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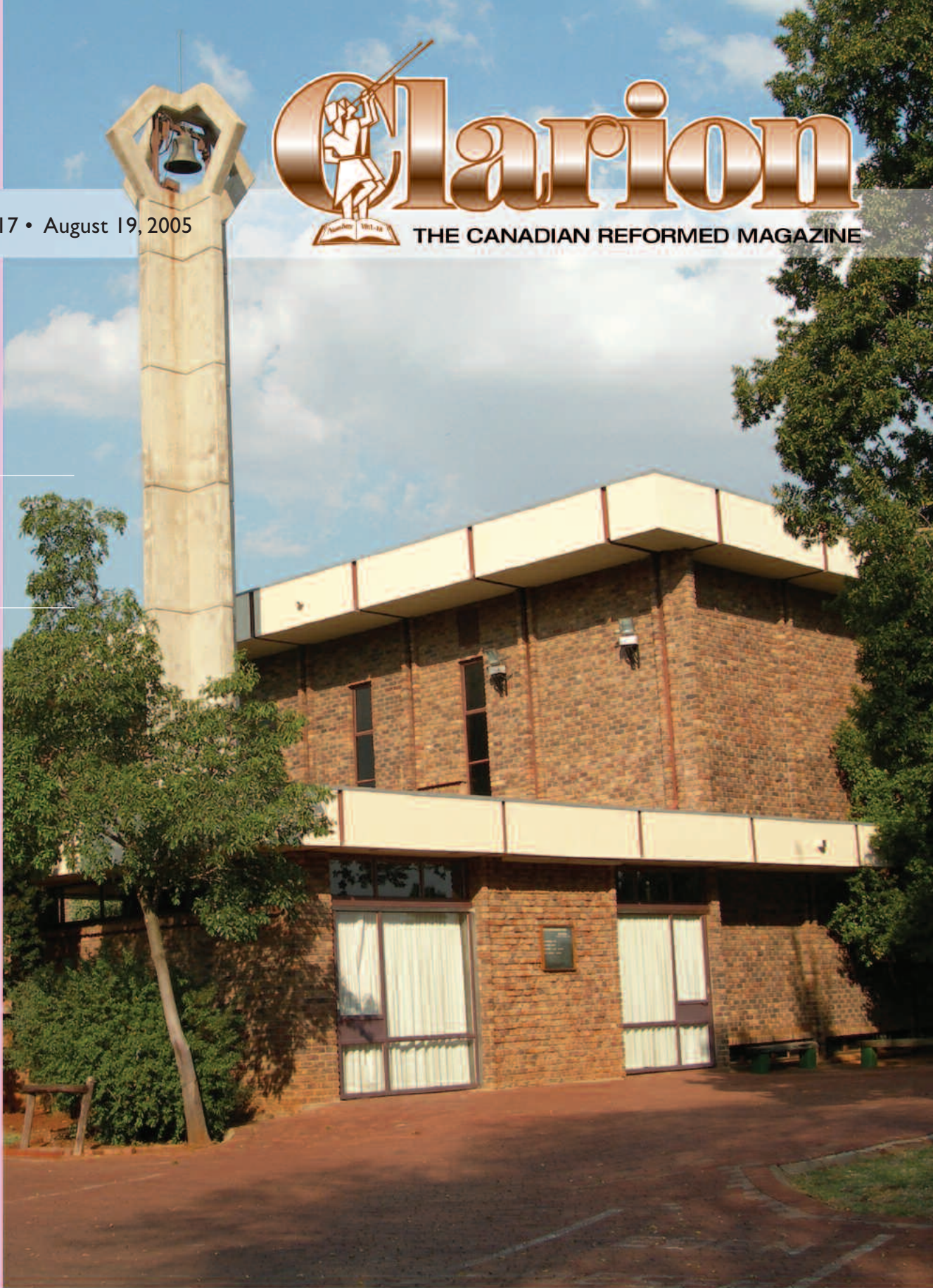
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 54, No. 17 • August 19, 2005

*Another Look
at Article 11 of
the Church
Order*

*Seeing the
Good in
Your Work*

*Our Sister
Churches in
Africa*



*The Free Reformed Church in
Pretoria, South Africa*



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Another Look at Article 11 of the Church Order

In the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches the use of Article 11 CO is not a rarity.

A new pastor comes to town

It took some time but the Canadian Reformed Church at Mildville finally received its new pastor. He had come from out of the province and was looking forward to a new challenge. At the same time the church was optimistic that in the Rev. C. Kantwin they had found a man with just the right gifts and talents to meet the needs of the congregation.

All went well during the first number of months. The pastor preached clear, biblically sound sermons. His instruction of the church youth received positive feedback. He did his pastoral work with due diligence. The future looked bright.

Only as time went on, things started to happen. A few members had a comment or two to make about Pastor Kantwin's sermons. The pastor himself was not above making the odd contentious remark.

Controversy!

In the meantime the elders were dealing with some controversial issues. These issues were of the "what-to-do" variety. If they decided to go this way there would be disagreement and unrest from these members in the congregation, and if they decided to go a different way, other members would voice their disapproval. In the middle of it all, the Rev. Kantwin was trying to give leadership as best as he knew how.

Here we have a case of human incompatibility.

His best, however, was not good enough. Over time his words and actions alienated some important members. They did not take it lightly, and before anyone realized it, the fight

was on. Unkind things were said. Sermons seemed to be directed at certain members. Criticism mounted and the pastor caught most of it.

One day the cry went up, "The pastor has to go!" He ignored it at first, resisted it for a good while, but in the end the handwriting was on the wall. The elders slowly came to the realization that as long as the Rev. Kantwin remained the pastor, there would be conflict. Reluctantly they decided that he should be released from his ministry in the Church at Mildville.

Dismissed!

Now, such a step is never taken lightly. Mildville, being a church in the Reformed tradition and operating under the Church Order of Dort, had to go through various hoops. Most of them had to do with getting the classis to agree, as well as the regional deputies. All in all, it took various attempts, but in the end Rev. Kantwin was dismissed.

It was all done under the heading of Article 11 CO. This part of the Church Order was applied to him and said that he was "judged unfit and incapable of serving the congregation fruitfully and to its edification." Such was the bad news! The good news was in the following clause: "without there being any reason for church discipline." Small consolation!

Still, there was more. For the Classis not only dismissed him; it also made sure that a proper severance package was put in place. It would last for three years, and include a declining salary scale (year one: 100%, year two: 60%, year three: 40%). In this way the Rev. Kantwin was given time to lick his wounds, assess his situation, receive another call, or find other work.

Released!

Now, you might think that this would be the end of the matter. Such, however, was not the case. For from the time that the Rev. Kantwin was dismissed, the clock started ticking. What do I mean? Well, Article 11 CO contains a second paragraph. It



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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**ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:
(subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):**

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One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
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Email: clarion@premierprinting.ca

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Email: premier@premierprinting.ca

Subscription Rates for 2005	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$44.00*	\$72.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$46.50	\$60.00
International	\$72.00	\$108.00

*Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT
Advertisements: \$13.50 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$19.00 per column inch
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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

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Agreement No. 40063293; PAP Registration No. 9907; ISSN 0383-0438

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states that if you do not receive a call within three years, your ministerial status is history. The Rev. Kantwin would become simply Mr. Kantwin. For him there will be no more preaching, no more administering the sacraments, no more pastoral leadership. His service would be over.

Commentary

You may have guessed by now that the above story is fictional. It has not been written with a view to any particular person or congregation. Still, those who are no strangers in Jerusalem know that fiction happens. In the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches the use of Article 11 CO is not a rarity. There have been congregations who have suffered controversy and division. Ministers too have been dismissed. No doubt this sad trend will continue in the days to come. As long as this fallen world remains and people are sinful, there will be Article 11 situations.

