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*The Sacrament
of Baptism*



By J. Geertsema



Heroes of the Faith?

A term intended to stimulate

Reading through the Letter to the Hebrews, one will also come to chapter 11, the chapter about “by faith.” The NIV translates verse 2 as “This [faith] is what the ancients are commended for.” The RSV reads, “For by it the men of old received divine approval.” The verb used here means in the active form, “to bear witness, to testify.” In Heb. 11:2 the passive form is used: “the men of old were testified about,” or “they received a (good) testimony.” In the *NIV Study Bible*, I found the following note at 11:2, “the ancients. Heroes of faith in the pre-Christian era. . . .” One commentator wrote at Heb. 11:4, “Our author’s catalogue of heroes and heroines of faith. . . .” This term “heroes of faith” and similar expressions occur in more commentaries.²

What does the term “hero” indicate? My *New Webster Dictionary* gives as first meaning, “a man of exceptional quality who wins admiration by noble deeds, especially] deeds of courage.” Deeds of courage have often been performed in wars. We speak therefore of “war heroes.” Also in daily life very dangerous situations occur sometimes in which a person risks his or her own life in order to rescue others. Another context in which the term “hero” is used is the world of sports. When men or women come to an excellent, record breaking, performance, especially when this happens under difficult circumstances, they become heroes. They are placed on a pedestal and become the great examples for others. People, especially young people, are confronted with these examples of excellence in order to strive for the same excellence in performance. Such examples of heroism are used as means to stimulate us to go for the very best in our life.

Our Letter to the Hebrews seems to do the very same thing with the many examples of faith in chapter 11, doesn’t it? Does Hebrews 11 not want the believers to look at these men and women, this “cloud of witnesses” (12:1), and follow these examples of excellence in their performance of faith? Does it not seek to stimulate his readers, us included, to live in this same strong and steadfast faith and also come to such great deeds of faith? Verse 2 says that these men and women received a good testimony. We find this good testimony in the Old Testament, as well as here in Heb. 11.

Beside the “cloud of witnesses” of faith from the Old Testament, there are also the more recent examples of faith in the New Testament. Their faith, too, must be followed. Hebrews 13:7 says, “Remember your leaders, who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith.” Also these examples of faith of New Testament people have to stimulate the believers after them to endure and persevere in their faith.

In line with the men and women of faith in the Bible, heroes of faith are found in the history of the church, in the martyrs and in leaders as Luther and Calvin. They, too, lived and acted and spoke and died in faith.

When today people use this term, “heroes (and heroines) of faith,” they, too, have this purpose in mind to stimulate themselves and others to look at the old examples and to

follow these heroes and heroines of faith. Our conclusion is that this term, “heroes and heroines of faith” is used with good intentions; we are to be build up in faith.

And yet, a dangerous term

Good intentions, however, do not automatically make a thing good and the goal does not sanctify the means. When we use the term “hero” in the context of wars or in the field of sports, such a hero with all his or her greatness and excellence is in the centre. All the attention is directed to that person. A clear example is what happened at the occasion of the Olympic games. Just recently this was brought back to our mind with the choice of the Canadian sports hero of the year, Donovan Bailey, “the fastest man on earth.” Such a hero is not only praised. He is glorified. And in him “mighty Man” is glorified.

Because of this connotation of glorification of man, the term “heroes of faith” is prone to lead to the same result. Since not faith is emphasized but all the attention becomes directed to the person of the believer and his glory, there is the danger that in the hearts of those to whom this term is addressed as a stimulus there will arise, beside the admiration for the heroes of faith, the desire to become themselves such heroes, such great and glorified persons. In other words, since the believer comes in the centre of the attention, human greatness becomes the aim. Our desire to be great is stimulated. Probably unintentionally, but in fact, the idea of being an hero is sold to us by making use of our human inclination to be proud of ourselves. The believer finds self-realization and self-esteem in being a great successful believer. And . . . the goal of faith is missed. For faith does not boast. Faith makes humble. Faith gives glory to God. “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord” (Rom. 3:27, 1Cor. 1:31, 3:21).

There is a second danger. When we are called to become heroes of faith with the stress on human greatness, we can do immense mental and spiritual damage to serious older and young people who think they have to follow the call and must become heroes of faith. They receive the notion that this is the will of God. But in the practice of their daily life they see the truth of Romans 7: the good that I want to do, I do not do, and the evil that I do not want to do, is what I do time and again. They come to despair: “Oh, I, miserable sinner; I never become such a hero. I never reach that goal.” And the more they try, the more they see that they fail. The more they come to despair. Such despair can easily lead to depression. For the focus is no longer on Christ as Saviour of sinners but on the believer who must be or become a hero.

Then there is the danger of the opposite effect. Some, being told to become heroes of the faith and focussing on this calling, can get involved in all kinds of actions of “faith.” They throw themselves with great energy in “the work of the Lord” with this aim to become heroes of faith. And they accomplish something. They become heroes, perhaps in the eyes of others, but also . . . in their own eyes. And they begin to look down with contempt on others who do not display the same energetic activities, who do not achieve the same great

results, who are not heroes of faith as they themselves are. Compare what Paul says in 1 Cor. 12-14.

Back to Hebrews 11

Let us look once again to Hebrews 11 with its many examples of faith. Is it the intention of the author to place all these men and women in the centre of the attention? Sure, they receive a good testimony from God in His Word. God does praise them. But this does not mean that now these persons are in the centre and must be glorified. In Hebrews 11 faith is in the centre, faith as humble trust in and service to God. These men and women are people of faith, not heroes of faith. Some of the persons mentioned in this chapter have done things we can look at with amazement, such as Abraham, "the father of all believers," who was ready in faith to offer Isaac, the son of promise. But let us also look at Jacob. Was he such a great hero of the faith? Not really! It was rather so that the LORD had to have a lot of patience with Jacob. Genesis tells us that in Jacob's life God's sovereign grace in His electing good pleasure shines forth in spite of Jacob's doings. Herewith it is not denied that also Jacob has performed actions of faith. He did. Hebrews 11 shows it. But let him who boasts boast in the Lord. The Lord led Jacob to his deeds of faith.

Further, faith is defined as "being sure of what we hope for and certain [convinced] of what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1, NIV). Now that which is hoped for and about which one is so certain is in Hebrews 11 nothing but what God has said in His words to these believers. Abel, Enoch, Noah, and all the others had received God's words, either personally or via parents in the line of the generations, or in both ways. And they acted according to these words. They were certain of the truth and reliability of those words. They lived by them from day to day. What those words of the LORD promised was the sure hope that dominated their thinking and actions. Their faith was obedience to the words of God.

Let us, for example, take Noah and Abraham. The Lord said to Noah that He would give "man" of those days one hundred and twenty years to repent (Gen 6:3). If they would harden in their rebellion against their Creator, He was going to destroy the world by means of a flood. Therefore, Noah had to build a huge ship to save himself, his family, and the animals. Although these words of the LORD must have been hardly imaginable and very strange for him, Noah believed them and acted accordingly. For one hundred and

twenty years he kept building the huge boat through this faith: what God says is true. This faith we are to follow.

To Abraham God said that he had to leave his father's house and clan and go, with only his family, to a strange land and live there without the protection from the clan, just trusting the promises of the LORD. And the LORD would give Him that land and a large offspring. Abraham believed the words of God. He lived by them. He acted accordingly, even when God commanded him to offer Isaac. God's promise of offspring through Isaac would still come true. Even though he could not understand what God commanded, he believed it and did it.

Therefore, the lesson is not that we all must become heroes of faith. The call is rather that we, just as these men and women of old, live by God's Word with our whole life on the place where God has set us. This means that we keep ourselves intensely busy with that Word, that we read it, study it, ponder it, with the constant prayer that the Lord, by His Spirit, guide us in understanding it and applying it to our own life, and strengthen us unto such a life of faith.

We have the promise that the LORD will guide us through His Word and Spirit and show us how He will use us in His service and what task He has for us. This task is for the one this and for the

other that, just as the men and women of faith in Heb. 11 had their own place and task in the history of redemption. And by humble faith they fulfilled these tasks. Surrounded with this "cloud of witnesses" of faith, the Hebrew Christians were called to persevere in their faith in Christ in a life of holy dedication to Him. This is also our calling.

In conclusion, calling ourselves and others to be "heroes of faith" appears not to be good. God's Word does not teach us to do this. And the term has the inherent danger of leading to the glorification of man and is apt to do damage to those who use this slogan and to those who listen to it. Let us rather encourage each other to live out of the faith in the living triune God as our God, stimulating each other to live by the Word of this triune God in our daily life wherever God has set us, in humble obedience seeking the coming of His kingdom and the glory of His Name, according to His Word.

Endnotes:

¹Donald A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, in *New International Biblical Commentary*, Peabody: Hendrickson, (1983), 1990, p.184.

²I mention two more: Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, (1977) 1987, p.442; R. McL. Wilson, *Hebrews in The New Century Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987, p. 218.



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By H.J.J. Feenstra

BE WISE WITH WISDOM! *The Church – God's Bridgehead*

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

Understanding these things, we can only stand in awe for the cosmic significance of the church. Indeed, the new cosmos is starting to take shape in God's church who knows God's covenant mysteries.

It is in the church that we learn how to be human in God's world; how to get to God's new world; how to look at the world and at life in the right way again; how to be husband and wife; how to be parents in a responsible manner; how to be child in your parental home. In the church we are enlightened about principles which apply in society and in politics. *The church is the beginning of the new mankind who lives towards God's new world.*

The world considers the church as not much more than a peripheral phenomenon. In some communist countries the church is still retained within its own ghetto. However, such views and practices should not bother or confuse us.

What is the position of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world? What is the significance of the true (see Eph. 4:15) church? This church is God's *bridgehead*.

