

# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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Who Appoints?

Saying Farewell  
to Dr. J. De Jong

General Synod  
Chatham 2004



*General Synod  
Chatham 2004  
appoints a  
new professor,  
Dr. A.J. de Visser*



**N.H. Gootjes**

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## Who Appoints?

*These ministers realized that one of the most important requirements for the future of the Reformed Churches was having ministers who could preach the gospel.*

By the time this issue of *Clarion* has reached your mailbox, General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches has met in Chatham, Ontario, and its decisions are known. But this editorial is written before Synod has been convened, before any discussions have taken place and decisions made. One of the important decisions to be made by Synod concerns the Theological College. Unexpectedly, a vacancy has occurred which needs to be filled. In the past year, Dr. J. De Jong celebrated with his family and the whole College community that he had been serving in the ministry for twenty-five years, as minister and preacher, and also as professor. However, he will not return to the classroom. We commend him and his family to the Lord, who governs the present and the future. May he comfort them and give them strength.

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*The theological department of the university was supervised by the government, not by the churches.*

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As a result, Synod Chatham will have appointed a new professor, according to Article 19 of the Church Order. In this article, dealing with the training for the ministry, two things in particular are mentioned. In our situation, we want to concentrate on the first rule in this article: the churches together have decided to “maintain an institution for the training for the ministry.”

This is obviously an important article for the churches, for it indicates the way in which they expect to receive their ministers. The training for the ministry had an interesting history in the Reformed Churches. We want to shed some light on the views of our Reformed forefathers concerning theological education and their struggles to make it work.

Obviously, it is not possible to go over that whole long history, nor is it necessary. We will limit ourselves to three characteristic moments.

### **Wesel 1568**

For the beginning of Reformed theological training we have to go back to the time of Luther and Calvin in the sixteenth century. This was the time in which Reformed people in The Netherlands were attempting to obtain freedom to profess the Reformed religion. In the first year of the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648), a provisional decision was made about schooling for future ministers. That happened at a meeting of ministers which took place in Wesel, Germany. This meeting was intentionally organized outside of the country, because in the given situation it was not safe for the ministers to organize the meeting in The Netherlands.<sup>1</sup>

These ministers realized that one of the most important requirements for the future of the Reformed churches was having ministers who could preach the gospel. The very first section of the summary of their conclusions, dealing with the establishment of these churches, discusses the need for men who are godly and well trained, able to correctly present the word of God.

The meeting also formulated the requirements for theological students: they should know the languages and sciences, and they should be trained in the explanation of the Scriptures. Actually, the report of the meeting says that “the three languages” should be studied. When we read that today, we may think of English, French and German, but that would not be in agreement with the time. Although it is not indicated, the first important language would have been Latin, which was the scholarly language used in classroom instruction. Further, they needed Hebrew and Greek, in order to be able to read the Bible in the original languages.



They stated in the same document that, when God would give the opportunity, a Synod of representatives from all provinces should be convened to deal with these issues. This Synod would have to deal with all aspects of the training for the ministry, from the remuneration of the teachers to the sermon sessions.

When these ministers met at Wesel to discuss the future of the Reformed Churches, and made an inventory of all that had to be organized, they emphasized that the real decisions should not be made by them but by the churches themselves. This can be shown from the actions of the Convent of Wesel itself. It was convinced that theological instruction should be organized. But during their meeting in Wesel, they did not go ahead and establish a Seminary by themselves. They realized they were not an official Synod, but only a meeting of ministers without ecclesiastical authority. Rather, they determined that an official Synod of The Netherlands churches should organize theological studies when the circumstances allowed that.

## Inside . . .

Synod Chatham recently directed the Board of Governors of our Theological College to appoint Dr. A. J. de Visser as professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology effective May 1, 2004. There are important implications in Synod making this decision and that our Theological College even exists because of the decisions and support of our churches. Dr. N. H. Gootjes makes that clear in his editorial.

It is fitting at this time to remember that Dr. J. De Jong's task as professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology at our College is officially coming to an end. His colleague and friend, Dr. C. Van Dam, writes a fitting "farewell" to our beloved professor. May the Lord be with Dr. J. De Jong and his family, and continue to give blessings to the faithful work our brother did for so many years.

The minister of the Church at Chatham, Rev. H. Versteeg, is giving us his personal observations of the Synod's proceedings. He and Rev. W. B. Slomp are also providing us with a number of photos.

We have the second part of Rev. H. Versteeg's speech to a Women's League Day in Chatham, Ontario. He writes about living in the joy of faith, particularly when life is not always so easy.

We have our regular columns, *Treasures, New and Old*, *Children's Catechism* and *Ray of Sunshine*. We also have a letter to the editor.

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## The reality during the Dutch Republic

The churches of the Reformation were unable to realize their plans to keep the training for the ministry in their own hands. It was Prince William of Orange who was responsible for the beginning of academic theological training in The Netherlands. He granted the city of Leiden the right to establish a university which would include a theological department. This was a reward for the brave resistance of the city when it had been surrounded by the Spanish troops. They had not surrendered, although the siege had led to a severe shortage of food. In recognition for their perseverance, Leiden received in 1575 the first university of the country which was still fighting for its independence. One of the main reasons for establishing this university was the training for the ministry. Soon after, several other cities received the right of establishing a university, including a theological department.

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*The lack of ministers was so severe that worship services were organized on weekdays if a minister could be found willing to preach.*

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The result was that, although theology was usually taught by Reformed professors, the theological education was not organized by the churches. Nor did the churches have any say in the teaching. The theological department of the university was supervised by the government, not by the churches.

From the side of synods the government was urged to grant the churches influence in the appointment of professors and supervision over the theological training. Particularly after the churches had gone through years of debates between the Remonstrants and the Reformed, the Synod of Dordrecht in 1619 attempted to increase the influence of the churches. They requested that the churches be consulted when theological professors were to be appointed. They could do no more than request to be consulted, for in the context of the university it would be impossible to receive the right to appoint professors. Even more important was the request that the theological professors would be subject to the churches with respect to the theological teaching. However, these requests were never accepted by the universities.<sup>2</sup>

It is obvious that the churches wanted to have control over the content of the theological training, but the concrete situation prevented them from exercising that influence.

