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Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE



Our "Coram Deo" family

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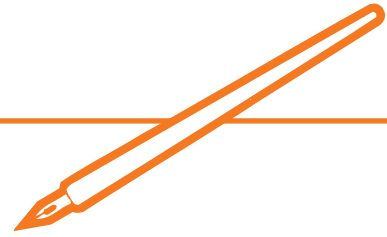
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By J. Visscher



Surfing the Net



The title of this editorial may puzzle some of our readers; however, I am sure that many of you will recognize it immediately. Specifically, it has to do with the Internet. More generally, it also has to do with the world of computers and modern communication. When a person has a computer and that computer is connected by either telephone line or satellite hook-up to the world-wide web, then that person can begin to surf or to ride on electronic waves. He or she has the means at their disposal to consult with people around the globe.

Instant communication

For example, if today you do not feel like taking out pen and paper to write a letter to a distant relative or friend, mailing it at a certain cost and waiting days or weeks to get a reply, you have an alternative. You can sit behind your computer, type a letter on the keyboard in front of you, hit a button and in an instant it is sent and received on the other side of the world.

Never before has so much information been at the beck and call of so many, so cheaply and so quickly.

It may be that in addition to writing a letter, you want to send some pictures. No problem! Take out your digital camera, snap your pictures, download them electronically to your computer and with a few clicks of your mouse, they are on their way.

Keeping up contact

Or perhaps you have friends or relatives living in different parts of the world and you want to keep up contact with all of them; only time is lacking and the postage costs are prohibitive. This too is but a minor matter. Write your letter on the computer, add your pictures and then send it to as many people as you want all at once. It's just that easy.

Searching everywhere

Another scenario comes to mind. You have to do research on a certain subject. Perhaps it has to do with a school assignment or a work project. Again, you power up your computer, connect it to the web, go to one of its many search engines like Google, Altavista, Yahoo or the like, type in your subject and with blazing speed all kinds of sources are identified and many can be accessed.

What this brief introduction shows you is that computers plus the Internet open up all sorts of wonderful opportunities. Never before has so much information been at the beck and call of so many, so cheaply and so quickly.

The downside

Nevertheless, along with the good there is also the bad. Indeed, as is the case with almost every human invention, it has the ability to be used either for good or evil. The telephone was invented and while it allowed families to keep in close contact, it also allowed gossip to spread like wildfire. The radio came along and people were exposed to both religious and secular broadcasting. Television hit the market and human eyes took in both pictures of great beauty and images of grotesque violence. So often there seem to be these two sides to whatever man invents.

The same also goes for the Internet. I have just mentioned a few of the positives, but I would derelict in my duties if I did not also mention some of the negatives. What are they?

Wasting time

Now, some will say that the fact that certain people spend a lot of time surfing the net is nothing to worry about. It is a novelty that will soon wear-off. And no doubt in many cases it does. For some people, however, the hobby becomes an addiction. They seem to spend a lot of their free time glued to keyboard and screen.

Most of you are familiar with the expression "golf widow." It describes a wife who is married but who rarely sees her husband because he is out on the links every chance he gets. In line with this we now have another kind of widow: "a computer widow." Hubby is so wrapped up in this electronic marvel that she is forced to take a backseat to a thing of metal and wires.

What are we doing with the gift of time that God has so graciously given to us?

Should you ask what hubby or teenage son or daughter is doing on the net, then different answers are forthcoming. Father John may well be part of a discussion group where the debates are raging fast and furious. Son Bill may be playing strategy games with his friends and seeing who can win the battle or the war that is being fought. Daughter Betty may be on one or other chat line telling her friends about the latest flame in her life.

Oh, and lest we think that Mother Alice is not involved in any of this, we should think again. I happen to be a "lurker" which is a term used to describe someone who is a member of one or more discussion groups on the web, reads what comes along but rarely interacts. What strikes me when I am lurking, and so often deleting too, is that some women are no less adept than men when it comes to using the net as a major time consumer.

All in all, it begs the question as to what people are doing with their time. Even more it makes one wonder whether Christians who live their lives on the net are living aright. Surely, it behooves all of us as believers to step back occasionally and to ask ourselves what are we doing with the gift of time that God has so graciously given to us?

Bad manners

Another problem that is connected with the net is an increase in bad manners. What do I mean? I am thinking of the fact that some people use the net to err their complaints recklessly. Take the case of the church member who disagrees with Sunday's sermon. In the past if he or she might

What's inside?

Dr. J. Visscher's editorial deals with the timely subject of computers and the Internet. As with so many developments in our world, there is a good and a bad side to technology. The warnings of the editorial should be taken to heart.

Dr. C. Van Dam updates us on the exciting work of Partners in Reformed Education in Latin America (PIRE-LA). Clearly our ties with them are growing along very positive lines.

We have an important report submitted by committees of the CanRC and the URC regarding a song book for the churches. The following is stated in the report: "The major part of this work will include the 'testing' of hymns. For this work the prayers of the saints are solicited. Both committees are mandated to report to their respective Synods, to be convened in 2004, D.V."

We have a report of the Faithworks group that spent the last two weeks of February in Haiti at "Coram Deo," the home of Karen Bultje. It is humbling to see the tremendous needs in Haiti and to realize that God allows us opportunities to be of assistance. May the Lord continue to bless this work.

Two congregations in our federation received ministers from outside our federation: Rev. A. Souman to the Church in Smithville, and Rev. D.M. Boersma to the Church at Denver. We rejoice with our sister congregations.

We have a meditation, a press review by Dr. J. DeJong, a press release from Classis Pacific West, and a number of letters to the editor.

On a practical matter, some readers report that their issue 8 of *Clarion* missed a number of papers. This was a printing problem. Please contact Premier Printing for a replacement issue. Our apologies for any inconvenience this has caused.

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felt compelled to approach the offending pastor, they would do so politely and during the week. Now what seems to happen all too often is that people come home from church in a huff, get behind their computers, pound out a complaint and fire it off right away. It is so much easier to vent your frustrations at a metal box than to deal with a human face.

Or what about apologies? Common courtesy demands that when you wrong someone you go to them and make your excuses. Modern modems, however, allow you to send a lame message via computer in a very detached and impersonal manner.

Still, of all of these misuses the most serious one remains to be mentioned, and it has to do with pornography.

Hence my advice to all you net users is: mind your manners! Just because you have this new invention at your disposal does not give you the right to blaze away with abandon and to retract with glibness. Loving your neighbour has electronic implications too.

