

# Clarion

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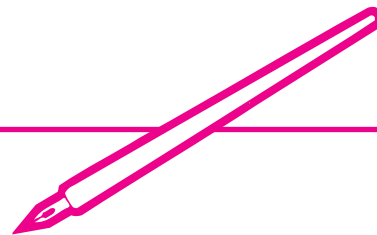


*Fiftieth Anniversary of the  
Church at Coaldale*

*Numbers*

*10:1-10*

By Cl. Stam



## Hierarchy in the Canadian Reformed Churches

### The report

Recently we received the report of the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA). This report is to function on the forthcoming Synod at Neerlandia in May of this year. At one time our synods had separate committees for various contacts, but this was streamlined under one main committee with subcommittees. This was supposed to make things work better and more smoothly.

In this report, however, the general committee disagrees with the report of a subcommittee. The official report now contains a reaction of the CCCA to the report of this committee. When I read this, I thought: so much for a smoother operation. The subcommittee's report now comes to General Synod tainted with corporate disapproval.

*A centralized approach leaves the decision-influencing process in the hands of an elite few.*

### Centralization?

When I read Synod Fergus' decision to establish a committee for contact with churches in the Americas, I thought: here we go into the direction of centralization (*Acts Synod Fergus*, Article 72, 2). The benefits of a centralized approach may be many, but there is one great drawback: it can easily lead to hierarchy.

The danger of centralization is precisely that the findings of those with other viewpoints are already judged by a body that really has no authority to do so. Now the general Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas has let its light shine on the report of the (sub-)Committee for Contact with the OPC, and has found that the present CCOPC Report gives "a one-sided impression of the decision of Synod of Abbotsford." This general Committee then comes with its own recommendations to Synod Neerlandia, namely, to instruct the Committee for Contact with the OPC as yet to do its duty.

Why does the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas publish such a reaction? Is this part of the mandate of this committee? I could not find anywhere in the documents of the previous synod that the report of the general CCCA had to contain implicit approval of the work of every subcommittee. What is the General Synod to do with this reaction? Is Synod not capable of judging this itself?

Imagine that Synod would agree with the subcommittee and not with the reaction of the general committee. Centralization could then lead to disintegration. It has been my observation, when looking at our Dutch sister-churches, that a centralized approach leaves the decision-influencing process in the hands of an elite few, and does not foster involvement and clarity in the churches.

### Committee level

As I was reading the report of the CCCA, I wondered what the weight is of the recommendations of each subcommittee. If there is no reaction of the general committee to the proposal of a subcommittee, has it passed the test? Does this mean that the entire CCCA endorses this report? Synod is not likely to reject proposals that have been endorsed in this manner.

I also asked myself this question: what is the value of the work of a (sub)committee when it must first pass a general committee in order to reach synod without official comment? Until now I was of the impression that the main purpose of a committee is to be involved directly on a personal and local level and so be enabled to present a qualified report on the matter for which it was appointed. But here a general committee interrupts and undermines this process by cutting off the subcommittee at the pass, suggesting that the subcommittee has no right to make the proposals it made.

*The CCCA may say that the admission is in agreement with Lord's Day 30 of the Heidelberg Catechism, but the procedure does not agree with our Church Order.*

We now have various committee levels which do not clarify matters for General Synod but clutter up the process, adding comments to reports or giving an evaluation of a report. The general committee does the work that Synod itself is supposed to do.

I sense that the general committee (CCCA) itself felt that there is a bit of a problem here. In the section, "Clarification on Overall Mandate" (page 33) the CCCA agrees that "the past three years have been a bit of an experiment for the CCCA." In point three of this clarification, we read the following: "Each subcommittee is expected to make their own

report. What does Synod expect the CCCA to do if a subcommittee takes a different direction than desired by the whole committee? Can a report by a subcommittee be overruled by other members who are not part of that subcommittee?" A committee that struggles with such an important question should not first have judged the work of a subcommittee, but should have waited until synodical clarification was given. This is like bringing out the relish after the hot-dog has been swallowed.

### *What's inside?*

You can tell that the next General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches is approaching fast. Not only have delegates been chosen for Synod and reports of standing committees sent out, but we are starting to get some insights and clarification into matters which will be on Synod's agenda. Rev. Cl. Stam's editorial and an article by Rev. J. Van Vliet provide us with insight and also serve to stimulate discussion. We hope to have more such articles in the upcoming months.

Rev. P. G. Feenstra begins a five part series of articles which deal with the proper worship of God in connection with our financial gifts. Considering that the matter of voluntary contributions is often a point of discussion and concern, these articles will be appreciated.

We have a press review by Dr. J. DeJong which deals with the handshake in the worship service between the elder and the minister, as well as the prayer in the consistory room before the worship service. Again, these are matters which are often discussed in our churches and therefore should be of interest to our readers.

We have received a report of Coaldale's fiftieth anniversary celebrations. In this issue of *Clarion*, we also have a meditation by Rev. D.W. Vandeburgt, a book review by Dr. N.H. Gootjes, a report of a speech by Dr. J. van Bruggen, the column "Education Matters," and a letter to the editor.

RA



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## Other reports endorsed?

There is another question that begs to be answered. The reports of the other subcommittees have been passed on without comment. This must mean that the general CCCA agrees with the proposals of all these committees. Lack of negative comment must mean an official endorsement. Is General Synod also to take this factor into account?

I have some questions about the proposals of the CCCA with respect to the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS). The CCCA admits that the RCUS church "concept" differs somewhat from ours (page 29). What is this difference? Besides, what exactly is the church "concept" of the Canadian Reformed Churches other than what is professed in our creeds? Do we all in our churches have the same church "concept?" What is this business about a church "concept?" Are we being bound to some kind of a concept? The large CCCA has a lot of area to cover, but does it also determine what our church concept is? Here, too, I see a danger of hierarchy.

Regarding this different church "concept" we are told that we have to "continue to listen to one another, since both churches base their approach on the Scriptures." What is said here of the RCUS has been repeatedly said since 1977 of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). The OPC also fights independentism and synodicalism. Wherein does the church "concept" that exists in the RCUS differ from the one that is in the OPC?

When it comes to admitting guests to the Lord's Supper, the RCUS follows a more defined and careful approach than the OPC does. The table is obviously "fenced." But nevertheless, it should not escape our attention that guests are admitted *on their own testimony*, and not on the basis of an attestation given by a body called and qualified to do so. The CCCA may say that the admission is in agreement with Lord's Day 30 of the Heidelberg Catechism, but the procedure does not agree with our Church Order. Admission is based on more than "a verbal warning," but the decision is still left to the individual. And behind this acceptance of a personal decision lies a specific church "concept," not unlike the one that exists in the OPC. The required agreement with "historic orthodox Protestantism" allows for this approach to the Lord's Supper. The RCUS, too, has a strain of the pluriformity virus, when it comes to the doctrine concerning the church.

One of the appendices regarding the RCUS mentions that the RCUS in 1996 valued the sister-church relationship with the OPC so highly that "if the Canadian Reformed Churches do not recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true church, it would be an affront to our relationship with the OPC." The expectation was that this issue would be resolved at the 1998 Synod Fergus. It wasn't. At the RCUS Synod 2000 an OPC delegate was received and given the privilege of the floor.


