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*How to Elect
Office Bearers*

*Of Siblings
and
Separations:
God's
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*The Churches'
Care for the
Schools: The
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between
Church and
School in
Historical
Perspective*



*Trials
serve the
purpose of
testing the
sincerity of
our faith.*



N.H. Gootjes

Dr. N.H. Gootjes is professor of Dogmatology at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario.
nhgootjes@canrc.org

How to Elect Office Bearers

The first New Testament office bearers were the deacons in the congregation of Jerusalem.

We are used to having elders and deacons in the church. They usually come out of the consistory room when the worship service begins. During the worship service they are rather visible for they have reserved seats in the front of the church. More importantly, they visit the members of the congregation to encourage them and to provide support. Office bearers have an important function within the congregation.

How did it come about that the churches have office bearers? The New Testament provides us with the necessary information. The sources are not abundant, but there is enough to discern the main contours. We must exclude the apostles themselves, for they were special and had no successors. The first New Testament office bearers were the deacons in the congregation of Jerusalem. That happened following a complaint coming from the congregation itself, that a segment of the congregation had been overlooked in the daily distribution (Acts 6:2). The apostles, realizing that they could not take on more work without neglecting their own task of preaching, concluded that seven men should be elected. These elected men were to be charged to devote themselves to this work. And they were duly ordained (Acts 6:6).

But that was not all the apostles said. They also indicated the way these deacons would be selected. The apostles gave the following instruction to the congregation: "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). The church listened to this ruling of the apostles, a meeting was organized and in due time they chose seven members to assume the responsibility for the work.

It is noteworthy that the apostles did not themselves appoint these deacons. The apostles merely indicated how to find such helpers: they had to be chosen. But they left the

choosing to the congregation itself. It was the members of the congregation of Jerusalem who chose the seven deacons. That is an interesting development. Although the apostles were still alive, and very active in the congregation, they did not insist that they themselves should be the ones who appointed the deacons. They took a step back, or rather two steps. They let the congregation do the choosing. And they withdrew from organizing the mutual support. They left it to the deacons to do their work within the growing congregation. The care for the church came from within the church.

Election in the Reformed churches

During the Middle Ages a hierarchy took over in the church with the result that the congregation was bypassed in appointing priests in the local churches. When the Reformation broke with this system, it had to reinvent the proper way for the calling and ordination of those who would lead the churches. That proved not to be easy, for the direction the Synods wanted to go was not in line with the will of the congregations.

The intention of the Synods can be found in their decisions. Several Synods in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wanted to give the right to decide about new office bearers almost exclusively to the consistory. To give an example, the Synod of Emden 1571 stated that the elders and deacons should be elected by the consistory! After these elders and deacons had been elected, their names would be made known to the congregation. The members would have the option of either silently accepting those whom the consistory had chosen, or of bringing in objections within fifteen days. This means that the congregation could either approve or object, but the members were not allowed to vote.

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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher; Managing Editor: R. Aasman
Coeditors: N.H. Gootjes, W.B. Slomp, Cl. Stam

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION, 26 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J3
Fax: (780) 418-1506 E-Mail: raasman@canrc.org

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CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202
Email: clarion@premierprinting.ca

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That was the way preferred by this Synod. But they added an exception clause, for at the time there were churches which had instituted the custom of congregational election. For the time being, these churches would not be forced to change their accustomed way of electing. The reason was that there had not yet been an opportunity for General Synod to be convened. This decision was made at the beginning of the Eighty Years' War, and the Spanish troops were roving around in the country, making it dangerous to convene a national Synod. But when the opportunity would arise for a General Synod, then this Synod could determine whether local churches would still be allowed to continue voting for their office bearers or whether they would be appointed by the consistory and only approved by the members of the congregation.¹

The intention of the early rules was obviously to limit as much as possible congregational influence on the election. They wanted a future General Synod to make regulations so that the right to elect would be taken away from the membership. No doubt this was done with the best intentions.

Inside . . .

One would think that our election of office bearers is fairly standard operating procedure. Surprisingly, during the early years of the Reformed churches, election for office bearers was almost placed exclusively in the hands of the consistory. Thankfully it did not turn out that way. Dr. N.H. Gootjes explains why in his editorial.

The manner in which office bearers were selected was not the only thing that the early Reformed churches had to work out. As Dr. R. Faber demonstrates in his article, it took some time for the Reformed community to realize that Christian education is in the first place a parental responsibility.

Nobody asks for trials and tribulations in life. No one asks for trouble. And yet, it is precisely in troubled times that our faith is sharpened and we come closer to the Lord. Rev. P. G. Feenstra deals with this in an article in this issue.

In this issue we read of the fiftieth anniversary of the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto. The Lord has blessed this congregation richly.

We have our regular columns *Treasures, New and Old* and *Children's Catechism*. We also have a book review on *Ministerial Memorabilia* by Rev. G. vanRongen.

RA

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And the background was probably that the churches in the sixteenth century were usually national churches. In that situation, the Synods did not dare to entrust the vote to the membership. All the same it is regrettable that they did not see their way clear to follow the New Testament in granting to the congregation the right to elect their office bearers.

Congregational election

Later Synods no longer opposed congregational voting for office bearers. It was an approach which wanted to do justice to both the consistory and the congregation. Originally, this was stated very simply: The consistory should begin the process by presenting to the congregation a double number – twice as many names as would be required. This was to be followed by voting where the members had to select half of the presented names.

