

# Clarion

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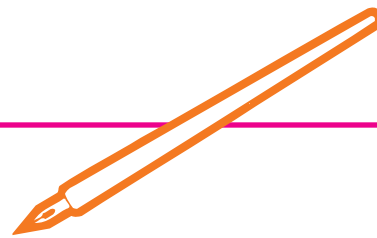


*Teaching to Learn -  
Learning to Teach*

Numbers

10:1-10

By C. Van Dam



## The future of Canadian Reformed Schools

At this time of the year, our school boards are busy making sure that there are teachers to man the classrooms in the next school year. It can be a time of expectation as to who the new teachers will be or a time of dread because of expected shortage of staff who are difficult to replace.

As Boards already now look ahead to planning for a new school year, we do well to ask ourselves about the future of our schools.

### Many pressures

There are many pressures that can spell trouble for our schools. The most obvious one is financial. It is no small thing for our relatively small Canadian Reformed community to bring up the millions of dollars needed to sustain an education system apart from the public system in our nation. Although financial help from tax revenue is on the increase in the western provinces, there is as yet no sign of any monetary relief in Ontario (or for that matter in the U.S.A.). We can be very thankful to the Lord our God that He gives material prosperity and moves the hearts of many to pay for this education.

Closely related to the financial pressures is the sad reality that in far too many cases, the education of the children is being seen solely as the responsibility of the parents of these children and not of the faith community to which we belong together. If a trend develops that the schools become user-pay schools then humanly speaking the future of our schools does not look bright because the costs will become unbearable. We need to persevere in putting our collective resources together if we are going to continue to enjoy schools where teaching is done in harmony with our Reformed confessions.

This brings us to another problem. How do we ensure that the schools indeed remain faithful to the Reformed confessions and that the teaching is done in harmony with the faith presuppositions that are to govern our life? The answer is simple and difficult at the same time. We need Reformed teachers. And therein may lie the greatest challenge for the future viability and existence of our schools as *Reformed* schools.

### Needed – Reformed teachers

What is a Reformed teacher? A Reformed teacher is someone who in teaching his or her courses is able to show the distinctiveness of the Reformed faith and how Biblical truth impacts on all the areas he or she is teaching. In other words, it is someone who is able to *integrate* one's confession with his or her profession. The key word here is "integrate." A Reformed teacher is not just any well-meaning communicant member of the church who also happens to like teaching. The danger is very real that unless one has been trained to think through all the subject matter from a consistently Reformed perspective, the confession of the heart can easily become separated from the nitty-gritty of life in the classroom.

If our schools are going to have a future as schools that will be confessionally faithful, it is imperative that only the very best be hired today for the tremendous task given to them. Believing parents cannot afford to have their Reformed commitment jeopardized in any way by those training their children during school hours.

Of course, all this is nothing new. There is however the reality of pressures to fill the classrooms, even if the teacher to be hired does not have all the qualifications that the Board may ideally wish to see or may even have decided upon – such as the need to have training at Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College before coming into the classroom. Is this a small matter? Is the Teachers' College *really* necessary?

### The Teachers' College

Do we really need this institution? It may be helpful to mention the two basic considerations that justified the establishment of the Teachers' College.<sup>1</sup> Firstly, new government regulations required teachers to get a university education and secondly, there were fewer and fewer teachers coming from Reformed teacher training centres in the Netherlands. The first factor is important for us now. Over twenty years ago and also now, the majority of those who prepared themselves for a teaching career in our schools have gone to a secular university. That was and still is reality. It was correctly seen that a secular university is far from an ideal training ground for becoming a *Reformed* teacher. How can teacher training which takes place in an environment where God's norms are routinely rejected be good for the future of Reformed education? Since such a university education does not take into account the Scriptures God revealed to us, how can that be a preparation for becoming a Reformed teacher?

It was for this reason that when the Teachers' College was established "the school boards . . . almost unanimously and wholeheartedly supported this new venture."<sup>2</sup> But, is that still the case today?

### The current situation and some options

At present there is no country-wide agreement among school boards that only those who have attended a program at the Teachers' College should be hired. Rather, the situation seems to be that if the market is tight and a prospective candidate fresh from a secular university comes along, he is quickly offered a position regardless whether he has any specifically Reformed credentials or not and regardless of whether he is willing to achieve a Diploma of Reformed Education in the foreseeable future, assuming he is asked. This is not a good situation. As long as school boards are content, or forced, to hire whomever comes their way from secular universities, the future Reformed character of our schools must remain dubious. Eventually the effects of the secular training will start to dominate the classrooms of our children. It is only a matter of time. Although we cannot control the future, should



we at least not do what is possible to safeguard the Reformed integrity of our schools?

If it is very difficult in the present situation to maintain or enforce a policy of insisting on Reformed teachers' training as a requirement for one's application for a position even to be considered, a credible alternative needs to be devised. At the very least some sort of a Reformed program should be a prerequisite for a permanent contract, such as the equivalent of a year's training in key subject areas from the Teachers' College, to be earned either by physically attending classes there (which might be difficult) or by correspondence courses supplemented by some sessions at the College itself. This second option should be attainable from anywhere in Canada. In this way, a Diploma of Reformed Education could be earned in a realistic period of time. Indeed it would be most reasonable to require such a Diploma of all those presently teaching who lack such background. This cannot but strengthen the Reformed character of our schools.

The schools and the churches have been blessed with the Reformed training given at the Teacher's College in Hamilton. Times are changing and our Teachers' College is reassessing how it can best meet its responsibilities in today's challenging context. The evaluation and self-examination that is now taking place may very well lead to necessary major changes. Let these take place after adequate consultation and planning. But one thing has not changed; namely, the need for a Reformed training for teachers so that those to whom have been entrusted God's little ones for a good part of each school day can be as fully equipped as possible for their task of instruction.

### The need for action

It is time to be honest with ourselves and ask, do we really want the Teachers' College or not? If not, let there be a public discussion on it, but let not this school die a slow and ignoble death in a forgotten corner of our life together as Canadian Reformed community. This institution has been established at considerable sacrifice and has rightly earned its place in our midst with graduates that testify to the quality work done there. This College is, to my knowledge, the only Canadian training for teachers whose task is specifically based on and circumscribed by the Reformed confessions. We need very good reasons to do away with such a school which has been a tremendous source of blessing in the education of our children.

It is however high time that the value of this work be recognized for what it is. One way is that school boards across the country agree to hire only those who have attended the Teachers' College in one form or another or who promise to earn the Diploma of Reformed Education. Neglecting to do so will in all likelihood sound the inevitable death knell of the Teachers' College which presently has no students – a situation which exists at least in part because no one seriously requires students to attend there.

Furthermore, if we do not insist on hiring only Teachers' College graduates or those who promise to become a graduate, our indecision will cast a very long shadow over the future prosperity of our schools as *Reformed* institutions. Our schools will not be worth supporting if they lose their Reformed character.

What will be the future of our schools? That may very well depend to a large extent on the decisions that are made in the next year or so.

<sup>1</sup>As mentioned in the *Information Paper* (September 2, 1977) that was sent to all school boards, school society members and church members.

<sup>2</sup>*Information Paper* (September 2, 1977).



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By J.L. van Popta

# Marriage, a covenant of friendship

*A friend loves at all times (Proverbs 17:17)  
Husbands, love your wives (Ephesians 5:25)*

*A friend loves at all times.* Marriage is a covenant. As with every covenant, it contains two parts: a promise and an obligation. Marriage is rooted in covenant keeping. It is founded on undying loyalty. It is based on faithfulness. It is firmly established on friendship. Husbands and wives must consider marriage to be a covenant. Young people who are going steady, who are dating, must understand and know that marriage is a covenant.

When we marry, we promise to be friends for life – never forsaking, for richer or poorer, in good days and bad, for better or worse, until death do us part. In marriage, we promise covenant loyalty. We promise constancy to death. In marriage, we make that ultimate covenant between two people. Lives are bound up with each other. People share lives with each other. A husband and wife must be friends who love at all times. The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 5 that husbands must love their wives even as Christ loved the church.

Betrayal in marriage is then even more terrible than the betrayal of sim-

ple friendship. Betrayal of friendship is awful. Betrayal of marriage covenant, appalling. The Lord God compares his covenant relationship with his people to a marriage covenant. Think of Jeremiah 3:6 where the Lord accuses Israel of marital unfaithfulness. In the same chapter, in verse 14, He calls for return to faithfulness. Why? “Because I am your husband,” the Lord says. In this chapter, the Lord tells his people that He divorces them for their unfaithfulness, but yet He calls them back. He will always take them back for He is ever faithful even when they are unfaithful.


