

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
VOLUME 48, NO. 12 JUNE 11, 1999

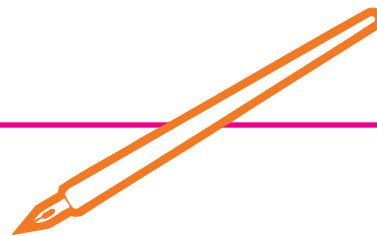


*Faithworks in Guatemala –
building and painting
church benches.*

Numbers

10:1-10

By J. De Jong



A New Form Needed?

One of the decisions made by Synod Fergus 1998 with regard to our sister relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands concerns the Form of Marriage. Synod stated that the Committee for Contact with the Churches Abroad (CCCA) should discuss the alternate form provisionally adopted for use by the Dutch churches with the Dutch delegates, since the reference to the husband's calling to daily labour no longer seems to be represented. According to the Committee, the "alternate Form" which the Synod of Berkel and Rodenrijs 1996 sanctioned for use on a trial basis in the churches "no longer makes reference to the husband's obligation to work faithfully in his daily calling so that he may support his family."¹ Reading this may make some readers wonder what kind of changes are being made in Holland and what the motivation for these changes are. Why a whole new Form for the Solemnization of Marriage? Do we need to review our own form on this point?

Changes in Holland's Form

The Committee is correct in pointing out that the reference to the husband's daily labour no longer occurs in Berkel's alternate Form. That represents a change from the form adopted at the Synod of Arnhem 1981, since there one finds the phrase which the Canadian churches also incorporated in their revision: "Labour faithfully in your calling that you may support your family and also help those in need."² But this does not mean that Berkel 1996 dropped all reference to the husband's duty and role. For the first part of the charge to the husband was amended as follows: "Care properly for her (your wife, JDJ) and lead her in all things according to the will of God." Whereas the older form spoke of "protection" the new form speaks of "caring for" in which the idea of daily support is included.

What would motivate the deletion of the reference to the husband's daily calling as it occurred in the old form? The churches that initiated the changes in the appeals maintained that relationships are so diverse among couples seeking marriage in the churches that one could no longer speak of the husband as the breadwinner. Today his spouse often has a daily calling out of the home as well; she helps her husband through a particular study or training program, or she works full time or part time, and so on. Hence a change was made on the basis of new or altered social conditions. The Committee on liturgy reporting to Synod Berkel

opted for a more general reference to the husband's role as one providing support and care.

Headship

The Committee (CCCA) highlights this change in the form, but there are a number of other more significant changes to which it did not refer at all. Readers may be interested in knowing about these as well. The new or alternate form does not abandon the idea of headship, but it is remarkably weakened in its meaning. The Synod of Arnhem 1981, reacting to submissions from the churches upon the provisional form released in 1978, gave a clear formulation in the form it adopted of what it saw as the meaning of headship. It read, "As Christ is the head of his church and exercises authority over her, so the man as head has authority over his wife."³ Following the traditional explanation, headship is connected with the exercise of a certain authoritative role.

In the alternate form adopted by Berkel this link between headship and authority is abandoned. Drawing on the context of Ephesians 5: 22f, Christ's headship is attached to the notion of service: "Christ loved his congregation and gave himself completely up for her." Then the analogy is carried to the husband: "So the man must be head of his wife in love and self-denial." In other words, the reference to the relationship between Christ and his congregation in Ephesians 5 and its accompanying notion of headship is interpreted in a specific way. The headship mentioned in Ephesians 5:22 is defined and explained in terms of the love and self-denial introduced in the verses 25 and following of Ephesians 5. The new form also has no mention of the wife's obligation to be subject to her husband. Arnhem 1981 already abandoned the idea of "being subject" since it was felt that the term could be too easily associated with a 'slavery' model. The result of all this is that while the term "head" remains, any idea of the wife being subject to her husband, and the husband having and exercising authority over her have been dropped from the new form.

Another reason cited for dropping the reference to "being subject" was found in the interpretation of Genesis 3:16, one of the texts used in the old form to provide scriptural backing to the principle of the submission of the woman. On the basis of this text, the old marriage form took the principle of submission as an "ordinance of God."⁴ But Synod Berkel was convinced by the churches recommending changes to

It cannot be denied that some of them represent a major shift in thought about marriage. One can hardly avoid the conclusion that here some concessions are being made to changed social circumstances. While life's circumstances do change over time, one might raise the question whether all of these changes need to be reflected in ongoing revisions of the liturgical forms, in this case especially the form of marriage.

the form that Genesis 3: 16 cannot be seen as an ordinance of God. Rather, it was to be viewed as a punishment, since it is spoken in the context of the punishment to the woman. This provided a new ground to eliminate the reference to submission in the alternate form.

Holland in transition

All this means is that the Dutch churches are making some far reaching changes in an important liturgical form. We should not conclude from this that they are abandoning their heritage, or that a whole new view of marriage has surfaced in the Dutch Reformed world. We cannot even take the new alternate form as the final stage in the process of revision, since Berkel 1996 appointed new deputies for worship, and they are currently proposing an entirely new form to the churches. It models Berkel's alternate form in that all the references to subjection or the exercise of authority have been deleted. But the structure and flow of the form has been completely overhauled. Therefore in its discussions our committee will need to be careful to remember that we are not dealing with a definitive situation in these churches.⁵

Other changes

The alternate form of Berkel has introduced other changes as well. The reference to the propagation of the human race which occurs in the section dealing with the purpose of marriage, with its accompanying proof text, Genesis 1:28, was considered to be inappropriate for the current situation. The argument was: Which couple getting married today thinks in terms of "propagating the human race"? How does this expression correspond to the fully populated world we live in today? Genesis 17:7 was considered to be a superior passage for this purpose, and this text found its way into the alternate form, along with a new formulation of the purpose of marriage. Dutch newlyweds need no longer think in terms of the "propagation of the human race," but now may think in terms of the "progress of God's covenant," giving a more spiritual "flavour" to the building of a family.

Some comments

What are we to think of all these changes? It cannot be denied that some of them represent a major shift in thought about marriage. One can hardly avoid the conclusion that here some concessions are being made to changed social circumstances. While life's circumstances do change over time, one might raise the question whether all of these changes need to be reflected in ongoing revisions of the liturgical forms, in this case especially the form of marriage. The central question, however, is whether Scripture itself supports such changes. Here on some points the argumentation appears weak. Let us briefly look at a couple of passages.

Ephesians 5

Perhaps one of the more fundamental changes concerns the description of headship in Ephesians 5. Should headship be defined strictly in terms of self-denial and service in the way Synod Berkel's alternate form does it? That is not what Ephesians 5:22 says. This text speaks about the specific duty of the husband to function as the head of his wife, and the wife to be subject to her husband. Then, in the verses 25 and following a new thought is introduced which outlines the frame of reference in which headship should be exercised. Headship must be exercised in the context of the bond of love that exists between the husband and the wife, which in its own way models and imitates the love that Christ has for his church. However, this framework of love does not



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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Agreement No. 1377531 Registration No. 1025
 ISSN 0383-0438

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IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – A New Form Needed? — J. De Jong.....	270
Treasures, New and Old – Critical Days — G. Ph. van Popta.....	273
Evangelicalism – Evangelicals and Roman Catholics Together (Part 5) — P. H. Holtvluwer	274
Reader's Forum – Getting Involved Politically — Alice Veenman	278
Ray of Sunshine — Mrs. R. Ravensbergen	279
Press Review – Getting to Know Each Other — J. De Jong	280
Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund (CRWRF) — Anna Marie Beintema and James Baartse	281
Book Reviews – Seven Thousand Shall Remain! by A. Van der Jagt — reviewed by J. De Jong	283
Letter to the Editor	284

exhaust the notion of headship to which Paul refers in the previous verses. Headship has its own unique place and function. And while the term “head” includes by definition the elements of responsibility, leadership and care, the specific thought of ruling and authority cannot be cut away from the term.⁶

No doubt we can grant that the way in which this headship and authority relationship functions is also influenced by cultural and social circumstances. A more mobile society like ours allows for various roles being fulfilled by both men and women in different contexts. But in a marriage relationship, headship will always be present as an understood and accepted aspect of the whole marriage relationship as it functions as a bond of love and unity.⁷

Genesis 3:16

It is not correct to assert that because God’s word of reproof to Eve after the fall exists in the context of a punishment (Gen 3:16) it cannot be termed an ordinance. The old form was not wrong in calling this word of God an “ordinance of God” for the simple reason that in and with this word of punishment God keeps his creation ordinances in mind, and here also states the original ordinance in a new way, and in the light of new conditions. As God moves forward, his original ordinances are *never abandoned, only restated*. Therefore this support for the change in the Dutch form is untenable.

