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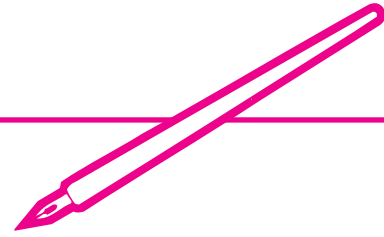


*Ministerial Conference of the
Canadian Reformed Ministers
in Western Canada*

Numbers

10:1-10

By J. De Jong



Church Order Changes?

In the January 19 issue of *Clarion* Rev. Jason Van Vliet (Lincoln) provided a brief preview of the major proposals to be dealt with at Synod 2001. His article refers to five proposals, but in perusing his list, I only found four mentioned. It seems as if one of the proposals from Regional Synod East got lost in the shuffle. However, that proposal may be considered the most far-reaching, since it is proposing a change to the Church Order, whereas the others concern questions of its application, such as the Subscription Form, our liturgical forms, and other liturgical matters. Rev. Van Vliet indicated that some discussion of the proposals to General Synod would be appreciated, and I gladly take my turn at the bat. However, in the interest of space I will restrict myself in this article to the proposal dealing with the Church Order. Perhaps we can return to the others (interesting enough!) at a later date.

Ministers from other federations can be received into our federation, and so accepted as bona fide ministers of the Word.

Regional Synod East's proposal

Regional Synod East is proposing to change Article 4 B 2 of the Church Order so that it would read as follows: "have served in churches with which the Canadian Reformed Churches do not maintain a sister-church relationship, *and have been well tested for a reasonable period of time* and examined by the classis in which they live, with due observance of the general ecclesiastical regulations adopted for that purpose; or" The italicized portion represents the addition as proposed by the synod. The ground for the decision is that this proposal is in line with the instruction of the Lord in 1 Timothy 5:22 (see also 1 Tim 3:10).

I am not sure of the background of this proposal, but I suspect that it arises out of the problems that some churches in the east have had with ministers that came into the federation from federations with which we have no sister church relationship. In more than one case, these situations soured over the years, and left a trail of difficulties and ill feelings. From there one can appreciate the desire to close what is seen as a gap in the Church Order, and increase the level of testing required for ministers coming into the federation from other (non-sister) churches. But is there a gap here? Or does this concern the way the Church Order is to be applied? I would argue the latter to be true.

Are they ministers?

When ministers of churches with which we have no sister church relationship come into the federation, how are they to be viewed? Whether they come with the congregation or a part of it, (which is always to be encouraged) or whether they come alone, they are *ministers*. Therefore, they fall under the category of those mentioned in Article 4 of the Church Order. This article stipulates that, with due observance of the general ecclesiastical regulations, ministers from other federations can be received into our federation, and so accepted as bona fide ministers of the Word, who then are recognized as such in all the churches of the federation.

The "general ecclesiastical regulations" mentioned in this article were established at General Synod Edmonton 1965. They require, among other things, that an examination be held for the incoming minister which would be at the level of our examinations as applied to graduates of the Theological College. Next to that an attestation concerning his conduct from the church from which he had seceded was required. In other words, the brothers of 1965 wanted to ensure that doctrinally the minister would be knowledgeable with regard to the teaching of Scripture and the confessions, and faithful in his conduct. Nothing was said about a period of testing, for it was assumed that the article in question concerns a minister who has received the training required for the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments, and who now only wishes to do this according to the Reformed order, in a more scriptural way than he had done before. Hence it was clear that no additional testing was needed.

So there was every reason to be careful of these travelling, self-made preachers.

The need for testing

However, should there not be place for a period of testing for such ministers? Or, as another possibility, would it not be better for them to attend the Theological College for a year or more in order to learn more about our Church Order, our history, and the unique blessings we have received through the church struggles of the past, and so on? Readers may recall that we do have such a provision in place for candidates who apply for eligibility for call, but who have not been trained at our own seminary. Synod Orangeville 1968 decided that in such cases, the candidate should

present a certificate stating that he has followed and/or completed a course of studies conforming with the training provided by the Theological College before he can be admitted to the ecclesiastical examinations.¹ In effect, this decision provided for a year or more of additional studies at the College if the training previously obtained was not considered sufficient. This provided an additional safeguard for the churches concerning those who are to be admitted to the ministry of the word and sacraments. However, this does not apply to ministers, but only candidates.

The provision concerning testing can be found in Article 7 of our Church Order, in which there is a reference to those who have "recently come to the confession of the Reformed Religion." In the revisions of the 1980s, a slight change of thought was brought into the article. The old Article 9, of which our Article 7 is the corresponding revision, made a reference to "novices, priests and monks and those who have left some sect . . ." The old article specified that these could not be admitted to the ministry except with great care and caution and not without having been tested for some time. If we recall the historical background to the article, then it becomes clear what the churches were concerned about with this provision. They were extremely hesitant to allow those who had acquired recognition for the performance of certain ministerial duties in

What's inside?

With this issue of *Clarion* it is clear that the upcoming Synod of Neerlandia is drawing near. The date of Synod is set for May 1, 2001. The editorial of Dr. J. De Jong examines a proposal by Regional Synod East to General Synod regarding a change to the Church Order. Dr. DeJong does not agree with the proposed change which deals with the testing of ministers who come into our federation from a church with which we do not maintain a sister-church relationship. In addition to this editorial, there is also the second part of a summary of the Report of the Committee for Contact with the Churches in the Americas. This part of the report addresses our relations with the RCUS, and it also examines the committee's request for a clarification of its mandate.

Regional Synod East also recommended to the upcoming General Synod that the mandate of the *Book of Praise* committee be expanded to include consideration of additional hymns. Speaking about the *Book of Praise*, we also note that the report for Synod regarding the United Reformed Churches also speaks about the possible formation of a common song book should union between our respective churches take place. Because of these things, Dr. R. Faber presents us with an article which describes the principles supporting the first psalter of the Reformed Churches. In this issue we have the first part of this article.

Rev. P.G. Feenstra presents his final article dealing with financial giving to the Lord. We have a report on a ministers' conference in Western Canada. Considering this includes ministers from deep in the States to southern Manitoba to northern British Columbia, it is clear that these men really enjoy getting together! This issue also contains three letters to the editor.

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other non-Reformed church groups (Rome and the Anabaptist sects, for the most part) to willy-nilly enter the ministry of Word and sacraments in the Reformed churches and perform ministerial duties similar to what they did before. In these cases, both lifestyle and doctrine and the level of training had to be carefully monitored. Often those who considered themselves to be the most “driven by the Spirit” were the ones who lacked proper knowledge of the church’s doctrine, and even sound common sense. So there was every reason to be careful of these travelling, self-made preachers.

A minister coming from say, the United Reformed Churches or the Free Reformed Church, could, I suspect, assume duties in our federation with a minimum of transition pains on both sides.