In Ecclesiastes, the preacher urges the husband to enjoy life with his wife. In Proverbs, we hear the wise man tell the husband to rejoice in the wife of his youth. *May you ever be captivated by her love. Why embrace the bosom of another man’s wife? For a man’s ways are in full view of the Lord.* If husbands break faith with their wives, if they break covenant, the Lord knows. He will call to account, if not in this life then after.

Betrayal of marriage covenant is in full view of the Lord.

Paul says that husbands and wives are to reflect the relationship that Christ has with his church. He gave himself up for her. He was willing to die for her. A husband must be willing to die for his wife. He must be willing to lay down his life for his wife. That does not only mean that if she were in danger of drowning, that a husband should risk his life to save her; no, it means self-denial. He must not only be willing, but as well, engage in true self-denial. He must set aside his own needs, wants, hopes, demands, personality, his whole life, if it interferes with his relationship with his wife. And wives are to love their husbands, adorned with grace and good works.

It is not the example of husband and wife which illustrates the relationship of Christ and his church, but rather the opposite is true. It is the way in which our Saviour acted with respect to the church, his people, that is the model for husbands. As Christ lay down his life for his church so husbands are to love their wives. As the church is to love her Saviour, with total devotion, commitment and honour, so a wife is to love her husband.

That means that young people too, are to understand the covenant character of dating and courting. Dating and going steady and becoming engaged is part of the road; it is preparation for entering into covenant. It is preparation for life long friendship. It is the training ground for loyalty. It is an apprenticeship for faithfulness. It is the practice arena for girls to love their boyfriends. It is the rehearsal for self-denial. And that means also with respect to sexuality. Self-denial is the order of the day for young men if they are to live in covenant fidelity.

Husbands love your wives. Wives love your husbands. Be friends who love at all times. Live lives of self-denial. Then your marriage will be established on holy ground. 

## *What’s inside?*

The past couple of issues have seen us deal with the topic of education. This one rounds things up with another article by Mr. T. Vanderven and an editorial by Dr. C. Van Dam.

The decisions of General Synod Fergus, 1998, continue to generate discussion. Especially the decision on our relationship to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) has made a number of writers submit different views. In this and the next issue, we hope to round things up so far as articles about this Synod decision go. In this issue you will find articles by Prof. J. Geertsema and Mr. W. Pleiter (plus a couple of letters on this point). Further, I will direct you to the editor’s note above Prof. Geertsema’s article.

From Mrs. Ravensbergen, we receive a “Ray of Sunshine.” May it encourage all, especially our special-needs brothers and sisters and those who care for them.

Rev. VanRietschoten introduces us to the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, a church that has recently joined the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

Mrs. J. Van Dam and the Rev. J. Mulder update us on the recent work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF). The spread of the gospel and the Reformed faith continues. The Reformed churches in South Sudan continue to see tremendous numerical growth. Our brothers and sisters there live in difficult and dangerous circumstances because of war and oppression by the Muslim government. It is good to learn more about the work God is doing in Sudan as well as other places in Africa and the Middle East. May God bless richly the work of MERF. *GvP*

By T.M.P. Vanderven



## Teaching to Learn – Learning to Teach

### Reformed education as partnership

Reformed schools try to fulfil a very important and far-reaching mandate: creating a learning environment which in all its aspects is God-centred. Fortunately, neither the schools nor the families they serve are left to fulfil this mandate on their own. Reformed education is a partnership between home and school, in which the school seeks to assist the parents with their parental mandate. The church has a strongly edifying and encouraging role as well, in teaching and upholding what the Scriptures say about the education of the children of the church.

Within this partnership, we do not only have to reckon with the home, church, and school as agents of education, but also with the government. It does play an important role in Reformed education as well. As Christian parents we have never rejected the role of the government in the education of our children, but neither have we ever relinquished God-given parental responsibilities. Unfortunately, the government (and society in general) appears to believe that it is the main stakeholder in education. Therefore Christian parents find themselves often in conflict with the demands of their government. For one thing, we certainly do not share its humanistic, horizontal aims of education.

### Education goals

Reformed education – any education for that matter – is always goal-driven; the question why we teach and learn is indeed a first question. In my courses at *Covenant College* I have singled out Waterink's definition of education as a most useful general statement (see Box 1). It applies to all of education, not just schooling alone. The tasks of each of the agents of Reformed education must be distinguished, yet understood as fully complementary in order for each to be able to work effectively in achieving this education goal.

Merely repeating this statement at appropriate moments is not sufficient; it is much more than a ceremonial "flag," hauled out on official occasions. This goal statement with all (!) its implications must be internalized by all educators – parents as well as teachers. In our Reformed schools it must become the "life and blood" of our teachers so that it drives all that they do and affects all their daily teaching decisions.

### BOX 1

Education is the forming of man into an independent personality serving God according to his Word, able and willing to employ all his God-given talents to the honour of God and for the well-being of his fellow-creatures, in every area of life in which man is placed by God (J. Waterink, *Basic Concepts in Christian Pedagogy*, 1954).

Therefore, with the input of each faculty member, every school must work to develop its own statement of aims or goals, describing what education it seeks to offer its students. These goal statements should be regularly reviewed, even adapted or changed when necessary, so that they do not become mere "lofty statements." Each teacher has the challenge to translate these broad goals into the objectives of her every day lessons. Throughout all this, it is important that the teachers together agree on what is of real importance in the curriculum, and work towards a common goal – also within the school Reformed education must be understood as a true partnership (rather than each teacher doing his own "thing" behind the usually closed door of his classroom).

### Reformed teacher training

Since this is what is expected of the teachers in our Reformed schools, it is not surprising that from the moment that Canadian Reformed schools were first established, it was recognized that the training of teachers should receive high priority. After all, it is within the

classroom (not just in documents and handbooks), under the guidance of teachers committed to the biblical principles of education (not just by committee decisions or board instructions) that Reformed education comes alive. Just as believing parents are the key to truly scriptural, Reformed education in the home, so competent, Reformed teachers are the key to truly scriptural, Reformed schooling.

At *Covenant College*, we have worked at identifying characteristics of such a Reformed teacher. With the help of the college's Academic Advisory Committee, a profile of the Reformed teacher has been developed, describing what we believe are some of those unique characteristics. I quote here a part of the introduction to this profile to show the sets of major characteristics that we are now working with.

A teacher education program seeks to provide its candidates with a wide range of experiences which can be grouped under the headings: self, instruction, and professional.

*Self.* We do not think of a teacher as primarily someone who administers a certain academic program to a group of students. Such a view would be neither biblically nor professionally sound. The Bible highlights the importance of genuine interaction between a teacher who knows and has experienced life and gained wisdom as a result, and those who are yet at the (very) beginning of life's experiences. It is interesting that this view is generally accepted even by those



**BOX 2****EYES**

Eyes . . .

A classroom full of eyes  
Directed at  
Me.

Eyes aglow with an eager light,  
Eyes afire with some bitter spite.  
Eyes that are dreamy and far away,  
Eyes that sparkle and are full of play.  
Eyes overcast with a haze of confusion,  
Eyes disappointed with a fading illusion.  
Eyes that wait in great expectation,  
Eyes that dance with anticipation.

I's . . .

All unique little I's  
Entrusted to  
Me.

Can I be for them  
What I should be?

Commissioned by God –  
Teach them,  
Guide them, And help them . . .  
See?

Miriam den Hollander,  
Class of 1991.  
(now Mrs. J.G. Slaa)

who do not accept God's Word: teachers are charged to pass on the values and ideals of society to their students. Therefore the person of the teacher is an essential element in his professional make-up. He embodies in word and actions the educational ideal he stands for.

*Instruction.* Sound competence in a wide range of instructional skills is the hallmark of a good teacher. This will enable him to reach out to his students with optimum effectiveness. Although there may not be a one-to-one relationship between teaching and learning, the quality of the teacher's acts are in a large part responsible for quality learning.

*Professional.* A teacher is not an island unto himself. Cooperation among staff members of a school is essential for effective education throughout a student's schooling. Further, a Reformed school is a parental school which prides itself on the crucial contact of home and school. A Reformed teacher serves the community of the school and the larger community of the school's constituency.

**Words that echo The WORD**

Teaching is much more than the use of good techniques, and that applies in even greater measure to the work of the Christian teacher. Waterink points out that our exploration of the world and its phenomena in essence is a matter of interpretation and explanation.