This is a telling term. Remember the invasion of Europe by the allied troops

during World War II. After fierce battles, the allies managed to establish a bridgehead on the coast of Normandy, breaching the German defenses of Western Europe. A small area of Normandy was taken from the German stranglehold and became the launching area for further military action against the enemy: from Normandy to Berlin.

To continue this image: God wants to go to "Berlin;" He wants to move towards the last day, towards the new cosmos under the headship of Christ. The bridgehead has been established. God has already conquered "Normandy" – He has established His church as a post in the front line and as a base from which to attack. This church knows God's mystery – the mysteries of the covenant.

Indeed, these things are mysteries, matters which no human mind could have conceived. Unbelievers do not see these things and do not understand them, however intelligent they may be. Your neighbour may be such a person, while a foreigner from another country and perhaps another culture could well understand these things because he believes in Christ, and therefore he knows the mystery. With such a person we live in full unity already now.

Remark:

An image often has limitations. The image of the bridgehead might suggest that God controls the world only in part. But the contrary is the case. I point to

Psalms 97: *The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice . . .* Yet, here is the problem: the earth is not rejoicing. There are *worshippers of images* (v. 7) who do not sing the praises of the LORD. That is the case in Zion, that is, in the church (v. 8 - 9). The church confesses and experiences the kingship of the LORD over all the earth. The image of the bridgehead has been used in that sense.

Further, this image is a military term and may suggest a militant church. However, the church is much more than God's storm troops. To mention one thing: for the larger part the church is already in heaven (Hymn 40:4).

Yet, I chose to use the image of the bridgehead because it characterizes so well the progress of the kingdom of God.

From Scripture Psalm 103:19-22
 Matthew 28:18

From the Confessions
 HC Lord's Day 48

A Cultural Force

Scene: a Thursday evening; there is a knock on the door. The elders present themselves for a family visit. After the usual coffee, one of them takes the Bible and proposes to read from Ephesians 4. In this living room the Word of God is heard:

Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life . . . because you have come to know Christ . . . Therefore, put away falsehood, let every one

What's inside?

We believe that our gracious God, mindful of our insensitivity and weakness, has ordained sacraments. . . . So begins article 33 of our Confession. When a person is baptized, and when we celebrate the Lord's supper, we see our salvation. We go home with the Song of Simeon running through our minds: ". . . now have I beheld Thy wonderful salvation." Two sacraments: Holy baptism and the holy supper. For the next few issues, we are going to focus on the sacraments. This issue and the next will have articles on baptism – specifically on the baptism of the children of believers. Then we will have a two part article on the Lord's supper – focussing especially on how often we ought to celebrate it. May you be edified by these.

For the past two years, we have been publishing in serial form an English translation of a study on Proverbs written by a Dutch minister, the Rev. H.J.J. Feenstra. With this issue, we have come to an end. We hope they have helped you grow in wisdom. We thank Rev. Feenstra for allowing us to publish these. As well, we sincerely thank Mr. VanderVen, principal of our Teachers' College, for his fine work of translating the study into English.

In these pages you will also come across some reviews, reader contributions, and releases. Happy reading!

GvP

... speak the truth with his neighbour . . . be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger . . . let no evil talk come out of your mouths . . . and do not grieve the Holy Spirit . . . let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you . . .

What happens here in this living room? Are these the words of a legalistic busy-body? On the contrary, at work here is a power which changes cultures, and which is busy building a new unity of all things in heaven and on earth. Here is instruction in the wisdom which the church has in Christ Jesus.

I quote the concluding sentences from *Christ and Culture*, written by Dr. K. Schilder.

Blessed is my wise ward-elder who does his home visiting in the right

way. He is a cultural force, although he may not be aware of it. Let them mock him; they do not know what they are doing, those cultural gadabouts of the other side!

Let us recognize the dimensions of the wisdom which has been given to the church as a gift of grace according to God's good pleasure.

From Scripture Ephesians 4:20-32
Finis 

By Virtue of the Covenant¹ (part one)

By J. Ludwig

There is perhaps no subject in Christianity about which such difference of opinion exists as the sacrament of baptism. The very name recalls to one's mind an endless list of strifes, disputes, heart-burnings, controversies, and divisions. It is a subject, moreover, on which even eminent Christians have long been greatly divided. Praying, Bible-reading, holy men, who can agree on all other points, find themselves hopelessly divided about baptism.

That was the assessment of John Charles Ryle in 1877, the pious Bishop of Liverpool.

Having only touched the tip of the iceberg, by way of selective reading in preparation for this speech, I must admit that his assessment is quite accurate. In the history of the church of Christ many doctrinal battles have been waged over this sacrament: Who may receive it? What does it mean? How is it to be administered, by whom and upon what ground?

A brief history

Already in the early church, the thinking and practice of some Christians on baptism was influenced by ideas probably derived from the so-called "mystery religions," which were cults formed around the worship of Egyptian and other ancient gods. These mystery religions included initiation rites which some Christians saw as equivalent to baptism – while in reality they were

worlds apart. Initiation into the mysteries, usually involving some form of purification by water, was administered to those who had already earned the favour of the gods by their own deeds. By analogy, baptism came to be regarded by some as a sign and seal of the higher status that a person had obtained for himself before God.

Tertullian, one of the church fathers of the second century, wrote a treatise on baptism in which he argued that sins committed after baptism were particularly dangerous and cannot be forgiven. For that reason, as you can guess, he opposed infant baptism.

By the middle ages, the Roman Catholic church had turned the sacrament of baptism into a magical means whereby grace was automatically and mechanically infused into the recipient.

The sixteenth century witnessed the rise of the Anabaptist movement. Men like Conrad Grebel, Michael Sattler, and Balthasar Hubmaier vehemently disagreed with the Reformers on a number of points but especially over the understanding of baptism. Convinced that Scripture only commanded believers' baptism, they established their own churches and penned their own confessions. The first article of *The Schleitheim Confession* (1527) for example, states:

Baptism ought to be given to those who have been instructed in repentance, who believe that their sins have been blotted out by Jesus Christ, and who want to walk in

His resurrection. Consequently, it ought to be administered to those who request it for themselves, not for infants, as is done in the pope's kingdom.

As recently as the last century, the Reformed churches in the Netherlands experienced a bitter struggle over infant baptism, as this came to the fore in the theory of presumptive regeneration and the doctrine of the covenant. The result of this struggle was the Liberation of 1944.

The struggle about baptism

Thus, as you look back over the history of the church, you will observe that the sacrament of holy baptism (and Lord's Supper for that matter) was continually a bone of contention. It may seem odd that the sacraments should generate so many theological controversies and church schisms. After all, the sacraments are so simple and straightforward. God ordained them precisely because he was "mindful of our insensitivity and infirmity" (Art. 33). Because of the weakness of our flesh, our propensity to doubt, our inclination to trust what we see more than what we hear, God gave us visible signs and seals "to represent better to our external senses both what He declares to us in His Word and what He does inwardly in our hearts" (Art.33). Just as we instruct little children with the use of uncomplicated pictures, so God in His grace condescended to give us sacraments "so that

by their use He might the MORE FULLY declare and seal to us the promise of the Gospel" (A. 66).

As a compassionate Father, God saw how prone His children are to stumble and therefore He gave us a means of grace through which He makes His covenant promises tangible before our very eyes. That's what makes the struggle about baptism so odd! Here we are given simple, added confirmations via water, bread and wine, and yet we turn them into sources of division. That shows how persistent and how deep our depravity is. By the same token, this struggle also reveals the deception and power of Satan. He is able not only to raise conspiracies against God's Holy Word, but also against God's Holy sacraments. That makes it all the more essential for us to diligently search the Scriptures so that we know and confess and are able to defend the Biblical truth concerning Holy Baptism.

As Reformed people, we need to defend the truth about baptism over against the teaching of the Baptist churches. Virtually every town and city in this province has a Baptist church. They have their own seminaries, missionaries and periodicals. According to a recent estimate, the international Baptist World Alliance claims over 33 million members in 138 different countries.²

Baptist influence has also been felt in the last few years within our federation. Here and there some Canadian Reformed members have left to join churches affiliated with the Baptist tradition. And occasionally you hear remarks like the following from the mouth of a Reformed person: *Baptism is not really a salvation-issue. Your eternal weal or woe does not hinge on whether you're re-baptized or whether you reject infant baptism. It is not that important.*

In noting the differences between Reformed and Baptist churches on this sacrament we make no judgement upon people as such. Some of you probably know very sincere Christians who attend a Baptist church. We are concerned with their official teaching, their doctrine. If that teaching is contrary to the Word of God we are obliged to point out the errors as clearly as we can and share with them the riches of our Reformed heritage.

We should also be careful at the outset not to paint every Baptist church with the same brush. Among the English Baptists of the 17th century there

were two strains: one group influenced by Arminianism (General Baptists), the other by Calvinism (Particular Baptists). One of the best known preachers belonging to the Calvinistic Baptists was C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) whose penetrating sermons are still read by many today. The Calvinistic group now refer to themselves as "Reformed Baptists." Yet it will become obvious from our examination of their teaching on baptism that the name "REFORMED Baptist" is a contradiction in terms. Although this group of Baptists speaks out against the freedom of the will, yet, because of its understanding of baptism, it cannot rid itself of that Arminian stigma.

Immersionists

Concerning the MODE of baptism there are two opinions. The majority of Baptists maintain that the mode is a matter of indifference – sprinkling, pouring, immersing all have the same effect. The "strict" Baptists, however, insist that immersion is the only proper manner of administering this sacrament. Sprinkling or pouring is wrong and therefore whoever is baptized in that way has an invalid baptism. The Trinity Baptist Church, for example, (at the corner of 2nd Sideroad and Appleby Line in Burlington) fiercely holds to that view. I recently obtained a pamphlet from their church entitled: "Immersion: The Only Scriptural Mode of Baptism." In it they go to great lengths explaining that the Greek word "baptizo" means "to immerse" and that this manner alone symbolizes the burial and resurrection that we have in Christ according to Romans 6.

