

Clarion

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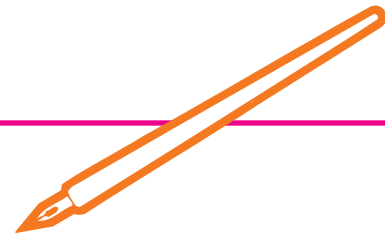


*The Light of the
Gospel in Mexico*

Numbers

10:1-10

By G. Ph. van Popta



“He descended into hell”

Perhaps the most misunderstood words of the Apostles' Creed are: “He descended into hell.” In this ancient statement of what the church and believers believe, we say that Jesus Christ suffered, was crucified, that He died and was buried, that *He descended into hell*. Then we go on to say that He arose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. A quick read will lead the reader to conclude that between his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ spent some time in hell, the place of eternal punishment.

Did he? Did the Lord Jesus, after He gave up his spirit, go to hell until Easter morning? We know that his body was buried in a tomb. But where did his soul, his spirit go? Did it go to hell? Did it go to that place described in the Bible as the lake of fire, as the outer darkness – the place of eternal torment of all those who hate God?

No, the soul of Jesus Christ did not go to the place of eternal torment between Friday evening and Sunday morning. Several of the things Christ said on the cross prove that conclusively.

Towards the end, Jesus said, “It is finished.” His paying for the sin of man was finished. If it was finished, why would He need to go to the place of eternal torment? If He did, in fact, go to the place of everlasting punishment, even just for a little longer than a day, we could only conclude that “it” was not finished on the cross. Obviously, more suffering was required.

His promise to the one criminal crucified with Him also proves that He did not, upon death, go to hell. To the criminal who repented and asked Christ to remember Him when He came into his kingdom, Christ said, “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” Not tomorrow or the day after or some time in the future, but “today.” Both Jesus and the criminal died on Friday. And on that very day they were together in paradise, in the heavenly kingdom.

Just before He died, Christ said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” If He needed to go to hell to suffer there in the spirit yet for a day or so, He would not have been able to commit his spirit into the Father's hands. His spirit would have been committed into the hands of the devil.

These three words of Christ on the cross prove that Jesus did not go to hell, the place of eternal punishment, after He died; rather, while his body went into the grave, his soul went to the Father in heaven.

Why, then, does the church say in the Apostles' Creed, “He descended into hell?” What is the meaning of this article of faith?

It does not refer to something that Christ endured after He died; rather, it refers to the “anguish, pain, terror and agony, which He endured throughout all his sufferings, but especially on the cross” (*Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 44*). The life of Christ was a steady descent into hell. He suffered the depths of hellish agony on the cross. For what is the essential thing about hell? Surely it is God-forsakenness. God the Father forsook his Son on the cross. The most heart rending words Jesus spoke on the cross – the most heart breaking words spoken in the history of mankind – were, “*My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?*” While Jesus Christ hung on the cross, the whole land was plunged into darkness for three hours from noon until mid-afternoon. God withdrew the gift of light from his Son. He who once said, “Let there be light!” made

it dark. In that darkness, Christ knew that He was utterly forsaken. God the Father had abandoned him. “He descended into hell.”

To be forsaken by God is the essential thing about hell. There is no doubt that hell is a place in God's universe. Some of the mainline churches have worked the doctrine of hell out of their theology and confession. They put Satan on the unemployed list. A church can only come to this conclusion as it closes the Bible. The Lord Jesus warned us about hell. He said that it is the place of unquenchable fire. Hell is also referred to as the outer darkness, the bottomless pit, the lake of fire and sulphur, and the second death.

The Bible uses different images to describe

hell. The images are powerful and inspire fear. The worst thing about hell, though, is not the fire or the darkness. The worst thing about hell is being forsaken by God. The most frightening aspect of hell is being left, for eternity, to yourself. The man who wanted nothing to do with God gets his wish. He is left to his own devices, forever. Recall back to when you, as a child, were lost for a half hour. The feeling of abandonment is still vivid. Amplify that feeling infinitely, and perhaps you can just begin to get the first inklings of what it would mean to be abandoned by God in hell forever.

Christ suffered under the wrath of God against the sin of man the whole time He lived on earth, but especially on the cross. The good news is that whoever believes in Him will not be cast into hell but will, instead, receive eternal life. That's the good news of Good Friday and of Easter Sunday. We are free! Free from the curse of God and received back into the Father's favour.

The
good news of
Good Friday and
of Easter Sunday:
We are free! Free from
the curse of God and
received back into
the Father's
favour.



Light of the Soul

*Light of the soul, O Saviour blest!
Soon as thy presence fills the breast,
Darkness and guilt are put to flight,
And all is sweetness and delight.*

*Son of the Father! Lord most high!
How glad is he who feels thee nigh!
How sweet in heaven thy beam doth glow,
Denied to eye of flesh below!*

*O Light of light celestial!
O Charity ineffable!
Come in thy hidden majesty;
Fill us with love, fill us with thee!*

*To Jesus, from the proud concealed,
But evermore to babes revealed,
All glory with the Father be,
And Holy Ghost, eternally!*

Translated from Latin by Edward Caswall

What's inside?

Recently, Dr. Van Dam was in Mexico again visiting the brotherhood there. We publish part two of his report on that trip. You will read about the syncretistic idolatry that is such a huge part of life in Mexico. Devotion to Mary is interwoven with goddess religion. In that context, a faithful group of Reformed churches is spreading the true faith. May the LORD God bless greatly the work being done in his Name in Mexico.

The Rev. De Gelder, having settled into his new responsibilities in Flamborough, has again been able to submit a Hiliter. We look forward to seeing this column again regularly. Please note Rev. De Gelder's new address (see the end of Hiliter) to which you can send church bulletins.

Our sister churches in the Netherlands have been handed a big job to do. A synodical committee has asked the churches to evaluate 255 hymns for possible inclusion in their church service book. Hmm . . . Where would one start? Dr. De Jong writes about this in the Press Review.

You will also find a Ray of Sunshine and some reader contributions. We wish you happy reading, and may you have a blessed Easter celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

GvP



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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: C. Van Dam
Managing Editor: G.Ph. van Popta
Language Editor: J.L. van Popta
Coeditors: R. Aasman, J. De Jong, J. Geertsema,
N.H. Gootjes, G.Ph. van Popta

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION
46 Sulphur Springs Road, Ancaster, ON L9G 1L8
Fax: (905) 304-4951
E-Mail: clarion@compuserve.com

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

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202
Email: clarion@premier.mb.ca
World Wide Web address: <premier.mb.ca/clarion.html>

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IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – “He descended into hell” — G.Ph. van Popta	146
Poem – Light of the Soul — Translated from Latin by Edward Caswall.....	147
Treasures, New and Old – Guidance — E. Kampen	148
The Light of the Gospel in the Land of the Virgin of Guadalupe (second of two articles) — C. Van Dam	149
The Hi-liter — J. de Gelder	152
Ray of Sunshine — Mrs. R. Ravensbergen	154
Letters to the Editor	155
Reader's Forum – Reformed Teacher Training — William Hoogerdijk, Harold J. Ludwig	156
Press Review – Hymns in Dispute — J. De Jong.....	158
Press Release	160
Our Little Magazine — Aunt Betty.....	161

By E. Kampen

Guidance

Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105)

"As I was praying, the LORD said to me, 'Marry the next girl you meet!' I walked out of my room the next day, and this is the first girl I met!"

Though this kind of talk might not be heard too often in our midst, it will not be altogether strange to our ears. When we encounter others who confess to be Christians, sooner or later we will meet those who claim that the LORD speaks to them directly. It is very well possible that questioning this claim might be met with a comment like, "Are you saying that God can't speak to us today?" Or, "Are you trying to put the Holy Spirit in a box?"