In the Reformed churches the rule was that those were declared elected who had a majority vote. That could be half of the number of votes plus one. For example, if 80 votes were received, the majority was 41. But it could even be half the number plus half a vote. For instance, if 79 votes were received, the majority was 39.5 plus 0.5, for a majority of 40. However it worked, elders and deacons were chosen by absolute majority.

The intention of the early rules was obviously to limit as much as possible congregational influence on the election.

However, in a later period when the churches had grown, this system did not always work. That was particularly the case in large churches where the members of the congregation no longer knew one another sufficiently. It could happen that a church needed, say, 20 elders. This means that 40 nominees had to be presented. But it was impossible for the voting members to know all the proposed candidates for office, and they filled out only the names of those they knew. That could mean they selected only 10 of the required 20 names. As a result, it was impossible to maintain the rule of needing a majority vote. In such situations, churches did move away from the rule that the majority decides.²

We may be thankful that in our time we no longer strive for having huge churches with a large membership. Rather, we establish another church when one church becomes so large that the members no longer know one another. That is

Church News

The Theological College will be closed for the annual summer break from July 19th until August 9th. The College will reopen at 8:30 a.m. on August 10th, D.V.

Called by the church of Carman-East, Manitoba
Candidate R. Bredenhof

Called by the church of Cloverdale, British Columbia:

Rev. D. Poppe
of Houston, British Columbia.

Called (a second time) by the Free Reformed Church of Albany, Australia:

Rev. J.D. Louwerse
of Fergus, Ontario.

As of Sunday, July 14, 2004, the Canadian Reformed Church in Fergus has been divided into two autonomous churches: Fergus South (Maranatha) and Fergus North. Rev. J. Louwerse is serving as minister of Fergus South. Fergus North is vacant.

Times of worship until the end of August are as follows:

Fergus North worships at 9:00 and 1:00; Fergus South worships at 11:00 and 3:00. Fergus South shares its building with Fergus North.

important for the mutual help and support in the congregation. It is also important for the voting, for it allows the election to be well thought out. The voting members know the candidates presented to the congregation well enough to make a responsible choice. And they make clear with majority vote whom could be considered best suited for office.

A majority vote is also important for the elected office bearers themselves. They have important work to do in the congregation. In order to do that well, they would need to know that they have the trust of the congregation. And they would want to have that confirmed in the vote. Having been chosen by a majority of the votes, they know that the congregation has expressed their confidence.

¹ For these decisions, see P. Biesterveld, H.H. Kuyper, *Kerkelijk handboekje betreffende de bepalingen van de Nederlandsche Synoden* (Kampen: J.H. Bos, 1905) 37.

² F.L. Bos, *De orde der kerk* ('s Gravenhage: Uitgeverij Guido de Bres, 1950) 90f; H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerd kerkrecht* (2. ed.; Kampen: Kok, 1970) vol. I, 545-548; Joh. Jansen, *Korte verklaring van de kerkenordening* (Kampen: Kok, 1923) 97f.. They discuss the possible complications, and ways to resolve them.

J.P. VanVliet

Of Siblings and Separations: God's Household (Part 3)

Rev. J.P. VanVliet is minister of the Lincoln Canadian Reformed Church in Lincoln, Ontario.
jvanvliet@canrc.org



Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.

Ephesians 2:19

For many centuries the Gentiles stood on the outside. They were, as the apostle Paul says, "separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). The separation between Jew and Gentile is even called "the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (v 14).

Actually, at that time, in the temple in Jerusalem, there was a physical barrier between the Gentiles and the Jews. There was one, outer courtyard for the Gentiles. Then, closer to the temple itself there was another courtyard reserved for Jews only. Between the two stood a stone dividing wall about four feet high. That stone wall, though silent, spoke volumes. The Gentiles, the unclean, the uncircumcised had to stay out! They did not belong.

However, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ. Then things began to change. Through his death on the cross, He smashed down the stone dividing wall (v 14). Now Gentiles no longer stand on the outside, as excluded foreigners, but they are included. "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (v 19).

Sometimes, though, the inclusion of foreigners is less than wholehearted. Many immigrants (perhaps even members of your own family) can tell stories of how they moved to a new country but they were still made to feel like outsiders.

However, when God included Gentiles within his people, it was a complete inclusion. They were not only "fellow citizens with God's people" but also "members of God's household." Living within the same country as other

people is one thing; living under the same roof is quite another. Yet the Lord not only gave the Gentiles new citizenship papers, He also brought them into a new family, his own family.

God's household is full of adopted children (Eph 1:5). Yes, there is the one, eternal, natural Son. However, the rest of the children are all adopted. Living within a huge household of adopted children presents its own set of joys and challenges. The joy is that all these children have a home to call their own, whereas otherwise they would have been left out in the cold as orphans. The challenge is that adopted children all have their own family histories and divergent backgrounds. Yet despite their differences, adopted siblings have to learn to love each other and live together.

By the Father's choice in Christ (Eph 1:4), Jews and Gentiles alike became members of God's household. However, life within God's household was not always peaceful bliss. Numerous letters of the apostle Paul indicate that Jewish and Gentile siblings did not always get along with each other. They disagreed and even argued. At times they did selfish and unkind things to each other. The Jewish siblings did not always understand their Gentile brothers and sisters with their different ways and habits. And vice-versa. Nevertheless, the Father had joined them in one household which was built squarely on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of the house. So now they all had to learn to love and live with each other.

The inclusion of the Gentiles was a unique moment in the history of

redemption, but many of the principles still apply today. In the church of the living God, which is his household, we live with many different brothers and sisters. In most of our congregations, the vast majority, if not all, are Gentiles. Still there is no lack of variety! All our spiritual siblings come complete with their unique characters and specific histories. We are all adopted after all!

