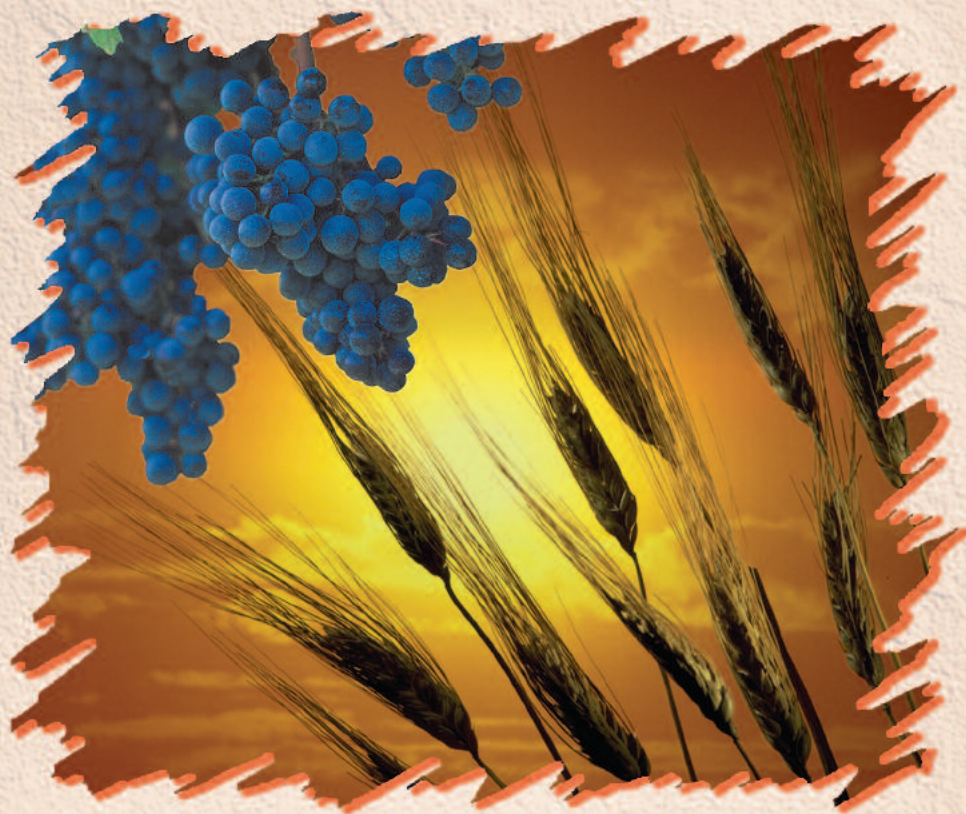


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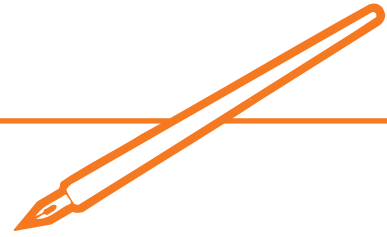
Unity in the grain and the grapes

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- *Preserving, Enhancing, and Purifying This World*
- *The forgiveness of sins*
- *A Reformed Congregation in Russia*



By Cl. Stam



The Evaluation of Divergences

The invisible church: the position stated

One of the first points under discussion for a long time between Canadian Reformed and Orthodox Presbyterian committees is the view on what is commonly known as the invisible church. What exactly is this all about?

The Westminster Standards declare that there is an invisible church. This reads as follows, "The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof . . ." (Article 25, section I). This is contrasted or complimented in section II as follows, "The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation as before, under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children . . ."

If we simplify that, it goes as follows. The invisible church consists of all the elect. The visible church consists of all true believers and their children. It should also be noted that it is said of the visible church, "out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." This comes very close to what we confess in Article 28 of the Belgic Confession about the church, "and there is no salvation outside of it." We agree, then, that the way to the (invisible) catholic church goes via the local (visible) assembly or congregation.

The invisible church: the problem stated

Where does our difficulty lie with the Westminster Standards on this point? This has been formulated by our churches over the years as follows: the emphasis on the invisible church would lead people to be less obedient and particular when it comes to membership of the visible church. This teaching may lead to certain nonchalance: it doesn't matter what kind of visible (earthly) church you are a member, as long as you are a member of the invisible (heavenly) church. This would sound the death-knell for any kind of reformation when needed.

The Deputies of 1986 wrote as follows, "Our Deputies have rightly warned against a polarization of the visible and invisible church. It results in low esteem for what is called the visible church, a weakening of church consciousness, a lack of understanding of the seriousness to separate from the false church and the rise of the 'theologoumenon' of the pluriformity of the church which is neither taught by the Scriptures nor by the Reformed Confessions and which proved to be an undermining factor in the fight against the sins of the church and for the reformation of the church."

In other words, this distinction between invisible and visible church is a dangerous one which could impair the proper development and safekeeping of church life. I have written in the same vein in 1979 in the book *Everything in Christ* and I am happy that our churches are officially on record on this point. Nothing has been covered up when it comes to our confession concerning the church!

The invisible church: the problem solved?

It would seem that there are here two irresolvable viewpoints. We certainly need further frank discussion on this matter in an atmosphere of brotherly love. This difference in viewpoints has consequences also in other areas, and I think particularly of the "fencing" of the Lord's Supper. We'll deal with that later, the Lord willing.

Yet we can and must take a charitable approach in discovering on what it is that we do agree. The expression "the invisible church" (and what is meant by it) is not unknown in Reformed church history. In the past I have not enough taken this into consideration.

The term is not found in the Bible, but that is not conclusive. Many other terms that we use are not found as such in Scripture either. But the Bible does speak of a multitude that no one can count. The church is not invisible, but it is innumerable. In my book *Everything in Christ* (1979) I used the non-English expression that the church is "un-over-see-able." We cannot see the totality of this church, since many members have gone before us and many may yet come after us. If the term is used to convey that sentiment, what is wrong with it?

This distinction should not be used to make membership in the visible church less important. I do see dangers here, for which I have warned. But the distinction itself has merit which should not be overlooked. In its totality, the church of all ages is not visible to us. When the Westminster Standards speak about the "invisible church" this is done in terms of the totality of the elect. The invisible church is in the Presbyterian standards the church as God alone can see it and which as such is invisible to us.

Humility and charity

The Deputies of 1986 also refer to Augustine, Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin who spoke in this manner or even used the term "invisible church" out rightly. Calvin particularly saw the church that is invisible to us as visible only to God (the church *coram Deo*).

I know that the debate around these terms came to a frenzied height when the views of Dr. Abraham Kuyper on

This distinction between invisible and visible church is a dangerous one which could impair the proper development and safekeeping of church life.

this point were wrongly elevated to church doctrine. But we should not hold the OPC hostage to what happened before the Liberation of 1944. It would be wrong to accuse Presbyterian Churches who hold to the Westminster Standards of "Kuyperianism." It is the other way around, if at all. Kuyper referred to the Westminster Standards to bolster his own theories. Our view on these Standards may be somewhat skewed because of this.

Speaking about an "invisible" church has a long standing in Reformed church history, and while the term can be abused, it is not in itself wrong. The OPC has not used this term to get away from the need to reform but "is fruit of church reformation in the twentieth century" (Report Deputies, 1986, Acts, page 145).

I'd like to add a final note on this point from my side. A better understanding of the term "the invisible church" has led me to be more humble with respect to the church of Christ. So many brothers and sisters have gone before us, perhaps in much more difficult circumstances than ours. There are people in this world today that we do not know, but who are members of the church of Christ. It may be that many must still be born and added. Christ's work is catholic and much of it is invisible to us. That does not make the church invisible, I know, but we do not see or know everything about the church of Christ. Let us be humble, for humility leads to charity.



Rev. Cl. Stam is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, Ontario. clstam@canrc.org

What's inside?

In his editorial, Rev. Cl. Stam writes about the expression "the invisible church." While he agrees that the term can be misused and misleading, he is also charitable in his evaluation. The use of this terminology in Presbyterianism was not designed to flee into fantasies of a pluriform church concept.

In our column, *Ray of Sunshine*, we read the names and addresses of six special members in our churches who will be celebrating a birthday. A phone call or a card goes a long way to showing how much we love and care for them.

A Christmas tree in the Christian home can cause some debate. Rev. George van Popta tells us of a debate among a seventy-member congregation in Central Russia. It is about a Christmas tree.

At the heart of the gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ shed his blood for the forgiveness of sins. Rev. Peter Feenstra emphasizes how this gospel is something that we should never forget, and that we must daily ask for the washing away of our sins.

