

Clarion

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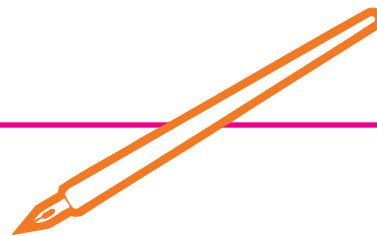


Preachers and Preaching

Numbers

10:1-10

By R. Aasman



Preparing for Marriage

A sure sign of spring and summer in church life is an increase in the number of marriages that take place. These are happy events. The very thought of a man and woman leaving their parents and becoming one causes us to stand in awe of God who in his providential care has led them to this point in their lives. How thankful we may be that in a time when marriage is not held in such high esteem by our society, Christian couples long to be married and to see their marriage as a gift from God. Of course the happiest people at a wedding are the bride and groom. They are obviously ecstatic and devoted to one another. They make clear to the family and friends that their love and devotion to one another is for a lifetime. At the same time, their family and friends are also very excited for the married couple and they offer up prayer to the Lord to give his continued blessing on this marriage. The reason for such hope and prayer is more than sentimental. There is so much at stake in a marriage. When God first created man as his image, He said in Genesis 2: "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." God's purpose in marriage is for husband and wife to help each other rejoice in the blessings of God and to offer their lives as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God. Moreover, when God gives them children, they are to raise their children to appreciate the covenant promises and demands and so walk in the ways of the Lord. Good marriages and families where God and his Word are central are basic to a flourishing church life as well. For these reasons, marriage is to be held in high estimation and to be taken seriously by all.



will be successful. As the Lord promises in Psalm 128: "Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD." Marriage is not a hit or miss proposition no matter what the statistics of our society suggest. A good and lasting marriage is guaranteed when a couple place complete trust in the Lord.

Of course certain preparations have to be made by the prospective husband and wife which will ensure a happy and blessed marriage.

Typically, some months before the marriage, a couple attends a preparation for marriage class led by their minister. It is gratifying to note that ministers are establishing marriage classes which require an engaged couple to attend several classes with the minister. In these classes lectures are given about the purpose of marriage, the roles of husband and wife in a Christian marriage, communication skills, problem solving and financial stewardship. Couples are often given questionnaires which are reviewed between the minister and the couple. Certain books and articles on marriage are also distributed. These classes provide a couple with good biblical insights into what constitutes a marriage in the Lord. Couples who attend these classes are very enthusiastic about what they have learned and they are saying that it is helping them to approach married life with insights and skills that will be a real blessing to their marriage. Of course, a marriage course can never give a couple all the insight and skills which are required for a lifetime of marriage together. There is also the possibility that the enthusiastic discussions of such a course can wear off and be forgotten in only a few weeks. Realistically, preparation for marriage is more than taking a course or reading some good literature. It has to be reinforced by a lifetime of learning and preparation for marriage.

There are many important things to consider in connection with preparation for marriage. However for the purposes of this article there are two that are most essential and therefore need to be mentioned. One key element in preparation for marriage is the example that children receive in their parents' marriage relationship. It is a fact of life that

A happy and flourishing marriage is not something that happens by chance.

However, a happy and flourishing marriage is not something that happens by chance. When a man and woman get married, they do not say to each other: let us hope for the best and see what comes of this marriage. They pray to the Lord for his blessings on their marriage and they trust on the basis of what God has said in his Word that their marriage

children learn patterns of behaviour from their home life. It is not for nothing that Scripture commands parents to teach their children well and to set a good example of a godly walk of life for their children. Children learn from their parents how to pray and read Scripture, how to communicate with others, how to love and respect, how to forgive, and so on. Children also learn a pattern for marriage from the example of their parents. Boys will learn from their father how to treat a wife. Girls will learn from their mother how to treat a husband and they will learn from their father how they may be expected to be treated by their husband. How important it is that in the light of what we are taught in Ephesians 5 that a Christian father acts as the head of his wife and children even as Christ is head of the church. That means providing proper leadership and seeing to it that his wife blossoms under his loving care so that she may rejoice in her God and in the husband that God has given her. It is equally important that a Christian mother acts as a godly wife who submits to her husband even as the church submits to Christ. By means of their example and teaching, parents are preparing their children for marriage. It is of critical importance that parents create a home environment where their children see first hand the beauty and blessing of a marriage where father and mother love each other and help each other walk in the ways of the Lord. Parents should pray to God for this and strive to set a good example for their children.

Children learn a pattern for marriage from the example of their parents.


Another key element in the preparation for marriage, in fact the most important element for a happy marriage, is that a man and woman who wish to get married must first have a living faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. They must rejoice in the gift of God's grace which causes them to be washed in Christ's blood and sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Why is this so important to a marriage relationship? Again we need to consider the basic purpose of marriage which is for husband and wife to help each other rejoice in their relationship with the Lord and to live for his praise and glory. They

are to love and respect each other, read the Word of God and pray together, attend the worship services and participate in the communion of saints. They are to forgive each other when a wrong has been done and they are to esteem each other highly. How can a husband and wife fulfill this purpose of marriage and have a fruitful relationship together unless they both love the Lord and walk in his ways? Even when we speak of the ability to love one another as Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13, it should be clear that to love another person, one must first know what it is to be loved by God. Think of what John writes in his first epistle: "this is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." John expands on this in the third and fourth chapters. When a person has experienced the incomparable love of the Father who gave his Son to die for our sins, then a person's life becomes a window by which the love of God shines through and starts to effect relationships with other people. This is also true for a marriage relationship. A husband and wife who experience the riches of God's love in Jesus Christ, will turn in love to each other and will flourish in

that love. In a good marriage, husband and wife will assist each other in rejoicing in God's love and they will more and more reflect in their marriage the unity of Christ and his church. Therefore when considering marriage, the most basic requirement that needs to be met is that a prospective marriage partner shares faith in Jesus Christ. A marriage in the Lord is a marriage that receives God's sure promise that husband and wife shall be happy and shall be blessed by the Lord.

When considering marriage, the most basic requirement that needs to be met is that a prospective marriage partner shares faith in Jesus Christ.

A well prepared marriage is one where the happy bridegroom and bride may start on their wedding day to walk hand in hand through life, together with the children whom God may give them, towards the New Jerusalem and the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb. **C**



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By D. Moes

Guard your Heart!

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the well spring of life. Proverbs 4:23

My family and I live in Vernon. It is located in the beautiful Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. Right at this moment, we are enjoying beautiful summer weather. We are surrounded by big and beautiful lakes that are a delight to the eyes and a refreshment to your bodies. Many of the hills surrounding the city are covered with all sorts of fruit trees which will soon be bearing their delicious fruits. Once summer has gone and passed, the skiing industry will begin in full swing. For Vernon is the home of a Canadian Classic known as Silver Star Mountain. It's a wonderful ski resort with lots of challenging, and not so challenging runs.

However, beautiful the city and surroundings of Vernon may be, the city and the area also have a dark side. If you were to look through the pages of one of Vernon's newspapers, you would notice that there is a lot of crime. At least once a week, there is a column known as *Crime Stoppers* which pays cash rewards up to \$2,000.00 for information leading to the arrest of any person responsible for any unsolved crime. Looking in this column one day, I noticed that over a period of no less than seven days, all sorts of items had been

stolen from stores and private homes. One day, five cellular phones were taken; another, some cigarettes and assorted candy. One day, two computers, a monitor and a printer; another some jewelry. One day, a window in a vehicle was smashed and a shirt was stolen; on the same day, a stereo, VCR, scanner, camcorder, fifty CD's and money was taken. And then I have not mentioned the tools and meat that were stolen from someone's shed.

Guarding your possessions

In the light of this, it is not surprising when you look in the *Yellow Pages* of Vernon's Telephone Book, you will find all sorts of businesses advertising burglar alarm systems. One is called *Action Electronic Security Systems* with as a slogan *Your Low Voltage Specialists*. With this company you can buy residential and commercial alarm systems. You can obtain access control and video surveillance, home theatre and automation systems, two-way live voice and ULC approved monitoring. Another company is called *Alarm Tel Home Security Systems* with as a slogan *Call the Pros*. This company specializes in live 24

hour voice and video monitoring, trained guard dispatch, perimeter and pre-entry intruder detection and telephone tamper. In total, I counted no less than twelve companies offering you their services of protection!

I find this very understandable for people to want to guard their homes and possessions. For many of us work hard to be able to enjoy some of the luxuries of life. And if you live in a city with a lot of crime, there is nothing wrong with having a good burglar alarm system installed in your home to keep unwanted guests away from your belongings.

Guarding your heart

And yet, when I look in the Bible, I also realize that our earthly possessions are not really the main thing in life. The Bible clearly tells us to focus our attention more on heavenly treasures than on our earthly ones (Matt 6:19-24). In the light of this, it should not surprise us that this same Bible also tells us to guard our hearts and to put the best security system we can find around our heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

I'm sure you all know what a well-spring is. It's a spring that is a continual

What's inside?

This issue is largely about preaching. We are very happy to publish a speech by one of our senior preachers – the Rev. M. van Beveren of Edmonton. In it, he provides some valuable words about how the elders ought to be evaluating the preaching of their minister. Rev. Van Beveren has been preaching for more than forty years and has had his preaching supervised by six different consistories. He has lots of experience and provides valuable advice.

We also have included a speech by the Rev. W. den Hollander which deals with the fruit that preaching ought to bear in the life of the hearer.

Dr. J. de Jong, our homiletician, reviews an article by the Rev. R. Visser of South Africa on preachers and preaching.

Dr. C. van Dam updates us on what is happening at the Juan Calvino seminary, a training school for preachers in Mexico.

