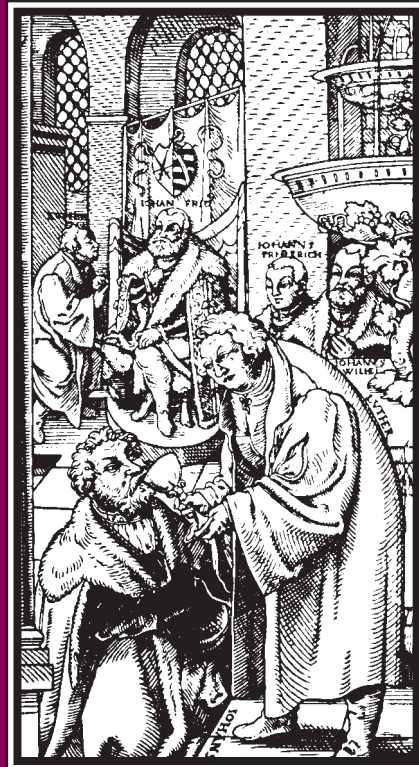


Clarion

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*Luther
serving
Communion
to the
elector
John and
family*

Numbers

10:1-10

By R. Schouten



Living Members

When people are admitted to the Lord's Table through profession of faith, they are asked to make several promises. Among the promises is a statement that the new member will commit his or her whole life to the Lord's service as a *living member of His Church*. The same terminology is found in Lord's Day 21 of the Catechism in which young people learn to confess that they are and ever shall be *living members* of the church (Answer 54).

If we seek to define a living member, we enter into the territory of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God makes that which is dead alive. He regenerates by the Gospel of Christ. Uniting God's people to Christ, the Spirit imparts life and light to dead sinners living in darkness. Living members of the Church, then, are those who are living members of Christ by the Spirit.

However, when we use the term "living member," we are usually speaking about the visible *results* of a living relationship with Christ. A person who has such a living relationship with Christ through the Spirit to the glory of the Father, will give evidence of that relationship in a transformed walk of life. People who are in Christ by a true faith will have a lively and abiding interest in the life of the local church. They will look for and seize opportunities to be useful for the edification of the local congregation. Such people will walk close to God in prayer and in meditation on His promises. Pursuing holiness and so a clear conscience will be central priorities. The cause of mission and outreach will be very important to them.

It seems clear that the use of the term "living membership" implies the possible existence of another class of people in the congregations. Alongside the living branches which are planted in Christ and thus bearing fruit, there may also be "dead wood." Such branches are not rooted and planted in Christ and so bear no fruit. Thus, it is possible that the church may confront within its own ranks the sad reality of those who are members "in name only." In other words, the church has to reckon with the threatening problem of *nominal* Christianity.

Nominal Christianity is, of course, a broad term. We shouldn't too quickly throw it out as a charge against a fellow member. We can recognize variations within this category. For example, there are those who are simply hypocrites. Then, there are those members who, while they may have a strong and quiet trust in Christ, simply don't get involved. Reasons for this marginalization vary: the bitter aftermath of a conflict in the church, a timid disposition, ill health, depression, being "burnt-out," as well as other mitigating circumstances. Actually, such members are not nominal Christians at all; they are rather people who need to be encouraged and loved and motivated to express their faith in word and deed.

In general, though, by "nominal Christians," we mean those who want to be regarded as church members and as

Christians, but who fail to maintain an ongoing relationship with the Lord and His Church. The nominal Christian may be a member by baptism; he may even have made a profession of faith. A nominal Christian may be familiar with the language of orthodoxy, but he is a stranger to the inward realities of which that language speaks. Thus, the nominal Christian shows an inward apathy to the riches of Christ. Spiritual vitality is absent. As a consequence, radical Kingdom living is missing and there is very little or no involvement in the life of the local congregation.

Causes of nominality

A recent book on our topic describes in considerable detail a number of perceived causes of nominality.¹ While we cannot accept all the prescriptions for health offered by this author, we certainly can learn much from his perceptive analysis of different factors contributing to the problem of nominal Christianity.

In the chapter entitled, "Characteristics and Causes of Nominality," the author deals with the question why a person's relationship with Christ and the church becomes damaged or distant. He lists and discusses the following factors:²

- They may be left unaware of Christ's claims upon their lives. They have never rightly understood the need for a personal response to the message of the Gospel.
- They have resisted Christ's claims upon their lives, opposing any emphasis on personal faith and obedience.
- They are overly dependent on the spiritual vitality of other Christians.
- They may have become atrophied through non-involvement and non-use of gifts.
- Their obedience has been selective.
- They are "residual" or "cultural" Christians who are living on the spiritual capital accumulated through previous generations.

However, the author of this book also describes the *role of the church* in the problem of nominal membership. According to the author, the church must be prepared to recognize the fact that it may be as much a part of the problem as the solution.

Here are some of the ways in which the church is perceived by the author as possibly contributing to the problem:³

- The congregation has never had the Gospel clearly presented in the power of the Holy Spirit. Problems seen by the author in preaching include: presenting moral homilies instead of the radical Gospel of repentance and the offer of new life in Christ and preaching that has been so "stylized and punctuated with religious jargon as to be unintelligible or irrelevant to large sections of the audience."
- The authority of the Bible has been undermined through rationalism and empiricism. Through the influence of rationalism, "dogma is now dubious and doubt dogmatic."

Ambiguity covers everything like a Scottish mist . . ." (quoting from O. Guinness).

- The Word of God has been proclaimed in a cold, abrasive and judgmental manner. The author states that "righteous indignation must always be tempered by a heartfelt longing for the impenitent to change their ways and a preparedness on the part of the pastor to go to any lengths to reach out effectively to the recalcitrant."⁴
- Unresolved personal conflicts.
- Too frequent change of ministers.
- Lack of effective procedures for integrating newcomers.

Dealing with the Problem

As Reformed churches we can certainly recognize the accuracy of Gibb's diagnosis. In our own midst we must be vigilant in the struggle to serve the Lord faithfully. Lack of commitment to Christ and so also to Christ's Church is an ever-present danger. The danger of a mere second-hand religion inherited from grandfather and grandmother is familiar to us from the Old Testament. How often, for example, don't the prophets fulminate against ceremonial religion which is not accompanied by sincere love for God from the heart!⁵ In clear language, we are told that such duplicitous worship is an abomination to God.

What can we do to help prevent a lapse into nominal Christianity? In the first place, we must not abuse the doctrine of the covenant. Most of our members are "born into the church." As infants, we have received the wonderful assurance of God's gift of righteousness in Christ. The sign and seal of baptism testifies to God's faithfulness. However, we must never permit being "born into the church" to relativize the need to be "born again." Baptism is a mark of privilege, but it is also a mandate to live in faith and obedience. To quote the *Form for Baptism*, "we are, through baptism, called and obliged by the Lord to a new obedience. We are to cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to trust Him, and to love Him with our whole heart."

Sometimes, Baptists and Mennonites and the like have said strong words against infant baptism on the grounds that it promotes nominalism. Now, we might reject the charge by pointing out that nominalism can also be a problem for Baptists. We would do better to respond with genuine grief that nominalism does exist in Reformed churches.

Infant baptism, however, is not a cause of nominalism. A wrong understanding of infant baptism may very well promote nominalism. A recent writer made the acerbic remark that Baptists do not understand the covenant because paedobaptists themselves don't understand it.⁶ An understanding of covenant membership which to the slightest degree diminishes the call to personal faith and holiness may well lead to presumption. Rightly understood, however, the covenant and infant baptism as sign and seal of covenant promises, do not diminish but rather intensify the call to faith and obedience. After all, from those to whom much has been given, much is also expected.