The wording

And yet, I have a problem. As a matter of fact, I have a number of problems with this Article, both in terms of its wording and contents. In the first place, it is clear that Article 11 has to do with a situation in which a minister and a congregation are no longer getting along and something has to be done. Whose fault is it? In many of these situations, a classis will steer clear of pointing fingers and assigning blame. After all, it takes two to tangle. Here we have a case of human incompatibility. Oh, and remember, Article 11 says that there are no reasons for the dismissed minister to be on the receiving end of church discipline. So he is dismissed without prejudice.

Or is he? For imagine being that minister and now Article 11 CO is part of your resume. In it the statement is made that you have been “judged unfit and incapable of serving the congregation fruitfully and to its edification.” What is that but a huge blot on your reputation?

Besides, and in all fairness, where does it say anything in the Church Order about the congregation being, “judged unfit and incapable of supporting a minister fruitfully and to his edification”? You will not find it!

So what is the impression and result? It is that in its present wording Article 11 expresses a severe judgment on the minister but remains silent about the role and conduct of the congregation.

Now, that is what I would call “unfair!” This Article badly needs to be revised. It needs to use language that is more

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carefully chosen and not so one-sided. In a conflict situation where blame needs to be spread around, it is not right to single out the minister as if all the blame is his and his alone.

The contents

In addition to unfortunate wording, this Article of the Church Order suffers from another problem, and it has to do with content. Specifically, I am referring to the fact that after a period of three years a dismissed minister who does not receive and accept a call is considered released. His office is terminated and he can no longer perform the duties of the pastoral ministry.

In its present wording Article 11 expresses a severe judgment on the minister but remains silent about the role and conduct of the congregation.

Now, I know the reasoning behind this part of the Article. It has to do with the fact that a minister needs to be tied to a congregation. No call, no tie, no office! As such there is an important principle here, namely that Reformed church polity does not want to legitimize free-wheeling pastors of the Word.

Fine, but what about the pastor? Every Lord's Day he may be asked to preach the Word of the Lord. At times he is also requested to administer the sacraments. Churches may well invite him from hither and yon. They may appreciate his homiletical efforts. At the same time, his lifestyle and conduct may all be beyond reproach. But then three years pass, the clock strikes midnight, and the pastor is no more.

Surely something is not right with this picture. Perhaps this explains why our sister churches in The Netherlands never made this change to their edition of the Church Order. The Canadian Reformed Churches altered the original version of Dort in 1983. It was done in reaction to a specific situation. Should it have been done?

A different route

Let me be open with you and say that the writer of this editorial was party to that decision back in 1983. I, along with the other members of Synod Cloverdale, thought that it was an improvement. Since then I have recanted! Now I think that it was an over-reaction.

Not only that, but now I wish that we had taken a different tact. What kind? How about letting a dismissed minister retain his ministerial status for the rest of his life, as the Synod of Dort intended? In other words, no three year limit. Once a minister always a minister, provided, of course, that one's doctrine and life remain uncontested.

But then, will this not result in "unattached pastors"? At present it would, but not if we changed the Church Order and left the dismissed minister's ministerial status with the last congregation that he served.

But then his status would remain with the church that dismissed him? Yes! Of course, I realize that this will not be a popular solution. When a minister and a congregation part company there are usually hurt feelings all around. I realize that, but over time that too will abate. Also, such a continued linkage need not be problematic seeing that doctrine and life were not an issue in the dismissal. In addition, how much contact is there between a retired minister and his last congregation or between a professor and his last congregation?

At the same time, such a linkage also addresses another problem that we now have. For under the current Article 11 and during the three year period, the dismissed minister is not tied to any church. Should such a minister be asked to do something that pertains to his office and be in need of advice, he has nowhere to turn. His former church has washed its hands of him. His current church may hold his membership, but it has nothing to do or say when it comes to his office.

Suggestion

So how about revising Article 11? I would suggest for your reflection and reaction something along the following lines: "If, for reasons other than such as warrant ecclesiastical discipline, either a minister of the Word or the congregation he is serving desires to end their current pastoral relationship, such dissolution shall occur only upon mutually satisfactory conditions and only with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod. It shall include proper arrangements regarding the support of the minister and his family for a reasonable period of time. In the event that the minister does not receive a call, he shall remain bound to the church that he served last with respect to his ministerial status." (The first part of this revision is based on the wording that can be found in the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches of North America.) I would also give the revamped Article 11 the name "Dissolution" instead of "Dismissal."

This is how I see it. What about you?



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Seeing the Good in Your Work



MATTHEW 13:52

*“That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil
– this is the gift of God.”*

Ecclesiastes 3:13

“I can’t get no satisfaction!” That’s the cry of meaninglessness, isn’t it! It’s the lyrical scream of a rocker whom some think has it all, yet he constantly spurns the gifts of God for a selfish, godless lifestyle and he just can’t get no satisfaction through all his immoral living. Is your life filled with that cry? Or is there a better way? The Teacher in Ecclesiastes 3:13 speaks of finding satisfaction in one’s toil and thus he provides us with a far more positive message than Mick Jagger, especially around Labour Day.

The Teacher calls it the gift of God to find satisfaction in our toil. The original language speaks of “seeing good” in one’s work. “Seeing” has to do with *understanding* the good, even with *experiencing* it. The King James translates, “[T]hat every man . . . should *enjoy* the good of all his labour.” To find satisfaction or pleasure in one’s task – that is the gift of God.

Not all cry out like Mick Jagger. In fact, because of the kindness of God, there are a good many people who eat and drink with pleasure and who find enjoyment in their work, even non-Christians. Their satisfaction is the gift of God. Although their lack of thankfulness to God will testify against them, this does not take away from the fact that God gives them this enjoyment.

Ecclesiastes is filled with statements that are true the world over. Some

observations describe the meaningless life, namely, life without God. Then one’s work is little more than an unhappy burden, lacking satisfaction (1:13; 2:11, 17). But other statements remind us of the good purpose we were created for. In these we learn of the mercy of God who provides all people with enjoyable things such as food and drink and work, mitigating the curse that came on our work after we sinned (2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7).

We learn that our God is generous. He sends his rain on the just and the unjust alike. If we were to make bricks, He would provide the straw. Actually, He does provide the knowledge, strength, materials, and time for all of our work. These things are his gift. In the beginning the Lord God filled our lives with purpose by commanding us to work the garden and subdue the earth. Today, in his kindness, God still allows many people to experience something of how good and satisfying it is to fulfil one of our created purposes. The Teacher commends this to all people.

The Teacher knows, however, that this is not the whole purpose of man. Even those who see some good in all their toil will someday move on. Their death will mark the end of their contributions and they will no longer be able to get any satisfaction from the work of their hands. The results and benefits will be inherited by another,

and who knows what he will do with it (Eccl 2:19)?

The whole purpose of man is known only by those redeemed in the blood of Jesus Christ. We must therefore receive this verse in a new way, for Ecclesiastes was penned for the benefit of our faith. Others may find some joy in fulfilling one of man’s purposes (work), but we must put work in its proper place in order to truly enjoy it. Our primary purpose is to worship God. In Jesus Christ we have been redeemed to worship God in everything. We are now to perform worship through our work, just as it was God’s purpose for us in the beginning. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). Your work is for the glory of God. Do it in that way! “Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58). The Lord’s work is to do good wherever you are. “Let us not grow weary in doing good” (Gal 6:9) – in all our work, at home, school, and the workplace.

Such a perspective ought to make us work all the better, as those “serving the Lord, and not men” (Col 3:23). With Christ as Lord you can also be assured that “you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Col 3:24). There’s no greater satisfaction than that!

J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 4.2

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



God says that we must not steal. In other words, don't be a thief.



Sometimes a thief is a person that carries a gun, covers their face with a mask, and steals someone's purse. Or a thief may break into a house and steal someone's belongings. You sure don't want to be a person like that!

But the commandment not to steal is not only for criminals. That law also applies to you and me. Stealing on a small scale is also sin. Here are some examples: you find money on the floor, and you pick it up and keep it instead of telling your mom; a treat is handed out, and you act as if you did not get anything yet so that you get a second one; you try to sneak into a hockey game without paying; you don't prepare for a test, and you cheat instead. There are many ways that people steal, but God does not allow it.

