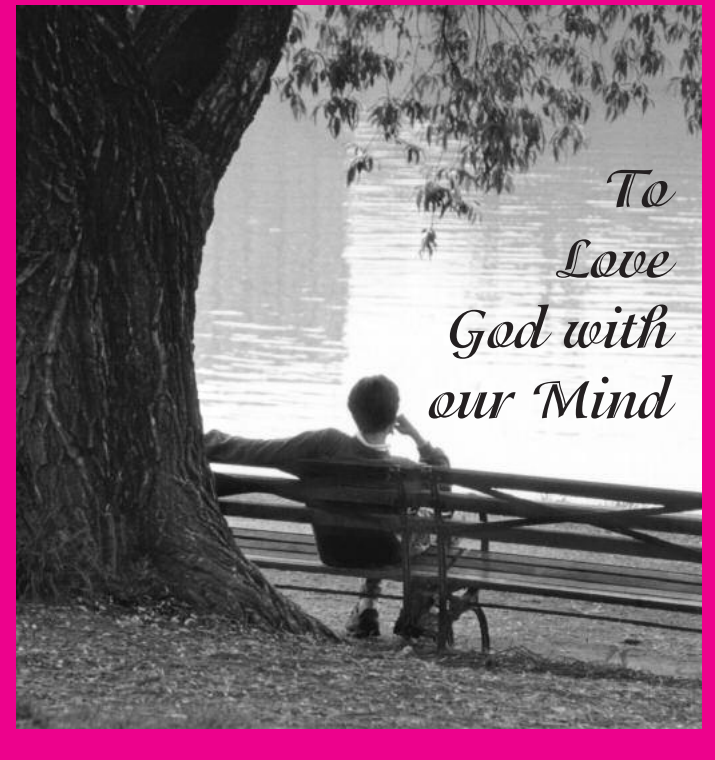


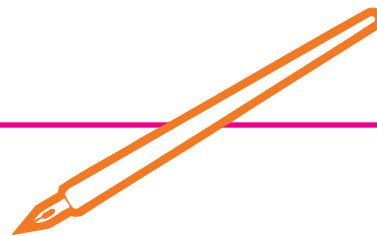
Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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*To
Love
God with
our Mind*



By J. Geertsema



Multiculturalism and Reformed: Conflict or Accommodation? The Challenge to Remain Reformed

Multiculturalism

Western governments make laws based on multiculturalism. Multiculturalism dominates and permeates the teaching of the humanities in universities, colleges, and grade schools. Multiculturalism, however, is a typically modern phenomenon. Through immigration, many nationalities and cultures have been brought together. People with various religious beliefs and differing social customs live side by side in our complex society. Moreover, in the humanistic framework in which (wo)man is the measure of all things, all people and all cultures are considered fully equal and must be treated equally. Everyone who does not think and act in line with multiculturalism engages in serious social and political sin.

This has serious consequences for the church. The claim that one's own religion is better than someone else's is deemed as haughtiness. There is no absolute truth in our modern culture. If we say that we know the truth, and that the beliefs of others are not true, we commit an (almost) unforgivable social sin. This is considered evil.

A book by Gene Edward Veith Jr., *Post-modern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1994) is helpful in this discussion. This book is quite easy to follow and provides good insight in the philosophy of our present age. It is an excellent source of information for young people and their parents, and for adolescent students and teachers. The author writes, "While it is good to study other cultures, to be multicultural would be to have no culture of one's own," and that "learning about other civilizations . . . is valuable. The post-modern approach, however, goes no deeper than the *surfaces* of these other cultures" (152). He adds that such superficial multiculturalism "leads to relativism" (153).

Multiculturalism's danger for the church

This presents a threat to the church. Just as has happened often in her history, the church might adopt the prevailing views of the world, in whole or part. The worst case scenario would be that church members might believe that all religions are equal. "Christians, Jews, Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, North-American Indians, all serve the same God." This view is the consequence of a superficial look at various religions. Many outside Christianity believe this equality of religions. But, strange as it may seem, this belief in equality of religion can be found also within the liberal camp of Christianity (*Christianity* taken in a very broad sense). This view finds support in the present stress on human *spirituality*. Spirituality, however, seen as a purely human phenomenon, just as all religion is considered purely human, coming

from within man. Here, too, man is the measure of all things, not God and his Word. The psychoanalytical theories of Carl Jung, Carl Rogers and their followers strongly teach and promote this view of spirituality.

We should, however, carefully examine ourselves whether this superficial, shallow, modern social multiculturalism is not creeping upon us on a smaller scale. Is it seeping into our thoughts about other churches and other Christians? If we touch only the surface, without doing in-depth studies, then the many conservative "denominations" will appear quite similar. It would not matter, then, whether one is a member of a Reformed or a Lutheran or a Presbyterian or a Baptist evangelical church; they all are the same. They all serve the same triune God and accept the same Bible as God's Word. All sing God's praise. All believe that in Christ they have the forgiveness of their sins and that the Holy Spirit works sanctification in them.

The challenge for 1999

The challenge for Reformed Churches again this coming year is to remain Reformed. For Reformed Churches, not man, but God is the measure of all things. We might also say, "God's Name is the measure." This means: God as He has revealed himself in his Word. Reformed people do not separate God from his Word. They know God from his Word.

Reformed people also know that the human heart is sinful and easily becomes prey of Satan's deceit. Satan tries to make people err and misinterpret God's Word. Satan tries to have people read and interpret the Word of God in such a way that it says exactly what they want it to say. This allows them to believe what they want, do their own thing, and go their own way.

Reformed churches and people are afraid of falling prey to God's adversary. They want to be on the alert not to deviate from God's Word and become unfaithful to it and so to God himself. That Word calls the church to be a pillar and bulwark of the truth and to be the light of Christ in the world by preaching this Word and living by it. To continue to fulfil that purpose, these churches accepted not only the old ecumenical Creeds, but also the Confessions made in the days of the Reformation. Holding up the truth of God's Word against the teachings of Rome and of the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, they summarized that Word in the *Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Later, in the beginning of the seventeenth century, they maintained this same truth in the *Canons of Dort*, against the Remonstrants who followed Arminius. The Reformed believers wanted to live by God's Word, not by the philosophy of the world as it influenced the thinking and teaching of the Arminians.


What does the Lord say to his people?

What the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands did was not unique. The Reformed Churches in Switzerland, France, Germany, and England did the same. By adopting confessional standards these church federations sought to have a solid firm basis for doctrine and life, for faith and practice. They did not want to be churches bound to certain persons, whether minister or elder or any other individual. The truth of God as confessed by the community of the Reformed churches was to be their only foundation. They wanted to know only: What does the LORD say to his people?

This is the challenge for us as Reformed Churches also in the year ahead, the year of our Lord 1999. The challenge is to remain truly and simply Reformed Churches that abide by the foundation and norm: the teaching of God's Word as we confess it in the Three Forms of Unity. What we feel or like or experience is not the norm but rather, the teaching of God's Word. Not accommodation to multiculturalism, but the truth of Scripture is the rule.

The post-modern world lives and acts superficially and is driven by individual feelings, not by the sure knowledge of God's Word. This is, however, also a danger for us. We too can have a superficial look at others, without an in-depth knowledge of either our own rich heritage or the differences we have from others. And this can easily mislead us.

When there are voices that point to a lack of piety and fear of the LORD in our midst, we should take those voices seriously. There is no reason for pride in ourselves. However, we should not blame the Reformed basis. Rather, we should blame ourselves of not abiding by the basis. We should blame our lack of knowing its riches. A superficial declaration that all churches are equal will not help or correct a lack of health in a Reformed Church. Rather, it will worsen the sickness of the church. It will not build up, but break down.

Therefore, again this year, let us strive to build up a well rounded knowledge of our rich faith as revealed in God's Word and confessed by the churches. Let us do so in humble submission to our Lord and Saviour and in the joy that comes from the Spirit by the Gospel. 

What's inside?

And so we begin a new year of *Clarion*. . . . It is the prayer of editors and publisher that this new volume will provide you, the reader, with enlightening and thought-provoking articles firmly based upon the Word and the Reformed confessions.

Two of the articles call us to view the world carefully through the Word of God. We need to keep our wits about ourselves. Professor J. Geertsema writes about the contemporary and politically correct love affair society has with "multiculturalism." He urges us not to be taken in by the siren song of "tolerance" which proclaims that all religions and beliefs are the same. Dr. F. Oosterhoff writes about how we are to love God with our minds. Reformed people, rejecting both rationalism and irrationalism, will use the power of reason in their pursuit to know and serve God.