Secondly, the practice of infant baptism must go hand in hand with faithful church discipline. The privileged people of the covenant are expected by their Lord to bear fruit that befits repentance. When branches are conspicuously fruitless, the church must do the necessary pruning. Naturally, this will require a great deal of pastoral sensitivity and patience. Reformed churches take into account various stages of maturity and deal tenderly with those who struggle against prevailing sins, especially when they are young. Nonetheless, when sin is persistent and attitudes are hardened,

the necessary pruning must take place through faithful church discipline. If this doesn't happen and sin is tolerated, nominalism is promoted and the name of God is blasphemed because of us.

In summary, a response to nominalism must keep in mind the marks of the church as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic. The **sacrament** of baptism must be rightly administered and explained – not as a ticket to heaven, but as a mark of privilege and as a mandate for perseverance in faith and godliness. **Preaching** must be pure, that is, it must present Christ *together with* the call to repent and believe. And third, **church discipline** must reflect the necessary boldness and courage to confront sin in the covenant community – also sin amongst covenant youth who have not yet made a confession of faith.

¹E. Gibbs, *In Name Only. Tackling the Problem of Nominal Christianity* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994).

²*ibid*, pages 89-94.

³*ibid*, see pages 78-89.

⁴*ibid*, page 82.

⁵See, for example, Psalm 50:7-23; Psalm 51: 15-17; Isa. 1:10-17; Mic. 6:6-8.

⁶D. Wilson, *To a Thousand Generations. Covenant Mercy for the People of God* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996), pg. 91.



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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Geertsema

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

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION
5621 - 51 Street
Taber, AB T1G 1K6
Fax: (403) 223-0149
E-Mail: clarion@compuserve.com

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

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

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By G.Ph. van Popta

The poor get a kingdom

Matthew 5:3 – “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

The Lord Jesus contradicted the ideas of the world. He rejected popular opinion. He spoke and acted differently. Rather than hobnob with the high and mighty, he ate with the tax-collectors and sinners.

He often spoke in startling ways. His Sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7) testifies to that. In this sermon he contradicted common opinion. He rejected popular practice. He contrasted his teaching with that of the law-experts. He criticized the behaviour of the smug and wealthy. He disagreed with the opinions and values of the world.

We can see this in the opening words of his sermon already: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

Whoever heard of that – poor people getting a kingdom? The world says: Blessed are the rich; they get the kingdoms, the power and the glory.” But God doesn’t work the way the world does. Jesus said: “The poor get a kingdom.” In the kingdom of heaven, paupers become princely people. Beggars become kings and queens. Whoever heard of that?

What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

When the Lord spoke of a poverty in spirit he was not speaking of material poverty. Being poor in material things as such does not open up the way into the kingdom of heaven. It is only the blood of Jesus Christ, His sacrifice on the cross, that gains admission into the kingdom of heaven – whether you are rich or poor in material things. It is only

as we embrace Christ in true faith that we find ourselves inside the kingdom.

Jesus Christ said that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are poor *in spirit*. The poor in spirit are those who fall to pieces when they stand before God. The poor in spirit are those who realize that their hands are empty when they come to God.

It’s okay to show self-confidence when you are face to face with another person, but when we face God, our self-confidence dissolves. In the holy presence of God we feel nothing but a sense of utter poverty of spirit.

The word “poor” which the Lord used here refers to the poorest of the poor. A completely destitute beggar. That’s what we are. We must realize that. We must admit that we are spiritually bankrupt. We must become conscious of our sin, our misery, our lack of any natural redeeming qualities. We have nothing of ourselves to offer to God. We can only stand before God, lift up our empty hands and say: “Lord, have mercy; Lord, save us.”

Such an attitude is pleasing to God. In Isaiah 57:15 the LORD God said: *“For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.’”*

Are you offended by the suggestion that you are a miserable beggar? Perhaps you resist and want to reject the idea that you must admit absolute poverty. But

you shouldn’t be offended. Think about the poverty of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was poor in spirit. But his poverty was a *self-imposed* poverty. Our poverty is natural. We are born with it. Mankind has been impoverished since he fell into sin. But our Lord took poverty upon himself. He willingly embraced poverty, and humility. He was the eternal Son of God, God himself. But He did not clutch at the glory of being God. He gave it up. He came to earth in the form of a man. He became a man, one of us.


Why did He empty himself? Why did He become poor and dependent? For the salvation of man. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 8:9: *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”*

He became poor that we may be rich. He became a pauper that we might be princes, princesses.

He did it all. He emptied himself, He gave himself up, to the point where He died on the cross. In humility. In weakness. In poverty. He went to the cross with empty hands. And those hands were nailed to the cross.

We look only to the cross of Christ. *Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to Thy cross I cling.*

As we go to the cross of Christ with our empty hands, Christ fills them. He blesses us. He makes us happy. He makes us rich. He welcomes us into the kingdom of his Father.

Acknowledge your poverty. Receive a kingdom. 

What’s inside?

In the lead editorial, Rev. Rob Schouten attacks the problem of nominal Christianity. As he says, there are many different reasons why some people are members of the church in name only. Some of the reasons have to do with the attitude of the individual; in other instances, the church may be at fault. He then suggests how the problem ought to be dealt with. Read it and be challenged.

Rev. Paul Aasman concludes his two-part article on how often we ought to be celebrating the Lord’s supper. You may be surprised by Rev. Aasman’s conclusions. Hopefully his articles will open up discussion on this point.

Mr. Gerry Denbok of Burlington gives us an interesting little piece of recent church history.

The Rev. Van Spronsen updates us on news from here and there in the federation of churches.

Dr. Neal Hegeman gives us his read on recent articles we’ve published about church unity.

Enough to keep you busy for awhile. Happy reading!

GvP

Celebration of the Lord's Supper – How often?₂

From the Reformation to today

By P. Aasman

In the previous issue, Rev. Paul Aasman of Grand Valley, ON, examined the matter of the frequency of the celebrations of the Lord's supper by looking at the biblical data and examining the positions and practice of the church from the time of the apostles through the Middle Ages. In what follows, he summarizes what the Reformers had to say about it, the practice of the reformed churches, the statement of the World Council of Churches and reactions to this statement. He ends with a plea. – Editor



Martin Luther

5. The Period of the Reformation

5.1 Martin Luther

For Luther, the Lord's supper was an integral element in official worship. In the Lord's supper, the congregation enjoys fellowship in and with Jesus Christ. No gathering for worship could possibly be complete without this celebration. In 1520, Luther said that the Lord's supper should be celebrated daily. Three years later he changed his mind and announced that it should be celebrated only on Sundays.¹ Luther's desire to see the Lord's supper celebrated weekly is

remarkable since Luther is well-known for being conservative when he introduced reforms. He maintained whatever parts of the medieval cultus he considered theologically neutral, such as images, altars, and vestments. But by teaching the people that they should receive the bread and wine frequently, Luther made a clean break from that part of the medieval cultus which restricted personal participation in the Eucharist to one time per year.

5.2 Ulrich Zwingli

Zwingli did not favour frequent communion. When Zwingli prepared a preface for the German rite for the Lord's supper in 1525, he recommended that this sacrament be celebrated four times per year: Easter, Whitsun, autumn and Christmas.² Although four times per year was more frequent than the medieval church in which the people received the bread only annually, yet by confining the church calendar to only four celebrations per year, Zwingli stood alone among the continental Reformers.

