few other families. He came into contact with the Free Reformed Churches and eventually became minister of the Free Reformed Church of Johannesburg (see *Clarion* article referred to above). We had many discussions together, and found ourselves very much united in the Reformed faith. I was able to deliver the same presentation about the Canadian Reformed Churches in the church of Johannesburg. This church has about 180 members. We found the city of Johannesburg itself to be a dark, dirty and dangerous place. Rev. Heiberg and his family, however, live in a pleasant suburb of Johannesburg. Even there, though, you could smell the air pollution and you could sense some unease about crime. High fences around the homes and sophisticated security systems, also for cars, are the rule.

From out of Johannesburg, we visited Bethal, a picturesque farming community on the high veld a couple of hours drive to the east. This town likes to be known as the “Potato Capital of South Africa.” I recently read that the area had received the first snowfall in memory this winter. The Free Reformed Church there is a recent addition to the federation. Rev. P. Nel is minister there. He and his wife and family and a number of other families and individuals separated from the Dutch Reformed Church last year, and were admitted to the federation of our sister churches. Some who separated

with Rev. Nel have since joined a pro-apartheid church. There is among some concerned members of the Dutch Reformed Churches more a desire to return to the old ways than to return to the Word as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity. But since those persons have left, others have joined for good reason, and still others continue to attend and show interest. The church continues to grow, and now has around 80 members. The brothers and sisters in Bethal were interested in the Canadian situation, and were encouraged to receive brotherly greetings from the brothers and sisters in the Canadian Reformed Churches. They have gone through difficult times in Bethal, but are determined to remain truly Reformed. Visiting them and speaking there was also very stimulating to us.

The final stop was the city of Pretoria, where my wife and I also started our married life. We stayed at the home of old friends, who were very hospitable in true South African fashion. Pretoria is one of the two capital cities of South Africa, surrounded by a number of white and huge black suburbs. One of the black suburbs is Mamelodi, where there are two mission congregations and Rev. J. Bosman, also forced out of the Dutch Reformed Church, is missionary and M.B. Mogashoa evangelist. Another suburb is Soshanguve, where there are two more mission churches under the care of the church of Pretoria. Rev. A.J. de Visser is missionary there, and candidate D.M. Boersma was called (hopefully by now ordained) as second missionary. Soshanguve is a sprawling city with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. There are virtually no buildings over one story high. Just rows and rows of small plots with small brick homes on them. There are some high class neighbourhoods, and on the fringes the usual scrap wood and corrugated tin huts.

On Sunday morning, April 28, we visited the mission church in Soshanguve-north which is pastored by missionary Rev. A.J. de Visser. It was a very moving experience to be among the 180 or so black Sotho brothers and sisters gathered for worship that morning. It was gratifying to note that there were not only older members, but many were children and young people. The young people especially are active, which bodes well for the future of a mission church such as this one. The liturgy used was similar to ours. I was able to preach in English (which most younger people understand), with Rev. de Visser translating in Sotho, a language spoken by more than 6 million black people in South Africa. What



Rev. and Mrs. P. Nel of Bethal

On safari: from left to right: Rev. A. de Graaf, minister in the Neth., called by Pretoria as 2nd minister (declined); Rev. J.R. Visser, minister of Pretoria (FRCSA); young Job Visser; Cand. (now Rev.) D.M. Boersma, missionary in Soshanguve-South; Mrs. Moesker; Rev. Moesker



was really very striking was the singing in church. They have their own song book consisting of psalms and hymns, and their own unique way of singing. One of the women starts the singing, and the others fall in at various times with different voices. After the worship service, Rev. de Visser gave catechetical instruction under a thorn tree, while the young people met and sang in the classroom used for the service. A new church building is under construction. Much of the finances and the work are supplied by the members of the mission church themselves.

