

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Number 10:1-10



*Shout for joy
to the LORD, all the earth...*

Psalm 98:4

*For the word of the LORD is right and true;
He is faithful in all He does.
The LORD loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of his unfailing love.*

Psalm 33:4,5

*To all our readers,
Best wishes, and the
Lord's blessing in the year 2001*

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Celebrating Christmas

by N.H. Gootjes

Christmas instituted

Christmas is one of the important celebrations of the year. It is a special day all over the world, and most people enjoy it as a day of freedom. That has not always been the case. There is no record that the New Testament church celebrated Christmas. Neither Acts nor the epistles written by Paul contain even a hint that the day of Jesus Christ's birth was commemorated with a special day. Actually, the New Testament does not give any indication concerning the exact date of his birth. Celebrating Christmas is not a New Testament commandment.

It took several centuries before it became a special day. A special feast in commemoration of Jesus Christ's birth can only be traced back to the beginning of the fourth century. Later during that same century, the church of Rome connected this redemptive event with December 25. From there, the custom to celebrate the birth of our Saviour on December 25 spread all over the Christian world. Celebrating Christmas is a human invention.

We are therefore confronted with the question whether we should celebrate it. Is it a good custom to set apart a special day to commemorate Christ's coming into this world? If Scripture does not even mention the date, let alone tell us to maintain this special day, why should we make so much of it? Would it not be better to do away with this human festival day?

The Old Testament tells us that God himself instituted several feasts. One of these was a feast in commemoration of an event in the past: Passover. This was to be the memorial day of the exodus, the liberation from the oppression the Israelites had experienced in Egypt. The people of Israel had to ex-

plain to their children that this feast brought back to memory the punishment of Egypt, and the way in which God had rescued them, so that they did not undergo the same punishment (see Exod 12). Israel commemorated the great wonders by which God had rescued them (Ps 77:11-15).

In this case, the celebration was based on a direct command of God, but there were other occasions. Much later in Israel's history, God had rescued his people through the intervention of Queen Esther. That was the occasion for instituting a new feast day: Purim. There is no word in Scripture stating that God ordered Israel to celebrate this. It was organized by Esther herself and by her uncle Mordecai (Esth 9:29-33).

Bringing his Son into this world for the sake of our salvation is one of the greatest things God has ever done. The importance of Christ's birth warrants celebration. When the Christian church in the fourth century instituted Christmas day, it continued in the direction God had indicated in his word.

Christmas abolished

The Reformation which took place in the sixteenth century, the century of Luther, Zwingli

and Calvin, affected the celebration of Christmas. Actually, there was a rather widespread attempt to abolish the feast days altogether, including Christmas.

The Synod of Dordrecht 1574 made a radical decision to abolish Christmas. The Synod wanted the people to be satisfied with the Sunday. On the Sunday preceding December 25, the gospel of Jesus Christ's birth should be preached. And on that same occasion, the people had to be admonished that the special day of Christmas had been abolished. Christmas was no longer going to be celebrated.



“Celebrating Christmas is a human invention.”

It sounds unbelievable that a Synod of the Reformed churches would want to abolish a special feast day for the celebration of the birth of our Saviour. It becomes more understandable when it is seen in the light of the general trends of the period. It seems that during the previous century, the number of holy days had been greatly increased. The fact that the people had no work to do during those days had led them to indulge in drunkenness and other kinds of excesses. Already before the Reformation, there were attempts to severely restrict the number of feast days.

The Reformers agreed with this. At one point, Luther had wanted to do away with the feast days altogether. Later, he allowed for the celebration of special Christian feast days. Calvin agreed with the attempt to abolish those days. At the time, sermons were preached on every day of the week, for those who could attend. But he refused to pay special attention to the day of Christmas. He used to preach on the significance of Christ's birth on the Sunday preceding December 25, and on Christmas day he preached on whatever Bible book he was working on.

Seen in this light, we can understand the Dutch churches who wanted to do away with the special celebration of Christmas. The whole system of feast days had led to all kind of evils.

The attempt to abolish Christmas failed. The authorities in the cities maintained the feast days as public holidays for the citizens. The churches decided that it was better to organize worship services on the Christian feast days, when they were celebrated anyway. If a day was set apart in commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ, it was better to direct the thoughts of the people to the significance of it by the reading and preaching of God's word. That is the background of the rule in the Church Order that Christmas was to be celebrated.

Christmas today

In our society Christmas is an accepted holiday. Most people need not work; they are allowed to take the day off. That may seem like a victory for Christianity but it is not. The day is still named after Jesus Christ, but usually it does not have much to do with Him or his birth.

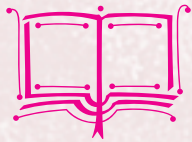
Everyone turns it to their own purpose. The stores tell us that we need to buy all kinds of luxury items for Christmas. It has become a day for giving presents. The importance of Jesus Christ has diminished and his place is taken by Santa Claus, a jolly fellow who brings joy and warms the hearts in the cold season. The stores rake in the money. Others capitalize on the idea of freedom. The travel agents offer Christmas cruises in warmer places, to escape the cold season.

In the midst of all this commercialism, the significance of Christmas has disappeared. It has developed into a day for enjoying the good life and hospitality. If that is the case, we might as well do away with Christmas altogether. It says nowhere in the Bible that we have to maintain a special day for remembering the birth of Jesus Christ. A Christmas day without Christ is like a fruit that is whole on the outside but rotten inside. It stinks. We can understand why Reformed people in the sixteenth century wanted to abolish it.

There is a better way. Rather than abolishing it, we should maintain its original meaning. It is the celebration of the birth of our Saviour, an event greater than the rescue celebrated in the Purim feast. The church has the right to designate a special day to commemorate God's great acts in history. The birth of our Saviour certainly qualifies as a great miracle God performed to make possible our salvation. Christmas is a human institution but there is every reason to celebrate this. We can show gratitude to God for Jesus Christ's birth. When Christ is the centre, our celebration of Christmas is not hollow amusement but the profound joy of people saved from the brink of disaster. C

"The significance of Christmas has disappeared . . . we should maintain its original meaning."





What's Inside?

With this issue of *Clarion*, we come once again to the Christmas season and the end of another year. In keeping with the season, the editorial of Dr. N. H. Gootjes and an article by Rev. Cl. Stam (from his book, *Celebrating Salvation*) both speak about commemorating the birth of our Saviour. The Reformers tried to abolish a special feast day which celebrates Christ's birth. This attempt failed. However the point is made clear that celebrating Christmas as we do is proper only when we remember the true meaning of Christmas. Also in this issue, Jane deGlint submits a Christmas poem, as well as a book review on Dr. J. van Bruggen's books, *Christ on Earth* and *Jesus the Son of God*.

Rev. W. den Hollander once again writes the Year-End Review 2000. Reading his comprehensive review makes one realize again how richly the Lord has blessed us as churches.

Rev. P. G. Feenstra writes his regular column. He writes about the comfort that we, as sheep, have in Jesus Christ. We also have the column, "Ray of Sunshine."

This issue contains a number of different reports and press releases. These keep us informed of various activities in church life from ordinations of ministers to the work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship and Faithworks. This should also assist us in articulating our petitions to God as we pray for various activities in his Kingdom.

We here at *Clarion* wish you the Lord's blessings in this festive season and for the coming year. By God's grace we will continue to supply you with relevant articles and press releases during the year of our Lord, 2001.

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Comfort for Christ's Sheep

by P. G. Feenstra



The need for comfort

Comfort is something that every person wants in life. To have peace of mind, to be relieved from misery, to possess contentment and inner calm – certainly everyone desires that! That's why we use the word quite frequently. For example, in your home you set your thermostat to the comfort zone so that the temperature is pleasant for everyone. If you are out of town, you can stay at the Comfort Inn. When you are cold at night you can snuggle under a comforter! We speak about degrees of comfort: of ultimate and extreme comfort.

Comfort is not only something every human being wants but it is also what every individual needs: when sick and dying, when standing in a funeral home or at a grave side but also when healthy and strong. Lamech called his son "Noah" which means "comfort." He named him Noah saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed" (Gen 5:29). Isaac was still weeping over the death of his mother when the Lord provided him with a beautiful wife, Rebekah. And when he brought her into the tent, ". . . Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (Gen 24:67).

True consolation can only be found in the Lord by finding our strength, consolation and refuge in Him. He is our ever present help and strength. Children of God can turn to Him with all their burdens and afflictions, when anguish fills their hearts or when fight-

ing and struggling against sin. In the Lord there is true comfort and quietness for the soul.

"Comfort" in our Reformed confessions

The doctrine of comfort is a theme that is found within our Reformed Confessions. The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism is well-known to us, "What is your only comfort in life and death?" The catechism returns to this subject of comfort in its explanation of the Apostles' Creed. Thus children of the covenant are asked to respond in faith to the question, "What comfort is it to you that Christ will come to judge the living and the dead?" and "What comfort does the resurrection of the body offer you?"

Speaking about the gifts and grace, the Lord signifies and seals to us in baptism, the Belgic Confession makes this wonderful statement, "He washes, purges and cleanses our souls of all filth and unrighteousness, renews our hearts and fills them with all comfort, gives us true assurance of his fatherly goodness, clothes us with the new nature, and takes away the old nature with all its works" (Art 34). In the following article of the Belgic Confession, we confess the comfort we receive from the celebration of the Lord's Supper. "This banquet is a spiritual table at which Christ makes us partakers of Himself with all his benefits and gives us the grace to enjoy both Himself and the merit of his suffering and death. He nourishes, strengthens, and comforts our poor, desolate souls by

the eating of his flesh, and refreshes and renews them by the drinking of his blood."

Explaining God's decree of election, which many might consider a comfortless subject, the Canons of Dort say, "Although perverse, impure, and unstable men twist this decree to their own destruction, it provides unspeakable comfort for holy and God-fearing souls" (Chapter I, Article 6). Election is to be taught "for the living comfort of his people" (Chapter I, Article 14). Confessing the perseverance of the saints, we read in the Canons of Dort Chapter V, Article 10, "And if the elect of God did not have in this world the solid comfort of obtaining the victory and this unailing pledge of eternal glory, they would be of all men the most miserable."

The Bible and comfort

Holy Scripture directs us to the comfort we have in the Lord. Let me provide you with a sampling of several texts that speak beautiful words of the comfort we have in the Lord:

- Psalm 119:49,50, "Remember the word to Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your word has given me life."

- Isaiah 40:1, "'Comfort, yes, comfort My people!' says your God."

- Isaiah 51:3, "For the Lord will comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places, he will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD. . ."

• Isaiah 66:13, “As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.”

• 2 Corinthians 1:3-6, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.”

From all these passages it is clear that our only comfort in life and death is always connected to the work of Jesus Christ – to the salvation the Lord has in store for Zion – for the church. Jesus Christ provides us with comfort as a Shepherd cares for his flock.

Comfort and repentance

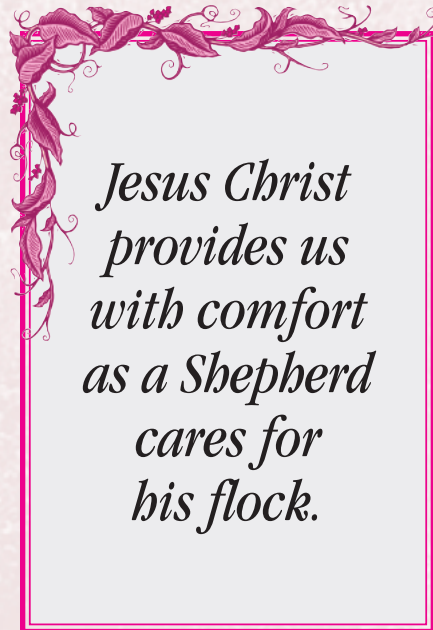
True comfort is far more than an emotion or a good feeling. Being comforted is an activity. The word which is used for “comfort” in Isaiah 40 (and in other parts of the Old Testament) has the same root as the word used to call people to repentance. God’s comfort is granted to us through repentance from sin; when we seek our safety, refuge and security outside of ourselves in Christ.

Repentance is worked in our hearts through the Comforter sent to us by the Son (John 16:7-11). According to Psalm 23, the disciplinary rod and staff of the Lord comfort the believer. When a passage of Scripture or a sermon rebuke and warns us, that does not mean there is no comfort! There is no comfort when we are not directed to Christ through admonition. Since the Spirit is present in the administration of the Word, we can say today, “For You are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” The Holy Spirit changes the direction of my life.

I am made ready and willing from now on to serve the Lord. The focus is off of ourselves and on to God. The comfort of the Holy Spirit includes consolation and encouragement but also rebuke, exhortation, admonition and training in righteousness.

Comfort for Christ’s sheep

Our only refuge is in Christ and his redeeming work. He upholds us so that all things work together for our salvation. He preserves us so securely that not even a hair can fall from our heads without the will of our heavenly Father.



Those things that seem small and of little significance are caught up in the greater plan of God so that all things work together for my salvation. Psalm 23 sings of this so wonderfully. “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want” that is, “I shall not be lacking what I need for body and soul, I shall be utterly content in the Good Shepherd’s care.” Why? “He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters, He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness.” The Lord is always near his sheep.


The price paid for our comfort

We have comfort in life and in death because Jesus Christ paid the price which cost Him his life. In a real and vital sense we truly belong to Him because He bought us at the incredible price of his own blood. Personally I belong to Jesus Christ with my whole life because I belong to the great congregation which He bought through his precious blood.

Being the sheep of Christ’s pasture we can be sure that He has equal concern for all the members of the flock, whether we are young or elderly, single or married. Christ has a heart for all his sheep, whether they look preened and pretty or scarred by the troubles of life. We are his because He has paid our debt in full. Our only comfort is found in what happened at Golgotha. He bought us, thereby setting us free from all the power of the devil.

Ultimate and absolute comfort

We have total comfort because Jesus Christ as our Shepherd provides us with total care. He provides us with spiritual shelter, care and daily sustenance. Throughout the day and all through the night He casts his eyes over his flock to make sure everything is well. The Lord keeps watch over his flock, taking care of each individual’s welfare spiritual as well as physical. Thus for a covenant child to pray before he or she goes to bed, “Now I lay me down to sleep and I thank thee for thy keep. Watch this night now over me” is not an empty petition but is built on the unconditional confession of comfort: “The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want.”

Let the doctrine of God’s covenant be our strength for every hour and second of our life. Those who rely on the Lord will renew their strength and comfort. They will never be put to shame. The Lord is our only comfort in life and death; He is our refuge and strength because there isn’t anything or anyone who can snatch us out of his hand. 





The True History of the Birth of Jesus Christ

by Cl. Stam

And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:7).

There is only one proper manner in which to remember and celebrate the birth of our Lord. Certainly, we may make a happy day out of it with family and friends. There is nothing wrong with a festive meal with fellowship and sharing. But this may not become a goal in itself, which obscures the true meaning of Christmas. We must let the Word of God and the true worship of God determine everything from beginning to end.

We know the story of Christ's birth so well, and yet every year it must strike us, on the one hand, how amazingly simple the description of Luke really is. Never before has anyone like Christ been born, and never will anyone like Him be born again; yet Luke describes it to us in such simple terms. But on the other hand, these simple terms are deeply stirring: you cannot escape the solemnity of the biblical account.

