

Volume 52, No. 22
October 24, 2003

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE



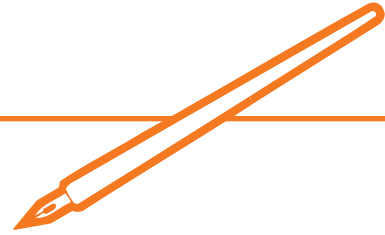
Castle Church Tower, Wittenberg, Germany

INSIDE:

- *Reflecting on the Reformation*
- *Reformation and Liberation*
- *The Unity of the Church*



By W.B. Slomp



Reflecting on the Reformation

Nearly 500 years ago Luther first nailed his ninety-five theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. These theses exposed many wrong practices, especially the sale of indulgences, and the role of good works in relation to one's salvation. It was mainly because of Martin Luther's personal struggle against these ideas that the wheels were set into motion for the great Reformation of the sixteenth century.

Since that time the Reformed churches have flourished apart from the Roman Catholic Church. Although it does happen occasionally that we lose members here and there to other churches, only very infrequently do we lose them to the Roman Catholic Church. Their doctrines and practices are now so foreign to us that we are not likely to go back to them.

Indulgences were sold quite aggressively during Luther's days to pay for the rebuilding of the basilica of St. Peter's in Rome.

And so, why is it still so important to remember the Reformation? Are Luther's concerns and struggles still relevant for us today? In this editorial I will argue that they are. For even though we are far removed from the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic church as such, we as individual believers are always in danger of going back to those practices in one form or another.

Indulgences

What were some of the erroneous practices and beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church that gave rise to the Reformation? In the first place Luther was appalled by the sale of indulgences. Indulgences were sold quite aggressively during Luther's days to pay for the rebuilding of the basilica of St. Peter's in Rome. The people were told that if they bought indulgences they could achieve remission of sins, prevent temporal punishment, and, to the great relief of many, shorten the time of loved ones in purgatory.

Luther objected to this practice, arguing against the idea that one can pay for any of God's gifts with money. According to Luther, it is not money that God requires, only a repentant heart. Therefore, the church is only able to declare the forgiveness of those sins that God Himself has forgiven.

Good works

Luther particularly struggled against the Roman Catholic conception of God's righteousness. In accordance with Roman Catholic theology he believed that God was a just God who rewarded man according to his works. He saw God as a cold judge in heaven who kept a meticulous record of his sins. He tried in every way to appease such an exacting God who weighed his sins over against his good works. He realized that his works were totally inadequate to cover his sins. And so, feeling condemned, he despaired.

Now, it is true, of course, that God is a just God. It is also true that when you transgress God's law that then you must pay the penalty. That is what He said already in Paradise. As a just God He does not go back on his word.

God's righteousness is a gift

Ultimately, Luther learned that there is more to God's righteousness. The passage in Romans 1: 17 proved to be pivotal in Luther's thinking: "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" By carefully studying this verse in the context of the rest of the letter to the Romans, Luther came to the wonderful and liberating discovery that God's righteousness is a gift acquired through faith alone. You cannot earn it; it is impossible. Righteousness comes from God and not from man.

Because most Jews thought that man had some righteousness of his own, Paul contrasts God's righteousness with our own righteousness. He writes in Romans 10:3: "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." Righteousness is *from* God alone.

Righteousness is from God alone.

However, we can also speak about the righteousness of God, which is the righteousness that belongs to Him because it is part of his nature, because it is one of his attributes. It is that righteousness that He credits or imputes to us (Rom 4: 3, 24). And you acquire that righteousness through faith.

And so, as Paul continually argues in this letter, man has nothing to boast of. It is all God's doing. Man is incapable of contributing anything to his own salvation.

Man's arrogance

How then did the Roman Catholic Church come to teach differently? Well, because of man's pride and arrogance the church of that day had gone away from the Scriptures. Man's opinions were elevated to doctrine.

And we should not be surprised at this. That has been the problem right from the beginning. Man thought (and still does) that he knows better than God. Through Adam we ate from the forbidden tree – thinking that we could be like God.

Ultimately the Reformation was about humility, about the honour and glory to God alone.

Ever since Paradise man has wanted to be like God, or, at the very least, to possess some divine qualities. That was the problem the New Testament church had faced as well. We read, for example, in Acts 8 about Simon the sorcerer who became a believer and was baptized as the result of the preaching of Philip and the apostles Peter and John. Prior to that he had been revered by the people as having divine qualities (Acts 8:10). His faith, however, proved to be a temporary faith. He reverted back to his former pagan ways. For when he saw how the apostles were able to heal others and grant the gift of the Holy

What's inside?

We welcome a new member to our editorial team: Rev. W.B. Slomp from Edmonton, Alberta. Rev. Slomp has been managing the *Treasures New and Old* column for some time already, and now he is one of our co-editors. In this issue he presents us with his first editorial which deals with the topic of justification in the time of the Reformation.

The meditation of Rev. W. den Hollander and the first half of a speech by Rev. J. Ludwig also commemorate the work of our Lord Jesus Christ who gathers, defends and preserves his church in the unity of a true faith.

The speech which Dr. C. Van Dam presented at the recent Theological College evening is published in this issue. It is a fascinating look at the special place of the elders in both the Old Testament and New Testament eras and what a blessing that is for the entire church.

We have a Classis press release, a presentation on the newly-instituted church in Dunnville, Ontario, and a letter to the editor.

At this time we would also like to acknowledge the work which Dr. J. DeJong has done for *Clarion* for many, many years. You read in the previous issue of *Clarion* about Dr. DeJong's health concerns. He has asked to be relieved of active duty in the *Clarion* editorial committee due to these health concerns. May the Lord be with our brother and his family. We have been deeply blessed by his many articles and editorials, and we will miss him sorely.

RA



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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Canada*	\$41.00*	\$67.50*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$43.50	\$56.00
International	\$67.00	\$100.00

*Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$13.00 per column inch

Full Colour Advertisements: \$18.00 per column inch

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

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Agreement No. 1377531

PAP Registration No. 9907

ISSN 0383-0438

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Spirit at the laying on of their hands, he also wanted to have that gift. And so he offered them money to be able to do so. Peter, however, said to Simon, “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!” (Acts 8:20).


Simon responded by asking Peter to pray for him so that he will not stand condemned. Rather than praying himself, he wanted Peter to pray for him. Somehow he wanted to use Peter’s good standing with the Lord God to be imputed to him. He wanted to use Peter’s good works for his own good standing with God. And so he remained condemned, receiving the sacrament of baptism “to his condemnation” (see BC art. 35).

What about us today?

At heart we are not any different from the pharisaic Jews, the Roman Catholics, or Simon the sorcerer. We too want to be treated as little gods. In the work place, in our homes, in the church, we want *our* accomplishments, *our* good works, and *our* sacrifices, financial or otherwise, to be recognized. We too want to be admired, and served. If not we sulk, and are upset. Our own inherent arrogance causes much conflict and turmoil.

We also take pride in the accomplishments of our leaders and somehow want their good works to be imputed to us. While it is good to remember our leaders, our motivation should be to imitate their faithfulness and their dependence on God’s work – not to be content to rest on their laurels. Each generation, and more specifically, each person has a responsibility to work out his own salvation with “fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). For God is at work in us.