Therefore, Article 7 of our Church Order refers to those who have completed some ministerial training, but who have a decidedly *non-Reformed* background. That is different from the category as referred to in Article 4 B where ministers of a Reformed persuasion are treated.²

What form or shape would that testing of Article 7 take? Normally it was a period anywhere from six months to two years. It involved additional training in the history and background of the churches, and special sermon sessions with ministers of the classis who would then review and criticize a sermon proposal given by the applicant. Thus, some additional training would be given in the essentials of the ministry as it functions in a Reformed federation.³

The proposed revision

What do we see happening in the proposed revision? The criteria regarding testing applied to “recent converts” (Article 7) are now applied to all ordained ministers seeking admission into the federation, regardless of their background. In other words, we are raising the barrier to admission in order to be sure that those admitted can function in our federation without hindrance and to the well-being of the congregations they are called to serve. But the question remains: are we raising the bar too high?

I believe the latter to be the case.⁴ I also believe that the stipulations of 1965 are sufficient for these cases. The general ecclesiastical regulations of 1965 allow some flexibility in the way one deals with an incoming applicant to the ministry from outside our federation. Some could be given longer or shorter periods of testing, but some, specifically ministers, could be admitted to the ministry without undergoing any extra period of testing at all. If the amendment would be adopted, we would have the situation where all applicants to the ministry from outside the federation must necessarily be tested for a reasonable period of time.

Several problems arise in this approach. First, all may not need to be tested in a prolonged way, or even a reasonable way. (And what here is *reasonable*?) A minister coming from say, the United Reformed Churches or the Free Reformed Church, could, I suspect, assume duties in our federation with a minimum of transition pains on both sides. Other fraternal ministers “twice removed” from us may require a longer period of adjustment, with some testing. But does this need to be applied in every case?

A second difficulty concerns the form of testing to be applied. The revision makes no mention of this, and it is basically left to the assemblies themselves to determine what form the “period of testing” for these ministers will take. However, the historical background to the provision of Article 7 clearly points to the need for continued *academic* training (with its attending practical applications) regarding the proper way to administer word and sacrament in the Reformed church. And that is also the tenor of the decision made with respect to candidates seeking admission to the ministry who have been trained at other seminaries, as referred to earlier.

Some conclusions

In summary, I do not see the proposal of Regional Synod East as one that moves us in a positive direction. To my mind, it takes us away from the spirit and intent of Dort 1618-1619, and as churches we should as much as possible hold to the line of the fathers, and avoid adding new (perceived) barriers in our church life. To be sure, in cases where there is a measure of doubt concerning the qualifications and capability of a minister of Reformed background, a period of testing could conceivably be applied to him. But this concerns more a matter of the *application* of the Church Order, rather than the wording of the Church Order itself. Indeed, we always must be careful to adjust the Church Order on the basis of certain negative experiences that one or more churches may have had.


I do not see the proposal of Regional Synod East as one that moves us in a positive direction.

On this point, I believe the revisers of the 1980s captured the essential intent of the older Church Order, and redrafted it for our circumstances. That original intent should be respected. Let us not just change things for the sake of change, but be careful to be sure that change is implemented for the right reasons. Then we also keep the best foot forward, also in relation to the churches with whom we seek greater unity in the fellowship of a true and living faith.

¹Acts General Synod Orangeville 1968, Art. 171, p. 59

²Here with all respect I differ from the position taken by Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene who says concerning the brothers referred to in Article 7: “The person we are referring to here is the one mentioned in Art. 4 B 2.” See W.W.J. Van Oene, *With Common Consent. A Practical Guide to the Use of the Church Order in the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg: Premier, 1990), p.43. It seems to me that the “recent convert” of Article 7 is a figure one more step removed from proximity to the Reformed confession relative to the figure mentioned in Article 4 B 2. The history of the interpretation of Article 4 B (the old Article 5) also refers to ministers of the *Reformed* persuasion, see H. Bouma, *Kerkorde van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1983), I-Art. 9 1-3.

³F.L. Bos *De orde der kerk*, (’s Gravenhage: Uitgeverij Guido de Brès, 1950), p.47. Bos refers to the decision of a regional synod in Dort 1627, which specified a period of one year before church membership would be granted, and thereafter a period of two years “in training” before being admitted to the ecclesiastical examinations.

⁴Perhaps I may refer to a previous article of mine: “On receiving ministers from non-sister churches” *Clarion*, Vol 41 (1992) 139-140. In the same volume, Rev. Van Oene also defends the sufficiency of the rules of Synod Edmonton, 1965, cf. p. 142, 258. 

Worshipping the Lord through our financial gifts (Part 2)

The model for giving

By P.G. Feenstra

Last time we noted how the financial giving of the Macedonian churches was motivated by the grace of the Lord. The exemplary behaviour of the Macedonian churches had its roots in and was far surpassed by the ultimate example of gracious giving as seen in the earthly ministry of our Lord and Saviour. Paul says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

Christ became poor so that we might be rich.

Christ's poverty

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is infinitely rich in the presence of his Father willingly and voluntarily became poor at his incarnation. Jesus was born in a very humble setting, having a cattle trough as a bed, and being born to parents who were far from rich. He left the wealth of heaven behind to dwell in the poverty of a world under the dominion of sin. When he became a man he laid aside all his godly glory. He was willing to be treated in ways which are utterly and completely unthinkable. Christ who was rich became poor to such a radical degree. He was born into the world as a helpless and dependent baby. The eternal Son of God had to learn how to crawl, walk, talk, feed himself. He humbled himself and He did those things other children had to do too.

From rags to riches

Jesus selflessly made himself nothing to serve and to give his life as a ransom. He was willing to come down

and be the suffering servant; to be despised, rejected, misunderstood and mistreated. Christ became poor so that we might be rich. The Son of God laid aside his divine glory and subjected himself to extreme poverty for our sake. He made us rich by taking the credit and debit cards of our sins and all the outstanding bills of our transgression and paying for them in full. He took upon himself the very heavy debt of our sins so that He might cancel the bond which stood against us. Through Christ we receive adoption as sons and daughters of the living God. As children He allows us to share in the inheritance of eternal glory.

This gracious work of our Lord Jesus Christ must drive us to our knees in praise and open our hearts and hands to each other. Those who know how Christ gave himself to us must give themselves to the Lord and to the needs of his people.

The task of deacons

We are not in the same circumstances as the Macedonians or the Corinthians. Today deacons, in their ministry of mercy, are to encourage the congregation to keep themselves focussed on the grace of God in their giving. That's why a deacon must "hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience" (1 Tim 3:9). He must have this doctrine straight so that he can teach the congregation to view giving from the right perspective.

Deacons are given to us to equip us for a very important part of our worship of God. Their entire ministry is to reflect the grace, mercy and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus gave himself to the most powerful and gracious work of saving those who had become completely destitute. The deacons, through

the ministry of mercy, display the riches we have in Christ. Every time they stand up to collect they set before you the gospel of Christ's incarnation, "though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich." This is how deacons are to enter the homes of the congregation and speak about their work.

The way we use our money, our time and our talents is always a spiritual act; it is an act of worship. Our willingness and our attitude in giving for the church budget but also for the work of the deacons is a reflection of what lives in our hearts, and how we have given ourselves to the Lord. It shows whether we have truly understood to live by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The deacons, through the ministry of mercy, display the riches we have in Christ.

Enhancing God's honour in giving

Christian offerings for the poor have a place in every worship service. Ministers of the Word do well to direct the congregation to the connection between their giving and the grace of God in Christ. For example he may introduce it as follows:


1. "Let us worship the Lord by offering to Him of our financial resources. As we give let us remember this word of Scripture, "He who has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor" (Prov 22:9).
2. "With glad and generous hearts, let us now present unto the Lord our

financial offerings for the care of others in need.”