Family life within the local congregation is not always easy. Sometimes siblings even get into spats. Yet, in faith, we understand that we are God's children here and now, and that we have to learn to love each other and live together on the unmoveable foundation of God's eternal Word (Eph 2:20).

Finally, let's take this a step farther and apply it to our relationship with the United Reformed Churches. In Part 2 of this series of meditations, we discovered that the betrothal-marriage analogy really does not fit our relationship with the URC. The family metaphor, however, does apply. We call each other *sister churches*. We refer to each other as *brothers and sisters* in the Lord.

Sometimes because of circumstances and/or sin, a household becomes separated. However, that is not how it ought to be. A family should live together, under the same roof. That may take some time. Let's remember that the building of God's household is ongoing (Eph 2:22). However, since we are sisters by grace alone, we do have to learn to love each other and live together, also by grace alone. Anything less would not be honourable to our heavenly Father, the head of the household.

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

How do we handle trials?

Trials, however, are never an end in themselves but always serve the purpose of testing the genuineness and sincerity of our faith.

Living in a fallen and sinful world, Christians are not exempt from experiencing trials, tribulation and suffering. Struggles and afflictions are never far away. Throughout history believers have cried out to God, expressing the same sentiments articulated in Psalm 25, “Turn to me, and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have multiplied: free me from my anguish. Look upon my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins” (16,17).

A trial is something that troubles and perplexes us. The dark storm clouds of adversity threaten to block out the light of God’s mercy. No child of God escapes affliction. The apostle Paul speaks about how he was afflicted in every way; perplexed, persecuted, struck down, always being given up to death for Christ’s sake (2 Cor 4:8-11). Our Lord Jesus Himself came face to face with many struggles during his earthly ministry. There were times when His human spirit was greatly troubled.

Trials can hit us gradually or quite suddenly. They come in various forms (James 1:2,3). Your trial may be a health concern, financial difficulties or a struggle against a particular sin. It may be a matter of coming to grips with being single, widowed or not being able to

conceive children. You may struggle with accepting the Lord’s will when loved ones have done something terrible to you, or if family members stray or do not know the Lord. Trials can come in the form of disappointments, frustrations, misunderstandings, unfulfilled dreams, unmet expectations, hurtful slander, tremendous loss, loneliness, fear, criticism or conflict. In such difficulties our greatest certainties and principles are often challenged. Trials, however, are never an end in themselves but always serve the purpose of testing the genuineness and sincerity of our faith. They are meant to make us secure in the Lord.

A joyful response to trials

In the letter of James we are encouraged to consider it pure joy when faced with various trials. How can this be true? Isn’t joy restricted to good times? Are we to take pleasure in pain and suffering? Not at all! We are able to consider it pure joy when we face trials because we know that every hardship is in the hands of our Lord and Master. He will not use trials against us. Trials are the instruments the Lord uses to form us and to expose the spiritual faithfulness, endurance, growth, maturity and completeness He wants to see in us.

They are sent upon us to enrich our faith. The Lord may bring a trial upon us to prod us out of our securities and outward support systems. We are brought to our knees in confession, “Whom have I in heaven but you?” (Ps 73:25).

To have joy in trials is learned just as we learn to be content in whatever state we find ourselves (Phil 4:11). If we value the comforts and conveniences of life too highly, trials will upset us. If we pursue having what we want, trials will cause us to be resentful and bitter rather than joyful and glad. If we live only for the present and forget the future, trials will fill our hearts with gall instead of joy.

Trials cannot be avoided. They must be accepted in faith. If we cannot consider it pure joy when we face various trials then we have to question our values. For once we see the positive purpose of trials we will rejoice. James encourages his readers to have a right attitude toward the difficulties of life.

When you and I meet various trials we have no choice but to rejoice. For this is just as much a command as “You shall not kill,” or, “You shall not commit adultery.” We are under obligation to consider it *pure* joy when we face various trials. Most people can look back at a difficulty they experienced and

rejoice in the support they received. They consider those memories as joyful. James instructs us to consider it pure joy – even when there is nothing positive about the entire experience.

We can consider it pure joy when we face trials because in faith we look beyond them. Though tears fill our eyes and anxiety threatens our hearts we believe that through the trial the Lord is fulfilling his purpose. Our Sovereign Lord is leading the way, directing this situation to our eternal benefit. That gives fullness of joy; a pure, total and complete joy in the Lord. Trials pledge better things to come. The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed (Rom 8:18). Joy in trials causes believers to consider it a privilege to have their faith tested – not because the trial is so pleasant. They know that through such tests the Lord is drawing them closer to Himself. For isn't it true that when faced with the struggles of life we are much more aware of the presence of the Lord? When trials are missing we so easily become sloppy, careless and comfortable in our routines. Bible reading and prayer are done out of habit but lack depth.

Joy in trials causes believers to consider it a privilege to have their faith tested.

The proper and Christian reaction to trials and trouble is not humanistic resignation but joyful acceptance. The Lord will provide us with the strength to help us through it. When we suffer for doing what is right we have God's approval (1 Peter 2:20). He will not allow us to carry more than we can bear – even though those who suffer will never

find the trial easy; often if it is not until later that we become aware of how the Lord was carrying us through the trial.

The worst of our trials do not even come close to the suffering Jesus Christ had to endure for us. He suffered in ways we cannot even imagine. The author to the Hebrews encourages us to “look to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame” (12:2). Jesus went through trials,

looking beyond the suffering to the joy of eternal glory. Our Saviour was able to look beyond his afflictions, while suffering at the hands of men and afflicted by the heavy wrath of God.