## The new beginning

The Secession of 1834 was a reaction to the deterioration of the Reformed Dutch churches. Only a few ministers joined this reformation movement, but within a year the number of congregations had grown to about seventy. The lack of ministers was so severe that worship services were organized on weekdays if a minister could be found willing to preach. As the churches realized that this situation could not continue, they decided that they needed to organize training for the ministry.

This was started in 1839, only five years after the beginning of the Secession. Hendrik de Cock, whose suspension from office had led to the beginning of the Secession, was appointed to teach men suitable for the ministry. This was obviously a heavy burden for him and others who were subsequently added to take on the training of the future ministers. Ten years later, the General Synod of the Secession churches decided to set apart three ministers to take care of the theological education of future ministers. The seminary was officially opened in 1854 with four ministers who would serve as full time professors.<sup>3</sup> Now the conviction that the churches should take control of the training of their ministers could be put into practice.

It is not the intention of this article to deal with the history of the Theological School of Kampen. Rather, on the occasion of the appointment of a new professor it is good to realize why it is the Synod of the churches which makes the decision. This conviction has its origin in the time of the Reformation, although the churches for a long time could not achieve it. Today, however, we do have that freedom. We are grateful to the Lord that because of the desire of the persecuted ministers at the Convent of Wesel it is the churches, through their Synod, who organize the theological study.

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<sup>1</sup> For the text of the following decisions, see P. Biesterveld, H.H. Kuyper, *Kerkelijk handboekje, bevattende de bepalingen der Nederlandsche Synoden* (Kampen: Kok, 1905) 2f.

<sup>2</sup> J. Janssen, *Korte verklaring van de kerkenordening* (Kampen: Kok, 1923) 77ff; H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerd kerkrecht* (2. ed.; Kampen: Kok, 1970) vol. 1, 496ff.

<sup>3</sup> This history has been described in W. De Graaf, *Een monument der Afscheiding: the Theologische opleiding van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland 1854-1954* (Kampen: Kok, 1954) 5-48; H. Bouma, 'De voorgeschiedenis der opleiding' and P. Deddens, 'De weg tot de oprichting der Theologische School' in *Tot de prediking van het Woord des geloofs* (Kampen [1954]) 14-67.



D. Ph. Poppe

# Suffering

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MATTHEW 13:52

*“... be freed from your suffering.”*

Mark 5:34

One of the great difficulties we face in this fallen world is sickness. We have all been sick with a cold or the flu, and a surprising number of us have had more severe illnesses. Christ came into this world, not only to save people from sin, but also from this effect of sin. In Mark 1:34 and 3:10 we are told that He healed many of their diseases.

One of the people who came to him was a woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years. She believed that if she could just touch Jesus' cloak, she would be healed. And that is exactly what happened. Immediately her bleeding stopped.

But then, to her horror, the Lord Jesus turned and asked who touched Him. She fell at his feet trembling with fear, and told Him the whole truth. Now you might wonder why this woman was so afraid. A wonderful thing had just happened to her! But consider the position that her sickness had put her in. In the laws of Moses, it is written that a woman who is bleeding is unclean (Lev 15:25), and anyone who touches her also becomes unclean (Lev 15:19). Being unclean was serious, for Leviticus 15:31 says, “You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them.”

She should have avoided contact with others. Instead, this woman made her way through the large crowd pressing around Jesus, making each person she touched unclean. No wonder she was terrified. And how would Jesus Christ

Himself respond to the fact that she had even risked making Him unclean?

But instead of condemning her, the Lord Jesus responded with comforting words. “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.” Here the LORD Jesus reveals that He is the Son of the Father. The Father is known among his people as a God who loves to forgive his children their sins and heal them of their diseases. In Psalm 103:2-3 we confess, “Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.” Jesus Christ demonstrates this aspect of God's nature in his dealings with this woman. Although at one time she suffered intensely (the word used in the original for her suffering also refers to a whip or scourge) now she was set free.

Furthermore, Christ also opened the way for her to have fellowship with God once again. For twelve years this woman had been ceremonially unclean and unable to worship the LORD in his house. Imagine her great joy now that she is once again able to go to the temple!

Jesus Christ has come to do the same for us. He loves us, and He will heal us when we turn to Him in faith. In many ways it is difficult for us to do so. We live in a time when the medical profession has made significant advances in preventing sickness and overcoming disease. The temptation is to rely on doctors to heal us.

But consider what is said of this woman. During the twelve years of her illness, she had spent all her money on

numerous doctors, but instead of getting better, she only got worse. These doctors were unable to help her. This still happens today. Sickness continues to ravage our lives, and how often does it not also end in death? Some dramatic examples are the plague that killed one third of the population of Europe in the fourteenth century, the “Spanish Flu” of 1918 that killed up to 50 million people and the AIDS pandemic that has killed more than 21 million people. Everyone who has lost a loved one from cancer knows the limitations of doctors. In contrast we see the power of Jesus Christ over disease. When the woman of our text turns in faith to the Lord Jesus, she is completely healed of her disease. Instead of putting our trust in doctors we must learn to rely on the LORD. Always remember that ultimately He blesses the work of the doctors so that you are healed. And if the Lord Jesus does not provide that healing for you today, rely on the promise that it will happen one day. The Lord promises us that in the New Jerusalem there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev 21:4).

Also remember that healing is not the only gift we receive from the Lord Jesus. The Holy God of the Old Testament who required that all uncleanness be kept from his holy temple has not changed. The filth and uncleanness of our sin disqualifies us from having this Holy God dwell in our hearts. Thanks be to our Lord Jesus Christ, who by his power makes us holy so that we may again enjoy fellowship with the LORD.



# Saying Farewell to Dr. J. De Jong

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In the unsearchable ways of the Lord our God who directs our paths, the time that Dr. De Jong has been active in the Theological College officially comes to an end now that Synod Chatham is appointing a successor. According to human reckoning, this end comes much too soon given his age of some 54 years. But in his sovereign wisdom, our faithful God and Father in heaven has decided otherwise and clearly indicated by the failing health of our brother that indeed his task at the Theological College has been completed. We have therefore come to the point at which we need to say farewell to Dr. De Jong from his position as active professor and teacher of theological students. Such an occasion calls for both reflection as well as giving thanks to God for what he has given to the churches in Dr. De Jong. I would like to begin with the latter.