The reason why Zwingli took this position is not easy to discern. Perhaps he felt that it was quite generous, as indeed it was in comparison to the medieval church. But more significantly, quarterly celebrations is in keeping with Zwingli's reformational principles. In Zürich, all ceremonies and rituals were reduced to their barest form. He even had congregational singing abolished! It is well-known that Zwingli had at one point taught that the Lord's supper was not a means of grace at all. Perhaps this explains why he did not regard it as essential to the weekly worship. It should be noted, however, that Zwingli later modified his statement about the Lord's supper, and agreed with Calvin and Bucer that it is a means of grace in which Christ is offered to the believer. Maxwell brings forward the point that Zwingli was distinct, in this matter, largely because while Luther and Calvin



Ulrich Zwingli

were scholastics, Zwingli was a humanist, and consequently "more rationalistic in his theological outlook, less mystical, and more subjective and analytical."³

Another possible reason why Zwingli took this position regarding the frequency of celebrating this sacrament is more speculative, yet it is characteristic of the time. Perhaps Zwingli took this position simply in reaction against Luther. It is well-known that Zwingli and Luther were spiritually at war over the manner in which Christ is present in the bread and wine. Their conflict over this point was so intense that both men came to hold intemperate positions. Calvin observed that Zwingli's doctrine concerning the Lord's supper was ruled, at certain points, by a passion to oppose Luther rather than to provide a reasoned and balanced doctrine.⁴ Perhaps Luther's initial position that the Lord's supper should be celebrated even daily, reeked so much of Romish doctrine that Zwingli reacted and said: No, not daily but four times per year.

We have examined the roots for Zwingli's position in some detail here because even though he was the only continental Reformer to go in this direction, his influence appears to be determinative for all of Protestantism. Maxwell concludes his discussion of the Zwinglian rite for the Lord's supper thus, "Its most tragic influence, however, was the beginning of the separation of the Lord's Supper from the Lord's Day, making it no longer the norm of Sunday worship, but a memorial feast infrequently celebrated."⁵ This is probably overstating the case, for it was an ancient practice to celebrate the Mass only three times per year, reaching back at least to A.D. 600, as we have already seen. But it is true that nearly all Reformed churches followed Zwingli's position from the very start, and the Lutheran churches followed it as well in subsequent generations.

5.3 John Calvin

Calvin agreed with Luther that the church should celebrate the Lord's supper *at least once a week*. He longed for a return to the manner in which the early Christian church commemorated Christ's death, and to be rid of all the accumulated rubbish of the medieval period. He regarded infrequent celebration of the Lord's supper to be part of that rubbish. For instance, in his *Institutes*, he observed that soon after the apostolic age, the celebration of the Lord's supper was "corrupted by rust," and he says:

Now, to get rid of this great pile of ceremonies, the Supper could have been administered most becomingly if it were set before the church very often, and at least once a week. 4.17.43

An earlier version of his *Institutes* states this point even more forcefully. He wrote that "this custom that enjoins that men should communicate only once a year is certainly an invention of the devil. The Lord's Supper should be celebrated in the Christian congregation once a week at the very least."⁶

In the next section of the *Institutes* ("44. The Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently"), he gives doctrinal reasons why he feels that this sacrament should be set before the church very often. He writes:

[I]t was ordained to be frequently used among all Christians in order that they might frequently return in memory to Christ's Passion, by such remembrances to sustain and strengthen their faith, and urge themselves to bring thanksgiving to God and to proclaim His goodness;



John Calvin

finally, by it to nourish mutual love, and among themselves give witness to this love, and discern its bond in the unity of Christ's body.

He goes on to point out that such frequent celebration will more effectively bind on all members the duties of love toward one another. He then states the biblical support for this teaching:

Luke relates in The Acts that this was the practice of the apostolic church, when he says that believers "... continued in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers"

[Acts 2:42, cf. Vg.]. Thus it became the unvarying rule that no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving. That this was the established order among the Corinthians also, we can safely infer from Paul (cf. 1 Cor. 11:20).

As we have noted before already, we might not agree with Calvin when he supposes that Luke is referring to the sacrament in Acts 2:42, but the same point is made in 1 Corinthians 11:20, as Calvin also points out here. So biblical grounds indeed exist to form the unvarying rule found in the early Christian church that no meeting of the church should take place without including the sacrament of Lord's supper.

This concern to have the Lord's supper celebrated every week was not a passing fancy that Calvin had. It was an matter of great importance to him. Although he was continually frustrated from implementing it in Geneva, he never ceased to press for it. As Maxwell states it, Calvin's aim was to restore the Eucharist "as the central weekly service, and, within this service, to give the Holy Scriptures their authoritative place. The Lord's Supper, in all its completeness, was the norm he wished to establish."⁷ In his *Institutes*, he stated the position which he strived during his whole time in Geneva to implement. When the



One Big, Happy Family? Later artists pictured the Reformers as unified, though they were anything but that in their lifetimes. Here, the light of the Gospel is rekindled by Luther (E), Calvin (H), Zwingli (D), as well as the deceased John Wycliffe (A) and John Hus (B). The Pope and the Devil (in the foreground) try to blow out the light.

magistrates in Geneva consistently prevented him from realizing this ideal, he was forced to modify his position, although it always remains clear that Calvin was not content with anything less than weekly celebration.⁸ In an essay he wrote later on during his ministry in Geneva, entitled, "Treatise on the Lord's Supper," he says:

With reference to the number of times that the Lord's Supper is to be partaken of, no fixed regulation can be adopted. For in the case of every one there are frequent special hindrances, which excuse him if he absents himself. Besides, we have no express command which obligates all Christians to partake of it every time when it is offered. In all cases, if we keep its object rightly in view, we will recognize that its use ought to be more frequent than is commonly the practice. For the more our weakness makes itself felt in us, the more frequently must we practice that which may and will serve for the confirmation of our faith and our furtherance in a holy life. Therefore in all well regulated churches the custom is to be insisted on that the supper should be celebrated as frequently as the circumstances of the congregation may allow . . . [I]t is within the purpose of the Lord that we should partake of it often, otherwise we lose the benefit which arises from it.

Calvin then considers three different excuses why people might object to more frequent celebration of the Lord's supper, of which the third is relevant to this study. He writes, "Still others consider frequent communion superfluous on the ground that having once accepted Christ, communion with Him does not require repeated renewal." He responds to this position thus:

In behalf of the third objection not even the shadow of a reason can be given. For it is not possible to be surfeited by this spiritual bread, which was given us in order that after having tasted its sweetness, we might desire it more and more, and enjoy it as often as it is offered to us. For as long as we tarry in this mortal life, Christ is never imparted to us in such a manner that our souls are satisfied once for all by Him, but He will be our constant support.

To sum up, Calvin was, on one hand, rather forceful, especially earlier on, in his insistence that the Lord's supper should be celebrated weekly. To the end, he never missed an occasion to press upon his readers that the Scriptures

demand that this sacrament should be enjoyed frequently, and that it was "the abomination of the mass set up by Satan, who caused it that people received communion only once or twice a year."⁹ But while Calvin could be fiery in pressing his point, he was capable of assuming an intelligently and genuinely irenic tone, as indicated when he writes, "the supper should be celebrated as frequently as the circumstances of the congregation may allow it."

It is indeed a tragedy that the views of Zwingli should have triumphed in Geneva over the position of Calvin, for the next four centuries would pass with almost no questions raised among Protestant churches on this point, either in England, the Continent, or in North America. It seems that in the moment when the Church was so magnificently restored to her original purity, the celebration of the Lord's Supper was separated from the Sunday worship service in Geneva and remained an extraordinary addition reserved for only four or six Sundays in the year.

Calvin's close friend and colleague, Bucer in Strasbourg was able to lead his congregation into the pattern of weekly celebrations, but within a generation, this too had fallen into the pattern established by Zwingli and followed by Geneva. The only other figure in subsequent history who is well-known for protesting this pattern was John Wesley. Wesley also favoured frequent and weekly communion, but Methodism frustrated also its leader when it practised monthly or quarterly communion.¹⁰

6. The World Council of Churches

Churches in every country have, during the twentieth Century, been experimenting with new liturgical forms for worship. One of the most significant forces for liturgical change is the World Council of Churches, with over 300 member churches worldwide. One of the stated aims of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council is "to call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ." The Faith and Order Commission has served this purpose by creating a document in which the central doctrinal peculiarities of the member churches have been blended together to form one accepted pattern which all the member churches can accept. This document is called, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.¹¹ Naturally, this document promotes liturgical uniformity as well. Its recommendation on the frequency of the Lord's supper is candid. It states:



This woodcut shows Luther serving Communion to the elector John and family. Luther is serving the cup to lay people, a Reformation distinctive.