A third year student of our Theological College, Reuben Bredenhof, takes a look at an old hymn known as the *Didache*. This takes us down the road of a most interesting investigation into certain understandings about the Lord's Supper.

We have our columns *Education Matters* and *Treasures, New and Old*. We also learn about Albany's fiftieth anniversary as a church. And finally, we have a *Reader's Forum* which takes issue with a speech of our representative at the previous Dutch synod.

RA



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By T.G. Van Raalte

Preserving, Enhancing, and Purifying This World

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."

Matthew 5:13

Salt is the most common spice in the world. Whether it is meat, vegetables, or grains, we usually add some salt to enhance the taste.

Salt has also been used as a preservative. People have not always had refrigerators and freezers. Sailors on long journeys ate food that had been packed in salt. Many fishermen still pack their fish in salt in the holds of their boats to keep them fresh until they are sold.

Salt has also been used as a purifier. Still today if you have an infection in your finger or toe you may be instructed by the doctor to soak it in salt water three times a day.

When salt is in short supply it becomes all the more valuable. For instance, early settlers in North America would travel to a "salt lick" once per year. This was a place where they found salt forming on the ground or bubbling out of a spring. Instead of paying the very high price of imported salt, they went on a special trip once per year to obtain their salt or to boil their meat in the brine bubbling out of the salt spring.

In ancient times, salt was often traded ounce for ounce for gold. It was literally worth its weight in gold! The early Chinese used coins made of salt for their money. In many areas around the Mediterranean Sea, salt cakes were used as money.

What makes salt so valuable? Its saltiness. Salt remains useful by being different from that which it is applied to. Salt preserves meat, purifies wounds, and enhances the taste of food, but only when it slows down the process of decay in the food, when it is cleaner than the infected wound, and when it is different from the bland taste of the

meat. Salt cannot do any of these things unless it keeps its properties as salt and is distinct from the things it is applied to.

In fact, salt does keep its distinct properties; it is always salty. Salt is a stable compound that does not break down. This makes it all the more valuable.

The Lord Jesus, however, warned that if salt loses its flavour, it becomes useless and might as well be thrown into the rubbish. People have looked at this and criticized the Lord's geology. What did He know about salt? they ask.

The objection can easily be answered: First, the Lord spoke with a condition: "If." He certainly is right. If it should happen that salt would lose its flavour, what use is it?

Second, a lot of salt in Palestine came from the Salt Sea, or the Dead Sea, that inland lake that has the highest salt concentration in the world, nine times saltier than ocean water. This salt contains many impurities, such as gypsum, natron, and sodium sulphate, and that is what the cheaper versions in Palestine contained in the time of Christ. This salt easily acquired an acidic taste when the salt content dissolved and the impurities were left over. People then threw it out into the street and it became part of the mud that was trampled upon by many walking feet.

Do you see what Christ means when He says that salt without saltiness is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by men?

Jesus Christ has given his church the most important place in the world, to be the purifying, enhancing, and preserving influence in this world, as neces-

sary as salt. We acknowledge humbly and happily that by the grace of God we are considered so valuable to the Lord that He gave his own life for us.

You are worth more than all the gold and silver in the world, not because of who you were, but because of what Jesus gave to save you and because of what the Lord Jesus is making of you. That is what makes you the salt of the earth and that is what makes you so valuable, for you exist in contrast to many others who have not been saved. Christ wishes to use you to bring his message to others that He may save them too.

At times you sting their consciences, at times you enhance their lives, and all the time you preserve them from destruction. "For the sake of ten righteous people," said the LORD, "I will not destroy it," referring to Sodom and Gomorrah.

The church in this world is the very reason why this wicked world has been preserved as long as it has. When the church is once removed from this earth, when the judgment day comes and God separates those who trust in Jesus from the rest of the world, the time for preserving the unrepentant and stubborn will come to an end.

Until then each Christian has the calling to demonstrate always that their salvation is the most unique thing in this sinful world, and that this difference is the most attractive thing about the church of Jesus Christ.



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Unity in the Grain and Grapes

By Reuben Bredenhof

*As grain, once scattered on the
hillsides
Was in the broken bread made one
So from all lands Thy Church be
gathered
Into Thy kingdom by Thy Son*
(Hymn 46)

Introduction

As we sing from the *Book of Praise* in church or at home, we might have a vague notion of the origin of the words that are in our mouths. Indeed, the date and place of the first rendering of the song's words or the date of the melody's composition are often included at the head of a psalm or hymn. Though of course we should not let our imagination wander over to sixteenth century Geneva or Strasbourg while praising our God, it can be instructive to have some knowledge of the history behind the words we sing. The faithful liturgical heritage of the Christian church is something for which we may be thankful. We in the twenty-first century would do well to see how the catholic church has worshipped in the past, in order that our God and Saviour may be praised properly by us today and in the future.

This testimony to catholicity in the church's worship can be clearly observed in one of the hymns of our *Book of Praise*. The words of Hymn 46 (and also some language from the Form for the Celebration of Lord's Supper) have a story that can be traced far back into time. Not from the era of the Reformation or the Middle Ages like many of our psalms and hymns, the words of Hymn 46 spring from a very early time of the Christian church, from the second century after Christ. More precisely, the words of this hymn can be traced back to an old church manual called the *Didache*. The connection between the ancient Christian writing the *Didache*,

the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper, and Hymn 46 has been dealt with before on the pages of *Clarion* to some degree¹, but a "history review" might be helpful.

The *Didache*

The proper title of the work from which the phraseology of Hymn 46 and the Form comes is "The Teaching (Greek: *didache*) of the Twelve Apostles" or "The Teaching of the Lord through the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles." The *Didache* is basically divided into three parts: the first contains precepts of Christian morality regarding the "Two Ways," the way of life and the way of death, as well as brief directions for specific Christian and ecclesiastical practices (some have called it a primitive "church order"), covering such topics as fasting, baptism, prayer, and eucharistic (thanksgiving) prayers.

The Didache is generally thought to be from the late first or first-half of the second century after Christ, roughly between 70 and 160.

The second part offers instructions regarding the teachers of God's Word and the manner of meeting together for worship, while the final part is an exhortation to be ready for the coming of the Lord.

The *Didache* is generally thought to be from the late first or first-half of the second century after Christ, roughly between 70 and 160. It is written in a simple and concise style, for it was composed, as the title suggests, for the instruction of the young churches in practical church matters. The *Di-*

dache is an invaluable source for information about the early Christian church. It covers a wide variety of the practical workings of the church as it struggled to be established and ordered, over against competing state religions and the attacks of heresy.

A borrowed image

It is in the ninth and tenth chapter of the *Didache* (sections containing the prayers that were to be offered after the Lord's Supper) that we find language which is so familiar to us. These words of the *Didache* are echoed in both Hymn 46 and the Lord's Supper form, which are intimately connected in content. We read from chapter 10 of the *Didache* first, "After you are filled, make your thanksgiving thus: Holy Father, we thank you for thy holy name, which you have made to dwell within our hearts . . ." If one holds Hymn 46 verse 1 parallel to these words, the literary source of our Hymn 46 becomes perfectly clear. The hymn-author index on page 435 of the *Book of Praise* will inform us of this fact too, where it notes: Hymn 46 – from *Didache*, c.110.

Examining the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper, the language of the *Didache* is again clearly echoed. In the brief section on the fellowship of the table, there is first a quote from the apostle Paul, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Cor 10:17). Following this we read, "As one bread is baked out of many grains and one wine is pressed out of many grapes, so we all, incorporated in Christ by faith, are together one body" (*Book of Praise*, p. 598). This sentence is the part of a line from the latter half of chapter 9 of the *Didache*, which is also found in the second verse of Hymn 46 (quoted above). The ancient yet somehow familiar

words of the *Didache* read, "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom."

The first part of Hymn 46:2 is taken, like stanza 1, from chapter 10 of the *Didache*, "Lord, remember thy community, to deliver it from all evil, and perfect it in your love, and gather it in from the four winds."

**Whoever eats my flesh
and drinks my blood has
eternal life.**

Though the order of the *Didache* is not followed exactly, it is undeniable that we have in our liturgical form for Lord's Supper and also our Hymn 46 a clear hearkening back to the *Didache*. There are those who have wondered if the *Didache* is about the Lord's Supper at all, for it does not include Christ's words of institution, as we can find them in the gospels and 1 Corinthians 11. But not every aspect of the Lord's Supper is recounted in the *Didache*, and it clearly speaks of the meal of thanksgiving (Greek: *eucharistia*), and of the broken pieces of bread. We may also note that chapter 9 and 10 are very Christocentric. Though the sacrifice on the cross or the words of institution are not explicitly mentioned, especially the second paragraph of chapter 10 speaks of the spiritual nourishment unto eternal life through the Son, "but you have blessed us with spiritual food and drink and with eternal life through thy Child." Here we can hear an echo of John 6: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life . . ." (verse 54). The spiritual sustenance provided by the bread and wine of Lord's Supper are clearly in view in John and the *Didache*, without making an explicit mention of the Lord's Supper.