This leaves me wondering if it is right to hold off the OPC again, while entering into sister church relations with a church who has such a relationship with the OPC. Within the framework of the CCCA some discussion *on this point* would have been valuable. We should not give reason for confusion by appearing to be inconsistent. And certainly we should not give affront to a new sister church by holding off her sister.

*This leaves me wondering if it is right to hold off the OPC again, while entering into sister-church relations with a church who has such a relationship with the OPC.*

## Hierarchy?

I do not accuse anyone of seeking to lord it over another. I know that this is far from the minds of all the brothers involved. But hierarchy comes at a slow pace and in subtle ways. My reading of the original intention is that a "more focussed approach" was desired which prevented "overlap and possible disagreement between sister churches" (*Acts Fergus*, page 63).

Entering into a sister church relation with the RCUS, while having unfinished, important business with a sister church of the RCUS, long ago recognized as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ, is a divisive act which may be perceived by the OPC as contemptuous and by the RCUS as an affront. Then we do lord it over others and cause estrangement.

We need to get our own house in order before we tell others what to do. 

## *O Lord, I Will Praise Thee* (*Isaiah 12*)

I will praise thee ev'ry day  
Now thine anger's turn'd away!  
Comfortable thoughts arise  
From the bleeding sacrifice.

Jesus is become at length  
My salvation and my strength;  
And his praises shall prolong,  
While I live, my pleasant song.

Raise again the joyful sound,  
Let the nations roll it round!  
Zion shout! for this is he,  
God the Saviour dwells in thee!

Here in the fair gospel field,  
Wells of free salvation yield  
Streams of life, a plenteous store,  
And my soul shall thirst no more.

Praise ye, then, his glorious name,  
Publish his exalted fame!  
Still his worth your praise exceeds,  
Excellent are all his deeds.

*Olnay Hymn*

By Douglas W. Vandeburgt

## A question of honour

*If I am a father, where is the honour due me? Malachi 1:6*

The book of Malachi is full of questions, and many of them are from the LORD to his people. The questions come because while the LORD begins this oracle with a declaration of his love there is no love response from his people. The first question of the LORD in Malachi is the question, "If I am a father, where is the honour due me?" Earlier in the verse, the LORD had referred to the universal truth that a son honours his father and out of this, his question arises. Where is my honour?

Although the conditional language in verse 6 appears to leave open the possibility that the LORD is not Father, the opposite is in fact the truth. We must read it as follows: "If I am a Father . . . (and I am), where is the honour due me?" The LORD is Israel's Father: "This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son" (Exod 4:22). By virtue of his electing love expressed most clearly in Israel's liberation from Egypt, the LORD is the Father of Israel. God's people today are in that same position with respect to the LORD. He is our Father by virtue of his electing love expressed most clearly in our liberation from sin and Satan through the completed work of Jesus Christ, his Son: "Yet to all who received him, those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

What prompts this question of honour? It is prompted by the disobedient worship of both the priests and the people in Judah. The priests show contempt for the name of the LORD by placing defiled food on his altar (1:6ff). The people bring injured, crippled and diseased animals for sacrifice and the priests accept these for worship. The curse of the LORD falls on both priests and people for failing to honour their father. Where the law speaks about worship, the LORD had made very clear what was and was not acceptable. He had made very clear what animals were or were not to be brought (cf. Lev

22:17ff). The long and short of these laws was that the LORD demanded the very best of his people in worship. If his people would not bring right worship then He would rather they not bring any worship: "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty" (1:10).

We have here an important principle of worship that must be applied in the church today. Our Father in heaven wants and deserves only the very best we have to offer in worship. It is a question of honour. Malachi 1:6ff challenge the office-bearers in the church to lead God's people in acceptable worship.

In the midst of much ongoing discussion on the subject of worship, the office-bearers and the other members of God's church must not fall into the trap of using words like contemporary or traditional in discussing and assessing our

worship. Worship is not a matter of contemporary versus traditional, as if old is somehow better than new or new somehow better than old. Worship is a matter of honour versus profanation. The bottom line on worship as God makes clear through Malachi is twofold. One, worship is about our Father who deserves our honour and who is our King, whose name is to be feared among the nations (1:14). Worship is not primarily about our needs, comforts, or desires as the people of God. With this in mind, we see that, two: worship is to be an act of God's people as determined by God's Word. The Lord wants our very best. When we like Judah purposely offer anything less than our best then we might as well shut the doors of the church building because we are engaging in an activity that is a waste of God's royal time. It is, quite simply, a question of honour. **C**



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# Worshipping the Lord through our financial gifts (Part 1)

By P.G. Feenstra

Voluntary contributions and giving of our financial gifts for the service of the Lord is an important aspect in the budgeting and financial planning of a people whose heart is aflame and regenerated by the Spirit of God. Knowing how to budget and deciding what our priorities should be in managing our money belong to our spiritual life. In Lord's Day 38 we confess that to maintain the ministry of the gospel and the schools is the first way in which we keep the Sabbath day holy. Furthermore, we are instructed to give Christian offerings for the poor. But is there a Scriptural guideline we should be following which determines the amount of money we are to contribute to maintain the ministry of the gospel or how much we should give to the poor? Do we still have the same obligations to give if we are unemployed, have trouble making ends meet, or are studying in college or university?

People have used the Old Testament principle of tithing as a standard for giving. Tithing is giving a tenth part of one's possessions to the Lord. Israel was commanded to do this. Does the same principle apply in the New Testament? If so, to what does the tithe apply? These are some of the questions we will answer in this series of articles. This first article will examine some of the references to tithing and voluntary giving in the first five books of the Bible. The second and third installments will cover tithing and giving in the writings of the prophets, tithing and giving in the New Testament, and the practical implications for today. The fourth and fifth articles will examine the motivation and the model for financial giving.

## The first references to tithing

Genesis 14:20 is the first Biblical reference to tithing. After a battle against several kings, Abraham is met and blessed by Melchizedek king of Salem. In return, Abraham gives him "a tithe of all." Note well, Abraham did not give Melchizedek a tenth of all his possessions or of his total annual income but simply a tenth of all the spoil he had taken in battle. Abraham's motivation for giving is twofold.

*But is there a Scriptural guideline we should be following which determines the amount of money we are to contribute to maintain the ministry of the gospel or how much we should give to the poor?*

First, he gives a voluntary contribution in thankfulness to the Lord his God; secondly he offers his gratitude by caring and providing for a servant of God.

After God had appeared to Jacob at Bethel, Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me . . . then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You" (Gen 28:20-22). Tithes were thus a kind of vow. Jacob promises to give to the Lord according to the measure of his blessings.

## Prescriptions for tithing

When the people of the Lord received the law, tithing became manda-

tory to keep them in the freedom of the salvation that had been obtained for them. In this regard, there are several important passages that need to be investigated. The first passage is Leviticus 27:30-33:

And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S. It is holy to the LORD. If a man wants at all to redeem any of his tithes, he shall add one-fifth to it. And concerning the tithe of the herd of the flock, or whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the LORD. He shall not inquire whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; and if he exchanges it at all, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.

