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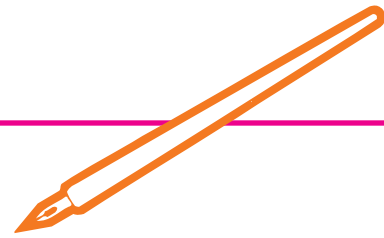
JULY 9, 1999



John à Lasco



By R. Aasman



Where, O Death, Is Your Victory?

There comes a time when we are all confronted by the reality of death. Perhaps we have to say farewell to a grandparent or parent, a brother or sister, a friend, or even to one of our own children. At such times, we understand from personal experience what Paul meant when he called death the “last enemy.” In a word, death is not normal or natural. Death is an enemy. When God created Adam and Eve in Paradise, He intended for them to live in fellowship with Himself and with each other. Death had no place in a perfect creation which God Himself called good. It goes completely against the beauty and perfection of God’s creation for a person to be serving God, enjoying his family, listening to the singing of birds, smelling flowers, and then suddenly to be cut off from all these things. This is not how God intended his creation to be. Death truly is an enemy. It is an enemy that we feel very deeply. It is an enemy that really hurts us. When this enemy draws near and attacks our loved one, then our tears flow freely, our hearts feel like they are breaking, and the sense of loss and loneliness roll over us like the billows of a raging sea.

However, a Christian does not grieve as one who has no hope. The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:26: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” He is quoting here from Isaiah 25:8: “He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.” This is powerful and comforting language: God will swallow up death, pulverizing it and crushing it so that it has no power anymore. God will swallow up death so that it cannot be an enemy which hurts us. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes so that our joy and hope may be in the Lord God forever.

Knowing that God has swallowed up death, Paul can look that terrible, unnatural enemy in the face and cry out: “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” Who has not heard these words of Paul and felt the rousing battle cry which challenges that miserable and hurtful enemy called death? But the question is this: is it really possible? Can the power and influence of death and the grave be overcome just like that? Certainly when we are present at the death bed of our loved one, or we go to the funeral and burial of our loved one, it does not readily appear that death has been swallowed up. It does not look as

if its victory and sting are overcome. On the contrary, it does not look good or hopeful at all!

Paul explains the basis for saying that the victory and sting of death have been overcome in these words: “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here Paul explains that the sting of death is sin. We are reminded here of what we said above: God did not create man as his image with the purpose of seeing him die. How then did death come about in God’s perfect and life-filled creation? Death came because of the fall into sin. The wages of sin is death. Because Adam and Eve sinned against God and incurred the justice and wrath of God, they and their offspring came under the penalty of death. Here is the hurt and the pain of death:

knowing that we have rebelled against God and alienated ourselves from Him to the point that we have brought death on ourselves. To make this painful subject even more clear, we note that Paul calls the law “the power of sin.” We understand what Paul meant by this, particularly when we think of what he wrote in Romans 7: it is through the knowledge of the law that he learns what a sinner he is and how deserving of God’s wrath. The law convicts us of our sin and guilt. It shows us plainly how deserving we are of death and of being cut off from fellowship with God.

It is when we understand our sin and misery that we hear the wondrous comfort of the gospel: the good news of God’s gracious gift in his own Son Jesus Christ. Paul says: “But thanks be to God!

He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” God sent his own Son to be born of a woman, to take the sins of his people as the surety of the covenant, and to pay for our sins by bearing our curse, our shame, our God-forsakenness, our agony of hell, and finally our death as penalty for sin. Jesus Christ faced the enemy and felt the sting, crying out on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Since He did all this in full and perfect obedience to God, He was rewarded with a resurrection from the death and an ascension into heaven where He was crowned with all power and authority in heaven and on earth. The consequences of all of this are overwhelming, as Paul outlines in 1 Corinthians 15. Christ is the first fruits of all those who have fallen asleep. He has removed the sting of death by making full satisfaction for our sins. He is victorious over

**“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”
The sting of death is sin,
and the power of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God!
He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**


death and has swallowed it up so that our death is no longer a satisfaction for sin but an entrance into everlasting glory. We confess this in Lord's Day 16 of our Heidelberg Catechism.

How important it is that we do not see this simply as some fine words which are meant to act as salve on grieving and aching hearts. This is the truth which sets us free from the crippling hurt of that which longs to separate us from our only comfort for body and soul, in life and death. Let us take an example. At the death of Lazarus, the Lord Jesus said to Martha in John 11:25,26: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" We see here also that the basis of any hope in the face of death is the fact of Jesus Christ's resurrection and life. Now what happens to the believer who dies? In a certain way it can be said that such a believer does not die but goes on living, only now with Jesus Christ

**"I am the resurrection and the life.
He who believes in me will live, even
though he dies; and whoever lives
and believes in me will never die.
Do you believe this?"**

John 11:25,26

in heaven. Death becomes a door which the resurrected and victorious Christ opens to let a believer leave this world which is no more than a constant death and enter with Christ into the glory of heaven. It is as Paul says, "Where, O death, is your victory?" Another example may be taken from Philippians 1:23 where Paul is discussing whether it is better to live or die: "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." How can Paul say this except for the fact that he rests with unwavering confidence on the knowledge of Christ's death and resurrection? How can he say death is better unless he knows for sure that the sting and victory of death has been swallowed up by God? He knows that death will be the door to being with Christ in heaven. And as for his body which will return to the grave, this will be raised up in glory on the last day. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us! Nothing shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord!

We know from experience that it is not easy to see a loved one die. Our minds and hearts are flooded with so many thoughts and emotions: there was so much that I still wanted to say to him or her, so much to do, so much to share. But thanks be to God, there bursts through our tears the incredible and unsurpassable joy in Jesus Christ who is the resurrection and the life. Death cannot hurt us any more. Christ has conquered death and now uses it to take us from here to be with Him in heaven. Thus a child of God can say, even in the face of death: there is nothing to worry about because the Lord is so good. He has swallowed up death and wipes away the tears from my eyes. 



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IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – Where, O Death, Is Your Victory?
 — R. Aasman318

Treasures, New and Old – Pray to the Father
 — Richard Eikelboom320

John à Lasco and the Reformed Church Order
 — R. Faber321

The Art of Celebrating a Wedding — R. Schouten324

Poem – Morning — St. Ambrose. Translated by
 John Chandler, 1837325

Ray of Sunshine — Mrs. R. Ravensbergen326

Observation Deck — J. VanRietschoten.....327

Dirk Hoksbergen: A Lesser-Known Figure of the 1834
 Secession — Wes Bredenhof.....330

Our Little Magazine — Aunt Betty.....333

By Richard Eikelboom

Pray to the Father

"When you pray, say: "Father" (Luke 11:2).

When my kids talk to me they call me "dad." When my nephews speak to me they call me "uncle." Most people, though, call me "Reverend Eikelboom," although some call me "Richard." And yesterday when I was walking across the church parking lot a toddler called out to me, "Hi, minister!" So I have at least five titles which different people use. But this does not make me five different people. Instead people use a different title depending on the relationship that they have with me. And, of course, I also treat people differently, depending on the relationship they have with me. I'm sure that you all do the same.

In the Bible many titles are used to address God. In Genesis 2 He is called LORD. Melchizedek refers to him as "God most high." David calls God "my Shepherd." Isaiah speaks of Him as Israel's Father and Hosea depicts Him as the church's Husband. The Psalmists also use various titles to depict particular relationships with God: He is "our Shield," "our Tower," and "the Rock of our Salvation."

When the Son of God teaches his disciples to pray He chooses for them one of those many titles from the Old Testament. He commands them to say, "Father." The disciples who hear this in-

struction do not think of three thrones in heaven, with God the Father sitting on one throne; with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit sitting on separate thrones. The Lord Jesus does not command them to say "Father" so that by this title they might attract the attention of one specific Person of the Triune Godhead. Instead, He wants his disciples to pray to God. He commands them to say "Father" because He wants to draw their attention to the relationship that they have with God! He gave them life. He protects them and provides for them. And therefore they may ask Him for anything and trust that He will look after them. After all, that's what a father is supposed to do.

