

Clarion

Numbers 10:1-10

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

11 12

Sow for yourselves righteousness,
reap the fruit of unfailing love,
and break up your unplowed ground;
for it is time to seek the LORD,
until he comes
and showers righteousness on you.

Hosea 10:12

**May the LORD bless all our readers as we
enter the new millennium!**

**“Because of the LORD’s great love we are
not consumed, for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is your faithfulness!”**

(Lamentations 3:22-23)

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A New Millennium

This year's end issue of *Clarion* comes at the close of a millennium. One thousand years went by. From next year we will number the years beginning with the digit 2. Another thousand years of Christian history has passed.

When we stop to think about this for a moment, a stretch of a thousand years fills us with awe. If we assume that one generation is on average 30 years, that makes 33 generations between the people who lived in the year 1000 and their descendants born in the 1990s. So many important developments have taken place during this period, both in the world and in the church. It seems fitting in this issue of *Clarion* to look at some changes that exercised influence on church life during the past thousand years, and from there to look forward into the coming millennium.

Expansion of the gospel

How far had Christianity come around the year 1000? Christ the Lord had told his disciples to go out and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19). They should not sit back and wait, rather, taking the initiative they should travel to speak to all nations.

The book of Acts records how that began with Jews from all over the Roman empire, from the East (Parthians) and North (Asia Minor), from the South (Egypt) and from the West (Romans), see Acts 2:9f. Later, apostles went out: Philip to the Samaritans and to the Ethiopian (Acts 8), Peter to the Roman commander (Acts 10) and Paul to the Greeks and the Romans. The spread of the gospel continued in the following centuries.

By the year 1000, the gospel had made much progress. It had reached out into Greece and Russia, it had gone eastward and established itself in China. It had also gone out through Northern Africa and Western Europe, as far as Great Britain. However, most of Africa, with the exception of Egypt, was already lost for Christianity by the end of this period, as a result of the spread of Muslim religion. Moreover, North and South America and Australia had not even been touched by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, at the end of the second millennium, the situation has changed for the better. The gospel has been preached virtually everywhere. The Bible has been translated into many languages. The gospel has gone out to South Africa and Brazil, to Korea and Australia. It is true that many churches are small, and everywhere the church is struggling to be faithful. But God's Word has been preached and is still being preached to the ends of the earth. These thousand years have been years of progress for the gospel. Let us never take this for granted.

Bible

When God gave his words to his prophets He made sure that his words were recorded. They were written down and preserved for the following generations, in a collection we now call the Old Testament. When the Lord Jesus fulfilled his task on this earth, He made sure that He was surrounded by disciples who were witnesses of his words and works. These were recorded and approved, together with letters from Spirit filled apostles and prophets. In this way, the books of the New Testament were added to the books of the Old Testament. They were collected to form together the Bible, the most important collection of documents existing in this world.

All through the first millennium, books were handwritten. As a result, most Christians did not own even a part of the Bible. They trained their memory and often they knew part of it by heart. Scrolls and books with sections of the Bible could only be consulted in the major libraries.

Somewhere around 1450, book printing was invented. It seems that the Bible was the first complete book that was printed (the Mazarin Bible). From the beginning the idea was that the Bible should be available to many for a reasonable price. This was followed by a tremendous growth of the printing industry. Many editions of the Bible were printed in many languages throughout the 16th Century. Bibles were not cheap, but many owned at least part of it. Later, special societies were founded to print bibles at a price everyone could afford.

In our own time, we are used to having bibles in our homes. Children receive a bible upon graduation from grade

school. Many people at the end of the second millennium own more than one bible, in several translations. Different from 1000 years ago, God's word can now be read and studied by everyone who can read. Let us never take this for granted.

Churches

An overview over the past 1000 years of church history also reveals a tremendous increase in the number of different churches. During the first millennium, several groups existed on their own (for example, the Arians and the Donatists) but the churches in East Europe and in West Europe stayed together although they were divided over many issues. Early in our millennium, in the year 1054, the schism between the Eastern Church led from Constantinople and the Western Church led from Rome, became a fact.

Halfway through the second millennium, the Century of the Reformation did not just witness the parting of the ways between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants, but also divisions among the Protestants. The Zwinglian and the Calvinist movements came together, but no unity could be achieved between them and the Lutherans. And next to them there were others: several anabaptist and spiritualist groups.

The 17th Century saw the rise of the Remonstrant and the Baptist churches as independent churches, and during the 18th Century the Methodists and during the 19th Century the Salvation Army established themselves. In that same century, a reformation in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands led to Secession and Doleantie. These two united in 1892, but those who did not join in the Union continued as an independent group of churches. Our own background is in the reformation called the Liberation, but it did mean again another church added to the number.

The telephone directories show that we have ended up with many groups that for doctrinal and/or national reasons all form independent churches. There are many churches people can choose from. We have lost the sense of the abnormality of this situation. Looking back over the past millennium will make us realize that this proliferation of churches is neither

normal nor desirable. It is a change which must be justified in every instance. Let us never take this for granted.

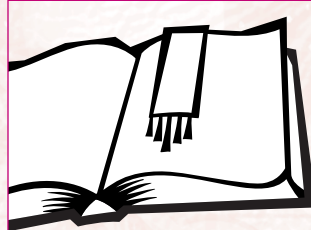
The new millennium

What do we expect from and hope for the new Millennium, in view of all of this? The gospel must be proclaimed wherever God allows. The church should not sit back looking with satisfaction at its achievements. Although all the continents have been reached, there are still regions where the gospel is barely known. Moreover, we should not forget the great mobility of people today. Immigration continues, and groups of people from other countries often form a separate part of the population of their new homeland. Many of those were never really confronted with God's message of salvation in Jesus Christ. The gospel should not only go out far, but also near.

Bibles can be purchased almost everywhere. Will printed Bibles become outdated in the new millennium, with the availability of Bible programs on computers and via the Internet? The way things look now, printed material will probably retain its place, and Bibles will still need to be published. The real issue in this age of information is not whether people will read a paper copy of the Bible or an electronic copy, but whether they will still read it at all.

There will be so much information available for everyone that the Bible can easily lose its readership. When chasing after the hottest news and the latest discovery, the "old news" of the Bible appears immaterial. The challenge we will be facing is not whether printed Bibles are available, but whether they are still read and studied.

The Church of Christ has to maintain the teaching of the Scriptures in the new millennium. At the same time, we should realize that our situation when so many different Christian assemblies exist side by side is abnormal. It should not happen that many can claim to be churches of Jesus Christ and yet stay on their own. Is Christ divided? We should not simply accept the situation that has grown during the last centuries. There is a task for us in the new Millennium to pray and work for more unity in the true faith. **C**



*These thousand years
have been years of
progress for the gospel.*



What's Inside?

In keeping with our entry into a new millennium in just days, we present you with a number of articles on that theme. The editorial, the meditation, and a feature article all address the new millennium. Despite all the y2k hype of this past year, we do well to remain sober about the change. The LORD who takes care of birds and flowers will take care of us his children.

This issue is chockfull of things to read. Rev. W. den Hollander has again written the ever-popular review of the past year. Dr. N.H. Gootjes returns to the topic of the virgin birth of our Lord. This time of the year we focus on the incarnation of the Son of God. Rev. P.G. Feenstra addresses that in his regular column, and Dr. J. de Jong writes about celebrating Christmas.

Dr. Gootjes supplies some more clarity on the matter of "Articles and Confessions." Rev. R. Aasman concludes his se-

ries "The Singing of Psalms and Hymns." Undersigned continues the series on Authority. Aunt Betty has something for the children.

Finally, there are a number of reports – from the Women's Saving Action; the Guido de Bres graduation; the Ontario Women's League day; the ordination of the Rev. T. van Raalte; CRWRF; a report on a Thanksgiving Study Weekend. Commenting a moment on the latter – often complaints are heard about the behaviour and commitment of our youth. This report speaks about many young people who want to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, follow Him, and are not ashamed of Him. Praise and thank God for our young people!

We here at *Clarion* wish you a pleasant holiday season, and may God bless you richly in all your righteous endeavors in 2000!

GvP



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A Millennium and a Day

With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 2 Peter 3:8

Many in the church of Asia Minor faced a problem with respect to the day of the Lord. It was this problem: the Lord Jesus Christ had spoken about the *imminent* coming of God's kingdom. Peter himself had written in his first letter: The end of all things is *near* (4:7). But time continues. The one year after the other slides into the growing past of history and nothing happens. History goes on. We are at the end of a year, a century, a millennium. Even if you believe in Christ's coming in glory and in the day of God's judgment, must you not at least conclude that the Lord is very slow in keeping his promise? Does He not tarry? Does He not delay the damnation of the wicked and the bliss of the righteous? Does He not defer his great day? And is justice deferred not justice denied? Is God not already too late?

This was not simply an academic question for Peter's readers. They were being persecuted, pestered and boycotted. The Christians in what is now Turkey had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials (1 Pet 1:6). You can imagine that they had awaited the coming of Christ and the day of the Lord with eager anticipation. Then there would be the judgment over their persecutors and the public vindication of God's church. The cause of the church would then be shown to be the cause of the Son of God. But alas, history goes on and on. There was in the church of Asia Minor

something of the impatience of the souls under the altar in Revelation 6: (How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" There seems to be a delay of the coming of the Lord. Does the situation in the world possibly compel God to become tardy? Does the course of history hold Him up and can He not help it? Or is He indifferent to the misery of his people?

Then Peter says in our text: Listen, my beloved. God created time but He himself is not subject to it. He transcends it. God governs history but He himself is exalted above it. He is beyond history. Far be it that the Lord would be delayed by something outside himself. He is not dependent on the circumstances. God himself majestically governs the circumstances. History comes about according to his sovereign plan.

Do not forget this one thing. When God says that He is coming soon, you must not reckon with human measures. You should not use your time standards. With the Lord it is different than with us. The Lord's perspective on time differs from ours. His view of history is not the same as our view.

With us a day is short and an age is long and certainly ten centuries is a very long period. Ten centuries are a thousand years. A millennium is ages and ages. A thousand years ago the entire Middle Ages had yet to begin and the crusades had yet to take place.

With us, humans, eighty years is already quite a time span. Scripture says:

the length of our days is seventy years – or eighty, if we have the strength (Ps 90:10). What then about one *thousand* years?

We, human beings, are subject to time and history. God is eternal; He is above history and time.

At the end of verse 8 Peter writes: with the Lord *a thousand years are like a day*. There he quotes Psalm 90. It is a prayer of Moses, spoken in the desert, when during forty years this man of God saw the Israelites pine away under the wrath of the Lord. Moses spoke about the brevity of human life in contrast with the eternity of the everlasting God: "Lord, You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God. You turn men back to dust, saying, 'Return to dust, O sons of men.' For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night" (Ps 90:1-4).

What, for us, is a day just gone by? What did we do yesterday? A day is for us a short while, let alone a watch in the night, when we are asleep anyway and the hours fly by. In our perspective a day is short and a thousand years is a very, very long period. But how is it with God? "A thousand years in your sight are like a day . . ." From everlasting to everlasting the Lord is God. A long period of time, a thousand years, seems for us interminable, without end. But in

the perspective of the eternal God it is only a second.

The apostle Peter adds something to Ps 90:4. He adds the reversed statement. He even puts it in front: *With the Lord a day is like a thousand years.* God is above time also when he works in history. He works intensively and he works patiently.

He works intensively. We say, "What can we really do in one day?" But God always works and He does many things in one day. We would have thought that He needed a thousand years for it but He does it in one day. He leads history and is eager to bring everything to the end. He desires to come to the destination of all history: the last judgment, the final verdict over the ungodly and the final blessing for his people. Therefore, with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, for He works intensively and steadily. He does not slack off. And with God *a thousand years are like a day.* For God works patiently. He takes his time. We live seventy or eighty years here on earth and therefore we are impatient; we want things to happen in our life time and therefore we want to see them happen right now. But the eternal God has all the time in the world and He takes his time. In his sight a millennium is like a day.

God is in a hurry: a day is like a thousand years. And God takes it easy: a thousand years is like a day. He is exalted

above history. What does it mean for us? History still continues. We live many ages after Peter. It is now almost the year 2000. Canada and the world enter the twenty-first century. We are reminded of it *ad nauseam* (time and again).



God is in a hurry: a day is like a thousand years. And God takes it easy: a thousand years is like a day.

What does it mean for our Christian faith? There is growing secularism especially in the Western world. Scoffers taunt us: Do you really believe in the coming of the Lord? Do you still believe in a last judgment and in a future of heaven and hell? Scoffers say: Now that we reach the year 2000, where is this promise of his coming?

And then there are speculations by Christian sects about an imminent coming of a thousand year reign of Christ. Some sectarians will say: a day is like a thousand years; therefore six days are six thousand years. There were 4000 years before Christ and now we are 2000 years after Christ and thus now comes the seventh day; the millennium, the kingdom of the thousand years. They forget that with the Lord not only is a day like a thousand years but also with Him a thousand years are like a day. The apostle Peter precisely excludes time speculations for us, limited human beings. He excludes speculations about the exact *date* of the coming of the Lord.

Let us not fall into the trap of secularism or be ensnared by sectarianism. Let us not scoff in unbelief about the coming of the Lord and let us not speculate about the date of this coming. Let God be God! Let us adore and worship the eternal God. He is exalted above history. He comes with haste; He works intensively. A day is like a thousand years. And He comes with deliberation; He works patiently. A thousand years are like a day. He is above history and he works in history. And He wants us to come along with Him. For there is his grace and mercy, his kindness and compassion towards *you* in Christ Jesus. **C**

CHRISTMAS DAY

*Jesu, Redeemer of the world!
Who, ere the earliest dawn of light,
Wast from eternal ages born,
Immense in glory as in might;*

*Immortal Hope of all mankind!
In whom the Father's face we see;
Hear thou the prayers thy people pour
This day throughout the world to thee.*

*Remember, O Creator Lord!
That in the Virgin's sacred womb
Thou was conceived, and of her flesh
Didst our mortality assume.*

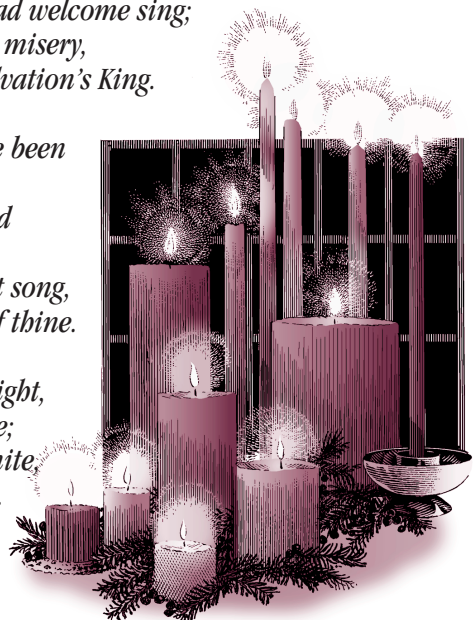
*This ever-blest recurring day
Its witness bears, that all alone,
From thy own Father's bosom forth,
To save the world thou camest down.*

*O Day! to which the seas and sky,
And earth and heaven glad welcome sing;
O Day! which healed our misery,
And brought on earth salvation's King.*

*We too, O Lord, who have been
cleansed
In thy own fount of blood
divine,
Offer the tribute of sweet song,
On this blest natal day of thine.*

*O Jesu! born of Virgin bright,
Immortal glory be to thee;
Praise to the Father infinite,
And Holy Ghost eternally.*

Translated from the Latin
by Edward Caswall





by
N.H. Gootjes

Immanuel and the Virgin Birth

The problem in Isaiah

In the days leading up to Christmas, the Immanuel prophecy always draws the attention. The reason can be found in the gospel according to Matthew, where Jesus and Immanuel are closely linked together. Matthew inserted Isaiah's prophecy concerning Immanuel right in the middle of his record concerning the birth of Jesus Christ. He began by saying that Mary was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit (v. 18) and he ends this section by mentioning that she gave birth to a son, and called him Jesus (v. 25). In between he pointed out that this was the fulfilment of an old prophecy by Isaiah, that the virgin would give birth to a son. Considering this position in Matthew, it is small wonder that Isaiah's prophecy has traditionally been understood as a direct prophesy concerning the virgin birth. When Handel, in his great oratorio, *The Messiah*, included this prophesy among the Old Testament announcements of the Saviour's birth, he was in line with the general opinion of his time.

However popular this view may be, it is not without problems, as Calvin's exegesis demonstrates. Over against Jewish commentators, Calvin defends the view that the Immanuel prophesy speaks directly of Jesus Christ. In his words, some rabbinic interpreters had the impudence to apply this prophesy to King Hezekiah. Calvin attributes this to their desire to lie, for Hezekiah was

about fifteen years old when this prophesy was given. Other Jewish exegetes have taken this as a prophesy of the birth of some unknown son of King



Isaiah's prophecy has traditionally been understood as a direct prophesy concerning the virgin birth.

Ahaz. Calvin asks pointedly: "With what right can someone who ended his life without office and glory be called Immanuel? For to Him the whole earth is subjected." Calvin mentions yet a third opinion, that this refers to a son of the prophet Isaiah himself, but he rejects this without even refuting it.

For Calvin it is clear that Isaiah's prophesy speaks of the Christ. When Israel's king refused to ask for a sign that

Jerusalem will be safe, God himself gave a sign: The promised Redeemer will come. In him, God will fully reveal his presence among his people. It is obvious that the Jewish opponents Calvin is arguing against will disagree with this interpretation. Calvin does bring up their counter argument, that in the situation it would be foolish to give a sign that would only appear eight centuries later. In their view, an event taking place long after the death of King Ahaz cannot be a sign for Ahaz and his contemporaries.

Calvin attempts to solve the problem by stating that Isaiah speaks of two children. The prophet first deals with the complete salvation when he speaks of the child who is rightfully called God. After that, he deals with a specific salvation which was to take place in the near future. There, he is speaking of child that was either newly born or that would be born soon. To be specific, Calvin sees verse 14 as a prophesy of Jesus Christ and the two following verses as a prophesy of a child born in his own days.

Calvin is stuck between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, he cannot agree with the Jewish exegetes, for that would mean to reject Jesus as the Messiah. On the other hand, he has to admit that Isaiah must give a sign which people of his own day could witness. His solution is to divide Isaiah's prophesy into two distinct parts, although the Isaiah's words appear to form a unity. Calvin is a good illustration of the

difficulty connecting Isaiah's prophecy and Matthew's application.

Isaiah's prophecy

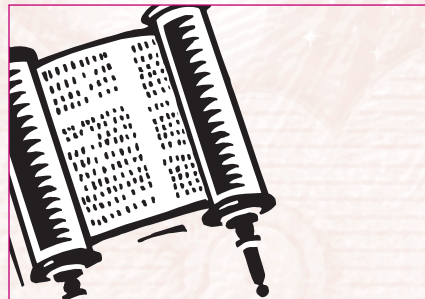
We need a closer look at Isaiah's prophecy concerning Immanuel. It was spoken at a time when war was threatening the kingdom of Judah. Two kings, the king of Israel and the king of Syria, were gathering their armies to attack Judah. We cannot go into the complicated political situation¹, but it is obvious that the situation is desperate for Jerusalem, the two tribes and the royal house of David.