In this passage another principle is taught. The ordinary rules for vows applied to tithes as well. A man should not promise to give something to God in the heat of the moment and later on retract what he promised to do. If a person vowed to give a tenth of his earnings to the Lord but failed to pay his vow he would be penalized with a twenty percent surcharge.

Tithing had to do with the faithfulness required of God's people. No one was allowed to shortchange the Lord. Israel had to acknowledge God's right as the owner and provider of all things. The underlying motive for presenting tithes to the Lord was the confession that all that the believer possesses belongs to the Lord.

The second text of importance is Numbers 18:21-24. There we read:

Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of

the tabernacle of meeting. Hereafter the children of Israel shall not come near the tabernacle of meeting, lest they bear sin and die. But the Levites shall perform the work of the tabernacle of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a statute forever, throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. For the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer up as a heave offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites as an inheritance, therefore I have said to them, 'Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.'

This tithe is the salary for the priests and Levites. God made sure that these ministers of the gospel would receive proper support without worries. The priests and Levites had no source of income of their own. The Israelites were to give ten percent of their earnings to the Levite; to maintain the ministry of the gospel. The Levites in turn would give ten percent of what they received for the service of the priests.

The book of Deuteronomy tells us that the Israelites were to bring their tithes to the place the Lord had chosen to be his dwelling place. The people of God were to present their tithes as an act of worship in God's sanctuary (12:6, 11, 17) and to support the ceremonial feasts and celebrations such as the Passover. Deuteronomy 14 and 26 introduce a third tithe which was to take place every three years. This tithe was meant to provide for the needs of the poor, the defenseless, the widow, stranger etc.

At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do (14:28, 29; cf 26:12).

Note how the Lord's mercy was also shown to those who came from outside the community of believers. They were not to be excluded from God's gracious provision for His people. The third-year tithe was a special (extra) gift for the ministers of the gospel, for people who came from outside the covenant

community, for the fatherless and for widows. These tithes were to be stored in the towns of Israel and used over an extended period of time.

### Freewill offerings

Besides tithing the Old Testament speaks about freewill offerings. This is demonstrated on at least two occasions. A freewill offering is giving what you are willing without any sort of assessment or levy involved.

*Tithing had to do with the faithfulness required of God's people.*

The first example of a freewill offering is found in Exodus 35 and 36. Moses asked the people for offerings of all kinds, including people using their skills to help build the tabernacle, make the decorations, weave the material, and set the precious stones that were donated. The response of the people was overwhelming. They gave so much that Moses had to ask them to stop giving because the craftsmen had more than enough to finish the job!


The same thing happened when David made preparations for building the temple. King David decided to collect building materials so that his son Solomon could start constructing the temple. The king set the example by being the first to give and again the people gave willingly and wholeheartedly (1 Chron 29:1-9).

*Tithing would be a reflection of their spiritual health.*

Several conclusions can already be drawn from the information we have gleaned from the Pentateuch and from the book of Chronicles.

- What was tithed? Agricultural products (animals and food) or money if it was more convenient. If a person preferred to tithe with money he had to add an extra twenty percent. This would ensure that he would not pay his obligations to the Lord with money of a lesser value.
- To whom were tithes given? To the Levites and priests; to the poor, widows and defenseless; and to main-

tain the service of the Lord in his holy dwelling place. It is noteworthy that the tithe was given to provide for those who served as ministers of the Word and not for the upkeep of the facilities of worship. The building and repair of the tabernacle and temple came through separate funding (Exod 35:20:29; 1 Chron 29:6-20; 2 Chron 34:8-13).

- Why were tithes required? Tithes were to be an indication of Israel's:
    - *Faithfulness.* The Israelites were given material goods to be used for the glory of the Lord. Tithing would be a reflection of their spiritual health. Through tithing Israel performed their vows to the Lord (Lev 27).
    - *Justice.* The rights and the privileges of other members of the covenant were to be maintained; especially those who had no source of income (Num 18).
    - *Mercy.* God's people were to show compassion and sympathy for those in distress (Deut 12, 14, 26).
  - How many tithes did Israel pay? Some read the legislation in the first five books of the Bible without any thought or consideration that more than one tithe might be under discussion. We tend to think that Israel's duty was one tithe and after that their obligation to give was finished. However, Israel was required to pay one tithe for the Levites, one tithe for the sacred feasts (Deut 14) and one tithe every third year for the needy. Israel paid much more than ten percent of their earnings. Most times it was between twenty to thirty percent of their income. Later, the kings would also require a tax on top of what was tithed.
- Besides tithing, the Israelites were also required to give redemption money for the firstborn, the half-shekel tax, a number of animals for the sacrifices, and the first-fruits (estimated to be about one sixtieth of the entire products of fields and flocks).
- Israel demonstrated fruits of faith by their willingness to tithe and contribute voluntarily of the blessings God had given them. It was a reflection of their spiritual health. We will continue with this subject next time. 



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# A preview of the proposals

## Synod Neerlandia 2001

By Jason Van Vliet

### The agenda of Synod

Typically a general synod will focus most of its time on three kinds of matters. First, there will be *reports* from various committees that were given a mandate by the previous synod. Second, there may be *appeals* from members who feel that they have been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly. And finally, synod will often deal with *proposals* that come from the churches. Proposals are also sometimes called "overtures." It is this last category that has our attention in this article.

According to Article 30 of our church order "a new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly may be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it." This means that a local consistory cannot directly put a new matter on the agenda of general synod. There is a process to be followed. The local consistory must first present their proposal to classis. If classis adopts the proposal, then it is presented to regional synod. And if regional synod adopts the proposal, then it appears on the agenda of general synod.

A general synod will be convened, the Lord willing, in Neerlandia, Alberta, in May 2001. There will be five proposals on the agenda, two coming from Regional Synod West and three from Regional Synod East.

### Purpose

Before previewing these proposals, I should mention the purpose of this article. The goal is to be informative. That is to say, I will not be going into an in-depth analysis of each of the five proposals. However, as members of Christ's church we do need to be well-informed, also when it comes to what is on the agenda of general synod. It is all too easy to say, "Let the delegates at general synod figure it all out." In-

deed, the delegates to synod have a weighty responsibility here. At the same time, the decisions taken at general synod affect the whole federation of churches. Therefore, we should all be up-to-date. At our profession of faith we vow to be living members of Christ's church. *Living* members should also show a *lively* interest in what will be decided upon at general synod.

Having said that, here are the proposals. All quotations are taken from the acts of the respective regional synods.

### Subscription Form

Regional Synod West of Dec. 5, 2000 received the following proposal: The Church at Willoughby Heights, Langley, B.C. requested Classis Pacific West to approach Regional Synod West to overture General Synod to adopt a standardized Form of Subscription.

Regional Synod adopted this proposal on the grounds listed below.

1. Article 26 of the Church Order specifies that all officers "shall subscribe to the confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches by signing the form(s) adopted for that purpose." No Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches has even adopted such a Form to ensure consistency among the member churches of the Federation.
2. To protect and promote as much as possible the unity among the Churches, it is important that there be uniformity in Subscription Form so all are bound by exactly the same promises.
3. In our efforts to come to unity with other Reformed Churches, it is important to be able to show that all the churches in the federation live by the same promises.