We enjoyed an evening service in the Free Reformed Church of Pretoria, which has around 750 members. The pastor Rev. J.R. Visser preached the gospel there from the Word as we confess it in Lord's Day 31. We also had opportunity on the Saturday evening to speak at a congregational meeting about the Canadian Reformed Churches. Again I spoke in Afrikaans. I felt more and more confident with my Afrikaans as we went from church to church. And the beautiful thing was that though we had been away for more than twenty years, we also were able to pick up the conversation with old acquaintances right away. We ascribe this to the common bond of the faith and the experience of faith.

It was very encouraging to see firsthand brothers and sisters of all races in a far-off country, and to be able to communicate with them on the basis of the Reformed faith. South Africa is a country in the midst of great change and uncertainty. There are economic and political concerns which have caused many, also among the brotherhood there, to move elsewhere. In the past the state was Christian, even if it was more in name than practice. No longer.

The ANC government has taken politics into secular waters, and this is a new situation for Christians in this so-called "Rainbow Nation." And the large, powerful Dutch Reformed Church has not only abandoned its wrong theological justification of apartheid, but it is unfortunately also busy abandoning the good Reformed tradition. This has left much of what was once at least based on good Reformed principles in South African society without foundation. State support of Reformed education is fading away. We noticed that pornography is freely available. State lotteries have been established, and gambling casinos are prominently advertised. Capital punishment has been done away with. Crime has increased considerably. There is also widespread support for abortion on demand. Many whites now feel subject to discrimination as the government gives preference to blacks in its bureaucracy and economical policies. And all this has led to considerable pessimism especially among whites, and to the complaint, uttered by many under breath, that the present system of government is in actual fact no great improvement in many respects over the old apartheid regime.

All these changes and developments have led to new and pressing concerns within the small federation of sister churches there, especially about how to live as Reformed believers in the new South Africa. There is ongoing discussion and debate among the members of the churches about how to react to all these changes and new circumstances. Also how to reach out to people in the Dutch Reformed Church who are concerned about the direction that church has taken. And how to cope with a possible sizable influx of people

from that church. How will this affect the present structures and lifestyles among the Free Reformed population? In addition to this, there is the question of how the five mission churches will eventually be taken up in the small federation of Free Reformed Churches once they become fully instituted. There are more mission churches than instituted churches at present, and how will their incorporation into the federation affect it? For instance, what language will be used? And how much of the cultural distinctives (for instance, how the singing in church takes place) should be maintained by the mission churches when they become part and parcel of the federation? A magazine published among the churches there, called "Kompas" provides a lively forum for these discussions and debates.

All this has also led to keen interest in how the Canadian Reformed Churches live and function in Canadian society, which is similarly secular. And there is interest for how we react to those who, for example, have left the Christian Reformed Church or who are concerned members of that church, and what we do and plan to do as far as mission among the aboriginal people of Canada is concerned. The South African brothers and sisters were in the past very much oriented towards the Netherlands where there were strong roots among the immigrants and where there was similarity in language. But the present generation of church members has less affinity to the Netherlands, and most of the younger generation is proficient in the English language which is the preferred official language of the majority of the population of South Africa. And there is similarity in mission among culturally distinct aboriginal people within our countries. And what about members

who insist on moving to a location where there is no sister church nearby? Similarity in issues such as these have led to increasing interest in the sister churches in Canada.

In conclusion, we were truly amazed at the changes that have taken place in South Africa. The sister churches are truly faced with a great challenge in the new South Africa. But it was immensely encouraging to communicate with the brothers and sister there and to discover that in the churches there is a real desire to be and remain Reformed and to apply the Reformed faith to all of life in the midst of that change. There was pessimism about the future of the nation, certainly. But there was also optimism among the brothers and sisters about increasing opportunities to speak out and reach out in the midst of all this change and uncertainty as Reformed believers with a beautiful message – the message of the covenantal gospel. Great uncertainty. But at the same time great potential. Our brothers and sisters of all races in South Africa require our continued encouragement and prayerful support. I

was privileged to convey greetings to the brotherhood there from the Canadian Reformed Churches. I was requested to also bring to all in the Canadian and American Reformed Churches the brotherly greetings from the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa.