At that point in time, Isaiah is sent by God to tell Judah's King Ahaz that he need not be afraid, for the blazing anger of these two kings is no more than the last red glow of burning wood before it disintegrates (Isa 7:4). Isaiah is even allowed to offer Judah's king a sign. Seen in the proper context, this sign is clearly intended to strengthen Ahaz's trust in God's word. Moreover, it was something God had done before. A parallel can be found in the history of King Hezekiah, who was very sick and received a prophecy that he would fully recover. He could choose one of two signs: the shadow on the steps would either go forward or go back ten steps. Hezekiah had accepted the assuring sign and had chosen for the shadow to go backward, as the more difficult sign (2 Kgs 20:8-11).² Compared to Hezekiah, Ahaz receives more room for choice. He is free to choose any sign, either in the deepest depths or in the highest heights. God's intention was to strengthen Ahaz's morale, so that he would stand up to the pressure, not trust in treaties and armies, but remain faithful to God.

Remarkably, Ahaz refused to be strengthened by a sign, on the pretext that he did not dare to tempt God. The actual reason will have been that he was already planning to go against God's will and enter into a covenant with the powerful nation of Assyria. He did not want to see a sign. In that situation, the Lord gave him a sign, whether he wanted it or not: "The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son. . . ." In this sequence of events, the sign can only be something Ahaz himself would experience. As a confirmation of God's prophecy of safety for Judah, it must refer to an event taking place in the days of Ahaz and Isaiah.³ Calvin's exegesis cannot be maintained in view of what Isaiah recorded. The Immanuel prophecy

must refer to an event witnessed by the king himself.

This means that Isaiah is not speaking directly about Christ's birth from the virgin. This is confirmed by several other elements in the text. In the first place, the word Isaiah used is not the normal word for virgin, but for young woman, a girl of marriageable age. Further, the name of this child is to be Immanuel, but the son of Mary was never



*The Immanuel
prophecy must refer
to an event
witnessed by the
king himself.*

called Immanuel, he had to be called Jesus (Matt 1:21). Moreover, the child mentioned in Isaiah will eat curds and honey, something that has no connection with Jesus, whatsoever. What clinches it is the fact mentioned by Isaiah that the land of the two attacking kings will be destroyed when the child is still very young. This happened within three years (see 2 Kings 16). Isaiah's prophesy became reality many centuries before the birth of Jesus Christ.⁴

Fulfilment in Matthew

This brings us back to Matthew's use of the Immanuel prophesy. If Isaiah 7 does not contain a prophesy of the virgin birth, why did Matthew say that Isaiah 7 was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ?⁵ What does Matthew mean by "fulfilled"? Actually, he used this word on several occasions that a prophesy was fulfilled. It will be helpful to take a look at some passages to see in what sense something is fulfilled. The outcome may be different from one's expectation.

According to Matthew 2:15, Joseph took Jesus and Mary and brought them to Egypt for safety. This was a fulfilment of the prophesy of Hosea 11:1: "Out of

Egypt I called my son". Even a brief glance at this chapter will suffice to show that the expression "my son" in this text refers to the people of Israel, and not to the child Jesus: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." Moreover, Hosea referred to something that happened before his time, but Matthew speaks of something happening much later. The term "fulfilment" obviously does not mean here that something is foretold by Hosea and realized in the time Matthew describes.

Something similar can be seen in the other instance of fulfilment of prophesy in Matthew 2. Here, the slaughter of the boys of Bethlehem is seen as the fulfilment of the prophesy of Jeremiah: "A voice is heard in Ramah. . ." (v. 17). Jeremiah spoke of an event during the time Israel was conquered in his own time, as is made clear in the reference to the Lord's announcement of Israel's return from captivity (Jer 31:16). In these cases, the word fulfilment must indicate that something which happened during the Old Testament, occurred in a fuller way and on a larger scale in the New.⁶ We may attempt using the same approach to the Immanuel prophesy.

Another consideration is that we should pay careful attention to the place where the Immanuel prophesy is used in Matthew 1. It is not connected with the conception of Jesus, for that is mentioned before, verse 18. Neither is it connected with the birth of Jesus, for this is recorded later, in verse 25a. Rather, it is connected with the commandment of the angel to Joseph to call Mary's child Jesus. The angel emphasized that the child came for the salvation from sins. The common element connecting Isaiah 7 and Matthew 1 is salvation. However, when Matthew speaks of fulfilment he means that the salvation mentioned here is fuller than the one mentioned by Isaiah. In the case of Jesus Christ, the salvation is complete.

Judah, in the days of Ahaz, was in a very precarious situation. It was attacked by two nations, each of which was larger than Judah. It was no wonder that the king was looking for allies. Isaiah, however, tells the king that he need not fear for God will save his people. God promised to maintain his chosen nation, against overwhelming opposition. The sign that this would come true was the child whose name says it all: Immanuel, God with us.

The salvation Matthew 1 speaks of is greater, however. This is not a salvation from enemies threatening God's people with oppression by the enemies and death. It is a salvation from sins, threatening the people with estrangement from God and eternal death.

At the time of Ahaz, Israel's situation looked so desperate, that Israel's king was working on a covenant with the world power Assyria. The situation of God's people is much more desperate. Because of their sins, they stand condemned before a God who is a consuming fire. However, God brings his own Son into this world in the way of the virgin birth, to save his people from their sins. Jesus is not to be identified with Immanuel; rather, He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Immanuel. In bringing his own Son into this world by way of the virgin birth, God showed to the fullest degree that He is with us.

Jesus Christ is the living proof that God is truly "with us."

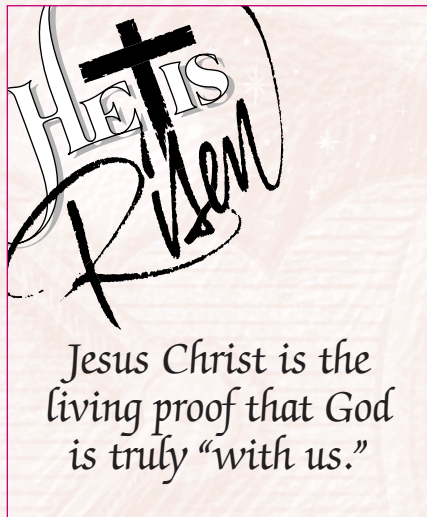
God's people of all ages are not left alone in their struggle against sin. In Mary's son, God has sent the Messiah, who is the Saviour in the fullest sense of the word.

¹ See the commentaries, e.g. of E.J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 275f; and J. Ridderbos, *Jesaja* vol. 1 (Kampen: Kok, 1940) 38f. Two articles are very helpful for understanding the situation, J. Van Woudenberg, "The Sign of Immanuel: As Deep as Sheol and as High as Heaven" in *Clarion*, Year end issue, 1995, 576-579, and D. Berghuis, "Het Immanuel-teken" in G. Zomer,

Komende in de wereld (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1975) 93-119.

² Other, earlier signs are those given to Gideon (Judg 6:36ff) and to Saul (1 Sam 10:1ff).


³ So also the two articles referred to in footnote 2.

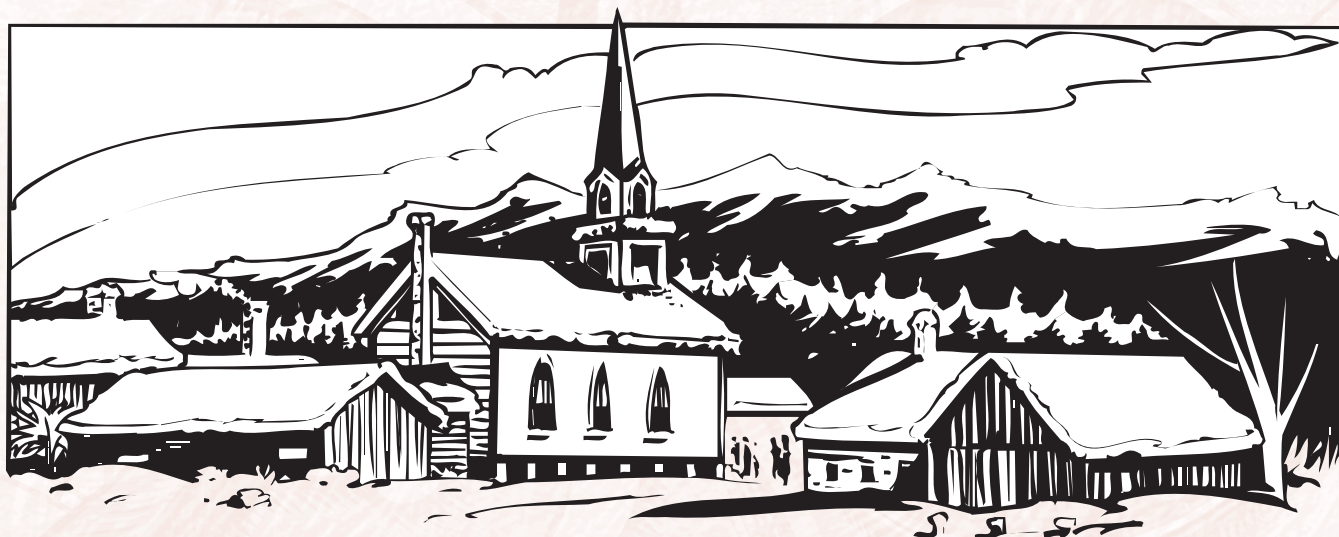


⁴ J. Van Bruggen has revived the traditional exegesis, as found in Calvin, that Isaiah spoke directly about Jesus Christ, see his *Matteüs: Het evangelie voor Israel* (Kampen: Kok, 1990), 42-44. We need to briefly look at the three main arguments that support his interpretation. In the first place, he mentions that Isaiah uses the word for "young woman" not the word for "virgin." He counters this by pointing out that there is no mention made of a father, and that the Greek translation used by Matthew speaks of "virgin." This is not a strong argument for the omission of the name of the father can be explained differently in this context. Isaiah emphasizes

that this young woman will call her son "Immanuel." Further, the Greek word does not necessarily mean "virgin" as can be seen in the Greek dictionaries. Van Bruggen's second argument is that Isaiah 7-12 is a unit, so that the prophesy on Immanuel must be understood in connection with the Messianic prophesies of 9:5,6 and 11:1-10. This argument from the wider context, however, is much weaker than the argument from the immediate context, which speaks of an event during King Ahaz's lifetime. Van Bruggen's third argument concerns the name "Immanuel." To counter the objection that Mary's son was not called "Immanuel" but "Jesus", he appeals to Matt 1:23, which uses the plural: "They will call him Immanuel." This does not support his argument, either, for nowhere in the Bible is Jesus Christ called "Immanuel."

⁵ Zahn has argued that it was not the evangelist but rather the angel who referred to Isaiah's prophesy (see *Das Evangelium des Matthäus*; 4. ed; Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922) 80; he is followed by Van Bruggen, *Matteüs*, 42. This is improbable in view of the use of similar formulas in Matt 21:4 and 26:56, see E. Lohmeyer, W. Schmauch, *Das Evangelium des Matthäus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967) 16.

⁶ See on the different options for understanding the fulfilment texts in Matthew, R.H. Gundry, *The Use of the Old Testament in St. Matthew's Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), Gundry elaborated on this in his commentary on Matthew; see particularly the very stimulating discussions on these texts by J.W. Smitt, *Opdat vervuld zou worden I, II* (Groningen: Vuurbaak, 1975f.); see on Matt 1:18, 44ff. 





A Millennial Reign, But How?

by
Tj. Boersma

We are days away from the year 2000. The arrival of a new millennium arouses expectations with many people. If by that time the return of Christ has not yet taken place, also Christians will step across the line. With these words we are already indicating something very essential about *our* expectation of the future. We await the *coming of Christ* in glory. It is good that we are looking forward to *that* future. For this expectation of the future is based on the promises and prophecies of the Lord our God.

Unfortunately, this expectation of the future divides Christians, because the promises and prophecies are explained in different ways. The differences centre especially around the expectation of a millennial reign of which Holy Scripture speaks in Revelation 20. Many people connect this to a new future of national and spiritual restoration for the people of Israel. The establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 has added new impulses to these expectations. As another century comes to a close, and the year 2000 dawns, the question once again comes to the fore: What will the new millennium bring? Can we look forward to the millennial reign of Christ in the near future?

It is my intention with this article to discuss several ideas that are prominent particularly in American evangelical circles – though not only there – with regard to the millennial reign. Then I hope to look in the Scriptures, especially in Revelation 20, to see what the Lord reveals to us about “what must

soon take place” (Rev 1:1). Within the framework of this article I will have to leave out many things, and will only be able to briefly refer to other studies. The key question is whether there will be a period *within this New Testament dispensation* (that is to say, toward the end of this dispensation, just before Christ’s return) in which the promises to Israel will be realized. On the basis of Scripture we all believe there is a millennial reign. The questions are: What does it look like, and, what can we expect from it?

Postmillennialism

According to the postmillennial position, the present dispensation will gradually lead into the millennial reign. An increasing number of people, both Jews and Gentiles, will give heed to the proclamation of the gospel and will put their faith in Christ. During the millennium the gospel will have a dominating impact on the nations of this world and on the lives of individual believers. After the millennium Christ will return and the end will come.

Various objections could be brought forward against this position. I restrict myself to two of them. In the first place, this notion finds no support in Revelation 20. This Scripture passage does not describe some future golden age on earth toward the end of the present dispensation. Rather, as we will see shortly, this passage speaks of the reign of the souls of the believers with Christ in heaven during the entire new dispensa-

tion. In the second place, Scripture shows us that until Christ’s return there will be a continuous struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. That tension will be there throughout history, until the end, when the great war will be waged, that of Armageddon (Rev 16:13-16) and of Gog and Magog (Rev 20:7-9). The idea that toward the end of history evil will be reduced to negligible proportions does not do justice to the reality of the struggle, and it creates an idealist expectation of the future that cannot be maintained in the light of Scripture.

Premillennialism

Premillennialism argues that the return of Christ will take place *before* the millennium. The church will go through the great tribulation. When Christ returns the dead believers will be raised, and the living will be taken up with them on the clouds and will meet the Lord in the air. They will accompany Christ as He returns to earth.

The great majority of the Jews will then accept Jesus as their Messiah and will be saved. That will be the beginning of the thousand-year reign. Christ will then visibly rule over the entire world, together with his redeemed people, consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. This millennium does not mean the end. There will still be sin and death during this period, even though evil will be pushed back to the far edges of society.

Satan will be bound during the thousand-year reign of Christ, but will be released toward the end in order to once again deceive the nations. He will gather them for the battle of Gog and Magog. Fire, however, will come down from heaven and put this revolt to an end. When the millennial reign has ended, the unbelievers will be raised from the dead, and the last judgment will take place.

We will soon come to an evaluation of these views in the light of Revelation 20. Now already I want to comment that the idea that the glorified Christ and the glorified believers will return to an earth where there will still be sin and death is a strange notion. Scripture teaches us differently! Christ will return in glory, and the believers will be raised to live in a situation where death and sin will have disappeared forever and where the tears will be wiped from their eyes (Rev 21:1-4).

Dispensationalism

Dispensationalism is a shoot from the root of premillennialism. Dispensationalism has its origins in John Nelson Darby (1800-82). He and his followers, known as Darbyists or Plymouth Brethren, speak of three dispensations: the dispensation of *Israel*, that of the *church* (a parenthesis, an insertion between the first and the third dispensation), and that of the *kingdom*, in which the promises made to Israel will be fulfilled.

Dispensationalism gained prominence when the *Scofield Reference Bible* was published in the United States in 1909. This Bible assumes seven dispensations, in which man is put to the test with regard to his obedience to God. Also in this scheme of things, the church is a parenthesis, an inserted dispensation. In 1967, the *New Scofield Reference Bible* was published, in which the notes of the Scofield Reference Bible were revised in response to criticism. Around the same time, Charles C. Ryrie's *Dispensationalism Today* (1965) was published, a book which for a long period would be a standard publication in these circles.

Characteristic features of dispensationalism are the literal explanation of biblical prophecy and the separation between Israel and the church.¹ With respect to the latter notion, the idea is that Christ, when He was still on earth, offered the kingdom of heaven to the Jews of his days. This kingdom was an earthly rule over Israel in which the Old Testament prophecies would be fulfilled. The Jews, however, rejected this kingdom. Its definitive establishment

was therefore postponed to the time of the millennium. In the meantime, the visible church arose as the "mystery form" of the kingdom.

At the present time, Christ gathers his church from all nations, Jews as well as Gentiles, until He returns. This return will take place in two stages. In the first stage, the rapture of the congregation will take place. This rapture of the congregation to Christ can take place at any time. At the same time, the resurrection of the true believers will take place. These will then be taken up, together with the believers who are still alive at that time, to meet the Lord in the air. Then the church will go to heaven for seven years to celebrate with Christ the marriage feast of the Lamb.

During these seven years, which are related to the 70th "seven" in the prophecy of Daniel (Dan 9:24-27), the great tribulation will take place. During this period, impressive events will take place, such as the reign of the Antichrist. But also a remnant of Israel will be converted to Jesus as her Messiah, and this remnant will proclaim the gospel of the kingdom. The result will be the salvation of a great multitude from the Gentiles. After this, however, the nations will be gathered together for the great war, the battle of Armageddon.

At the end of this seven-year period, Christ will return in glory, accompanied by his church. The people of Israel will then be gathered together again in Palestine, and the large majority of the Israelites will accept Christ as the Messiah. In this way the biblical prophecies will be fulfilled. Satan will be bound and thrown into the abyss for a thousand years. Believers who died during the seven years will now be raised to life (Rev 20:4).

At this point, Christ will begin his millennial reign. He ascends the throne in Jerusalem, and from there will rule the world during a time of incredible prosperity and peace. In the rebuilt temple of Jerusalem, sacrifices will be offered up again. They will not be sin offerings but sacrifices in remembrance of the death of Christ.

Toward the end of this millennium, some of the believers' children will revolt against Christ. Those who are only nominal Christians will be gathered together by Satan for the last great revolution, which will be put down by Christ. Before the end of the millennium all the believers who died during the thousand-year reign will be raised from the dead. After the end of the millennial reign all the unbelievers will be raised up, and

the last judgment will take place. This will be the close of the age.

Evaluating dispensationalism

Serious scriptural objections can be brought against this scheme of things. In the first place, it is not biblical that there are seven periods in which people are put to the test with regard to their obedience to God. The idea is put forward that whenever people do not pass the test, God has to start over again. Only once, however, in paradise, has man been put to the test. Since the fall into sin there is salvation only by grace. God immediately placed this perspective before mankind in the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). This redemption is the central theme in the entire history of revelation from Genesis to Revelation. There are two different dispensations, the Old and the New Testaments, but both proclaim redemption in Christ. There are differences in administration between the Old and the New Testaments, but it is one covenant of grace.²

It is also wrong to consider the church as an in-between dispensation. The promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3) is fulfilled in the congregation of Christ, which is being gathered from Jews and Gentiles. The New Testament shows clearly that from the beginning God had this congregation in mind.³ By creating a different future for Israel, separate from the church, one turns back the clock of redemptive history to the Old Testament.

The dispensationalist method of interpreting biblical prophecies, and the way in which it relates these to the millennium as a Jewish affair, would require a separate critical evaluation. This method of exegesis is far removed from Calvin's reading of the prophecies. In Calvin, the salvation promised in the Old Testament prophecies receives the following progressive unfolding:

- a. the return from exile;
- b. the coming of the Messiah and the addition of the nations to the dispensation of Easter;
- c. the final kingdom of peace of the Messiah in the new heaven and on the new earth.

Here there is no trace of a restoration of Israel in the Jewish land.⁴

Developments in dispensationalism

It would not be right to end this part of our discussion without paying attention to developments within dispensationalism in which earlier points of view are being corrected. In 1992 a remarkable book was published entitled *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*.⁵

This book shows that the distinction between Israel and the church is retained (compare the title of the book). But this distinction no longer functions in the same way as before. The church is no longer seen as a parenthesis, an insertion into God's plan of redemption which has become necessary because the Jews rejected their salvation. The book underlines the importance of the church which is not an after-thought of God but a stage in God's plan with his people.