Knowing the will of God in trials makes it possible for children of the Lord to sing psalms while being burned at the stake or imprisoned. With tears of grief rolling down their cheeks they can sing praise to the Lord, standing at a grave side. With the ache of loneliness, the pain



of physical ailments, the strain of stress and anxiety they can still sing and make melody to the Lord in their hearts.

The apostle Paul was burdened by a thorn in the flesh – something that he had to bear for the rest of his life. Yet it did not embitter him! Instead he exclaimed, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest upon me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:9,10).

Trials are meant to produce endurance

In the context of speaking about trials James writes, “. . .because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance” (1:3). When he says, “because you know,” he is not talking about knowledge that comes from textbooks but that which is gained from experience. By going through trials ourselves or by seeing others go through them we learn that the testing of our faith works endurance. Trials are meant to produce something very beneficial for ourselves and for others who see God at work in us throughout the time of testing.

The Lord tests us by means of various difficulties to increase our level of endurance. An athlete will go through vigorous training, exercise and discomfort because he knows it will increase his endurance levels. Similarly, the Lord tests us through trials to make us strong in faith. Implied in the word testing is the idea that what the Lord intends to do with the specific trial will be completed successfully. What a comforting thought! When we might think we cannot go further the Lord assures us that we can in his strength.

Our heavenly Father *preserves* us in such a way that we will *persevere* to the end.

David expresses beautifully how a trial tested his faith and produced endurance. He proclaims in Psalm 40:1-3, “I waited patiently for the LORD; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud; he set my feet on a rock, and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.”

The only way out of a trial is to go through it.

The Old Testament gives us several other examples of perseverance in trials. Job was severely tested when his children and his possessions were taken from him. His own wife turned against him and suggested he curse God and die. But Job remained steadfast. In his adversity and sorrow he praised the name of the Lord. He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised” (1:21). Later, as he sat out on the garbage heap, afflicted with sores and totally misunderstood by his friends he was extremely miserable and troubled. Nevertheless, looking beyond the trial, he breaks forth and sings of his Redeemer, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27). That is a marvellous example of how a severe trial produced perseverance.

The second example is from the prophecy of Habakkuk. The prophet cries out to the Lord in his affliction and confesses, “Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there be no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls. . .” (and who would not be inclined to panic and become desperate in such a situation? But the prophet continues) “. . .yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God, my Saviour.” (3:17-18). In trials we must believe that the Lord God is your strength and your salvation. He will give you what you need to stand firm.

The only way out of a trial is to go through it. The Lord does not promise us a life without troubles and trials but He assures us that He will take us through it. Thus the Lord speaks these consoling words, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour” (Isaiah 43:2, 3).

Let us pray that we and our fellow believers are not overwhelmed by afflictions. The Lord, who created and adopted us to be his children, knows what is best for us. How wonderful that when troubled by trials we can sing, “My soul, why are you sad and grieving, why so oppressed with anxious care? Hope yet in God, his Word believing; For light and joy from him receiving, I’ll praise his Name again and laud my Helper and my God (Book of Praise Ps 43:5).



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 16



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

Do you like pets? A dog, a cat, or a guinea pig? Some people like white mice. And fish in an aquarium can be fun. Every goldfish is different. It may happen that your pet dies. You feel bad about it, but you know that can happen. You may even bury them in the backyard, and put a stick in the ground to remember it. But you know that this is the end for the fish or the mouse.

Grandma can die, too. You loved her very much. You could talk with her about many things, also from the past. And you could hear that she loved the Lord. Grandma will be buried. When you are at the funeral, you have tears in your eyes. But that is not the end for Grandma.

The Lord Jesus, too, was buried. That was after much suffering on Golgotha. This began with the pain caused by the flogging, and by the crown of thorns. Then the nails driven through his hands and feet. And the spitting and mocking. But that was not the worst.

Much worse was the fact that during the day it became dark. Then the Lord Jesus realized that He did not belong anywhere. Not even with his Father in heaven. He was under so much pressure that he cried: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!"



When you are separated from God, Satan attacks you. You cannot see him, but you can feel him. Then you are scared to death. That was what happened to Jesus. It was like hell for him.

Our Saviour was willing to do this for us. Now, death in hell is no longer waiting for us. The Lord has paid everything for us. That is what we can say: Jesus Christ paid for all our sins. And now, God will never leave us alone.

After all this had happened on Golgotha, the Lord Jesus was buried. Then all people could know that He had died. It did not just look like He was dead: He had really died.

But now you may have a question. If it is true that Jesus Christ died to pay for our sins, why do we have to die? That is a good question. You could think that dying is no longer necessary for us, because Christ died. Yet, we do have to die. But through the death of Christ, our death is not as bad as it would have been.

For when you die, you are with Christ right away. And you are free from all that is evil and sinful. Think about that! The more you think about it, the more you will serve the Lord.

Bethel Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto Fiftieth Anniversary 1954-2004

January 1, 2004 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto. To commemorate that event, past and present members came together on May 1 for an afternoon of thanksgiving, reflection and fellowship.

Rev. W. Den Hollander opened the proceedings by reading from Psalm 90, and then focusing some remarks on verse 1 which was the foundational text at the time of institution fifty years ago: "Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations."