## Reasons for gratitude

It is with great thankfulness that we may take note of the fact that the Lord was pleased to use Dr. De Jong as his servant for over twenty-five years of faithful service. Dr. De Jong was ordained as minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in London, Ontario, in 1978, after having completed his studies at the Theological College as well as having received what we would call the degree of Master of Theology (Th. Drs.) in Kampen, The Netherlands. In 1983 he left London for the Burlington Fellowship congregation where he laboured until 1990.



In his service for the churches as a minister of the gospel, our brother was not afraid of work. He has unselfishly laboured, not only for his local congregation, but also for the federation of churches as a whole. Almost immediately after ordination, Dr. De Jong started to write meditations from Scripture for *Clarion* and he kept it up until 1990. However, even after commencing his work at the Theological College, his efforts for *Clarion* continued unabated by writing on a wide variety of topics, especially those related to his field of study.

While he was a pastor in Burlington, he also resumed his studies in Kampen and received the Doctor of Theology degree in 1990 with a dissertation on the principle of accommodation in K.

Schilder's theology of revelation entitled *Accommodatio Dei*. That same year his work at the Theological College started as Professor of Ecclesiology and Diaconology. Although his field of specialization was dogmatics, he did not hesitate to tackle new challenges when Synod Winnipeg 1989 appointed him as successor to Dr. K. Deddens to teach the ecclesiological and diaconological disciplines. In faith he saw this appointment as coming from the hand of God and trusting in the Lord's provision took up this new task. To be sure, he entered these new fields with some trepidation. He indicated that he realized the scope of study he would have to undertake when he told Synod Winnipeg that he must again start as a beginner. But then he added: "Especially in the rich and variegated field of theology, one is always a 'beginner'!" Supported by his wife and family, he gave his everything to the new task. We are thankful for that service. Surely one of the highlights of his time at the Theological College is the development of the Pastoral Training Program which Rev. J. De Gelder directs.

Both as minister and as professor, he also served the federation of churches in synodical committees. From 1980 to 1995 he served on the Committee for the *Book of Praise*. This was the committee on which he served the longest. In addition, he gave of his time and energy for the Committee on Bible Translations from 1986 to 1992.



## Church News

Appointment Accepted

**Dr. A.J. de Visser**

missionary/evangelist of Pretoria, South Africa for the work in Soshanguve, has accepted the appointment as professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology at the Theological College.

However, his greatest love was probably for the work he did on the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity. He served the cause of church unity from 1995 until his failing health forced him to give up this work last year. He did this work with great love and devotion and in this showed himself a true disciple of Dr. K. Schilder, and more importantly he showed that he understood the high priestly prayer for unity that our Saviour prayed: "that they all may be one" (see John 17:11, 21).

It is with praise and thanksgiving to God that we take note of the faithful service that our brother and colleague was allowed to do for the churches, as pastor, as professor, and as synodical deputy.

An occasion like this in which we say farewell is also an appropriate time to pause and reflect. This is certainly the case now when the Lord unexpectedly removes someone from active service at a relatively young age. Let me therefore pass on some items for reflection, using the work of Dr. De Jong as our guide.

### The depth and comfort of the Gospel

Dr. De Jong was first and foremost a minister. Few were the Sundays that he was not on the pulpit. The task of minister of the gospel is no ordinary calling. It is an awesome responsibility and a tremendous privilege to administer the Divine Word. When Dr. De Jong was ordained, his first sermon on that ordination Sunday of October 22, 1978 was on Matthew 13:52. This text recounts the words of the Lord Jesus: "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old. The theme and divisions of this sermon were: "The Lord

Jesus entrusts to his disciples the treasures of the kingdom. 1. The content of these treasures; 2. The administration of these treasures; 3. The value of these treasures." In this sermon, Dr. De Jong spoke of the owner of the house taking old and new treasures out of a bag. The owner of the house was one trained in the service of the kingdom and the treasures were the Word of God, the gospel of the kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Dr. De Jong did what the owner of the house had to do. He has exhorted, comforted and guided God's people by the proclamation of the gospel. He has taken from the gospel, riches both old and new. As mentioned, he also shared his insights by writing a regular column called "Search the Scriptures" in *Clarion*.

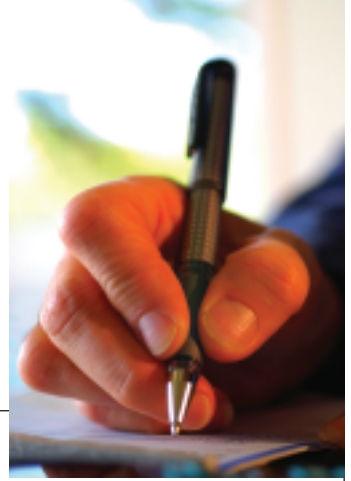
It seems appropriate that when we officially say farewell to one whose passion was the gospel and its proclamation that we listen again to some of the treasures that Dr. De Jong shared with God's people through his column in *Clarion*. I would like to mention three meditations.

The first deals with the parting of ways, in this case the parting of ways between the apostle Paul and the Ephesian elders as described in Acts 20:38. ("What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again.") This parting of ways was very difficult for the elders and they experienced much sadness. Dr. De Jong mentioned several reasons for this. But the underlying reason for their grief was that missing the fellowship with the apostle meant missing the fellowship that gave a foretaste of the glory to come. However, in this sorrow there was comfort. The comfort of knowing that the fellowship with Christ will be celebrated in perfection. And now I quote: "then faith gives way to sight, and then we may know the fellowship that has no barriers and the bonds of love

that have no grief. The realization that in Christ this deepest joy is dawning in the world is and remains an ever greater source of comfort and strength for the faithful. Sharing the foretaste of this joy today gives us the confidence and hope we need to bear the cross of the present age. For the joy that knows no bounds is coming! Then we will share with Christ the fullness and the unity of all things."<sup>2</sup>

The second meditation I want to touch on briefly deals with Exodus 19:4b. Israel is at the Sinai and then God says to his people whom he delivered from Egypt: "You yourselves have seen . . . how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." On this passage, Dr. De Jong comments how all through the history of his people, God is busy delivering his people and bringing them to himself. He writes: "the image of the eagle finds its fulfilment in Christ and his work. By his death and resurrection he has delivered us from the bondage of sin, borne us on eagles' wings, and brought us to the Father." Then the meditation comments on the difficulties of this life and ends this way: "Thus . . . we have great comfort. Through all the turmoil, we know that we are on a steady course. We soar on eagles' wings; finding safe shelter under the refuge of his wings. He takes us through the years, and, taken up by him, we know that we will be cared for. With his Word and Spirit to guide us, we will surely arrive and see his glory."<sup>3</sup>