As to the biblical simplicity: usually the birth of great people is surrounded by fantastic legends. There are some apocryphal accounts of Christ's birth which are nothing more than elaborate embellishments – "tasteless and unedifying," as one commentator aptly put it of what the Bible tells us. Fact is mixed with fiction, and human imagination is added to divine revelation so that the truth is obscured.

The birth of Christ is to be proclaimed in truth and without embellishment. It must be done in simple and

yet stirring terms, for so the Holy Spirit has revealed it. Perhaps we could summarize the message of Luke 2:7 as follows: the true history of the birth of Jesus Christ, and note that it is both a simple history and a special one.

A simple history

It is not easy to tell the story of a birth in a clear and yet a restrained manner, paying attention to necessary detail and still preserving dignity. We can easily say too much or not enough. Although most of us know well the process of birth, there are also little children and perhaps older people who have not experienced or witnessed such an event.

Now Luke could have made quite a story out of it. In a lengthy first chapter he has built up the tension. Now the moment of the birth of Christ has arrived, and that has been the focal point of everything. Should Luke not now go into great detail and in depth describe to us the birth of our great Lord and King?

There is indeed detail and depth, not in the sensationalistic manner of the world, but in the quiet manner of the Word. We read about the decree of Caesar Augustus that everyone was to go to his place of birth for proper enrolment, and that also Joseph and Mary, who was pregnant, undertook a journey to their town of origin, which was Bethlehem.

And there in Bethlehem the Lord Jesus is born. In verse 6 we read, "the time came for her to be delivered," which simply means, she was "full term," her due date had come. Christ's birth was not premature or delayed, but came after a regular, full term pregnancy. When Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem, the time had come for the child to be born.

Verse 7 tells us about the birth itself. It says: "she gave birth to her first-born son . . ." That's it. That's all. It is indeed such a simple history. It does not say whether it was a very difficult or lengthy labour and delivery. We are not told how much the baby weighed at his birth and whether he was immediately healthy and strong, or not.

A first-born son

We do read that Mary gave birth to her "first-born." It was for Mary a first child, her first labour and delivery. It is generally agreed that the first time is often the most difficult, but the point is here not so much that it was a first delivery (the process) but that the child himself was her first-born (the result). It says nothing about the birth itself.

Now, giving birth is under the best of circumstances a difficult experience. In this case, for this young couple, having been displaced and cut off from their supportive and familiar surroundings in Nazareth of Galilee, being all alone, young and inexperienced, with

no one to help, it must have been quite an ordeal!

Still, it is told in simple terms. “She gave birth to her first-born son.” “First-born” implies that she later had more children, and even though this first birthing process was unique for Joseph and Mary, unique in many ways as we will see more clearly later – yet it was simple like those that would follow.

The swaddling cloths

Now it was the custom in those days that right after a child was born it was washed, rubbed with some kind of body salt, and wrapped in cloths. It is clear that a new-born baby needs to be washed. It does not say whether Mary was able to use the body salt – perhaps she had none – but it does say that she wrapped him in “swaddling cloths.”

The verb “to swaddle” means simply to bind or to wrap. The idea was to wrap the child snugly in these cloths to keep it warm. In the famous hymn about the shepherds watching their flocks by night (which is Hymn 17 in the *Book of Praise* of the Canadian Reformed Churches) there was a line about the babe being “all meanly wrapped in swaddling cloths.” All meanly wrapped? As a child I thought, “How awful to wrap up this newly born child so tight that it almost suffocates.” Was He maltreated from the moment He was born? But in truth it is quite simple: he was properly clothed for protection and warmth. There was nothing strange about it: it happened to all new-born infants in Israel. One family may have had nicer and newer swaddling cloths than another, but Christ, just like all other babies in his time, was properly washed and clothed.

In this light we can appreciate that the newer version of Hymn 17 – as we now have it – reads: “. . . Not as a King arrayed, but *humbly wrapped* in swaddling cloths . . .” Indeed, *humbly*, for “meanly” means commonly, in humility, without riches.

It says that Mary did all this. She gave birth, she wrapped, and she laid the child in the manger. She is on her own. We do not read that any other women came to help her. Of course, she will have received the loving help of Joseph. But most men are quite at a loss when it comes to labour, delivery, and post-natal care, certainly the first time around. Mary had to do the main por-

tion of the work of post-natal care herself, despite her weakness and fatigue.

Many children have been born under difficult and poor circumstances. So it was with our Lord Jesus Christ. In simple terms, his was the normal birth of a healthy child, but one who was born in extreme poverty and under difficult circumstances. We can take it literally when the apostle Paul says that Christ who was rich (in heaven) became poor (on earth) in order that He might make us rich in Him (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Back to our main point, then: it is a simple history. Until now, we have discovered nothing significant, nothing out of the ordinary. Luke tells it all in a restrained manner, with tasteful discretion, and yet in such a way that we know all we need to know about what happened that day.

Christ, our Saviour, came in the natural way of labour and delivery; He was born of woman, like all people, and his birth was very common. It is true, Christ came in a different sense than all others – for He alone is the eternal Son of God – but He came in a natural way, for He truly is son of man!

In no way may this be obscured or embellished. It has been told as it really happened. These are the facts as we must know them for our salvation. Christ did not come into the world in any spectacular way with a grand entry, but in the normal way of pregnancy and birth. In this manner He became truly one of us, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone! And so He could begin in our flesh to overcome sin.

A special history

It is indeed a simple story. But yet it is a special story. For this child, who was born that day in Bethlehem, is nevertheless the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. And indeed, it must be said of Him that He suffered from the *beginning* of his life to the end. We see this element come to the fore in the second part of verse 7.

For Luke adds something here that is indeed different: “[Mary] laid Him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.” This lying in a manger may be considered significant also in view of what the angel says to the shepherds: this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in

swaddling cloths – thus a new-born infant – and *lying in a manger*.

The manner in which Jesus is born may not be different from that of other births, but the place where He is laid is of great significance; it constitutes a sign!

The nativity scene

You have perhaps seen reproductions of the “nativity scene,” and no matter how these scenes differ from each other, they all have this in common: the place looks so cosy and warm. A quaint little stall, a nice wooden crib with clean straw, a baby with healthy, rosy cheeks, proud parents and smiling shepherds, even interested animals looking on with a sheepish grin. Not a bad atmosphere at all, really, in which to be fostered as an infant.

I do not want to poke fun at these scenes, but I do have to point out that they hardly reflect the reality of Christmas. We do not know exactly where Jesus was born in Bethlehem – and the commentators differ greatly on what is the proper explanation of the words in which the event is described – but from our text a few important matters do become quite clear.

It says that there was “no room for them in the inn.” The word used for “inn” meant: a place to let down, tie down the animals and lie down yourself. It was a rest-area, as we sometimes have them at the roadside. The area was generally divided into two sections: one for the people, around a fire, an open hearth, and one for the animals in a type of cave. And the word used for “manger” means indeed “feeding trough.” “Manger” is derived from a verb (think of the French “manger”) which means “to eat.” This, as we saw, was for the shepherds a clear sign of identification. For you do not normally find babies in a manger. In a manger you find slop, not sucklings. Shepherds knew all about animal feeding areas, how dirty they were. Every barn or stable, let alone those in a public area, is filled with bacteria and filth. The shepherds also knew where these mangers were. They didn’t have to go checking all sorts of places, asking whether a baby was born, for there was only one place to look: the public rest area. And that was indeed where they found the infant: it was exactly as the angel had told them.

And to think that this child, lying in that manger, is indeed Christ, the Lord, the awaited Messiah, the Son of David! Here is where the history becomes special and different from any other birthday story. Here the extreme poverty becomes a humiliation, an emptying, which will lead to the final humiliation on the cross of Golgotha.

I think now of Hymn 19 in *The Book of Praise*, "For though God's equal, though eternal King, He did not to his rightful glory cling . . . Himself He emptied that He us might save . . ."

The Son of God comes out of the glory of heaven into the Bethlehem sloop; He comes from a heavenly throne to a feeding trough, because now already He begins to bear the wrath of God for our sins. That is the special history of Christmas! And if this is his beginning what will his end be? He will go from manger to tomb, from rock bed to rock bed, enduring even the agony of hell, for our sake, because of our sins.

Lack of hospitality?

Often in connection with this verse, a verse from John 1 is quoted, "He came to his own home and his own people knew Him not." And frequently you can read as commentary: how awful, the King was born and no one knew!

But the people in Bethlehem could not know initially that in this way and in that place a Saviour was born to them. The Lord God used the shepherds for that purpose later: they made known to Bethlehem and surrounding area the birth of the Messiah. What John refers to when He writes "His own people knew Him not" is that the people *when told*, refused to acknowledge Him as their Saviour! The expression, "They knew Him not" does not mean: we didn't know about Him, but it means: we knew, yet we said, No! We don't want such a Saviour. And that rejection has to do with the fact that they never knew their own misery, never acknowledged the depth of their own sin. No one did identify the poverty of the babe in the manger with the extreme misery of his own sin.

Meanwhile, the process of emptying himself has begun. And He will have to go all the way, drinking the cup to the last drop.

We see here something of the great, inexplicable love of God that He

*"A newborn
Child you there
will find, not as
a king arrayed
but humbly
wrapped in
swaddling cloths
and in a
manger laid."*

Hymn 17:4
Book of Praise

gave his only-begotten Son, who from the beginning had to bear the eternal wrath of God. We see here something of the immeasurable love of Christ who, though He was Father's everlasting Son, did not despise the virgin's womb. We see here something of the great love of the Holy Spirit, who alone does guide us to understand and to know Him, receive and acknowledge Him, as our Saviour. I think here of the old hymn, "Te Deum" (Hymn 2 in the *Book of Praise*), the Hallelujah of the New Testament church.

Shopping mall yuletide

The world, too, knows that the "Christmas story" is simple, yet special. Many would agree if you told them that the history of Christ's birth is one of stirring simplicity and special depth. They would say: yes, it strikes a tender chord with us, too. It strikes a chord, but it does not lead to an eternal song, for the world has made this feast into a celebration of human kindness and good cheer in bad days. People do not want to know the truth about Christ or about themselves. Therefore Christmas makes no real difference in their lives.


The trouble with most shopping mall and yuletide "nativity scenes" is

that they focus the attention on one aspect and do not give the living history. The trouble with most people is that they never really get beyond the shopping mall and mistletoe mentality. But is not the trouble with *us*, Reformed people, that we do not let the reality of Christ's earthly ministry encourage and motivate us to a newer and better service?

Slowly but steadily, we are taking over the Christmas style celebration of the world around us. Our manner of celebrating Christmas is already much more integrated with our society than was that of our parents. And it is being said: it's only a matter of style, not content! What's wrong with a festive atmosphere? With some lights, some boughs, a Christmas tree? That's only atmosphere, indeed. But be careful that the main issue is not lost among us, that the true story is known, the real meaning of Christmas not obscured!

The main issue is our dedication and commitment to the Lord, who went from the manger to the throne; it is our seeking first the kingdom of heaven and the righteousness of God in Christ. Here is where the devil wants to wean us away from the truth of God's Word. He tries to do it in his own special, deceptive way, by giving lots of atmosphere, but no room to breathe spiritually; by providing lots of trees, but not the tree of life, and lots of lights, but not the Light of the World.

For the devil likes to make Christmas into a carnival. He is the great pretender, the great deceiver, who takes away the Word and gives "atmosphere" instead. The devil takes this special story and vulgarizes it, makes it romantic and endearing, a story of human kindness and of men of goodwill. He commercializes it, neutralizes it, paganizes it, packages it and then says: here you have it, Merry Christmas!

We may never separate style from content, for the one is reflected in the other. Keep combining simplicity with depth. Especially on Christmas Day. Then it will remain for us and our children indeed a very special history, which leads us to sing of the victory of Christ over death and Satan's power infernal. And the true history will motivate us to greater service. 

Taken with permission from Rev. Cl. Stam's book, Celebrating Salvation.



Year-End Review 2000

by W. den Hollander

Introduction

The year of the Lord 2000 is coming to an end. Our turn of the year is a moment which people have established. There are different kinds of systems of time notations. In the Western world we have the Christian system, that takes the birth of Christ as its fixed point from which the years are numbered, hence the *Anno Domini* 2000. This system is most prominent in the rest of the world, too. However, there also is a Jewish system with a New Year's day on a different day. The Chinese, too, have their system. Their New Year's day is a day of great feasting, yet it takes place on a different date. Our year end on December 31 and New Year's Day on January 1 is a choice which was made at some point in history. Another sensible choice could have been February 28 and March 1; in that case the names September, October, November, etc. would have been more correctly the seventh, eighth and ninth months, as the names denote. So this matter of the turn of the year is somewhat relative. The Bible doesn't give any directives for it either.

At the same time, this occasion of the turn of the year is very conducive for reflection and meditation. It is a good opportunity to consider the world, look at your life in the midst of it. For many people the striking of the clock at twelve brings great excitement. For us believers, however, this moment should turn our attention to God's progress in history, to his plans for the future. As far as man's progress and plans are concerned, they are so relative and so uncertain that we cannot build our meditations on them. For us it will be much better to find

our basis for reflection and meditation in the security of God's revelation and in the certainty of God's plans.

When we do that, then we observe concerning the past year that God's faithfulness was great again. We also are aware that the struggle of the spirits continued, the battle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Rev 12). This spiritual warfare continued in the *larger* context of persecutions and in the *smaller* confines of our own hearts. In the midst of that struggle and warfare the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of his catholic church, is still gathering, defending and preserving his church. The activities collected in this Year-End Review may testify to his faithfulness, as He continues to do that work by his Spirit and Word. In the larger and smaller blessings bestowed upon the communion of saints in every place we survey, we may see Him as the Lord of the year 2000!

Congregational life

The heart of all congregational life is in the weekly *worship services*. From Sunday to Sunday the congregations gather to worship our Triune God. The Lord Jesus Christ brings them together by the power of his Spirit and Word. This weekly congregational activity of worship is part and parcel of the overall *celebration* of the Sunday as the New Testament day of rest. This *worship and celebration* has been the focus of many congregational gatherings during the past year. The liturgy for our worship, the songs of praise we select from the Psalms and Hymns we adopted, and the possibility of expanding on the same, all received the necessary attention: lest we worship out of custom or superstition! For the present and the coming generation it is important as well that the celebration of the entire day of the Lord be

*"Choirs, . . .
the pursuit of
the communal
development
of the vocal
talents for the
greater praises
of our God."*



*Top left:
Rev. W.
Bredenhof*

*Top right:
Rev. K. Wieske*

*Bottom left:
Rev. F. Dong*

*Bottom right:
Rev. D. Poppe*



and dedication to the Lord as we make use of all these blessings. They serve the entire federation of churches as a calling to “hold on to what we have” and to continue in that course! Hence the concern among quite a few of our churches about the attendance during the afternoon worship services should be a serious warning regarding the risk of losing what we have! The Lord is faithful, not only to his covenant promises but also to his covenant threats! “Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.” Let’s not lose the zeal and dedication of the pioneers, the first love of those who were instrumental in the preservation of the Reformed worship in our land. Love for the Lord and his church shows in our obedience and eagerness in heeding the call for worship, also in our obedient submission to the call by the servants of the Lord!

In light of these anniversaries it is worth mentioning that in the Niagara Peninsula there is a Historical Society of the Niagara area churches, which collects and organizes items of a historic nature pertaining to churches in the area. Also, at one of the meetings of Classis Alberta/Manitoba, one of the elders mentioned the discovery of important historical material in the attic of his parents’ home. Especially when we see the blessed progress among our congregations, we must ensure that the knowledge about the way the Lord has guided our churches is preserved to be used by the future generations!