3. “In praise of our God who prospers our work and who daily attends us with his goodness and mercy let us present our offerings for the assistance of others in need.”
4. “You now receive the opportunity to offer unto the Lord your financial gifts. Let us acknowledge in our giving that we are returning to the Lord what belongs to Him. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness

thereof; the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps 24:1).

The preceding is only a small sampling of the many ways in which the offering can be highlighted as an integral part of how we are to worship the Lord through Christian offerings for the poor. It serves a better purpose than negatively lecturing the congregation for their failure to give when the funds of the deacons are low and the church budget is not being met.

May the sincerity of our love for the God who gave us everything in Christ be reflected in our generosity and eagerness to give for the needs of others. Let us support the ministry of the Word and the ministry of mercy with glad and generous hearts. Let every one of us be a source of encouragement and help to others, giving evidence of God’s grace in us. As you excel in everything, see that you excel in this work of grace also (2 Cor 8:7). 

A Psalm of Praise

Ye holy Angels bright,
Which stand before God’s throne,
And dwell in glorious light,
Praise ye the Lord each one.
You there so nigh
Are much more meet
Than we the feet,
For things so high.

You blessed souls at rest
That see your Saviour’s face,
Whose glory, even the least,
Is far above our grace;
God’s praises sound,
As in his sight
With sweet delight
You do abound.

All nations of the earth,
Extol the world’s great King;
With melody and mirth
His glorious praises sing.
For he still reigns;
And will bring low
The proudest foe
That him disdains.

Sing forth Jehovah’s praise,
Ye saints that on him call;
Magnify him always,
His holy churches all.
In him rejoice;
And there proclaim
His Holy Name
With sounding voice.

My soul, bear thou thy part!
Triumph in God above!
With a well-tuned heart
Sing thou the songs of love.
Thou art his own
Whose precious blood,
Shed for thy good,
His love made known.

Though human help depart
And flesh draw near to dust,
Let Faith keep up my heart
To love God true and just;
And all my days
Let no disease
Cause me to cease
His joyful praise.

Though sin would make me doubt,
And fill my soul with fears,
Though God seem to shut out
My daily cries and tears,
By no such frost
Of sad delays
Let thy sweet praise
Be nipped and lost.

Away, distrustful care!
I have thy promise, Lord.
To banish all despair,
I have thy oath and word.
And therefore I
Shall see thy face,
And there thy grace
Shall magnify.

Though sin and death conspire
To rob thee of thy praise,
Still towards thee I’ll aspire,
And thou dull hearts canst raise.
Open thy door;
And when grim death
Shall stop this breath
I’ll praise thee more.

With thy triumphant flock
Then I shall numbered be;
Built on the eternal rock
His glory we shall see.
The heavens so high
With praise shall ring.
And all shall sing
In harmony.

The sun is but a spark
From the eternal light;
Its brightest beams are dark
To that most glorious sight.
There the whole Chore
With one accord
Shall praise the Lord
For evermore.

Richard Baxter (1615-1691)

Report Synod Neerlandia of the Committee for Contact with the Churches in the Americas (CCCA)(Part 2)

By R. Aasman

C. Subcommittee for Contact with the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

The members of the committee for contact with the RCUS are Rev. J. Moesker, Rev. K. Jonker, Mr. W. Gortemaker and Mr. A. Poppe. Synod Fergus mandated the committee to make a closer investigation on the matters of admittance to the Lord's Supper, Sunday observance, the doctrine of the Church, erasure and the position of the CRCNA among the NAPARC churches.

“The procedure of examining guests seeking admission to the table in the RCUS clearly shows that the RCUS does not have an open but a fenced Table.”

The Lord's Supper

The committee learned the following about the RCUS practice of admitting guests to the Lord's table:

The RCUS doesn't require an attestation from guests, but Elders will usually conduct an examination of prospective guests. Agreement was expressed with J. Murray's article on restricted communion (see *Collected Writings* Vol 2 p.381ff). On page 383 Murray writes: “It seems utterly unreasonable to leave the matter [= participating in the Lord's Supper celebration] entirely to the conscience of the person concerned, when this is not done and should not be done in the case of the members of the congregation.”

This led the committee to conclude the following: “The procedure of examining

guests seeking admission to the table in the RCUS clearly shows that the RCUS does not have an open but a fenced Table . . . we believe that the Lord's Supper is guarded in the RCUS in a manner consistent with Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 30, Question and Answer 82.”

Sunday observance

The more recently instituted RCUS churches tend to have two worships per Sunday, whereas the older congregations tend to have only one service. The committee observes the following: Having only one Worship Service per Sunday has been a long tradition within the RCUS. Since the Bible doesn't say that people have to go to church twice, the important question for them is, where do you draw the line?

However, the RCUS has a statement about profaning the Sunday in its constitution. Article 180 of their “Church Order” reads: “The Lord's Day (Sunday) shall be kept a holy day, devoted to the public worship of the Lord, to reading the Holy Scriptures, to private devotions, and to works of love and mercy . . .”

We found that there is awareness in the RCUS that they should not be complacent about how to observe the Lord's Day. Overall the RCUS is less strict on this point, but in its teaching and preaching it strongly emphasizes worship. On Sundays people should use their time for the Lord. We witnessed that this teaching is given. The profaning of the Lord's Day is addressed and if members do not attend church regularly, they will be disciplined.

The recommendation of our committee on this point is: “That the matter of Sunday observance has been sufficiently discussed and cannot be a bar to ecclesiastical fellowship.”

The doctrine of the church

The committee was mandated to examine and discuss the RCUS's doctrine of the church. The committee makes the following points:

We feel, though, that the danger of separating the visible and the invisible church is not always avoided. Then one speaks about the pluriformity or the multiformity of the church; the latter term is used in their Church Unity paper. We warned against this danger of denominationalism, the danger of ignoring the mandate of the Lord to express the unity of faith.

The RCUS does not want to do away with the distinction visible/invisible to avoid the impression that they would claim to be the only true church. Furthermore, we could witness the strong emphasis within the RCUS regarding organic union.

Erasure can be compared with the Canadian Reformed practice of the public announcement regarding the withdrawal of a member by his/her actions.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the RCUS church “concept” differs somewhat from ours. This is an area, as has been acknowledged before, about which we need to continue to listen to one

another, since both churches want to base their approach on Scriptures. And both churches strongly fight independentism and synodicalism. It must also be emphasized that the RCUS practices confessional membership.

The committee concludes: "While terminology may differ and practices vary, we conclude that the doctrine of the church in the RCUS is in agreement with the Reformed confessions."

Erasure

Erasure is a form of discipline and excommunication besides the regular excommunication. The RCUS emphasizes the same principle as our churches: church members should not withdraw from the church. However in the case that a person cannot be reached anymore, formal discipline can no longer take place. Erasure, therefore, is the means to declare such a member outside of the body of Christ. The committee states the following:

Erasure can be compared with the Canadian Reformed practice of the public announcement regarding the withdrawal of a member by his/her actions. However, in the RCUS the element of discipline is more strongly emphasized in cases of erasure. The member who is erased cannot be readmitted unless he has received restoration.