It is undeniable that there is a strong appeal to the idea that the LORD speaks to us directly, giving answers to very specific questions, telling us what vocation to choose, which person to marry, etc. Further, it is not hard to think of examples in Scripture where people received direct answers. Did the LORD not give Israel the Urim and Thummim, and was it not possible to seek the LORD? We can read how David on a number of occasions did exactly that, and the LORD gave very clear and direct answers.

Though it would be convenient to have such direct access to the LORD, and it would make life a great deal easier for us, we should not be misled. When the LORD spoke directly in response to a question, it had to do with the state of the church (Israel) as a whole. We do not read of David approaching the LORD on personal business. He sought the LORD's guidance in his capacity as the LORD's anointed; he needed

to know what he should do next. We should keep in mind that God was still unfolding his promises. Revelation was in progress. It was only in matters of national significance, in matters of God's promises, where there was no revelation, and not in mere private matters, that the LORD was to be consulted.

When we let our mind run through the Bible, then it should strike us that the farther along we are in salvation history, the more we have of the Bible, the less we read of these extraordinary means by which God gives revelation to his people. When it comes to inquiring of the LORD via this means of special revelation, we do not read of it after David's life. After the exile, there are no Urim and Thummim anymore. This means of revelation was no longer necessary. Even the prophets ceased for nearly 400 years, until John the Baptist appeared. After the fullness of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and the work of the apostles and prophets in the early church, when the written word of God comes to fullness, there is no further special revelation from God.

Though we confess that there are no further special revelations to guide us, that does not mean that the LORD does not speak to us today. He speaks to us very loudly and clearly in his holy Word, which He has preserved for the Church. It is the written Word, which is there for the foundation, regulation and confirmation of our faith. As the volume of God's self-revelation increased, that became increasingly clear. Think of the well-known Psalm 119:105, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." That was written when the Bible was much smaller than it is today! Perhaps only the Five Books of Moses and Joshua and Judges existed. In that respect, the first five books of the Bible give us much direction not only in learning about God as Creator but also God as Redeemer and Sanctifier. The books that follow show us how the LORD further unfolded his promise, until it came to fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ. When it comes to the New Testament, what is new is how we are shown the

fruit of Christ's work as the gospel went to the nations. Though Scripture clearly teaches that the work of the Lord Jesus has put an end to the many ceremonies and sacrifices of the law, it certainly has not put an end to living in holiness and obedience before the LORD.

We have that same Word to guide us in how we then should live today as God's children. Think of Paul's words to Timothy. He refers to the Old Testament part of Scripture when he writes that Timothy had been acquainted from childhood with the sacred Scriptures which were able to instruct him for salvation (2 Tim 3:15,16). Since God speaks to us through his written Word, rather than through some whispered word, we will have to do some hard work, studying what the Word says. The answers are not always spelled out for us in our particular situations. Rather, the Word will give us the general principles to guide us in our lives. We find these principles summed up especially in the Ten Words of the Covenant. Those principles will guide us as we reflect on questions like, "Whom should I marry" or, "What kind of career should I pursue."

This does not, however, eliminate the need for prayer. Actually, we cannot live a day without prayer. But we should pray appropriately. That means, not a prayer for revelation, but for *illumination* of our mind. Take note of that: *illumination*. When we ask for illumination, we ask the LORD to enlighten our understanding so that we may receive wisdom to rightly apply his Word to our lives.

Thus, we will not be seeking the sound of an audible voice. Rather, filling our mind prayerfully with his Word, we can rest assured we will be guided in our choice. We will find that God's Word truly is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Often the problem is not that we do not know what the LORD requires of us. The hard part is humbly walking on the path lit up by God's Word.

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

In LINK with you



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Churches Note: We invite you to link Clarion's homepage to your church's homepage.

The Light of the Gospel in the Land of the Virgin of Guadalupe (second of two articles)

By C. Van Dam

While I was in Mexico, there was the pervasive presence of devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe. At least twelve times during my travels through the southeast, road traffic was disrupted by beautifully dressed relay runners with large fiery torches (and support vehicles and personnel) all in honour of this virgin. Who is this lady and what does this devotion mean? First a little history.

The virgin of Guadalupe

In what is now part of north Mexico City (Guadalupe), there was in pre-Spanish times an Aztec shrine to the earth goddess Tonantzin. This centre of worship on a hill was destroyed by the Spanish. Shortly thereafter, in 1531, a native convert to Roman Catholicism, Juan Diego, was walking across this very hill on his way to the Franciscan monastery in the area when, according to him, the dark-skinned virgin Mary appeared before him. In his native language she asked Juan to go to the bishop to request that a church be built in her honour on the hill. The bishop did not take heed. Then on December 12, as the story goes, dark-skinned Mary appeared again to Juan and instructed him to pick roses and take them to the bishop and ask for a shrine. He did so, placing the roses in his cloak. When he presented the flowers, the roses fell out of his mantle and beneath them was the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The bishop was convinced and built the shrine. The image and the cloak have been preserved to this day and are still on display in what is now a huge modern basilica. It is important to note that the Virgin of Guadalupe is identified in Mexico with the Aztec earth goddess and is thus another example of Roman Catholic syncretism.

Over the centuries the bishops of Mexico and the popes in Rome have elevated and promoted the Virgin of Guadalupe so that today she is adored not only as patron saint of Mexico, but also as Virgin Patroness of Latin Amer-



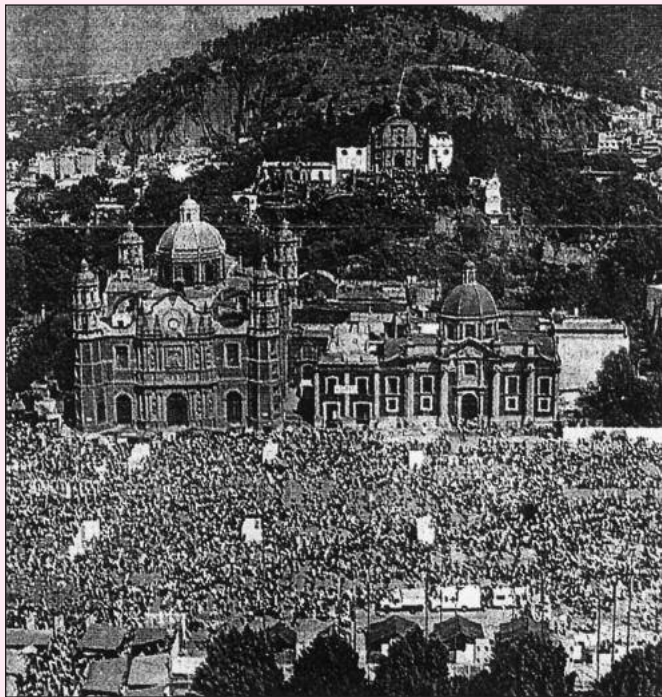
The seventeenth century church in Miahuatlan, now an IPCM church.

ica, Queen of Mexico and Empress of the Americas, and as Patroness of the Philippines. The anniversary of her appearing, December 12, has become an important pilgrimage date to her shrine for her devotees both in Mexico and beyond. Many travel the last mile or so on their knees and traditionally hundreds of thousands come together at her basilica on December 12 to celebrate and sing birthday songs to her.

It is impossible to underestimate the importance of this saint for Mexico. When Father Didalgo declared Mexico's independence in 1810, he did so with the waving of her banner, thus inspiring the populace to follow for battle. The revolutionaries of 1910 also fought under her banner. The days preceding December 12 are throughout Mexico

characterized by much display of devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe. The ceremonies at her shrine also betray the heart and soul involvement of Mexico's pagan past. While the Roman Catholic priest is busy inside the basilica with his rites in her honour, outside the basilica the ancient pagan Aztec rites are performed with the permission of Rome. The earth goddess is still very much there.