We should make sure that the historical evidence of these works of the Lord remains available!

What more could be mentioned in terms of highlights in the life of our local congregations? One of those special events is the inauguration of a new church building. The Redeemer congregation in Winnipeg was blessed with such an occasion this past year. After their recent institution and the new arrival of their own minister, this third blessing on their brief congregational history certainly was a festive occasion! Let’s not forget the day of such seemingly small beginnings!

Church activities

At the same time, we should remember that the church is not the building but the *people* who assemble for worship. Congregational life, also, is not restricted to the worship services on Sunday, but it entails all the *activities* taking place among the members and the joint endeavours by the members. Among those activities we should value highly the work of the weekly Bible study groups, which should aim to “build up the body of Christ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature . . . !” In view of that important work we should note with thankfulness the continued efforts of the Inter-League Publication Board (ILPB), which continues to publish new study aids! Since I ended this survey of congregational life by mentioning our beloved congregation in

Winnipeg, it may be said that thanks to the printing activities performed in this city, congregational life in every province is enriched by such publications as *Clarion*, *Reformed Perspective*, *Mission News*, *Horizon*, etc. Thus we may see the manifold gifts of the Lord which He provides in order that life in the congregations, purchased by the precious blood of his Son and gathered by his Spirit and Word, may flourish to the praise of his glory!

Ministry of the Gospel

In the context of a flourishing congregational life the ministry of the gospel has a pivotal place. Thankfully, the ministers in the midst of our churches have been able to serve the congregations fruitfully during the past year. We realize, however, that they have this treasure of the proclamation of the gospel in jars of clay. This became evident once again during the time of serious illness encountered by the Rev. C. Bosch of Burlington-Fellowship. On the other hand, this awareness of man’s frailties moves us to greater thankfulness again at an occasion such as an anniversary. This certainly was the overriding sentiment expressed at the forty-fifth anniversary which the Rev. J. Mulder could celebrate this past year! Also the privilege enjoyed by the church of Grand Rapids, namely to have an elderly minister like the Rev. W. Boessenkool from our sister church of Johannesburg, South Africa, come to help out for half a year, testifies to the goodness of the Lord in providing health and strength to his servants. From our own midst we observe with thankfulness that also the Rev. J. VanRietschoten, minister-emeritus of the church at Chatham, continues to be active in serving churches such as Armadale in Western Australia and Smithers, B.C.

During this past year the churches were blessed with *new* ministers of the Word as well. The Rev. Frank Dong became eligible for call in our federation, eventually ending up becoming the Urban Missionary in the Greater Vancouver Area, as minister of the church at Cloverdale. He declined the call from the church at Kelmscott, Australia, for mission work via the radio broadcast to Mainland China. The Rev. Ken Wieske became the new missionary for the church at Surrey for the work in Brazil. The mission work

among the First Nations people in the Smithers area was enriched with the arrival of the Rev. Wes Bredenhof, who accepted the call from the church at Smithers, B.C. for that work. In that same part of the country, the church at Houston saw its vacancy filled with the ordination of the Rev. Dirk Poppe.

Although vacant churches extended many calls, not too many ministers could see their way clear to accept such a call. The Rev. J. Kroeze, former missionary for the work in Brazil by the Church at Hamilton and its supporting churches, accepted a call from the Church at Legana, Tasmania. The Rev. A. J. Pol made the move from the Church at Guelph, Ont., to the Church of Carman West. The Rev. J. Vanwoudenberg will be coming to the end of his ministry in Kerwood, Ont, when he makes the move to Guelph early in the new year. At this time of writing we don't know yet what the Rev. P. G. Feenstra is going to decide in regard to the call he received from the Church at Smithers, B.C. for its vacancy.

Quite a few ministers entertained a call from a vacant church during this past year, but decided to decline this call. The Rev. W. M. Wielenga of Lynden, Washington, declined Houston, B.C. The Rev. P. Aasman, of Grand Valley, Ont., declined a call from both Houston and Smithers, B.C. Also the Rev. P. G. Feenstra received a call from Houston, B.C., which he declined, as did the Rev. J. Van Vliet of Lincoln, Ont., and the Rev. R.J. Eikelboom of Calgary, Alta. The Rev. R.A. Schouten, of Abbotsford B.C., declined a call from both Smithers and Smithville. The Rev. J. Visscher of Langley, B.C., also, declined a call from the Church at Smithville. Finally, the Rev. W. den Hollander continues to serve the Church at Toronto after declining a call from the church at Grand Rapids, Michigan.

All in all there was a lot of activity in the area of calling, yet little change in the sense of ministers moving. For the congregations these times of extending and receiving calls are usually quite unsettling. There too, the regular and continued ministry makes for the best situation in terms of continuity and progress. For these vacant churches such times of vacancy are difficult indeed, both for the congregation and for the office bearers. What

a blessing it is when the ministry of the gospel continues to edify the congregation. What a deep sense of gratification it gives when the weak and humble efforts of these pastors and teachers are used for the spreading and proclamation of the glorious gospel. That explains the gratitude as well, when we see the work of one of our ministers, namely the Rev. Cl. Stam of Hamilton, as compiled in the book *Living in the Joy of Faith*, translated and



“Quite a few ministers entertained a call from a vacant church during this past year.”

published in the Sinhala language for use in the Lanka Reformed Church (Sri Lanka). The same may be observed in the publication of the missionary endeavours of the Rev. H. Versteeg of Chatham, in the book *The Teachings of the Bible, the Simplified Catechism*, a translation of a teaching manual for the people in the jungle of Irian Jaya! May the Spirit of Christ continue to work mightily with the proclamation of the gospel, and may He move many men to aspire for this ministry!

Theological College

With this expressed desire of men for the ministry of the gospel, the transition to the work at our Theological College is made easily. Among the many regular blessings enjoyed at our College, a good library certainly is high on the list. The work of the Women's Savings Action for instance, during all the years of the College's

existence, has been a great asset to the College and has enriched the College community greatly from year to year. In the course of time, however, these blessings can create a "problem" as well, especially when the storage quarters, such as a functional library, become too cramped and congested. We can well imagine how great the joy and thanksgiving must have been at the occasion of the official opening of the new library building on Saturday, September 9. People from all over Ontario and from beyond, even from as far as our sister churches in Australia, came out for the official opening ceremony, where the ribbon cutting ceremony was performed by the first librarian of the College, Dr. J. Faber, as well as the current librarian, Miss Margaret VanderVelde.

It is so good to see how *the love for the College* reflects in the way the membership of our churches is involved at these special occasions. It was with deep gratitude that the Board of Governors observed the generosity during the time of fund-raising for this library building. The same thankfulness and joy could be noted in the regular contributions of our present principal, Dr. J. De Jong, as he kept the membership up to date in his *College Corner* during the time that its construction was in progress. Also at the evenings, convened at regular times in the churches of our federation in Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia, when one of the professors makes his public relations visit, this thankful support and interest is shown time and again. Here too, however, we may not take anything for granted. In fact, as far as the *attendance* at those meetings and at the annual Anniversary and Convocation is concerned, a revival of enthusiasm is needed!

During the first semester of the present academic year, Dr. N. H. Gootjes is enjoying a well-deserved sabbatical. After more than ten years of teaching and three years of principalship, such a break from the regular duties of teaching provides a good opportunity for renewed research and reflection. At present he is working on a scholarly publication of his studies in the history of the Belgic Confession. In the meantime, his teaching duties are being fulfilled by an adequate substitute in the person of the Rev. Drs. J. M. Batteau of the church of Wageningen,

the Netherlands. Many years ago they were colleagues in their teaching positions at the Theological Seminary in Pusan, Korea.

Also in the context of the work done at the Theological College, there is much appreciation for the work done by the present professors, as well as for the work that was done in the past. During this past year the publication of the Rev. H. Scholten's *Church History Notes* was followed by the publication of his *Workbook for Church Polity*. In this way the legacy of one of the teachers of the first hour was preserved. The same can be said about the publication of the book *Patrimony Profile, Our Reformed Heritage Retraced*, by the Rev. W. W. J. Van Oene.

At the beginning of the academic year, the College was blessed with a good supply of new students. After some meagre years, five new students were admitted to the College. Among them was br. Pila Njuka, who came to us from the Reformed Church in Indonesia and who is supported by our sister churches in Australia. These churches in Australia have been and continue to be a great support for the College in a financial sense and otherwise! One of their "sons," the student Carl Vermeulen, received consent to speak an edifying word in the churches (according to CO Art 21).

Mission

Much of the attention for the work of mission during this past year was directed toward the work in Brazil. On July 5, 2000, the churches in Brazil gathered at their first General Synod in Brazil, in order to begin a federation of Reformed Churches in Brazil (the Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil – or IRB). Ten congregations were represented of which five were instituted churches and the other five are developing and moving toward being instituted in the future. This milestone in the history of the work of mission, in which our churches have been involved over the past decades, certainly was an occasion for great rejoicing and amazement at the progress in the church gathering work of our Lord. At the same time, the churches and missionaries involved now have a complex task on their hands in the sense of maintaining such a federation of churches, and in the meantime of pur-

"The small congregation of Maceió . . . could present to the [ICRC] delegates the use of their new church building."



suing the work of church planting and expansion of the mission expansion!

In the context of the continuation of this work I may mention again the arrival of the Rev. Ken Wieske, missionary for the church at Surrey. After his ordination in October 1999, he prepared himself at various institutions in the U.S. and the Netherlands before he made the move to Brazil. Against the background of the above-mentioned first Synod of the IRB, it is just as noteworthy that one of the longstanding missionaries for Surrey has repatriated. The Rev. R. F. Boersema, after many years of faithful service, in which he encountered many difficulties, has settled down in Bristol, Tennessee. One other important event, which took place in the context of the work of mission, was the Latin American ICRC Mission Conference held in Maceió in October 2000. At the time of the Conference, the small congregation of Maceió, established through the work of the Rev. J. Kroeze (who was succeeded by the Rev. A. de Graaf) and br. Henk Plug, could present to the delegates the use of their new church building!

How arduous and difficult the work of a missionary can be was described very aptly by the Rev. S. 't Hart in the June issue of *Mission News*. The Reformed missionary does not come into town with a rally and a well-marketed outreach program, but embarks upon the groundbreaking work of bringing the gospel from contact to contact. He takes time to prepare himself to know the language, so as to ad-

dress the people in their native tongue as much as possible. He preaches the gospel over a long period of time, sowing the seed of the Word that the Holy Spirit may work its fruit. Then in the course of time much teaching and training needs to be done to equip the natives in the field for the work of service in newly established congregations. As Reformed believers, we are well-aware also of the powers of sin and evil, of resistance and opposition, that need to be overcome. In that light it is a miracle indeed, when we see churches that are built over many years come to the establishment of a federation of churches.

Also the work of mission in which the Rev. 't Hart is involved could enjoy the continued blessings from the Lord. The situation of the congregation in Ekoru, Papua New Guinea, has been very stable. The congregation in Port Moresby has grown spiritually and has enjoyed greater stability. The Church of Toronto, together with its supporting churches, is presently in the process of obtaining a second worker for its work in Papua New Guinea. Meanwhile, the political situation in these countries remains a concern. In Irian Jaya, for instance, the Togeretz family, also supported by Toronto and supporting churches in their work for the Mission Aviation Fellowship, was involved in an evacuation of sorts during an uprising in Wamena. The political situation in all Indonesian territories remains very volatile and explosive. The drive for independence,

as we have seen last year in East Timor, continues to upset the various regions.

In all these developments it is the task of the missionaries and the sending churches to keep the supporting churches involved. In addition to the bimonthly publication of *Mission News*, the church of Hamilton provides newsletters with more information, while the church of Toronto sends "Gleanings" to the supporting churches, to be included in their local bulletins. In this way the members in our churches can be involved in the developments and lives of the missionary families. As presently is the case, this interest includes happy occasions such as the expectation of new life, as is the case with the 't Harts, the Togeretzes, and the Plugs! Also the younger members have shown a great deal of interest; witness the activities at *Credo* Christian High School, Langley, B.C., which raised more than \$7,000 for a lot and church building in Barreiras, Brazil. In the same way, the fruits of a similar Missions Week held by the *John Calvin* School in Yarrow, B.C., were sent to Papua New Guinea for the building at the 8-Mile settlement of the church of Port Moresby.

Last but not least, we may note with thankfulness that also the work in Smithers could proceed. In spite of the absence of a full-time missionary, a very active and enthusiastic group of members of the Smithers congregation kept up many activities. Thus the Sunday School as well as the Sunday Night Teen Bible Study continued its outreach. The Soup Kitchen as well, un-

der the care and direction of br. Hilco de Haan, continues to be a great attraction and source for new contacts. On a part-time basis he also kept up the leadership of the Thursday Bible study group. The annual Native Summer Camp enjoyed the participation of some thirty-seven children this year! Now, with the arrival of the Rev. Wes Bredenhof, the focus of the work will be somewhat divided, since he will concentrate his efforts on the work in Fort Babine, while the Mission Board continues its endeavours in Smithers itself!

Evangelism

As I mentioned in previous years, much activity in this category is going on in each and every congregation. There are the regular activities of Vacation Bible School and Saturday Bible School. Then there are the local endeavours at old age homes and in nursing homes in the form of singing, presentations, and other forms of outreach. Several congregations maintain a Bible study group for women under the name of Take-a-Break or Coffee Break. At the same time we know of the so-called neighbourhood outreach, in which certain members of the congregation gather neighbours at their place for the purpose of Bible study. Sometimes a special activity is organized in order to bring the people, with whom contacts have been developed, into the worship services. Such is the case with the Grace congregation in Winnipeg and its so-called "Scatter the Seed Sunday."

With thankfulness we may also mention here the work of the *Voice of the Church*. Through radio messages broadcasted throughout the land, the Word is proclaimed over the airwaves. From the association coordinating this work we hear that lately more responses come in and more requests are received for a copy of these messages! The Word is going out and is being heard! That's also the case through such ministries as the *Street-light Ministries*, which is done under the auspices of the churches of Ancaster and Burlington-Fellowship. Brother Richard Bultje, the worker in this ministry, is involved as well with the *CornerStone Bible Institute*, a Reformed gospel outreach to prisoners. Plans are underway for this ministry to open a halfway home for inmates who have been studying with the CBI. *Campfire!* also is looking back at a very blessed year in which the directors and leaders were able to run five weeks of summer camps!

Then there are the united efforts of others, who are involved in activities, which could be classified under mission, evangelism, or other ministries. The church of Owen Sound pursued its contact with L'église Reformée du Québec at St. Georges de Beauce. For more than three months the Rev. P. Bédard spent time in Owen Sound studying, observing, and inquiring in the Reformed way of congregational life. He also visited many of the churches in Ontario. The work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship could be mentioned here as well. This work, too, was blessed with expansion and increased outreach. In addition to the ongoing instruction through the John Calvin Centre at Cyprus, they have their centres in Cairo and Beirut from which they broadcast the Word of God in the Arabic world. They also stepped up their efforts to combine the proclamation of the Word with deeds of diaconal aid in Sudan and elsewhere.