Violence

Wasting time and poor manners, however, are not the only downsides of the net; there is also the issue of violence. Where this rears its ugly head is especially in the area of computer games. Many of these games are violent and some are violent to the extreme. Males, and young males in particular, activate certain games and then get sadistic satisfaction out of the ever increasing number of people that they can kill on the screen.


Of course I realize that these are not real kills; nevertheless, one has to ask some serious questions about the spiritual level of Christians who get their thrills out of zapping

imaginary people. Does it not desensitize them to real violence? Is it not, in spirit at least, a violation of the sixth commandment and the call to love our neighbour?

Pornography

Still, of all of these misuses the most serious one remains to be mentioned, and it has to do with pornography. You may be employing the net in a perfectly innocent and legitimate way and suddenly a message pops up on your screen inviting you to visit a sexually explicit site. In a moment of weakness, you may surf where no one should really surf at all and end up in a world of lust, perversion, cruelty and degradation. So easily this invention that has such great uses can become an instrument of the devil.

As a result, we all need to be on our guard. If someone in your household spends a lot of time on the computer they must agree to be answerable to the other members of the household for what they are doing on it. If there is a computer with Internet access in your home and it is behind closed doors, get it out into the open. If a family member is monopolizing it, set reasonable time limits. From time to time check the history window to see which sites family members are visiting. In short, hold one another accountable.

In summary, the best standard when it comes to the proper use of this medium, as well as to so many other things in life, is what we find in Philippians 4:8, 9. Listen: "whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." 

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Photo courtesy Cor Loddler

By Paul Aasman

How shall we Make them Come in?

“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.’”

Luke 14:23

The forced conversion of people’s hearts is reported often in the news these days. Several fundamentalist Muslim countries have laws against apostasy from Islam, and some even demand that such “apostates” be forcibly reconverted until they confess, “Allah is the only God, and Mohammed is his prophet.”

Similar things are heard from countries that continue to persecute Christians, as in China and elsewhere. Christians are being imprisoned and forced to undergo educational programs in order to compel them to give up their allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Does Jesus Christ command us to do the same thing? Are we supposed to force people to become Christians, to compel them to confess the truth, to (as Jesus says in the parable of the marriage feast) “make them come in?”

A large segment of Christianity has thought so in the past.

The Waldenses in Northern Italy in the 1300s, the Lollards (followers of John Wycliffe) in England during the 1400s and the Hussites in Bohemia during the 1400s were all severely persecuted because the Church of Rome had declared them heretics. They were slaughtered by crusaders and arrested by the Inquisition. The Inquisition would torture a “heretic” until he repented and confessed Christ according to the teachings of the church. Those who refused would often die under torture or be executed as heretics. During the 1500s, Reformed believers were arrested and tortured by the tens of thousands everywhere

in Europe by the Inquisition and other Roman Catholic institutions.

Had Jesus Christ commanded this? Is this what he meant when he said, “make them come in?”

One of the main reasons why Christians have suffered some much down through the centuries is because Augustine taught that the church must at times use force to convert a heretic. In his writings against the Donatists (a group that broke away from the church in his time), he said that many have come to faith being “guided aright by love,” but more often have they been “corrected by fear.” The later is the more effective way to bring a person to Christ than the prior. The twelve disciples were *guided aright by love* when Jesus called them to follow him, but the apostle Paul was *corrected by fear* when he was captured by Christ’s voice, dashed to the ground by his power and struck with physical blindness. Augustine points out that because Paul was compelled or forced to become a Christian, he was a more effective minister of the gospel.

So, Augustine said, Jesus teaches in the parable that we must first invite people to believe in Jesus Christ, but if they refuse, then we should use whatever means we can think of, even if we need to force them to confess Christ.

But Augustine cannot be right. We must not use such methods. Of course the church should *make them come in* as much by promises of grace as by threats of eternal hell. But the church

must never wield physical power. She has only spiritual power.

But that does not mean that the church is weak. Her spiritual power is what makes her great. It is precisely in the use of holy words that the church can “make them come in.” Paul calls the gospel the *power of God unto salvation* (Rom 1:16). It is an enormous power which, when unleashed, has mighty effect. Paul also says that the church uses *divine weapons to demolish strongholds*, that *take captive every thought* (2 Cor 10:4). That is why God says through Zechariah that He will conquer the world for himself, “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty” (Zech 4:6).

God has equipped us all to “make them come in.” We have the strongest weapons and the greatest powers on our side. If anyone can compel another, we can do it. Those who try to compel anyone to faith by torture or other physical means will be found to have chosen, as it were, to enter battle with a stick when he could have had a complete battleship at his disposal. Let us pray for Christians who are tortured, but let us not despair when false religions and false churches lay down the real power in order to take up such pathetic small ones. By giving us the gospel, God has mightily equipped us to conquer the world for the Lord Jesus Christ.



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Spreading the Reformed Faith in Latin America

By C. Van Dam

The exciting work of the Partners in Reformed Education in Latin America (PIRE-LA) continues both in supporting ongoing projects and in seizing new opportunities. We seek to spend the Lord's money wisely, targeting especially areas like education, translating books and supporting initiatives that will have long term impact. Allow me to take this opportunity to update you on the basis of the last two newsletters.

John Knox Bible Institute in Campeche

Our work of support to this training school for pastors and church leaders in the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico continues. We allocated a total of \$4,900 (US) to support seven students, to pay for supplies, telephone and Internet connection; and for the cost of an exchange teachers program (within Mexico). Previously, we had also helped them to acquire a number of essential books for their library. Although this Bible Institute is an official work of the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico, there are only very limited resources in this church for this important and vital work. There is an ongoing urgent need for trained pastors and other leaders in this part of Mexico.

Adolfo Garcia De La Sienra: a Planter of Seeds

Dr. Adolfo Garcia, a university professor in the Faculty of Economics at the University of Veracruz, is an energetic promoter of the Reformed faith in Mexico. Fluent in both Spanish and English, he has worked very hard in lecturing and translating a number of books of Reformed authors, which PIRE-LA has helped to fund. One of those was H. Evan Runner's *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*.



When PIRE-LA suggested that Groen Van Prinsterer's classic *Unbelief and Revolution* be translated, Dr. Garcia was most enthusiastic. In his own words: "Van Prinsterer's book is for me one of the dearest and most liberating books I have ever read." The project got a real boost when PIRE-LA discovered that a translation of this work had been started several years ago in the Netherlands. For a small fee, it could be purchased and so the book is well on its way in the process of touching up and finishing the translation and then eventually printing it.