Dr. J. Visscher provides us with his third and final installment on the Acts of General Synod Fergus. You will also find two readers' contributions related to the Acts.

We include several articles of a more meditative quality, an Observation Deck, and some press releases.

We hope you will be challenged, edified and comforted.

GvP



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By Rev. E. Kampen

Infant Baptism

"Where in the New Testament are we told that children should be baptized?" Many parents are asked that question sooner or later. That the question is asked is a very good sign. Often young people ask that question because they openly spoke about their faith and then they were challenged on this point by someone who comes from an "adult only baptism" church.

When this question is asked, it is important that it be dealt with thoroughly. This will mean that parents cannot answer it in a hurry but should take the time to sit down with their son or daughter, preferably bringing out the Bible. The discussion about baptism is in essence a discussion about how we are saved. The question that needs to be answered is: are we saved by the sovereign God who graciously makes us alive, or by our own sovereign action, our own free will, whereby we decide to accept God's grace? To answer this involves more than referring to one or two texts about baptism. It is necessary first of all to talk about the very basics of the gospel of salvation.

What is the basic gospel message? It is this, that God graciously comes to save sinners. God takes the initiative. We see this already in the garden of Eden when God graciously made his promise of salvation (Gen 3:15). We see it so clearly in the choice of Abraham as God called Abraham and separated him from his people, establishing the covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3).

When we reflect further on how God established his covenant with Abraham, we see that God not only initiated this covenant but also determined who would be included it. We read in Genesis 17:7, "And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an

everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you." As a sign of this covenant the LORD commanded that the males be circumcised when they were eight days old. We read in Genesis 17:12,13: "He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised; every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of



your offspring, both he that is born in your house and he that is bought with your money, shall be circumcised . . ." Notice how the LORD God decides who shall receive the sign of the covenant. Even slaves were to receive it!

The special relationship which the descendants of Abraham had with the LORD was not because of anything special within them. It was not anything they might have done, but the gracious act of God to an undeserving people (e.g. Deut 7:6-8).

This same emphasis on God's sovereign grace is heard in the New Testament. In Ephesians 1:4,5 Paul writes that ". . . He chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." Further he writes in Ephesians 2:1,4,5: "And you He made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins. . . . But God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." We can also find a testimony to this sovereign grace of God in saving sinners in Titus 3:4-7.

Take note then of God's sovereign grace in establishing a covenant with unworthy sinners. That truth was signified in circumcision, which was a sign of the covenant. Note again that God decided who would be the recipients. Circumcision, performed on little boys merely eight days old, proclaimed: I, the LORD God am promising to you the benefits of my grace.

With this renewed understanding on the sovereign grace of God in saving sinners, we can tackle the question about the sign of the covenant in New Testament times. Circumcision involved bloodshed. Christ, by his sacrifice has put an end to all the ceremonial bloodshed of the Old Testament. The New Testament Church understood that well and thus did not demand that the heathen converts receive the Old Testament sign of circumcision (Acts 15). In the New Testament we see that there was a change in the sign, from one involving blood to one that was bloodless, namely, baptism. We read this very clearly in Colossians 2:11,12: "In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by

putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with Him in baptism. . . ." Notice how Paul uses the term "circumcision of Christ" as a description of baptism! You could say that baptism is the New Testament version of circumcision.

We should note though, that while there is a clear change in the outward symbol, there is no indication anywhere that God made changes concerning the recipients of this "circumcision of Christ." This might seem questionable in light of Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:16. But what do we read there? In Mark 16:16 we read: *"he who believes and is baptized will be saved."* Does this not teach that believing must precede baptism? When you study this text carefully, you will note that baptism is only mentioned in passing. The context is the risen Lord mandating his disciples to preach his resurrection not just in Israel but the whole world. In the process He answers the question: how is it possible for the world, the Gentiles, to share in Him? The answer is: through faith! They don't have to become Jews, for salvation is not through the flesh but through faith. Furthermore, by speaking of baptism, there is a contrast to circumcision. Here is the new, international sign of the covenant, both for Jews

and Gentiles. The point of the passage, as well as the parallel passage in Matthew 28 is not whether children should be included in baptism but that the Gentiles were to be included in the covenant! This was according to the promise made to Abraham that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3).

Of course the question lingers: What about the children? There is no explicit command. The question that should be raised however, is this: Why do we expect an explicit command? As a matter of fact, is the lack of an explicit command not very telling? Does it not suggest that the matter is so obvious there simply was no need to spell it out? Obviously people knew exactly what to do, namely, also give the new sign to the children of believers? This is exactly what we find in the New Testament. You will see it in Acts 16 where we read about the conversion of Lydia. It says in v. 15, *"And when she was baptized, with her household. . . ."* A little further, in v. 33, where it speaks about the Philippian jailer, we read that *"he was baptized at once, with all his family."* Does this not bear a striking resemblance to what we read in Genesis 17:12,13? Abraham had to circumcise his whole household, slaves included!

In the household baptisms of Lydia and the Philippian jailer we see that very same practice. God may have changed the sign, from blood to water, but he did not change whom were to receive the sign, namely, believers and their children, their household.

When the question is raised, "Where in the New Testament are we told that children should be baptized?" take the time to speak with your son or daughter about God's sovereign grace in establishing his covenant. Speak about the fact that God himself decided who should receive the sign of the covenant, namely, believers and their children. In the New Testament the sign has changed, but not those who are to receive it. For the gospel remains the same: God sovereignly comes to us and our children, saying, "You are mine!"

When you have talked about this with your children, marvel together at God's grace in saving dead sinners. In light of Paul's words (Col 3:16), why not get out the Psalm Book and sing Psalm 105, stanzas 1-4?

Rev. E. Kampen is minister of the Willoughby Heights Canadian Reformed Church in Langley, BC



To Love God with our Mind (Part 1)

By F.G. Oosterhoff

When a lawyer asked Jesus about the greatest commandment, the Lord replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. . ." (Matt 22:37). Jesus' answer shows that our entire being must be involved in the service of God, not only our will and emotions, but also our intellectual gifts. In what follows I want to deal with the question how we are to love God with our mind. In the next issue I hope to write about the bearing the commandment has on education.

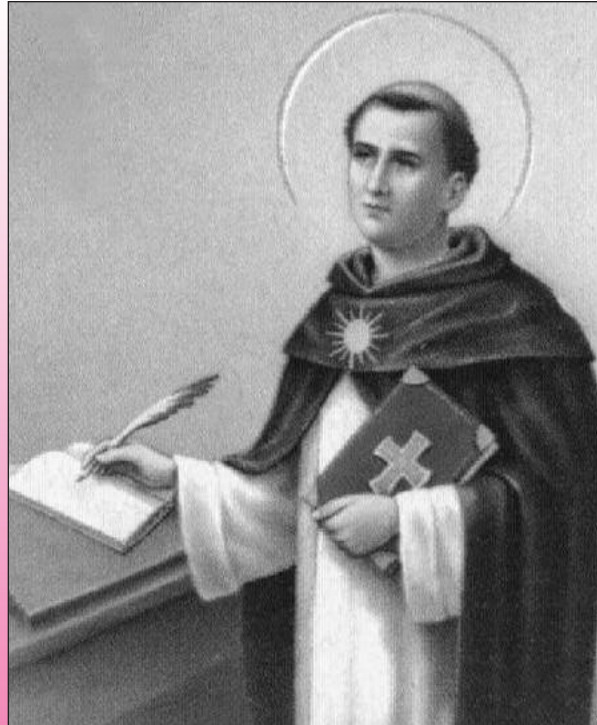
Christianity and learning

To love God with our mind is not necessarily the same as to study the Bible or to become an expert in theology and related disciplines. Those things can be done as mere intellectual pursuits. They are then not a means to come to know God, but simply to know *about* Him.

Yet to love God with our mind does involve study of the Scriptures, and also of those subjects that can help us in understanding them and defending their truth. The intellectual aspect of the faith has therefore rightly occupied the church throughout its history. Although there have been exceptions, generally speaking Christian thinkers have been convinced that the mind, and therefore reason, plays a valid and necessary role in the Christian religion. As beings made in God's image, they believed, we have been given the power of reason so that we may know and serve God.

That gift is a talent which may not be buried but is to be diligently used. And this means first of all that God's Word must be interpreted and proclaimed, and that attacks which unbelieving reason directs against it must be countered. But that does not exhaust its meaning. The gift of reason also obligates us properly to train our minds so that, to the best of our ability, we can fulfil our daily task, promote justice and truth, proclaim God's providence in nature and history, and fulfil the man-

Thomas Aquinas



date He gave us with respect to the guarding and development of creation. The commandment to love God with our mind has a bearing on all of life.