The third and final meditation is on Deuteronomy 33:27, part of the song of



## Letters to the Editor

Moses, where we read: “The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” What a wonderful passage! The eternal God is described as our dwelling place. As Israel goes to the Promised Land, they are reminded that not the land, not the things of this world, but ultimately God is their destination! He is their dwelling place – made possible in the work of Christ. Dr. De Jong writes: “This song of blessing. . . makes clear where the LORD is going with his church. He is the eternal God, always ahead of his people, breaking open a pathway of victory for them.” And so in all the difficulties and tribulations of this creation, we ultimately have nothing to fear. The mediation concludes this way: “So we can continue our pilgrimage with confidence. He is always ahead of us, the eternal God. He has been sure and steadfast in his purpose! He will carry Jerusalem as a mother carries a child (Isa 66:12). Underneath are the arms that encircle and protect us. And He will carry us home!”<sup>4</sup>

### Conclusion

May this rich gospel conveyed in these meditations be of constant comfort to Dr. and Mrs. De Jong, and to their children as they experience their own parting of ways, their own being carried on eagle’s wings, and the truth that the arms of God encircle, protect, and carry them forward. He is faithful and He will do it.

As Dr. De Jong’s memory is failing him more and more, he is also withdrawing more and more to early memories and in the process reaffirming the gospel. Lately, when he is at the College, he often sings softly, “*Maar de Heer zal uitkomst geven!*” This is the Dutch rendition of “But the Lord will send salvation,” which is the

### Letter to the Editor:

I am amazed after seeing the deterioration in government policies in the last couple of years, that we still find reasoning about our political calling such as one expressed by Mr. Hank Jager in his Letter to the Editor, of January 30, 2004.

Mr. Jager seems to think that we can only fulfill our political duties in a party like C.H.P. I am convinced that we have failed to make use of the opportunities we have to promote our Christian and moral principles in the past. And by not doing so, we are also guilty of the decay taking place in our society. The sad fact is that if we do not use it, we will lose it.

If we care about the future of our next generations we better start supporting those politicians who are also greatly concerned about the direction in which our country is going, and we should be thankful that there are still many of them around. I know some elected politicians who find themselves “under the gun”

when issues come up that go against their convictions. At such moments they feel so alone. I have heard them complain, and say: “Where are you people and why can’t I count on your support privately and publicly?” Then I feel ashamed and think, yes, the only thing we do is sit back and complain, and meanwhile we do not support such politicians because their convictions are not up to our set of standards.

It is written: “The little they have will be taken away.” We don’t need a situation such as the one in Holland, where instead of working together for the things they stand for, each denomination seems to have their own political party; some years ago I counted over thirty. In the meantime the country is the most godless country in the western world.

Are we too blind to see that?

Arend Harke,  
St. Albert, Alberta

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first line of both the Dutch as well as English fifth stanza in the versified version of Psalm 42.

But the Lord will send salvation  
And by day his love provide.  
He shall be my exultation,  
And my song at eventide.  
On his praise e’en in the night  
I will ponder with delight,  
And in prayer, transcending distance,  
Seek the God of my existence.

<sup>1</sup> See “A Day of Joy: Ordination and Inauguration of Rev. J. De Jong,” *Clarion* 28 (1979) 58.

<sup>2</sup> J. De Jong, “From the Scriptures: The Greatest Joy (Acts 20:38),” *Clarion* 38 (1989) 394.

<sup>3</sup> J. De Jong, “From the Scriptures: On Eagles’ Wings (Exod 19:4b),” *Clarion* 32 (1983) 7.

<sup>4</sup> J. De Jong, “From the Scriptures: Carried Home (Deut 33:27),” *Clarion* 37 (1988) 490.



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# Living in the Joy of Faith – Reflecting the Image of God in Christ<sup>1</sup> (Part 2)

*Zephaniah 3:14-17*

## Remain in the joy of faith

But let us remain connected with the topic of the day, namely, depression. This depression can quench the joy of faith. Let us see how we can combat this so that, despite struggles in life, even very bitter ones at times, we can still live in the joy of faith with singing.

Now we all know the definition of faith. Our Heidelberg Catechism defines it succinctly: a sure knowledge of all that God has revealed to us in his Word and a firm confidence that God grants the salvation of Christ also to me, out of mere grace. In one word, it can be said that faith is trust. Just like a young lady has to trust that what her boyfriend promised would really happen in order for her to have immediate joy, so we must trust that what God had promised us in his Word will really happen in order for us to have immediate joy. And then we also have this beautiful fact in Scripture that, not only has God already confirmed his promise in the coming of his Son, in his Son's death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, but also, in the outpouring of his Holy Spirit into our hearts we already have the first deposit of the fulfillment of his sure promises. It is at the same time a guarantee of what is to come (2 Cor 5:5).

It is when the wedding rings have been bought that there is a sure guarantee that the wedding will take

place. But remember, the young lady could only rejoice after she received knowledge of her boyfriend's plans and she had faith in her boyfriend's promise, trusting that he would do as he said.

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*He promises to be Father unto us and He promises not to hold our sins against us for his Son's sake.*

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Now it may be that from the time her boyfriend promised the ring to the time she received the ring, she said and did things to him which were not so nice, to the point that it made her doubt whether he would stay true to his promise. She could understand if he would break his promise. Yet, he had made his promise to her. Would he now keep it or not? Then, she has two choices. She could either dwell on her doubts, causing her to go deeper into despair, or she could remind herself of his actual word of promise and remember that her boyfriend has always been a man of his word. She also has the opportunity to go back to him and ask him to reconfirm his promise unto her. She can then go on with joy in life, trusting and believing in her boyfriend's promise, eagerly waiting for the day he would fulfill his promise.

## God remains faithful

Our lives with the LORD our God are very much like that. It is out of the joy of his heart that He, out of grace alone, has sought to continue a relationship with us. He comes to us with wonderful promises. He promises to be Father unto us and He promises not to hold our sins against us for his Son's sake. He promises us a glorious future with Him.