. . . the physical phenomena which I observe do not speak by themselves of God. There is no method which of itself can provide me with that revelation. No eye has seen

and no ear has heard (that is, in this visible and audible world) what God has prepared . . . The child cannot learn of this by means of observation and exploration. Such revelation can per definition only be perceived by the child via the spoken word which echoes THE WORD (Waterink, *Grondslagen der didactiek*, 1962).

Waterink brings us back to Psalm 78 (the motto of the College): *telling the coming generation*. Reformed teachers are story tellers, telling the coming generations about the glorious deeds of the Lord and his might and the wonders He has wrought . . . in Mathematics, Science, Geography, History, in novels and poems and music, in Art and Physical Education – all these subjects are windows on God's world through which God's revelation may shine so that faith is expanded and strengthened.

This high view of teaching underscores at least three important points. First, as Reformed teachers we must always strive for the highest degree of competence so that we are able to the best of our abilities to help our students learn.

Second, it also means that we must constantly reflect on our work. One of the characteristics of an educated person is self-examination, and it is right here that teachers are required to show that they are, indeed, educated persons. Note, that self-examination should be followed by action to improve and refine our own work.

Third, we may never be satisfied with what we know now; we must recognize the necessity to update and increase our own knowledge and competence at every opportunity. In other words, in our work as teachers we must show that we are learners, always searching to learn new things and expand our own personal and professional horizon. There is much to learn about education, its processes and its techniques; there is no single correct set of answers to our questions how best to help student Andrew or student Charlene. There is no fixed recipe for all parents to follow. There are no methods that guarantee instructional success to all teachers. Each set of parents and each group of teachers must seek out their own solutions to the challenges which a Reformed education sets before them as they work with another generation of children. That is our individual and collective responsibility: as Reformed parents and teachers we are always on the look out for better ways to nurture and instruct our children, each with their own individual characteristics and peculiarities, in the ways of the Lord.

This is a never-ending, but not a disheartening task. It is by the grace of God that He allows fallible and sinful covenant members to teach a new generation of covenant children. Therefore, I do believe – despite shortcomings and perhaps dire failings – that we truly have a good thing going: Reformed education is a worthy and worthwhile enterprise since it is a mandate given by God our Father Himself. That is why it is possible to have Reformed schools, even though financial means may be limited. Reformed educators may be scripturally optimistic!

*God is our refuge and strength, a well proved help in trouble (Ps 46); Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations . . . from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God (Ps 90).*

\* \* \*

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# Synod Fergus 1998 and the Fencing of the Lord's Table

By J. Geertsema

## The Discussion Continues . . .

*It was to be expected that the decision of Synod Fergus concerning our relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) would generate debate. Clarion has tried to provide a forum for that discussion by letting the different views be heard. In this issue we have two more articles on this matter. One by Prof. J. Geertsema and one by Mr. Wayne Pleiter. Although normally one only has opportunity to write once for Reader's Forum on a given topic, we have allowed this second contribution from Mr. Pleiter because he summarizes many of the arguments from the perspective of a delegate at Synod. In the next issue the editor will provide some closing reflections on this issue. We will then consider this discussion closed for now and move on to other topics.*

The editor

## Introduction

In the 1998 Year-end issue of *Clarion*, Synod Fergus received quite some criticism. This criticism focused especially on the manner in which this Synod placed the fencing of the Lord's table in its decisions concerning contact with other churches. It was suggested that these decisions functioned as a "Fourth Mark of the Church" (Rev. J. Visscher, p. 609) and were unreformed, making our Canadian Reformed practices and traditions binding for other faithful churches (br. Wm. Van Spronsen, pp. 624-625).

It is not my intention to enter into a debate with the two brothers. I can quite well understand the disappointment that we still have not come to a final decision regarding our relationship with the OPC. This speaks the more since the previous Synod of Abbotsford 1995 expressed the hope that this matter would be brought to a conclusion in 1998. I also do not intend to write a

defense as such of the decisions of Synod Fergus.

My aim is to make a number of remarks about the fencing of the Lord's Supper as such. How are we, as Reformed people, to look at this matter? I want to show some of the Reformed background. Another point is that we should distinguish between practice and principle. Practices can differ, but the biblical principles should be the same, even though we all often fall short in living up to each normative principle.

**... the Lord's Supper shall not be celebrated in a place where there is no "form" of congregation. Where there are no elders and deacons, there is no table of the Lord either. The argument is that these office bearers, together with the ministers, have to attend to both the acceptance and the government of those who are admitted.**

## The Reformed approach as based on God's Word

Let us begin with the historical background of our Form for the Lord's Supper. Dr. W. van't Spijker writes about it in his contribution to the book *Bij Brood en Beker*<sup>1</sup>. He tells us that our Form for the Lord's Supper (along with other Forms) comes from the Church Order of the Palatinate. The Palatinate was a region in Germany where Frederick the Pious was the rul-

ing prince. He was Reformed and promoted the Reformed cause. Under his authority a Reformed Church Order was put together based on the teaching of Oecolampadius, Bucer, and Calvin, to mention only these. It reflects what was seen then as the "order" that should be followed in Reformed church life.

This Church Order speaks first about the preaching; it is the central element. Then it presents the Form for Baptism, followed by the Heidelberg Catechism, the summary of the teaching of God's Word for the baptized youth of the church, as well as for those who seek to join her. After the Heidelberg Catechism comes the celebration of the Lord's Supper. First, this Church Order deals with the preparation for its celebration, including the public profession of faith. Then follows the Form for the Lord's Supper. Under the heading "The Admission to the Holy Supper," Van't Spijker writes (p. 366):

From what was established in the Church Order of the Palatinate regarding the preparation for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, it is evident that great caution was taken concerning the admission. Typically Reformed is the view that the Lord's Supper is not an open table, just open to every one. The right to celebrate this meal was expressly granted. But it could also be taken away. Preceding the Form for the Holy Supper, we find in this Church Order regulations about the admission. The Form is followed by regulations about excommunication: the sacraments must be administered in the manner prescribed by the Word of God; they can only be administered to those who are entitled to receive them. Excluded from the sacraments are those who adhere to an ungodly doctrine or who live in gross sin and refuse to repent from it.

Van't Spijker calls this granting of the right to celebrate (along with the

accompanying regulations) "a part of church discipline" (p. 369). He refers to L.D. 30 (Q.A. 82) of the Heidelberg Catechism.

### **The importance of the local church and its office bearers**

Van't Spijker continues with pointing to the important place and function of the office in the congregation with regard to the Lord's Supper. The office bearers have a leading and supervising function. He mentions the very first meeting of the Reformed Churches which laid the foundation for the formation of the federation of these churches: the Convent of Wezel in 1568. In one of its Articles (VI,7), the churches agreed that "No one shall be admitted to the Supper of the Lord unless he has made profession of his faith beforehand and has submitted himself to the discipline of the church." The profession of faith includes both the faith that is believed (the doctrine taught here in this Christian Church) and the faith with which one believes (the fact that one does believe). This (confessional) membership and the willing submission to the admonition and discipline of the Church are still included in the questions asked in the Form for the Public Profession of Faith.

In this context, Van't Spijker refers to the rule adopted by the Synod of Dordrecht of 1574. It says that the Lord's Supper shall not be celebrated in a place where there is no "form" of congregation. Where there are no elders and deacons, there is no table of the Lord either. The argument is that these office bearers, together with the ministers, have to attend to both the acceptance and the government of those who are admitted. Being part of the congregation manifests itself at the table of the Lord. Coming to the congregation means in fact the same as: coming to the table. . . . For just there the congregation manifests itself: by bread and cup. . . . [And, based on what the Synod of 1578 said,] no one is allowed to be received into the congregation, except after examination by the consistory. This receiving into the congregation takes place in the way of granting admission to the Lord's Supper. . . . One cannot break the one bread, except in the one congregation. One cannot bless the one cup, except together as the one Body of the Lord, which receives its

life from the blood that was poured out (pp. 370-371).

Let us pay some more attention to the last sentence: "One cannot bless the one cup, except together as the one Body of the Lord." The question must be asked what is the meaning of the phrase "the Body of the Lord." Many, hearing the term "Body of the Lord" as metaphor of the church, think of the so-called church universal. This church universal is, then, the invisible, world-wide church which contains all the (individual) believers. The trouble is that this idea of the universal church as the total number of all the individual believers together is a rather man-made concept. The Scriptures do not speak in this way. Such a church is not a body. Such a church also does not have functioning office bearers to whom a believer has to and can submit. This church universal has no consistory that governs it.