Precisely on this account I also find the change from the expression of the “propagation of the human race” to “progress of God’s covenant” to be both misleading and misplaced. For marriage itself is not a matter *first* of the progress of God’s covenant. That comes with the spiritual nurture in the home. Marriage is first of all a continuation of what we receive from God in our first parents at creation. To be sure, it is graciously restored to us after our fall into sin, and so comes to us under the configuration of grace and redemption. However, the marriage mandate itself concerns the cultural task of the beginning which is then restated under new, post-fall conditions. We still share the calling given to all humankind in paradise to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it.

The Canadian situation

So far I have not heard of any churches among us proposing changes with regard to the Form of Marriage. In

flavour and content we have the form that models Arnhem 1981, and the churches appear to be content with that. In the light of the comments above, I do not see the need for a major revision of our form in the current situation. While the forms should be phrased in clear contemporary language, we need not adapt our forms to the spirit of the time, or change according to perceived misconceptions that may arise among contemporary hearers whether in or outside of the church.

Other concerns

While I express these concerns about the changes in the Form in Holland, perhaps I may add that as Canadian churches we need to be watchful not to sound our alarms too sharply or quickly. Other points of concern raised by the Synod Fergus 1998 deal with changes which were perceived by one church (Guelph) as being extremely far reaching. This concerns “statements made by certain ministers in the RCN” and “an alleged deviation from Reformed doctrine regarding Christ’s sufferings on the cross, the concepts of eternal death and substitutionary atonement.” On this basis the church of Guelph questions “whether the commitment to the authority of Scripture and the Reformed Confessions is being upheld” and “whether the Form of Subscription is being upheld.” Synod therefore mandated the CCCA to investigate these issues.⁸

On the whole I find this a rather alarmist and an over-stated reaction. Our readers may know that statements were made by a certain minister on the substitutionary atonement of Christ, but they should also then be told that these statements have been, and still are, matters of discipline in the churches. The same applies to the statements that were made by another minister with regard to the foundation of the church, as well as to statements with regard to the relationship between the sabbath and the Sunday. Our readers should not have the impression as if the Dutch churches are completely abandoning their Reformed heritage. Far from it! The struggle of faith carries on there as well, and we should seek to be a hand and a foot to each other rather than let unfounded criticism or general rumour predominate.

I trust the Committee will receive the necessary wisdom to hold to the essential things that affect us as sister churches and may have an effect on our

relationship. I am sure that with regard to the other matters mandated by Synod, the committee will receive a satisfactory explanation from its Dutch counterpart. Let us then seek as much as possible to learn from each other, admonish one another in brotherly love, and build each other up in Christ, holding each other to the treasure and blessings we have received in him.

¹Acts Fergus 1998, p. 31.

²See the form adopted by Synod Arnhem 1981, *Acta*, Art. 57, pp. 154-157


³*Acta* Arnhem, 1981, Art. 57 p. 165 (my translation).

⁴See the 1972 edition of the *Book of Praise*, 541: “You shall not resist this ordinance of God, but be obedient to the command of God and follow the example of godly women, who trusted in God and were subject to their husbands.” The textual reference here for the ordinance of God is Genesis 3:16.

⁵The report to Synod 1999 says that “there is much unclarity regarding the place of the man and woman in the Christian marriage,” cf *Rapporten Deputaten aan de General Synode van Leusden 1999* (De Vuurbaak: Barnveld, 1998), 17. Quoting L. Floor, the Committee opines that “for later readers (of Ephesians 5:22, JDJ) the term ‘be subject’ has a negative tone,” 19. Sentiments like these indicate that this aspect of life is in much discussion in the Dutch churches today.

⁶J.A.C. Van Leeuwen says, “Here we naturally envision the thought of ruling and authority, but certainly no less the thought of an organic living unity.” in *Paulus’ Zendingbrieven aan Efeze, Colosse, Filémon, en Thessalonika*, (KNT:Bottenburg, Amsterdam, 1926) 124. Hendriksen also states that headship implies more than rulership, and therefore the text should not be used to place undue stress on the husband’s authority over his wife, cf. W. Hendriksen, *Ephesians* (NTC) 248. F.W. Grosheide, on the other hand, consistently attaches the notion of obedience on the part of the woman to the man to this term, *De brief van Paulus aan de Efeziërs*, (CNT second series, Kok, Kampen, 1960) 86. In a more recent commentary, L. Floor suggests the term points to responsibility and life-unity, but fails to mention any idea of authority, cf L. Floor, *Efeziërs. Eén in Christus* (CNT: derde serie, Kok: Kampen, 1995), 189.

⁷A careful reading of the texts will indicate that despite shifts in cultural mores, the authority relationship itself, as given in Scripture, may not be abandoned. Despite the wide range of attempts to do so, cutting the idea of authority (in headship) out of the Greek term *kephale* in Eph 5: 22 cannot be made convincing. The Greek term and its use in Paul is too clear to allow for such (agenda-based) revisionist readings of the term. On the other hand, recall that the context in Ephesians 5, as well as other places, clearly indicate that all ruling must occur within the parameters of *marital love* as sealed in Christ and directed to his service.

⁸*Acts Synod Fergus 1998*, Art. 40, p. 34. 

By G. Ph. van Popta

Critical Days

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'" (Acts 2:14-21).

On the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, opened the scriptures. Many who want to follow the leading of the Spirit want to do so with a closed Bible. Some even suppose that the Holy Spirit will speak to them differently today than He did to God's people ages ago through the holy scriptures. Look at Peter! He opened the Bible.

Many of those who had heard the disciples speaking in other languages supposed that they were drunk. They were wrong, of course. It was only 9 a.m. Rather, this was something the prophet Joel had spoken about. Joel had said that God would pour out his Spirit upon men and women, boys and girls. He would make prophets out of all his people.

We are prophets. We speak prophetically. Prophets speak about the great things God has done and the great things God is yet going to do. We must speak about these things.

It is important that we speak prophetically because the day of judgment is almost upon us. Peter's quotation from Joel speaks about the day of judgment as well. Joel spoke about the day of Pentecost and the day of judgment almost as if they were the same day. Our Lord's stay in heaven is a very temporary one. The day of Pentecost and the great day of judgment both belong to "the last days." We – prophets and prophetesses – live in the last days. These last days will end with judgment of the living and the dead.

Judgment is coming. It will begin with the household of God, wrote the same Peter in his first letter, 4:17. Judgment begins with the church – with you and me. If it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel? *"If the righteous man is*

scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinner appear?"

***We live in critical days.
These are days for
prophesying.***

Critical days. Days for prophesying.

Let us speak prophetically to one another. Let us speak about the great things God has done and is yet going to do. In this way, let us prepare ourselves and each other for the day of judgment. For, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14:3ff, he who prophesies builds up and encourages others. One who prophesies edifies the church.

We also speak prophetically in the world, so that those who do not yet belong to the household of God may be saved from the coming day of wrath. Sinners are bound for eternal punishment. However, there is an escape. The day of wrath is coming, said Peter. But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Call upon the Lord's name, and you shall be saved. Flee from the coming wrath to Jesus Christ. Speak prophetically. Pentecost has come and gone. We are prophets! Encourage each other to embrace God's free salvation. Speak about judgment and salvation to others who are in danger of plunging into hell!