But as we go through life, life can at times become so burdensome. There are times when a certain misery tears at our hearts and minds, leaving us devastated. And sometimes, through weakness, we do fall into sins and we can be very angry with ourselves for having fallen; we of all people, God's people, should have known better, should have done better. You can then begin to doubt God's promises, for you do not always have them sufficiently before your eyes. The miseries, the burdens, the concerns of life can sometimes cause the joy of our faith, our trust in God, to grow dim for a time.

Then we have two choices. We can wallow in our doubts, perhaps also in self-pity, but that will not do us any good. More often than not, it is a self-fulfilling prophecy. When you say to yourself often enough that you are a terrible person, you are good for nothing, nobody likes you or cares for you, then that is exactly what can happen. The reason is simply because most people don't care to

associate with grumpy people who only have themselves in focus and wallow in their self-pity. But we also have the choice of reminding ourselves of the promises of God. We not only have the choice of reminding ourselves of what we have learned about Him, know about Him, even confessed about Him when we publicly professed the faith, but also, we have the opportunity to go to Him in prayer. Then He also directs us to his infallible Word, his Word of promise that endures forever.

### **Amen to that**

“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of the Lord stands forever,” said Peter (1 Peter 1:24,25). For the man or woman who wants to be stable in life, who wants to live in the joy of faith in life, it is important that he/she has a healthy self-image that reflects dependence on God. Then we must always return to his Word. And that Word would remind us of blessings, manifold, undeserved and wonderful blessings. And then first of all, in the Scriptures, God reveals to us that He is a God of his Word. “For no matter how many promises God has made,” said Paul, “they are ‘Yes’ in Christ” (2 Cor 1:20). We who live in the end of the ages can say our Amen to that, to the joy of our faith, and to the glory of our God.

In the Scripture, God reveals to us that He is a faithful God. And, because He is faithful, Paul says, He will also not let you be tempted or require you to face trials beyond your strength. With every temptation or trial, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (2 Cor 10:13). And that way out is to come to Him in prayer. The Lord Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened” (Matt 7:7, 8). Ask for comfort and strength through prayer; seek

comfort and strength from the Scriptures; when you so knock at his door, He will give rest for your souls; He will quiet you with his love.

The Lord Jesus also told his burdened people whom He loved to come to Him, to throw off the yoke of formalism and legalism of the Pharisees – and we may add, to throw off the concerns and anxieties of life – and instead to look to Him, to take his yoke upon ourselves and to learn from Him. Then we will find rest for our souls (Matt 11:29,30). And that yoke is to remember that, because of sin, there will be suffering; there will be misery.

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### *We who live in the end of the ages can say our Amen to that, to the joy of our faith, and to the glory of our God.*

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Nevertheless, because Christ has taken that yoke on Himself, all our sins and misery upon Himself, all our grief and sorrow, our depressions and burdens, we may go through life with a light burden. Our suffering will not be unto death as his was, but a suffering unto life, a suffering through which God purifies us, moves us to rely completely on Him, the only source of life.

### **In difficult times**

Yes, when you are down and burdened, just think and read again about the wonderful God that you have and about his wonderful promises. Remember how you were fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps 139:14). There are thousands of parts to your body, yet they all work together in perfect harmony. You have an amazing God! And what is man that God is mindful of him (Ps 8)? Man was the crown of his creation. Man was

the creature who was to give the Creator, the ultimate joy. Instead, man gave God bitter grief. Man is less than a drop in a bucket, even dust on the scales (Is 40:15). Yet, God is mindful of man. What a gracious, loving and merciful God we have!

And look at his handiwork! (Ps 19, Ps 104, etc.). Every season is beautiful. Every season we see the mighty hand of the Creator at work. Every creature receives what it stands in need of. Then remember the words of our Lord Jesus, “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” Do not worry about what you will eat, drink or wear. (Matt 6:26-31). Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will have enough concerns of its own (Matt 6:34). “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all (that you stand in need of) will be given to you as well” (Matt 6:33). Why? Because “you were bought at a price” (1 Cor 6:20), “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Pet 1:19). And so, you are his. “The Lord knows those who are his.” (2 Tim 2:19). Of them, He has said: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (And) so we (can) say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Heb 13:5, 6).

### **Where does my help come from?**

Therefore, when you are depressed or burdened with grief and sorrow or with struggles in life, remember to look up to the hills, and ask yourself again, “Where does my help come from?” and He will remind you that your “help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. (And) He will not let your foot slip – He who watches over you . . . will neither slumber, nor sleep. . .

He will watch over your life; . . . your coming and going both now and forevermore” (Ps 121). But you must trust that: “as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, both now and forevermore” (Ps 125:2). And you must believe in God’s sure promise for you, for by believing they are yours, just as the Lord Jesus said concerning our eternal life in John 3:36: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.” Yes, “The LORD is with you when you are with Him” (2 Chron 15:2).

And He has promised to be with us to the end of the ages (Matt 20:20). Indeed, “those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint” (Isa 40:31). “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love, into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5).

Be “confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion, until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6). He did not bring you to the faith to drop you like a hot potato. He brought you to a life of joy for what He has done for you; to a life of joy in your faith, which will express itself in a love for life, in a love for others, and reaching out to others regardless of need. But above all else, a love to serve the LORD in obedience and faithfulness to the best of your ability all the days of your life until you may enjoy life to the fullest in his service, upon Christ’s return.

Yes, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High (for as long as this life continues) will rest in the shadow of the Almighty” (Ps 91:1). When you live close to Him, come before Him regularly in prayer, constantly read the Scriptures and also take the time to meditate on his Word, while also faithfully attending the proclamation of his Word, then you may be sure that you will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. Your Lord will overshadow you with his love and mercy.

He will give the ability and the strength, to go on in life. Though misery at times may be great, you will yet be able to sing a song or whistle a tune, despite a heaviness in your heart, because you trust in the Lord and so you can go on in the joy of your faith in Him.

By his Spirit, who works in you through his Word, whose comfort you seek, you will be able to say: “I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust’” (Ps 91:2). Yes, “we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom 8:37).