The question is: what does the New Testament mean with the expression "body of the Lord" as characterization of the church? We find this characterization in Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 1:23, 2:16-22, 4:4,12,16, Colossians 1:18, 24, 2:19 and 3:15. Paul's use of this expression in 1 Corinthians 12 follows after he has admonished the congregation in Corinth about their unworthy celebrating of the Lord's Supper. They were eating and drinking judgment unto themselves because they defiled the Lord's table by their sinful way of life. They did not practice mutual love. It is after this that Paul uses the metaphor of the one body with its many members for the congregation of Christ to correct the sinful situation. "Body of Christ" is here clearly the local congregation. The context in Romans 12 is similar so that here, too, the local church is in view. It means the local church with its elders (presbyters).

Even though it might seem that the Letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians speak about the church as body of Christ in a broader sense, also here this body is still concrete. It does not mean a total, world-wide number of individual believers taken together. For this wider "Body of Christ" remains a church to which functioning office bearers are given, among whom are local "pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11) for the local upbuilding in the faith. In other words, the local aspect has not disappeared. This body, wider than the local body, is to be taken as all the local bodies, the local, concrete churches, together. It is

normal that Christ gathers his catholic church locally. Therefore, one is member of the catholic church of the Lord by being and functioning as a member of a local church.

The consequence of the above is this: At the table of the Lord we are not dealing with two entities: the Lord and the individual believer, but with three: the Lord, the (local) church with its office bearers, and the believer. We can say, on the basis of what we learned from Dr. Van't Spijker, that this is the Reformed and biblical view. It means that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is first and most of all a matter of membership in the local catholic church. I am called to the table of the Lord, *there* where I am a member locally, and have placed myself under oversight and discipline of the office bearers of the local church; there where I am together with other members and am called to function as member of this body of the Lord.

In this light, I do not see myself called or obliged by Christ to sit at his table wherever on earth that table is prepared and I happen to be there. Sure, I may, in the correct, biblical, church-orderly way, join a body gathered at another place. But I do not have to. For I am member elsewhere, where I have placed myself under the oversight and discipline of Christ's office bearers. These office bearers are responsible for me and accountable to the Lord with respect to me.

Now the local office bearers are responsible for keeping the table of the Lord holy. They are to do this by admitting only those to the table whom they can declare, after an examination on biblical grounds, to have the right to celebrate. It should be evident without further proof that this responsibility to keep the table holy by admitting only those eligible concerns in the first place the members of their church. But in Reformed thinking based on the Scriptures, this responsibility concerns guests too. In both cases the consistory (elders) are responsible for the Lord's table. With Van't Spijker I say, therefore, that an open table is unbiblical. And I say further that a proper discharging of the office of elder is, also with guests, an active admitting or not admitting. This flows from their having oversight and discipline. In the case of guests, a brief investigation would be a good means. Guests are to acknowledge the responsibilities of the elders and appreciate such an investigation.



They see that the elders take their charge seriously.

I see here this consequence. If safeguarding the holiness of the table of the Lord consists *only* of a “verbal warning” from the pulpit, this is not sufficient. For in this case, there is no active admitting or not admitting by the elders based on an investigation. In such a case, the elders are, therefore, lacking in the fulfilment of their calling.

Therefore, I conclude that our Synods of Lincoln 1992 and of Abbotsford 1995 maintained a good Reformed principle when they stated that giving *only* a verbal warning “is insufficient.” It must therefore also be concluded, that Synod Fergus 1998 did the right thing when it maintained this statement of its two predecessors. In fact, it acted in accordance with the mandate of Synod Abbotsford (see its *Acts*, Art. 106. VI, D, 1).

### The distinction between practice and norm

We should always clearly distinguish between norm (or principle) and practice. This counts also with respect to the regulations around the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. A norm is that which is prescribed in God’s Word or can clearly be deduced from it. A practice is a practical manner in which certain actions are done.

An example of a norm or principle is that those who celebrate receive both the bread and the cup. Another example of a principle is that the consistory is responsible for admitting and not admitting to the table. Examples of practices, for instance in admitting guests, are: the rule to have an attest or declaration from one’s own consistory; or the handing out beforehand of tokens by the elders to the celebrants with which they are declared worthy partakers as far as the elders can know; or the old regulation in the Reformed churches in the sixteenth century that elders visit the communicant members during the week (two weeks) of preparation. Other practices are, for instance: sitting at the table or staying in the pew. In this latter case obviously no norms are at stake.

I return now to the “verbal warning.” This “verbal warning” can be seen as a practice. But it flows from the normative principle, that the elders are to call the congregation to prepare themselves by self-examination. As apostle, that is as an office bearer, Paul gives a clear verbal warning to the congregation in Corinth in 1 Corinthi-

ans 11:27-32. This verbal warning follows the calling for the church members to examine themselves. Therefore, giving such a warning is a biblical principle. It is done according to a biblical norm. It is an act of obedient service in which the consistory properly discharges their office.

However, this was not the point in our discussion. The point is: is giving *only* the warning enough? On this point I keep saying: no, doing this *only* is insufficient.

A last remark in connection with the distinction between norm and practice is the following. We can also distinguish between the norms of Scripture and our doing, our practicing them.

... our Synods of Lincoln in 1992 and of Abbotsford in 1995 maintained the biblical and Reformed norm when they stated that giving *only* a verbal warning “is insufficient.” It must, therefore, also be concluded, that Synod Fergus did the right, biblical and Reformed thing when it maintained this statement of its two predecessors.

When we see that other churches are lacking in maintaining a norm of Scripture, should we not first examine ourselves and clean up our own house, before we point the finger at the others? Do we ourselves join word and deed? Are our consistories always faithful in guarding the table? Do we never give members in the congregation reason to question: how can the consistory allow member so and so to the table?

Or are we always acting according to the command of love when (not) admitting guests to the table? We have the practice of giving and requiring attestations from the home consistory before we admit guests. This is a practical way of living by the norm that we

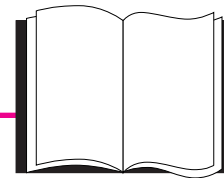
have to guard the table. This practice is not the normative principle itself. Are we acting according to the biblical norm of love when we refuse admission to the table because the attest is not presented?

The practice of the attest is a good way to live by the norm. But maintaining this practice as if it is in itself a biblical norm is legalism and lack of love. The idea behind the practice is that the consistory receives information from the home consistory of the guest that he or she is a member in good standing in his or her home church. In this way, the elders have a good basis for admitting the guest to the table of the Lord. This receiving of information as basis for a decision is the point. If, through whatever circumstances, the attest with the needed information is missing, the consistory can nowadays easily avail itself of this information, for instance by means of a telephone call. Making this (probably) one call would be a simple act of love and would do the neighbour-guest much good. A legalistic refusal, on the contrary, can cause and has done much hurt.

So let us admit that we ourselves can and do fall short in practicing to maintain the norms of God’s Word concerning the table of the Lord. But does this mean that we should not say anything to a neighbour anymore? I think not. What we should do is be humble, examine our own life in the light of God’s Word and repent from what is wrong and do what is right. At the same time, the Lord wants us to maintain his Word as norm also for the neighbour. This neighbour has, just as we have, the calling to humbly examine himself and repent from what is wrong and do what is right.

The result will be a double thankful joy in the Lord of the Church for his grace that He works in both of us this practicing of what He wants us to do.

<sup>1</sup>Dr. W.van’t Spijker is a retired professor of the Theological University of the Dutch Christian Reformed [Christelijk Gereformeerde] Churches at Apeldoorn, The Netherlands. He is editor of and contributor to the book *Bij Brood en Beker* (By Bread and Cup) published in 1980 by De Groot, Goudriaan. His chapter (pp. 363-419) is entitled “Het klassieke avondmaalsformulier” (“The classic Form for the Lord’s Supper”).



## Synod's Decision – A bridge too far?

By Wayne Pleiter

It is not surprising that there is much confusion regarding the Synod Fergus decision concerning the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). Numerous articles have been published in the pages of *Clarion* denouncing this decision with its modified proposed agreement, even to the point of labelling the decision unscriptural. Further, the struggling relationship between the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and the OPC has been described as the bridge too far. Are these criticisms really reflective of the 1998 Synod decision?