This combination of word and deed certainly is the main pursuit of organizations such as the *Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund* and *FaithWorks*. The former concentrated its activities on disaster relief in Ethiopia, Kenya, East Timor, Haiti, Mexico, and Honduras. In these last two countries also volunteers from FaithWorks were involved in relief and restoration. CRWRF also supports

"CRWRF also supports long-term projects, such as the one set up by sr. Linda Baartse in Guatemala: the Tajamalco Women's Program."



long-term projects, such as the one set up by sr. Linda Baartse in Guatemala: the Tajamalco Women's Program. This program helps women with household management, money-management, and other home economics, and combines this work with outreach! A new project supported by CRWRF is the work of sr. Konnie Peet, together with her son Neil, in Kwa Zulu Natal Province in South Africa. She is involved there in developing effective models for the prevention of and care for those with AIDS, a huge problem in South Africa, as in so many countries on this continent.

The western branch of the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund goes by the name *Manna*. The committee is based in Edmonton and draws its contributions from various churches in Alberta and Manitoba. Manna fully supports the *Mufu Home* in Kenya, an orphanage which gives food, shelter, and a Christian education to about sixty children. Individual families and several young people's societies sponsor specific orphans. Every year, the students at *Parkland Immanuel Christian School* in Edmonton have numerous fund-raising activities for the work of Manna; this past year they raised \$2372.07! International disaster relief efforts are also undertaken by this organization.

Other events

Prominent among the activities in the churches is the work of Reformed education. During this past year *Guido de Bres Christian High School* in Hamilton could celebrate its twenty-fifth anniversary. Their theme "Great is Thy Faithfulness to all Generations" succinctly expressed the thankfulness to the LORD for his blessing on this high school, which is serving many congregations in Ontario with quality Reformed high school education! In the same city the *Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College* was blessed

with a year of full-time instruction to students in the one-year and three-year programs. Besides, the College also embarked on its program of *Advanced Studies of Reformed Education* in places such as Winnipeg and Neerlandia. The teachers of the College organized a two-day workshop for the staffs in British Columbia, and addressed the teachers of Alberta/Manitoba at a CRTA (West) Teachers' Convention. For the purpose of education also a unique en-

Anchor Home that is maintained by this association there are seven residents, while several others are supervised and supported through the Supervised Independent Living Program! Also for the benefit of the handicapped and others among the federation, the column "Ray of Sunshine" in *Clarion* continues to shed its light in the often dark surroundings. The care for this column passed from the luminary sr. R. Ravensbergen to the new light bearers, the sisters Corinne Gels and Erna Nordeman.

What more could I add? Lots and lots more. There are the yearly highlights of the Women's League Days in East, West, and the middle of the country. We could mention the activities of the synodical committees for ecclesiastical unity, for contact with churches abroad, for the publication of the *Book of Praise*, and the fruits of their labours. Attention could be given to the labours of office bearers at Classes and Regional Synods. Proposals and reports are being distributed among the churches in preparation for the General Synod to be held in Neerlandia, the Lord willing on May 1, 2001. Efforts are made to develop web sites for the churches, so that the work of the churches becomes known via the Internet.

In all of these activities we see that the work of the catholic church through universal cooperation and through cyberspace continues for the benefit of the congregations in all places! Yes, under the blessing of the Lord, these activities will continue until the day that the work is completed and the Lord returns on the clouds! May that day come soon, and indeed, and may He find faith on earth! Yes, may our heavenly Lord and Master find us ready and working for that purpose when He comes! Then the fruit of all his blessings and our labours will praise and glorify Him!

*"Jesus Christ
is still
gathering,
defending and
preserving His
church."*

deavour got underway, when "*The Reformed Canadian Political Research Council*" was established in Winnipeg. Its aim is to be a national centre with a director to promote and discuss our Christian response in political life.

A review of this nature would not be complete, if I did not include the important work of the Anchor Association. For the past seventeen years this association has promoted the care and well-being of the handicapped in caring for those with special needs. In the





World Governance

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Matthew 28:18

Nothing happened

And so, what happened to Y2K (turn of year 1999/2000 and associated computer problems). What happened to the accompanying anxiety? What happened to all those introspective reflections about the state of mankind?

Nothing much happened at the turn of year 1999/2000, and most everyone quietly carried on with their day-to-day affairs. If there was much uncertainty prior to year 2000, it vanished soon after. With renewed confidence man sets himself up against God and His laws. Witness, for instance, the United Nations' desire to rule the world by man-made regulations and philosophies. It is their hope to establish world peace by eradicating all strife and war. And, since religion causes much turmoil, so they think, it must be rooted out, except for the United Nations' own philosophies which is a religion, too.

No disasters occurred on January 1, 2000, and mankind falsely believes and lives on in assumed superior intelligence to govern the world by its own insight, but yet. . . .

It is still happening

For the Son of Man, Immanuel (God with us), the One who descended and ascended, has all authority in heaven and on earth. He reigns, and the government (is) upon His shoulder, and His name is called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). We believe what we do not yet see.

The turmoil and chaos expected and feared at the beginning of year 2000, is happening and will happen in a

measure unimaginable. Make no mistake, He, our Lord, is coming, and of His government there will be no end.

Thank you

To all who contributed in bringing God's message via the pages of *Clarion*, we say "Thank you." In the summer a transition took place in the editorial team. Dr. J. Visscher, chief editor, took the place of Dr. C. Van Dam. Rev. R. Aasman assumed the task of managing editor previously held by Rev. G.Ph. van Popta. Prof. J. Geertsema left the editorial team and was replaced by Rev. Cl. Stam. Dr. J. De Jong and Dr. N.H. Gootjes remain on the editorial committee with enduring dedication. We express our sincere appreciation to all of you for the smooth transition, so that *Clarion* could be delivered without interruption to our readers' mailboxes.

Besides the editorial team there are many other regular contributors: Rev. J. de Gelder ("Hi-Liter"), Rev. P. Feenstra ("Living by the Doctrines of Scripture"), Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman ("Ray of Sunshine"), Aunt Betty ("Our Little Magazine"). They, and others, all do their work steadily. Be assured of our appreciation!

Subscribers and advertisers: we thank you for your continued support, and we humbly count on your interest for the year to come.

Year-end greetings and best wishes

Now that the real turn of the century is occurring, we send you our greetings for the twenty-first century. May all your days and years be spent in His Service, for He alone is worthy of all our praise and honour.

W. Gortemaker





Observation Deck: From the absurd to New Age

by George Van Popta

OK, please plant tongue in cheek, and start reading . . .

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire ... at Church

Churches are trying a variety of tactics – including cash prizes – to fill the pews. Pastor Rod Loy held a “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire” game at First Assembly of God in North Little Rock, Arkansas. Two winners took home \$1,000 each when they answered biblical questions. Loy has brought tigers, camels, and elephants to the sanctuary for Christmas pageants to attract new members. “It’s important to keep things visual because people remember it,” he said.

Other churches send visitors gift baskets filled with fresh bread and fruit, or offer them gift certificates to restaurants. The Fellowship of Las Colinas in Texas concludes its Sunday services in time for Dallas Cowboys football games, which are shown on a big screen outside the church. Rick Sebastian pays \$10 to people who come to his Bryan, Texas, church aboard his bus. Other pastors have created games, fancy food courts, or glitzy games to fill pews.

Opinions vary about these tactics. Some ministers say the enticements are worth it if they bring people into contact with the Bible. Others say the tactics cheapen church. “Our influence over men must not be human manipulation, but divine inspiration,” says Joseph Chambers of Paw Creek Ministries in Charlotte, N.C. Flavil Yeakley, director of church growth at Harding University in Searcy, Ark., said, “These days it’s about building a relationship with each other as opposed to a higher being, which is often secondary.”

– *Religion Today*

And we thought the preaching of the Word was to do it . . .

OK, Reverend, Fifty pushups!

Lutherans want their pastors to shape up. The Church Worker Health and Wellness Task Force of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, formed recently, helps pastors stay physically and mentally healthy.

About 120 pastors leave the pulpit every year because of burnout, ministry director Bruce Hartung said. “If we keep going like we’re going, by the year 2017 we’ll have 2,200 parish pastors for 6,500 preaching stations.” Helping pastors stay physically fit will allow them to deal with pastoral pressures, because people who take care of themselves can care for others better, he said.

The task force will lead by example, Hartung said. Each member has identified areas where they need to be healthier and has set goals. Hartung said he wants to lose fifteen pounds and learn to listen to more sermons about spiritual growth, rather than ideas for ministry. Others are dedicating themselves to spending more time with their families and developing spiritual disciplines. – *Religion Today*

Some like him just the way he is

A Brazilian town loves its pastor so much that it won’t let him leave. Ceny Tavares of Igreja Presbyterian Church has been in the city of 40,000 since 1980, when his church consisted of just forty-six people. Today the church has 1,000 members and has started thirteen new congregations.

When Tavares announced his plans to start a church in Canada, the town erupted in protest. The Igreja city council asked Tavares in a letter to reconsider, and police jokingly arrested and imprisoned him for desertion, the min-

istry said. Residents hung banners in the streets begging him to stay and the mayor offered him a job as his personal assistant. Tavares has not announced his final decision. – *Religion Today*

And now for...

... A Question to our American readers ...

Did the founders of Washington, D.C., deliberately align the city with the stars, consecrating it to goddesses? That’s the hypothesis of British author David Ovason in his new book, *The Secret Architecture of Our Nation’s Capital*. Almost all the men who surveyed and laid out Washington were Freemasons, a secret brotherhood, and everything about the city has astrological symbolism, Ovason wrote, according to the *The Washington Times*.

Washington’s founders consecrated the city to Virgo, also known as the Egyptian goddess Isis, Ovason wrote. Every August 10, three stars form a right angle triangle between the Capitol, the White House, and the constellation of Virgo, he said. Zodiacal symbolism has been incorporated into scores of official buildings around Washington.

Ovason’s ideas have been met with skepticism but were applauded by Fred Kelinknecht, sovereign grand commander of the 33rd-degree Supreme Council of Freemasons, based in Detroit, the newspaper reported.

– *Religion Today*

Ted, stick to broadcasting, OK?

Religion according to Ted Turner

Ted Turner delivered a sermon to 1,000 swamis, ministers, monks, and other spiritual leaders from around the world. The CNN founder, who once said publicly that Christianity was “for losers,” addressed a cheering crowd

on the subject of religious intolerance August 29 at the United Nations.

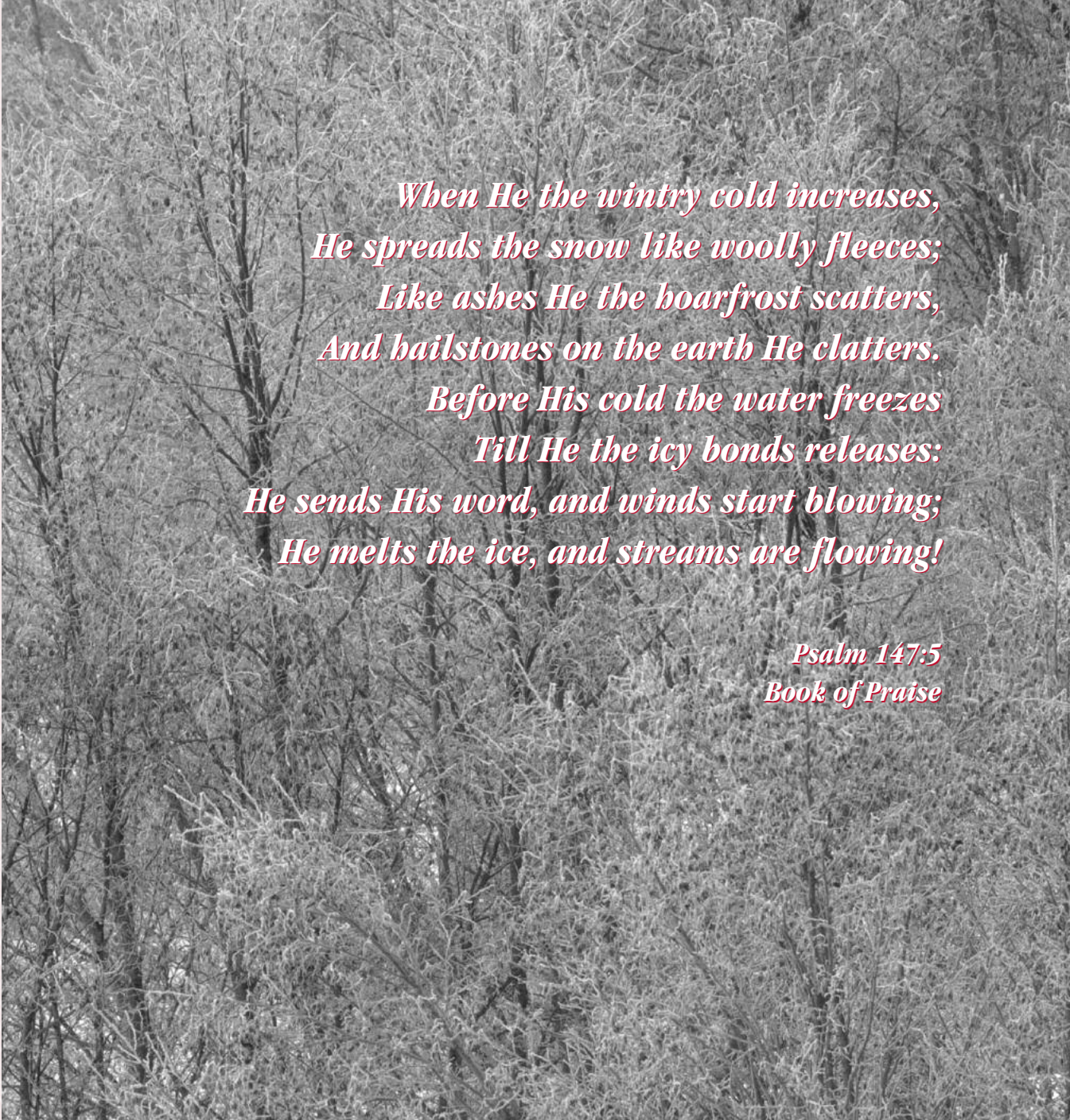
This came during a meeting of the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders, which Turner suggested three years ago and has helped sponsor financially, according to *The Washington Post*.

"We are all one race, and there is only one God that manifests himself in different ways," Turner said. The religions that have survived "don't have hatred behind them. The ones that

have done the best are the ones based on love."

Turner said he remembers the "intolerance" within his family's Christian community, according to the *Post*. He told the delegates he had planned to become a Christian missionary but turned away from the church when he learned about other religions. "We thought we were the only ones going to heaven," he said. "Now I believe there may be one God who manifests himself in different ways to different people."

