

Clarion

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JUNE 8, 2001



General Synod Neerlandia

Numbers

10:1-10

Synod Neerlandia *2001*

By R. Aasman



Opening

On Tuesday, May 1, 2001, sixteen men were seated as delegates to General Synod Neerlandia of the Canadian Reformed Churches. They came from East and West. From the East came four ministers: J. de Gelder, Cl. Stam, G.Ph. van Popta and J. VanVliet, and four elders: J. Jonker, G.J. Nordeman, P. Oosterhoff and B. Poort. From the West came four ministers: R. Aasman, J. Huijgen, E. Kampen and A.J. Pol, and four elders: P. DeBoer, W. Gortemaker, E. Kampen and W. VanAssen. These sixteen men elected the following to serve as the

moderamen for Synod: Rev. Cl. Stam as chairman, Rev. R. Aasman as vice-chairman, Rev. E. Kampen as first clerk, and Rev. G.Ph. van Popta as second clerk. Rev. W.B. Slomp was appointed as advisor to Synod.

Four committees were quickly set up and the agenda items were divided among the committees. It was also decided, in accordance with the Guidelines of Synod, that material which came in late was inadmissible.

The chairman, Rev. Cl. Stam proposed that each day of Synod would begin and end with a meditation on a Scripture passage. The chairman would

begin every day with a meditation on the Book of Ecclesiastes, and the other members of Synod would take their turn at evening, using whatever passage they desired. This proved to be a wonderful part of our daily meetings. All the brothers were deeply edified by these meditations. Many expressed the hope that subsequent Synods would maintain this practice.

A new professor

On the first day of Synod, a decision was made regarding the upcoming vacancy in the New Testament department at the Theological College of the



*Rev. G.H. Visscher:
new professor.*

Canadian Reformed Churches. Prof. J. Geertsema is retiring at the end of the current academic year. Synod decided to direct the Board of Governors to appoint Drs. Gerhard H. Visscher of Waterdown as Professor New Testament as of June 1, 2001. Rev. G.H. Visscher was informed of this decision. He arrived in Neerlandia a few days later. On Friday evening, he accepted this position. Great joy and thanksgiving was expressed that the Lord has provided us with a man who is well qualified for this position. It was also noted by Synod that Rev. G. H. Visscher is in the process of completing his doctoral studies at McMaster University in Hamilton.

Theological College

The Board of Governors presented a report that demonstrated how richly the Lord has blessed the work at the Theological College. Appreciation was expressed for the governors whose terms have expired. Appreciation was also expressed for the work of Prof. J. Geertsema who is retiring from his position as New Testament professor, and for Dr. J. Faber who has served faithfully on the Senate during his retirement years but now has asked to be released from this position. The Lord has blessed his College through the work of such faithful men! It was also noted with

great thankfulness that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have supported the Theological College with their financial contributions. Some discussion was held on the Pastoral Training Program at the College. The Board was mandated to present proposals regarding this Program to the next General Synod.

Church relations

L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ)

The Committee for Contact with the ERQ (CCERQ) served Synod with a report. Synod thanked the committee for its work and noted with gratitude that the ERQ is faithful to the Word of God and brings Reformed confessions and Church Order to expression in its own context. Progress has obviously been made in developing a relationship between our respective churches. It was decided to reappoint the CCERQ to continue to develop closer ties with the ERQ with the goal of establishing Ecclesiastical Fellowship hopefully by 2004. This will have to be decided by Synod 2004. More discussions would focus particularly on the matters of pulpit supervision, fencing of the Lord's Supper and confessional accountability. Our churches are also encouraged to continue supporting the ERQ financially when the need arises.

Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

From the report of the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad (CRCA) Synod learned that the FRCA are faithful to the Word of God, the Confessions and the Church Order. The FRCA are thanked for their generous support of the Theological College. Synod expressed gratitude that the Lord



Rev. W. Slomp: chairman of convening church.



*Committee at work –
l to r: Rev. J. de Gelder,
Mr. W. VanAssen,
Rev. R. Aasman,
Mr. W. Gortemaker.*

guided the FRCA during the struggles surrounding the teachings of Rev. F.J. van Hulst, which led to a split in the Church of Launceston, Tasmania, and the deposition of Rev. van Hulst. It was decided to continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FRCA under the adopted rules.

Free Church of Scotland (FCS)

Since the previous General Synod, a split had taken place within the FCS which resulted in two churches: Free Church of Scotland (Majority) and Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). The report of the CRCA made clear that there are questions about whether matters were dealt with fairly within the FCS before the secession took place. It was decided to continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCS (Majority) under the adopted rules, while continuing to monitor the situation with the FCS (Continuing) in order to come to greater clarity on the matter. The CRCA was also mandated to communicate to our churches the need for prayerful support for the situation within the FCS. The FCS (Majority) and the FCS (Continuing) will also be informed that they have our prayerful support and that it is our hope that they will, by God's grace, come to reconciliation.

Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)

From the report of the CRCA, Synod learned that the FRCSA are faithful to the Word of God, the Confessions and the Church Order. It was decided to continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FRCSA under the adopted rules.

Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK)

Great regret was expressed that our churches have not had meaningful contact with the PCK. There have been no responses to the enquiries by the CRCA, and as a result, the committee could not learn anything further on the PCK's practices regarding fencing the Lord's Supper and the matter of confessional membership. Since both CanRC and PCK delegates will be present, the Lord willing, at the upcoming ICRC meeting in Philadelphia, Synod recommended that a meeting take place at the ICRC with a view to opening the lines of communication between our respective churches. It was decided to continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the PCK under the adopted rules.

Independent Presbyterian Church in Mexico (IPCM)

Regional Synod East overtured Synod to investigate the IPCM with a view to establishing relations with these churches. Many of our churches are familiar with these Mexican

churches because of Dr. C. VanDam's visits to and reports on the Juan Calvino Seminary. Based on the material presented, Synod decided that further investigation of the IPCM was justified. Gratitude was expressed to God for allowing us to find and interact with these churches.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

Some very significant developments took place regarding the OPC. In the first place, there was the matter of Rev. B. R. Hofford declaring ministers and elders in the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic of the OPC to be "false shepherds." Synod rejected unambiguously such a general disqualification of office bearers in the OPC, and Synod decided to send the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic a letter of regret that this matter was not dealt with correctly and in a timely manner. In the second place, Synod Neerlandia considered that Synod Fergus failed to recognize that in the "proposed agreement" between the Committee for Contact with the OPC and the Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC, significant progress had been made in coming to the mutual understanding that the eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to



Rev. R. Stienstra: URCNA.

Jesus Christ (in accordance with article 29 BC) and move to Phase 2, which would include such things as accepting each other's attestations, admitting each other's members to the Lord's Supper and opening pulpits to each other's ministers. This is seen as the natural progression to full federative unity between our churches. Local congregations are encouraged to implement Phase 2, although this may vary from place to place, depending on how far local relations have progressed between CanRC and URCNA. Committees will also be set up to deal with such matters as church order and theological education. Furthermore, our *Book of Praise* Committee was mandated to deal with the matter of a new songbook. In Synod's decision it was made clear that moving into Phase 2 and activating these committees can only take place if the URCNA decide at their Synod Escondido (June 2001) to commit themselves to working toward federative unity with the CanRC. Rev. R. Stienstra, seated at Synod as a delegate from the URCNA, expressed his joy and thankfulness in light of this decision.

Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN)

A number of concerns were raised by the CRCA and local churches about recent developments within the GKN that appear to take these churches away "from a long and well worn old

the Lord's Supper. Therefore Synod Neerlandia returned to the original "proposed agreement" presented to Synod Fergus (taking away the changes of Synod Fergus) and decided to establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules upon the OPC's acceptance of the "proposed agreement." This decision was made unanimously. Rev. G.I. Williamson who was present as a delegate from the OPC responded with moving words of gratitude for this historic moment.

Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil (IRB)

The IRB are in part the fruit of the missionary work of our churches. They stand on the same basis as the CanRC. It was decided to offer a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship to the IRB. Great joy was expressed that the IRB was constituted on July 5, 2000 and that now the door is opened to have a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

Synod acknowledged with thankfulness that the RCUS, standing on the basis of Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity, is a faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was noted that the Lord's Supper is properly supervised in the RCUS and that while there are some differences as to the way the Sunday is observed, this cannot be a bar to Ecclesiastical Fellowship. It was decided to enter into Ecclesiastical

Fellowship with the RCUS under the adopted rules, in response to the request of the RCUS for this Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Rev. G. Syms who was seated as delegate from the RCUS spoke words of appreciation at this wonderful, historic moment.