He noted that "Bethel" has the meaning of being a resting place for generations to come, and that for the congregation of Toronto, the Bethel Church has indeed been such a refuge, a dwelling place for fifty years. By means of the faithful preaching of God's word during all those years, the Lord has led and established his congregation in the manner that Moses prayed in verse 12 "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." It was for this purpose that the original founders of fifty years ago first instituted a church before all else. And as we reflect on those past years we may indeed see that our God has faithfully been our dwelling place in all circumstances. It is our earnest prayer that Bethel will continue in that faith and trust, continue to be a "Bethel – a resting place for generations to come."

Rev. Den Hollander then turned the floor over to our Master of Ceremonies



Rev. W. Den Hollander opening and addressing the meeting.



Mr. Ed Veenstra, Master of Ceremonies for the celebrations

for the day, Br. Ed Veenstra, himself a member for these fifty years. Ed very capably took us through the remainder of the programme for the afternoon, setting a very comfortable and casual tone within the continuing theme of thankfulness and reflection. We were fortunate to have in our midst our former pastors Rev. J. Mulder and Dr. R.N. Gleason, our past missionaries Rev. H. Knigge and Rev. H. Versteeg, and our first mission aid workers Br. and Sr. B. Vegter. Each of them was given an opportunity to speak, and although each had prepared their short reflections

separately, their themes were both consistent and encouraging: Look forward with a confident trust in God, continuing to work together in Christ, and relying only on the truth of the Gospel. Rev. and Mrs. Mulder presented the congregation with a framed picture of our first church building, and Br. and Sr. Vegter surprised us with a well composed song having the refrain:

Oh Toronto, you helped us all the way,
We praise the Lord for your and his support each and every day.



Mr. L.J. VanHof, member of the first Bethel Consistory of fifty years ago, closing the ceremonies.



Mr. and Mrs. B. Vegter reflecting on their Mission work on behalf of the Toronto Congregation.

Rev. Versteeg, Rev. Knigge, Rev. Den Hollander, Rev. Mulder, and Dr. Gleason, participating in the historical quiz.

Interspersed throughout the short reflections were entertaining presentations by the various study societies. The Dutch Morning Study Group combined in perfect harmony and melodious tone to sing the Dutch version of our theme passage, Psalm 90. The ladies of the Tuesday Morning Bible Study challenged former and present pastors and wives with an historical quiz, while the Bible Study Club took us through the fashion styles of the last fifty years under the theme of: "The Way We Wore." The Children's Choir movingly sang for us as only children can, and the Young People's Society moved us to laughter and shock as only young people can. Finally, the Women's Society took us through their complete fifty year history through a well thought out composition in word and song.

The formal part of the day's events was brought to a close in prayer of thanksgiving by Br. L.J. VanHof, a member of that first consistory of fifty years ago. There followed a time of fellowship wherein we could renew old acquaintances and reminisce about "The Way We Were." We spent some time browsing through the pictorial history put together so carefully by Sr. Betty



Mrs. Den Hollander, Mrs. Versteeg (partially hidden), Mrs. Mulder, Mrs. Knigge, and Mrs. Gleason responding to the historical challenge.

DenBroeder and Br. Andy Baartman, and admiring the signature quilt made by Srs. Margaret Spanninga and Ingrid Huizing for our new church facility. We also had the opportunity to purchase a Commemorative Booklet of the past fifty years with its historic memorabilia, articles, and pictures.

Our appreciation goes out to our fiftieth Anniversary Committee for all its

time and effort which resulted in such a well organized and enjoyable day. With the members of the Committee, and with all those who were able to attend the celebration, our collective thankfulness is to our heavenly Father. As we sang that day in our closing hymn:

To God be the glory, great things He has taught us; great things He has done!

Dr. Riemer Faber is professor of
Classical Studies at the
University of Waterloo.
rfaber@watarts.uwaterloo.ca

The Churches' Care for the Schools: The Relation between Church and School in Historical Perspective (Part 1)

Introduction

Readers familiar with the Church Order know that it deals almost exclusively with matters pertaining to the orderly function of the congregations.¹ Divided into four parts, the Order treats offices in the church and supervision, the assembly of consistory and broader meetings, the worship services (including the sacraments and ceremonies), and the process of Christian discipline. Even a quick reading of the Order, which appears on pages 656-676 in the *Book of Praise*, reveals that there is only a brief statement on the role of government, while nothing is said about politics, citizenship, legal matters, or society generally. The reader may be surprised, therefore, when he reaches Article 58, which is entitled "Schools." The Church Order is based on the premise that it should deal with the good order and decent conduct of the churches only; on what grounds does it give the right, even the duty, to the consistories to ensure that parents send their children to a Christian school? In other words, how do we define the relation between church and school?

*Church Order, Article 58:
The consistory shall ensure
that the parents, to the best of
their ability, have their
children attend a school where
the instruction given is in
harmony with the Word of God
as the church has summarized
it in her confessions.*

One way to appreciate the relation between church and school is to trace the development of this article from the time of the early Reformed churches until today. In what follows we shall consider the circumstances in which the article was first drafted, and what the original intention of it was. Next we shall consider the interpretation of the article at selected points in the history of the Dutch Reformed Churches, noting especially the changes it has experienced. We shall observe that over time the churches redefined the roles of the parents, the congregation, and the

consistory regarding the education of the youth. Despite the changes, however, the article has always expressed the importance of the care the churches must bestow upon the schools.

