

Clarion

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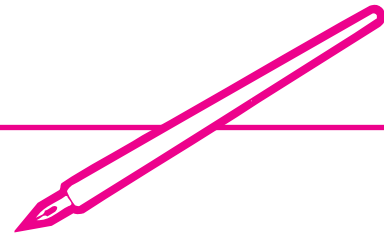


*Neerlandia Canadian
Reformed Church – location of
2001 General Synod*

Numbers

10:1-10

By Cl. Stam



Coming to grips with historic Orthodox Protestantism

In a previous editorial I touched on the report of the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA). In this report it is stated that a guest who wishes to attend the Lord's Supper in the RCUS (Reformed Church in the United States), must answer the following question of the elders, "Do you hold any doctrines, that as far as you know, do not accord with *historic orthodox Protestantism*?" (Emphasis mine, Cl. S.).

I presume that the answer to this question will be a clear no. But it still begs the question: what exactly is meant by historic orthodox Protestantism? Notice that the question does not ask whether one agrees fully with the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Reformed Confessions. This is the line stipulated in Article 61 of the Church Order.

Some in our churches feel that Reformed and Presbyterian churches are two mutually exclusive systems, and that never the twain shall meet.

One might say that under "historic orthodox Protestantism" is meant the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. The aspiring guest must also indicate, if he is a member of a Reformed or Presbyterian Church, whether he wants his home church to be notified. These two churches must then be foremost within "historic orthodox Protestantism." I do wonder, however, why the option is given to say: no, I do not want my church informed. What reason would anyone in good standing of a home church have to hide the celebrating of the Lord's Supper in another Reformed or Presbyterian Church?

A line in the sand

Through the years, as our discussion with Presbyterian churches continued, certain issues have come to stand out as matters about which we insisted that full agreement must be achieved before we can enter into a sister-church relation with one another.

Some in our churches feel that Reformed and Presbyterian churches are two mutually exclusive systems, and that never the twain shall meet. The magazine, *Reformed Polemics*, constantly reminds us of this, making use even of Presbyterian

sources. Our churches, however, have always upheld the official recognition that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ and that we must work towards a functioning sister-church relationship.

A self-respecting magazine should take long-standing ecclesiastical decisions into account when conducting polemics.

Throughout the years our churches have identified areas of concern which needed to be discussed and resolved with the OPC. Finally there were three points left which functioned as a sort of a line in the sand: these needed to be resolved before the fraternal relationship could become a reality.

Sometimes it is necessary to draw a line in the sand, and to say: we can go no further, until these matters are first resolved. This happened in our discussions with the Orthodox Presbyterians. The OPC, however, drew its own line in the sand, as well. They said: How can the Canadian Reformed Churches allow one of their ministers to call OPC ministers and elders "false shepherds?" The line in the sand has now become a marking in cement.

Historic Orthodox Protestantism

The RCUS, with whom a sister-church relationship is now proposed, and the OPC, whom we have recognized as a true church of the Lord, are both within the tradition of historic orthodox Protestantism. Protestantism: they are churches in the mould of the great Reformation. Orthodox: they hold to the infallibility of Scripture and have accepted and abide by Reformed standards. Historic: they have shown their faithfulness in the course of history. These are not fly by night churches: they are shining examples of faithfulness and obedience.

These are not fly by night churches: they are shining examples of faithfulness and obedience.

In the past, in the aftermath of Synod Coaldale 1977, I was opposed to the decision taken with respect to the OPC. One of my main reasons was that this decision had not been properly prepared in the churches and was imposed upon the churches by General Synod. Also, there were

many outstanding matters which needed to be discussed, at least, to come to a good understanding of one another. I even took part in an appeal process in the 1980s. But the churches have always maintained the decision of 1977. I terminated my appeal process, and decided to consider the decision of Synod 1977 as binding, in accordance with our church order.

In the course of time we covered all these outstanding points. A report was "received" at Synod 1986 (Burlington) which examined the many doctrinal divergences but considered these not to be an obstacle to a sister-church relationship. This report was later given official status by Synod

What's inside?

The editorial by Rev. Cl. Stam deals with the report of the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas. He notes that the report proposes a sister church relationship with the Reformed Church in the United States. He raises the question whether our churches should not first settle the matter of a sister church relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. After all, our churches have recognized the OPC as true churches of Jesus Christ over twenty years ago. This is a matter which will be under discussion at Synod Neerlandia in May of this year.

Speaking of Synod Neerlandia, we note that in this issue of *Clarion* there is an introduction to the report of the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity. Attached to this article are two important papers written by the committee and passed on to synod: *Statements of Agreement* and *Position Paper: Strategies to Church Unity*. It will become clear that the committee is recommending to the churches a major step forward in our relationship with the United Reformed Churches. Have a look for yourself what the recommendations are.

Rev. P.G. Feenstra continues his series of articles on giving first fruits to the Lord. We have the column *Observation Deck* by Rev. G.Ph. van Popta dealing with the Salvation Army. There is also the column *Education Matters*. The meditation in this issue is written by Rev. C.J. VanderVelde.

Rev. W.L. Bredenhof writes a letter to the editor which has some remarks about Dr. J. van Bruggen's book, *Jesus the Son of God*. Dr. van Bruggen himself writes a response. Since there has been some controversy surrounding what Dr. van Bruggen wrote about the incarnation of the Son of God, it is good to hear what he has to say.

RA



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1992 (Lincoln). In the end, three matters remained. One was resolved when the OPC cut ties with the Christian Reformed Church. The other two (fencing of the Lord's table and confessional membership) remained outstanding, but a mutual agreement was made by the contact committee and presented to Synod Fergus. Synod Fergus chose to amend this agreement, and hence it was no longer an agreement, but a synodical imposition.

Being part ourselves of historic orthodox Protestantism, we owe it to the OPC, which has shown its Reformed mettle in history, having recognized this church and maintained this recognition for more than twenty years, to open the way for a sister-church relationship.

Coming to grips

We need to come to grips with orthodox Presbyterianism. What are we prepared to recognize as being an acceptable tradition, not one which we would adopt for ourselves, but which we certainly would allow Presbyterians to follow, as they have done for many centuries?

Are we willing to recognize the cherished principle behind a certain tradition? Take the fencing of the Lord's Supper, for example. Some OPC leaders would like to see a closed table. Others want things to remain as is: a strong verbal warning to all. But what is behind the whole issue? There is a very strong sense that the table is the table of the Lord, and that all true believers should have access to this. The bottom line is that all participants stand before the Lord who alone can judge. Yes, this has to do with the different confessions concerning the church. But we have declared that difference not to be an obstacle. Why then make such an issue of something that flows forth from this difference in confession?

We may not agree with this for very good reasons. We can still discuss this with the OPC also within the framework of a sister-church relationship. We can place it as a regular feature on the agenda of deputies. But may we make agreement on this a condition for entering into a sister-church relationship? We still abide by our rules, and can continue to explain these to the OPC. We lose nothing, keep our integrity intact, and have a good forum for further discussion.