As a Reformed philosopher, Dr. Garcia has had the opportunity to speak

to many different student and church groups and explain the biblical worldview. This work is going so well that it has been very difficult for him to keep up with the demand. Mexico is hungry!

To cope with the increasing workload he has taken the initiative to establish a more formal structure, a ministry to promote the vision of Abraham Kuyper that Christ is for all of life. He is raising funds for this work in Mexico, and he has also asked PIRE-LA to help with this project with a monthly funding for the first year of \$637.50 (US) per month. The level of support PIRE-LA is able to give will depend on its income.

One of Dr. Garcia's converts to the Reformed faith is a very energetic young man, Alberto Vazquez in Monterrey. Describing the profound change in his life, he said: "It was as if my eyes were suddenly opened, and I was able to see everything so clearly." He is now translating Jonathan Chaplin's *Introduction to a Christian Worldview*. In addition, he has also completed a book aimed at young people entitled *The Company of my Father*. As well, he is busy establishing a book publishing business which PIRE-LA has assisted with a loan. In this way he hopes, as he put it, "to promote the interests and values of the kingdom of God everywhere."

Supporting the Work in Portuguese Latin America

PIRE-LA is giving support to the International Reformed Theological College, the Portuguese Internet seminary ministry headed by Rev. R.F. Boersema. This ministry currently has eighteen students. Eight professors help out, part-time, without remuneration. The assistance PIRE-LA gave was in the form of a donation towards purchasing computer hardware, scanner, and software. We are also hoping to provide financial assistance for placing Reformed theological books in Portuguese on the internet. In our quickly changing world, this work can be a real blessing for spreading the Reformed faith in Portuguese speaking countries world-wide. (More information on this seminary, as well as an opportunity to support it, is available by visiting their website: <http://pro-rege.net>).

Via Rev. K. Wieske, PIRE-LA received the opportunity to sponsor the

translating of Dr. J. Douma's *The Ten Commandments* into Portuguese through The Centre for Reformed Literature (*Centro de Literatura Reformada - CLIRE*). Support was also given for purchasing a computer for the translation and publishing effort. Rev. Wieske recently wrote that the translation work is progressing well. They plan to have the book available at a Reformed Theological Symposium in July where ministers, elders, deacons, seminarians, and people who love the Reformed faith will gather from all over Brazil. In this way they hope to spread this book "as widely as possible throughout the seminaries, churches, pastor's studies and bookshelves of this huge country of 180 million people."

We share Rev. Wieske's enthusiasm and hope that this effort and possible future translations may contribute greatly to the vital work of spreading Reformed and biblical literature in Brazil.

Finances

In the past year we have been able to support the projects mentioned in this article. Our total income for 2002, mostly from churches, was \$15,662; while our expenses were \$27,517. PIRE-LA still ended in the black because we started the year with a balance of \$32,681. We have committed obligations this year so far of about \$16,000. Therefore, the actual current balance is approximately \$3,000. We hope and pray that we will be able to continue to meet the many new and exciting opportunities that are opening up for spreading the Reformed faith. The Latin American world is vast, the number of



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people involved is huge, and most importantly, the hunger for the gospel and the biblical world view is growing. May the Lord bless this work.

All donations to PIRE-LA should be made out to Worldwide Christian Schools, and mailed to P.O. Box 642-1801 Lakeshore Road West, Mississauga, ON, L5J 4S6. Please indicate on your cheque that your gift is for the PIRE-LA Project. An acknowledgment and a tax receipt will be sent to you.

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Denver Receives a New Minister in Dirk Maurits Boersma

By Wayne Chase

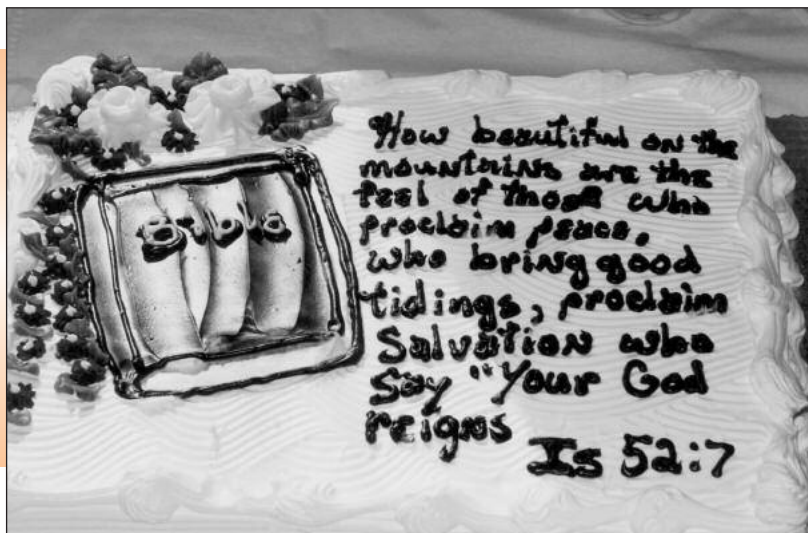
On February 16, 2003, the congregation of Emmanuel American Reformed Church joyously received Rev. Dirk Maurits Boersma, previously missionary in South Africa for six years, as their pastor. The congregation welcomed him to Westminster, Colorado, on the Saturday afternoon prior to his installation Sunday. Besides members of the congregation of Emmanuel, several members of Grace Reformed Church (RCUS) of Greeley were present for the informal event on Saturday afternoon. Rev. Boersma was introduced to the congregation by way of several of the various organizations and committees which were presented. Included were a review of the history of Emmanuel American Reformed Church, a presentation of the work of the Missions and Evangelism Committee, an introduction to the women's outreach Bible study (Women of Westminster), an overview of the work of Heritage Helpers, the fundraising wing of Heritage Christian School, and sev-



eral musical selections presented by students of Heritage Christian School. Finally, the consistory presented Rev. Boersma with a number of welcome

gifts. The congregation was encouraged as Rev. Boersma, responding to this warm welcome, indicated his pleasure to be present at last. He expressed his eagerness to begin his ministry, noting that the goal of his ministry was that of leading the congregation, through teaching and example, into a deeper knowledge of, and closer relationship to God.