Church and school in the early Dutch Reformed Churches

For much of the sixteenth century, Roman Catholicism was the official religion in The Netherlands. Consequently, all schools were operated by the Roman Catholic Church, which provided the oversight and instruction of the children. However, as the Reformation spread in the Lowlands during the 1560s, governments first tolerated and then promoted Protestantism. The authorities increasingly turned to the Reformed churches to replace the monks and nuns who taught in the day-schools. Nearly all teachers had been raised in the Romanist faith; many knew or cared little about the Reformation. Moreover, there were many parents who did not see the need of sending their children to school, preferring instead to benefit from their labour. By means of

co-operation between church and state, however, good and Reformed education could be promoted. Thus in the last decades of the sixteenth century, a relationship developed between the government and the Reformed churches regarding the appointment and remuneration of school teachers. Consequently, the early synods encouraged local consistories to be vigilant about the beliefs of the teachers and the substance of their instruction.

*Article 21 Order of Dort:
“Everywhere consistories shall see to it that there are good schoolmasters, who shall not only instruct the children in reading, writing, languages and the liberal arts, but likewise in godliness and in the Catechism.”*

When the government throughout The Netherlands changed from Romanist to Protestant, the Synod of Dordrecht (1578) decided that “effort shall be made that everywhere schools be established in which children learn not only eloquence and the arts, but are taught also and especially the Christian Catechism and be led towards the preaching (Chapter 3).” This statement may appear to suggest that it became the duty of local consistories to establish and operate day-schools. Given the social and political climate as depicted above, however, it is clear that this decision encourages consistories to appeal to the governing authorities to effect the changes, and to collaborate with them in this matter. The churches wished that the government would appoint teachers who professed the Protestant faith, were members in a Reformed church, demonstrated an

ability to teach the Heidelberg Catechism in the classroom, and who were under the supervision of local consistories. While the churches would recommend suitable teachers, the government would provide salaries and other resources.

The churches’ desire for involvement in the schools via the government is perhaps understandable in the circumstances, but it was based on the unbiblical principle that the state is responsible for the instruction of the youth. On the other hand, the early churches rightly saw that learning (expressed by Dordrecht as “eloquence and the arts”) cannot be divorced from faith, which is summarized in the catechism and conveyed by means of preaching. The Reformed faith holds that what is taught during the week must accord with what is taught on Sunday.

The Church Order of Dort

Article 58 in our Church Order began its career as Article 21 in the order composed by the Synod of Dort (1618-19), as follows: “Everywhere consistories shall see to it that there are good schoolmasters, who shall not only instruct the children in reading, writing, languages and the liberal arts, but likewise in godliness and in the Catechism.”

First a point about the location of Article 21 in the context of this Church Order. It occurs in the section that treats the offices in the church, in particular the task of the elders. From the wording of this Article, too, one may be led to think that consistories were deemed directly responsible for the appointment and supervision of school teachers. However, at the time societies were still unknown, and schools were controlled by municipal governments assisted by local consistories. Thus the article encourages consistories to influence civic authorities, causing them to appoint teachers who are both good and Reformed. The phrase “reading, writing, languages, and the liberal arts,” which can be traced back to

the order of Calvin’s Geneva, refers to the subjects that were to be taught in the schools. The synod desired that the curriculum of the schools be well-suited to meet the needs of society. Yet as intellectual and vocational training involves developing moral behaviour that is grounded in an understanding and acceptance of the Christian faith, the article enjoins teachers to promote godliness and knowledge of the Catechism.

Readers may find the explicit and repeated reference to the Heidelberg Catechism in the official statements of the early Dutch Reformed Churches surprising, but it reflects both the purposes for which the catechism was composed and the role it played in the homes, churches, and schools of the Reformation era. In fact, the Synod of Dort planned there to be a domestic and an educational version of the Catechism. This latter version for use in schools was to exist of the following three editions:

*Article 235, Synod of Dordrecht (1893):
“The Synod expresses the desire that schools, because they are to be established not by the churches but by the parents, be acknowledged by the government as Associations.*

1) a booklet of six chapters for younger pupils; 2) an anthology of key questions and answers from the Heidelberg Catechism; and 3) a complete edition of the Catechism for the senior students. We shall have occasion to return to the topic of the link between the catechism and day-schools in the second instalment of this article; it will suffice for now to state that the early churches viewed the catechism as a key link in the chain that binds church and school.



School visitation

When dealing with particular questions posed to it, the Synod of Dort determined that the local minister, together with an elder or a member of the town council, should visit the schools regularly in order to supervise the teaching of the Christian faith by means of the Catechism; they were to encourage both teachers and students, and to reprimand slothful or impious teachers, reporting them to the authorities if necessary. In many places it became customary for ministers to teach catechism at school. This narrow bond between church and school was expressed also by Article 54 of the Dort Order, which required that school-masters, much like elders and deacons, sign a form of subscription, promising to uphold the doctrine of the church in their teaching and conduct. Later generations would realize that instructors of day-schools do not hold biblically ordained offices in the church, and this article – which also has its roots in Calvin's Geneva – was later dropped from Reformed church orders.

At the time of Dort, however, this close collaboration of teachers and ministers was encouraged further in Article 41,

The exclusion of parents, however, is the underlying error in this configuration of church, state and school in the early seventeenth century.

which treats the duties of the church visitors regarding all who had signed subscription forms: "The task of the church visitors is to ascertain whether the instructors, consistories, and schoolmasters faithfully perform their duties, remain true to the doctrine, maintain the accepted church order in every respect, and promote the edification of the congregation, including the children, as required . . . and by their advice and action direct everything to the benefit of the churches and schools."