Therefore the struggle of the Reformation ought to remind us that our actions are subservient to God’s actions. For our deeds are always sinful deeds. They merit nothing. As the catechism says, “even our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin” (HC Q/A 62). The Lord gives us what we need to serve Him, and we must employ those gifts to his glory and out of thankfulness for *his* good works.

And so we must lead repentant lives. God requires humility and repentance from us in our daily lives. Ultimately the Reformation was about humility, about the honour and glory to God alone. Let us continue to learn that lesson. 

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Town square, Wittenberg, Germany

By William den Hollander

Reformation and Liberation

"... and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."

2 Corinthians 3:17

As we remember the Lord's work in the days of the Great Reformation, we cannot help but think of his servant Martin Luther right away. His struggle with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church has been central in the development toward the liberation from Rome. Indeed, these two aspects – reformation and liberation – played an important role in the quest for the truth in his days. Luther learned that the truth would make him free! Luther believed that the Word couldn't be shackled by the powers of man. Hence, in Luther's battle for the return to the Word of God, for the truth about the work of Christ, and for the freedom of the believer, the freedom in Christ was front and centre!

Martin Luther was a prolific writer. He wrote many a commentary, treatise, meditation and the like. He was able also to write in a very concise manner about the most profound issues. The latter is evident from his essay *"About the freedom of the Christian."* He wrote this essay in the year 1520, the year in which the definite break with Rome would take place. He wrote it as a last appeal to Pope Leo X. He wrote it as a last attempt to win the church for the gospel! Yes, indeed, that may seem like an oxymoron, yet Luther's quest was to plead with the leader(s) of the church for the pre-eminence of the gospel! That Word should not be bound, the Word that proclaims to us our freedom in Christ! Luther's ideas about this were not his personal opinion, but his conviction that it was the truth about the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. Luther called the church back to the freedom, which we have by faith in Jesus Christ!

In his essay Martin Luther works with the same two notions, which the apostle Paul highlights in 2 Corinthians 3: the Law and the gospel. The Law requires of us that we obey God's will, do good works, and so appear righteous before God. Yet, we are unable to do so! Hence the wrath of God over sin is revealed over us! Then the gospel proclaims to us the glad tidings: by faith in Christ we share in his righteousness! In Him we have all the grace, righteousness, peace and freedom proclaimed to us! By faith in Him they are our own. Through a long and hard struggle Luther had come to this central message of the Great Reformation.

*By faith in Christ we
share in his righteousness!
In Him we have all the
grace, righteousness, peace
and freedom
proclaimed to us!*

That reality he would not give up for anything in the world! That truth had set him free, because it is the truth that will set anyone who believes in the glorious freedom of the children of God! By faith this truth becomes united with the believer so much, that he will live and work and love in Christ, through the Spirit of Christ! Contrary to the teaching of Rome, therefore, demanding good works to make man righteous, Luther posed that we are righteous in Christ by faith, and that through faith the Christian will freely go to work to love and obey the Father of Christ!

This is not the place to elaborate on the observation that Luther's use of the Law was restricted to its condemning function: the Law as source for our knowledge of sin and misery. In the context of the struggle towards the Reformation of the church and the return to the Word of truth, Luther's focus was on this function of the Law to drive us out to Christ! In many a place the apostle Paul also shows us the use of the Law as our guide for a life in thankfulness for our deliverance. That, too, is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who restores us in the image of Christ so that we may live in newness of life, in all righteousness and holiness! In Luther's life and time, however, it was especially the salvation from the curse of the Law, the deliverance from the slavery to sin, which was so liberating. The gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ calls us to the freedom in the kingdom of the Son! He is the Lord who through his Holy Spirit renews us and fills our life with the freedom we have in Christ! He enables us to live in love and obedience to God again, to serve Him freely, voluntarily! That is the glorious gospel to which the church of the *Reformation* returned under the leadership of Martin Luther. That gospel sets us in the glorious freedom of the children of God, a *liberation* that transforms us into the likeness of Christ with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit!



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The Unity of the Church¹ (Part 1)

By John Ludwig

Introduction

I appreciate the opportunity and consider it a privilege to address you this evening. Given the alternative of staying at home to ward off ghosts and goblins with candy, this occasion where we can reminisce about the Reformation is a real treat. That's the reason we have come together: to commemorate the Reformation of God's church in the sixteenth century. We gratefully remember and we deeply cherish this event because all of us – Free Reformed, United Reformed, and Canadian Reformed – trace our ecclesiastical roots back to those liberating days when the church, by the grace of God, threw off the Roman yoke and once again submitted willingly, joyfully and exclusively to the yoke of Jesus Christ. We love to reminisce about the Reformation, to study and discuss it, because it falls into the same category of events which Asaph described as “the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders which He has wrought” (Ps. 78:4). What took place in Europe and elsewhere was truly a “work of God,” and therefore He deserves our praise and adoration. The Reformation testifies of the Lord's faithfulness to his own promise, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). In the raising up of men like Luther and Calvin we see the loving care of the ascended Christ for his bride, whom He bought with his precious blood. He preserved her in the midst of heresy and abuse. He led her back to Himself and to his Word. He opened her eyes and heart to the revealed truth that there is one Supreme Bishop, the Lord Jesus Christ, that there is one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father of us all.

It is that truth that I would like to touch on this evening: “The Unity of the Church.” Perhaps you are thinking, “How is it possible to speak about unity

in conjunction with the Reformation? Did not Luther's writings and actions result in a *divided* church? Instead of one church, there were now two: Roman Catholic and Protestant?” The reformers, however, were fully aware of the fact that, by breaking from the Roman Catholic Church, they were not starting another church of Christ. The Church of Rome no longer reflected the marks of a true church. It had become false by assigning more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, by administering the sacraments as it pleased, and by persecuting those who lead holy lives according to the Word of God. The faithful, who seceded, regarded themselves as the lawful continuation of Christ's church.

In the raising up of men like Luther and Calvin we see the loving care of the ascended Christ for his bride, whom He bought with his precious blood.

This did not make them become isolationist or sectarian in their thinking. One of the confessions, penned at that time, captured the burning desire of the Reformed people to seek and maintain the unity of the church. You find that expressed, among other places, in Article 28 of the *Belgic Confession*, a confession to which all of us wholeheartedly subscribe. There the church of the Reformation summarized God's Word as follows, “. . .no one ought to withdraw from it [the assembly of the redeemed], content to be by himself, no matter what his status or standing may be. *But all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church. . .*” Guido de Brès and all those who embraced this confession were not stating something new. They were simply per-

severing in the faith once delivered to the saints. Article 28 is nothing more than an expansion of what the church expressed at the Council of Constantinople in A.D 381, namely, “We believe *one* holy catholic and apostolic church.” Both creed and confession are not a formulation of human opinions but a summary of divine wisdom revealed in Holy Writ. I hope to come back to that scriptural basis in a minute.