Delegates gave an icy reception to the Patriarch of Ethiopia, who urged protection for unborn children, according to an evangelical who attended the meeting. They also reacted coolly to a Muslim World Council speaker who urged recognition of marriage only between a man and a woman. A Buddhist master received a standing ovation when he condemned all attempts at religious conversion, something at the heart of Islam and Christianity. – *Religion Today* **C**



*When He the wintry cold increases,
He spreads the snow like woolly fleeces;
Like ashes He the hoarfrost scatters,
And hailstones on the earth He clatters.
Before His cold the water freezes
Till He the icy bonds releases:
He sends His word, and winds start blowing;
He melts the ice, and streams are flowing!*

*Psalm 147:5
Book of Praise*



News from MERF-Canada

by **J. Geertsema**

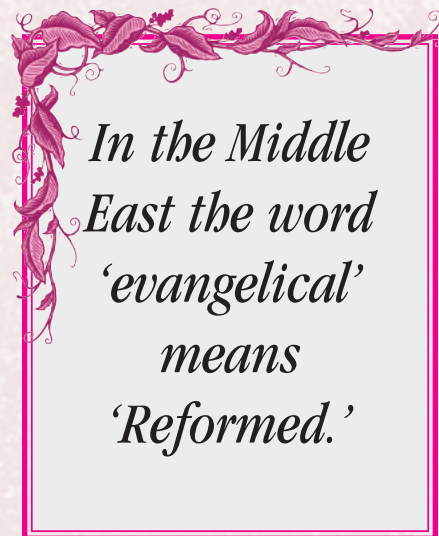
MERF-Canada's representative at MERF's International Council

What follows is a report about the second meeting of the International Council of MERF held from June 19-23, 2000 in Larnaca, Cyprus, which I attended on behalf of MERF-Canada. The purpose of this meeting was to consolidate the reorganization which took place in December 1999 and January 2000. This report will also deal with some of the ongoing difficulties and consequent rumors concerning MERF. Some contributors have asked us for more information and we expect that this will clarify matters.

Past developments

You will probably remember (see our May 2000 Newsletter) that at the end of last year a new Board of Directors invited delegates from all the MERF committees for an initial international meeting. In December of 1999 a new Board of Directors had been set up, consisting of seven members. This Board directs the work of MERF together with Rev. Victor B. Atallah. The work of MERF and its organization would no longer rest basically on the shoulders of one man, Rev. Atallah, who was up to that point the only (general) director, even though he was assisted by the chairman of the former Board. This former Board of MERF was completely indigenous, consisting of only Arab Christians. Eleven of the fourteen members of this Board came from Egypt, because the largest number of evangelical churches is found there. (In the Middle East the word "evangelical" means Reformed.)

Last year, two mission organizations in the United States, the *Back to God Hour* (CRC) and *Words of Hope* (RCA), signed an agreement of coop-



eration with MERF. Because they could not find a replacement for their retiring missionaries for broadcasting the gospel to the Arab speaking countries, they took up contact with MERF. Agreements were made to use MERF for their Arabic radio ministries. They would adhere to the Reformed basis of MERF. With their input the broadcasting of the Gospel could be increased from time slots on three days to better time slots on seven days per week. Moreover, it would become much easier to set up local broadcasting in Egypt and Lebanon, as well as on Cyprus itself, besides the broadcasting via Trans World Radio.

Reorganization becomes necessary

At that same time, it became clear that there were some problems in Egypt (not on Cyprus) with properly giving account of the funds designated for distribution to the field committees.

This problem led to a leadership crisis in the former Board of MERF and caused it to disintegrate and fall apart. This, together with the expansion, made evident that a reorganization of MERF was necessary. A new Board had to be formed, which should no longer consist of only indigenous Arab people, but also include members from the supporting MERF committees. This new board would organize and direct the work together with Rev. Atallah. Furthermore, a better controlled system of budgeting and accounting had to be set up. At the same time there would be more direct and closer contact between the supporting and the field committees. To make all this possible, the new Board of Directors invited delegates from all the MERF committees to a meeting to discuss these matters and come to conclusions and decisions. Thus, in January a new constitution was drawn up, describing the basis and the four tasks of MERF, the Board of Directors with its position and functions, and the position and function of the International Council. The delegates went back to their home committees to report these decisions to them.

At the June meeting, the delegates to the first official International Council meeting presented their reports about the reactions at home. With one exception all the MERF support committees – MERF-England/Wales, MERF-Holland, MERF-Ireland, MERF-New Zealand, MERF-Scotland, MERF-USA – conveyed a positive reaction. Only MERF Australia was divided. This means that MERF's supporting as well as MERF's field committees in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, etc.,

accepted the changes as an improvement and endorsed the restructuring. On this basis the June International Council meeting discussed and adopted a set of bylaws in which details of the Constitution were finalized. The next International Council meeting is provisionally set for November 2001. November will remain the month for the meeting of this International Council as it is the best time for preparing the budget for the next year, and presenting the needs of MERF and of the Field committees.

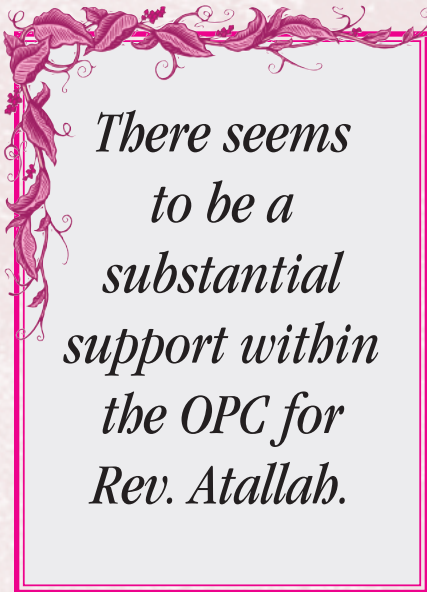
Money problems

The problem that arose within the former Board of MERF has a number of aspects. The first one is that of proper accounting and distribution. As said above, from the moneys and their use on Cyprus account was given, but from the money received and distributed in Egypt and Sudan no proper account was made available. Within the Board there was at times also a difference of opinion with regard to the distribution of the MERF-funds. These problems caused division and a leadership crisis in the former Board, so that a new and different Board had to be formed. This was done (see above).

Rev. V. B. Atallah and the OPC

But there is a second aspect. When this sudden reorganization took place, the new Board informed the Committee of Foreign Mission (COFM) of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) why restructuring was deemed necessary. Rev. Atallah was ordained by the Presbytery of the Midwest of the OPC in 1977 and called soon thereafter by the COFM as missionary to the Middle East. This meant that Rev. Atallah was working under the call and oversight of the COFM and consequently he reported regularly to the Presbytery of the Midwest and the COFM of the OPC. However, the mission organization of which Rev. Atallah was the General Director (MERF) was not itself working under the auspices of the COFM. MERF was independent and the COFM had no authority over it. This COFM was also invited to send delegates to the international meeting in January but decided not to come and to declare the reorganization illegal. It demanded that Rev. Atallah have nothing to do with the new board. The COFM placed itself behind

what was left of the former Board in Egypt and over against Rev. Atallah and the rest of the reorganized MERF. Rev. Atallah could not agree. For it would mean that he had to abandon MERF. Therefore, instead of abandoning MERF, Rev. Atallah resigned as minister under the COFM. For this reason, he is now charged with insubordination by the COFM before the Presbytery of the Midwest. There is no charge of misuse of funds filed against him. The matter of insubordi-



nation is under investigation by this Presbytery. The COFM published that "the ministerial relationship between Victor B. Atallah and the Committee on Foreign Missions was dissolved as of March 18, 2000."

The General Assembly of the OPC which met in July was informed about the case against Rev. Atallah via the report of the COFM submitted to the General Assembly. The matter as such was not discussed at this General Assembly, since at that time the Presbytery of the Midwest was still dealing with it. In spite of the action of the COFM, there seems to be a substantial support within the OPC for Rev. Atallah, whose desire it is to remain an OPC minister, but then of a local church and no longer under the COFM. He prefers the system as most Reformed churches have it: a missionary is minister of a local church who has the supervision over him.

As mentioned above, the OPC COFM placed itself behind the former

chairman of "the old MERF" in Egypt, although he is unable to continue any of MERF's ministries via the Cyprus facilities (broadcasting and lectures at the John Calvin Centre). It seems that this support of the COFM has helped the former chairman claim that he is the continuation of MERF. It is remarkable that only a few other members of the former board went with him. They are his friends or relatives. MERF Egypt and other church leaders in Egypt have distanced themselves from him.

Further complications

A number of members in the Canadian Reformed churches are aware of a declaration of the Overseas Mission Board (OMB) of the New Zealand Reformed Churches. It was taken over in *Una Sancta*, the magazine in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. The OMB, without much investigation of its own, declared to have full confidence in the COFM of the OPC, and therefore rejects "the new MERF". It is remarkable, however, that in the New Zealand Reformed Churches the OMB stands over against the MERF committee. The New Zealand MERF Committee is fully behind the reorganized MERF.

At the meeting in June, an Egyptian elder, supported by four other delegates from Egypt, remarked that, as far as the Egyptian situation is concerned, the former chairman of MERF, who continues to claim that he represents the old and true MERF, has no legal basis for his claim at all, nor does he receive any MERF money anymore and his so-called MERF is fading away in their midst.

Ownership

There is one last matter that has raised questions: Rev. Atallah was the only legal owner of MERF. From 1984 to December 1999 Rev. Atallah and his wife were officially the only two shareholders, thus owners of the legal company MERF. They declared, however, that this was only true on paper but not in reality since they had pledged never to claim the assets of MERF for themselves. They were the shareholders, because according to the Cyprus law every charitable organization has to be registered as a company with shareholders as its legal owners. This was for MERF the only possibility to be officially registered and recognized in Cyprus. This is reason

why, in the beginning of MERF's existence, it was seen as the best way to have Rev. and Mrs. Atallah as these shareholders and owners. With the reorganization, the seven directors, of which Rev. Atallah is only one, are the shareholders and so legal owners. But all seven have declared and signed before a notary that they will never take any money of MERF for themselves. In the Bylaws 1.4, 5 it states: "Only Directors are eligible to be Shareholders" and "All Shareholders are required to provide a notarized declaration renouncing any personal claim to the assets of the Company."

Conclusion

MERF-Canada together with almost all other MERF support commit-

tees around the globe is confident that the reorganization of MERF is an improvement. There is more accountability and more direct involvement of the supporting MERF committees. As well, the input of Arab Christians and the indigenous control of their own local ministries has been maintained. We also hope and pray that the differences between Rev. Atallah and the Committee of Foreign Missions of the OPC will be resolved.

We are grateful that MERF's work of Evangelism, Radio Broadcasting, Biblical Training and Diaconal Aid continues. Organizational changes had to be made, but God's Word and the Reformed Confessions remain the basis. The purpose also remains the same, namely, to spread the Good

News of Jesus Christ in a hostile Muslim world and support Christians and Christian churches who have to live under these difficult circumstances.

It is our hope and prayer that MERF may continue to receive the support of all those throughout the world who love the Lord Jesus Christ and therefore wish to promote his church gathering work in the Muslim world of the Middle East.

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

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



Christmas

by Paulus Gerhardt, 1656
tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1858

*All my heart this night rejoices
As I hear
Far and near,
Sweetest angel voices;
"Christ is born," their choirs are singing,
Till the air
Everywhere
Now with joy is ringing.*

*Hark! a voice from yonder manger,
Soft and sweet,
Doth retreat,
"Flee from woe and danger!
Brethren, come! from all doth grieve you,
You are freed;
All you need
I will surely give you."*

*Come, then, let us hasten yonder!
Here let all,
Great and small,
Kneel in awe and wonder!
Love him who with love is yearning!
Hail the star
That from far
Bright with hope is burning!*

*Thee, dear Lord, with heed I'll cherish,
Live to thee,
And with thee,
Dying, shall not perish;
But shall dwell with thee for ever,
Far on high,
In the joy
That can alter never.*



Helping Hands for the Honduras

by Jason Bouwman

Hurricane Mitch

In the latter days of October 1998 Honduras was battered for four days by Hurricane Mitch. It killed thousands, injured tens of thousands, and displaced millions. Economically the country suffered a huge setback. Agriculture is only just returning, and in the capital city of Tegucigalpa, there is still evidence of the flooding, landslides and destruction Mitch left in its wake. Over one year later Honduras is still trying to rebuild.

On April 8, 2000 our team (Chris, Lindsey, Cara, Brendan, Joanne, Mark, Tim, Dave, and Jason) travelled to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, to volunteer building houses for the refugees, through an existing organization affiliated with the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee called "Ven a Servir" (Come to Serve). The CRWRC has been working in Honduras since Hurricane Fifi swept through in the mid 1970s.

We caught our first glimpse of Honduras from the air. It was appalling. The country was littered with garbage, houses, shacks and businesses, and at times it was impossible to distinguish between them. It quickly became obvious that one of the problems facing Honduras is pollution. Later it would seem to me that the only variety in smell was that of different kinds of smoke.

Evidence of destruction

We were met by Don and Eva Meidema, employees of CRWRC. As we drove through town, Don pointed out bridges and buildings destroyed by Mitch. At one point he pointed across the valley to a large hill. It was stippled with tiny houses except for a very large bare section in the middle where a massive landslide had effectively wiped out

an entire neighbourhood community. An entry from Lindsey's journals reads, "As we clung to the box of the truck, we absorbed the scenery of strewn garbage, bare footed children clinging to their mothers and staring people."

Hard work

We worked for two weeks building the first of three duplexes in a new community at La Joya (The Jewel) just outside the capital. The four-room homes are approximately twenty by twenty-five feet (500 square feet), made almost entirely of brick and are sold at cost (\$3000.00 US) to those currently living in camps. The plans call for eighty such dwellings.

We were kept busy excavating footings, forming, pouring concrete, mixing mortar, laying bricks, tying reinforcing bar, and a host of other jobs. All work was done by hand. There were no power tools which was a result of cheap labour, a lack of power sources, and no parts or services. Our progress was slow, but steady, with few delays.

While we worked alongside the Hondurans we struggled with the language, sometimes with hilarious results. When hopelessly stuck on a word or phrase we would ask the help of Nahum, our translator. One phrase that we heard repeated was "Mucho Travacho, Poquito Denairo" which meant "Much work, little pay." The complaint is recognizably universal but in Honduras it seemed to ring a little closer to the truth. I made the following entry in my journal: "April 11 We have a running joke around mealtimes that goes something like this. 'You are hungry? Why? Didn't you have enough last year?' It is a joke but speaks to a harsh reality that exists for many Hondurans."

Cara wrote: "April 10, Day 3 . . . Today I met a little girl named Tania, 5 years old. For toys she had two plastic spoons. When one of them broke she was in tears. Plastic Spoons! Her mother had terrible arthritis and thanked Joanne and me for playing



Colouring with the local villagers.

*Worksite:
Building
in progress
by the team.*



with Tania and for picking her up because she couldn't any longer."

Devotions

Evenings were spent at a campground nearby. We held regular devotions, shared our observations and discussed everything from relationships to economics. Joanne writes: "On a trip like this it is much easier to share our feelings . . . We have a closeness here in our discussions." An entry from Tim's journal reads: "April 14, Day 7 . . . I thank God that I had the opportunity to meet this group and to be able to get along so well with everyone, as close friends and Faithworks coworkers."


From Nahum we were able to get a little better understanding of life in Honduras, his country and culture. We learned that many live the American dream, meaning, many dream of going to America.

One night we went to church in Suyapa, the community where Nahum lives. The pastor there is Angel, the director of "Ven a Servir." (He was also our taxi to and from work everyday). In Suyapa we were again confronted with extreme poverty. The following is taken from Chris' journal: "April 18, 2000 . . . We all piled into Angel's little yellow truck wearing our clean, well, as clean as Joanne could get them, white Faithworks shirts. Obvious Gringos. Through the darkness we could see how poor these people lived. The roads were terrible, the

housing worse. It makes me realize why the Hondurans need our help."

Throughout Angel's sermon people whispered at the open windows. The church, by way of its crude construction alone, was a witness to its community. We were very thankful for the opportunity to worship there.