Understandably, the committee recommends to Synod: "That the concept of erasure has been satisfactorily clarified."

Membership in NAPARC

NAPARC is an acronym that is heard from time to time in our churches. It stands for North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. The RCUS is a member of NAPARC. The concern of Synod Fergus was the fact that the Christian Reformed Church had membership in NAPARC as well. This concern is clarified by the committee report:

With strong support from the OPC but with CRCNA opposed, the RCUS became a member of NAPARC in 1994/1995. This council of churches in Northern America has existed for some 25 years. Its stated goal is "to promote greater spiritual unity among the member churches in view of organic union." The RCUS pursues this goal with vigour in the midst of this council.

At the moment the CRCNA is suspended as member due to the

CRC's deviating position regarding Holy Scripture, in particular concerning issues like the position of women. The suspension of the CRCNA from NAPARC was an action in which the RCUS played an important role.

The recommendation of the committee is to regard the RCUS's membership in NAPARC as no hindrance to our relationship with the RCUS.

"We recommend that the Canadian Reformed Churches enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Church in the United States under the adopted rules."

Federation or merger

The RCUS asked our committee the question: "Do we have the desire that the RCUS become Canadian Reformed?" The response of the committee is as follows:

We envisage that the RCUS remains a separate federation in the US (see "Hamburg" report p.5/6).

We are also of the opinion that this matter of federative organization within Canada and the United States needs to be considered in view of our developing relations with the URCNA churches.

Recommendation

Since the RCUS stands on the firm basis of Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity, the committee recommends to the Synod of Neerlandia: "We recommend that the Canadian Reformed Churches enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Church in the United States under the adopted rules."

D. Clarification on overall mandate

Synod gave specified instructions to the Committee for Contact with the Churches in the Americas concerning the contact with ERQ, OPC and RCUS. A subcommittee was designated to deal with each of the three contacts. Each subcommittee had its own meetings throughout the past three years. To fulfill the overall mandate the CCCA met yearly to keep each other informed. Each subcommittee prepared its own report, in the form of recommendations.



Called to the church at Smithville, Ontario:

Rev. W.B. Slomp

of Neerlandia, Alberta.

The intention of working together as three subcommittees under one umbrella committee is to have a united and consistent approach to our contacts with different churches in the Americas.

The committee raises a number of questions for Synod Neerlandia:

1. Why is the contact with the Orthodox Christian Reformed, United Reformed Churches of North America and the Free Reformed Churches of North America not under the umbrella of the CCCA? Synod Fergus gave no reason justifying why they should not have been a subcommittee of the CCCA.
2. To this point our contact has largely been with churches in North America. In July 2000 the missionary churches in Brazil formed a federation of churches. Is it our responsibility as Committee to seek contact with them? Who of the CCCA would be responsible for this, since Synod Fergus specifically assigned who would be in each subcommittee? Is it our responsibility to visit these churches?
3. 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 the other members who are not part of that subcommittee?
4. Since the ERQ, OPC and RCUS are involved in NAPARC, and obviously see the benefit of it, we request permission to send an observer to a future meeting of NAPARC who would be mandated to report on the character and the usefulness of joining this organization.



The Reformers on Psalms and Hymns in Public Worship (Part 1)

By R. Faber

Introduction

Recent developments suggest that the selection of psalms and hymns in the *Book of Praise* may be re-evaluated in the near future. In the process towards union with the United Reformed Churches, an important step is adopting a common song-book for use in worship services. Also, within the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches, there is a desire to increase the number of hymns. The upcoming general synod will be requested to broaden the mandate of the committee for the *Book of Praise*, to include evaluating proposals for additional hymns.

“Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your hearts.”

The recent experience of the Dutch sister-churches reminds us that differences of opinion may arise when psalters undergo revision. It will be beneficial, therefore, to have a clear understanding of the Reformed criteria for selecting psalms and hymns. In fact, regardless of these developments, the inherent importance of congregational singing requires that all believers grasp its function. Singing is integral to public worship, and like the offering of public prayers and alms-giving warrants conscious exercise.

Roman Catholic influence

At the turn of the sixteenth century, the manner of public worship re-

flected Roman Catholic theology. The teaching of works-righteousness caused the liturgy to contribute to the merit earned by humans. Since the priest’s daily sacrifice was considered crucial to human salvation, the omission of even one word from the mass was considered a grave sin. This over-estimation of external features meant that singing acquired a sacred quality. There was a superstition that the performance of song was bound up with the salvation earned in the mass. As a result, the ritual chanting of the Psalms in Latin – unintelligible even to many who performed them – gave the impression of magic, and so reinforced the formalism of the mass.

The Reformers

It was in revising the mass that the Reformers examined the role of congregational singing. They viewed psalms and hymns from the perspective of the teaching that true worship is based on God’s grace in Christ to humanity. This doctrine denies that the liturgy of itself merits anything, suppresses the role of outward features, and rejects ornateness that draws attention away from the proclamation of the Gospel. In going back to Scripture and the practices of the early church, the Reformers sought to recover all the elements of true worship, especially preaching the Word, giving Christian alms, celebrating the Lord’s Supper, and offering public prayers. They compared the role of singing in the Old Testament with that in the New, and read about worship in the age of the apostles and church fathers. In this return to the sources, the Reformers found Ephesians 5:18-20 especially useful, for it is both concise and complete: “be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another

in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your hearts, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.”

As the Reformation developed, the mass gave way to the preaching of the Word and celebration of the Lord’s Supper; the introduction of metrical psalms and hymns also indicated a reforming congregation. Replacing the rote songs of the mass with psalm-singing, congregations renewed the exercise of personal faith in God through public praise, and practiced the corporate worship of the covenant community.

An examination of the surviving psalms, hymns, and chorales would reveal much about the nature of Reformed worship in the sixteenth century. Of greater relevance, however, are the criteria which the Reformers employed in compiling the psalters used in congregational worship. Of course, the principles that supported the introduction of the new psalters reflect the broader doctrinal concerns of the Reformation, but they also helped restore to the liturgy the important role of congregational singing. And since these principles are drawn from Scripture, they are not restricted to a particular time or culture, but remain valuable to the church of all ages, including the Reformed churches of the twenty-first century.

The purpose of this article is to describe briefly what four leading Reformers advised about compiling psalms and hymns, and to summarize the principles underlying congregational singing in the churches of the Reformation. In conclusion, we shall list the Reformed criteria for selecting psalms and hymns.

Huldrych Zwingli

Of the major Reformers Huldrych Zwingli reacted most radically to the performance of song in the Romanist mass. Though a talented musician and author of several hymns, he did not advocate singing by the congregation. Indeed, the Zurich church-order of his day prohibits both organ-playing and congregational singing during the worship services. To be fair, Zwingli did not object to singing per se, but he was convinced that the reforming congregations needed to unlearn several Romanist heresies first. He did allow responsive recitation by men and women during the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and the congregation spoke the Apostles' Creed in unison. And Zwingli did not criticize the public singing that was taking place in Strasbourg. He simply felt that the Zurich believers were not ready for it, and it was not until 1598, well after Zwingli's death, that the city's churches resounded with song and music.