Rev. Boersma was installed the following Sunday in the morning worship service, with Rev. J. Van Rietschoten officiating. Rev. Van Rietschoten chose as his text Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" Rev. Van Rietschoten preached this text under the theme: Gospel means glad tidings of the victory of God our Saviour. He noted that the word gospel is limited to the New Testament, but is rich





Rev. D. Boersma and Rev. J. VanRietschoten


in usage in the Old Testament, as God was busy calling his people to fear Him even as He was proclaiming the gospel, the good news of victory. This was true also in the time of Isaiah, when Assyria had invaded Judah, and was threatening Zion, the city and people of God. For the sake of his Name as covenant God, the Lord pronounced his victory of peace, which brings good. And because of this timely gospel of salvation, the people of God may know that God reigns. Thus, Rev. Van Rietschoten concluded, it remains the task of the minister of the Word of God to proclaim this gospel, this victory of God in Jesus Christ over sin and death, and in so doing, beautiful are the feet of those who bring these tidings.

Following the installation of Rev. Boersma, and following the worship service, Rev. Boersma was invited to publicly sign the Form of Subscription used at Emmanuel American Reformed Church, and a number of congratulatory letters were read from churches within the federation of the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Churches of the United States. Rev. Van Rietschoten himself delivered congratulatory remarks on behalf of the churches of Carman East and Carman West and classis Manitoba.

On Sunday afternoon, Rev. Boersma officiated, and delivered his inaugural sermon, using as his text Philippians 1:9-11. He noted that while the apostle Paul had commended the congregation of Philippi for their love, he urges

them to press forward in this love of God in Jesus Christ. And in so doing, he indicates that the Philippians, and the congregation of Emmanuel American Reformed Church, are to expect from God what is needed in the congregation, namely, love. For contrary to the values of our society, it is the love of God in Jesus Christ which is the central thing in all of life. So the apostle Paul urges the Philippians to abound more and more in this love. Secondly,

Rev. Boersma noted that this love expresses itself in concrete ways, knowledge and insight. By knowledge, the apostle understands that intimate relationship, that bond of fellowship existing between God and his people. Insight points toward wisdom, the wisdom of Christ, through which this love expresses itself in its direction both towards brothers and sisters within the church, and towards those without Christ in this world. For this love of God in Christ expresses itself in the desire to do the will of God and obey his commandments. Finally, Rev. Boersma asserted that this love of God prepares the congregation for the future, for the task of the Christian is oriented toward the day when God will complete that work which He is doing in him. In this connection, the church is to remain in the Vine, as the Lord Jesus in John 15 describes Himself. Thus, the congregation may trust that God will provide them his Love in Christ Jesus, through which now already the fruits of righteousness are received.

As the congregation of Emmanuel celebrated this new beginning, they rejoice in the work which God is doing both in their lives, and in the lives of the members of faithful Reformed churches in this area of the United States. It is their prayer that Rev. Boersma may be used by God in the upbuilding of this congregation and for the furtherance of his kingdom here in the Denver area. 



Welcome to Reverend and Mrs. A. Souman and family to the Church at Smithville

By Keith Sikkema

After a vacancy of over four years, and almost a year after extending the call, the congregation of Smithville received a new pastor and teacher in Rev. A. Souman, formerly of Tiel and Zaltbommel in the Netherlands. There was gratitude with both the Soumans and the congregation when the Lord granted favour and the authorities issued the immigration visa. After all, the call had signified the flock's recognition of the pastor's voice, and its acceptance indicated his dedication to be installed as the congregation's minister. On March 19, 2003, Classis Niagara conducted a *colloquium*, and approbated the call extended to Rev. Souman: although his voice came from afar, the sound and its message were those of the Chief Shepherd.

Recognizing the shepherd's voice

In the installation sermon on Colossians 1:25, on March 23, Rev. D.G.J. Agema explained that the congregation at Colosse did not hear the Chief Shepherd's voice from all who had some-

thing to say. This congregation had been tempted to follow mis-leaders with a deviating message. The Lord shows his care for the church when Paul defends the Gospel as a good minister. He is a minister of the congregation, of the Lord, and of the Word. As a slave of Christ, and not a dictator, he serves the congregation as a *diakonos* who looks after spiritual and emotional

Although his voice came from afar, the sound and its message were those of the Chief Shepherd.

needs. As a minister of the Lord, and not a democratic ruler, he has a divine commission of authority and responsibility. This charge shows God's care as it is part of his plan for our salvation. As a minister of the Word, not of his own agenda, he must bring the fullness

of the Word of God. Effective preaching reaches the hearts by bringing the Word of the living God. Then both the minister and the congregation hear the voice of the Lord, and are united as sinners who depend on and praise God for his care.

After this service, messages of congratulations, blessing, dependence on God, and desire for fruitful cooperation were conveyed and expressed.

In the afternoon, Rev. Souman preached his inaugural sermon on Hebrews 11:1-16 and Lord's Day 7. With a focus on the faith which God works by the preaching of the Word, Rev. Souman summarized the message: "We are saved only by true faith in Jesus Christ. By faith we see God's deeds in the past and God's work in our life, and expect the fulfillment of God's promises." The church does not control world events, but God is always Lord and neither He nor his Word will change. That Word is about the blessings of grace given to us; it is about God's work of regeneration that makes us humble and obedient listeners, and that makes us boast in the Lord for the hope He gives us. In Christ we receive righteousness and life, his Spirit renews us, and in the faith He gives we can overcome in our struggle against the spiritual powers of evil; and even the consequences of sin will be taken away. We look forward to the fulfillment of all God's promises. It is the glorious task of the minister to preach that Gospel.

Recognizing who is who

During the March 28 welcome evening for the minister and his family, the focus was more on making amusing acquaintance, although the element of





gratitude and joy was clearly present as well. Menko Wieske served as an able MC, expressing delight, for instance, that Mrs. Souman had joined her husband in coming to Canada, and letting the children know that they, too, were “*hartelijk welkom*.” He led the audience in reading from Philippians 3:21-4:1, prayer, and the singing of Psalm 150. Some songs of joy and praise to the Lord were presented by

Effective preaching reaches the hearts by bringing the Word of the living God.

the Niagara Choral Society “Voice of Praise.” Rev. Agema reminisced on his two terms as counsellor of the Smithville congregation. He pointed out how good the cooperation had

been, how things and people had changed, and how he had recently discovered that the office bearers had no problem recognizing themselves in pictures their wives had drawn of them, but that the wives had problems recognizing themselves in their husbands’ drawings of them.