To describe this new position, a new expression has been coined: *progressive dispensationalism*. This phrase indicates that there is progression in the various stages of salvation. In all stages of history, Christ is present with his salvation: in the period of the church, of the millennium, and of the close of the age. But there is progression! The period of the church is regarded as the bronze age, the period of the millennium as the silver age, and with the close of the age, the golden age will arrive.

A positive point in this new position is that the notions of a postponed kingdom and of the church as an after-thought has been abandoned. Both notions are clearly in conflict with Scripture. That such a position is untenable becomes clear when we imagine what would have happened if the Jews had accepted the kingdom that had been "offered" to them. Theoretically at least, the cross of Golgotha might not have been necessary for redemption. Another positive point in this re-evaluation is the christocentric approach. In the various dispensations, God's plan of redemption is progressively unfolded: from less to more!

Remaining questions

This new dispensationalist approach is attractive to Reformed people. Nonetheless, big questions remain. Distinctions are still made between various kinds of salvation. The salvation which God gives in the church is of a different order than the salvation which is realized in the millennium. The former is spiritual, the latter national/political; and the former is less ("bronze") than the latter ("silver").

The idea of the church as a parenthesis (insertion) has been abandoned. In its place, however, the idea of a thousand-year reign appears as a stage inserted between the church and the close of the age. There is no straight line from the church to the close of the age.

This is dispensationalism's Achilles' heel, which is still there in this progressive dispensationalism: Between the pe-

riod of the church and the close of the age another period is inserted in which the salvation is of a different nature. This salvation is of a different nature because it has national/political dimensions in the state of Israel and among the people of the Jews.

This is certainly *not* progression! It is a relapse into the Old Testament. It means a denial of the biblical message that nation, cult, and priesthood of the old covenant have been fulfilled in Christ (see the theme of the letter to the Hebrews). This approach is far removed from the progression of salvation as sketched by Calvin who drew a straight line from Israel in the Old Testament to the church of the new dispensation, and from there to the close of the age in the ~~new heaven and on the new earth.~~



What will the new millennium bring?

A millennial reign, but how?

The question still remains how we should explain Revelation 20. Unfortunately, the book, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, does not contain a detailed exegesis of this chapter. In this article we have looked at various views on the millennium. What is the Reformed position on this? To distinguish it from postmillennialism and premillennialism, it is often called amillennialism, which literally means: no millennial reign.

It is certainly true that Reformed people do not believe in a thousand-year reign as it is propagated by post- and premillennialists. This does not mean, however, that they deny the millennium. Also our Bibles contain Revelation 20. It is better, therefore, not to use the term "amillennialism" to describe the Reformed position. We would do better to take over Jay E. Adams's suggestion and speak of "realized millennialism."⁶ Then the positions become more clear: Over against post- and premillennialists, who expect a millennial reign in the future, we believe that this kingdom is already realized at the present time.

Revelation 20

The exegesis of Revelation 20, about which I will finally make a few comments, is tied in with the place of this chapter within the whole of the book of Revelation.⁷ Several times, this book traces the entire history of the church of Christ, from its beginning to the end. This history is viewed each time from a different perspective.

Chapter 19:11-21 pictures the triumphal return of Christ as the rider on the white horse. His coming introduces the last great war against the beast and the false prophet, who are captured and thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This brings the end of history. Revelation 20:7-10 runs parallel to Revelation 19:19-21. Note the expression "war" or "battle," which occurs in both passages. This concerns the (great, definitive, decisive) battle at the end of history.

This means that the events of Revelation 20:1-6 do not chronologically follow after Revelation 19:11-21. Of course, there are connections between both passages. It is best to regard Revelation 20:1-6 as an overview of the entire history of the New Testament church from the beginning and from the perspective of the triumph of Christ, described at the end of the previous chapter. It is a triumph which is hidden from the human eye. After all, the history of the church is one of oppression, of blood and tears. But Christ is victorious!

The verses 1-3 describe the binding of Satan. He is thrown into the abyss. Earlier, in Revelation 12:9, we read that Satan was hurled to the earth. But apparently there is progression in the history of redemption! Satan now gets hurled from the earth into the abyss, a bottomless pit, which is the temporary abode for the devil and his evil spirits (cf. the same word "abyss" in Rev 9:1,11).

Satan remains bound for a thousand years. The number 1,000 should not be taken literally. In this book God makes known the future to John by means of signs or symbols (see 1:1). Also the number 1,000 has a symbolic meaning. 1,000 is ten (the number of perfection) to the third power. It is the indication that Christ's rule covers a perfect period.

The binding of Satan shows the superiority of Christ over Satan.⁸ That is clear also from verse 3 where it says that Satan is bound to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore. During the thousand years of Christ's reign, Satan cannot prevent that the gospel goes

into the world of the nations, and during that period he is unable to gather Christ's enemies for the attack against the church.

The verses 4-6 describe the same period as the vv. 1-3, as can be seen in the occurrence of the expression "the thousand years" in both passages. Where are the thrones? Of the 47 times that the word "throne" appears in Revelation, all but three refer to a throne in heaven. Add to this the fact that John sees (not the bodies, but) the souls of those who have been beheaded, and it becomes clear that this vision transfers us to heaven.

At this point we arrive at the crucial sentence, "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." These are the words to which the adherents of a millennial reign appeal for their doctrine of the bodily resurrection. In their view there is a two-fold resurrection, one at the beginning of the millennium and one at Christ's return, which then also means the close of the age.

The Greek word *ezèsan* (and they lived) can indeed refer to a bodily resurrection; nevertheless, this meaning is not very likely, because the resurrection of the dead is mentioned later on in this chapter (Rev 20:11-13). Therefore, verse 4 must speak of something else than a bodily resurrection. We will have to think of the situation in which the believers, who died for Christ, live in heaven and rule with him during these thousand years.⁹ Here the triumph of Christ, hidden until now, is revealed.

In verse 5 we read, "The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were ended." This refers to what happens – or does *not* happen – with the unbelievers after their death. They do not share in life in heaven with Christ during the thousand years of his rule. This does not mean that they will come to life afterward.¹⁰ Later on in this chapter we read what happens with those other dead, after the thousand years have been completed. They come into the grip of the second death, and at the resurrection in the last judgment they are thrown into the lake of burning sulphur. It does not become better, but worse for them!

"This is the first resurrection," says John. The word "resurrection" is rather unusual for the life of the believers in heaven. But considering the situation, it is not strange. Here on earth, the believers die as martyrs. But in heaven, those who have been killed here appear to live. Although the expression "second resurrection" is not used in Revelation 20, we may regard the bodily resurrection of

these believers as the continuation and crowning of their first resurrection, the life of the souls in heaven.

Those who also after death may live and reign with Christ in heaven are congratulated. For the second death has no power over them. The second death is the eternal punishment, according to the conclusion of this chapter. This confirms us in the opinion that the "first resurrection" is not a bodily resurrection. For those who share in the bodily resurrection live in a glorified situation in which there will be no more death (Rev 21:4). Then it would not be necessary to say that the second death has no power over those people.

From the above, the conclusion may be drawn that the premillennial explanation of Revelation 20 has no basis. There simply is no earthly rule of Christ during a millennium which precedes the close of the age. Much less is there a kingdom in which Israel plays a central role. Revelation 20 does not say a word about this.¹¹

This does not mean that our expectation of the future is less real. On the contrary! We may know that also in our time, as the attacks on the church and the gospel are becoming increasingly sharp, the government remains in the hands of Christ, until the thousand years have been completed. We may know that at their death believers go directly to heaven and there will be seated on thrones. We may know that at one point everything will be fulfilled in a new heaven and a new earth. That comfort allows us to enter a new millennium in the year 2000 looking forward to the return of Christ.

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¹See Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 186-87; and Tj. Boersma, *Jeruzalem vandaag: Kerk en duizendjarig rijk* (Ermelo: Woord en wereld, 1986), pp. 7-8.

²See John Calvin, *Institutes* II.x.11.

³See, e.g., 1 Pet 2:9; Gal 3:28-29; Heb 12:22-24; Acts 15:14-18; Eph 2:14-21; 3:8-11. In this last-mentioned passage, note the "eternal purpose" of God. The church is not some after-thought that

God has come up with. See on this point also Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, pp. 194-95; and Tj. Boersma, *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle . . . An Evaluation of Hal Lindsey's Writings* (St. Catharines, ON: Paideia, 1978), pp. 54-61.

⁴See Boersma, *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle . . .*, pp. 19-43; Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, pp. 194-222.

⁵Craig A. Blaising, and Darrel L. Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids, 1992).

⁶Jay E. Adams, *The Time Is at Hand* (Philadelphia, 1970), p. 9.

⁷For the exegesis of Revelation 20, see Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, pp. 223-38; L. Selles, "The Prophetic Vision of Satan's Binding in Biblical Perspective," in *Unity in Diversity: Studies Presented to Prof. Dr. Jelle Faber on the Occasion of His Retirement*, ed. Riemer Faber (Hamilton, ON: Senate of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, 1989), pp. 47-56; Boersma, *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle . . .*, pp. 61-69.

⁸The same Greek verb "bind" is used in Matt 12:29, where Christ, by driving out the evil spirit, shows himself superior over the devil. Cf. Luke 10:18, where Jesus says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Satan's binding of Revelation 20 is a result of this fall of Satan, which Jesus saw. The context of Luke 10 is his sending out of the seventy to proclaim the gospel. This also sheds light on the intention of Satan's binding in Revelation 20. Nothing will prevent the proclamation of the gospel in the world, for Satan has been bound.

⁹The same Greek verb is used in Luke 20:38: "for to him all are alive." Also these words not only deal with the resurrection of the body – which the Sadducees asked about – but also with life immediately after death. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have not yet been raised up, but they do live for God.

¹⁰The Greek word *achri* (until) means that what is said here continues during the entire thousand-year period.

¹¹H. Berkhof, *Christus de zin der geschiedenis* (Nijkerk, 1958), p. 146, is of the opinion that the word *ezèsan* (they lived) likely refers back to the Greek translation of Ezek 37:10 and refers to the restoration of Israel. But Berkhof takes his starting-point here precisely in the point that needs to be proven, namely, that the prophecy of Ezekiel refers to a restoration of Israel in a future within history at the end of the New Testament period.



*And lo, I am with you always,
to the close of the age.*

Matt 28:20

The Close of the Age

Uncertainty

In anticipation of the clock moving forward to January 1, 2000, 12:00 a.m. much has been written about possible Y2K-related failures. Reflective articles on rumoured dire consequences have made people feel uncertain and nervous about the future. Some have taken stock of the situation and are prepared for the worst. Others are feeling somewhat relieved that nothing has happened so far of the turmoil expected prior to the time change.

Unsettled times cause people to look for certainty, for safe havens. In their reflections, some turn to the Lord God, the Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth, the Lord of times and places. But multitudes seek safety in their own plans and devices, with no regard for others. See here our Good News task.

Certainty

When the Lord Jesus spoke the words to his disciples quoted above, He comforted them as He was about to ascend to the heavenly throne. He did not leave them uncertain or insecure or lonely. He gave them a discipling and teaching task and told them He would send his Spirit to dwell in their hearts. Without the will of their heavenly Father, nothing could befall them (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1). And so this comfort also comes to us at the end of this present age, the 1900s. Our God is our Rock of Ages – rock solid, no uncertainty. As long as we observe all that He has commanded us, all things will work together for our salvation. He assures us of this by his Holy Spirit. We can then look forward to the close of the age of all ages when the Lord Jesus will return on the clouds of heaven. Then, for us in perfection: Immanuel – God with us, always!

Our appreciation and thanks

To help equip us for our daily tasks, our editors and contributors work hard to bring God's message to your homes via *Clarion* magazine. Dr. C. Van Dam, chief editor,

and Rev. G. Ph. van Popta, managing editor, have been able to keep the flow going. They have been ably assisted by fellow editors Rev. R. Aasman, Dr. J. De Jong, Prof. J. Geertsema, and Dr. N. H. Gootjes. Thank you all very much for your dedication and efforts in the past year.


Our language editor, Rev. J. Van Popta, notified us that he could no longer devote the time required to review the material and manage the "Meditation" page. His responsibilities to his large congregation and the special needs within his own family made it necessary for him to lay down these voluntary tasks. We thank Rev. van Popta for his efficient and cheerful way of helping with our magazine. May the Lord bless your ministry in Coaldale and may your son Julian receive everything he needs in his struggle with cancer. May his health be restored and your family strengthened. We hope to find a replacement for Rev. van Popta soon to help alleviate the editors' workload.

Another regular contributor has been Mrs. R. Ravensbergen. She now wishes to pass the "Ray of Sunshine" page onto a new team. Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman have been found willing to continue the column of cheer and encouragement. Thank you, Mrs. Ravensbergen, for providing your rays of sunshine to those in need for almost nine years!

Many thanks as well to Rev. J. de Gelder ("Hi-Liter"), Rev. P. Feenstra ("Living by the Doctrines of Scripture"), Rev. J. Van Rietschoten ("Observation Deck"), T. Vanderven ("School Crossing") and Aunt Betty ("Our Little Magazine"). Your work is greatly appreciated.

To all who receive the magazine and support it in one form or another, we say, "Thank you!"

Best wishes

Towards year-end we pay special attention to Christ's birth approximately two millennia ago. He was with us in the flesh, one of us, and He made us alive in Him – his wonderful Name be praised by us – in the year 2000, and forever! God bless us all in this task. 



Once more: Articles and Confessions

During the past year, some discussion took place on the issue whether the Form for Baptism refers to the confessions. Rev. P.K.A. De Boer entered the debate in an article in Reformed Polemics, vol. 5, no. 16 (April 16, 1999). He stated as his position that the confessions are referred to in the expression "taught here in this Christian church," and backed this up with references to further literature. I responded in two ways. In Clarion (vol. 48, no. 17, Aug. 20, 1999) I gave an interpretation of this expression. And before I wrote that article I had written a briefer article for Reformed Polemics, in which I showed that the quotations used in support of the position taken by Rev. De Boer did not refer to the confessions. My article was finalized by the end of May and sent to Reformed Polemics in June. To date, no response was received and my article was not published. In order not to stretch out the discussion beyond this year, it seemed good to publish this brief article now in Clarion.

I would like to briefly react to the responses to my article on the expression "articles of the Christian faith," published in the February 20 issue of *Reformed Polemics*. I hope to deal more at length with the second question of the Form for Baptism and the history behind it in a later article in *Clarion*. Here, I only want to pursue the discussion as it was published in *Reformed Polemics*.

It can be noted gratefully that the discussion has been helpful. It is again

generally acknowledged that the old expression "articles of the Christian faith" used in the Catechism and in the original Form for Baptism, refers to the Apostles' Creed. That is important as a point of departure. Parents were always asked to express agreement with the doctrine summarized in the Apostles' Creed. When the expression "articles of the Christian faith" was changed into "the confessions," it meant a much more comprehensive promise.

Rev. P.K.A. de Boer defends this change on the basis of the words following the expression "articles of the Christian faith." He presents the original question in its entirety: "Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian Church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?" According to him, the sentence "which are taught here in this Christian church" refers to how the Apostles' Creed was upheld by the adopted confessions. In other words, this expression refers to the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. Rev. De Boer adds a statement by Synod 1986: "...as taught here in this Christian Church" means one gives allegiance to all the confessions of the church."

When one takes a closer look at this interpretation, an uneasy feeling comes up. This is a smooth explanation, but is justice done to the original expression? There are two elements

that cause this uneasy feeling. In the first place, why did the Form for Baptism not say this in a more straightforward way? If this was the meaning, why did the Form not simply speak of "the doctrine summarized in the articles of the Christian faith (= the Apostles' Creed) and in the confessions (= Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dort)?" What was the reason for making a separate sentence "... as taught here in this Christian Church?"

The second problem is why the Form for Baptism suddenly speaks about "taught." Rev. De Boer explains this as "which is expanded upon and maintained . . ." But that is not what the Form says. It speaks of the doctrine of Scripture as taught here in this Christian Church. The word "taught" has no function in Rev. De Boer's explanation. The original expression is more complicated than it looks at first glance.

Rev. De Boer supports his explanation that the Form for Baptism means the confessions with a quotation from the explanation of this Form by Dr. B. Wielenga. He changes the expression slightly in his translation, and this change affects the meaning. He says of the Reformed church of London (England) in the 16th Century, that "it was determined that only parents who held to the Reformed Confessions of the church of which they were members could have their children baptized." Wielenga, however, does not use the plural form "Reformed Confessions." Rather, he speaks of the "Reformed

confession" in the singular.¹ This may seem to be merely a minor difference, but it determines the meaning of the word "confession." This meaning becomes clear when Wielenga on the same page speaks of "Roman Catholic or Lutheran confession." The Roman Catholics do not even have confessions in our sense of the word. Wielenga, obviously, is not referring to any specific confessional document, but in general to the doctrinal conviction of the Reformed, the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics. The beginning of the quote from Wielenga proves this beyond dispute: ". . . it has been indisputably proven that with the words *this doctrine* the whole reformed teaching (!, N.H.G.) is meant."

This brings us back to the second problem we raised. Why does this question in the Form for Baptism suddenly speak of the doctrine as "taught" in this Christian church? The word must refer to the preaching and catechetical instruction of the church. The parents who presented their child for baptism had to declare that the preaching and teaching in this church is the true and complete doctrine of salvation. This teaching obviously had to be in agreement with the confessions, the Three Forms of Unity. But the parents declared no more than that they accepted the Reformed teaching and preaching. They had to submit to that, without resisting it. They also had to promise to train their children in it. This has important consequences for the education in the faith. It also led to a struggle concerning the expression "which is taught in *this* Christian church." I cannot deal with that in this brief response, I hope to discuss it in the forthcoming *Clarion* article.

We may conclude that the Reformed confessions were not directly mentioned in the second question of the Form for baptism. The confessions function in the background. They determine the preaching and the teaching in the Reformed churches. The parents, however, had to state that the doctrine

- contained in Scripture
- and in the Apostles' Creed
- and taught in this Christian church

is the true and complete doctrine of salvation. To ask more would certainly have been overburdening parents of the 16th Century.



¹ B. Wielenga, *Ons doopsformulier* (2. ed.; Kampen: Kok, 1920) p. 255. The same translation mistake occurs in the quote from Dr. H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerd kerkrecht* (Kampen: Kok, 1934) vol. 2, p. 302.

A HYMN ON THE NATIVITY OF MY SAVIOUR

*I sing the birth was born tonight,
The Author both of life and light;
The angels so did sound it.
And like the ravished shepherds said,
Who saw the light and were afraid,
Yet searched, and true they found it.*

*The Son of God, the eternal King,
That did us all salvation bring,
And freed the soul from danger;
He whom the whole world could not take,
The Word which heaven and earth did make,
Was now laid in a manger.*

*The Father's wisdom willed it so,
The Son's obedience knew no No,
Both wills were in one stature:
And as that wisdom had decreed,
The Word was now made flesh indeed,
And took on him our nature.*

*What comfort by him do we win,
Who made himself the price of sin,
To make us heirs of glory!
To see this babe all innocence,
A martyr born in our defence:
Can man forget this story?*

Ben Jonson





Christ's Royal Incarnation

When confessing the doctrine of the conception and birth of our Lord Jesus Christ we have to say with the apostle Paul, "Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh . . ." (1 Tim 3:16). We cannot comprehend with our human minds how it is possible that Christ remains who He was (God) and becomes what He was not (man). Nevertheless, the church upheld this doctrine in her creeds and confessions throughout the centuries. For although the incarnation is incomprehensible it is essential for salvation.