At the heart of Zwingli's reaction was the conviction that the Romanist church had replaced the Word of God with the words of man. Zwingli held that preaching should be central in the worship service. The words of man to God are vain; the Word of God to man is a primary means of grace. Therefore using congregational song to enhance or to frame the proclamation of the Gospel would be Romanist. Instead, the Bible and the preaching should inform every aspect of the liturgy. The involvement of the congregation in the lessons, prayers, and recitations is only a way to God's Word. Zwingli argued that if Scripture is neither the basis nor goal of public singing, then singing should be abolished.

.....
*True worship comes from
the heart.*
.....

Zwingli also responded to the external display of piety associated with the performance of songs in the Romanist mass. He opposed the mindless chanting of texts and the superstitious singing of passages in Latin. When people do not seek to know the text of the song they are singing, he said, they cannot have their hearts directed to God, but must be concerned with their behaviour before fellow humans. In the *Sixty-seven Theses* that advanced the reform in Switzerland he writes, "those

who act in order that they may be seen by men and secure praise during their lifetime are hypocrites. It must therefore follow that those who call on God in spirit and truth should do so without great publicity (44, 45)." From this reasoning he concludes: "choral or spoken church services that are performed without true intent but only for reward are carried out either for the sake of reputation or for profit (46)." True worship is a matter of the heart, and it is in this way that Zwingli interprets the phrase "making melody with your hearts" in Ephesians 5:19. Zwingli even interprets the context of Colossians 3:16 ("sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God") as referring to private, not corporate worship.

While these views are somewhat extreme, they should be seen in light of the circumstances of the time. Moreover, as we shall see, Zwingli does share with the other Reformers several important premises of public worship. These are that the Word of God permeates every aspect of the liturgy; that worship should be done in simplicity, and not for display; and, that congregational singing must come from the heart. Indeed, for Zwingli true worship is much more than giving expression with one's mouth; it is the giving of one's heart.

Martin Luther

Less radical than Zwingli in revising the mass, Martin Luther initially hesitated to reform the liturgy. While he knew that the heresy of the mass as sacrifice offered by humans had infused the singing with undue merit, he preferred to correct its meaning than to change its external form. Luther also was careful not to be moved by radicals seeking to introduce new features simply for their novelty. And in order not to rattle the faith of people in this time of reform, he differed with Anabaptists wishing to abolish the Romanist liturgy altogether. Luther's attitude explains to some extent why the liturgy of the Lutheran churches developed differently from those of other

.....
*Proclaiming
the Gospel in song.*
.....

Protestant churches. Yet the changes he made to public worship in general,

and to congregational singing in particular, influenced also the worship in Reformed churches.

Luther's primary concern in reforming the church was to restore the preaching of the Word, and he subjected even congregational singing to this goal. In criticizing the Romanist mass, he said, "when God's Word is not preached, one had better neither sing nor read, or even come together."¹ Luther defines the place of the Bible in congregational singing as follows: "the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely by proclaiming the Word of God through music."² For this reason Luther disapproved of songs drawn from the experiences and writings of men; they tend not to point to the Bible. Moreover, he thought, human compositions may lead to the belief that mortals of themselves can offer worship in spirit and truth. Thus, only the Bible determines the role of singing in public worship, and it is the only criterion for compiling psalms and hymns.

Psalm-singing is not the offering of good works, but the sacrifice of thanksgiving for grace received.

More specifically, Luther held that just as every sermon points to the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospel, so too congregational singing should proclaim the Saviour. In the preface to the *Wittenberg Hymnal* (1524), to which he contributed 24 compositions, Luther writes: "we may now boast that Christ is our praise and song and say with St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 2, that we know nothing to sing or say, save Jesus Christ our Saviour."³ It is well-known that Luther interpreted the book of Psalms in light of Christ's work of salvation; similarly, he understood the singing of psalms as pointing to Him. And just as prayers are offered in the name of the Lord Jesus (John 16:23), so too songs are performed in his name. Luther supported this Christo-centric emphasis in psalm-singing by referring to the already-cited Ephesians 5:20 ("giving thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ"), and to Colossians 3:17: "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Therefore, in addition to the Psalms of David, Luther wished

“Were Not God with Us at this Time”

(Psalm 124)

by Martin Luther, *1523 Hymnal of Eight* (tr. G. MacDonald)

Were God not with us at this time,
Israel must loud declare it,
Were God not with us at this time,
We should have now despair-ed;
For we are such a little flock,
Despised by such a crowd of folk,
Who all do set upon us.

'Gainst us so angry is their mood,
If God had giv'n them tether,
Us they had swallowed where we stood,
Body and soul together.
We were like drowning men, like those
Above whose heads the waters close.
And sweep them down with fury.

Thank God their throat he did not yet
Let swallow though it gaped;
As from the snare the bird doth flit,
So is our soul escaped.
The snare's in two, and we are through;
The name of God it standeth true,
The God of earth and heaven.

that congregations would sing hymns based on the revelation of the New Testament. And he thus promoted versification of the songs of Mary (Luke 1:46-55), Zechariah (Luke 1:68-79), and Simeon (Luke 2:29-32). Whereas the Psalms of the Old Testament are prophetic, the New Testament passages convey the fulfillment of prophecies. For this reason, too, Luther deemed the Nicene creed suitable for congregational singing: although not a passage of Scripture, it expresses the substance of the entire Gospel.

Psalm-singing is the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

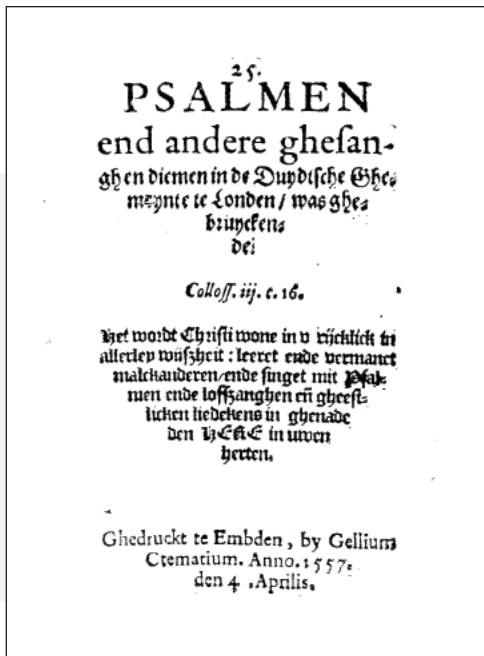
Like Zwingli, Luther reviewed public worship in light of the struggle against the Romanist teaching that one can obtain salvation by performing good works. For him, this meant rejecting any notion of righteousness ob-

tained through the “good work” of worshipful singing. Public singing must reflect the Gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone. Therefore Luther removed the chants, choral songs, and other aspects of the Romanist liturgy that suggested one could obtain grace simply by performing them. Communal song was to be divested of its falsely based sacred status. Like the preaching of the Word and the use of the sacraments, congregational singing should turn attention away from deeds of man to the deeds of God.