The exclusion of parents, however, is the underlying error in this configuration of church, state and school in the early seventeenth century. Given the social and political customs of the time, it is perhaps understandable that government and church collaborated; but according to Scripture and the confessions, under normal circumstances the church should not involve itself in the operation of a school system. This relationship suppressed the responsibilities of parents towards their children. Fortunately this parental duty was realized later in the history of the Dutch Reformed Churches, as we shall see below. And in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the error did not have serious consequences, since nearly all participants in government belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church, professed their faith, and sought to live holy lives.

However, as time passed, and as worldly philosophies and secular thinking (such as humanism) infiltrated society and the educational system, it became clear that the state could not be relied upon to oversee the schools. More importantly, during the eighteenth century the secularization of government increased, as did the notion that children are under guardianship of the state. Thus believers realized that the Bible does not give the responsibility of raising children to the state, but to the parents and the community of God's covenant. Moreover, they perceived from Scripture that church and state have separate jurisdictions in the kingdom of God. The task of the government is to maintain good order in civil affairs, to promote peace, and to punish those who break the law; the church is to preach the gospel, to show mercy, and to govern the elect in God's name. And instruction in the faith is not to be equated with education generally.



Nineteenth century developments

It took some time for this correction to take place, as one can imagine, and it was not until the nineteenth century that the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands changed the definition of the relation between church and school. A synod held in 1891 determined that normally it is inadvisable for churches to establish schools. Article 235 of the Acts of the Synod held at Dordrecht in 1893 also reveals the change in thinking: "The Synod expresses the desire that schools, because they are to be established not by the churches but by the parents, be acknowledged by the government as Associations."

The reader will have grasped that the Synod was concerned about the

official recognition of school-societies by the government. Besides this expression of desired accreditation, however, this article states explicitly that supervision of the schools is the mandate of Christian parents, not the church. Despite this shift from governmental to parental support of education, the churches rightly maintained that the care of the elders extends to the education of the youth. Their concern in this matter, however, is to be impressed not upon the state, but upon the parents. Briefly stated, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands perceived the duties of the elders towards the schools to be as follows: 1) they must encourage parents to fulfil their covenant obligations towards God for

the children He entrusts to them; 2) they must exercise supervision over the children, whose membership in the covenant is signed and sealed by their baptism, and must promote nurture and training that accords with God's Word. Thus by the end of the nineteenth century the churches' definition of their relation to the schools had been improved in light of the Bible's teaching about the upbringing and education of the children of believers. In the next instalment we shall pursue the development in this relationship further, tracing the interpretation of the Article concerning the churches' care for the schools to the modern era.

¹This article was presented first as a speech to the Canadian Reformed School Society of Owen Sound in February 2004.



The Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches

The Thirty-fifth Anniversary Meeting and the Thirtieth Convocation
of the Theological College will be held, D.V., on

Friday, September 10, 2004 at 8:00 p.m.

in the auditorium of Redeemer College
(777 Garner Road East, Ancaster, Ontario)

Dr. N.H. Gootjes will speak on the topic:

How Much Did Jesus Christ Know

(see Luke 2:40, John 1:47, Mark 13:32)



The Master of Divinity Degree will be conferred on:

Reuben Bredenhof
Pila Njuka

Albert Johannes Gootjes
Ian Wildeboer

A collection will be taken for the Foreign Student Bursary
(TAX RECEIPTS AVAILABLE)

Reviewed by W. Huizinga

Ministerial Memorabilia by Rev. G. vanRongen.

Published in the series of Reformed Guardian, printed by Pro-Ecclesia Printers, Armadale, 2004

Rev. G. vanRongen celebrates sixty years in the ministry on 9 July, 2004, D.V. One might expect that after so many years, someone else writes a book about him and his contributions to our church life. For does the press not say, *if you have a question, ask Rev. G. vanRongen?* He has written extensively in the fields of liturgy and church polity. In these important fields he has shown his talents and expertise. In our magazines he has continuously offered many articles in these fields. Yet I am not reviewing a book about my older colleague, but one written by himself.

Rev. G. vanRongen continues to publish. Even though he has stopped filling the pulpit, because of his heart condition, he continues to surprise me. No sooner is one publication finished, but he already has started the next one!

For this festal occasion of sixty years in the ministry he has written a booklet of some 100 pages. It is entitled *Ministerial Memorabilia*.

Memorabilia

The word *Memorabilia* indicates that what is written is more than memoirs. The histories and stories give us significant material from the past. The material is not only important for the minister and his wife, but for a wider audience. Rev. G. vanRongen gives us material from the past sixty years in church life that offers much for all our readers. I think his past parishioners who lived in Waardhuizen, Zwiijndrecht, Launceston, Grand Rapids, and Steenwijk will especially enjoy this booklet. He refers to many people whom he served and met in those churches. His booklet also includes many photos with which

these (ex) members can identify. Yet the stories of what happened in those years of ministry will also strike a chord with the older generation who lived through those same years. And it has much instructional value for our youth today.

Ministerial

Rev. G. vanRongen tells us about his student years at Kampen before he became a minister. You will enjoy the stories, also one about the pranks of students. He then takes us through his ministries in the five churches he served. Since he started in the ministry in Waardhuizen on 9 July, 1944 in the midst of a war, and in the midst of a serious church struggle, you can be sure to read about both events. The effects of World War II and the after effects of the Liberation both receive ample attention. The stories he tells about the church struggle and its pastoral problems are refreshing. For many members found certainty of salvation during this church reformation. The promises of God as fulfilled in Jesus Christ gave them that certainty. Instead of doubts, uncertainty, and questions, members came to the Lord's Supper with conviction.