There is some background to this proposal. In the 1950s our churches were instituted by emigrants from the

Netherlands. The subscription form used during those years was borrowed from our sister churches in the Netherlands. This Dutch subscription form was subsequently translated into English. However, this was done locally with each congregation making its own translation or borrowing a translation from another congregation. Our federation has never had a standardized subscription form. Thus, out of the west comes the proposal to do just this. And it would appear that the east is of the same mind for Regional Synod East of Nov. 8, 2000 received and adopted a similar proposal.

A proposal from the church at Orangeville was amended and adopted as follows: Classis Northern Ontario request Regional Synod East to overture General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches:

- a. 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.
- b. To publish these forms in our *Book of Praise*.

The grounds for this decision are more elaborate than the grounds of Regional Synod West, however, essentially many of the same arguments are brought forward. Regional Synod East also requests that this standardized subscription form be published in our *Book of Praise* since this "promotes greater awareness and understanding of subscription to the confession in the churches . . ."

### Ordination vows

The second proposal from the above-mentioned Regional Synod



West concerns the answer which office bearers give when they are ordained. It reads as follows:

The Church at Willoughby Heights, Langley, B.C. requested Classis Pacific West to approach Regional Synod West to overture General Synod to change the answer to the question asked in the Forms for Ordination from "I do with all my heart" to "I do."

As the decision of Regional Synod points out, Synod Cloverdale 1983 dealt with the revision of our liturgical forms, including the ordination forms. Before that time there was a difference between the answer that ministers/missionaries gave and the answer that elders and deacons gave. Anyone who still has a 1972 "blue" *Book of Praise* on their bookshelf can easily check this out. Ministers were to answer "I do with all my heart;" elders and deacons answered "Yes." Synod 1983 decided to make these forms consistent. Now all office bearers answer "I do with all my heart."

However, Regional Synod West proposes that this matter needs to be revisited because now there is a discrepancy between the answer given at ordination vows and other vows. At baptism, profession of faith and marriage, the person taking the vow answers "I do." However, at ordination it is "I do with all my heart." Therefore, Regional Synod states:

The existing divergence is arbitrary, giving the impression that the vows for the offices are in a higher category than vows made in connection with baptism, profession of faith or marriage. Considering that it is the Forms pertaining to the office which have a more ostentatious answer, unwittingly one may rekindle the idea that the vows of the "clergy" are more weighty than those of the "laity."

### **Book of Praise**

Our churches have a standing committee to take care of matters relating to our *Book of Praise*. Each general synod receives a report from this committee and also gives this committee its mandate for the next three years. From Regional Synod East there is a proposal to broaden the mandate for this committee.

The church at Toronto submitted an overture which seeks to broaden the Mandate for the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*. Council of Bethel Church 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*. Accordingly, Bethel Church overtures Classis to bring this matter to Regional Synod East 2000, and overture Regional Synod to bring this to General Synod 2001. The Council of the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church proposed:

- a. that, in accordance with our Church Order art. 30, Classis pursue this matter by submitting it to Regional Synod East 2000 with the intention that Regional Synod may propose to General Synod 2001 (to meet DV, in Neerlandia, AB) to include this task of evaluation and scrutiny in the mandate of the Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise*.
- b. 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, 1966 [should read 1965 jvv], 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*.

*Our federation has never had a standardized subscription form.*

Regional Synod adopted the proposal for these reasons:

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*.

By way of explanation, then, it should be clear that this proposal is not asking for certain additional hymns to be included in our *Book of Praise*. Rather it is asking to outline clearly what *process* churches should follow if they want to propose the inclusion of a certain hymn. Moreover, this request points us back to the principles upon which our *Book of Praise* is based. These principles are outlined in the *Acts of General Synod Edmonton* 1965 Art 35.

### **Voting by all communicant members**


The final proposal comes from Regional Synod East. This one originated from the church of Burlington South, and it concerns the matter of "extending the vote for office-bearers to all communicant members in good standing, and no longer restrict this matter to male communicant members only." The basic proposal is to "appoint a Committee to serve the Churches with a report in this matter." Twice in the past, synod has appointed a committee to study this matter. The reports were received at General Synod 1980 and 1983. Article 33 of our church order states "matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds." Bearing this in mind, Regional Synod East decided:

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 of March 10, 2000, 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.

Conclusion: Regional Synod decides 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.

Point two refers to developments in our sister churches. One of those developments is the decision of our sister churches in the Netherlands to extend the vote to both male and female communicant members. This decision was taken at Synod Ommen 1993.

### **Concluding remarks**

So, those are the five proposals. As you read them over, I am sure you will have some questions and comments of your own. Hopefully, this preview has sparked your interest. It may also spark some discussion around your coffee table, and perhaps on the pages of this magazine. Let it be so. Living members who have a lively interest in the affairs of the church will also engage in lively discussions. May those discussions not only be lively but also upbuilding. 

By J. De Jong



## Customs under review

Rev. K. De Gier, one of the ministers in the Dutch counterpart of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations of the United States and Canada (NRC) who has published material on Reformed church government, writes in *The Banner of Truth*, the federation's magazine, concerning the consistorial prayer and the handshake before the service. He received the following question from a reader: Why is there a prayer in the consistory prior to the service, and what is the meaning of the handshake at the foot of the pulpit? To that question he gives the following reply:

The prayer offered in the consistory room before the service probably originated at the time of the Secession. When the congregations of the Secession originated, church services were often disturbed by the military or police force. Before the services, they were not certain whether it would take place undisturbed. For that reason the consistory felt the need to join in prayer before the service began. They prayed to the Lord that the Word of the Lord might be preached in peace, that the Lord would strengthen the preacher, and that the gathering together of the congregation might not be disturbed. In these congregations and also in the congregations which originated from the Doleantie this custom continued, even when the danger of disturbance was past.

Although not strictly commanded according to Reformed liturgy, prayer in the consistory room is not superfluous. The consistory and the minister are present in the consistory room before the church service begins. It is in this official circle that the officiating elder asks the blessing of the Lord upon the service of the Word and upon the minister. The prayer of the officiating elder is an official prayer. On behalf of the consistory he seeks the face of the Lord that it may please the Lord to

strengthen the minister of the Word in his labour.

This prayer, which ought not to be long, is not one in which the entire need of Christendom is enumerated. It must be an imploring of a blessing from God for the preacher

*Why is there a prayer in the consistory prior to the service, and what is the meaning of the handshake at the foot of the pulpit?*

and a blessing upon the preached Word in the midst of the congregation. Whenever it is thus done, it may be to the encouragement and strengthening of the minister, upon whom rests the task of the preaching of the Word of God according to the meaning of the Spirit. He then feels that in the prayer of the officiating elder he is carried by the entire consistory, and he leaves the consistory room with the conviction of unity and responsibility as the public worship is begun.

*It is a very serious thing to refuse to give the handshake.*

Furthermore, it is according to Reformed liturgy preferable that the elder who offered the prayer in the consistory also leads the minister in, i.e. going before him and shaking his hand.