The composition of the image

The phraseology in the *Didache* of the bread being scattered on the hills and being made one (chapter 9) should be examined somewhat further. Some have drawn a connection to the Old Testament as the root of this idea.² The sentiment of such passages as Isaiah 11:12 seem to be heard in this prayer of the early church: "And he will gather the lost of Israel and the scattered ones

of Judah he will gather from the four corners of the earth."

Related to this point, some have suggested a possible link between the prayer found here in the *Didache* and a prayer from the Jewish liturgy of the synagogue.³ They suggest that this Christian thanksgiving prayer is reminiscent of the Tenth Benediction of the *Shemoneh Esreh*, which reads "Sound the great horn for our freedom, and lift up the ensign to gather our exiles, and gather us together from the four corners of the earth. . . ." The Christian thanksgiving prayer at Lord's Supper in the *Didache* is then similarly an expression of hope for the gathering of the church, so that it might be brought into the kingdom of Christ (see Mark 13:27). This is said to be adapted in the *Didache* from a song of the Jewish hope for a reunion of all Diaspora Jewry. A connection from the liturgy of the Jewish synagogue to the *Didache* to our Hymn 46 and Lord's Supper Form is an interesting one to ponder, but hard for us to confirm.

The main comparison in the prayer of the *Didache* is between the one bread eaten at the Lord's Supper and the church which is moving to that final great day of Christ, when it will be fully gathered as one. As the actual bread of the Lord's Supper meal has come into being through a process of the gathering of grains (or more poetically, the gathering of "bread") once scattered on the surrounding hills, so the prayer is that God may continue and complete the gathering of the scattered believers from the ends of the earth into an ecclesiastical unity. What was diffuse (the grain, the believers) must come to a full union (the loaf of bread, the church).

To the image of the many pieces of bread or grain forming one loaf has been added the figure that we also find in our Lord's Supper form, "[as] one wine [is] pressed out of many grapes." This symbolism is a continuation of the "bread" image of unity in the *Didache*, now extended to the other element of the Lord's Supper, the wine. In the same line of the *Didache* there were many early Christian writers, such as Justin Martyr, Chrysostom, Sarapion and Augustine, who utilized the comparison of the unity of the bread with the gathering and unity of the church. It was the church father Cyprian, though, who was the first to expand this comparison to the wine as well. In his sixty-ninth

Epistle he writes on the idea of the unity of the Christian church:

Even the Lord's sacrifices themselves declare that Christian unanimity is linked together with itself by a firm and inseparable charity. For when the Lord calls bread, which is combined by the union of many grains, his body, He indicates our people whom He bore as being united; and when he calls the wine, which is pressed from many grapes and clusters collected together, his blood, He also signifies our flock linked together by the mingling of a united multitude.

To Cyprian then, we may trace the expanded image we find in our form, "as one bread is baked out of many grains and one wine is pressed out of many grapes . . . so we all, incorporated in Christ by faith are together one body."

**There were many early
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utilized the comparison of the
unity of the bread with the
gathering and unity of the
church.**

Rev. G. Van Rongen in *Our Reformed Church Service Book* explains that this additional but related symbolism being included specifically in the form for the Lord's Supper dates from the time of the Reformation – it was Caspar Olevianus who took this symbolism from the Württemberg Form.⁴ The figurative language as found in our Form of the one bread made of many grains and the one wine pressed out of many grapes is clearly meant as an elaboration and illustration of what is first quoted from 1 Corinthians 10:17, "Because there is one loaf, we who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf." The image of bread or grain being scattered on the hills and then being brought together into one loaf is obviously not in perfect harmony with what Paul writes, who might be said to have a more restricted view of the image of the bread.⁵

A scriptural image?

An important question must be asked however: it is fine and interesting that the early church and the fathers found a "deeper" meaning for the Lord's

Supper elements of bread and wine, but are these comparisons scripturally legitimate for not only one of our church hymns, but also for the Holy Supper form?

In 1 Corinthians 10:17, Paul speaks of the “one loaf” as the bread of the Lord’s Supper. He is of course not excluding the element of wine in the Supper, but by taking a part for the whole describes the meal as the “breaking of bread.” According to verse 16, it is the *sharing* in this one loaf that is a shared participation in the body of Christ and is the basis of Christian unity – for Paul, the bread *itself* (i.e., its composition, what it is made of: many grains or many pieces of “bread”) does not say anything about the unity of the congregation. Yet the unity of the church in celebration is still emphasized by Paul, when he writes, “We who are many are one body.” In Christ, the outward divisions of society and gender and wealth and gifts no longer matter – and this is a theme throughout 1 Corinthians: “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought” (1 Cor 1:10).

When we gather at the table of the Lord to share in the bread, we who are many believers of diverse backgrounds and characters and gifts are one, for we are together nourished by the one bread of life, our Saviour Jesus Christ. There are many who have fellowship with the Christ, yet Christ is not divided. The Lord’s Supper meal is indeed a powerful statement on the fellowship that believers share today, while also looking ahead to the perfect unity in the future at the wedding feast of the Lamb.

The image of the gathering of grains and grapes into one is not from Scripture, yet functions as a further illustration of the vital point about unity that Paul was emphasizing to the Corinthians, and also to us. Though they are not the words of the apostle, they serve to elucidate his teaching in a proper way, stressing the same main idea. As Dr. J. Faber wisely stated on this matter, “*Non-Scriptural* does not mean *un-Scriptural*.”

Conclusion

We can say that present and future heavenly unity is not a foreign idea

to the Holy Supper. The idea of unity as found in the *Didache* is not simply a practical teaching forcibly derived from the concept of the meal by early Christians, who sometimes were eager to isolate deeper levels of meaning in the teachings of Scripture. The church in the first few Christian centuries drew a further metaphor of unity from the aggregate character of the two elements of the Lord’s Supper, and crafted a poetic and suggestive image: “as broken bread scattered upon the mountains.” Unlike Paul, they looked at the actual composition of the bread and wine for this teaching about the church expressed in the Lord’s Supper – many parts becoming one whole: the grain from the hillsides baked into a loaf, the grapes pressed into a wine, and the many believers gathered into one catholic Church. As the church father John Chrysostom writes in his twenty-fourth homily on 1 Corinthians, “As the bread consisting of many grains is made one, so that the grains nowhere

We can say that present and future heavenly unity is not a foreign idea to the Holy Supper.

appear (they exist indeed, but their difference is not seen by reason of their conjunction); so are we conjoined both with each other and with Christ: there not being one body for you, and another, for your neighbor, to be nourished by, but the very same for all.”

We may be thankful that Hymn 46 and our Form for the Lord’s Supper celebration have retained this link with the early Christian church. It is not a good link simply because it is old, because it is traced to the *Didache* of the first or second centuries, for the same document contains practices that we do not follow or statements with which we would not fully agree. But we may accept and appreciate how our church has used chapter 9 and 10 of the *Didache* in our hymnary and liturgical forms, because its teaching agrees with the teaching of Scripture, and it stands as a good illustration of the scriptural principle of the oneness of the church through the Holy Spirit.



Called to the church of London, Ontario:

Rev. R.E. Pot

of Orangeville, Ontario.

Called to the church of Carman-East, Manitoba:

Rev. P.G. Feenstra

of Owen Sound, Ontario.

We should ever remember that we are members of a church that is from all times and places, and also that we may build on the faithful traditions of liturgy that are passed down to us by God’s preservation. Then when we sing Hymn 46 and share in the Lord’s Supper, the beauty of Christian unity can find double expression: first and foremost in our being nourished together by the one sacrifice of Christ, but also in the very details and words of our liturgy, as we together echo the ancient thanksgiving voices of those of the one holy and catholic Christian church who went before us.

¹J. Faber, “Dutch Form for Holy Supper.” In *Clarion* vol. 30 (1981), no. 12; J. Faber, “The Image of the Grains and Grapes.” In *Clarion* vol. 30 (1981), nos. 15-16.

²Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache*. Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 151.

³Y. Brilioth, *Eucharistic Faith and Practice: Evangelical and Catholic* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1930), pp. 19-20.