Perhaps you have done things like that. If there is a way to make up for it, you should try. You should also be sorry. When you are sorry, the Lord is always willing to forgive, because He is merciful. But don't do it again. Fight against your evil desire.

There are also many ways that adults steal. If fifteen minutes are allowed for a coffee break at work, an employee might take a longer break if the boss doesn't notice.

Such a man is a thief, because he is stealing the time that belongs to his boss. There are many more examples of stealing. When you are older, you will find out about them. You need to remember that God forbids stealing, no matter how small it may seem to you.

In this commandment the Lord also tells his children to work hard. When you work hard, you can earn enough money to be able to give some away. There are people who cannot buy all the things that they need, and this commandment is also telling us to share what we have. By helping one another we are also helping each other stay obedient to the Lord.



The Candlestand Statement

Reformed considerations regarding the Charismatic Movement (Part 1 of 4)

Composed by 14
church-leaders from Kenya,
Indonesia, Uganda,
The Netherlands, South-Africa,
India, and Zimbabwe

Part One: Revelation and the Bible

I.1 About revelation

I.1 * 1 Revelation

We believe in the sovereign and almighty God, creator of heaven, earth, and all that is created. He made man according to his image and likeness, giving him special qualities, making him responsible and able to listen, answer, and understand. The eternal God took the initiative to make Himself known to man. He was in fellowship with man, revealing his will, love, and holiness to him. But man gave ear to the words of Satan. As a result man subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death, curse, and corruption.

However, God did not cease to reveal Himself to man, but He came to search for him and to call him. He punished man because of his rebellion, but also promised the coming of a Saviour. A divine plan for the reconciliation of all things was set up, to be fulfilled along the destined and designed lines of history. We confess the accomplishment of this plan in Jesus Christ, in order that, as recorded for us in Scripture, "We may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name" (John 20:31).

I.1 * 2 The Bible

God's revelation received its climax and centre in Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-2). By

his Holy Spirit God carefully handed down all that we need to know about Him and his redemptive works. We receive this knowledge through the Bible, which covers the whole history of redemption, or the teachings of the prophets and apostles. The works of creation and providence give us a sense of the existence of a divine being. The Bible is the only source containing sufficient information to really know the creator of all things. By the Bible we also know the whole will of God needed for our salvation and comfort, as well as for the edification and guidance of our personal and congregational lives.

I.1 * 3 The completeness of the Bible

We believe that God has completed this work of authoritative revelation, recorded for us in Scripture. By reading and explaining Scripture the Holy Spirit will lead us to understand God's plan and will, as well as to believe his promises for today and for the future. The truth of the Bible, to which we subject ourselves, provides the only source for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, and adequately equips us for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

I.2 Understanding the Bible

I.2 * 4 The Bible and the church

We receive the sixty-six books of the Bible, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament, as the only and sufficient source for the church to know God and his redemptive

works. Although the Bible is composed of many different books, we acknowledge that it conveys the one, coherent story of God's redemptive revelation.

It is through this coherent story of God's revelation that we are enabled to know the Triune God, his great deeds, and his deep love for his creation and mankind. The church of all ages is established through the witness of the prophets and apostles (Eph 2:20).

The church, being grateful for this special love and fully trusting that God will accomplish his plan, is equipped and illuminated by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel of total restoration in Christ Jesus to the world.

I.2 * 5 The need for Bible interpretation

We believe that the Bible can be read and understood by everyone who submits himself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Yet, we also believe that a thorough and competent method of interpreting the Bible is desirable and should therefore be encouraged so that the church will be able to carry out its mandate and responsibilities in the right way. The need for such a method of interpretation is caused by the long historical distance between the ancient context of the Bible and the present situation of the church. This need is felt even more due to the rise of modern ideas which deny the divine authority of the Scriptures.

Such a method of interpretation is needed for the faithful proclamation of

the gospel and for the edification and expansion of the church. It provides a sound basis for theological understanding, and is an important tool for fruitful Bible study.

We believe that the church should pray for opportunities to provide appropriate training to ensure that the members of the church are dedicated and spiritually motivated. Church leaders should be able to interpret the Bible in the right way and so further the proclamation of the gospel, good preaching, and sound theological development.

God did not cease to reveal Himself to man, but He came to search for him and to call him.

1.2 * 6 Hermeneutics and exegesis

We believe that biblical passages as a whole communicate in a more or less clear way (notwithstanding that some are also complicated) what the Divine Author intended to communicate.

We believe that the biblical text contains historical, literary, and doctrinal aspects. We believe in the trustworthiness of biblical events, the writer, and the text. We believe that as a basis for this comprehensive mandate and responsibility of the church, the goal of Bible interpretation is to discover the intention of the Divine Author. Therefore we have to make every effort to understand his original meaning and how this is communicated in the text to the hearers. We believe that in our efforts to understand the original meaning of the text it is important for us to acknowledge that these texts are based on specific phases in the coherent story of God's revelation.

For example, it is important to take into account that the books of the New Testament are related to the specific transitional phase in the realization of God's plan. The life and work of Jesus Christ broke down the temporary wall between Israel and the nations. The proclamation of the gospel initiated the gathering of the worldwide church.

1.2 * 7 Application

We apply Scripture to our present times by transferring the author's meaning to our context. It is to be expected that applications may vary in terms of time and place. For example, we do not consider our government to be of a theocratic nature as it was during the old covenant. Compared to biblical times our society is influenced by very different religions, philosophies, ideologies, and world views. The situation of our modern world is incomparable with the situation in which the first congregations lived.

Therefore, when applying the Bible to our modern times, we have to take into account the many factors that are different. We should avoid superficial similarities and we are obligated to supply understanding on the basis of good studies.

This does not discourage the members of the church from reading their Bible every day. On the contrary, regular reading provides more understanding. There should be a willingness to read, an openness to accept guidance and correction by means of Bible study, and a regular listening to the preaching and teaching of the Word.

1.3 The power of Holy Scripture

1.3 * 8 The Scriptures as a precious gift

We confess that the Holy Spirit breathed the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as his very precious gift or charisma. By giving these written documents the Spirit convinces us that

God's revelation is reliable, unchangeable, and without deceit. As we read and hear Scripture we should express our gratefulness to the Spirit. For believers this reading and hearing is an act of obedience by which the Spirit opens their hearts and lives to be governed and renewed in Christ.

1.3 * 9 The power of the Scriptures

We confess that the Holy Spirit cares for the Scriptures and continues to empower the biblical text. We realize that as we study the Bible better we come in a closer relationship to God. We hear the loving voice of our Saviour speaking to us in our daily lives, and in this way we experience intimate fellowship with the Spirit. God Himself promised that his Spirit would be present whenever a believer opens the Bible and reads it. "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and the one who hears it and takes to the heart what is written in it" (Rev 1:3). This close fellowship with the Word of God strengthens faith, comforts, and makes the believer trust in the Lord. The power of the Spirit will fill him more and more and enable him to rely fully on the Lord Jesus Christ during good and evil times (Eccl 7:14).

The church is equipped and illuminated by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel of total restoration to the world in Christ Jesus.

1.3 * 10 The messenger of the Scriptures

We confess that the Bible communicates divine revelation to us. In its divine mysteries it is far beyond our human capabilities of understanding

(Rom 11:32). We believe that God chooses people to bring the message of redemption: "Blessed are the feet of those who bring good tidings" (Isa 52:7). Therefore the messenger should be trustworthy, a solid, convinced believer who honours Scripture as the gift of the Holy Spirit. As a result of faithful prayer the Holy Spirit will graciously bless the message that has been prepared by means of proper study and meditation. The Holy Spirit then exercises his power and enables the reader and listener to really hear and accept the content of the message. We pray for a humble attitude on the part of preachers and teachers by which they leave the power and the effect of the preaching in the hand of the living Lord and the Holy Spirit.