We live in critical days. These are days for prophesying. **C**

What's inside?

Western society is changing. Different pressures are exerting forces upon our families and marriages. Our Dutch sister churches are struggling with this on the point of marriage. Ought we to accommodate to the changing circumstances of society? Are there any concessions to be made? Dr. J. De Jong addresses this in the editorial.

Mr. Peter Holtvluwer, graduand of our Theological College, contributes another article on Evangelicalism. This time he writes about and evaluates the ECT document – "Evangelicals and Catholics Together."

Early this year, a group of eight young people went to Tajumulco, Guatemala, under the auspices of *Faithworks* and *CRWRP*. They were hosted by members of one of the Burlington churches, James and Linda Baartse, who work there on behalf of Wycliffe Bible Translators. You will find two enthusiastic reports of this trip, one from James and another from Anna Marie Beintema.

With the steady decay of Western culture, one sometimes wonders whether it is still worthwhile to attempt to influence culture and society, or whether we as Christians ought to be withdrawing and erecting our own parallel culture. Mrs. Veenman of Orangeville, Ontario, argues strongly in favour of getting involved. In Reader's Forum, she speaks about her own experiences and the many possibilities for us to influence positively our communities.

In addition, you should find a few reviews of sorts. We hope you enjoy this issue. Best wishes!

GvP

Evangelicalism – Evangelicals and Roman Catholics Together (Part 5)

By P. H. Holtvluwer

In the last two articles we examined and evaluated the four 'isms' of the Evangelical movement – conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism. In my evaluation I presented a number of criticisms of Evangelicalism which showed how the movement is in many ways less than truly scriptural and less than the Reformed Christian faith. In this article we will examine the modern result of this legacy as it shows itself in the current trends within Evangelicalism.

One of the serious charges which I laid against Evangelicalism in the previous article is that it is prone to doctrinal change. Over the course of its history Evangelicalism has included both Calvinists and Arminians, Baptists and Presbyterians. At one time salvation is seen as coming from God alone who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the Word and by his Spirit. At another time and quite often today the decision to be saved is seen as being in the hands of the believers – “Accept Jesus into your heart and you will be saved,” is the common invitation. Evangelicalism gets blown about very easily by every wind of doctrine.

And the current state of affairs within Evangelicalism in the mid 1990s and right up to today shows this serious weakness and grave danger of the Evangelical movement. In the spring of 1994 a group of renowned Evangelicals and Roman Catholics came together in a conference setting and worked out an 'accord' of sorts to which they all could agree. This accord was meant to form the basis of a Christian partnership between Evangelicals and Romanists, a basis upon which they can stand together as Christians and fight against the secularism of the world today. In the four years since this agreement was signed, further discussions have taken place, to the point where in the fall of

1997 the two groups could form an even more elaborate statement of concord. In these discussions and agreements we may truly see the ugly side of Evangelicalism – its ignorance of what the Lord of the church requires of us and its desire to achieve unity but not a unity in the true faith. In this we see the great failing and the great danger of Evangelicalism as together with Romanists they are making shipwreck of the faith.¹

In this article I will outline just what it is that Evangelicals and Romanists are

This group of Evangelicals and Romanists is very concerned about what they call the “Christian mission of the one Christ.”

presently doing together. In the following and last article I will then present suggestions as to how to approach both Evangelicalism and Evangelicals.

Evangelicals and Catholics together – spring 1994

In the spring of 1994 a number of prominent Evangelicals, led by Charles Colson, and leading Roman Catholic scholars, such as Richard John Neuhaus, came together in New York City to discuss, “common convictions about Christian faith and mission.” In the course of these discussions they produced a document entitled, “*Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*” [Hereafter known as ECT].² It was endorsed by such leading Evangelicals as J.I. Packer, Mark Noll, and Pat Robertson, giving the document weighty support in the Evangelical world. Although

not an official statement from either a leading Evangelical association or the Vatican, yet ECT does indicate where the leading edges of both Evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism are heading, and the destination is not pretty.

Priority of mission

You will notice in the subtitle to the ECT document a very dominant stress present throughout the whole document: *Christian mission*. This group of Evangelicals and Romanists is very concerned about what they call the “Christian mission of the one Christ,” which as we noticed already in the previous two articles is one of the leading characteristics of Evangelicals which falls under *conversionism*. ECT reasons like this:

As Christ is one, so the Christian mission is one. That one mission can be and should be advanced in diverse ways. Legitimate diversity, however, should not be confused with existing divisions between Christians that obscure the one Christ and hinder the one mission.³

One can already sense where they are headed with such a statement. Since “existing divisions” do not, in their opinion, qualify as “legitimate diversity,” then it is necessary for those divisions to be taken away in order to advance the “one mission of Christ.”

This desire to advance a united front in the one mission of Christ comes out more clearly a little later in the document:

As Evangelicals and Catholics, we dare not by needless and loveless conflict between ourselves give aid and comfort to the enemies of the cause of Christ. . . . The love of Christ compels us and we are therefore resolved to avoid such conflict between our communities and, where such conflict exists, to do what we can to reduce and eliminate it. Beyond that, we are called

and we are therefore resolved to explore patterns of working and witnessing together in order to advance the one mission of Christ.⁴

What strikes us immediately is that all the differences between Evangelicals and Catholics are regarded as “needless and loveless conflict.” In this brief statement ECT seeks to undo 400 years of history. Suddenly the Great Reformation becomes meaningless, the great struggles of Calvin and Luther and so many others are relegated as “needless.” The persecution of Protestants, including many early Evangelicals, by the Romanists is called simply a “loveless conflict.” All the gains of the Reformation are virtually thrown over board by this seemingly harmless statement.

Defend against the common enemy

Notice also the underlying motive for ECT’s call for unity, namely to defend together against a common enemy. The main purpose for joining together now at this point in time is because of the huge enemy which Christianity faces. The feeling that “we dare not . . . give aid to the enemy of Christ,” comes from Ephesians 6, as they quote, “we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”⁵ As they see it, all Christians face these enemies and so must face them together or else they will be doomed. A common enemy will make for strange bed-fellows and ECT proves that truth once again. What none of them seem to notice is that the enemy is not just on the outside in the world but is also on the inside of this movement, in the form of compromising clear biblical truths. Although they say outrightly, “we reject any appearance of harmony

that is purchased at the price of truth,”⁶ yet it is exactly truth which they are giving up by knitting such a close bond with Romanists.

Justification by Faith . . . ?

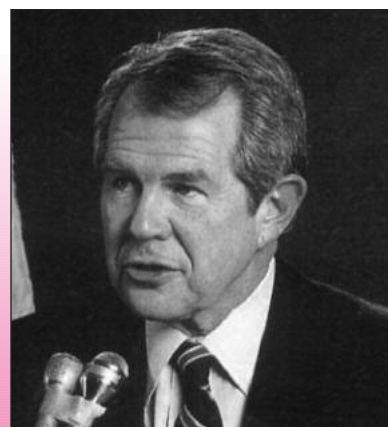
The pressing question which comes from such a close interaction of Evangelicals and Romanists is how can these two join together since they hold central doctrines which conflict with each other? We have seen in previous articles that one of the central doctrines which Evangelicals adhere to is justification by faith alone, the great *sola fide* of the Reformation. But Romanists, according to the official doctrine of the Roman church have pronounced this doctrine as accursed. Let me quote a few lines from the Council of Trent (completed AD 1563) which is still authoritative in the Roman Church today:

If Evangelicalism itself represents the lowest common denominator among Protestants for a basis for cooperation together, ECT finds an even lower common denominator.

On Justification: Canon IX – If any one saith that by faith alone the impious is justified, in such wise as to mean that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will: let him be anathema.⁷

How is it possible that Evangelicals can see their way clear to forming a united Christian front with a church that basically holds a different gospel than they do?