⁴G. Van Rongen, *Our Reformed Church Service Book* (Neerlandia, AB: Inheritance Publications, 1995), pp. 209-210.

⁵In his articles Dr. Faber noted with regret that this “disharmony” led our sister churches in the Netherlands to delete the sentence following the quote of 1 Corinthians 10:17 in a revision of the church service book.



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The forgiveness of sins

By P.G. Feenstra

Forgiveness of sins is something we all need very desperately. Without it no sinner can enter God's holy presence. The eyes of our God are too pure then to behold iniquity (Hab 1:13). Without the forgiveness of sins the church would collapse.

Where forgiveness is granted

In the church of Christ we receive the promise and assurance of the forgiveness of sins. Through the forgiveness of our sins we are freed from guilt and shame; we are freed from the curse of eternal death so that we may live forever in blessed communion with God and his people.

When the birth of our Lord was announced to Mary and Joseph, the angel Gabriel told them that the child they were expecting would save his people from their sins. In harmony with what was announced at the birth of Christ, the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 21 ties the church and the forgiveness of sins together. The forgiveness of sins is the most marvellous treasure which the bride of Christ loves dearly.

By definition the church is "a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by his blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit" (Belgic Confession Article 27).

The church is entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. Within the assembly of God's people we may hear repeatedly the breath-taking gospel: "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool" (Isa 1:18). This is the amazing grace of every church service. We enter God's presence having sins to acknowledge and confess. Yet the Lord says to us what He declared to the high priest Joshua, "See, I have taken away

your sin, and I will put rich garments on you" (Zech 3:4). Since there is forgiveness we may receive the grace of the Lord and leave the assembly of God's people with his blessing and peace.

Do we need forgiveness every day?

Among evangelical Christians there are those who suggest forgiveness of sins is something you may claim but it should not be something you need every day. The prayer "And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" shouldn't be necessary every day. These ideas have been popularized through the works of Neil Anderson. According to Mr. Anderson, if Christians continue to sin daily it is their own fault. Sin can be avoided. He contends that the reason why Christians sin is because they view themselves as sinners rather than as saints. Whether you will sin or not is a matter of how you perceive yourself. Through the power of your positive thinking you can change your life. Mr. Anderson claims, "You must see yourself as a child of God in order to live like a child of God." (*Victory over the Darkness: Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ* p. 50) "If you see yourself as a sinner you will sin; what would you expect a sinner to do?" (*The Bondage Breaker* p. 44). Mr. Anderson, and those who follow him, denies that saints are sinners or that Christians have a sinful nature against which they have to struggle all their life. He claims that if you are a born again Christian, the sinful nature is behind you. If you are a believer and have the mind of Christ you will sin only occasionally. You put to death the sinful nature when you were born again and therefore you should not need to ask for forgiveness of your sins on a daily basis. Whatever sin is present is merely

residue and leftovers of the old mind set. If you do not *think* sin you will not *commit* sin.

Why we need forgiveness

Such reasoning, however, has no solid biblical basis. It demonstrates an alarming lack of self-knowledge. It misses an understanding of the human nature and of the corruption of the human heart. To say we sin only occasionally is a theological construction built upon the terrible sin of arrogance and pride. It not only betrays a shallow view of sin but also of the Lord's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt (Jer 17:9). We are conceived and born in sin. Every day we fall short of the glory of God.

A sinner is not only someone who has committed a crime or has done something terrible and immoral. Sin is our failure to do what the Lord requires of us. It is the failure to be what we could have been and what we ought to have been. It is our failure to live to the praise of God's glory with all our heart. Sin lies not only in the things we have done wrong but also in the good we have left undone.

The apostle Paul speaks pointedly about this issue in Romans 7. As a child of the Lord he humbly confesses, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing" (7:18, 19). Reflecting the truth of Scripture, the Canons of Dort also give us clear direction. The last chapter states, "Therefore daily sins of weakness spring up and defects cling to even the best works of the saints. These are for them a constant reason to humble themselves before God, to flee to the crucified Christ, to put the flesh to death more and more through the Spirit of prayer. . . ."

A growing awareness of the extent of sin

As we grow in knowledge of the saving merit of our Lord Jesus we become increasingly aware of the sinfulness and corruption of our human heart and the great need for forgiveness. I am the least of all the saints. I do not know any sinner who is worse than I am. As Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:15, "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst." The apostle does not say, "of whom I was the worst before my conversion." He remains chief of sinners! Through the working of the Holy Spirit Paul is profoundly aware of the corruption and evil of his heart. He needs the forgiveness of sins every day of his life. Knowing his own sinfulness Paul does not consider himself worthy of being an apostle.

Among evangelical Christians there are those who suggest forgiveness of sins is something you may claim but it should not be something you need every day.

As Christians we have only a small inkling of what we are confessing when we say with the Apostles' Creed, "I believe . . . the forgiveness of sins" It isn't the murderer, prostitute, or drunkard, the person with a criminal record, or all those we view with a critical eye who is the worst of sinners. A kind and loving senior Christian is no less sinful than a rebellious teenager. Every Christian must bow in submission and confess, "I am the least of all the saints. I am the worst of sinners. I sin because I am a sinner. Everything I do from the beginning to the end of my life is contaminated with sin."

We are not only guilty of sins we commit – as if those are the only ones that need to be forgiven. There are hidden faults which are concealed from the public eye and from our own perception and awareness. We need forgiveness much more than our sinful minds can begin to comprehend. As David prays in Psalm 19:12, 13, "Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me."

It is an act of extreme arrogance to think ourselves less sinful than others or that we should think we can make our way through a day without the need for the forgiveness of sins. Rather than turning my focus on what others are doing wrong I must first learn to see that my situation is desperate! I deserve to die for every sin I commit against the Lord and others. Daily I need to humble myself before the face of God's divine majesty. Humility must characterize our relationship with the Lord and with each other. It is a complete miracle of God's love and mercy that we may confess with fellow sinners in the communion of saints, "I believe the forgiveness of sins."

The blessing of forgiveness

Without forgiveness we cannot live. Forgiveness is the only way out of all our troubles. The Lord in great mercy cancels the bond which stood against us because of our sins (Col 2:14). He erases our sins and wipes them all away through Christ's atoning blood. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:7, 8, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding." In Colossians 1:13, 14 he concludes, "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

The Lord sees everything in our lives. Nothing is hidden from the sight of our God. Yet all the sins we commit are covered by Christ's blood. The Lord is merciful and gracious. David says in Psalm 103 that the Lord removes our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west. . . And how far is the east from the west? He does not say that God removes our sins from us as far as the north is from the south. For then you could say we and our sins are a long distance away, poles apart. But the Lord removes our sins from us as far as the east is from the west – an immeasurable distance. There is no measurement that can be used to show how far the east is from the west. Similarly, there is nothing that can measure how far God removes our sins from us.


When the Lord forgives your sins He promises never to hold them against you – not even on the day of judgment. For He is not like so many humans who resurrect past sins to knock the sinner over the head with them repeatedly. In worldly fashion we even deem it neces-

sary to have a criminal check done on fellow believers. The Lord God does not keep a record of past sins and misdeeds to bring them all to mind the next time we commit an offence. He graciously grants us the satisfaction (payment) of Christ and clothes us with his righteousness so that we never come into condemnation.

When the Lord forgives your sins He promises never to hold them against you – not even on the day of judgment.

Our fallen human nature will do everything to draw us away from the joy and assurance of forgiveness. Therefore, we must also use the means God has granted to us to live in the blessed assurance that our sins are forgiven. Daily we must confess our sins and seek forgiveness. Every Lord's Day we must place our lives under the ministry of reconciliation. Such knowledge gives a child of God profound joy and happiness.

The Word of God tells us in no uncertain terms that every believer who confesses his sin can also be assured his sins will be forgiven. King Hezekiah spoke beautifully of the forgiveness of sins in a prayer he offered to the Lord after he recovered from a sickness. He said, "In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back" (Isaiah 38:17). When the Lord casts our sins behind his back, his wrath is turned away from us and his love rests upon us. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The Lord cleanses us of all our iniquity. How else could Christ say to the criminal on the cross, "I tell you the truth, today you shall be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43)?

We are truly blessed by the confession: I believe. . . the forgiveness of sins. Each Lord's Day the wonderful gospel of the forgiveness of sins may be proclaimed to God's people: "Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins" (Ps 103:2, 3). "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered." (Ps 32:1). 