For your visual pleasure, we have illustrated the articles about preachers and preaching with some pictures of famous preachers – the Golden-Mouthed Preacher, the Prince of Preachers, and the Thundering Scot.

Editor R. Aasman writes about another aspect of the minister's work – preparing young people for entering the blessed and blissful state of holy marriage.

May these offerings help you in how you listen to and benefit from your preacher.

GvP

source of water. It is always bubbling away supplying a person with fresh and refreshing water. It invigorates his life. It makes him feel good and fit. It gives him the renewal he needs to do a day's work and tackle a day's problems.

"Well," says God, "that is what your heart is like." That is what the center of your conscious being is like, where all your thinking, your feeling and your willing takes place. It is the wellspring of life! Just as a normal wellspring rejuvenates and refreshes, so does your heart. Just as a normal wellspring is always bubbling away and supplying a person with a fresh supply of water, so your heart can do the same. There is always activity in this heart. It is always thinking, feeling and willing. And it is always giving you a perspective on life that will make you do things in line with this perspective.

Because this is so, we would do well to do what the Proverbs 4:23 says: to guard this heart of ours and to place the best security system we can find around it. Just imagine if unwanted intruders were trying to influence this so vital center of our lives. What do you think would happen? Why they might poison our wellspring with all sorts of toxins and not only warp our vision and perspective, but also rob us of a lot of energy and vitality.

Prayer

"But," you say, "how do I do that? How do I guard my heart? How do I put the best security system there is around this so vital center of my conscious being? And where do I get such a security system?"

Well, you do not have to go to the *Yellow Pages* of your Phone Book to find out where to find this security system. All you have to do is open your Bible and you will find it there for you. When you do this, you will find that God's security system is made up of a number of different parts. One part is the important component of prayer. Whoever does not pray leaves his heart wide open to all sorts of bad influences. On the other hand, whoever does pray – and then not haphazardly, but regularly – is busy placing a very important component of God's security system around his heart. For such a person will pray, "Father, of myself, I am too weak to guard my heart. Of myself, I am tempted to expose it to all sorts of temptations. Of myself, I am not better than anyone else. I am prone to seek my happiness and well-being in

earthly treasures. I am inclined to think more of myself than someone else. I am liable to steal from you and from others as well. O LORD, help me not to do this. Help me to use the gifts and talents and possessions you have given me to promote your interests and well-being of others."

When you pray like this, you are installing something powerful in your life. You are putting up a tremendously strong wall against all the temptations that assail you.

The Word of God

Another component of your divine security system is saturating your mind with the Word of God. Again, anyone who does not saturate his mind with this Word of God, has all sorts of other words living in his mind. Words that focus not on his true heavenly treasure, but on those you enjoy here on this earth. When that is the case, such a person's heart can only be wide open to being broken into and entered. Such a person's behaviour will make it on the *Crime Stoppers* list every time. June 17: defrauded someone. June 15: was dishonest in my business dealings. June 13: abused and squandered my gifts. June 11: did not promote my neighbours' good. June 9: did not deal with my neighbour as I would have liked him to deal with me. June 7: did not work faithfully so that I was able to give to those in need.

Just like the component of prayer, the Word of God is a very vital part of the security system that guards our hearts. We need it, to keep the wellspring of our hearts pure and to keep people and agencies from stealing our hearts.

A humble and dependent spirit

A final component of our heavenly security system is the component of a humble and dependent spirit. If such a spirit is not living in our hearts, we will become proud and arrogant. We will try to get for ourselves what we can get for ourselves. We will become enslaved to our own greed and hoard as much wealth and good for ourselves and our children. When we think we are not getting enough, we will begin to worry. We will begin to fret and stew, losing our sleep and losing our composure, all because we are worried we will not get enough. On the other hand, when a humble and dependent spirit lives in our hearts, we will guard and protect ourselves against all these

and other materialistic sins. We will not worry about tomorrow, for we know that if God feeds the birds and clothes the lilies, He will much more feed and clothes us, his dearly beloved children. And we will not become enslaved to our own greed, for we know that money and possession are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end: namely, this end the interests of our God and well-being of all those around us. With a humble and dependent spirit living in our hearts, we will remember the words of our Saviour, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). "God loves the cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7). And "Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:38).

Install it today

What a tremendously powerful security system these three components make: prayer, the Word of God, and a humble and dependent spirit! *Action Electronic Security Systems* may be *Your Low Voltage Specialists*. This heavenly security system is *Your High Voltage Specialist*. For it contains the voltage and power of no one less than the Holy Spirit of the living God Himself. *Alarm Tel Home Security Systems* may offer you a live 24 hour voice and video monitoring system, perimeter and pre-entry intruder detection. Your heavenly security system beats this all. For it does not just monitor what you can see. It also monitors what you cannot see. It penetrates deeply into your heart and exposes the burglars that are roaming around in your heart. At the same time, it has the power to throw them out and keep them out.

This security system will not cost you lots of money. It is free for all those who desire it. If you know that your heart is the wellspring of life, if you know that people and agencies are out to steal your heart then install this security system today. Do not wait for tomorrow. Do it right way. And continue to maintain it every day of your life.

Dick Moes helps God's people install security systems in their hearts by preaching the gospel and pastoring the congregation of the Canadian Reformed Church in Vernon BC.



Evaluation of the Preaching by the Elders

By M. van Beveren

This article first served as a speech at the Alberta Office-Bearers Conference hosted by Calgary, February 14, 1998. The speaking style has been retained.

Right and Duty

All the churches have *sermon discussions* on the agenda of consistory meetings on a more-or-less regular basis, and the elders certainly want to carry out their responsibility to ensure that “in every respect the congregation is edified by the pure doctrine of the gospel.” But the question is, “How should this be done?” and, “What should we be looking for?”

Article 73 of the Church Order states, “The ministers, elders, and deacons shall mutually exercise Christian censure and shall exhort and kindly admonish one another with regard to the execution of their office.” That article does not give the ministers, elders and deacons the right to admonish each other, if necessary, but rather, it recognizes their right to do so. That right is given with their *office*. Each may have a different office, a specific task, but as servants of the Lord they are one in their responsibility to see that God’s Word will prevail and the congregation be built up in the faith. They are, as the apostle Paul says, each other’s fellow servants, fellow workers, fellow soldiers (Rom 16:9, 21; Col 1:7; 4:7). They have to work in the closest possible cooperation. With that in mind we can speak of “evaluation of the preaching.” The elders have the responsibility to ensure that in every respect the congregation is edified by the pure doctrine of the gospel. It is a responsibility that comes with their office.

Necessity

What that office entails is spelled out in many places of the New Testament. Apart from Article 30-32 of the Belgic Confession and Article 23 of our Church Order, we have a good sum-

mary in the *Form for Ordination in the Book of Praise*. I quote freely: The elders have received authority from Christ. The Holy Spirit has made them guardians to tend the flock of God. They are called bishops or overseers, shepherds, stewards and watchmen over the house of God. Together with the minister they have supervision over Christ’s church. Together with the minister they exercise Christian discipline. They assist the ministers with good counsel and advice and are also charged with the supervision over the doctrine and conduct of these fellow servants. They shall permit no strange teaching, so that in every respect the congregation is edified by the pure doctrine of the gospel. They must watch diligently that no wolves enter the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd.

The elders have the responsibility to ensure that in every respect the congregation is edified by the pure doctrine of the gospel.

So, among the many tasks of the elders is also the supervision over the teaching and preaching of the ministers. As the preaching is one of the most important tasks of the minister, so is the supervision over the preaching one of the most important duties of the elders. The preaching is the life-blood of the Church. The Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples to preach the gospel (Matt 10:7; Mark 16:15). The apostles tell us: “preach the Word” (2 Tim 4:1-5). And Paul asks in Romans 10, “How are they to hear without a preacher?” “Faith,” he says, “comes

from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.”

Those are just a few texts of the many to show that the preaching should have the full attention of the consistories. They have a tremendous task, impossible for sinful men if not the Lord had given his promises. And that is why in the *Prayer for the Office-Bearers* we ask the Lord that He may grant the elders more and more the gifts they need – wisdom, courage, discretion and mercy.

Guidelines

Now, for what should the elders be looking? In other words, what are the guidelines for the evaluation of the preaching? To answer that question, we have to realize and agree on what preaching is. Otherwise we easily set out on a slippery slope. Everyone of us may have his own expectations from the preaching. We may have our personal wishes for a sermon. We might even be guided by unhealthy desires, desires of individuals or preferences of the congregation. We may also be influenced by modern trends regarding the worship service.

When we now try to define what preaching is according to the Scriptures and what the essential elements of such a preaching are, we are at the same time formulating the norms for the evaluation by the elders. The requirements for the sermon are also the rules by which the elders listen. We first then realize that preaching is not just delivering a good speech; it is not presenting an educational essay or a theological lecture. It is giving a message. That is how the Bible speaks about preaching. When the apostle Paul says to Timothy, “Preach the Word,” we could translate that as: Proclaim the Word as a herald, loud and clear. A herald is sent out to announce publicly the great tid- ing of the coming of the King and his Kingdom. Preaching is also proclaiming

the good news, the gospel, the evangel, giving the happy message of God's grace in Christ. Another word in the Bible for preaching is "being a witness," giving a testimony. That is not a testimony of one's own spiritual experiences. It is a judicial term, as used in court. It is giving a testimony about God's mighty deeds, e.g., the resurrection of Christ, over against the denials of the unbelieving world and over against the opposition of God's rebellious covenant people.