I began by mentioning the thankfulness we share in celebrating the Reformation. And yet this silver lining does have a cloud. Along with the joy, there is (or there ought to be anyway) a twinge of regret, a pinch of sadness. Why? Because we have members here of three *separate* federations of Reformed churches. The “splintering of Christianity” is painfully apparent at this gathering. We come together once a year to reflect on our common heritage, to socialize and mingle with one another, and yet for fifty-two Sundays a year we meet in segregation. Many of us literally cross paths as we drive to our own places for worship and communion on the first day of the week. We do not yet enjoy and experience what the author of Psalm 133 sang about, “Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers *dwell* together.”

Admittedly, unity discussions are taking place on the local and synodical levels of the United, Free and Canadian Reformed Churches. Committees have been established and meetings are taking place. But are we as diligent as we ought to be? If the unity of the church is something to which we are indifferent or cold, if it ranks as something nice but not necessary, does that not call for repentance? The catechism in Lord's Day 33 describes repentance as “the heartfelt joy in God through Christ and a love and delight to live according to the will of God in *all* good deeds.” Well, this love and delight, which is part and parcel of our renewed life in Christ, is that transparent in our zeal to do God's will in the good

deed of seeking the unity of the church? Can we honestly say that we are striving for that to the utmost of our ability? We all need to examine ourselves with the light of Scripture to see whether or not we are *willing* to heed the prayer of Christ, "Holy Father. . . I do not pray for these [my disciples] only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, *that they may all be one*, even as thou Father art in me, and I in thee. . . ." (John 17:20, 21). An unwillingness to unite on the part of faithful churches living in the same city and sharing the same confessions constitutes sin against the letter and the spirit of Article 28 of the *Belgic Confession*. It is disobedience to the clear Word of our blessed God and Saviour. We have the apostolic command in Ephesians 4:3 where Paul says that we must be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." How eager are we?

The centrality of the church

On October 31, we commemorate the reformation, not of a social organisation, but of an institution created and upheld by God: the church. It is not merely an appendix to God's work of salvation. It is the assembly where his saving work is applied, where the blessings of Christ's redemptive work are distributed. One of the reformers, Calvin, I believe, dubbed it "the workshop of the Holy Spirit." That does not mean that the Spirit's sovereignty is confined, that his power is limited to the church. He is able to turn the bricks of this building into living stones, into spiritual children of Abraham – if I might paraphrase the words of Christ. The point is, however, that God has chosen the church as the means and the place for working and strengthening faith, for transforming people in the image of the Triune God.

The church is the guardian of the truth. To her God has entrusted his abiding and living Word. She must teach it to the coming generations, defend it against heretics, spread it to the ends of the earth, hold it aloft for all to see and read (Ps 147; 1 Tim 3:15).

The church is the sole bearer of the keys of the kingdom – the preaching of the holy gospel and church discipline. Through them she opens the kingdom of heaven to believers and closes it to unbelievers (Matt 16:19; Lord's Day 31). The church is the light of the world (Matt 5:14). Jesus tells us that in the Sermon on the Mount. Instead of hiding our faith, covering the light, we have to let it shine, so that all men may see our good works and give glory to the

Father who is in heaven. In Revelation 12 Christ gave his servant, John, a breath-taking vision of the church. "A great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars."

Clothed with the sun. With that image we are shown the radiant and exalted position of the church. She reflects the light of the Son of righteousness. *The moon under her feet.* This symbolizes her dominion. Think of Psalm 8. About man as the jewel of God's creation, David declares in that psalm, "Thou hast given him dominion over the work of thy hands; thou hast put all things *under his feet.*" God-given rulership is meant by that expression. *And on her head a crown of twelve stars.* This testifies of her triumph and endurance in the faith. As the ruling Saviour promised to the church at Smyrna, "Be faithful, and I will give you the *crown of life.*"

So, taken all together, these creation motifs show that the church, as the mother of all believers, stands in the centre of the universe. Everything must serve for her development and increase. Moses spoke of that already in Deuteronomy 32, "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance. . . then he fixed the bounds of the people *according to the number of the sons of God.*" In a word: according to the church. The church is the hub of the world – everything is done for her sake. In Joshua 10, for example, we read that "the sun stood still. . . and the moon stayed" until the church took vengeance on her enemies.

But are we as diligent as we ought to be?

Do you see how indispensable and central the church is? She is the temple of the Holy Spirit, the pillar and bulwark of the truth, the gatekeeper of the kingdom, the light of the world, the centre of the universe, the apple of God's eye. That's why the Israelites in captivity in Babylon cried out, "Let my right hand wither, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. . . if I do not set *Jerusalem* above my highest joy" (Ps 137:5, 6). They considered the church above everything and everyone, even above their own family members, above the bond of flesh and blood.

Now considering this glorious position God has given to the church, con-



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sidering that Scripture from beginning to end is about her salvation in Jesus Christ, it follows that we are obliged to be extremely conscientious about seeking and manifesting her unity.

The church has many attributes or qualities, all of which are received out of the hands of God. Besides her unity, there is her holiness and catholicity. We are most concerned for her holiness. On the last day the Bride will be presented without spot or blemish to the Father. We know that from Revelation 21. And yet that does not make us indifferent and slack about leading a holy life now. We take seriously the command, "Be holy as I the Lord your God am holy." We pray daily for the Spirit's sanctifying power in our life as churches. We do our best to exercise church discipline because we are deeply concerned about the holiness of the church. Why should it be any different with the unity of the church? Is unity less important than holiness? If

we truly desire to be one then we must actively pursue that oneness. It is not enough to talk about unity. It is not even enough to pray for it. Discussion and prayer are necessary, but we have to go further. We have to do what the Lord requires. *Ora et Labora* – prayer and work. For not every one who says, “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of our Father in heaven. We confess that the Holy Spirit makes us living members of Christ, imparting to us what we have in Christ. And since Christ, in whose anointing we share, is not divided (1 Cor 1:13) His church should not be divided either.

One church

In the Nicene Creed we confess that Christ is gathering *one* church. Lord’s Day 21 repeats the same, “I believe that the Son of God is gathering. . . a church . . . chosen to everlasting life.” This comes straight from the Word of God. In John 10 the Lord Jesus tells the Jews, “And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice, so there shall be *one* flock, one shepherd.” Now to that, you might reply, “Yes, but Jesus uses the future tense, ‘there shall be one flock!’ Is He not referring to the Last Day when all the faithful will be gathered together into one multitude before the throne of God and the Lamb?” That’s true, the distant future is

*On the last day the
Bride will be presented
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the Father.*

in view here. But the present reality is not excluded either. For in the same breath Jesus says “there shall be one Shepherd.” And that certainly is not confined to the new heavens and the new earth. Already now we acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Shepherd of his sheep who by means of under-shepherds, ministers and elders, cares for their every need. Further on in that same chapter Jesus declares, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life. . . and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.” If we take these words about the “one Shepherd” as applicable today, we must do

the same for the preceding phrase about the “one flock.”

The oneness of the church is beautifully expressed in another biblical image: “the body of Christ.” The body of which Christ is the Head. Just as a body cannot function, cannot live without a head, so the church cannot function or live without Christ. Without Christ the church is nothing but an association of like-minded people. In 1 Corinthians 12:12,13, the apostle Paul writes, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many are *one body*, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free. . . .” That imagery says a lot. Even though the Spirit grants a diversity of gifts, we *belong* together. There are many different parts but they are all connected and they function together as one entity.

