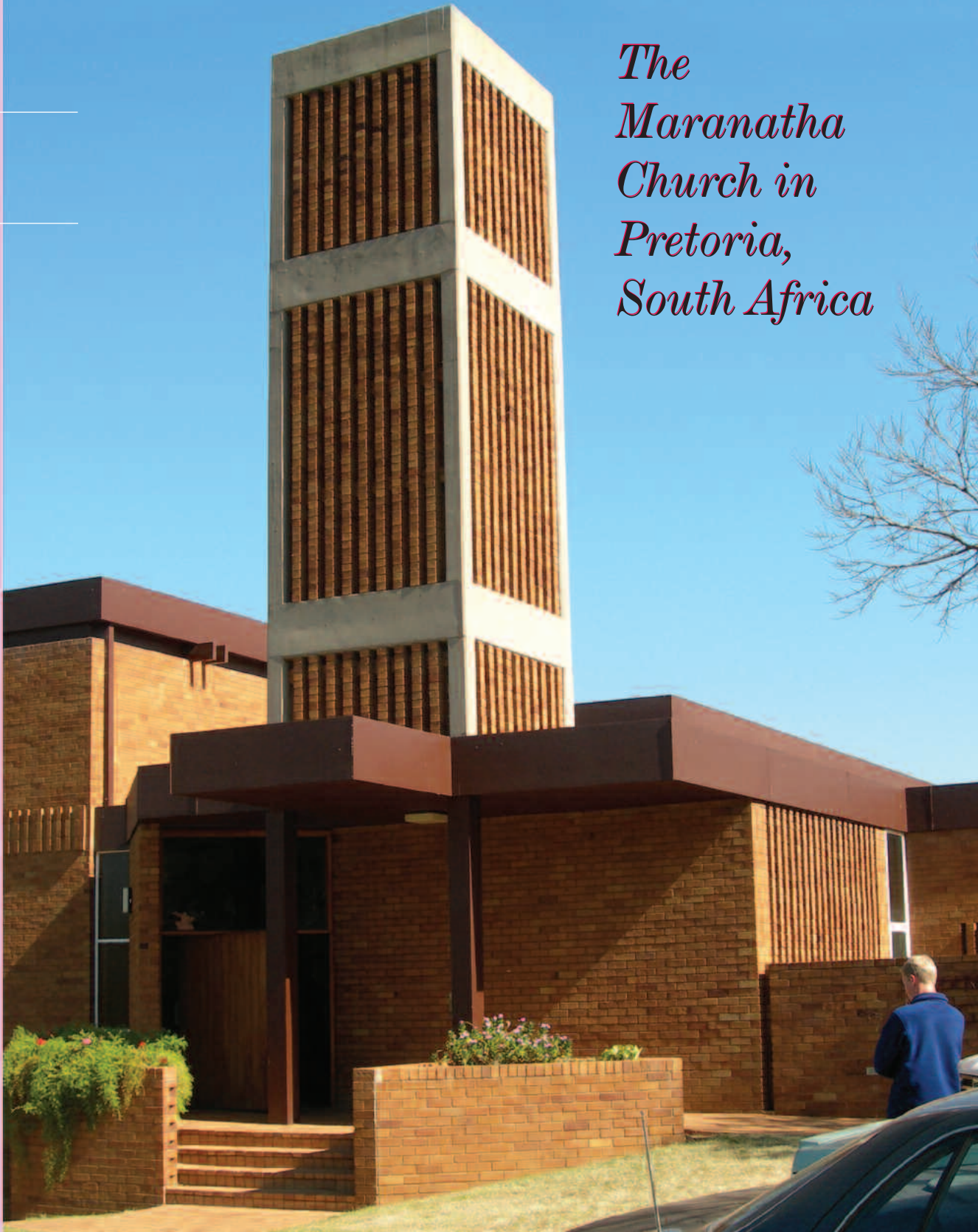


*An Attractive
Church*

*Labour on
Dry Ground*

*Celebrating
and Conserving
the Treasure*

*The
Maranatha
Church in
Pretoria,
South Africa*





A.J. de Visser

Prof. A.J. Visser is professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology at the Canadian Reformed Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario.

An Attractive Church

It seems that there is general agreement that the church should try to be attractive to outsiders.

The debate

Earlier this year there was an interesting little debate between the British theologian Alister McGrath and his Dutch colleague Bram van de Beek.

McGrath, a professor at Oxford University, said that mainline Protestant churches are not likely to survive much longer. They are too intellectual, he said. They do not cater to people's spiritual desires. In today's world the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Reformed churches are becoming more and more irrelevant.