I.3 * 11 *Illumination and personal experience*

We believe that the preaching of the Word of God bears fruit in the lives of his children. By this holy work the Spirit is leading, guiding, illuminating, and governing our lives. He gives true understanding of Scripture (1 Cor 2:16). This work of the Spirit influences our whole being: mind, soul, emotions, and conscience. For this reason we sometimes explain special experiences or unexpected circumstances as God's guiding hand in our personal lives. For example, He may use them to lead us to godliness.

Dreams are part of a natural process associated with daily life. In general, a dream today, as reflection on human perceptions, cannot be a normative standard by which to know the truth. The guidance of dreams and other special experiences always has to be subjected to the authoritative message of the Bible. It is our responsibility to let ourselves to be led, guided, and transformed by the Spirit. He uses our human insights in such a way that we plan, act, receive advice from others, and correct our errors. However, we should not place too much stress on this for it will lead us to neglect God's fatherly guidance.

The link between the proclamation of the Word of God and its faithful reading will always exist and should remain in place to prevent us from drifting away on the waves of human invention and feeling.

I.3 * 12 *Expectation of perfect revelation*

We believe that on this earth and in our times we must live our Christian lives in the expectation of the coming of Christ. There is a longing for more perfect times. "What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). This expectation of the coming of this full revelation fills us with comfort and leads us to pray. As was revealed to John, "The dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be his people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev 21:3, 4).

The Holy Spirit breathed the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as his very precious gift.

Actually, we do not know what to pray for; "But the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Rom 8:26). The Lord taught us to persevere by praying, hoping, and patiently waiting for the fulfilment of all his promises. In doing this we are encouraged by the intercession of the Holy Spirit. He helps us in our weakness and He is a deposit, guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession (Eph 1:13-14).

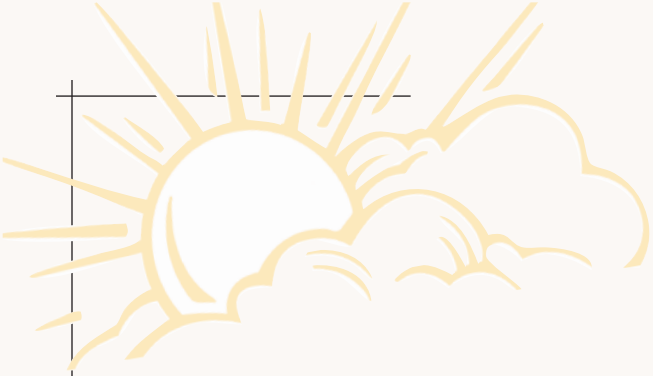
Refutations

1. We refute all teaching which denies that God has completed the work of authoritative revelation in the Bible. It is not to be expected that God still inspires special men to add specific or private authoritative revelation to bypass his already completed revelation.

2. We do not believe that the Bible is equal to God, nor do we expect any magical power from its written or spoken words. God is not to be reduced to the biblical text, nor may that text be easily manipulated and applied according to one's needs or desires.
3. We refute the misuse of the Bible, Bible passages, specific verses, or even words in order to derive extra power to heal or to prosper. There is no biblical basis for the teaching that God will perform miracles by repeating his words, or by forceful reading or whispering.
4. The Bible is not to be seen as *logos* (Greek word meaning "word") which becomes powerful *rhema* (another Greek word meaning "word") by speaking it. We refute the distinction made up between these words for the sake of defending a certain use of the Bible to work spiritual powers.
5. We refute all desires (and prayers) to receive instant messages for our daily life directly from God, bypassing Scripture.
6. We refute the preference given to direct personal experiences (for example, direct guidance from the Holy Spirit by inner voices and visions). This preference goes beyond the promises of the covenant we live in, neglects the creational way of exercising our responsibilities, and forsakes the sound use of the Scriptures.
7. We refute every teaching claiming that dreams are directives in things concerning the church and the Christian affairs and do not need to be subject to the authority of the Scriptures. This is without biblical support and must not be taught or be pursued. There is no room for anyone to make his or her dreams a norm if they conflict the Scriptures.

The Candlestand Statement appeared in the June 2005 issue of Lux Mundi and is re-printed here with permission.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 15:13

These words were written by Paul many years ago. In this chapter of Romans, Paul is teaching the people to have a spirit of unity and to accept each other in love. The Jews and the Gentiles had many differences and had a difficult time building each other up. Here Paul is trying to tell them to accept one another in love just as Christ has loved us.

Paul is also defending a great truth about the Bible and its purpose. Romans 15:4 reads, “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” We can read the Scriptures today and know they are meant for us as well. By daily reading from God’s Word we receive renewed hope. We know that God’s Word stands firm.

The circumstances that we have to go through in this life from an earthly perspective may seem hopeless. So many dreams and hopes for a better tomorrow are not fulfilled. What we often forget is that God has a plan for each one of his children. The Lord does not want us to despair; He wants us to put all our hope and trust in Him alone.

There are many verses in the Bible which speak about hope. We know from Romans 5:4 that character produces hope. Romans 5:5 states, “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.” It is through faith that we receive this hope, otherwise we would constantly doubt. With hoping comes waiting and it requires a lot of patience. To hope for something also means we have never had it yet. With an earthly hope we do not even know if we will receive what we have hoped for. A child may hope for his entire birthday list to be fulfilled, but knows that this may not happen.

We know that without God’s Word to guide us we would have no hope at all, and therefore no stability. Any hope a Christian has comes from God. By the power of the Holy Spirit who works faith in our hearts we have received this hope as a gift. We know this hope to be a blessed hope. Titus 2:13 states, “We wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Christ gave Himself up for us to redeem us from all wickedness. This in itself gives us great hope. We also know that God has promised never to leave us; another reason to live with great hope. Our covenant God who

has done so much for us will never leave us in a hopeless state. He is preparing a place for his people. It is like a treasure that will be revealed to us at his second coming. Where would we stand if we did not believe in this hope? This blessed hope carries us through day after day. As dreams are sometimes shattered on this earth, and we feel that life can be hopeless, the words of Romans 15:13 will also give us renewed hope and joy. Just like Paul prayed long ago for this hope to live in the people, so today we have to pray for hope and joy in Christ. Then we will receive peace with God, which is the basis for your joy. This joy is not based on a temporary worldly happiness, but is a joy that lasts through good and bad days. It rests on the salvation that we have in Christ Jesus. To know that God’s compassion for us existed before our salvation, while we were yet sinners; shows us the immense depth of his love. It is totally undeserved and is through grace alone.

Let us continue to hold on to the hope that we have been given. Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in you so that your joy and peace may increase for the glory of our God. May we as church continue to be filled with hope as we often sing together:

*The hope of faith shall not deceive us,
The Saviour’s words are true and sure.
Our friends on earth may fail and leave us,
But Jesus’ faithfulness endures.
Who limits his dominion ever?
He rules creation from on high;
All that his love and grace endeavour
Shall Him his power not deny.*

*That hope must soften all our sorrow.
Come, fellow pilgrims, heads then high;
For those who bide salvation’s morrow
The hills are level, seas are dry.
O blessedness above all measure,
O joy when once all grief is banned.
There is our heart, there is our treasure,
When we are in the Promised Land.*

Hymn 53:1, 2

Birthdays in September:

- 8 MARSHA MOESKER will be 28**
5820 Dixon Dam Road, Vernon, BC V1B 3J8
- 11 MARYVANDE BURGT will be 49**
c/o Fam. W. Togeretz
32570 Rossland Place, Abbotsford, BC V2T 1T7
- 14 JERRY BONTEKOE will be 41**
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B0
- 29 PAUL DIELEMAN will be 36**
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday in this month. We hope you have a very enjoyable day together with your family and friends, and above all may our heavenly Father bless you richly in this new year.

Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
Phone: 905-563-0380

Just a reminder to all parents and caregivers; please let us know as soon as possible if there is a change of address. This is the only way that we can find out. Thanks!