The second item is confessional membership. Not everyone, even in our own churches, is sure as to what this exactly entails. To me it is simple: all communicant members accept the doctrine of the Scriptures as summarized in the ecumenical and Reformed creeds. The OPC does not go that far. Why not? I have learned that this is because they want to avoid even the odour of confessionalism. This is in itself a good striving. That our system does not lead to confessionalism and prevents heresy needs to be carefully explained and demonstrated, but may we just brush the concerns of the OPC aside and tell them to change their age-old tradition and buckle under to our demands? The same fear leads the OPC and other Presbyterians to reject catechism preaching, because the catechism is a man-made document. Is this not one of the accepted lines in historic orthodox Protestantism? Or are we going to demand that catechism preaching be instituted in the OPC? I think we ought to acknowledge the Presbyterian concern about confessionalism (see Article 7, Belgic Confession).

We need to come to grips with orthodox Presbyterianism. We are not merging into one federation. We still retain our own identity, as the OPC does. What will we allow as differences, which need to be discussed on an ongoing basis, without anyone forcing the issues from either side?

Confusing signals

A few years ago I met OPC delegates at an ICRC mission conference in Paramaribo, Suriname. These brothers spoke exactly as we did and there was agreement with them on almost all points discussed. We truly experienced the fellowship of faith. It was sad that we did not have a sister-church relationship. We tried to console one another.

The OPC men spoke about our sending out confusing signals. On the one hand, there has been recognition, going back to 1977. But since then, all kinds of "problems" have risen. There is no end to the demands from our side. Are we prepared to honour the long-standing traditions of the OPC while continuing to raise important points for brotherly discussion?

Being part ourselves of historic orthodox Protestantism, we owe it to the OPC, which has shown its Reformed mettle in history, having recognized this church and maintained this recognition for more than twenty years, to open the way for a sister-church relationship. Recognize the RCUS? Fine. But let's first finish what we started in 1977. Not to do so, would not only be confusing, but also cause offense. C



By Clarence J. VanderVelde

God is faithful and just

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:19

The Word of God teaches that we need self-knowledge – self-knowledge of the most important kind, namely, knowledge of our sin and misery. This does not mean that we attain this knowledge ourselves; in fact, only from the Word of God do we learn that we are sinners. Apart from God’s revelation, we would not know our true natural *condition* (conceived and born in sin and inclined to all manner of evil), nor our true natural *status* (guilty and condemnable in the sight of God). Throughout our whole life we will have to deal with the reality of sin. Just before the text, John writes, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us”(1:8).

Sometimes believers worry whether all their sins are really forgiven. Particularly a sin against which we must struggle time and again but do not seem to make much headway in overcoming, can make us wonder whether the LORD will really forgive us.

But then we may focus on the words of the text: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” John speaks about confessing our sins without going into details about what confession means. You will understand that this is an honest confession made with integrity, which means that we have broken and contrite hearts and are heartily sorry for our sins and fight against them. God is not just interested in words, but in the attitude of the heart. John says that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins.

Notice carefully that John does not just say that if we confess our sins, God will forgive us our sins. John says, “If we confess our sins, *he is faithful and just* and will forgive us our sins and

purify us from all unrighteousness.” There is a *guarantee* for the forgiveness of our sins, and it lies in God’s faithfulness and justice!

God is faithful – faithful to his promise of forgiveness! Scripture records in many places the promise of forgiveness; that promise even lies at the heart of the covenant. And we know from Scripture that God is faithful to his covenant promises. His words are spoken in truth, and stand forever! God faithfully keeps his promise of forgiveness because He is the faithful One!


God is also just – just in the sense that He does what is right and good. This is closely connected with God’s faithfulness because if God says He will do something, it is a matter of his justice that He will then also do it. God sent his Son into this world to pay the price for our sins, and since the price has been paid, God, in his justice, will not exact the price from us. Christ bore the wrath of God against our sins so that we may be filled with God’s blessing. Therefore, it is a matter of God’s justice to grant us the blessing of forgiveness when we confess our sins.

Yes, in his faithfulness and justice, God will forgive us our sins and purify

us from all unrighteousness. Therefore, the *guarantee* of our forgiveness lies in the very fact of who God is! He is the faithful and just One!

Forgiveness means that “. . . as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Ps 103:12). John uses a word for forgiveness which has as its root meaning the notion of “sending away.” When we confess our sins, God removes our sins from his sight so that He does not focus on them; they have been paid for by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 John 2:2). God then applies to us the redeeming work of Christ. There is the reassuring aspect of finality in that word *forgiveness*.

And God purifies us from all unrighteousness when we confess our sins. He washes us so that we are clean. When we are forgiven, our robes are white because they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14). We are then whiter than snow, not by nature but by virtue of Jesus Christ’s work.

God looks at us as we are through faith in Jesus Christ. When we confess our sins, we are forgiven and purified people. That is a matter of God’s covenant faithfulness and justice! 



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Worshipping the Lord through our financial gifts (Part 2)

Will a man rob God?

By P.G. Feenstra

Last time we made several conclusions about tithing from the first five books of the Bible. Israel was required to give several tithes. Ten percent was given to the Levites, ten percent for maintaining temple service and ten percent every three years for the care of the poor, widows, widowers, defenseless, etc. Other Old Testament passages that refer to tithing are: 1 Samuel 8:15, 17; 2 Chronicles 31:5, 6, 12; Nehemiah 10:37, 38; 12:44; 13:5, 12; Amos 4:4.

An important text is Malachi 3:8-10. The Lord admonishes the returned exiles about their failure to bring to Him what He required of them. He says: "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house; and try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."

The problem

Why did the Lord need to say this? Why should the people of God bring their tithes to his storehouse? Those who were addressed by the prophet Malachi had turned covenant life upside down. They said, "We will bring the tithes but the Lord must do his part first. We need to see and receive more of his blessings before we can give. For how can we give if we don't receive much?" To put it in today's terms: "How can we contribute to the church budget when we don't have any money?" But the Lord refutes such reasoning. He reminds his people, and us too, that in the covenant relation we must first bring our "tithes" and show that we trust and obey and believe that He will bless us.

Israel is charged with a serious offense. They have violated the eighth commandment by robbing God. Yet the Lord's chosen people act as if they

do not know what the Lord is talking about. "Why do we need to repent and turn back to God? We never went away from Him. How are we robbing God?" Since Israel does not see their own sins, the only thing left to do is to embarrass them by pointing to one glaring example of where they have refused to turn to the Lord. By failing to bring their tithes Israel has not only been stingy and negligent, but they have broken covenant with the unchangeable God. They have turned aside from the statutes of God and have not kept them. Yet the Lord keeps calling them back: "Return to me . . . and I will return to you."

When our heart is with the Lord that will manifest itself in our willingness to give of the products and earnings of our labour to maintain the service of the Lord. The Lord asks all of us, "Do you love me? Do you take delight in worshipping me?" It's easy for us to answer, "Yes, we do with all our heart." Who wouldn't say it? But that also has to manifest itself in action. Our readiness to give to the Lord and to maintain the ministry of the gospel exposes what lives in our hearts. The Lord wanted Israel to bring their tithes into his house without reservation. He wanted them to show their faithfulness, trust and obedience. He demanded this of his covenant people in the old dispensation but even more of us today. For we know more fully of God's unchanging faithfulness. Has He not demonstrated this to us in the most profound manner possible? Did He not send his Son to be the Saviour of our entire being?