Rev. P.G. Feenstra is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Owen Sound, Ontario. pfeenstra@canrc.org



By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*"Blessed are they whose ways are blameless,
who walk according to the law of the LORD.
(Psalm 119:1)*

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Last week Sunday we could again hear the ten commandments, which are also known as the ten words of the covenant. They are very familiar to all of us. However, it can be refreshing to go over the commandments as to why they are so important to us. In this article we would like to introduce the ten commandments and continue on with each individual commandment in the issues to come.

These commandments were given after God had liberated his people from Egypt. This is a freedom that God alone has secured. The people of Israel were not co-operative. They mistrusted Moses and Aaron and had forgotten the covenant of the Lord. The Lord in his great mercy and love, spoke to them at the foot of Mount Sinai at Horeb. There the Lord came to them with the ten words of the covenant. "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Here the Lord restores a covenant relationship with his people. By giving us his law, He has made us free. Deuteronomy 6:20-24 explains why the ten commandments were also given. Moses says that if your son later asks you about the meaning of these laws, tell him all about the exodus out of Egypt. Once we were slaves, but now we are free. This law is given for our good so we may know how to live a righteous and holy life before our Creator.

The Lord does not simply give us rules to obey to make our life more miserable. We are to be taught by the commandments to see our sin and misery. God says to us, "I have delivered you, now serve Me by obeying my commandments." By obeying his commands we show our true thankfulness to Him.

Our covenant God has done so much for us. He has led us through the Red Sea to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, and brought us into the land of Canaan. The precious blood of our Saviour who died for us is our "Red Sea," and the tyranny of Pharaoh is the devil. He helps us to fight against Satan and to enter the spiritual land of Canaan. This will be our eternal home, Article 34 of the Belgic Confession explains to us. The Old and New Testament are tied together so beautifully and thus provide a great comfort for Christ's church today.

Our baptism also sets us apart to be committed to Him. No longer does the devil control our lives for we have a guide to help us to do his will; namely the ten commandments. They are the rule for Christian living to show us how to live before Him. It gives us the freedom of new life which God has given us in his covenant. To know that we do not deserve any of this makes us even more thankful.

As long as we are in this world, we will never be able to keep any of the commandments of God. It is through the grace of God and the Holy Spirit working mightily in us that we have a desire to serve Him. As a result we strive to live uprightly before Him.

The ten commandments should always remain a rich treasure for us. We should always listen with great reverence when our God is speaking to us. It should make us stand in awe, just like the Israelites at Mount Sinai. God said in Deuteronomy 4:10, "Assemble the people before Me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land, and may teach them to their children."

We are a holy people set apart by God to glorify his Name and to obey Him. Let us this coming Sunday listen with great reverence for our God has told us in his Word that we will be called blessed if our ways are blameless, and we walk according to the law of the Lord.

*The law of God is whole
And it revives the soul
By bidding it to rise.
His testimony sure
Forever shall endure:
It makes the simple wise.
The precepts of the LORD,
Which are His perfect Word,
With joy our hearts do brighten;
While His commandments sure,
Which are both true and pure,
The eyes of man enlighten.*

Psalm 19:3

Birthdays in March:

3: TREVOR HOFSTINK will be 25

C106 8920 - 165 Street, Edmonton, AB T5R 2R9

10: JAMES BOONE will turn 7

1020 Abbeydale Drive NE, Calgary, AB T2A 6H5

12: GERRY EELHART will be 41

c/o Mr. P. Eelhart, 305.10041 - 149 Street
(Summit Village), Edmonton, AB T5P 4V7

15: JIM VANDERHEIDEN will turn 44

1156 Diltz Road, RR 2, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W2
Telephone: (905) 701-9000

18: ROSELYN KUIK will be 29

68 Lynn Lake Drive, Winnipeg, MB R2C 4N7

26: COURTNEY POPKEN will be 10

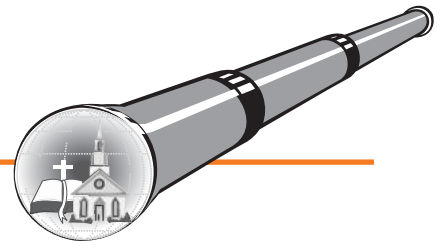
9445 Windsor Street, Chilliwack, BC V2P 6C5

Congratulations to all of you who are celebrating a birthday in the month of March. May you have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends and may above all our heavenly Father bless you in this new year with much health and happiness. Till next month,

Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

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1-905-563-0380



A Reformed Congregation in Russia

By George van Popta

The following article about Reformed believers in Russia was originally published this past December in the *Moscow Times*, an English language, though Russian, Internet newspaper. It is an interesting piece for several reasons, one of which is the connection of this small Russian Reformed congregation to our Dutch sister churches. We received permission to reproduce the article here providing it was left intact.

May the Lord Jesus Christ be with the Russian Reformed believers and their very few and small congregations as they seek to apply the Christian faith consistently to all spheres of life.

“No Christmas Tree for Tver’s 70 Calvinists”

By Andrei Zolotov Jr.
Staff Writer

TVER, Central Russia -- What is Christmas without a Christmas tree – that German tradition that made its way to Russia some 300 years ago and has become such a part of both Orthodox Christian and secular culture here?

But there is at least one small Protestant Christian community that takes its Biblical foundations so seriously that a tree and even the whole merry spirit of the holiday is a matter of debate – if not controversy – among its 70 members.

On Zavokzalnaya Ulitsa, among typical wooden houses with snow-covered gardens, one of Russia’s four tiny Reformed communities made its home six years ago in a brick house it bought from a Gypsy clan.

Here, where the services are translated from the Dutch liturgy, the seemingly simple question of a Christmas tree caused Pastor Yevgeny Kashirsky to hesitate.

“I have not raised this question yet,” Kashirsky, who resembles characters from Holbein and Vermeer canvases, said Friday. “Last year, we did have a tree. The year before we didn’t. The more conservative brothers consider it to be pagan.”

Otherwise, the pastor speaks with conviction about John Calvin’s theology and a need for Christian enlightenment and political activism to eventually build something of a 16th-century Geneva or rural Dutch town in this sleepy city of about 500,000 inhabitants.

Contrary to the traditional Russian perception of Dec 25 as “Catholic” Christmas, the vast majority of the arguably more than 1 million Russians who will celebrate the holiday on Wednesday are Protestants, predominantly adherents of Protestantism’s 19th-century, originally Anglo-Saxon denominations – Baptists, Pentecostals and Seventh-day Adventists. So-called first-wave Protestants are represented in Russia by two Lutheran churches – one of German, the other of Finnish tradition.

Reformed communities, which existed before the Revolution in St.

Petersburg, Moscow and Odessa, were almost exclusively Dutch and did not survive the Soviet period, while Hungarian Reformed churches from Transcarpathian Ukraine never proliferated either.

Against this background, Kashirsky’s strictly conservative Evangelical Reformed Church and its even smaller fellow parishes in Moscow, Omsk and Ufa represent a somewhat exotic phenomenon for the followers of Russia’s religious revival. One of the most traditional forms of Protestantism, the Reform (sic) church emerged in a most untraditional setting as a result of a religious pursuit by a group of intellectuals and not of proselytizing by foreign missionaries.

“I see it as a form of religious creativity, which was so widespread in the 1990s in Russia, when tons of people began inventing their religions,” said Alexander Shchipkov, author of the “What Russia Believes In” program on Radio Rossii and head of the Media Union’s Religion Reporters’ Guild. “They are intellectuals, and it comes from their heads, not from their hearts. It is unlikely to become big in Russia. But



Yevgeny Kashirsky leading a service at the Evangelical Reformed Church in Tver.
Reproduced with permission.

they are serious. They took a real basis, a tradition that works without them, and began adapting it to Russian conditions."

The small group that formed around Kashirsky meets weekly for services, holds a theological class, tries to enforce Puritan discipline among its members and does not go after new adherents for sheer numbers. It produces a web site and publishes brochures to disseminate its ideas.

"The most common Russian Protestant worldview largely has to do with your personal salvation and preaching the Gospels, usually a very optimistic and joyful type of preaching," Kashirsky said as a portrait of Calvin looked down from the wall. "But what do you do after that? Well, you create one choir, another choir and the question arises – is that it? We are saying that you should be totally Christian in all spheres of life – in the family, at work, at school, so that everything leads to Christ."

While rejecting what Protestants describe as Orthodox "additions" to the Bible, Kashirsky said he finds many common points with the Orthodox Church. "We work on the same field with the Orthodox – we are pro-state, pro-family, pro-patriotism," he said.