From Zwiijndrecht, Rev. G. vanRongen and his family moved to Launceston, Tasmania where he was installed as minister on October 23, 1955. It was not easy to be an immigrant minister, as the stories tell us. But the G. vanRongen family came, and he ministered for eighteen to nineteen years there on the apple island.

From Launceston Rev. G. vanRongen and his wife took the call from Grand Rapids. While there he often travelled to London, Ontario for the four classes per year. Since the undersigned lived in London at that time, we often met. We also were allowed to work together on the translation of the Heidelberg Catechism. I was impressed how my colleague put out a magazine every Sunday, including one complete sermon,



along with articles which could help those who were concerned with the problems in the Christian Reformed Churches.

From Grand Rapids he travelled back to The Netherlands, to Steenwijk, where he completed his ministry.

Liturgy

As said above, Rev. G. vanRongen has made many contributions in the field of Reformed liturgics, the field about the worship of God, especially our worship of God in the Sunday church services. Accordingly, he completes his booklet by referring back to some issues that really stir his heart. He does this in with a biblical study of texts in the last book, the Book of Revelation.

In conclusion, I heartily recommend this pastoral *deposito*. It is available from Pete Engbers, 168 Josselyn Drive, London, ON N6E 3V2, Canada (tel. 519 685 6057); email: phengbers@execulink.com P. Engbers has agreed to act as distributor and agent in Canada/USA for Reformed Guardian. The price is \$8 for subscribers and \$10 for non-subscribers.

Allow me to finish with a note of thanks. Rev. G. vanRongen is one of our immigrant ministers to whom we owe a debt of thanks for the enormous amount of work they were allowed to do for the Lord and for his churches. May the Lord give him and his dear wife grace and joy from day to day in their sunset years in our midst.



Our Little Magazine



Dear Busy Beavers

I hope you are all doing well and are enjoying the summer holidays. Maybe some of you have been camping or going to a cottage. Did you see any wildlife? Some of you may have been travelling to different places. Where did you go? If you stayed home, what kind of things did you do to keep busy? Hopefully you are able to enjoy the outdoors and the nice weather which God gives us. Let me know what you have been doing. Also send along a puzzle, riddle or word search for others to enjoy.

Love, Aunt Betty

From the Mailbox

Thank you for your letter **Cheryl Driegen**. I am glad that someone wrote to you. I know that it has been a while, but did you enjoy the play you watched. How did your speech go?

Hello **Nicole Vandenbos**. Welcome to the Busy Beaver club. You have lots of different animals on your farm. Do you think you would be able to add your favourite animal, a horse, too? Do you have to do chores on the farm? Thanks for the word search Nicole!

Puzzles

New Testament Books

By Nicole Vandenbos

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	Acts
Romans	Corinthians	Galatians	Ephesians	Philippians
Colossians	Thessalonians	Timothy	Titus	Philemon
Hebrews	James	Peter	Jude	Revelation

Bonus word: _____

T	H	E	S	S	A	L	O	N	I	A	N	S	V	W	J	G	W	V	B
G	N	S	R	W	H	M	R	T	Z	D	U	Y	P	X	O	T	Q	H	T
H	Q	N	I	T	R	A	F	W	H	H	K	E	U	Y	U	G	A	J	P
D	A	A	R	U	U	T	R	J	E	X	T	U	T	Z	R	J	Z	K	H
R	M	I	Y	B	R	T	W	S	B	E	T	Q	S	Z	T	O	M	L	I
P	R	H	E	R	U	H	U	R	R	F	D	R	R	F	Y	H	N	I	L
H	K	T	K	M	R	E	P	H	E	S	I	A	N	S	U	N	B	O	I
I	R	N	R	N	H	W	R	H	W	H	M	C	Q	R	R	O	J	Y	P
L	T	I	M	O	T	H	Y	J	S	J	V	L	P	K	S	I	T	P	P
E	T	R	R	R	P	K	T	T	V	M	A	R	K	F	U	T	F	T	I
M	L	O	H	U	Q	R	W	W	S	H	C	M	O	T	T	A	D	J	A
O	T	C	R	Q	L	J	F	U	F	T	T	A	E	I	J	L	Y	U	N
N	P	G	T	I	T	U	S	T	B	K	S	B	N	S	V	E	W	H	S
R	O	W	U	O	W	D	K	G	H	S	Z	C	M	T	S	V	T	T	T
G	W	J	E	S	I	E	R	E	U	C	X	D	L	J	K	E	W	H	U
W	T	E	I	G	E	W	Y	T	T	S	N	A	M	O	R	R	Y	M	T
V	E	I	E	R	H	U	H	E	W	J	N	E	K	Y	U	U	N	Y	T
S	L	E	G	A	L	A	T	I	A	N	S	F	J	B	I	B	L	E	K
Y	D	K	R	R	E	R	T	W	Y	U	D	G	I	U	G	T	A	T	U
E	R	R	C	O	L	O	S	S	I	A	N	S	H	B	F	U	I	T	T

Fathers

Who was the father of each of the following

1. Ham
2. David
3. Abel
4. Joshua
5. James and John
6. Rachel
7. Samuel
8. Abner
9. Isaiah
10. Gideon
11. Benjamin
12. Elisha
13. Samson
14. Jehu
15. Saul
16. Esau
17. Absalom
18. Isaac
19. Methuselah
20. Jemina, Kezia and Kerenhappuch



Aunt Betty

c/o Premier Printing Ltd.

One Beghin Avenue

Winnipeg, MB R2J 3X5

Email: clarion@premier.mb.ca