Time to leave

When it was time to leave Honduras, the foreman, Abdulio, spoke on behalf of the community. He thanked us again and again for our contributions and for "Coming to Serve." As we left they wished us all God's blessing. It was a familiar greeting by now: "Dios le bendiga." We pray that God will bless Honduras richly with our small contributions. 

For more information on Hurricane Mitch, read "After the Deluge" in the November 1999 issue of National Geographic (Vol 196, No 5).

Faithworks

We use the word "work" to talk about "labour" and we say that something "works" when it functions properly. God sets out demanding tasks for us, for people of faith. When we have faith in his plan, these demanding tasks – that seem to be such hard work – make sense. Faith works to do this, and through our labour God establishes mighty works!

Based on this concept, Faithworks has been established. Faithworks is a volunteer-based committee of the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund. Our goal is to establish short-term relief projects where we can put our faith to work through hands-on experience in helping the impoverished and underprivileged in our society. Through these projects, we hope to encourage the Canadian Reformed community to care for and aid the needy in their own neighbourhoods and to continue to support long-term relief projects. Most importantly, the relief projects of Faithworks hope to challenge and strengthen our faith in our heavenly Father as we share his love and gospel with others.

Every year Faithworks organises several short-term relief trips that work with the poor in several areas such as in Kentucky, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. Following is an article by Jason Bouwman who relates his experiences on his recent trip to the Honduras. If you are interested in finding out more, if you have any questions or concerns or would like to apply to one of the relief trips, please contact any one of the following:

Richard Bultje	(905) 317-8117
Bob or Freda Jagt	(905) 632-4422
Brigette Lodder	(905) 318-7970

Applications should be sent to:	Faithworks c/o Brigette Lodder 95 Westminster Ave. Hamilton, Ontario L9C 4M1
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The Ordination of Rev. W.L. Bredenhof

by Harold Dykstra

Ordination Sunday

On Sunday, October 22, 2000, the congregation of Smithers, B.C. was able to rejoice with their supporting churches in the ordination of Rev. W. L. Bredenhof as missionary to the native people of the Smithers region. For many years, the position of missionary here has been vacant, and the work of outreach has been done by a mission worker, Br. Hilco deHaan, and many volunteers.

The ordination service was conducted by Rev. R. Aasman from the Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton. He chose as text Isaiah 52:7:

*How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring
good news,
who proclaim peace,
who bring good tidings,
who proclaim salvation,
who say to Zion, "Your God
reigns!"*

The theme of the sermon was "The King sends his messenger to bring good news." The context of this text is a messenger bringing the joyful message of the end of the exile to the remnant left in Jerusalem. Ultimately it is a prophecy about Christ who is the only one capable of bringing true peace and salvation. While Christ, the ultimate messenger of peace is in heaven, He has left with us other messengers to do his work: people like Rev. Bredenhof who have a special calling to bring the good news of Christ to those who may not have heard it. Rev. Aasman ended his sermon with the prayer that God would bless the work of Rev. Bredenhof, the Church of Smithers, and all of the supporting churches. We are one step closer to the

*Rev. W. L.
Bredenhof and
Rev. R. Aasman*



return of Christ, when people of all nations and races will be dressed in white and praising God.

That afternoon, Rev. Bredenhof preached his inaugural sermon. He chose as text Acts 17:10-12:

As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.

Paul's preaching in Thessalonica was not well received, especially by the Jews. A mob forced Paul and Silas to leave, and they were sent to Berea. The message brought to Thessalonica and Berea was the same, but while it

was scorned by most in Thessalonica, in Berea it was received with eagerness. Rev. Bredenhof stressed that the "noble character" of the Bereans was a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bereans were people who actively looked for the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament, and moved by the Holy Spirit, recognized that fulfillment in the Christ who was proclaimed by Paul. Rev. Bredenhof then referred to the parable of the sower. The Bereans were an example of people who were good soil, while the Thessalonians were not. We must not use human standards to judge God's work. The Word of God never returns empty. Prayer is indispensable for mission work, and Rev. Bredenhof prayed that the Holy Spirit would work in those who hear the Gospel, so that the Word may be met with the Berean attitude, and that it may fall upon good soil.

The Welcome Evening

On the following Saturday, a welcome evening was held for Rev. and Mrs. Bredenhof and their family. It was set up as a dessert potluck, and there was tremendous variety of desserts which could be enjoyed. Letters of congratulations from many congregations and individuals were read, or made available for reading. Rev. D. Poppe, who was ordained in Houston on the same day as Rev. Bredenhof, spoke words of congratulations and support on behalf of the Houston congregation. Entertainment was also provided. Rev. Bredenhof was invited to join the council in a light hearted game of musical stumps. He was also given an intense oral exam by the Young People's Society covering a broad set of topics from the name of the tallest mountain in Canada to how a Smithers resident would get a moose or elk into a refrigerator. Finally, he joined in a game in which he had to identify by sound the many species of animals likely to end up on his doorstep in Fort Babine. The welcome



*Rev. and Mrs. Bredenhof
with their two children,
Josiah and Julie*

evening was very well attended by people from both the Smithers and

Houston congregations, and it was enjoyed by all. C

God With Us

by Jane deGlint

*Who's greeting me? Whose voice is this
That wishes me eternal bliss?
It is an angel! How I fear
To hear the reason why he's here!*

*O David's daughter, don't be scared.
The Holy Spirit has prepared
Your humble womb to be the place
Where God will join the human race.*

*Then Mary stretches out her hands,
Accepts the gift that God commands.
With willing wisdom she submits
As God salvation in her knits.*

*The God-sent Spirit works in us
As well with presents generous
And trains us to submit ourselves
To God, who through Him in us dwells.*



News from ...

The Women's Savings Action

The new library and the work of the Women's Savings Action

As you could read in a previous *Clarion*, the official opening of the new library took place on September 9 and the College community is now enjoying the advantages of the new building. For the first time in the history of the College the library has a home specially designed for it! Much reason for gratitude! At the sod turning Dr. J. Faber

aptly pointed out that, humanly speaking, without the work of the Women's Savings Action, the library would not be where it is today, and this project would not be starting! And now at the beginning of this new millennium, with a beautiful new library facility in place, we look forward to helping to fill the shelves and so providing the College community with up-to-date resources to meet the challenges of this post-modern age.

Contributions received

During the past year a total of \$28,955.50 was collected. It is wonderful to see that the amount is up considerably from last year. From Australia \$647.39 was received; this time a collection was held at the League Day which took place in West Albany. As well, \$1,214.99 was received from royalties for books written by the late Prof. L. Selles for ILPB.

WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION

Contributions for the year ended June 30, 2000
(with comparative figures for the previous year)

Congregation	2000	1999	Congregation	2000	1999
Abbotsford	\$ 715.00	\$ 1,200.00	Houston	384.29	
Aldergrove	600.00	615.00	Kerwood		
Ancaster	926.60	723.39	Langley	1,401.00	1,534.50
Attercliffe	1,006.50	777.50	Langley/Willoughby Heights	295.00	755.00
Barrhead	1,375.22		Lincoln	308.20	566.35
Brampton	146.24	215.15	London	240.00	
Burlington Ebenezer	972.35	1,647.65	Lynden	585.11	725.36
Burlington Fellowship	557.62	691.55	Neerlandia		844.00
Burlington Waterdown	780.00		Orangeville	457.00	45.00
Burlington Waterdown/Flamborough		1060.00	Ottawa		113.50
Calgary	362.00	360.00	Owen Sound	285.00	170.00
Carman East	242.00		Rockway		55.00
Carman West	531.00		Smithers	819.96	833.61
Chatham	625.00	549.85	Smithville	1,195.40	1,231.75
Chilliwack	489.00		Surrey	525.00	750.00
Cloverdale	1,020.00	560.00	Taber		305.00
Coaldale	827.50	672.50	Toronto		
Edmonton Immanuel	1,226.00	883.04	Vernon	324.50	441.00
Edmonton Providence	2,730.23	2,386.49	Winnipeg Grace	635.00	505.00
Elora	100.20	78.28	Winnipeg Redeemer	738.25	510.00
Fergus	710.74	223.35	Yarrow		
Flamborough	662.94		Australia	647.39	
Grand Rapids		172.20	Royalties (Selles)	1,214.99	791.17
Grand Valley	147.63	85.05			
Guelph	626.50	898.00			
Hamilton	1,519.14	1,383.03	TOTAL COLLECTED	<u>\$28,955.50</u>	<u>\$25,358.27</u>

College evening

Your generous donations in congregations across Canada and across the border, along with the special donations from Australia and the Selles family made it possible once again to present our annual pledge for the purchase of books and periodicals on the College Evening – this time again \$25,000.

Very little reserve

For quite a number of years, we have put a lot of money into the expansion fund and we now 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 7 years in order to keep up with inflation and our weak Canadian dollar. Virtually all books have to come from the U.S. or Europe, making the exchange rate an important factor.

Thank you very much!

Our sincere appreciation goes to those of you who have done and do

the work (the organizing, the collecting, the counting) – the representatives and the volunteers – whether you have “retired”, whether you continue to take on this task (some of you for many years already) or whether you have just joined our ranks! Without your faithful participation and dedicated efforts we would not be able to carry on!

But, of course, there would be no work to do if you did not continue to give your donations! And so our heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your contributions! Materially the Lord has blessed each one of us differently. Whatever amount you give, be assured that it is received with thankfulness. If perchance you or your congregation did not make a donation . . . please join our team effort this coming year!

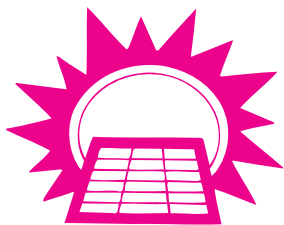
Every year we see again how many small amounts add up to one large amount. Congregation size varies, contributions vary, the method used by each representative varies. There are so many variables, and yet we are all united with a common purpose – we

want to show that as women of the church we love the Theological College, and we want to show that we know how important it is that future teachers and preachers of the Word be well-equipped for their task. Above all, we want to show our love and thankfulness to the Lord in this way.

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Ray of Sunshine

by Mrs. Corinne Gelms
& Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”

(John 1:6-9)

Celebrating the birth of Christ

We are arriving at the time of the year when we celebrate Christmas, when we remember the birth of Christ. It is indeed a busy time in which much celebrating is done. With this article, we would like to focus on how we must celebrate, and in what light that we as Christians must shine forth.

In this day and age, much focus is placed on the atmosphere and on the gift-giving. Many homes

are being decorated with various lights and decorations. Some people even begin to prepare for this occasion months in advance. In the world around us, people know that Christmas holds a special meaning, but they do not realize the deeper meaning that Jesus, who was born in a manger, would later be the Saviour of all those who believed in Him. The gift-giving has taken over the knowledge

– continued on page 588

of who the newborn Babe is, and even the true knowledge of themselves. For why was man created and placed on this earth? So he could praise himself, or others; or was it to give all the praise and glory to the risen Saviour Jesus Christ?

Be careful how you celebrate

We too must be very careful and should give each year again deeper thought as to how we celebrate Christmas. Do we too tend to celebrate Christmas in the manner in which the world does it? The devil wants us to lean away from the truth of the Bible more each year. He does this through his deceitful and evil way, by providing lots of trees, but not the tree of life, and by providing lots of lights, but not the Light of the World. The devil is also working very hard on us, Christ's children, and every year again he works harder, and therefore we as individuals, and as Church must work all the harder to fight the many temptations.

Indeed, there are many lights burning at Christmas time, but where does our light shine? Is it in the lights that we decorate our homes with? We hope not! For our lights should shine forth from the faith that we have with Jesus, our Saviour, and not just at Christmas time, but throughout the whole year. For if we only speak about the cozy feelings that are brought about at this time, then we start to fall astray. We also must study the facts and believe that Christ was born into this world. We all must break the darkness and point the way to Christ. We should all have our lights shining brightly, that those who are in the darkness can see Christ shining in us, and thus give all the glory to God the Father. As Christmas approaches, we should all take time to deeply ponder the true and deeper meaning of Christmas, and then we can only come away amazed, filled with praise and thanksgiving.

Celebrating and growing

When Christmas comes around every year, it should have a richer meaning in our lives, as we grow in faith. For we do not just celebrate Christ's birth, but we also must reflect on what He continues to do for us through his redemptive work. He continues to gather a church for Himself, a church

chosen from the beginning till Christ returns. For we can be assured that one day, the glory of the Lord will shine around us, and we will be taken up in it, fully and eternally.

We may look forward to that day when Christ will come back to take those who have remained faithful through shining their proper lights through faith. Let us conclude with what it says about the life hereafter when we will sit at God's right hand; and as the Lord says in Revelation 22:5 "there will be no more night. They will not need the light of the lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever."

The people who in darkness walked
Have seen a glorious light;
Now day has dawned for those who dwelt
In death's surrounding night.
To hail Thee, Sun of Righteousness,
They with rejoicing come
As when with joy they share the spoil
Or bear the harvest home.

Hymn 15:1

Birthdays in early January:

2nd Liz Koning will be turning 40
9905 152nd Street
Edmonton, AB T5P 1X4

7th Christine Breukelman will be 29
2225-19th Street
Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

Congratulations to Liz and Christine on your birthdays. We would like to wish all the readers a blessed Christmas and the Lord's blessing for the new year 2001. Till next year:

Mrs. E. Nordeman and Mrs. C. Gelms
Mailing Correspondence:
548 Kemp Road East
RR 2 Beamsville, ON
L0R 1B2
Tel. 1 (905) 563-0380





Alpha and Omega: Guido Graduation 2000

by Leanne Van Bostelen

Another October has come and gone, and with it another commencement ceremony. Graduates, parents, board members, teachers, and friends all gathered at Park Bible Church in Burlington on October 27 to share the excitement of endings and beginnings.

The chairman of the board, Mr. Leo Kampen, opened the evening by reading from Revelation 1:1-8 about beginnings and endings. Graduation is a time when most people focus on the physical fact that graduating students will no longer be attending Guido de Bres Christian High School in Hamilton, but they will be focussed on post-secondary education and searching for a career. Mr. Kampen, however, immediately brought the focus back to God and his plan for each of the graduates. The event of graduation, said Mr. Kampen, is an evening for the individual graduates to say their farewells, but it is also an evening to remember that by the grace of God, who has no beginning and no ending, this Christian School has been able to provide these

*“...the eternal nature of God:
“I am the Alpha and the Omega...”*

young adults with a Christianly-focussed education.

Following this introductory speech, the principal, Mr. Hans VanDooren, welcomed all to the ceremony. He

spoke of pictures: physical, mental, and spiritual. Physical pictures, said Mr. VanDooren, will fade with time, as will the mental pictures. The spiritual picture, however, will never fade: God’s Word as the foundation of learning. Mr. VanDooren reflected on the importance of maintaining the spiritual picture, as it relates to 1 Corinthians 13: we see but a dim reflection now, but then we will see fully.

To further impress upon those gathered the important points brought forward by the previous speakers, the Guido Choir presented two pieces: “Praise His Holy Name” and “Our Hope Alone is You.” The songs provided focus for the thankfulness that God has brought the graduates this far, but also a prayer for future guidance.