Thus Luther repudiated singing not only as an act whereby the performer gains in the estimation of God, but also as an act whereby the performer obtains a sense of personal satisfaction. For Luther, congregational singing does not express human emotions, but a message, and that is God's message of salvation by grace alone. Any emotions that do arise from singing must come from the faith grounded in the biblical text of that song, and not from the performance of it. For

congregational singing is the response to the mercy of God as revealed in the Gospel and as illustrated in the sacraments. After all, faith comes only from hearing the Word proclaimed, and faith in turn evokes praise to God in song. Thus, contrary to the Romanist view, psalm-singing is not the offering of good works, but the sacrifice of thanksgiving for grace received. Singing regains its legitimate place in corporate worship as an act of self-denial, as a sacrifice of the natural man and the adoption of the new life in the Spirit.

In accordance with these principles, Luther first expressed his wish for a vernacular hymn-book thus: “to follow the example of the prophets and the ancient fathers of the church, and to compose psalms for the people [in the vernacular], that is, spiritual songs, so that the Word of God may be among the people also in the form of music.”⁴ The biblical basis and content of the first collection of eight hymns published in 1523 is reflected in the title, “some



Title page of a Dutch psalter used in the London refugee churches.

Christian hymns, canticles, and Psalms made according to the pure Word of God, from Holy Scripture." Thereafter Luther went on to compose some thirty chorales based upon the book of Psalms. Yet he also composed a number of festal hymns for special events in the liturgical year, especially those commemorating the acts of the Lord Jesus Christ, such as Christmas, Good Friday, and Pentecost.

Besides the biblical content of the hymn-book, Luther argues for its didactic function. Placing the Bible in the

mouths of believers through song serves to implant the Word of God in heart and mind. The Bible text from which Luther argues that public singing should help to instruct in the faith is 1 Corinthians 14:26, in which the apostle Paul exhorts the churches that "all things be done for edification," including congregational singing. Since psalm-singing serves to edify believers, the content of the songs should be the Word of God, in all its clarity and simplicity. While the Latin versions of the metrical psalms were unintelligible to most, the new

songs in the vernacular would draw attention to the text.

Indeed, Luther's attitude towards the text of the metrical psalms was similar to that of the German translation of the Bible. He said: "only the simplest and most common words should be used for singing; at the same time, however, they should be pure and apt; and further, the sense should be clear and as close as possible to the Psalm."⁵ He also agreed that those who turn the Psalms into verse "need a free hand here: maintain the sense, but don't cling to the words; [rather] translate them with other appropriate words." The text should be as literal as possible and as free as is necessary. The music to which the psalm is sung should carry the message of the text; musical notation should be direct and uncomplicated. In this way, Luther envisaged that the youth would first learn the songs in school, teach them to their parents in the home, and in due time congregations would sing in public worship.

¹Concerning the Order of Public Worship (1523), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 53 (ed., U. Leupold; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 11.

²Preface to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae Iucundae* (1538), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 53, 323.

³Preface to the Wittenberg Hymnal (1524), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 53, 316.

⁴Letter to George Spalatin (1523), in *Luther's Works*, vol. 49 (ed. G. Kroedel. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 68.

⁵*Luther's Works*, vol. 49, 69.



THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

Students who are graduating with a B.A. degree (or its equivalent)

and are interested in pursuing further studies at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches should contact the registrar with regard to the requirements for application. Applicants should agree with the basis of the College, which is the infallible Word of God as confessed in the *Three Forms of Unity*. Formal requests for admission, with accompanying documentation, should be in by May 31, 2000.

High school graduates

who are considering the study of theology at the Theological College are also requested to contact the registrar for information concerning the B.A. program which provides the best preparation for their future study. The B.A. degree required for admission includes courses in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, History, English and Philosophy.

Dr. C. Van Dam, Registrar

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College website: www.canrc.org/college

Ministerial Conference of the Canadian Reformed Ministers in Western Canada on December 6 and 7, 2000

It was a beautiful morning in December as we drove to Chilliwack for the 2000 Canadian Reformed Ministerial of Western Canada. Twenty-four ministers were present. All of them were hale and hearty, although a few were still suffering from the after-effects of a Regional Synod that ended late the night before.

The Rev. M.H. VanLuik as convenor welcomed all of the brothers, proposed that Hymn 15 be sung, read from Romans 10 and led in prayer.

Developments in preaching

After the opening exercises the Rev. D. Moes was given the opportunity to make his presentation on "The Dutch Connection: Recent Developments in Homiletics." It was a hi-tech approach making use of MS PowerPoint. He began with giving us a brief historical survey on preaching developments in the Netherlands since 1989 and then sketched the background against which preaching takes place. Some new emphases on a Reformed vision of preaching were also presented. Among these we have a new stress on the work of Holy Spirit, especially as that has been introduced by C. Trimp. Further elaboration has taken place on this by C.J. deRuijter and Jos Douma.

The listener

Another new emphasis has to do with the listener. C. Trimp says that God not only speaks to man but also about man. This speaking can be compared to a love letter. Various images of the listener were presented. Who is the listener? He or she is someone who is searching for God, as well as at times he or she moves away from God as they feel assaulted by trials and temptations.

The preacher

From the listener, Rev. Moes went on to deal with the preacher. He brought out the fact that the preacher needs to identify with the values, norms and attitudes of his hearers. The preacher needs to realize that he is a role model to the congregation and has to be seen as empathetic, accepting and authentic. In the past the stress was on the office of the preacher and the person of the preacher was often overlooked. His spirituality is an important element.

The preacher needs to identify with the values, norms and attitudes of his hearers.

Often spirituality is determined by two factors: how you think about God and how you fellowship with God. In this connection Jos Douma spends some time on Luther's triplet – oratio, meditatio, tenacio (prayer, meditation and temptations.) He also deals with the various types of meditation. He sees the preacher primarily as a witness. He has to personally know God. At the same time, the preacher is a mystic because he seeks God in all things. As well, he is a "mystagogue" which means that he has to pass on the mystery of life.

What is a sermon?

A sermon has often been called an explanation and application of the text. C. Trimp has critiqued this distinction extensively. He finds that the explanation-application schema is part of an objective and subjective duality. For Trimp, a sermon is an applicatory

covenantal address that should completely resonate in the key of an address. Douma finds the explanation-application approach to be theologically dangerous, hermeneutically incorrect, and homiletically unfruitful. His new definition is that a sermon is a "neues Wort" or "a new Word" in which the sermon becomes a living, recognizable, surprising . . . Word. According to Douma, "preaching is the art of performing texts."

After the presentation a discussion followed in which quite a few questions were asked and comments were made. Rev. Moes was thanked for his very thorough and extensive presentation.

Addiction

After lunch and some exercise, the conference was called to order again. Rev. M.H. VanLuik was given the opportunity to introduce the topic of "Addiction." Some of the points made include:

- Sexual addiction is also prevalent. Romance addiction is common. In addition, many other areas of life also display addictive behaviour.
- Addiction is often hard to spot, since the addict lives a double life. Coupled with this is the fact that addicts often feel as if they are insane, because their body is sending them mixed signals. Some are binge drinkers, others have specific times or places where they drink. An addiction will progress over time, and will become evident eventually. Addicts tend to be "good liars."
- Not all addictions are publicly viewed in the same way. Some are viewed as acceptable (smoking, caffeine, workaholic); others as unacceptable (drinking, alcohol, sexual perversion).