Some Statistics About South Africa

Area: 1,219,912 sq. km. (approx. equivalent to Ontario)
Population: 45,095, 459
Ethnic divisions: black 75.2%, white 13.6%, Coloured 8.6%, Indian 2.6%
Languages: eleven different official languages including Afrikaans, English, Zulu, Xhosa, Swazi, Ndebele, Sotho, Tswana, Tsonga, Pedi and Venda.
Population Johannesburg: 2 million
Population Capetown: 2.5 million
Population Pretoria: 1 million
Religion: Reformed 16% (mainly Dutch Reformed and Reformed Churches in South Africa), Methodist 8.9%, Roman Catholic 9.6%, Anglican 6.6%, Lutheran 3.6%, Presbyterian 2.1%, Congrega-

tional 2%, Independent churches 20.7%, other Evangelical churches 9.5%, Hindu 2.15%, Islamic 1.4%, Jewish .5%.

Free Reformed Churches of South Africa: (spring 1996 statistics)
 Capetown (instituted 1952) with 370 members; minister Rev. E. Viljoen
 Johannesburg (instituted 1957) with 180 members; minister Rev. C.F. Heiberg
 Pretoria (instituted 1950) with 757 members; minister Rev. J.R. Visser
 Bethal (instituted 1995) with 80 members; minister Rev. P. Nel
Free Reformed Mission churches:
 Belhar (by Capetown with support from the Netherlands); missionary Rev. E.L. Van't Foort
 Mamelodi-East and Mamelodi-West (by Pretoria with support from Johannesburg and Netherlands); missionary Rev. J. Bosman
 Soshanguve-North, Soshanguve-Center, and most recently Soshanguve-South; with evangelist M.B. Mogashoa and missionaries Rev. A.J. de Visser and D.M. Boersma.

PRESS REVIEW

By J. De Jong



A Poem for our Time

The magazine published among our sister churches in Australia, *Una Sancta*, has opened a new column called The Arts. In the words of editor J. Bruning this column will feature "articles and contributions covering all the arts, including painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, music and poetry."

J. Numan submitted an article on Matthew Arnold's poem *Dover Beach*. First follows the poem, then the article.

Dover Beach

*The sea is calm tonight.
 The tide is full, the moon lies fair
 Upon the straights; on the French coast the light
 Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
 Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
 Come to the window, sweet is the night air!
 Only, from the long line of spray
 Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
 Listen! you hear the grating roar
 Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
 At their return, up the high strand,
 Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
 With tremendous cadence slow, and bring
 The eternal note of sadness in.*

Sophocles long ago

*Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
 Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
 Of human misery; we
 Find also in the sound a thought,
 Hearing it by this distant northern sea.*

The Sea of Faith

*Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating, to the breath
 Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
 And naked shingles of the world.*

Ah, love, let us be true

*To one another! for the world, which seems
 To lie before us like a land of dreams,
 So various, so beautiful, so new,
 Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
 Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
 And we are here as on a darkling plain,
 Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
 Where ignorant armies clash by night.*

Mr J. Numan makes the following comments:

As you can see, the first stanza opens with the powerful visual impact of a moonlit scene: calm sea, full tide, fair moon, vast glimmering cliffs and a tranquil bay. It is a scene of beauty, rest, peace, bathed in the light of full moon. The speaker, likely young man at the beginning of married life, calls his sweetheart to the window to enjoy the tranquillity of the "moon blanched" scene.

However, no sooner has he said this than he detects a harsh sound intruding on the peaceful scene:

*Listen! you hear the grating roar
Begin, and cease, and then again
begin,
With tremendous cadence slow,
and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.*

The evening's beauty and peace is marred by the "grating roar" as the crashing waves rudely snatch up the beach pebbles, smash them down again and grind them together. It is an indication that all is not what it appears. The peace and tranquillity cannot be fully enjoyed because they are continually undermined by the harshness of the sea. Since stanza three interprets the sea metaphorically as "The Sea of Faith," it is evident that the speaker sees the bliss of his romantic future threatened by faith, or rather, since the sea is withdrawing, by the decline of faith. Hence we see an impressive theme developing, a theme of man's plight in a world which is losing its faith.