The guest speaker, Rev. Jason VanVliet, from the church at Lincoln, continued the evening’s theme of beginnings and endings. The title of the speech was “From Commencement to Consummation,” and it focussed on the eternal nature of God: “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” Revelation 1:8. Rev. VanVliet spoke of decisions to be made by the graduates, roads to be taken in the future, and potential problems that may be encountered along the way. But most importantly, he spoke of God’s eternal nature. God has always had a plan for the graduates, and, although things may not always be easy, God will follow through with this plan. Rev. VanVliet closed off with two summary passages: Ecclesiastes commands that we do everything with all our might and work for the Lord unconditionally until his return; 1 Corinthians 15 speaks of always giving ourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because our labour is not in vain.

This speech was followed by the moment all graduates had been waiting for: the presentation of their diplomas. After handshakes, smiles, and a



Michael Sieders gives his valedictory address: life is a book edited by God.

Graduates.



few hugs, the graduating class was introduced to the audience, who gave them a standing ovation.

To give further focus to the evening, the Guido Choir again shared its talents, singing "Lord, Make us Worthy" and "Teach me, O Lord." Later on, one of the graduates, Joni Schulenberg, also bade farewell and Godspeed to her classmates with a solo entitled, "A Closing Prayer."

As final reminders of their effort and education at Guido, awards were

handed out, and Mike Sieders presented the valedictory address. The effort by this group of graduates was highlighted at the awards ceremony. Most notably, Karen Spithoff received the Governor General's Bronze Medal, and Rolf den Hollander, the Dr. F. G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-year Award. Proud of his fellow graduates, Mike stepped up to the podium. He spoke about a book with many chapters. Some of these chapters have been completed, but some have yet to be written.

There has been and will be comedy, mystery, drama, action, and suspense. But, said Mike, the key to all of these events is God, because He is the daily editor. Without his plan, nothing can happen. This speech accurately and effectively summarized the message of all of the evening's speakers: God is our refuge, He will shield us, and He holds the master key to our lives. God is the Alpha and the Omega; all of our beginnings and endings fall under His guidance and care. C

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMAS

Jessica Aasman
Julia Aikema
Elisa Alkema
Kent Baartman
Carolyn Bartels
Gerald Bartels
Jaclyn Bartels
Sarah Bartels
Sharon Bartels
Amanda Blokker
Cindy Bos
Adam Bosscher
Krista Bosscher
Brian de Boer
Cheryl DeJager
David DeJong
Ryan deJonge
Jennifer Dekker
Rolf den Hollander
Ken Dokter

Amber Dykema
Aileen Feenstra
Jason Hart
Val Hartman
Jaclyn Havenaar
Kim Havenaar
Tammy Heemskerk
Carolyn Hoeksema
Erik Hoeksema
Joanna Homan
Tasha Hopman
Amanda Hordyk
Sarah Hordyk
Grace Hulleman
Alisha Hummel
Chris Hutten
John Hutten
Laura Jansen Van Doorn
Deanna Kampen
Chris Keep

Jacob Kelly
Jody Knegt
Crystal Ludwig
Jeanette Ludwig
Tracy Malda
Christina Muis
Tyler Nichol
Petra Oostdyk
Ryan Oosterhoff
Ten Oosterhoff
Nadia Ostermeier
Steven Ostermeier
Lori-Anne Ouwersloot
Amanda Piper
Andrew Ravensbergen
Sarah Reinink
Adrian Scholtens
Jolene Schulenberg
Joni Schulenberg
Carrie Schuurman

Mike Sieders
Krista Smeding
Karen Spithoff
Anne-Marie Stam
Janese Tiggelaar
Laura Tiggelaar
Cheryl VanAndel
Tina VanBrederode
Alex Vandelden
Chris Vanderhorst
Rachel VanderVeen
Felicia Vandervelde
Reuben Vanderwoude
Brian VanDooren
Henry VanHengstum
Becky Van Huisstede
Garett Vanlperen
Tyler Van Middelkoop
Sarah Vis



Karen Spithoff earned this year's Governor General's Bronze Medal. Presented by principal J.G. Van Dooren.



The Dr. F. G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award goes to Rolf den Hollander. Presented by Mr. J. Lof.



Sarah Hordyk receives scholarship from Redeemer University College from Miss C. VanEerden.



Becky Van Huistede receives the Edward M. Stam Memorial Scholarship from Dr. A. Witten.

AWARDS

The Harry Aasman Memorial Scholarship
Karen Spithoff

The George DeBoer Memorial Scholarship
David DeJong

The Ontario Scholar Certificates
Krista Bosscher
David DeJong
Rolf den Hollander
Sarah Hordyk
Crystal Ludwig
Brian VanDooren

The Premier School Agendas Ltd. Scholarships
Kent Baartman
Krista Bosscher
Crystal Ludwig
Michael Sieders
Laura Tiggelaar

The Guido de Bres Alumni Scholarships
Ryan deJonge
Erik Hoeksema
Joanna Homan
Amanda Hordyk
Alex Vandelden
Brian VanDooren

The Edward M. Stam Memorial Scholarship
Rebecca Van Huisstede

The Guido de Bres Christian High School Participation Awards
Elisa Alkema
Carolyn Bartels
Krista Bosscher
Ryan deJonge
Rolf den Hollander
Jaclyn Havenaar
Erik Hoeksema
Tessa Hopman
Steven Ostermeier
Michael Sieders
Laura Tiggelaar

The Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award for Students
Rebecca Van Huisstede

The Dr. F. G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award
Rolf den Hollander

The Governor-General's Bronze Medal
Karen Spithoff

The Redeemer College Honours Scholarship
Sarah Hordyk



Faith Expressing Itself Through Love

The 39th Annual League Day of the Canadian Reformed Women's Societies of Ontario held on October 18, 2000 in Stoney Creek, ON

by Thea Heyink

Opening

A beautifully prepared hall and many glittering chandeliers greeted 355 sisters from across Ontario when they arrived on the foggy, mild day that was October 18. The hall quickly filled to capacity and after a quarter of an hour of fellowship, the president Mrs. Martha DeGelder, called the day to order.

Accompanied by Mrs. Betsy Kingma on the keyboard, praise to the Lord was sung with Psalm 92: 1, 2, 3 and 6. Galatians 5 was read and the theme for the day announced: "Faith Expressing Itself Through Love." We were reminded that there are many areas of unrest in the world, where Christians must sometimes flee to safety. We are truly blessed in the freedoms and gifts the Lord continues to give us. Therefore we must constantly express our faith through love for the Lord, but also for those less fortunate than ourselves. Announcements were made. Roll call was held which allowed us to see the groups of sisters from the various congregations. As well, guests from points west, Australia and the Netherlands were welcomed. The League song was once again enjoyed by all, and in preparation for the morning's topic, we read 1 Corinthians 12 together.

Time management

Mrs. Annette Bartels was given the opportunity to present her introduction entitled, "Time Management in Communion of Saints." She asked us all the question, "Why can some of us seem to be able to 'conquer the world' and get so much done, while others have difficulty getting just the daily essentials completed?" Time manage-



*Speaker Mrs.
Annette Bartels
and
Mrs. Martha
DeGelder*

ment is the answer. Because each of us has tasks too varied to generalize, time management takes on a differing aspect for each of us. Our family's composition determines how much work we have in our households and how much time we have for other kingdom work. Important words in terms of time management are priority, balance and organization. In this way, not only does the daily routine include family and household duties to be done, but also work within the communion of saints. This work would not only include cleaning, cooking, and shopping for the elderly or sick, it would also include a compassionate heart, a listening ear, words of wisdom, comforting words, extra finances, and passing on knowledge to our younger sisters. In this way we may all realize our calling as sisters in the Lord, to the praise and honour of the Lord.

After the singing of Psalm 121:1 - 4, the opportunity was given for round-table group discussions, and then time was allowed for questions and sharing from the floor. The topics that came up for discussion included home-help committee organization and experiences, the guilt that young stay-at-home moms often feel, and the inclusion of our unmarried sisters in all our activities.

The freewill offering for the Indian mission in Smithers yielded \$1,258.23. Again we raised our voices in praise, with the singing of Psalm 127: 1 and 2 and the morning session was closed.

Mrs. Jane Oosterhoff led in prayer of thanksgiving and asked the Lord's blessing for lunch. We then filed into another spacious room, where we were served a delicious hot luncheon.

After a short time of fellowship, the afternoon session was called to or-

Mrs. Martha DeGelder and speaker Rev. D.G.J. Agema



der with a prayer of thanks for the meal. A rousing rendition of the national anthem was sung, and we were entertained by the hosting societies of Attercliffe. They presented a lineup of ladies who came on stage carrying various articles, from which the audience had to guess the name of a Canadian/American Reformed minister.

Amid much merriment, the president once again called order, and we sang Psalm 119: 42 and 43. Scripture was opened at 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13. Rev. D. G. J. Agema was introduced and he took the floor to speak on "Is There Apathy in the Church?"

Apathy in the church?

Rev. Agema began by remarking that the Liberation in 1944 took place

during a time of apathy in the church in the Netherlands. Rev. H. Knoop delivered a speech in April of 1944 which pointed to various indications of this, i.e., contentedness with achievements, a shifting in perspective, narrowing of spiritual life, lack of expectation of Christ's return, affluence and materialism in the lives of church people. Then, amid the dark days of war, God called his church to reform and return to his Word. The word "apathy" was examined, and the history of the church throughout Scripture was followed in the perspective of apathy. We realized that even in the bustle of a busy, active church life, apathy can and does exist. If true zeal for the Lord and knowledge of his Word is not foremost in the everyday lives of believers, then apathy

truly exists. Among us today we experience the same indications spoken of by Rev. Knoop fifty-six years ago. Materialism, lack of humility and piety in our lives are also things we struggle with today. The antidote to apathy is a renewed dedication to the service of God: the faithful, daily study of his Word and daily time of personal prayer. We also need to renew our ceaseless efforts to teach our children in the ways of the Lord, and if we do these things together in faith, He will bless us with joy every morning.

Once again, after singing Psalm 138: 1, 3 and 4, group discussions took place and there was a time of sharing and questions from the floor. These questions revealed a great concern regarding apathy that lives in our hearts, and basically, we all realize the need for renewal and zeal in our service to the Lord. It was a time of building each other up in faith.

Closing

In wrapping up the day, several announcements were made and the speakers of the day were heartily thanked. The next League Day will be held, the Lord willing, in the same venue, hosted by Burlington South, on October 17, 2001. The president thanked babysitters, accompanist, hosting society, and the outgoing League corresponding secretary. In closing we sang Psalm 116: 1, 7, 8, 9, and 10, and Rev. Agema led in thanksgiving prayer. It was a day thoroughly enjoyed by all. C



Press Review

Same Status, Different Roles

by J. De Jong

Rev. M. Kelderman, pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation in Burgessville, Ontario, takes care of the “Corner for Teens” column in *The Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*, the official publication of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregations, (HNRC). This group of churches was formed in 1992, when the “mother church” in the Netherlands rejected the stand of one of the leaders in America on the matter of divorce. The group, which holds to the *Three Forms of Unity*, has eight congregations with some preaching posts as well. They also operate a seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Rev. Kelderman, who is running a series of articles on the place of man and woman in marriage, had this to say in a recent submission:

In previous articles we have been emphasizing that male and female were created equal. They have equal worth in the sight of God. They equally represented the image of God, yet they were not created equal in every respect. The man was created as leader and the woman as helper.

We must distinguish status and role. Male and female were created equal in status but different in role. The feminist misses this point and actually falls into the same error as does male oppression. Feminism says that both status and role must be equal and thinks to gain power and overtake the male role in order to be an independent head. Male oppression distorts the God-ordained way as well. It seeks to gain superiority by power and domination instead of exercising headship in a way of denial and self-sacrifice

“Male and female were created equal in status but different in role.”

toward his spouse. Both of these positions therefore are not concerned with the righteousness of God and his created order but seek to establish their own rights and authority, denying the authority of God.

True Christians don’t advocate male oppression because the Bible opposes it. Male oppression is sin as much as feminism is.

What then is the biblical teaching concerning the roles of male and female? To answer this question we return to Genesis 1-3.

Several compelling arguments demonstrate male headship. The first regards God’s continual speaking with Adam first. Even after the fall God did not come to Eve or the serpent but He came into the garden, calling Adam! “Where are you?” After He brought Adam face to face with his sin, He turned to

Eve and then the serpent. God immediately pronounced his curse upon the serpent and laid a judgment upon Eve, and then upon Adam. Thus God was saying that responsibility began and ended with Adam who was to exercise headship in a God-glorifying way. Similarly, in Romans 5, Paul clearly places the responsibility for the fall upon the shoulders of the leader Adam.

A second argument regards the terms used to name mankind and Adam’s naming of Eve. In Genesis 1 Moses writes about the creation of man in general terms; then in chapter 2 he expands upon it. Those who assert women’s equality do not like to hear a term like “man” refer to both men and women. This does not fit the picture of the independent woman. But God intended the term man to be an inclusive term. The feminist problem with this term is that the woman is not mentioned except in man, which is unacceptable to them. If using the term man to refer to man and woman collectively is wrong, then we must conclude that God was wrong in saying “Let us make man in our image (Gen 1:26).” God reaffirmed that this is what He calls them in Genesis 5:1. He did not call male and female together “woman” nor does he call them a neutral name such as “person”, but he called them man. Furthermore, when Adam named all the living creatures around him, he exercised authority or lordship over them even before Eve was created. After this Eve was created by God and Adam also named her, showing his leadership over her. This is not

only true pre-fall but also post-fall when he called her Eve, mother of all living.

Young men, the position God has created you in is to be equal with young women in regard to your status before God but head and leader in regard to your role in marriage. Do you reflect this leadership role as we see it set forth in Christ in his relationship with the church? Young women, you have been created under the rule and authority of men. This means you are to be subject to your father until you are joined with a man who is your husband and then you are to be subject to him. This is not degrading for you but it is God's will

for your life. Together then – the male bearing the primary responsibility and the female giving counsel and help as a helpmeet – you are to serve and glorify Him and have dominion in the earth.

There are several worthwhile points in the argument of Rev. Kelderman. It is especially noteworthy that he warns against male domination as much as against the dangers of feminism. We need to watch for dangers on two sides!

On one point I would add a brief comment. The Hebrew language has a different word for the generic "man" (*adam*) than it does for the man in his relationship to the woman (*'ish*). Here, as in Dutch and German, (as

well as other languages) there is a difference which the English language does not have. That has perhaps unintentionally led to an acerbating of the sentiments on this point. However, it is true that the generic name is closely tied to the name of the first man, Adam, and that an element of representational headship is incorporated in the naming of the first man.

In a world in which relationships are taking on ever greater distortions because of sin, it is good to maintain the guidelines of Scripture for our young people. In general I do not see this as a major problem among our youth. But we always do well to be reminded of God's norms on these important matters. C

Christmas Greetings from the Canadian Reformed Church at Kerwood, Ontario



Enjoying a potluck supper in the auditorium of our Church on September 9, 2000.

Children playing games beside the Church.

Book Review –

The History and Message of the Word in the Flesh

Reviewed by Jane DeGlint

Jakob van Bruggen, *Christ on Earth*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998. Paperback, 320 pages; Can. \$37.50

Jakob van Bruggen, *Jesus the Son of God*. Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1999. Paperback, 307 pages; Can. \$37.50
Translated by Nancy Forest-Flier

Anyone who writes a commentary on the Bible undertakes a precarious journey. On the one hand he wants to make an impact with an articulate formulation of his researched insights. On the other hand he wants to stay in the background. No matter how lucid and brilliant his publication, his own person must remain in the shadows. His scholarly document only serves to reflect the light back to the light. Prof. Dr. Jakob van Bruggen has shown that he possesses both the talents and the disposition to qualify for such commentary writing. With able pen he captures the attention of the reader. He takes him along on the path through the gospels and shows him details which a quick glance would easily miss. He also provides his reader with clear directions for finding the way through passages which require careful comparison of the four gospels. But always he points away from himself to the Word in the Flesh. Time and again the reader is delighted when unexpected aspects of our Saviour's life and work suddenly become visible.