Unfortunately, the only way for Evangelicals to work with Romanists is to yet again reduce the gospel message even further. If Evangelicalism itself represents the lowest common denominator among Protestants for a basis for cooperation together, ECT finds an even lower common denominator. In the first place, they basically skate over or even ignore the central doctrine of justification by faith. In the section of the document titled, “we affirm together,” the most they can say together is, “we af-



Pat Robertson

firm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ.” Conveniently they leave out the word, “alone” so that this single statement can be interpreted both by Romanists and Evangelicals in their own way. The Romanists can nicely understand it to include the necessary good works which accompany a faith in Christ and give to a person the righteousness needed to stand before God. And Evangelicals can understand the statement in the traditional way of *sola fide*. Other than this single statement on justification the entire ECT document fails to deal with this central debate between Evangelicals and Romanists.

And what does ECT replace justification by faith alone with? They water down the gospel to the point where the lowest common denominator becomes:

All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ. Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have not chosen one another, just as we have not chosen Christ. He has chosen us, and He has chosen us to be his together.

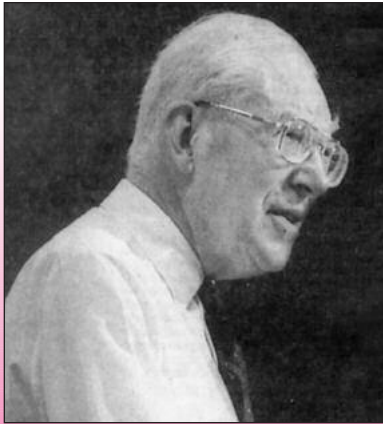
But are we really brothers and sisters with those who hold to a false gospel? If someone believes that their works contribute toward their righteousness before God, do we not confess in Lord’s Day 11 of the Heidelberg Catechism that this constitutes a denial of the Saviour Jesus Christ? All ECT succeeds in doing with a statement like the above is muddying the waters and putting all who claim to be Christians in the same camp. Once again we see they have no concept of a unity in the true faith, despite their own claims. They also again display their distaste for the scriptural idea of a true and false church. For

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J.I. Packer

those who participated in ECT, all churches are on an equal footing – all are true. All that remains is to set aside our ‘petty’ differences and come together for what is really important namely evangelizing the world and standing up against secularism. Obedience to *all* of Christ’s commands changes into obedience to a *select few* of Christ’s commands.

“Differences and disagreements”

Moreover, ECT freely admits that there are differences between Evangelicals and Romanists, even serious, divisive differences, but this does not stop them from banding together in evangelization and standing up against secularization. They reason that since we cannot understand God fully because of who He is, we must now search together for the truths of Scripture. They write:

In this search to understand the truth more fully and clearly, we need one another. We are both informed and limited by the histories of our communities and by our own experiences. Across the divides of communities and experiences, we

need to challenge one another, always speaking the truth in love building up the body (Eph 4).⁸

In other words they are saying that the truth lies somewhere between us. In this statement neither Romanists nor Evangelicals claim to know the truths of Scripture on other than a few basic points. Basically, this statement denies the history of both the Roman Catholic Church and of the Reformation. True Romanists would shudder at such a statement because they have always taught that the Roman Church has been the bearer of truth from the beginning. And for our part, people who hold the Reformation dear, we too shudder at such talk for it in effect denies the gains of the Reformation. Did not our fathers write down in carefully researched and documented confessions a faithful summary of the Christian faith as it is presented to us in Scripture? Or are these confessions just a discussion point with modern Romanists concerning what Scriptures really say?

ECT goes on to note some of the “differences and disagreements” which must be addressed in order to strengthen the relationship between Romanists and Evangelicals. They list such matters as:

- a) The church as visible communion *or* invisible fellowship of true believers
- b) The sole authority of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) *or* Scripture as authoritatively interpreted in the church;
- c) Sacraments and ordinances as symbols of grace *or* means of grace;
- d) The Lord’s Supper as eucharistic sacrifice *or* memorial meal;
- e) Remembrance of Mary and the saints *or* devotion to Mary and the saints;

- f) Baptism as sacrament of regeneration *or* testimony to regeneration.⁹

ECT puts all these doctrines and others up for discussion, as if they can be debated and a common understanding arrived at. But these and other doctrines are not up for discussion. There is one way to understand them and that way is according to Scripture. Furthermore, a true and accurate summary of the biblical understanding of these doctrines can be found in the Reformed confessions. But of course, for ECT the Reformed confessions are only of limited value, documents which may be used for discussion purposes but not documents which are binding. And they do this to their detriment, for they open themselves up to compromising the truth of Scripture.

Much more could be said about this 1994 ECT document, but allow me to move on to more recent developments in the Fall of 1997.

Evangelicals and Catholics together – fall 1997

Justification by faith . . . alone!

One of the things which ECT 1994 called for was further dialogue and discussion between Evangelicals and Romanists in order to come to greater communion. Since then a number of informal conferences have been held. In the Fall of 1997 one of the latest conferences was held and out of it came a new agreement, a new accord called “*Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Gift of Salvation*” [hereafter known as ECT²]. For anyone who has read Dr. J. De Jong’s review of this document in *Clarion* (Vol 47, No. 9; May 1, 1998) you will know that this document differs from the first in some significant respects. The main difference is that ECT² deals head-on with the doctrine of justification, and even comes to some remarkable conclusions on that subject. Without repeating what Dr. De Jong has published, let me say that it appears as if Evangelicals have won back the doctrine of justification by faith alone. The Romanists who signed the document are prepared to concede to the true Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. Now if only the Vatican were to endorse this explanation we may have the beginning of a meaningful interchange between Evangelicals and Catholics. But, of course, that has not happened to date.



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Common tradition of the early church

However, this development does not mean that Evangelicals are tightening the reins on what their relationship with the Romanists should be like. It is only a fortunate development for Evangelicals that this doctrine was in the end maintained, for after all, as we saw from ECT¹, they were going to endeavour together to discover the truths of Scripture across community divides. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is still not the foundational unifying factor for Evangelicals and Romanists, as ECT² explains in its introductory remarks:

We give thanks to God that in recent years many Evangelicals and Catholics, ourselves among them, have been able to express a common faith in Christ, and so to acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We confess together one God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; we confess Jesus Christ the Incarnate Son of God; we affirm the binding authority of Holy Scripture, God's inspired Word; and we acknowledge the Apostles' and Nicene creeds as faithful witnesses to that Word.¹⁰

All this sounds good on the surface, but the problem lies not in what is said here but rather in what is missing. Notice how all the classic doctrines of the Christian faith are mentioned: Trinity, Incarnation, Holy Scripture, and the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. Remarkably the Evangelicals are now willing to bind themselves to a confession, but when it comes to joining with the Romanists those confessions can only be pre-Reformation confessions. All these doctrines were long established before the Reformation and agreed upon by all the Reformers and Romanists alike. The current movement afoot in Evangelical and Romanist circles is to turn to the common "tradition" all Christians hold, namely, the first 1000 years of the New Testament church. One can see this at a glance by the title of a recent book written by Evangelicals, Romanists, and even Greek Orthodox Christians, *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics, & Orthodox in Dialogue* (1997).

By stopping with this incomplete description of some of the early doctrines which the church set forth in the early ecumenical creeds, ECT² succeeds in tapping into a part of the Christian tradition to which all Ro-

manists and Evangelicals alike can agree. What they do by implication, however, is exclude the Reformation and the doctrines which emerged anew at that time. We do not read here about the unifying doctrine of justification by faith alone; that only comes later. Once again this group has undermined the validity of the Reformation by relegating all the disputes and all the confessions arising from those disputes as "serious differences." Consequently they have given up the idea that contained within the Reformed confessions is a faithful summary of the doctrines of Scripture.