Christ's incarnation and our creeds

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, "who" as the Nicene Creed puts it, "for us men and our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man." Article 29 of the Athanasian Creed says it even stronger, "It is necessary, however, to everlasting salvation that he should also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ."

According to both the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism it is essential that we recognize that Jesus in his conception and birth was in the line of royalty as the true seed of David. Article 18 of the Belgic Confession states, "He is the fruit of the loins of David (Acts 2:30); born of the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom 1:3); a fruit of the womb of the virgin Mary (Luke 1:42); born of woman (Gal 4:4); a

branch of David (Jer 33:5); a shoot from the stump of Jesse (Isa 11:1)..." Lord's Day 14 speaks of Christ being born into the world as the "true seed of David."

The Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism confirm what is recorded in Scripture regarding Christ's royal incarnation. In this regard we take note of the following:

- The faithful in Israel lived in the expectation of the coming of the Messiah as the one who would be born as the true seed of David. They knew how the prophets had predicted his royal birth: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given . . . Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore" (Isa 9:6,7).
- Zechariah praised God for keeping his promise to David: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David . . ." (Luke 1:68-69).
- The angel Gabriel informed Mary of the royal incarnation when he said, "He shall be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of his father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom

there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32,33).

- The Lord prepared the birth of Christ so that it would take place in the city of David: "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David. . ." (Luke 2:4).
- The angel who announced the Saviour's birth to the shepherds in the fields of Ephratha said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

Joseph abdicates the throne of David

Through Joseph, Jesus has the legal right to claim the throne of David. The angel, who appeared to Joseph in a dream, addressed him as "Joseph, son of David" (Matt 1:20). He is the legitimate heir to David's throne. Joseph, however, abdicates the throne of David to his son. As the last one in the royal line of David, he steps aside because the true son of David has come, the crown prince.

The pages of history give us several examples of kings who abdicated the throne to a son or daughter. In such a ceremony the abdicating ruler and his



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successor would stand side by side on the balcony of the palace. The farewell address was read and the new ruler was presented to the people. The abdicator steps forward and he shouts, "Long live the King. May the King live forever!" He then steps back and disappears from the scene. Once Joseph has fulfilled his task in announcing the name of Jesus he leaves the scene. For the spotlight will be on Jesus Christ who, as the true seed of David, will redeem his people from their sins.

Jesus Christ is born of royal lineage. He is the true seed of David. What separates him from all David's sons, is that He is born without sin. His rule will not be over one physical nation but his dominion will be from sea to sea (Ps 72:8).

Born in the city of David's birth

The fact that Jesus is born as the true seed of David highlights two things: God is acting in faithfulness to the promises made to David concerning the coming of the Messiah, and, secondly, He is making a whole new beginning with mankind. This is why the Lord God causes his Son to be born in Bethlehem.

The Lord will make a new start in the same city where David was born and anointed to be king over Israel. The great Son of David is born in Bethlehem, but

as soon as He begins his earthly ministry He has his face turned toward Jerusalem since in the royal city He will raise the horn of salvation and He will bring peace. Jesus will bring restoration not to the lineage of David but to the people of David through his sacrifice.


The royal incarnation was only the beginning of what Jesus would do as the true seed of David. With royal power and dignity He will save his people from their sins and heal the rift that exists between the Lord and his people. The title on his cross highlights how He as the true seed of David has the power to save his people from their sins. Pilate unwittingly acknowledges this when he wrote the title, "Jesus of Nazareth the king of the Jews" (John 19:19). On the cross Christ defeats the powers of hell and on the third day rises as our victorious King. As the true seed of David He is given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt 28:19).

The results of the royal incarnation

As the true seed of David, Jesus fulfils what He started in his incarnation. He reigns as our King having been crowned with honour and glory at the right hand of his heavenly Father. The

main item on his program today is to claim citizens for his kingdom. Jesus Christ our Lord, transfers us from the kingdom of darkness and allows us to bathe in the light of his eternal kingdom. Unless Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit He could not make the new beginning as our King. Unless we are born anew we cannot enter the kingdom of Christ.

We believe in Jesus Christ conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary and in the line of royalty. Since He was born in the line of royalty we know that we are on our way to the day when the King will say to all those who are his, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt 25:34). The king born in Bethlehem is presently preparing a place for his people in the New Jerusalem.

This is the significance of the doctrine of Christ's royal incarnation for today. To worship him as our King we don't have to go to Bethlehem. He is to be worshipped where his kingdom is being established and the increase of his government is manifest – in the church. Come let us adore our King in the local gathering of his subjects and so await the glorious day of his return. 



The Singing of Psalms and Hymns

Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs

In the previous article it was demonstrated that a strict application of the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW) is untenable. The teaching that the church may worship only in a way that is clearly prescribed in Scripture runs into a problem when one sees that Scripture does not give a detailed description of the worship service. Certain principles are laid out. For instance, the centrality of God's Word in worship is inviolable. But as Calvin himself made clear, there is to be toleration for some different practices in the liturgy. This raises the question: is the singing of hymns one of those things which should be tolerated even though there appears to be no basis for it in Scripture? This is not the case, as we are about to see.

Let us quote here two passages from the New Testament: "Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:18-20). "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16). The proponents of the RPW say that "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" all refer to Psalms – the 150

Psalms. In order to prove this, they refer to the headings of the Book of Psalms as they are found in the Septuagint or Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. There is some ground for this line of reasoning, although there are capable critics who point out that this is quite a stretch of logic to say that "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" all refer to Psalms. It is also possible to deduce from these texts in Ephesians and Colossians that Paul is speaking about songs in addition to the Psalms. For those who hold to the RPW to insist that there is no biblical warrant for the singing of hymns, it rests upon them to prove without doubt that Paul is only referring to the Psalms in these two passages. Otherwise, they may find themselves in conflict with their own principle.

There are fine exegetes and biblical scholars who say that Paul is referring to more than the 150 Psalms in the two passages mentioned above. Take for example a recent commentary on Ephesians by Dr. L. Floor (found in the series of the *Commentaar Op Het Nieuwe Testament*) in which he comes to the conclusion that one cannot restrict these three words only to the 150 Psalms. He also refers to Colossians 3:16. Paul is exhorting the readers to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly also when singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Of course the Psalms speak of Christ. However in his letter to the Ephesians and Colossians, Paul expands on the tremendous riches and blessings of

what God has given us in his Son Jesus Christ. What he writes is the inspired or God-breathed Word of God about Jesus Christ. That must be reflected in the hymns and spiritual songs to be sung by the New Testament church. The word and the work of Jesus Christ as it has been fulfilled needs to be expressed in the singing of Christ's bride. Hence, Paul is referring in these passages not just to the Old Testament Psalms but also to hymns based on the inspired Word of God about Christ's work.

I understand that the final word has not been written on the expression, "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." Nevertheless, it should be clear that those who hold to the RPW and deny that Paul is speaking of hymns other than the 150 Psalms cannot prove their claim. There is strong and good reason to interpret these passages as an exhortation to sing both the Psalms and scriptural hymns.

Sing a new song

Any doubts about whether the church may sing hymns should be dispelled by our consideration of a well known Biblical expression, "sing a new song." This is found a number of times in the Book of Psalms. It comes up in times of trouble and anguish. The ability to sing a new song means that the Lord has brought deliverance so that the Psalmist can change his song of cry and lament to a new song of praise and joy which speaks about God's deliverance.

Take as an example Psalm 144. In verses 5-8 David cries out for the Lord to deliver him from the enemy. Then he says in verses 9 and 10: "I will sing a new song to you, O God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you, to the One who gives victory to kings, who delivers his servant David from the deadly sword." Strikingly, the Book of Revelation uses the expression "new song" in the same way as the Book of Psalms. We see in Revelation 5 that there is weeping because no one was found worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. The weeping stops and the tune changes when the Lamb comes forward: he is victorious and he is worthy to open the scroll. This is an occasion for a new song as we read in verses 9-14:

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

It is clear that as redemptive history unfolds and the grace of God in Jesus Christ is manifested in richer detail, there is occasion and even a need to



Hymns which are firmly based on Scripture and are to God's glory will be a blessing to the church.

sing a new song which reflects praise and glory for God. When Israel was liberated from Egypt and was led through the Red Sea, then there was occasion to sing a new song. This is the song of Moses in Exodus 15. Israel sang this song with him. It was a new song to reflect the new and glorious things that God has done. We see the same thing happening in Deuteronomy 32 in connection with the conquest of Canaan. Moses sings a new song. Israel was instructed to learn it and, we may assume, sing it. God does new things in his unfolding of redemption and they are then put into a new song. The 150 Psalms themselves are wonderful examples of new songs which speak of the works of God and his peoples' praise for Him.

The question is this: may we say that only the 150 Psalms are to be sung? What about the songs of Moses? What about the new songs that are to be sung about the coming, death, resurrection,

ascension, government and return of Jesus Christ? What about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Seeing that new songs have been composed at different stages in the history of redemption and speak of the wonder of God's grace in Jesus Christ, it becomes difficult if not impossible to come to the conclusion that the church is forbidden to sing anything but the 150 Psalms. We have every reason to see that the church is encouraged and instructed to sing both the Psalms and scriptural hymns.

Conclusion

In the Canadian Reformed Churches, we have the practice of singing both Psalms and hymns. We abide by our Church Order, article 55: "In the worship services the Psalms will be sung in the rhyming adopted by general synod and the Hymns approved by general synod." We may have deep appreciation for those who advocate the singing of the Psalms. How important it is that we do not go in the direction of churches who have abandoned the Psalms and are experimenting with embellished liturgies. History has shown that in times of liberalism, churches adopt hymns which are filled with Arminian teachings and empty sentimentalism. These are exactly the excesses and dangerous developments which Calvin, the Puritans, Hendrik De Cock and others fought against. At the same time this does not deny the legitimacy of singing biblical hymns in our worship of God. Hymns which are firmly based on Scripture and are to God's glory will be a blessing to the church. Through the singing of Psalms and hymns, based on the Old Testament and the New Testament, the singing of the church will speak of the work of God in Jesus Christ from both the aspect of expectation and fulfillment. As in the preaching, the fullness of God's work in Jesus Christ will be reflected in the singing. This is what Scripture demands of us: all praise and glory to God. 





Authority

Style and Limits of Authority

Two issues back we considered the source of authority. God is the source. He is the ultimate and final authority. He reveals to us his will through the Word, the Scriptures. Last time we addressed the topic of the agents of authority. As we go about our business in life, God comes to us mainly through three agents: our parents, the church, and the state.

We ended the last article with a few questions: The questions were: How ought those whom God gives authority in this world – parents, the church, the civil government – to exercise that authority? What ought to characterize their authority? I said that those questions can be answered by one word: “Service.” All authority ought to be qualified by service – servant-leadership.

Style of authority

All whom God calls to exercise authority in this life – be it in the family, in the church, or in the state – must do so as servants. In this they must follow the Lord Jesus Christ. God gave Jesus Christ all authority in heaven and on earth. Today He is seated at the right hand of God the Father as King of the universe. However, Christ exercised authority already while He was on earth – authority to forgive sins, to drive out demons, to teach, to judge, and to give eternal life. What was the main distinguishing mark of the way in which Christ exercised authority? Service.

In Mark 10 beginning at verse 35, the Evangelist Mark related how the disciples of the Lord Jesus were arguing about who was going to get the choice spots in the kingdom of heaven. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, started it. They said to Jesus: “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.” The Lord told them that was an inappropriate demand of them to make of Him.

When the other disciples heard about James’ and John’s request, they became very angry. It turned into quite a hullabaloo. So the Lord Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The Son of Man (i.e., the Lord, the Christ) – the One to whom God the Father gave all authority in heaven and on earth – came to serve. To give his life as a ransom.

If we turn to John 13, we see this servant leadership of Christ at work. Jesus and the disciples were about to sit down to eat. It was customary to have one’s feet washed before eating. This was a very important social convention in Palestine at that time. People

walked barefoot in sandals, and so their feet would get dusty. Because people reclined on the floor when they ate, resting perhaps on a pillow, around a low table, it was very important to have the dust washed off the feet.

The lowliest servant in the house would typically do this. There were Jesus and his disciples, ready to eat. Apparently, there was no servant boy to wash their feet. Who would do it? All the disciples were very self-conscious. To get up and wash the feet of their peers would mean that they were less than the others. No one got up. No one wanted to look like he was less than the others.

Suddenly, the Master Jesus got up. He took off his outer cloak, wrapped a towel around his waist, poured water into a basin, and went around to each of his disciples, washing their feet and drying them with the towel. This was shocking. No other rabbi in Israel would have done such a thing. No other teacher would have stooped so low as to wash the feet of his students, his followers, his disciples. But Jesus did.

When he had finished washing their feet, He put on his clothes and returned to his place. He asked the disciples whether they understood what He had done for them. He said: “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.” Then He made a penetrating application: “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet.

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

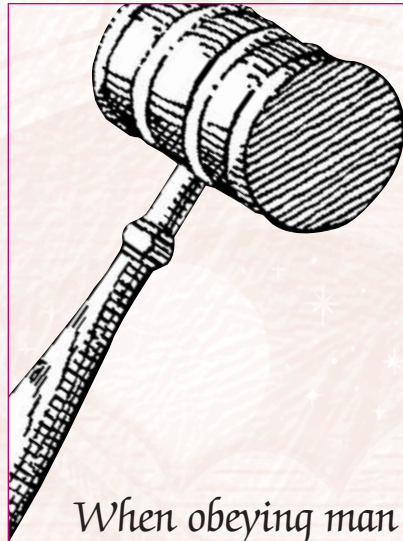
The Lord gave us an example. The example is especially for those who occupy positions of authority. Those who have been placed by God in positions of authority must exercise that authority by serving. Their authority is to be qualified by service. The quality of service is what is to give their authority its texture and colour. Anyone – parents, church leaders, government officials – who do not qualify their authority by service (who do not provide *servant leadership*) become ugly monstrosities.

The account in John 13 challenges all who are in positions of authority – in the home, in the church, in the state – to be *servant* leaders. We need to exercise legitimate authority like Jesus Christ did, by becoming a servant to those God has placed under us.

Limits of authority

Not only does authority have its appropriate style. There are also limits to authority. All human authority is limited. No human being has absolute authority. Only God does.

There is a wonderful story in the book of Acts that demonstrates the limited authority of man and the absolute authority of God. In Acts 4 we can read about how the Apostles Peter and John were arrested by the Jewish Council for preaching the good news of salvation by the cross of Jesus Christ. Peter and John were arrested. The council commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the



When obeying man would make you disobey God, you need to disobey man to obey God.

name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

What Peter and John said was significant. They were intent upon disobeying the authorities because they had to obey God. The Lord Jesus Christ had told them to preach the gospel. When the Jewish Council abused their

authority – took unto themselves *absolute* authority – John and Peter said: “We will disobey you because we must obey God.”

We need to be very careful here. The only time that we may disobey someone in authority over us – parents, church or state – is when they tell us to do something against the will of God. Only when obeying them will put you in conflict with the will of God, the only absolute authority, may you disobey the person in authority over you. Of course that includes if someone is perpetrating a crime against you. Some kind of abuse – sexual or physical abuse. Then too you disobey, if you can.

To that we can add the thought that if you *may* disobey, you *must* disobey. For the only time that you may disobey is when obeying the human authority will put you in conflict with the divine authority. In such an instance your highest calling is to obey God.

We were looking at Acts 4. If we go to Acts 5, we see that what we have seen so far is confirmed.

Once Peter and John were released, they promptly went out and continued preaching and teaching in the Name of Jesus. In short order they were arrested again and thrown into jail. During the night, an angel of God came, opened the doors of the jail, and sent them out with the command of God to tell the people the full message of this new life.

When the Jewish Council sent the police to get Peter and John out of the prison for them to be interrogated, the police found the jail cell empty. The report came in that Peter and John were preaching in the temple courts.

In short order, they were arrested again and brought before the council. Once again the council told them not to speak and teach in the Name of Jesus. But then Peter spoke the decisive word: “We must obey God rather than men.”

That is the bottom line. When obeying man would make you disobey God, you need to disobey man to obey God. All human authority is limited. Only God’s authority is unlimited and absolute. God is sovereign. Jesus Christ, alone, is King of kings and Lord of Lords. His is the kingdom, the power, the glory forever. His and his alone.

This series of articles will be concluded in the next issue in which the topics of the abuse of authority and the rejection of authority will be dealt with.





Celebrating Christmas

In last year's December edition of the paper *New Horizons* published by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Rev. G.I. Williamson, a retired minister in the OPC, was invited to set forth his views regarding the celebration of Christmas as a special day of worship. His article produced a long train of reactions from OPC members, most of whom found his position too rigorous. It all raises the question concerning the "ecclesiastical" status of this day and what we are doing with it. Here follows Rev. Williamson's positions:

I want to thank the Committee on Christian Education for remaining faithful to the Orthodox Presbyterian tradition of respecting minority views that are firmly rooted in Presbyterian and Reformed history. I therefore gladly avail myself of the privilege to express myself on the subject of Christmas.

It is seldom understood today that there was a time when such days as Christmas were generally regarded as lacking any warrant from Scripture. But listen to the careful statement of Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma in *The Church Order Commentary* (Zondervan, 1941). Under the heading of "The Original Position of the Reformed Churches regarding Special Days," they say this on page 273: "During the early days of the Reformation some Reformed localities observed only Sunday. All special days sanctioned and revered by Rome were set aside. Zwingli and Calvin both encouraged the rejection of all ecclesiasti-

cal festive days. In Geneva all special days were discontinued as soon as the Reformation took a firm hold in that city. Already before the arrival of Calvin in Geneva this had been accomplished under the leadership of Farel and Viret. But Calvin agreed heartily. And Knox, the Reformer of Scotland, shared these same convictions, he being a disciple of Calvin in Geneva. Consequently the Scottish Churches also banned the Roman sacred days."

Christ on Christmas

It is my conviction that this view alone is fully consistent with Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. I say this for the following reasons:

1. When Jesus sent his apostles forth, he commanded them to teach converts to observe all things that he had commanded, (Matt 28:20). He did not authorize them to add to-or to take from what he had commanded. And I believe that they faithfully did what Jesus told them to do.
2. It is quite evident from the apostolic writings that there was no such day as Christmas in the apostolic Churches. They did not have it for the simple reason that this was not one of the things that Jesus had commanded.
3. The question therefore, comes down to this: were the teachings and practices of the apostles sufficient to establish the practices that Christ himself authorized for his churches? The modern church quite

obviously says no. But men such as Zwingli, Knox, and Calvin said yes. I believe these men were right.

The detriments of Christmas

It is also my conviction that the widespread return of the Reformed churches to what is, after all, a Romish invention and tradition, is not in any way truly beneficial to the church. People think it is. But that does not make it so. And here I only want to mention one important consideration. Sunday school material – even such as is produced by our own Great Commission Publications – suffers under the dominion of what is commonly called "the church calendar". This means that every year, in the cycle of materials, an inordinate amount of time is spent repeating the story of Christ's birth. I hope no reader thinks for one moment that I discount the importance of the virgin birth of Christ. No, not at all. I certainly want the scriptural accounts in Matthew and Luke to receive due emphasis. But it is not due emphasis when a small portion of the history of salvation is magnified all out of proportion to the emphasis it receives in the Bible itself. Yet that is what has happened.

It is my hope, though I probably not live to see it, that the Lord will send a new and even greater Reformation than the one He sent in the sixteenth century. When that happens, I believe, the Church will again be emancipated from what is after all, nothing more than a man-made tradition.