Giving regardless of the circumstances

Moreover, Malachi 3 teaches us that God's people are also to give for the service of the Lord under hard economic circumstances. The returned exiles did not give because they figured they didn't have enough. They had been plagued by drought and an infestation of locusts. But hardships do not change God's law concerning the tithe. The people of the covenant were not permitted to use the bad state of the economy or their own financial woes as an excuse.

The poverty-stricken are to give for the service of the Lord too. The widow with the two coins certainly understood this principle. We find the story recorded in the first two verses of Luke 21. Jesus "looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites. So He said, 'Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.'" Rich and poor are to give since both must rely on God to help them.

Tithing an act of worship

Tithing was shrouded in confession and worship. To give for the continuation of the ministry of the gospel and to provide for those in need is an act of worship that should not be done carelessly or thoughtlessly. What you put in the collection bag or how much you give toward the church budget is an act of faith. Yet financial contribution is not the only means in which we are to give to the Lord. Failure to give of our money is not the only way in which we can rob God. Financial giving should never become the lazy person's way out or an excuse for failing to give of our time, talents and energy. The local body of believers needs everyone's time and talents throughout the week – not just on the Lord's Day.

Israel's tithing was accompanied by a profession of faith and trust in God. They would set down their tithe before the altar of the Lord and worship God, stating their gratitude and praising God for all that they and their families had received. We must learn to do the same.

In this passage the Lord challenges us to put Him to the test: "Test my faithfulness. Give with a glad and generous heart and I will bless you richly." This is an act of faith, especially for the poverty-stricken. Yet God says, "Do it. Put yourself completely in my hands and you will not be disappointed." Next time we will continue addressing this subject. **C**

Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity

By R. Aasman

Report to Synod

The Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU) has distributed to the churches its Report to Synod Neerlandia 2001. This report has some far-reaching implications for our churches. It concerns relations with the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), the Free Reformed Churches in North America (FRCNA) and the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC). Based on what we read in the report, it is clear that the Lord has blessed our discussions with these churches. The members of the CPEU are Rev. R. Aasman, Dr. J. DeJong, Rev. W. DenHollander, Rev. W. Slomp, Mr. P. VanWoudenberg and Mr. F. Westrik.

Free Reformed Churches

Two articles were published in *Clarion* (Volume 49:17) which acquainted us with some of the discussions between our committee and representatives of the FRCNA. The discussions have gone very well. The recommendation of the committee to Synod Neerlandia is as follows:

- that synod acknowledge that the CanRCs have been received into the stage of 'limited contact' of the FRCNA unity guidelines at the FRCNA synod May, 2000.
- that the Committee continue dialogue with the Free Reformed Churches of North America with a view to promoting federative unity, and identifying whatever obstacles there may be with the FRCNA on this path.

Clearly we are in the early stages in our relations with the FRCNA, although there is reason for optimism that there will be positive developments in our contacts. May the Lord continue to bless our discussions.

Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches

No formal discussions have been initiated with the OCRC on the federative level. However the limited contacts which our committee and our ecclesiastical assemblies have had with the OCRC suggest that we should have more formal discussions together to discuss the call and duty to pursue federative unity. The report notes with thankfulness that there has been a growing awareness and desire within the OCRC to enter into discussions with other churches. The recommendation of the committee to Synod Neerlandia is as follows:

- that the Committee represent the churches (when invited) at meetings of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, with a view to promoting greater understanding and exploring possibilities of federative unity.

The committee members demonstrate an eagerness to be appointed by the next synod to have greater contact with the OCRC.

United Reformed Churches in North America

The bulk of the committee's report deals with the URCNA. The reason becomes clear upon reading the report. Extensive meetings were held between our committee and representatives of the URCNA External Relations Committee. The report states:

The results of these discussions was agreement on all the outstanding areas of discussion which would be of concern to our two federations. The memorandum of agreement is appended to this report. On the basis of this agreement, we recommend that the URCNA be recognized as faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that both federations initiate steps to move to a second phase of dis-

cussions and consultations, including occasional pulpit exchange on a local level, with possible table fellowship in due time, particularly in those localities where discussions have progressed well for some time.

The memorandum of agreement mentioned here can be found following this article. It is entitled, *Statements of Agreement*. It is coauthored by our Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity and the URCNA's Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity. It demonstrates agreement on church history, the covenant, the church, the church order, the song book, and so on. It is a remarkable document which shows an important consensus between our committees which serve the churches meeting together at the broader ecclesiastical assemblies.

The CPEU's report to Synod Neerlandia makes the following assessment as a result of the above mentioned agreement:

We feel with the agreements as presented to your synod that we have reached a stage in which a closer form of cooperation with the URCNA is warranted. Although there are a number of outstanding issues, there is substantial agreement on most key areas of church government and general ecclesiastical policy. We are therefore confident that synod can recommend entering into Phase 2 of the negotiations on our own proposed strategy schedule, which is almost analogous to the second phase of the URCNA grid. On the basis of the Statements of Agreement which are the results of our discussions regarding the marks of the true church ad Art 29 BC, we recommend that Synod recognize the URCNA as faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, and express the hope and wish that through our deepened

cooperation and fellowship, we may benefit one another and serve each other in the service of Christ. This would mean that the synod allow closer ties of fellowship such as occasional table fellowship (recognizing each other's attestations) as well as occasional pulpit exchange in those localities where talks have progressed to such a point that both parties are ready for this stage, – all with the proviso that the URCNA, in their forthcoming synod, have adopted the proposed time schedule towards ecclesiastical unity and also adopt the agreement reached by our respective sub- committees, and adopted by our full Committee. Barring any unforeseen obstacles, this should move us to a position of federative unity in 2004.

The implementation of our recommendations is thus a local matter, and can vary from place to place, depending on the level of discussions that have taken place at the local level between churches of the two federations. Where these discussions have advanced to the level of deepened mutual recognition and understanding, fellowship on the Phase 2 level can take place, as long as both local churches involved commit themselves to calling their own federations to federative unity on the adopted basis by the year 2004.

The committee report refers here to the *Statements of Agreement*; as was mentioned earlier the reader will find this document below. There is also a reference here to "our own proposed strategy schedule." This document is also attached below; it is entitled, *Position Paper: Strategies to Church Unity*. This paper is being presented by our committee to Synod Neerlandia, "to serve as a general directive for churches involved in discussions at the local level." The committee is recommending advancing to Phase 2 of the proposed strategy schedule. At this level of contact there could be occasional pulpit exchanges and acceptance at each other's Lord's Supper celebrations, depending on stage of discussions at the local level.

It is important and valuable to note that this Phase 2 is only to be implemented if there is clearly the will and the commitment to enter into a federative unity between the CanRC and the URCNA.

Recommendation to Synod


The committee makes the following recommendation to Synod Neerlandia regarding the URCNA:

1. that synod thank the URCNA for accepting the CanRC into Phase 1 of their guidelines for ecumenical relations, and express gratitude that with this acceptance via appointed committees much contact could be experienced with the URCNA.

2. that deputies be instructed to pursue continued fraternal dialogue with the United Reformed Churches of North America with a view towards establishing federative unity. This will include the following elements:

- That the Statement of Agreement with its accompanying time frame be adopted by Synod 2001, and that, with the recognition of the URCNA as faithful churches of Jesus Christ, we move to Phase 2 of the negotiations on the Statement of Strategy (Appendix 12) all with the understanding that both federations are committed to reach the final phase of these discussions in 2004.
- That special committees be appointed in accordance with the recommendation in the Agreement regarding the church order and theological education, for the purpose of meeting with the URCNA counterparts in the period 2001-2004.