There are many more aspects of the preaching such as we find in words like teaching, admonishing, convincing, rebuking. But this is clear: the preacher is to give a message, not of his own, but the message of Him who has sent him. The minister is to be a herald, a preacher of good tidings, a witness in the biblical sense, and – as Paul says it – an ambassador of Christ (2 Cor 5:20). And in church, the minister is not giving a message to an audience of strangers, but to a people that has been called out of darkness to God's wonderful light, the Lord's covenant people.

Preaching as kingdom keys

It is also important to remember what we confess in Q. & A. 84 of the Heidelberg Catechism about preaching. "The Kingdom of heaven is opened when it is proclaimed and publicly testified to each and every believer that God has really forgiven all their sins for the sake of Christ's merits, as often as they by true faith accept the promise of the gospel." And further, "The Kingdom of heaven is closed when it is proclaimed and testified to all unbelievers and hypocrites that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them as long as they do not repent."

Covenantal preaching

The *Form for Baptism*, that beautiful summary of the covenant, says that the sacrament signifies and seals to us God's promises. Which promises? None other than those which are constantly preached and should be preached to His people, namely, that we are adopted as children and heirs of God the Father; that we are washed in the blood of Christ; and that the Holy Spirit will dwell in us. Moreover, we are called and obliged to a new obedience. *Preaching, then, is proclaiming God's promises to a people that always needs to be strengthened in the faith and that constantly needs to be called to a new life.*

Joyful preaching

Preaching comes to us in many forms. There is a great variety even in the sermons of one minister. That is to be expected, since a sermon is based on and determined by text and context. Whatever text is used for the sermon, the congregation should be shown the riches we have in Christ. The sermon should always be the happy and comforting message that through Christ's sacrifice we are set free from the power of sin and death, and receive a new life through God's Spirit. And when admonitions are to be made, it should be done on the basis of the promise that through Christ we have a gracious and faithful God and Father, and that in thankfulness we may give our life to Him, because Christ gave his life for us. To say it briefly: "Christ should be preached." Apart from Him the congregation cannot rejoice. After all, the preaching of the gospel is a joyful event.

***The preaching
of the gospel is a
joyful event.***

Applicatory preaching

It is important, of course, that the preaching reaches the daily life of the congregation. Since God's Word has authority over all aspects of life, the preaching should take into account the struggles, difficulties, dangers, weaknesses and prevailing sins in the congregation. The Word of God should shine over our marriages, our families, and in the upbringing of our children as well as over our place and task in our society and in the world in which we live. Where necessary, the congregation should be encouraged, comforted and admonished. Young people also should know that they are addressed by the Word of God.

I believe I have mentioned the most important requirements for the preaching. When we now ask, "What should the elders be looking for?" We answer again: The requirements for the preaching are also the norms for the evaluation by the elders. Other aspects of the preaching could have attention, for instance, the way the sermon is presented, the language used. Sometimes, little changes in those areas may make it easier for the congregation to follow the sermon. But the great question for

the elders is: *Does the congregation hear God's promises proclaimed and are they reminded of their obligations to the Lord? Is God's Word applied to the congregation in a message that has bearing on their every-day life?*

Scriptural preaching

If those requirements would be neglected, we could have sermons pleasing to the ear and a preaching exactly to our taste. But the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17), the living and active Word of God (Heb 4:12), would not be handled. The congregation, therefore, would be in great danger. We should never forget that the authority with which the minister is speaking does not lie in his personality, and not in the beautiful expressions he may be using, nor in the smooth sermon he is presenting, and not in strong convictions he may have, but solely in what God has revealed in the Scriptures. To the Corinthians the apostle Paul says (1 Cor 2:1-5), "I did not proclaim to you the testimony of God in lofty words or human wisdom, but in demonstration of the power of the Spirit, so that your faith might not rest on the wisdom of men but on God's power." When the consistory is convinced that the minister preaches in accordance with the Scriptures and that he is diligent in using the talents God has given him, there should be deep thankfulness to the Lord for the grace He is giving to the congregation.

When the consistory has on the agenda the item of discussing the preaching, they do not go by one or a few sermons (unless, of course, a sermon is clearly against Scripture). The consistory will speak about the preaching as they have heard it during an extended period. According to the Form for the Ordination and Installation of ministers, the minister should declare to the congregation "the whole counsel of God." That expression is used by the apostle Paul when in his farewell speech to the elders in Ephesus he said, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). We have to keep in mind that at that time Paul had been preaching in Ephesus for three years. It goes without saying that no minister will ever be able to fathom the depth of the riches and wisdom of God as revealed in Scripture (Eph 3:18,19; Rom 11:33).

The minister

We should never think that for a minister it is easy to make a sermon

because he has studied for it. Making a sermon can never be a matter of routine. Understanding the Scriptures does not just come through natural gifts. In general we know how a sermon is born. The minister chooses the text. Usually, he will make sure that during a year there is a certain balance between texts taken from the Old and from the New Testament. He will study the text while using the rules for exegesis, and will consider the context, then try to find what the Lord is teaching in this part of the Scriptures. Next he can explain and show how the text is relevant for our faith and how it has bearing upon our life in Christ. It has been said that in his study the minister is to preach to himself first. I believe it is essential. He has to submit himself to the authority of God's Word. Only then, as a servant and instrument of the Lord, he will be able to deliver the message. That is what the congregation will hear, and that is what the elders are listening to.

We all know that no sermon is perfect; there is no perfect minister. The minister himself will be the first to say so. It is not difficult to find weaknesses. But when we just look for weaknesses and close our eyes for the strength of a minister and for the gifts God gave him, we not only do injustice to him as a person, but we also misunderstand the way the Lord sends us preachers. We then better read again how the apostle Paul writes about Christ's ambassadors. They have the treasure of God's Word in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7. "Not by power nor by might, but by My Spirit," says the LORD.

The task of the elders is a serious one and a delicate one. It requires wisdom, tact, and above all, a brotherly spirit.

The elders

Since elders are not directly involved in making the sermons, and in most cases have not received formal theological training, it can be asked whether they are able to truly supervise the preaching. The answer is a wholehearted "Yes, they are!" if and when they themselves submit to God's Word; if and when they acquaint themselves



*John Chrysostom (c. 344/354 - 407)
The most distinguished of Greek patristic preachers, John earned the name "Chrysostomos" ("Golden-mouthed").*

more and more with the Scriptures; or – as the form for their ordination says – when they train themselves in godliness and diligently search the Scriptures. The answer is "Yes!" if and when they prayerfully rely on the promises the Lord gives them for their office. They have to watch not only over the flock, but also over themselves, as Paul says in Acts 20. Having faithful elders for the upbuilding of the Church is a blessing from the Lord.

Article 73 does not set a time or time-table for the evaluation of the preaching. This means that consistories themselves can decide when to place it on the agenda. As far as I know, there is a great variety in this respect and there are different customs. I have the impression that some consistories seldom, if ever, have evaluation of the preaching as a separate item on the agenda. Is that dishonouring Article 73? Not necessarily. I can envision a consistory, especially a smaller consistory, not having that item on the agenda, yet speaking about the preaching quite frequently. They may do so when, for instance, visits in the congregation are discussed and when special needs are mentioned. At that time the elders may give the minister worthwhile advice and helpful hints in a relaxed atmosphere. It is not unthinkable that the minister himself will use the opportunity to ask the elders whether his preaching and the presentation of his

sermons are edifying and profitable for the congregation. With such an approach it is hardly necessary to have evaluation of the preaching as a special item. It has also the advantage of constant and immediate interaction between minister and elders, instead of observing a waiting period till the appointed time of the agenda.

Mutual censure

Article 73 requires that the "mutual censure" will take place some way or another. The office bearers should not work besides each other individualistically. They have a corporate responsibility and have to function as a body. It is understandable that especially the larger consistories with a busy agenda want to make sure that this censure is not forgotten. They may prefer to set a special time, for instance, every three or four, or more months, for the evaluation of the preaching.

We know the usual procedure. The chairman will ask the brothers if anyone has to say something about the preaching of the minister. It is quite possible that some elders, even if they would like to say something, are hesitant to speak up, afraid that they would give the impression of being unduly critical. That may be an admirable attitude, yet, it is not correct. It defeats the purpose of this Christian censure. Another extreme may be that elders who have been saving their remarks, now use the opportunity to relieve their conscience. The result may be that the minister is almost buried under an avalanche of well-meant advice. We should not think lightly about the task of the elders. It is a serious one and a delicate one. It requires wisdom and tact, and above all a brotherly spirit.

Kindly admonition

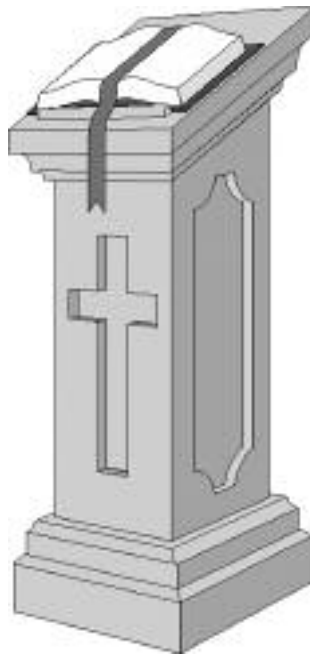
Article 73 tells us that the office bearers should admonish one another kindly. That word "kindly" finds a place here not as a result of modern psychology. It dates back to the early days of the Reformed Churches. In the Church Order of 1578 we read the rule "that the Christian admonitions should be done in love." Eight years later, 1586, it was changed into "kindly admonish one another." That was more than 400 years ago. The early fathers were well aware that this censure could be misused by someone for personal reasons or to just show one's authority as an elder. I do not have to convince you that such a misuse does not occur among us anymore.