What do we mean by reason?

In the foregoing I have used the word reason a number of times. Because that word (and related terms) will keep coming back in this article and the next, and because the term can be used in more than one sense, I will give a description of its different usages. The best way of doing so is by means of a brief walk through the history of our civilization, all the way from the ancient Greeks to the postmodern era. This approach has the added advantage of providing examples of the proper and improper use of reason.

The modern concept of reason has been modelled very largely on that of the Greeks, who exalted reason highly. Anxious to know God but not having his

special revelation, Greek philosophers thought that reason was perhaps the means by which to "reach out for Him and find Him" (Acts 17:27). The belief that the mind could climb up to and understand the Infinite was an intoxicating one, which our own civilization inherited. It has greatly influenced not only its approach to scholarship in general (such as the study of philosophy and the sciences), but to theology as well.

We can note the influence of the Greek concept of reason already in the theology of the early church and, even more so, in that of the Middle Ages. The medieval scholar Thomas Aquinas, for example, taught that unaided human reason could prove several biblical doctrines. Among these were the existence of God, his infinite power and wisdom, his providence, and the immortality of the soul. These doctrines, he said, were matters of reason, rather than of faith proper. Revelation

and faith were necessary only for the so-called *mysteries* of the faith, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, Christ's sacrifice on the cross, the resurrection, and the last judgment.

The belief of the ancient Greeks that the mind could climb up to and understand the Infinite was an intoxicating one, which our Christian civilization inherited. It has greatly influenced its approach to scholarship, including theological scholarship.

The Roman Catholic Church accepted the substance of Thomas' philosophy and made it official church doctrine, but many of his contemporaries attacked his system. So did, some centuries later, the Reformers. Among the objections all these critics had to Thomism was that reliance on reason in matters of theology tends to push the truth of God's self-revelation in Christ into the background; and as Luther was to remind his contemporaries, the only way in which God allows Himself to be known is in Jesus Christ. Deriving God's existence and attributes from human reason can lead to a concept of God similar to that of the Greek deities. Ceasing to be the God of the Scriptures – the Creator and Redeemer of man and nature – He becomes little more than the Supreme Being, the First Cause of all that exists, the creation of human logic. That this is indeed no imaginary danger became apparent later, with the rise of deism, which followed Thomas in proving God's existence with reference to reason alone.

Thomas Aquinas himself was not a deist. He was a believing Christian, who placed the Bible above Greek wisdom. If faith and reason clashed, reason had to go. In Thomas' case, therefore, reason was not yet *critical* reason – the kind that acts like an acid, destroying whatever it cannot explain. For him reason was still subject to revelation, even though it was given a dangerously large degree of autonomy. It was not until the modern period that reason became fully autonomous. But before dealing with that development



Martin Luther

we must turn to the intervening age of the Reformation.

Faith and reason in the Reformation

In what follows we must distinguish between *rationalism* and *rationality*. When reason becomes fully autonomous we speak of the former; when we refer to something that is reasonable or endowed with reason, rather than being irrational, we use the latter. The term *rationalism*, then, refers to the attitude of rejecting the supernatural and making human reason the only source of knowledge and truth. The fact that we must reject such unbelieving rationalism, as well as the Christian rationalism of Thomas Aquinas, does not mean that the rationality of biblical Christianity is to be denied. The foregoing has made that clear. For although revelation is certainly beyond reason, Christianity is a reasonable faith, or else the Lord would not have told us that we must love God with our mind. Reason properly defined belongs to the essence of faith, rather than being a hindrance to it.

The Reformers knew this as well as the scholars of the Middle Ages. Because they attacked the abuse of reason under Roman Catholicism and stressed the principles of *sola scriptura* and *sola fide* ("the Scriptures alone" and "by faith alone"), the Reformers have been called despisers of reason. The charge has stuck especially in the case of Luther, who on one occasion referred to reason as "the devil's whore." That remark, however, must be seen in context. Luther had studied at universities where the curriculum was still very much influenced by the traditions of the Middle Ages. The God presented to him was the God of the philosophers, a cold and distant being who despised sinners

and whose word could not really be trusted. Searching for a merciful and trustworthy God, and finding Him at last in the Scriptures, Luther for the rest of his life, and with all the many gifts he had, promoted the principle of *sola scriptura* and attacked the type of reason that exalts itself above revelation.

But Luther did not despise reason as such – that is, the type of reason which knows its place and submits to revelation. He had to take a clear stand here, for his situation was not all that different from the one we find ourselves in: rationalism and irrationalism both posed a threat to religion in his days as in ours. That Luther was far from being an irrationalist is clear from practically all his writings. It is also clear from the fact that he himself, as well as his friend and successor Melancthon, worked hard to promote literacy and education in Germany.

Like his follower Abraham Kuyper more than three hundred years later, Calvin knew that Christ must be served in all areas of life.

And what applies to Luther applies with perhaps even greater force to John Calvin. Like Luther, Calvin fought the prevailing threat of irrationalism and strongly promoted learning. One of his greatest achievements in the field of education was the establishment of the Geneva Academy, the first Protestant university. The Academy was instituted so that the churches would be provided with a well-educated ministry, but that was not its only function.



John Calvin

Like his follower Abraham Kuyper more than three hundred years later, Calvin knew that Christ is the ruler of all of life and must be served in all areas of life, and the Academy therefore provided also for the training of students seeking non-theological careers, such as law and medicine.

Calvin holds, like Luther, that reason is indispensable as a servant but very dangerous as a master.

Calvin spoke highly of the human intellect. Well-known is his praise of learning in Book II of his *Institutes* (II, ii, 15,16). Having mentioned there the work of ancient philosophers, medical doctors, mathematicians, and other pagan scholars, he writes that their accomplishments are gifts of the Holy Spirit, and that therefore Christians may not despise them but must make a grateful use of them. But he adds that “all this capacity to understand” is but “an unstable and transitory thing in God’s sight, when a solid foundation of truth does not underlie it.” And with respect to the role of reason in theology, and indeed in all other scholarly pursuits, he holds, like Luther, that it is indispensable as a servant but very dangerous as a master.

Modern critical reason

After the Reformation, with the triumph of modern secularism, we note a return to the Greek view of reason. Impressed by the achievements of the human intellect as evident especially in science, modern thinkers once again saw reason as the means by which mankind can climb up to heaven. They

began by equating reason and revelation, but soon they made reason the judge of revelation, and from there it was but a step to the rejection of revelation and the reliance on reason alone.

This optimistic rationalism did not last indefinitely. In the end critical reason proved to be a reed that pierces the hand of the person who leans on it. It led to unreason. That the idolatry of human reason tends to have this effect had become clear already in ancient Greek history. After the time of the great Athenian philosophers, many Greek thinkers rejected reason and turned to scepticism (disbelief in objective truth) and/or mysticism.

Something similar has happened in modern history. For two or three centuries faith in man’s critical reason was strong. People believed that philosophy, science, and the social sciences could solve all mankind’s problems and bring about an earthly utopia. The disasters that the West experienced in our own century, however, replaced that heady optimism with a profound pessimism, which in western history, too, led to scepticism and the exaltation of unreason.

Reason and unreason today


Although irrationalism is widespread in our postmodern world, faith in reason has not disappeared. Many people still believe, for example, that the sciences and the sciences alone can and will solve the many problems that confront our world. The rationalistic attitude continues to be found in religion as well. For many people science and logic still decide about the credibility of religious doctrine. Whatever cannot be observed, or whatever contradicts human reasoning, is rejected. The influence of this rationalistic attitude is as strong as it has

ever been. It continues to be very much a part of our world-view, and it therefore does not fail to affect Christians.

But if rationalism remains strong, irrationalism is rapidly gaining ground. In our days it manifests itself in such things as the New Age religion and the widespread belief in the occult. The same type of thing happened, as I mentioned, among the Greeks, and the process has occurred at other times in western history. In all cases it came after a long period of rationalism. For as I said earlier, critical, autonomous reason acts like an acid, corroding and destroying whatever truths and realities it cannot account for. This means that it destroys a great deal, for there is much in life that is beyond reason. And the many things that reason cannot account for – such as religious truth, and the experience of beauty and love and goodness – are among those that are most meaningful for a human being.

Critical, autonomous reason is an acid, which corrodes and destroys whatever truths and realities it cannot account for. This means that it destroys a great deal, for there is much in life – such as religious truths, and the experience of beauty and love and goodness – that is beyond reason.