Private Celebrations

And now let me add one important caveat. I do not think that the strictest Reformer ever questioned the right of an individual to celebrate the birth of Christ at a time – and in a godly manner – of his own choosing. I certainly do not question this right. If you want to exchange gifts, or read Luke 2, or sing “Silent Night” on December 25, then I have no quarrel with you at all. What I ask in return is that you will not quarrel with me when I stand with the Great Reformers mentioned above. What I question is not your personal right of Christian liberty, but the right of the church in its corporate capacity – whether on a denominational or congregational level – to designate an annual date to commemorate the birth of Christ.

Since no one knows the day of the year on which Christ was born, and God has deliberately not told us the day, no one has the right to invent a date to substitute for what God has not given. The popes of Rome of course, have claimed this authority – that’s how it came about that December 25 was set aside. But as for me and my house, we cannot in good conscience submit to such man made impositions.

A balanced position?

There are some important elements of warning given to us in the position of Rev. Williamson. We certainly should not succumb to the trend of our modern day to make Christmas a day of special celebration which exceeds in value and meaning the regular services of the Sunday preaching. Sometimes people put more into Christmas services than they do any other service. The Sunday services are considered to be just “ordinary” services; Christmas falls in the category of the “extraordinary”. Rev. Williamson rightly points out that this assuredly was not the stand of the Reformers, and we agree that this is a custom or tradition we should not follow.

On the other hand, I could sympathize with many of those who reacted to Rev. Williamson, because on several points his position is too rigid, in my view. For him Christmas is a “man-made” institution, and essentially a “Romish invention and tradition.” But these are bold assertions lacking the weight of sound argument or proof. And that is where we need to part company with Rev. Williamson’s position.

It is true that we have no apostolic command to celebrate Christmas, let alone having a day actually named on our calendars. These institutions (Christ-

mas, Good Friday, etc.) arose in the history of the church in the early centuries. However, we do have an indication that feast days were still considered important for the apostles in the New Testament dispensation. In Acts 20 Paul relates that he was hastening to be in Jerusalem before Pentecost. Why? As a concession to the Jews, or as an attempt to reach out to as many of them as possible during the festive season? Was the celebration of this day strictly related to Paul’s continued mission to the Jews? I do not think so. For at this point the break with the synagogue had already taken place, and Paul had already been told that nothing but trials and persecutions awaited him from the side of the Jews. Therefore, this festive celebration was important also and especially for the *Christian church*. It was the Christian church that was going to retain the celebration of the culmination of all of the great events surrounding the early life and work of the Saviour.

What then did the church do in its early history? Taking its cue from this apostolic sentiment it extrapolated backwards, shaping an annual recollection of all the major events in the earthly life of our Lord which pertain to our salvation: his birth, the cross, the resurrection and ascension. One may say that here we have no direct apostolic command. But the apostolic *hint* and *intimation* is certainly present! And is that not a part of the freedom of worship in the new dispensation, the dispensation of the Spirit (See 1 Cor 3:20)? Does not the church of the New Testament, sharing the maturity of the outpoured Spirit, receive in itself the strength and ability (in the power of God’s grace!) to *fill out* and *follow through* on the basis that the apostles have laid?


Therefore I hesitate to refer to December 25 as simply a “man-made” institution. To be sure, we have no evidence for it being any special religious holiday. According to most authorities the day derives from the celebration of an ancient pagan sun festival. Some associate it with the Roman feast of saturnalia. But at some time in the fourth century we find Christians celebrating Christ’s birth on this day. How it happened we do not know. Yet the result is clear: in this way Christ’s birth has been aligned with the arrival of the winter solstice. In other words, through the tradition of the Church responding in faith to the Word of God, the birth of Christ has been connected with that time of the year in which the sun’s presence slowly returns, and the power of its rays steadily increases.

How may we then see Christmas day? I do not think it is too far fetched to assert that the early church saw as its

duty – in line with the apostolic intimation! – to *transform* long standing pagan rituals – where possible – into Christian feasts. This is a case of a healing, reforming and renewing accommodation to the cultural milieu of the day. Such is the reformatory power of the gospel that pagan holidays are not simply abandoned, but – where it is fitting – transformed into living testimonies of the surpassing *victory* of Christ.

If anything was confessed in the early church it was this truth: behind and transcending the power of sun and moon, surpassing the recreative power of creation we see Him who is the Lord of creation. He was called *Sol Invictus!*, the victor over sin and death. We have something to celebrate! We have a *victory* to celebrate – even at the moment of Christ’s birth!

To be sure, we need to uphold the style of the Reformers, and heed the warning against shallow and secularized excess. The best celebration of Christ’s birth is: an ordinary worship service with a text recalling the events and prophecies around the birth, and drawing out their implications for the believers today. Let not the preaching of the Word be replaced with fanfare and fluff! And let the songs of *redemption* fill the air – not empty tunes about a “beautiful baby in the manger” that never cried. Then we stand in the line of the early church, and show that still today, the Reformed church seeks to be nothing else than the continuation of the *one Christian church*, founded on the testimony of the apostles.

From all this one may conclude that I have no trouble with the formulation that has now been adopted on this matter by our churches in their revised Church Order, Article 53. It now reads: “Each year the churches shall in the manner decided upon by the consistory, commemorate the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”¹ Here *days* are not important, but the *events* themselves! And that is what Christmas is all about! And if long standing ecclesiastical tradition, moulded by the testimony of the apostles, gives us a day to reflect and build each other up regarding the event, why not make use of it? So we can wish the churches a joyful and worship-full Christmas day and season, in which they are edified and strengthened in the one message of our salvation: the mystery of the Word made flesh. 

¹Only, let us take for granted that our consistories are wise enough not to overturn 1600 years of tradition just to devise a “church year” all of their own!



Year-End Review 1999

Reflections in general

At the end of a year we reflect on the time gone by. We review our personal life, considering some of the major events which took place in it: a birth, an engagement, a wedding, a death, a graduation, an anniversary, a move, a job loss, a promotion, are some of those highlights which readily come to mind. Similar reflections are common for a year in our family-life, in the life of our congregation, our federation, and also in the political situation of our country, or of the world. The latter will have our attention even more, since we are entering upon the year 2000 this January 1st. With the Preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes, it is only by faith that we can come to the conclusion in this pursuit, that God "has made everything beautiful in its time." This same Preacher also reveals the cause behind this pursuit of reflection and review: "He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." We have to contemplate and consider the sense of life, meditate on the purposes of life, and reflect on the events, the blessings, the trials in it.

As we set out in this review to observe some of the special events of the year 1999, we should begin to highlight the blessings of the common things. When we acknowledge the faithfulness of our God, whose mercies are new every morning, we should be filled with deep gratitude. Often it takes

a set-back, a sudden illness, or a disaster, for us to realize how good and gracious our God has been during times of stability, of health, and daily work. Yet, during those stable times and regular daily mercies we tend to take them for granted. In congregational life also, we have become so accustomed to the weekly worship-services, the preaching and teaching, the society meetings, the school activities, the work of the office-bearers, to mention only a few, that we tend to neglect to praise the preservation, the constant care and blessings, of our Saviour Jesus Christ, the Head of his church.

Among the "common" blessings in our federation of churches thankfully belongs the weekly proclamation of the gospel. Yet, when a vacancy arises or when difficulties develop (as we have seen during the past years in congregations like Rockway, Aldergrove, and Grand Rapids for instance), we realize how rich we are when the preaching may go on unhindered and the congregation may be built up in the faith progressively. The same would be the case if we would lose the freedom we now enjoy to see the office bearers make their home visits. It was an excellent occasion, therefore, when the Office Bearers' Conference in Ontario considered "the Glorious Work of Home Visits." For the members of the congregation as well, it is a glorious gift from Christ when they see their elders and deacons go through the congregation, trying to

become more and more acquainted with their members.

During this past year the local councils busied themselves with many activities. Among them was the scrutinizing of the *Acts of Fergus 1998*. Also in the publications among the federation the considerations, recommendations, and decisions of Synod Fergus received ample attention. Perhaps the exercise was not always appreciated by everyone; nevertheless, "when iron sharpens iron" we are all served with a review which serves the upbuilding of the churches. As churches we have made progress together. Also through the implementation of the decisions and the execution of the mandates, much work could be done by the members of the various committees for contact with churches at home and abroad, for the promotion of ecclesiastical unity, and for the governance of our Theological College. However, the labour of the delegates to the various classes and regional synods should receive mention for once as well. That work, too, must be done beside and over and above a heavy workload carried by the office bearers already. Yet, when it serves the building up of the churches it is worth the sacrifices that are made in this way. During this past year the number of classes increased, thanks to the split in Classis Ontario North. Thus, the churches in the federation continue to share in the many blessings which the manifestation and realization of the unity and the catholicity of the church

receive through Christ's work with his Spirit and Word.

The churches have been blessed richly by a flourishing practice of the communion of saints. In this respect too, the regular practice of mutual discipline, of care, and of edification through joint study activities, continues to bear fruits collectively and for the individual members. We could be so accustomed to this, however, that it takes the feedback and comments heard from ministers and members from the United Reformed Churches, to move us to a renewed thankfulness for the publications of study aids by ILPB and others. They provide solid and reformed material to aid us in our society studies. In regard to a discussion in *Horizon* concerning an *inductive* method of Bible study (going from the facts in the text to the message for the readers, and using different study-guides for that), it will serve our brothers and sisters well to do their preparatory studies for such an approach by means of the study aids that are published by the ILPB (i.e. which follow the *deductive* method of using essays to aid the understanding of the passage). Thanks to a regular reporting in *Clarion* we are kept up-to-date as to their activities and publications.

Among the federation in general and in the individual congregations we may enjoy continued attention for our brothers and sisters who are living with special challenges. The Anchor Association provides a group home in Beamsville, which is supported by individual members and deaconries alike. Their yearly summer camp still is an outstanding event in the lives of our handicapped brothers and sisters, as is the annual concert performance by their band. The Board, the Director, and their counsellors keep the churches informed by means of their bulletin, introducing their residents through *Clarion* as well. *Clarion* also supports and strengthens these brothers and sisters, and others who are suffering in one way or another (and their caregivers), by the regular publication of the column of our sister R. Ravensbergen "Ray of Sunshine." Through an interview with brother John Siebenga, we could take note of similar activities and support through the work of the *Eirana* Support Services operating in the Western part of our federation. In order to aid the office bearers in their care for members with special difficulties, the churches supporting the Office Bearers' Conferences in Ontario employ a Counselling Services Networking Committee, which has published a Handbook to fa-

HYMN 14: 1,2,4

*Blest be the God of Israel,
The Lord who visited His own;
Who by His gracious providence
Redemption unto us made known.
Within His servant David's tent
Has He to us, His people, sent
The horn of His salvation'
E'en as He spoke by holy men of old,
Who unto Israel foretold
How He to them His mercy
would unfold.*

*He promised that He us would save
From all who for our ruin wait,
And from the hands of them
that rave*

*Against us with a warring bate;
To show the mercy once foretold
Unto our fathers, and uphold
His holy cov'nant with us;
That He would still remember in
His care*

*The oath which He to Abram sware,
To benefit his seed from heir to heir.*

*Yea, thou shalt make salvation
known,*

*That we may be revived again,
Receiving favour as His own,
In free remission of our sin,
Through God's compassion
and His love*

*Whereby the dayspring from above
Has visited His people;*

*To lighten them that in the
darkness hide,*

*And in the shades of death abide;
Our feet into the way of peace
to guide.*



Facilitate such care. Through a Canadian branch of *Bralectah* (located in Abbotsford), a very valuable service is rendered by providing copies of *Clarion* on tape for the reading impaired. The society for the Assistance to the Special Child as well, seeks to raise the profile, needs, and help for the individual care of the special Royal Children among us. Yes, even by the publication of the beautiful speech of Marten Jansen, one of these younger members who is suffering from Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, in *Reformed Perspective*, we are all helped to empathize with our special brothers and sisters and encourage and support them.

Although the "seniors" among the churches do not always want to be singled out and placed in a special category, their service and contributions rendered in the past certainly earned a special recognition in the present. Here too, we may be used to their place among the membership so much that this special attention could easily be neglected. Yet, they should feel that they are precious among the communion of saints. The younger members in the congregation of Edmonton Providence acknowledged this special position, and set up "Reaching Out." Through this organization they want to help and visit our elderly members and others with special needs. Also the Society for the Care of the Aged in Ontario is in operation in order to extend care and nursing to our elderly. They operate two seniors' homes, *Ebenezer Villa* and *Mt. Nemo*, to facilitate this care. The Rev. Nederveen has been actively pursuing special attention for their position and needs among the churches. Not only is he producing a special study paper (or doctoral thesis) for this purpose, he also addressed the ministers in a workshop on the topic. His focus has been especially on the aging process as such and on the way the elderly members may continue to function among the communion of saints. Well, also in *Manoah Manor* in Langley or in *Carman's Home* for the Aged, these are concerns that are actively promoted. Besides, also in congregations which do not have their "own home" for the elderly, similar activities are a blessing for the elderly and younger members alike.

Before we turn to more particular specifics and events concerning our local congregations, we should mention yet the manifold blessings enjoyed through the Reformed schools that are operated among the churches. Christian

education is not a luxury (even though the support of it may demand a lot of money from its members and donors); it's a need. Hence we should treasure the elementary schools and the schools for secondary education. By means of these institutions our covenant youth receives a Reformed education in tandem with the upbringing at home and in the church. In an ever-changing society they need specialized training to enable them to deal in faith and obedience to our covenant LORD with many rapid changes. Adequate training through Reformed education and preparation for stewardship in the Kingdom of God in the midst of this world is required more than ever. Thankfully, therefore, we may observe a good cooperation among the many teachers working in these schools too. Their cooperation goes so far even, that they could organize an International Principals' Conference (including some of our Australian teachers.) this past year. Also through the renewed operation of our Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College, with a class of students enrolled in the 1 year-course, our schools may be served in the future with teachers who are well-equipped for Reformed Christian education. In order to advance the latter, the Teachers College is in the process of developing a post-graduate course leading to a formal certificate of Advanced Studies in Reformed Education. Through e-mail and Internet access their correspondence courses also facilitate continued training for teachers around the globe.

Congregational life

First and foremost in our reflections should again be the regular features and events in our congregational life. The weekly proclamation of the gospel and the explanation of the "Book of Comfort" focus our attention at our life in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our only comfort both in life and death continues to have a bearing on the ongoing births, deaths, baptisms, Lord's Supper celebrations, public professions of faith, etc. The continued internal growth of the members, the strengthening of their faith by the means of grace, and their training in the armor of God for the spiritual warfare of our days, produce fruits and blessings which glorify our God and Saviour and assure us of his presence by Word and Holy Spirit. This work is so peculiar, so particular, that it should stand out in the lives of the members of the congregation individually and collectively.



Houston Canadian Reformed Church, Houston, BC

In this context we may observe as well that a congregation shows its vibrancy by dealing with matters related to its congregational life in a communal fashion. Thankfully, we may note indeed that issues such as the choice of a Bible Translation, the manner of celebrating the Lord's Supper with individual cups or not, the adherence to our agreement to seek the administration of baptism as soon as feasible or the desire of some to take the whole family to the baptismal font to witness the administration, or the study of the liturgy and the addition of hymns to our Book of Praise, are openly discussed among our congregations. Sometimes concerns are raised about tensions which exist between the office bearers' inclination toward lording it over the congregation and views among the congregation which show a democratic understanding of the operation of a congregation. It is by way of open discussions in congregational meetings, however, that such tensions may be removed. Also in regard to the attendance at meetings in which a proposal for the calling of a minister is presented, it should be stressed how important a collective involvement is for the well-being of the congregation.

Among the events which stand out as highlights for certain congregations is the move into a new church building. The Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Kerwood (formerly Watford) saw such a long-standing desire fulfilled. The church of Guelph, on the other hand,

has been forced to consider the option of a new church building, since they have grown out of their present facility. In our "friendly Manitoba" the continued growth has led to the institution of a fourth congregation. Carman now has a Carman West (the new congregation) and Carman East congregation. Discussions and plans are ongoing to come to a second church building. Carman as well as Winnipeg are making good progress in that regard. From the blessing of a new and adequate church building to the use of a "new" organ is not such a big step. The congregation of Toronto expressed its appreciation and thankfulness for 15 years of organ-building in an evening of praise at the occasion of the completion of their organ. The congregation of Orangeville enjoyed a similar event. Not only are organs a precious possession for the accompaniment of the congregational worship; organists to play them have become precious as well, due to a shortage. Hence an organ workshop for children was organized in the Burlington *Ebenezer* building to stimulate and motivate the youth to take up organ lessons.

As I indicated already, among our congregations there always are matters and issues which occupy the hearts and minds of the members, and which need careful consideration and discussion among the congregation. One of those was the matter of a Bible Translation. Most churches among the federation

have followed the recommendation of the Synods of Abbotsford and Fergus, and adopted the NIV translation. Some, however, are considering the use of the NASB or the NKJV, or have decided to use one of those. Yes, matters old and new come up. The old matter of the unions and the question of union membership still comes up too once in a while. The church of Chatham successfully opposed mandatory union-membership. In the congregation of Langley there is a new phenomenon among our churches, namely the appointment of a part-time pastoral assistant to help with the work of visitation in the congregation. Langley also shows a renewed interest in political and legal matters. Although there are voices for the awakening of the dormant Associations for Reformed Political Action [ARPA], Langley is in the process of developing a Public Affairs Committee. In the church of Toronto the Home Mission Committee has taken on the task of informing the congregation concerning political and legal issues. Also through participation in local political functions, such interests in political affairs are promoted among us.

Ministry of the gospel

For the church of Ottawa 1999 was an anniversary year. On the first Sunday the congregation started out in the new year with the ordination and installation of their new pastor and teacher, the Rev. M. Jagt. Then on January 4th they celebrated and commemorated the 40th anniversary of the church in our nation's capital. The congregation of Cloverdale as well began the year with a new pastor in the manse: the Rev. J. Huijgen, who had come to them from Smithers. On January 10th the church of Denver received a new minister in the Rev. D. W. VandeBurgt, who came to Denver "fresh" from the Theological College. In the newly instituted church of Flamborough the Rev. J. DeGelder became the first minister. For the church of Fergus the installation of the Rev. J. Louwse made an end to a long period of vacancy. Finally, with some candidates admitted to the ministry among the churches, the church of Aldergrove received its own pastor in the Rev. P.H. Holtvluwer, the newly instituted Redeemer congregation in Winnipeg received its first pastor and teacher in the Rev. T. Van Raalte, while the Mission work in Brazil by the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church of Surrey obtained in the Rev. K. Wieske their new missionary.

The existence of vacancies among the congregations keeps congregational life abuzz with talk and speculations about possible candidates to fill these vacancies. Also in the manse of many a minister's family the unsettling experiences of having to consider a call remains a common feature. With the latter the congregations that are presently being served by these ministers are forced to live through a time of uncertainty as well. However, the Rev. W. Wielenga continues to serve the church of Lynden, Western Australia, after declining a call from Kelmscott-West, Australia. The Rev. C. Bosch did not exchange Burlington-South for Aldergrove, British Columbia, or for Legana, Tasmania. The Rev. C. Van Spronsen declined a call from Aldergrove. The Rev. M. H. Van Luik did the same with calls from Smithers and Aldergrove. The Rev. C. VanderVelde also stayed with these colleagues in the Fraser Valley, serving Yarrow rather than Houston, British Columbia. Also the Rev. J. Van Woudenberg had to disappoint the church of Houston, British Columbia, as well as the Free Reformed Church of West Kelmscott, Australia. The Rev. R. Aasman could not see his way clear to go to either Smithers or Smithville; and, finally, the Rev. J.G. Slaa continues to serve the church of Elora, after declining a call from the church of Houston, British Columbia.