The program offered a variety of musical presentations by voice, on the piano, the flute, and the organ, bringing out some of the hidden and much appreciated talents in the congregation. John Calvin School students offered information about the school, and sang “All things bright and beautiful;” representatives of the seniors’ club *Gezellig Bijeen* and the Dutch Men’s Society *Trouw aan het Woord* presented information about themselves, encouraging Rev. Souman in his task and to participate sometime; the Adult Bible Study linked the family’s past in Holland with the present in Niagara; the Women’s Societies involved everyone

in activities requiring name and face recognition; and the young people took this a step further by letting the minister and his wife match up a number of wives with their respective husbands. They did remarkably well.

A congratulatory letter had been received from the congregation at Lincoln, and brother P.G. Ravensbergen spoke on behalf of Covenant Church at Grassie. He invited Rev. Souman to preach to them as well from the “remarkably similar” pulpit. Brother Roy Hummel presented a gift from the congregation: a barbecue with a meat order

Office-bearers had no problem recognizing themselves.

certificate. We sang our national anthem, standing, and Rev. Souman received the floor for some comments of appreciation, in which he clearly indicated to be ready to take up the task of preaching the Word and visiting the members of the congregation. He also led the audience in closing prayer, and the congregation exited to the annex for refreshments and fellowship while James Buikema played the organ.

Flock and shepherd

Both the Sunday of the installation and the welcome evening were filled with joy and gratitude. As the under shepherd calls each sheep of the flock from the pen to the green pastures of salvation, may all continue to hear and recognize the voice of the Chief Shepherd and give thanks to God for his mercy. C



PRESS REVIEW

By J. De Jong



In the OPC magazine called *New Horizons*, Anthony A. Hoekema writes on the importance of catechism instruction. Here follows a few excerpts from his article:

History

There was no catechesis – in the sense of the ecclesiastical pedagogy of covenant youth – in the medieval church. Instruction of children was considered a domestic rather than an ecclesiastical duty. Protestantism, however, with its emphasis on the Scriptures as the sole rule of faith and life, stressed the indoctrination of children as one of the ecclesiastical implications of infant baptism.

The Reformed particularly began to think in terms of the covenant of grace as logically correlated with the doctrine of infant baptism. This emphasis on the covenant of grace naturally implied an emphasis on the catechetical instruction of the children of the church are included in the covenant.

Catechetical instruction continued to flourish as the Protestant Reformation spread to other lands. In America too, at first, there was much emphasis on catechism. The instruction in those early days was chiefly a matter of memorizing answers to questions, and catechism books consisted solely of sets of questions and answers.

Since 1850, there has been in the American churches in general swing away from catechetical instruction. Gradually the Sunday school, which was originally intended to be a missionary institution, took the place of catechism classes. In many American churches today catechism classes no longer exist.

Covenant Obligation

This, however, is not as it should be. Catechism instruction is definitely a part of the church's obligation towards its youth. This obligation, in fact, as indicated above, is rooted in the very

covenantal relation that exists between God and his people. The question may be asked, is it the church's task to indoctrinate the children? May this task not be left to the home or to the Christian school (when there is one)? The answer to that question is that it is most decidedly the church's business to indoctrinate its youth, since the youth of the church are included in the covenant which God makes with his people. The doctrine of the covenant is a fundamental principle of Reformed theology – so much so, Herman Bavinck said, that Reformed theology cannot be understood on any point apart from the doctrine of the covenant.

But the doctrine of covenant is more. It is also the regulative principle of Reformed life, all of which should be lived in the light of the fact that we are God's covenant people, his peculiar possession. Out of this regulative principle flows the necessity of catechesis. The church, which administers

baptism as a sign and seal of the covenant membership, must, after baptism, assume the responsibility of training covenant child into the understanding of his covenantal relationship, and of leading him to the acceptance of covenant obligations. Having received the first seal of the covenant (baptism) the child must be trained so that he may in time receive the second seal (the Lord's Supper), and may live a full-orbed life of covenantal obedience and kingdom service. The church, which administers the seals of the covenant, cannot escape its obligation to train those to whom it administers these seals. The task of training covenant youth in the doctrines of the covenant is therefore of one of primary importance. It is to be ranked alongside of preaching as one of the main tasks of the church. C

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jdejong@canrc.org



Photo courtesy Cor Loddler



Media Release of the Joint Meeting of the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Psalter Hymnal Committee of the United Reformed Churches in North America

Some might consider it “bad news” when, on a Friday, thirteen people get together at close quarters. Not the group of Canadian Reformed and United Reformed, “brothers-cum-one-sister” who met in the historic Ontario town of Ancaster on Friday and Saturday, March 21 and 22. It marked the second meeting of this combined committee and was a productive one in which a spirit of harmony and cooperation was very much in evidence.

This meeting was organized by the Canadian Reformed contingent and was chaired by Rev. G. van Popta, minister of the host church of Ancaster. Those attending the meeting from the United Reformed Churches were: Rev. E. Knott, Rev. R. Lankheet, Mr. H. Nuiver, Rev. D. Royall, Rev. D. VanderMeulen, Dr. R. Watson, and Rev. D. Wynia. The Canadian Reformed members included: Rev. D. Agema, Rev. C. Bosch, Dr. N. Gootjes, Mr. C. Nobels, Mrs. C. van Halen and Rev. G. van Popta.

The ice having been broken back in March of 2002, it remained for this committee to continue to “melt” together – this with a view to our churches possessing a common songbook one day. It did not take long before this “melt” to be realized, as a spirit of harmony, cooperation and dedication to working together towards our common goal was in evidence throughout the meeting.

After hearing each other’s “progress reports” the joint committee agreed to the following *Introduction, Preface, Principles and Guidelines for the Selection of Songs in the Church.* These will be followed in selecting the psalms and hymns that might one day be incorporated in a common songbook for use in the churches.

Introduction

The Canadian Reformed Churches and United Reformed Churches entered into “Phase Two” of ecumenical relations, effective January 1, 2002, with the goal of eventual federative unity. The synods of those two federations mandated their respective committees to labor together to recommend to the churches a common songbook which would be faithful to the Scriptures and our Reformed confessions.