United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)

Synod decided to recognize the URCNA as true churches of our Lord

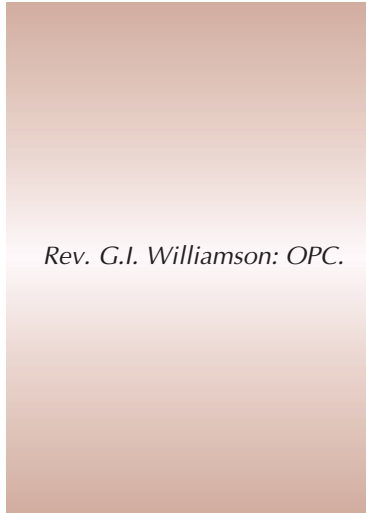


Rev. G. Syms: RCUS.

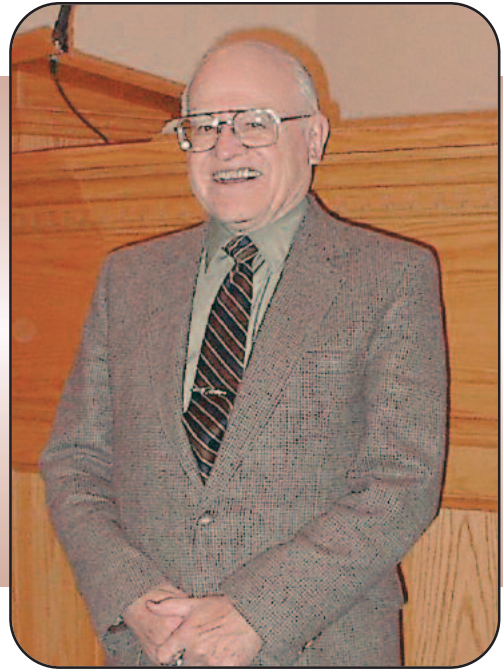
Reformed path.” There is the matter of an alternate Form for the Solemnization of Marriage, which raised the question whether there is a weakening of the Scriptural language concerning the matter of “obey and submit.” There is also the matter of army chaplains being allowed to administer the Lord’s Supper in crisis and war zones to soldiers who are not from the GKN. Synod decided to instruct the CRCA to study the Marriage Form of Synod Leusden and to make a more thorough study of the concerns mentioned in the CRCA’s report in order to determine whether the GKN are truly deviating from their Reformed basis in the Word of God as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. Synod also made clear that in the future, if any churches become convinced of a problem within the GKN, they should make their own careful examination and then present their findings to the CRCA. It was decided to continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GKN under the adopted rules.

Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)

The Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU) informed Synod that the FRCNA have received the CanRC into what is called “limited contact” in accordance with their guidelines. (For information on what is meant by “limited contact”



Rev. G.I. Williamson: OPC.



see Appendix 15 of the CPEU report that has been sent out to the churches). Synod considered that this was a significant and positive development. This should lead to a relationship of sending delegates to each other’s Synods and exchanging the Acts of our respective Synods. Synod decided to continue dialogue with the FRCNA with a view to promoting federative

unity, discussing whatever obstacles there might be on this path. It should be noted that Rev. L. Bilkes of the FRCNA was present one afternoon and spoke to Synod on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches.

Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC)

The CPEU recommended to Synod that it be mandated to have greater



Moderamen of synod – Rev. G.Ph. van Popta, second clerk; Rev. R. Aasman, vice-chairman; Rev. Cl. Stam, chairman; Rev. E. Kampen, first clerk.



*Chairman
Rev. Cl. Stam
at work.*

These guidelines can be found in Section E of the committee's report.

International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

Synod Fergus made a recommendation regarding a change to the Constitution of the ICRC. The CRCA, which sends delegates to the ICRC meetings, requested Synod Neerlandia to reconsider and withdraw this proposed change or to give clarification of this proposal. Basically the concern of Synod Fergus was that a change in the Constitution of the ICRC was a watering down of its basis. Further study and reflection demonstrated that this was not the case at all. Thus, Synod Neerlandia withdrew the proposed change. It was also decided to continue membership in the ICRC.

Other churches

It was decided to gather more information about the Pilgrim Reformed Churches in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia which have requested contact with our churches. In discussions with the CRCA, it will be pointed out to these churches that their primary contact should be with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia who are geographically much closer. Relations with some other churches who have contacted us were also discussed.

contact with the OCRC. It was noted that the OCRC have the same basis as the CanRC. Synod decided that the CPEU attend OCRC meetings when invited, with a view to promoting greater understanding and exploring possibilities of federative unity. Local churches were also encouraged to initiate contact with local OCRC.

CPEU guidelines

It was decided to commend the CPEU's guidelines re federative unity for use within our churches. The CPEU had been mandated by Synod Fergus to develop a set of guidelines to ensure a proper dovetailing of local discussions with discussions at the federative level.



*Rev. R. Stienstra and
Rev. W. Pols
from the URC.*

Mandate for the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA)

It was brought to the attention of Synod that some clarity had to be given to the mandate of the CCCA. It was decided that the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU), which is dealing with the URCNA, would not come under the umbrella of the CCCA because the CPEU is working for the specific purpose of seeking federative unity between the CanRC and the URCNA. The mandate of the CCCA is to continue contact with churches throughout the Americas with whom we have Ecclesiastical Fellowship, to investigate all new requests within the Americas for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, to submit one report to the churches and the next Synod (in case a subcommittee has a different opinion it can submit a minority report), to contact the Korean Presbyterian Churches in North America, and to send an observer to NAPARC at the CCCA's discretion. The CCCA will have nine men on its committee and will di-

vide all the work relating to churches in the Americas amongst as many subcommittees as necessary.

Delegates to General Synod

Regional Synod West overtured Synod to increase future delegations to General Synods by having each Regional Synod delegate six ministers and six elders. This overture was denied because there was no evidence that an increase in delegates would allow the work of Synod to be dealt with more efficiently.

Bible translation

It was decided to continue a Committee on Bible Translation particularly with a view to monitoring developments of any significant changes that should appear in the NIV text. The committee is also to monitor developments in the field of Bible translation.

Subscription Form

Overtures from Regional Synods East and West requested standard subscription forms to be used by the churches. Synod considered that it was desirable

for the churches to use identical forms for subscription. Accordingly, the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* was instructed to prepare standardized forms to be used in local councils/consistories, classes, and for professors of theology.

Church Order change

Regional Synod East proposed to change Article 4B2 of the Church Order as follows (the italicized words are the change): "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 . . ." The concern of Regional Synod was that ministers coming from outside our federation be tested in accordance with 1 Timothy 3:10. Synod agreed with this request and instructed the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* to insert the change.



Brothers at Synod. – Top Row (l to r): Mr. G.J. Nordeman, Rev. A.J. Pol, Mr. W. Gortemaker, Rev. J. DeGelder, Mr. B. Poort, Mr. P. DeBoer, Rev. J. Huijgen; Middle Row: Mr. P. Oosterhoff, Rev. W.B. Slomp, Mr. W. VanAssen, Mr. E. Kampen, Rev. J. VanVliet, Mr. J. Jonker; Front Row: Rev. G.Ph. VanPopta, Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. Cl. Stam, Rev. G.H. Visscher, Rev. E. Kampen.

Ordination forms

In agreement with a request from Regional Synod West, it was decided to change the answers in the Forms for Ordination from “I do with all my heart” to “I do.” The rationale for this was to have consistency in the various forms and not give the impression that vows for ordination carry greater weight than other vows in the church. Synod mandated the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* to incorporate this change in the *Book of Praise*.

Overture re Hymns

Regional Synod East overtured Synod to mandate the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* the task of evaluating hymns which are submitted by the churches for inclusion into the *Book of Praise*. In answer to this, Synod gave the committee the mandate to “receive submissions and proposals for additional hymns from the churches with

the reasons for their suitability, evaluate them in accordance with the requirements set out by General Synod Edmonton, 1965, and submit a selection to the churches prior to subsequent General Synods.” Synod also clarified the procedure to follow when churches would like to submit changes to the *Book of Praise*: submissions should be sent to the Standing Committee of the *Book of Praise*.