The devotion to her appears to know no bounds. During the night of this past December 12, the firecrackers and guns went off seemingly non-stop in celebration to the Virgin of Guadalupe. This entire city of about 25 million was in a constant uproar. Because the pope would be coming in January, also to show his devotion to this saint, this was



Three thousand pilgrims arrived from abroad. Six million pilgrims are estimated to have come to the Basilica for the festivities.



A totzil Indian carrying an image of the Virgin so that peace may come back to the State of Chiapas.



Local procession in remembrance of the Virgin Mary.

More pilgrims dancing.



Lots of garbage left behind.



Mass at a newspaper office.



Guadalupe celebrations in New York.



Guadalupe Fever/Fervor



Pilgrims from the state of Guerrero, perform folk dances and gymnastics before mass.

an even more special day of devotion. Indeed, next day's papers reported that the evening before five to six million worshippers had gathered around her basilica! The religious soul of Mexico is being fed poison instead of the bread of life. But the soul of Mexico is clearly hungry. Only the Biblical faith, the Reformed faith can satisfy this great need. The experiences of December 12 help provide a meaningful backdrop to the events of the following days.

Spreading the Reformed faith

After Prof. Misaél Custodio and I had reached Mexico City from the southeast, Mr. Cris Diomedi from Toronto arrived shortly thereafter, on Friday, December 11. This brother is fluent in Spanish (having been born in Chile) and serves as a deacon in the Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto. Part of his reason for being in Mexico City was investigating the possibility of the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund being able to do meaningful work in a Reformed context. Furthermore, both brother Diomedi and I are board members of Partners for Reformational Education in Latin America, and also in that context we were in Mexico to further this work.

The Reformed Church of Mexico (RCM; Iglesia Reformacional de México) is a young church (established in 1992) in the city of Mexico with a mission post in Querétaro. Why these brothers did not simply join the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico (IPCM) is not yet clear to me, for like the IPCM they want to bow before the Word of God in all matters and they have excellent relations with brothers in the IPCM. In any case, the RCM congregation under the leadership of Rev. Gorge Álvarez had organized in a most professional and effective manner an evangelistic breakfast in the five star Hotel del Prado in downtown Mexico City. This was a first for this young church and it was a success. There were about 40 guests and 40 members of the congregation present. In this way the congregation is trying to reach and minister to the upper business class. They too need the Reformed faith. Dr. J.P. Roberts spoke on the end times and the present idolatry and the divine judgment that will surely come. I spoke on the destiny of man in the Old Testament, linking it to present day issues such as the how and why of our present existence. There was also singing and music and of course the enjoying of good food in a warm Christian fellowship. A simple explana-

tion of the basics of the Reformed faith and printed information about the RCM was also given. Many good and promising contacts could be laid through this form of outreach.

Also the John Calvin Seminary does its best to spread the Reformed faith through its teaching not only prospective ministers, but others as well who are interested in learning of the Reformed faith and applying it to their vocation. The public lectures that I had come to give were announced outside the immediate Seminary community as well. On Friday evening, I lectured on contemporary aspects of the office of elder from an Old Testament perspective and on Saturday afternoon I gave a similar treatment on the office of deacon.

Both times lectures were followed by vigorous discussion and the topics were obviously relevant for the audience. It was a joy to deal with this biblical material in a Mexican setting with its own specific questions and dilemmas.

Miahuatlan

Early Sunday morning, Dr. J.P. Roberts, Mr. C. Diomedi and myself drove out to Miahuatlan, an Indian village high in the Sierra Madre mountains. I had been here on my previous visit to Mexico. When we arrived, we discovered that the morning service had already been held at 5:30! (Since there is no telephone in the congregation, prior consultation was not possible.) However, when they saw and

The IPCM at a Glance

The IPCM subscribes to the Westminster Standards and since 1998 also to the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort and the Belgic Confession.

The total membership of the IPCM is about 10,000.

The IPCM is organized in three Presbyteries

THE CENTRAL PRESBYTERY including the central part of Mexico

9 churches and 9 pastors (including those teaching at John Calvin Seminary in Mexico City). There are also numerous mission posts.

Training for the Ministry

- Maranatha Bible Institute located in the city of Monterrey, Nuevo León
- Westminster Bible Institute located in the town of Susupato, Michoacán

THE PRESBYTERY OF THE SOUTHEAST

15 churches and 10 pastors. There are also numerous mission posts.

Training for the Ministry

- John Knox Bible Institute located in the city of Campeche

THE PRESBYTERY OF THE RIVERS REGION

8 churches and 9 pastors. There are also numerous mission posts.

Training for the Ministry

- Revelation Bible Institute

All together there are 32 organized churches with about the same number of mission posts, which as the work is blessed, will develop into an officially organized church.

SYNOD

Every two years a synod meets. The John Calvin Seminary in Mexico City operates under the oversight of the Synod, whereas the Bible Institutes function under the oversight of the presbytery in which they are found. Besides supporting the Bible Institute in their own presbytery, some congregations also support the work of John Calvin Seminary. To become a minister, one can attend the Bible Institute in their presbytery (which is less expensive and closer to home) or one can go to the John Calvin Seminary in Mexico City which tends to have higher standards. Many students do a bit of both.


There are also standing synodical committees which deal with matters such as evangelism, ecclesiastical relations with other churches, and literature.

heard that we were in town, the congregation was called together for a second morning service at about 11 o'clock. Dr. Roberts led the worship service during the course of which I was given the opportunity to bring the gospel which I did using as text Isaiah 66:13 – on the comfort God gives – while Mr. Diomedi translated into Spanish. Later, on request, Mr. Diomedi also gave a personal testimony, describing his own Roman Catholic background and coming to the Reformed faith, and encouraging the congregation to be steadfast in the Lord. Throughout the service, the con-

gregation listened with great attention and it was a joy to be in the midst of these simple believers. Here is a church that meets in a seventeenth century abode building that once belonged to Rome and goes against the syncretistic idolatry of Rome! Here too is the true light of the gospel shining in a land of much superstition and darkness.

The IPCM and us

As I reported in *Clarion* articles during the month of July, 1997, also now I wish to end by expressing the hope that ways and means can be found for us as churches to have meaningful in-

teraction with the IPCM for mutual blessing and encouragement. In its December 1998 meeting Classis Ontario North has agreed to an overture of the Bethel church in Toronto to further investigate the IPCM with a view to eventually establishing official relations with her. This overture now goes to Regional Synod and from there hopefully to the next General Synod (2001). May the Lord continue to strengthen and encourage his people both in the Independent Presbyterian Church in Mexico and the Canadian Reformed Churches and may they serve the mutual upbuilding in the faith. 

THE HI-LITER

News from Here and There

By J. de Gelder

Rockway

Rev. Wieske was delegated to a Regional Synod that had to deal with various appeals, and commented on his experiences as follows:

It makes you wonder sometimes why brs. and srs. seem to find it so difficult, if not impossible, to leave their problems with the Lord. If you only knew how much energy and time is required to leaf your way through the often lengthy appeals to come to a fair judgment you would think twice before you would send one yourself. I'm afraid that we have lost, or are busy losing, the willingness to be meek and to suffer personal wrongs. We seem so bent on getting things our way that almost nothing deters us.

No, I'm not saying that an appeal is necessarily wrong. But I do question the motives more than once that lead up to it. Don't we know that not everything can be straightened out? Does Scripture not call us to be the least and in humility to count others better than ourselves? Is it so important to be personally vindicated that we have 16 brothers spend hours on end to come to a judgment? I couldn't help thinking of what Paul wrote in 1 Cor 6:7a: "To have lawsuits at all with one another is defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?"

There is much truth in these words of my colleague. I agree with him, especially when you see that certain matters keep coming back time and again. On the other hand, I don't think it is fair to put all the blame on a lack of willingness to be meek and to suffer wrong. After all, Art. 31 CO does open the way to the major assemblies for every church member who feels himself wronged.