When the preacher descends from the pulpit after the service, the same elder shakes his hand again and leads the way back to the consistory room.

### The Handshake

Opinions vary in Reformed circles as to the significance of this

handshake at the foot of the pulpit. In any case, there is in the handshake more than polite formality or cordiality. The administration of the Word is an official task. God is a God of order, who has given rules by which the minister must abide and to which he must submit. The Word of God must be proclaimed from out of the consistory, upon whom the King of His Church has placed the governing of the congregation. By the handshake that the minister receives at the foot of the pulpit before the eyes of the entire congregation, it is revealed that this is an official service. The consistory gives God's called and qualified minister of the Word the opportunity to fulfill his task. Therefore, the service is more than a lecture. It is an official proclamation of God's Word in the midst of the congregation.

At the same time, the handshake shows the congregation that the consistory assumes responsibility for what takes place in the church service and for what is preached. Moreover the handshake is also an encouragement for the minister. He knows that he does not stand alone in the performance of his responsible task. The consistory stands behind him to support him.

### The Closing Handshake

The responsibility of the consistory also includes the handshake given by the elder at the conclusion of the service. However, this handshake does not mean that every word and expression of the preacher is accepted by the consistory. Naturally, in his sermon a minister may well say things regarding which the officiating elder thinks differently. It can also happen that another interpretation is given about a certain text than that which the elder himself thinks it should be. There remains freedom of interpretation as long as it is not contrary to the doctrinal

standards of the church. A mere difference of view is not a reason for the officiating elder to refuse to shake hands after the service. He may do so only when the sermon transgresses the test of God's Word and the church's doctrinal standards. Moreover, the officiating elder should always bear in mind that he acts on behalf of the whole consistory, and not only for himself. No personal feelings or opinions must dictate to the elder here, but the opinion of the whole consistory.

It is a very serious thing to refuse to give the handshake. When it is deemed necessary, however, this matter must be soon thoroughly discussed with the minister by the entire consistory. If in the opinion of the consistory, it becomes evident that the officiating elder has acted wrongly, this elder must express regret for his action. It must also then be announced before the congregation, because it has taken place before the eyes of the congregation. If the action of the officiating elder has the approval of the consistory, this matter must be resolved with the minister in order to prevent further offense and commotion in the congregation.

I appreciate the careful and balanced way in which Rev. De Gier has treated these matters, and for the most part, I can concur with the approach he takes. While the origin of the handshake is unknown, it represents a clear visible

token of the unity of the consistory, and of the abiding importance of the consistory's role in the administration of the Word.

I would add a small addendum to Rev. De Gier's final point concerning the closing handshake. Should it ever be refused? I agree that in cases of overt heresy and clear blasphemy, that is an obvious requirement. However, it can occur that an officiating elder has a strong conviction that the Word of God

*Let the prayer be short, concise, and focused strictly on the one gift of the freedom of worship, and the prayer of strength for God's servant who preaches.*

and the confessions have been transgressed, but later it becomes clear that there is by no means unanimity on the matter. For the sake of good order and peace, even if the officiating elder feels at a certain point that wrong elements have been introduced into the preaching of the word, but this does not have the character of overt heresy or doctrinal deviation, he should then shake the preacher's hand, and deal with the matter in the lawful way at a subsequent meeting of the church's officers. Ultimately, as Rev. de Gier says, the judgment concerning the preacher's ortho-

doxy does not rest with one elder, but with the whole consistory, and indeed, the consistory with the judgment of classis and the deputies of regional synod. In my view, the incidence of such a refusal would then be rare indeed.

On the matter of the consistorial prayer, I have always seen this prayer as focussed in particular on the freedom of worship for which officerbearers, as a college of rulers, give thanks to God every week again. Living in times of peace for a number of decades, we almost take for granted that we can meet and worship God unhindered by anyone, even protected by the authorities. But times have been different in the church's history.

I do not mean to suggest by this that the custom should be instituted where it was never done, or reintroduced where it has fallen into disuse. I would only say that where it has been practiced through the years, there is every reason to maintain it, if not at the beginning and end of the worship services, then at least at the beginning of the services for the day. Let the prayer be short, concise, and focussed strictly on the one gift of the freedom of worship, and the prayer of strength for God's servant who preaches. All other matters can be voiced in the public congregational prayer. But, as Rev. de Gier indicates, why not as a college of elders, in an official setting, give thanks for the freedom of worship? After all, this freedom cannot be sold *at any price*. C





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# Reflections of the celebration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Church at Coaldale

By Ite Veurink

## History

The Church at Coaldale was instituted April 16, 1950 as the first Canadian Reformed Church. Fifty years later, this was remembered during three days of celebration. On Friday, April 14, 2000, congregation and many guests were invited to attend an evening to reflect on God's work in the past fifty years. The meeting was opened with both singing and reading of Psalm 47. Brother Jack Voorhorst, our first master of ceremonies for the evening, led in prayer. He then welcomed everyone with the reminder that the celebration should not honour man but God, who showed his faithfulness in preserving a church for Himself in Coaldale. Apart from God we have nothing, but in Him we have a glorious future.

The first speaker of the evening was brother W. Van Dieren, a member since the institution of the Church at Coaldale. He gave a short overview of the history of the immigrants which led up to the institution.

Brother K. Leffers, who has been our archivist for many years, continued with the history of the Church at Coaldale from institution to the present. He spoke of the institution, the election of the first office bearers, and the humble beginnings of the church (such as the great distances travelled to attend services). The congregation had used a variety of buildings and since 1992 has worshipped in a beautiful, very functional church building. Mr. Leffers told of Rev. G. Pieffers, Rev. J. Mulder, Rev. M. van Beveren, Rev. J. Visscher, Rev. J.D. Wielenga, as well as the present minister Rev. J. Van Popta. All these ministers have served the congregation faithfully and the Lord has blessed their work. The Church at Coaldale has only

been vacant for about five years during these fifty years.

## Past ministers

After singing Hymn 2 accompanied by the organ and other instruments, sister Sylvia Hofsink played a variation of Psalm 150. We were all reminded of the great gifts we have been given in a good organ and capable organists for assisting the congregation in praising the Lord.

Sister L. Hamoen, daughter of Coaldale's first minister, shared her memories of the arrival of the first minister's family in the congregation. A lot has changed over fifty years, but she still feels the bond of faith and the bond with the congregation.

A letter from Rev. Mulder was read expressing disappointment that he and his wife could not be with us at this time. He shared in thanking God for his care of the Church at Coaldale. He urged the congregation to use this occasion to

look ahead and not become complacent, but to trust and obey the Lord.

Brother Voorhorst spoke about the service of Rev. van Beveren for the Church at Coaldale. Rev. Van Beveren could not be present because of road conditions. By e-mail, he expressed that he joined us in thankfulness for God's gifts over the last fifty years. He reminded us of the words of Psalm 115, "Not to us but to God's name be glory."

The Children's Choir, under direction of Mrs. Angela Hulst, then presented a message in song based on Deuteronomy 7:6, 9 and 11:18-21.