Kashirsky, who was born in Tver and specialized in English and German during his studies at the local university's linguistics department, said he had had an interest in faith since his childhood. Growing up in a typical, religiously indifferent Soviet family, he would stop by the city's only Orthodox church and light a candle, but no one would ever speak to him there about faith. In the late 1980s, he went to a Baptist church.

"I am very grateful to Baptism that it led me through the doors of Protestantism, and then I walked on my own," he said. His love of reading led him to Calvin's theology. It was not available in Russian until several years ago, but he got hold of an address for a British publishing house, which sent him several books in English.

In 1991, he registered the first Calvinist community in post-Soviet Russia. After ties were established with several Reformed churches in Europe, mainly with the Dutch-

based Reformed Church (Liberated), Kashirsky attended pastoral seminars in Wuppertahl, Germany, and at Theological University in Kampen, the Netherlands.

In 1996, the community bought the house on Zavokzalnaya Ulitsa. Built by an extended Gypsy family, it had a spacious common room in the middle with a staircase leading to a second-floor gallery, so no remodeling was necessary to convert the house into a church.

Kashirsky writes extensively on issues ranging from men's need to reassume responsibility and leadership in families to the confrontation between Islam and Christian civilizations. He views his community as God's nation with a special mission to bring the Reformation to Russia and said he would like one day to form a Christian political party.

"We will create our own Russian Protestant culture," he said. "There was a time when there was no Protestant culture in the Netherlands or Switzerland either."

Sermons in Kashirsky's church take up more than an hour of the 1 1/2-hour services, which seem to have more of an intellectual than an emotional or artistic appeal. There is no organ.

The Christmas service at 7 p.m. on Wednesday will not be much different from others, Kashirsky said, while community members are encouraged to invite relatives and

friends who are alone for Christmas Eve dinner. Children will get their gifts on New Year's Eve.

Vadim Skakovsky, co-owner of a small company producing communications equipment, said he was baptized in the Orthodox Church but did not like its emphasis on ritual. When a friend of a friend brought him to Kashirsky's church, Skakovsky, who said he had always liked to read philosophical books, found a home here.

"I discovered such a depth of theology here, and such a systematic worldview that I could not find elsewhere," Skakovsky said. As a presbyter, his duty in the community today is to oversee discipline, visit troubled members at home and resolve issues such as a quarrel between two sisters who refused to receive Communion together.

Because of its small size and because it does not proselytize in the streets, Tver's Reformed church has not encountered any problems with the authorities or local media, which did not appear aware that such a church exists in their city at all during a seminar on religion and the press in Tver on Friday.

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Tsar Cannon, Moscow, Russia

Albany Free Reformed Church Celebrates 50 Years His Wonderful Works

By Rene Vermeulen

Saturday, December 14, Albany awoke to a glorious day, very appropriate considering that it was a day of festivities for the Church at Albany. The church building had been beautifully decorated and the addition of a new foyer and meeting facilities all added to the festive occasion.

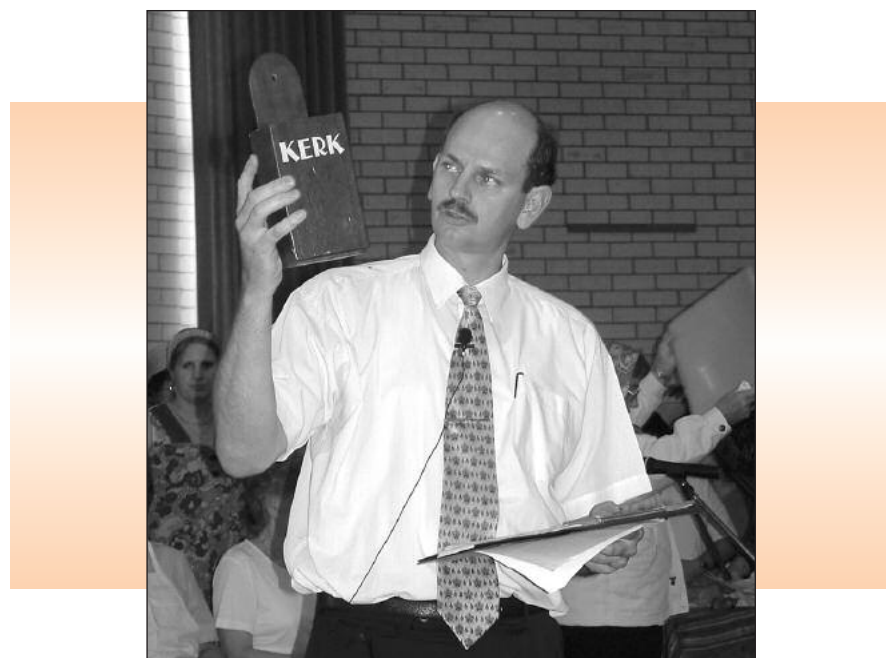
Albany's Choir Sing and Rejoice opened the proceedings of the celebration by singing a work entitled "Jubilee." Under the able direction of conductor Ian 'tHart the choir set the tone for the next number of hours. This day was exactly fifty years since the church was instituted by the ordination of three office bearers.

The Master of Ceremonies was Elder Len Schoof who did a wonderful job at keeping everyone to the time allotted to them.

The first speaker was brother Len 'tHart who until a couple of weeks ago was chairman of the consistory. The Church at Albany is currently vacant. Br. 'tHart reminded his audience that the title of the choir's opening contribution was related to the year of Jubilee, fifty years at which Israel was to release slaves, forgive debts, etc. A cause for joy for all of us.

"We are thankful for the blessings we have received during all these years and we may look forward to the future with at its conclusion eternal blessings." Brother 'tHart recalled the early days of the church, the discussions at his parental home about the covenant and its promises which had become real again in the liberation of the church during the war years.

All this led to the realization that in their new country of Australia there



MC Len Schoof show first box used for collecting Fixed Voluntary Contributions.

was a need to establish a school and eventually a church building.

And so we see today two relatively large congregations, the Church of Albany and its sister congregation in West Albany. Many members of West Albany were also present at this festive afternoon. Brother 'tHart concluded with: "Our parents were not perfect but they led us to serve our heavenly Father. He will not forsake the works of his hands."

After this fitting opening our previous minister Rev. A. Veldman took the floor to pass on the congratulations of Classis North, and his current congregation of West Kelmescott. He called upon his audience to see in this

festive event God's care for his church. "God showed his unfailing love during the fifty years." He reminded his audience of the words of Psalm 48 which richly show the care of our covenant God. Quite a number of members have passed on during these years and have become part of the cloud of witnesses. These are not things to be sad about. But he also reminded his listeners that there were sad occasions when there were excommunications, withdrawals and marriage breakdowns. "There were high days and also sad days, but God's mercies were new every morning. With God on your side you can travel on."

The children from the John Calvin Primary school gave a wonderful example of enthusiastic singing and this was followed by a little light hearted humour as brother Robert Dekker, representing the School Board recalled some correspondence between church and school.

A surprise was the appearance, on a large screen at the front of the church building where our meeting was held, of our first minister Dr. P. van Gurp. Dr. van Gurp was able to address our festive afternoon by video link from the Netherlands where he and his wife live in retirement. Dr. van Gurp emphasized the need to be obedient to God's Word. He concluded with "May God bless you."

Our MC brother Len Schoof in introducing our next speaker Rev. Joe Poppe recalled that during the time West Albany was in the process of calling their first minister the calling committee came with two names, the then candidate Poppe and Rev. K. Kok. The committee reminded the consistory that if they were unable to make up their mind, they could call both brothers which would mean that it was all a lot of "Poppycock." With this bit of humour Rev. Poppe took the floor.

Rev. Poppe as counsellor also represented Classis South and our neighbouring church of West Albany, reminded his audience that the church



Being entertained by "The Flurries" a singing Group from metro sister churches, who sang Irish, Dutch and Australian Folk songs.

faces a unique challenge of being either isolationistic or a bright light, a salting salt in the community in which it lives. "There is always the danger that the influence of the society in which we live will turn us away from God. Therefore it is important that we recognize that as Reformed churches we are either in reformation or deformation. Keep your eyes focussed on Jesus Christ and his covenant promises. For God remains faithful."

The Young People's Bible study clubs and the Ladies Bible study clubs

gave some wonderful humorous insight into the life of the congregation. The star of the show was without doubt the reappearance of Opoe Plug. Opoe Plug was a very central figure in the early life of the congregation. She always wore the traditional dress of the women in the fishing village of Katwijk, on the North Sea coast of the Netherlands. One of her grandchildren Sister Teunie 'tHart had dressed in her clothes and was interviewed by one of the sisters. Everyone who knew Opoe Plug could only say that Teunie 'tHart did a marvellous job of acting the part of our late sister; it was almost real.