Now, again, what can be discussed? I have already mentioned the most important question: Is the consistory convinced that the preaching is in accordance with the Scriptures. Are God's promises in Christ proclaimed and is the congregation admonished to live in holiness before the Lord according to their obligations to Him. The consistory may also expect that the minister pays sufficient attention to the explanation of the text, to clarity in his presentation, and that he applies God's Word to the congregation in their various circumstances. Elders can be of great help for understanding the special needs of the congregation. They may be closer to the membership than the minister. The consistory is also to make sure that the minister has sufficient time for study, and that he edifies the congregation in accordance with the talents he has received. Elders should not try to press the minister into their own mould and according to their own preferences. Every minister has his own personality (which you knew already); he has his own system of doing work and his own way of approaching people.

When it is necessary to make remarks about the ministry, the elders should beforehand know what they are going to speak about and organize their thoughts. Bluntly starting criticizing the minister does not show wisdom and discretion. The best way in my opinion is to start out with questions and to give the minister time to answer. His reply may even solve a problem immediately. Never be impressed if the minister would say, "I know because I studied at the College." But the elders should listen when he says, "This is what the Scriptures say."

***No office bearer is
beyond healthy
and constructive
criticism and
supervision.***

The elders may not always agree with the minister. And that is not necessary either. But there should always be respect, mutual respect. Article 73 is meant to assist and to encourage each other. If the result of the evaluation of the preaching is that the minister becomes depressed, there must have been something lacking, something missing in the discussion. And if a minister is to do



his work in sadness, it is of no advantage to the congregation (Heb 13:17).

Time table

We have noted that Article 73 does not stipulate a time for the "mutual Christian censure." Nor does Article 73 give any indication about the method to be used. Consistories are free to make this "censure" a special agenda item or not. What then is the value of this Article? It points out and wants to guarantee that no office bearer is beyond healthy and constructive criticism and supervision. It makes sure that if shortcomings become apparent, those shortcomings will be addressed, will be dealt with and, if possible, be corrected. How? That is up to every consistory. If a consistory decides to have evaluation of the preaching at a fixed time, so be it. The question is: is that the ideal and most desirable situation?

I mentioned already that in smaller consistories the preaching may be discussed quite often, e.g., during reports of family visits and in discussions about the needs of the congregation. It could be a great opportunity for a relaxed and frank exchange of thoughts. And should there not be regular personal contact of the elders with the minister and of the minister with the elders? Should they not share the joy and the difficulties of their office? And should the door of the minister's study not always be open for an elder who may have questions about the preaching? The supervision of Article 73

means brotherly cooperation. And that should not be restricted to a consistory meeting.

For the benefit of Christ's Church

In closing allow me to give some personal examples. When one elder was going to make some remarks about my preaching he always started out graciously. He would say, "That was very good, pastor, but. . . ." A compliment was given before criticism. Or many years ago as a new and inexperienced minister I had an elder in the consistory who took a piece of paper and wrote down what he believed was lacking in my approach. After a few weeks he slipped that paper into my hands and said, "You should read that." I am sure he never talked to his fellow elders about it. And from him I received wonderful advice. I admit, he also listed some of his personal hobby-horses. And I would tell him when I did not agree with him. But it created trust and a brotherly atmosphere. It is sermon evaluation that flows from that trust and kindness and a true brotherly atmosphere which will benefit Christ's congregation.

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**A SHORT SERMON
LISTENING GUIDE
FOR THE MEMBER
IN THE PEW**

1. What was the main message of the sermon?
2. How did the sermon strengthen your faith in God?
3. How did the sermon affect your outlook on yourself, your neighbour, and your environment?
4. What aspect of the sermon was particularly striking for you? How do you plan to remember this?
5. What part of the sermon do you think you should put into practice in your daily life?
6. What part of the sermon would you include in your prayers?
7. How did the way in which you listened to the sermon affect the way in which you heard the message?



Experience of Faith is a Fruit of the Word

By W. den Hollander

This article first served as a speech delivered at the annual League Day of the Women's Societies of Ontario held on October 8, 1997. The speaking style has been retained.

A personal relationship with God

One of the primary pursuits in the religious affairs of our time is a personal relationship with God. Under the strong influence of Evangelicals, Baptists, and Pentecostals, the believer's spiritual attention is focused on the experience of God's nearness and on God's close involvement with our life. More and more we see the emphasis placed on personal spirituality. Faith is something personal and private which is experienced in the inner intimacy of the believer's heart. This emphasis is connected with the development of an image of God as a dear Father with whom you may be intimate friends. An image like that is conducive for such a personal approach in the matter of faith. One of the serious dangers in this development is the possibility that the God whom we experience in this way is a God whom we design rather than the God who revealed himself in his Word. Nevertheless, the general desire of experiencing a personal relationship with God is an important matter worthy of our serious attention.

***Do ministers
insufficiently stimulate
the personal
appropriation of the
message?***

The importance of our attention for this matter may be highlighted by the fact that in our midst as well, such a personal relationship with God is propagated. Our first reaction to such a trend can and may be very positive.



*John Knox
(c. 1514-1572)
nicknamed
"The Thundering
Scot."*

Who would have a problem with the sincere spiritual desire for a personal relationship with our God? The fact, however, that this desire needs special attention is remarkable. The observation that this personal relationship seems to be missing in the general perception of the spiritual life of the believers in our churches should at least alarm us. Could this be true? Is that relationship of a personal and intimate bond with the LORD missing? I remember vividly that this was the most disturbing reaction in my heart and mind to the articles of our sister F. Van der Boom (*Reformed Perspective* Dec. '95 - March '96) Could it be true, that after decades of redemptive-historical preaching proclaiming our covenant relationship with the LORD a sincere child of God like Mrs. Van der Boom

discovers that there was no personal relationship with the LORD – that in her covenant relationship the Lord Jesus never became her personal Saviour? Therefore, taking her discovery seriously, as pastor I started very intensely to consider what could be the cause.

The appropriation of the Gospel

Let me state here, up front, that it is not my intention to interact with the articles published in *Reformed Perspective*. They did awaken in me a special interest, however, for what the preaching should mean for the believer's personal experience of faith. Could it be, perhaps, that a lack of attention in the preaching for the personal relationship of faith has led to such a spiritual condition? To put it in more dogmatic terms: Is this the result of a lack of attention to

the subjective aspect in the preaching? Does Mrs. Van der Boom's experience prove the allegation true that the preaching in our churches is too objective, and therefore open to the danger of "covenant automatism?" In the preaching much attention is given to the exegesis of the text, the historical aspects as well, while the application for our life and time ideally comes interspersed through the sermon. But what of the "appropriation," the matter of the listener's response of faith, making the message his or her own, accepting the promises, the admonitions, for their own life of faith in the Lord?

Scriptural experiential preaching pursues the obedience of faith which is worked by the Spirit.

Experiential preaching

It is in this context that the term "experiential preaching" should be mentioned. In the framework of discussions about this personal relationship with the LORD the observation is made again and again that this kind of preaching has always been treated too much as a step-child in our churches. One of the arguments in the discussion concerning the preaching today is the complaint that everything is dealt with in such a cold, objective manner, displaying too much distance between us and the LORD, between the believer and our Saviour Jesus Christ. In our churches the attention for the personal experience of faith is not very well developed. Hence, the effect is seen in the believer's personal devotion as well. Devotional life is developed too little, so that the reading of the Scriptures, meditation, and personal prayer appear difficult or are altogether absent.

Before we go deeper into this matter of the "experiential preaching," I think we should not gloss over such a complaint. It is important for ministers and listeners alike to consider this point: Do ministers insufficiently stimulate the personal appropriation of the message, and do you as the members who listen to the preaching not work with the message for the development of your personal bond of faith with the LORD your God and Christ your Saviour? One opinion which has been expressed in the discussion of this situation is the proposi-

tion that due to developments in our recent church history we have become fixated on points of doctrine such as "the church," so that many other elements in our confession and life of faith lacked sufficient attention. Elements such as our spiritual struggles with temptations, with doubt, with the consciousness of sin and guilt, with the suffering for Christ's sake, bearing our cross after Him, have been neglected too much, if not ignored. If this is so, we should certainly alert each other to such a deficiency in the preaching. How should this be remedied, however? Is the answer for this situation found in a turning to more "experiential preaching?"

It is becoming high time, I would say, that we look a bit more closely at this term. In our circles we are familiar with terms such as "redemptive-historic preaching," which is then often contrasted with what has been called "exemplaric preaching." But what should we understand "experiential preaching" to mean? "Experiential preaching," according to various proponents, is the aspect in the preaching dealing with the processes of the heart. It tries to show from the Scriptures what goes on in the hearts of believers, what God's Spirit works in those hearts, what the soul experiences and feels when the Holy Spirit sheds his light upon his own work in the heart, and what the soul misses and suffers when in darkness and doubt.

Faith without experience is dead.

Pietism

In the history of the church after the Great Reformation the emphasis on this experience of God's work in our hearts has seen various developments. In Pietism it turned into a preaching descriptive of the subjective experiences of an elite kind of believers: the ones who "had an experience." Especially after the so-called Second Reformation (in the 17th and 18th centuries), during a time in which rationalism (or intellectualism) made inroads in the church leading to a dead orthodoxy, experiential preaching was a reaction to this trend and instead exposed the believer's inner processes and pursued a personal sanctification of life. Also during the 19th century, in certain orthodox Reformed circles, a peculiar kind of spirituality developed in which conversion stories, personal callings, and distinct experiences of the

work of the Holy Spirit in the heart were promoted through what was called "experiential preaching" [Dutch: *bevin-delijke prediking*].