In our day the remark is often heard, “Don’t get so worked up about church union as long as we’re united with *Christ*. That’s the main thing.” In light of what we have seen so far, to speak that way is to trample on the honour of Christ, the King of the church. And that arouses the righteous anger of the God who sent Him. To dishonour Christ will sooner or later have harmful consequences. He left the glory of heaven for this sin-ridden world in order to save *his people*, (Matt 1:21) in order to gather for Himself a church chosen to everlasting life (Lord’s Day 21, Q/A 54). How is it possible then to place Christ over against his church, as if union with the one does not necessitate union with the other? John Calvin wrote about this in his *Institutes*. Book 4, chapter 1 is entitled, “The True Church, and the Necessity of our Union with Her, Being the Mother of all the Pious.” “I shall begin with the church,” says Calvin, “in whose bosom it is God’s will that all his children should be collected, not only to be nourished by her assistance and ministry during their infancy and childhood, but also to be governed by her maternal care, till they attain a mature age, and at length reach the end of their faith. For it is not lawful to ‘put asunder’ those things ‘which God has joined together.’” And then he goes on to say, in the line of the church father, Cyprian, that “the church is the Mother of all who have God for their Father.”² Later in that


chapter he stresses the same point, “Let us learn, from her single title of Mother, how useful, no, how necessary the knowledge of her is, since there is no other means of entering into life unless she conceive us in the womb and give us birth, unless she nourish us at her breasts, and in short, keep us under her charge and government, until divested of mortal flesh. . . . [Moreover] beyond the pale of the church no forgiveness of sins, no salvation can be hoped for. . . .”

*Even though the Spirit
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Did not Ruth, the Moabitess, acknowledge exactly that in her response to Naomi? You all know the story. Naomi and her family had sought salvation outside the church. They left Israel when famine struck, at a time when God sent covenantal punishment for disobedience. And that withdrawal to Moab had sad consequences for the family. But redemption came in the life of that Moabite woman because she confessed to her embittered mother-in-law, “your God shall be my God.” But did she leave it at that? Did she stay behind in Moab content to worship Naomi’s God there? No, she refused to go back, insisting, “Your people shall be my people.” She saw that the Lord had bound Himself to Israel – the church of the old covenant. To Jacob God had given his Word. Israel had the law, the ministry of atonement, and the promise of the coming Messiah. In order to serve the God of Naomi she knew that that’s where she belonged!

There is one God and Father of us all, one Mediator – Jesus Christ, one Spirit, and one body.

¹ This is a copy of a Reformation Day Speech held on October 31, 2000

² G. Van Rongen in *The Church: Its unity in confession and History*, notes this distinction that whereas Cyprian started with the church (“A person cannot have God as His Father unless he first has the church as a mother”), Calvin mentions God the Father first of all and only then speaks of the church, p.81-2. 

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Elders Seeing God¹

By C. Van Dam

To see God and to be in his presence! Is this not the wish of every child of our heavenly Father who wants to be right with God and yearns for communion with Him!? David articulated this desire with the words: “As for me, let me see your face in righteousness; let me, when I awake, be satisfied with (seeing) your form” (Ps 17:15).² By God’s grace we have the promise that one day we will see our God and Saviour “as he is” (1 John 3:2). What we now know in part, will then be known fully (cf. 1 Cor 13:12).³

There were gradations of holiness at the Sinai where God met his people.

Tonight, let’s consider how on Mount Sinai in the days of Moses those holding the office of elder were privileged already in this life to see God and experience his presence in a special way. This event, when seen in the context of Scripture, has a message for us today. To mention but two things for the purpose of this evening we observe the following. First, we see something of the wonder and God-given gift of the office of elder, as well as the tremendous responsibility of this office. Second, the topic of elders being in God’s special presence also tells us something of the joy that we as people of God may have as well!

To that end, let us this evening briefly consider Exodus 24:9-11 and then in connection with that also turn to Isaiah 24:23 (and Isa 25:6-12) and Revelation 4:1-5; 5:6-7. These passages are printed with this article.

Exodus 24

In this chapter, we read of elders of Israel actually seeing the God of Israel and having a meal at the same time. It says: “They saw God, and they ate and

drank!” (Exod 24:9). They were there at the express command of God (Exod 24:1). What does this mean? In answering this question, let us first review the context of this momentous event.

With a mighty and powerful arm, the Lord God had led his people out of the land of slavery and bondage that was Egypt (cf. Exod 6:6). He carried Israel as on eagle’s wings and brought them to himself. He wanted to make them his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, if only they obey him (Exod 19:4-6). He brought them to the Sinai. There he displayed his majesty in a tremendous display of power. In the midst of much thunder, lightning and a trumpet blast, God himself descended. The mountain shook violently and smoked and the Israelite camp trembled (Exod 19:16-19). Then God declared: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exod 20:1). After thus identifying himself as their covenant Lord, he stipulated the Ten Words of the Covenant (Exod 20:2-17). So awesome was the divine manifestation of power with thunder, lightning and trumpet sound, that Israel begged that not God, but Moses speak to them (Exod 20:22). This happened. Moses met God on the top of the mountain where God revealed his laws and ordinances (Exod 20:21-23:33). Moses then descended from the mountain and declared this Book of the Covenant (Exod 24:3; cf. Exod 24:7) to the people of God. They responded enthusiastically: “Everything the LORD has said we will do!” (Exod 24:3).

With this reaffirmation (cf. Exod 19:8) of the desire of Israel to serve the Lord their God, Moses prepared for a ceremony of covenant renewal and reaffirmation. He built an altar at the foot of Sinai, along with twelve stone pillars, representing the twelve tribes of Israel (Exod 24:4). Burnt offerings and fellowship offerings were sacrificed to

God, the Book of the Covenant was read and the people again reaffirmed their commitment to obey the Lord (Exod 24:7; cf. 3). Then in an awesome and moving ceremony, Moses took blood from the sacrifices and sprinkled it on the people saying: “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you” (Exod 24:8). What a ceremony of covenant renewal!

Now it was only after the blood was sprinkled that Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy elders of Israel went up the Sinai and saw God (Exod 24:9). They went near to God, but they could only do so only on the basis of the sacrifices and sprinkled blood – the sacrifices that spoke of forgiveness and a good relationship with God. Israel in covenant with God – and before God! However, there are distinctions when it comes to being in God’s presence.

Exodus 24:9-11

Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank. (NIV)

Only a select few actually climbed up the Sinai to go to God! The people as a whole were not allowed! They were not even permitted to touch the mountain, lest they die (Exod 19:10-25). They had to keep their distance! But a privileged few, including seventy elders, could come closer. God determined who could come close and who not. There were gradations of holiness at the Sinai where God met his people. These different levels of holiness would later be reflected in the tabernacle. The least holy would be the enclosed courtyard

outside the tabernacle where the people could come. That was the closest the average Israelite got. The next level of holiness would be the holy place which was accessible to the priest, and finally the holy of holies to which only the high priest was allowed to enter. Such gradations were first seen at Mount Sinai. The people were before the mountain but could not come close and touch it. They were so to speak in the outer court. But, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders could climb up the mountain. They entered as it were the holy place. Yet only Moses could go all the way into the very presence of God, the holy of holies so to speak (Exod 24:1-2, 15-18). So, there were three degrees of coming into God's presence.⁴

God selected the elders to be in his presence. He singled them out. Well if God has such a high esteem of their position in Israel, how much more should the people esteem them for the sake of their office!