C. Van Dam

Our Sister Churches in South Africa (Part 1 of 3)

From mid-May to mid-June, my wife and I had the privilege of being in the midst of our sister churches in South Africa. The immediate occasion for being there was an invitation by the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA – *Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika*) to attend their synod and to participate in the discussions on theological education that would take place at this assembly. While at synod, I was also able to function as the official representative of the Canadian Reformed Churches on behalf of our Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad. Furthermore, this visit was an opportunity to conduct exegetical seminars and give lectures for three theological students in the Cape Town area.

Since the FRCSA are physically far removed from our churches, we tend to know relatively little about them. However, the fact that they are sister churches suggests that we should be as

well informed of them as possible. I would therefore like to use this opportunity to help the readers of *Clarion* to become better acquainted with our brothers and sisters in that part of the world. Before passing on some of the decisions of their last synod, I will first give a historical overview of these churches, as this will facilitate an understanding of their unique situation.

The early years

Like the Canadian Reformed Churches, the FRCSA were also established by immigrants after World War Two. These immigrants soon discovered that they could not simply join the Reformed Church in South Africa (RCSA – the “Dopper” churches). In spite of earnest discussions with these churches, the RCSA continued to maintain a sister church relationship with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Synodical) [RCN(Syn)]. Because joining these churches would

have amounted to a denial of the struggle of the Liberation of 1944, the immigrants from the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated) [RCN(Lib)] were forced, to their regret, to establish their own congregations. A Free Reformed congregation was instituted in Pretoria in 1950. Others followed in Cape Town (1952) and Johannesburg/Witwatersrand (1957). In 1997 the original congregation in Pretoria split into two due to growth, with the new church adopting the name Maranatha.

Later developments

In 1976 the RCSA broke their ecclesiastical ties with the RCN(Syn). This decision opened the way for renewed talks in the hope of achieving ecclesiastical unity with them. These talks are ongoing, and representatives of the RCSA were also at the recent Pretoria synod of our sister churches.

Due to growing liberalism in the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederduitse*

Gereformeerde Kerk), several ministers broke with that church and joined the FRCSA. In 1992 Rev. E. Viljoen left, and became pastor of the Cape Town congregation in 1994. Dr. J.A. Breytenbach broke with the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in 1997 and became a missionary at Belhar (in the Cape Town area) in 1998. That same year, Rev. C.F. Nicholson also left the Dutch Reformed Church; he became missionary at Wesbank (also in the Cape Town area) in 2001. Both of these missionaries work among the coloured people and are under the oversight of the Cape Town consistory.

When Rev. P. Nel left the Dutch Reformed Church in 1995, he was able to take some of his congregation at Bethal with him. This congregation, which is about two hours southwest of Johannesburg, has since grown to 130 members; unlike the other white congregations it is not made up of Dutch immigrants but is Afrikaans.

Other ministers who left the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa are



The Free Reformed Church in Soshanguve-North where Rev. M. P. Magagula is minister.

Rev. J. Bosman who became a missionary in Mamelodi in 1994, and Rev. C. Heiberg who served the Free Reformed Church at Johannesburg for a number of years and in 2001 accepted a call to the United Reformed Church in Sheffield, Ontario.

Mission

Mission to their black and coloured African fellow citizens has occupied much of the attention of our South African sister churches. The mission around Cape Town goes back to 1979, and the work in the black townships of Mamelodi and Soshanguve outside Pretoria goes back even further. Dr. A.J. de Visser laboured in Soshanguve prior to his coming to Hamilton as professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology. The Lord has richly blessed the mission activities of the FRCSA. The congregation of Mamelodi was officially instituted in October, 2002 with a membership of 216. Rev. Tebogo K. Mogale shepherds this flock. Rev. M. Peter Magagula is minister of Soshanguve-North, which was instituted in March, 2003 and numbers about 328.

Other congregations are in the formative stage under the direction of missionaries. Until recently Nellmapius (in the Pretoria area) had Rev. J. Bosman as missionary. Rev. Jerry Mhlanga labours as missionary in South Soshanguve. His



Rev. E. Viljoen, pastor of the church in Cape Town, Rev. P. Nel, pastor of the church at Bethal, Dr. J.A. Breytenbach, missionary in Belhar, and Dr. C. Van Dam.

congregation numbers about 100 but is not yet instituted. In Central Soshanguve a group of about 50 come together for worship. Rev. P. Boon has recently been installed as missionary for Soshanguve, with his duties including the coaching and encouraging of the mission workers in Soshanguve.

The Lord has richly blessed the mission activities of the FRCSA.

As the Lord worked faith in the hearts of many, the yearning for Christian education also took root. Parents took the initiative to establish such a school in January, 2000. The school is called *Lesedi la Ditshaba* which is Sotho for “Light for the Nations.” Many sacrifices are made for this school. It meets in large freight containers placed behind the North Soshanguve church and manages to run without subsidy, although getting the salary money together each month remains a tremendous challenge.

In the Cape Town area, missionary Dr. J.A. Breytenbach ministers to the congregation of Belhar and also oversees a preaching post in nearby Leiden. The congregation of Belhar numbers about seventy, and in some ways functions on its own. It is, however, not yet instituted since there are too few men in the congregation, a reality that would make choosing future office bearers difficult. Also in the greater Cape Town region, Rev. C.F. Nicholson is missionary in Wesbank, a large new housing development. The congregation has about thirty-four members.

For outsiders, it is difficult to imagine the scope and potential of the work that is being undertaken. For example, the black township of Soshanguve has a



The Free Reformed Church in Wesbank, the mission post of Rev. C. F. Nicholson.

population of about a million, and the population of the coloured townships in which mission work is being done by our sister churches is about 60,000.

The fields are ripe for the harvest and the Lord is raising indigenous workers for the task.

(The total number in townships around Cape Town is over one and a half million.) The Lord is blessing the mission efforts. This blessing is apparent not only in the growing congregations that are developing, but also in the fact that seven theological students are studying for the ministry, four in the Pretoria area and three in the Cape Town region. The fields are ripe for the harvest and the Lord is raising indigenous workers for the task.

These mission efforts are run and partially financed by the FRCSA, but

most of the support comes from RCN(Lib), specifically the churches in Friesland as well as those in four classes in the province of Groningen.

In conclusion

The FRCSA are, in a sense, a unique federation of churches. Although small in number (seven churches with a total membership of about 1800), their composition reflects the catholicity of the church of Jesus Christ. Many tribes and peoples are represented in these churches. There are the Afrikaaners who have lived in South Africa for centuries, the Dutch immigrants, the coloured people of various backgrounds, and last but not least the black Africans, who are of the original indigenous population and are African from time immemorial. Also, although these churches are small in number, they are not afraid to tackle a host of issues, and their recent synod showed that. In a following article I hope to report on some of the highlights of this synod and so further introduce these churches to the readers of *Clarion*.



Rev. James Folkerts

MERF CANADA News

Lokichoggio Ministry Centre Expands



Construction of MERF's East Africa Ministry Centre in Lokichoggio, Kenya was completed in 2003. Its dormitories and classrooms were initially designed to accommodate classes of forty trainees at a time.

We thank the Lord for his continuing hand of blessing on the training of pastors and evangelists at the MERF study centre in the northern frontier town of Lokichoggio, Kenya (just over the border from southern Sudan). Thirty-five men are taking part in the second and longest biblical training course in 2005. It began on April 5 and runs for four and a half months until early September. Two Kenyans come from Kisii (in the south), and one brother is from the indigenous Turkana tribe (in the north). Two men come from northwest Uganda's Alur tribe, and two come from west Ethiopia. Most of the other trainees are from southern Sudan. The Sudanese come from four different tribes: Nuer,

Burun, Murle, and Anuak. It makes for a diverse classroom, but a warm and lively discussion and learning place – an exciting group to teach!