Women’s voting

If there was one discussion that generated a spirited discussion, then this was the one. An overture from Regional Synod East requested Synod to appoint a committee to revisit the matter of women’s voting rights and serve the churches with a report, taking into account reports and decisions from 1977-1998. Synod decided to deny this request on the basis that no new grounds were adduced to warrant revisiting this matter.

Other matters

There were other appeals, overtures and requests made to Synod. Not all are mentioned in this press release. The Acts should be published and distributed in a few months, and they will serve as the exhaustive and definitive record of the actions of Synod.

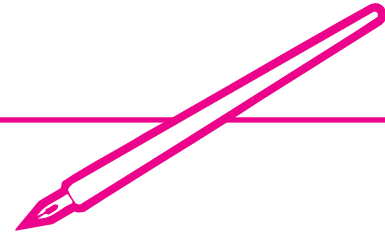
Closing

After exactly two weeks of meeting, Synod Neerlandia drew to a close. The meetings and discussions were carried out in a most brotherly manner. It was clear that a close bond developed between the brothers, and that to a certain extent, it was difficult to say goodbye to one another. We also experienced excellent hospitality from the brothers and sisters in Neerlandia. Synod Neerlandia is finished. May its decisions serve the churches well. Even more important, may they serve the glory of the Head of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ.



Audience before the opening of Synod.

By R. Aasman



Freedom of Religion

The role of the government

In article 36 of the Belgic Confession, we confess in connection with the civil government: “Their task of restraining and sustaining is not limited to the public order but includes the protection of the church and its ministry in order that the kingdom of Christ may come, the Word of the gospel may be preached everywhere, and God may be honoured and served by everyone, as He requires in His Word.” Our government, along with the courts of the country, has a duty laid upon it by God to sustain an environment in which the church of Jesus Christ may flourish. This is not an exaggerated statement. We read in Romans 13:1: “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” In fact, there are Christians who believe we should speak in stronger terms. They wish to state quite firmly that it is the task of the civil government to remove all idolatry and false worship, so that the kingdom of antichrist may be destroyed. Article 36 even used to state this. However, it is agreed that the civil government has the task to allow the church and all Christian activity to flourish without hindrance and fear of persecution.

The civil government has the task to allow the church and all Christian activity to flourish without hindrance and fear of persecution.

Sadly, in our country there is great cause for concern. We live in a postmodern era which is clearly being reflected in the laws of the land and the decisions of our courts. We have seen the legalization of abortion, easy divorce laws, the abolition of capital punishment, protection of alternate sexual behaviour, and so on. There is concern not only for the environment in which we live, but also for the freedom of religion. Just this morning (May 23), I read in a newspaper that a couple in P.E.I., who denied a homosexual couple the use of a Bed and Breakfast facility, is paying damages to the homosexual couple and closing down the B&B. Sometimes we wonder, what will the future hold for our churches who make clear statements about sinful sexual lifestyles? What about our Christian schools which would deny a practising homosexual from teaching? Thankfully we have the comfort that the Lord Jesus Christ continues to gather, defend and preserve his church. The future may not be easy, but it will be secure in our Lord.

Supreme Court of Canada

Recently, however, something happened which is very encouraging as far as religious freedom is concerned. On May 17, 2001, the Supreme Court of Canada made a decision (with only one dissenting vote), requiring the British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT) to approve Trinity Western University’s teacher certification program. As many of you will know, Trinity Western University (TWU) is located in Langley, B.C. It is a privately funded Christian liberal arts and sciences university with an enrollment near three thousand students.

In fact, the BCCT had relied on a caricature of what “Christian fundamentalists” must be like.

Back in 1996, the BCCT refused to approve TWU’s teacher education program. Obviously this was a serious blow to the education program because it jeopardized the careers of graduating students who needed teacher certification. But what was the BCCT’s problem? The heart of the matter was a document that students at the University sign. This document asked them, while studying at TWU, to respect standards that reflect biblically based values and a desire to foster a positive, caring learning environment. Students were asked to obey the law and conduct themselves as responsible citizens who contribute to the welfare of the greater community, obey Jesus’ commandment to love and respect others, and refrain from practices contrary to biblical teaching including drunkenness, swearing, pornography and extramarital sex including pre-marital sex, adultery and homosexual behaviour.

The BCCT argued that the agreement was discriminatory and might lead to TWU graduates discriminating against homosexual students in public school classrooms. For this reason the BCCT denied approval of the University’s teacher education program. The matter went to court. The lower courts in British Columbia accepted TWU’s argument that there was no basis whatsoever for the BCCT’s decision. The University’s policies clearly require students to show love and respect to everyone. It was noted in a *Globe and Mail* article that the BCCT had not done its homework to determine whether teachers graduating from TWU were engaged in discriminatory practices. In fact, the BCCT had relied on a caricature of what “Christian fundamentalists” must be like. This begs the question: who is being discriminatory?

Freedom of religion: At the heart of this challenge is the BCCT's disapproval of TWU's standard prohibiting homosexual behaviour, a standard that arises from our commitment to the orthodox Christian belief in marriage. For hundreds of years the belief in marriage between husband and wife has been completely lawful. Until now it has never occurred to anyone that Canadian citizens could be deprived of their rights based on this belief. Today, however, attempting to set a new direction, the BCCT is using its position of authority to bear down on people whose religious beliefs it does not prefer.

What's inside?

As promised in the previous issue, we have more information on Synod Neerlandia in this issue. In fact, we have the official Press Release. Included are a number of photographs taken during Synod. Apparently the vice-chairman had a new digital camera, and he was just itching to try it out. We reap the benefits.

At the time this issue was being put together, the Supreme Court of Canada made an important decision regarding the right of Trinity Western University to have an approved teacher education program. At the heart of the issue is this University's right to expect moral behaviour of its students in accordance with the Word of God. The editorial examines this decision and its implications for the freedom of religion.

In keeping with the time of year, the meditation by Rev. P. Aasman focuses on Pentecost and the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Rev. P.G. Feenstra continues his series of articles on the Providence of God. Rev. G. Nederveen continues his series of articles on Theonomy. We also have our regular column, Education Matters.

You will be pleased to note that Rev. J. de Gelder presents us with another Hiliter. He deftly takes us across our country, as well as Australia. It is interesting, and important, to see what is going on in our churches.

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After the court ruling, Dr. Safford wrote:

This decision protects the principles of liberty and respect as fundamental Canadian values. Everyone will benefit from the wisdom the Court has brought to this issue . . . It



students, is free to practise its religious beliefs. As a result, TWU plans to move ahead with implementation of the teacher certification year to begin in fall of 2002. The BCCT will have to cooperate – so says the top court of this country!

Stand on guard

The decision of the Supreme Court is most encouraging. At the same time, we must remain sober. The emphasis in the Supreme Court's decision rested on the fact that

there was no evidence of any discriminatory conduct by any graduate of TWU. A certain inference may be drawn from this: a Christian school may have its Christian standards so

The decision of the Supreme Court is most encouraging.

for . . . student who demonstrated an open homosexual lifestyle? Would the courts be favourable then? Let us not forget the unfavourable ruling of the Supreme Court in connection with King's University College of Edmonton which dismissed a homosexual employee.

Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:1, 2: "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." We must pray to the Lord for our government and courts. Pray that the Lord will guide them to uphold basic moral principles and to allow Christians to apply their beliefs in their daily walk of life. Our religious freedom is precious and it is vulnerable in this postmodernistic age. We are thankful for what we have. We pray that the Lord may maintain it.



*Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire.*

*Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.*

*Thy blessed unction from above
Is comfort, life, and fire of love.*

*Enable with perpetual light
The dullness of our blinded sight.*

*Anoint and cheer our soiled face
With the abundance of thy grace.*

*Keep far our foes, give peace at home:
Where thou art guide, no ill can come.*

*Teach us to know the Father, Son,
And thee of both to be but One,*

*That, through the ages all along,
This may be our endless song.*

*Praise to thy eternal merit,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

Latin; Tr. John Cosin, 1627

By P. Aasman

The Lord and Giver of Life

*And with that, he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."
(John 20:22)*

With the church of all ages, we confess the Holy Spirit as "the Lord and Giver of life" (Nicene Creed). Pentecost celebrates how the Lord of life gave life to the church.