The priests and elders did however get to see God. It is nevertheless striking that when a description is given of seeing God, we read: "under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself" (Exod 24:10). This reminds one of the vision of God seated on a sapphire throne which Ezekiel saw (Ezek 1:26-28). One gets the distinct impression that they looked up and saw through translucent pavement. No actual description of God himself is given. His feet are mentioned, but not even his throne. They saw something of God enthroned, but not clearly. This reminds us of the time a little later that Moses would ask God to show him his glory. But God answered: "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exod 33:20; cf. 3:6). The seventy elders saw *something* of God enthroned. He was close. His feet were visible! But at the same time he was distant, even for the select few who could come up and have a meal, beholding God. Yet, what an awesome privilege. In his grace and mercy, God allowed them to come close and see him. What a revelation of God's majesty! The God who had been hid-

den in the thunder and cloud now allowed himself to be seen. And God "did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank" (Exod 24:11). Apparently nothing was said. The event transpired in awesome silence. Human beings in God's presence – heaven and earth close together.

Why did the elders have the privilege of coming close to God, just in front of the Sinaitic holy of holies so to speak, to which Moses would be allowed to go (Exod 24:12, 18; cf. Isa 6:1)? Why is it that they here shared this privilege with the priests, Aaron, and his sons, Nadab and Abihu? What aspect of their office as elder came out here? The answer must be that they were there as representatives of the people of Israel. God had renewed his covenant with his people. And now on the mountain these elders as representatives of the nation may eat and drink as part of the meal that belongs to the ceremony of covenant renewal. This meal confirmed the renewal of the covenant and spoke of the restored fellowship between God and his people. Indeed, it was probably the meat of the fellowship offering which formed their meal, with the Lord God "consuming" the burnt offering (cf. Exod 24:5).⁵ At this banquet of communion with God, the elders represented that large multitude below the mountain. Such comprehensive representation is probably indicated by the number seventy. After all, Jacob's descendants were seventy (Gen 46:27). The seventy elders represent the entire community of Israel.⁶

There is also another aspect here. The fact that God chose elders to represent the nation at this covenant renewal indicates their great importance. It certainly enhanced their authority with the people. God selected the elders to be in his presence. He singled them out. Well if God has such a high esteem of their position in Israel, how much more should the people esteem them for the sake of their office!⁷

Elders of the people. They were allowed to come into the special presence of God and see him so that they could celebrate a meal of covenant communion with him, a meal based on the atoning blood, a meal sealing the covenant relationship!⁸ What a revelation of the mercy and grace of God! For, this meal is full of promise since it anticipates the full redemption to come (cf. Heb 9:18-28). After all, if the *representatives* and leaders of the people

could participate now, would this not be an indication that eventually all the people would be able to do so?!

Well, that would be some time coming, but this observation does take us to the next occasion where we find the elders in the presence of God, namely in Isaiah 24.

Isaiah 24-25

This time the setting it is not Mount Sinai, but Mount Zion! God is enthroned in splendour and majesty. The glory of his presence radiates from him (24:23; cf. 4:5; 60:1). What is the context? The world has been judged with divine judgment. It is horrible. Devastation is everywhere and the earth languishes and withers for its people have disobeyed the Lord (Isa 24:1-13, 16b-20). There is clearly no redemption or forgiveness for their sin. Judgment comes in all its terror and the scene is apocalyptic. But there is a righteous remnant and they shout for joy and sing "glory to the Righteous One!" (Isa 24:16).

In a scene full of terrestrial upheaval with the assurance of punishment for the wicked, there is a suddenly shift to the splendid promise that "the Lord almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem!" And where God is, there is glory!! His glory is so overwhelming that it says literally in Isaiah 24:23 that the moon is abashed and the sun ashamed. What are they compared to the light of the splendour of the Lord who reigns on Zion in glory!? God is there in all his majesty, ruling the world from Mount Zion and Jerusalem (cf. Obad 21). This is his dwelling place (Ps 76:2; 132:13). And there beholding his glory are the elders!

Isaiah 24:23

The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and glory will be before his elders.

These are the elders of God. It says literally "his elders," referring to the Lord of hosts.⁹ That means the elders are responsible to the Lord. They are to follow his commands. This the elders often did not do. As a matter of fact, earlier in the book of Isaiah we read that the LORD entered into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people and accused them of ruining the Lord's vineyard and plundering his people (Isa 3:14). Elsewhere the Lord indicted the

elders with misleading the people (Isa 9:15-16). All this reminds us of the awesome responsibilities that leaders in the church have, including the elders. The Lord calls office bearers to account for their actions. But, the Lord also promises that elders, his *elders*, will be there in the presence of the Almighty when he reigns victoriously on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem! That promise entails that also among the elders there will be a faithful remnant. The grace of God! Over against the abundant sin and destruction, he maintains the work of his hands and triumphs over his enemies.

The promise of the elders being in God's glorious presence on Mount Zion prompts comparison with the elders' experience on Mount Sinai. There are some similarities. On both occasions the event takes place on a mountain and a key element is proximity to God. However, there are two crucial differences, differences which reflect the progress of God's self-revelation to his people in these promises.

The first difference is that whereas the elders in Exodus 24 only see the feet of God, in Isaiah 24 they are in the presence of the very glory of God.¹⁰ In Exodus 24, the glory of God was found on the very top of the mountain, inside the cloud that covered the summit of Sinai. The people saw something of the glory filtering through the cloud on top of the Sinai. It looked like a consuming fire (Exod 24:17).¹¹ Only Moses had been allowed to enter there (Exod 24:18). However, in Isaiah 24, the elders find themselves in the immediate presence of this glory of God. They are as it were in his holy of holies (cf. Isa 4:6; 60:1)!

Yes, for this is a meal of celebration and rejoicing because the Lord God will remove all reason for sorrow and darkness.

The second difference concerns the meal. A meal is also mentioned in Isaiah, be it in the larger context of the elders being in God's glorious presence on Zion. After the elders are mentioned, a song of praise interrupts the account (Isa 25:1-5) and after that a meal is described on Mount Zion. It is a rich banquet with aged wine and the finest of meats (Isa 25:6-8). However, this vision

of the sumptuous festivity on the mountain with God that speaks of the future glory is not just the privilege of the elders or of Israel for that matter, but to this meal are invited all the nations! What a promising perspective!!

It is a tremendous privilege for those at the Theological College to train teaching elders and in this way also to help equip those with the office of ruling elder.

Yes, for this is a meal of celebration and rejoicing because the Lord God will remove all reason for sorrow and darkness. He will triumph over death and therefore he can remove the veil of mourning from the peoples and wipe the tears from their eyes (Isa 25:7-8; cf. 1 Cor 15:54; Rev 21:4). So God's work of redemption will culminate and his grace will go out to all the peoples.