This list of calls received, accepted, or declined shows how much the position of a minister is interwoven with the weal and woe of congregational life. That is even more the case when there are difficulties or causes for concern and sorrow in regard to these servants of the flock. The Rev. John Van Popta family became such an object of anxiety and concern for the church of Coaldale and the entire federation, when shortly after settling down in Coaldale, their son Julian suffered from a relapse of cancer. Thankfully, the Lord spared his life and after a long struggle of severe suffering granted a turn-about. Also the passing away of the Rev. D. VanderBoom on October 2nd brought grief and sorrow. Yet there was much thankfulness as well for 45 years of faithful service. For the church of Grand Rapids and the Rev. B. R. Hoford and his family the dismissal according to art. 11 C.O. also was the end of a very sad development. Here, too, much time and effort will be needed for healing and for the restoration of the congregation. Finally, for one of the graduates of our Theological College, brother Frank Dong, a long anticipated move to Australia fell through. This, too,

was a very disappointing experience for our brother and his family, as well as for the churches in Australia which had supported him to this end. It is our hope and prayer that the initiatives that are presently under study among the churches in the Fraser Valley for a ministry among the Chinese population in the Greater Vancouver Area may come to fruition under God's blessing.

Theological College

For the Theological College of the churches for the churches, 1999 was an anniversary year: we celebrated its 30th anniversary and its 25th Convocation. This celebration was enhanced by the fact that six students graduated from the College (among whom the first sister, who obtained the Diploma of Theological Studies). Also in regard to our College facilities it was a special year: after a successful Fund Drive raised more than \$ 850,000, the building plans for a new library-addition could be executed. On November 4th the sod-turning ceremony took place.

The professors at our Theological College received the limelight for one reason or another. Prof. J. Geertsema enjoyed a sabbatical from his regular work in lecturing. This time of "rest" was used, however, for much arduous labour in the writing of a commentary on the book of Hebrews. Prof. Dr. C. Van Dam took upon himself the rewarding task of Public Relations. He promoted the College on a trip to Australia, where he visited the Free Reformed Churches. He made contacts as well with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Also through many a speaking engagement these churches benefited from his presence very much. Prof. Dr. J. DeJong continued the practice of maintaining and enhancing the bond of the churches with the College by means of a trip through Alberta and Manitoba. He visited and addressed all the churches in these provinces. After the Convocation in September, Dr. DeJong also took over the principalship of the College. This implies that our principal for the period of 1996-1999, Prof. Dr. N. H. Gootjes, was relieved of this task, which he carried out in an excellent and fruitful manner.

This past year the College population had the privilege of seeing some new faces as well. The Rev. Drs. G.H. Visscher took the place of Prof. Geertsema, during his sabbatical. He did an admirable job in filling in for such a competent and knowledgeable professor. At a ministers' workshop he used

his newly developed expertise in lecturing by sharing with his colleagues his special studies in "newer interpretations of Paul's rejection of the 'works of the law.'" Then, at the beginning of the new school year the Rev. J. De Gelder made his entry in the College as the newly appointed Coordinator for the Pastoral Proficiency Program. Rev. De Gelder has begun this task with great enthusiasm. We wish him well in the implementation of this program for the enhancement of the practical orientation and training of our future ministers. We pray that also the work of the familiar workers at the College, namely of the sisters Catherine Mechelse and Margaret VanderVelde and their helpers, may continue to be blessed.

Mission

In order to make a smooth transition from the Theological College to the work of Mission, I should mention that one of our 1998 graduates became a minister in West-Timor. The, now, Rev. Yonson Dethan is serving one of the Pilgrim Christian Churches. Especially during the serious unrest in East-Timor, Rev. Dethan became very much involved with the care for the refugees fleeing the turmoil and seeking refuge in the village where he is ministering. Tensions resulting from the volatile situation in Indonesia and its colonies were felt in Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea as well, where the Clarence Togeretz family is working for the MAF and the Rev. 't Hart family is serving in the mission respectively. Violence and its traumatic fall-out caused much suffering also in the family of another missionary. When the R. Boersema family in Recife, Brazil, suffered a serious armed robbery and assault, the compassion and prayers around the federation of churches were multiplied.

Speaking about Brazil, we may look back at much progress during this past year. The evidence of this progress shows in the fact that students of the young Reformed churches became available for call in this "federation-to-be." Also the Rev. Venema has been working with the native evangelist, brother Moises. The institution of churches which had matured to the point of an independent existence became a reality in Camaragibe. Meanwhile the progress toward a federation of churches could be seen in the first meeting of a Classis, held by the churches of Curitiba and Unai. The Lord willing in the year 2000, the churches in

Brazil hope to establish a federation of Reformed churches.

This is not to say that there are no difficulties on the way of progress. On the contrary, the Plug family which is working in Maceio (together with the Rev. J.G.R. Kroeze) encountered serious difficulties due to the expiring of their visa. Their renewal application was refused, so that the possibility was very real that they would have to leave the country. At this time of writing this situation is still uncertain. The Rev. Kroeze was declared eligible for call, due to his retirement from the mission field. At this time he has not received a call yet, so that he is planning to repatriate to Tasmania after 10 years in the mission field of the church of Hamilton and its supporting churches. Another well-seasoned mission couple has returned as well: the Jake and Darlene Kuik family. They, too, spent ten years of their life as a team of mission-workers in Brazil. On the other hand, we could see the Rev. A. De Graaf family move to Maceio to continue the work. Rev. DeGraaf has busied himself very much with language training, studies in Urban Mission, and . . . in the area of family-building.

Also in other mission fields changes took place in one way or another. In Papua New Guinea, the 't Hart family settled down in their mission post of Ekoru. After the successful completion of the building of their house by brother Terry Veenendaal, the 't Harts have

moved in. Brother Veenendaal rendered a tremendous service to the work in PNG by enduring the solitude and loneliness in this village in order to prepare an adequate dwelling for the missionary family. From this post the 't Harts now continue to help out the congregation of Port Moresby with good counsel and advice. They also continued their language studies in Pidgin English and Motu. Meanwhile they have laid a good basis for the work in Ekoru, building up a good rapport with its people and preaching the gospel from Sunday to Sunday. All this, and much more, the Rev. Henry Versteeg reported first hand after he made a three week-trip to the churches in Irian Jaya and to Papua New Guinea. He, too, could observe changes and improvements in many ways among the churches he used to serve as a missionary. The faithfulness of our Lord is great indeed. Finally, a change took place in the mission project of the Smithers congregation in the way of the retirement of brother Hilco De Haan. It is not certain yet how this work will be developed from here on. The project was enhanced considerably, however, when the workers could receive a new building to better facilitate their activities.

Evangelism

Under this heading of Evangelism we could enumerate a lot of activities which are taking place in almost every congregation. Often it is work done by



Rev. de Graaf behind a make-shift pulpit presents his paper on "The Sin Against the Holy Spirit" at Maceio's Youth Congress, September, 1999, Maceio, Brazil



Smithers Indian Ministry – the deHaans' preparing for the grand opening of the new building.

a small group of enthusiastic members. They have a heart for the Lord and for their neighbours. They try to be creative in their approach. The more simple aspects in their approach are the use they make of the inserts in *Clarion*, published by the Reformed Evangelism Taskforce: namely *Outreach* and *Evangel*. No, this service of the R.E.T. is not simple; on the contrary, their writings show a lot of insights and discretion as well as competence to deal with difficult things in a clear and understandable manner. It's one of the easier ways, however, to place these magazines in a hospital lounge or a doctor's office. It is not too difficult either to write a pamphlet introducing the congregation and distribute this pamphlet in the neighbourhood or place them in medical clinics and Welcome Wagons. The difficult part comes in, though, when the follow-up must be organized. That's where they need much endurance, insistence, and faithfulness. Also for the proper approach to this outreach you need a special talent. Then it's beautiful to see how the Lord provides to each congregation such special people who are good at this.

The activities which seek to implement the local strategies for outreach vary greatly. Quite a few congregations have maintained the Vacation Bible School from summer to summer. Some follow it up with a Christmas reunion,


others attract their VBS students to a weekly Saturday Bible School or Sunday School. In a number of congregations the Coffee Break has become a standard feature. Especially in cities with a lot of anonymity and loneliness, this opportunity for a get-together and Bible Study is grabbed with both hands. Also the "neighbourhood Bible Study" approach is coming up as a good way of combining neighbourliness with outreach. Again others make the most of the opportunities offered by homes for the elderly for chapel services and Bible Study.

There is also the avenue of cooperation and coordination in an approach toward evangelism. Of course, foremost in this category is the outreach via the airwaves. For some 20 years now the Canadian Reformed Broadcasting Association has been effectively operating the Voice of the Church. Thanks to this collective approach meditations are available which are sent out in many regions of our vast country. Also local Evangelism Committees make use of these messages to be broadcast in a limited area locally. Another project with a collective support from East and West is the *Streetlight Ministries*, administered by our brother Richard Bultje of Ancaster. Credo Christian High School in Langley organized a Mission Week to raise money in support of this ministry. At a wider scale we see outreach and evangelism in projects supported by

the Middle East Reformed Fellowship. Sudan especially has been a target area which was in great need of support. Also the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund and *Faithworks*, organize camps, projects, and programs to facilitate evangelism, help, and mercy in Word and Deed. Then there are James and Linda Baartse, sponsored by many individuals and churches in Ontario, who continue their work of Bible Translation and support projects, sometimes under the most precarious circumstances. Thus in many ways a great number of younger and older people employ themselves readily and cheerfully for the well-being of their near and distant neighbours; particularly for their eternal spiritual salvation.

Conclusion

While reflecting on any and every category in this review, I realize how limited I am in my access to the facts and the details regarding the activities and highlights across the federation of churches. Seeing the busyness and vitality among the congregations, it should be understood how impossible it is to stay on top of all the events. This observation, therefore, must lead us, *not* to the expression of disappointment over an oversight or lack in mentioning a certain highlight, *but* to the amazement of the manifold blessings of the Lord. Over and above all the facts and events mentioned in this review, the common and special happenings, there is so much more indeed. How many, therefore, are the gifts and blessings from the Lord; they are innumerable for sure. As I mentioned before, it is through my involvement in the work for the promotion of ecclesiastical unity that others make me aware even more of this fact. It is one of the incentives we should have for this pursuit of unity, because the Lord has preserved among us such a rich Reformed heritage and so many covenantal and confessional insights. Let us share this whenever and wherever we can. This too, can be done at the local level as well as in the formal contacts by our committees.

In deep gratitude we may come to the conclusion again how good and gracious our God has been. "The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." In Him must be our trust, also when we move into the year 2000. He is our *Immanuel* who has assured us by his Incarnate Son, "I will be with you always, till the close of the age." That's not just till the year 2000 but till He comes. 



News from the Women's Savings Action

College Evening

At the College Evening in September we, on behalf of all of you, presented the principal of the Theological College with a pledge for \$25,000 to be used for the purchase of books and periodicals. What a blessing to be able to make this presentation every year! In fact this year we were able to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Women's Savings Action! This presentation is only possible because of the faithful support of you, the church members, young and old, members of small and large congregations, from across Canada and beyond. Thank you very much!!

Contributions received

During the past year a total of \$25,358.27 was collected. This is the lowest amount that has been collected in quite a number of years. However, considering the fact that there was also an expansion drive going on at the same time, we are very pleased that we were still able to collect just over the amount which we have pledged for the library! Australia did not contribute this past year; they decided to concentrate all efforts on the fund raising for the expansion. A very substantial amount was received from royalties for books written by the late Prof. L. Selles for ILPB; we again express our appreciation to the Selles family for this generous donation.

Expansion

This past summer, just after the end of our fiscal year, we made our last payment into the expansion fund – this time for \$35,000. This was the amount

of a GIC which we had designated for expansion. This makes a total of just over \$80,000 which we were able to put into the expansion fund. The College community is very appreciative of the large amount which we have been able to set aside for expansion. We are very thankful that this has been possible while also being able to maintain for the last 5 years an annual pledge of \$25,000 for the library.

Very little reserve

With so much going into the expansion fund, it does mean that we have very little reserve. We certainly do want to be able to maintain our level of support; in fact it would be wonderful to increase our pledge from the \$25,000 we have given for the last 5 years in order to keep up with inflation and our weak Canadian dollar. Virtually all books have to come from the United States or Europe, making the exchange rate an important factor.

Thank you very much!

Our heartfelt thanks goes to all of you. First of all, to the representatives and their teams who do the work – who organize, collect and count. A very special thank you to those of you who have “retired” – we very much appreciate all the hours you have spent, some of you for many years! And of course, a warm welcome to new representatives and new helpers – we appreciate your willingness to volunteer your time and energy!

But of course there would be no work to do, if you did not continue to give your donations! Materially the Lord has blessed each one of us differently.

Whenever you are called upon to make a contribution be assured that whatever amount you give it is received with thankfulness. A big thank you to all of you, young and old, for your faithful support! If perchance you or your congregation did not make a donation this past year or years, we would love to have you join us this coming year!

Above all, we thank our gracious God for giving us willing hearts and providing us with the financial means. To Him alone goes all the praise and glory!

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THE WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION 30 Years of Service

Last September, in God's grace, we could celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Theological College. It was also the 30th anniversary of the Women's Savings Action. For 30 years one of the items on the programme of the College evening has been the presentation of the Women's Savings Action. For 30 years women in the church have been saving and collecting funds for the purchase of books and periodicals and teaching aids. Why do it this way? Why

not simply have an amount set aside on the regular budget of the College? Why not have the Finance Committee of the Theological College take care of the purchase of books and periodicals?

Mrs. G. Selles, the first secretary of the Women's Savings Action, answered those questions very well when she said in her first College evening presentation, "If you love someone, you want to show it, by word and deed. You do this in helping, assisting in giving small favours. It is our womanly way. It is

also the Biblical way. To be a helpmate is our calling. In such a way we do regard our savings action work. We like to show you, Faculty, how much we care."

For 30 years this labour of love has continued. For 30 years there was always an air of excitement when the Women's Savings Action presentation was made. How much was collected during this past year? How much will be pledged for books and periodicals for the coming year?

For 30 years the saving has continued. For 30 years dedicated teams have collected and counted all the pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters and so on! How much neatly rolled change has made its way to the bank – we will not even hazard a guess at the amount! Every year all the amounts, whether small or large, added up to one very large amount. At the first presentation in 1970 Mrs. Selles was able to announce with great thankfulness that the total collected was \$2,544.46. Over the years the amount has grown very steadily and in 1998 it was announced that a total of \$28,030.55 had been collected. In 1970 \$500 was given for the library, in 1998 \$25,000. During those years we have been able to provide the necessary funds for the purchase of books and periodicals, as well as a number of teaching aids. As well, in 1985 the Women's Savings Action was able to make a very substantial contribution towards the purchase of the new College building.

We rejoice that the Lord has so richly blessed that decision taken 30 years ago at the annual meeting of the League of Women's Societies in Ontario when the women asked themselves how can we as "women of the church" be of support to the Theological College. At that time it was unanimously decided to organize the Women's Savings Action. Women's societies across the country were invited to participate. There was enthusiasm for this venture across the country and soon there were representatives in every congregation.

Because that enthusiasm has continued during the last 30 years, the Women's Savings Action has worked and worked well to raise the needed funds. The dedicated efforts of the representatives and all those who assisted in collecting and counting, and the generous donations of all who have given to this most worthwhile cause have never been taken for granted, but have always been greatly appreciated by the whole College community. We are also grateful for the work of the Theological Library Fund Committee of our sister churches in Australia.

We pray that that same enthusiasm and dedication may continue for this labour of love, our way of showing thankfulness to God for his gift of the Theological College where future preachers and teachers of the Word may be trained. To Him alone be the glory!

WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION

Contributions for the year ended June 30, 1999
(with comparative figures for the previous year)

Congregation	1999	1998
Abbotsford	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 620.00
Aldergrove	615.00	560.00
Ancaster	723.39	637.85
Attercliffe	777.50	758.50
Barrhead		775.00
Brampton	215.15	153.60
Burlington Ebenezer	1,647.65	1,419.30
Burlington Fellowship	691.55	635.69
Burlington Waterdown/Flamborough	1,060.00	1,200.00
Calgary	360.00	957.25
Carman		343.75
Chatham	549.85	520.00
Chilliwick		
Cloverdale	560.00	1,075.00
Coaldale	672.50	444.50
Edmonton Immanuel	883.04	796.98
Edmonton Providence	2,386.49	2,064.62
Elora	78.28	51.35
Fergus	223.35	814.95
Grand Rapids	172.20	154.99
Grand Valley	85.05	96.95
Guelph	898.00	1,068.50
Hamilton	1,383.03	1,232.96
Houston		
Kerwood		
Langley	1,534.50	1,915.90
Langley/Willoughby Heights	755.00	865.00
Lincoln	566.35	325.40
London		
Lynden	725.36	581.37
Neerlandia	844.00	
Orangeville	45.00	162.50
Ottawa	113.50	170.00
Owen Sound	170.00	110.00
Rockway	55.00	
Smithers	833.61	1,105.69
Smithville	1,231.75	1,037.37
Surrey	750.00	1,019.00
Taber	305.00	583.00
Toronto		76.40
Vernon	441.00	363.50
Winnipeg Grace	505.00	550.00
Winnipeg Redeemer	510.00	479.66
Yarrow		
Australia		1,871.18
Royalties (Selles)	791.17	432.84
TOTAL COLLECTED	\$25,358.27	\$28,030.55



Guido de Brès Christian High School, Hamilton, Ontario

Commencement '99

October 22, 1999

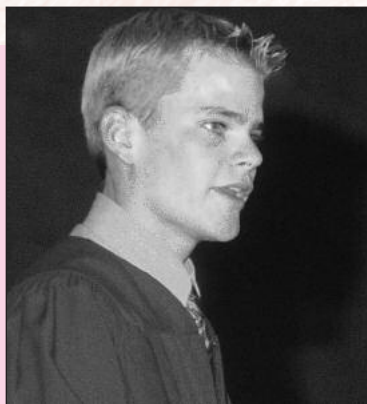
The students had gone; all that remained in the Guido gym was a cluster of busy teachers, frantically assembling, decorating, cleaning. The organization for a gala night of celebration had brought the staff together in a flurry of last minute preparations. The urgency in the hustle and bustle of activity was evident: you go here, you go there, pick up this or that, lighting to be reset, sound equipment to be tested, tables to be set. That the intention of this preparation was to make the evening's celebration a wonderful, momentous occasion was clearly evident.

The Commencement of the Guido de Brès Christian High School graduating class has become the annual highlight of the school year. Eighty-two young men and women received their diplomas this year. Joining this group in celebrating their achievements was a crowd of well-wishers numbering well over a thousand.

The evening began with a reception in the Guido gym where the grads, parents, and staff could meet and mingle. At about 7:30 everyone moved over to Bethel Gospel Tabernacle to participate in the formal commencement activities.

The Board Chairman Mr. J.H. Harsevoort opened the assembly with reading from Romans 12 and encouraged the grads to use their respective gifts in a life of service to God.

Principal Mr. J.G. VanDooren welcomed everyone and spoke to the audience about taking moments in life to



Valedictorian Darryl Boersema delivered fitting words of farewell.

stand and survey the landscape to reflect on where you have been and what the potential future might look like. Mr. VanDooren had observed a cyclist, who pedalled up a steep, challenging trail and who, when at the summit of the course, looked back on the road he had just mastered. From this lofty perch the cyclist could overlook a beautiful panorama and the many inviting paths he could take to continue on his trek. In the same way the grads could look back on their struggles and triumphs of the past four years and now survey the many opportunities that lie ahead of them.