Christian faith is deepened by the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Hence the Eucharist should be celebrated frequently. (. . .) As the Eucharist celebrates the resurrection of Christ, it is appropriate that it should take place at least every Sunday. As it is the new sacramental meal of the people of God, every Christian should be encouraged to receive communion frequently.¹²

These recommendations of the World Council are well-grounded in Scripture, in the churches' early history and in the express desires of the first great reformers.

This portion of Baptism, *Eucharist and Ministry* caused quite a stir among the member churches since the vast majority of them do not celebrate the Eucharist weekly. Their protests are striking because they very likely parallel the kinds of protests that would arise from our own midst. The Lutheran Church of Australia protested, saying that the uniqueness of the Lord's supper



The Colloquy at Marburg was called in hopes of reconciling the two centers of the German Reformation – Zurich and Wittenberg, but conflict over the Lord's Supper split their common cause.

is lost if celebrated weekly.¹³ The Presbyterian Church of Canada objected by saying that because faith is deepened by celebrating, it should not be celebrated too often lest frequency breed a ritualistic approach of over-familiarity, thereby weakening faith.¹⁴ The Methodist Church (UK) observed that some would argue that “the infrequency of celebration actually heightens the sense of the Eucharist’s presence.”¹⁵ The United Church of Christ [USA] stated that familiarity will diminish the meaning of the sacrament, and the preaching of the word may be subordinated to the sacramental action.¹⁶ Many more similar positions could be quoted from other churches which are members of the World Council.

According to these churches, infrequent communion protects the sacrament from ritualism and over-familiarity, and preserves the sacrament’s highly sacred nature. But this position becomes completely empty when it is shown that the Scripture expects frequent communion, and that in the early part of the church’s history, it was enjoyed frequently with great profit. As Calvin pointed out, it is infrequent communion that is tandem to spiritual decline. The desire to “protect” the sanctity of the sacrament by celebrating it only occasionally is nothing more than a human invention, and as such, is suspect.

As to the notion that weekly Eucharist would subordinate the word to the sacrament, one wonders if this has not been in theory what has happened ever since Zwingli set the pattern of quarterly celebrations. What is being suggested by this pattern is that the preaching of the Gospel is so common that the church can receive it twice on

Sundays, but the Lord’s supper is so sacred that people need to prepare themselves for it for at least one week and then be satisfied for two or three months with the superabundant benefit that has been received there before receiving such spiritual renewal again. Bringing the word and sacrament together into the weekly worship will not subordinate one to the other but will compliment the one with the other, as Reformed doctrine so urgently teaches that it should.

7. Final Conclusion

Calvin had written, “I have taken care to record publicly that our custom is defective, so that those who come after me may be able to correct it the more freely and easily.” From a Biblical and a church historical point of view, Calvin is certainly correct in labelling our practice as being defective. Many have taken up Calvin’s challenge to work in the church to correct this defect which has overshadowed the reformed churches for nearly 500 years, but with little observable success. With the passage of time, this defect has become so firmly entrenched that people cannot conceive of celebrating the Lord’s supper every week. The form for the celebration for the Lord’s supper has become so lengthy because it has become customary to devote nearly a whole service to its celebration. The shorter form has been mislabelled in the *Book of Praise* as being for “the afternoon service.” The intention of this shorter form was to make it more feasible for a church to celebrate Communion more frequently, however, since this notion is so foreign to our circles, it has been recast for a second celebration on the “Lord’s Supper Sunday.”¹⁷ The manner in which the

congregation receives the bread and wine (people come forward to sit round a table) necessarily consumes a great deal of time. Both of these things (the length of the form and the manner of celebration) support infrequent communion and, therefore, need to be adjusted before positive change can be made.

The Reformers of the 16th Century saw themselves as returning to the purity of the early church. With regard to the sacraments, the exodus from gross corruption was magnificently begun, but strangely left unfinished when it came to bringing the Lord’s supper into the weekly worship service. Though he struggled to complete the reformation of the Lord’s supper, Calvin had to accept that it would not happen in his life time, so he conceded that the church should celebrate the Lord’s supper at least as frequently as circumstance might allow it. May this study serve to make more favourable the present circumstances so that the complete reformation of the Lord’s supper may yet be realized.

¹Maxwell, op. cit., 74.

²Ibid., 81.

³Ibid.

⁴See Calvin’s “A Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper,” ¶ 56, where Calvin writes that Zwingli and his colleague Oecolompadius tried to defend that Christ ascended into heaven and is there locally present as to his humanity, but adds: “Meantime, while engrossed with this point, they forgot to show what presence of Jesus Christ ought to be believed in the Supper, and what communion of his body and blood is there received.”

⁵Maxwell, op. cit., 87.

⁶Ibid., 117.

⁷Ibid., 112.

⁸Maxwell adds the following interesting detail: “He [Calvin] thought to mitigate the stringency of these decrees [the city council had decreed that Eucharist be celebrated quarterly] by arranging that the dates of communion should vary in each church in the city, thus providing opportunity for more frequent communion for the people, who might communicate in a neighbouring parish.” in Maxwell, op. cit., 117.

⁹This quote is from his letter to the Magistrates of Berne, 1555.

¹⁰Maxwell, op. cit., 144.

¹¹Faith and Order Paper no. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).

¹²Ibid., 16.

¹³*Response to BEM: Official Responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Text*, volume II, Faith and Order Paper 132 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986), 90.

¹⁴Ibid., 156.

¹⁵Ibid., 224.

¹⁶Ibid., 308.

¹⁷For more information about this, see G. van Rongen, *Our Reformed Church Service Book* (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1995), 217-218.

Early History of the Church in Hamilton

By G. Denbok

Recently we published two articles dealing with the contact we had with the Protestant Reformed Churches some 50 years ago. One of the articles dealt especially with how matters unfolded in the church at Hamilton. Mr. Gerry Denbok, another man who was there, writes about this same history, – Editor.

It was good to see the (almost half-century old) history of the Church in Hamilton dealt with in the Year-End issue of *Clarion*. Especially the doctrinal issues, as well as whether or not these, or the binding of them, were justified reasons not to join or to separate from the Protestant Reformed Church. Br. & Sr. Lodder obviously were very aware of the doctrinal differences and they were prevented from joining the Protestant Reformed Church in Hamilton for that very reason.

The Press Review by Dr. J. DeJong basically deals with the same issue, and that was also good to see, since divergent views and terminology with regards to covenant, baptism and election are still with us, and still cause division among brethren today.

Dr. DeJong quotes the Rev. Hanco, with regards to the Hamilton history. And this is the main reason for my short article.

It is not true that the people in Hamilton who requested institution, deliberately deceived the Protestant Reformed Churches. And I have some material that will show him (Rev. Hanco) to be wrong. Perhaps it should be published, if for the record only, before all the men who were members when the institution of the Hamilton Protestant Reformed Church took place on April 19, 1949 have passed on. Only three of those twelve men are still living today. Fortunately Prof. Th. Plantinga has done some excellent work in his *“Schilder’s Struggle for the Unity of the*

Church” (pages 407-458). I need only to fill in some details.