The rebellion against rationalism is therefore bound to come sooner or later. But it can take different forms. If it comes as a simple rejection of the idolatry of reason, it can bring healing; but if it takes the form of irrationalism, it can lead to a destructiveness that exceeds the harm done by the rationalism it is reacting against. History provides examples of both, but especially of the latter. And because, as a modern philosopher reminds us, those who fail to study history will be forced to repeat it, it is well to keep these examples in mind. That applies to Christians, for the irrationalist trend affects believers as much as the rationalist one. More about that in the next article.

Dr. F. G. Oosterhoff is a retired teacher of history living in Hamilton, Ontario. 

UNDESERVED MERCY

By L.E. Leeftink



Preparing for the Lord's Supper

Self-examination and *the sure promise of God*

From the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper

Self-examination is an important aspect of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper tells us that true self-examination consists of three parts. This meditation focuses on the second part.

Second, let everyone search his heart whether he also believes the sure promise of God that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is freely given him as his own, as if he himself had fulfilled all righteousness.

With you there is forgiveness

This week is the week of preparation before the Lord's Supper. During these days of preparation I must concentrate on the Lord Jesus and on the cross. I ought to do that always! The Lord knows how difficult that is for me. It is just a normal week. I throw myself into my work; I am fully absorbed by the every-day things. I know that God approves of that. It is not in contradiction to the holy feast of next Sunday. Yet I need to prepare myself. In Psalm 130 I read: ". . . with you there is forgiveness. . . !" Right now I want to ask God to ensure that nothing will stand in the way of my understanding these words well. "With you there is forgiveness. . . !"

*Do I actually need that forgiveness?
And – am I really willing to say this?
Do I really believe this?*

I ought to consider this carefully. I ought to remind myself of the first part of the self-examination, and again confess: because of my sins I deserve God's wrath. That is the way it is. And now the point: I must let go of everything, and indeed expect all things from Jesus alone. He died on the cross a shameful and bitter death. My God – with you there is forgiveness!

Surely, I cannot claim that nothing sinful has happened in the months past. I cannot claim that I have done no wrong and therefore can attend the Supper with a self-confident heart. I can no longer compare myself with others and draw some favourable conclusions for myself. There is nothing for me to hide behind. Because I am standing at the cross, face to face with Christ! No one stands between us. At the cross I find myself standing . . . guilty.

And yet . . . with you there is forgiveness? At first I thought that this had little to do with the statement: 'be-

cause of my sins I have deserved God's wrath.' Yet that is not so, as I realize now. The first is the extension of the second statement. If I do not know anything else but my sin and God's wrath, then I am the most miserable of all people, and then this preparation week is the worst of all weeks.

*I am standing at the cross of Christ Jesus.
How shameful and bitter was his death!
Sometimes I just do not know what to do.
Often I do not even recognize myself.
I do not know the way to my own heart.
At times I am even afraid of my own thoughts.
I am stuck fast in my own sin.*

Yet – I remind myself of that cross. That's where Jesus Christ died. Why did He die? To let me share in his righteousness. No longer do I need to detest myself. Thanks to the cross of Christ, God's loving kindness awaits me.

*May I believe that?
Do I dare to believe that?
Does that fill me with deep awe and thankful reverence?*

*Yes Lord – with you there is indeed forgiveness!
You have said this yourself!
Please work it in me through your Holy Spirit.*

Leeftink, L.E. (1998). *Tot versterking van ons geloof: ter voorbereiding op de viering van het Heilig Avondmaal*. Woord & Wereld #39. Translated by T.M.P. Vandervelen. Rev. Leeftink is minister of the Reformed Church (Liberated) at Zaamslag, The Netherlands.

This meditation includes suggested Bible readings for each day during the week of preparation, a passage from the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper that forms the focus of the meditation, a written out Bible passage to focus attention on God's Word since sacrament and Word may never become isolated from each other, and an appropriate psalm or hymn to be sung.

When thinking about the Bible passages, consider these key questions: 1. How does this passage speak of God the Father, and / or God the Son, and / or God the Holy Spirit? 2. What warning is given in this passage, also for me? 3. What promise is given in this passage, also for me? 4. What phrase / sentence speaks most directly to me? 5. What part of this passage can I use in my prayer?

Readings for the week of preparation

Sunday:	Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12
Monday:	Isaiah 55:1-13
Tuesday:	Micah 7:18-20
Wednesday:	Romans 3:21-30
Thursday:	Romans 5:1-11
Friday:	2 Corinthians 5:11-21
Saturday:	Matthew 26:26-30
Sunday:	Morning: Psalm 86:1-7 Evening: Psalm 86:8-13

Singing: Psalm 86:1,2

1. Turn Thy ear , O LORD, and heed me;
Answer me, I'm poor and needy.
I, who serve Thee constantly,
Trust that Thou wilt rescue me.
Thou, LORD, art my God and Saviour;
Show to me Thy grace and favour.
Cheer Thy servant, gladden me:
I lift up my soul to Thee.
2. Thou art good, Thy grace astounding,
And in steadfast love abounding.
When we call, O LORD, be nigh;
Listen to my troubled cry.
Thee I call, for Thou art near me;
None among the gods will hear me
Or is like Thee, LORD benign,
And no works compare with Thine.

From the Scriptures

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD;
O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.
If you, O LORD kept record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.
I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.
My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.
O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with Him is full redemption.
He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Not a new condition

Brother John Werkman was 'floored' by General Synod Fergus' decision regarding the OPC, because it "came up with a new condition now that all major barriers had been removed." And he quotes this 'new condition': "A general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient, and that a profession of faith and confirmation of a godly life is required." If brother Werkman turns to Article 72 of the Acts of Synod Lincoln, 1992, he will note that Synod 1992 introduced this same condition, in almost identical words! General Synod Fergus 1998 did not introduce a new condition, as brother Werkman suggests. Instead they simply repeated what Synod 1992 said. I sincerely wish that people would get their facts straight before urging members to voice their disapproval to their consistories and appeal to the next General Synod.

Far be it from me to suggest that General Synod Fergus, 1998 made no mistakes. But to those people who believe that General Synod 1998 introduced new conditions with respect to the OPC – or 'raised the bar' – I would like to see some evidence that supports this accusation. And otherwise it should be withdrawn.

R. J. Eikelboom, Calgary, Alberta

Re: "Love is a command" (Clarion, November 13, 1998)

"Love is a command" features an artificial, confounding, and un-Biblical construct. The sins of Hitler and Morgenthauer are said to be "against equals, against their fellowman; my sin is of a much higher or uglier order: I had sinned against God." Is the sin against equals not a sin against God as well? Sin is sin against God, never mind who commits it. Let's try to keep things straight.

Rienk Koat
Langley, BC

Our apologies for not publishing this letter sooner. – Editor

The Rev. P. Aasman clarifies at the request of the editor:

A distinction does not need to be exclusive in order to be valid. It must be granted that even though all sin is ultimately against God, the distinction between sin against God and sin against one's fellow man is valid. In the Lord's prayer, Jesus Christ says: "Forgive us our sins as we also forgive everyone who sins against us." On this basis at least, I would defend the construct disputed here.

P. Aasman

Inter-Church Relations: Where Are We Headed?

By J. Visscher

Do we really need five committees?

It cannot escape anyone who reads the Acts of Synod Fergus 1998 that Synod spent a lot of time on inter-church relations. Neither can it escape anyone who reads Article 141 of the Acts that Synod appointed a lot of committees on inter-church relations. We now have five! We have the long-standing Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA), the almost equally long-standing Committee for Contact with the OPC, the not-so-old Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity, the fairly recent Committee for the ERQ and a new Committee for the RCUS. (I realize that the Committees for the RCUS, ERQ and OPC are called "sub-committees" but they really are separate committees since each has its own mandate and each has to report directly to the next Synod.)

If you tally up all of the appointments to these committees you will come to a total of 22 men serving on them. Twelve of these men are ministers.

It goes without saying that one of the basic questions that will be heard through the federation over the next number of years is this: "In a small federation such as ours, do we really need five committees and 22 men spending their time on inter-church relations of one sort or another?"

It is to be hoped that the next Synod will take a good hard look at all of these committees and this manpower and seek ways to streamline the whole procedure. Surely, the churches would be best served by having only two committees, one to deal with relations with other churches in Canada and another to deal with relations with foreign churches.

Committees – why bother?