We do not want to devote too much time to this aspect of the Baptist tradition. In his booklet *Christian Baptism*, Prof. J. Murray has adequately refuted their arguments. Essentially, he proves from Scripture that the word "baptizo" does not always or necessarily mean immersion. Among other places, he points to Hebrews 9: 10ff where you find the expression "divers baptisms" (RSV: "various ablutions").³ The author is referring in this passage to OT regulations for the body – one of which is the "SPRINKLING of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls. . . ." (v.13). Obviously, then, the word "baptism" refers to an action that can be performed by sprinkling as well as any other mode.

With respect to Romans six, Professor Murray shows that Paul is not at all

referring to the mode of baptism. The emphasis is plainly upon the *meaning* of baptism into Christ, namely, union with Him.⁴

Similarities between Reformed and Baptist practice of baptism

Our focus right now is on those Baptists who agree with us that the validity of the sacrament is not determined by the amount of water or the way in which it is applied. The first part of our Forms for infant and adult baptism would be fully acknowledged by them:

First, we and our children are conceived and born in sin and are therefore by nature children of wrath, so that we cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are born again. This is what the IMMERSION IN OR SPRINKLING WITH water teaches us.

We are also in agreement with the Baptists with respect to the formula for baptism. They, too, use the words of Matthew 28:19, baptizing "into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, these Baptists maintain with us that baptism can only be administered by a lawfully ordained minister and in the assembly of God's people.

One more similarity might be that with respect to adults, the Baptists just as the Reformed Churches baptize only those who are won for Christ and upon prior profession of faith. Upon the surface this appears to be true. As we delve into the matter, however, it will become apparent that their understanding of adult baptism is fundamentally different from ours.

Rejection of infant baptism

We come now to the obvious difference between Reformed and Baptists. The Baptists adamantly object to the baptism of the children of believing parents mainly for the following two reasons:

There is no express command in the Bible that infants must be baptized nor is there any example of infant baptism.

Jesus commanded that his disciples baptize those who believe (Matt. 28:19 and Mark 16:16). True belief is a sure knowledge whereby we accept as true all that God has revealed in His Word. At the same time it is a firm confidence that God has granted to me the benefits of

Christ out of mere grace. Since infants do not have this knowledge and confidence they may not be baptized.

The Reformed response

Let us look closely at those two objections. The first one (about no explicit command or example) is rooted in the imbalanced approach of Baptists to Scripture. The Baptists certainly hold to the Bible as the infallible Word of God and they desire to base their rejection of infant baptism on that Word. No one will deny that. The problem arises, however, in their treatment of the Old Testament as opposed to the New Testament. One may find a clear example of this way of thinking in the anonymous pamphlet I referred to a moment ago from the Trinity Baptist Church. In the introductory paragraph it states that:

... baptism is a positive institution PECULIAR TO THE NEW TESTAMENT (their emphasis), and therefore cannot be deduced by analogical reasoning from any Old Testament institution, either as to its form, subjects, signification or design. These things we must learn from the New Testament itself, to which alone this ordinance belongs and in which alone we have any revelation about it.

Did you get that? The Baptists here put an emphasis on the New Testament at the expense of the Old Testament. The underlying issue beneath their first objection, then, is: "What is the value of appealing to the OT?"⁵ For Baptists, the old covenant has been fulfilled in the coming of Christ, and therefore whatever ceremonies and symbols it contains have *relatively* little (or no) significance for life in the new covenant.

We can agree with the first part of that sentence. We too believe that "the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ, and that all shadows have been fulfilled, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians." Nevertheless, immediately after that we add (in article 25 of the BC):

YET their truth and substance remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. In the meantime we still use the testimonies taken from the law and the prophets, both to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel and to order our life in all honour according to God's will and to His glory.

The point is that if you are going to use Matt. 28:19 and Mark 16:16 to re-

ject the baptism of the children of believers then you may not wrench those verses out of their context. You must let them speak within the totality of God's revelation, and that means within the OLD and New Testaments. We are dealing here with the basic hermeneutical principle that "Scripture interprets Scripture." If that principle is not upheld, then subjectivistic eisegesis ultimately rules the day so that each person reads his personal convictions into the text.

In the second place, their first objection betrays a Biblicistic approach to Scripture. Their reasoning is: there is no *explicit* command to baptise infants in Scripture and therefore we may not do that. This argument, however, rests upon the untenable assumption that only doctrines and practices explicitly stated in Scripture can be regarded as true or valid. John Calvin already pointed out the weakness of such argumentation by applying it to other areas, for example, the Lord's supper. There is no explicit command in Scripture that women may partake of the Lord's Supper.⁶ Paul's letters make no mention of this. The only example we have is the first supper at which our Lord was surrounded by His disciples, all of whom were men. And yet no Baptist would contend or even contemplate limiting this sacrament to men.

We must agree with the Baptists: there is no explicit command or example of infant baptism in the Bible. BUT IT MOST DEFINITELY IS IMPLIED! *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, I.6. rightly states that

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture. . . .

We wholeheartedly concur. By good and necessary consequence infant baptism may be deduced from the Scriptures. (to be continued).


¹Based largely on a speech held on Reformation Day, Oct. 31, 1996, in the St. Thomas Free Reformed Church, ON.

²E.F. Kevan "The Baptist Tradition" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by W.A. Elwell, p.122.

³J. Murray, p. 20,21.

⁴Ibid., p.32.

⁵W. van't Spijker, *Doop in plaats van Besnijdenis* (1982), p.22.

⁶*Institutes*, IV.16.viii. Other examples: worshipping on the Sunday instead of the Sabbath; the doctrine of the Trinity, etc. 

"Men ought always to pray."

- Luke 18:1.

*Pray in the early morning
For grace throughout the day
We know not what temptations
And trials may cross our way.*

*Pray in the gladsome noontide,
When the day is at its best;
Pray when the night o'ertakes thee
To him who giveth rest.*

*Pray in the silent midnight,
If wakeful hours be thine;
Pray for a heart submissive,
That never will repine.*

*Pray in the hour of sorrow,
Pray in the hour of grief;
In coming to the Father
Thy soul shall find relief*

*Pray when the sun shines brightest,
Thy path with roses strewn;
Pray that thy heart be ever
With the Saviour's kept in tune.*

*Pray when the dark day cometh,
And clouds hang overhead;
In the secret of His presence
Thy soul hath naught to dread.*

*Pray for the Father's guidance
In all thy work and ways,
So shall thy days be fruitful,
Thy life be full of praise.*

*Living in touch with Jesus,
Keeping our own hearts right,
Others will be attracted
From darkness into light.*

Mrs. Major Arnold

Theonomy and Infant Baptism

By H. Boersma

Infant baptism always again provokes debate. The many questions surrounding this issue continue to divide many Bible-believing Christians. Both paedobaptists – people who accept infant baptism as biblical – and Baptists appeal to the same Scriptures. Both want to live in obedience to the Lord and to the way in which He has given His ordinances. This means that it is good to remain aware of the various arguments that are used on both sides of the debate. It also means that the discussion should proceed in a loving manner, one that is upbuilding for the people of God.

Robert R. Booth's recent publication, *Children of Promise*, is a worthwhile contribution.¹ It presents a carefully construed argument in favour of infant baptism, and it does so in an irenic spirit. A one-time Baptist pastor himself, Booth does not come to the topic in a vindictive spirit to lambast his former Baptist associates and friends. He has struggled with the issue tremendously in a personal way: "As I began studying the subject of baptism and realized that my views were being challenged, I felt my heart sink. Day by day I could sense myself moving further and further in the direction I did not want to go. Finally, there I stood, teetering on the precipice, looking for someone to rescue me" (xii). Booth has obviously struggled with the issue of infant baptism himself, and his love and sympathy for his Baptist fellow-believers is evident throughout this book. The book is aimed especially at Baptists who are willing to take a look at the issue. The kind spirit pervading the book will certainly make it easier for a Baptist to make his way through it.

Each chapter starts off with an interesting story which grabs the attention and brings home the main point of the chapter by comparing it to something else. Again, this makes for easy reading. The author's style also helps along, so that all in all the book is a pleasure to

read. Sometimes I felt the author was somewhat repetitive, but perhaps this helps him to make the reader more aware of some of the key issues.

Five main points

The book centres around five main points. The first, pivotal point is the interpretive principle: how do we interpret the Bible (chapter 2)? Booth feels that the "fundamental question is whether there is a basic continuity or a basic discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments" (15). Over against the "dispensational or baptistic" view, Booth opts for a basic continuity. With appeals to people like R.J. Rushdoony and Greg Bahnsen, the author feels that we must follow a Reformed, covenantal approach. Since God has dealt with people throughout history by means of covenants, the conclusion must be that children are included in the covenant now as they were in the Old Testament.

Booth works out the continuity of the various historical covenants in his second point (chapters 3 and 4). He discusses the various covenants: the Adamic, the Noahic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, and the Davidic covenant. Booth feels that these covenants are basically identical: they "progressively expand the one covenant of grace" (45). In the New Testament, says Booth, we see Christ confirming these historic covenants. Christ did not do away with, but validated and confirmed the Old Testament covenants. Booth continues in the same line in connection with his third main point: there is essentially one church, throughout the Old and the New Testaments (chapter 5). The New Testament does not put a spiritual Israel in place of an ethnic Israel. There were already spiritual blessings in the Old Testament, and the New Testament is not devoid of material aspects. Believers in both periods looked in faith to the same Saviour. "Since God has not changed the terms of church membership, new covenant believers and their

children are likewise included in his church" (73). Booth approvingly quotes Charles Hodge: "There is no authorized definition of the Church, which does not include the people of God under the Mosaic law" (88). The conclusion should be obvious: since there is but one church, its membership must consist in both periods of believers and their households, including the children.