In the last 4 months of 1948, the Protestant Reformed ministers, DeJong, Hoffman, DeWolf and Kok, came regularly to the Hamilton area to contact the few “Vrijgemaakte” immigrants who had arrived during 1947 and 1948 and conduct Sunday services for this very small group. These ministers were very sympathetic towards us, contrary to what we had experienced in the Christian Reformed Church where one was not allowed to speak of anything related to the “Vrijmaking.” The Protestant Reformed ministers were just the opposite. They were familiar with all the issues, and we felt at once “at home” with them. However, right from the start they made no secret of the doctrinal difference between them and the “Vrijgemaakten”. But following the advice of Prof. Schilder and Van Spronsen (who also were very much aware of these differences) none in this group thought that these differences were big enough to warrant a new Church federation.

On Sunday evening, February 13, 1949, this small group requested institution as a Protestant Reformed Church. We were overjoyed by the love and support we were receiving from the Protestant Reformed brotherhood in the U.S.A.

The Protestant Reformed churches took our application seriously, and on one of the following Sundays (March 6, 1949) Prof. Herman Hoeksema came to Hamilton with his son (Homer I presume) and preached for us in both services. Actually he preached *one* oversized sermon – point one in the morning, and the second point in the afternoon. The whole sermon was an urgent admonition to the whole congregation to seriously consider the consequences of joining the Protestant Reformed churches, especially with a view of the doctri-

nal differences. During the lunch-hour, between the services, a Dutch university student (from Delft, I do not remember his name) joked: “Daar moet je wel even aan wennen, als ze hier onze geliefde Verbondsbeschouwing zomaar onschriftuurlijk staan te noemen” (I guess we’ll have to get used to them calling our beloved view of the Covenant “unscriptural”). However, in these same lunch discussions, as well as after, few of the brothers were able to refute what Prof. Hoeksema had said.

The joyous day of the Institution of the Hamilton Protestant Reformed Church arrived on Tuesday, April 19, 1949. Two cars with six ministers (Kok, DeJong, Veldman, Vos, DeWolf and one other). Several of the ministers took part in a service of praise to the Lord, and afterwards in the installation of the 3 office bearers (Van Huizen, Reitsma and Ton) who were chosen out of the 12 male confessing members present, (the other 9 were: L. Klapwijk, A.C. Oosthoek, Reemeijer, J. Veddes, Th. Hart, J.J. Knegt Sr., J.J. Knegt Jr., C. Groenewegen and the undersigned). Some of us had not celebrated the Lord’s Supper for about one year, and so on one of the following Sundays we had another joyous Sunday celebrating the Holy Supper. We enjoyed the preaching that we received when Prot. Ref. ministers came all the way from their various congregations in Michigan to serve us. It is true what Prof. Hoeksema wrote in later years reflecting upon what happened: (page 424 *Schilder’s Struggle*) “Let me inform you, that we have as Protestant Reformed Churches faithfully laboured among them, that we have literally taken them into our bosom; we have loved them.” That certainly was true, and as far as the brothers and sisters who handed their attestations in on that Tuesday evening in April 1949 were concerned, that love was returned, unconditionally.

However, Hoeksema was no less right when he said, in the same article: "But it was always the influence exerted upon them from the old country . . . their purpose apparently was to create in America an extension of the Liberated Churches." That certainly was true. Personally I received via br. Kottelenberg, who lived in Leamington at that time, a letter written by "Ds" Van Raalte, a letter (which was also sent to 18 other "Vrijgemaakte" immigrants already in Canada), in which "Ds" Van Raalte writes, that he and "Ds" DeGoede had decided to start working on behalf of immigrants in Canada with the goal to send in 1949, if possible, one or two ministers to Canada to help "Vrijgemaakte" immigrants with the institution of a church. Shortly after the institution of the Protestant Reformed Church in Hamilton, I (and others) received a questionnaire from the Rev. Hettinga, with a number of questions about our "church-needs," ignoring the fact that a church already had been established in Hamilton.

Most of the brothers and sisters in Hamilton who had so wholeheartedly recently celebrated the institution of

their Protestant Reformed Church did not take kindly to these overtures from the Netherlands. Overtures which so obviously were in sharp contrast with the advice given by Prof. Schilder and Van Spronsen.

Hindsight being 20-20, most of these same brothers and sisters have, some sooner, others later, come to see that Prof. Herman Hoeksema was (unfortunately) also right when he (in 1952) wrote: "*The differences between us were rather fundamental, although Dr. Schilder called them differences in terminology.*" (Plantinga: "*Schilder's Struggle*" page 441).

Conclusion: there was no deception of any kind, we were glad to live within a church community where differences of "terminology" were tolerated but we could not live with "fundamental" differences, especially not when they were made binding in a "Declaration of Principles." We were and are very thankful to the Lord for the formation of the Canadian Reformed Churches, even though one can never be thankful for a multiplication of "church-federations," *not then and not now.*



The Council of the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto, in consultation with the Board of Foreign Mission and with the Reverend Henry Versteeg has decided that:

Rev. H. Versteeg

be available for call after February 1, 1997.

The address is:

Reverend H. Versteeg

19 Cygnus Drive
Richmond Hill, ON
L4C 8P4

* * *

Br. Theodore Lodder

has been examined and declared eligible for call in the Canadian and American Reformed Churches by Classis Ontario South, Feb. 19, 1997. Br. Lodder can be reached at 905-648-9018.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address. They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length.

Dear Editor,

Re: recent publications regarding church unity.

General concerns on the recent literature on "Church Unity" motivated me to write you. Chapter 2, Art. 9, *Canons of Dort*, speaks about the fulfillment of God's counsel. In due time the elect are gathered together into one. There will always be a church of believers. This counsel then included the prayer: "That they all may be one." This prayer was heard and will be fulfilled in due time, according to His counsel. God has decreed this, and is making this come about ever since time began, and will continue to do so till the end of time. My concerns are as follows. Is there a suggestion that we do not see this today or in the past? Are we sug-

gesting that this depends on the free will of man? Are we thinking that we have more or less pure faith, and that God therefore revokes the perfect obedience of the law? Is there a suggestion that the unity of the church depends upon covenants we attempt to make, as, so we say, "the church is so divided, not one." Is then a "brotherly feeling," emotionalism or pluralism? Is the Canadian Reformed Church guilty of causing the disappearance of faithful churches? Is interdenominationalism scriptural? I will not add pulpit exchange to the list, but rather caution the ones who govern, that unity also means: the faithful proclamation of His Word in the unity of the Spirit! This unity is only to be seen in (not ours, but) His Church, visibly gathered into one, according to His counsel (Acts 4:32). We firmly believe

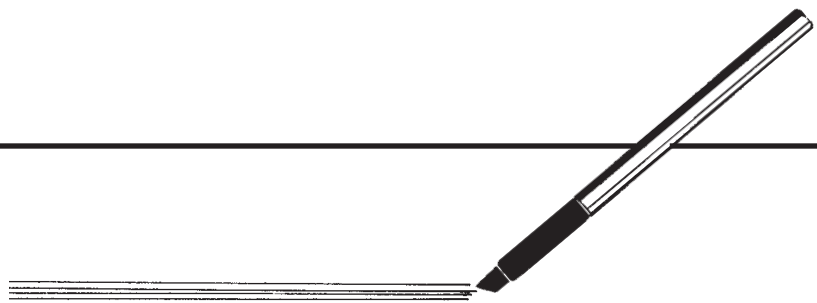
to be a member thereof and are made to be one. This must be because God willed it so; His counsel does not change. Art. 32 BC speaks about the usefulness of those that govern in preserving unity and harmony. This is not a matter of debate, interpretation, cultural, and or other excuses, but a matter of obedience. We will see this unity and harmony in the Can. Ref. Church: by believing in God's counsel. The operating or keyword is then obedience. God's counsel has also promised that, obedience! This is the glory of His counsel fulfilled. Hopefully these concerns may help refocus issues of the reformed faith in the Can. Ref. Church.

Sincerely,
J.M. Bosma
Canfield

THE HI-LITER

News from Here and There

By C. Van Spronsen



In Burlington-South the matter of smoking as it affects the eligibility of brothers for office was reviewed. "Church council remains convinced that the matter of smoking is a serious one and may prohibit a brother for nomination to the special offices." Times *have* changed!