### The proposed agreement

In order to avoid confusion, it would be helpful to consider what is meant by the agreement. At Synod 1995, the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (CCOPC) was mandated "to arrive at an agreement with the OPC on the matters of the fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership" (*Acts 1995*, Art. 106 Rec. D.1; p. 75). Equipped with this mandate the CCOPC continued its discussion with the committee of the OPC and came to an agreement on these two issues. As this agreement was reached at the committee level, each committee was required to present it to their respective broader ecclesiastical assemblies. Theoretically speaking, the agreement became a "proposed agreement" before the broader assemblies. It would not be until both the General Assembly of the OPC and the General Synod of the CanRC ratified this "proposed agreement" that we could technically speak of an agreement. From the perspective of the OPC, the proposed agreement was upheld at the 64th General Assembly in 1997. It was now incumbent on our Synod 98 to ratify the proposed agreement in order for the two federations to enter into a sister church relationship. However, our Synod could not fully support this proposal as presented.

### Changing the proposal

Synod 98 heard an outcry from the churches within our federation vocalising their concern that the proposed agreement was too vague and did not sufficiently deal with the issues of fencing the Lord's Table and confessional membership (*Acts 1998*, Art. 130 Consideration C.2). In addition, there was the voice of the OPC representative, Rev. J.J. Peterson. In both his speeches at Synod 95 and 98 he "defends that right of the OPC to admit to membership and to the Lord's table those who do not make profession of the Reformed faith" (*Acts 1998*, Art 130 C.3). These comments directly contradicted the pronouncements of Synod 92 and 95 that a general verbal warning was insufficient. Also, Rev. J.J. Peterson's words were not in harmony with the understanding or purpose of the committee agreement.

In order to maintain the credibility and integrity of the decisions of previous Synods, Synod 98 incorporated these guidelines into the proposed agreement. It should be noted that Synod 98 could have sent the report back to the CCOPC and mandated them to tighten up the proposed agreement. Then one could not be faulted for exclaiming, "Another three years wasted!" However, Synod 98 took a proactive approach on the matter and as a result the following words were added to the proposed agreement. "This means that a general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required and confirmation of a godly life." Synod 98 provided the CCOPC with a new mandate to present this modified proposal to the OPC to seek their agreement. Should the OPC support this proposal, ecclesiastical fellowship will be implemented immediately. The Lord willing, this will occur sometime during 1999!

### Fourth mark of the true church

It is precisely because of this addition that criticisms have been directed to Synod 98. Most recently, it is Rev. J. Visscher who makes a serious accusation that Synod 98 has demanded the OPC to "accept our extra-biblical position of the access to the Lord's Supper before we can enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with them." The question is posed whether or not we are "turning the matter of access to the Table into the Fourth Mark of the True Church" ("Access to the Table," *Clarion Year-end 1998*). Reading this may give the impression that Synod 98 went over and above the three marks of the true church. However, if one is to review the *Acts* of Synod from 1983 to 1995, it will become clear that "the matter of fencing the Lord's Supper concerns the Church Discipline, as well as the doctrine of the Church" (*Acts 1983*, Art. 55 C Consideration 2.d). The matter is not whether we have added a fourth mark, but whether we are maintaining the three marks of the true church! Such comments are not helpful, and simply fuel those with fiery perceptions of CanRC legalism or exclusivism. Let's focus on the issue, then it will become clear that right from the beginning of our contact with the OPC, the CanRC have considered the admission to the Lord's Supper as an essential matter of church discipline (cf *Acts 1986*, Art 132 E Consideration e). That is the issue we must face.

### A confessional matter

Before we do so, we should understand that prior to the changes made by Synod 98, there was little concern amongst our churches that the proposed agreement with its guidelines of Synod 1992 was unscriptural or non-confessional. "Vague" the churches said, "but not unscriptural." In his article dealing with the OPC committee report Prof. C. Van Dam clearly stated that in his view the proposed agreement, was "clearly

Biblically and confessionally supported" (*Clarion* 47:9, p. 213). Yet after the OPC decision of Synod 98 the story changes. Criticism are made. How the Lord's table is supervised is not a confessional matter! Rather it is claimed that the issue is "how a church through its elders admits guests to the Lord's table is not a confessional but a church order (practical) matter."

The first issue relates to whether the additional words included by Synod 98 are confessional or not. When Synod 98 added the words mentioned above, it stated in essence that supervision requires the need for a verbal warning as well as confirmation of the Reformed doctrine and a godly life. However, according to Rev. G. van Popta the *man-ner* in which the elders of a church admit a guest to the table is not a matter of our confession at all. He states that "our confessions do not address this matter . . ." ("Correcting an Error," *Clarion* 47:24 p. 575).

While it is clear that our church order in Article 61 deals with the two criteria (doctrine and life), the question arises whether or not these criteria have scriptural and confessional support. Synod 98 answers this in the affirmative by providing clear scriptural references to defend its inclusion of these criteria in its decision. These confessional references include references to both the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity. According to Synod 98, the issue is more than a church order matter but it is a matter of being faithful to Scripture and our confessions. While Synod 98 does not provide specific "Lord's Supper" texts to support particular practices of how the Lord's table is to be supervised, it does provide principles with which to work. One would not be able to find specific texts in Scripture to regulate the practice of how the table is to be supervised. Is it right then, to automatically conclude the review of the scriptural texts by stating that Synod 98 has made its "decision into a supra-scriptural one [that] exceeds the demands of God's Holy Word" (as J. Visscher wrote in the article referred to earlier)? Synod 98 did not just evaluate Biblical texts but also worked with principles outlined in Scripture and our confessions. When speaking about the work of the OPC and CanRC committees, Prof. Van Dam clearly outlined that, "Biblical principles had to be agreed on." In the same way Synod 98 worked with these scriptural and confessional references and appropriately applied them to the proposed agreement. It is no coincidence that Ar-

ticle 61 incorporates these same confessional principles.

### An identical practice

This leads us to the second issue, whether Synod was demanding an identical practice of how the elders in the OPC supervise the table. According to Rev. J. Visscher, by "demanding the OPC regulate the Lord's Table in a certain specific way, we are going further than Scripture itself does." But is that really what Synod 98 has done? To address this concern it is helpful to analyze the "Access the Table" article. In his article Rev. J. Visscher highlights several examples, which may assist in bringing clarity to whether Synod 98 is asking too much. First he mentions how in Calvin's time Geneva members were visited by the elders prior to the Lord's Supper. Then the token system as performed in Scotland and the system of receiving attestations for guests in the CanRC, is explained. It is beneficial that he has done this as it emphasizes a very significant point. While each of the specific practices are different, they still have a common element. The commonality between each of these specific practices is that they ensure confirmation of one's doctrine and godly life. These examples demonstrate that a verbal warning is not enough. Each of these Reformed practices illustrates clear biblical principles at play. Synod 98 does not demand the specifics of the practices of fencing the Lord's Table in the OPC. Nor does Synod demand them to use our specific practices as the norm from which to work. Rather Synod 98 requires that the Scriptural and confessional principles be present.

It is therefore inappropriate for Rev. J. Visscher to call upon churches to appeal the OPC decisions of Synod 98. Not only does he do an injustice by failing to interact with the Reformed principles that underline the decision, he also fails to provide scriptural or confessional proof that Synod has erred in its decision. Synod is not enforcing our church order practices on to the OPC as if Art. 61 is the only way to fence the Table (cf. *Acts 1998*, Art. 130, IV. E. 3.a.). Rather, Synod advocates admission to the Lord's table only when the Reformed principles of "doctrine and life" are met.

### Confessional integrity

Rev. Mulder is correct when he states that according to Synod 95, the current practice in the OPC "does not undermine the OPC's confessional integrity as a true Church" (*Clarion Year-end*, 1998). In fact, Synod 98 could be grateful for the desire of the OPC to be

faithful to the Scriptures and to defend the Reformed heritage (cf. *Acts 1998*, Art. 130, Recommendation D). However, these statements should be understood within the framework of the OPC's supporting the decisions of Synod 92 and 95 regarding the verbal warning. To date the OPC has not formally disagreed with the need for the Reformed profession of "doctrine and life" and therefore Synod 95 and 98 need not have questioned the OPC's confessional integrity on this matter.