Conclusion

It is with gratitude to the Lord that we note how positive the discussions and contacts between our churches have been. May the report of the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity serve our churches and the upcoming synod well. May it serve the glory of the King and Head of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ. 

Statements of Agreement

Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity Canadian Reformed Churches and Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity United Reformed Churches in North America

Church History

We acknowledge from both sides with sin and shortcoming, that both of the most recent secessions in our history, the liberation of 1944 and the 1990s secessions, were acts of obedience required and obligated in keeping with the will of God (as confessed in Art 28 and 29 BC).

The Covenant

The covenant is a relationship between God and man established by God at the time of his creation of Adam and Eve. It is one sided in origin and two sided in existence. God established it to live in fellowship with man and show him his love and favour, and to receive from man love,

obedience, trust, and honour. When man broke this covenant of favour by his rebellion and fall into sin, God in his grace maintained this relationship and promised to redeem man by the sacrifice of his Son, the Seed of the woman in its deepest sense. The Lord makes this covenant of grace with the believers and their offspring.

The promises of the covenant together with the demand to repent from sin and believe the promises must be proclaimed throughout all the world. All who repent and believe and receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour are grafted into the covenant and share in its promises and blessings. The death of Christ on the cross represents the fulfillment of the terms of the old covenant. Therefore in the new dispensation of the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ, believers and their seed are called by the power of God to live in true thankfulness and love according to all the commandments of God.

In an obedient response to the covenant obligations the believers are called to gather together in unity with Christ, the Mediator of the covenant, and in unity of faith with the church of all ages. These gatherings are found where the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed in purity, where the sacraments are administered in purity, and where church discipline is exercised for the correcting and punishing of sins. All people belonging to God's covenant of grace are called and obliged to join the church and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church. The fullness of this covenant takes place at the consummation of all things when the one triune God will live with his chosen people in perfect love and fellowship through all eternity.

The Church

We acknowledge that due to the many limitations and shortcomings of human understanding there is a brokenness of the church both in local situations and in broader federations. This implies that there can be more than one true church in a particular place at any given time. We need to reject a broad denominationalism on the one hand, as well as a narrow sectarianism on the other. Churches of various backgrounds but one confession have the duty to pursue the highest forms of ecclesiastical fellowship possible in their context, in order to promote the unity of the church locally as well as in the federation of churches.

The Church Order

The unity committees express their gratitude that both federations have maintained the principles, structure,

and essential provisions of the Church Order of Dort in their respective adaptations for Reformed church life. The committees discussed the specific differences between the orders of the Canadian Reformed and the United Reformed Churches. The agreement was reached that a recommendation be sent to the next synods that each synod appoint a church order committee, and that the two committees work together to produce a suitable and agreeable adaptation of the Church Order of Dort. The differences between the current orders of the federations would be evaluated in the light of the Scriptural and Confessional principles and patterns of church government of the Church Order of Dort.

Barring any unforeseen obstacles, this should move us to a position of federative unity in 2004.

NOTE: The Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the United Reformed Churches has agreed to recommend to synod 2001 that the last sentence of Article 34 of the URC Church Order be suspended during the period of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, should both synods agree to enter such a relationship. The sentence in question reads, "*Fratern activities between congregations which need not be reported to classis may include occasional pulpit exchanges, table fellowship, as well as other means of manifesting unity.*" The committee will also recommend to synod that all churches are urged to maintain this provision.

The Song Book

The unity committees gratefully observe that both federations have maintained the principle that while preaching is the central ingredient in the church's worship, congregational singing suitably accompanied forms a significant part of a Reformed worship service. The committees discussed the differences between the Canadian Reformed *Book of Praise* and the United Reformed *Psalter Hymnal*. The agreement was reached to recommend to the 2001 synods that when the two federations

agree to enter into **Ecclesiastical Fellowship** each synod appoint a song book committee, and that the two committees work together to produce a song book that contains the Anglo-Genevan psalter and other suitable metrical versions, while including hymns that also meet the standard of faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Reformed Confessions. The committees recommend that the churches continue to use their accustomed song books, also after the Union should the Lord grant this, until the new song book is ready and adopted.

Creeds, Confessions, Liturgical Forms, and Prayers for Inclusion in the Proposed Song Book

The unity committees also note with thankfulness that both federations have translations of the Three Forms of Unity in their song books which adhere to and reflect the original languages as adopted by the Synod of Dort. The committees are also grateful that the liturgical forms and the prayers for special and designated purposes appear in each federation's song book since they form a direct link with the history of the early Reformed churches in Europe where they originated. The unity committees recommend that the first Synod of the new combined federation, should the Lord grant the Union to take place, appoint a committee or committees to coordinate and harmonize the present translations of the Ecumenical Creeds, the Three Forms of Unity, the liturgical forms, and the special prayers, consulting where possible the original languages, for eventual inclusion in the new song book.

Agreement on Theological Education for Ministers

With thanks to God the unity committees concur that both federations have maintained the traditional Reformed practice of requiring and providing a thoroughly confessional and scholarly theological education and training for their students aspiring to be ministers of the Word. The Canadian Reformed Churches own and support their Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario, and the professors are Canadian Reformed. Graduates normally become candidates and ministers in their churches. The United Reformed Churches have no federal seminary, and the candidates for

their ministry are trained by a number of Reformed seminaries, especially by the independently owned and operated Mid America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, but also by the similarly independent Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California.

The committees discussed the potential and actual differences in the confessional requirements, the church membership of the professors and teaching staff of these three theological schools, the appointment procedures, as well as the institutions' curricular diversities. Agreement was reached to recommend to the synods of 2001 that when the two federations agree to enter into **Ecclesiastical Fellowship** each synod appoint a theological education study committee. The unity committees recommend that each synod's committee also have serving on it one or two professors from its own theological school or schools, and that the two committees work together to draft proposals for their synods in preparation for the eventual Plan of Union in accordance with their mandates.

The unity committees recommend to the synods of 2001 that the mandates for the proposed theological study committee of both federations contain provisions for the commitment that should the Lord of the Church grant eventual Union, the resulting United Churches will retain at least one federational theological school and that the synod recommend the school's professors and teaching staff for appointment. A further recommendation to be included in the study committees' mandates is that the synod of the United Churches select those non-federational seminaries for the preparation of its future candidates for the ministry whose professors and all teaching staff sign the Form of Subscription indicating agreement with the Three Forms of Unity. Another recommendation for inclusion in the study committees' mandates is concerning an aspiring candidate's failure to have adequate instruction in significant courses such as Reformed Church Polity or Reformed Church History. He will be required to supplement his education in those courses to conform to the standards of the churches' theological school(s) before being able to be declared a candidate

for the ministry of the Word in the United Churches.

Preaching

Grateful to the King of the Church, the unity committees report their agreement that both federations seek to maintain a high standard of preaching as required by Scripture. Fully trained and ordained ministers are called to preach the whole counsel of God. This includes the regular preaching of the Reformed Confessions focussing especially on the Heidelberg Catechism during one of the worship services on each Lord's Day. The committees agree that preaching the full counsel of God requires the proclamation of the promises of God, together with the command to repent and believe the gospel, thus calling all to flee from the wrath to come. With suitable exhortations and admonitions all the hearers are encouraged to appropriate the promises of the gospel with a living faith. In this way, the committees agree, every effort is expended in the churches of the two federations to promote the proper explication and application of the Scriptures for the building up of the congregations.