A new Bible study group was formed in Coaldale, AB under the name "College and Careers" for members in the age category of between 20 and 30. "The focus will be on daily issues confronted by young Christian adults in college or on the work force."

The severe snowstorms in the Fraser Valley, BC which made the "National News" also effected church life. All nine churches in the Valley cancelled their services on December 29, 1996.

A new program is being started in Cloverdale, BC, the "Little Lambs." This is a program for children three and up who would regularly attend the nursery during the second service. This program would provide them with Bible stories, prayer, songs and crafts pertaining to the theme. "The children will be taught with material based on the Bible in a simple and developmentally appropriate manner."

The Women's Savings Action for the Theological College is still very active in most congregations. In some places the traditional way of collecting coins in a can is still very productive. In Hamilton the ladies report that, besides receiving a number of bills and cheques, they rolled twenty four thousand seven hundred pennies! Conclusion: "This shows again that a lot of little amounts do add up."

In this same congregation "two noteworthy decisions were taken. First, a Canadian flag (and stand) will be placed in (the lobby of) the church building in recognition of our status as citizens of this land. Second, a plaque will be mounted (also somewhere in the lobby) indicating our sister churches abroad, as well as those churches with whom we have official contact (e.g. as per synodical deputies). This is meant to show clearly to all of us, as well as guests, that we are not an isolated church but have a recognized brotherhood around the world as part of Christ's catholic church."

Rev. J. Ludwig of London, ON gives his congregation some helpful hints to determine when you are getting old. "For example, you know you're old when you have gold in

your teeth, silver in your hair, and lead in your pants. You know you're old when the candles on your birthday cake are lit and everyone faints from heat exhaustion! . . . One of the nice things about old age is that you can whistle while you brush your teeth." He also provides us with a wife's definition of retirement: "Retirement means 'twice as much husband and half as much income' ."

I wonder which commentaries Rev. Ludwig consults for his studies.

The Valley Herald of Grand Valley (ON) tells us that a new schedule was drawn up for the organ playing. Now that in itself is not so special but the fact that five organists share the privilege of leading the congregation in song is. One even left for a few months to Germany in pursuit of musical studies. Certainly this would be the envy of some congregations!

The Consistory of the same Church decided to make the matter of Bible translation a matter on the agenda for their meeting with the congregation, "especially the matter of the use of the archaic language in prayer." At least the congregation does not have to guess what the Consistory thinks about such language!

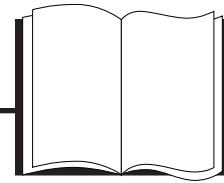
The Church at Neerlandia, AB published a "Birthday Book," first listing all the members in alphabetical order with their birthdays followed by a birthday calendar. I am sure this booklet will be consulted frequently!

The Church at Chatham dealt with a request to sponsor two young men from Bosnia. "Council decided that, notwithstanding our Christian call to do well to all men, this was not to be pursued by the church as such but rather by its members. Each one of us is personally responsible to the Lord as to how we show our Christian compassion to those who suffer in many different ways."

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Clarion
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE



Oops! Heidelbergers at the Arches

The treasurer of the board of Ligonier Ministry of Canada, Mrs. Alida Leistra, keeps me supplied with *Clarions* of the Canadian Reformed Church (CaRC). I especially like reading about the reflections which CaRC theologians and ministers have about the Independent Reformed and the newly formed United Reformed Churches (URCNA). They seem to have a better idea about what we are doing that I do. That is not to say that URCNA follows outside advice, but it's a great source of ideas!

The authors which I have read lately are Dr. J. DeJong (July 12;26; Aug. 23; Sept. 6; and Nov. 15, 1996), Rev. J. Visscher (Sept. 6, 96), Rev. W. den Hollander (Nov. 15), and Rev. H. Boersma (Nov. 15). A variety of ideas and methodologies are presented. Clearly, there is not *one* federative CaRC way, but a general interest for more cooperation.

Dr. J. DeJong, professor at the Canadian Reformed Seminary in Hamilton, wrote on obstacles, possibilities, and strategies (oops). The emphasis was on reviewing the obstacles (first two articles) and then giving some helpful recommendations as to strategy (third article).

Under "confessional obstacles" Prof. DeJong cites a "liturgical" baptismal form question. URCNA does not place liturgical forms, like baptismal forms, under confessions. Perhaps a technical oversight on DeJong's part, yet an important question lies behind this. How does the Holy Spirit sanctify children at baptism? If you want to bring it into the confessional realm, what is the role of Canons of Dort, Head 1, Art. 17?!. Now we speak about the pros and cons of presumptive regeneration and how to speak about the mysteries of the faith. This in turn reflects on the article on which the

church stands or falls, justification by faith alone. So, the URCNA's contribution should be to bring the liturgical question about the baptism of children into the confessional realm and yet further, into the Biblical realm. After all, sound Biblical exegesis, not systematic theology or historical ecclesiology, must determine our Reformational *Sola Scriptura* final stance.

One could review each point DeJong makes. Independents go too far with congregationalism. Who should run the seminaries? Should leaving a federation be easy or difficult? Can you preach out of the Three Forms of Unity or only the Heidelberg Catechism? What role does classis have in dismissing a minister?

In a subsequent article (July 26), DeJong gives helpful recommendations as to how to use the *Book of Praise*. The discussion on admission to the Lord's Supper is helpful in clarifying that the Canadian Reformed practices are not legally cast in steel. Pulpit exchange is closely tied to the question of where pastors are trained. DeJong cautions the Independents in federating too fast. He prefers a provisional federation for the URCNAs but not for the CaRC.

In the obstacle section DeJong does not cite many *Biblical* or *Three Forms of Unity* grounds for not fully cooperating. There is a deep concern for Church Order questions.

URCNAs are not so church orderly minded. URCNA leaders have used pre-CRC, CRC, 1959 CRC, 1914 CRC, and now a new Church Order. In URCNA ecclesiastical life only the Bible and Three Forms of Unity have not changed. In our democratic and politically active meetings, we can vote in and out almost anything in the church order. Small denominations, like the Free Reformed Church, know that. If they were to entrust their 3,500 souls

to a larger assembly of Reformed churches, then in one ecclesiastical assembly, all their distinctive traditions could be voted as non-operative. If we bind ourselves to doing Church Orders together and Church Orders rise and fall on the voting process, "he with the most votes is pope." Decisionism (how strange, in Calvinist circles), rather than mutual ministry and missions, rules the day. The church politician, be he a pastor, preacher, teacher, counsellor, missionary, minister, and elder, rules the flock. Petty theological positions easily become covenant binding in church assemblies. The only way to avoid that is place Church Orders directly under Bible and Confession and make it subservient to the Word of God. Article 7 of the Belgic Confession says: "... Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all: *for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself.*"

As an URCNA person, full cooperation does not require federation unity. Federation, by nature, is always provisional to being faithful to the Bible, the Confessions and to the historical context (the apostles and prophets were not federated as we are proposing). Remember, most URCNA ministers have been in pre-CRC denominations, the CRC denomination, the CRC concerned group, Independent, Alliance, and now URCNA. We are federatively unclear. Perhaps our generation of leaders has to pass away before URCNA can seek federation without the baggage of the past. Meanwhile, we have never been so ministerially universal (ecumenical,

in the right sense of word – not having to structurally join WCC! While in the CRC we stayed within the CRC boundaries. Now, our local URCNA congregation has heard Reformed Baptist, Presbyterian, and other Reformed preachers. We conducted local and regional Christian education seminars and conferences together with the broader Calvinist community. In missions we support and cooperate with a variety of Reformed groups. All this, without federation. If federation can improve on that, great! If not, why federate?