All are invited to the climax of history! His complete church will be there before him! This truth is essentially expressed by the vision of the elders on Zion being before God's glory.¹²

Revelation 4 - 5

Another vision of elders in the presence of God is found in Revelation 4 and 5. When the Apostle John was shown heaven through an open door (Rev 4:1), then he saw God's throne and surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white, symbolizing their being cleansed from sin and they had crowns of gold on their heads, symbolizing the authority to rule with Christ (Rev 4:4; cf. also 11:16; 19:4). Twenty-four elders, twelve of them representing in all likelihood the twelve tribes of Israel (cf. Rev 7:4-8) and twelve representing the apostles and the New Testament church (cf. Rev 21:14). In other words, the elders around the throne represent the entire holy catholic church of Christ, spanning both Old and New Testament times.¹³

They are there in the very holy of holies of God's presence, worshipping and praising God, putting their crowns before his throne. They are there because of the triumph that has been won by the Lamb of God. As we read later in Reve-

lation 5, the Lamb who has triumphed did so by being slain and by purchasing with his blood people from every tribe and language and nation (Rev 5:9). The blood of the covenant sacrificed on the altar of the cross of Golgotha – that is the basis of the elders and the church being in the glorious presence of God! The presence of the elders speaks of the official presence of the church! – a presence later specifically mentioned in Revelation 7 where we read that a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, was standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. There they worship God and he wipes away every tear from their eyes (Rev 7:9-17). That is the future of which the presence of the elders in Exodus 24 before God's presence already testified to!

Revelation 4:1-5

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. (NIV)

Elders, they are God's representatives to the people, but they also represent the people before God! Elders in the church. What a gift of God! In the new dispensation in which we live we see the office of elder functioning in a double way: the office of teaching elder which we normally call a minister of the Word, and the office of ruling elder, which we generally understand by the title elder. It is a tremendous privilege for those at the Theological College to train teaching elders and in this way also to help equip those with the office of ruling elder.

In Closing

When we reflect on the elders seeing God, then in summary several observations can be made.

First, when the people were as yet not allowed to draw near to God on the Sinai, that prerogative was given to the elders. This office was chosen to be in God's very presence. This speaks of the high place that this office has in the mind of God. How privileged we therefore are to still have this office today. In this egalitarian age where special privilege and responsibility is disdained and church offices are often ridiculed, let us not lose sight of the tremendous gift of God in the eldership. Let us encourage the office bearers who labour in our midst. They need that for the eldership is not only a tremendous privilege but also an awesome responsibility.

Secondly, when the elders saw God, they did so as representatives of the people. Their being representatives of the church before God's throne anticipated the day when, according to God's promises (Isa 25:6-8; Rev 7, 14:1-3), all God's children would be in his glorious presence and enjoy him forever in holy worship. And therefore, because of the sprinkled blood of the new covenant we are not en route to Sinai with its terrifying fire, darkness and gloom as God appeared with warnings not to touch or come near. Rather, we are en route to Mount Zion, the city of the living God (Heb 12:18-24; cf. Rev 14:1). Indeed, we can even draw near to the holy of holies through the blood of Jesus in the full assurance of faith (Heb 10:19-23).

Thirdly and finally, the fulfillment of God's promises means that one day not only the elders but the entire people of God, the 144,000, will actually be before God's throne (Rev 14:1-3).¹⁴ There they will have a meal with God, the great wedding feast of the lamb (Rev 19:7, 9). Like the elders who are there today, we too will worship, praise and glorify our God in joy unending! The day comes that we will see our God and Saviour in a way that surpasses all revelation which we enjoy today, for heaven will come down to earth and the dwelling of God will be with us in perfection (Rev 21:3).¹⁵

¹ An abbreviated version of this article was given as a speech at the College Evening of September 5, 2003.

² The translation is from Gert Kwakkel, "According to My Righteousness" *Upright Behaviour as Grounds for Deliverance in*

Psalms 7, 17, 18, 26 and 44 (dissertation; Kampen: Van den Berg, 2001) 71, 81 for the justification, and 96-101 for an interpretation. Also cf. The New English Bible.

³ See further on this subject, e.g., R. J. Bauckham, "Vision of God", in Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 1988) 710-711.

⁴ See Philip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness. A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 89-93; Peter Enns, *Exodus* (NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 488.

⁵ See W.H. Gispén, *Exodus* (Bible Student's Commentary; Grand Rapids, Michigan / St. Catharines, Ontario: Zondervan / Paideia, 1982 [orig. pub. in Dutch in 2 vols., 1932, 1939]), 240 and Enns, *Exodus*, 492, 494.

⁶ See Th. C. Vriezen, "The Exegesis of Exodus XXIV 9-11" in *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 17 (1972) 107-108 and Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1991), 150. Moses also gets the help of seventy elders when the work becomes too much for him (Num 11:16, 24-25). Cf. also Luke 10:1.

⁷ Being allowed in the very presence of God is indicative of the esteem God also expects others to show to such a person. After all, when Moses' authority was challenged by Miriam and Aaron, the Lord supported the authority of Moses by reminding the rebels that Moses came into God's presence and that God spoke with Moses "face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" (Num 12:8).

⁸ In the ancient Near East, a solemn meal was often used in ratifying or sealing an agreement between two parties. Think, e.g., of the pact that Abimelech and Isaac made and sealed with a meal (Gen 26:27-30) or that made between Jacob and Laban (Gen 31:44-54).

⁹ The NIV is in error to translate "its elders" referring to Jerusalem. If that was the case the Hebrew would have read "her elders" since Jerusalem is treated as feminine. See, e.g., Isa 40:2; 51:17; 52:2; 62:6; 66:10. See also more generally on the gender of place names, Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 103-104.

¹⁰ A point also made by J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 206-207). The "glory of God" has been variously defined and understood, a fact that underlines that the context is important for determining its precise meaning. See Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadel-

phia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 87, 249 (on Exod 16:7). In general it can be defended that the glory of the Lord is a "technical term for God's manifest presence" or the Lord himself. See C. John Collins in W. A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 2.581-582 and Gispén, *Exodus*, 241.

¹¹ See Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2000) 3.297.

¹² See E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (3 vols; NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965, 1969, 1972) 2.182.

¹³ This is an ancient interpretation that has enjoyed wide support. See, e.g., S. J. Kistemaker, *Revelation* (NTC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 187. There has been considerable difference of opinion on the identity of the elders. It appears that generally speaking the early church considered the elders to be glorified saints while some modern exegetes have defended the identity of angels (according to J. M. Baumgarten, "The Duodecimal Courts of Qumran, Revelation and the Sanhedrin," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95 [1976] 66). For the elders as a higher class of angels or spiritual beings, see, e.g., G. Bornkamm in *TDNT* 6.668-670 and N. B. Stonehouse, "The Elders and the Living Beings in the Apocalypse" in *Arcana Revelata* (Fs F. W. Grosheide; Kampen: Kok, 1951) 135-148; for their identity as glorified saints, see, e.g., Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 186-188 and cf. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 322-326. The view that denies that these elders are office bearers but are rather earlier witnesses of God's work (H. R. Van de Kamp, *Opening: profetie vanaf Patmos* [CNT³; Kampen: Kok, 2000], 165-167) does not sufficiently take into consideration Isaiah 24:23 and its reference to Exodus 24:9-11.