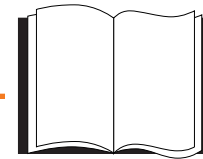
On behalf of consistory brother Marcel Bax, the current chairman, concluded the afternoon by thanking the organisers who had done such a wonderful job of making this afternoon possible. He reminded us that it is good to reflect on God's blessings. This was further made possible through the publication of a 100 page booklet entitled *His Wonderful Works* in which the fifty years pass the review. Brother Bax concluded the afternoon by giving thanks to God and asking his blessing over the meal which was being prepared in the school's grounds.

All in all a wonderful day which was followed the following day with the celebration of the Lord's Supper and in the afternoon a commemoration sermon by our previous minister Rev. A. Veldman on Psalm 124.

All thanks to God alone.



"Opoe Plug" being interviewed about how it went in the early days in Albany.



On April 6, 2002, the General Synod of the Vrijgemaakt Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN) was officially opened. The official speakers for the Free Reformed churches in Australia and the Canadian Reformed Churches raised quite a stir in the Netherlands with their speeches that were very critical of certain developments in the GKN. It was big news in the Dutch Christian press; in particular, *Reformatorisch Dagblad* and *Nederlands Dagblad* wrote quite a bit about this. The articles were easily accessible through links on the official website of the Dutch Synod: <http://gszuidhorn.gkv.nl>

After reading about this, I thought I would wait to see the actual text of the speech of our delegate in print myself before I react to it. I have waited for eight months to read the speech of Rev. J. Huijgen in *Clarion*. I have seen it now and I am embarrassed by it, to say the least.

We Canadians seem to have a nasty habit of acting in a self-righteous manner when it comes to foreign relations. First we had to read about this critical speech at Zuidhorn by our delegate(s) in the Dutch press. (I did not read that his fellow delegate Rev. C.J. VanderVelde took exception to it, so he probably shares the guilt). All I could do is feel badly and say: "The delegate did not speak on my behalf!"

What really bothers me about the speech of our delegates to the Dutch Synod and the contents of that address is not just what was said and the way it was said. It is not my intention here to get into my own thoughts about some of the changes that have come about in the sister churches in the Netherlands. There are some changes that I think were long overdue and there may be some things that should have been left alone; I have not made a study of them.

What I do have a problem with is the fact that the delegates were completely out of line with their criticism of the Dutch churches. The reason, in my humble opinion, is that they forgot all about their instructions by Synod Neerlandia 2001, and grossly overstepped their authority. What they expressed

there were their personal opinions only, but certainly not the official position of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Let me prove this: just read the official mandate from Synod Neerlandia to the CRCA committee. Rev. Huijgen quoted these instructions in his speech and renumbered them one through four. The committee was instructed to: "1: Stay in touch . . . 2: Study . . . Consult . . . and . . . Report to Synod 2004 . . . 3: Make a thorough study . . . To see whether the Reformed churches are deviating from the Reformed basis . . . (and report to our own next Synod of course), and 4: . . . To express our disappointment about not having been informed about a major change to the church order. (This last point of the mandate, was really the only criticism they had authority to express to the Dutch synod).

You don't have to take my word for it: just read page 95 of the Acts of Synod Neerlandia. The Official Report of committee 3 of Synod Neerlandia did not accept certain parts of the CRCA Committee. See consideration 4.7 and I quote from it: "If there is a need to sound a warning cry in the direction of the GKN because of deviations from the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity discipline and liturgy, it is our responsibility as sister churches to provide the necessary evidence from the Scriptures and the Reformed Confessions and to appeal to the GKN on that basis." And they added: "Departure from a long, traditional and well-worn path is not necessarily wrong. A thorough study and evaluation of the developments in the GKN in that light would also show that not every change in church life carries the same weight."

Let me ask, did our CRCA committee complete this big task and report to next Synod, to be prepared by Synod Chatham in February 2004? I guess not! The Committee indeed did what they always wanted to do. See the recommendation from the CRCA to Synod Neerlandia 2001, that is to: "Instruct the CRCA to address the next Synod of the GKN expressing the concern that they seem to be drifting away from the old Reformed paths as is evident in the

weakening of the Scriptural language in the form for Marriage, the increasing centralization in church life, the increase in the number of hymns which historically has come at the expense of the singing of the Psalms, the shift of the focus of the Theological University from an institution for the ministry to a Knowledge Centre and an apparent professionalizing of the ministry."

Here you go: at Synod Neerlandia the CRCA committee had already made up its mind and Committee 3 of Synod Neerlandia disagreed with that approach. Synod then sent the CCRA committee back to work and investigate. Instead of that, the delegates overstepped the boundaries of their mandate and did exactly what they were not supposed to do and went overseas to criticize our Dutch sister churches and pretend that they were speaking on our behalf.

Yes, I can just hear the objections already. This was just a committee report, not a mandate. That may be, but still it is obvious, if you read the Acts of our Synod 2001, that the actions of our delegates are totally out of line with the spirit of Neerlandia 2001. Just read the entire report of committee 3.

Just in case some readers think that I don't appreciate all the work that the committee members do, let me say this: I do, I've been there; for some sixteen years or so I worked hard on the very same committee, with one other non-minister and two hard working ministers.

One thing I have noticed. All members now carry an expiry date. It makes it harder for a Synod to simply replace them at the next Synod. Too bad, in a way, because the members of our CRCA committee that bear responsibility for this bad publicity overseas ought to be replaced. Ironically the Theological University at Kampen is getting criticism in Canada for an "apparent professionalizing of the ministry." In my opinion a little more professionalism in the ministry here in our own Canadian Reformed Churches would not hurt at all!

Art Lengkeek
Chilliwack, B.C.



Report on the CRTA-East Convention, November 7-8, 2002

By A. Kingma and K. Sikkema

Ben Harsevoort's keynote address

Paul did not impress the Corinthians with "wise and persuasive words," he wrote, "but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on man's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor 2:4). Further down in the chapter, he elaborated on this antithesis and affirmed that "we have the mind of Christ" (v. 16). It turned out that the Corinthians had some growing up to do in this regard, because they "are still worldly" (3:3). The November 2002 CRTA Convention was built around the theme "... but we have the mind of Christ."

Rather than seeking to "transform" the world with a Christian view on all matters, Mr. Harsevoort called his audience to focus on conserving what we have received, and to keep the lights of Bible and Church History burning by studying those subjects.

The theme came through loud and clear in Mr. Ben Harsevoort's keynote address on this verse, in which he stressed the antithetical difference between worldly wisdom and Christian belief. He amply illustrated the ongoing rudderless crisis in public education and in our society. A disastrously strong division has been accepted between our public and private lives, and the claim of Jesus Christ as the only way is silenced, and people choose their own way with the old pagan gods. Rather than seeking to "transform" the world with a Christian view on all matters, Mr. Harsevoort called his audience to focus on conserving what we have

received, and to keep the lights of Bible and Church History burning by studying those subjects. We must have an education that produces knowledgeable and biblically wise Christian disciples, if we are to develop the Christian mind. Without wanting to see the Christian day school as the exclusive agent of education, he identified it as indispensable in developing the content of the Christian mind.

The theme was also neatly printed on the convention booklet, which had been sent to the schools several weeks ahead of time. This booklet introduced not only the various speakers, workshops, and workshop leaders, but also the guests from several non-Canadian Reformed Schools, including the first Netherlands Reformed Christian School and Heritage Christian School from Jordan Station, Providence Reformed Collegiate from Komoka, and Rehoboth Christian School from Copetown. All in all, this convention could claim to be the largest yet in our history.

While the main courses were offered in Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington (both in terms of actual meals and main speeches), the workshops were held in John Calvin Christian School across the parking lot. At the entrance of the school, one bulletin board was artfully decorated with the convention-theme. Several workshops allowed opportunity to link directly to the theme, including the ones on the *Purpose of Studying English*, *Teaching Bible History*, and *Reformed History*. The theme was not clearly in the scope of other presenters in workshops such *Conflict Resolution*, *Self Esteem*, and *Kids 4 Kids*. While we yet learn from them, it begs the question whether or not we can maintain a distinctly Reformed Christian perspective in such significant areas.

Some mingling

A fair portion of these CRTA conventions allows for mingling and connecting with people from other schools. Opportunities for this exist before opening and after closing, but also during the lunches and breaks. This convention was no exception, and, with the large number of teachers

present, the biggest obstacle to finding a conversation partner may have been the need to get a coffee and eat the wonderful snacking foods.