But this puts on the churches the obligation to make the appeal-way clear and accessible, and to create the conditions that appellants can trust that justice will be done within a reasonable period of time. I side with Rev. Wieske when he says: "You would think twice before you would send one (an appeal) yourself." One would think twice perhaps out of willingness to suffer wrong, but even more because the way our appeal process works is usually a frustrating experience for the appellants, and for the delegates to the major assemblies.

The Hiliter is not the place to elaborate on this, and to develop suggestions for improvements, but I may come back to this later on. For those who are interested in this matter and are able to read Dutch I recommend the brochure *Recht doen aan bezwaarden*, published by the Gereformeerde Wetenschappelijk Genootschap in 1997.

Burlington Ebenezer

The Acts of our latest general synod have evoked a lot of discussion already, especially on the topic of relations with other churches. But there are more issues. Rev. Nederveen made us aware of this:

A quick glance through the Acts indicates that our congregation is known by at least four different names: a) the church at Burlington East; b) the Ebenezer Church at Burlington-East; c) Burlington Ebenezer; d) Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church (Burlington-East). Wow! Do we ever have an identity problem! I wonder how many other churches in our federation share that dubious honour. To my knowledge, the church at Burlington-East does not exist. When Ebenezer church split into two wards in the 1960s there was for a short while the distinction between Burlington East and West. Not as two churches, mind you, but as two wards of one church.

As soon as Burlington West became an instituted church in 1971, Burlington Ebenezer continued as the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church. That is its only proper designation. The only correct short form would be Burlington Ebenezer. I wish that churches in the federation would honour these designations in bulletins or in official correspondence.

Toronto

Our confession with regard to the church requires an open eye for the dynamics of Christ's church-gathering work by his Word and Spirit. This can lead to surprising initiatives. Rev. DenHollander wrote in the bulletin of the church in Toronto:

This past Monday-morning we received at our place a visit from a young pastor and his wife of a Hungarian Reformed Congregation here in Richmond Hill. Together with a group of about thirty members they left the local Presbyterian Church of Canada, with which a congregation of Hungarians was affiliated. The reason for this was a persistent liberal trend in this congregation. During the past two years members of this group have been investigating 'conservative Reformed congregations' in order to establish contacts with them.

It would be interesting to hear more about this initial contact.

London

We usually urge the elders to get to know the families and members in their wards. They should show interest in what is going on, and make more visits than just the annual home visit. It can give the impression that all the initiative must come from the elder. When people say, "I hardly know my ward elder," it is often the elder who gets the blame for it. However, the London bulletin showed that there is also another side to it. The members are encouraged:

Get to know your elder. Invite him and his wife down for a social visit. Don't let the contact between you and him be nothing more than the yearly official home visit. They are, after all, the Spirit-appointed guardians of the flock. The more contact between elders and you, the members, the better they will know your needs, your joys, your trials, your struggles. And the better they will be able to address them.

Chatham

In the bulletin of the church at Chatham Rev. Versteeg reflected on the many mission and home mission projects going on, far and near. He stressed the Lord's call to witness the love of God and His Son Jesus Christ to others in word and deed. Then he said:

I know we are all busy. However sometimes we need to remember the priorities of life and what is really of eternal value. Then we know that spiritual things are of eternal value while material things are of temporary value. Let each of us, therefore, examine our hearts and our use of time, and ask ourselves whether or not God is calling us to join the Home Mission team in witnessing the call of salvation in Jesus Christ to others around about us in our community. Not a lot of ability is required, just a true belief and conviction of your own salvation and the joy that should come with it.

A necessary reminder for all of us.

Also in Chatham last year a brother was confronted with the fact that his workplace changed from non-union to union. Instead of giving up right away, the matter was successfully addressed. Rev. Versteeg wrote:

With regards to thanksgiving we may also praise God and give Him thanks for giving our brother exemption from the union. Amazingly the union did not even wish to contest the case. Most unusual! May this give courage and strength to others who still struggle to be freed from such ungodly yokes to do the same.

Edmonton Providence

How beautiful to see the young people actively involved in congregational life – a blessing for them, as well as for the congregation. In Edmonton the following initiative was taken:

The Young Peoples Society have come up with a "Reaching Out" program. We would like to help more people, more often, so this is what it includes: If you are sick and need some help around the house or maybe some meals, all you have to do is call. Or maybe you know of someone who could use some help but would never ask themselves. We would also love to visit the elderly more if they would like the company sometime. In one of our vacant churches the council discussed a report of the calling committee. It said:

The name of a minister will be presented to the congregation and we will have a meeting with the membership after the afternoon service this Sunday. It was also decided that all communicant members will be eligible to vote on whether or not to call this minister.

Food for thought. What is actually the reason to distinguish between voting for a minister, and the election of elders and deacons? Article 3 CO speaks about "the election to any office." So, we are talking about a local decision to have the sisters of the congregation participate in the election to an office in that particular congregation.

Is that wrong? Not necessarily. One could argue that this option is covered by the rule in Article 3 CO – ". . . the election to any office shall take place . . . according to the regulations adopted for that purpose by the consistory with the deacons . . ." – since neither the Church Order, nor the Confessions forbid the participation of the sisters.

On the other hand, I don't think that it would be a positive development in the federation if all the local churches would come up with their own arguments, against or in favour, to make their own decisions in this matter.

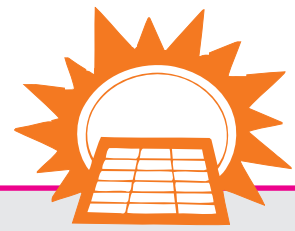
But there is also another side to it. Our last two general synods, Abbotsford 95 and Fergus 98, had to deal with requests to study the matter of the participation of women in the voting for office bearers. However, both times the requests were denied on technical, church political grounds, whereas the issue itself was never discussed.

Now with all due respect for the grounds of our synods – if you are convinced that God's Word does not forbid the sisters of the congregation to take part in the election of office bearers, you can imagine that it is quite frustrating to see that the matter was never really dealt with, and that it seems to drag on from synod to synod. And if people get the feeling that the background is that our synods don't dare to tackle the issue, we run the risk that it's going to backfire. Then the churches will all go their own way, without waiting for a policy with regard to "women's voting" that we should develop as a federation.

Finally, please send your bulletins to my new address:
7 Mercury Road, RR 1, Freulton, ON L0R 1K0



RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is what He has promised us, eternal life.

1 John 2:24, 25

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is the time of the year that we celebrate Easter.

To the world this is the feast that introduces the Spring. After all the cold weather of the winter, we are thinking about flowers that start blooming and birds that are laying their eggs. The sun is giving us more warmth, we open the windows and inhale the nice spring air. Add to that springy feeling a lot of other fiddle-faddle, and you have what the world calls Easter.

Of course we cannot separate ourselves from that happy feeling, which we get when the spring is returning to us. And we may thoroughly enjoy that. The Lord has created this part of the world with its different seasons. And we are allowed to enjoy the milder temperatures after a cold winter. But that is not foremost on our minds when we celebrate Easter. For Easter is one of the feasts that the Church celebrates in remembrance of what the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for us. He died for us on the cross. After his burial He left his grave when He rose from death. The grave could not hold Him, for He was the Son of God. He could not be left in the realm of death; He belonged to the Father.

That is not everything. What makes this happening the most wonderful for us is that the Lord did this for us. The Lord Jesus is God. He was with the Father before He came down to earth. He did not have to suffer for his own sake, for He was without sin.

But *we* were not in such a happy position. For man had fallen into sin. As a result we all had to live with the consequences of our sin. We needed to be punished for our sins. We had to die. Satan had made us sin, and now we were in the destructive power of Satan.