The "grating roar" of the pounding waves, with their "eternal note of sadness," sets him thinking. He is reminded, first, of Sophocles who compared the fortunes and misfortunes of Oedipus and his family to the turbid ebb and flow of the sea. Oedipus is a Greek mythological hero whose parents had been warned that if they had a son he would kill his father and marry his mother. Despite every attempt to avoid the fulfillment of this terrible prophesy, Oedipus unwittingly kills his father and marries his mother. Just as the fortunes and misfortunes of Oedipus and his family are determined beforehand by the gods, and every effort by Oedipus or others to avoid the curse of the gods is fruitless so, too, man's lot is governed by fate. Like Oedipus every effort man makes to understand his position in the world merely increases his sorrow, and every effort he makes to avoid misfortune is meaningless and doomed to

fail. The speaker sees the fate of Oedipus and his descendants representing the misery and fated lot of all mankind.

Hence all human efforts are meaningless and faith is an illusion. Just as the tide recedes so, too, faith, which once "lay like folds of a bright girdle furled" round "earth's shore" has receded. Only faint vestiges of "Its melancholy, long withdrawing roar," can still be heard. To lose faith is to lose hope, and without hope life is meaningless, miserable, tragic. Nothing is left but the "naked shingles of the world," a metaphor for the cold hard reality of a hopeless world.

The metaphor is more fully explained in the last stanza. The reader is struck by the contrast between the closing scene, dark, depressive, melancholy, and the opening scene, a moonlit panorama of beauty and tranquil serenity. The speaker's earlier desire to share scenery with his lover has turned into a plea for faithfulness to one another in an unfaithful, turbulent world. He realizes that the majestic beauty of the scene is a dreadful illusion, for the world with its hopes and dreams and aspirations, like the speaker's own dreams and plans, "So various, so beautiful, so new," are all illusory.


The absence of faith, of religious assurance, has robbed the young couple of any comfort. In the abyss of time, which marches on with the clocklike regularity of crashing waves driving home "the eternal note of sadness," the imminence of death overshadows their lives; and the world, which at first seemed so wonderful, "hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain." The idea that the world offers a positive future is a childish illusion; one is confronted with a bankrupt reality. Furthermore, any attempts, any aspirations to improve one's lot, to avoid misfortunes are like those of Oedipus, governed by fate and therefore doomed. The beautiful moonlit scene is no more than an artificial facade which, when swept aside, reveals a darkling plain, and the poet is torn between demonstrating faith in the future by a futile active participation on the one hand or, on the other, by an equally futile total withdrawal.

Faced with the harsh reality, the person utters a cry, a plea to his lover for mutual faithfulness and truth. Since there is no faith, no hope, nor stability in the brief turbulent years of man's life, the poet turns to his lover with the plea

that they remain faithful to one another. By being true to one another, he hopes to find some anchorage, some stability in the turbulent waves of life, of disillusionment, of fate. But the fact that he must express such a plea suggests that even this hope may be an illusion.

Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* is a poem about the spiritual bankruptcy and meaninglessness of life when there is no longer faith in God. Over the years an increasing number of people have identified with the ideas it expresses. It reflects many of the characteristics of existentialism: alienation from God (absence of faith); a feeling of alienation from others in a loveless, chaotic society; alienation even from nature (the moonlit scene is really a dark plain, and the calm sea fades leaving cold, lifeless shingles). Active participation in determining one's future is meaningless since man's life is governed by fate, and death's dark dominion looks menacingly near.

Dover Beach presents us with the logical consequence of a loss of faith. The future becomes bleak, hopeless, meaningless, offering the cold, hard reality of a comfortless existence. It is a foretaste of hell, the harsh alternative to the heavenly foretaste believers experience and which we confess in Lord's Day 1. Most Westerners today prefer not to think too deeply about the implications of living without God, of the meaninglessness of a brief life in which the only certainty is inevitable death, of the inevitable injustices, turbulence and crime when the Bible is rejected as basis for society's moral standards. Television, sport and other entertainment offer them an escape from reason.