Preachers, as well as listeners, have to watch for external repentance only.

Due to the fact that this so-called "experiential preaching" became identified and equated with this pietistic, subjectivistic, and individualistic spirituality, it obtained a negative reputation. It led to a reputation of apathy, doubt, uncertainty, a denial of the genuine offer of the gospel and a questioning of the sincerity of God's promises in the covenant. This development, however, is very deplorable. For the experience of faith is part and parcel of the entire response of faith to the preaching of the Word. Scriptural experiential preaching pursues the obedience of faith which is worked by the Spirit, but which shows indeed in the life of love for the LORD, surrender to the Christ and holiness in daily conduct.

The covenantal experience of faith

Throughout the times following the Great Reformation, this matter of the subjective element also received ample attention in the right manner. From our studies of church history we may recall the names of ministers like Voetius, or Van Lodensteyn, or à Brakel in the Netherlands, while Bunyan could be mentioned for similar developments in England. One of the names in the more recent history, which the older ones among us may remember, is the name of Dr. J.G. Woelderink, who already far before the Liberation promoted an experiential faith as fruit of a life in the covenant. Covenant, he taught, means unity, communion, friendship, intimacy. In his preaching, which perhaps would not be labeled with the adjective "experiential," he pursued the scriptural notion that faith revives and activates the whole man, including his emotions. He emphasized that where faith has spiritual depth there will be an experiential life with the God of the covenant. Faith without experience is dead. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart. . . ." (Matt 22: 37-40) In his preaching Woelderink appealed to his listeners to increase in daily prayer, in



order that their daily intimacy with God for their walk and talk would be deepened, for, as he observed, in reality their daily conversation was too superficial, too external, lacking the true depth of the covenantal experience of faith.

An essential aspect of faith is having a personal relationship with God.

Emotions set free

At all times, preachers as well as listeners have to watch for external repentance only. Over against a preaching which suffices with external change (as already Judah displayed in response to the prophetic preaching under Josiah's reign. Jer 3:10), scriptural preaching must seek the heart of the hearers. Also today, the response to redemptive-historical preaching may not be a matter of "no bars, no drugs, no drinks," but should be that of a new life in the Lord. In the preaching a walk in faith with the LORD should not be taken to mean just participation in Reformed education, Reformed organizations, but more as obedience of faith in every aspect of our walk and talk. Experiential preaching, therefore, should be part and parcel of covenantal preaching. Not even all that long ago, Dr. C. Trimp wrote in *Reformatie* that the true covenantal preaching will set man's feeling, man's emotions free.

The friends of God

An essential aspect of faith is having a personal relationship with God. It

would therefore be legitimate to ask in the preaching, "How is your bond with the LORD, your relationship with Christ?" The preaching must pay attention to God's intimate and personal involvement with his people. However, this should be done within the framework of the covenant relationship with the LORD and the proclamation of God's great works of creation and deeds of salvation. In that context, the preaching may help the covenant people to grow and increase in the Lord. In the covenant preaching the Scriptures themselves lead us in the pursuit of an experienced faith.

Going over too quickly to the comfort in Christ weakens the depth of our thankfulness.

For the announcement of this afternoon's topic I suggested that Psalm 25:14 be included. In the history of the quest for an "experiential preaching" this text has played an important role – and rightly so. Psalm 25 being a so-called "Alphabetic Psalm (each verse beginning with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet), David shows us the ABC of the covenant-communion. Verse 14 of this Psalm speaks about "the friendship of the LORD." The word used there is rather common for every special relationship which could be called "intimate." It denotes a nearness between people, but also the nearness for which many a psalmist prays to God: ". . . be Thou near me." The connotations of this nearness, this friendship, are the confi-

dentiality, the intimacy, which belong to a very close relationship.

A relationship like this can best be illustrated with the life of Abraham, the father of all the believers and thus may be accepted as characteristic for every believer in the covenant, or as it says in this text, "for all those who fear the LORD." In the Old Testament (2 Chron 20:7, Isa 41:7) and the New (James 2:23) Abraham is called a "friend of God." To him the LORD "made known" his covenant. This means not only that the LORD stated his covenant promises and obligations, confirmed them, and re-iterated them time and again, but also that he intimated his counsel, his plans, yes even that he gave to Abraham a place of communication, an opportunity for pleading. To him the LORD opened his heart (Gen 17). Job, as well, expressed his life with the LORD in a similar way. "When the friendship of God was upon my tent" (Job 29:4). The covenant-intimacy over his life was like the rainbow arching over his tent, as the covenant-love embracing his entire life.

Experience his friendship

Thus, the LORD manifests himself as the God who walks with us, listens to us, involves us in his plans, in his works of salvation and in the decision making process (by our prayers, for instance.). Also the Lord Jesus emphasizes this intimate relationship when He stresses in John 16:27, "For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father." Now as the Lord Jesus brings out here, this intimate friendship is never one-sided. It is for those who fear HIM, for those who take their life in the covenant with HIM seriously, who take HIM seriously in their life. The question, therefore, must be asked by the preaching time and again: "What are you doing with this relationship?" Don't wait until you feel something before you submit to such a life in intimacy with the LORD; no, submit to the LORD (repent and believe, that is.), and you will experience his friendship.

Covenant intimacy

This one example may now serve to show us that the preaching, by which the LORD makes known his covenant intimacy, will help the listeners grow and increase in the LORD. In fact, the entire book of Psalms is an eminent source to lead the covenant people to such experiences of faith. For these Psalms testify of joy (4), comfort (23:40),

hope (73:24), pleasures (36:8, 9), trust (22:50), grace (32:5), love (116:1), obedience (119:97, 140), as experiences of faith. Similar experiences, however, are also described in many of the historic accounts portraying covenant people like Abraham as he is tested by famine, or Israel tested in the desert, or Jacob as he wrestles with the LORD, or David in his humiliation due to the census he takes, or Joseph in his trials before he is exalted.

Exemplaric preaching

In preaching about these accounts, the preacher does not need to take an "exemplaric" approach in order to bring out the matter of their experiences of faith, but as the Holy Spirit does through the author of the epistle to the Hebrews in chapter 11, these accounts may be used by the preacher to proclaim the LORD as the Deliverer of his covenant people, on whom He works for the refinement of their faith. Hence the listeners may learn to see and say as well ". . . what God has done to their soul" (Ps 66; 118), so that they may remind themselves with the words of Psalm 103: "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." In this way the preaching helps the listeners in their meditation on the message and in the contemplation of the Word for their own walk with the LORD. God's covenant people must learn to deal with their guilt, with the temptations in their life, with the LORD's way for their life. The experience of sin and guilt before God is essential for our experience of faith. Going over too quickly to the comfort in Christ weakens the depth of our thankfulness as well.

Our confessions are rich in expressing a scriptural experience of our faith.

Catechism preaching

Also in the exposition of the doctrine of salvation as this is done in the afternoon-service this experiential aspect in the preaching can be abundantly communicated. Our confessions are rich in expressing a scriptural experience of our faith. In them we confess the struggle of faith and conversion, the heartfelt sorrow over sin and the heartfelt joy over a walk in obedience. In various

contexts the practice of godliness is highlighted. The reality of believing in the justification by faith alone is always paired with a walk in holiness (not as a service by which we have to earn our salvation, but as a fruit of the newness of life which we have in Christ and as a foretaste of a life with God). On the one hand the confession brings out the desire and prayer for perfection, while on the other hand the weakness of our faith and the grieving of the Holy Spirit in the life of believers do not remain hidden either. There is the spiritual joy, as well as the time in which we could lose a sense of God's favour. Especially in the Canons of Dort the description of that wonderful work of the Holy Spirit in our heart contains experiences in which the emotions and will of man are stirred very noticeably (I, 12; III/IV, art. 11, 12). The confessions, therefore, also help us consciously to experience the love and grace of God, expressing as they do these realities found in the Holy Scriptures.

Experiences and feelings concerning a personal relationship with God must always be subject to the norms of Scripture.

Dilemmas

At this point it may be helpful to pay attention to a dilemma that is often made when it comes to the effect of the preaching. Some people contrast believing with your mind with believing with your feeling. The rational aspect, then, is considered to be expressed especially in the Reformed doctrine (the confessions), while the observation is made that the believer's feeling does not come into the picture. As a result it is often alleged that the youth is interested in evangelical circles.

As you may have concluded already from the summary of this doctrine I just gave, you will agree with me how false a dilemma this is. We cannot separate feeling and mind that sharply, for by faith God makes the whole man new; He makes him alive: your thoughts, your feelings, your will, your whole life is moved by your new heart. It is true that by faith we flee to Christ, embrace Him and all his benefits, have communion with Him. Through Him we have communion with God, which renders the believer abundant joy. However,

sometimes we don't experience this joy. Then we may still note thankfully that our assurance of faith does not rest in this feeling of joy, but in Christ.

As a result of this false dilemma between feeling and mind, the opinion is often raised that a sermon should always "touch" the hearers. For many people a sermon is "good" only when they have been touched by it. But it is not that the sermon should always do something to you, but that you should always do something with the sermon. It is true that the Holy Spirit entrusts to us all we have in Christ, but the believers themselves also appropriate the gifts of salvation.