Preface

The Bible is filled with references to singing. From the very beginning God’s people have responded to his grace, almighty power and presence with song. The songs of the church are, essentially, prayers to God. They are filled with praise and thanksgiving, sorrow for sin and petition for forgiveness, and prayers for intercession in behalf of others in Christ. They also include instruction and exhortation. Thus the songs of the church express the entire spectrum of the Christian’s experience. While every believer may find personal expression of praise, thanksgiving, petitions, and

repentance in song, and while we encourage the families of our churches to make use of the songbook in family devotions, the principle purpose for which this songbook is being developed is for congregational singing. The psalms and hymns are being selected with the prayer that they may express and enrich our congregational worship of God.

Psalm 66:2: “Sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious.”

Ephesians 5:19: “. . . Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

Principles

The Song of the Church is to be Suitable for the Church’s Worship to the Glory of God

1. *The songs of the Church are to be scriptural*

In content, form, and spirit the Church’s songs must express the truth of the Holy Scriptures.

Augustine, referring to the singing of psalms, said, “No one can sing anything worthy of God which he has not received from Him. . . then we are assured that God puts the words in our mouth.”





2. *The songs of the Church are to be a sacrifice of praise*

Singing is an important element of the congregation's response to God's redeeming work in Christ Jesus and the Word proclaimed in the worship service.

John Calvin wrote, "Singing has great strength and power to move and to set on fire the hearts of men that they may call upon God and praise Him with a more vehement and more ardent zeal. This singing should not be light or frivolous, but it ought to have weight and majesty."

3. *The songs of the Church are to be aesthetically pleasing*

The songs for worship are to be a beautiful blend of God-honoring poetry and music.

Guidelines for Selecting Songs:

1. The songs of the church must be thoroughly biblical. They are to represent the full range of the revelation of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
2. The Book of Psalms is foundational for the church's songs. Therefore, all of these psalms, in their entirety, ought to be included in the church's songbook.
3. When psalms or other portions of Scripture are set to music, the words must be faithful to the content and form of the inspired text.
4. In the case of songs other than the versification of Scripture, the words must faithfully express the teach-

ing of Scripture as summarized by our Reformed confessions.

5. The songs of the church must be intelligible and edifying to the body of Christ.
6. The songs of the church must reflect and preserve the language of the church of all ages rather than accommodating current secular trends.
7. In content and form, the songs of the church must be free from artificiality and sentimentality.
8. The music of the song should suit the text.
9. The music of the church should be expressive of the Reformed tradition. Where possible, use is to be made of music developed in the

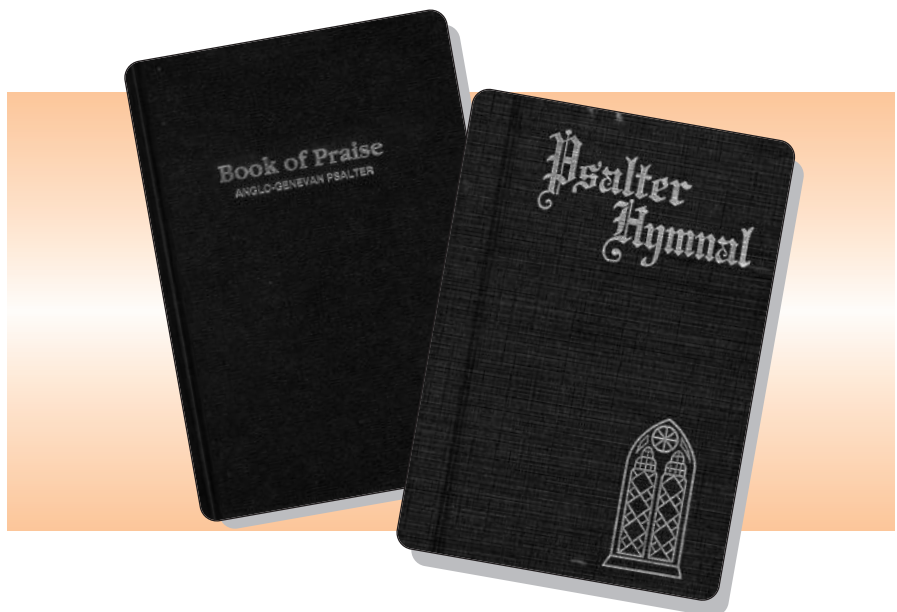
tradition of this rich heritage (e.g., the Genevan psalm tunes and the Scottish Psalter).

10. The music of the church should not be borrowed from music that suggests places and occasions other than the church and the worship of God.
11. The melodies and harmonies of church music must be suitable for congregational singing, avoiding complicated rhythms, excessive syncopation, and a wide range of pitch.

The meeting continued to meet on Saturday morning and some time was spent in reviewing an assessment of some of the hymns currently sung in our respective churches. The joint committee also discussed the tasks that still lie ahead. The major part of this work will include the "testing" of hymns. For this work the prayers of the saints are solicited. Both committees are mandated to report to their respective Synods, to be convened in 2004, D.V.

The meeting witnessed a sporadic outbreak of questions and the airing of various concerns. These indicated a healthy interest in each other's principles and practice of glorifying the Lord in our songs of praise. The atmosphere was brotherly and sisterly, the refreshments provided by a sister of Ancaster most palatable, and the work accomplished, important. The committee looks forward to meeting again in Grand Rapids in March of 2004 to continue its work under the blessing of the Lord.

Garry Apperloo 



Faithworks Report

By Trish Hoeksema

Faithworks Haiti 2003 was an experience unlike any other for our nine-member group. For most of us it was our first Faithworks trip and for one member, his first time in an airplane. After months of preparing and planning and after a six-hour journey we were finally in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. What a different world it is down there. From the barren mountains on the one side to the flourishing terraced gardens on the other, from the smooth paved roads to ones ridden with pot holes; from the shiny Mercedes to the rusty tap-tap (the local taxi), from the large elaborate homes in the mountains to the slums of Cite Soleil: Haiti is a land of stark contrasts. But the biggest contrast of all is found between "Coram Deo" and the life outside of its walls.

Karen Bultje has lived in Haiti for six years. During the last three years she has devoted her time, her savings and all her heart into setting up "Coram Deo," which has become a safe haven in an otherwise turbulent country. Her selfless nature and unfailing love for

others shines brightly as she brings hope to the helpless. Karen runs a school at "Coram Deo" for handicapped and disadvantaged children in her area. She also sponsors some secondary students as well as a number of children at a school for the deaf. Whether it is food, shelter, clothing, medical aid or education, we witnessed Karen humbly assisting in all these areas. You just need to look at the bright smiling faces of the eighteen residents of "Coram Deo," who each have their own tragic story, to know how they feel. This was evidenced immediately upon our arrival as the "Coram Deo" family ecstatically greeted us. The usual awkward period of getting acquainted was replaced with unreserved love as the children threw their arms around us and clamoured for our attention, which we were more than happy to give.