Each weekday MERF offers four one-hour classes – two in the morning and two in the evening, plus two morning sessions on Saturday. It is not uncommon for class to run longer due to questions and discussion. Classes are taught in English with translation into Nuer, the southern Sudanese language known to most of the students. I taught the group for one month. The rest of the teaching is being carried out by Pastor Tut Mai (Sudanese), retired Pastor Sulwyn Jones (Welsh), and Pastor Nathan Elgersma (American).

During one class, while explaining the oath of Genesis 15 (when animals were cut in two and the presence of God passed through the pieces), I wondered whether they would catch on to the concept. I was shocked by their laughter as I introduced the material. They already knew all about this practice from their own East African culture! They also cut a cow in half symmetrically and pass through the blood as a way of reconciling two feuding parties. By doing this one is saying, "May I be like this dead animal if I don't keep my word."

I was told the Nuer will eat the cursed animal, though the Nuer trainees wondered why. In other tribes the animal is not eaten. When asked "Who passed through the blood in Genesis 15?" the students replied "Abraham." "Look again," I said, "Do you see the covenant of grace here? God's presence passed through but Abraham did not." It was exciting to see their eyes light up with understanding and see how a particular passage really touched them and their culture in a special way. God's reconciliation is initiated by Him, entirely of grace; ultimately He takes the curse from us and puts it upon his Son Jesus Christ. We do not eat the cursed flesh and blood of the old covenant but are

given the cup of blessing of the new covenant!

The current study term is being extended due primarily to the exceptional quality of the trainees. The Reformed communities in their areas of East Africa are growing rapidly. Trained spiritual leaders are desperately needed. MERF is eager to set up regional satellite training centers led by gifted and godly native pastors. Several of the current class are superbly qualified to help lead this next phase of MERF's training ministry.



The Rev. James Folkerts (centre, kneeling) recently joined MERF's regional ministry team. He served at Lokichoggio for one month.



Lokichoggio trainees enjoy engaging meal time fellowship.

We praise God for the encouraging news of Ugandan trainees taught in courses last summer! Many of these men had had no prior training. One pastor reported that they and their churches in Uganda had been built up and encouraged by the training they received through MERF. That brief training course had significantly enhanced their preaching and ministry of the Word.

In addition to the study courses at MERF's Lokichoggio centre, five men work full-time producing radio messages in the Nuer and Dinka languages of southern Sudan. They have also seen much fruit from their labours bringing the good news of God's Word to people

who have been crushed under many years of war. The nightly broadcasts address topics including "Peace and Reconciliation," "Christ and Culture," and "Bible History" – how the gospel transforms all of life.

Many of the trainees and broadcasters here express their deep thanks to the Lord through prayer for the way in which churches around the world are encouraging them in the Word through MERF. As Paul gave thanks to the Philippians for their partnership in the gospel, so the people here in East Africa express their deep thanks for the way in which you are helping to build them up with the Word of God through your prayers and support.



Retired Welsh pastor Sulwyn Jones teaches a recent class of Lokichoggio ministry centre trainees.



Welcome to Cloverdale!



On Sunday morning, May 15, 2005, Cloverdale was again in a celebratory mood. By now, we'd become accustomed to meeting in our "new" church building instead of in the school gym, but one thing had been lacking. We were missing a pastor; while our elders were taking excellent care of us, we missed not having our own minister. On this particular Sunday morning that would change. Right around the time that our church renovation project had been completed, we'd received word that Rev. Theo Lodder had accepted our call. And now the day of his installation had arrived.

Dr. J. Visscher of Langley had the honour of leading this service. His sermon, "A New Pastor on Pentecost," centred on John 16:8-15. We learned that our new pastor is called to participate in the Spirit's work of convicting the world, guiding the church, and glorifying Christ. In the afternoon our new pastor, Rev. Theo Lodder, preached his inaugural sermon based on Ephesians 3:14-21. As a servant of the gospel he humbly prayed that we as congregation will be strengthened by God's power, that we will grasp the full dimensions of Christ's love, and that God will answer this prayer for his own glory.

A festive welcome

May 27 was designated as the Lodder welcome evening. The M.C.'s, James and Jan Bredenhof, ensured that the evening would move along smoothly and briskly. First on the agenda was the introduction of our new pastor, Theo Lodder, his wife Marina, and their four children, Joshua, Katie, Nathan, and Austin. Dr. Visscher, as counsellor and our former pastor, spoke warm words of welcome. Rev. J. VanVliet of Surrey Maranatha welcomed the Lodders on behalf of Classis. He noted that he and Rev. Lodder had become well acquainted during their four years at the Theological College. In those young and foolish days they even enjoyed playing the odd prank on the professors, like putting the clock a half hour ahead in order to shorten the lecture time. It almost worked. But they had also worked closely together in the fledgling outreach efforts in downtown Hamilton, efforts which, under the Lord's blessing, grew

into Streetlight Ministries. Rev. VanVliet was looking forward to being neighbours once again.

James and Jan, true to their word, moved things along smoothly and briskly, and between each congregational contribution highlighted some aspect of beautiful British Columbia, and more particularly Surrey. Surrey is the second largest city in B.C., with 1,000 new residents arriving each month (the Lodders being six of the most recent ones), and is expected to surpass Vancouver within ten years. And did you know that Canada has one quarter of the world's fresh water supply, one third of which is located in B.C.? Another interesting tidbit about Surrey: by 1930, when the last tract of lumber had been logged in Surrey, an estimated four billion





feet of lumber had been cut. One of the largest trees was known as the Eagles' Tree. The nest at the crown of this tree was too large for a farm wagon to haul away. All of us learned things about Surrey we'd never known before.

Congregational contributions

Various groups from the very young to the very mature had a chance to add their welcome. Kindergarten through Grade 7 from William of Orange sang lustily. The Women's Morning Bible Study offered a welcome basket full of ideas, maps, gift certificates, and write-ups of each member's favourite neighbourhood place, shop, or family activity. The youth group played "stump the new pastor," a game where Rev. Lodder was required to match children and parents. The Women's Society sang songs of welcome and the Chinese Reformed Church members led us in hymns of praise.

But, the most memorable contribution of the evening was that of the Men's Society. One of its members had compiled an alphabetical Yellow Pages of all the occupations of the men of Cloverdale from accountant to yard maintenance worker. I don't believe we had ever heard as many corny and convoluted puns in such a short time

period as during this presentation. One example, for the letter "e": "Now for a switch, it should be no shock to hear that we consistently and even currently rely on the wiry skills of the following brothers: Roger "the breaker" Kieneker, Rick "the resistor" VanOene, and Tony "the 220" VanOene. These men strive to keep us well grounded, well lit, and short-free, and do so with electrifying and yet alternating personalities."

Gifts of welcome

After that, the rest of the presentations seemed somewhat more

mundane, but thankfully did not require gymnastics of the brain to catch all the nuances. Deb Huttema presented the Lodders with a congregational photo directory. They are not the only ones to benefit from this in-house project. Sales within the congregation had been brisk, and now we'll all be able to address each other by name from the youngest baby to the oldest great-grandma. As the evening neared its conclusion, Jake Bredenhof as member of church council presented a "welcome-to-Cloverdale" gift to the Lodders: a comfortable patio set and some outdoor playground equipment. The message was clear. "Make sure you take time to relax and enjoy B.C. sunshine." Our new pastor was the last to speak. He noted that he and his wife were overwhelmed by this warm welcome, and were beginning to feel like family already. He hoped that under the blessing of the Lord our relationship would be of mutual benefit for years to come. With that the formal part of the evening concluded and we moved to the fellowship hall for further celebration.



Further Discussion

From time to time Clarion will publish longer responses to articles received. The decision as to which responses to publish will rest with the Editor.

Recently Rev. G.Ph. van Popta wrote a three-part series of articles on: "What is the Lord's Day?" (*Clarion*, Vol. 54, Nos. 8, 9, 10). In the first article he dealt with "Biblical Background Old Testament"; in the second, "Biblical Background New Testament." I appreciate much in these two articles, although I have some questions. The topic of the third article is "Observing the Lord's Day." Here he speaks at length about the historical background of observing the Lord's Day in several countries.