McGrath does not imply that Christianity as such does not have a future anymore. Interestingly, he believes that atheism is dying as well (recently he published a book entitled *The Twilight of Atheism*). But as far as Christianity is concerned, McGrath believes that only those denominations will survive that allow people to experience the sacred and the spiritual. Such churches would be the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. In other words, if Protestant churches want to survive, they are advised to become more evangelical.

Unbelievers should feel that the church community is different.

Van de Beek, a dogmatics professor at the Free University of Amsterdam, reacted to the views of McGrath with an article in the Dutch magazine *Wapenveld*. He agrees with McGrath that the future of Protestantism is bleak. However, he disagrees when it comes to the explanation. According to the Dutch professor Protestantism is not in danger because it is not relevant enough, but because it is trying too hard to be

relevant! Protestant churches generally feel that they should be active in the world. They are involved in welfare programs. They change their style of worship services so that people might feel at home more easily. They try to adapt to the current climate.

In van de Beek's view the churches should stop trying to be attractive and stop trying to please the outside world. Instead the churches should try to please the Lord Jesus Christ. After all, if the church is the bride of Christ, she should try to be attractive to Him and forget about everyone else.

Van de Beek believes that becoming more evangelical is no solution. In fact, he is convinced that Evangelicalism does not have a lasting future. In his opinion it is no more than a fly-by-night movement that is doomed to vanish when today's culture is replaced by the next one. The evangelical movement is successful because it has adapted successfully to the mindset of today's people (very individualistic: it is all about *my* experience, *my* faith, *my* activities). However, there is a reverse side: as soon as today's culture is replaced by tomorrow's, the evangelical movement will disappear as well.

Van de Beek calls on Protestant churches to remain faithful to key characteristics of the Protestant faith. In his view the churches should remain faithful to the Scriptures, to the confessions, to the use of the sacraments, and to the central role of the offices in the church of Christ. (As an aside, it is quite refreshing to hear these things coming from a Free University professor!)

Should the church be attractive?

As was to be expected, van de Beek's statements caused quite a stir in Reformed circles in The Netherlands. The *Nederlands Dagblad*, a Dutch Christian newspaper, carried a series of letters to the editor. Van de Beek was criticized by many for his criticism of the evangelical movement.

It would be interesting to follow that discussion a bit longer, but let us rather turn our attention to the North American continent. In this part of the world there are similar



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Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: R. Aasman, N.H. Gootjes, W.B. Slomp, Cl. Stam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:

Clarion, 57 Oakridge Drive South, St. Albert, AB T8N 7H2
E-Mail: veenendaal@shaw.ca

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discussions. We are told by many that the church in North America should *re-invent* itself. Many believe that the church is rooted in a culture of times gone by. Therefore, the church should not expect people of this time and age to come and join the church. Instead, the church should study contemporary culture and adapt accordingly. If the church is prepared to do so, the church will be attractive once again.

Whatever means are proposed, it seems that there is general agreement that the church should try to be attractive to outsiders. Some authors propose that the church should be “seeker sensitive”; others talk about building “contagious churches.” Seminars and conferences are organized where church leaders can learn how to make their church more attractive.

We do not intend to discuss these specific movements here, but it may be worthwhile to briefly discuss the basic question: *should the church be attractive to outsiders or not?* If we wish to see the church growing in numbers, should the church then somehow adapt to the changing situation and try to attract outsiders? Or should the church not worry about anything and just mind its own business?

The answer to this question depends on what is meant by being attractive. There are characteristics of the Christian church that will attract outsiders. If the church is what it should be (the temple of the Holy Spirit), there will be friendliness, peace, harmony, hospitality, etc. These things are attractive to anyone!

However, there are other characteristics of the Christian church that will *not* attract outsiders initially. The church is a strange phenomenon in this world and its message goes against the grain. In a certain sense, unbelievers should not feel at home in the church too quickly! Let me qualify that. Of course outsiders should feel *welcome* in the church. They should be received warmly. But at the same time they should feel that the church community is *different*. When the church worships and praises its God, non-believers should be able to feel that this is real worship – and it would not be a bad thing if they felt a bit out of place. If the minister starts preaching, they should be challenged and convicted in their hearts and minds (see John 16:8) – and it would not be a bad sign if there was some heartfelt resistance, initially.