Inner dilemma

This inconsistency and inner dilemma of Evangelicalism which historically looks to the Reformation for its birth but is now joining itself with the Counter-Reformation can be seen in the closing remarks of ECT²:

The current movement afoot in Evangelical and Romanist circles is to turn to the common "tradition" all Christians hold, namely, the first 1000 years of the New Testament church.

All who truly believe in Jesus Christ are brothers and sisters in the Lord and must not allow their differences, however important, to undermine this great truth, or deflect them from bearing witness together to God's gift of salvation in Christ As Evangelicals who thank God for the heritage of the Reformation and affirm with conviction its classic confessions, as Catholics who are conscientiously faithful to the teaching of the Catholic Church, and as disciples together of the Lord Jesus Christ, . . . we affirm our unity in the gospel that we have here professed.

Clearly both Romanists and Evangelicals face an unresolved tension here, for the "classic confessions" of the Reformation are directly opposed to much of what the "Catholic Church teaches." How then can there be any kind of unity in the true faith? There simply cannot be. And the participants say it correctly when they say they have a



CALLED by the church of Smithville, ON:

Rev. R. Aasman

of Edmonton (Providence), AB

unity "in the gospel that we have here professed." But the gospel they have professed is not by far the full gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now that we have, over the course of these articles, gained an understanding of the history of Evangelicalism, its doctrines and now the current trends within the movement, it remains for us to discuss our approach to Evangelicalism and Evangelical in the next and last article.

Mr. P. H. Holtvluwer has completed his studies at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton.

¹I share this conclusion with Kevin Reed, *Making Shipwreck of the Faith: Evangelicals and Roman Catholics Together* (Dallas: Protestant Heritage Press, 1995). See also, of course, 1 Tim 1:19.

²The entire accord is printed in "Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," *First Things*, May, 1994, p.15-22, with all the participants' and endorsers' names attached at the end.

³Ibid, p.15.

⁴Ibid, p.16.


⁵Ibid, p.16.

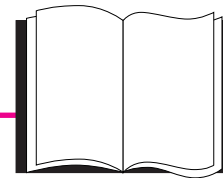
⁶Ibid, p.16.

⁷Quoted from the Council of Trent, "On Justification, Canon IX," in Philip Schaff, ed, *The Creeds of Christendom, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990 [Reprint]) p.112.

⁸"Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," *First Things*, May, 1994, p.17.

⁹Ibid, p.18. Lettering the list and italicizing the word "or" is my doing to highlight what is being contrasted.

¹⁰"Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Gift of Salvation," as printed in *Christianity Today*, December 8, 1997, p.35. The signatories are also included at the end. 



Getting Involved Politically

By Alice Veenman

On June 3rd, Ontario voters will have gone to the polls, and I would like to contribute my "take" on the Christian's involvement in Canadian politics.

During the past eight years I have been involved in municipal politics. The first two terms were as Municipal Councillor and my third, and possibly my last term, as Deputy Reeve of Mono Township. I am interested in sharing what I believe is our responsibility as well as our opportunity of becoming positively involved in Canadian politics whether that be local, provincial or federal.

For many years, Mr. Pieter Jongeling was a member of Parliament in the Netherlands as a faithful and knowledgeable Christian. When Mr. Jongeling visited Canada approximately 20 years ago, he gave a speech on Christians and politics in which he taught us that if we are to be effective Christians in this world in which we live we must arm ourselves not only with the Word of God but we must also be knowledgeable about the issues being discussed. I never forgot those words, because that had obviously made him an effective soldier for the Lord.

Realizing the importance of those words, as well as having a desire to serve my municipality to the best of my ability, I became involved.

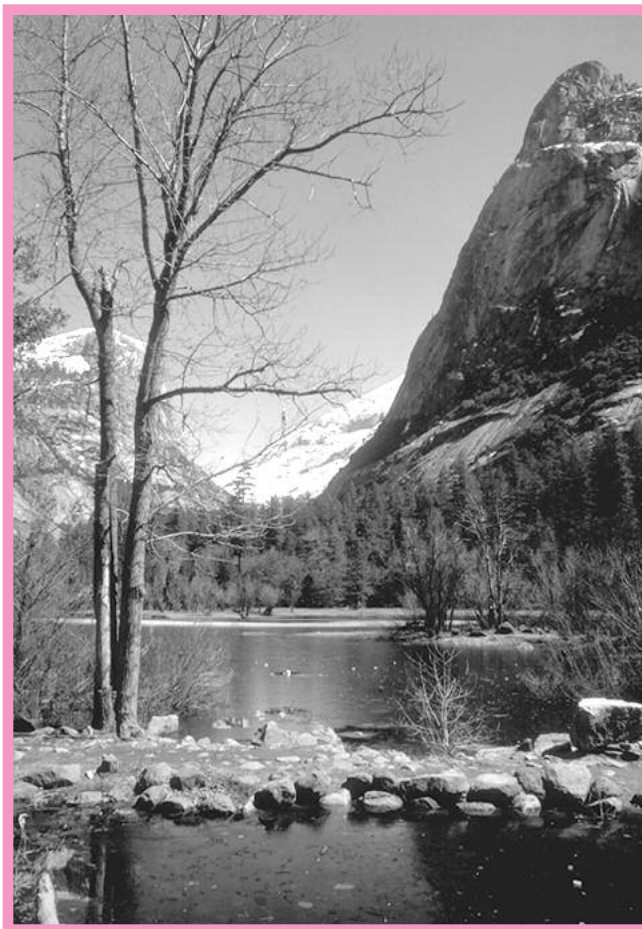
Besides praying and casting your vote, the most available venue for anyone to have any input into the political process is to apply for local committees used by provincial and municipal politicians for citizen involvement in the decision making process. Committees exist in the following areas: Local Architectural Conservancy Advisory Committee, Policing, Recreation, Library, Fire Boards, Health Units, Planning Advisory, Economic Development, Niagara Escarpment Commission, Hospital Boards and possibly others. These various committees usually have the electorate involved and are advertised in local newspapers. Incidentally, the NDP has done a superb job of putting their people at the grass roots of our political system. They do it continuously in every area. Why should we lag behind?

Let me give some examples of opportunities to give input as a Christian in some of the areas mentioned. Recreation – you can have some input regarding events held on Sundays. Why should anyone of any religious persuasion be left out of recreational events provided for by the taxpayer? Planning – what commercial venues are allowed in which particular area of your municipality? This concerns the location of beer stores, strip bars, pornographic material displays etc. Library – membership on this committee could be very effective in determining the choice of reading materials. Health Units – here one has the possibility of introducing a different moral code than the one we are continuously faced with, that is, chastity versus promiscuity and possibly including preventive medicines.

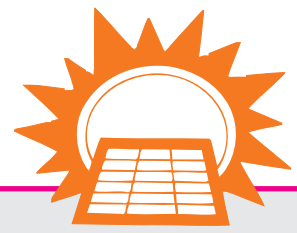
My personal involvement has put me into the "enviable" position of negotiations with the Canadian Union of Public Employees and the Ontario Nurses' Association and other negotiations of similar businesses. I have the privilege of serving on a Health Board and as small as my input may be, it IS input.

The above committees have been a part of my involvement for four to eight years in various ways. I have met wonderful people from all walks of life and I have felt very privileged to have been part of our political process. So I would urge all who have the capability and who love our country to become involved in some way in our political system.

Mrs. Alice Veenman is a member of the Orangeville Canadian Reformed Church and she is currently Deputy Reeve in Mono Township.



RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

Look at the birds in the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Matthew 6:26

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Spring is almost over, and according to the calendar, summer is ready to start. When you look around outside, you do not have to go far from home to see God's beautiful creation. So many things catch your attention! Already early in the morning, bird songs fill the world around us. Each bird has a song of its own kind. Perhaps you can recognize some birds by their songs. That beautiful "choir from heaven" gives a pleasant feeling when you wake up. All those birds! There are so many different kinds! Some sing very beautifully, others make a bit of a 'rougher' sound. Yet, all sing according to God's plan. God created each bird, and not one will drop even a feather, unless it is according to his will.