And so it seems as if we begin our prayer with a confession of faith. We address God as "Father" and with this word we confess that we believe in Him – that we trust Him to hear our prayer and look after us. That's what it seems like. But reality is that this confession is often an empty word. Because we find it so difficult to trust God. Our hidden sins make us ashamed to pray. They make us doubt whether God really will listen to people as bad as us! And we find it so difficult to bring before God all the struggles and difficulties that we

face. Because, we bring them to God. We ask Him for a solution. But we do not let go of them. Instead we continue to worry about them as if God doesn't exist; as if it still depends on us to solve them. All this belongs to the weakness of human nature, and it hinders our prayers! But the Son of God who teaches his disciples to pray shares our humanity, and therefore He understands all our weaknesses, including the weakness of our faith and our prayer-life. And then, because He knows us and our struggles so well, and because He truly wants us to overcome these struggles, He commands us to address God as "Father"! Not as a triumphant profession of faith! Not as if we believe that God is our Father; as if we believe that He will give us everything that we need. But as a confession of sin and weakness. In recognition of our unbelief!

The catechism explains this so very beautifully in Lord's Day 46 where it says that we address God as Father *in order to awaken in us thereby* that child-like reverence and trust which should be basic to our prayer. We cry "Father!" at the beginning of our prayer, so that God might respond immediately by working in our hearts by his Spirit and giving us faith! This means that the first word of the Lord's Prayer is already the first petition: Father! That is: *You want us to pray believing that You will provide for us and give us what we need. But we find it so difficult to believe this! And so: help our unbelief. Give us that child-like reverence and trust towards You that should be basic to our prayer!*

When we pray to God, we can address Him in various ways. And when Jesus commands us to address God as "Father," He does not forbid us to use other titles. But the promise that God will give us the faith that we need to pray is connected specifically to the word "Father." So let us obey this command and experience his blessing in one place where we surely need it: in our prayer life.

Rev. Richard Eikelboom is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Calgary, B.C.



What's inside?

From time to time we all must stand at an open grave to lay to rest the body of a loved one. When a dear one dies we feel grief. However, as Christians we do not grieve as if we had no hope. We bury our loved ones in the sure hope and knowledge of the resurrection from the dead. Rev. R. Aasman writes about this in the editorial.

In this dispensation, we live between the house of mourning and the house of feasting. Not only do we go to funerals; we also attend weddings. Weddings are times of joy and laughter. How ought we to celebrate our weddings? What makes a party a *Christian* party? Rev. R. Schouten writes about this.

The Word of God calls us to do things decently and in good order in the church. That holds first of all for the local church, but also for a federation of churches. A lesser known reformer, John à Lasco, published one of the earliest Reformed church orders. Dr. R. Faber writes on this topic.

In the church history department, we are also pleased to publish an article by Mr. Wes Bredenhof on a lesser known Secession leader, Dirk Hoksbergen.

From his Observation Deck, the Rev. VanRietschoten brings into view the Reformed churches in Ukraine. We praise the Lord for the demonstration of his sovereign grace in preserving his people in this region through many years of communist oppression.

A Ray of Sunshine and a meditation round things up. We wish you happy reading.
GvP

John à Lasco and the Reformed Church Order

By R. Faber

One of the earliest complete Reformed church orders was composed by John à Lasco shortly after 1550.¹ Intended for use by the refugee churches in London, it was employed also by other Reformed churches in continental Europe. The order was popular especially in the lowlands during the formative years of the Dutch Reformed churches in the last decades of the sixteenth century, having been adapted and translated into Dutch by Marten Micronius. While it was not as influential as the ordinances of Geneva and Strasbourg associated with John Calvin, it was one of the main models for the orders decided upon at the convent of Wezel and the synod of Emden, which anticipated the Synod of Dordt in 1618. In this way the London order has come to occupy an important place in the history of the government, structure, and liturgy of Reformed churches of Dutch origin.

The immediate purpose of the order was to provide a Reformed exposition of the institutions and rites of the church for the members of the “Strangers Churches” in London, and for those who observed them from the outside. As the congregations consisted of believers with diverse backgrounds, the order would express their unity in matters of faith and practice. And while the churches were under no obligation to use the rites of the Church of England, they required ordinances which demonstrated to the governing Privy Council that all would be conducted decently and without confusion.

The order also provided an example for other Reformed churches developing ecclesiastical rules. For this reason it was not written to reflect only the circumstances of the London churches. In composing the order à Lasco avoided also the excessive influence of any one branch of the Reformed faith. Besides the earlier church orders of Geneva and Strasbourg, the London order was influenced by the writings of such Reformers as Bullinger and Bucer. Most explicitly, however, the Bible and not the

traditional canon law of the Romanist church was the basis for the order. After all, the founding charter states that the Strangers Churches desired to adhere to “an incorrupt interpretation of the most holy Gospel and administration of the sacraments according to the Word of God and apostolic observance.”

The London order is divided into five sections. These treat the offices of ministry, the proclamation of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, the exercise of church discipline, and special services. In what follows we shall summarize the contents of these sections, noting both those features typical of a Reformed order of the time, and those elements unique to à Lasco’s

In its order the church confesses the Christian faith

ordinances. The significance of this order, we shall observe, is that the principles which support it underlie also the modern Reformed church orders which derive, in part, from it. These principles, it will be suggested, should continue to guide the use of the orders in Reformed churches today. We shall conclude, therefore, with some observations about the value which the London order has for its modern counterparts.

Offices of ministry

The London order contains two special offices: elders (or presbyters) and deacons. The eldership, in turn, is divided into two, namely ministers of the Word and sacraments, and those who govern the congregation. The diaconate, also a biblically ordained and apostolic office, concerns especially the collection and distribution of alms. The minister and the elders comprise the so-called *coetus*, or meeting, of governors. As this arrangement appears to have been in place in London



John à Lasco

during the years 1550-1553, some have wondered whether the *coetus* may be seen as a prototype of Presbyterian government, and whether this regulation was known to the Scottish Reformer, John Knox. At any rate, government of the church by ordained elders meant the formation of a “consistory”, a radical departure from the Romanist model of hierarchy and separation of clergy from laity. In fact, while the duty of the *coetus* was to consider nominations for a prospective minister, all the communicant members of the congregation participated in the election. This arrangement stresses the corporate responsibility of individual members and their collaboration with the elders.

A striking though not unprecedented office in the order is that of the Superintendent, who presides over the whole rank of special offices. Chosen from this rank, the Superintendent oversees the ministry of the Word, the exercise of the sacraments, and the use of discipline. In less charitable moments, critics have compared this position to that of bishop. John Calvin wondered whether the Polish Reformer did not exercise too much power over the four London congregations. As Superintendent, à Lasco needed to serve in humility. Very loosely based



John à Lasco

upon the Lord Jesus Christ's charge to Peter that he strengthen his fellow disciples, the office of Superintendent concerns especially doctrinal purity and consistency in applying discipline. Given their precarious situation, the London churches benefitted from the Superintendent, who forged unity and order, while also acting as liaison between them and the Privy Council.

Proclamation of the Word

The ministry of the Word concerns the preaching services, training in the catechism, and the so-called prophecies. Regarding the first of these, ministers and elders could call public assemblies of the churches as often as they deemed necessary. Normally, services were held twice every Sunday, and on major holidays. As is typical of a Reformed order, the preaching of the Word is the focus of such services, and ministers were expected to expound upon each book of the Bible, from beginning to end. Afternoon services were dedicated to the proclamation of the gospel as it is summarized in the catechism. Services proper were marked by a liturgy not unlike the ones followed in modern Reformed churches, although the participation of the members was greater. Recitations of the prayer of confession, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer attest to the involvement of the entire congregation in the worship service.