As he enters on the practical application of the commandment today, he poses the question: "What about working on Sunday?" He recognizes that it is a bit of a minefield. He picks a farmer as an illustration and, according to Rev. van Popta, the dilemma the farmer may face. He comes to the conclusion that "the whole matter of personal conscience comes into play here."

But I ask: what about the contractor who has half of the roof left to finish on the building he is constructing and is affected by the same storm? What about travelling on Sunday because, we say, we can't afford to lose Monday as a day of work? What about taking on a job knowing that it involves working on Sundays? Etc., etc.

According to Rev. van Popta our conscience, ultimately, will have to determine what we may or may not do on the Lord's Day. Saying this, he contradicts what he wrote earlier, on pages 228-9:

On the Lord's Day we diligently attend the services and participate fully in the worship. And it's not just a matter of going to church with the rest of the day being ours to spend in selfish pursuits. The rest of the day,

between the services and after, ought to be characterized by what we were doing in church. It's the Lord's Day, not the Lord's hours. The Sunday should be of one peace [sic]. Since we worship with the communion of saints, it only makes sense that the other activities we are engaged in reflect that [*italics his – GK*].

I am deeply concerned about Rev. van Popta's conclusion that our conscience is to be our guide. How do we reconcile that with the following?

1. Lord's Day 3 (HC, Q/A 7):
Q. From where, then, did man's depraved nature come?
A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Paradise, for there our nature became so corrupt that we are all conceived and born in sin.
2. Lord's Day 10, (HC, Q/A 27, 28):
Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?
A. God's providence is his almighty and ever present power, whereby, as with his hand, He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things, come not by chance but by his fatherly hand.
Q. What does it benefit us to know that God has created all things and still upholds them by his providence?
A. We can be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and with a view to the future we can have a firm

confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from his love; for all creatures [also storms and the like, GK] are so completely in his hand that without his will they cannot so much as move.

3. Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper (*Book of Praise*, p 595): Therefore, according to the command of Christ and of the apostle Paul, we admonish all those who know themselves to be guilty of the following offensive sins to abstain from the table of the Lord, and we declare to them that they have no part in the kingdom of Christ: . . . all who do not diligently attend the worship services and who despise the proclamation of God's Word or the sanctity of the sacraments . . .
4. Our promises at baptism and profession of faith.

The 10 Commandments are still the Lord's rule for our lives, directing us in thankful service and humble dependence on Him. How, then, can we make exceptions when it comes to the fourth commandment? The severe punishment in the Old Testament for violation of the Sabbath underlines God's demand on his people. Is He not the same God in the new dispensation, requiring our worship out of thankfulness for the deliverance by grace through Christ and our living in the trust that "all things come not by chance but by his fatherly hand"? Then it is not up to us whether or not to attend worship services on certain occasions. Should we not simply obey the commandment and keep the Lord's Day

holy, and then trust in the Lord regarding the consequences of our obedience? Our Father knows what is best for us.

Rev. van Popta more or less promotes sports (baseball, soccer, etc.) after the afternoon service as excellent “communion-of-saints stuff.” So, on with the blue jeans or shorts (if they are not already wearing them), and off to sports, as happens in some places already – just like on the other six days of the week.

The godless world around us influences the church in many ways, including how we observe the Lord’s Day, both in what we do and in how we dress. That alone should make us doubly careful about how we celebrate the Lord’s Day, not only by going to church, but also in how we conduct ourselves the rest of the day.

“Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them – the Lord, who remains faithful forever.” Psalm 146:5, 6

Gerry Kuik
Winnipeg, MB

Response of Rev. G.Ph. van Popta

I thank my brother G. Kuik and colleague Rev. T. Van Raalte for their comments on my speeches the Burlington Reformed Study Centre published in *Clarion*. I will avail myself of the opportunity to respond to a few points, although I do not relish a protracted debate.

The view espoused by the brothers Kuik and Van Raalte is the one set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, 21:8, which says that the Sunday is a simple continuation of the Jewish Sabbath “changed into the first day of the week” (see also the Larger Westminster Catechism, Q/A 116). I, rather, agree with Calvin who sees the Christian Lord’s Day as a distinctly Christian institution adopted upon the fulfilment of the Old Testament Sabbath. I would kindly ask my

brothers to read what the venerable John Calvin wrote on the fourth commandment in the *Institutes*, 2.8.28-34. Lord’s Day 38, to which I wholeheartedly subscribe, is entirely consistent with Calvin’s explanation.

I will address a few of Rev. Van Raalte’s explicit criticisms.

Re: Matthew 12:1-14 (and parallels): Rev. Van Raalte supposes that “our Lord was simply freeing the Sabbath from Pharisaic oppression”; however, he does not give any evidence of his supposition. Interestingly, the Lord did not counter the objection of the Pharisees to the disciples picking heads of grain by saying that their view of the Sabbath was oppressive; rather, he pointed out that David did what was unlawful by eating the showbread, and that priests desecrate the day though remaining innocent. Rev. Van Raalte does not pay enough attention to that.

Re: John 5:1-18, where the Lord, on the Sabbath day, healed a paralytic and told the man to carry his mat: Rev. Van Raalte does not pay enough attention to some of the things the Lord said, such as: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” We need to stop at every word and ask what the Lord meant. Neither does Rev. Van Raalte notice the Evangelist John’s assessment of the events when he wrote: “For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God his own Father, making Himself equal with God.” Rev. Van Raalte lets his preconceived notions of Pharisaic prejudices rather than careful exegesis control his explanation of these passages.

Re: Colossians 2: Again, a careful reading of the text will bring one to the correct conclusion. Paul wrote that the Old Testament Sabbath is one of the shadows that Christ cast backwards. Christ is the body that creates the shadow. Christ is the fulfilment. Christ is the true Sabbath, the one in whom we find rest.

As for the caricatures of my third article (unintentional, I’m sure), I’ll leave them alone for they are hard to respond to except to say, “That’s not what I said.” I tried, in the space of a speech, to give a selected historical survey of Lord’s Day observance in the past 2000 years and some practical applications.

Re: Romans 14:5 and the place of conscience: I tend to think my brothers are somewhat troubled by what the Apostle Paul said here rather than by my attempted application to an example.

As for my agreement with the nine Ontario ministers, I must not have made my point as clearly as I ought to have. There should be a Lord’s Day Act because, as we confess in Belgic Confession 36, the government is to give the church the room to fulfil the mandate Christ gave it and the space for Christians to worship God according to his Word. The nine ministers argued the same point. Only one of the Reverend brothers is still with us, but I would surmise they held to a Calvinist view of the Sabbath rather than a Puritan one.

I would introduce one other text which, I think, is instructive for the discussion. Mark 7 records a disagreement between the Lord and the Pharisees about clean and unclean foods and hands. In Mark 7:19 the Evangelist Mark concludes, “In saying this, Jesus declared all foods ‘clean.’” Note that the Lord abolished the distinction between clean and unclean foods *during his earthly ministry*. Similarly, He brought the Old Testament shadowy Sabbath to fulfilment *during his earthly ministry*.

The Old Testament Sabbath with all its careful restrictions, including preparing of food (such as smearing peanut butter on a slice of Sabbath bread), was passing away while the Lord was still in our midst. Unbiased exegesis and a redemptive-historical reading of the scriptural data about Sabbath and Lord’s Day compel one to that conclusion.



Press Release for Classis Ontario West, Held June 8, 2005, in Hamilton, ON

Elder Bruce Morris, on behalf of the convening church of Hamilton, welcomed the brothers who had gathered and led the opening devotions. He welcomed the guests, in particular Br. and Sr. Hendrik and Kristin Alkema and Br. Dong Woo Oh. The delegates from Hamilton reported on the credentials. All churches were lawfully represented. The church of Chatham had an instruction. Classis was constituted.