The next thing that catches our attention is what grows around us in the fields and gardens. There are trees and shrubs, grain and corn, potatoes and flowers, to name only a few. Can you imagine what the world would be like without these? A street looks so much nicer when trees grow down the sides and around the houses. Another beautiful sight is the field where the farmer grows his crops that will serve as food for people and animals. And, what is a house without a flower garden? As with the birds, everything that grows is made according to its kind. Each kind of tree has a different size and shape and colour. Some people can see from a distance what kind of tree is growing in someone's garden. A farmer sees right away what is growing in a field: corn, soybeans, barley, potatoes, or whatever it may be. Of the flowers, there are thousands of different kinds. They come in all colours and they grow to different heights. Some even grow everywhere in great numbers, without having been planted by people. Other kinds are rare, and some are hard to grow because they need special conditions to thrive.

There are many more things that we can observe when we look carefully at the things that we can enjoy in nature: spiders and insects and animals, and much, much more. All these different things that grow and live around us make the world a beautiful place to be. It is no wonder that many people try to enjoy the outdoors as much as possible in the summertime.

But nobody can really appreciate this beauty to the fullest, if they do not first know God who created it all. Without the Lord, a flower is just a flower, and a tree is a tree. But when we know the Lord, then we see the Creator himself in all that He has made. Then we know that the Lord created each little flower, and each little insect, and each big oak tree according to its kind. The Lord made Life. He controls life and death. He gave the life to each different plant, and it will live as long as He wants it to live. He makes the bees find the honey in the flowers, and He makes the mole find its way underground. He gave all the tiny body parts to the ant, so that it can walk and find food to feed its colony.

Early
in the morning,
bird songs fill the
world around
us.

When we know Him, we do not just hear a bird sing, but we hear the birds sing their praises to the Lord. When we know Him, we do not just see beautiful flowers, but we see the flowers displaying their beautiful colours to show us some of God's Majesty and Wisdom.

We are fortunate that the Lord, through his Holy Spirit, has opened our hearts and our eyes to Him. That gives us hope and comfort. For when we know that He created the world so beautifully, then we stand in awe before God the Creator, who is also our Father. All those little plants and animals are so important to Him that nothing escapes his attention; how much more attention will He pay to us! He is aware of everything that happens to a plant; how much more will He know about us! Also when there are things in our lives that cause us grief and frustrations, God knows.

He will help us when we ask Him. He gives us comfort in days of trouble. He gives us courage to deal with our illnesses or handicaps. He is there for us always, and we can pray to Him any time of the day or night. He promised us that there are better times to come: when we go to Him forever. So let us join the birds and the flowers and bring our praises to Him. We can do that now in spite of our tears, but one day we will join the choir of angels in heaven and sing our praises to Him in perfection.

*Praise Him, you hills and mountains all,
You fruit trees and you cedars tall;
Wild beasts and cattle, creeping things,
Praise Him with every bird that sings.
Kings of the earth, with all its people,
Princes and judges, strong and feeble,
Young men and maidens, old and young,
Come, praise the Lord with joyful song.*

Psalm 148:3

Birthdays in July:

4: JAMES BUIKEMA

c/o R. Feenstra, RR 1, 1557 Silverdale Road,
St. Ann's, ON L0R 1Y0

20: CHARLIE BEINTEMA

29 Wilson Avenue, Chatham, ON N7L 1K8

28: JIM WANDERS

538 Wedgewood Drive, Burlington, ON L7L 4J2

29: TOM VANDERZWAAG

"ANCHOR HOME", 361 30 Road, RR 2,
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

It will be James' 38th birthday, Charlie's 24th, Jim's 38th, and Tom's 45th.

I wish you all a happy birthday, and 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

By J. De Jong



Getting to Know Each Other

A recent issue of the paper *The Trumpet*, published in the circles of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, carried a report of a meeting in which a delegate of the Committee for Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) was also present. This all takes place according to the mandate of Synod Abbotsford 1995, reiterated by Synod Fergus 1998. N. Gazensdam of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church [OCRC] in Bowmanville reports on the meeting:

Representatives of three Reformed Denominations met in Bowmanville on March 27, 1999. The conference was initiated and hosted by the Consistory of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church of Bowmanville. The meeting was public and featured various speakers. They were asked to address, why and how their churches (denomination) were started and what distinguishes them from others, highlighting their views (and use) of Bible versions, hymnbooks, Sunday School material, etc.

Elder van Daalen of the Immanuel Orthodox Christian Reformed Church in Nobleton, Ontario described the history of the OCR churches from the late 70s to the federation in 1988. These churches issued a "Declaration of Separation and Return," stating that they had to leave the CRC because of spiritual deviation in that denomination. The speaker mentioned in particular Report 44 "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority," adopted by the CRC Synod 1972, which set the trend for unscriptural positions in other areas of life. The churches have adopted the following position papers: The New Hermeneutic, Creation, Headship and Women in Office and Homosexuality.

Rev. den Hollander, minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Thornhill, Ontario, described the history of the Canadian (and American) Reformed Churches leading his audience back to the Reformed churches in the Netherlands during the 19th century and the 20th till the Liberation in 1944. On this continent the CRC rejected the Liberated view and

chose the synodical side. This led to the establishment of the Canadian Reformed Churches. He spoke about the preaching (redemptive-historical) and the view of the Covenant in his church. They have a seminary and are active in mission, education (Canadian Reformed schools, Teachers' College) and publications.

Rev. Stienstra, minister of the Grace Reformed Church in Dunville, Ontario, described the rather young history of the United Reformed Churches. These churches left the CRC around the early 90s, not only because of the 'women in office' issue, but for the dishonouring of the Word of God and new hermeneutics in that denomination. A few years ago most of the then Independent churches formed the URC (with now some 70 congregations). They have no pronouncements on particular doctrinal issues, since their history has not provided the occasion.

It is beyond the scope of this report to describe in detail the content of the speeches. The factual aspects of why and how the churches were started were well presented. The distinguishing marks separating the churches from each other, calls for statements of position of the different federations of churches. On this most important aspect it was in essence left to the hearers to draw conclusions.

After a question was raised with regard to Bible translations, it became clear that the Canadian Reformed Churches (in general) use the NIV.

After a delicious lunch, served by the ladies of the Bowmanville OCRC, Rev. Stienstra reviewed the work of a Committee on Ecumenical Relations between the United Reformed churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches. This committee of 14 members (8 URC and 5 CanRC) was appointed for three years in working towards Ecclesiastical Fellowship in 2001 and Church Union in 2004. According to Rev. Stienstra, the final decision on Church Union will be made by Synod with delegated authority from


the churches. Rev. den Hollander emphasized discussions at local level, though their Synod will ultimately decide.

In the question period issues were raised about positions on the True Church, children at the Lord's Table, Christian Schools, etc.

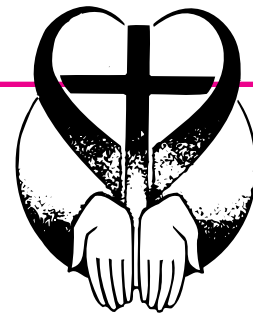
The Conference was a worthwhile exercise in fellowship and an honest effort seeking ecumenical unity. There is unity already which surpasses denominational borders. Scripture does not call for denominational structures; they are not essential for the being of the church, though they can be and should be for its well-being. We all subscribe to the same creeds and to the three forms of unity, but is that all? The CRC does the same. The problem lies in the different ways these creeds are lived out. We should not ignore such differences, but identify them and evaluate them openly. This conference has been a step in that direction.

We are thankful that the Lord has given us the freedom and the desire to meet together. In all our efforts we depend on the grace and blessing of the Lord. Our prayer is that He will guide the churches in the truth and in obedience to the Word, which is the only basis of true unity. Many thanks to the Bowmanville people for hosting this conference and for their fine catering.