This leads us to the fourth principle, the continuity of covenant signs (chapter 6). Booth here compares circumcision and baptism. He strongly insists that circumcision had a spiritual meaning: the removal or cutting back of one's sinful nature. Both circumcision and baptism point to regeneration. This means that any argument used against infant baptism is also an argument against circumcision. Booth's fifth and last point is that God has a redemptive concern for households, not just for individuals (chapters 7-8). The author goes through a number of biblical texts where God judges an entire household because of the sin of the head of the household. Parents are responsible for their children. Children belonging to believing parents are therefore set apart to God. Concludes Booth: "The biblical idea of the household as a covenantal unit is a dominant feature of God's redemptive plan and remains intact in the New Testament. The head of the believing household has a duty to obligate his entire household to the service of God. We do not have the prerogative to exclude persons (including our children) from covenant privileges that God has always allowed" (136). Booth uses the notion of God's concern for the redemption of households to argue that the baptisms of households in the New Testament would also have included infants. In a final chapter the author summarizes his entire argument. He does so in the format of a discussion between a pastor and two members of his church.

The meaning of baptism

I have already mentioned a number of positive features of this book. It is stimulating reading and would certainly challenge someone inclined to a Baptist mode of thinking. I am not convinced, however, that Booth's case is entirely convincing. Having finished the book, I am still left with the nagging question: what, according to Booth, is now the biblical basis of infant baptism? It is one thing to argue for the unity of the Old and the New Testaments. One still needs to ask the question, however, why such continuity warrants also the baptism of infants in the New Testament. One of the questions that always emerges as central in this discussion is: what exactly is the meaning of baptism? What does baptism signify? Booth does not give a lot of attention to this question. He does compare circumcision and baptism, and then appeals to John Murray in arguing that circumcision and baptism both signify union and communion with God, the removal of defilement, and the righteousness of faith (108). The author should have worked this out more. Why, for example, does he have no discussion at all of a central text like Titus 3:5-6 ("He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior")? Should we not at least ask the question whether 1 Corinthians 12:13 links water baptism and Spirit baptism ("For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink")? As it is, I feel that the author does not explore the meaning of baptism carefully enough.

Since some of the questions surrounding the meaning of baptism have not been explored carefully enough, the result is somewhat of a lack of clarity as to the basis for infant baptism. At one point, the author states that children must be baptized even though they have not yet appropriated God's promise by faith. He then states: "This faith would be their covenant obligation – an obligation they received from their believing parents" (80). In other words, the parents' faith places them in a covenant relationship with God. This in turn obliges the child to believe as well. If I understand the author well, he is saying that the *obligation* to faith is a warrant of infant baptism. Later on,

however, he argues that both in the Old and in the New Testaments the household was the divinely ordained structure. He then comments that "if the head sins, all the parts of the organism are held to be sinful with it" (125). In other words, the sins of the parents are considered the sins of the children. This "covenantal principle of family solidarity" appears to imply that the faith of the parents is considered also to be the faith of the children.² The parents' faith is imputed to the children.³ So it seems that the *presence* of faith (by means of the parents) is the basis for infant baptism. The question comes up: Is it the *obligation to faith* or is it the *presence of faith* which is the basis for infant baptism?

Theonomic interpretive principle

A more serious problem of the book lies in its understanding of the covenants. The author has a theonomic understanding of the Scriptures. His book is replete with references to people like Greg Bahnsen and R.J. Rushdoony. Their understanding of the Old Testament law comes through quite clearly. Booth is of the opinion that throughout all ages the people of God have "the same ethical standards" (9, 87). Theonomists argue that any Old Testament law that is not explicitly repealed or abrogated by God himself is still valid for us today. Booth appears to buy into this principle. He uses it as the basis for infant baptism. Already in his first chapter he makes the statement: "Any new conditions in the amendment supersede all former conditions in the contract addressing the same issue. All other matters addressed in the old contract remain unchanged and valid" (16). This theonomic principle pervades the entire book and is foundational for it: "According to covenant theology, the teachings and practices of the Old Testament are still valid and required for believers in the new covenant era unless God has revealed in Scripture some change in the use, form, or application of His previous revelation" (18). It is this very same principle which Booth then uses in defence of infant baptism. Notice how the theonomic understanding of the law is explicitly connected to infant baptism:

The Reformed or covenantal principle of interpretation holds that we must read the Bible as one book that progressively reveals God's one redemptive purpose. We need to assume continuity and unity in God's revela-

tion. Unless God himself has explicitly changed some aspect of His redemptive dealings with His people, we should continue to follow what He has already revealed. Because the children of believers were always included in the covenant of grace in the Old Testament, and God nowhere rescinds His command to include them in the covenant of grace, we must assume that they are still to be included under the new covenant and are to receive the covenant sign of baptism (156).

It is true that the Reformed understanding of Scripture has always maintained that children are included in the covenant in the Old as well as in the New Testament. But do we need to base this on the theonomic notion that we continue to live by the Old Testament standards unless God himself has changed certain aspects?

There is certainly continuity in God's covenant dealings with His people. After all, we can expect continuity if we have one and the same faithful God expressing His will throughout history. But this basic continuity does incorporate some very drastic notes of discontinuity as well. Does the apostle Paul not state that we are no longer under the law (Gal. 3:23; 4:4,5,21; 1 Cor. 9:20; Rom. 6:14-15)? That same apostle also classifies a return to the law as a return to the basic principles of the world (Gal. 4:3,9), as a return to slavery (Gal. 4:9). It is true enough that the various covenants progressively reveal God's redemptive purpose. Let us remember, however, that they do so "progressively." It is true enough that the new covenant builds on the foundation of the older covenants and fulfils their promises (50). But again, let us remember that people do not live underground in the foundation of their homes, but in the homes themselves. So we also do not live in the foundation of earlier covenants, but in the building of the new covenant itself. I have not been convinced that theonomy is a Scriptural antidote to a Baptist understanding of the covenants.

¹Robert R. Booth, *Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995. pp. xvi, 190.

²Interestingly, this line of thinking was also followed in the seventeenth century by Richard Baxter, in his discussions with the antipaedobaptist John Tombes.

³The author does not spell this out in detail, but this seems to be his line of thinking at this point.



Growing Reformatory Movements in the CRC

The *Christian Observer*, a conservative publication hailing from Manassas, VA, recently reported on growing secessionist activities in the Christian Reformed Church. Last November 7 and 8 an interclassical conference of church officers was held in South Holland, IL. A group of 219 ministers, elders and deacons coming from all parts of the CRC met to consider what courses of actions conservatives in the CRC should be taking. A proposal to secede from the CRC because of the Synod 1996 decision re woman in office was narrowly defeated. The Conference ended up deciding to petition Synod 1997 to allow their churches to organize classes that would oppose women's ordination, but this too passed by a narrow majority.

The paper then goes on to explain the different approaches to reformatory work in the CRC:

Two different visions

Heading the overtures was the official proposal from the Interclassical Conference interim committee, calling for the formation of "at least four theologically identified classes" within the denomination. Currently the CRC has 47. The proposal asked Synod 1997 to approve the formation of the new groups of churches with the understanding that each would "accept the absolute authority of the Bible as well as the subordinate authority of the Three Forms of Unity as our confessions," "agree in faith and practice to the 'statement of faith' presented by the 1995 Interclassical Conference," "agree to be governed by the Church Order of the CRCNA as it existed prior to Synod 1995 with the exception of recognizing fraternal relations with the GKN" and "agree to remain members of their theologically identified classis

(and thus the CRCNA) until at least the conclusion of Synod 2000."

According to the grounds for the proposal, "the theologically identified classis approach would appeal to the many congregations present at this conference and those not present who are concerned about the issues but are not ready to sever ties with the CRCNA at this point." The grounds also note that Synod 1996 allowed churches to transfer between classes for theological reasons including support for or opposition to the ordination of women. So far, Classis Northern Michigan has approved the transfer of Trinity CRC of Mt Pleasant to a classis willing to ordain its female pastor and Classis Hackensack has approved the transfer of Terra Ceia (NC) to a classis opposed to the ordination of women; both decisions await Synod approval.

The proposal also made clear that it will be the last compromise offered to the denomination in an attempt to avoid further secession. "This motion will allow us to stay together as we seek to honour God while bringing our witness to bear within the denomination" noted the proposal. "Our Biblically directed consciences will likely not allow us any other option to remain within the CRC."

Other conferees, however, made clear that they believe the time for compromise is over. Newton (NJ) CRC and Rev. Bradd Nymeyer of Phoenix (AZ) CRC submitted calls for secession.

While the Christian Reformed synod has allowed the ordination of women since 1995 and refused to discipline advocates of theistic evolution since 1991, the CRC maintains official objections to abortion,

addressing God with feminine language, and homosexual practice. "These practices destroy our Biblical understanding of the nature of the unity of the church," objected Newton CRC. "They break down the distinction between word and deed. They tend toward denominational idolatry and a hierarchical view of the church. They elevate loyalty to the church to a higher the degree than loyalty to God's Word and thereby compromise the Reformation's emphasis on *sola scriptura* by adding *et ecclesia*."

"The Christian Reformed Church has tolerated false teachers and at the same time she has disciplined true teachers," concluded Newton CRC – whose pastor, Rev. Casey Freswick, was ejected from the most recent meeting of Classis Hudson because of statements advocating secession made to United Reformed News Service.

Both Newton CRC and Nymeyer urged the Interclassical Conference to call for the formation of a new denomination, but both also urged that the new denomination seek to merge with an existing denomination as soon as possible. Nymeyer attached a summary of the positions of four denominations (the United Reformed Churches in North America, the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, the Reformed Church in the United States and the Canadian Reformed Churches as possible candidates for affiliation.