However, God had not created us to die, but to *live!* So the Lord made his plan of Salvation, for all those who believe in Him. That is why Jesus Christ was born to die so we could live. Not only did He die for us, but He also conquered death and the grave. That is what happened on the Easter morning, so many years ago. He rose, so everyone could see it and believe that He was Jesus Christ, God's Son. It is a big miracle, and it is hard to understand. For one who dies cannot stand up and walk again. Yet it happened. Those who saw it and believed, wrote it down for us in the Bible. Every time we can read that good news again: Jesus Christ rose and made it possible for us to live, and to be near God again. Now we can go to the Lord in prayer, but later on we will be able to be with Him in heaven.

There is nothing new in this Easter story. We all have heard it before. Most of us have celebrated Easter many times in our lives. But when you hear something wonderful, you want to hear it over and over again. Sometimes we still may start doubting the truth of it. But there is no need for that. For we can read it again, or we ask some-

body to tell it to us. The Lord knows us. He knows that we are apt to forget and to doubt what He has promised to us. The Lord helped us, so we would not doubt. He did not only give us his Word, but also the Sacraments. The Sacraments are visual signs; they show us that all his promises are true. The Sacrament of the Holy Supper helps us to remember that the Lord Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Every time when we see that, we are reminded that the words, written in the Bible, are true. It is as sure as the bread and the wine that we see and/or taste.

We can be thankful that also this year we may celebrate Easter again. Many Easters have passed since the Lord's friends found the grave empty on that Sunday morning. The Church will continue to celebrate Easter until the last of God's promises will be fulfilled. Then the Great Day of his return will be here. Then we will receive what Christ bought for us with the price of his own blood: we will be freed from our sins, and we will have eternal life.

*Guard my life, O gracious Saviour;
Come, I pray, deliver me,
Lest my head with shame be covered,
For my refuge is in Thee.
Trusting in Thy power supreme,
Lord, I wait for Thy salvation;
God, come quickly to redeem
Israel from tribulation. Psalm 25:10*

Birthdays in May:

4: DEBBIE VEENSTRA
RR 1, Sherkston, ON L0S 1R0

10: ROB DEHAAN
"ANCHOR HOME," 361 30 Road, RR 2,
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

30: BERNIE DEVOS
40 Kerman Avenue, Grimsby, ON L3M 3W5

It will be Debbie's 25th birthday, Robbie's 34th, and Bernie's 24th. Congratulations to all of you.

This is the new address for TREVOR HOFSTINK, whose birthday was on March 3rd:

C106, 8920 165 Street, Edmonton, AB T5R 2R9

Unfortunately his new address was brought to my attention when the *Clarion* had reached the readers already. This is not the first time that I cannot place the right address with the birthdates. Please be aware that I need the information almost two months before the birth date!

Until next month,

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

If implicit, why not explicit?

In a recent *Clarion*, Dr. Van Dam explains why he believes Synod Fergus 1998 was wrong in its decision concerning the OPC. First, he states that Synod did not fully appreciate or understand the Agreement and writes that “although the precise words ‘verbal warning not sufficient’ do not occur (in the original Agreement, JM), the issue is covered by the fact that the Agreement explicitly affirms that the supervision of the table includes guests and that the eldership has the responsibility in supervising admission to the Lord’s Supper.” But if the original Agreement already implicitly affirmed that, why would it be wrong to make that explicit? Also, besides once meeting with members of the Committee for Contact with the OPC (CCOPC), the committee at synod also consulted Rev. J. Petersen of the OPC. Synod cannot be accused of misunderstanding the report.

Secondly, Dr. Van Dam believes Synod’s decision shows a lack of sensitivity to the OPC. How would amending the Agreement proposed by the CCOPC to include what had already been implied show such insensitivity, especially when Synod also acknowledged the faithfulness of the OPC?

Thirdly, Dr. Van Dam believes that Synod was wrong because its decision perpetuates an attitude on our part that can be seen as “measuring with two standards.” He says we demand agreement on the issue of admission to the Lord’s Table while other important issues are left for future discussion after ecclesiastical fellowship has been achieved. He also asks how we can insist on an amended Agreement while we have fellowship with churches that have practices similar to those in the OPC? But, Synod 1998 can hardly be blamed for all this because those decisions were made by earlier synods.

I believe, that Synod 1998 did its best to deal with the matters before it honestly and scripturally. Besides, we have to answer more to God than to men for our decisions. The decision of Synod regarding relations with the OPC was not a wrong one.

Rev. J. Moesker, Carman, Manitoba

Make the Teachers’ College More Helpful

Re: The Future of Canadian Reformed Schools.

As a teacher struggling to find work in a system demanding more attention to government qualifications, I wish to make the following points.

First, most provincial governments fund our Reformed schools in exchange for meeting certain standards, such as the qualification of teachers, Ontario being the exception. Today, becoming qualified means five to six years of university study. Expecting a person to travel to Ontario and add another year of training is not realistic. On the flip side, to receive all the training in the College is of no use for qualification in other provinces. In Ontario, the viability of the College relies on not needing to meet government standards. If funding began there, would they reject it in favor of taking teachers who are not provincially qualified?

Second, I challenge the comment that a “Reformed teacher is not just any well-meaning communicant member of the church who also happens to like teaching.” I was not trained in the College, yet as a Reformed person, Biblical perspective was not hard to integrate. Also, I did not notice greater abilities to do this when the person was trained at the college.

Finally, for the college to function in our schools, it should do two things. One, make correspondence courses available allowing teachers to receive Reformed Teaching Education without moving across the country. Two, get involved in de-

veloping Reformed Curriculum. This is where help is really needed as individual teachers spend countless hours developing Biblical lesson and unit plans. Pooled resources would greatly aid this very slow process.

So keep the college, but make it offer help to everyone in the profession, so that they in turn are better able to help the parents teach the children.

Bill Selles, Coaldale, Alberta

Exaggeration?

I would like to make a remark about what Prof. Van Dam mentioned in *Clarion* February 19, 1999, in the editorial, about the speech of the official delegate of the OPC, Rev. Peterson, to General Synod Fergus, 1998.

Prof. Van Dam says: “Unfortunately, his speech to Synod gave an exaggerated emphasis to his personal point of view on the matter of fencing (the Lord’s Table) to the extent that his remarks were perceived as conflicting with the agreement on fencing that had been reached between the two committees. One cannot minimize how difficult this speech made it for Synod to subsequently still approve the agreement.”

As a matter of fact: It was not the first time that Rev. Peterson was officially delegated by the OPC to a General Synod. General Synod Abbotsford, 1995, heard exactly the same speech (See Acts, General Synod 1995, page 94-97). It is hard to believe that this speech “gave an exaggerated emphasis” to his “personal” point of view on the matter of fencing, like Prof. Van Dam suggests, for after General Synod 1995, the General Assembly of the OPC delegated him to General Synod Fergus 1998. Do we have to believe that this Assembly was not aware of the speech at General Synod 1995? Do we also have to believe that the practice around the Lord’s Table in the OPC like Rev. Peterson has pictured it twice, is against the will of the General Assembly? If so, then it is about time that we hear an explanation of the OPC.

W. DeHaan, Wardsville, Ont.

One must keep in mind that in 1997 the General Assembly of the OPC accepted the agreement on fencing reached by the committees of the OPC and the CanRC. – Editor

Dordt or Dort?

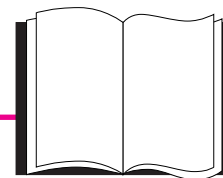
I know we all struggle with the English language from time to time. And when we add Dutch to the mix, things can become really confusing. But could you please set your contributors and readers straight on the correct translation of “Dordtse Leerregels”? If I’m not mistaken, our Book of Praise renders it as “The Canons of Dort” (without the ‘d’). J. Faber, however, in his “Confessional History of the Canadian Reformed Churches” (*Clarion*, Vol. 48, No. 4, pp. 80-83) consistently uses the word “Dordt” (with dt!). I think the professor is right, and so does your editor obviously. Shouldn’t we then change our *Book of Praise*?