I will refrain from any further commentary, except to note that the report speaks for itself concerning the value of this sort of meeting. The approach of using conferences was also one of the avenues employed in the process leading to the Union of 1892. However, if such conferences are to be really valuable, let those establishing the agenda and keeping records see to it that worthwhile topics are introduced so that a sense of progress is clearly visible.

We would also request that reports of any other conferences of this nature be sent to *Clarion* as well. May the Lord bless all that is done to promote a true unity of faith based on his Word and the confessions which in his providence have come down to us. 

Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund



Guatemala Volunteer Trip: Two Perspectives

Have you ever participated in a “Faithworks” trip or financially and prayerfully supported someone who has? Or are you perhaps one who harbours reservations about the value of such short-term efforts? Whatever your view, you are urged to read the following accounts of a recent Guatemalan trip, written both from the point of view of a participant and from that of the hosts. We think you will be encouraged in knowing that such short-term efforts do indeed bear fruit and complement the work of more long-term missionaries/development workers.

For CRWRF, Ruth Meerveld

REWARDING EXPERIENCES

December 29th, 1998 to January 8th 1999, marked the first CRWRF, Faithworks trip to Tajumulco, Guatemala. Unlike other Faithworks trips, the eight-person team didn’t go down to leave the people there with a church building, or to build/repair a home for someone in need. This was not because there is not a need for new or better homes in Guatemala. On the contrary, we saw many “homes” that were in great need of repair. But previous attempts to build in Guatemala have resulted in bitter land disputes and the eventual tearing down of the building by the local governments to end these disputes. Instead we spent ten days learning about and witnessing the mission work that James and Linda Baartse have devoted their lives to.

While we were in Guatemala, we had the pleasure of handing out small care packages to some of the local widows. These packages were handed out to show the widows that people cared about them and to give an example to the church about how they can take care of their members. We worshiped with the local Protestant church and got to know the pastor and some of the elders who came along on the widows’ visits. The faith that we witnessed in the church and its members was a blessing to us, because they have so little and yet they are full of the fruits of the Spirit. It was an amazing testament of faith. We also took part in the New Year’s Eve worship service which was a little different from a Canadian Reformed service in that they spent their time from after supper to well after midnight in

the church building worshipping their Lord and Master.

Because of the growing congregation, we also helped them to build church benches and to paint the existing benches. While we were there we spent a few days in the Baartses’ attic. Whenever there is a small earth tremor, the dust in the attic would filter into the house through the cracks in the ceiling and fill their house with clouds of dust. This was not good for James’ medical condition and so we placed a layer of plastic in the attic after sweeping all the existing dust out. We also had the joy of holding a children’s program for the children of Tajumulco. We played games with them and did a craft (with James or Linda translating) and Linda told them a Bible story. We also travelled to a little village called San Juan Pidela Cuesta, where we helped the local church members there level a piece of land for their new church building. We also held a

children’s program. The people there cooked us an amazing lunch to repay us. They were awed that a group of people from Canada would sacrifice their time to come to Guatemala to help people they didn’t even know. They couldn’t thank us enough. But they can’t realize how richly blessed we were and how much our faith was strengthened by this trip.

It was not a sacrifice for any of us to come down at all but an absolutely up-building, encouraging experience! We also got to visit the highest point in South America, the top of the Tajumulco Volcano (14000 ft above sea level) on New Year’s day, and Antigua, a positively beautiful city where we visited an old convent that was destroyed in the earthquake of 1979. On the whole, this trip inspired our hearts and mind and refreshed our faith for the coming year.

– Anna Marie Beintema



The
*‘Guatemalan
team’ en
route.*

THANKS FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT!

After returning to the village for the first time since the group of eight young people left, we visited a few neighbours. One was our dear old friend and widower, Eliazer. Without any prompting from us, he just wanted to share how much it meant to him when a number of the young people had come to visit him, encourage him and pray with him. These are the type of sentiments and thanks we wish to pass on, not only to the 8 young people who visited us under the "FaithWorks" banner, but to all who supported their trip down to Guatemala in early January.

We not only want to express our thanks, but also share with you our perspective of some of the benefits that arose from the trip. First we ourselves greatly appreciated a visit from a number of people who represent our support base. We can only write so much in a two page newsletter, and it is important that, you, our supporters are well-informed as to what we are doing. It is also important that we be held accountable, and that is next to impossible without having a thorough picture of not only what we do, but also the cultural setting in which we work. We trust that they are passing on some of this information to you so that you are better equipped to evaluate, pray for, and make wise ongoing support decisions about the work here in Tajumulco.

Many other people besides us were encouraged in concrete ways through their visit. The widows and widowers were encouraged that Christians from so far away would take the time to visit them, encourage them in the faith and provide a little material sustenance. With a little follow-up from us, we hope that the church leaders also learn some valuable lessons from these visits. For other people, who often see the only purpose of traveling as to earn money, they thought twice when they saw students coming from afar with the sole purpose of serving and encouraging others. Although the list could continue, we would like to give a final example. One small struggling church in a remote village had worked for years in an effort to make an unusable piece of land usable. They were trying to build their own church building, but had no money to buy a suitable piece of land. So they struggled for a long time trying to etch out a piece of land from a mountainside. It required endless digging, moving of rocks, building of walls. However, although they had made a lot of progress, they were getting disheartened at the amount of work left to be done. Along comes a literal 'God-

Having fun stringing beads. This was part of a Children's Program the team assisted with, which also included Bible stories and games.



send' for them; eight eager, joyful, hard-working young people, who spend a long day working side-by-side with the locals in an effort to finish leveling the land. By the end of the day, although much remained to be done, good progress had been made, and more importantly, the church's vision had been rekindled.

The group also helped out in other ways, such as children's programs, helping a local church build and paint benches, and a few projects around our own house. One project that helped us immensely would not have been done if they were not here. They served us by putting up plastic in our attic. If you see how much dust blows around here in the dry season, you will understand that this will benefit my health for however long we remain here. It is also one of the reasons why I could not do the job myself. There was too much dirt and dust up there for me (dust is one of the worst hazards for someone with cystic fibrosis). In addition, we were hesitant to ask the locals to do the work because parts of the ceiling were very poorly supported and could easily cave in if one were not careful. The house was built by foreigners and so is an unfamiliar construction to the locals and they are not always careful about following instructions, or understanding the need to walk only on the beams.

We have not even mentioned the benefits to the lives of the individuals that came down since I'm sure they can tell you more about those benefits themselves. However we trust that as people see other parts of the world, completely different from their own, their minds and hearts will be opened a little more. They may also return with a better understanding, not only of another culture, but of their own culture and how it has affected them. And we pray that through

this trip our Lord will continue to impress on their hearts the needs of world missions, and how they might be involved in the future.

Finally, to complete the picture, money that was left over after the trip expenses was divided equally between two projects. One part of the money will go towards bringing potable water system to a remote village up in the mountains. The other part will go to completing the needed finances to build a retaining wall outside the pastor's house. (The CRWRF provided the majority of funds for this project earlier this year.) Due to the floods of last fall, the parsonage is in danger of being lost over a cliff during the next rainy season unless a retaining wall is built. The local church is providing all unskilled labour, and local building materials such as stone and sand.

These are just a few, but by no means all, of the benefits we have seen. So we wish to express our sincere thanks to everyone who helped make this trip a reality, whether it be via your prayers, your encouragement, or your financial aid.

— James Baartse

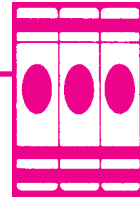
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Seven Thousand Shall Remain

By J. De Jong

A. Van der Jagt, *Seven Thousand Shall Remain!* (Some important topics of early Church history) Published by Christian Reading Materials, Lewiston New York, 220 pages, US \$12.95, (\$17.50 CDN)

The first fifteen hundred years of the history of the church is such a long period with a vast amount of material to cover that it always remains a challenge for any author or teacher to decide how best the subject matter might be approached. Regardless of what route one takes, there are here no easy short cuts, and one must be ready to develop his plan through trial and error, continually fine tuning his approach. Every author does it in his own way; happily there's still enough material in this period that one can safely avoid too much repetition!