What happened at Pentecost is similar to what happened on the sixth day of creation. In Genesis 2 we read, "Yahweh God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." It was not enough to fashion man from the elements that form the human body. That was only a clay vessel. For Adam to live, God had to breathe life into him. God had a big job for Adam and his offspring. He had created Adam to be his image so that he might discover and declare his glory in all creation. In order for him to begin this, God imparted to him the gift of life.

That gift of life is intimately connected to the Holy Spirit. The spirit that is in all living things is God's Spirit. In the book of Job, Elihu thinks that way about the spirit in a human being, for he says of God, "If it were his intention and he withdrew *his spirit* and breath, all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust" (Job 34:14). The spirit in us is *God's Spirit*. What Elihu applies to human beings, the Psalmist applies to all living things, for he describes the spring season as the sending forth of God's Spirit: "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104:30). That is why the church from very early on referred to the Holy Spirit as the Lord and Giver of life.


At Pentecost, the Lord of life exercised his power in the most wonderful way. Just as on the sixth day when Adam was but a lifeless vessel until the Lord of life gave him life, so the church

was like a lifeless vessel until the Lord of life breathed life into her. When Jesus died, the church had forsaken her faith. She did not believe in the Lord. Instead of going to the tomb to meet the risen Saviour on Sunday morning, they all mourned because He whom they had hoped would redeem Israel was dead, or so they thought. When told that Jesus was risen, they would not believe it. Thomas would not believe it for yet another week.

But when Jesus met the disciples, He greeted them and then He breathed on them, and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." He imparted to them the Lord of life. They were spiritually dead (they did not believe in Jesus), but Jesus needed them to live. He had a big job for them to do. He pointed to that in his first words to them: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so now I send you" (Jn 20:21). He wanted to send them out to bring the message that gives life to every nation on earth. In order that they might fulfil that mission, He gave them his Spirit. He

made them live. He breathed the Spirit on them.

But on Pentecost, that Spirit came mightily on God's people. Suddenly, the church was bursting with life. Right there on that day, the message of God's grace in Jesus Christ symbolically reached the ends of the world, because many visitors from distant nations were there in Jerusalem: they all heard the believers declaring the wonders of God in their own language. Peter, who two months earlier was so afraid to acknowledge Jesus that he swore he did not know him, now stood up and preached in the middle of the temple about the victory of Jesus Christ. The apostles became brave, fearless and powerful because they had been made alive by the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit who makes the church a living power in the world, by creating in us faith in Christ's victory, and confidence in his glory. May the Lord of life give life to his church so that she might fulfil her great calling for the salvation of our fellow man, and the glory of our God. 

Hymn 36:1

*He has come, the Holy Spirit!
Jesus left us not alone
When He went up to inherit
Might and glory on the throne,
For He sent the One He Promised:
Holy Spirit, Power of God.
Let us spread this truth abroad
And unceasingly declare it.
Let us now our voices raise:
To the Spirit we give praise.*

Book of Praise

Theonomy: What is there to Re-construct? (Part 2)

By G. Nederveen

In the first section I supplied the definitions relevant to theonomy, and the principal founders of Christian Reconstructionism. This was followed by an outline of the political agenda proposed by Gary North. In this second installment we will focus on the battle plan, the enemies, and the hermeneutic (i.e., principles of biblical interpretation) North suggests for reconstructing society.

Battle plan

What is North's solution to get Protestant groups to take God's law seriously? In *Conspiracy: A Biblical View* (= *Con.*: 1984), he unfolds his battle plan. He writes:

I propose a program. Some variant of this program must be adopted if we are to have any meaningful hope in recapturing the machinery of civil government, the media, and the educational institutions. It will be done. It has already begun. How long it will take is problematical. I think we will begin to see major victories before the year 2005. In two decades, our enemies will begin to feel the pressure; possibly sooner. . . . We need to be prepared to replace them in every area of life when the spiritual revival comes (144-5).

But, he warns, "There is no quick fix" (145).

For him, three basic ideas are crucial for the success of any religious, social, intellectual, and political movement: first, the doctrine of *predestination*; second, the doctrine of *law*; third, the doctrine of *inevitable victory* (*Backward Christian Soldiers* [= *BCS*; 1984], 30).

From the way I read him, North uses the word *predestination* in the sense of sovereignty and providence. "Without a doctrine of the comprehensive sovereignty of God, without a doctrine of a unique biblical law structure which can reconstruct the institutions of society, and without a doctrine of eschato-

logical victory, in time and on earth, the old fundamentalists were unable to exercise effective political leadership" (*BCS*, 31; cf. 267-8).

As more and more converts are added to the rolls of the churches, society becomes progressively sanctified.

According to North, old evangelical thinking has kept itself busy "saving men *out* of the world, but not training redeemed men to take responsibility *over* the world" (*BCS*, xi). The good news is: younger men will begin to become more consistent with their own theological presuppositions, and those who adopt the three crucial perspectives – predestination, biblical law, and eschatological optimism – will begin to dominate the moral majority movement (*BCS*, 31). What is needed is personal sanctification, i.e., "the progressive conformity of a person's life to the standards set forth by the Bible for ethics," but also 'social sanctification.' By that he means that when godly people begin to restructure their behaviour in terms of what the Bible requires, the world about them begins to change. As more and more converts are added to the rolls of the churches, society becomes progressively sanctified – set apart by God for his glory, just as He set apart Israel in Old Testament times (*BCS*, x).

Under North's plan, the goal is to learn what God requires of us as individuals and as society. In every area of life, people must first repent, and then return to their jobs as redeemed men, "to rebuild in terms of God's standard." Christians must reconstruct in everything. "Victory can be achieved only in terms of God's righteousness, God's

sacrifice at Calvary, and God's standards of righteousness for every realm of life" (*BCS*, 47-48). Victory is assured because Satan cannot win. Why not? Because he has denied God's sovereignty and disobeyed God's law. But Moses was told explicitly, God's blessings come only from obedience. "Satan will not win because he has abandoned God's tool of dominion, biblical law." Satan is not alive and well on planet earth – alive, yes, but not well (*BCS*, 48).

Enemies

Now, in case you are thinking that North is fighting unbelievers here, let me make clear that he sets his sight much broader. His bone of contention is just as much with those whom he calls Christian humanists. He considers them "zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge" (Rom 10:2) (*75 Bible Questions* [= *BQ*; 1984], 9).

"There is a war on," he writes in *75 Bible Questions*, "a war between Christianity and humanism." With the aid of seventy-five questions he seeks to expose what he considers the mistakes and outright lies of Christian humanism. By humanism he means the claim that God's laws and logic and autonomous man's laws and logic really are not in conflict (*BQ*, 1). "Humanism is Satan's most effective imitation of Christian culture" (*BCS*, 57). Too many Christians agree with the humanists. They are therefore theologically and intellectually compromised (*BQ*, 144).

Once again he makes his position very clear. "What I *am* saying," he writes, "is that anyone who rejects most of these seventy-five questions holds a *compromised* form of Christian doctrine which is incapable of successfully challenging secular humanism" (*BQ*, 3). Because Christians have held to humanist presuppositions in certain key areas, they have allowed the secular humanist to take over *by default* (*BQ*, 4). As a result,

people are being misinformed about the Bible in at least three areas: 1) the sovereignty of God, 2) the law of God, and 3) the kingdom of God (BQ, 6).

What Lloyd-Jones wants is simple: the triumph of irrelevance.

The most important question of human knowledge is this one: "By what standard?" (BCS, 67). I'm sure you will recognize that this was the title of Rushdoony's first book! In any case, on this score North has a bone to pick with the late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), whom he describes as an important advocate of Christian surrender to the world with his blueprint for "Christian inaction," or to be more precise, his blueprint for humanistic reformism (BCS, 70-71). One of North's main beefs with Lloyd-Jones is that the latter in an interview with *Christianity Today* (Feb 8, 1980), said:

You can't reform the world. That's why I disagree entirely with the "social and cultural mandate" teaching and its appeal to Genesis 1:28. It seems to me to forget completely the Fall. You can't Christianize the world. The end time is going to be like the time of the Flood. The condition of the modern world proves that what we must preach more than ever is "Escape from the wrath to come!" The situation is critical. I believe that Christian people – but not the church – should get involved in politics and in social affairs.

The Apocalypse alone can cure the world's ills (BCS, 74-76).