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### *Help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.*

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Therefore, think of these things that God has done for you in Christ, for these are truly noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy things to think about. Then we know that “the God of peace will be with you” (Phil 4:8,9). You “can do everything through Him who gives (you) strength” (Phil 4:13).

### **Daughters of Zion are to sing**

Zephaniah told the daughters of Zion to sing, even to shout aloud, to be glad and rejoice with all their hearts. The reason was because the LORD had been gracious. He had taken away their punishment and turned back their enemy. What happened to the people of Judah in that day is true for all those who trust and believe in the Lord still today. The LORD has graciously taken away our punishment in his beloved Son’s bitter and shameful death on the cross. And having turned back the great enemy in our lives, Satan and death itself, He will also stand by and grant us all that we stand in need of.

And therefore, the Word of Zephaniah is very appropriate for us, namely “do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with his love, He will rejoice over you with singing.” He takes pleasure in saving you, rejoicing over you with singing. Our God is a singing God, a God of joy. You should then also take pleasure in his saving you. You should then rejoice with singing. And so, not only be content and joyful in life, but also draw others to the Lord, as you share your joy for your life in Christ.

We ought then to be a singing people, a people who sing with rejoicing. And that is also why you find in so many places, the people of God singing as, for example, in the Psalms. Read Psalm 66, 81, 95, 96, 98, 100, to mention but a few. Yes, singing is characteristic of God’s people because they are living in the joy of faith which they have received from their gracious God out of grace alone, in Christ’s merits.

Yes, there will be down days. But we know where to go to find rejoicing again, to find comfort, to again be able to sing a song of rejoicing, to again whistle a tune of joy. Take one day at a time. Take each day as “This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps 118:24).

In conclusion, remember that the Lord Jesus once told his disciples in John 15:11, “I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” We are given knowledge about our Creator God, who is at the same time our Saviour God. Let your Father and your Saviour delight in seeing you live in the joy of what He has done for you. Make your joy complete by living trustingly in the knowledge of this salvation. “Sing, O daughters of Zion, . . . be glad and rejoice with all your heart!”

Take one day at a time.

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<sup>1</sup> Speech held for Women’s League Day in Chatham, October 22, 2003



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

# Lord's Day 6



*Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.*

We are speaking about Jesus Christ. What did he come to do? It is recess, and the grade six students go outside to play. Pete stays behind to look for the pen he lost. When he has found it, he, too, goes outside.

When class resumes, a dirty word is written on the blackboard. Who did that? Peter, of course, for he had stayed behind. The teacher calls him to come forward: "Peter, wipe out that stuff you wrote!" Only then does Pete notice that something is written on the blackboard. He says: "But I did not write that, sir." "You said you were looking for your pen," the teacher says. "Good try! Wipe that out!"

Then Keith raises his hand. "Sir, I know for sure that Pete did not do that. Someone else did. But I'd rather not say." The teacher believes Keith, and Pete does not come forward to clean the blackboard. Why not? Because Keith mediated between the teacher and Pete. You could say: Keith came between the teacher and Pete to make peace. He was a mediator.

Mediators come between two parties who disagree, and make peace. Jesus Christ is a Mediator. For he came to bring about peace between God and us. How do we know that? From the Bible, of course. The Bible tells us what God did for us. You can see the work of Christ

in the sacrifices brought in the temple of Israel. And you can read what the prophets said about his work. That is sometimes somewhat hard to understand. That is why we should always read the Bible, all our lives.

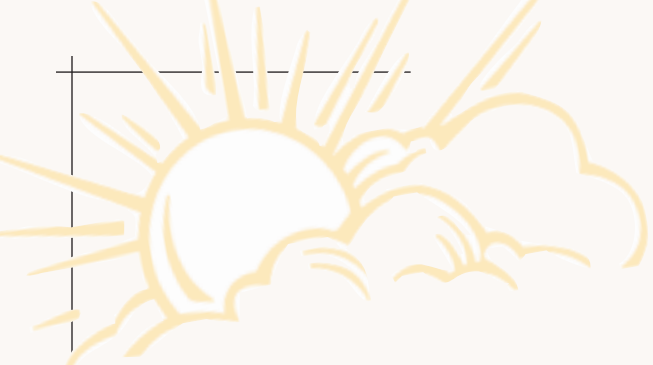
I'll tell you a story. The neighbours have rats coming into the house. Something must be wrong with the sewer; otherwise they would not be there. You can hear them, and droppings are all over the place.

But the neighbour is scared of rats. She is going crazy! Her friend tells her to call the rat catcher. While she is calling him, she sees a rat scurrying through the kitchen. She panics and cries out to the rat catcher: "Please help me. Save me from the rats!" The rat catcher comes, and rids the house of the rats. Our neighbour is no longer in misery. She feels she has been saved.

The Catechism uses the same words: being in misery, being saved. Misery means that we are stuck with our sins. And salvation means that we do not suffer the punishment we deserve because of our sins.

Just as our neighbour was saved from the rats, so God's children are saved from the punishment we deserve. You too! But that does not happen easily. More about that next time.





# Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people He chose for his inheritance. From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling place He watches all who live on earth – He who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do.” Psalm 33:12-15*

In the next few articles we would like to present a mini series on the Beatitudes. We will look at why were they given, to whom were they given and how can we apply them to our own lives. With this article we will introduce the purpose of the Sermon on the Mount and the events surrounding his teachings.

In Matthew 5:1-12 we may find the Beatitudes. The term “Beatitudes” comes from the Latin word meaning “blessing.” They describe what it means to be followers of Christ. They also contrast kingdom values with worldly values, and selfish pride with true humility. Finally, they also show how Old Testament expectations are fulfilled in God’s kingdom.

But first we must back track and begin in chapter 4 where we can see what Jesus was doing before He gave the Beatitudes. Jesus had begun his ministry throughout the land of Galilee. He was preaching and teaching and healing the sick throughout this area. Crowds of people were following Jesus not only because He was healing the physically sick but also those of spiritual sicknesses. Jesus’ words were good news because they offered freedom, hope, peace of heart, and eternal life with God.

The Sanhedrin, who were the supreme governing authorities, had banned Jesus from teaching in the synagogues. Therefore, after seeing the crowds, He went up to the mountainside and continued his teachings here. Jesus is sitting down in the manner of a teacher in Israel, and Matthew tells us that his disciples come to Him (Matt 5:1).