Rev. J. Visscher, in his “A modest proposal for the unity of the church,” (Sept. 6) proposes a well thought out plan for an Association of Reformed churches (ARCH). URCNA will recognize the vision as being similar to the ARC, which we formerly belonged to. The ARCH is highly recommendable since it would help URCNA relate with remaining ARC churches and be able to invite in others, such as the CaRC. It should also include Presbyterian groups like the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), Reformed Presbyterians (RP), Bible Presbyterians (BP), and others with whom we do not have Biblical or Confessional (Biblical) differences.

Rev. H. Boersma gets to the heart of the ecclesiastical (church) questions in “Federative or Local? A Wrong Dilemma,” (Nov. 15). His proposed “Overcoming the dilemma” is worth the price of subscribing to *Clarion* for the whole year. Boersma ties into what theologians are saying and what churches are doing in Holland and he gives a good solution for local churches to work on. This includes four stages: Discussion, cooperation, integration, and union. I would be happy seeing the first two stages in our lifetime. Integration and union are great, if you need it for ministry and missions.

Denominationalism has phased out the life of many churches, either through theological default or bureaucratic disfunctionalism². However, the optimist denominational view, if Biblically motivated, should win the day. Healthy optimism takes precedent over suspicious pessimism. URCNA’s simply have not had many pleasant experiences with it and maybe the CaRC can show us the way.

Dr. J. DeJong and Rev. W. den Hollander both report on the October meeting where the URCNA was feder-

ated. The fellowship was encouraging. URCNA did not approve a provisional Church Order, as DeJong had advocated, but most URCNAs realize that with the amount of work the new Church Order needs, it might be considered functionally provisional.

Missing in the articles which I have mentioned above are the emphasis on Biblical correctness and the role of missions in the church. Granted, all of the authors are Bible preachers and committed to the Reformed Confessions. However, the ecclesiastical conversation is not as saturated with Biblical exegesis as it ought to be in order to stay on our Sola Scriptura course. Belgic Confession Art. 7 warns us not to elevate the word of man over the Word of God. Art. 29 points to the serious consequences. This is not to say that either the URCNA or CaRC are violating Art. 7 and 29, but it is potentially possible. We have been there before³.

What about cooperation in our outreach efforts? Thankfully, local and international mission cooperation is taking place, but mostly among the membership. For example, last summer I accompanied a group of CaRC young adults to the Dominican Republic. The chairman and treasurer of Ligonier Ministries of Canada, of which I am director, are CaRC. We meet each other at Christian Heritage Party meetings. I have had the privilege of speaking at a joint Reformational Rally, held in the CaRC church in Surrey. Just recently, Rev. Henry Versteeg spoke about Islam at a London Ligonier Study Centre evening, hosted in our local URCNA church. Not all attempts to cooperate have been rosy, but we chalk that up to pedagogical development,

theological maturation, and apologetical training.

If this were not such a serious topic and you were not reading this on Sunday I would say it is my turn to treat you to a Heidelburger at the golden ARCHes in order to speak about how we can further cooperate. Give me a call at 1-800-563-3529 to see how we can work together.

FOOTNOTES

¹N.H. Gootjes, “Can parents be sure,” *Lux Mundi* (Dec. 1996) answers the question about covenant children dying in infancy in the affirmative. The Westminster Confession’s answer that all elect children are saved leaves the question in the mystery of God’s sovereign will rather than as a known covenant promise. What is the Biblical exegesis for both positions?

²Johan Tangelder, *Denominationalism and Christian Education*, Alliance of Christian Schools, 1994. What is the Biblical exegesis on denominationalism?

³The tension between Word and tradition is part of the Reformational ethos. Rome elevated the tradition of oral tradition, the sacraments, mariology, and ecclesiology, among other matters, over the Word. To prevent that we need continual Biblical expository and exegetical preaching, teaching, and discussions of the issues at hand.

Dr. Neal Hegeman, Associated Minister of London URC, Director of Ligonier Ministries of Canada

The views expressed in Reader’s Forum are not necessarily those of the editorial committee or the publisher.

Submissions should not exceed 900 words. Those published may be edited for style or length.



By P. Aasman



Singing in the Fire: Christians in Adversity

Faith Cook, *Singing in The Fire: Christians in Adversity* (Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1995) paperback; 193 pages; \$ 9.95

Christian biographies can be excellent fare. When well written, they form an effective antidote to depression over personal troubles, affliction, or persecution. They serve to encourage one to be patient and to persevere in faith. There are, however, two shortcomings to which such biographies often succumb, to some degree. The first is that the biographer glorifies man by crediting his perseverance to his noble piety. The second is that the biographer uncritically advances theological weaknesses which the subject embraces. Faith Cook's series of brief biographies, published by The Banner of Truth Trust in 1995 under the title, "Singing in the Fire: Christians in Adversity," succumbs at times to the first shortcoming, and with annoying frequency to the second.

Singing in The Fire consists of fourteen brief chapters, none more than sixteen pages, describing the lives of Christians. Some of them were martyred for the faith, others endured enormous persecution, while yet others simply suffered from frustrating obstacles and trying hardships. The characters in this book range from the fifth Century mother of Augustine, Monica, to a little girl named Janet who died of asthma in 1961, and a Chinese Christian named Wang Ming-Dao who suffered cruel imprisonment for his faith until he was released in 1976. Most of the subjects, however, are English who lived during the 18th and 19th Centuries. Faith Cook's rapidly changing style, as she leaps with her reader from one era to another, her vivid recreations of moving experiences, and her clarity of writing makes this book easy to read and often quite enjoyable.

However, her stories are often marred by highly questionable doctrinal assumptions. Primary among them is a strong Wesleyan focus on the character's conversion. Many of the chapters identify the very moment when the person was converted and became a committed Christian. This baptistic

slant pervades the whole book. A few examples will indicate how distasteful this really is. William Bramwell, Cook tells us, grew up in a family which regarded Scripture highly and observed the Lord's day with meticulous care, yet, concerning the young William, we are told that "as yet no ray of gospel light illuminated his soul." About William Hog, we are told that outwardly all was correct,

his sincerity, zeal, attendance at gatherings for prayer and worship, diligent study of the Scriptures and even his swift appeal to the throne of grace in times of need. But he himself knew that these things, commendable though they might be, were insufficient to save his soul while he lacked an inner convicting work of the Spirit.

Cook then chronicles how, through a series of remarkable encounters with God, he at last came to a measure of the "inner convicting work of the Spirit." The attainment of such faith is hereby placed far outside the reach of lesser mortals as the reader will surely be. About Edward Payson, Cook writes that "to give the exact date for Edward's conversion would be difficult." His mother was convinced that it had happened in childhood, but his father could not believe it even when his son was a young man. Cook places examples before us in which the most rigorous Christians are in constant doubt about their own faith and only come to a measure of assurance of it through extraordinary means. One would expect to be encouraged by this book, but one will be left wondering if we are not too easy about the promises of God's grace.

Cook also tells quite regularly of how prophecies were uttered and apparently fulfilled, and private revelations were bestowed to men and women. These things occurred for what seem to be trivial and insignificant reasons. They leave the reader wondering if these things really happened in this way, or whether truth has been exaggerated or perhaps even imagined. For instance, at the ordination of Richard Baxter, a minister laid his hand on Richard's head, and, writes Cook,

Suddenly he declared, to the surprise of all: 'Behold, all ye beholders, here is the head of a faithful minister and servant of Jesus Christ, who shall lose the same for his Master's interest, and it shall be set up before sun and moon in the public view of the world.'