Comments North: "What he conveniently neglects . . . is that God gave the same cultural mandate to Noah, after the Flood (Gen 9:1-7). It should be obvious why Dr. Lloyd-Jones conveniently neglects this passage: "it spells the doom of his entire misinterpretation of the Bible" (BCS, 76).

Dr. Lloyd-Jones is further on record as saying:

I would argue that the Christian must of necessity have a profoundly pessimistic view of life in this world. Man is "in sin" and therefore you will never have a perfect society. The coming of Christ alone is going to produce that (BCS, 78).

North calls this the "counsel of despair, the psychology of defeat," and lashes out: "We must be pessimistic.

Why, he doesn't say; we just ought to be." North contends that by equating "Christianity" with "perfection," Lloyd-Jones emasculates applied Christianity. And he concludes: "What Lloyd-Jones wants is simple: the triumph of irrelevance. If he didn't want it, he wouldn't argue so vehemently for its inevitability, especially in the face of the biblical testimony favouring victory, in time and on earth – not perfection, but victory" (BCS, 79).

It is questionable whether Dr. Lloyd-Jones would have responded to these charges had he been alive when they were made. In any case, it is not wise on Gary North's part to vilify statements of someone who is dead. But I understand his intent. He wanted to expose the pessimistic view that the world is not getting a better place. For that view runs counter to Christian reconstruction thinking. They rather take the positive view. You cannot expect constant defeat to be God's training ground for total victory (BCS, 83). Pessimism erodes the incentives to create detailed alternatives to collapsing secularism (BCS, 86). The theology of pietism is the theology of external defeat (BCS, 90).

That is why North proposes a two-pronged and up-beat program. First, we need a *strategy of victory* – a general plan, including confidence of ultimate success. Second, we need *concrete tactics*, including an integrated, well-understood program for every sphere of human life. In short, we need a positive eschatology and a developed program of biblical law (BCS, 84).

Knowing that the best defense is a good offense, Christian Reconstruction must take the offensive and be governed by the vision that secular rulers and all who conspire against God and his law are evil and will eventually lose. We are righteous and will eventually win. God is on our side. We are stronger than our enemy because we are right (Con., 128).

What should that strategy be? At the very least, Reconstructionism ought to adopt as its political minimum, and non-negotiable demand: "My hand out of your wallet; your hand out of my wallet; no handouts from the government; and handcuffs for the thieves" (Con., 130-1). And, writes North: "The only thing that can defeat a bad idea is a good idea. We have the best ideas. We have the Bible, the U.S. Constitution, and an understanding of freedom. Freedom works. It produces abundance. Socialism produces poverty. It exists only because

Western capitalists and governments have subsidized it with taxpayer's money" (Con., 131).

Christ's victory over Satan and sin is in principle our personal and corporate victory over Satan and sin, in every area of life, including politics. Christianity is the *dominion* religion. It is not the power religion, nor is it the escape religion (Con., 138).

Biblical foundation

Let us now review some Bible passages North uses to substantiate his position.


Hermeneutic

"Let me ask you a question," North writes. And what a leading question it is! Listen to this. He asks: "When you hear the words, "the *principles* of the Bible," or "the *moral teachings* of the Bible," don't you **instinctively** [bold mine, GN] think to yourself, "the laws of the Bible?" "If the principles are binding, aren't they laws?" And he continues: "Isn't one of the most important aspects of secular humanism the attempt to substitute man's laws for God's laws?" (BQ, 87-88). Talk about leading the witness! But the stage has been set.

North proposes the following hermeneutic (i.e., principles of biblical interpretation) because he believes it was the one which Paul adopted in his epistles (BQ, 88)

- First, we must assert that all the revealed laws of God are always binding *in principle*, for they reflect his unchanging moral character.
- Second, we must admit that the *application* of some of God's laws have been changed by God as a result of Christ's death and resurrection.
- Third, we must affirm that unless the New Testament explicitly announces that the *former application* of a *still morally binding* law had been changed by God, we should still honour it in its Old Testament details.

The only thing that can defeat a bad idea is a good idea.

The fallout of this hermeneutic is clear from his treatment of certain Old Testament promises. In the next article we will look at several examples how this hermeneutic forms the foundation of theonomy thinking. 

The Gospel of God's Providence (Part 4)

By P.G. Feenstra

In previous articles we took note of what we confess concerning the providence of God. "We believe that this good God, after He had created all things, did not abandon them or give them up to fortune or chance, but that according to His holy will He so rules and governs them that in this world nothing happens without His direction" (Belgic Confession Article 13). The Lord gives to all life, breath, and all

Christ's redemption is of cosmic and universal significance.

things. In Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:25, 28). The LORD provides our food (Ps 145:15,16), directs our ways (Prov 20:24) and supplies us with all our material and spiritual needs (Phil 4:19).

Christ and providence

The Lord God carries out his providence through our Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God, through whom the world was made, upholds all things by the word of his power (Hebrews 1:3). "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth . . . All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Col 1:16,17). Christ is the One through whom all creation is preserved and governed. The laws of nature and the forces of nature are under his control. He is the power that holds and binds the entire universe together. You could say He is the glue keeping it all together. Without the binding power of Jesus Christ, the earth would burst at the seams and the heavens would split wide open.

Christ's redemption is of cosmic and universal significance. The cross at

Golgotha, which cancels the bond which stood against us sinners (Col 2:14), was not only erected for the inner peace of sinners' souls. Through Christ's death, the Lord is pleased to take hold of this world and settle everything into its rightful place. Christ did not find the creation repulsive or out of his realm. Sin brought chaos into the world. Through the blood of the Lamb this world is on its way from estrangement to restoration. The beginning of this renewal is seen within the church, among people who submit themselves to Christ's rule and government.

No self-designed plans

The Lord rules, governs and maintains everything by his providential hand. Acknowledging God's providential care we believe and confess that future events will only take place if the Lord wills. Thus the execution of God's plan must determine the manner in which we realize our own plans.

In the fourth chapter of his letter, James exhorts us to see the proper relationship between God's providence and our planning. He combats the attitude, whether done boastfully or in silence, which suggests we chart our own direction and make our own decisions. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city and spend a year there, buy and sell and make a profit'."

Those to whom James wrote, made their plans, presuming everything would go their way. These people chose their own time (today or tomorrow), their own location (we will go into such and such a town), their own timetable (and spend a year) and finally they chose their own operation (we will trade and make profit). Yet something is seriously amiss. They assume that they will be living tomorrow or be in good health the next week

or that the economy will cooperate with their plans. One thing is left out of the plan: the will and providence of the Lord. At very best it is planning that tags God on to add some validation. It is the sort of planning that thanks the Lord for blessing us as long as everything goes our way.

Not all planning is bad

Confessing God's providence, however, does not rule out human planning. The book of Proverbs, as well as other Bible books, set forth the wisdom of good planning. There is nothing wrong with having a strategy for the future. The question is: how do we make our plans? Are we controlled by God's sovereign will and his providence?

The Lord warns against the secular dreaming and manner of working that puts ourselves and our accomplishments at the centre of the universe. We get so preoccupied and absorbed with our own goals that we can't quit thinking about it while we are in church or stop talking about it once we get out of church. During the week we have no

If we ignore the providence of God in our plans we build them on quicksand.

time to "stop and smell the roses" which the Lord, in his providence, placed in his creation for our enjoyment. We will never become aware of how the heavens declare the glory of God and his firmament shows his handiwork if we remain engrossed in our own world. God's blueprint for living should not be replaced by our own design.

Showing our dependence upon God

We must live and act as those who are completely dependent on the Lord and live out of his hand, also in times of prosperity. If we ignore the providence of God in our plans we build them on quicksand. The Lord says, "You do not know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. You do not know whether you will be around long enough to see your business flourish or to enjoy years of retirement." God says to those who make self-designed plans, "Don't you know that I, in my providence, may demand your soul before this day is out" (Luke 12:20)?

The small print of life is in God's sovereign hand too. We may be full of energy with places to go and people to meet but the Lord can take us away suddenly – even in our teens. Every birthday celebration, every funeral you attend, every serious illness, and every time you sit down to plan, is a reminder from God that our life is governed and upheld by his providence and not by our foresight or good vision. Each year that is added to our earthly journey is a gift from God.