Another sentiment that has arisen about the appointment of some of these

committees is that of: "Why bother? Synod often does not adopt their recommendations anyway. It just appoints a new committee and studies everything to death."

Needless to say, this is a rather cynical assessment of the situation; however, having been a minister in the federation for more than 25 years, I can sense where it is coming from. To give a recent example: Synod 1995 appoints a committee to deal with the request of the ERQ for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. This Committee of four men spends a great deal of time reading and studying the documents, having meetings with their ERQ counterparts, drafts a long and extensive report, along with the recommendation to proceed.

So what happens? Synod decides that their report is insufficient and that some of the issues raised need more study. But what kind of issues? There is the status of deacons and deaconesses, liturgical forms, order of worship, supervision of the pulpit, Lord's Day observance, fencing of the Lord's Table, confessional binding, differences in Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and the issue of federative unity.

Real obstacles or not?

Now, let us look at these issues and ask ourselves this question: "Did the Committee really neglect to look into these areas?" A careful reading of the Report submitted to Synod may well lead you to quite a different conclusion.

With regard to the matter of deacons and deaconesses, the Synod wants a further clarification. Why? Presumably because of the sentence in its report which states: "The ODE does not specifically forbid the ordination of women to the office of deacon." Does this sentence represent a problem when women are not ordained as deacons in

the ERQ and deacons cannot be part of the ruling council of the church? I fail to see it. At the same time our readers should be reminded that until a few years ago our own Church Order also lacked such a restriction.

Synod also wants further clarification on liturgical forms and order of worship. Is this necessary? The ERQ has appointed a committee to prepare liturgical forms for use in their churches, and as for an "order of worship," have we forgotten that our own are "suggested orders"?

Another item that requires further investigation has to do with the pulpit and the Lord's Supper. With respect to the former matter, a careful reading of the pages 16 and 17 show, as our Committee concludes, that the ERQ "jealously guards itself from what it would consider to be potential unreformed influences." As for the latter, the ERQ is more in the Presbyterian tradition of fencing the Table. We may consider such an approach to be inadequate, but can we go to them, with Bible in hand, and admonish them for being unscriptural?

Confessional binding?

Another issue to be talked about more is called "confessional binding." Yet again I am forced to ask, "What is meant here?" If we are referring to office bearers, then Synod 98 is wrong, for on page 5 of the Report it specifically says that "... all office bearers must subscribe to these confessions." If we are referring to members, then I ask you, where do we as Canadian Reformed Churches confessionally bind our members? In various Forms we ask them whether or not they "... confess that the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian church, (and whether it) is the true and complete doctrine of

salvation?" If you go by the actual words of this question you are forced to conclude that all that our churches ask of members is that they agree that "the doctrine of the Old and New Testament" is "summarized in the confessions." There is no reference here to whether or not we consider them binding. (Indeed, that has always been one of my objections against the change in our Form from "articles of the Christian faith" to "summarized in the confessions" in that this formulation binds no one. It is weak and merely descriptive. If we want our members to express publicly that they adhere to the confessions then we should have adopted a different wording.)

Other issues

Another issue that apparently needs further study has to do with differences in the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Well, I challenge you to read the pages 19-21 of the Report and come up with a problem. As our Committee says, "The most dramatic change comes with the addition of Rule 1. This addition does not present any difficulties, especially since it reflects the 'missionary' character of these churches."

Finally, there is one more issue that needs further discussion and that has to do with federative unity. Now, this is a matter that may require further discussion but why, especially in light of the current cultural and political situation in Canada, make it an obstacle? The Committee's proposal to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship as an interim step was both realistic and reasonable.

Having said all of this, I can only conclude that Synod did both the ERQ and our Committee a disservice. Here we have a small, young, and struggling church that wants to be Reformed in doctrine and practice and which asks us to grab hold of the right hand of fellowship that they offer and embrace them, but we refuse. On what basis? On a poor reading of the Report and because they do not do things exactly as we do them. I am ashamed of our churches and the hard-hearted approach that we have taken to the ERQ.

For the members of the Committee, this must be a bitter pill to swallow. All that work and what happens to it? Is it any wonder that I have heard more than one minister say, "I hope that Synod does not appoint me to any of its committees, and certainly not to those com-

mittees that have to deal further with the ERQ, the OPC and the RCUS. I could not work in good conscience with such mandates."

And what about the RCUS?

And that brings us to the manner in which Synod 98 dealt with the Report of the CRCA regarding the RCUS. In that connection I will not comment on the matter of the Lord's Supper since I have said enough about that; however, there are some other parts of the mandate of the new Committee that need comment.

For example, there is the matter of Sunday observance. This needs further discussion. Why? Apparently because while the Constitution of the RCUS states that those who profane the Sabbath are worthy of censure, this is not sufficient according to our recent Synod. The fact that some members work and some attend restaurants on Sunday is apparently the obstacle.

Now I agree that such developments are reason for concern and mutual discussion; however, as Canadian Reformed Churches we should guard ourselves against adopting an attitude of self-righteousness on this point. Thankfully, those among us who work and eat out on Sundays appear to be few, but what about all those who travel here, there and everywhere on the Lord's Day? Is that too not a matter of concern that the RCUS could raise about us?

Then too there is the matter of the RCUS and its membership in NAPARC. It is regrettable that the Report did not anticipate this issue; however, the members of Synod should have known, or else they could have learned quickly enough, that the RCUS led the fight in the suspension of the CRC from this organization.

Finally, there is the doctrine of the church in the RCUS that somehow needs elaboration. Well, the Committee added a long appendix to its Report which explains the RCUS view. In addition, the RCUS has adopted the Three Forms of Unity which binds it to the Articles 27-30 of the Belgic Confession. Is more needed? Do we have more? One more thing that should be noted is that the Church at Carman which originally had questions on the RCUS's view of the church apparently saw no need to write Synod 98 and protest against the Committee's evaluation.

The article by Dr. J. De Jong in the Year End issue (1998), p. 616, should have been entitled "The Appropriation of Salvation" (not: "The Approbation of Salvation"). Our apologies to Dr. De Jong for this error.

– Publisher

So where are the real problems that prevent us from entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship? Once again Synod has failed to do justice to a Committee's report and recommendation.

Needed changes

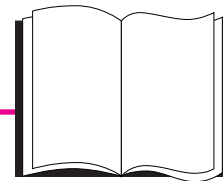
So where does that leave us? For starters it leaves us with the need to make some changes. In the first place, future synods need to take an approach to inter-church relations that distinguishes clearly between truly biblical obstacles that prevent fellowship and issues that can be resolved within the framework of fellowship. In the second place, Synod needs to do a much better job evaluating the reports that it receives from its committees. In the third place, future synods would do well to insure that the Committee making the Report is present at Synod and receives the opportunity to interact on the floor with the report of the Synod's Sub-Committee on the matter. In the fourth place, it would be beneficial if these matters received much more discussion in our "unofficial" church press.

Discontent in the churches

Why should we have more discussion and debate about these issues? Because there is a lot of confusion and disagreement about these inter-church relations decisions of Synod. Never before have I received so many calls and comments from members of our churches in different parts of the country who are distressed by these decisions of Synod 98. They are concerned that these decisions are driving the Canadian Reformed Churches in the direction of narrow-mindedness and sectarianism and off the historic Reformed road of catholicity and biblical integrity. I share their concern. What about you?

Dr. J. Visscher is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Langley, BC





Delegation to Synod

By *Tako van Popta*

The Public Complaints Commission looking into RCMP actions at last year's APEC summit hit a serious roadblock when the chair, Mr. Gerald Morin was accused of bias. Someone had overheard him in conversation, in a public place, suggesting he had already made up his mind about the outcome of the inquiry. If he had made up his mind prior to hearing all the evidence, obviously he cannot act as an impartial judge. No one would argue that we must demand the highest degree of fairness and impartiality of our judges. In the meantime the inquiry is held up until the issue of bias can be sorted out.

That brings me to Synod 1998. Clarion has already printed a number of interesting analyses of the more controversial decisions, and I'm sure more will follow. I want to address a more mundane, although equally important, topic, namely, the issue of procedural fairness and due process. Take a look at page 9 of the Acts of Synod and compare the committee structures and membership to that of Synod 1995. You will see that Rev. W. den Hollander, in two successive synods, acted as convener of the committee dealing with the Denver appeals. At Synod 1995, several churches and individuals appealed a certain regional synod decision involving the American Reformed Church in Denver Colorado. Rev. den Hollander was one of the authors of the report denying those appeals. You will find that decision at Article 115 of the 1995 Acts. Then in 1998 Rev. den Hollander was appointed as the convener of the committee dealing with the same issue. He was asked to sit on an appeal of the decision he had helped prepare three years previously and apparently he agreed! How could he possibly be expected to be impartial and hear the evidence with an open mind? This certainly creates a perception of bias on the part of the judge.