Training in the catechism was an important component of the ministry of the Word. From the age of five until fourteen, children were taught the Smaller Catechism, which consisted of 130 questions. Young people then learned the 250 questions of the Greater Catechism, and every Sunday afternoon some recited the question and answer

which formed the focus of the sermon. Such training was intended to prepare young people for the public profession of their faith, whereupon they would be admitted to full membership, including participation in the Lord's Supper.

The "prophecy" was an important element in the weekly life of the congregation also. On Thursday, every member was required to attend this meeting, which served for a "public comparison of the scriptures and a reinforcement of the teaching contained in the sermons (81)." Taken over from Zwingli's practice in Zurich, the prophecy allowed members to ask both practical and doctrinal questions which arose from the preaching on the previous Sunday. The minister, who had been informed of the questions in advance, was expected to refer extensively to Scripture in expounding further upon the Bible or catechism. In this way the prophecy helped to avert domination by the clergy and misunderstanding within the congregation. It also acquainted non-members, of which there were many in the London churches, with the teachings and rites they observed on Sundays. And in addition to preserving doctrinal unity among the congregations, the prophecy conveyed a message to the Privy Council that the Strangers Churches would not tolerate heretics.

In its order the church puts faith into practice

The two sacraments

It is not surprising that baptism and the Lord's Supper receive considerable attention in the London order, for in the sixteenth century the meaning of the two sacraments was much debated. While it resorts to polemics against Anabaptism and Roman Catholicism, the order does promote a clear and balanced understanding of the sacraments. Briefly put, the order treats the sacraments by recounting the Scriptural doctrines of baptism and the Supper, offering biblical guidelines for their administration, and removing any confusion and inconsistency that may arise regarding them.

Considering only baptism, we note that the London order stresses the importance of understanding the biblical basis and doctrine of the sacrament. With frequent references to the Bible,

the order teaches how the sacrament is to be understood rightly, and how the Romanist rite errs. Pointing to the mystery of the communion with the Lord Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection as a key expression of baptism, the order seeks to instruct the entire congregation. The parents who bring the infant for baptism are asked whether they profess that the child is a "seed of the church," whether they believe that by baptism the child receives the seal of the covenant, and whether they assume their responsibility in instructing it in the faith. The covenantal aspect of baptism is impressed upon all the members, who are encouraged to reflect upon the relevance of their own baptism, and to realize their communal duties in the spiritual nurture of the new member. And, to preserve order and decency, parents seeking baptism for their children are required to submit a declaration by two "sponsors" attesting to their good standing.

Church discipline

According to the London order, "church discipline is a certain defined practice, demanded by the scriptures, whereby Christian admonitions from the Word of God are mutually given, gradually, among all the brethren in Christ's Church, so that the entire body and its individual members can continue to carry out their tasks, insofar as they are able (170)." Deeming discipline to be the third mark of the church, à Lasco dedicates considerable space to the discussion of the meaning and importance of both private and public discipline. Private discipline is derived from Matthew 18:15-35, and stresses the tasks of the members in preserving the purity of the body of Christ and in encouraging one another.

The process of public discipline, which is exercised only after private admonitions prove futile, is characterized by mercy and patience. Noting that discipline is intended not only for the checking of sin but also for the strengthening of the faith and the exhortation of all, the order differs somewhat from those of Strasbourg and Geneva, which have been described as "judicial" rather than pastoral in these matters. Regarding excommunication, for example, the London order states that care must be taken not to remove anyone from the membership roll until all avenues have been exhausted. And even then, excommunication must be applied out of love for the sinners, so that "their spirit can be called back to repentance and they can thus be saved (170)." Discipline is

to be used positively in affirming the faith of all members. This understanding is put into practice bi-monthly, when the roll of names is reviewed in anticipation of celebrating the Lord's Supper, which was restricted to members. In short, like the proclamation of the Word and the administration of the sacraments, discipline strengthens the faith of the believers.

Special worship services

The section dealing with special worship services may be broken into four parts. The first concerns the calling of special assemblies in the event of disaster or a special joy for the entire congregation. Such meetings may be anticipated by a day of fasting, self-examination, and personal prayers of confession. The public service is marked by the proclamation of the gospel and public prayers. The Lord's Supper may also be celebrated at such occasions. The day on which a special service is held may end with a "prophesy" to exhort the congregation about fasting properly.

The three other kinds of special service are marriage, visitation of the sick, and burial. About marriage the form states that only members may enter wedlock, and that after approval by the "consistory." If no lawful objections are raised in response to the bann, the wedding is solemnized in simplicity on a Sunday morning. Visitation of the sick focused upon consolation or admonition, as each case required. Public prayers were made for those who were suffering, and again when health was restored. In the burial rite, as in the other services, the London order seeks to avoid the ornate ceremony of Roman Catholicism, keeping a simple service for the edification of the church.

Conclusion: relevance

The "church fathers" who gathered at the convent of Wezel in 1568 to plan the formal organization of the Dutch Reformed churches stated that they had consulted the "best reformed church orders." Among them was the London order and the Dutch adaptation of it, already in use in the Netherlands. It is not easy to determine the extent of the influence of the London order, but it does appear that the composers of the early Dutch ordinances desired especially to adopt the *principles* which are at work in it. We shall note only three of them here. First, the Reformed church order must be founded upon Scripture; second, it must define the body of Christ and its duties; and third, it must strive to effect practical order.

The first principle of the Reformed order is its biblical basis. This is not a mere platitude of the Reformation, but a genuine profession that the rules for church government and structure are revealed by God in the Bible. In opposition to the Romanist church, which had developed a canon law grounded in papal decrees and decisions of Councils rather than in the Bible, the Reformed order returns to the source of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ and his Word. For this reason, the order points to and reflects the entire gospel of salvation, including the justice of God, his mercy through Christ the Son, and his providence through the Holy Spirit by whom the church is guided. Each ordinance – from the office of ministry to the liturgy – is established upon the Bible. In this way the complete teaching of Scripture is worked out in the organization of the church. And, because the order finds its unity in the Bible, the various ordinances are not divorced from one another, but connected by the doctrines of Scripture. Thus the sacraments, for example, are not explained or employed outside the context of the proclamation of the gospel or the use of Christian discipline. In short, the Reformed order is not a historical "constitution", a semi-legal document, or a summary of mere practices, but it professes to enact biblical norms in the church, which as the body of Christ is ruled by its Head.

In its order the church is governed by Christ the Head

As the Reformed order concerns the body of Christ, it defines what that body is and how it functions. This second principle is explicit especially in the London order and was adopted elsewhere for good reasons. Most importantly, the order distinguishes between members and non-members, to demarcate the body of Christ from those who do not belong to it, while at the same time revealing to non-members how the gospel operates in the life of the congregation. The definition of the body shows also that the jurisdiction of state does not extend to the church: as a divinely instituted organ, the church is governed by the Law of God. And whereas the Roman church had made an improper distinction between clergy and laity, the Reformed order restores

the proper place of general and special offices as revealed in Scripture. Since the church consists of all who have been engrafted into the body of Christ, the order should be read and applied by all members of the church. Basing itself upon such passages as Ephesians 4, 1 Timothy 3, and 1 Corinthians 11, the order illustrates the corporate responsibilities of all members, who entrust to the special offices the task of preaching, teaching, and oversight.

A third principle supporting the Reformed order is its purpose in producing the practical organization of the church. This important goal is based upon several biblical texts, most notably the injunction in 1 Corinthians 14:40 that "all things should be done decently and in order." To this end, the London order is pragmatic in working out the principles of the faith in the life of the congregations, making no demands in matters on which Scripture is silent. Such common-sense practicality was not intended to circumvent doctrine, but to put it into effect. Nor does it intend to legislate an inflexible liturgy or ritual; rather, it shows the biblical basis for the proper worship of God. Thus the order seeks to demonstrate the close bond that should exist between the proclamation of the Word and the activities in the congregation. Avoiding confusion in the churches and the temptation to clerical dominance which may follow it, the order desires to make every aspect of the church's service to God pleasing to Him.