Whom then did He teach this to? Primarily to the disciples. But clearly our Lord was preaching to these men and telling them what they were to do in this world, not only while He was here, but also after He had gone. It was preached to the people who were meant to practise it at all times. Thus we can see how this also applies to all our lives as well. The whole Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit is living and is meant for all of us today.

Now sadly the Scribes and the Pharisees and other teachers of the people were always misinterpreting the law as given by God through Moses. Thus the people were very eager to hear what Jesus had to say. The sacrifices and burnt offerings were no longer necessary in the New Testament because He fulfilled the law through the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross. The Sermon on the Mount is in line with the ten commandments in showing how we must live in all humility and thankfulness before the Lord.

As we hope to go through each Beatitude, we must study them in a proper light. They must be seen as a whole, and not

individually. These are all attributes that we must have. This will also be explained further in the forthcoming articles how all the Beatitudes must portray the characteristics of a follower of Christ.

The Sermon on the Mount does not say “live like this and you will become a Christian.” Rather we are told, “because you are a Christian live like this.” So why then should we study this? Why should we try to live like this? The Lord Jesus Christ died to enable us to live the Sermon on the Mount. They show us the deep need for the working of the Holy Spirit and how He works within us. He did not die for us, and then leave us on our own. He loves us and wants us to live also concerning the Beatitudes.

The more we try to live according to them the more we shall experience his blessings. To be considered blessed is more than being happy, because happiness is just an emotion that comes and goes. To be blessed is to have an ultimate well being and spiritual joy, knowing we share in the salvation of the kingdom of God.

Let us also strive to live out of thankfulness to God. His Word and Spirit are ever before us and continue to uphold us. As we do our mini series with each of the Beatitudes, let them be a joy and a source of comfort to all of you readers.

## Birthdays in April:

- 2 DEREK KOK will be 34**  
464 Domville Street, Box 4, Arthur, ON N0G 1A0
- 19 MARINUS FOEKENS will be 52**  
19 Forest Street, Chatham, ON N7L 2A9
- 23 ARLENE DEWIT will be 43**  
c/o P. DeWit, Barnston Island, Surrey, BC V3T 4W2
- 29 BRYCE BERENDS will be 29**  
3217 Twin Oaks Crescent, Burlington, ON L7M 3A8

Congratulations to all of you who are celebrating a birthday this month. We hope and pray that you will have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends, and above all with the Lord’s blessing for this new year. Best wishes and till next month!

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman  
548 Kemp Road East, RR2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2  
Phone: 905-563-0380

# General Synod Chatham 2004 (Part 1)

I was asked to write a press review of the affairs of Synod as they take place from day to day at Synod Chatham 2004. A clear distinction must be made between Press Review and Press Release. Press Review is not the official record of Synod; rather it is only one person's reflection of what has taken place at Synod. This is simply my personal reflection of what transpired at Synod.

## Prayer service

Rev Cl. Stam began the week of Synod with the good custom of leading a prayer service on Monday evening. He shed light on Psalm 131 and pointed out the importance of moving forward in the spirit of humility. The matters that are placed before the brothers of Synod are matters of the Lord and his church in which the Head of the church will then also give wisdom and guidance to each who seek it of Him in humility. In the awesomeness of Christ's reconciling sacrifice on the cross, each child of the

LORD is "stilled and quieted." In that quieted spirit of humility the church is called on to move forward and put their "hope in the LORD both now and forever." The proclamation was well received and set the tone for this Synod which was to do its work in great humility and trust and hope in the LORD.

## Opening of Synod

Synod was opened Tuesday morning by Rev. H. Versteeg. In line with the proclamation of the evening before, speaking from Psalm 123, he also reflected on the necessity of doing the work of the LORD in the spirit of humility. There is to be a looking to the hand of the LORD for all that his servants stand in need of in order to be good servants of our LORD. Some introductions were made of those in the congregation of Chatham who have spent many hours of preparation so that this Synod would be able to do its work as speedily and as efficiently as possible.

The executive was elected: Rev. C. VanSpronsen was elected as chairman, Rev. J. DeGelder as vice-chairman, Rev. J. VanVliet as first clerk and Rev. D. Agema as second clerk.

## Theological College

Because of the sad deterioration of Dr. J. De Jong's health, the Synod had to appoint another professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology. Appointed is Dr. A. J. de Visser, who is well qualified academically and has a wealth of experience as pastor and missionary in our sister church federation of South Africa. On Monday February 16, Dr. de Visser was heartily received in the midst of the delegates as well as the present professors from the Theological College. Dr. de Visser addressed the assembly, humbly speaking about the honour and trust shown in him by this appointment. He also spoke about his work in South Africa and how, should he accept the call and depart, it would be difficult for the churches and the mission work. This is accentuated by the fact that just last year Rev. D. Boersma was also called to Denver, Colorado, USA. He also reflected with sadness on the reason for his appointment as professor in this particular field at our Theological College.

Thereafter, Rev. J. Moesker, as governor of our College, and Dr. C. Van Dam, as principal, spoke very appropriate words, imploring not only the LORD's wisdom for Dr. A. J. de Visser as he needs to decide upon this appointment, but also the LORD's grace and mercy for the Dr. J. De Jong family. Dr. J. De Jong and his wife will receive an official letter of thankfulness for our brother's years of



Moderamen: Rev. J. de Gelder, Rev. C. VanSpronsen, Rev. J. VanVliet, Rev. D. G. J. Agema





*Rev. W.B. Slomp, Rev. K. Jonker, P. van Woudenberg, Sr., H. VanderWel*

faithful and diligent service for the churches.

Dr. A. J. de Visser's presence among us was a wonderful way for him to feel welcomed among the churches here and to meet many church members who spoke words of support to him. He will make known whether he accepts the appointment by Friday, February 20. Should he accept, he will receive some help for the first semester as Rev. J. De Gelder will be asked to teach Church Polity for the fall semester of 2004. There was much thanksgiving to the LORD that a qualified professor could be found. Yet, there was also some sadness that this was only necessary due the illness of our brother Dr. De Jong. He and his family were remembered in prayers.