Perhaps Synod 1998 didn't take the appeals of these churches in Alberta very seriously. After all, this was the third synod dealing with this trouble-

some issue. I can't blame people for being tired of it, but the fact that three churches in Alberta thought the issue was important enough to appeal once again should have been enough reason for Synod 1998 to take it seriously.

This is not so much a criticism of Rev. den Hollander or even of the Synod's executive committee that distributed the work assignments. After all, committees only make recommendations and the synod as a whole is responsible for the final decision. Rather, this is a criticism of the system we have developed to appoint people to synod in the first place. Two other 1998 delegates, the Reverend Messrs. R. Aasman and P. Feenstra, had also been delegates to Synod 1995. As a matter of fact, Rev. Feenstra has been to the last three Synods and Rev. Aasman and Rev. den Hollander both have been to the last four, without interruption.

I had the pleasure of serving with all three at Synod 1995, and I know them all to be intelligent, hard working and capable leaders who have the best interest of the Federation of Churches at heart. But that's beside the point. If we are going to use our synods not only to make principled decisions concerning, for example, the Theological College and Bible translations, but also as an appeal court, we must ensure its highest integrity. Appeals are obviously very important to the people and churches involved, so synods too must treat them with the highest degree of sincerity. Our ecclesiastical courts seem to have missed a central element in judicial fairness, namely, not only must justice be done, it must also appear to have been done. That, I'm afraid, has not always been the case, and it certainly was not the case with respect to the Denver appeals in 1998.

A few simple changes would prevent this unfairness. We should never delegate anyone to two successive general synods no matter how capable or willing he is. Nor should we delegate anyone to a general synod if he attended the immediately preceding regional

synod. Furthermore, we should adopt a rotation system giving equal opportunity to all our forty or more active ministers. This will guarantee that at a minimum, appellants will be able to present their case to someone other than the person whose decision is being appealed.

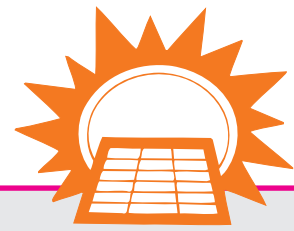
Our Churches would truly be better off without an ecclesiastical court of appeal than with one that allows systemic bias and procedural unfairness. Our appeal system is supposed to function as a means for resolving disputes in the Church environment. Unfortunately, not everyone will agree that a synod's decision is in keeping with God's Word. And in a community of mature Christians, we should be able to accept the judgment of the court, even when it goes against our dearly held beliefs. But if justice does not appear to have been done; if it appears that we did not get a fair hearing, a contrary decision can be very hard to swallow. Perhaps that is one of the reasons we so often see appeals on the same issue coming back to synod after synod.

When it comes to running our public court system, we take these issues very seriously because as a nation we realize how an untrusted judicial system can undermine the people's confidence. Our church courts should easily meet and exceed these public standards. The Apostle Paul says not to take disputes to the worldly courts but to have them resolved within the church. Certainly he implied that the church would give a fair hearing. We may expect no less from our synods.

Tako van Popta is a member of the Langley Canadian Reformed Church, practices law in Surrey, BC, and was a delegate to General Synod Abbotsford, 1995.

Editorial note: In a sense, the federation of churches has been too small to avoid all the types of problems mentioned above. With the recent creation of new classes in British Columbia and Ontario, we may expect some improvement in the future. – CvD

RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

"Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." Romans 12:12

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

When a new year starts, you hear many people talk about their New Year's resolutions. They treat the new year just like other new things: they want to keep it nice and clean. They look back at the old year, and they see some of the things they did that messed up their lives. So now they want to make a new start and make everything look better. Therefore they make their resolutions: to stop smoking, to go on a diet, to exercise, and many other things. Once the year is on its way, and several weeks elapsed, you don't hear much about these brilliant plans anymore, for then most of the resolutions have already been broken. Maybe their only comfort is: Next year. . . .

It is a good thing that we do not have to make and break New Year's resolutions. If we had to thrive on the good things we could do, there would not be much hope for us.

Fortunately we can find the guidelines for our lives in God's Word. There we read that we cannot do anything on our own. We need God's help and his blessing on everything we do. The Lord requires of us that we try our best in everything we do. If something does not go very well, then we have to try again. We never have to give up, and we do not have to leave it until the next year either. This is not depressing. For we have a great comfort. We have to try to do everything well. But when we fail, we are not a hopeless case. Because we can go to the Lord, and He understands why we failed. At the end of every day we can go on our knees and talk to Him. We can tell Him everything that was difficult for us, in which we failed, or the things that we just could not handle. Then He does not reject us because we did not do very well. He will accept our prayer and He will comfort us. He will forgive when we ask Him, and when we repent. He will also give us the strength to go on again the following day. He is with us in everything we do. For the task that He has assigned to us, we can accomplish as long as we do it with Him.

This New Year 1999 is not much different from the year 1998. Most of us will still have to do the same things we did before. The only thing that is different is that we write a different date. We live now in the year 1999. We are another year farther away from the birth of Jesus Christ. And we are also a year closer to his return.

He who was born on earth to die for our sins, is now with our Father in heaven. Every time when we pray to the Father, He is there to intercede for us. He takes away the sins, even of our prayer, so that it is

made perfect and holy to God. And our Mediator can do that, because He died for our sins. Now He can tell the Father that we do not need to be punished for our wrongdoings, for He bore the wrath of God. Everything is done for us by the Son, so the Father can forgive.

We do not know what will happen in the new year that lies ahead of us. We probably have to do what we have been doing for many years already. That task may be difficult for many of us, because of illnesses or handicaps or other limitations for ourselves or for those in our care that keep us from having the life that we would like to live. Yet it will be good if we receive every day as a gift out of the hand of our Father. He will help us through each day if we live it with Him. He will comfort us with the fact that there is a New Life in sight. For one day there will be no more New Years to celebrate when we will enter his eternal Glory, which has been prepared for us by our beloved Saviour, Jesus Christ. And remember: every day brings us closer to that glorious Day!

*If, showing no compassion,
Thou shouldst our sins record
And mark all our transgressions,
Who then could stand, o Lord?
But thou dost pardon fully
All our iniquity,
That we may serve Thee truly
And fear Thy majesty.*

Psalms 130:2

Birthdays in February:

12: Conny Van Amerongen

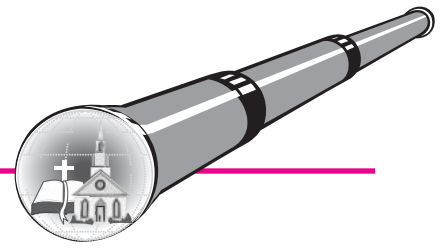
35 Bredin Pky #102
Orangeville, ON
L9X 3X1

18: Cora Schoonhoven

24 James Speight
Markham, ON
L3P 3G4

For Conny it will be her 34th, and for Cora her 48th birthday. Congratulations to both of you, and until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Reg. Rd. 20, RR #1
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
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Observation Deck

By J. VanRietschoten

The South African situation

In South Africa there are several Reformed Churches. One of these has been much in the news because of a unifying movement among Reformed Churches. The churches involved are in the process of forming the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). One of the old established Reformed churches in South Africa is the Nedduits Gereformeerde Kerk, now known as the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). Through mission work the DRC established "daughter" churches. These federated under the name Dutch Reformed Mission Church of South Africa (DRMC). Mother and daughter were however separated because of the system of apartheid. Within the Uniting Reformed Church all churches must join on the basis of full unity in Christ regardless of race or colour.

Previously the mother church (DRC) supported the state-system of Apartheid. This changed. In 1986 the DRC issued *"Church and Society. A Testimony of the Dutch Reformed Church."* In this Testimony the DRC declared, *"Racism is a grievous sin which no person or church may defend or practise."* In the same year the uniting churches (URCSA) issued the *Belhar Confession*. The uniting churches made it clear that every church joining the URCSA must adopt the Belhar Confession. The mother church was faced with having to accept the Belhar Confession. Adopting the Belhar Confession meant that the DRC not only should denounce racism as sin but also should denounce apartheid and church separation as sin.