These principles of the Reformed order may be summed up in three Latin words: *credenda*, *agenda*, and *administranda*. *Credenda* means that the church must believe and confess the Christian faith in its order, which reflects the entire gospel of salvation. *Agenda* refers to the necessity of putting faith into practice: the body of Christ must serve Him in the manner revealed in his Word. And *administranda* means that the church must be governed and organized according to the will of its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let it be our prayer that also in the implementation of their orders modern Reformed churches bring greater praise and glory to the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

¹A full text of the order, often referred to by the abbreviated Latin title *Forma ac Ratio*, appears in the still-standard edition of Abraham Kuyper, *Joannis a Lasco Opera*, Vol. 2 (Amsterdam 1866), 1-284. Quotations (in English translation) derive from this edition.

Dr. Riemer Faber is Professor of Classical Studies at the University of Waterloo. 

The Art of Celebrating a Wedding

By R. Schouten

Is it a bad thing to have fun? Is it wrong to have a party? Some severe strands of the Christian tradition frown upon anything frolicsome. For the grim victims of these traditions, pleasure is associated with sin and making merry with superficiality. To see the people of God whoop it up is too much for their sensibilities.

People with solid roots in a Scriptural worldview don't have this problem. They know that everything made by God is good. His gifts are to be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim 4:4-5). Even in a world so deeply impacted by human wrong-doing, there are plenty of reasons to celebrate. To be always grave when the Lord of glory saves us would be ungrateful indeed. To be gloomy when we receive his gracious gifts is no evidence of godliness but rather of infiltrating demons.

Christians should have fun. They should know better than others how to really throw a party. Celebration is a natural part of living in fellowship with God through Christ. Naturally, the festivities of the saints will be animated by the values of the Kingdom of God. Led by the Spirit of God who gives us gladdened hearts, the people of God will make merry in a way of their own. Even in their revelry, they remain God's own possession – called to imitate Him in a life of holiness.

So what would a party look like? What kind of things would be happening at, say, the wedding feast of a Christian couple? Just a few hours ago, they stood before friend and family in a church building, pledging their lifelong troth to each other. The Name of God was invoked over their marriage. Joyful songs of praise were sung by all the guests. Who of their family and friends fails to rejoice at what God has done for the new couple?

But what's happening now? The M.C. introduces himself as well as out-of-town guests. Everyone is welcomed.

A prayer is offered. Soon the meal begins. When everyone is satisfied, the entertainment starts. It turns out to be a real variety show. Somebody stands up and tells a few coarse jokes – aiming for the cheap laugh of television sitcoms. Next thing you know, everyone is asked to sing Hymn 48 while desert is served. There follows a silly skit with vulgar gestures and sexually suggestive remarks. Before you even have time to mutter a complaint to your neighbour, some young children (relatives of the bride, no doubt) are singing Psalm 116:1 and 10. The M.C. considers this an appropriate moment to let everyone know that the bar is now open. Well, now that quite a few folks are into the liquor, wouldn't this be a great time for some pals of the groom to come to the microphone? They do and we are

Christians should know better than others how to really throw a party

treated to a tawdry tale about some ungodly escapade of the groom when he was still covered, it would seem, by the young offender's act of the church. After this choice offering, we are requested to sing "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD God Almighty" to the accompaniment of an accordion which really needs some help. Without missing a beat, the M.C. informs us that we again have opportunity to again attend the bar. Next, the family of the bride will no doubt have opportunity to perform a poorly-practiced skit which seems even poorer than it is because there is no sound system. No worries, the M.C. will divert us with a few more off-colour jokes. All right, isn't it time now for the father of the bride to close the evening with thanksgiving? He pro-

nounces the expected words: "Thank you for coming." Without a trace of embarrassment, he adds, "I'm glad that we could celebrate in such a Christian manner." No sooner has he finished than the M.C. declares, "For those who wish to dance, the floor will be cleared. The bar is still open."

I think you get the drift. The essentially pagan character of such an evening can't be hidden with a nod to God in the form of a few songs and a prayer or two. Due to the constant, illogical interchange of pious songs and words with pagan revelry, the whole evening takes on a surreal quality. As a result, *nobody* really has a good time. Pagan guests can't really have fun because of the religious *undertones* (just enough to remind everyone that there is a different way to do this) while the gladness of true Christians is dampened by the weird and painful inconsistencies.

Obviously, the above description is something of a caricature. It cannot be denied, however, that wedding celebrations do often lack the aroma of godliness. Perhaps it would be good for the community to rethink the art of celebrating. We need to ensure that our times of celebrating reflect the style of the Kingdom. Kingdom style means that we don't get drunk with wine or other liquor (Eph 5:18). It also means that we avoid "obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking, which are out of place" (Eph 5:4). Nor do the people of the Kingdom delight in evil – as if past sin is in any way a reason for laughter instead of shame and sorrow. Kingdom style also means that we strive for *quality* in our entertainment. We need to shake off our aesthetic stupour and work past the deadening influence of entertainment culture. Can we not become more creative and authentically Christian in the way we celebrate?

Allow some suggestions in that direction. Could we not have some original songs for the occasion? Are there

perhaps family members or friends able to compose lyrics set to familiar tunes? Is it not possible to have *capable* musicians to lead the singing and to create a festive atmosphere throughout the evening? And can't we have jokes that are genuinely funny without descending into the scatological or ribald? After all, a joke is a very serious thing! This request doesn't imply, by the way, a prudish avoidance of all references to the joys of the marriage bed – as if the evening was not the celebration of vows surrounding the sexual relationship of one man and one woman! Wholesome references to the joys of sexual life are entirely appropriate at a wedding reception (*wholesome* being the operative word). Funny (but not degrading) stories about the bride and/or groom are certainly a welcome offering at any such event. Amusing the guests with accounts of past and sinful behaviour of the groom or bride is, however, not fitting for Christians. We have no pleasure in sin and certainly don't want to trivialize it by presenting it in the form of so-called entertainment. People who attempt such things at a wedding should not be rewarded with snickering and hooting from the guests but rather with sustained silence. Then, too, isn't a wedding reception a great place for the talents of amateur dramatists to shine? However, let's please have the skit well-rehearsed so that the guests can properly enjoy it! Otherwise, why do it at all? Well-told stories about incidents of family history can also be a great treat at a wedding ceremony. Everyone enjoys a slide show or a video highlighting key moments in the life of bride and/or groom. Besides the above, may I make a plea for some more free time during a wedding reception – time to mingle freely with other guests? It's frustrating to see other guests you haven't met for a long time but to have no time to chat with them.

Perhaps I could end with the words of Philippians 4:8. *Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

Rev. Rob Schouten is minister in the Canadian Reformed Church, Abbotsford, B.C. 

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CANADIAN REFORMED
CHURCHES**

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and the Twenty-fifth
Convocation
of the Theological College**

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**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1999
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in the auditorium of Redeemer College

(Hwy. 53, Ancaster)

Dr. N.H. Gootjes will be
the featured speaker

*A collection will be taken for the
Theological College Organ Fund
(tax receipts available)*

Morning

*O Jesu, Lord of heavenly grace,
Thou brightness of thy Father's face,
Thou Fountain of eternal light,
Whose beams disperse the shades of night!*

*Come, holy Sun of heavenly love,
Shower down thy radiance from above,
And to our inward hearts convey
The Holy Spirit's cloudless ray!*

*And we the Father's help will claim,
And sing the Father's glorious name;
His powerful succor we implore,
That we may stand, to fall no more.*

*May he our actions deign to bless,
And loose the bonds of wickedness;
From sudden falls our feet defend,
And bring us to a prosperous end!*

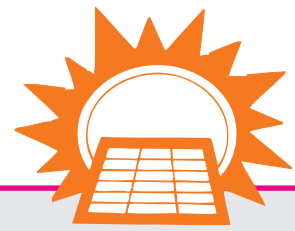
*May faith, deep rooted in the soul,
Subdue our flesh, our minds control;
May guile depart, and discord cease,
And all within be joy and peace!*

*And Christ shall be our daily food,
Our daily drink his precious blood;
And thus the Spirit's calm excess
Shall fill our souls with holiness.*

*Oh, hallowed be the approaching day!
Let meekness be our morning ray,
And faithful love our noonday light,
And hope our sunset, calm and bright!*

*O Christ! with each returning morn
Thine image to our hearts is borne:
Oh, may we ever clearly see
Our Saviour and our God in thee!*

St. Ambrose. Translated by John Chandler, 1837



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy.”
Isaiah 35: 5,6a

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Do you ever feel rejected? Does it feel sometimes as if people do not like you, or do not want to associate with you? It is possible, for that is how it often goes in this world. Of course it happens to other things, too. When something is for sale, the nicest looking items go right away, because everybody likes them. When there is a litter of puppies or kittens, the cutest ones are sold, but if there is one that is a little slow, or that does not look so nice, nobody cares for it. The beautiful, big plants at the market are sold, but the smaller ones stay behind. When something is not attractive, people stay away from it. And, sadly enough, that happens sometimes among people as well.