*May it serve the glory
of the King and Head
of the church, our
Lord Jesus Christ.*

Agreement on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper


Noting that the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them is a mark of the true Church, the unity committees agree that in both federations the sacraments are maintained and administered according to the ordinance of God. The elders exercise supervision with regard to the administration of both sacraments, and only confessing members in good standing are allowed to present their children for baptism. After making public profession of faith members are admitted to fellowship at the Lord's Table. It is in this way that the sacraments are celebrated to the glory of God and for the edification of his people.

The committees discussed the different practices of supervising the participation of guests at the Lord's

Supper. The Canadian Reformed practice is to require of guests an acceptable certificate or attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct issued by the elders of their "sister churches." The United Reformed Churches generally accept upon an interview with the guest, his or her signed personal attestation concerning doctrine and conduct thereby assuring the consistory of their church membership by profession of faith and of their godly walk.

Agreement was reached that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is entrusted to the congregation in each location, and that its elders are charged by Christ with the pure administration of this sacrament. In receiving guests from elsewhere, the committees have agreed that a travel attestation from a guest's home consistory is a time honoured and effective practice in supervising guests at the Lord's Table. A personal attestation prepared and administered by the consistory of the church celebrating the Lord's Supper is also an acceptable and Reformed way of supervising attendance at the Lord's Table, when as much as possible the elders have attempted to secure confirmation of the guest's godly life from appropriate sources. In the attestation the signatories state that they are communicant members not under discipline of a faithful church which fully confesses the doctrines of the Scriptures. The consistory would send the personal statement to the person's home church.

Ecclesiastical Discipline

Since both federations seek to govern themselves according to the pure Word of God, all of the churches exercise church discipline for correcting and punishing sins, the unity committees agree that the implementation of Scripture, the Confession, and the Church Order are duly practiced in the churches. The Canadian Reformed and the United Reformed Churches consider Christian discipline to be spiritual in nature, and for the purpose that God may be glorified, that the sinner may be reconciled with God, the church and his neighbour, and that all offense may be removed from the church of Christ. 

Position Paper: Strategies to Church Unity

Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity

Preamble

The final goal of all local discussions with churches from other Reformed federations is ecclesiastical union on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, in agreement with the Reformed confession, according to the rules of Reformed church government.

All parties in the discussions should agree at the outset to submit in all things to the Word of God, and to a commonly agreed upon confessional framework (in our case the *Three Forms of Unity*).

The respective congregations should be kept informed of the progress made in the discussions throughout the entire process.

Local congregations will also factor in the decisions of the broader assemblies with regard to ecclesiastical unity and maintain these decisions in their own local discussions. Reports of the discussions should also be presented at classis, and essential decisions regarding the advance of the discussions should receive the approval of classes from both federations.

Discussion must proceed on both the local and national level, and one approach should never cancel out the other. These various levels of discussion should not end up working at odds with each other. Discussions at the level of synodical committees will keep the churches informed by means of regular published reports.

The Stages

We can distinguish three main stages in the process of discussions towards ecclesiastical unity: recognition, acceptance, and union. We will review these stages in turn:

a. Initial Recognition and Exploration

In the first stage the discussions should be exploratory and should concern a mutually agreed upon understanding of the confessional heritage of

the church, specifically of Articles 27 to 32 of the Belgic Confession. Here use can be made of work done by the Ecumenical Relations Committee (URC), as well as statements agreed upon by participating consistories in various locales.

This recognition stage would benefit from a mutual understanding that accepts one another's more recent histories as being, despite many weaknesses and shortcomings, required and obligated separations according to the standards of the Word of God, especially the Liberation 1944, and the 1990 separations in the CRC.

This stage of recognition should also isolate areas where differences of approach exist, and which need to be examined more closely in order for progress to be made towards an integral ecclesiastical union, i.e. worship, theological education, schooling, and so on. There should be some form of agreement as to the scriptural and church orderly way that these differences can be overcome.

b. Acceptance and Cooperation

This stage of the discussions envisions a mutual acceptance by the two participating consistories of each other's faithfulness as churches to the Word of God and the confessions of the church. In other words, the consistories are able to declare agreement on the fundamentals, and to publicly note that they recognize each other as true churches of Jesus Christ.

Ideally this stage will also include a specific proposal regarding the options open to come to closer ecclesiastical fellowship. This could occur if the agreement reached at the level of the synodical committee could receive the approbation of the churches by the time it is ready to be forwarded to the broadest assemblies.

Once the point of recognition has been achieved certain forms of cooperation can be explored and implemented. For example various groups may hold combined meetings, e.g.

men's clubs, women's service agencies, Bible studies, speeches or addresses by each other's ministers, cooperation in evangelism, and so on.


Delegates should also visit broader assemblies, e.g. classes and synods. Meetings of combined consistories (or meetings of consistory committees) should be held regularly to isolate the specific differences that need further attention.

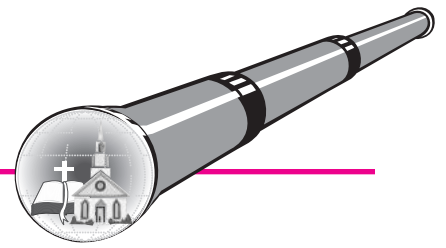
If agreement could be reached on a proposed time schedule towards union (say the period 2001 to 2004) with a commitment to attain integrated unity by the set target date, the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship as outlined in the URCNA "Guidelines" (a to f) could be implemented in the relationship between the two church federations.

c. Advanced Recognition to Union

In the stage of advanced recognition the consistories should come to an agreement as to the form of merger they wish to pursue. If both consistories defend and promote federative unity, proposals regarding a mutually agreeable time table should be tabled at consecutive classes and synods. With the assistance of the deputies for ecclesiastical unity, these proposals should be coordinated into one mutually acceptable draft plan for union, agreeable to all parties, all along the lines of the agreement reached in Phase 2.

The more detailed draft plan for union, including the formulation and adoption of a mutually agreed upon text of the church order, should be ready for adoption by the broadest assemblies of both federations in 2004.

The agreement of Phase 2 should include some initial mutually agreeable provisions regarding theological education, song books, liturgical forms and customs, and Bible translations. The further coordination of these matters in a definitive form would be the subject of the more detailed arrangement in Phase 3, as well as subsequent negotiations. 



Observation Deck

By George van Popta

They were out in full force again. We saw them in the entry ways to the stores and malls. At Christmas time, The Salvation Army is obvious like at no other time of the year. The ladies and gentlemen of the Army, dressed in their uniforms, stood quietly beside their drums of change and bills gladly receiving any donation you might give them as you entered or left the store. Perhaps you put a few quarters in the drum; maybe you avoided eye-contact as you scurried along.

Who are these people? What is The Salvation Army?

The start of The Salvation Army

William Booth, the founder of The Salvation Army, was born in Nottingham in 1829. At the age of thirteen he was sent to work as an apprentice in a pawnbroker's shop. There he became aware of the poverty in which people lived and how they suffered humiliation and degradation because of it. During his teenage years he became a Christian and spent much of his spare time evangelizing.