In October 1998 a synod of the DRC declared without qualification that, *"It rejects apartheid as wrong and sinful, not simply in its effects and operations but also in its fundamental nature."* This statement is in line with the contents of the Belhar Confession. The DRC contends that this statement should be sufficient for being received as full partner in the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa. The adoption of the Belhar Confession had been debated by all eleven regional synods as well as the general synod of 1998. Although the Belhar Confession was judged to be in harmony with Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity, the decision was made not to add this confession to the basis of the DRC. The synodical statement calling apartheid a sin was deemed to be sufficient. This statement is also incorporated in a new Testimony on Church and Society like the one issued in 1986.

Our Sister Churches in South Africa, the Free Reformed Churches.

A development has taken place among our sister churches in South Africa. There now are five congregations and five mission posts. Altogether these are served by nine

ministers. Five serve the congregations and four serve the mission posts. Part of the development is that five ministers became ministers in our sister churches after having broken with the Dutch Reformed Church. This is the same DRC of which we wrote in the previous paragraph. These ministers, as well as individual members, left the DRC because of unreformed practices and inroads of more liberal interpretation of Scripture. From the REC News Exchange of Nov. 12, 1998 we receive some insight into the ways of the DRC.

The DRC accepts baptized children at the Lord's Supper. It is left up to the local churches to decide the age level.

Some members had gone to charismatic churches, been rebaptized, and then returned to the DRC. The church will now treat them as they would other members who disagree with the church's doctrinal positions.

The DRC synod reaffirmed that the church's confessions agree with Scripture.

To encourage more women in leadership, the DRC decided that at least two of the six elders in its General Synodal Commission must be women, if at least two women elders are delegates to the General Synod. Some of the pastors could also be women, and might be elected to the Commission.

After the DRC renounced apartheid as a sin the DRC has been reinstated as a member of WARC, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches which has 214 members.

This picture of the DRC in South Africa resembles the picture of the CRC in North America. The seceding of the five ministers and others who joined our sister churches in South Africa resembles the seceding of many congregations and ministers from the CRC and forming the URCNA.

For a more complete overview of our sister churches in SA here is a list of the five churches and five mission posts.

Bethal, minister: P. Nel.
Capetown, minister E. Viljoen.
Johannesburg, minister C. F. Heiberg. Minister emeritus W. Boesenkool.
Pretoria (1) minister J. R. Visser
Pretoria (2) minister C. Klein
Mission posts:
Belhar, minister Dr. J. A. Breytenbach
Mamelodi, minister J. Bosman

Three mission posts in Soshanghuve with two ministers, J. M. Boersma and A. deVisser.

Our sister churches in SA are in the process of setting up their own training for the ministry. The Foundation Woord en Wandel publishes a monthly magazine *Kompas*.

The articles in the issues I reviewed were of high calibre. The brotherhood there is well served by a variety of authors who write in a upbuilding manner. The style is lucid, well within the reach of the average church member. Just in case any one of our readers would like to know the address of *Kompas* here it is:

Adm. Mrs. G. A. de Wit.
P. O. Box 23931
Gezina 0031 SA

Email address of the editorial committee of *Kompas* is, wmeijer@alpha.terranet.co.za


I hope that Observation Deck has brought these far away sister churches and their affairs a little closer to us all. Now we know better how to pray for each other.

Sources

Theological Forum Issue Vol. XIX, No. 1, March 1991 of the REC, *The Belhar Confession*.

The REC News Exchange of Nov. 12, 98.

Kompas vol. 7 nrs 7,8,9.

I thank the librarian of our Theological College, Miss M. VanderVelde, for her valuable assistance in locating sources. 

PRESS RELEASE



Press Release Classis Pacific West of the Canadian Reformed Churches Convened as Classis Contracta on December 7, 1998 in Langley, BC

A Classis Contracta of the Churches in Classis Pacific West was called to deal with the approbation of the call by the Church at Cloverdale to the Rev. J. Huijgen of the Church at Smithers. On behalf of the convening Church, Rev. J. Visscher called the meeting to order. He read Psalm 84 and led in prayer. The examination of the Credentials showed that the Churches at Cloverdale, Langley, and Willoughby Heights were represented. After Classis was declared constituted, it was agreed that Rev. J. Visscher would act as Chairman and Rev. E. Kampen as Clerk. The agenda was adopted.

The Church at Cloverdale submitted the following documents: Letter of call; Letter of acceptance; Certificate of Release from the Church at Smithers; Attestation from the Church at Smithers testifying that Rev. Huijgen is a minister in good standing; Letter testifying to the approbation by the congregation of Cloverdale and assuming of responsibility as of Dec. 23, 1998, at 000:01a.m. PST. These documents were found to be in good order. Classis decided to approbate the call.

The Church at Smithers requested that Rev. J. Huijgen be appointed as counsellor and that the pulpit supply for Cloverdale be transferred to Smithers. Classis appointed Rev. Huijgen as

Counsellor. Classis granted pulpit supply one Sunday per month. The Deputy for preaching arrangements was instructed to draw up a schedule. Rev. C. VanSpronsen was appointed to represent Classis at the welcome evening for Rev. J. Huijgen.

For Classis Contracta of the Churches in Classis Pacific West, held on Dec. 7, 1998,

Rev. E. Kampen

Press Release of Classis Alberta/Manitoba, December 8, 1998

On behalf of the convening church of Carman, the Rev. J. Moesker called the meeting to order. He read Isaiah 7, prayed and then requested the singing of Hymn 12: 1, 3. The delegates were welcomed as were the visitors. A special welcome was extended to the Deputies of Regional Synod, the Revs. C. Van Spronsen and R. Schouten, as well as to Candidate Doug Vandeburgt who was at Classis to be examined. The credentials were examined and found to be in good order. There was one instruction. Classis was then constituted. The executive officers were appointed: Rev. J. Moesker, chairman; Rev. E. J. Tiggelaar, vice-chairman; and Rev. R. Eikelboom, clerk. The agenda was adopted after some additions.

Leading into the examination of Candidate D. Vandeburgt, who was called by the church at Denver, the church at Taber came with the following instruction: *"The Taber Canadian*

Reformed Church recognizes the American Reformed Church of Denver as a sister church within our classical resort and federation, 1. in light of the letter of the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC to Classis Alberta-Manitoba, dated April 3, 1998, in which the forgiveness that Classis asked of the Presbytery has been received 'for not having been more careful when receiving M. Pollock into our federation when there were charges by Presbytery against him', 2. because the Presbytery expresses its sincere appreciation for the action of Classis AB/MB in the matter and now considers the Denver matter closed, 3. having walked the ecclesiastical road and exhausted all avenues of appeal in all good conscience." The chairman made note of full harmony being achieved in Classis.

The examination of Candidate D. Vandeburgt then took place. The documentation for examination were checked and found to be in good order. The candidate presented his sermon proposal on Isaiah 5: 1 - 7. A discussion followed in closed session, led by the examiners, the Revs. R. Aasman and K. Jonker. The sermon was judged to be sufficient for continuing the examination.

Rev. R. Aasman, the examiner on Old Testament, examined on 1 Samuel 1 and 1 Samuel 2: 1 - 11. Rev. G. A. Snip, the examiner on New Testament, examined on Hebrews 12 and Revelation 1. Rev. K. Jonker examined on Knowledge of Scripture. Rev. W. B. Slomp examined on Doctrine and Creeds. Rev. E. J. Tiggelaar examined

on Church History. Rev. R. J. Eikelboom examined on Ethics. Rev. J. Van Popta examined on Church Polity. Rev. J. Moesker examined on Diaconiology. Following each of the categories of examination, the rest of the delegates, including the Deputies of Regional Synod were given the opportunity to ask questions as well. After meeting in closed session and deciding, Classis could with the concurring advise of the Deputies for Regional Synod congratulate Candidate D. Vandeburgt on successfully passing his examination. Approbation of the call with the appropriate certification was then given. Br. D. Vandeburgt was then asked to sign the Subscription Form. Singing and prayer took place, after which Br. Vandeburgt and the delegates of Denver were congratulated by all.

Church visitors reported on visits made to the churches at Calgary, Carman, Coaldale, Taber, Grace Winnipeg and Redeemer Winnipeg.

The report of the Observer to the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC was received.

The Committee for Aid to Needy Churches submitted its report for 1998 and its requests for 1999. The Churches at Barrhead and Denver requested assistance for 1999. Classis approved these requests.

Question period ad Art. 44 was held. It was noted with thankfulness that in all the churches the ministry of the office bearers is continued and that decisions of the major assemblies are honoured. In closed session advise was given to the church at Taber on a matter of discipline.