Pim Schon, Langley, B.C.

According to Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, both Dordt and Dort are possible. – 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.





Reformed Teacher Training

We publish here two contributions responding to Dr. Van Dam's February 5th editorial on Reformed education and the place of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College. – Editor.

Difficulties

Being a teacher in one of our Canadian Reformed Schools, it is not altogether surprising that I was quite interested in the contents of the editorial of February 5, 1999. Still, it became increasingly difficult for me to accept a number of items put forward in this editorial.

Brother Van Dam acknowledges the tremendous sacrifice our communities make in maintaining our schools. Yet, I fail to see how this sacrifice leads him to conclude that all teachers must be graduates of the Teachers' College. Brother Van Dam makes this connection by creating what seems like a crisis mentality. He states "the greatest challenge for the future viability and existence of our schools as *Reformed* schools" depends on the availability of *Reformed* teachers. This statement, combined with his later arguments, seems to indicate there are not *nearly* enough *Reformed* teachers in our community to ensure our schools remain *Reformed*. There is no evidence to support this argument.

Brother Van Dam goes on to define a *Reformed* teacher as one "who is able to *integrate* one's confession with his or her profession." When connected with later statements, the implication is that teachers taught in secular universities are unable to integrate their confession with their profession – a sweeping generalization promoting a crisis mentality, yet standing on no hard evidence.

Instead, thanks to the cooperation between home, church and school, children have been educated, trained and disciplined to discern between good and evil, to test the spirits and to examine teachings through the light of the Scriptures. Students attending secular universities should be able to evaluate the material they are taught and work with it

only as much as it is in agreement with the Word of God. As such, there is already an integration of their confession in their profession (as student) which later continues (as teacher).

At the Teachers' College, the instructors attempt to teach teaching in the light of Scripture in accordance with the confessions. If the instructors are to do this, surely they also must have been taught in the manner. Yet we find they are not. This is not a slight against the instructors. They continue to hold up modern trends to the light of Scriptures for examination, to study and read, and to apply their faith and confessions to their professions. This is acceptable for the instructors at the Teachers' College. Why then is it not acceptable for teachers in our schools? Is there a double standard? Then stop being hypocritical and examine what it is that we are really after. Or is this editorial simply a rallying call for the Teachers' College? Then do not disguise this call under a supposed crisis in *Reformed* education. At the end of the article we find we are really dealing with the latter: "Do we really want the Teachers' College or not?" In this I agree with brother Van Dam: Discuss the future of the Teachers' College in terms of its merits, and move on.

One must consider the reasons why it was not a unanimous decision to establish the Teachers' College in 1977. The plea to establish the college outside of Ontario was ignored and as a result the college still lacks the power to grant degrees. Therefore, it is functionally useless in terms of schools outside of Ontario obtaining qualified teachers according to provincial laws and regulations. Some schools might still be able to hire these teachers, but at the risk of losing government funding. For many of those teachers who wish to have a B. Ed., it becomes financially impossible to take an additional year at the Teachers' College after completing their degree. Perhaps the school boards would be willing to assume this extra

cost, but they too are struggling under restricted financing.

In addition, Redeemer College has finally become able to grant degrees. Why not send those who prefer a Christian institution to Redeemer rather than to the Teachers' College? Why not direct the college funds to the operation of our elementary and secondary schools? Or have we come to the point where institutions such as Redeemer and Trinity Western are totally unacceptable? In that case, we should pour millions more dollars into an alternative education system by establishing our own Canadian Reformed University to train *Reformed* historians, chemists, biologists, doctors, lawyers, psychologists, and theology students. However, if we are to do that, let us also do ourselves a favour by placing the institution outside Ontario to avoid another 20 years struggle for accreditation.

William Hoogerdijk
Hamilton, Ontario

Appreciation

First of all, I would like to express my appreciation for the editorial by Dr. Van Dam in the Feb. 5, 1999 issue in which he discusses the future of Canadian Reformed Schools in the context of the future of the Covenant College. He addresses a number of issues which deserve a wider discussion such as the need for Reformed teachers, the nature of their training and the future of the College as a place for such training.

I would like to offer a few comments:

1. The editor implies with his line of argumentation that it is very difficult to have Reformed teachers unless they have received some kind of Reformed training (preferably at the Teachers' College). This seems unwittingly (and unintentionally no doubt) to impugn the integrity of many fine teachers in our community who have not had the benefit of same.

I would also say that there is no (logical) direct correlation between the Reformed training and being Reformed teachers. We can all probably think of instances in the history of the federation where that has been evidenced. In fact, even an education of ministers at a Reformed theological school is no guarantee of their being truly Reformed!

2. As a teacher and administrator in five different Canadian Reformed Schools in three provinces, I have seen many teachers from different backgrounds with different kinds of training. I wholeheartedly agree that the need for training and maintaining exists. I have personally advocated for many years (through my involvement in the CRTA organization among others) the need for Reformed curriculum writing, professional development and cooperation among teachers and boards across the country.
3. Dr. Van Dam is absolutely correct in stating that the onus is on boards (acting on behalf of parents) to insist upon Reformed training of some kind if they wish to maintain and improve the Reformed character of their schools. So far I've seen little evidence that boards have been prepared to do that. It seems we are not prepared to demand such standards of our teachers or perhaps do not sufficiently appreciate the value of them ourselves. Therein lies another concern!
4. Could it be possible that many of our parents who have themselves gone to Reformed schools and then on to secular institutions, do not consider their education to be of sufficient value to insist upon more of it from the teachers of their own offspring? If

so, what does that say about how they have been educated?

5. The editor calls for public discussion on the future of the Teachers' College. I agree, that's a good thing. Again, where have been the public forums to discuss? The latest information we received locally was a decision to re-institute the three-year program. No explanation for the rationale behind it.
6. Exactly how the Teachers' College might be able to serve the needs of our schools, the desires of young people for a career in teaching which might not be limited to our own schools and the professional development needs of those already in the schools are questions that warrant a greater discussion.
7. One final observation: If Reformed training is so important for teachers and ministers (and I agree that it is), is it any less important for Reformed scientists, lawyers, software developers, journalists or even future politicians? How are they being prepared to serve in God's kingdom? Will their secular training not be equally injurious to the future of themselves, their families, their church and – yes – their schools ultimately? If the parents don't have a thorough grounding in what is required to be Reformed, they will soon not see the need for it anymore in the schools either. Isn't that a logical conclusion as well?

Maybe that should open up a whole new debate which could involve the resources of both the Teachers' College and the Theological College for the benefit of the churches as a whole.

Thanks for starting the debate on a very important issue.

*Harold J. Ludwig
Abbotsford, BC* 

CHURCH NEWS



DECLINED the call to Smithers, BC
Rev. M.H. Van Luik
of Chilliwack, BC

DECLINED the call to
Aldergrove, BC

Rev. M.H. Van Luik
of Chilliwack, BC

CALLED and DECLINED the call to
Houston, BC

Rev. J. VanWoudenberg
of Watford, ON

CALLED by the Free Reformed
Church of West Kelmscott, AU

Rev. J. VanWoudenberg
of Watford, ON

CALLED by the church of
Smithers, BC

Rev. R. Aasman
of Edmonton (Providence), AB

DECLINED the call to the Free
Reformed Church of Australia at
Legana, Tasmania

Rev. C. Bosch
of Burlington (Fellowship), ON





Hymns in Dispute

Our sister churches in the Netherlands are becoming more deeply embroiled in a dispute concerning the place of a synodically commissioned group of hymns currently being distributed in the churches. Confusion and unrest abound as more and more churches either wonder what should be done with the hymns, or decide not to use them. Both in letters to the editor and in many articles the place of the hymns has become one of the more thorny issues the churches have faced in recent years.