- Addiction may be defined as “any substance, activity or state of mind which takes a person captive so that it becomes the centre of one’s life, affecting their relationships, their work and their faith life in a detrimental way.”
- Is addiction a disease? The disease model may best capture what happens in the case of an addiction. Yet this model falls short, for it is not possible to overcome an addiction simply by medical means. Such persons also need to take responsibility for their addiction. Genetics do not make one an addict; however, genetic make-up is a factor leading some to have an adverse effect to various substances. Addiction is thus a moral issue. People who decide to solve their problems by using alcohol are making a moral decision. After a while the addiction takes over their lives.
- The turning point seems to come about when people see that the addiction is really adversely affecting them. They need to take personal responsibility for their addiction.
- In communities where drinking is allowed, the rule of thumb should be: no more than two drinks every twenty-four hours and that drinking be limited to four days a week.
- Pointers to addiction: why is he always late? Why is he bringing home less money? Why are her grades suffering? Have their friends changed? Do they have mood changes? Have you caught them telling lies? Have they had recent problems with the law? Are they restless? Have they become bloated?
- The brain never forgets an addiction. The recovered addict always has to be on his or her guard.
- The church community has to be there for the alcoholic. Yet often the church community does not understand them and a judgmental attitude may be present. Friends and office bearers need to get involved. Three or four visits are not enough. There needs to be constant and ongoing help.
- Some stress responsible drinking; whereas, AA has a slogan, “one drink is too many; a thousand are not enough.”
- As office bearers the preaching is a prime means to expose wrong behaviour, dispense grace and bring comfort. It does not mean that we can avoid working in the trenches. The communion of saints also needs to be activated.

Discussion

Questions were asked about whether the disease model should be used, about the environment that may lead to addiction problems and whether there is a common denominator in all addictions, about an annotated bibliography, about office bearers and smoking, about addiction and treatment, about being held accountable.

People who decide to solve their problems by using alcohol are making a moral decision.

After this discussion the Rev. VanLuik is thanked for his presentation, which was well received and pertinent to the pastoral work being done in many of our churches.

Towards the end of the afternoon we traveled to the VanLuik residence, where some of the wives had gathered and we enjoyed a time of fellowship and appetizers. Thereafter, we went back to the church and had a sumptuous meal prepared by Lisa Stikma and her helpers. Music and mutual sharing followed.

On Thursday, December 7 we met again. The meeting was opened with the singing of Psalm 8; Colossians 1 was read. Rev. VanLuik as convener led in opening prayer. The expenses for this conference were added up and divided equally among all the participants.

Nature and grace dualism

Next, the Rev. E. Kampen was given the opportunity to make his presentation

on “Nature and Grace Dualism in Sixteenth Century Anabaptism.” He mentioned that Guido de Brès identified at least fifteen different types of Anabaptists. He also referred to the fact that modern Anabaptism often presents a sanitized version of its history and thus makes little mention of what happened at Munster. In particular, he traced for us how a nature and grace dualism was prevalent in 16th century Anabaptism.

In this dualism, nature is viewed in terms of the fallen world. The old creation is seen as so totally spoiled that it needs to be thrown away. At the same time the redeeming work of Christ has little or no effect on this world. The result is that Christians are urged to flee from the world.

Three areas

Our speaker then traced this dualism in three particular areas. The first area of investigation had to do with separation from the world. At Munster, this separation led to violence; however, in most cases it manifests itself as a more moderate separation from the world.

Anabaptism has its origin in Switzerland. There the forerunners of Anabaptism distanced themselves from their earlier hero and mentor, Ulrich Zwingli. People like Grebel, Blaurock and others became impatient with Zwingli’s pace of reform.

At the second disputation in Zurich, Zwingli wanted to take a slower, methodical approach to reforming the church. Grebel and others wanted greater haste. Zwingli wanted to avoid aggravating the emperor and the other authorities. Grebel and his followers wanted to pursue a church free from



Ministerial in session.



Rev. F. Dong and Rev. D. Poppe.



Colleagues enjoying a meal.

any and all state control, the so-called Free Church idea.

Grebel deemed any relationship between church and state to be improper. The state represents the world and the church can have no place in it. He was not willing to accept the status quo. For him and his followers any relationship between church and state was considered wrong.

Whereas the Anabaptists stressed the need for a new creation, the Reformers stressed the biblical teaching of a renewed creation.

This view of the state led to the creation of a separate existence. It comes out in the Schleithem Confession where separation from the world is elaborated on and Christian involvement in civic affairs are deplored. Withdrawal from the world is the only proper believer response.

An example of this separation is to be seen in Jacob Hutter and the founding of

Hutterite colonies, called "provisional paradises in the wilderness of the world." The imminent return of Christ was tied to the creation of these colonies.

Another area investigated had to do with the ascetic lifestyle as promoted by Anabaptism. Holiness is a very strong emphasis in this movement, as is active discipleship.

The Reformation had to do with both immoral living and wrong doctrine. Luther and Calvin often complained about corruption in the church. Over against this the Anabaptists came across as those who were the only ones who were really concerned with reforming the church. Holiness even took precedence over doctrine. Work also was seen as penitential and morally corrective.

The final area of investigation had to do with the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and his birth. Some leaders in the movement (eg. Melchior Hoffman, Bernard Rothmann, Dirk Philips, Menno Simons) denied that Jesus was of human flesh and claimed that He possessed a new flesh.

As for the Reformers, they did not write off the world and its structures. The world might be under the curse but this

did not disqualify it. Whereas the Anabaptists stressed the need for a new creation, the Reformers stressed the biblical teaching of a renewed creation.

Another discussion

After the presentation, a discussion was held. It focused on the Anabaptist view of the world and its origin. Is there a connection between Anabaptism and Gnosticism? Should Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, the last paragraph, not be modified to refer to certain Anabaptists and not all? (This has been done in Article 34 when there was a linguistic revision of the Belgic Confession.) Should there not be a standing committee appointed by General Synod to deal with ethical issues and is the refusal to appoint such a committee not an Anabaptistic approach? Do Canadian Reformed Churches as churches not engaged in world flight? Does world flight not lead to corruption in the church seeing that recent developments in Hutterite colonies in Alberta have uncovered many cases of sexual abuse? What about the ideas of Al Wolters with respect to regaining and redeeming creation? Why is there not more political involvement on the part of our Canadian Reformed community?

The best time to deal with sin is when it is still green.

New hope in mental health

Next on the Conference agenda was an entirely new and previously unannounced matter. It had to do with the area of mental health. The Synergy Group of Canada, represented by Anthony F. Stephan and Noelle Jellison, informed us about a new and very effective approach to the treatment of various mental difficulties (bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, depression, ADD/ADHD, obsessive compulsive disorder, autism). It involves a special nutritional supplement.

For more information on this matter our readers are urged to go to www.truehopewest.com. CTV, as well as the Discovery Channel, have previously reported on this development. Further research has been done and is still being done by the University of Calgary, financed by the Government of Alberta.

Our readers who are suffering from mental difficulties or who have family, friends or neighbours who are, should be aware of this promising new

development. They should check out the above-mentioned web site.