Songs and Psalms of Praise

The same applies to the emotional aspect of the worship-service. True believers who sing the Psalms as songs of praise expressing the covenant faithfulness and steadfast love of the LORD will experience the singing as joyous and as very uplifting for their heart, soul, and mind. If you have a daily intimacy with the LORD, every sermon will have an impact on your daily walk with Him. However, if your meetings with Him in your daily life are scarce and superficial, your whole relationship with the LORD will also be poor. Then the worship service and sermon will stay outside of your daily spiritual life as well. "For to his saints who in their hearts Him seek He will proclaim his steadfast words of peace." Those who experience the worship service as a meeting with the LORD in which the LORD opens his heart to you, shows his love for you in Jesus Christ, they will also give themselves to the LORD. To such people the whole exercise of worship is already an experience of communion, and the participation of the LORD's Supper in that context becomes an experience of God's wonderful love.

Experiences must be there, since they are portrayed in the Scriptures (especially the book of Psalms) as indispensable for a life in godliness and as the blessed fruit of a walk in intimacy with the LORD. However, these experiences are fruit of the preaching of the Word. Experiences do not precede faith, neither do our feelings prove that we do believe. Experiences and feelings concerning a personal relationship with God must always be subject to the norms of Scripture.

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By J. De Jong



Preach God's Word

Under the heading above, Rev. Rob Visser of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa writes in the paper *Kompas*, the "church magazine" of the FRCSA devoted to building up Reformed life in that country. Rev Visser's article highlights the important place of preaching in a Reformed setting.

1. In Whose Service Does the Preacher Stand?

Those who are called to preach the Word in the congregation are called ministers of the Word. Paul often writes about the administration of the gospel with which he and other preachers had been charged. There are two important examples of this in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; but our competence is from God, who has also qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills but the spirit makes alive. And if the dispensation of death, carved in letters of stone, came with such splendour that the children of Israel were not able to look at Moses' face because of its brightness, fading as this was, shall not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendour? (2 Cor 3: 5-8). All this is from God who through Christ, has reconciled us to himself and has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation; that is God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the ministry of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:18-20).¹

The administration that a preacher of the gospel has received, he received from God. He stands in the service



Charles Haddon Spurgeon
"The Prince of Preachers"
(1834-1892)

of Christ, and must function as a representative of Christ. He must also be an upright minister of Christ, a servant of the Word of Christ. He may not proclaim his own words and ideas, but must proclaim the word of his master (Acts 6:4).

The preacher as proclaimer of the Word does not stand in the first place in the service of the consistory or the congregation. This may never happen. A consistory or congregation may also not reason this way. The minister is called to proclaim the Word of Christ on the pulpit and not the leadership strategy of the consistory. The preacher is not called to preach what appeals to the consistory or the congregation, but what Christ says in his Word. This means that in the administration of the Word the minister must always remain independent over against others. This is clear when we read 2 Timothy 4:1,2.

And I charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who will come to judge the living and the dead by his appearing and by his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and admonish, be unfailing in all patience and teaching.

Timothy is called to continue to preach the gospel, also when this becomes unpleasant for people. The Word must rule! Christ's Word must rule over his servant and he must openly and honestly, in prayerful dependence upon Christ, proclaim the Word in a given situation. If the preacher does not do this, he will be called to account and the LORD will hold him responsible. In this way the preacher is properly the servant of the congregation. This is strongly maintained in Colossians 1:24-29. If the minister in his preaching must admonish the congregation sharply and strongly, he may not do this because he is angry or because something unpleasant happened to him, but he must do this with patience. Paul clearly gives this guideline to Timothy (1 Tim 4:2). This means that he must foster patience and love with the people he wishes to reach. He must also foster teaching, since he will want to make clear from the Word why this needs to be said. In this way he will build the congregation.

That the preacher is a servant of the Word is also emphasized in the *Form for Ordination of Minister of the Word*. In the charge given to the preacher, we read:

Preach the pure doctrine, so that by your preaching and teaching the congregation may be kept in obedience to the Word of God.

In the charge given to the congregation we read:

Take heed to receive the Word of God, which you shall hear from him, and accept his words, spoken according to the Holy Scriptures. . . .

Later also in the prayer:

Grant that those entrusted to his pastoral care may acknowledge this servant as sent by Thee. Give that they may receive the instruction and admonition of Christ which this shepherd shall bring to them and that they may joyfully submit to his direction.

As a servant of the Word, the preacher stands in a special place in the service of Christ. The task which Christ has given him to do implies that in a certain sense he comes to stand over against other people, and this in four ways: 1. over against himself. 2. over against his fellow office bearers. 3. over against the congregation. 4. over against all who listen.

The Word does not find its origin in the heart of the preacher. When he preaches it is not his own word he brings; it may not even be his own word. This means that in deep dependence on his Master the preacher must ask God in prayer: "Lord control me through Thy Spirit, let Thy Word control me so that I proclaim it and nothing else." With this also comes the prayer that you have the courage of faith to proclaim the Word impartially, independent of yourself and any other person. This means among other things that you preach against yourself and you admonish your own sins and smallness of faith. The minister stands in service of Christ and in this way Christ guarantees that his Word is proclaimed.

2. What Is the Address of the Preaching?

One can say that the address of the preaching is the whole world and every man. In the perspective of world mission, this is true. But now we are concerned with the existing congregations as the address of the preaching. An important question for the preaching is: How do we see the congregation? Do we see every member as a believer, elected and regenerated? Or do we see them as unbelievers, lost and unregenerate? Or do we view the congregation as we experience it, as a congregation composed of some believers and some unbelievers? We must avoid this sort of subjective judgement of the congregation.

When Christ gathers a congregation today we must view this as Paul viewed the congregations to whom he wrote his letters. He repeatedly calls them holy, and uses the term "believers" for them. With these terms Paul reminds us that the congregation is a covenantal congregation. Members of the congregation are not just like all other people. The LORD has come to them with his promises. Hence they stand in a special way under the



A young Spurgeon

care of Christ. The congregation to which the Word is administered is not an arbitrary group of hearers. These are people with whom the LORD has made his covenant, people to whom He in a special way has shown his love. These people belong to Christ. Through God's initiative they stand in the judicial position of being children of God. To this position they must repeatedly give a believing answer. The congregation is a covenant congregation, without us thereby asserting that all members are believers, regenerated or elected.² Precisely in the covenant congregation the member must be called to faith and conversion. The LORD has come to us in His wonderful love and to this love we must react, otherwise our condemnation will be the heavier.

We also confess this truth in the Reformed confession where the marks of the true church and the true believers are mentioned (Art. 29 BC). It is also said here that there are hypocrites who are mixed with the good, but yet do not belong to the church. The confession is in agreement with the Word of the LORD which states that there are also unbelievers in the congregation. This is also confessed in Q&A 84 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which deals precisely with the preaching as one of the keys of the kingdom. We should carefully note the answer:

According to the command of Christ, the kingdom of heaven is opened when it is proclaimed and publicly testified to each and every believer that God has really forgiven all their sins for the sake of Christ's merits, as often as they by true faith accept the promise of the gospel. The kingdom of heaven is closed when it is proclaimed and testified to all unbelievers and hypocrites that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them as long as they do not repent.


With our baptism the LORD has truly without any doubt come to us with His promises. The wonderful privileges must be acknowledged by us, and therefore the congregation must be addressed as congregation of Christ. This may not lead to a false security among us. Baptism does not mean that someone is regenerated or elected. We confess this clearly in the first paragraph of the *Form for the Baptism of Infants*.

We and our children are conceived and born in sin. Therefore the wrath of God abides on us and we cannot enter the kingdom of God unless we are born again. This is what the immersion in or sprinkling with water teaches us, through which the uncleanness of our soul is depicted to us. So we are admonished to forsake ourselves, to humble ourselves before God and to seek our cleansing and salvation outside of ourselves.

The LORD does not give regeneration in baptism, but He promises this in baptism. He promises that He will dwell in us with his Spirit and unite us to Christ. The preaching may and must address the congregation from this perspective of God's wonderful promise. The preaching may and must announce, recommend, proclaim and shout forth to the congregation the riches of God's covenant concerning a kingdom of Christ for poor sinners. The preaching is Christ's appeal to his congregation. The centre of the preaching is then always and ever Jesus Christ in whom the triune God has come to us.

These worthwhile comments are passed on for our reflection and consideration.

¹(See also 2 Cor 6:4, Eph 3:7, Col 1:23-25; 1 Tim 1:12, 4:6; Acts 6:1-4.)

²(See Jer 13:23, John 3, 1 Cor 10, Rev 2, 3) 

By C. Van Dam

Ongoing Challenges and Opportunities

Important events at Juan Calvino Seminary

On June 19-21 the Seminary planned to hold its final celebration of its 50th year of existence with a gathering of the national pastors, evangelists and church leaders who have graduated from the seminary. The theme for the event: "Rejoice always: Celebrating half a Century of Reformed Witness in Mexico."

Dr. Richard Venema, well-known pastor and outstanding spokesman for the restoration of the church, will be a special speaker at the seminary in June. Some years ago he had experienced the necessity to leave the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). *Sem News* reports that "the students in Mexico are eagerly awaiting his discourses on the dangers of extremist movements in the churches. As an incentive to other pastors whom we wish to have as supporting speakers from abroad (attention United Reformed, Canadian Reformed, Orthodox Christian Reformed, Free Reformed and Reformed Church of the US pastors!), please realize that Dr. Venema will be spending a week vacationing in Mexico City and another week in Acapulco."

The Seminary will be hosting in July a conference of all Presbyterian and Reformed Bible Schools and Seminaries to discuss theological instruction and the institutional problems common to them in Mexico. In the past this semi-annual meeting had been given a very pronounced liberal direction, but with the increasing participation of the Juan Calvino Seminary, there is now a clear witness by the seminary professors of the true Reformed heritage. They hope and pray that their testimony will bear fruit in these doctrinally weak institutions.