Yet the LORD continues to direct people to Himself. While people are alive the universe is before them "a most beautiful book" directing the "readers" to the Creator (Art. 2 BC). Moreover, the Good News of heavenly comfort, of joy and light, is there for all who will take hold of the promises of the Gospel. That delightful fellowship that we have with God is also available to those who now walk in the comfortless despair of their unbelief, if only they believe. May our gracious LORD open the eyes of many so that they, too, may experience the comfort we enjoy. And as God's fellow workers in His kingdom, here is incentive for us to be active in support of mission, bold in our day-to-day witnessing, fervent in our prayers for the fullness of Christ's kingdom. 

“The Least of These My Brethren”

By F.G.Oosterhoff

“We have not understood what the Bible teaches about the body of Christ. If one member suffers, the whole body suffers.” These are the words of Brother Andrew, as quoted in a recent issue of *Christianity Today*. Brother Andrew, a Dutchman by birth, is the founder of Open Doors, an international organization supporting persecuted Christians. He began his work in the 1950s by smuggling Bibles from the Netherlands to churches and individual believers behind the Iron Curtain. The story of these early years is told in his moving and inspiring autobiography *God’s Smuggler*, first published in 1967 and still in print (co-authored by John and Elizabeth Sherril; Penguin, Signet Books).

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Open Doors shifted its attention from the communist to the Muslim world, where persecution of Christians has been increasing very rapidly in recent decades. Brother Andrew, and many other advocates of religious freedom, have long complained about the apparent lack of concern of many western Christians for the suffering of the brotherhood elsewhere. The apathy increased, they believe, after the collapse of communism in Europe. In the words of Nina Shea, one of these advocates, “Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a deafening silence from the church.”

Persecution in China

Although the communist threat to Christianity has indeed diminished since 1989, it is still present. North Korea forbids the importation of religious literature, denies entry to missionaries, and licenses only three churches for 25 million people. Vietnam also persecutes Christians, as does Castro’s Cuba. Large-scale persecution continues in China, where the Christian church has several million members. The *CT* article reports the following incident:

In Beijing, China’s capital city of 5.9 million, outspoken Christians are at grave risk. Gou Quinghui and her husband, Xiao Biguang, have paid a high

personal price for seeking religious liberty. Xiao, a Christian intellectual, has not been seen since his arrest in April 1994. Periodically, police officers come and ask his wife, Gou, to provide clothes or money for Xiao, providing hope that he is still alive.

According to Human Rights Watch/Asia, Xiao stood trial in a closed two-hour session on April 10, 1995. He had been charged with several crimes, including “creating a negative atmosphere among students.” But he still has not been sentenced. Under the Chinese system, prisoners can be held incommunicado until their sentencing.

Xiao, 34, came to Christian faith after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. He began studying the Bible and came to the conclusion that only Christianity could solve China’s problems, which he saw as essentially problems of the heart. Active in a labor union movement, Xiao wrote several academic articles promoting Christianity among intellectuals. Prior to his arrest, he also spoke out on behalf of Christians imprisoned for holding “illegal” religious meetings.

Persecution in the Muslim world

Previous reports in *Clarion* have mentioned the situation in Sudan, where a Muslim government tries to Islamize the entire country. Stories of the kidnapping of women and children, rape, slavery, and crucifixion of Christians continue to surface. The government in Khartoum denies them, but as *TIME* magazine reported this past summer, two American journalists who travelled to Sudan have verified that slavery and the slave trade do exist. They in fact purchased two boys, 10 and 12 years old, who had been held in bondage for seven years, and restored them to their father. They reported that Christian Solidarity International, a Swiss group, has also been ransoming Sudanese slaves. So have Roman Catholic missionaries.