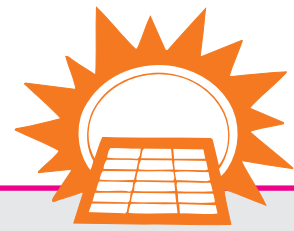
However there is also the issue of the CanRC integrity. One may wonder why there is such controversy over the decision made by Synod 98, since Synod 98 did nothing new or different from previous synods. The changes that Synod 98 made to the "proposed agreement" was not only consistent with the decisions of Synod 1992, they were the very guidelines mandated to the CCOPC (cf. *Acts 1998*, Art. 130. C.1). In fact the Synod 98's decision is consistent with what the CCOPC committee reported to Synod 95. They wrote that "to proceed with establishing a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship without resolving these issues first would not take seriously the view that these are confessional matters; these are not mere differences in emphasis on certain points. In addition, leaving the debated practices unresolved might affect our churches adversely. If these matters cannot be resolved, the relationship between the CanRC and the OPC will have to be re-evaluated and possibly terminated" (*Acts 1995*, Appendix V, p. 161).

If the decision of Synod 98 does not reflect the intent of the committee's original proposed agreement and the sentiments of previous Synods, then the issue becomes one of our own integrity! Aren't we prepared to live up to what we have said – or did we not really mean what we said in the first place? Synod 98 had the courage to make the tough decision. While its decision is by no means flawless, Synod did provide a definite voice to resolve these issues prior to going into ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC. This decision was made in the attempt to bridge the gap with the CanRC and the OPC so that we might finally experience the consequences of declaring the OPC a true church. Instead of calling for decisions to be appealed (without scriptural grounds), we would do well to have the courage and conviction to stand behind what Synod 98 has done, with integrity!

*Mr. Pleiter lives in Chilliwack, B.C., and served as a delegate to General Synod Fergus, 1998.*







By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

*In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.*

1 John 4: 9,10

## Dear Brothers and Sisters:

It is February. After the busy month of December, January and February are, to many people, dull and boring months. They say, "The weather is cold, the days are dark, and there is nothing *exciting* to do." Is that, perhaps, why they invented Valentine's day? So the stores could decorate with hearts and other Valentine stuff and the people would get excited and start buying cards and gifts (again)?

Whatever the reasons, the facts are there: *Sweet-heart Day* is celebrated by many. You have to pick a sweetheart and send him/her (often funny) cards and flowers or other gifts. Even at the schools, Valentine's Day is exciting for the students. Some children pick many sweethearts, and others are selected to be sweethearts by many of their friends. Some children go home with a whole pile of sweetheart cards; others go home with nothing. . . . They have no friends, they are not *popular*, and nobody picks them to be their sweetheart. Unfortunately, this does not only happen at school among children, but also at work among older people. Some people see February 14th as a very exciting day, because of all the attention they receive; to others it is a very difficult day. They experience (again) that they have no friends, and that nobody cares for them.

Valentine's Day is not one of the celebrations that were given to us by the Lord. It is something that was invented by people. Therefore, such a celebration concentrates on the people, on what and who they are, and on what they do. However, the special day that the Lord gives us to celebrate is there for *everyone* to enjoy. Whatever we celebrate in the Church points towards Christ, the Saviour. It does not show us what we have to accomplish in order to be accepted by others, but it points to *Christ* and what He accomplished for all those who believe in Him. All God's covenant children take part in those celebrations, for to the Lord all his children are the same. There are no popular and unpopular people to the Lord. No matter how much we may feel rejected among our earthly friends, we may know that the Lord accepts us in his grace through the redeeming work of our Saviour. The Lord has chosen us, not because of what and how we are, but out of grace. All our imperfections in the way we look, or the way we behave, or the things we cannot do or forget to do, yes everything even our sins, are made perfect through Christ. We do not have to feel inferior or uncertain, for Christ accepts us all. He paid for all our sins. He wants us to come to Him, for to Him we belong.

Now when February 14th comes around, we do not have to dread it. We do not really have to worry about getting Valentine cards or not. Why should we really care about that? What can an earthly friend really do for us when we consider eternity? Maybe it seems very nice to be surrounded by friends, to be very popular, and to receive all kinds of attention this one day of the year. Yet, is it really very important?

The important thing is that we know that the Lord accepts us, every day of the year. That means that we can go to Him always, and that He will help us and comfort us. Maybe we are a little lonely now, but that loneliness will not last. The Lord promises us a beautiful future. For one day, a heavenly host will surround us, and we will be with the Lord, always. God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him.

*Our countless misdeeds and transgressions  
Prevail from day to day;  
But Thou, O God, in great compassion,  
Wilt purge our guilt away.  
Blest is the man whom Thou hast chosen,  
And bringest nigh to Thee,  
That in Thy courts, in thee reposing,  
His dwelling place may be. Psalm 65:2*

## Birthdays in March:

### 3: Trevor Hofsink

4249 Academy Street, Box 772  
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

### 10: James Boone

22 Aberdare Road NE, Calgary, AB T2A 6V9

### 12: Gerry Eelhart

9713-151 Street, Edmonton, AB T5P 1S6

### 15: Jim VanderHeiden

7162 Canboro Road, RR 1  
Dunnville, ON N1A 2W1

### 18: Roselyn Kuik

68 Lynn Lake Drive, Winnipeg, MB R2C 4N7

### 26: Courtney Popken

9445 Windsor Street, Chilliwack, BC V2P 6C5

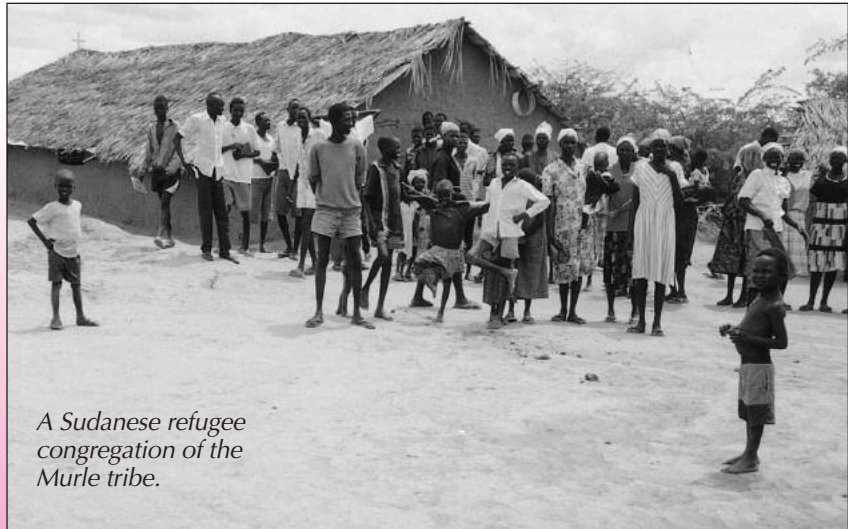
Mrs. R. Ravensbergen  
7462 Reg. Rd. 20, RR 1  
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0  
tel: 905-957-3007, e-mail: rwravens@netcom.ca

# Middle East Reformed Fellowship

## NEWS from MERF-Canada

### Meeting with the leaders of the Reformed Churches In South Sudan

In early November, a MERF delegation, led by Dr. Abdel-Masih Istafanous and Rev. Victor Atallah, met in Kenya with leaders of the Reformed Churches in South Sudan, led by Rev. Paul Bol Kuel and Rev. Peter Gai Lual. MERF's delegation included the four South Sudanese members of MERF's Local Administrative Committee in South Sudan. The meetings included a field trip to three Reformed congregations in the refugee camps by the Sudanese/Kenyan borders. The purpose of the trip was to learn first hand of the state of the Reformed community in the "liberated" areas of Sudan (the areas outside the Muslim government control). MERF's delegation was quite touched by the way the Lord continues to bless these brethren under the most difficult of living conditions. The Reformed churches throughout South Sudan continue to see tremendous numerical growth. One of the most pressing needs is in the area of training the growing number of volunteer evangelists. More than 900 of them are actively engaged in evangelism. Their doctrinal knowledge, however, is very little and their understanding of the Scriptures is very superficial. Much effort is needed to train these evangelists, as well as provide more in-depth training for pastors, elders and deacons. After much discussion it was determined to take immediate action to appoint two mobile teams, each composed of two young South Sudanese pastors to start the effort of providing training for lay evangelists. MERF is now committed to provide the necessary training, material and support for these two teams and for two other teams to be appointed before the middle of 1999. These mobile training teams will work only in the "liberated" areas of the Sudan, as well as in the refugee camps in the neighboring countries. MERF's Local Administra-



*A Sudanese refugee congregation of the Murle tribe.*

tive Committees in the North and West of Sudan will oversee the appointment, preparation and support of training teams to operate in the rest of the countries. Rev. Matthew M. Deang serves as pastor of a large parish of Reformed congregations in South Sudan. He is also the Co-Chairman of MERF's Local Administrative Committee. He says: "Our need is for trained workers from among our own people. We have very few pastors. Our people are not only facing physical starvation; more importantly they need spiritual and biblical nourishment to everlasting life. This is the abiding gift of God to us in Christ. What MERF desires and what MERF offers is close to our hearts. MERF's Word and deed approach is what our people need."