It was then with some curiosity that I approached this little book by A. Van der Jagt, a retired federal civil servant currently living in Lewiston, New York, to see what approach he would take to this labyrinth called early and medieval church history. His book, entitled *7000 Shall Remain!* – an allusion to the account in 1 Kings 19 – seeks to explore some lesser known events in the church's history which have significantly influenced its history, and which other texts might more easily ignore. The work comprises a collection of nineteen short chapters in which the author touches on several points of interest from the early church through the Middle Ages. Here he follows the pattern of an earlier work for which he is known at least in the smaller community of the Canadian Reformed Churches, *Struggle and Triumph* (1960).

The positive aspect of this book is that brief surveys are given which appear to be directed primarily to younger readers, introducing topics and themes that they would not otherwise easily come across. No doubt most readers of this book whether young or old will

come across some interesting facts and events that they either have not heard of before or have long forgotten. And in that sense this book makes a contribution, albeit small, to this vast area.

However, there is a downside to all of this. For with such a broad sweep, and with such short and succinct chapters it is important for any author to clearly define the parameters of the subject with which he deals. Here the book leaves something to be desired. In fact the author has made it doubly difficult for himself, for he has opted to include a few chapters dealing with the church of the Old Testament as well. Here he is directed by the language of the confession regarding the church, (Lord's Day 21 HC and Art. 27 BC), which speak of the church as existing from the beginning of the world to its end, and of a gathering called out of the whole human race. Of course, no one can quarrel with that language. Yet it is quite another matter when these words are taken as a principle of division for the subject of church history. This has questionable results. Moses, for example, is called the author of the first book on church history, the Pentateuch. From that perspective three of the 19 chapters deal with themes in the period of Biblical history.

We should not see Moses as the author of the first church history book, or take the writings of Scripture in the first place as church history. In the period of Biblical history the church is still in its infancy, so to speak, and we have the direct revelation of God through the mouth of his servants, the prophets. Hence the Old Testament is made of the law, the writings and the prophets, and although these collections of books have quite a bit of material describing the history of the church in the Old Testament, they do not purport to give church history first of all. This material belongs to *salvation* history, not church history. At our College, for example, the study of church history deals with the church since Pentecost, that is, after

she has received the gift of maturity through the outpoured Spirit. When you are already occupied with such a vast period of 1500 years, why make it so much more difficult by adding on another 2000 years on one end? The book seems unbalanced by skipping through this period of 2000 years in three short chapters. If you choose to write about Moses, what about Samuel, the Judges, David, and other authors who made contributions to the formation of the Old Testament canon?

Then there is the question of accuracy on the part of the author. Although he lists his sources, at too many points one wonders whether these sources were sufficient for the task at hand. Just a few examples. In the section on Sabelianism, (which is more properly identified as "modalism") Van der Jagt asserts that modern theologians like F.D.E. Schleiermacher, H. Berkhof and E. Brunner were stained by this heresy. Perhaps such a statement is true of Brunner; he accepted the Barthian notion of the persons of the Trinity as modes of revelation of the one God. But Schleiermacher, Barth's great opponent? And H. Berkhof? If anything these figures were Arians in their own time. In Schleiermacher's case, it was precisely his unbridled Arianism and humanism that aroused the anger of Barth and Brunner!

Augustine also does not come off very well in Van der Jagt's assessment. He is said to have considered the "unity of the church more important than the sinful life of its officebearers" (p. 100). He is also taken as the "prime mover" of some of the more dangerous heresies that surfaced in the church at later periods. Meanwhile, Van der Jagt, out to correct an unfair judgment against the Donatists, ends up painting them in a rather favourable light. There were, as he puts it, schismatics and not heretics. "Nobody ever judged Donatists to be heretics," (p. 94).

All this is slanted too much in favour of the Donatists and too sharply against


Augustine. Did Augustine see the unity of the church as more important than the sinful life of the officebearers? At best, the assertion is unkind. He did ask for toleration with regard to the shortcomings of the clergy for the sake of the unity of the church, and that is probably the quotation which Van der Jagt is thinking about.¹ Yet he repeatedly spoke out against clergy abuses, and promoted strong disciplinary measure against officers who had committed gross public sins. Was he a “prime mover” of later heresies? Hardly! Repeatedly one notes that the primary responsibility for later heresies lies not with Augustine but with his interpreters in following generations. If Augustine is read *in his context* then many of his statements, even those supporting a life of meritorious works, can be understood, as long as they are kept *in the overarching context of prevenient and abiding grace*. While it is true that Augustine did not regard the Donatists as heretics, he had no kind words for the sin of schism. For him, in distinction to Optatus, schism and heresy are often lumped together as equally destructive

sins. And although he allowed the Donatists the name of “brothers” because they still had elements of the church, they were not a part of the Catholic church but clearly outside of it.

So there are more points that one could mention, but in this short review I will mention only one other striking difficulty I had with the book. Van der Jagt claims that where the Roman Catholic Church officially became a false church in the Middle Ages, the line of the true church was carried on by the Waldenses, the Bohemian reform sect formed under the leadership of Peter Valdez in the 12 century. But this involves a major rewrite of the history of the church which flies in the face of the approach taken by most if not all Reformed church historians since the time of the Reformation. To be sure, the Waldenses were forced out of the church, and were not hostile to it. But they developed a rigorous sectarian approach to the world around them based on distinctly medieval and monastic principles of interpretation. They did not champion a *sola Scriptura* in the true sense of the phrase. One does not do

justice to history by applying the marks of the church of the Belgic Confession to this reform sect, and then lifting them out of their context as the representation of the true church in a dark time.

Another flaw in this book is the final editing for which the author himself claims responsibility. It is always a more precarious circumstance when an author becomes his own publisher. There were several omissions and inconsistencies in the end product, one which even necessitated a special mailing with a request to insert a specific correction. Hence the final judgment is that although we have some interesting elements brought forward in this book describing in particular some unique aspects of medieval church history, the final product needs some careful revision before it can be used effectively as a source book for study societies or other groups.

¹He noted that some evil officers were tolerated “on account of the chain of unity and peace (*propter unitatis et pacis vinculum tolerantur*). Although he concurred with this, it was not something he was happy about! 

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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

An invitation

In a recent issue (Vol.48/10-May 14, 1999), Rev. J. de Gelder in “The Hi-Liter” refers to a matter which has touched several churches over the years: The use of “communal” versus “individual” cups in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. He comments and suggests that:

Recently this issue requires again the attention of various councils. In other churches it was discussed only a few years ago. Would it not be beneficial if somehow the study material, the reports, and information collected by those churches that have dealt with this, as well as the conclusions they have come to, with the grounds, would be available for others? You don’t even have to come to the same decision per se – although that would be nice – but at least not everyone would

have to do all the ground work over and over again.

On behalf of SpindleWorks.com we invite Reformed and Presbyterian churches everywhere, their church assemblies and individuals to contribute their studies, reports and decisions on this subject to this web site for publication. You may do this by sending the text in hard copy to:

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We will make every effort to feature as much as warranted of these contributions, representing all sides of the dis-

cussion, on our website during June and July. Since SpindleWorks.com receives many visitors from all over the world, of a wide variety of Reformed and Presbyterian origins (and in particular from the US and Canada, but also from as far as Hong Kong, Eastern Europe and South America), the Internet and our “communal” service provides an effective yet very “individual” means of sharing this overflowing “cup” of growing research and understanding.

We look forward to receiving many of these local studies and discussions in order to make them widely, instantly and freely available to everyone. Click on www.SpindleWorks.com and enjoy the thousands of pages of Reformed resource material already posted there!

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