As professor of New Testament at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in Kampen, the Netherlands, Dr. van Bruggen receives the opportunity to make in-depth studies. And he does so with systematic and disciplined persistence. This led him to take on the production

of a commentary on the New Testament. But with this commentary he wanted to do more than provide exegetical clarification. Before he would issue separate volumes on each of the gospels (and on the other New Testament books), he wanted to write a detailed and structured description of the life and teachings of Jesus, the Word in the Flesh.

With the books *Christ on Earth* and *Jesus the Son of God* this goal has been achieved. As the author explains in his introduction to the second of these volumes, each book follows one line of Jesus' life. The first line is horizontal and traces the historical facts of Jesus' life on earth. The second line is vertical and indicates the heavenly message which Jesus proclaims. However, these two lines are not static and the author does not give a bisected view. To the contrary, with artistic skill the author allows the lines to interplay throughout both volumes.

It is the author's explicit wish that these books are read not only by theological scholars and students, but also by teachers and members of Bible study groups. In other words: everyone should read them. But is that possible? Can a book be written that is stimulating to the scholar and edifying to the layman? Well, it is, if the layman is willing to skip and persist, which is actually not difficult to do. At times Dr. van Bruggen enters a detailed discussion with church-fathers, historians or modern theologians. His arguments are succinct and concise, yet sometimes rather technical. A not-so-academic reader has two viable options to clear these hurdles. He can read them anyway, and certainly he will retain some facts which might be reinforced

in following chapters. Or he can simply jump right over them to the point where Prof. van Bruggen picks up the story line again.

Each book offers a suitable enrichment. In *Christ on Earth* the author discusses the use and validity of the sources which are employed to arrive at an accurate description of Jesus' life. *Jesus the Son of God* takes time out to explore the origin of Christian baptism and is enhanced with an appendix on the Pharisees. Prof. van Bruggen is a master of language use. His writings are laced with keen allusions, apt descriptions, pithy sayings. One wonders how the translator would have tackled these. As was expected, some punch got lost in the process. The short and catchy exclamation "*Gesprekstof voor een breed publiek!*" turned into a lengthy "Fascinating topics of conversation for a wide range of people!" But instead of quoting examples to show which minute details were lost, it is better to express appreciation for the impressive English rendition of the complicated idiom and delicate wordplay which Prof. van Bruggen skilfully employs when writing in his native tongue.

The history and the message of the Word in the Flesh are beautiful. Prof. van Bruggen has highlighted this beauty in a compelling way. Though admiration for the author can hardly be kept back, it is adoration for Christ which prevails. "Therefore God has exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11).



Press Releases

PRESS RELEASE OF CLASSIS NORTHERN ONTARIO

SEPTEMBER 23, 2000, held in the Canadian Reformed Church at Elora.

Opening

On behalf of the convening Church of Elora, Rev. J. G. Slaa opened the meeting by welcoming the delegates and guests, and inviting them to sing Hymn 11:1, 2. He then read Isaiah 40:1-11 and led in prayer. A special welcome was given to Rev. W. Van Hal, of Bethel United Reformed Church of Woodstock. Rev. Slaa noted with thankfulness that after the departure of Rev. A. J. Pol from Guelph, Rev. J. VanWoudenberg has accepted the call to Guelph. It was also noted that Rev. P. Aasman has received and declined a call to the Church of Smithers, B.C.

Constitution of Classis

After the delegates from the Church of Brampton examined the credentials and concluded that all the churches were lawfully represented, classis was declared constituted. Classis appointed the following officers: chairman: J. G. Slaa; vice-chairman: R. E. Pot; clerk: P. G. Feenstra. These brothers then commenced their respective duties.

Adoption of the Agenda

After some revisions, the provisional agenda was adopted.

Reports

The following reports were received:

1. A church visitation report to the Church of Fergus; it gratefully noted that this church seeks to be a faithful church of Christ.

2. From the treasurer of classis, with a financial update.

3. From auditors for the books of the treasurer (Owen Sound), noting that these books are in good order.

4. From the Committee for Needy Churches. Classis adopted the proposal of this committee to assess the churches \$6 per communicant member for the year 2001.

5. From the church to inspect the books for the Committee for Needy Churches (Fergus), noting that these are in good order.

6. From auditors of the books of the fund for financial aid for students for the ministry (Fergus), noting that these are in good order.

7. From the church for financial aid for students for the ministry (Guelph). Classis decided to further replenish the fund by assessing the churches \$2.34 per communicant member for 2001.

8. From the church to inspect the archives of classis (Orangeville), with a report about the archives. A discussion ensued about the inclusion of certain documents in the archives.

These above-mentioned reports were received with gratitude.

Question Period (Art 44 CO)

After a brief recess, question period according to Article 44 of the Church Order was held. The churches declared that the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued, and the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. The Church of Fergus requested the judgment and help of classis regarding some matters of discipline. Advice was given in closed session.

Proposals and Instructions from the Churches (Art 33 CO)

Classis considered and adopted a proposal from the Church of Owen Sound, regarding neighbouring churches (Art 41, 44 and 71 CO), proposing that each local church be assigned a specific neighbouring church.

Correspondence

1. A letter from the Church of Orangeville regarding the manner in which Classis Contracta June 22, 2000 dealt with a request for pulpit supply, was received and discussed.

2. A request was received from the Church of Guelph to approve the call of Rev. J. VanWoudenberg of Kerwood (Art 5 CO). Upon examination of the required documents, this request was granted. The Church of Orangeville was appointed to send a delegate to Rev. VanWoudenberg's installation to speak on behalf of classis.

Address by Observer from United Reformed Churches

Rev. W. Van Hal was invited to speak, and spoke some words of introduction about himself and his congregation. He encouraged the churches of classis in their commitment to the Reformed faith which the Lord has entrusted to both the Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches. He expressed the wish for the Lord's blessing over the work done to promote unity in faith between our respective federations, in harmony with the requirements of Scripture, on the basis of the truth of Scripture, and for the growth of Christ's church. On behalf of classis, Rev. Slaa thanked Rev. Van Hal for being present and for his words, echoing the appreciation for our common heritage, and the desire for unity in the true faith.

Appointments

After a recess for lunch, the chairman reconvened classis with the singing of Psalm 16:1, 5. Classis made the following appointments:

1. Committee of Examiners;
2. Church visitors;
3. Church for taking care of the archives: Owen Sound;

4. Church to inspect the archives: Orangeville;
5. Treasurer: F. Hoekstra;
6. Church for auditing the books of the treasurer: Owen Sound;
7. Church for financial aid to students for the ministry: Guelph;
8. Church for auditing books of fund for financial aid for students for ministry: Fergus;
9. Committee for needy churches: W. Oostdyk (2001), F. Westrik (2002), C. Lodder (2003);
10. Church for auditing books of fund for needy churches: Fergus;
11. Delegates to Regional Synod East, November 2000: Ministers P. Aasman, B. J. Berends, P. G. Feenstra; alternates (in that order) R. E. Pot, J. D. Louwse, J. G. Slaa; Elders John Jonker, Jake Kamphuis, C. J. Nobels; alternates (in that order) K. Knol, Calvin Lodder, P. Broekema;
12. Convening church for next classis: Fergus, December 22, 2000;
13. Suggested officers for next classis: chairman: P. Aasman, vice-chairman: J. G. Slaa, clerk: R. E. Pot;
14. The mileage rate for expenses incurred by classical committees and church visitors was set.

Question Period

Personal question period was held.

1. The advisability of having a list of previous classical decisions was considered. One of the churches will prepare a proposal regarding this.
2. The churches were reminded that the clerk of classis must send a sufficient number of copies of the Acts to each church (for each office-bearer and for the archives).
3. The presence of observers from our classis at URCNA classes was discussed.

Brotherly Censure (Art 34 CO)

The chairman judged that censure according to Art 34 CO was not necessary.

Adoption of Acts and Press Release

The Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was read and approved for publication.

Closing

The chairman expressed thankfulness for the cooperation of the delegates, and the wish for God's blessing

over the churches. After the singing of Psalm 36:2, R. E. Pot led in prayer, and the chairman declared the meeting closed.

R. E. Pot, vice-chairman of Classis Northern Ontario

PRESS RELEASE OF REGIONAL SYNOD EAST

November 8, 2000, held in the Canadian Reformed Church Brampton, Ontario

Opening

On behalf of the convening church, the Canadian Reformed Church at Brampton, Rev. B. J. Berends called the meeting to order. He asked the delegates to sing Hymn 28: 1- 4 and read from 1 Peter 1: 1 - 13. In prayer a blessing was asked over the meeting. The brs. Berends and Nobels report that all the primi delegates of the Classes are present and properly delegated. Regional Synod East 2000 is constituted.

The following moderamen are elected:

Chairman: Rev. W. den Hollander
 Vice-chairman: Rev. D. G. J. Agema
 Clerk: Rev. G. H. Visscher

The agenda is adopted as proposed.

OVERTURES

Form of Subscription

Classis Northern Ontario request Regional Synod East to overture General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches:

to establish a Committee to propose standardized subscription forms for the minor and major assemblies, as well as for the professors of theology; or to mandate the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* to propose such forms in consultation with the churches for adoption by General Synod.

To publish these forms in our *Book of Praise*.

Regional Synod decides to accede to the request of Classis Northern Ontario on the following grounds:

1. Scriptural

Scripture frequently calls us to hold fast to the pure doctrine of God's Word, and guard it (2 Thess 2:15; 2 Tim 1:13-14; 2 Tim 2:2; 4:3; Tit 1:9; 2:1; Heb 10:23).

2. Church Political

Article 26 of the adopted church order states that "All ministers of the Word, elders, deacons, and professors of theology shall subscribe to the confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches by signing the form(s) adopted for that purpose." This implies that the churches of the federation have agreed to ensure that confessional subscription is in place, in accordance with an adopted form. The duty to ensure that this "adopted order is being observed and maintained in every respect" (CO article 46) belongs to the churches as a whole (CO article 44).

This is a matter in common to all the churches (Church Order, Art 30), by virtue of the fact that such a form is required by the church order (Church Order, Art 26).

The common confession of the truth of Scripture is foundational to our unity as local churches in a federation. This unity of faith will be served by a commonly adopted Form of Subscription.

3. Historical

The Synod of Dort 1618-19 adopted a standardized Form of Subscription for use in local churches.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands have continued to use standardized forms for officebearers after the Synod of Dort 1618-19.

4. Practical

It ensures that local Canadian Reformed Churches are uniform in practice with respect to their observance of Article 26 of the Church Order.

It promotes greater awareness and understanding of subscription to the confessions in the churches, and it gives greater opportunity for officebearers, students and candidates to study the Subscription Form prior to signing.

Since other Forms used in our churches are standardized, there is good reason for local churches to have a form with the same wording.

Voting by All Communicant Members

Classis Central Ontario of March 10, 2000 recommended to Regional Synod that the next General Synod be requested to appoint a committee regarding allowing all communicant members to vote.

Regional Synod decided to request General Synod to appoint a committee to revisit the matter of women's voting rights and serve the churches with a complete report, taking into account reports and decisions from 1977-1998.

Grounds:

1. the matter of women's voting rights has been dealt with as a matter of the churches in common (Synods 1980, 1983, 1986, 1995, 1998);

2. subsequent developments since 1983, outlined in a letter from Burlington South to Classis Central Ontario, especially in our sister churches, necessitate a revisiting of the matter to examine the grounds which have now been presented;

3. the matter of women's voting rights does "live in the churches" since it keeps coming back to the ecclesiastical assemblies.

Mandate of the Book of Praise Committee re Hymns

Classis Central Ontario of March 10, 2000 recommended to Regional Synod that the next General Synod be requested to broaden the mandate of the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*. It would like to see added to the mandate of the Standing Committee the task of evaluating Hymns submitted by the churches for inclusion in the *Book of Praise*. It also proposed that this Committee receive submissions and proposals for additional

Hymns from the churches with the reasons for their suitability, evaluate them in accordance with the requirements set out by General Synod Edmonton, 1965, and submit a selection to the churches prior to subsequent General Synods, with the recommendation that such Hymns be included in the Hymn section of the *Book of Praise*.

Regional Synod decides to accede to the request of Classis Central Ontario of September 15, 2000.

Grounds:

1. The *Book of Praise* is a matter of the churches in common (Article 30, CO).

2. The mandate of the *Book of Praise* Committee is not clear (Article 140, Acts Fergus). It would be beneficial for the churches to know what process to follow in order to propose the addition of suitable Hymns to the *Book of Praise*.

Reports

The following reports were received: Deputies ad Article 48, CO; Treasurer of Regional Synod; Church for the Auditing of the Books of the Treasurer of Regional Synod and Church for the Inspection of the Archives.

Appointments

Deputies for Classis Ontario Central ad Article 48: Rev. G. Nederveen (Rev. W. den Hollander as alternate).

Deputies for Classis Northern Ontario ad Article 48. Rev. P. G. Feenstra (Rev. B. J. Berends as alternate).

Deputies for Classis Southern Ontario ad Article 48. Rev. D. G. J. Agema (Rev. G. Wieske as alternate).

Treasurer for Regional Synod: br D. Van Amerongen (342 Russ Rd., R.R. 1.,

Grimsby, Ontario L3M 4E7) is re-appointed.

Church to audit books of the Treasurer: Lincoln.

Church to maintain the Archives: Toronto.

Church to inspect the Archives: Brampton.

Convening Church for next Regional Synod: Church at Blue Bell, November 7, 2001.

Delegates to General Synod 2001:

Ministers: Revs. J. De Gelder, Cl. Stam, G. Ph. Van Popta, J. Ph. Van Vliet (alternates: W. den Hollander, D. G. J. Agema, P. G. Feenstra, P. Aasman in that order).

Elders: Brs. L. Jagt, G. J. Nordeman, P. Oosterhoff, B. Poort (alternates: J. Jonker, G. Vanwoudenberg, Hank van Dooren, R. Jager in that order).

Governors of Theological College. The following are nominated for appointment by General Synod: B. J. Berends, G. Nederveen, Cl. Stam (alternates: G. Ph. Van Popta, P. Aasman, J. VanWoudenberg in that order).

Closing

The Chairman ruled that censure according to Article 34, CO was not necessary. He thanked the brothers for the harmony displayed throughout the meeting. The vice-chairman also thanked the chairman for his leadership in the meeting. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved.

After the singing of Ps. 146: 1, 3, the chairman led in prayer, and Regional Synod East 2000 was closed.

For Synod,
D. G. J. Agema
Vice-chairman e.t.





A Psalm

*Sing to the LORD a new song,
for He has done marvelous things;
his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for Him.
The LORD has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.
He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to the house of Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.*

*Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
make music to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn –
shout for joy before the LORD, the King.*

*Let the sea resound, and all that is in it,
the world, and all who live in it.
Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;
let them sing before the LORD,
for He comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.*

Psalm 98

Season's Greetings from all of us at Premier Printing Ltd.