Persecution in Iran is so well-known that even the secular press has reported

on it. In 1994 three leading evangelical ministers were murdered in this country. Persecution is also accelerating in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Pakistan, Egypt, and Algeria. In some of these nations the death penalty is reserved for anyone converting to Christianity. Those who are allowed to live face the threat of fines, imprisonment and torture. Even in a country like the Philippines militant Muslims threaten Christians.

Islam’s challenge to Christianity is indeed a formidable one. In Brother Andrew’s words: “The message is no longer *There is no God, but Who is God?*” He also believes that “. . . we in the Western church don’t come close to matching the level of commitment, determination, and strength of many Muslim groups. Until we do, Islam will continue to be the world’s fastest-growing religion – not because of its strength, but because of our weakness. . . . We want to surround ourselves,” he complains, “with prosperity and materialism.”

Helping the persecuted

The complaints of religious-freedom activists about western apathy are having an effect. More and more Christian periodicals write about the persecutions. A group of Congressmen in the United States is active on behalf of the suffering church. They organize press conferences, speak with foreign leaders, and lobby the White House and the State Department to address the issue. One of them, the Democratic Senator Sam Nunn, says that a country like the United States can make a difference and that it should do so. Jesus’ words that “from everyone who has been given much, much shall be required,” he points out, apply to nations as well as to individuals.

Religious leaders also are becoming more active. Interestingly, they include not only Protestants and Roman Catholics, but also Jews. One of the organizers in fact is the Jewish lawyer Michael Horowitz, a one-time official in the Reagan administration, who believes that Christians are becoming “the Jews – the scapegoats” of the twenty-first

century. Various attempts are being made to have both President Clinton and Republican candidate Bob Dole speak out on the issue – so far, however, with little success.

What can we, individual Christians, do? We can and should pray for the international brotherhood, individually and communally. We can send letters to our representatives and to the press. We can give financial support to organizations that seek to promote religious liberty world-wide, that distribute Bibles and Christian literature, that evangelize in Muslim and communist

countries, and/or that provide material support: food, medical supplies, and help in rebuilding homes, churches, and hospitals. For “the least of these brethren” of Christ whom He tells us to help in their need are to be found not only in our own church and immediate neighbourhood (there too), but also in the *world-wide* communion of saints.

Based on information in *Christianity Today*, July 15, 1996; *TIME Magazine*, July 1, 1996; *First Things*, May 1996; issues of *Frontline Fellowship News*, South Africa; correspondence with Frontline Fellowship, South Africa.

ORGANIZATIONS THAT HELP THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Among the various organizations that help persecuted Christians and need public support are:

- Frontline Fellowship, P.O.Box 74, Newlands 7725, South Africa
- Christian Solidarity International, 1101 17th Street. NW, Suite 607, Washington, D.C., 20036.
- Open Doors, P.O.Box 27001, Santa Ana, Calif., 92799
- Amnesty International, 440 Bloor St.W., Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1X5

PRESS RELEASES



Classis Alberta/Manitoba October 15, 16, 1996

On behalf of the convening church, the church at Neerlandia, the Rev. W.B. Slomp called the meeting to order. We opened with singing and the reading of Holy Scripture after which Rev. Slomp called upon the Lord in prayer. He welcomed the delegates of the churches, the deputies of Regional Synod, (Rev J. Visscher and Rev. C. VanSpronsen), Candidate R. Eikelboom, and all other guests.

All the churches were duly represented. The suggested officers took their places.

Chairman: P. de Boer

Vice-chairman: G.Ph. van Popta

Clerk: E.J. Tiggelaar

The agenda was adopted.

Peremptory examination of Candidate Richard John Eikelboom, Minister-Elect of the Church at Calgary

In closed session, the necessary documents were scrutinized and found to be in order. Candidate Eikelboom presented his sermon proposal on Luke 8:42b-48. In closed session it was determined that the sermon was acceptable and that the examination could, thus, be continued. Candidate Eikelboom was examined in Exegesis OT, Exegesis NT, Knowledge of Holy Scripture, Doctrine and Creeds, Church History, Ethics, Church Polity, and the Diaconological Subjects. In closed session the examination was sustained. The deputies of Regional Synod gave concurring advice. In open session, the

chairman read the Form of Subscription which was then signed by Candidate Eikelboom. After we sang Hymn 64:1 and the chairman led in prayer of thanksgiving, the members of classis were given an opportunity to congratulate Candidate and Mrs. Eikelboom.