Classis made the following appointments: Convening church for the next classis meeting: Coaldale. Suggested officers: Rev. T. Lodder, chairman; Rev. E. J. Tiggelaar, clerk. Date and place of the next meeting was set for March 9, 1999 in Calgary. The alternate date was set for June 8, 1999.

Delegates for the next Regional Synod are alphabetically as elders: L. Bredenhof, H. DeBoer, E. Tams. Alternates in order are Jacob Kuik, W. Van Assen and H. Vandenhoven. Alphabetically as ministers: the Revs. J. Moesker, G. Snip and J. Van Popta. Alternates in order: K. Jonker, R. Eikelboom and R. Aasman.

The Revs. R. Aasman and K. Jonker were reappointed to the examination

committee. Rev. W. Slomp was appointed as alternate.

The church at Carman was appointed to bring the greetings and congratulations of the churches of Classis Alberta/Manitoba to the church at Denver, with the ordination of Minister-elect, br. D. Vandeburgt.

Personal question period was briefly made use of.

Censure according to Art. 44 C. O. was not needed.

The Acts were read and adopted and the Press Release was read and approved for publication.

The chairman requested the singing of Psalm 96: 8, after which the Rev. K. Jonker led in thanksgiving prayer. The chairman closed the meeting.

E. J. Tiggelaar,
vice-chairman, e.t.

Press Release of Classis Ontario North, December 11, 1998

1. On behalf of the convening church at Guelph the Rev. A.J. Pol called the meeting to order. He requested the brothers to sing Psalm 125:1 and 2, read Psalm 125 and led in prayer. Rev. Pol welcomed as observers: Revs. J. Bouwers and P. Vellinga from the United Reformed Church; Rev. C. DePrine and elder J. DeVries from the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church; Rev. P. Bedard from l'Église Réformée du Québec.
2. The credentials were examined by the delegates of Grand Valley. There were no instructions.
3. Classis was constituted. The appointed officers were: Rev. B.J. Berends, chairman; Rev. G. Nederveen, vice-chairman; Rev. P. Aasman, clerk.
4. Memorabilia: The chairman thanked the convening church for preparing classis. He congratulated the churches at Flamborough and Fergus that the Revs. J. DeGelder and J.D. Louwerse had accepted the calls extended to them. Also candidate Marc Jagt accepted the call by the church at Ottawa. He also welcomed the Revs. D.G.J. Agema and G. Wieske who were present as Deputies Regional Synod for the peremptory examination of br. Jagt. The chairman mentioned further that the Rev. C. Bosch had declined

the call to Aldergrove and that candidate Doug Vandeburgt had accepted the call to Denver and passed his peremptory examination in Edmonton earlier this week. Finally, the chairman mentioned that the home of missionary R.F. Boersema was broken into and that he and his family were accosted. He commended Rev. Boersema and family into the Lord's care.

5. The agenda was adopted after several items were added to the provisional agenda.
6. Peremptory examination of brother M. Jagt. The necessary documents were presented and found to be in good order. Classis proceeded to the examination. After the sermon proposal on Genesis 50:24-26 was presented, classis decided to continue with the examination. Br. Jagt was then examined on Exegesis Old Testament, Exegesis New Testament, Doctrine and Creeds.
7. After lunch the chairman called the meeting back to order. He requested the brothers to sing Psalm 96:1, 2. Roll call showed that every one was present.
8. The examination continued on Knowledge of Scripture, Church History, Ethics, Church Polity and Diaconiology. Classis judged the examination to be sufficient and decided to declare br. Jagt eligible for the ministry within the Canadian Reformed Churches. Deputies Regional Synod gave their concurring advice. Br. Jagt was informed of this decision. He signed the Form of Subscription for Ministers. The chairman requested the assembly to sing Psalm 84:4, 5 and led in prayer of thanksgiving. The brothers at classis received the opportunity to congratulate br. Jagt.
9. The chairman gave the observers the opportunity to address classis. Rev. Bedard from the ERQ, Rev. DePrine from the OCRC, and Rev. Bouwers from the URC expressed their appreciation for being present to witness the work of classis. They extended greetings from their respective churches. The chairman responded to each speaker and expressed the hope that the search for unity between the federations may become reality.
10. Approbation of the call by the church at Ottawa. The necessary

documents were presented and found to be in good order. Ottawa also informed classis that the required announcements were made. Classis approved the call, and the ordination will take place on January 3, 1999, DV.

11. Approbation of the call by the church at Flamborough. The necessary documents were presented and found to be in good order. Flamborough also informed classis that the required announcements were made. Classis approved the call, and the installation will take place on February 14, 1999, DV.
 12. Question Period according to art. 44 CO. The church at Burlington Ebenezer sought advice in a matter of discipline. Advice was given.
 13. Proposals and instructions
 - a) Overture from the church at Toronto seeking the endorsement of classis as per Art. 30 CO for its proposal to promote ecclesiastical fellowship with the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico. Bethel Church requested classis to submit this matter to Regional Synod East 1999, "with the intention that Regional Synod may propose to General Synod 2001, to include in the mandate of the Committee on Relations with the Churches in the Americas:
 - 1) to further investigate the Federation of Independent Presbyterian Churches of Mexico, using the material included in this overture as a basis for the examination of the marks of the true Church, to see if we can come to a sister church relationship with this federation of Churches, and
 - 2) to include in their report to the next General Synod their findings in this investigation, with a recommendation concerning such a relationship."
- Classis endorsed the proposal of Toronto and instructed the clerk to submit the material to the convening church of Regional Synod East 1999.

b) Proposal from the church at Guelph re: The fund for Needy Students.
The church at Guelph informed classis that the Fund for Needy Students has been depleted. It

proposed that "instead of replenishing the fund, separate funds now be established in each of the two new classical regions." The church at Guelph reminded the churches that they could consider the amount of \$2.34 per communicant member as a valid guideline for the amount needed to replenish the fund when preparing their budgets for 1999.

Classis accepted the proposal of the church at Guelph, to be acted upon by the two new classes at their first separate classical meetings.

14. Correspondence received. Report of the "transition committee" regarding the transition into two classical regions. The committee suggested that
 - a) the churches in the two classical regions hold their own classis in March 1999 in order to adopt Regulations for Classis, or make changes to the existing Regulations. In any case, changes would have to be made to Article 1 and new appointments would have to be made as outlined in the present articles 7.1 - 7.11.
 - b) both classes use the present Regulations as a point of departure in determining what their own Regulations should be.
 - c) both classes institute a separate Fund for Needy Students. The church at Guelph should present a financial report and audit, and send it to both Classes.
 - d) Classis September '98 adopted the recommendation of the Committee regarding Ottawa's request for assistance. It also approved the assessment of \$6.00 per communicant member for the coming year. At their respective March 1999 meetings, the churches in each classical region should establish their own Committee for Needy Churches to determine whatever funds may be needed in the future in their respective regions. Classis Central Ontario has the right to use whatever funds remain – including funds collected in 1999 – in order to continue to support Ottawa. Whatever further funds may be

needed for the year 2000 will be a matter for discussion in 1999 given the understanding that "for the time being support for needy churches in the two classical districts remain a joint responsibility" (Acts, Classis Ontario North, September 18, 1998, article 14.d).

- e) Archives of Classis Ontario North can be closed. The church at Burlington Ebenezer will be requested to store the archives, including the book of Subscription.
 - f) The books of the Treasurer should be closed and audited (by the church at Burlington-Waterdown) and the remaining funds distributed proportionally among the two Classes. Report of this should be available for the March classis.
 - g) New books for the Form of Subscription will be necessary for each classis, to be looked after by each convening church for the March 1999 classis.
- These recommendations were adopted.
15. Treasurer's report. The treasurer requested that the churches pay up before December 18, 1998. He also sought instruction how to divide the assets between the two Classes. The clerk was instructed to communicate the decision of classis.
 16. Appointments for next Classes:
 - a) Convening church for Classis Central Ontario: Ottawa. Date: March 12, 1999. Suggested officers: G. Nederveen, chairman; C. Bosch, vice-chairman; W. den Hollander, clerk
 - b) Convening church for Classis Northern Ontario: Orangeville. Date: March 12, 1999. Suggested officers: P.G. Feenstra, chairman; P. Aasman, vice-chairman; B.J. Berends, clerk
 17. Question period was used.
 18. Censure according to art. 34 CO. was not necessary.
 19. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release approved.
 20. The chairman requested the brothers to sing Psalm 145:2, 3 and led in closing prayer.

For Classis Ontario North,
December 11, 1998
G. Nederveen 