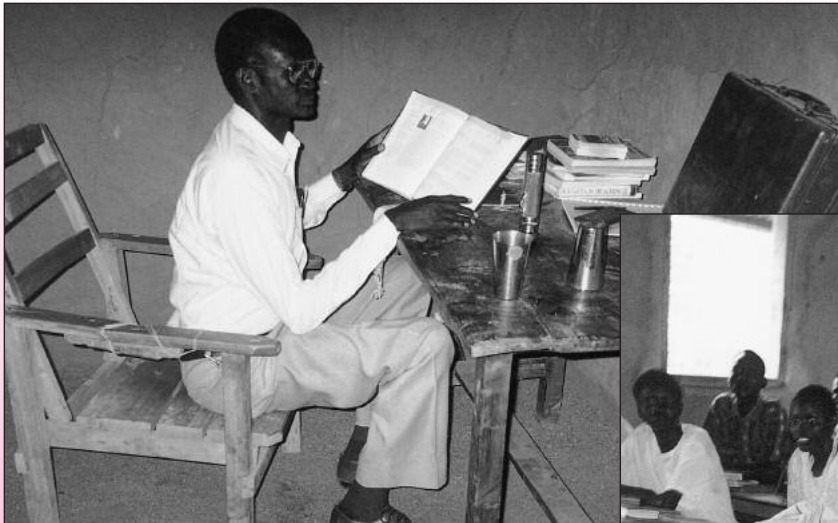
### Sudan Appeal

At its annual meeting in September MERF's Board of Directors was satisfied with present cost-effective and accountable use of diaconal aid funds channeled through to the local Reformed ecclesiastical committees. These committees continue to use the funds to purchase food and other locally available supplies at very cheap rates. The Board offered thanks for

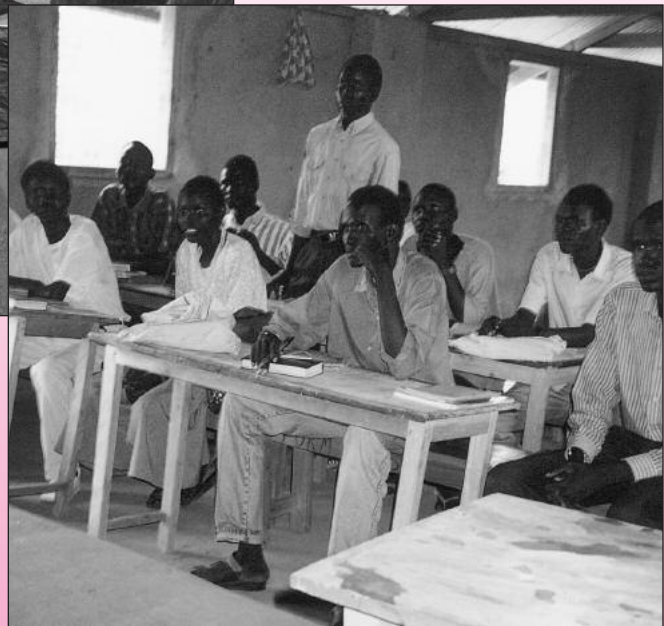
the faithful way in which diaconal aid is administered alongside the ministry of the word carried out by duly ordained and appointed church officers. In this connection, MERF seeks to clarify the fact that it is not interested in receiving and transporting food or clothing supplies for distribution in the Sudan. Such an approach is too costly since it requires professional relief staff. Such employment costs would far exceed MERF's policy of not allowing more than 7% of its budget for administrative costs. Dr. E. Anees reported that months of planning and preparation are yet required to actualize the Sudan Medical Project on the field, especially to secure the legal framework under which the Committee can carry out its work.

### Increased mail response to Gospel Broadcasts

Up to recently only one P.O. Box in Beirut, Lebanon had been announced in each broadcast for the listener's response. Now to encourage more listeners to respond in writing to the Gospel broadcasts two more local postal office boxes have been added – one in Cairo, Egypt and the other in Amman, Jordan. Poorer listeners in Jordan,



*The principal of the Biblical Training Institute of the Reformed Churches of Sudan in his office in the refugee camp.*



*Students of the Biblical Training Institute of the Reformed Churches of Sudan.*

Palestine, Iraq, Egypt and Sudan can afford the cheaper postage rates required. The new addresses will also give the broadcasts a clear Arab identity and facilitate the personal follow up efforts of the vast majority of responding listeners.

Y.T.I. of Aswan (the most southern Egyptian town) writes: "I already feel that you are close to my heart. I appreciate the sincerity of your words. I do not know what you look like. But that does not matter. I know that you are caring people who are proclaiming not an ideology but the way to God and to heaven. . . . I look forward to reading the Christian Holy Book (the Bible) and any other writings which will help me understand the way I must go. . . ."

### **Thank you very much!**

The plight of the Reformed churches in the Sudan has obviously touched the hearts of many. We have been overwhelmed by your generosity. Your prayerful as well as financial support has greatly encouraged all those who are involved with MERF. In his December newsletter, Rev. Atallah wrote:

Dr. Abdel-Masih Istafanous, MERF's Chairman wishes, on behalf of the


Board of Directors, the staff and all the MERF field committees, to express gratitude to the Lord for your partnership in MERF's ministries. The prayers and financial support of faithful people like you are most vital for MERF's cost-effective and far-reaching Gospel witness in many Arab and Muslim lands. May the joy of the Lord be multiplied to you and those around you as you continue to share with us in the expansion of Christ's abiding Kingdom.

Once again, thank you very much! Please continue to pray for a blessing upon this Reformed witness in the Middle East. And please continue your fi-

nancial support for the Gospel broadcasts and biblical training, as well as diaconal aid to the Sudan. If your support is meant specifically for the Sudan, please indicate such on your cheque.

If you would like to make a personal donation please make your cheque payable to MERF-Canada and send it to:

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1225 Highway 5, R.R. #1  
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

Yours in His service,  
Rev. J. Mulder, chairman  
Mrs. J. Van Dam, secretary 



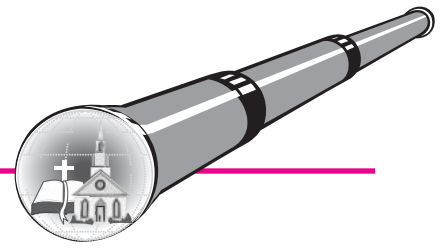
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# Observation Deck

By J. VanRietschoten

## The RPCNA

This past year, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA) has come in closer focus to us by becoming a member of the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC). From my observation deck I have tried to collect some information about this group of churches.

In 1998 the 167th synod was held at Geneva College, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. The first Presbytery was officially instituted in 1798. A split occurred in 1833 resulting in the so-called "Old Light" and "New Light" churches. The New Light churches are now known as the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod. The RPCNA are the Old Light churches. In 1969, the Associate Synod of North America merged with the RPCNA. These churches now consist of about 80 congregations and missions organized in seven presbyteries. Within the Presbytery of St. Lawrence, there are three Canadian congregations: Almonte, Ottawa, Smiths Falls, Ontario, and a mission in Montreal, Quebec. Mission work is done in Japan. The Presbytery of Japan consists of four congregations and three missions. The minutes of the 1996 Synod show a total membership of 5733. This breaks down to 4075 communicant members and 1658 non-communicant.

Some major items dealt with at the Synod of 1997 were: Revoking of the compulsory vow of ministers of abstinence

from alcoholic beverages; allowing the use of hymns and the use of instruments in the worship service. Decisions taken by synod 1998 have yet to be ratified by a majority of the presbyteries. The results of this procedure are not know to me. For two hundred years the RPCNA churches have practiced exclusive psalmody with a *capella* singing. In a following Observation Deck I hope to give some more details on RPCNA distinctives and the work of the National Reform Association.