Church discipline

After lunch, the Rev. R. Aasman introduced the topic "The Application of Church Discipline Relating to Repeated Admonitions." He pointed out that an absence of church discipline is not something to be proud of, but a lamentable development. It shows a lack of love and biblical faithfulness.

His focus was on how do we look at the sinner and approach him, especially in connection with the matter of admonition. Someone is living in sin, so how we deal with it? In the time of the Reformation there were two approaches. One approach stressed immediate expulsion. People, especially office bearers, are upset and demand quick action. "He or she has stepped out of line and we are going to get him or her." Another approach is to work with the sinner and to persevere and be persistent with the ambition to lead them to see their sin, to confess it and be restored. Reference is made to the connection between Matthew 18:15-20 and the previous verses 10-14 about the lost sheep. Discipline is an exercise of love.

It is also a work of the congregation and every church member. Discipline should not simply be viewed as the business of the elders. Members need from time to time to rebuke one another in love. A number of specific Bible passages were cited.

Matthew 18

Attention was paid next to the Church Order and what it says about



Mrs. H. Van Popta, Mrs. and Rev. W.W.J. VanOene.

church discipline. The Church Order makes special mention of the rule of Matthew 18. This rule was examined in detail. Rev. Aasman critiques the idea that these words only apply to Christ's immediate disciples. He also mentions that the wording deals with both those who have been sinned against directly and sin in general.

The best time to deal with sin is when it is still green. The sinner needs friends who see what he is doing and confront him as soon as possible. If it continues until finally the elders or the minister catch on, it will often be too late. A good congregation may still suffer from a lack of mutual discipline. This has to be taught also to the young in the catechism classes. They need to approach wayward members not in a

spirit of superiority but out of love and in humility.


Church discipline has to do with repetition and patience. It usually happens when, as our Lord says, a person "refuses to listen." In Matthew 18 the Lord mentions witnesses. These are not witnesses to the original sin but to a subsequent hardening of heart. Mistakes that are made in the process include doing nothing, fast tracking, or dragging it out.

The speaker encouraged the brothers to be faithful in their work of dealing with delinquent members. After the speech, discussion followed. Questions had to do with the discipline of non-communicant members: age, approach, attitude; the presence of addictions and the failure of discipline; the time frame of Matthew 18; and withdrawal and discipline.

Future plans

After thanking the speaker, a discussion took place about the topics, time, and place of the next Conference. It will be held, the Lord willing, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, coinciding most likely with the next Regional Synod. The brothers were thanked for their attendance and participation. The general feeling was that it was great to meet together as colleagues, to share, to learn, to joke and to encourage one another in word and prayer. The presence of so many new faces around the table added a special dimension to the gathering.

After the singing of Psalm 121, the Rev. J. Visscher led in prayer and the 2000 Western Canada Ministerial Conference was history.

J. Visscher, reporter 



Ministers' wives joining for supper.

LETTERS 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:

The candid letter my young brother Chris de Boer wrote to the editor of *Clarion* (January 19) struck me as having been written for the very purpose of drawing out reactions from his readers. If so, he has succeeded. For one might ask why Br. de Boer felt the need to justify his choice of an institute for post-secondary education. Did his friends and acquaintances solicit his reason(s) for attending a secular university rather than a "Christian" one (see letter referred to)? Or was the letter written as a public account for the choice made, a disclosure, as it were, before the forum of *Clarion*?

The letter rightly reminds us that one encounters "antithesis" in secular (humanistic) universities and colleges. We as Reformed readers generally associate "antithesis" with the seed of the woman versus seed of the serpent, Jacob versus Esau, the camp of the saints and the beloved city versus Gog and Magog (Rev 20:8,9), et cetera.

Abraham Kuyper used "antithesis" to express the contrast between leftists and rightists in his political career. Philosophers Kant and Hegel had their own individual ideas about "antithesis."

We further learn that at Trinity Western University is found "synthesis," apparently a worse abomination than "antithesis" since studying at a secular university is to be preferred. While I admire my brother's evidently sincere and cautious concern (it takes a man to speak up for his convictions), I would nonetheless appreciate some clarification at this point. For instance, what is the essence of this signaled "synthesis" at Trinity Western? What does Br. de Boer specifically refer to here? Are we talking about a combining of often varied and diverse ideas into one coherent or consistent complex? What, in the area of ideas and beliefs, is being synthesized at "Trinity?" Does the "synthesis" that allegedly takes place there perhaps combine the position of those ignoring or rejecting the message of the

Gospel with the position of those embracing this message? For in the domain of ideas, *synthesis* (which combines different and even antithetical ideas) ultimately transcends the thesis and the antithesis, does it not?

At any rate, the reader gets the impression that it is better or preferable to be exposed to the "antithesis" of a secular university than being contaminated by the (so-called) synthesis of a "Christian" university. If this interpretation is correct, why not let one's bright Reformed light shine in a "Christian" university which recognizes the inerrancy of God's Word, a university where one's Scriptural arguments will be respectfully listened to? The other choice inevitably invites the predicament of constantly having to swim upstream in a secular university, which (politely at best) relegates Scripture to the realm of myth. How do I know? When I was quite a bit younger I swam through three of them, upstream. At that time Trinity Western was still in its infancy, a two-year college.

Wishing my brother continued spiritual fortitude and vigilance in his academic pursuit,

Rienk Koat

Dear Editor

I could not agree more with the statement made by Mr. Chris deBoer in his letter to the editor (*Clarion*, Jan 19, 2001), that deciding whether or not to attend a Christian university is a difficult decision to make. Any student (or parents) who must pay the incredible tuition for four years of Christian education has to make many sacrifices. Yet, in retrospect, most students will be quick to tell you that not a penny was wasted for such an enriching education.

In fairness to Mr. deBoer, his concern is not with money, but with the fact that he will constantly be challenged to discern the validity and truth of professor's statements at a Christian university such as Trinity Western (TWU). This concern seems somewhat strange, for are we not encouraged by Jesus Christ

to "be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves?" (Matt 10:16). Is not a key component of the Christian faith the ability and necessity to discern truth from lie? As a student at TWU, I have many times been challenged to question my beliefs. This, however, has not caused me to stray from the Canadian Reformed church, but has helped to strengthen my faith. If we seek wisdom and counsel from God, is there really any reason to consider a Christian university "very dangerous?"

In regards to Mr. deBoer's question of where he can find a "true Christian university" I would argue that the answer may be subjective. If by "true Christian" he means Reformed, then yes, his search may be in vain. If, however, we utilize the apostle Paul's definition of a Christian, then his search may not be so fruitless. For, Paul says that if you "confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9 – see also verses 10-13). Everyday that I attend Trinity Western I may confess that openly and joyfully. I would suggest that Mr. deBoer does not have this freedom where he attends. I pity him in his predicament.

Rachel Pruim

Dear Editor,

In his letter to the editor, published in the January 19 edition of *Clarion*, Chris deBoer of Langley, B.C. asks, "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?" Well, it's in Ancaster, Ontario, and it's called Redeemer University College. Redeemer offers university level education from a Reformed Christian perspective and grants recognized degrees in arts and sciences. Redeemer would welcome students like Mr. deBoer, and others, who truly seek to serve the Lord in a Biblical manner.

A. Ben Harsevoort,
Stoney Creek, Ontario