After an enjoyable choir presentation the evening's keynote speaker, Rev. W. den Hollander spoke to the grads "A Word of Farewell." He encouraged the grads to remember the sacrifice of parents and community that worked so hard

to provide Christian education for them. They should now return to the community as young adults and take positions of responsibility so they could obey the command to serve God and promote the well-being of their neighbours.

The presentation ceremony was eagerly anticipated by the audience. The grads looked resplendent in their blue gowns and as the eighty-two young men and women individually walked up to the stage to accept their diplomas, each was warmly applauded by enthusiastic family and friends.

A tradition has been established that every year the graduating class showcases some of the musical talent from their group. This year a trio of Klarie Scholtens, Tanya Strating, and Amy VanStraten sang to the gathering a beautiful rendition of "Be Thou My Vision."

The valedictory address was given by Darryl Boersema. He made reference to the fact that though they might look very similar in their gowns, the class of 1999 were as individuals quite different. In spite of these differences and even with the parting of their paths that had occurred in June, the class still have a common bond. They share the knowledge that our God, who is everlasting, will not change or stop caring for us. This unity of faith and purpose, Darryl assured the audience, is what will allow the class of '99 to remain together.

A fond farewell to the "last class of the Millennium." May God continue to go with you.

The Rev. W. den Hollander, minister of the church at Toronto, and father to three current students at Guido de Brès, delivered "A Word of Farewell" to the graduating class of 1999.

The Guido de Brès Christian High School Graduating Class of 1999.



Ontario Secondary School Diplomas

- | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Nina Abel | Matthew Feenstra | Jacob Keep | Jeremy Richer | Alana VanderMooren |
| Benjamin Bartels | Rhonda Feenstra | Alida Kelly | Nicholas Roza | Douglas VanderVeen |
| Bradley Bartels | Cornelis Gootjes | Edward Kelly | Klazina Scholtens | Shelley VanderVelde |
| Derek Bartels | Nicole Groen | Rebecca Kingma | Duane Schutten | Trevor VanderVelde |
| Matthew Bartels | Jacqueline | Trisha Knegt | Ryan Schutten | Winston VanderVelde |
| Benjamin Boersema | Heemskerk | Patricia Kroes | Lynsie Sikkema | Andrew VanderVen |
| Darryl Boersema | Sharon Heemskerk | Jeremy Linde | Arlene Smouter | Teresa VanMeeteren |
| Justin Bol | Erica Hekert | Michael Linde | Sheldon Spithoff | Melanie |
| Henry Bos | May Hofsink | Alyssa Loopstra | Tanya Strating | VanMiddlekoop |
| Kimberly Bosscher | Nicholas Hopman | Linda Ludwig | Nicole Torenvliet | Anne-Marie VanPopta |
| Sarah Bouwman | Amy Hordyk | Jonathan Mulder | Petra Torenvliet | Joel Van Popta |
| David de Boer | Richard Horlings | Christopher | Renee VanBrederode | Amy Van Straten |
| Joanna de Jong | Nicholas Huizing | Oosterhoff | Marija VanDam | Trisha |
| Melanie de Jonge | Tricia Hulleman | Daniel Oosterhoff | Bruce VandenOever | VanWoudenberg |
| Angela Dokter | Jolene Hulzebosch | Diane Poort | Adam | Jan Van Zanten |
| Daniel Driegen | Joel Jagt | Wade Poort | VanderBruggen | Stephanie Witten |
| Catharina Dykema | Cornell Jans | Jennifer Postma | Marlaine Vanderhorst | |
| Elissa Faber | Katrina Jelsma | Peter Ravensbergen | Janet Vanderlaan | |

Awards

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| The Harry Aasman Memorial Scholarship
Katrina Jelsma | The Redeemer College Honours Scholarship
Amy Hordyk | The Edward M. Stam Memorial Scholarship
Ryan Schutten | Marlaine Vanderhorst |
| The George DeBoer Memorial Scholarship
Joanna de Jong | The Premier School Agendas Ltd. Scholarships
Kees Gootjes | The Guido de Brès Participation Awards
Henry Bos | Teresa VanMeeteren |
| The Guido de Brès Alumni Scholarships
Darryl Boersema
Elissa Faber
Marlaine Vanderhorst
Joel Van Popta
Amy Van Straten | Erica Hekert
Richard Horlings
Rebecca Kingma
Alana VanderMooren
Anne-Marie Van Popta
Stephanie Witten | Joanna de Jong
Melanie de Jonge
Kees Gootjes
Dan Oosterhoff
Nick Roza
Ryan Schutten
Renee VanBrederode | Joel Van Popta
Amy Van Straten |
| | | | The Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award
Melanie de Jonge |
| | | | The Governor-General's Bronze Medal
Katrina Jelsma |

A New Minister for a New Church

Impressions of the ordination and inaugural services and welcome evening of Rev. T. VanRaalte

by Allard Gunnink

Sunday, October 24, 1999. It was a long morning before the Grace and Redeemer congregations of Winnipeg assembled in the rented Covenant Christian Reformed Church building at 12:30. The day had arrived to witness the ordination of br. Ted VanRaalte as minister of the Word. His parents, father-in-law, and several other relatives were present. Rev. Jonker led the ordination service. He preached about 2 Timoth 4:1,2. Paul charges Timothy to preach the Word. That preaching must be pure, urgent, relevant, considerate, and confessional. After reading the form for ordination of minister, br. VanRaalte clearly answered: I do with all my heart. Rev. Moesker and the elders of the Redeemer congregation joined Rev. Jonker with the "laying on of hands." No magical powers were passed on, but it was the symbol that Rev. VanRaalte is set apart for the work of ministry.

After the service, congratulatory messages were conveyed, either in person or via e-mail. When the congregation filed out of the auditorium to congratulate the newly ordained minister and his wife Christine, the festive sound of organ, piano, and trumpet filled the air.

After a quick lunch the congregations were back for the afternoon worship service. Rev. VanRaalte led the service and delivered his inaugural sermon about Romans 1:16 with the theme: God calls us to confidently proclaim the Gospel because it is his power. This Gospel issues the vital proclamation of salvation and this Gospel includes the vibrant participation of believers. The minister's task is to proclaim the Gospel and the members must use that good news in their life and share it with others.

The Redeemer congregation received its own minister after a vacancy of

a year and a half. In the last service before the vacancy ended, the serving elder thanked the Lord that the Redeemer congregation had a counsellor, Rev. Jonker, and that many ministers provided printed sermons which could be used. (Ministers, continue to make sermons available for the benefit of vacant churches!)

On the Friday evening of that same week, most (almost all) members of the congregation came together in the gymnasium of the Immanuel Christian School. The honoured guests, Rev. and Mrs. VanRaalte, arrived late, but that was not their error. We all enjoyed supper, which was followed by an evening of song, speeches, and skits. Young and old showed the talents of the members. A few ladies showed that all members were somehow related to the oldest member of the congregation, Mrs. Tiggelaar. Amazing.

The minister and his wife received ample advice how to cope with the brutal Manitoba winters and the mosquitoes in summer. Some students had prepared a few questions in order that we got to know our minister. Let me tell you that in the Theological College, he liked dog-matics (after all they have two dogs) the best and Latin the least.

After all was said and done, the minister and his wife thanked the congregation for their friendly reception, and they expressed the wish that a good relationship may develop between the minister's family and the congregation.

The Redeemer congregation welcomed the minister and his wife. His work has started on the pulpit, at catechism classes, in the homes. May the Lord bless his work and may the congregation receive him as minister of the Word and carry him in their prayers.

C



From left to right: Jake Riemersma, Christine VanRaalte, Ted VanRaalte, Ryma VanRaalte, Clarence VanRaalte



The oldest and youngest members of the congregation: Mrs. Fijje Tiggelaar and Heather Nienhuis.



“I Desire to do Your Will O my God, Your Law is Within my Heart”

*The 38th Annual League Day of the
Canadian Reformed Women’s Societies
in Ontario held on October 20, 1999,
in Burlington, Ontario*

It was a lovely autumn day, when 330 women filed into the Polish Hall to once again enjoy fellowship and study. The President, Mrs. M. DeGelder, called order at 10:05 a.m. to begin our 38th League Day. Mrs. Aafke Spithoff accompanied us as we sang Psalm 111: 1,2 and 3. Psalm 19 was the Scripture reading, and President led in opening prayer. After some words of welcome, she explained the theme of the day *“I Desire to Do your Will, O my God, Your Law is Within My Heart”*. She spoke for several minutes about God’s glory and presence in creation, referring to Psalm 19.

The President made several announcements. She reported that the collection for the day would be for Canadian Reformed Teachers College. She passed on greetings from sisters in Australia and the Netherlands. Roll Call was held, with a special welcome to guests from the Netherlands and the west.

We then sang the League Song, after which we opened Scripture at Genesis 9: 1-17, Matthew 5:17-20 and Galatians 3: 19-25. Mrs. DeGelder introduced Rev. G. Nederveen as the speaker of the morning. He spoke on *“Theonomy: What is There to Reconstruct?”*

The speech began by defining the term Theonomy, which means law of God. Although we as Reformed believers are in a sense theonomists, we are not Christian reconstructionists, who aim to rebuild society and modern life in the Old Testament law and practices. They call biblical law the “tool of dom-



President – Mrs. Martha DeGelder

inance”. Rev. Nederveen outlined the attraction of theonomy, the movement’s founders and history, their published works and political agenda. He also outlined the biblical foundation the proponents of this movement use to build their platform. In conclusion, Rev. Nederveen gave a very strong rebuttal of this movements, and explained its fallacy according to Scripture.

Rev. Nederveen was thanked for his speech, and we sang Psalm 73:8.

Discussion was opened. Many questions were submitted in written form from the floor. Some of these were:

- How does Theonomy affect us as women of the church in our daily lives?

- Do we abide by the law for our moral life, or our tradition?
- In the speech it was mentioned that God’s law was only revealed at Sinai, what about before Sinai?

Many of the other written questions were taken with the speaker for answering at a later time in the women’s magazine, *The Horizon*.

Collection was held, after which Rev. Nederveen closed the morning session with prayer, and we sang Psalm 78: 1,2,3. A delicious luncheon was then enjoyed by all.

At 1:30 p.m. the President once again called for order. Our national anthem was sung, after which Mrs. Karen Mans was given the floor, for the Trip Down Memory Lane in remembrance of the upcoming new millennium. It was determined that Sr. Mary DeWitt of Fergus was the most experienced woman in attendance, in that she experienced the most changes in the standards of existence during her span of life.

We then sang Hymn 47: 1,4. The President introduced the speaker for the afternoon, Mrs. Nicole Vanderee who was to speak on the topic, *“Knowing and Doing the Will of God.”*

Do we know the will of God? There are things God has chosen not to reveal to us, but knowing the will that He has revealed, comes only through the preaching of the Word, and Bible study. God is always at work around us, see Article 13 BC. God uses his people to

execute his will on earth, as well. Although we may feel we have no talents for His work, that is not an excuse not to do His will. Several examples of this are Noah, Moses and Jonah. We must also prepare ourselves, as the Bride of Christ, for his return. We must bring our request to Him in prayer, daily, and ask Him for his Holy Spirit, as well as doing personal daily Bible study. We must help and build each other up in study society, the older ones leading the younger ones. Doing God's will in our lives is by way of obedience to his precepts and statutes. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding" (Prov 3:5).


The President thanked Mrs. Vanderee, after which we sang Hymn 48: 1 and 4. Discussion ensued, and once again many questions were submitted and discussed. Some were:

- If one makes a decision and it turns out disastrously, was it God's will?
- God's will is also revealed in the weekly preaching of his Word. Therefore it is very important to faithfully attend the church of God.
- Is our priority as sisters in the church towards outreach or work within our own families?

In wrapping up the day's activities, several announcements were made. CCRTC collection totaled \$1054.91. The next

League Day would be held, D.V., in Attercliffe. A hearty thank you was extended to the hosting society, the baby-sitters, the accompanist and speakers.

The president thanked the outgoing *Horizon* committee members, Mrs. Mary DeBoer and Mrs. Miriam Verburg, for

their dedicated service, and the outgoing Vice President Jo Anne Werkman for her work for the League. She also thanked those who had been found willing to stand for election. In closing we sang Psalm 40: 2,3 and 4, and Mrs. DeGelder led in thanksgiving prayer. 



Speaker – Mrs. Nicole Vanderee



Speaker – Rev. G. Nederveen



Attendees



“I am Not Ashamed of the Gospel . . .”

Romans 1:16

*Thanksgiving Youth Conference –
October 8-11, 1999*



*Listening to Rev. Stam's
speech*



Saturday morning . . . the glory of God's creation greeted us all around. The blue sky. Raindrops glistening on the trees and grass. The glorious colours of the changing trees. The smell of breakfast in the air. Pancakes and sausages. What a wonderful day it promised to be! And it was. . . .

After breakfast we were entertained by our hosts with several skits and songs. The guest speaker, Rev. Clarence Stam was welcomed. He addressed the young people on the chosen theme for the weekend: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." Though it is the last thing to be ashamed of, young people, as well as older adults, are sometimes ashamed of the gospel. At times, we are afraid to proclaim we are Christians. Too often, we get swallowed up by the world's culture or succumb to negative peer pressure. It is not always easy being a child of God for Satan will do anything to hinder the spiritual growth of God's people. Some further examples were given. Rev. Stam then went on to positively point out ways to overcome our shame. Growth in the knowledge of the Bible. Faithfulness in prayer. Personal devotion and meditation. Bible study and discussion groups. These things will surely inspire boldness and courage when standing up for the LORD.

Following Rev. Stam's address everyone split into small discussion groups. Participants openly shared the difficulties they face when witnessing for the Lord. The world is not always

Thanksgiving was a wonderful weekend!! We had the privilege of being chaperones at the Thanksgiving Youth Conference hosted by Hamilton Young People's Society. We want to share some of the highlights of this weekend with others in the Canadian Reformed community.

It was quite an undertaking. Three days and nights of camping at Valen's Conservation Area. About 250 young adults from various churches in On-

tario participated. It was a weekend to see old friends . . . meet new ones . . . to laugh . . . to sing . . . to study God's Word . . . to marvel at his creation . . . to grow together in faith . . . to enjoy fellowship in Christ.

Friday night . . . despite the rain that greeted the arrivals the mood was happy and relaxed. The participants were warmly welcomed by the hosting Hamiltonians. Many of the planned activities, however, had to wait for better weather.

kind to them. They encouraged one another to stand firm in faith. They spoke of the need to equip themselves with the full armour of God.

After a lunch of submarines and pizza the afternoon was packed full of activities organized by Hamilton's young people. A polar bear swim which raised close to \$400.00 for the church in Maceió, Brazil. A scavenger hunt. A canoe race. A camping game. We were amazed (and appalled) that someone could stuff 32 marshmallows into their mouth and still speak, or, that 17 young people could fit into a port-a-potty!! There was laughter and shouting and good fun all around. Some preferred a quiet walk, others sat around and talked. A game of chess. A nose in a book. The atmosphere was relaxed and comfortable. All beneath God's glorious sky.

By suppertime the group was ravenously hungry and the Hamilton cooking crew served another great meal. After supper the sound of praise filled the air as several musicians shared the talents God gave them.

Various workshops were held that night. In the glow of coleman lanterns and flashlights covenant youth gathered on picnic tables and discussed various topics: purity, the mark on your forehead, defending the faith. Each workshop tied in with the central theme . . . I am not ashamed of the Gospel. Later,

a campfire burned brightly. Around it, voices singing praise to God. The praise resounded loud and clear in the still night. *Ye servants of God, your master proclaim!*

By 12:30 . . . quiet . . . only the sounds of the night and whispers in the dark, sleeping bags rustling.

Sunday . . . a day of rest and of joy in going to the house of the Lord. The troops headed off to the Burlington churches and stayed there for the day. That evening, back at camp, we enjoyed more entertainment prepared by the Hamilton group. A sudden downpour could not deter the joyous mood of the weekend and we squeezed together under shelter until the rain went away. There, we shared a devotion. We were urged and encouraged to be humble in our lives as Christians. Humble . . . yet bold. Through Christ we will be equipped with power and boldness to proclaim his Name. Afterward . . . another campfire. Once again, beautiful voices lifted in praise to God, one song after the other.

Monday . . . Thanksgiving Day . . . the day was the most glorious yet! The sky could not have been bluer. The reds, yellows and oranges of the trees could not have been more vivid. *Oh, Lord . . . how majestic is your name in all the earth!* Brunch was superb . . . waffles topped with fruit and whipped cream.

We gathered together under God's splendid sky one last time to officially close the weekend. As we sat there the leaves drifted gently to the ground. We praised and thanked God. On the stage there stood a decorated box which contained notes. On these notes the young people had briefly written what they were thankful to God for. One by one the notes were read out loud.

I thank God . . . for peace and freedom to worship Him . . . for my friend . . . for God's faithfulness . . . for health . . . for my parents . . . for this weekend . . . for the beautiful weather . . . for salvation . . . for the Bible . . . for this country. And many more. As the young people reflected on the blessings they had in Christ a reverent awe was felt by all.

We felt privileged to share this weekend with the young people of the Canadian Reformed churches. We witnessed young adults expressing love for the Lord and a sincere desire not to be ashamed of the gospel but to proclaim it with power and boldness. For us, as older adults, it was truly encouraging to observe in our young people a strength that comes from being a child of God. We could see how God preserves his church from generation to generation. As chaperones we thank God that we were able to participate in this weekend. We encourage the youth of our churches to go forward in faith.



Seeing old friends and meeting new ones

The Polar Bear Swim raised \$400.00 for Maceió, Brazil

Hamilton YPS – putting on the skits

Enjoying one of many great meals!



CRWRF



Approximately two hours north of Mexico City lies the city of Queretaro, the home of “Pan de Vida” (= “Bread of Life”) Children’s Home. This is no ordinary home run by no ordinary couple. The home takes in only children sent by the local social welfare agency – essentially those who have been either abandoned or abused.

The Hilbrands who run the home with the help of a mainly volunteer staff, are totally committed to helping the forty children in their care. They do so in full reliance on the Lord, striving always to provide a stimulating and secure environment. A central component is a love which is concrete and firm. Darrel writes, “We treat these children as sons and daughters, trying to give them all the love and attention possible.” Dr. C. Van Dam, on one of his trips to Mexico, met with Darrel Hilbrands and was encouraged to speak with a man so thoroughly committed to the Reformed faith. Others have attested to this as well. Darrel and his wife are examples to us all as they seek to be effective followers of our Lord, a challenge which “requires a complete commitment of body and soul,” as Darrel puts it.

Since government support given the home comes only sporadically and is far from sufficient, we at C.R.W.R.F. have undertaken to partner with the Hilbrands by supporting the home with \$1,000 per month for the next year. (Our involvement will be reassessed at

the end of that time.) Though only a fraction of the total needed, this added regular income will make a big difference in ensuring such basics as a nutritious diet for the children and a regular salary for the teachers.

Read on and you will be moved by the sacrificial service provided to these children and the way our gracious God has healed broken lives. Perhaps you will want to commit to praying for “Pan de Vida” or even aim to take a few weeks (or more) and head down to Mexico to lend a hand!