¹⁴ This means that both the representatives of the saints as well as the people of God will together be in the presence of God. On the identity of the elders, see, e.g., Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 186-187. No one of the saints will be excluding in worshipping before God's throne (Rev 14:3; also see Kistemaker, *Revelation*, 403).

¹⁵ His glory will be so overwhelming and bright that there will be no need for sun or moon (cf. Isa 24:23) "The glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp" (Rev 21:23; cf. 22:5).



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A New Beginning in Dunnville, Ontario

By A. Kingma

It was a hot, humid Sunday afternoon, one of those regular Ontario muggy summer days. Nothing unusual was happening outside, but inside the Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Church building, members and guests were experiencing a very special service. All came as one congregation, and all left as two congregations. All members could in some ways experience the sadness of parting, but all could also experience great joy: the Church at Attercliffe became a mother and the Church at Dunnville/Wainfleet became a newly instituted daughter.

The farewell sermon

Rev. D. Agema chose 2 Chronicles 7: 1-6 as the text for this special service. In that Bible passage, the magnificent temple which King David had planned and which King Solomon could build was consecrated to the Lord in a special worship service. King Solomon offered a prayer to the Lord, asking the Lord to dwell among his people, to hear them, to help them, and to bless them. Immediately after the prayer, the LORD answered in two ways: by sending fire on the sacrifices and by filling the temple with a thick cloud. In these ways, God answered, "Yes, I will live among you. I will make the temple my permanent dwelling place." Rev. Agema stated that we do not expect a fire or a cloud to fill the church building as signs of the Lord dwelling among his people, but we know that He fills with his glory "the temple that cannot be destroyed," which is the church. The church is his work.

The priests could not perform their duty, because of the glory of the Lord. Before Solomon's prayer they had brought the ark of the Lord into the Most Holy Place. Then they made themselves ready to play the musical instruments to accompany the singing, but they could not because of the fire and the cloud of the Lord. They, the consecrated office bearers, had to wait,

realizing that they were in the service of the Lord, the God of Israel, whose glory now "filled the temple." Rev. Agema drew the parallel to today's situation: As the priests couldn't perform their duties until the cloud of the Lord's glory dissipated, so today the newly appointed office bearers cannot do their work unless they acknowledge that the church building work, as displayed in this institution, is the Lord's work. Only then can they lead the congregation in giving glory to Him.

Having seen the awesome acts of God and the multitudes of sacrifices, the congregation of Israel responded by kneeling and worshipping. Yet we have more than the Israelites, Rev. Agema explained. God was with them in their temple, but their temple could be destroyed. He is now permanently with us by his Word and Spirit in a temple that cannot be destroyed. How much more should we not kneel and worship! And starting a new church should only increase our worship. The Israelites confessed, "The Lord is good; His love endures forever." How much more should we not confess the Lord's goodness. It is because of his goodness that He restored Israel after the exile; it is because

of his goodness that He sent his Son; it is because of his goodness that He established the New Testament church, and it is because of his goodness that we could institute a new church in Dunnville.

While the Levites led the Israelites in singing, the priests accompanied the singing with musical instruments. The priests of today, the office bearers also accompany us in singing: they support the congregation's song of praise to God. They support the congregation by holding it to the truth of the gospel, by upholding the reformed confessions, by instructing and teaching, by administering mercy, and by bringing the pure preaching. With this support the mother and daughter congregations can praise their God and Father, singing harmoniously the same song of praise as Israel did. Rev. Agema concluded his sermon by sharing the wish that the members of Attercliffe and Dunnville may continue to sing that song of praise as they go on their separate ways, but travelling together toward the heavenly dwelling where the eternal song of praise continues day and night.





New officers ordained

After the sermon, the congregation could witness the ordination of the new office bearers. Ten men could say before the Lord and the congregation "I do," thereby taking on their respective offices. In response and with joyful hearts, the congregations sang with the church of all ages Psalm 132 and Psalm 150.

The Subscription Form was then read by Rev. Agema, and after he urged the newly appointed clerk to add the third Form of Unity to the document, the ten brothers could sign the form, thereby vowing to remain faithful in their office and to submit to the discipline of the church. Through the ordination of the office bearers, the new church of Dunnville could be instituted. The new congregation was urged to accept these office bearers as Christ's gifts to them.

Congratulations

The Member of Parliament, the Right Honourable Mr. Maloney, took the floor and congratulated the newly instituted church. He urged the new council to spread the Word of God and to strengthen the church with the help of the Lord. The mayor of Dunnville, her Worship Mrs. Lorraine Bergstrand, was also present to witness this institution.

Neighbouring churches shared their congratulations as well. The Church at Grassie acknowledged that it was no longer the "baby" in Classis Niagara, and urged the "new kid on the block" vitality and strength, recognizing that in a smaller church everyone must be "on the front lines." The Church at Lincoln stressed the importance of worship and Word, urging the

new church to be faithful while recognizing that "the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, for He will guide us on our paths." The grandmother Church of Smithville could relate that it was a joy for her to see the growth: 151 members in 1952 to over 2000 members in 2003; then all in one church, and now all in one classis (along with the Church at Blue Bell). Smithville urged the church at Dunnville to be a salt and a light, and wished that this institution may also be a blessing to the remaining church at Attercliffe. The Grace United Reformed Church at Dunnville also shared its congratulations by letter, praying that the newly instituted church may "grow in faith and number."

Concluding remarks

After sharing some more personal remarks about being a minister of Attercliffe almost from its inception, Rev. Agema gave a little white business envelope to the new clerk, br. H. Homan,

containing all the statistics of the members of the new church. Br. Homan then shared that what we see today is a sign of God's on-going church gathering work, and the results of the faithful preaching of the Word and evidences of the fact that the Lord is good. On behalf of the new church, he shared a few thank-yous to the institution committee, the "mother" church, the minister, the government representatives, and the neighbouring churches.

The meeting was ended with a voluminous and joyful singing of Psalm 150, after which the minister cheekily noted that some ladies had overruled the council so that all could enjoy coffee, juice and baking after the service. Obviously, after an extra long service, most members silently agreed with those ladies, but ironically, as the two congregations came out of church, big drops of rain greeted us, diluting our coffee and juice, and softening our baking. Resiliently and hurriedly, people transported everything into the social hall downstairs where personal emotions and reactions could be shared along with the food.

The Church at Dunnville, numbering around 270 members in total, will continue (for now) to worship in the Attercliffe Church building each Sunday at 9:00 A.M. and at 1:00 P.M. while the 360 members of Attercliffe switched their worship times to 11:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M. to accommodate them. In this manner, both churches can sing that song of praise together as they go on the separate ways. May the Lord bless the ongoing building of his church. C

Mr. Arthur Kingma is principal of Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Elementary School in Ontario. abkingma@kwic.com





Press Release of Classis Pacific East, September 18, 2003, Chilliwack, B.C.

Rev. M.H. VanLuik of the convening Church of Chilliwack called the meeting to order. Those gathered sang Psalm 65:1, 2, 3. Second Corinthians 4 was read from the Word of God. The delegates were welcomed, as was Rev. J. Merica, who was visiting on behalf of the RCUS Western Classis. Some matters of memorabilia were noted.