When there is a mother with a baby, everyone wants to have a look at the baby, and says how cute it is. But when the baby does not look so cute because maybe it has been born with a handicap, then people shy away from it. They do not know what to do or what to say; and even though the baby is very sweet and very much loved, they feel very sorry for the mother that her baby is not like other children. As long as the baby is small, it will not notice this rejection; the mother will love it, and comfort it. But it may be very difficult for the mother.

When you are older, and you look different than most people, and you feel that people do not accept you, it also may be very difficult for you. For we all want to be liked by other people. It is hard to cope with mental or physical limitations every day. It may take much effort to move around, or to understand the things that people tell us, or to hear, or to speak, or to see. Then, when we feel that some people try to ignore us, it makes it much harder yet.

Unless those people change their attitude, there is not much we can do about it either. Probably we will always keep running into them. For many people want things around them to be strong, and beautiful. They do not like anything that does not look great, for they are aiming for perfection. Maybe we should not become angry or frustrated with them, but feel sorry for them. For we know very well that their desire for perfection can never be satisfied here on earth. Sin has destroyed the perfection of Paradise, and the consequences of sin are all around us. Nothing is perfect anymore.

But that does not have to depress us, for we know that we belong to our Father in heaven. And we know that, because it is written in the Bible, and we confess it in Lord's Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Whatever imperfections we may have, we belong to Him with our whole body. He made us, He keeps us in his care, He never forsakes us, nor rejects us. For we are his. Is a father ever ashamed of his children? He loves them, and helps them, and understands them as much as he is able. Our Father in heaven is much more able to do that for us, for He is perfect. He understands us much better than our parents here do. He also can help us much better, for He listens to us night and day, whenever we pray to Him. The Lord even sees us in a different way than anybody here on earth sees us, for He knows our hearts. He enables us to serve Him with all our hearts.

As long as we live here on earth, the Lord also gives us a very important task. By just being who we are, and how we are, we can show others the way to Him. Everyone has certain

abilities that enable them to display God's greatness to other people. It may be through singing, or praying, or reading, or writing, or cooking, or sewing, or quoting Bible passages, or being friendly, or patient, or helpful, or maybe even just by smiling. If we carry out our God-given tasks in obedience to Him, He will make us successful. It does not matter what some people think of us or even do to us, as long as we try to please the Lord in everything we do.

And then, of course, we have the nicest future awaiting us. For this life here is not the end of things; it is only a beginning. When we are done here on earth – at the time that only the Lord knows – then we will be able to reach a perfection that we cannot even imagine. We will live with the King of Heaven, and we will live lives that kings and queens can never attain. Even our bodies will be made perfect, and also those who are now unable to speak will be able to sing perfect praises to the Lord God in heaven.

So there is much comfort for our mothers and fathers, and care givers, and ourselves, for the Lord is working with us. We are all princes and princesses, even though many people are unable to see it.

With the help of the Holy Spirit we will be able to carry on; with his help we do not get discouraged, but we will continue to keep our eyes out for that wonderful future that our Lord Jesus Christ has prepared for us.

*The Lord His goodness has revealed;
He is to us a sun and shield,
For He bestows renown and favour.
And when the upright seek his face,
The Lord will not withhold his grace;
His faithfulness endures forever.
O Lord of hosts, how blest is he
Who puts his hope and trust in Thee. Psalm 84 : 6*

Birthdays in August:

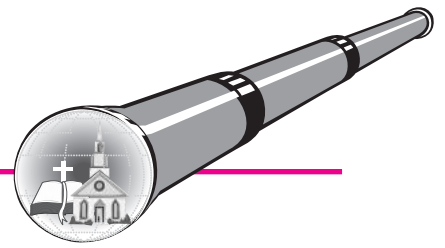
- 4: TERENCE BERENDS**
“ANCHOR HOME”, 361 30 Road, RR 2,
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0
- 5: PHILIP SCHUURMAN**
367 Stone Church East, Hamilton, ON L9B 1B1
- 9: ROSE MALDA,**
“OAKLAND CENTRE”, 53 Bond Street,
Oakville, ON L6J 5B4
- 18: FENNY KUIK,**
140 Foch Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2C 5H7
- 23: JACK DIELEMAN,**
5785 Young Street, Apt.704, Willowdale, ON M2M 4J2

Terence is 'new' in our column. He moved with his family from BC to Ontario, and has been living in the Anchor Home since last fall. Terence will be 23 years old, and he will be very happy with cards or letters.

Philip will reach the big 40 this year, Rose will be 42, Fenny 47, and Jack 27. A very happy birthday to all of you, and until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

7462 Reg.Road 20, RR 1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
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Observation Deck

By J. VanRietschoten

REFORMED CHURCH IS ALIVE IN UKRAINE

“Reformed Church is alive in Ukraine” is the heading of a report published in *Presbyterians-Week* by Dr. C. Baynard. Here follows the first paragraph of the report:

Jim Beeke of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations, Bernard Woudenberg of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and Chuck Baynard of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church comprise an unlikely team. Yet, for two weeks these three toured Hungary, Ukraine, and Romania visiting the people and churches of the Hungarian Reformed Church, finding perhaps the last remaining true Genevan church to be alive and well.

Apparently the three ministers visited the Hungarian Reformed Churches on behalf of *Transylvania Reformed Assistance Committee (TRAC)*.

Where is Transylvania?

Transylvania is a large area which, before World War I, belonged to the Hungarian Austrian Empire. Because of the Treaty of Versailles, Transylvania was torn apart and divided over the neighbouring countries of Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine. As a result you will find citizens of these countries who are united by language for they all still speak Hungarian. Many of them are also still united in the Reformed faith. The Hungarian Reformed Churches are spread over these countries.

A far-reaching statement

The team of three visited this large area for only two weeks yet came to a far-reaching conclusion. You can find this conclusion in the paragraph quoted above. Dr. Baynard calls the Hungarian Church “. . . perhaps the last remaining true Genevan church to be alive and well.” Apparently Dr. Baynard is not acquainted with the Canadian Reformed Churches and her sister churches.

A heart-warming report

It is heart-warming to read an optimistic report on the Hungarian Reformed Church. During the long years of Soviet oppression a minority in the Hungarian Church remained faithful. The faithfulness of this minority has been a leaven inciting the church back to faithfulness. There is still great need of support.

TRAC came on the scene in 1990

Dr. Baynard writes:

Here I found the cause of causes, and where the Reformed Churches in the rest of the world should be setting a high priority in their mission budgets.

Apparently a two week tour of this vast territory is not enough to discover that some Reformed Churches outside of North America have been doing exactly that for years. TRAC came on the scene in 1990. The growth the TRAC team now witnessed among the Hungarian Churches came about with the blessed and courageous help of Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

The Reformed Church in the Netherlands have a long history of supporting the Hungarian Churches.