Following the Lord's design

A proper response to the gospel of God's providence is to repeat what James wrote, "Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that'" (4:15). As a child of God, I must realize that I am dependent on the will and providence of God every second of my life. It is the LORD who willed it that I woke up this morning. He upholds and governs my life and therefore I may begin each new day in his strength.

The book of Proverbs contains two relevant sayings in this regard: "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the LORD's counsel – that will stand" (19:21); "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes" (21:1). The king's heart – his entire being – his mind, his thoughts, his attitudes, his policies, his ability to write laws and edicts may make it seem like he is in charge, but the entire matter from start to finish rests in the Lord's hands. God is in charge, not world rulers or world economists. The Lord is able to turn the heart of the king


wherever He wills. In other words, once all has been said and done, after our plans have been hammered out – thought through, reworked, decided on, and distributed – it is ultimately his plan which will be carried out and established.

Confessing God's providence, the future should be the least of our worries.

The Lord willing

We need to start each day with the LORD and follow his design as laid out for us in Scripture. What we have in mind for the day will only be completed if God wills. As Reformed believers we have become accustomed to expressing this in a very visible way by appending the phrase "the Lord willing" or the Latin "*Deo volente*" to all our official notices. To express our complete dependence on the Lord by adding "the Lord willing" to our plans is a good practice. Yet it should never develop into a superstition or a commonplace expression that is void of meaning. It shouldn't serve as some sort of good-luck charm or gage by which we measure the faith and trust of others.

Confidence for the future

Since the Lord is in charge and will not let this world fall to ruin, we can be confident that He will fulfil his purpose with the world, in our own life and in that of our children. For this reason it is futile to worry about the future. Confessing God's providence, the future should be the least of our worries. The Lord, who takes care of the plant and animal world in such a wonderful way (Matt 6:28,29), will take care of his church, of our physical and financial needs, of our young people when they are out at night, of persecuted believers. Instead of worrying, seek God's kingdom and his righteousness and thank Him for his blessings and care. Believing God's providence, give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:18). Let your heart be filled with praise as you say, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits" (Ps 103:2). 



Called by the church at Smithers, British Columbia:

Rev. R.E. Pot

of Orangeville, Ontario.

• • •

Synod Neerlandia 2001 has appointed Rev. Gerhard H. Visscher, Th. Drs. pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington-Waterdown, as Professor of New Testament at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

• • •

Declined the call to Grand Rapids, Michigan:

Rev. R.J. Eikelboom

of Calgary, Alberta.

• • •

The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa informed us that they have admitted a Reformed church located in Springs (near Johannesburg) into their federation. The pastor of this church is Rev. R.J. Retief who was also granted ministerial status upon a successful colloquium doctum.

More information about the Free Reformed Church of South Africa can be found at www.vgk.org.za.

• • •

Change of Clerk and mailing address, Church at Chatham to:

Mr. Andy Vanderveen, clerk

29880 Jane Road

RR 5, Thamesville, ON

N0P 2K0

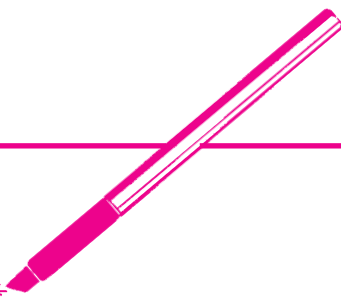
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THE HI-LITER

News from Here and There

By J. de Gelder



Niagara

The steady growth of the churches in the Niagara region has led to some interesting initiatives to deal with the consequences of this growth. The brothers and sisters in Smithville have discussed several possibilities. In the meantime they have gone to double services. In Lincoln, the council appointed an "expansion committee," while a group of members have formed an "institution committee." A harmonious cooperation between these two will be crucial, of course. The council wrote about that:

The possible institution of a church elsewhere is not the responsibility of council as such, but rather it is the responsibility of the members. And, if an initiative is taken towards institution, council will be duty bound to investigate and work with this initiative in all ways possible.

The council then goes on to explain that the institution of local churches is a scriptural concept. They continue:

The question will most likely arise: "how do we go about instituting a new church?" Most of us have seldom or never been involved in something like it. There are a few simple steps we would like to make you aware of, which may be elaborated on with help from more experienced members.

1. The area you live in must have shown growth and/or should have potential for growth.
2. If the above is the case, sound out some members in your area and gather support to form a committee. If a committee is formed, make the council aware of this.
3. Speak to members who may have some experience in this matter, from your own congregation or elsewhere.
4. If a genuine interest is present, and a viable number of members in theory supports institution, approach council to deal with this further in a cooperative way.

The latest information we have received is an initiative to institute a new church in an area that would cover the western

part of the Lincoln and Smithville congregations. Substantial progress has been made here, and with classical approval this could lead to the institution of a new church in this area later on this year. In the near future also the churches in Attercliffe and Hamilton have to find ways to deal with the ongoing growth of the congregations. Wonderful blessings bring new challenges.

Fergus

Some church councils have appointed special "greeters" to welcome everyone when entering the church building on Sundays. Now here is an encouraging spontaneous initiative from Fergus:

The Young People's have had a great discussion on hospitality, and would like to make the church a warmer and more welcoming communion. We look forward to greeting you with warm smiles and handshakes before services.

Keep it up, guys!

Orangeville

Reformed education is a great gift from the Lord. I hope we all agree on that. However – not all our children have the possibility to attend one of our schools. In Orangeville the deacons came up with the following idea:

As most of you know we have some young members in our congregation who (for different reasons) do not attend Dufferin Area Christian School on a regular basis. These children miss the contact and interaction with their peers, and miss the opportunity to talk about their different ways of life. Suggestions have been made to organize a club or society for this reason. All the children would benefit from this, and a strong Christian bond could develop between them. The deacons are looking for volunteers who are willing and able to organize this club for children in the 10-12 age group.

Grand Valley

We have a great Church Order, but sometimes a question comes up with re-

gard to the interpretation of an article of the Church Order which is not easy to answer. This is what Grand Valley's consistory came up with:

An overture to Classis Northern Ontario regarding change to Article 39 of the church order was approved. The consistory feels that this article is unreasonable because it forbids elders from meeting separately when there are fewer than three deacons.

Whether Grand Valley reads the intention of Article 39 CO correctly is questionable, but it is true that the wording can cause this misunderstanding. Article 39 CO reads as follows: "Where the number of elders is small, the deacons may be added to the consistory by local arrangement; this shall invariably be done where the number of elders or the number of deacons is less than three." The problem is in the word "or" in the last sentence. It does give the impression that even if you would have ten elders and only two deacons, these deacons are always part of the consistory. That is understandable when there are diaconal matters to be dealt with, but what about the government of the church?

A quick comparison with the parallel articles in the church orders of our Dutch and Australian sister churches (article 37) reveals the following: "This shall invariably be done where there are less than three elders *and* less than three deacons."

I guess that a change in that direction would take away Grand Valley's concern. But where does this rule come from in the first place? It is interesting to note that in the church order adopted at the Synod of Dort 1618/19 article 38 says: "Whenever the number of elders is very small, the deacons may be added to the consistory." That's all. And it was not until 1905, about 300 years later, that the General Synod of Utrecht added the stipulation: "which shall invariably be done where the number is less than three." Here the number refers to the number of elders. Nothing was said about the number of deacons, because the main focus was the consideration that the government of the church should not be entrusted to a body with less than three members.

The question remains: where does the present formulation of the last sentence of our article 39 come from? The answer is probably somewhere in the documents that led up to the revision of the church order at Synod Cloverdale 1983, but I couldn't find it quickly. Perhaps one of the brothers who was involved at that time can shed more light on the matter.

In the Grand Valley bulletin, Rev. P. Aasman also introduced his plan to begin a series of sermons on the first Head of Doctrine of the canons of Dort in the afternoon worship services. He explains:

The natural concern which a person might have with such a thing is that the Church Order requires that "as a rule, once every Sunday the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism is proclaimed." This article (52) gives expression to an important principle which is being eroded in many churches: that in the afternoon sermon the preaching be geared more toward instruction in the doctrine of God's Word as it is summarized in the confessions. The Heidelberg Catechism is a most excellent tool for this purpose, but the Canons of Dort contains matters related to the doctrines of the church which are not touched on or elaborated on in the Heidelberg Catechism, but which would be very profitable for God's people to hear expounded. The consistory recognizes important issues in the Canons of Dort which warrants a series of sermons.