The important question is *why* outsiders are attracted to the church, or even *who* is attracted to the church. If people are attracted because the church is no different from the world they live in, and they are able to feel at home right away, there is something wrong. But if outsiders are attracted

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because the church is different and because they can see that God is present among the believers, it is a different story.

The real attraction

It is striking to read about the effect that the church in Jerusalem had on outsiders. In Acts 5:13-14 it sounds almost contradictory: “No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.” The church in Jerusalem was feared by many outsiders, apparently because the church was a dangerous place (Ananias and Sapphira had died there!). They could sense that God was among the believers, and therefore they did not dare to join. For the same reason, however, the church was highly respected, and more and more people joined.

This gives us an important clue to our question. If a church is faithful, and if God is present among the believers, many people will be too scared to join. Others, however, will come and attend, though they may enter with trepidation.

The important question is why outsiders are attracted to the church.

When Paul discusses worship issues with the church in Corinth, he refers to the possibility that outsiders may come in and attend the worship service. The desired effect is that the outsider “will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming ‘God is really among you!’” (1 Cor 14:24-25)

I’m not sure whether this approach may be described as “seeker sensitive” or “attractive.” Clearly, many outsiders would not be attracted by the possibility of having the secrets of their heart being laid bare... but others will be attracted! If the gospel of forgiveness of sins is preached in the church, and if God is present among the believers, that will attract those who have been called by the Lord.

It is interesting to read the accounts in the book of Acts on how the church grew in numbers. Often Luke describes certain

aspects of the life of the church, and he concludes by mentioning that the church grew in numbers.

In Acts 2:42-27, for example, we find a description of the life of the church in Jerusalem. The believers devoted themselves to teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer, and they shared their possessions with the poor and praised God. That proved to be attractive: “The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

In chapter 6 we read about the crisis that was caused by problems regarding the distribution of food among the widows in the church. When that problem had been solved under the guidance of the Spirit, peace and harmony were restored. That proved to be attractive: “The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly” (Acts 6:7).

In chapter 11 we read about the ministry of Barnabas, that he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. That proved to be attractive: “A great number of people were brought to the Lord” (Acts 11:24).

In chapter 14 we read about the Paul’s ministry of proclaiming the gospel and that he was very effective in doing so. That proved to be fruitful: “A great number of Jews and Gentiles believed” (Acts 14:1).

In chapter 17 we read about the Bereans who examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul had said was true. That proved to be fruitful: “Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men” (Acts 17:12).

Conclusion

Should the church be attractive to outsiders? If God is among us, if the church is behaving like the bride of Christ, and if the church is a temple of the Holy Spirit, then the church will automatically be attractive to those whom God wants to add to the number of those that are saved.

However, if we are biting and devouring each other (Gal 5:15), if the gospel has lost its power, if the Spirit is grieved among us, if the church is dead, then the church will automatically fail to attract those that have been elected.





MATTHEW 13:52

Labour on Dry Ground

Rev. C.A. Vermeulen is minister
of the Canadian Reformed
Church at Elora, Ontario.
cvermeulen@canrc.org

“And God said: ‘Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.’ And it was so. God called the dry ground ‘land’ and the gathered waters He called ‘seas.’ And God saw that it was good.”

Genesis 1: 9-10

In this article we will reflect on God’s revelation about the creation of dry ground. We work on dry ground. Some people work on the sea, but normally in a dry environment, on the deck of a boat or the like. Whether we are farmers or office workers or teachers or construction workers or mothers, we work on dry land.

In the beginning, this was impossible. The earth was covered with a mass of water. Thus on the third day, God spoke his mighty word. “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And obediently, the waters gathered together into one place, and dry ground appeared. By this mighty word God made mountains and hills, valleys and plains, beaches and cliffs, places for farms, villages, palaces, cities, industry, and so much more.

God called this dry ground that appeared “land.” In this context, “land” refers to the place of man’s habitation.

God declared that the land and the seas which He had separated were good. That meant they fit God’s purpose. God was preparing a place for humanity to live and work. Room was being made on the earth for life – of plants, animals, and finally man. God was preparing a place for fields, homes, towns, cities, schools, universities, offices, and factories. God was preparing the place in which man

would be commanded to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and have dominion over it. God was preparing a giant work place for man. That is what is so significant about the creation of dry ground.

By obeying God’s command to have dominion over the earth and to subdue it, to develop it and cultivate it, man would bring glory to God. That was the ultimate purpose of the creation of dry land. That is how each of us must see the piece of ground we have been given. We can think of the land on which our house stands, the site of our business or workshop, our cubicle in the office, the fields we are working. The space in which we work is not under water; as everything was in the beginning; it is on dry ground. It is part of the land that God created on the third day so that we might have a place to labour to his glory.