Officers were appointed: Rev. R. Pot (chairman), Rev. H. Versteeg (clerk), and Rev. J. Slaa (vice-chairman). Under memorabilia, the chairman mentioned the church at Hamilton with a view to her ongoing vacancy of a pastor and teacher. The agenda was established.

Br. Hendrik Alkema of the church at Hamilton presented himself to Classis to be examined with a view to speaking an edifying word in the churches. After it was determined that the necessary documents were in order, Classis proceeded to examine Br. Alkema. He first delivered a sermon proposal on Numbers 20:7-13. After due discussion in closed session, Classis deemed the sermon proposal sufficient. Classis next examined Br. Alkema in Doctrine and Creeds ("The Holy Spirit" in the Three Forms of Unity). Once more, Classis deliberated in closed session and determined that the examination was sufficient. In open session, the chairman, with appropriate remarks, informed Br. Alkema of the joyful news. When Br. Alkema promised not to teach or preach anything in conflict with the Word of God and the confessions, Classis permitted Br. Alkema to speak an edifying word in the churches for the period of one year. Following thanksgiving song, Rev. J. Slaa led the assembly in prayer, after which opportunity was given to congratulate Br. Alkema.

Br. Dong Woo Oh of the church at Ancaster presented himself to Classis to be examined with a view to speaking an edifying word in the churches. It was determined that the necessary documents were in order. He has now completed his fourth year. Classis proceeded to examine Br. Oh. He first delivered a sermon proposal on Genesis 50:20. After due discussion in closed session, Classis deemed the sermon proposal sufficient. Classis next examined Br. Oh in Doctrine and Creeds ("The Sacraments" in the Three Forms of Unity). Once more, Classis deliberated in closed session and determined that the examination was sufficient. In open session, the chairman, with appropriate remarks, informed Br. Oh of the joyful news. When Br. Oh promised not to teach or preach anything in conflict with the Word of God and the confessions, Classis permitted Br. Oh to speak an edifying word in the churches for the period of one year. Following thanksgiving song, Elder G. Bartels led the assembly in prayer, after which opportunity was given to congratulate Br. Oh.

Question Period according to Article 44 of the Church Order was held. All the churches answered positively to the first two questions asked. Regarding the third question, the church at Chatham requested and received advice on a pastoral matter.

From the church at Hamilton: an audit report for the books of Classis stating that the books were in good order. Received with thanksgiving.

A financial report from the treasurer of Classis was received with thanksgiving.

The church at Kerwood, which inspects the Archives of Classis, reported on its inspection.

The church at Chatham, which administers the Fund for Needy Students, gave a financial report. "Any student residing in the classical area should submit his request for assistance, including budget details, before July 15,

2005 to his consistory. The consistory will then have sufficient time to forward the relevant documents along with their advice to the church at Chatham. This will allow Chatham to present a timely proposal to the September classis." Included in the report was an audit of the books. Everything was in good order.

Reports were made on church visitations to Chatham, Grand Rapids, Kerwood, and London, and the positive reports were received with gratitude.

The following appointments were made:

- A. Classis Treasurer: Br. Brian Vanderhout
- B. Church to audit the books of the treasurer: Hamilton
- C. Church for taking care of the Classical Archives: London
- D. Church to Inspect the Classical Archives: Kerwood
- E. Church Visitors: Rev. G. Ph. van Popta and Rev. H. Versteeg (Rev. J. Ludwig, alternate)
- F. Committee of Examiners: Rev. J. Ludwig and Rev. G. Ph. van Popta
- G. Church for financial Aid to the Students of the Ministry: Chatham
- H. Church to Administer the Fund for Needy Churches: Ancaster
- I. Church as Contact for Ecumenical Relations: Kerwood

The convening church for the next classis is the church at Kerwood. Suggested date is September 14, 2005 at 9:00 a.m. in Kerwood, ON. Suggested officers are: Rev. J. Slaa (chairman), Rev. R. Pot (clerk), and Rev. J. Ludwig (vice-chairman).

Personal Question Period was held.

Censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order was deemed not necessary. Acts and Press Release were adopted. Rev. R. Pot led in closing devotions.

*J. Slaa
Vice-chairman at that time*

Press Release for Classis Northern Ontario, Held June 24, 2005, at the Owen Sound Canadian Reformed Church

On behalf of the convening church at Owen Sound, Rev. P.G. Feenstra opened the meeting. He requested the singing of Psalm 33:1, 3 and read from the same Psalm. He then spoke some words of encouragement to the churches to continue thankful and faithful to the Head of the church given the present political climate in our country that trickles down into the heart of our communities. After these words of introduction he led in prayer. He welcomed the brothers, especially the Deputies for Regional Synod who were present for the retirement of B.J. Berends.

The credentials, as examined by the church at Orangeville, were found to be in good order. Classis was constituted. The following officers were appointed to serve Classis: chairman, Rev. Aasman, vice-chairman, Rev. Feenstra, clerk, Rev. VanWoudenberg. Rev. Aasman replaced Rev. Vermeulen (who at the time of Classis was enjoying vacation time with his family).

Rev. P. Aasman thanked the convening church for the work done in preparation for Classis. He noted with thankfulness that the preaching of the gospel may continue each Lord's Day and that special events in the history of redemption may be observed. He also noted that the office bearers can continue their work. He mentioned the changes that have recently taken place in Classis, for example the departure of Rev. Louwse to Neerlandia and the ordination of Rev. W. Geurts as minister of the Word in Fergus North. He welcomed Rev. Geurts who was present at Classis for the first time. He also noted that Rev. Feenstra

had declined a call received from the church at Lincoln and wished him the blessing of the Lord in considering a call to the church at Aldergrove.

After a number of items were added, the agenda was adopted.

A letter from the church at Brampton requesting the Rev. B.J. Berends be released from his duties as minister of the Word of the church at Brampton according to Article 13 of the Church Order. Having examined the documents, with the concurring advice of Deputies of Regional Synod East, Classis decided to most honourably release Rev. B.J. Berends from his ministerial duties in the classical district of Northern Ontario as of June 30, 2005, which is the date on which his retirement from active service in the church at Brampton will take effect, and to declare concerning Rev. B.J. Berends that during the past twelve years of his ministry in Brampton he was faithful and diligent in his ministry, and Christian and God-fearing in his confession and conduct. Rev. Berends was provided with a certificate of release stating the above. The chairman addressed Rev. Berends expressing appreciation for the work done by him in the classical region. Rev. Berends responded with some appropriate words and the chairman led in a prayer of thanksgiving. The church at Grand Valley was delegated to be present at the farewell service.

Classis received with gratitude reports of church visitations to the churches at Brampton, Elora, Fergus North, Fergus South, Grand Valley, Guelph, Orangeville, and Owen Sound. These reports gave testimony to the desire of the churches in this classical district to remain faithful to the Word of God, the confessions, and the adopted the Church Order.

Church News

Called to the church of Taber, Alberta:

Rev. C.A. Vermeulen
of Elora, Ontario.

Declined the call to Orangeville, Ontario:

Rev. R. Schouten
of Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Called to the church of Brampton, Ontario:

Rev. P.G. Feenstra
of Owen Sound, Ontario.

Question period according to Article 44 was held.

The church at Brampton requested that Rev. C. Vermeulen be appointed as their counsellor and that they be granted pulpit supply. These requests were granted. The church at Orangeville requested that Rev. P. Aasman be appointed as their counsellor and that they be granted pulpit supply. These requests were also granted.

An appeal from a brother of the church of Orangeville was answered in closed session.

The convening church for the next Classis was instructed to invite an observer from Classis Southern Ontario of the URC and also an observer from the ERQ.

The church at Brampton was appointed convening church for the next Classis to be convened September 23, 2005 at 9:00 a.m. The suggested officers for the next Classis: chairman, Rev. C. Vermeulen; vice-chairman, Rev. J. VanWoudenberg; clerk, Rev. P. Aasman.

Question period was held.

Censure According to Art. 34 C.O. was not necessary.

The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved.

The members of Classis were requested to sing Hymn 46:1, 2 after which the chairman closed in prayer.