The minutes of Synod 1997 present the following church organization:

### Institutions:

- Geneva College
- Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

### Offices:

- Synod's Board of Trustees
- Board of Education and Publication
- Crown and Covenant Publications
- The Covenanter Witness (Monthly Magazine)
- National Reform Association
- The Christian Statesman (Bi-monthly Magazine)
- Reformation Translation Fellowship

### Officers of Synod

- Moderator
- Clerk
- Assistant Clerk
- Treasurer

### Fraternal Relations

- Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland
- Trinity Community Christian Fellowship (Cyprus)
- American Presbyterian Church
- Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
- Free Church of Scotland, Synod of North America
- Korean American Presbyterian Church
- Orthodox Presbyterian Church
- Presbyterian Church in America
- Reformed Church in the United States

### Presbyteries

- Alleghenies
- Atlantic
- Great Lakes-Gulf
- Midwest
- Pacific Coast
- St. Lawrence
- Japan

Each year a synod is convened at which all congregations are represented. The roll of synod 1997 shows 127 pastors and elders in attendance.



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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Surprised

I am surprised by the opposition of the Rev. J. Mulder, Rev. J. Visscher and Br. Van Spronsen to the decision of Synod. Theirs is an overreaction. It is as if the faithfulness of our churches is in doubt.

There are major differences between the OPC and the CanRC as to how to supervise the Table. Rev. J.J. Peterson in his speech to Synod even defends admitting those who do not make profession of the reformed faith. On the other hand, Rev. G.I. Williamson is unable to see how this practice can be reconciled with the Westminster Confession (ch. 29.8), which in part states that "all ignorant persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with Him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's Table; and cannot, without great sin against Christ while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries or be admitted there unto."

Yet for our brothers it is too much to suggest having further discussion about these differences before coming to full ecclesiastical fellowship. They feel that such discussion can take place within the fellowship. However, I am convinced that as in all partnerships it is essential to understand from each other where we stand, especially when we are discussing church unity.

It should also be noted that numerous churches have written Synod with their concerns about the Committee report and that Synod could make their decision unanimously!

So where does that leave us? While the brothers have the right to be displeased with the actions of Synod, their reactions are not constructive. What sort of message are they giving our young people with suggesting that we are on a dangerous path and making suspect as unscriptural things which Synod has decided upon? I find it very disturbing.

*Herman Bosscher  
Lynden, Washington*

## Dismayed

In the *Year-End Clarion*, I read an article by Dr. J. Visscher entitled "Access to the Table." Instead of getting some answers, I was dismayed that there was not a strong defence of the way we, as Church of Christ, fence the Table of the Lord. There may not be a text that forbids entry to the Table without an attestation, but there is sufficient proof that we must guard the Table and the way we do it is a very good and proper way. Nobody has presented proof that it is wrong to do it in this manner.

Under the heading "Words of Protest," I read: "There will be some who feel that I am straying from the straight and narrow Canadian Reformed path on this matter." But the Canadian Reformed Church holds to the path of Christ's church, a path to the glory of the Most High.

Under the heading "Sabbath-Sunday," we have confusion. As a minister in the federation he should know better than to say: "Nowhere have we ever officially said 'you shall not mow your lawn of Sunday. You shall not shop on Sunday. You shall not go to the restaurant on Sunday.'" But does the Fourth Commandment not say: "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it *you shall not do any work*, you or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates"? This is not a rule from the Canadian Reformed Church. It is a rule from the Lord Most High whom we serve.

*Martin Onderwater  
Houston, BC*

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address.

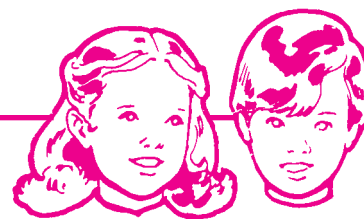
They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length.

Please include address and phone number.



# OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

*By Aunt Betty*



## Dear Busy Beavers

Did you have a happy Christmas? I had a very happy Christmas, mainly because I could remember and celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was He who died for us so that we could live forever. And it was really wonderful to be able to celebrate the birth and life of Christ.

How was your holiday? What did you do? Did you have enough snow to go downhill skiing or even cross country skiing? Or was it cold enough that you could go skating? Or did you visit friends?

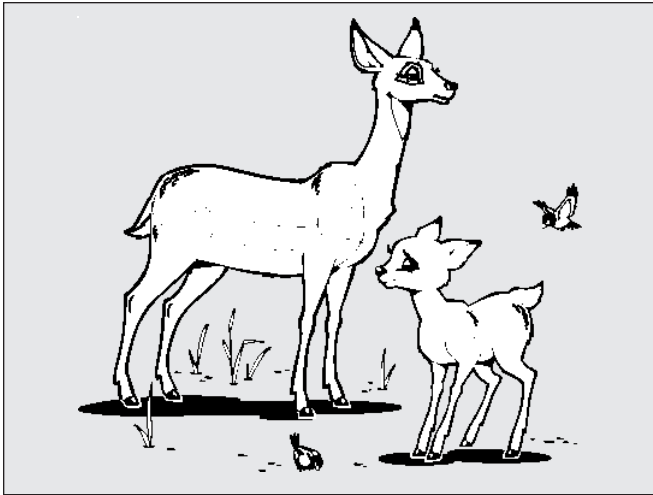
Did you know that in other countries, they have a warm Christmas? In Australia, for example, people can spend their Christmas Day on the beach because they are in their summer time. Doesn't that sound very strange?

Well, Busy Beavers, make sure you write to me some time. My letter box is quite empty and I need some letters to be able to write to you.

Bye for now  
Aunt Betty

## FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

5	Melissa Hovius	21	Nadine Barendregt
7	Stephanie Post	24	Francien Breukelman
12	Stephanie Verhelst	27	Rebecca van Dijk
18	Alicia Koolsbergen	28	Rianne Boeve
20	Jonathan Slaa		



# PUZZLES

## WORDSEARCH

By Busy Beaver Jillian Schouten

Y R E E R A D N I E N I L S D I -  
 V A D  
 K W I S E M E N R I T -  
 T E L S T W T D  
 O D E E H N F T -  
 L O E S W S A V E H R  
 K Y F A Y E U L E Q D H A P -  
 P Y Y E W  
 U K J I N S E B S K D I L -  
 N E I O E I  
 V I G N D D V P S P B O H E O -  
 Q M V S  
 S A Y E N E H Y U L W C -  
 C E T M A B E  
 I E P R B A L B S I N G -  
 I N G L R R M  
 O U P E E F O W E A S Y X W V Y Y R  
 V  
 E R A E T S R L J M T B T V -  
 M A S Y Z  
 H X H E R O D O N -  
 A A K I E U R B D H

<b>FIND:</b>	JESUS	SINGING
WISE MEN	SAVIOUR	BETHLEHEM
STAR	HAPPY	DAVIDS LINE
HEROD	LORD	CHRISTMAS
JOSEPH	SHEPHERDS	CHRIST
MARY	SHEEP	

## ONE FOR THE OLDER BUSY BEAVERS:

The letters of the answer-words in each of the following groups have been numbered and these numbers are used to give further clues to portions of the answer-word. You are also given a clue to the complete word and in brackets after it the total number of letters. The answers will be found to have clear Biblical connections. What are they?

### For example: Clue – Resident (10 letters)

1, 2            At home  
 3,4,5,6,7    Tendency to perform an action  
 5,6,7        Small piece for horse's mouth  
 7,8,9        Beat to a darker colour?  
 8,9,10       Insect  
 Answer:        Inhabitant

### TRY THESE:

#### Sky (9)

1,2,3            Tree  
 1,2,3,4        Company not easily shaken  
 4,5,6        Child's mother  
 5,6,7,8        So let it be!  
 8,9            Short testament

#### Confidence, certainty of salvation (9)

1,2            While or because  
 1,2,3        Animal or stupid person  
 4,5        Where Abram started from  
 5,6,7        Moved swiftly  
 8,9        Church title in brief

#### Temperance, freedom from excess (10)

1,2,3,4        Manner, custom  
 2,3,4        Kind of poem  
 2,3,4,5        German river  
 5,6,7        Animal or deserter  
 5,6,7,8,9,10 Allow only a limited amount

#### Acrid taste (10)

1,2,3            Small tool for boring  
 4,5,6,7        Bird  
 5,6,7,8        Another bird  
 7,8            Direction  
 7,8,9,10      Loch for the monster!



## FROM THE MAILBOX

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Jillian Schouten*. Thank you for your letter and puzzle. Are you the oldest of the children in your family? Do you enjoy school and do you have lots of friends at school? And thank you for your Christmas greetings.

### AUNT BETTY

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