A third set of overtures from First CRC of Chino took a middle road which is not necessarily incompatible with either approach. First Chino called for the Interclassical Conference to issue a set of joint theological affirmations, declare that the CRC "has placed itself in a position

which is disobedient to the teachings of the Word of God as historically stated in our confessions," declare that "the sin of schism in the body of Christ is not necessarily committed by the act of leaving the Christian Reformed Church for the purpose of joining a Biblically Reformed denomination," and appoint a study committee to "investigate the existing Reformed denominations which may be receptive to accepting potentially separating Christian Reformed congregations." The committee would report back to a reconvened conference in May. In the meantime, First Chino's overtures urged "churches not to separate from the Christian Reformed Church before the study committee has a chance to report" and adopt a statement respecting the consciences of conservatives who wish to remain in the CRC, pledging to pray for those who stay.

Perhaps the most crucial of the First Chino overtures was a proposal that the Interclassical Conference churches, regardless of their position on secession or remaining in the CRC, adopt a set of "United Reformed Affirmations" concerning the authority of Scripture, salvation through Christ alone, worship, women in office, homosexuality, feminine language for God, abortion, and theistic evolution. After extended discussion, the Conference adopted a seven-page statement consisting of affirmations, rejections, and commitments for future action on each topic.

Separation, but not secession

The committee studying possible secession adopted two crucial items for its report: A declaration calling "upon the churches represented at this conference to repent of their sin in allowing human innovations and laws contrary to the Word of God to bind us and our consciences" and "that it is the judgment of this body that it is now time to separate from the Christian Reformed Church in North America" while noting "that some will see that separation coming in terms of a theological classis, that some will see it in terms of forming a new denomination, and others will see it in terms of affiliating with an existing denomination."

When the secession report came to the floor, delegates adopted its first proposal virtually without dissent, thus going on record favouring separation from the decisions of the synod and listing the formation of theologically-defined classes, formation of a new denomination, or joining an existing denomination as three options to that end.

The article also reports that a proposal was adopted to create a committee to study various existing denominations to determine which would be receptive to receiving conservatives from the Christian Reformed denomination." Letters were sent to the RCUS and the newly formed United Reformed Churches of North America.

The method of reformation

It seems clear that the interclassical conference is defending a particular form of reformation, that is, that one (as church, or as those in the office of all believers) free oneself from the erring decisions of synod, and yet remain within the "denomination." History repeats itself! For this is very similar to the approach defended by the leaders of the *Doleantie* in 1886. The leaders of the *Doleantie* wanted to break with the hierarchical and erring "corporation," the binding decisions of the synods, but not with the church itself. And their conferences of church officers took the same kind of decisions as we see here!

History proved that in the end this road of reformation did not work. You really cannot have it both ways: out of the church, and yet remain in the church. And that is evident in the statements given in this report above. For the committee studying the matter of secession proposed to follow the road of separation rather than secession, but at the same time admitted that idea of separation can also include the formation of a new "denomination" and even joining an existing denomination. Here the notions of separation and secession have become multivocal, and through a circuitous route, we are talking about the same thing. It remains difficult for me to grasp a situation in which a group of churches either form a new denomination, or join an existing denomination, and yet remain in some way or other affiliated with the CRC! To imagine that the CRC synod can accept a proposal of this nature strikes me as entirely illusory. If it is not that, it certainly portrays a way of thinking about



CHURCH NEWS


CALLED to Coaldale, AB
Rev. W. Huizinga
 of Armadale, WA

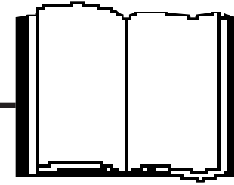
the church with which we cannot identify, and which does not rhyme with what is confessed in Articles 27-32 of the Belgic Confession.

Ready to talk!

However this does not mean that we seek to turn our backs to the conservative wing in the CRC. We may be thankful that Newton CRC and Rev. Bradd Nymeyer also mentioned the Canadian Reformed Churches as one of the groups of churches with which they ought to seek closer contact for possible merger. Although I would not want to exclude in any way the other churches mentioned, I would say that from a historical perspective the Canadian and American Reformed Churches belong high up on the list!

Therefore we say to Rev. Nymeyer, Cammenga and all the others: we are ready to talk! Indeed, the name of Rev. Cammenga has a special place among the Canadian Reformed, for the older ones have not forgotten what Rev. Cammenga (Sr.) did for the early immigrants in Canada! We have a lot of "commonalities." And even if we are hesitant about the way of *Doleantie*, taken in itself, history has also showed that it can lead to a new union, and a newly found recognition of those who are brothers and sisters in the Lord and wish to serve Him according to His will.

Appeals to the CRC have gone out in the past many times on our history. But we will not grow weary of repeating our aim, especially as movements to secession continue to ripple through their federation. We are ready to talk! And does not the Lord Himself call us *together* to this noble and honourable task? True believers are marked by the *will* to unite! May the Lord work this among all His children, and may we also continue to be found faithful, also in the pursuit of true Reformed ecumenicity. 



One Last Response to Br. Adrian Hamoen

By Wes Bredenhof

Editor's note – We have given some space in Clarion to the Brothers Bredenhof and Hamoen for them to discuss the matter of fasting. With this last response of Wes Bredenhof, we will close the discussion.

The second response of br. Hamoen seems to indicate a slight softening in his position. At the very least, he seems to have implicitly withdrawn his statement that the present writer undermines Christ's perfect sacrifice – and no longer is fasting an OT ceremony. However, there are still some rough spots to be ironed out in our dialogue. Among these are br. Hamoen's comments on tithing. He writes that it does not matter to him if tithing is done away with. There was a mistake in my last response in saying that tithing was in view in Mt. 6:2. In fact, Jesus is speaking about giving alms or doing acts of charity. I apologize for the mistake. Rephrasing what I wrote earlier then, if fasting may be done away with, so then may alms-giving. The fact remains: Jesus expects that His disciples (including us) will fast, just as He expects them to pray and give alms (cf. J. VanBruggen, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Winnipeg: Premier, 1986, pp. 60-62, and *Matteus, Het Evangelie voor Israel*, Kampen: Kok, 1990, p. 114). I reaffirm that Mr. Hamoen's arbitrary exegetical reasoning leads to confusion.

With respect to Calvin, I can only support br. Hamoen's comments at the end of his letter that we be careful not to take historical writings out of context. Calvin does commend fasting for the church in calamitous circumstances, but he does not stop there. 4.12.17 of the *Institutes* deals with the type of fasting to which br. Hamoen refers. However, in the surrounding passages of 4.12.15-16 and 4.12.18, Calvin also deals with fasting of a personal nature (cf. his Commentary on 1 Corinthians, p. 228). Regardless, it is clear that Calvin does not do away with fasting as cavalierly as br. Hamoen would like.

With regards to 1 Cor. 7:5, again br. Hamoen makes reference to Calvin. Please note that Calvin does make reference to this very passage in *Institutes* 4.12.16 and also comments on it in his commentary on 1 Corinthians. Abraham Kuyper, in *Practijk der Godzaligheid* (Kampen: Kok, 1909), also discusses this passage, speaking of it as a "command" (voorschrift) which, along with the other Scriptural evidence, affirms that fasting should be a part of the Christian life (p. 228). There are many Reformed leaders (also in our time) who dissent from the dominant view on the text-critical problem in this verse, and so to fall back uncritically on an appeal to authority is really quite pointless.

Br. Hamoen then makes reference to fasting in Ex.13:3-10 and a connection there with the week of preparation before the Lord's Supper. The fact of the matter is that Ex. 13:3-10 does not speak of fasting, but of the eating of unleavened bread before the Passover. Fasting is abstaining from food. The eating of unleavened bread (presumably in whatever quantity one desires) is not fasting. It is not clear

how this example bolsters Mr. Hamoen's assertion that New Testament fasting is abstaining from sin in the study of God's Word and the communion of saints.

Finally, br. Hamoen's reference to G.I. Williamson's words in his book on the Westminster Confession (p. 169) was much appreciated, for Rev. Williamson succinctly summarizes everything I have been trying to say. Rev. Williamson writes, "When fasting arises out of inward spiritual desire (i.e. because of mourning for sin, an earnest seeking of divine favor, an urgent personal crisis, or the like) it then becomes a part of true worship." Fasting should be a natural and spontaneous expression of the Christian's sorrow over sin. It ought to flow, like prayer and good works, out of the regenerated heart. To summarize, fasting is an act of personal piety and godliness taught us in the Scriptures by way of example and exhortation, just as prayer and acts of charity.

I hope and pray this discussion on fasting has challenged contemporary notions of this biblical practice and may it by God's grace be a means by which godliness will be further promoted among us.

The Elixir

*Teach me, my God and King,
In all things thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for thee.*

*A man that looks on glass
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heaven espy.*

*All may of thee partake;
Nothing can be so mean,
Which with this tincture, 'for thy sake,'
Will not grow bright and clean.*

*A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.*

*This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.*

George Hebert

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I can understand Rev. J. Geertsema's need to defend his job, but his article neglects a couple of key points.

1) The Church Order (Art. 19, 20) states that the task of the Theological College is to provide the churches with ministers of the Word and that the churches should be sure to help maintain students of theology by providing for those in need. If the churches all have ministers, then this task is no longer necessary.

2) When so many of our other institutions are desperate for financial aid, the statement "But, you know, for God money has never been a problem" has an empty ring to it. There are other organizations within our churches that are continually in debt. Making statements like this does not reduce their financial problems.

The Theological College is in the enviable position of assessing congregations to subsidize the cost of education and does not depend to such an extent on economics. Perhaps it should consider lowering the assessment and raising tuition in order to lower the cost to the community, since there is no longer such a need for its services.

Another option would be to suspend operations altogether for a number of years until the churches again need to "be provided with ministers of the Word" (C.O., Art. 19). By doing this, the College would also free four more pastors to serve the churches, postponing that situation for a time. This would liberate some of our financial blessings for other organizations that are in greater need and provide a more (at least at this time) necessary service.