Especially teachers have blessed places to stand, venturing forth in faith in sowing our seed every morning and in giving education-for-life to our children.

Rev. C. Bosch

Rev. C. Bosch presented a devotional speech to start off the second day of the convention. In this devotional, he zeroed into the text from Ecclesiastes: "Cast your bread upon the waters for after many days you will find it again." Many have interpreted this text in various ways. A literal meaning is obviously not meant. To suggest a care-free living is not meant either. Although doing works of charity is good, that is not meant either. All these are meaningless. To look at this text as a command to live out one's faith despite life's disillusionments brings us closer to the depth and meaning of this text. We are to eat and drink and find satisfaction in our toil, unfolding the secrets of God's world to our children, to our students, and in so doing, we will receive our rewards. Christian teachers as well as parents are to live faithful and happy lives (bread in this text means life or livelihood) in God's service even though they do not know what will happen (casting our bread upon the waters), thus showing that "we have the mind of Christ." When so doing, the Lord will bless our work.

Rev. Bosch added that doing our work must not be done in a "let me see what God will tell me today" attitude. We must plan carefully, be organized, make wise decisions, and do as much as we can in giving to others, to the next generation. In this sense, Rev. Bosch said that especially teachers have blessed places to stand, venturing forth in faith in sowing our seed every

morning and in giving education-for-life to our children. It should also be said that we may rest and stand back from our work as God stood back to observe His creation work. As He saw that it was good, so we can evaluate our work in the light of God's Word, and thank God for being able to do it. We may take humble pride in our work if it is good.

Reading further into chapter 2 of Ecclesiastes, we can note that there is a sense of urgency in this calling to cast our bread. We do not know what disaster or event may come. The imagery of the tree – *where it falls there will it lie* – is not a disappointment for the Christian, but a confirmation that events occur as God wants it to, just as he directs the tree where to fall. Rev. Bosch encouraged us to work with heads anointed with oil, trusting that God will provide: He will bless our work.

Winding down

During the rest of the day, we could enjoy another two sessions of workshops, one before a delicious meal of chicken breasts, potatoes, veggies, and tart, and one after that scrumptious meal. Teachers could choose from eight possible workshops for each session.

Guido de Brès Christian High's staff joined us for the Friday as well. Together, we experienced an enjoyable full house, where about 160 teachers could listen, could share, could be encouraged, could be equipped, and could support one another. What a blessing it is to have teachers together who share a firm commitment to teaching God's covenant children according to his covenant Word.

Hats off to the John Calvin Christian School (Burlington) staff for hosting this Canadian Reformed Teacher's Convention. Let's do all we can to keep treasures like this, improving wherever we can, but also recognizing these CRTA conventions as treasures for all our teachers. Teachers can now go home and implement what they have learned, whether it is done consciously or not, whether it is a teaching strategy or a better foundational understanding, so that the covenant children entrusted to us may get "education-for-life."

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Peregrine Survey

By K. Sikkema

Covenant Christian School in Flamborough chose a theme for this year based on Isaiah 40:30, 31, about "soaring on wings like eagles." As the education of covenant children around the country continues in 2003, may parents, teachers, board, committee members, and society members alike go forth hoping in the Lord. He will renew our strength; in his strength we will run and not grow weary, and we will walk and not be faint. We may easily feel overtaken by weariness, especially when those dark days of the year are here, when our strength feels zapped, and when we are faced with the challenges of preparing for the new school year. A theme like this helps us to lift up our eyes to our Almighty God and Father, who loves us in Christ his Son, and who renews us by his Spirit.

Even more reason for thanks though, are the firm principles on which our school society is based.

Several schools in Ontario report that the Ontario government has accepted their application for eligibility for the Education Tax Credit. The chairman of Maranatha/Emmanuel Christian School in Fergus reflects, "These things are never to be taken for granted, and we are thankful for this declaration by our government. Even more reason for thanks though, are the firm principles on which our school society is based. We can reflect on our blessings as we follow current events in the public system, which has trouble defining its principles." The school is still considering to include grades K, 11 and 12, and also contemplates long-term implications of its proposals, including a possible system of feeder schools. The membership will discuss it in February 2003. Home schooling families are remembered for special school events: "We would like to take this opportunity to invite all parents who are presently home schooling in our church community, to join us in the presentation of the program . . . We look forward to your participation!"

Guido de Brès Christian High School is not only going to be Smoke-Free by 2003, it has also developed a new compulsory Bible program worth a half credit in each of grades 9 and 10, and a full credit in each of grades 11 and 12. Its parts are connected through strands like Biblical Knowledge and Skills, History of God's People, Biblical Doctrine, and Faith and Practice. Grade 9 will study Archaeology and Geography of Bible Lands; Grade 10 will dig into the New Testament and Church History; Grade 11 focuses on The Unity of Scripture with special attention for Psalms and Revelation; and Grade 12 will delve into Biblical Studies with a program zooming in on Romans, Ecclesiastes, Ethics, and Current Church History.

ACRES in Attercliffe has by now welcomed their new immigrant-teacher to the school. After residing on the fertile clay of Groningen's Kantens for many years, we welcome the Jansen family to the fruitful clay of Canada's Niagara!

Around Chatham, dogs do eat homework. For a project on human anatomy, one student had brought some pig organs (lungs, heart, tracheas, liver and spleen) to school for closer observation. After all, they are quite similar to human organs. "When the organs had served their purpose, they were taken home and fed to the family dog. The father proudly announced that his son could honestly say, "The dog ate my project!" The school can also borrow videos again from the Lambton Kent Board of Education. "Videos are a nice tool to use as reinforcement to lessons taught," muses the principal. And less messy.

Chocolate bars always used to be good fund-raisers for kids to be involved in. Despite prizes and awards, however, one principal comments that "we have not even hit our target of \$3000.00," and several boxes had to be returned unsold. If it is no longer comfortable to have our children practice their dealership skills, we may need to think of other ways of raising the same money. Raising tuition will not be a popular one. Would eliminating the special events be? Once again, we have an issue that gives us cause to reflect on our priorities.

At William of Orange, brother DeGlint had to resign as teacher because of his health. May the Lord strengthen and encourage you, Mel. The principal gives three reasons why

parents (and I add: others) should read the reports on workshops and conventions teachers attended: "First, teachers learn some exciting things at these workshops. Secondly, some of the workshops that teachers go to are chosen on the basis of how to better help your child learn. And third, William of Orange Christian School has been blessed with a dedicated and professional staff. Honour them by reading their reports."

Credo Christian High saw a significant change in the trend of declining attendance at membership meetings: "The most recent AGM was very well attended and I wish to thank you for your continued support. It was wonderful to see so many come out. No doubt the presentation by the Inspector of Independent Schools was a motivator and as it turned out it provided a great opportunity for the membership

Around Chatham, dogs do eat homework.

to get an inside view of how we interact with the Ministry." "The school's principal has been nominated once again by the Fraser Institute for an award (Garfield Outstanding Principals Award) in the category of "academic achievement in excess of expectations." Congratulations, and may you continue to do well in that task of serving students, parents, the school community and God our Father.

Smithers' principal reflects on the decline of respect:

The world in which we live has moved over the last decades into a much more casual, individualistic, tolerant, "let's be friends" attitude. As Christians . . . we have . . . bought into this philosophy, at least in part. . . . One way in which we see this is in the lack of respect being shown by some of the students, . . . in our clothing choices, our entertainment choices, our brand of humour. The spirit of the age is: don't stand on formalities, get comfortable, be yourself. The lack of respect does not reveal itself in "lippy" children; it is more in children simply not listening to the adults, or addressing them in an impolite manner, not showing sensitivity to others and being individualistic in mindset rather than obedience – and service-oriented.

The antidote? "Be men of Issachar (1 Chron 12:32): people who understand the times and know what to do. . . . The only way to do that is to study God's Word, examine our lives very critically, and change them as necessary."

Be men of Issachar . . . people who understand the times and know what to do.

Whether it concerns matters of expansion, respect, curriculum development, fund(-rais)ing or staffing, all of our schools know their merriments and their murmurs. Some of them are struggling with the withdrawal of members, or the sudden departure of a teacher.

Many are currently trying to piece a full complement of staff together for 2003-2004, while teachers contemplate what to do during the next school year. These things put us on the toes of our commitments, and sometimes shake the foundations on which the schools were built. Let us not despair, however, but go forth, trusting the Lord and "soaring on wings like eagles." May the Lord also strengthen us to carry our burdens and responsibilities together, as a communion of saints, so that his church may continue to be built.



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