Sharing the Bread of Life

A five-year-old boy is brought from Acapulco to Mexico City to work the streets for the adult that says she’s his mother. The kid really doesn’t understand any of it but finds himself living in an abandoned car with another seven-year-old who says he’s his brother. The “mother” returns to pick up the seven-year-old, but leaves the five-year-old abandoned, saying he’s not her child. The devastation is almost complete. However, God had other plans for him. Through a gracious elderly lady the boy is fed, taught the rudiments of reading and eventually channelled to our home. Without any known relatives (the police spent six months looking for them), he has become a permanent member of our family, finishing up his Junior High and looking forward to a bright future. He says, along with Joseph, that the people

meant it for evil, but God has meant it for good.

A local over-weight prostitute was having trouble attracting clients but had a seven-year-old daughter who provided an extra incentive for the perversions of her clientele. For an additional price they could do what they wanted with the defenceless girl right before the approving eyes of the drunken mother. Finally, some of the neighbours became aware of the situation and reported it to the authorities. The mother was sentenced to two years in jail and the girl was channelled to our home. The girl, now 13, has made peace with her God and has blossomed into a very extraordinary person. She has forgiven her mother and has accepted her experience as part of her particular path to a much greater understanding of what salvation and redemption mean.

Perhaps our most amazing story is that of Reina (not her real name). As a girl of six, her drunken father felt that it was time to end her life so he splashed lighter fluid over her body and set her on fire. The girl was badly burned in the head and neck area as well as her shoulder. In fact, she didn’t even have much of a right ear, but the mother looked the other way due to the threat that her husband had over her. As a result the girl was never treated and lived her childhood as the ugly, burned girl who supposedly had pulled a hot pan of grease from the stove on top of herself. She endured the never-ending insults.

But her father wasn't through. While on a drunken rampage over a year later, he decided that he should pull out her permanent front teeth. He actually did pull one of them out. Because they lived in a small ranch, there was no recourse for the girl; everyone believed the stories that the father made up.

However, when she turned twelve and her father raped her a number of times, she finally figured out a way to escape and came to Queretaro, the state capital, looking for help. Finding her way to the state social agency, she filed a complaint against her father. By this time she was in our home. We helped her through the process that involved several face-to-face encounters with her father. Finally, he was convicted, but as Mexican law would have it, served only six months. We were all quite upset with the result, but the girl has continued with us. She recently had her seventeenth birthday. After a number of surgeries you can still see the scars on her neck but not anything like it was.

After finding peace with her Maker, the desperation and sadness have gone. She now wants to study to become a nurse, but first wants to spend this year affirming herself attending a small Bible school. Her story truly is remarkable. She has found it within herself to forgive her father and even see her mother on occasion. We can only say that God has had his way with her.

The stories could continue indefinitely in this home for children (over forty of them at present), for each of our children has his or her own special tale to tell. Some are worse, some simply abandoned, all are verified and have passed through the legal system to get to us. We take many of the worst cases in order that society, which takes a rather dim view of evangelical Christian organizations, might know the tremendous human potential and the power of the living God working within the individual.

Take the case of, let's call her Maria. She came to us diagnosed as a brain-damaged four-year-old.

She spoke no words only grunts. She could not follow instructions and would contemplate the tips of her fingers for hours on end. However, we noticed that she could perform certain functions with a great deal of dexterity. We began to have doubts about her situation. She was taken to have her brain examined, which left us in doubt that she had had brain damage. As we continued to work with her, she continu-

ally improved, uttering words, following some instructions, starting to dress herself, etc. Now, at nine years of age, she speaks fluently, is studying first grade, dresses herself, understands nearly all instructions given her, and has a new prognosis that she will be able to read and be a valuable part of society. Are we experts in this type of treatment? No. Do we depend upon a living God who can effect miracles and gives discernment and wisdom? Yes.

With these kinds of stories, one would think that the government would be more than pleased to help us out with the innumerable necessities that the home and school imply. While aid has been given in the past, there has never been consistent support and never in a way to sustain us. However,

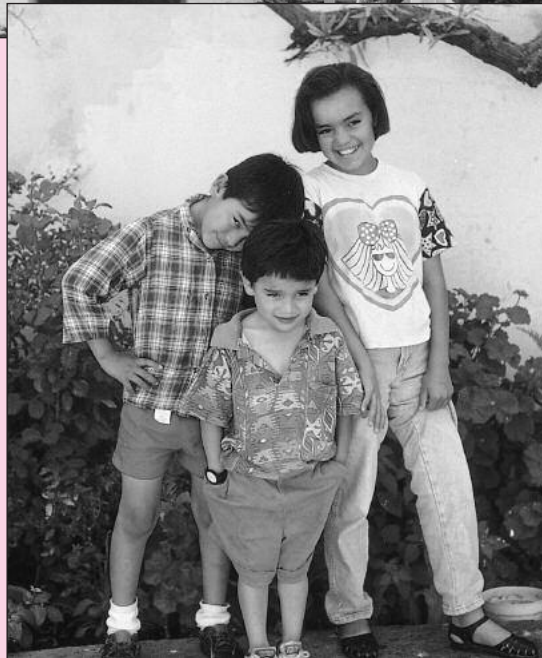
we have never missed a meal, all of the children are warmly clothed, and only occasionally do we have leaks in the roofs of the dormitories.

Philisophical base

As one might surmise, all of this doesn't just happen. It has required a great deal of planning, a tremendous amount of energy and wisdom, the help of a number of truly dedicated persons who form our staff, both teachers and household workers (none of whom receive payment for their services), and a philosophical or theological base. As founders of this home (we inherited a handful of children from another home), my wife and I have had to think through a myriad of questions, intentions and solutions in order to come up



*Vacation Bible School,
Summer, 1999*



*A family group – these
children have been with
us more than 5 years.
The photo was taken
about 1995*

Our student. Esteban has severe learning problems but he wants to read someday



A brother-sister team



with a viable philosophy for the running of this home.

My wife, brought up as a poor Mexican farmer's daughter, has lived in extreme poverty and survived. Her insights into Mexican culture and the incessant array of modern-day spin-offs has been a continuing force in the maintaining of a home. With my background as a mid-western (USA) Reformed Church pastor's son, and having lived through personal and family tragedies, I have been able to bring a solid biblical perspective and a firm theological understanding to our reality. Through my recent studies in practical Calvinism, we have been able to systematize our views and practices in child rearing, which has served as a tremendous lever for us to be recog-

nized within completely Roman Catholic dominated society. While Calvin was not directly involved in professional child care, as far as I know, his views about total commitment and consistent Christian endeavour imply that each person has the responsibility to give his all to whatever the Lord has called him to. These principles have served us well. The results we have had with these children leave many government psychologists astounded, only asking what we have done to achieve these results.


With the help of the Juan Calvino Seminary of Mexico City, we have been able to articulate more accurately the essence of the faith rooted firmly in the belief in God the Creator of the universe and in his Son, the Saviour of humanity. With these fundamentals we have

been able to transmit the truth of God's Word in a culturally effective way so that, as far as we know, all of our children have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. This commitment is reflected in our daily life to the effect that several of the government officials who visit us periodically have commented on the difference in these kids. One of the government officials actually commented that she had never seen so much positive change in any group of children with these circumstances. We know, however, what the source of the strength and change is.

In the school that we have designed, through the untiring effort of several qualified teachers and workers, we have been able to accomplish what many considered impossible. Children without any previous educational experience are able to read and complete their primary education in three years. Others who normally would have continued to make a go of it on the street are now thinking in terms of the profession they want to achieve. As the word has gotten out, many people have come to us offering their services, although in many cases their only interest in Christianity is what they have witnessed with our children.

What can I do?

Perhaps by now you are thinking of ways of helping. In order to help, there are many options. The need of personnel on a long or short-term basis is usually available. Everything from child care to fixing cars, teaching English or computation, to cleaning and painting. In all of these areas we can use help. Knowing Spanish would be a big plus but not necessarily imperative. Of course, the constant physical needs: food, clothing, car and home repairs, etc. are always present and require solutions. At times we have received small work groups with specific tasks in mind. Of course, there is always the need of prayer and financial support.

If you would be interested in finding out more about us or the way in which you might be able to help, we encourage you to contact us via CRWRF in order to discuss your area of interest and a possible plan to make your help a part of this exciting and rewarding Christian outreach. 

PRESS RELEASE OF REGIONAL SYNOD EAST

November 10-12, 1999, held in the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church of Burlington, Ontario

1. On behalf of the convening Church, the Rev. G. Nederveen called the meeting to order. He requested to sing Ps 24: 2, 5, read Isaiah 26:1-13, and led in prayer. In his welcoming words, Rev. Nederveen shared some reflections on the Scripture passage, especially verse 8, and wished the delegates the blessing and help of the Lord for their work.

2. The representatives of the convening Church, Rev. G. Nederveen and br. A. Smouter, examined the credentials, which were found to be in good order. It was noted that of the delegates present, three were alternates.

The following officers were chosen: as chairman Rev. Cl. Stam, as vice-chairman Rev. W. den Hollander, as clerk Rev. G.H. Visscher. Rev. G. Nederveen then declared Regional Synod East constituted. The moderators took their places.

The chairman thanked the Ebenezer Church for the preparations of Regional Synod. He also expressed appreciation for the confidence placed in the officers.

The Agenda was examined and after some changes adopted. It was decided to divide the work contained in the Agenda over four committees. These committees received their respective assignments to prepare proposals for Synod to deal with the various appeals and overtures.

Synod was then adjourned for committee work. At 16:45 Synod resumed in plenary session and dealt with the overture of the Church at Toronto re the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico, which had been adopted by Classis Ontario-North of December 11, 1998. The Churches of Ancaster and Smithville endorsed this overture. Regional Synod decided "to propose to General Synod to further investigate the federation of the IPCM as requested by Classis Ontario-North and the Church at Toronto."

Synod then discussed the overture of the Church at Attercliffe, as adopted by Classis Ontario-South of May 26-27, June 9-10, 1999, "to change Art. 4B2 C.O. as follows: 'have served in churches with which the Canadian Reformed Churches do not maintain a sister-church relationship, and have been *well tested for a reasonable period of time and* examined by the classis in which they live, with due observance

of the general ecclesiastical regulations adopted for that purpose; or . . . ' " Responses regarding this overture had come in from the Church at Guelph, Burlington Ebenezer, Brampton, and Smithville. Regional Synod decided "to propose to General Synod 2001 that the change suggested by Classis Ontario-South re Art. 4B2 C.O. be included in the Church Order."

After supper, Synod continued in committee meetings till the day was called. The vice-chairman requested the singing of Ps 100 and led in prayer of thanksgiving.

On the morning of November 11, Remembrance Day, the chairman called the meeting to order. He read from Isaiah 35, requested the singing of Ps 84: 3, 4, and led in prayer. The committees then continued their work till shortly before 11:00 a.m. when Synod met in plenary session. In commemoration of all those who gave their life for freedom during the past century and millennium, the chairman read from Revelation 12: 7-12 and asked that Hymn 42: 1, 8 be sung. This was followed by two minutes of silence, after which the National Anthem was sung. The committees continued their work.

At 2:00 p.m. the chairman reopened the meeting. Synod then went into closed session to deal with 6 appeals related to the dismissal per Art. 11 C.O. of Rev. B.R. Hofford as minister of the Church of Grand Rapids. After all appeals were finalized and the proposed decisions had been adopted as decisions of Regional Synod, Synod returned to open session on Friday, November 12, at 9:45 p.m.

Synod received two reports of deputies Art. 48 C.O. The deputies for Classis Central Ontario reported regarding their concurring advice with respect to the peremptory examination of br. Marc Jagt. The deputies for Classis Ontario-South reported regarding their concurring advice with respect to the request of the Church at Grand Rapids to dismiss Rev. B.R. Hofford per article 11 C.O.

Synod thankfully received the financial report of the treasurer of Regional Synod, br. D. VanAmerongen, for the period of November 1, 1998-October 31, 1999. For the year November 1999-November 2000 Regional Synod set the assessment at \$1.00 per communicant member. The Church at Lincoln reported that the books of the treasurer had been audited and found to be in good order. Synod then discharged the treasurer from his responsibility for the period November 1, 1998-October 31, 1999. Synod also received with thankfulness the report

of the Church of Brampton with regard to the inspection of the archives of Regional Synod as maintained by the Church of Toronto. These archives were found to be in good order.

Regional Synod made the following appointments:

Deputies art. 48 C.O.: from Classis Ontario Central Rev. G. Nederveen with as alternate the Rev. W. den Hollander; from Classis Northern Ontario Rev. A.J. Pol, and the Rev. P.G. Feenstra as alternate; from Classis Ontario South the Rev. D.G.J. Agema, and Rev. G. Wieske as alternate.

Treasurer: Br. D. VanAmerongen, Grimsby.

Church to audit the books of the treasurer: the Church at Lincoln.

Church to maintain the archives: the Church at Toronto.

Church to inspect the archives: the Church at Brampton.

Convening church for the next Regional Synod East: the Church at Brampton; date: November 8, 2000.

The question period was held: the clerk was requested to thank br. Mike Bosch of Coyote Software for Synod's use of a computer and printer. In connection with a request, it was deemed appropriate to respond to appeals by email in addition to regular mail, provided that both those appealing and those appealed against can be contacted via these means. It was also confirmed that Acts of closed session matters can be made available to office bearers elsewhere if requested. The clerk reminded Synod that according to Regional Synod Regulations, each church receives only one copy of the Acts. The ladies of the Ebenezer Church who served Synod so well were thanked.

The chairman ruled that censure ad Art. 34 C.O. was not necessary. He expressed thankfulness for the brotherly manner in which the meeting was held.

With a view to the late hour, it was agreed that the executive would be responsible for the publication of the Acts and the Press Release.

On behalf of all delegates at Synod, the vice-chairman thanked the chairman for the fine way in which he had led the proceedings of Synod and chaired the meeting. The chairman read from Psalm 130 and requested the singing of Ps 130: 1, 4, and led in closing prayer. Regional Synod East 1999 was closed.

W. den Hollander, vice-chairman of Regional Synod East 1999

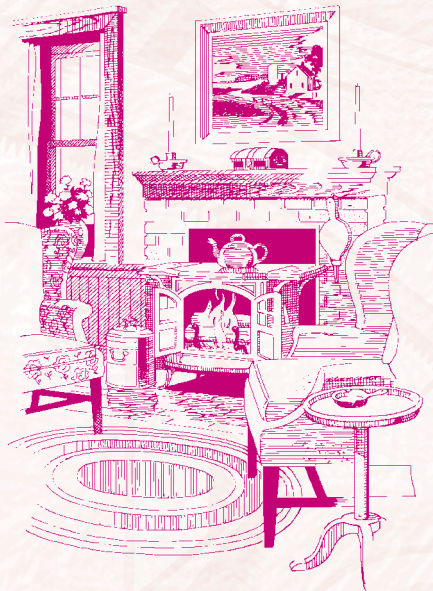


Our Little Magazine

Dear Busy Beavers

Can you just imagine? In Canada, the United States and Holland it's getting colder and the winter is starting to set in. In Australia and Africa, it's getting warmer and the summer is nearly there. Doesn't it seem really odd that another part of the world has totally different weather than you have. Then you get those parts of the world where it is never cold – they have warm weather all the time. Wouldn't that be nice? You could wear your shorts and t-shirts all the year round.

Then again, can you imagine never having snow or cold weather, when you can rug up and sit in front of a warm heater, or snuggle under your nice warm blankets on your bed?



Think about where you think it would be nice to live, and why, and write to me where and why? I think that would be fun, don't you?

Lots of love
Aunt Betty



FROM THE MAILBOX

Hello, *Jessica Verhelst*. It was nice to hear from you. Thank you for your puzzle and your photo. I'll put that your puzzle into *Our Little Magazine*, okay? Write again, won't you, *Jessica*.

Thank you also to *Melissa Tuininga* for your letter and puzzles. It must be lots of fun playing the flute in the band at school. Do you play the flute really well? I like the flute a lot too. And won't you have fun going to Winnipeg for your Opa and Oma's wedding anniversary. I can just imagine that your sister's kittens are really cute. Have you given them all away now? Bye for now, *Melissa*.

Hello also to *Shawna Bethlehem*. Wow, you are so lucky to have a baby brother. He must be so cute, and you must be so proud of him. I think he will be very spoiled by having a big sister. Thank you also for your puzzles. Till next time.

Hello *Jolene Breukelman*. Thank you for your letter, puzzles and picture. I can't put your picture in *Our Little Magazine* because your flowers are far too small for the other *Busy Beavers* to colour in. Next time draw one with not so many little flowers. But I can put in your puzzle of your class friends. That was a very good idea for you to do. They'll all be pleased that you thought of them all. Bye, *Jolene*.

PUZZLES

CELEBRATIONS WORD SEARCH

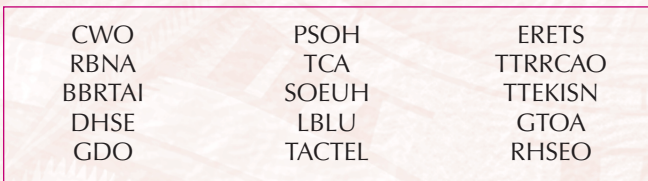
By Busy Beaver Jessica Verhelst



Words: CHRISTMAS, CANADA, LABOUR, NEW YEARS DAY, THANKSGIVING, EASTER, BOXING DAY

Unscramble the Words

By Busy Beaver Melissa Tuininga

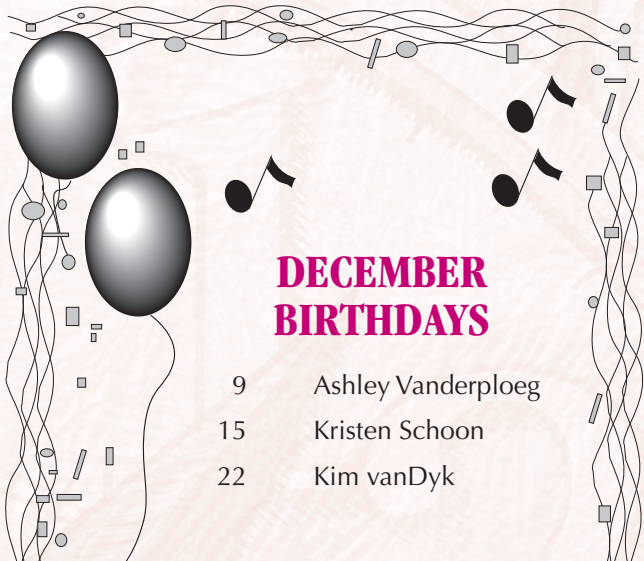


GRADE FOUR CLASS

By Busy Beaver Jolene Breukelman



Find: KAYLA, CASSIE, DERRICK, JANELL, STEPHANIE, JENNIFER, JESSICA, JUDITHA, JOANNA, JOEL, CHRIS H, JOSH, DWAYNE, CHRIS, TREVOR, JOLENE



Psalm 67: 1,2,3

May God be merciful and bless us,
Illumine us with light divine;
May He to us be ever gracious
And cause His face on us to shine.
May He to all nations
Show His revelation
And His way unfold.
Great is God our Saviour;
Let all see His favour
And His power behold.

Let all the peoples come before Thee
To sing their praises to Thy Name;
Let all the heathen tribes adore Thee,
With joy Thy mighty deeds proclaim.
Thou dost rule the nations,

Judge their populations,
Showing equity.
Justice Thou providest;
Thou all peoples guidest,
Let them honour Thee.

O God, let every tribe and nation
Shout forth Thy praises far and wide.
Let all men come with jubilation:
The earth its harvest did provide.
God is good and gracious;
Richly did He bless us –
He, our God and King.
Let all peoples fear Him,
All the earth revere Him,
Of His glory sing.



Season's Greetings

from all of us at

Premier Printing Ltd.