Rev. Visscher, minister of the Church at Coaldale for about five years, expressed his thankfulness for a safe trip, and that he and his wife were glad to be with us for this occasion. He expressed appreciation to the congregation for the patience they showed with their rookie minister, and brought back some memories. He spoke of God's covenant faithfulness and reminded us



Canadian Reformed Church of Coaldale.

to pray for the Lord's return and continued faithfulness.

For the second part of the evening, brother H. Tams was the master of ceremonies.

Sister I. Wielenga brought back some memories of the Wielenga family's arrival and welcome in Coaldale. She also spoke about the years of ministry with their ups and downs, especially the ups. Rev. Wielenga's ministry ended with a short sickness. In spite of sadness, it was remembered as a good time for the family before he was taken to the Lord and finished the race. Sister Wielenga spoke words of appreciation for the good relationship between the congregation and the minister's family. She wished her husband to be remembered for the work he did for the upbuilding of the congregation. She felt that the celebration should be a thanksgiving service for God's gifts. May we remain faithful to the end and be a light on a candlestick.

### Congratulations

Letters of congratulations and wishes for God's blessings were read from Rev. and Mrs. D. De Jong, Rev. and Mrs. C. Van Spronsen, Mrs. Van Spronsen sr., Mr. and Mrs. J. De Haas, and from Rev. R. Aasman personally and on behalf of Council of the Providence Church at Edmonton.

Brother J. Bareman spoke on behalf of the congregation of Taber. He expressed gratitude for the nearness and cooperation of the Church at Coaldale and that the congregation of Taber, who was so much a part of the history of Coaldale, shared in the celebration of God's gifts.

The choir "Rejoice in the Lord" then entertained us by singing three songs.

Rev. T. Lodder spoke on behalf of Classis Alberta/Manitoba. He ended with the hope that God's glorious gospel may continue to be preached and confessed in Coaldale.

The congregation joined in singing a song prepared for this occasion by sister Amie Veldkamp.

Rev. J. Baruch of the Trinity United Reformed Church at Lethbridge expressed appreciation for the contact with ministers and members of the Churches at Coaldale and Taber in the struggle to remain faithful to stay Reformed.

Mr. Duncan Lloyd, Deputy Mayor of the Town of Coaldale (who still remembered being lectured by Rev. Pieffers in his younger days) spoke words of



*Mr. Van Dieren (recently passed on to glory), one of Coaldale's senior members who spoke of God's faithfulness during the last 50 years.*

*Coaldale Children's Choir: A new generation singing praises to his Holy Name.*



appreciation for what the Canadian Reformed Church has meant and done for the community. He extended congratulations and encouraged that "we should look forward together to the time God calls us home." He also presented a plaque as gift from the Town of Coaldale to commemorate this event.

Brother Johan Knol spoke of behalf of the Men's Society and reminded us that an appropriate way to show our thankfulness is continuing to study God's Word.

Sister Lorien Van Popta, representing the Young People's Society, encouraged us to reflect on God's faithfulness for all we received from Him in our church life during the last fifty years, also as young people through the generations.

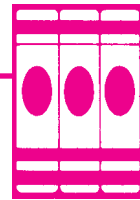
An e-mail was received from Rev. R. Eikelboom on behalf of the congregation of Calgary with congratulations and expression of appreciation of how Calgary has benefited from the good cooperation with the Church at Coaldale, such as pulpit supply during vacancies. Rev. E. J. Tiggelaar for the Church at Barrhead and Rev. W. B. Slomp for the Church at Neerlandia also e-mailed congratulations. An e-mail was also re-

ceived from former members brother and sister J. Deemter, now residing in Peace River.

Brother Martin Van Bostelen, member of the Church at Calgary, brought back some memories of the first immigrant settlers and the experiences as beginning church in Coaldale.

### Closing that lasted a weekend

After congregational singing of Psalm 98, Rev. Van Popta observed that this anniversary also represents the fiftieth anniversary of the federation of the Canadian Reformed Churches. The evening was closed about 11:30. Even after this late hour, there was still much fellowship. This was followed the next day by a luncheon at the school gym and some activities. On Sunday, Rev. Van Popta preached in the morning service and Rev. J. Visscher in the afternoon service. Brother Jan Van Dyk, the retired organist, played during the morning service. When the afternoon service was completed, there was a considerable display of singing and musical talent. All in all, it was a rich weekend of remembering the wonderful works of God, giving renewed courage to go in his service. 



## Calvin and the Calvinists

reviewed by N.H. Gootjes

Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, second edition, 1998. Hard bound, 84 pages; \$13.99 U.S.

When we look back at the history of the Reformed church, we see Calvin towering over many theologians of the sixteenth century. He was the acknowledged leader of the Reformed in his lifetime. There was enough justification for this special place, for God had given him a deep insight into Scripture, a well organized mind which retained what he had studied, and the ability to write clearly. It is for good reason that later theologians like to have Calvin on their side. This has led to debates between theologians with opposing views, each claiming the authority of Calvin for their opinions.

R.T. Kendall wrote a study on the relation between Calvin and the Puritans in England in the seventeenth century. In the view of Kendall, the Puritans did not follow Calvin but rather Calvin's successor Beza. Kendall distanced himself from Puritan theology, and he used Calvin to support his own views.

Paul Helm disagreed with this position, and gave his reasons in the book we are reviewing. He carefully checked the quotes from Calvin used by Kendall, and found that Kendall misunderstood many. He also investigated statements made by the Puritans to see whether Kendall did justice to these theologians. His conclusion is that Calvin and the Puritans basically hold to the same positions. Important issues are involved in this debate. To mention some, one is the question for whom Jesus Christ died on the cross to atone for sins. Another question concerns the role of the human will in conversion. Further, can we prepare ourselves for receiving God's grace, and do our works contribute to our salvation?

This debate took place about twenty years ago. Kendall finished his book in 1976, and Helm wrote his re-

buttal in 1981. This issue comes up again because Helm's study was reprinted in 1998. This gives us the advantage that we can look from a certain distance at this debate. In the meantime, some issues have been clarified. An important clarification concerns the relationship between Calvin and Beza. Kendall wrote his book at a time when these two theologians were presented as two opposite voices within the Reformed camp. If it could be shown that the Westminster Confession showed influence of Beza, it would be automatically condemned. This opposition, however, has not stood the test of time. It is now recognized that it cannot be maintained that Calvin and Beza had a radically different approach to theology.

This supports the argumentation of Helm that Calvin and the Westminster confession do not represent different theologies. He also gives many quotations from Calvin's *Institutes* and from

his commentaries. He is convincing when he rejects several "Calvin" interpretations by Kendall on the basis of these quotations. For example, he correctly rejects Kendall's interpretation that Calvin taught that Christ died for all people, but intercedes only for the elect (pages 33ff).

Helm, on the other hand, does not always prove what he set out to prove. An example is the discussion on the extent of the atonement, pages 38-43. He quotes many statements from Calvin and briefly interprets them. But none of these statements actually states what Helm wants to hear, something he does not seem to have noticed. Here, the danger of using Calvin in defense of a particular view becomes apparent.