Background

The story takes us back to the General Synod of Ommen 1993 which appointed deputies for the study of the place of the hymns in the worship service. The synod maintained that there was a serious gap in the liturgical heritage of the church in this regard, since there were no hymns for special days, baptisms and the sacraments in general, and other special occasions. The synod decided to appoint deputies to examine the desirability and feasibility of expanding the hymn section of the *Reformed Church Book*, (Dutch: *Gereformeerde Kerkboek*), the psalter currently in use in our Dutch sister churches. The deputies were asked to investigate the broader Christian tradition whether any hymns would be suitable for use in the services.

The deputies took their task seriously and came up with a total of 106 hymns of different backgrounds which they felt were worthy of consideration. These 106 hymns were placed with the deputies' report on the table of Synod Berkel and Rodenrijs 1996. The deputies recommended that the 106 hymns be sent to the churches as an example of what could be used in worship services.

Synod 1996 did not find the argumentation used by the deputies convincing. The 106 hymns were given to a newly selected group of deputies with the mandate to test these and to give a further accounting of the selection process to the churches. In other words, the 106 hymns were taken out of the picture, and the new deputies were ba-

sically charged to start from scratch. The idea that Berkel and Rodenrijs seemed to have had in mind was a slow process of issuing a select number of hymns to the churches with a detailed accounting of why these hymns were chosen. It was then in the province of the local churches to test them, first at the consistory level and then in the church services, if the consistories approved. The whole idea was to institute a carefully monitored process of producing a mutually agreed upon and scripturally responsible selection of additional hymns. Although the wording of the decision was not entirely clear and could be construed as including a large number of hymns, Synod Berkel and Rodenrijs, working in the line of Synod Ommen 1993, envisioned a carefully selected supplement of hymns that would pass the test of fitting in a Reformed church book.

Deputies take over

The deputies apparently took some liberties with their mandate. They were asked to come forward with a selected number of hymns at least two years in advance of the Synod of Leusden 1999. This would allow sufficient time for the churches to send in their considerations or objections to the forthcoming synod. But the deputies did not come out with their hymns until October 1998, well into the final year before synod was scheduled to meet. What's more, they failed to give any detailed accounting of the hymns they selected, stating that they did not want to short circuit the testing process that was to take place in the churches. And to top it off, they loaded the churches with a package of 255 hymns, all taken from the so called *Liedboek voor de kerken*, the hymnal used by the mainline liberal protestant churches in Holland. A good number of the original 106 hymns submitted by the previous deputies found their way back into this package.

So the question for the churches has become: what do you do when a group of deputies drops off a truckload of 255 hymns at your door? Where do you take them and how do you begin

testing them? The strategies are different in different churches, but in general there is a good deal of confusion and unrest about the enormity of the task, and whether it is responsible to introduce such a large volume of hymns at the whim of a small group of 'experts' in the churches. The end result is that some churches are regularly singing new hymns, while other churches, sometimes even in the town next to their hymn singing neighbour, refuse to have the hymns of the new book used in the services.

The whole idea was to institute a carefully monitored process of producing a mutually agreed upon and scripturally responsible selection of additional hymns.

The objections take various forms. For example, while the deputies failed to do much of the testing themselves, they did issue a brief set of rules to help the churches in their own testing procedures. But these rules differ markedly from the synodically approved guidelines of Synod Kampen 1975. Which rules are the churches to follow? Why did the deputies simply ignore the criteria set by Kampen 1975? Other churches are pointing to the church order (C.O. Art. 67, Dutch Order), which specifies that only the 150 psalms and the approved hymns are to be used in the worship services.

Other authors have asked what the ultimate goal of the proposed deputies' project really is. Drawing on quotations that they glean from deputy statements here and there, they have expressed the fear that as a result of this process, before long the whole *Liedboek* with its 491 hymns will become a part of the church's hymnody. That they see as very problematic, considering that the deputies reporting to Synod

Groningen 1978 said they could not recommend the use of any of the *Liedboek* hymns in the churches.

Who is at fault?

If anyone tries to point a finger at any specific body that can be blamed for the current confusion in the liturgical world of the Dutch sister churches he will be hard pressed to find one specific address. Delegates of the synods commenting publicly on the issue tend to point the finger at the deputies, but the deputies in turn point the finger at the language and text of the synod decisions. And it cannot be denied that the decisions of the synods, especially Berkel and Rodenrijs 1996, leave room for varying interpretations, some of which do not sufficiently safeguard the churches against the kind of "hymn shower" to which they have now been subjected.

Reflections

Although we only have a selected number of articles of the Dutch press at our disposal, and lack the actual deputy reports, there is a consistent line in these news reports. The picture that is emerging is one of growing unrest and confusion, along with sharper criticisms directed at the deputies. There were obviously some serious communication problems between the synods and the deputies. Meanwhile the synods, especially synod 1996, were caught off guard in granting a rather select group of deputies that much power in the churches. Normally one would have expected that the synod itself give provisional approval to a select number of hymns before allowing them to be distributed to the churches. After all worship is a matter of the churches in common.

The forthcoming synod of Leusden will need to take some measures to try and sort out the mess. It would at least be appropriate for the synod to restrict the initial testing to the consistories, and in the current situation of mass confusion, take some measure to protect the worship services. While some testing in worship cannot be ruled out, the real point of the singing of hymns in the services is praise to God, and therefore one would hope that at least the necessary scriptural testing would have already taken place by that time!

The Canadian situation

All this means that we need to pay careful attention to our own development in liturgy as well. One might try and posit from a distance why this sudden rush to hymns has overtaken the

Dutch churches, and why this somehow needed to take place among at least some of the churches at such neck-breaking speed. Is this, as some have suggested, an attempt to head the "devil" off at the pass, that is, a matter of trying to mollify the discontent of the young people, some of whom are at the point of leaving if things don't change? That's anyone's guess, and from this distance the best route is to avoid judging the situation. One thing the commentators make clear is that the deputies were very concerned about not following the direction of many modern day evangelical churches by instituting all kinds of popular 'praise songs' in the worship services.

One of the more dominant criteria, next to scriptural soundness, would be that we do not produce an eclectic songbook, one with hymns of various church backgrounds and religious traditions, but seek to uncover those hymns that form a part of the catholic church as Christ has gathered it through the ages to the present day.

At the same time, as sister churches having a relationship with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN [lib]) according to fixed rules of correspondence which include informing each other about major changes in liturgy, we need to raise the question in how far these rules are actually functioning. If suddenly a whole bus load of hymns become a part of the Dutch *Gereformeerde Kerkboek*, or a whole new book, or part of a new book is introduced, does that not mean that we as sister churches need to be informed about the process of revision and what its essential motives are? Is this not a matter of significant liturgical change about which we have agreed to inform each other? Are the rules in fact functioning as they should?

Canadian revisions?

The point of these remarks is not to stand on the sidelines to criticize. There may be good motives for reviewing the place and number of hymns in the churches, and we will need to consider

the same questions ourselves over time.¹ But at the outset we should at least be agreed that the revision should proceed in an orderly and controlled way. Above all, we should avoid the possibility of having a small group of delegates unleash a large volume of new hymns on the churches. The work does require expertise. One will need to conduct a thorough investigation of the background and place of the hymns open for selection. Criteria need to be established as to whether the hymns would fit in a Reformed church book. One of the more dominant criteria, next to scriptural soundness, would be that we do not produce an eclectic songbook, one with hymns of various church backgrounds and religious traditions, but seek to uncover those hymns that form a part of the catholic church as Christ has gathered it through the ages to the present day. One of the more untapped areas of research are the great hymns and songs of the early church, both Ambrosian and other western, as well as early eastern hymns. Besides this area, the development of the Reformation in various countries has produced a rich tradition of psalms and hymns that could be explored.