Take care and God bless.

*Peter Scholtens
Flamborough Centre, Ontario*

Response:

Thank you for your reaction, Peter. I appreciate it. Allow me to respond right away. For your reaction gives me the impression that I was not clear enough and caused some misunderstanding.

Ad 1) The task of the College:

You refer to Art. 19-20 of the Church Order and say that the task of

the College is "to provide the churches with ministers of the Word. . . ." The wording and emphasis of the Church Order is a bit different. Art. 19 says: "The churches shall maintain an institution for the training for the ministry." It, then, speaks about the task of the professors to instruct the students, "so that the churches may be provided with ministers of the Word who are able to fulfil the duties of their office. . . ."

The Church Order says that the churches are to maintain a College. The purpose is not just to provide ministers but ministers that are trained well. Imagine now that in about three years there are no vacancies anymore, and that the churches would follow your advice and close the College. And let us say that the four present professors go back into the ministry. Imagine further that this situation remains the same for two years, and that then a few ministers either retire or are taken away from this life while, at the same time, three or four other churches split up because of their size, and that there is again a need for seven or eight new ministers. It would take at least a year to get the professors who became ministers out of their congregations and back into the College, well-prepared. It will take five years, at least, to have well-trained new candidates. Besides, we have some foreign student at this moment from Indonesia. Closing the College would make it impossible to continue to help foreign churches with our institution. And I guess that you do not want to look only to our own Canadian Reformed Churches but are willing to think in a world-wide frame.

So, I conclude that it is good to abide by the wording of the Church Order and act accordingly in continuing to "maintain" the College.

I leave out the matter of Art. 20 C.O. dealing with the matter of support from the churches for needy theological students. As for our Canadian students, hardly any use is made of this way to get financial aid. There is only once in a while an exception. Our students rather work hard at a summer job and, if necessary, ask for government support, in order not to burden the churches. One can discuss whether this is correct. But this is not

the point here. Anyway, we can commend the students for this attitude.

Ad 2) I wrote that "for God money has never been a problem."

You react with saying that money is a big problem for us, since "so many of our other institutions are desperate for financial aid" and "continually in debt."

My remark probably appears to you as a truism that does not reckon with the hard reality of life. Therefore, I would like to give this explanation. What I meant to say with it is what Christ tells us in the Sermon on the Mount: "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you." I am sure that you agree with these words of Christ. I would also like to refer to God's promise in Malachi 3:10: "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, says the LORD, and thereby put Me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing."

In other words, should we as children of God not approach these matters from the point of God and His promises rather than from the point of our human possibilities and needs? From your reaction I have the impression that you focus on our huge human needs and our small present economic possibilities. But you do believe with me, don't you, that God can provide far above those human possibilities of ours? I am convinced you do.

Now what I said here, that for God money has never been a problem, counts for all the other institutions you mentioned just as well. I am aware of the needs among us here on earth to which we all have to contribute. I am well aware that many among our church members do not find it easy to contribute close to a thousand dollars every month for church and school and other institutions. This is quite a burden. Does this make God's promises less true or even untrue? Or does this mean that we under such circumstances have to focus on those needs rather than on God's promises? I am sure, you will say "no" with me.

This focussing on the promises of God when seeing a calling from God is exactly what was done in the past. Our

fathers did not just look at our human possibilities with respect to church and school, and so on. They clearly saw that their possibilities fell short in providing the means to undertake things. But they saw their calling and trusted God's promises. This is how we started instituting our churches and organizing church life with all that is involved, such as (to mention only one costly thing) buildings. This is also how we began to establish the schools. We did these things, and more, such as mission work and setting up homes for the care of those with special needs, because we were convinced that this was our God-given calling, even though in many cases there was not enough money available. We trusted that God would provide the means since by our actions we were seeking first His kingdom.

And up to now, the LORD has never failed us. In the normal way of membership contributions and donations but also in unexpected, wonderous ways,

He has always provided the means. The fault was never with Him. If something went wrong or goes wrong, the fault is only with us, sinful people who forget to live out of faith and obedience of faith to His calling.

Let me ask a question. When I came to Canada (Manitoba) practically ALL the wage-earning members of the church were members of the school society. All put their shoulders to this undertaking in and for God's kingdom. We said that Reformed school education was a matter of the covenant. That is, it concerns all of us who belong to the covenant. As covenant brothers and sisters we are all involved in taking care of the education of "our" children, the children of the church. So we helped each other by our membership and membership fees.

Do we still believe this? Or do we see the school education as a service that is provided by a society and its board and for which we pay as long as we have

children in school? This is how Revenue Canada sees it and treats parents. But do we more and more do the same? Are we terminating our membership when we no longer have any of our own children in the school, because we do not need the services offered anymore for our own children? In other words, do we still see the school in the light of the covenant and the kingdom of God and His church? Or do we see the school as an institution of learning the use of whose services you have to pay for?

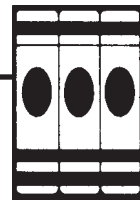
To come back to the point I wanted to make: Peter, don't you agree with me that when we see a clear calling from the LORD, for the work in and for His kingdom and church, that we should take up such a task, trusting that the LORD will provide the means, since for Him the money needed for it is no problem?

With sincere greetings, yours in our Lord's service,

J. Geertsema 

BOOK REVIEWS

By C. Van Dam



Outlines on Job

Rev. P. de Jong, *Job's Perseverance*. London, ON: Inter-League Publication Board, 1996. 79 pages \$ 7.50.

The book of Job is not an easy one for Bible study societies to discuss fruitfully. One can easily lose the main train of thought. This state of affairs is a great pity for the book of Job is rich and the rewards of careful study are abundant! With this publication, the ILPB presents eight outlines on this book which should be of some assistance. This is not to say, however, that the study of Job becomes easy. To use these outlines properly will require considerably more than the average amount of time and exertion for study and preparation. But the effort of studying God's Word will always be well rewarded!

The author, minister emeritus of our sister church in Oldehove, the Netherlands and now a high school teacher in Zwolle, the Netherlands, has reduced the contents of this rich book of forty-two chapters to eight outlines. The advantage of this brevity is

that it gives study societies a ready overview of the main structure of the book. It becomes more manageable, although each outline understandably does require a considerable amount of reading because of the number of chapters covered. The disadvantage is that justice cannot really be done to the book, even in a very brief way and a good commentary will need to be used with this guide. At one point the author himself even asks his reader to consult a good commentary for various points (p. 5). In the light of such a request by the author, it is unfortunate that no reference to other helps for studying Job is to be found in this book.¹

Given the limitations the author has set for himself, his work has merit. He correctly stresses that the Book of Job speaks of God and His work (pp. 4f.). His exposition is usually clear and the questions are on the whole good. All those who use it will increase their knowledge of this part of God's revelation.

Having said that, I would also like to make a basic critical comment which unfortunately impacts on the entire work. I fear that the author confuses Job's being blameless and upright (Job

1:1) with his being sinless. The author consistently minimizes sins that Job commits by trying to put them in the best possible light. The author refuses to admit that Job's cursing the day of his birth is sinful (pp. 12-15). He suggests that Job's false accusations against God are not wicked (p. 34) and that there was nothing wrong with Job's haughty final challenge to God (p. 47f.). This imposition on the text of a Job who does no wrong also flies in the face of God's subsequent interrogation of Job and calling Job to account for unjustly accusing God wrongly and even condemning God (Job 40:2, 8). Insisting on a Job who never does anything wrong also makes his repentance meaningless (Job 42:6). Because Job's sinlessness is not the point of the Book of Job, trying to make this element stick leads to contorted reasoning on other issues and points of interpretation. Furthermore, putting Job on a pedestal and making him more than the text states means that the real message of God's persistence in maintaining his work of salvation in the lives of his children is lost on those who read this book today. Job was a sinner in whom the Lord started a great

work of renewal. That work of God can stand all the attacks of Satan. Job's falling into sin from time to time does not change that basic message but brings it closer to those who today share Job's fallen humanity and struggles.

¹One could turn, for example, to the sermons of Calvin, of which a selection in modern English by L. Nixon is available from Baker Book House under the title *Sermons from Job*. For those who have no trouble with old typesetting and old English, all Calvin's sermons are accessible from the Banner of Truth Trust. Calvin did not write a commentary on Job. Also available is C. Bijl, *As Rich as Job* (Inheritance 1989). See the review in *Clarion*, August 31, 1990.

Watching Movies?

N. H. Gootjes, J. Plug, J. Poppe, *Watching Movies. No? Yes? How?* 1996, 72 pp., \$ 6.95.

In a time when VCRs and video outlets are everywhere and are also more and more becoming part of the entertainment of church members, this short book meets a real need, the need to reflect critically on the whole area of cinema. What does the Lord expect from us?

There are indications that watching secular movies at regular intervals, be it via TV, VCR or the theatre, is firmly entrenched among the majority of young people in our churches. The strong opposition that once marked a Reformed approach has lost its hold on the next generation. The authors detail yesterday's opposition (both in the Netherlands and in the Christian Reformed Church) and evaluate the objections carefully. Also more general considerations are addressed such as movies as an art form and how to evaluate properly such a medium. Many good points are raised here that bear further reflection.

As one can see, this book, although based on solid and careful study, is intensely practical. This feature is enhanced by the fact that two movies are briefly reviewed in it, namely "Lion King" and "Outbreak." Also, general features of movies today are explored and evaluated. Where does all this leave us? In a final chapter called "Strategy," the authors go into what should be our approach to movies. It would, however, be counter-productive to elaborate on all that here. You should buy this book and read it! I hope I have whetted your appetite!

A final note. This book found its origin in class assignments for an ethics course at the Theological College. All

three authors contributed equally. Dr. Gootjes is also to be commended for bringing all the material together and giving it its final form. The students involved have now graduated and serve sister churches as pastors, Rev. J. Plug in the Netherlands and Rev. J. Poppe in Australia. This publication deserves to be read, studied, and discussed in the family circle and at study clubs.