Let me offer the two most obvious ones: first The Canons of Dort leads a person to praise God for his grace in a unique and wonderful way through an understanding of the doctrine of election. Secondly, the heresy which is contradicted by the Canons (Arminianism) remains a powerful force in our present religious world, and God's people need to be equipped to confront and oppose it.

Toronto

Singing is an important part of our worship service, and sometimes the question comes up: how can we improve the congregational singing? In Toronto they took one simple step. They announced:

The congregation is asked to stand for the singing of all songs DURING the worship services this year.

A commendable practice. Did you ever see a choir that was sitting down while they were singing?

Langley

The church of Jesus Christ lives in this world with an open eye for the needs

of this world. This is a wonderful statement, but how to put it into practice? In the Langley section of the *Church News* of the Fraser Valley, I read this:

Recently a group of about 40 people, mostly young people, went to Vancouver and distributed food, clothing and tracts to the homeless. From the reports received it appears to have been an eye opener, as well as a tangible way of showing mercy and love to others. Sometimes we assume that the lost, the lonely, the down and out are far removed from us, when in reality they are living near by. May it remind us that mercy is not just a word or a thought, but also a deed.

Launceston

We go on to Australia, to the beautiful island of Tasmania. I have never been there, mind you, but everyone who has been there tells me how beautiful it is. Rev. B.A. Zuiddam of the Church in Launceston provides some food for thought:

It is one thing to boast about the endeavours of Martin Luther and to praise his faith. It is easy to build the tombs of the prophets. But would we allow him on our pulpit if he were presented to us in the flesh in Tasmania? Would the consistory allow him to take part in the Lord's Supper celebration, or rather put him under censure instead and discourage our members to listen to his preaching elsewhere, because Luther did not hold all the Free Reformed views we cherish? We should search ourselves and mend our ways. So we really appreciate the Reformation and the catholicity of the Church? Or do we merely pay lip service to the reformation and other high days in the history of the Church?

You can replace "Tasmania" by any place in Canada, and you have some good points to ponder.

Rockingham

A remarkable decision was made in Rockingham (Western Australia). While the consistory was working through the guidelines for church visitation, it came to the following decision:

It was suggested that it might be good practice that the minister be absent when consistory discusses those questions pertaining to the office of the minister. Adopted.

"*Nou breekt me de klomp*," to use a good old Dutch expression. It literally says that your wooden shoe is falling apart, which means something like: "I am utterly perplexed." Are the elders also going to leave when the questions come up per-

taining to their office? And what about the deacons? How is the minister ever going to benefit from the discussion if he is not present? And the reader is completely left in the dark as to the grounds for this decision. Some might say that the presence of a minister would be a hindrance for a frank and open discussion about his office. But I prefer to think that removing the minister would actually defeat the purpose of the discussion.

Byford

The short report of a consistory meeting in Byford gave a brief summary of a discussion on relationships in the church. This is an important topic and many valuable comments were made, but one sentence struck me:


Church activities should not be sacrificed for family time, which often means entertainment rather than Scripture related issues.

I have thought about this. Even though this is only a summary statement, as it stands here, something is not quite right. Sure, the importance of the church is clear from Scripture and the confessions. But so is the significance of family life. We should not stay away from the worship services. But sometimes we can be so busy in the church with other meetings, study-activities, speeches, etc., that it can be fully justified when parents or children say at a certain moment: "tonight we are not going. We stay home. Family life is also an important responsibility given to us by the Lord."

If parents are so busy with church related activities that they don't have time to do things (yes, even entertainment) with their children, there is something wrong, I would say.

Albany

In the Albany bulletin, we read encouraging reports about the "Prison Fellowship." Many members of the congregations of Albany and West-Albany are involved as volunteers to visit prisoners. The prisoners enjoy these visits. To use one of the prisoners words: "we really appreciate these visitors because they are Christian and since time usually costs people money this day and age, you people still make time to visit us, prisoners."

But it is not only positive for the prisoners, the visitors also enjoyed these visits, and all have indicated they'd like to go again. There is a growing network of volunteers to give support and encouragement to those that constantly live in an environment where they have to bear much scorn, ridicule, blasphemy and intolerance. May the Lord bless this wonderful work. 



Baptism and Article 58, CO

by K. Sikkema

When our consistories seek to ensure that the parents, to the best of their ability, have their children attend a school where the instruction given is in harmony with the Word of God as the church has summarized it in her confessions (Church Order, 58), they are fully in line with the third question which parents answer at baptism. The underlying principle is that one cannot separate faith in God's covenant promises from leading and preparing for a life of covenant thankfulness. This article traces the consequences our fathers, brothers, and sisters have taken from the connection between baptism and Reformed education.

Scripture

In the Old Testament, educating the children was primarily the task of the parents, and in particular, the task of the father. The parents were to immerse their children in teaching, living, and walking in God's ways (Deut 6). All of life was covenant life. The pedagogical principle was given in Proverbs 22:7: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (NIV).

Not only did fathers teach in Israel. Levites also taught the ways of the Lord and probably other skills, while prophets repeated and elaborated on the Lord's covenant promises, and wise men explained the meaning of the covenant for daily life. Dr. C. Van Dam reminds us that teachers were often called "father" and students were called "sons" (*Clarion* 41:13/14; see 2 Kings 2:12; Matt 12:27; Acts 23:6). This biblical terminology underlines the common purpose of education at home and at a school to prepare boys and girls for their future life with God and for the job.

Furthermore, the words of the covenant (Deut 6) were spoken to the whole community, and so, every-

one carried a communal responsibility for everyone else, including training of the next generation. The Heidelberg Catechism, about the communion of saints, reflects this communal responsibility (Q & A 55). In the church, bringing up a child has to be an immersion in a covenantal way of life in which the home, the church, and others (like the school) work towards the common goal.

Reformation and secession

The Reformers impressed on the churches the importance of a proper training of the youth, some for the ministry and others for other respectable occupations. Consequently, during the late sixteenth century, when our fathers rejected the bondage of their consciences to papism, they also laboured to make the public schools Reformed and to replace their clerical Roman Catholic inspectors. As late as the National Synod of The Hague, 1586, it was deemed necessary to propose to the government "that papist, libertarian, Anabaptist and other enemies of

The Reformers impressed on the churches the importance of a proper training of the youth.

the truth and the fatherland not be appointed to teach at elementary schools." Our forebearers believed that only *Reformed* education could approach the high standards of training for service to God. To ensure that the connection between the promise at baptism and the actual education a child received would not be lost even by the death of the parents, formal, well-qualified witnesses were allowed to present the child for baptism.¹ The government also agreed that Reformed education was important: in 1596 it warned its citizens that taking an education from any Jesuit school would render one forever unqualified for any public office or service.

The great Synod of Dort (1618-1619) viewed bringing up Christian youth as a life-long concerted effort of home, school, church, and state. These were to equip the next generation with the foundations of the true religion and with godliness. It understood that bringing up children must be "from faith in the Word of God (the basis of all knowledge), for the glory of God, for the general best of the Republic and the congregation of the Lord Christ, and for the children's salvation."² It maintained in its Church Order (Article 21) the task previous Reformed synods had stipulated for consistories in this regard.

After the Secession (1834), which was over two hundred years after the Synod of Dort, our Dutch fathers saw that the (originally Reformed!) public schools had become institutions in which the doctrines of humanism, rationalism, unbelief, and revolution were propagated. The Secession leaders clearly identified the conflict between leaving the modernist Dutch Reformed State Church and sending their children to equally modernist public schools. Whereas previously the connection between baptism and Christian education might have been implicit, they made it very explicit, and subsequently suffered eighty years of injustice in their battle to obtain full freedom to have unity between home, church and school.

Liberation 1944, and Canadian Reformed schools

After the Liberation of 1944, Liberated Reformed people in the Netherlands realized that the unity between home, church, and school suggested by the church order could only be maintained if they established their own schools. The "School with the Bible" could no longer guarantee that unity. "Life is one" was their slogan, and they knew no corners of life that fell outside their covenant thankfulness to God. As early as 1950, they established their own Teachers' College in Enschede, and, in 1951, they

organized a national league of (Liberated) Reformed school societies.

Those who emigrated to Canada and other destinations remembered the principle of the unity of home, church, and school for the training of their children in their adoptive countries.