All through this century the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands have had close relations with the Hungarian Reformed Churches. During the harsh years of Soviet oppression it was forbidden to bring Bibles or Reformed study books into Transylvania. Brothers and sisters of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands risked imprisonment by the Soviets by smuggling carloads of Bibles and Reformed literature into the several areas of Transylvania. The ministers and teachers in the Hungarian Reformed churches were supported far before 1990. The support continues and indeed is worthy of support by all Reformed Churches.

Support asked and received

Presently a synod of our sister churches in the Netherlands, the *Gereformeerde Kerken (Vrijgemaakt)*, is in session. The synod received a request for a sister church relationship from the *Evangelical Reformed Churches Union of Russia (ERCUR)*. From the Pro-acta of this synod I gleaned the following information:

Synod granted the request for a sister church relationship and asked the Church at Hattem to investigate how this relationship should function so that optimum help can be given.

The ERCUR subscribe to the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Confession and the Canons of Dordt. Officers of the church subscribe to these at their ordination. This is evidence that these forms do function as forms of unity. The order in the church is maintained, as much as possible, according to the Church Order of Dordt.

The ERCUR numbers only two congregations with a small number of members, but seeing their conscientious way of taking positions, their focus and missionary intentions, combined with possibilities of growth, entering into a sister church relationship is warranted. No third party relations form a hindrance to this.

For many years the Church at Hattem provided the ERCUR with material and other means to build up these churches. Hattem does this in co-operation with the Regional Synod of the Province of Gelderland.

The Church at Hattem sent out ministers to the Ukraine

In co-operation with other churches in the region, the Church at Hattem sent out ministers a number of years ago to assist the fledgling Reformed Churches in the Ukraine. First the Rev. M. Nap and his wife were sent out. They have now been joined by Rev. J. Werkman.

Contact with Rev. M. Nap

I contacted the Rev. M. Nap via e-mail and asked him to evaluate the report of TRAC and fill us in on the situation in the area. You find his reaction in the following letter.

Dear Rev. Van Rietschoten,

Thank you for the questions you sent to me. We translated several of your sermons into the Ukrainian language. We receive by mail (though not very regularly) the *Preach the Word* series. Until the local people are able to make Reformed sermons we have to make use of other materials. Now your questions:

TRAC makes no mention of the work which others are doing in the same area.

The area in the web sites you mentioned are Hungary, Romania and Ukraine. Hungarian Reformed churches can be found throughout the nation of Hungary. In Romania the Hungarian Reformed Church exists only in the large western part of Romania – Transylvania. In Ukraine, the Hungarian Reformed Church can only be found in one of the 26 provinces – the Zakarpathian Oblast – which borders on Hungary and only became non-Hungarian territory after 1919. You will not find this Hungarian-speaking Reformed church elsewhere in Ukraine. The mission of the Reformed Churches in Gelderland and Flevoland does not in the first place focus on this Zakarpathian part of Ukraine but on Ukraine itself.

Now the other part of your question.

There are many international organizations and churches which supported, and presently support, the

Hungarian Reformed Church in Hungary, Transylvania and Zakarpathia. The sources you quote would have a lot of work finding out all the help which churches from the (conservative) Reformed side in Holland give. Examples are the organization *Hulp Oost Europa* of the Gereformeerde Bond (Reformed Alliance); *Kom Over En Help Ons* of the Gereformeerde Gemeenten (Netherlands Reformed Congregations) and the Christelijke Gereformeerden (Christian Reformed); and for years the organization Fundament of our Reformed Churches. This latter organization aims to strengthen the Reformed character of the Hungarian Reformed churches. Drs. Jos Colijn is very active in this work. Your web site references could have mentioned Dutch and other American help (of the CRC and many others) if the Hungarian brothers had informed them about this help and if they wanted to write about that. Good help is very useful, because the economic situation in Transylvania and Zakarpathia is difficult and because of the felt need for reformation of the Hungarian Reformed Church.

About our work and that of other Reformed churches.

The work my colleague Rev. Jan Werkman and I do is concentrated in Ukraine, a former Soviet Republic with a population of 50.5 million (urban 68 % and rural 32%). The capital is Kiev (population, 2.6 million). We are sent



by the Gereformeerde Kerken in Gelderland and Flevoland. Our task is to assist the Evangelical Reformed Church of Ukraine in building up their churches, the education of future pastors, and mission in Ukraine. Hattem is the sending church. These Evangelical Reformed churches adopted the Heidelberg Catechism and are adopting other Reformed creeds.

Before World War II, they grew with the help of Ukrainian Presbyterians from the United States and Canada. The ERCUR nearly disappeared in 1945 and are re-establishing themselves now in at least 5 or 6 places. The name Evangelical Reformed is the translation of "evangelisch-reformiert" which was used for the first time in 1595 for Reformed churches in central Europe.

The Hattem mission also helped establish a Reformed mission school in Zakarpathia. This school is presently delivering its first missionaries. The relationship between the Hungarian Reformed Church in Zakarpathia and the Evangelical Reformed congregations in Ukraine is good. The Zakarpathian churches have a bishop system (as in Hungary and Transylvania). We, together, are trying to establish the Reformed system. The Canons of Dordt are translated into Russian, the Belgic Confession into Ukrainian, and the Heidelberg Catechism into Russian and Ukrainian. This year we will publish the confession of Cyrillus Lukaris in the translation by Prof. J.A. Meijer from Kampen.

Other Reformed churches

Besides Zakarpathia – speaking about Ukraine – I know that the Gereformeerde Gemeenten are working there too. I met Rev. Harinck who spoke here in Kiev. The Presbyterian Church of America is also active in Ukraine. They have a small number of Evangelical Presbyterian congregations. We are trying to organize a joint seminary with them. A classis of the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) is also participating in this process. The Rev. R. Sikkema and others have been involved in Reformed education in James College in Kiev for six years already. An organization called *Christ for Ukraine* of Denver, Colorado is also working on Reformed instruction in Ukraine.

The optimistic report

I doubt if the testimony of the brothers whose reports are on the web-sites you mentioned would be confirmed by the brothers in the mentioned areas, and not only because of their modesty to accept the qualification "perhaps the last remaining true Genevan church to be alive and well." I suppose that "Genevan" brothers inside the Hungarian Reformed Churches would answer that the church-discipline is sometimes far removed from "Geneva." I suppose that our friends and brothers in Koloszvar in Romania could mention their problems with the sister-on-the-pulpit, as it is widely accepted in the Hungarian Reformed Churches. I know that they would want to give more catechetical lessons than only during the two or three years before "confirmation." I am sure that some of them are very eager to change the mentality of the presbyters.

Immediately I want to add that we have also seen what these brothers noticed. The period of suffering brought fruits – fruits of faith – like diamonds. One pastor told me that the seven years he spent in the gulag was for him "the university of faith." But also, we have to add, a lot of lack of courage. It also depends on which circles you move in within this broad "Volkskirche" (Peoples' Church). The influence of liberalism, nationalism, conservatism and hierarchy, Pentecostal movements, and pietism make these churches need our prayer and practical Reformed help.

The last Genevan church and no church that even begins to touch the demonstrated faith of the Hungarian Reformed people?

I suppose that the Hungarians are not helped by such statements. Of course, with deep gratitude we read these words: when belief is demonstrated, who should not be very grateful? Who would criticize? But the reformation plans of the Hungarian brothers tell us that they themselves sometimes feel far from "Geneva."

In His service,
Marten Nap.

¹Presbyterians-Week is the weekly e-mail summary of Presbyterian and Reformed news supplied by the *Christian Observer*, journal of record for the Presbyterian community since 1813, Dr. Edwin P. Elliott, Jr. Editor.