Independent Presbyterian Church Synod

This summer will see the convening of the Synod of the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico (IPC)



on August 25-30 in Mexico City. Such a meeting is always very important for the Seminary which is the official school for training pastors in the IPCM. As Rev. Jorge Ramirez Catala, the Dean of the Seminary put it: "The Synod provides the doctrinal and spiritual direction safeguarding our school."

The Seminary and Chiapas and Oaxaca

Chiapas is a very sensitive and difficult region of Mexico where the grinding poverty and discrimination against the native people lead to much civil unrest. The IPCM churches are in increasing danger there. As a result, various professors of the Seminary will be launching a year-long study of the implications of the revolutionary fervour in this region for the IPCM. The June *Sem News* reports Rev. Virgil Crisostomo, Professor of Apologetics, as saying: "Our Reformed heritage shows a clear distinction and contrast between humanistic revolution and spiritual renewal. While we decry the pompous 'state pronouncements' so common to denominations with a socialist agenda, when our churches and Bible school are under the gun we must provide the sure understanding Scripture provides for those in physical danger, that they may remain faithful in moments of great peril."

The state of Oaxaca which borders on Chiapas is also receiving special attention and the Seminary may open an extension program in this remote part of Mexico. Rev. Luis Victoriano (M.D.), a graduate of the Seminary, "is doing an incomparable labour of word and deed as sole pastor and medical doctor of over 10,000 Mixe indigenous people. He travels by foot in places barely accessible to a goat – but teeming with souls in desperate need for daily bread – but especially the Bread of Life." The Seminary would love to see a comprehensive word and deed project begun here by one of the supporting churches. Interested deacons can write for more information (Dr. J.M. Velazquez Iglesias, President, Juan Calvino Seminary, Viena 99, Coyoacan 21, D.F., Mexico 04100).

The work of the Lord in Mexico goes on. Those wishing to support the work of the seminary, and in this way also the IPCM, can send tax deductible donations payable to

Worldwide Christian Schools
(Mexico Project)
P.O. Box 81129
RPO Fiddlers Green
Ancaster, ON L9G 4X1

Source for the news items: Juan Calvino Theological Seminary *Sem News* June 1998.





Word and Deed

The relationship between word and deed in mission endeavour is increasingly the subject of discussion in Holland and at our Reformed Mission conferences. It is a discussion with which we should be familiar. A good overview has been provided by C.F. Stolper in the Dutch church paper, *De Reformatie*. Under the heading "Mission and DVN: Working Together" Stolper writes the following:

A comparison of methods

Mission is on the move. A lot of studying is taking place and many congresses are being held. The last general synod of the Reformed Churches (liberated) also dealt with the matter of mission and mandated the deputies BBK (concerning foreign churches) to continue studying the issue. In the meantime two think tanks have sent a report to the churches. At issue is the fundamental connection between Word and deed, between mission and, for instance, the work of Distant Neighbours (DVN), an organization which gives developmental aid on mission fields. The consequences this fundamental connection has for the organizational aspect of cooperation between Word and deed are also important. To this end certain proposals have been made.

In this article we will use the conclusion of the report as our starting-point: that there is a fundamental connection between Word and deed. Deeds may not be disconnected from the Word but exist within the framework of the proclaimed gospel. Deeds are one way in which the power of the Word is made clear. Word and deed both fall under the responsibility of the offices and the congregation. Thus the missionary and diaconal tasks of the one congregation complement each other. In this article we wish to consider the possible structures of cooperation in the future. To this end we ask ourselves the following questions:

1) Is there (or has there become) an important difference between

the work of a missionary and that of a mission aid worker?

2) If so, what is the background of this difference?

3) Are there any workable solutions? We will opt for a comparison of the work of mission with that of DVN and not that of general developmental work, since DVN usually labours on mission fields where the fundamental connection between Word and deed will also have to be made visible in practice.

A little piece of history

When the first missionaries of the Reformed Churches (liberated) arrived in Irian after the war they were not only confronted with the emptiness and angst of paganism, but also a society that, compared with European standards, was economically and medically far behind. Entering that situation they not only proclaimed the gospel but also extended emergency aid as an act of mercy following the Word. On both accounts there was much that had to be done – too much, in fact. One of the reasons why many faithful brothers and sisters in the Netherlands came to the aid of the missionaries since the synod of 1951, the sending churches did not consider the act of mercy to belong to their diaconal task. The work was left to private initiatives, or the office of all believers. Organizations were set up which later fused to form DVN.

Initially then, the emphasis of the work of DVN was on emergency aid in the footsteps of the missionary. However, when small congregations had been formed, the point of connection became the congregations themselves. Outside aid tried to encourage the functioning of the diaconate within the congregation – at a time when there were no deacons in these churches – and thus to raise the level of civilization and improve the social and economic environment. Eventually, it was thought, a congregation would learn to help itself. Not considering incidental cases, the management of

DVN decided that the extended emergency aid would take on a more structural form with a more continuous benefit. In other words, a choice was made against general developmental aid for the whole population, and for diaconal aid from the Netherlands which would also be distributed diaconally within the congregations (using Gal. 6:10 "do good to all, but especially to those of the household of faith). Thus the Word gained a diaconal image in the Dutch congregations and linked up with diaconal tasks within the Irian congregations. Hence it was possible to appeal to Biblical concepts such as "talents received from God," "stewardship," "considering each other," and "one's own responsibility towards God."

However, cooperation between Word and deed did not exist. At home the sending churches and DVN worked past each other. On the mission field the story was exactly the same. There were then two lines of approach. And the Irians had little idea what was happening. From being small mission-congregations, daughters had attained the status of independent sister churches. And on the world map there were only a few blank spaces where the gospel had never yet been heard. It became clear to us that in many places there are young and faithful churches of Christ which can clearly use some help with their diaconal and missionary work. This meant a new approach for the sending churches, an approach in which the relationship would be mutual and reciprocal: less one-way traffic and more learning from each other. This has now been put in place.

A difference in method

We may be glad that Word and deed are once again together. But we must now face the question whether, in the mean time, differences in approach and attitude between the missionary and the mission aid worker have appeared which could hamper future cooperation. The list below

indicates some of the differences, using concepts and terms as we have been accustomed to use them (e.g. in our ordination form) or as they are still used (e.g. in the program of DVN).

Missionary:

- Minister of the Word, sent by a church, church-planter
- urgent call to repentance and obedience
- special office, speaks with authority
- pastoral care for the sheep
- comforting, exhorting, rejecting
- sacrificing
- admitting to the sacraments
- appointing elders and deacons.

Mission aid worker:

- teaching others to help themselves
- emphasis on own responsibility and own initiative
- indicating problems and possible solutions
- the aid-giver participates with those who receive aid
- giving of credit, interest
- taking responsibility for each – independence, being able to make out yourself
- distributing to others

Biblical backgrounds

There are clearly some distinct differences which are to be understood against the background of the various tasks. These especially concern theological insights regarding, for example, the office and the history of giving aid. The missionary identifies himself with Jesus Christ who, full of pity, travelled through the Jewish nation, preaching the Kingdom of God, healing the sick, and freeing those who were demon possessed. His miracles were a sign of His great love and pointed forward to a new world. There were almost no conditions for following Him: you had but to believe in the Son of God and know yourself to be dependent on His great sacrifice. He was the perfect minister and asked the same sacrifice of others. After His resurrection He gave the command that His gospel of reconciliation be proclaimed everywhere. In His tracks Paul went out to the heathens and thousands of missionaries were sent out. They passed on the joyful message, and distributed from their material abundance, which they in turn had received.

Yet when we study matters a little more closely it becomes clear

that the deeds of Jesus cannot be separated from the Word. He was selective in what He did. Not every demon-possessed person was set free, not every lame person healed. Nor did He organize a medical care-society. Jesus pulled in workers who were given responsibility, took initiatives and got moving. They become active in mission work and in diaconal work. And after the ascension things did not stagnate. On the contrary, the work continued and spread.

The approach of DVN is based on 20 years of experience, years of falling down and standing up again. The aid which DVN extends is focused "especially on making the Christian congregation materially independent and diaconally functional" (programme, DVN 1996). Experience has taught us that placing the responsibility on the shoulders of those receiving aid makes this goal more attainable. DVN also makes use of the experience of general developmental agencies and of the field of "developmental cooperation" as it is taught at some universities. From a Biblical perspective, DVN takes its starting-point in the congregation as the body of Christ, in which the members are a hand and foot for each other. Every congregational member has received his own gifts which, even in the very limited circumstances in which God has placed him, he may use and develop in order to function as image of God and to serve others within the congregation, as well as those outside. DVN appeals to the concept of stewardship and the individual and communal responsibility of the congregation to help each other and to distribute to others. The goal is a lasting improvement within the congregation so that the image of Christ becomes clear in the diaconal work of the congregation.

Possibilities for agreement

In the future, sending churches may begin to consider diaconal aid on the mission fields or for young sister churches as their responsibility. However, this need not mean that they also must assume responsibility for the execution of this duty. They often lack the professional know-how for this. By streamlining the approaches in good cooperation with the DVN, the church (i.e., the missions committee) can leave the execution of the aid to an orga-



DECLINED to Denver, CO, USA
Rev. C.J. VanderVelde
of Yarrow, BC

nization such as DVN. The members of such a committee should include deacons, who will have the interaction with DVN at heart. Differences in approaches could easily lead to conflicts. The starting point must be that the proclaimer of the Word has his own task and approach, which differs from that of the diaconal worker, and the mission aid worker. Yet points of agreement in approach and attitude should also be reached. Are not both busy with peoples' development, also in places where one can hardly speak of a congregation? The Spirit moves missionaries and mission aid workers are allowed to function as guide-posts. They're not the ones "pulling the cart," building church buildings, ploughing fields and organizing all the medical care. They carry stones to where others are going to build. And they avoid setting up organizations which cannot be handed over to be run by indigenous congregational members with a minimum of trouble and fuss.