Credentials were found to be in good order. Classis was declared constituted. The following officers served Classis: as chairman – C.J. VanderVelde; as vice-chairman – B. Wielenga; as clerk – J. Moesker. The agenda was established. Rev. J. Merica was received as fraternal delegate with full privileges of the floor, excepting the right to vote. It appeared that the form of subscription was not present at the meeting; Rev. J. Moesker would sign at the next Classis. The convening church for that Classis was instructed to have the subscription book available.

Under correspondence, an appeal was received, declared admissible, and brought into discussion. The appeal concerned method of celebrating the Lord's Supper in the Church at Chilliwack. A committee was established to draft a response for Classis. An invitation was received to the June 2003 Classis Western Canada of the URC. The convening church (Chilliwack) had already sent regrets to the convening church of the URC Classis. The clerk of this Classis would respond as yet with greetings to the next URC Classis, also explaining that Classis Pacific East did not meet in time to respond to their June invitation. Contact would be taken up with Classis Pacific West to seek an arrangement in which Classis Pacific West could concentrate on URC contacts and Classis Pacific East could concentrate on RCUS contacts in the West. Also under correspondence, a report was received with thankfulness from Classis' deputy for contact with the RCUS, Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer, who had visited the March 4-6, 2003 Western Classis of the RCUS. The report would be sent on to the CCCA.

After lunch, Classis heard the report of the committee assigned to formulate a response to the aforementioned appeal. The committee report was adopted; the appeal was denied. The brothers from the church at Chilliwack abstained from voting.

Correspondence was received from Classis Pacific West requesting clarification for a request from a previous Classis Pacific East to continue the West's financial support in the matter of needy churches. A letter will be sent to the next Classis Pacific West giving thanks for past support and indicating that no further support is being requested.

Rev. J. Merica was given the floor to address Classis. He extended warm fraternal greetings and spoke words of encouragement to continued faithfulness. Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer responded for Classis.

Under reports, a church visit report was received of a visit to the Church at Chilliwack. Reports were thankfully received and duly noted from: a. church for the inspection of the archives; b. the auditor of the books of the treasurer; c. the treasurer. It was noted with thankfulness that there were at this time no churches in Classis Pacific East requesting financial assistance.

Under question period, Article 44 of the Church Order, one church requested advice in the matter of proceeding with church discipline. Ad-

vice was given to proceed with church discipline in the two matters brought to Classis.

The following appointments were made: The convening church (and place) for next Classis is the Church at Lynden; the date and time were set at December 4, 2003 (alternate: March 25, 2003), 9:00 am. Suggested officers for that Classis: chairman – B. Wielenga; vice-chairman – J. Moesker; clerk – M.H. VanLuik. Deputy for contact with the RCUS and fraternal delegate to the next RCUS Western Classis is: P.H. Holtvlüwer. Church visitors are: R.A. Schouten, J. Moesker, M.H. VanLuik, and B. Wielenga, with C.J. VanderVelde as alternate. The following brothers were delegated to next regional synod: elders: C. Leyenhorst and P. Van Woudenberg, with W. Pleiter and J. Bareman as alternates in that order; ministers: J. Moesker and C.J. VanderVelde, with B. Wielenga and R.A. Schouten as alternates in that order.

Question period was held. Censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order was not deemed necessary. The Acts were read and adopted. The press release was read and approved for publication. The assembly sang Psalm 133:1, 2 after which the chairman led in prayer. The meeting was closed.

*For Classis Pacific East,
September 18, 2003
Bill Wielenga*



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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address. They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length. Please include address and phone number.

Dear Editor:

Re: The Importance of Education: Just the Parents' Business?

In his passionate support for Canadian Reformed schools, Rev. Eikelboom comes to the conclusion that without them we would no longer have churches. I quote: "The reality is that the churches need school teachers just as desperately as they need ministers. If we don't get the school teachers we need, our churches have no future." "Remember, if we have no schools left, we will have no churches left either." He even intimates that non-support is unfaithful and leads to curse. That is not saying much for the Lord of the church and saying way too much for the man in the school. I'm quite sure Rev. Eikelboom has it backwards: without the church there would be no schools. It appears like it is a passion gone amok. While on the topic of education matters, after reading brother Keith Sikkema's article "Is Home Schooling Less Reformed," some questions come to the table. In the last paragraph, Br. Sikkema's dream is "that we understand the communion of saints rightly again," and "that we help each other apply Matthew 18." The question I have is this: who does not understand the communion of saints rightly – the "home schooler" or the "Canadian Reformed day schooler"?

Appealing to Matthew 18 is quite ambiguous – but assuming one needs to apply something, I assume he refers to Matthew 18:15-20. If that is the case, who would he consider the sinner – "the home schooler" or the "Canadian Reformed day schooler?" It appears like this is another case of passionate support gone amok. To be frank, I find both of these positions scary. Left unchecked, they will lead to extra scriptural binding upon our members that can only lead to unnecessary strife.

*Glenn Tams
Stafford Lake, Alberta*

Response

Brother Tams suggests that my interest in Canadian Reformed day schools is a passion gone amok. When I suggested that Canadian Reformed Churches cannot survive without our schools, brother Tams responds that I am not saying much for the *Lord* of the church and saying way too much for the *man* in the school. In other words: I must rely more on God, and less on man. And that sounds like an impressive argument. But: can we say that *we need* more ministers? Or: *we need* more missionaries? Because God is almighty, of course God does not need anything. And yet God is pleased to use people to execute his plans. And therefore we say: we need ministers. We need missionaries. And

we also need men and women to teach at our schools.

Brother Tams also expresses concern that my position may lead to extra-Scriptural binding and unnecessary strife. I certainly hope not. Because the fact is that Canadian Reformed people have many different opinions on many issues. But if Christians disagree with each other, should they ignore these differences? Is a community healthier when differences are shoved under the rug? I think not. Instead, that causes bitterness and division. That is because we don't understand each other's motivation, but we are prepared to judge each other. And then I would point to the Canadian Reformed Church at Calgary as an example to show that brother Tams' fear is groundless. This small community includes many people who send their children to our school, but also others who home-school and others who send their children to the public school or interdenominational schools. We are not afraid of the issue. Instead it is discussed freely. And what about the fact that we disagree? We knew that already. But now we have the added advantage that we understand each other, and we continue to respect each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord. And surely that is a good thing.

R. Eikelboom

The Council and Congregation of the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Fergus extends the Lord's Blessing to:

REV. WILLIAM WIECHERT JOHANNES VANOENE

and

IETJE VANOENE (NEE RAAP)

for 60 years of service as Minister of the Word
and on the occasion of their 60th Wedding Anniversary

Rev. and Mrs. VanOene were married on November 2, 1943. Five days later, on November 7th, he was ordained as the minister of the Word of God in the Reformed Church at Oud-Loosdrecht, the Netherlands. He also served as minister in Schiedam, the Netherlands, and New Westminster, BC before being installed as Minister of the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Fergus-Guelph, Ontario on January 18, 1970. Although retired from active service on May 1, 1985, he remains minister emeritus of the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Fergus, Ontario.

Let not loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; Bind them about your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favour and good repute in the sight of God and man." Proverbs 3:3, 4