When his apprenticeship was completed he moved to London, again to work in the pawnbroking trade. He joined up with the local Methodist

Church and later decided to become a minister.

After his marriage to Catherine Mumford in 1855 he spent several years as a Methodist minister, travelling all around the country, preaching and sharing God's Word to all who would listen. Yet he felt that God wanted more from him, that he should be doing more to reach ordinary people. He resigned his position as a Methodist minister and returned to London with his family.

One day in 1865 he found himself in the East End of London, preaching to crowds of people in the streets. Outside a pub some evangelists heard him speaking and were so impressed by his powerful preaching that they asked him to lead a series of meetings they were holding in a large tent.

Booth agreed. He brought the good news of Jesus Christ to the poor and wretched of London's East End. He soon realized he had found his task. He formed a movement he called "The Christian Mission."

Slowly the mission began to grow. Outposts were eventually established and in time attracted converts, yet the results remained discouraging – his was just another of the 500 charitable and religious groups trying to help in

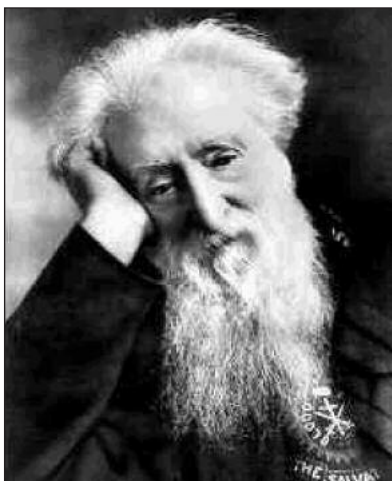
the East End of London. It was not until 1878, when The Christian Mission changed its name to The Salvation Army, that things began to happen. The idea of an Army fighting sin caught the imagination of the people and the Army began to grow rapidly. Booth's fiery sermons and sharp imagery drove the message home and more and more people found themselves willing to leave their past behind and start a new life as a soldier in The Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army soon spread abroad. By the time Booth died in 1912 the Army was at work in fifty-eight countries.

Why "Salvation Army"

William Booth's original aim had been to direct his converts to the established churches of the day. He had no intention of establishing another Christian church. But he soon found that many of his converts would not go to church. The poor did not feel welcome in places like St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey. They could not afford a special Sunday suit and many of the regular churchgoers were appalled when these shabbily dressed, evil-smelling people came to join them in worship. The poor soon got the message that they were not wanted and did not return. Booth decided he would have to do something about the situation, and as a result formed the "The Christian Mission."

Early one morning in May 1878, Booth summoned his son, Bramwell, and his good friend, George Railton, to read the proofs of the Christian Mission's Annual Report. Its preliminary statement read: "THE CHRISTIAN MISSION is A VOLUNTEER ARMY." Bramwell strongly objected to this statement, saying he was not a volunteer for he felt compelled by God to do what he had to do. In a moment of inspiration Booth crossed out the word "Volunteer" and



William Booth

wrote "Salvation." Thus, The Salvation Army was born.

The movement adopted a quasi-military structure that prevails to this day.

The General – The General, based at International Headquarters in London, is the international leader of The Salvation Army. He or she is elected by the High Council (a group of senior Salvation Army officers) for a term of five years.

Officers – Salvation Army officers have the status of ordained ministers and are employed by the Army in a professional capacity and on a full-time basis. Upon completion of a two year residential course at a Salvation Army Training College, they are commissioned (equivalent to ordination in other denominations). Officers work up through the ranks of lieutenant, captain, and major. All officers wear a uniform as a sign of war against evil. Women are accepted as officers on equal terms as men.

The majority of officers are responsible for a Salvation Army corps (church), with a pastoral role and community service. Others serve in social service centres, goodwill community centres or in an administrative capacity at headquarters. An officer's ministry includes preaching the Christian Gospel, distributing Salvation Army literature, visiting hospitals, institutions and prisons, counselling, conducting weddings and funerals, being a pastor to their congregation and administering the church programme.

Soldiers – Members of The Salvation Army are called soldiers. They sign the "Articles of War" which state the Army's beliefs and accept certain moral standards; e.g., Salvation Army soldiers do not smoke or drink alcohol. It is a matter of personal choice whether or not they wear uniform as a witness to their faith. Most have their own job of work or profession.

Local Officers – Salvationists who accept particular responsibilities in a corps, e.g., the finance of the corps, leadership of a musical group or children's work, are commissioned as local officers. They must be loyal, uniform-wearing members of the movement. They do not receive any remuneration for this work.

Adherents – People who choose to make The Salvation Army their spiritual home and place of worship, but who do not wish to make all the commitments which a soldier would be

The Salvation Army doctrines

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.

We believe that there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and who is the only proper object of religious worship.

We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead—the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.

We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that He is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.

We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocence, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness, and that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by His suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.

We believe that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, are necessary to salvation.

We believe that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself.

We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.

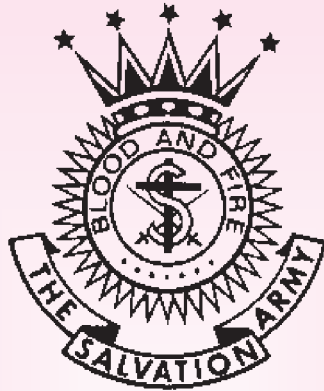
We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe in the immortality of the soul; in the resurrection of the body; in the general judgment at the end of the world; in the eternal happiness of the righteous; and in the endless punishment of the wicked.



Mission Statement

The Salvation Army, an international movement, is an evangelical branch of the universal Christian Church. Its message is based on the Bible, its ministry motivated by love for God. Its mission is both spiritual and practical, encompassing the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and alleviating human suffering and distress without discrimination.



What The Salvation Army does

- Accommodation for the homeless
- Occupational centres
- Food for the hungry
- Care for the elderly
- Health care
- Work amongst children
- Education
- Family welfare aid
- Refugees
- Fighting leprosy
- Convalescent homes
- Alcoholism and drug addiction
- Help for the blind
- Other handicapped people
- Involvement with military personnel
- Missing relatives
- Care for offenders
- Remand/probation homes
- Anti-suicide counselling
- Registered counselling services
- Students
- Emergency (fire, flood, earthquake, hurricane or other natural or human disaster) relief

expected to make, may become adherents. They do not wear uniform.

For the purpose of administration, The Salvation Army is divided into fifty territories world-wide (100 countries). Territories are divided into divisions while each division encompasses a number of corps, of which there are about 14,000, and other Salvation Army centres. Corps are the local centres where Salvationists gather for worship. They are also the centres for a variety of community work such as lunch clubs, mother and toddler groups, counselling services. Then there are the Social Services Centres, the familiar thrift stores, the homes and hostels.

Doctrine


The Salvation Army's beliefs are mostly orthodox (please see sidebar). Its view on the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, and Scripture are in agreement with that of the church of all ages. Articles 6 and 9, however, would seem to allow one to embrace the heresies of unlimited atonement and the freewill of man. Article 10 seems to teach perfectionism.