New Outlines on 1 Corinthians

L. Selles, *1 Corinthians in Twenty-one Outlines*. London, ON: Inter-League Publication Board, 1996. Soft-cover, 157 pages. \$ 13.95.

This is an excellent set of outlines on 1 Corinthians by the late Professor L. Selles who taught New Testament for the first 17 years of our Theological College (1969-86). My esteemed teacher who later became a colleague was a very careful worker and he took the time to listen to the text and to make it understandable for others. Reading through the first part of this easy-to-understand but very rich material was in a sense a nostalgic trip down memory lane. I was a student when Professor Selles lectured on the first chapters of 1 Corinthians during that unforgettable first year of the operation of the Theological College.

1 Corinthians is a part of God's Word that is so immediately relevant for us today and Professor Selles spares no effort to confront us with its message. To facilitate understanding, the exposition is not done verse by verse, but by larger units so that the train of thought comes to the fore clearly. The explanation given is very much to the point and occasionally, the author adds a special note with more detail (e.g. on pp. 98, 111). These are outlines and their brevity is a strong point in their favour. Prof. Selles also makes very effective use of questions. Every section ends with many points for further discussion framed in question format. These questions make one think, reinforce the explanation given, and allow the implications of the text to impact on our lives today. For example, on 1 Corinthians 11 and the issue of women wearing a headcovering, the author carefully explains the text and on that basis can conclude that it is not permissible for us to take the words of 1 Cor 11:13 as a general rule; namely, that a woman cannot pray with her head uncovered. However, that does not mean that there is no message here

for us today. The need to do what is considered proper stays, but the nature of this propriety changes (p. 97). Later two questions reinforce and carry further the explanations given. The first question asks whether we should look for a modern substitute for the veil (such as a scarf or hat) or whether we should look for the idea that lies behind and is represented in the veil (and in v. 14, by the long hair)? The second question: "What principle is at stake here and remains so? Does this principle exclude women from being invested with authoritative positions in state and society? What do we have against the feminist emancipation movement of our time? On the other hand, for what should we be on guard?" (p. 99). Other issues raised in this chapter include the matter of women in ecclesiastical office (p. 98).

In a similar manner of careful explanation and then challenging questions (which can usually be answered on the basis of a careful study of what Professor Selles wrote), the author deals with all the different topics that are raised in 1 Corinthians. Some examples are that chapter 6 deals with the matter of going to worldly courts to seek justice from a brother, chapter 7 with marriage and divorce, chapters 8 and 10, with Christian liberty, and chapter 12, with gifts of the Spirit and issues relating to Pentecostalism.

Although these outlines are written in an easily comprehensible manner, this does not mean that the author avoids difficult passages. When he comes to 1 Corinthians 15:29 ("baptised for the dead"), sometimes called the most difficult text in the New Testament, he carefully lists the different views and then presents his own interpretation, with evidence. His conclusion is that the phrase means to be exposed or to expose oneself to suffering and martyrdom (p. 142).

These outlines are very suitable for society purposes and interact with both the RSV and NIV. The ILPB performed a very good service in publishing this work. The typesetting is clear and attractive. However, section headings unfortunately appear right on the very bottom of the page a number of times with no text following on that page (pp. 5, 57, 67, 114, 133). These flaws and some typos (e.g. on pp. 115, 142) should be eliminated in a reprinting. In a future reprint, there should also be a list of recommended books for further study. I do hope this edition will soon be sold out. Societies should use it!! All who do will greatly profit from it by a better understanding of this part of God's Word.

By T.M.P. Vandervan

Selections from the Genevan Psalter

It took 25 years to complete the Genevan Psalter.

The Reformation took hold of Geneva in 1536, and within a year the Genevans felt an urgent need to provide the congregation with songs of praise appropriate for use in worship services. By 1562 the reformed church of Geneva had its complete Psalter which included rhymings of the 150 psalms plus a number of scriptural hymns and canticles.

The driving force behind the Genevan Psalter was John Calvin himself. He was fully convinced of the immense importance of allowing God's people to participate in the public prayers during the weekly services (contrary to the Roman practice in which the congregation was largely silent). Calvin distinguished two types of public prayers: those spoken and those sung. He therefore worked hard to give the congregation its own liturgical voice by means of a Psalter in the language of the people.

Various other well-known reformed theologians were involved in the development of this French Psalter, among them William Farel (who persuaded Calvin to stay in Geneva) and Theodore Beza (the first principal of the Reformed College in Geneva). Rhymings came from Calvin, and later from Clement Marot. In addition, Calvin was able to attract a number of able musicians to create the melodies: Louis Bourgeois, Maitre Pierre (about whom little is known), and Matthias Greiter. In 1562 at least 30,000 copies were printed! The tremendous success of the Genevan Psalter also translated into an 8% profit, which was used to help the poor of the city.

The Genevan Psalter remained in use in French-speaking reformed churches until the middle of the 19th Century. The psalter was translated into Italian, Dutch, German, and Portuguese, and in more obscure languages such as Gascon (Northern Spain), Malay, and Tamil. The reformed churches in Holland adopted the Genevan Psalter in rhymings by Datheen (app. 1566), and this version remained in use in these churches until 1773. With the spread of the Dutch trading colonies, the psalter travelled to Asian countries. Reformed churches were founded in various Dutch colonies, resulting in local versions of the psalter. Interestingly, a modern version of the

four-part settings of the 150 psalms by Claude Goudimel was published in Indonesia (Dutch East Indies) for the reformed churches in that country (*Mazmur Edisi Harmoni*, 1987).

Since 1773, the Dutch reformed churches have revised their psalmbook a number of times, adding more hymns. Yet the tunes of the original Genevan Psalter have been maintained. The Canadian Reformed Churches decided to follow in these historical footsteps, and may now boast an English version of the Genevan Psalter, their *Book of Praise: An Anglo-Genevan Psalter*. It is the general consensus of musicologists across the world that this collection of psalm tunes is of the highest calibre, unequalled by other psalters.

I have listened with great pleasure to the three collections of psalms reviewed here. The majority of the selections are based on the original tunes from the Genevan Psalter, as found in the *Book of Praise*. The performances range from congregational singing with organ accompaniment to elaborate a *capella* settings for solo voices. Each recording has its own merits, and will satisfy different tastes.

* * *

O SING JOYFULLY: A selection of psalms. Pro Musica Choir. Director and Accompanist: Ian Sadler. Audio Craft Productions Cres CD9404, 65.47 minutes. Available from Marj Stieva, 4271 Forsyth Blvd, Burlington, Ontario, L7L 2M2. Price: \$20.00. Proceeds will benefit "Anchor" Canadian Reformed Association for the Handicapped.

This is *Pro Musica's* first recording and I hope that more will follow. This mixed choir performs regularly in various locations across Southern Ontario, and has built a reputation of good choral singing. Their director and accompanist is Ian Sadler, a well-known organist and choirmaster who resides in Stratford, Ontario.

The title of this CD is taken from Psalm 81 (included in a setting of the English composer Batten), and well describes the program offered. This disc contains some very fine, and especially joyful singing of eighteen psalms in various settings, ranging from the 16th

century to the present. The settings of the Genevan tunes from the pen of French composer Goudimel (1520 - 1572) form the backbone of the recording (Psalms 87, 6, 25, 65, 33, 68, 138). Vaughan Williams' *The Old Hundredth* and Kodaly's setting of a stanza of Psalm 33 form an all too limited sample of what modern composers have done with these tunes.

In addition, the choir sings psalm settings from other traditions. The English choral tradition is represented by Batten (17th century: Psalm 81), Boyce (18th century: Psalm 100), the well-known setting of Psalm 23: Crimond, and Stanford's (early 20th century) setting of Psalm 119:1.

The Germans are represented by Schubert's (early 19th century) beautiful setting of Psalm 23, Mendelssohn's (19th century) settings of Psalms 121 and 42 (first movement), and Brahms's (19th century) well-known Psalm 84: *How lovely is Thy dwelling place* from the *German Requiem*.

Ian Sadler is quite busy at the organ throughout; in addition, he rounds out the performance with an *Occasional Overture* (four movements) by G.F. Handel.

My favourites:

– *Vaughan Williams: The Old Hundredth*. The five stanzas are sung with great discipline within a beautiful instrumental frame provided by the organ accompaniment.

– Psalm 6. Throughout the six stanzas of the psalm the choir maintains purity and simplicity in their unaccompanied as well as accompanied singing. In particular the female voices blend beautifully with clear diction.

– Mr. Sadler's playing throughout is superb. It is fascinating to hear what an English-trained church musician does with the beloved music of the *Book of Praise*. At times tempi are rather fast for my taste, yet the joy of singing the ancient psalms is evident throughout.

* * *

PSAUMES DE LA RÉFORME (Psalms of the French Reformation). Ensemble Goudimel. Christine Morel, Conductor. Naxos 8.553025. 49.02 minutes. Price: \$11.95. Available from most classic record stores.

The Ensemble Claude Goudimel consists of five singers (soprano, mezzosoprano, alto, tenor, bass). The ensemble's aim is to "open again the pages of a Psalter that has survived the test of time." The psalms are sung in the original French rhymings of Clement Marot, the poet engaged by John Calvin to help him complete the Genevan Psalter. Most of the settings are by French composer Claude Goudimel (1520-1572). Other settings are by the French composers Paschal de l'Estoquart, and Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, unfortunately unfamiliar names to me. The ensemble has included a setting of the Dutch composer Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck. This disc is part of Naxos series *Early Music*, a series dedicated to authentic performances.