During the next two weeks we kept very busy as we constructed an outdoor kitchen with a cement floor, repaired a large area of damaged cement,

The official objective of
"Coram Deo"

is

- 1) to assist physically and mentally handicapped members of Haitian society in obtaining medical treatment at home or abroad (through sponsorship by Canadian or US doctors);
- 2) to provide education for the handicapped to be reintegrated into Haitian society; and
- 3) to assist the extreme poor who request services to obtain an education and/or medical care. All these are to be done in a Christ-centred framework.

"Notre Maison" orphanage is a neighbour of "Coram Deo," and has been the recipient of help from groups that Faithworks has sent to Haiti. It is separately funded and organized through a Christian group in the US.

"Coram Deo International Aid" is hoping to achieve status as a registered Canadian charity by the end of 2003. Until that time, "Word and Deed" is processing donations. If you would like to support "Coram Deo," please make your cheque payable to

"Word and Deed"

and send it to:

Coram Deo International Aid

110 Oneida Boulevard,
Ancaster, ON
L7G 3C8



Sifting gravel for the concrete floor of the new outdoor kitchen.



Danielle Mussche with Ashley, a child who lives at "Notre Maison."



A busy market, common on the main streets in Port au Prince.

converted the old kitchen into a bedroom for three, constructed shelves in storage areas, levelled out the ground in the back yard, did electrical repairs, made improvements to the outhouse, set up a computer and organized and distributed the much needed and appreciated donated goods that we brought with us. We played games and made several crafts with the school children, which they enjoyed, especially those that involved stickers and glitter (more ending up on them than on the craft). We also spent several afternoons at "Notre Maison," a nearby orphanage for handicapped children. This was quite a heartbreaking experience. Many of the children at "Notre Maison" are not actually orphans but have been abandoned by their families because of their disabilities. Also the high staff/child ratio sometimes results in children not always getting the adequate level of care. The Faithworks team did give them what we could, namely our attention and love. "Notre Maison" is currently going through some organizational changes and urgently requires our prayers. May God bless these changes and may the results improve the quality of life for these children. We ended each day with group devotions that were participated by all, especially the singing.

God's presence was felt by our group during our time in Haiti and we grew together and with Him as we experienced his blessings daily. This was especially felt as we dealt with the death of Joseph, a little boy who suffered from autism and malnutrition. We only knew him for a short period of time, but the Lord prolonged his life long enough for him to know that he was loved before he passed away and his sufferings were removed.

It was an intense two weeks that none of us would miss and would

jump at the chance to do again. While our mission was to assist those at "Coram Deo," we received much more in return. We may have assisted them physically, but the simplicity of their lives strengthened us spiritually, bringing everything into focus – God is truly in control. From our Haitian family and our Faithworks group a heartfelt thank-you to all for your support. And thanks be to God for keeping us safe and so richly blessing our efforts. To Him be all the glory and praise!



One of the outdoor classrooms at "Coram Deo."



Press Release of Classis Pacific West on April 1, 2003, in the building of the Langley Canadian Reformed Church

1. On behalf of the convening church, the chairman Rev. J. VanSpronsen calls the meeting to order and welcomes the visitors and particularly Rev. W. Bredenhof as missionary of Smithers and Rev. S. Kang as visitor of the Presbyterian Church Kosin. He reads Isaiah 12. We sing Psalm 135:1, 2. Rev. J. VanSpronsen leads in prayer. In the memorabilia he mentions the pending departure of Rev. J. Huijgen to the Church at Burlington-Waterdown and the upcoming vacancy of the Church at Cloverdale.
2. The Willoughby Heights Canadian Reformed Church examines the credentials and finds them to be in order, after which Classis is constituted with the following officers: Chairman: Rev. E. Kampen; Vice-chairman: Rev. J. Huijgen; Clerk: Rev. J. VanSpronsen
3. Classis deals with the following items as per agenda.
4. Correspondence is received:
 - a. Classis Pacific East re: support for needy churches (Dec. 12, 2002). In light of an apparent misunderstanding, Classis Pacific West decides to request further information from Classis Pacific East, in order to be able to properly respond to this request for extended support.
 - b. Classis Pacific West Fund: Statement of Receipts and Disbursements Year Ended December 31, 2002. Received for information
 - c. The Church at Smithers asks for advice. It is received as information re request for advice (Art 44 CO).
5. The following reports were received:
 - a. The treasurer's report is thankfully received.
 - b. The Church of Cloverdale audited the books of the treasurer. A point was made concerning the transparency of declaration of expenses. The treasurer was discharged for the year 2002. Classis reminds itself to be conscientious about how to submit claims.

- c. The Church of Houston inspected the Archives. All is found to be in good order.
6. In the Question Period (Art 44 CO) the Church at Houston requests advice in a matter of discipline. Advice is given. In another matter classis decides not to dispense pastoral advice. The Church at Smithers requests advice on the status of newly professed members of Wit'at Reformed Fellowship in Fort Babine. The question is: are newly professed members under the supervision of the missionary, or as members of a "house-congregation" under the supervision of the consistory. Classis discusses the matter.
 7. The appointments are mostly identical to last year's appointments. New appointments are made in the Committee for Examinations and Church Visitors. For Knowledge of Holy Scripture Rev. J. VanSpronsen, Ethics Rev. D. Poppe and Diaconology Rev. D. Poppe. Church Visitors are Rev. E. Kampen,

C. VanSpronsen (convener) and J. Visscher.

Convening church for the next classis is Cloverdale, the place of meeting will be the Cloverdale church and time of meeting will be June 10, 2003, while the alternate date is September 30, 2003. Suggested officers for the next classis: Chairman: Rev. J. VanSpronsen Vice-chairman: Rev. C. VanSpronsen, Clerk: Rev. D. Poppe

8. Personal Question Period is made use of. Rev. S. Kang addresses Classis. He informs us that he is planting a church and seeks the prayer of the Canadian Reformed Churches.
9. Censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order is thankfully not needed.
10. The Acts of Classis are adopted and the Press Release is approved.
11. Rev. E. Kampen requests the singing of Psalm 150:1, 2, 3. After prayer the meeting is closed.

*Rev. J. Huijgen,
Vice-chairman at the time*



The Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches

Foreign Student Bursary Fund – A Unique Opportunity!