A glaring omission in the faith and practice of The Salvation Army is their neglect of the sacraments. The Salvation Army adopted a non-sacrament position in reaction to the Roman Catholic and High Anglican teaching that grace is infused by the very action of giving and receiving the sacraments (*ex opere operato*). They incorrectly hold that the Lord Jesus did not command the church to perform the sacraments as a lasting ceremony. Since questions about the sacraments have often been divisive, they thought it better to do without them.

The statement of doctrine could also be criticized because of what it excludes; e.g., it says nothing about what the church is. The Mission Statement would suggest a definition of "church" that does not take into consideration any marks (preaching, sacraments and discipline).

The Army web site contains many adopted position papers on a wide variety of ethical issues. Generally, the positions are pretty good.

Although The Salvation Army's teachings are incomplete and, at places, simply wrong, the movement can be commended for the work of charity, compassion and relief it administers throughout the world.

*All factual information in this article was taken from The Salvation Army's web page, <http://www.salvationarmy.org/>. 

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

As I read the Year-End Issue of *Clarion* I was rather surprised to see such a glowing review of Prof. J. van Bruggen's book *Jesus the Son of God*. I can understand that *Christ on Earth* would receive such a review, but its sequel is in a different category. One wonders whether your reviewer was aware of the considerable controversy this book has caused in the Netherlands. Over my four years at the Theological College in Hamilton, *Het evangelie van Gods zoon* certainly ranks as the most discussed book in the lectures.

Why is it such a controversial book? In this book Prof. van Bruggen makes the claim that in the New Testament, the term "Son of God" is used "to refer to Jesus as the eternal Word who became man" (p.150). In other words, it appears that Prof. van Bruggen is arguing that the Lord Jesus Christ became the Son of God at his incarnation, rather than being the Son of God from eternity. We do well to note that Prof. van Bruggen is not denying the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ – He is simply stating that the New Testament leads us to the conclusion that Christ became the Son of God when He was conceived in the womb of Mary – and thus prior to the incarnation his relationship to the Father cannot be understood in terms of Father-Son. This teaching appears to be a form of incarnational sonship, a teaching presently in vogue in certain evangelical circles (John MacArthur was advocating this teaching for some time, but later retracted).

Incarnational sonship is not a mere peccadillo, a trifling exegetical offence. In fact, this teaching has appeared before in the history of the church and has been condemned. For instance, it existed among the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. According to C. Vonk in *De Voorzeide Leer*, since incarnational sonship was often part of the erring Anabaptist doctrine of Christ, the Belgic Confession contains this statement in Article 10: "He is the Son of God, not only from the time that He assumed our nature but from all eternity . . ." Guido de Brès seems to have had in mind exactly the error which Prof. van Bruggen appears to be promoting in this book which received such a positive review in *Clarion*. Could it be that Prof.

van Bruggen is pushing against (or even beyond) the frontiers of confessional orthodoxy and should be soundly criticized as such? I am reminded of a saying attributed to Abraham Kuyper: "He who pushes against the frontiers of orthodoxy will soon find himself over that frontier."

*Yours in Christ's service,
W.L. Bredenhof, Fort Babine, BC*

Response by the Reviewer to W. Bredenhof's letter to the editor

The reviewer was aware of what Rev. W. Bredenhof describes as a considerable controversy. However, she decided not to make mention of it, since she was confident that the author does not in any way deny that Jesus is the Son of God from eternity. As far as the serious allegations about the confessional integrity of the author are concerned, it was deemed appropriate by the editors of *Clarion* to provide Prof. van Bruggen with the opportunity to respond himself.

Jane deGlint

Response by Prof. Dr. J. van Bruggen

Dear Rev. Bredenhof, I was surprised at the content and the negative tone of your letter about me in the *Clarion*. To my recollection, we have never met nor ever engaged in any other form of personal communication. The content of your letter is clear and direct. You question my orthodoxy or at least the orthodoxy of a portion of my writings.

While I don't know if I can reassure you, I am in full agreement (thanks to the grace of God in my life) with the Belgic Confession, as quoted by you, that our Lord Jesus Christ, "is the Son of God, not only from the time that He assumed our nature but from all eternity . . ." You can find that also in my second book on page 150: "The church in its creeds rightly speaks of the eternal Son of God."

So please do not fear that there may be a certain John MacArthur lurking under my cloak! Also, do you really think that your Reformed sister-churches in the Netherlands could accept a New Testament professor who denies the central confession of the eternal sonship of Jesus Christ?

Let us turn shortly to the specific issue at hand. How can you suggest that

I have the slightest doubt about this central point of the confession about our triune God? Have you read all of the 287 pages of my book *Christ on Earth* and the remaining 270 pages of my book *Jesus, the Son of God*? All of these pages were written to defend the orthodox faith against so much modern Bible criticism and disbelief.

Perhaps you are not fully taking into account the difference between dogmatics (confession) and the history of revelation. My books are about the history of God's revelation (in the line of the work of K. Schilder, B. Holwerda, among others). And my statement at the point under discussion is that God revealed his Son to us at the moment that He already had become our brother in the flesh. This is an undeniable fact. Please take note of it and let us together praise the Lord who revealed his Son right from the beginning as the Saviour from Bethlehem, our Mediator. At the moment that we begin to learn about the eternal Son He was already our brother. Don't be afraid, said Gabriel!

Let me finish with a personal word to all the readers of *Clarion* since you, Rev. Bredenhof, did invite them via this method of communication. I feel strongly connected with you as members of the sister-churches in Canada and the United States. It was this connection that prompted me to invest the time and energy in the translation of my books into English. The initiative for this project came from Dr. J. Visscher. He started the project for the translation of *Christ on Earth* many years ago already. It has taken the Dutch publishing company, Kok, a couple of years to secure a good translation and a good publisher in North America. This considerable investment of time and money was made out of the conviction that these books could be of use for the Bible-studying members of your churches. I hope that you can use them and will enjoy them through the grace of our Lord. May they be of help in the spiritual war we are fighting and may they be edifying for your faith.

And, should five or six pages of the nearly 600 pages feel a bit strange at first sight, perhaps leave such a bone at the side of your dish and continue to enjoy the rest of your meal!

*Dr. Jakob van Bruggen,
Kampen, the Netherlands*



From Mission to Measurement: a Book Review

by Keith Sikkema

From Mission to Measurement by Daniel R. Vander Ark. (Christian Schools International, 3350 East Paris Ave., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI, 49512-3054. ISBN 0-87463-152-1)

Mr. Daniel Vander Ark is the executive director of Christian Schools International. He believes that Christian schools need to teach a discernably different curriculum than other schools if they wish to count on the continued support of parents. Christian teachers should therefore be more intentional in carrying out their school's mission and mandate. Curriculum is the planned means to this noble end, and teachers must take care that "no student leaves your school without a really good one" (p. 6).

Written for teachers, this lucid and practical book contains many useful and profitable suggestions for curriculum development. As teachers are part of a team and as education is a collective effort, this book's relevance can be enhanced when it is studied in designated team discussions. Mr. Vander Ark's own occasional perspectives on an ideal Christian school can also be discussed in that context. The book would also help Education Committee and/or Board members to gain an appreciation for the effort involved in designing a good curriculum.

Curriculum organization and revision

Mr. Vander Ark begins with establishing the need for good curriculum, and lists several characteristics of "off course" and "on course" curricula. Each school should have a clearly stated mission which reflects the philosophy of the school and all its supporters. From this mission statement, concrete and attainable goals should be developed. The goals should lead to measurable objectives, which can be

attained by effective and focused teaching. A final assessment should determine whether the goals have been reached.