The recording contains 19 selections, ranging in length from 1.16 to 5.50 minutes. All are sung unaccompanied, as was the practice at the time. This permits individual voices, especially the middle voices, to be heard clearly. The singing is rhythmic and pure, although I find the soprano voice too strident at times. The unison singing is particularly attractive: it is remarkable how the inner strength of the Genevan tunes comes out when sung in this artful manner. As you listen to these performances the music will grow on you as you try to follow the various voices. Initially the listener may wonder about the melody because often it is hidden somewhere in the middle voices (also according to the practice of the time). This is music for the connoisseur: listen to it repeatedly; there are new things to discover all the time!

My favourites:

– Psalm 113 in the Goudimel setting. Simple, beautiful four part singing with the melody in the tenor line.

– Psalm 128 in a more artful setting by Goudimel.

– Psalm 25 beautifully sung by the bass soloist.

This disc is a valuable example of music making in the time of the Reformation. Although this music was not intended for nor used in the reformed worship services of Calvin's church, it shows how the Reformation immediately influenced the music making of the time.

* * *


GOD'S TRUTH ABIDETH STILL: A collection of psalms and hymns. Sung by combined choirs of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the Fraser Valley, BC, as well as combined choirs of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Alberta. Harm Hoeve and Herman van Vliet play the organ, with Noortje van Middelkoop, panflute, and Bastiaan van Vliet, french horn. CD CMR 105-2, 71.55 minutes. Available from Church Music and Records, Neerlandia, AB, T0G 1R0. Price: \$21.99.

Church Music and Records has already produced a number of recordings of the psalms and hymns as found in the *Book of Praise*. This CD is the result of tours in Western Canada by two Dutch organists, Harm Hoeve and Herman van Vliet. They are joined by local choirs. Panflute and French Horn add their own charm to a (limited) number of selec-

tions (a pity that we hear the horn only once). This recording provides the listener with quite some listening pleasure.

To me, the attractiveness of this recording is the inclusion of audience participation. It provides a sampling of congregational psalm singing, not always as tidy and together as would be expected from a more polished choir performance. Each organist brings his own style to the accompaniments, betraying their indebtedness to the typical Dutch organ school of Zwart and Asma in the attractive organ introductions to the psalms (improvisations?). The panflute and french horn are interesting rather than substantial additions to the performances.

I am not so happy with some of the efforts of the combined choirs (#10 in particular). There is a noticeable lack of pitch and blending of voices – lack of practice time? poor placement of microphones? I appreciate the efforts of our choirs (from my own experience I know of the dedication and hard work that usually goes into these concerts), but what might well be an enjoyable concert for participants and audience may not be suitable for recording and repeated listening.

The performance of the cantate *A mighty Fortress* . . . is enjoyable to listen to. Obviously the choir members are singing with gusto, and the panflute joins them in a joyful manner. The final stanza must have been a rousing event, with all choirs, audience, full organ and panflute joining in the triumphant statement that *God's truth abideth still*. 

PRESS RELEASES



Synod Committee for Contact with L'Église Réformée du Québec

The committee has met five times since receiving its mandate from Synod Abbotsford, May 1995. In our meetings we have discussed the differences that the ERQ has from the CanRCs in the areas of Confession, Church Polity and Worship as well as in our respective practices. We have also met twice with the committee appointed by the ERQ synod.

In our discussions, concerning the differences in Confessions, it was noted that the ERQ has as confessional documents, the Westminster Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. These have been translated into French by a joint Dutch – French venture. The ERQ, in its church order, also recognizes as Reformed confes-

sions the French Confession [Belgic] as well as the Canons of Dort, though these have not been officially adopted as as confessional documents. Though the ERQ has the Westminster Confession as confessional document we affirmed that the Canadian Reformed Synods as early as 1965 have stated that churches that subscribe to and uphold the Westminster Standards are true churches of the Lord. From our investigations and inquiries so far, this seems to be the case in the ERQ.

The committee delegated two of its members to attend the Synod of the ERQ convened in Sept 1995. There during the examination of a ministerial candidate, as well as the examination of an elder it became clear that the ERQ has a deep desire to maintain their confessional standards not just in word but in practice.

Though the ERQ has a very different Church Order from the CO of Dort, the committee understands that this CO was written by the fledgling church to meet its own peculiar needs in its mission setting. The ERQ delegates and ministers realize that their CO is not very extensive and needs to be developed to cover more details and situations. The ERQ desires the help and experience of the CndRCs in these matters.

At our joint meetings of January and May 1996 the two committees were able to meet in a brotherly and fruitful way. Many things were discussed and we were able to explain to each other the various differences, especially in practices that make each church distinct. The agenda was not completed and we look forward to another meeting in the near future.

In May the two committees met in Quebec city. Besides meeting to discuss our respective mandates, there we also had the opportunity to spend time with the members of the churches and to enjoy Christian fellowship with them. We attended the church which meets in the building of the Institut Farel. There too we learned more about the struggles of existing as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ in a secularized Roman Catholic culture. In the worship service and in discussion afterwards we could note a true desire to maintain the Reformed faith.

In our visits and discussions we are told that the churches in Quebec value our friendship, assistance and encouragement. Our visits underline the need that these churches have, not just for financial help, but for our prayers, our experience and our assistance in their struggle to remain Reformed. To be Reformed in doctrine and life – that is their desire.

In the mandate given by Synod '95 the committee is told "to keep the churches informed about the ERQ so that their financial and other needs as missionary churches can be responded to in a positive manner." The ERQ has been mailing a regular newsletter informing the churches of their mission activities and financial situation. In those regular newsletters we can read of the mission work done by these churches in French Quebec.

As can be seen from their newsletters these mission churches are only able to raise part of the funds needed to function. The published "budget" (Aug. 95) was not a budget of the individual churches but of a general fund which was established to solicit funds from various sources in order to support the congregations where needed. This "budget" of the fund does not, however, reflect the financial status of the 6 local congregations. This fund attempts to cover a certain percentage of the missionary-pastors' salaries in the needy churches, while the congregation makes up the rest as well as the operating expenses of the local church. Lately the churches needed to reduce the pastor's salaries by 25%. The ministers need to find other work or finances in order to continue in their work.

Synod 95, however, did say that, "... the information provided by the church at Ottawa, which was also evaluated by Classis Ontario North contains sufficient evidence to recommend to our Churches that they seriously consider extending financial and other assistance to these churches (Acts, Synod 95: Art 73, Consideration F. Page 39)." In light of our discussions with the ERQ and our "fact finding" about them, these recommendations of Synod are still valid. In the ERQ fiscal year, ending on Aug. 31, the

Canadian Reformed Churches had donated \$14,580.00. The churches in Quebec appreciate the generosity and thank the Lord for the gifts received. We urge the churches, however, to continue to provide funding for the ERQ. The financial situation is become increasingly desperate as the "mother" churches withdraw support. (As noted in the report to GS 95, this is because of the confessionally Reformed stand taken by the ERQ.) It would be a sad day for Quebec if the lone French Reformed voice was silenced due to lack of money. May the Lord continue to bless this work and may the missionaries see a crown upon their labours.

Donations can be sent to
L'Église réformée du Québec
5377 avenue du Marechal Joffre
Charny, Quebec G6X 3C9

For the committee
J.L. VanPopta – Secretary
G.H. Visscher – Convener

Committee on Bible Translation Concerning the New International Version (NIV)

In view of the questions raised from the churches and of new developments about which we now have authoritative information, the Committee on Bible Translation would like to inform the churches of the following:

1. Towards the end of 1995, Hodder and Stoughton of London, England released: *The Holy Bible, New International Version: Inclusive language Edition; The New Testament, Psalms and Proverbs*. Sometime before the end of this year, an inclusive language edition of the entire Bible will be published in England by the same publisher. This edition is being published alongside the regular edition of the NIV about which the report to Synod Abbotsford was written. Your committee has ordered copies of the British revision and intends to evaluate it. This revised edition is not being advertised in North America as it is intended for those speaking the specific English current in Great Britain.

2. There are also plans to introduce an inclusive language edition for North America with a target date of 2002. Dr. Kenneth Barker, the Executive Director for the NIV Translation Center, has informed us in a letter dated May 10, 1996, that inclusive language is "part of the total review process that will result in some changes to the NIV text." He added: "As in everything we do, we will follow a balanced approach."

Just last week we received a communication from Zondervan, enclosing

their position statement on the whole issue of "gender accuracy." From it we quote the following:

From the very beginning International Bible Society (IBS), The Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), and Zondervan Publishing House (ZPH) have used accuracy, beauty, and clarity as our standard in presenting the Holy Bible in the New International Version. Biblical accuracy always takes priority and we are unwavering in our standards. [...] CBT is comprised of the finest biblical scholars today, and all view the duty of translation with the gravity and respect which it requires. They take a balanced and accurate approach to the subtleties of the English language. Basically, where the original manuscripts and languages are considered to refer to humanity as a whole, rather than merely the male gender as traditional language has translated it, revisions are made to **restore the intention of the original texts**. Where possible, traditional patriarchal language is being revised to more current usage, provided this does not distort the intention of the original texts. **All references to God, Christ, Satan and other angels have remained in the masculine form, as this is accurate with the original texts**. So there is no theological basis for disagreeing with the text and meaning of the NIV.

[...] "Inclusive language" can be seen as a negative and politically charged term, and we hesitate to use it. We prefer the phrase "gender accurate." We intend in no way to advance a particular social agenda or stray from the original biblical texts.

3. Since an inclusive language edition is coming, the committee inquired whether the "regular or standard NIV" or the "non-inclusive-language version" would continue to be available for our churches. The following paragraph from the aforementioned "Zondervan Statement on Gender Accuracy" speaks to this when it states: "However, for those who would rather not switch to current language due to familiarity or comfort with traditional wording, the NIV will continue to be available in the present form. This will be the case until such time as people no longer desire this version."

This is all the information we have at present about revision plans for the NIV. As more information becomes available, we hope to keep the churches informed.

For The Committee on Bible Translation,

W. Smouter, secretary
December 12, 1996 