Reports:

The following reports were dealt with:

- a. Report from Committee for Aid to students for the ministry.
- b. In closed session, reports of visitations to the churches at Carman, Winnipeg, Neerlandia and Barrhead.
- c. Report from Committee for Aid to Needy Churches.

Proposals or instructions from the churches:

- a. A request from the church at Coaldale to revise Art. 13 of Acts of Classis AB/MB April 1996 was admitted. Classis denied the request of Coaldale on the grounds that the Church at Coaldale does not specify what new grounds the last classis failed to consider.
- b. Request from Coaldale re pulpit supply. Granted.

Question Period according to article 44

The chairman asked whether the ministry of the office bearers is being continued, the decisions of the major assemblies are honoured, and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of classis for the proper government of

their church. The churches answered the first two questions in the affirmative and the third in the negative.

Correspondence:

- a. One appeal was dealt with.
- b. A letter from the Presbytery of the Dakotas in which they respond to our last letter to them. Referred to next classis on grounds that the consistories have not yet seen this letter, and that the minutes to accompany this document have not yet been received.

Appointments:

Next classis:

Convening church: Taber; Date: Dec. 10, 8 pm; Place: Immanuel Church, Edmonton
Alternate date: March. 11, 1997, 8 pm.

Suggested officers:

Chairman: R. Aasman
Vice-chairman: P. de Boer
Clerk: G.Ph. van Popta

Standing committees:

All were reappointed.
Delegation to Regional Synod Neerlandia, Dec. 3, 1996.

Ministers: R. Aasman, W.B. Slomp, G. Snip, G.Ph. van Popta
Alternates: P. de Boer, E.J. Tiggelaar, M.A. Pollock, K. Jonker (in that order)
Elders: H. De Boer, T. Termeer, H. Vandenhoven, A. Van Leeuwen
Alternate: I. Veurink, R. Duker, M. Vogelzang, P. Werkman (in that order)

After Personal Question Period and an opportunity for Censure ad Article 44

C.O. was given, the Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved.

In light of Rev. P. de Boer's impending emigration to Australia, Rev. R. Aasman spoke some words of farewell and thanks to him for all the work he has done in this classical resort. He wished him well in Australia with the confidence that he will be a blessing to our sister churches there. Rev. de Boer responded with some words of thanks for the work he could do in this classis and wished all the Lord's blessing.

The ladies, Mrs. Bos, Mrs. Noot and Mrs. Vander Linden, were thanked for their faithful service throughout the past day.

Rev. G.Ph. van Popta closed the meeting with prayer.

For classis,
G.Ph. van Popta

Classis Ontario South September 11, 1996 in London, ON

Opening

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. J. Ludwig called the meeting to order. He requests that Psalm 99:1,2 be sung. He then read Revelation 1:9-20 and opened in prayer. Rev. Ludwig welcomed all the delegates. He also welcomed the two students, brs. R.C. Janssen and S. 't Hart, who were present to be examined by classis.

Credentials and Constitution

All the churches were represented; it was noted that the church at Lincoln sent only one delegate. Classis was declared constituted. The officers were:

Rev. Cl. Stam – Chairman

Rev. J. Ludwig – Clerk

Rev. K.A. Kok – Vice-Chairman

The chairman thanks the convening church for all the preparatory work. He notes that Candidate J. Van Vliet has had a call extended to him by the church at Lincoln. Rev. Stam also remembers the passing away of Rev. P. Kingma and his years of service to the Lord in classical region Ontario South. After some additions, the agenda is adopted.