### **Churches in The Netherlands**

Two delegates from the Netherlands, Dr. K. Wezeman and Rev. R.C. Janssen, were present during the first week. Rev. R.C. Janssen addressed the Synod with a very informative speech in which he enlightened the delegates and the audience on the developments in The Netherlands and expressed the pain they suffered not only because of a seceded minority in The Netherlands but also because of what they felt was a premature and unjustified critique from the side of the Canadian Reformed Churches. They request our churches to be open to examine carefully their struggles, which in the not so distant future will also be our struggle. They absolutely want to remain faithful churches of Jesus Christ, faithful to the

Scriptures and the Three Forms of Unity. They claim that the proposed changes to the marriage form as well as the discussion surrounding the fourth commandment on the manner in which the Sabbath Day ought to be hallowed are not because of a different spirit at work but because they are trying to adapt the language of faith and the practice of the Christian church to the language and situation of the time.

Later, based on the committee's draft proposal to Synod, a lively discussion took place which focussed basically on four issues: the place and number of psalms over against hymns, the understanding of the fourth commandment and Sunday worship, the understanding of some elements in the new marriage form of the Dutch sister churches, and the recent "liberation" of a small number of its members. Synod

charged the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) to study the result of the deputyship of The Netherlands with respect to the fourth commandment and Sunday worship. The CRCA is also charged with expressing our concern with regards to the proportion of psalms and hymns. Thirdly, they are to continue discussions with their Dutch counterparts with respect to changes in the new marriage form, especially in light of the fact that the words "obey" and "submit" are replaced by "accept as head" and "follow," as well as to clarify the phrase "when the Lord provides the possibility there to" when it speaks about receiving children from the hand of the LORD. Lastly, they are to seek clarity about the legitimacy of the recent "liberation" and monitor further developments. The churches are asked to remember the struggles in our sister churches in their communal prayers on Sundays.

### **Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS)**

Rev. G. Syms and Rev. T. Mayville attended Synod during the first week as delegates of the Reformed Church of United States. Rev. G. Syms addressed the assembly, expressing gratitude for the brotherly manner in which matters of concern with their church were being addressed. Synod also expressed thankfulness for the openness with which certain concerns such as the observance



*Rev. J. Moesker, Rev. J. de Gelder, W. Pleiter, J. Jonker*

for the Lord's Day and the administration of Lord's Supper among the shut-ins are being received by the RCUS for further study. Synod mandated our committee to continue the discussion and also to promote the use of our Theological College in Hamilton to the RCUS.

### **Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)**

Br. B.Veenendaal, fraternal delegate from FRCA, addressed the Synod with warm greetings, updating us on the developments in their churches, informing us about their contacts with their sister churches, and thanking our churches for the assistance they received through the Theological College in Hamilton. FRCA rejoices in the close fellowship they have with our churches in so many ways and encourages us to remain faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. The report of our committee on the FRCA is relatively short as compared to the reports on our contact with other churches. It may be said that this reflects our deep bond with these churches and that we are very



*Rev. C. VanSpronsen, H. VanderWel, Rev. W.B. Slomp, P. van Woudenberg, Sr.*

much alike in our understanding and practices with respect to the applications of the Christian faith.

### **Free Reformed Church of South Africa (FRCSA)**

With respect to the FRCSA, Synod decided to encourage the churches to assist the FRCSA in their extensive mission work and to request the Board of Governors of the Theological College to seek ways to offer assistance.

### **L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ)**

Synod considered that it was not yet time to invite ERQ into an ecclesiastical fellowship. Synod mandated our

committee to discuss further and clarify matters such as pulpit supervision, fencing of the Lord's Table, and confessional accountability while encouraging our churches to support ERQ financially, with advice when requested, and in prayer.

### **Other matters of general interest**

#### **Number of delegates to synod**

In response to an appeal, Synod decided to increase the number of delegates to Synod from four elders and four ministers to six elders and six ministers from each Regional Synod. When you consider that the number of



*Rev. J. de Gelder, Rev. W.B. Slomp, Rev. J. Moesker, Rev. W. den Hollander, J. VanderStoep, Rev. C. VanSpronsen, G. van Woudenberg*



churches has doubled in the last forty years and the membership has increased by two and half times, the decision is understandable. Although our system of government is not by representation but by delegation, there is, however, a certain amount of representation as an equal number of delegates is expected from each Regional Synod. Why then not make that from each Classis? The committee on the Church Order in discussion with the URC appears to be going in that direction. However, as that is still in the making and there is uncertainty when it will materialize, it was decided to proceed to this change in the Church Order. It brings matters of General Synod closer to the churches when there is a greater number of delegates from the Regional Synods and hopefully then also from the various Classes. Further, increased delegation increases the likelihood of unbiased decisions. The Scriptures also says, "many advisors make victory sure" (Prov 11:14).

**Admissibility of appeals**

Over the years it has become increasingly unclear whether an individual

member can interact with Synod decisions by sending appeals directly to the General Synod outside the way of the Church Order, which is via the consistory, classis, and regional synod. General Synod Abbotsford 1995 struggled with that. General Synod Fergus 1998 and in particular, General Synod Neerlandia 2001 pulled the lines tighter. Because there have been different practices over the years, people have become confused and some have been hurt. Therefore, this Synod has given a clear interpretation of Articles 30 and 31 of the Church Order. Synod has returned to the original intent of Article 31. Individual members must appeal decisions of Synod following the way of the Church Order. When a Synod makes a decision on a matter that is common to all, then an individual member may not take the decision to mean that he is personally wronged. He must then ask his council whether the council ratifies that particular decision of Synod. If so, then the individual has first of all an issue with his council and so must begin the appeal process with his consistory.

Further, this appeal process must also be seen as the most pastoral way of dealing with the issue. Rather than leaving an individual to deal with the issue himself for three years until the next Synod, he can be helped in a pastoral way by his office bearers. Perhaps, by the grace of the LORD, the Word of God administered through the office bearers will shed light on the case for the appellant in such a way that his burden will be lifted. Then he need not walk with it for three years.

**Days of prayer**

A church had requested the two churches appointed by past Synod to call a day of prayer, to do so because of the rapid moral decline in our nation. The two churches declined the request, judging that such moral decline should always be addressed in our public congregational prayers. Synod judged that the intent of the Article 54 CO was indeed to call a day of prayer in case "of an acute nature, of extreme severity and posing an immediate crisis for the life of the church and or the nation."



W. Pleiter, Rev. J. Moesker, J. Kuik, J. Jonker, F. Kampen