From the very start it must be clear that we are not forming our congregation, but that the indigenous people are forming theirs. This is the framework within which financial aid must be given for church buildings or the establishment of schools. This may mean a different attitude from that which sometimes exists in The Netherlands, where church councils can sometimes take initiatives or assume responsibilities and where the congregation follows. The shift in mission from establishing churches to assisting young sister churches also asks a different approach from the missionary. The missionary's work is beginning to look more and more like that of a mission aid worker: he must have an eye for the independence and distinct responsibility of the church requesting help, leaving

the leadership in the hands of others, participating in the spiritual development of those requesting help, and in most cases adjusting to the local structures or way of working and giving room for the creation of solutions which suit their own culture.

The consequence of choosing DVN for aid projects, aimed at an improved diaconal functioning of the congregational members and congregations, is that attention will also have to be paid to the actual workings of the diaconal office in the field. Emergency aid, itself a form of diaconal mercy, is primarily used as aid in cases of great need, and as a bridge to a more lasting system. Emergency aid is short-term. It is in a sense comparable with the miracles of Jesus which He gave as a sign of his love. Emergency aid can be very necessary in the first stages of mission work, but it does not last and may not become an obstacle to more lasting aid. It is clear that lasting aid can only be given with a heart full of love, even if this is not always clear to the one requesting aid.

In summary we can say that there are ways in which workers of the Word and workers of the deed can work together with the congregation, each retaining their own tasks. However, we have to give more theological consideration to the backgrounds of our ways of extending aid.

* * *

Rev. P. Vellenga, writing in the paper *Word and Deed*, the official publication of **Word and Deed. An International Relief Foundation**, addresses the same topic with a mediation on Jas. 1:27. Under the heading "Religion According to God" he stresses the close connection between Word and deed:

The epistle of James is well known among God's people as be-

ing filled with instruction that impacts the whole of life. At each turn throughout this short letter we can read what living faith is all about. Such faith leads God's people to be doers of the WORD and not hearers only.

Now it is true that God's people hold dear to the conviction that we are saved through faith alone because of Jesus Christ alone. However, we are also firmly persuaded from Scriptures that faith without works is dead (see for example James 2: 14-26). While we confess faith alone, we also confess that this faith does not stand alone. It is impossible for those grafted into Christ by true faith not to produce fruits of gratitude (Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 64).


Thus, the fruits of faith will be seen in the life of the believer. Christians are known by the marks of Christians: namely, when they by faith have received Jesus Christ as the only Saviour, they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love God and their neighbour, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof (see Belgic Confession Article 29). While in life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience, nevertheless with all seriousness of purpose, those converted to God do begin to live according to all God's commandments.

And so the WORD of the Lord speaks to the crucial relationship between faith and active works of obedience. An application of that relationship can be found in the text before us, James 1:27: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."

In our text, the Holy Spirit through the Apostle James stresses concern for the widows and orphans as evidence of faith that is pleasing to God. Such faith is to reflect the heart of God Himself. For example, in Deuteronomy 10 :18 we read that God administers justice for the "fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger, in giving him food and clothing."

It is particularly the orphan that receives special attention in the work of *Word & Deed*. While many of the children may indeed have parents, many come from families who are unable or unwilling to take proper care of their children. And in that sense we might say that they too are orphaned. Not only are they destitute with respect to the needs of the body, they are in desperate poverty so far as it concerns the needs of the soul.

God has given His people the responsibility, the task, the office of helping the needy. A true Word ministry cannot be separated from the Deed. And conversely, for the Deed to be ministry, it must come with the Word. The Word that seeks to instruct all those with ears to hear in the living faith, in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in the saving faith in Jesus Christ. The Word that seeks to show what covenant living is all about. Will you help us in our endeavour to encourage such a ministry?

All this deserves our careful reflection and consideration. It is possible that we have kept the two far removed from each other in our mission endeavour. Although there may be different spheres of responsibility, there is something to be said for working out a more integrated approach in our mission and relief work. 

PRESS RELEASES



Press release of the first National Conference of the Reformed Churches of Brazil

On the 10th to the 12th of June 1998 the first National Conference of the Reformed Churches of Brazil was held in Unaí, MG Brazil. Eight congre-

gations were represented, two from Colombo, Curitiba, one from Unaí, and five from the northeast of Brazil.

At this historic first conference, we discussed especially the possibility of forming a federation of Reformed churches in Brazil. All the churches expressed the desire to federate. They feel

the necessity of a federation of Reformed churches to maintain themselves and to develop. The Conference, therefore, decided that the churches will federate at the next conference, to be held on the first Wednesday of July 2000 (July 5, 2000) the Lord willing. The federation of the Igrejas Reformadas

do Brasil will therefore come into being at that assembly. We give thanks to God, who gave the churches this desire, and the possibility to hold this historical Conference, and to come to this agreement.

Now the churches have two years to prepare themselves to take upon themselves this responsibility. Many matters have to be studied. Difficult questions have to receive answers. Perhaps the most difficult question that has to be resolved is, what will be our relation with the IPB (Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil). The problem is that there are so many churches within the IPB which are not faithful to their confessions. The Conference left the churches free to maintain relations with the faithful churches in the IPB.

Other matters dealt with at this Conference were the metrification of the psalms and the choice of hymns to be used in the churches, the modification of the church order to fit the situation of the Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil, the form of the cooperation of the churches until the act of federation, and the training of theological students, etc.

The Conference was held in a spirit of unity and good will. We learned to understand the positions held by the other churches better and their situations. The result of this Conference will strengthen the churches and will promote their unity nationally. We give the glory for this result to our God.

Unaf July 12, 1998

Press Release of Classis Ontario North, June 19, 1998

1. On behalf of the convening church at Flamborough, Rev. G.H. Visscher called the meeting to order. He requested that the brothers sing Psalm 65:1,2, read Isaiah 1:1-18, and led in prayer.
2. The delegates of the church at Fergus reported on the examination of the credentials. All was found to be in order. There were two churches with instructions.
3. Classis was constituted. The following officers were appointed:
 - a. Chairman: Rev. J. Van Popta
 - b. Vice Chairman: Rev. A.J. Pol
 - c. Clerk: Rev. J.G. Slaa
4. Memorabilia: The chairman thanked the convening church at Flamborough for preparing the classis. Af-

ter welcoming the delegates and visitors he took note of the following: The churches at Flamborough and Fergus are still without their own minister and the church of Ottawa will be without a minister, since Rev. VanPopta has accepted a call to the church at Coaldale. These churches are commended to the care of the Lord and encouraged in their efforts to find a minister to fill their respective vacancies. A number of ministers have declined calls. Rev. den Hollander was unable to attend classis because of a funeral. Br. VanderMeulen of the church of Fergus requested permission to make a video-recording of the open sessions. There were no objections. The students Marc Jagt and Doug Vandeburgt, who came to be examined by classis, were welcomed specifically.

5. The agenda was adopted after the deletion of point II a. There were instructions from the churches at Orangeville and Ottawa and a request in connection with Art. 44.
6. After the necessary documents were presented and read, classis proceeded with the examination of br. Marc Jagt, who had requested permission to speak an edifying word. Following the sermon proposal, the student was examined on his knowledge of the confessions. Classis judged the results to be sufficient and gave him written permission to speak an edifying word in the churches for the period of twelve months after he signed a Form for Subscription to that end.
7. Classis then dealt with the request for the release of Rev. J. Van Popta from the church at Ottawa, since he had accepted the call to the church at Coaldale, Alberta. The necessary documentation was provided and the form for the release of Rev. Van Popta was given to him with thanks for the services rendered in the midst of the churches of Classis Ontario North, and also for evidence given at classis of work in reaching out to the ERQ.
8. The church visitors reported on visits made to the churches of Burlington/Waterdown, Flamborough and Orangeville.
9. Having checked the necessary documentation, classis continued with

the preparatory examination of br. Doug Vandeburgt. After the sermon proposal, the student was examined on Old and New Testament exegesis, and on the doctrines and creeds of the church. Classis judged the results to be sufficient and declared the brother eligible for call by the churches after he confirmed his agreement with the Subscription Form which he already signed after the examination for preaching consent at Classis Ontario North, September 11-12, 1997.

10. Question Period according to Art. 44 C.O. was held. The church at Orangeville requested and received advice on a matter of discipline. The church at Ottawa requested that Rev. den Hollander be appointed as counsellor and that beginning in October pulpit supply be given during the vacancy once every three weeks for the period of one year, due to the isolated position of the church. The requests were granted.
11. Correspondence: A letter from br. J. Poort indicating that the assessment has been established at \$2.00 per communicant member was read and approved.
12. Appointments.
 - a. The convening church for the next classis is Grand Valley. The classis is scheduled to be held on September 18, 1998, in the church of Burlington-East.
 - b. The suggested officers for the next classis are: chairman: Rev. G.H. Visscher; clerk: Rev. G. Nederveen; vice-chairman: Rev. J.G. Slaa.
 - c. Rev. R.E. Pot is appointed to become examiner for the subject of Ethics at Peremptory examinations.
13. Question Period was held.
14. No censure according to Art. 34 of the Church Order was necessary.
15. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release approved for publication.
16. The chairman requested that the brothers sing Ps 133:1 and led in closing prayer.

For Classis Ontario North
 June 19, 1998
 A.J. Pol
 Vice-chairman at that time. 