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Dirk Hoksbergen: A Lesser-Known Figure of the 1834 Secession¹

By Wes Bredenhof

Throughout the history of the church, reformatory movements have often received their impetus and momentum from youthful vigour. The great Reformation of the sixteenth century was spearheaded by men such as John Calvin, who wrote the first edition of his most important work, the *Institutes*, when he was but 27 years old. We see this same thing happening at the first Synod of the Secession churches in 1836. The oldest minister, Rev. Hendrik de Cock, was 35 years old. Rev. H.P. Scholte was 31 – but the others (Gezelle Meerburg, Brummelkamp and VanVelzen) were all under the age of 30. Eleven elders were also appointed to this first synod, and some of them seem to have been older men. But among them was also a relatively young 35 year old: Dirk Hoksbergen from Kampen. Unlike de Cock and many of the other Seceders, Hoksbergen had seen the problems in the Netherlands state church from his youth.

Life of Hoksbergen

Dirk Hoksbergen was born in Oldebroek on May 4, 1800, the second son of Beert Hoksbergen. We do not know much about his father. He remarried when his first wife passed away, and Dirk was the first of the offspring from his second marriage. Dirk's mother passed away when he was 8 years old and his father when he was 15. Beert Hoksbergen himself had many misgivings about the direction of the Netherlands Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk). This undoubtedly played a role in the shaping of his son. Dirk Hoksbergen received enough education as a child and teenager to allow him to ably express himself in both writing and speaking – as we shall see later. He was also an avid reader. As a young man, he thrived on the writings of authors such as Alexander Comrie, William a Brakel, and John Calvin – and this at a time when these names were virtually unknown in the Dutch state church.

Dirk Hoksbergen married Matje Broekhuis in his hometown of Oldebroek in the province of Gelderland on February 21, 1823. Matje passed away in 1847 and Dirk was remarried that same year to Aaltje Netjes. From these two marriages, 17 children were born, but of these, only 10 survived into adulthood.

Hoksbergen and the Secession

Hoksbergen first appears in the history of the Secession when he writes an intense letter to Rev. de Cock concerning the corrupted state of the church and the schools. The letter was originally sent in 1833, and de Cock published it in 1835.² A quote will give you the feel for the passion of Hoksbergen concerning the deformation of the Dutch state church:

“Our fathers had a saying: ‘When you want to see the Pope, you have to be in Rome.’ We don’t have to go there anymore, for we can find him in our own backyard. Who are these perjurers!? Instead of Christians, they are Antichrists, adversaries; they oppose those who remain faithful to the precepts and statutes of the Lord.”

In 1835, de Cock visited Hoksbergen at his farm and together they organized a meeting for people concerned about the state of the church. Shortly thereafter, the Secession church of Wilsum was formed. However, for some unknown reason, Hoksbergen did not become a member of this congregation. On June 4, 1835, he and de Cock instituted a Secession church in Kampen – and it was this church for which Hoksbergen was chosen for the office of elder.

Hoksbergen, however, was not just an ordinary elder as we understand the office today. He had been appointed as a “teaching elder.” When he first took up this office, he was reading the sermons of ministers, but soon the time came when he began making and delivering his very own sermons.³ Apparently, these ser-

mons from this relatively uneducated farmer were very edifying for his congregation and they consequently loved him dearly. He devoted much of his time to the work of the church, something he was able to do since he seems to have been quite successful in the farming business. He would have hired-help during his absences for home-visits and synods – not something every farmer could afford to do at that time.

At the First Synod of the Secession Churches

In 1836, Hoksbergen appeared at the first synod of the Secession Churches in Amsterdam. He had been delegated on behalf of the churches in the province of Overijssel. Since the King had forbidden the Seceders to meet, that first synod met in secret in an upstairs room at the home of the mother-in-law of Rev. Scholte. They met for ten days and had to deal with many difficult matters. One of these was the case of Rev. J. VanRhee, a minister who had apparently sinned against the seventh commandment. Along with Scholte and VanVelzen, Dirk Hoksbergen was appointed to a committee to deal with this matter. They unanimously recommended that VanRhee should be deposed.⁴ Another committee, consisting of the same men, was appointed to come with a manual for the education of young children. It is quite noteworthy that Hoksbergen, above all his other peers in the office of elder, was chosen for this task. He quite evidently had abilities which made him desirable for this work.

Perhaps the most interesting decision of this synod as it pertains to Dirk Hoksbergen is the one concerning the “teaching elders” or “exhorters.” Together with Rev. de Cock and elder Smedes from Assen, Hoksbergen formed a committee to study this issue. Appealing to the decisions of the convent of Wezel, Synod Middelburg 1581, the Hague 1586, Dort 1578 and Dort 1618-19, the brothers made their case

for the legitimacy of teaching elders in the Secession congregations. If one has the gift of exhortation, says their report, he "shall deem himself guilty when he does not use this gift to the edification of the congregation."⁵ Thus Hoksbergen could also feel justified for what he was doing in Kampen.

When the work of the synod was completed and the acts were written, Hoksbergen was also on the committee which examined and approved the acts for publication. From all this it is quite evident that Hoksbergen was not a small figure at this first synod. The farmer from Kampen was a mover and shaker, so to speak.

At the Second Synod in Utrecht

Due to tensions in the churches, particularly between de Cock and Scholte, there was another synod the following year (1837) in Utrecht. Hoksbergen was once again the delegate from Overijssel. The previous synod had adopted the old Church Order of Dort, but now Rev. Scholte and some others were arguing that the old Church Order was useless and obsolete. This made Hoksbergen very irritated. Scholte had problems especially with the amount of influence that the old Church Order gave to the government in church matters. He was uncomfortable with a Church Order which left the final decision in many things up to the civil government instead of the church. Hoksbergen was aggravated that someone would dare to question the wisdom of Dort. Hoksbergen esteemed very highly the wisdom of those who have gone before him. He says in one place that he has a desire "to crawl behind them from a long distance."⁶

There was much tension at this synod because of this issue. This tension was complicated by the fact that, because of the government oppression, all the delegates had to stay together in the same building for 14 days and 14 nights. The government had forbidden meetings of more than 20 people – but there were 24 delegates to this synod. An armed guard enforced the law at the front entrance of the building where the synod was to be held. The extra 4 members had to sneak inside the building and once inside the whole group did not leave until the synod was over. At one point, Hoksbergen went into a lonely room to find Rev. de Cock weeping because of the intense conflict among the brothers. It was truly a sad affair – who can blame de Cock for his tears? In the end, the tears and weeping were for nought. The new Church Or-


der won the day and Dort was set aside. De Cock and Hoksbergen were at the forefront of the struggle to prevent this from happening – and then it is no wonder that Hoksbergen was not appointed to any committees at this synod. This synod ended up splitting the Secession churches.

Hoksbergen maintained his position against the new Church Order, but de Cock was persuaded otherwise. Rev. A.C. VanRaalte had visited Mrs. de Cock and discussed the matter with her, convincing her that the new Church Order of Scholte was not that bad. With all of this pressure, de Cock became convinced. This, as one might imagine, created irreconcilable strife between de Cock and Hoksbergen. Hoksbergen would later write about this event, "Then he laid his head in Delilah's lap."⁷

Attempted reconciliation

Another meeting was held in 1837 in Nieuwleusen to attempt a reconciliation with those who wanted to hold on to the Church Order of Dort, but it was to no avail. Hoksbergen was stubbornly attached to the fathers of Dort and he would not turn aside to the left or to the right. The meeting was a failure. But the defenders of the adopted Church Order were not to be stopped. They went to Kampen – behind Hoksbergen's back – and tried to convince his congregation that he was wrong. When Hoksbergen found out about this, he became even more stubborn in his position. The end result was that there were no longer any ministers who would preach or administer the sacraments in Kampen.

What was to be done about this situation? Hoksbergen knew that the Dort Church Order did not provide for a situation like this. This was an emergency situation. One Sunday in 1838, Hoksbergen suggested to the congregation that they ought to select a man to baptize the children and administer the Lord's Supper. There were four children who needed to be baptized and they could not remain unbaptized. "The man need not have the gift of preaching," said Hoksbergen. "I will continue preaching, but if you want to choose a different man to administer the sacraments, that is fine." There was some resistance to this proposal, but the majority agreed, and in the end (not surprisingly) Hoksbergen was chosen to administer the sacraments. Thus, Hoksbergen essentially became the minister of the Church in Kampen. He would never actually be called "Reverend," although later in life he would sometimes wear the clothing as-

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sociated with the office at that time. The popular press referred to him as the "Klompdominee" (Wooden-shoe minister) because he would wear his everyday farm clothes and wooden-shoes while in Kampen for catechism classes and homevisits.