Overall, Helm wrote a study which in a brief format explains several important issues extensively investigated in the history of reformed theology. His book requires careful reading but those who do so will benefit from it. C

John Calvin





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# The importance of precision in exegesis

## Report on the speech which Prof. Dr. J. van Bruggen held in Lynden on August 13, 2000

By Jane deGlint

### An international event

The attentive listeners might not all have realized it, but the evening with Prof. Dr. Jakob van Bruggen was truly an international event. It did not seem so spectacular, because speaker and audience recognized and greeted each other as brothers and sisters in faith. It was more a family gathering than a meeting of international allure. Yet, the four-score and ten attendants represented at least three nationalities. Residents of the United States and Canada had gathered in the quaint building of the American Reformed Church in Lynden to listen to the New Testament Professor of the Theological University at Kampen, the Netherlands.

*He immediately focussed on the theme of his life: the congregation can only flourish when the Word of God is faithfully and accurately proclaimed.*

Those who had come out of sheer curiosity what a Dutch professor would have to tell a North American audience, were not kept in suspense for very long. With a few strokes Prof. van Bruggen sketched the beautiful scenery which he had thoroughly enjoyed during the preceding weeks and the wholesome congregational life that had enriched him on the Lord's Days. But from this backdrop he immediately focussed on the theme of his life: the congregation can only flourish when the Word of God is faithfully and accurately proclaimed.

### New Testament chair

Prof. Van Bruggen was thirty years old when he took over the New Testament chair from Prof. H. J. Jager. Six years later, in 1973, he earned the title of Doctor by publishing and defending a detailed study on the chronology of New Testament events, especially on the dating of the "Meeting in Jerusalem." This study showed without a doubt that he had decided not to follow in the steps of his predecessor. Prof. Jager held the position that knowledge did not matter as long as there was faith. However, the young theologian van Bruggen upheld the respect for the Word by paying attention to the importance of facts, dates and details. (Prof. H. J. Jager later left the federation of Liberated Reformed Churches.)

There is reason to be concerned about chronology (the dating of facts). Admittedly, there are people who have died in the Lord without possessing a detailed knowledge of the Bible. Yet, God's children are called to serve the Lord with all their mind. The perceived modesty that the exact facts are not important is often a disguise for a carelessness in exegesis. This cultivated inaccuracy can have far-reaching consequences. Some might come to the blasphemous statement that questioning the exodus out of Egypt or the historicity of Jesus' deeds is permitted as long as a sincere love for God is evident.

### Roots of the gospel must be defended

From the start of his work as New Testament scholar Prof. van Bruggen was aware of the fact that the roots of the Gospel must be defended. This defense is made by faithful scholars who have the gifts and the opportunity to go

deeper into God's Revelation. Much time has elapsed since the Bible was written. The text presupposes facts which were well-known at the time of writing and shortly thereafter, but which are forgotten by later generations. For example, the temple was known to the Jews. They knew that the temple had no images. That very emptiness was its message: Yahweh is the unseen Creator of Heaven and Earth. Yet, though this was once obvious, it is now worth stating explicitly.

Apart from the distance in time and background, another problem can hinder a proper understanding of the Bible. Over the years people have clouded the light of the Word with heresies, subtle and blatant. It is the task of conscientious theologians to remove these misconceptions.

*The accurate and faithful teaching of the Bible remains important for every time and place.*

### The study of chronology

The study of chronology is a very important tool in the defense of the truth. The dates are the backbone of the structure. If the backbone is neglected, the structure will collapse. This can be illustrated with the recent developments of the synodical churches in the Netherlands. In these churches the concept of historical reliability has become outdated. It does not matter anymore whether something really happened as described in the Bible. But this failure to take the Word of God seriously undermined the faith of the

believer. Doubting the facts led to doubting God. Prof. van Bruggen told us that many people were relieved to read his book *Christ on Earth*, which upholds and supports the historical facts of Jesus' life. The reading of *Christ on Earth* convinced these people that one is not a fool to believe the Bible. To the contrary. The Bible can stand the scrutiny of scholarly research, and actually those who do not believe it are the fools.

Prof. van Bruggen presented us with several examples to illustrate how his studies have brought him face to face with the truth. There are theological scholars who claim that John the Baptist is an insignificant player in the

gospels. In dealing with this issue, Prof. van Bruggen pointed out that John's contemporaries considered him more important than Jesus. Indeed, John was the last great prophet of the Old Testament. Yet, he was only like the moon. His light seemed impressive till the sun started to rise. John's significance is tied to the significance of Him who came to fulfill the prophecies. The accurate and faithful teaching of the Bible remains important for every time and place. The speaker ended his presentation by referring to the words which the apostle Paul wrote in one of his last epistles: "You, however, continue in the things you have learned" (2 Tim 3.10-17).

### Question period

In the question period our Dutch guest displayed the keen ability to skip effortlessly from topic to topic. The questions provided him with the opportunity to flesh out what he had already stated: the truth is undermined when people give in to misleading views. A few quotes will illustrate his pointedness. "Empty hearts lead to empty churches." "We have a task for the future, not knowledge of the future." "You do not keep people in church by changing the liturgy. A person stays in church through faith." The lesson of our brother from Holland deserves to be taken to heart. 

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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

### Dear Editor,

In his letter to the editor, Mr. Albert deJong asks, "Is the choice between a Christian university and its secular counterpart really that difficult to make? Does the need for Christian education simply vanish after high school?" (*Clarion*, Nov. 10, 2000). As a student who had to make the choice, I would answer the first question with an absolute, "yes, the decision is a difficult one to make."

When I was young, my parents chose to send me to a distinctly Reformed Christian school. That decision was somewhat easier than the decision I had to make when deciding whether I should attend Trinity Western University (TWU) or the University College of the Fraser Valley (UCFV). I chose UCFV because

I truly felt it safer and wiser to attend a place where I knew that what they were teaching with regards to Calvinism and Christianity would be the antithesis of what I believe.

If I had chosen TWU, there would have been a much greater responsibility to constantly discern if what the professor was saying was indeed Christian. A "Christian" university is place full of synthesis, of grey theology. Synthesis is much harder to discern than thesis and antithesis. Unless one is very strongly rooted in the Reformed faith and understands how important the covenant is and the position of the church and its role in our lives, attending a "Christian" university is very dangerous. A "Christian" university is synthetical, not antithetical, and as Reformed we must maintain the antithesis.

As far as the second question goes, I would answer, "no, the need for Christian education does not vanish after high school." But where is the true Christian university that I can go to receive a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in English or History? Where is the university that will maintain a Reformed character and maintain the antithesis? If we set up a Reformed Christian university that was able to grant recognized degrees then the choice would be a lot easier. But I'd suggest that going from a Reformed high school to an evangelical university is not the continuation of good Christian education but rather the crossing of a bridge from what should be antithesis over to synthesis.

Chris deBoer,  
Langley, BC



## Runner's World

By Ed Hoogerdyk

I love running. Short run. Long run. Any run. I love running. There's nothing like running along a scenic trail, or through the countryside gazing at the crops. There's nothing like running in the snow especially when you're the one making the first footprints of the day. There's nothing like crossing the finish line hearing the roar of the crowd. Running is invigorating and challenging. It gives you a great sense of accomplishment.