A Christian school needs to have Christian organizing principles that integrate "every element of human knowledge and experience into a view of life that can be whole and wholly Christian" (p. 26). Mr. Vander Ark reviews five organizational alternatives which were either developed as Christian perspectives or adapted for Christian purposes from a secular framework. The alternative

Each school should have a clearly stated mission which reflects the philosophy of the school and all its supporters.

include Harlem Central Park East Secondary School's *Five Habits of Mind*, a *Worldview Questions* approach, Douglas Wilson's classical Christian concept, *Spiraling*, and an *Historical Organizer*. Each of these has their own philosophical basis.

It is good to read a book like this to help prevent haphazard and hasty curriculum decisions.

Chapter four presents a map that gets teachers from their practice to what they should be doing in eleven straightforward steps. It is a workable process suitable for minor content adjustments as well as for large-scale mission-directed revisions of the entire curriculum. A well-integrated curriculum should eliminate distractions from the school's mission statement, and should enhance elements that support it. A typical six or seven-year curriculum revision cycle is an ongoing part of the teachers' task, and teachers are encouraged to write fitting personal

mission statements: "Your personal Christian education testimony is an important way to connect your school's mission to your own calling as a Christian teacher" (p. 54).

Tools and teaching

Chapter five, "Textbooks and Other Tools," addresses the importance of choosing and having good tools that fit the school's curriculum and mission. Mr. Vander Ark identifies several advantages and dangers of having a textbook, and describes criteria and a procedure for choosing one. Textbook selection should involve classroom teachers, principals, parents, and the board. He closes with suggestions for a policy on good materials selection, including the introduction of videos, internet, CD-ROMs, magazines, etc.

Chapter six is about the "delivery system" of the curriculum or teaching. Good teaching includes having a good plan, an awareness of the reality of God's Word and the students' world to bring students to the intersections of both, and a way to connect students to the focus or concept to be learned and applied. Mr. Vander Ark suggests that the relaying of information, the coaching to thinking about it and working with it, and the Socratic questioning method of the Paideia Proposal is applicable in Christian schools. He likes Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory because it recognizes that each person is a unique creation to whose talents the teacher has to teach specifically. He also advocates the importance of analogies, the use of reflective journals, asking skillful questions, telling stories, and praying for God's blessing (cf. Deut 32:2) as teaching tools.

Assessment

Student and school assessment are considered next. In Christian schools, the challenge is to use the kind of test that actually assesses all that we set out to teach – including biblical principles. Mr. Vander Ark suggests that external testing be done to assess whether the school is attaining its mission (in Ontario, a school evaluation committee

does that), and discusses eight worthy suggestions for internal testing by the classroom teacher. The book's final chapter underlines the need for frequent mission and curriculum review, both to stay on task and to maintain commitment to the school's Christian education: "Essentially, a curriculum is only as good as the practice of its teachers. . . . Sing God's song, and sing your part well. God's song will resound throughout the dark night of this world until he finally makes it all right again" (pp. 96-97).

In view that teachers' schedules are always loaded – even more so when ever-changing government curricula challenges the autonomy of our schools to design our own curriculum, it is good to read a book like this to help prevent haphazard and hasty curriculum decisions. Our schools are not immune to outside pressures, and a curriculum that is not carefully thought out and developed from the beliefs on which our schools were founded is more than likely to be off track. We look forward to the "Blueprint for Curriculum Writing" our CARE (Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Education) committee is developing, and to the continued support of our communities.

Here is an example of a mission statement of Tyndale Christian School, Calgary: "The purpose of our Canadian Reformed schools is to assist parents in educating their children. We strive to develop the students' talents so that they acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for a life of Christian responsible stewardship."

Peregrine Survey

The vision committee of Ebenezer (Smithers) tries to answer the question, "Why do we have the school?" The plan is to formulate a vision statement "in broad terms, which is then defined further in a mission statement and/or goals." This vision statement is very important, and "it is critical that the membership come up with it and believe in it." Shouldn't we all be thinking about this? Read on!

At Maranatha/Emmanuel Christian Schools (Fergus), teaching memory work is part of the vision, and the principal pleads that we, "(again) make the singing of our songs of praise to the Lord part of the daily family devotions around the daily supper table." The school's rationale for memory work states,

1. Children we teach are covenant children and, as such, they must be taught to speak, sing, pray, and think in the language of the covenant. Memory work is an effective tool whereby covenant children learn to speak God's words after Him.
2. The texts and songs the children memorize will feed their life of faith by providing content for their prayers, by enriching their study of the Scriptures, and by equipping them to be prepared at all times to give account of the hope that is within them (1 Peter 3:15).

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3. The Scriptures instruct, exhort, and comfort us in our life on earth. The texts and songs that the children learn well now while they are young will become a source of strength, guidance, and comfort in times of temptation, trial and grief.
4. God's word is the only antidote against the corruption and brokenness of life in this world. Memory work provides children with songs and words to occupy their thoughts and to temper their speech.

We also congratulate Vanessa on saving her Credit Union Prize for future training as a teacher!

Covenant's staff (Neerlandia) discussed Dr. Oosterhoff's book on *Postmodernism*, and others plan to do the same: ". . . educational theories and ideas are largely influenced by the philosophy of postmodernism. . . . It is particularly important for our Reformed schools to continually assess and evaluate our school climate so that it reflects a Reformed world view rather than the dominant world view."

During a two-hour block every fifth school-day, Neerlandians can share their talents for the benefit of the next

generation through "alternative courses" in building construction, law, hair design, tourism, cooking, sewing, and caring for children. In the same province, a Calgary public school official touted parental involvement "as the single most important factor in your child's educational success" in a talk show about getting value for your child's education. Because we know that the Lord has directed parents to train their children, we are not surprised – but how are we doing?

In other news, John Calvin (Burlington) had a theme week on eggs, complete with a hatchery field trip, incubators, art, research activities, and good cooperation from the Egg Marketing Board. Most of the school's staff also completed a Safety Oriented First Aid course. Credo (Brampton/Toronto) and other schools are preparing for the biannual April Science Fair at Redeemer College. Covenant (Flamborough) considered adding an indemnity clause to its constitution.

Several schools are blessed with growth. Dufferin Area (Orangeville) found no treasures of past civilizations when uncovering footings of a former structure during construction. Coal-dale is planning a separate high school on four acres of land directly across the street. Carman, Smithville, and Covenant Teachers' College are also experiencing growth.

As boards and education committees prayerfully search the landscape for Reformed and well-qualified new teachers, they will thankfully note the graduates of Covenant Teachers' College. We rejoice in its need to expand its staff.

We also congratulate Vanessa (Edmonton, grade 8) on saving her Credit Union prize for future training as a teacher! Interestingly, John A. Comenius (1592-1670) proposed that apprentice teachers first obtain a degree and then board with the headmaster. Teacher remuneration should be sufficient to give independence and should be "as much as a good man would desire, such as a bad man would despise, and enough to prevent a man of excellent gifts having reason to desert his appointment."

This column is supported by the Canadian Reformed Teachers Association of Ontario (CRTA-East). Please send responses to Arthur Kingma (editor) at abkingma@kwic.com or mail to Clarion.