When de Cock heard what had happened in Kampen, he fired off a letter rebuking Hoksbergen for his high-handedness and presumption. Hoksbergen quickly prepared a response in which he demonstrated that it was not he that was presumptuous, but rather those who had rejected the Church Order of Dort for the Church Order of Scholte adopted at Utrecht. Appealing to de Cock's opposition to man-made hymns, he pointed out that just as Dort was wise in rejecting man-made hymns, so it also would still be wise to reject all other innovations in the church – including a new church order. He concluded his letter in this way:

I still have the desire with you, in all simplicity of heart, to look into these matters by the light of God's Word. I will still receive you as a brother, you still have a place with me, even though it is between you and me as with David and Uriah. In the meantime, I wish with all my heart that the old relationship would be like in days past; which I desire back, but only after the counsel of Solomon (Prov. 22:28): "Remove not the ancient landmark, which your fathers have set."⁸

Also this letter did not have its desired effect. The rift between Hoksbergen and de Cock only grew wider and wider.

Suspension and Deposition

On June 18, 1838 there was yet another meeting at Nieuwleusen to try and convince the opponents of the Utrecht Church Order. There was no success. If they could not be convinced they would be convicted. Accusations were brought forward. Hoksbergen was

accused of rejecting order in the church, seducing faithful teachers and unlawfully exercising the office of Minister. There was a vote and the majority agreed that Hoksbergen and the others were guilty as charged. At this point, elder Schouwenburg from Zwolle read a document which stated that they were leaving the Secession Churches. Along with Hoksbergen and the church at Kampen, also the churches of Zalk, Deventer, Mastenbroek and Rouveen expressed their agreement and left the meeting. After they had left, the remaining delegates first suspended and then finally deposed the “schismatics.” Those who had left would after this time be known as the “Dort Reformed.”

There were further attempts at reconciliation on the part of VanRaalte in 1838 and DeCock in 1840, but these did not get anywhere. The “Dort Reformed” demanded that those who held on to the Utrecht Church Order bring forward a confession of guilt and ask for forgiveness. Only then could there be any reconciliation. As far as that went, it was hopeless.

The situation among the churches which had left was also becoming tense. There was no agreement about whether or not a “teaching elder” could administer the sacraments. Certain churches wanted to appoint five ministers who would serve the churches in general – something with which Hoksbergen could absolutely not agree. Ministers should be called by a certain congregation. But the churches went ahead despite the protests of Hoksbergen. After this point, Hoksbergen isolated himself and the church in Kampen. He had grown tired of fighting, tired of ecclesiastical assemblies. Hoksbergen would henceforth remain on his Kampen island – despite efforts later in 1851 to try and bring him and his flock back.

In 1869, most of the churches which had left the Secession churches reunited. The Utrecht Church Order had finally been rejected. Another road block had almost been removed, namely the request for government authorization which the Secession churches had made. At the beginning, the Secession churches had insisted that they were the true continuation of the Netherlands Reformed Church and insisted that the government recognize them as such. This led to their persecution and eventually brought most of the Secession churches to request recognition and authorization as a separate entity with a different name. However, this request was eventually repudiated. Reunion could

take place. But Hoksbergen would have no part in it. We do not know what his reasons were, but Hoksbergen continued to isolate himself.

Problems in Kampen

His self-isolation could not prevent other problems from arising. Around 1850, the Kampen congregation⁹ purchased a brewery building which was renovated into a church building. Members of the congregation had put forward most of the money from their own pockets for the purchase. By 1870 these congregation members still had not received their money back and they were furious. Hoksbergen told them repeatedly that there was no money. But they persisted. Things came to a head on February 6, 1870 when the church building was locked up with chains and a police guard placed in front. The congregation members demanded their money and they demanded a new minister. The money was nowhere to be seen and the “minister” – well, he was already gone. Yes, Dirk Hoksbergen had resigned from his office on January 16, 1870. Two weeks later he preached a farewell sermon on Acts 20:28-32. And then, on February 19, 1870, at the age of 69 years, Dirk Hoksbergen passed away into glory.

An exciting life, but also very tumultuous. Conflict followed Hoksbergen wherever he went. His ecclesiastical life was one problem after another. He was a stubborn man, there can be little question about it. But was he stubborn about the right things? Often he was, for instance in his insistence on the Church Order of Dort. Even when the whole Church was against him and friends had betrayed him, he maintained that the Dort Church Order is the most biblical form of church government. We can admire him for his tenacity in holding to that belief. We do have to put question marks beside some of his reasoning. He did not always interpret Scripture properly. When this was pointed out, he had a tendency to retreat into arguments such as: “This is what I think, and I have the Holy Spirit, so I must be right.” In modern terms, he often appears to have been hungry for power in the Church. We wonder at how an non-ordained and relatively uneducated person could basically appoint himself to the ministry with the approval of his congregation. Dirk Hoksbergen was a man with many faults and we should not glaze over them.

At the same time, we should recognize that the Lord used also this farmer for the preservation and continuance of His Church. The voice of Hoksbergen concerning the Dort Church Order ultimately did not go unheeded – it is basically our Church Order today. The preaching of Hoksbergen was edifying for his congregation and we have no idea how many sick and dying passed into the arms of the Lord under his watchful care. Furthermore, we must not forget that Dirk Hoksbergen was also a family man. He raised his children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. His children did the same and so today many of Dirk Hoksbergen’s descendants are believers, also in the Canadian Reformed churches. The LORD God used a weak and sinful man such as Dirk Hoksbergen for His purposes in the history of the Church and we may look back on that with thankfulness and praise to God.

Mr. Wes Bredenhof has completed his third year at the Theological College.

¹Most of the information in this article was gleaned from two pamphlets (publication information unknown) given to me by my grandfather: *Iets over het geslacht Hoksbergen*, G.Ph. Scheltens and *Dirk Hoksbergen (1800-1870): “Lerend ouderling” te Kampen*, Joh. Lagendijk. I am indebted to Mr. G. Zekveld of Ebenezer Villa in Hamilton for his translation of the pamphlet of Lagendijk. ²Brief van D. Hoksbergen over den tegenwoordigen verdorvenen Kerkstaat en de verbastering van het Schoolwezen . . .”, Veendam: T.E. Mulder, 1835. This letter is republished in *Hendrik de Cock: Verzamelde Geschriften* (Vol. 2), D. Deddens, W. Van’t Spijker, et al. eds., Houten: Den Hartog B.V., 1986, pp.317-349.

³For more information on this office of “teaching elder” (*lerend ouderling*) or “exhorter” (*oefenaar*), cf. “De oefenaar in de kerken van de Afscheiding in de eerste jaren na 1834,” by J. Wesseling in *Afscheiding-Wederkeer: Opstellen over de Afscheiding van 1834*, D. Deddens and J. Kamphuis eds., Haarlem: Vijlbrief, 1984.

⁴Cf. *Handelingen en Verslagen van de Algemene Synoden van de Christelijk Afscheidene Gereformeerde Kerk* (1836-1869), Houten/Utrecht: Den Hertog B.V., 1984, pp.36-41.

⁵*Ibid.*, p.48.

⁶*Dirk Hoksbergen (1800-1870): “Lerend ouderling” te Kampen*, Joh. Lagendijk, p.13.

⁷*Eene Afgeperste Verklaring*, 1861, p.6, quoted in Lagendijk, p.18.

⁸Quoted in Lagendijk, p.24.

⁹This congregation was known as the *Dordt-Gereformeerde Gemeente* (Dordt Reformed Congregation) until 1913. After that time it was just known as the *Gereformeerde Gemeente*.