Perhaps we can take the current unrest in Holland as a sign warning us that the process of revision requires careful and thoughtful planning. We should not be expanding our collection of hymns simply to fulfil someone's wish list, or answer some personal requests. We need to see it as our task to incorporate some positive elements of the rich hymnody of the entire Christian tradition, and especially the Reformed tradition, into our own book, so that we are more consciously united with those who preceded us, and more equipped to share our heritage with those around us.

¹Synod Fergus 1998 mandated the Committee on the Book of Praise not to proceed with changes at this time. However, it also stated that in the future, "there may be possibilities to add additional hymns to the *Book of Praise*," Acts, p. 181.

This article draws on the articles by Rev. A. Boersema and Dr. P. Van Gorp in Reformatanda, an article by Rev. P.L. Storm in Nader Bekeken, an extended series of articles by Drs. A. L. Th. de Bruijne and G.J. Van Middelkoop in De Reformatie, as well as periodic reports and letters in Nederlands Dagblad.

Note: My thanks to Rev. P.L. Storm (Rijnsburg, Holland) for reviewing the factual material in this article.





Press Release Classis Ontario South, March 10-11, 1999

On behalf of the convening church, the church at London, the Rev. J. Ludwig called the meeting to order. We sang Psalm 122:3, read Psalm 122, and prayed for God's blessing over the meeting. Classis was constituted. The moderamen suggested by the last classis took their respective places. Rev. J. VanWoudenberg served as chairman, Rev. J. Van Vliet as clerk, and Rev. G. Ph. van Popta as vice-chairman. The agenda was adopted.

Rev. A. de Graaf, Hamilton's new missionary, signed the classical form of subscription. We then sang Psalm 122:1 and asked the Lord to bless the Rev. De Graaf and the mission work in which he will be engaged. The chairman officially welcomed Rev. De Graaf into the classical district.

Question Period *ad* Article 44 of the Church Order was held.

Several churches requested the advice of classis in disciplinary matters.

The church at Kerwood (formerly Watford) informs classis that they have taken occupancy of their new church building and request to be put on the roster of host churches. This is approved.

The proposal of Kerwood to change the Classical Regulations to instruct the clerk to send only one copy of the Acts to the churches was adopted.

The revised Guidelines for Church Visitation are provisionally adopted. They will be field-tested for one year.

Appointments: Date for next classis, June 9 in London convened by Rockway. Rev. H. Versteeg will serve as chairman,

Rev. J. Van Vliet as vice-chairman, and Rev. J. VanWoudenberg as clerk.

Since the Rev. J. de Gelder left the classis region, the Rev. G. Ph. van Popta was appointed a church visitor (*ad* Article 46 Church Order).

At this point, the delegates were organized into five committees to serve classis with reports on the appeals that had been submitted. The rest of Wednesday alternated between committee and plenary sessions.

At 9 p.m., classis was adjourned until 9 a.m. Thursday morning.

*G. Ph. van Popta
Vice-Chairman, e.t.*

The meeting was reopened at 9 a.m. on Thursday March 11. Roll call was held. Br. Verhey is not present yet. Br. Heyink is replaced by br. Engbers and Rev. van Popta by elder A. DeJong. Rev. Wieske is appointed as vice-chairman to replace Rev. van Popta who is absent because of illness.

Various committee proposals re several appeals from a brother are given into discussion and voted on.

Br. Verhey joins the meeting and is welcomed.

Committee reports re four other appeals are discussed one at a time and are sent back to the committees for final presentation.

The appeal of a brother against the consistory of Hamilton is discussed. It is decided to appoint a committee to prepare this matter and to report on a future date.

The meeting is adjourned till after lunch for committee work. The meeting is reopened at 1 p.m. with the singing of Psalm 48:3.

Classis deals with the admissibility of a request of the church at Grand Rapids regarding its minister. Due to the late arrival of this request it is declared inadmissible.

Two appeals are further discussed and answered.

Classis appoints the following brothers to the committee that will deal with the appeal against the consistory at Hamilton: Rev. J. Ludwig; Rev. G. Ph. van Popta, Rev. J. VanVliet (convener), elder J. VanderGaag and elder A. DeJong. Alternate: elder J. Schouten. This committee is to report to the next classis and their report should be sent to the churches before April 8, 1999.

Two more appeals are discussed and finalized.

Question Period is held.

The need is stressed that all churches should remember the serious situation in the church at Grand Rapids in their prayers during the worship services.

Rev. DeGraaf thanks the meeting for having been privileged to be present. Though it was a difficult meeting it was conducted in a brotherly manner and atmosphere.

The vice-chairman mentions as memorabilia that the chairman, Rev. J. VanWoudenberg received two calls since the previous classis. The call to Houston B.C. was declined while the call to West Kelmscot (Australia) is still under consideration. He wishes him the wisdom from the Lord so that he may come to a responsible decision and expresses the hope that he will remain in our classical region.

The Acts are read and adopted.

The Press Release is read and approved.

The chairman judges that censure *ad art* 34 C.O. is not necessary.

We sang Psalm 121:1-4 after which Rev. Wieske leads in supplication and thanksgiving and the chairman closes the meeting.

*G. Wieske
Vice-Chairman, e.t.*



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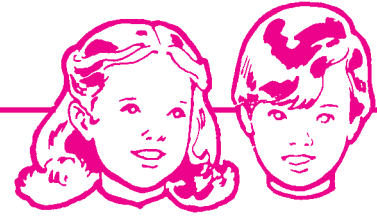
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OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers

Good Friday is the first of the Easter period. This was the day on which our Lord Jesus Christ was found guilty of blasphemy and hung up on the cross. (Blasphemy is when someone uses God's Name in the wrong way. His Name is very holy, and we are not allowed to use it just in any way we want to. We have to use it very carefully.)

And then comes Easter. We are very blessed that we know the meaning of these two days. At Easter, Christ rose from the dead. He took upon His shoulders what we should be paying for – He paid for our sins. Just imagine if we had to pay for all the things we do wrong – when we tell lies, when we hurt somebody else, when we steal something from Mom's pantry, anything at all – imagine we had to carry that all our lives. We would not have a very happy life.

But we can be very happy, because we can pray to the Lord, and He will forgive our sins. That's the reason why Christ came down to earth. Christ came to pay for our sins. And that should make us very, very happy.

Happy Easter, all you Busy Beavers.

Love from Aunt Betty

ANIMAL WORD SEARCH

By Busy Beaver *Brianne Tamminga*

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

FIND: WOLF HORSE RABBITS BIRDS
 MOUSE BEAR POLAR BEAR SNAKE
 TIGER MICE DOG CAT COW
 FALCON RAT PONY CHEETAH
 GRIZZLY BEAR RACCOON

Scrambled Animals

By *Busy Beaver Brianne Tamminga*

EEHATHC _____
 RAEB _____
 ERED _____
 COOCRAN _____
 GDO _____
 LEATNEPH _____
 OSUME _____

EASTER TIME TABLE

- _____ The time of Jesus' death.
- _____ The day the repentant thief met Jesus in Paradise.
- _____ The time Jesus stood on the shore of Lake Galilee after His Resurrection.
- _____ The hour Christ was heard to cry from the cross, "My God, my God!"
- _____ The time the Jewish leaders came to Pilate asking a guard for the tomb.
- _____ At this hour there was a great darkness over all the land.
- _____ The hour Jesus was crucified.
- _____ The time of day Jesus went into the house with the disciples of Emmaus.
- _____ At what time of day did Jesus point out His betrayer?
- _____ When the Word was with God.



FROM THE MAILBOX

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Brianne Tamminga*. Thank you for your letter and puzzles. You are very lucky to have pet rabbits. I hope you take very good care of them. Do you enjoy your piano lessons? Did you have a nice time at your Grandparents' anniversary? Write again, won't you, Brianne.