Last year, the Theological College was pleased to announce the establishment of the Bursary Fund. Through the generosity of many donors, plus the allocation of part of a bequest received, \$33,097 has accumulated in the Fund.

Now, a wonderful opportunity has presented itself in that the Senate of the Theological College was able to admit an applicant from Sudan. The Lord willing, he will be the first recipient of our new Foreign Student Bursary! Although he is married and blessed with five children, he will come here on his own and travel back to Sudan each summer to be with his wife and children. The Middle East Reformed Fellowship will fund these travel expenses. His wife and extended family will provide for the needs of his children in Sudan. That leaves us with the privilege of providing for the student in Canada. He comes highly recommended by those who know him well, among whom is Rev. Victor Atallah.

The Fund, as it stands now, will take care of his study needs for close to two academic years, but we need to be able to commit to the full four years of study in order for the Canadian government to allow him to enter our country.

We encourage all those who are able to make a contribution to the Fund to do so now by making out a cheque to The Theological College, Foreign Student Bursary Fund, and mailing it to:

The Theological College

110 West 27th Street, Hamilton, ON, Canada L9C 5A1

Your donation is tax deductible and receipts will be issued.

Thank you so much for your donation and making it possible for the equipping of a Sudanese pastor and church leader to be equipped with the biblical doctrine of salvation! He in turn will be able to pass on to many others the riches of the Reformed faith and thus your gift today will, made under the blessings of the Lord, multiply greatly in the years to come.

The Finance and Property Committee, Theological College

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter to the Editor:

Francis Ubertelli closes his article "Concerning Music in our Churches" asking whether or not our churches are "in front of the basis for a musical theology." Although the academic details of the article are very complex, one can understand his goal. He considers that "music suffered the disastrous consequences of the fall and therefore must be studied and criticized in order to discern the truth." With this point of view, he would like to establish a musical theology based on what he determines this truth to be.

This is a very noble goal. However, theologically, this method can only lead to disaster. First of all, allow me to point out that music as such did not suffer the consequences of the fall. People did. In this way we often twist the beautiful gift of music for our own sinful desires. Nevertheless, sin always rests in man. The fundamental flaw in Ubertelli's argument is that there is something inherently sinful or rebellious about certain types of music. There is simply no biblical support for this sort of "musical theology," as one will gather from the glaring lack of textual support in Ubertelli's article.

From this faulty premise Ubertelli moves on to claim that the truth he seeks is found in the primary place of pitch. Again, his argument is complex, but clearly his basis for this particular musical theology is found in "music theory treatises from the ancient Greeks to the present." As he says, "throughout the history of western music, music has used pitch as its primary vehicle for expression." Thus his argument is not based on theological considerations, but rather cultural traditions. In blurring the lines between culture and theology, he strays from the basic reformation tenet "*Sola scriptura*."

Ubertelli then goes on to say "The human understanding cannot claim its autonomy over our Lord." Who is claiming this autonomy? Is not Ubertelli claiming that man-made music treatises will provide us with our musical theology? From this claim he goes to suggest that Christian contemporary music is idolatrous in its very nature, "rebellious against the structure of Creation." To provide himself with a basis for such an accusation, he has committed a much more subtle, acceptable

form of idolatry: bowing down at the altar of Greek philosophy. As though we can claim western music standards apply to the eternal, sovereign God!

The LORD did not choose the ancient Greeks to be his people. Rather, "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise" (1 Cor 1:27). While Greek philosophers and learned men developed their music theory, a small Hebrew nation was engaged in the true worship of the eternal God. And they may have even used syncopation.

*Dave DeJong
Hamilton, Ontario*

Dear Editor,

"...When there is no prophesying, the people are denuded, but happy is he who preserves the law. . ." Proverbs 29:18. (Freely translated from the Dutch *Staten Vertaling*)

When I took notice of Filia Pastoria's "diatribe" (Readers Forum – *Clarion*, March 28) under: "Please Tell Me I Am Wrong," the above quoted message from the Word of God came to my mind. It made me aware of the facts of life, and I have to admit, that it is impossible for me dear Filia to tell you that you are wrong, but . . . *what are we going to do about it? You tell me!*

Granola Laymania

Dear Editor,

Allow me to continue where Dr. DeJong left off in his editorial of the *Clarion* of March 28, 2003. Dr. DeJong is right, a beginning minister learns a lot from his first pastorate. At the same time it must be said that not every student who finishes the College is automatically suitable for the office of minister. The churches have the right to decide not to call a certain candidate. Yet it leads to an awkward situation when there is a need for ministers and yet candidates do not receive calls. "Give it a try," Dr. DeJong writes at the end of his article. "That's fine for you to say," a council can reason, "what if it does not work and we are stuck with him?" Yet, Dr. DeJong's words merit consideration. Thus I would like to add the following suggestion. If a candidate does not receive a call, a vacant church could ask him to work for a certain time. The initiative could also come

from the candidate himself in that he offers his help to a vacant congregation. It must be made clear to all involved that there is no obligation on the side of the church to call this candidate, or if he receives more calls, he is not obligated to accept the call from this congregation. If during this time of working in this congregation it becomes clear that the man is suitable for office, wonderful. If it turns out that he is not suitable, then at least it can be pointed out to him why. The decision not to call or not to seek the ministry is then based on what was learned from that time of working together. I would think that this is fair to both the congregation and the candidate involved.

*D.G.J. Agema
Dunnville, Ontario*

Letter to the Editor:

Re the article: The calling process, in the *Clarion* of March 28, 2003, Volume 52:7

This article brings up some interesting points. However there are related problems associated with the calling of a minister. Perhaps it is time for the whole federation to look at the way we receive our ministers. Congregations are reluctant to call a minister who may for one reason or other not be suitable for that particular congregation, and they may have him for a very long time. There are ministers who, even though they have had numerous calls, remain in the same congregation for a very long time, in some cases as long as fifteen or more years. There are also ministers who for one reason or other would like to start of fresh in a new congregation but never receive a call.

There are congregations who hope that their minister will stay forever and then there are congregations who would welcome a new voice on Sundays. Perhaps it is time we look to other denominations and how they call ministers. There are some who rotate their ministers and in this way there are fewer problems than we have. No congregation is vacant for a long period of time, no student is ever without a congregation. This spiritually would be much healthier for both the ministers and the congregations.

*Mrs. H. Smouter
Burlington, Ontario*