... and so everyone carried a communal responsibility for everyone else, including the training of the next generation.

Interestingly, this was a North American tradition: Christian schools had existed in St. Augustine (1606), Boston (1635), New Amsterdam (1638), Holland, and Pella (1847)! The first "Canadian Reformed" Classis (Lethbridge, November 1950) deleted "schools" from its agenda for lack of time; but at the next one (Edmonton, April 1951) the church at Neerlandia "proposed to appoint a committee to investigate the possibility of having Christian instruction for the children in harmony with Article 21 of the Church Order." Classis was unanimously convinced of the necessity of Reformed Education and advised to establish school societies for that purpose.³ This advice was taken to heart: Yearbook 1955 of the Canadian Reformed Churches reports eleven school societies in fourteen congregations. The people realized even then that public school philosophies were not in line with what and how and for what purpose the Lord commanded them to teach their children.

As the churches had adopted the Church Order of Dort at Classis Lethbridge, 1950, Neerlandia's reference to (then) article 21 was appropriate: "The consistories everywhere shall see to it that there are good teachers who shall not only teach the children reading, writing, languages, and arts, but also instruct them in godliness and the catechism." Both its wording and its origins (Emden 1571 to Dordrecht 1618/19) made it clear that the article referred to teachers as we now have them in our day-schools. The initial thrust of this article had been for the consistories to urge the government to hire only teachers who could maintain the unity of home, church, and school; later, as explicitly discussed at Synod Leeuwarden 1920, it became clear that consistories should urge the *parents* to

establish and maintain schools that match with their promises made at baptism.⁴ One indeed cannot negate the parallel between the baptismal promise to instruct children in the doctrine of salvation (or have them instructed therein) and our current Article 58 CO. There should be no avoidable separation of the doctrine of salvation from preparing children for their task in this life. Our sister churches in the Netherlands,⁵ Australia⁶ and South Africa⁷ have made the consequences of this parallel explicit in their respective revisions of the Church Order. In view of current trends to seek alternative schooling, it is unfortunate that the *Prayer for all the Needs of Christendom*, while closely following the Dutch original, has a wording for "Christian instruction" in which this explicitness is lost (*Book of Praise*, pp. 642-644). It is well for consistories to give renewed attention to its task in view of Article 58, CO.

The consistories everywhere shall see to it that there are good teachers who shall not only teach the children reading, writing, languages, and arts, but also instruct them in godliness and the catechism" (CO Art 21, 1950).

The struggle for our immigrant parents to get established, the suggestions that a good education did not really depend on having our own Reformed schools, and other factors delayed the actual start of many Canadian Reformed schools. However, before long, "Saturday Schools" or "Friday Evening Schools" were set up to supplement the education given at the public schools. In September 1955, carried by prayer, faith, and conviction, the William of Orange School of New Westminster was the first Canadian Reformed school to open its doors, followed in 1962 by John Calvin School in Burlington, in 1964 by John Calvin School in Smithville, and by many others after them. The Lord has blessed the faithful efforts that at first seemed unnecessary or futile to many, so that today there are twenty-seven elementary and high schools among the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

Conclusion

The Reformed Churches have for centuries understood that there must be unity between home, church, and school. For various reasons, this unity was not always complete or optimal, and there was always room for reformation and improvement, but the Lord has given many schools in which the unity of faith between home and church is supported. This unity also reflects the notion that bringing up the next generation is a matter of the entire covenant communion of saints. It is difficult to negate the connection between the third question at baptism and Christian education, even though this goes beyond what is explicitly stated, and consistories do well to give renewed attention to their responsibilities in this regard.

¹Jansen, J. Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordering. Kampen:: J.H. Kok (1923) on Art. 56-58.

²Kuiper, J. *Geschiedenis van het Christelijk Lager onderwijs in Nederland*. Amsterdam: H.A. vanBottenburg, 1904, p. 18.


³Van Oene, W.W.J. *Inheritance Preserved*. Winnipeg: Premier Printing, 1975, pp. 78-93, 209.

⁴Jansen, p. 92, 3b. See also Bouwman, C. *Spiritual Order for the Church*. Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 2000, pp. 144-146.

⁵Article 57: *De kerkeraden zullen er op toezien dat de ouders, zoveel zij kunnen, hun kinderen onderwijs laten volgen dat in overeenstemming is met de leer van de kerk, zoals zij did bij de doop beloofd hebben.*

⁶Bouwman, p. 144

⁷Article 57: *Die kerkrade sal toesien dat die ouders sover moontlik hul kinders laat onderig in ooreenstemming met die leer van die kerk soos hulle dit by die doop belowe het.*

Education Matters is a column supported by the CRTA East. Teachers, board members, committee members and parents are invited to send in articles. Reader responses can be sent to acres@kwic.com or to Clarion. 

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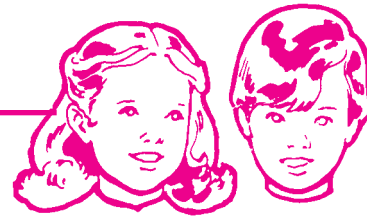


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OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers

Do you know what Pentecost is all about? Do you remember ever reading the first chapters of Acts, where, after the Lord Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples had gotten together to talk about what had happened? They finally understood that Jesus was the Christ and that their task now was to tell others about Him.

That is what Pentecost is about. God now sends the Holy Spirit to his disciples so that they can begin to call those to Him who were known as Gentiles. That is what the "tongues of flames" are in the story about Pentecost. They were a sign from God that the disciples now had the Holy Spirit and were to work very hard with that Spirit.

We must do the same. If we are talking to someone who doesn't believe in God, then we must explain to them how they should become children of God. But that is probably a little bit hard for you at the moment. Just remember that as you get older, though.

Lots of love, Aunt Betty

Puzzles

Listeners

Match the listener and the speaker.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Felix, Acts 24:24 | a. Delilah |
| 2. Eunuch, Acts 8:30-32 | b. Andrew |
| 3. Naaman, 2 Kings 5:1-4 | c. Jethro |
| 4. Moses, Exodus 18:17-24 | d. Paul |
| 5. Barak, Judges 4:6 | e. Jezebel |
| 6. Elisha, 1 Kings 19:20 | f. Jeremiah |
| 7. Samson, Judges 16:16-18 | g. Philip |
| 8. Eve, Genesis 3:4-6 | h. Elijah |
| 9. Ahab, 1 Kings 21:7 | i. a slave girl |
| 10. Peter, John 1:41-42 | j. Deborah |
| 11. Zedekiah, Jeremiah 38:19-20 | k. Satan |



Name Please

- Her body was eaten by dogs.
- This good man shed tears for Paul.
- The last enemy to be overthrown.
- Paul's first convert in Greece.
- In his home, Peter stayed during his visit to Joppa.
- She gave God everything she possessed.
- He heard Jesus' voice from heaven (an apostle).
- He introduced Paul to the Lord's disciples.
- The most favoured of women.
- She came a great distance to see Solomon.

First and Last

If the clues in each of the sets below are answered correctly, the first letters and last letters, reading downwards in order, will spell two Biblical names. These names work in pairs, belonging to the same group or type in each set. To help you further, the pairs are as follows: two books of the Bible, two kings and two tribes of Israel.

- A**
- Very strong man.
 - River of Damascus.
 - ". . . shewed unto him all the kingdom of the world in a . . . of time."
 - Hittite who was set "in the front of the hottest battle."
 - Candace was queen of this country.
 - "Take my yoke upon you and . . . of me."
- B**
- "Thou anointest my head with oil; my . . . runneth over."
 - Brother of Joab.
 - "But when you pray, use not vain . . . as the heathen do."
 - The children of Israel were often guilty of this during their journeyings through the wilderness.
 - Girl's name, either way!
 - Father of Noah.
- C**
- One of "the seven Churches which are in Asia."
 - Measure of capacity equal to eight gallons.
 - Whosoever shall say to his brother . . . shall be in danger of the council."
 - "And he was in the hinder part of the ship, . . . on a pillow."
 - Son of Saul whose murder was avenged at the command of David.
 - Kingdom which warred against Israel.
 - "I am the true vine and my Father is the . . ."

June Birthdays



- | | |
|----|-------------------|
| 2 | Albert Buikema |
| 7 | Gregory Spriensma |
| 17 | Melanie Spanninga |
| 22 | Jocelyn Schoon |



Aunt Betty

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