Examinations

Two brothers have come to this classis to be examined for preaching consent ad Article 21 C.O. First, br. R.C. Janssen, after examination of the necessary documents, presented a sermon proposal on Psalm 29. In closed session, the sermon proposal was discussed and was deemed sufficient to continue with the examination. The

brother was examined in church doctrine. Again in closed session, the examination is discussed and there was no objection to granting br. Janssen preaching consent for a period of one year. Br. Janssen was informed of this in open session. After he promised not to teach anything contrary to the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity, he was given a certificate from classis granting him preaching consent.

Second, br. S. 't Hart, after examination of the necessary documents, presented a sermon proposal on Matthew 25:1-13. In closed session, the sermon proposal was discussed and was deemed sufficient to continue with the examination. The brother was examined in church doctrine. Again in closed session, the examination is discussed and there was no objection to granting br. 't Hart preaching consent for a period of one year. Br. 't Hart was informed of this in open session. After he promised not to teach anything contrary to the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity, he was given a certificate from classis granting him preaching consent.

Question Period Article 44 C.O.

At the request of the church at Ancaster, Prof. N.H. Gootjes was appointed counsellor to the Ancaster consistory (Art. 45 C.O.). One church asked for advice in matters of supervision. Advice was given.

Appeal

An appeal is dealt with in closed session.

Correspondence

A letter was received from the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic (OPC) stating their intention to appeal a decision of Classis Ontario South of March 6 and April 17, 1996. This letter is received for information.

Reports

Reports of the church visitation to the churches at Attercliffe, Blue Bell, Chatham, Grand Rapids, Hamilton, London, Rockway, Smithville, and Watford were read.

The report from the church at Ancaster regarding the Fund for Needy Churches was discussed. Classis decides to accede to the proposed assessment of \$20.50 per communicant member.

Appointments

Classis made the following appointments:

1. Next Classis

The date of the next Classis: December 11, 1996

Place: Smithville

Convening church: Rockway

Proposed officers: Rev. J. Van Woudenberg, chairman; Rev. Cl. Stam, clerk; Rev. J. Ludwig, vice-chairman

2. Delegates to Regional Synod East of November 13, 1996

a. Primary Ministerial delegates:

Rev. D.G.J. Agema

Rev. J. De Gelder

Rev. Cl. Stam

Rev. G. Wieske

b. Alternate Ministerial Delegates:

Rev. J. Ludwig

Rev. J. Van Woudenberg

Rev. B.R. Hofford

Rev. K.A. Kok (in that order)

c. Primary Elder Delegates:

br. J. Koster

br. J. Schouten

br. W. Smouter

br. A. Witten

d. Alternate Elder Delegates:

br. T.M.P. Vander Ven

br. J. Bartels

br. D. Lof

br. M. Verhey, Sr. (in that order)

3. Church Visitors ad Article 46 C.O.
Rev. Cl. Stam (convener), Rev. D.G.J. Agema, Rev. J. De Gelder and Rev. G. Wieske
4. Examiners ad Articles 4, 5, and 21 C.O.

Deputies ad Examina: Revs. Cl. Stam and J. De Gelder alternate:

Rev. J. Ludwig

Exegesis Old Testament: Rev. D.G.J.

Agema alternate: Rev. G. Wieske

Exegesis New Testament: Rev. B.R.

Hofford alternate: Rev. J. Van

Woudenberg

Doctrine of Scripture: Rev. Cl. Stam

alternate: Rev. K.A. Kok

Church History: Rev. K.A. Kok

Knowledge of Holy Scripture: Rev.

J. Van Woudenberg

Ethics: Rev. J. Ludwig

Diaconology: Rev. G. Wieske

Church Polity: Rev. J. Ludwig

Closing

Personal Questions period was held. The chairman judged the Censure ad Art. 34 C.O. is not necessary. The Acts are read and adopted. The Press Release is read and approved. Classis sings Psalm 67:1. Rev. Cl. Stam leads in a prayer of thanksgiving and closes classis.

For Classis Ontario South
K.A. Kok, vice-chairman