His life unfolds just so. He died in battle as he and his supporters fought against a dragoon of King Charles II. His body was abused according to the words of the prophecy. Thomas Hog regularly received private revelations from God. God consoled him and his wife when they received no children, with the promise, "I will give you a name better than that of sons and daughters." He apparently wielded the power of God, for once when a man refused to pay attention during a sermon, despite admonitions, Hog announced that his refusal to receive God's grace will suddenly and visibly be punished. That very night, the man was struck by violent illness and died. Other examples appear often in this book. It seems that an era of signs and miracles similar to that of Moses in the wilderness, of Elijah and Elisha in Israel, of Jesus or the Apostles in the early Church has returned. The Bible itself does not commend such an idea. These stories testify to the fact that many people are not content with the spiritual power of God's word as it has been entrusted to the apostolic and universal church. Instead, they seek visible confirmations of God's power in the world, and such stories seem to satisfy that craving.

Although one may derive some pleasure from reading this book, especially since there are several chapters which are tastefully written (especially the last two), yet the decidedly Wesleyan slant and the neo-pentecostal flavour, will often disturb the discerning reader. The saints presented on these pages are often spiritual giants whose election were sealed by extraordinary experiences of God's divine intervention in their lives, and who often lived out their earthly days in intimate contact with heaven. Since none of us can identify with such spiritual heroes, this book, by and large, fails to encourage normal Christians in their present sufferings.

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

Imagine my surprise when I opened up this big envelope that came in the mail! It was a whole fistful of puzzles, and some letters, too, from a grade four class. Thank you students of Grade 4A of John Calvin School, Smithville.

All of us here in the Busy Beaver Club will enjoy your efforts, I'm sure. There are some of them in this issue, and I'll save the others for later.

By the way, if you want to share pictures, poems or jokes with us, please send them in. We love to hear from you. The address is

Aunt Betty
c/o Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB
R2J 3X5

by John B. Payne

The Colloquy at Marburg was called in hopes of reconciling the two centers of the German Reformation—Zurich and Wittenberg, but conflict over the Lord's Supper split their common cause.

birthday of another Protestant Reformer Ulrich Zwingli, of Zurich. Except in Zurich and its environs, Zwingli did not receive nearly the same amount of attention during his sixth anniversary year as Luther.

Dr. John B. Payne is Professor of Church History at Lancaster Theological Seminary and also president of the Theological and Reformed Historical Society in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.



May the Word of the Lord stand out like a lamp and not be put under a bushel.

By Busy Beaver
Luanne Feenstra

MARCH BIRTHDAYS

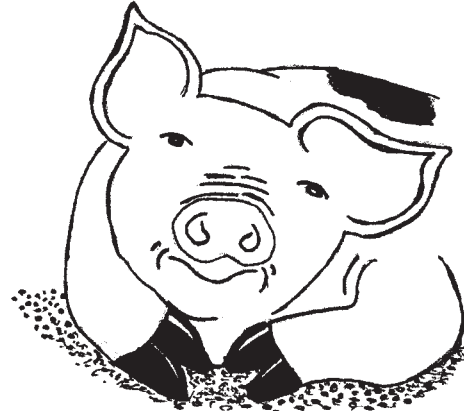
Happy Birthday to all Busy Beavers who have a birthday in March. May our God bless you in this year ahead. Have a great day!

Virginia Jager	1	John Boerema	13
Jessica Bos	3	Katie VanSpronsen	14
Candace Schuurman	3	Diana Nobel	19
Rieneke Huijgen	3	Lydia Jongma	21
Emily Boot	4	David Smeding	23
Nicholas Koolsbergen	7	Gail Schoon	25
Daniel Vis	7	Carolyn Vanleeuwen	28
Denise VanDelft	8	Erin Buitenwerf	29
Meghan Ludwig	9	Jacqueline Post	30
Janina Veldman	10	Carling North	31

By Busy Beaver

Eritia Smit

Eritia wrote: "I am planning to buy a piglet in spring."



6. This aged widow spent all of her time at the temple.

Quiz Time!

8. This beautiful orphan girl was reared by her uncle.

9. This young mother and her babe had to make their flight at night. _____
10. The early Christian church met in her home in Jerusalem. _____
11. She disguised herself upon her husband's request.

12. She met the same fate as her husband and was buried on his burial day. _____

WORD SEARCH

by Jacqueline Jager

A	G	O	G	L
B	A	T	E	L
O	B	A	I	O
Y	D	L	Y	G
L	L	L	E	W
O	Y	B	L	O
W	Z	T	L	W

SYMBOL CODE

by Busy Beaver Lindsey Nort

NUMBER CODE

by Busy Beaver Stephanie Post

A - 1	G - 7	M - 13	S - 19	Y - 25
B - 2	H - 8	N - 14	T - 20	Z - 26
C - 3	I - 9	O - 15		
U - 21				
D - 4	J - 10	P - 16		
V - 22				
E - 5	K - 11	Q - 17		
W - 23				
F - 6	L - 12	R - 18		
X - 24				

Can you find these words?

bat	go	yell
wow	boy	tall
low		

9 14 20 8 5 12 15 18 4 9 16 21 20

A	F ●	K *	P V	U X
B =	G ⊙	L ⊗	Q ^	V X
C //	H ⊙	M ⊕	R <	W)
D \	I x	N ⊗	S >	X {
E ○	J +	O @	T *	Y }
				Z ~

v < || x > o * q o ⊗ @ < //

● @ < q o x > ⊙ @ @ //

13 25 20 18 21 19 20

MIXED UP BIBLE NAMES

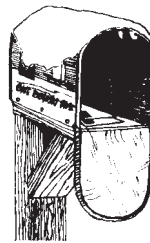
by Busy Beaver Jennifer Post

FROM THE MAILBOX

Hi again, *Eritia Smit*. It's good to hear from you again. You sure must know a lot about caring for animals by now! I'm glad to hear that your rabbits are doing well. I hope your goats have healthy kids in the spring. Keep drawing, *Eritia*. Bye now.

Hi, *Jennifer Post*. Thank you for the puzzle. I am sure it will be enjoyed by all. How do you like having school at home? I hope you continue to do well. Bye, *Jennifer*.

- | | |
|-----------|---------------|
| 1. bceear | 10. debo |
| 2. baocj | 11. ealh |
| 3. hepsjo | 12. laecrh |
| 4. vadid | 13. adina |
| 5. nossma | 14. yarm |
| 6. habar | 15. beatihelz |
| 7. ethesr | 16. iriamm |
| 8. uhtr | 17. hhaann |
| 9. oabz | |



Hello, *Luanne Feenstra*. Thanks for the neatly printed letter, and the excellent drawing. Keep it up! I hope you are feeling better now! Bye, *Luanne*.

Hi, *Stephanie Post*. How are you doing in school? Thanks for the puzzle. What are your favourite things to do? Hope to hear from you soon! Bye, *Stephanie*.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Kim VanDyk*. Your puzzle must have been a lot of work! In your next letter send your address, so I can send you a membership card! Bye, *Kim*.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Shannon Tenhage*. Do you like making and doing puzzles, and writing letters? I hope you enjoy being a member of our club. Send me a letter soon, so I know the address, and can send you a membership card. Bye, *Shannon*.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Lindsey North*. Thank you for the puzzle. What kinds of things do you like to do in your spare time? Hope to hear from you soon, *Lindsey*. Bye.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Carling North*. You and your sister wanted to join at the same time? That's fun – then you can do the puzzles together, and write letters together. What kinds of dogs do you have? In the Club we do all kinds of activities about the Bible. I hope you like them. Bye, *Carling*.

Answers for Name the Woman

I hope you enjoyed all the puzzles.
Bye for now,

Love, Aunt Betty

1. Ruth 3:11; 2. John 2:1-5; 3. Numbers 12:1; 4. Acts 23:16-24; 5. 2 Chron. 8:11; 6. Luke 2:36-37; 7. Gen. 19:15-26; 8. Esther 2:5,6,7; 9. Matt 2:11-24; 10. Acts 12:12; 11. 1 Kings 14:1-4; 12. Acts 5:1-11