I can't help but chuckle at the questions people ask me about running. Why do you run anyway? What's the point? What do you get out of it? Isn't it a waste of time? Why don't you try golf? Why don't you learn to relax? Why don't you take the car? Don't you know running is bad for your knees? Are you crazy?

Pretty good questions, I must say. But just really think about running. It requires good nutrition, strenuous effort, endurance, patience, preparation, dedication, and self-discipline. If you run with friends you get a great sense of comradery. If you run races, people cheer you on and you cheer people on. In fact, quite often the last place finisher gets the loudest cheer! Everyone is a winner.

So much for running. Physical running. How about spiritual running? This is a "running" that we all should love. Why? Because we're in a "race" that we know we're going to finish. A race in which we'll all win a prize. Also a race where everyone is a "winner." But this running also requires good "nutrition," strenuous effort, endurance, patience, preparation, dedication, and self-discipline. And if we all run together we'll get a great sense of comradery or communion of saints. We "cheer" each other on. We pick each other up when we stumble. We gently admonish and encourage those who want to quit. We all fight the temptation to quit when people ask: Why do you "run" anyway? What's

the point? What do get you out of it? Isn't it a waste of time? Are you crazy?

The beauty of spiritual running is that every thing it requires is given to us. Nutrition from God's Word. Strength and endurance from the Holy Spirit. The crowd is the "cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1). We fix our eyes on the finish line which is Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2). We get a prize which lasts forever (1 Cor 9:25).

*We fix our eyes on the finish line which is Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith.*

Food for thought as school community. Let's say this school year is a race. Are we all in this "race" together? Are we as teachers dedicated? Are you as parents committed? Are the students responding? Are we cheering each other on? Are we leaving others behind? Do we all want to finish the race together? Are we taking in the right "nutrition?" Do we know where our strength comes from? Are we convinced that this isn't a waste of time (Phil 2:16)? And do we believe that this year's race is just a small part of the ultimate race after which by the grace of God we can all say: "I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7).

Well? Let's line up. Ready. Set. Go!

*About the author:*

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## Student's without friends

By P. Veenendaal

*This article is a revised copy of a talk given to high school students in Manitoba. The issue described is not re-*

*gional, nor is it only for the benefit of one specific audience, but parents, teachers, younger and older students can benefit from the strategies and advice recorded here.*

Do you know any students in your school or even in your classroom who have difficulty forming friendships and gaining acceptance from their classmates? Chances are that you do. After all, studies have shown that approximately six to eleven percent of elementary school-age children have no friends or are recognized as friends by their peers. Some studies show even higher percentages. There is no reason to believe that statistics for high school students are appreciably lower. The number would be higher yet if we included those students who have learning disabilities.

In the first place, I would like to draw your attention to the reasons why students like yourselves should be concerned enough about the statistics that you will actually become involved, and after that I will offer some practical advice on how you can make a difference in the life of a lonely fellow student.

The overall most important reason why you should be concerned about lonely fellow students at your school that you are all children of one God – one Creator. He made each and every one of you. He determined what kind of a person you would be with your talents, abilities, disabilities, your temperament and character. You know that not everyone was made in the same way. You know that others around you have to struggle with things that come quite naturally to you and vice versa. You will not be able to change how a person was made, but you may be able to help a student cope with the challenges that come his way.

You should think of the students in your school as the complete body of one person. Each part of a body (e.g., leg, ear, eye) plays an important role in the function of the whole body. The eye cannot say to the ear, "I do not need you." Neither can the foot say to the



tongue, "You are useless to me and we might as well cut you off and throw you away" (Rom 12). No, you are all children of God, put in the place you are by divine providence and you not only have to perform your own duties and carry out your own functions, but you have to support and complement those around you.

***Think of the students in your school as the complete body of one person.***

A second reason why you should be concerned about your fellow students' well-being is that, in gaining friendships, a lonely student is put at less risk for getting involved in non-desirable, unchristian behavior. In later years, such a student is most prone to be drawn into a world of drug or alcohol abuse, violence, and crime. Because they consider themselves incapable of doing the things "normal" students do, such students are often pulled along by other forces which seem to give them the feelings of self worth and recognition they crave. By befriending such a person, you are put in a better position to help lead him to understand that as a child of the Lord, he indeed has great value.

***Lead him to understand that as a child of the Lord, he indeed has great value.***

The third reason to be involved with the friendless students is because of the Biblical command to bring back a brother who wanders from the truth (James 5:19-20). If, through your acts of kindness, love, and concern, an at-risk student is able to grow into a confident member of your school community, not only will he and his parents be forever grateful to you but you have put into practice the teaching of the Lord Jesus in the parable of the lost son this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

Now, what can you do? You may have noticed the difficulties which children without friends face every day again but you considered yourself help-

less and incapable of doing anything about it. A good way to start trying to understand another's situation is to observe what is going on. Why do people ignore or even reject certain other people? Discuss this with others who are concerned as well. These others could be peers or adults such as your parents or teachers who are often in a good position to observe what is going on in the classrooms and hallways. They may be able to help you pinpoint the underlying cause of the rejection or neglect. Does he perhaps lack certain social skills or behave in a certain way which "turns others off?" Is the lonely student aggressive toward others around him? Does he disrupt the class he attends so that the learning of others is hampered? Not every person will display any or all of these behaviours. There may be other cues which you or the adults around you have picked up.

Once you have identified the problematic behaviours, and have confirmed with others that your assessment is probably correct, it is time for some one-on-one action. Begin by speaking to the affected student. Take the time to befriend him and show by your actions that you care for him and are prepared to stand by him. Once you have gained his confidence, you may be able to carefully tackle some of the areas you have identified as being problematic. Perhaps you can give some specific pointers on small things which have attracted your attention and which may be part of the problems facing the



lonely student. Explain to him why this is such an important matter in developing relationships and friendships with others. Point out to him how others handle similar situations and show him how others react to the way you have demonstrated the way it should be done. Perhaps you can try out some of the ideas you have in a play situation, where each of you plays a different role. Studies indicate that these students will show an increase in positive interaction after seeing how others behave appropriately and successfully and what is most important, is that they will model this positive behaviour over time.

***Being rejected or neglected by peers can be a traumatic experience for students in school.***

Students who are aggressive to others and/or disruptive in class are often so because of problems mentioned earlier. These behaviours often indicate a lack of confidence. These behaviours become attention-getting mechanisms which actually cause more problems for the student than he had in the first place. Point this out to him and show that others in the class or on the playground do not appreciate being bullied or disrupted in their work. Watch students who treat others with respect and point out to the student how they interact with others.

There may be situations in which you will not consider yourself capable of handling it all by yourself. Once you have tried to use the strategies mentioned above, without the hoped for results, you may want to consult with your teacher, guidance counselor, or your parents who may have suggestions for further action.

Being rejected or neglected by peers can be a traumatic experience for students in school. These negative experiences can put them at risk for future inappropriate and damaging behaviours when they try to build themselves up in the esteem of others. Perhaps through your intervention you may be able to modify the behaviours of others so that they can lead a productive and fulfilling life as children of God.

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