That we have a place in which to work should not be taken for granted. After the fall into sin, God’s earth became filled with violence and with anti-God, idol serving activity. There were few believers left. Wickedness, murder, adultery, pride, and self-seeking filled the world. That earth was purged in a terrible way. The separation God had brought about by his mighty word was reversed. The waters did not remain gathered into one place but, released

from their confines, covered the whole earth. Mankind, with all its wickedness, was swept away. But God did not make a total end of the earth. The flood waters subsided, and once again dry land appeared. Man was given room to live, work, and praise God again.

Through his Son God has restored our ability to live and work on the earth to his praise. The Son of God came to live and die on the land to redeem sinners who had corrupted the earth. He rose and ascended into heaven that He might pour out his Spirit on the church. Through the Spirit’s work in the church we are restored to be faithful labourers on the dry ground which God created.

That is the context in which we do our work today. We labour on the dry ground created on the third day. As in the days before the flood, so in our day the earth becomes increasingly filled with violence and evil deeds. And the final purge is coming (2 Pet 3:10-13). But through the Spirit some workers labour in accordance with God’s will; they obey God’s commands, seeking his honour and glory in the way they develop and subdue and rule the piece of earth entrusted to their care. Then God’s glorious purpose for his creation is being realized, and his name is praised.



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 43

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



The ninth commandment says that you shall not give false testimony against your neighbour. What does this mean? You should not tell lies about your friends so that other people dislike them or hate them..



In the Bible we read that Satan is called the father of lies. He began in Paradise when he lied to Eve. Unfortunately she listened to him. Lying and deceiving is the work of the devil. The Lord does not want us to lie, or to cheat, or to spread rumours about other people. When you speak about someone you should speak positively so that other people will like them.

Why would someone want to lie? Usually they lie to look better than they actually are. In the process, often someone else is blamed. That is evil!

Another sin is enjoying it when someone commits a great sin. All the attention is focussed on that great sinner, and your own small sins are not noticed. The Lord does not want you to be happy when others sin! He wants us to love one another. He does not want us to hide the evil things that we have done ourselves.

You can also sin against the ninth commandment without lying. It may sound strange, but sometimes when you tell others something that is true, it is still wrong. Here is an example: you are talking with your friends about a new girl in school. You know her, and you tell your friends that she failed grade three. You are not lying, because she did fail. But wouldn't it be much nicer to say something positive about her? You should not tell on people either. If people want to know something about another person, they can ask that boy or girl instead of talking to you.

It is hard to obey this command. You need to think before you say something.

You have to ask yourself if it would be nice for other people if you talk about them. The Lord has given us this ninth commandment to help us love one another. Life with our family and friends will be much nicer if we keep the ninth commandment.



The Candlestand Statement

Reformed considerations regarding the Charismatic Movement (Part 2 of 4)

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

Part Two: God the Holy Spirit

2.1 About the Trinity

2.1 * 13 *The triune God*

We believe that God has revealed Himself as the one, true, and living God, from eternity to eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The three persons are one, each having his specific identity and function, working together in communion and interaction, accomplishing one will and plan in creation and recreation.

This God, by his Word and Spirit, accomplished the good work of creation, which was corrupted by the rebellion of mankind. God however loved the world, so He determined to reconcile Himself with creation and mankind. He revealed Himself by establishing his faithfulness as the God of the covenant. This plan follows the God-given lines and periods of redemptive history, in which each of the three divine persons carry out their allocated tasks, acting according to their own identity and function.

2.1 * 14 *God the Father*

We believe that God put enmity between Satan and mankind, thus submitting his creation to the powers of death. At the same time He established his covenant of grace by promising a mediating Saviour and Redeemer to restore the broken bond between God and man, and to renew his beautiful creation. He fulfilled this promise in history, becoming the God of Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob and the people of Israel. God promised to bless all the nations of the world through Abraham's seed, fulfilling his promise by sending his Son into this corrupt world to become the promised mediator, firstly to Israel, then to the whole world. This is Christ, the only and eternal Son, the Word through whom all things were created. In this God revealed Himself to be the Father of all, the creator and sustainer, full of love for his creation and especially to mankind.

2.1 * 15 *God the Son*

The Son fulfilled this task by not considering his equality as something to be grasped, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness (Phil 2:6-8). He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, thus taking up our infirmities and carrying our sorrows. By doing so He became the true cornerstone of the church, the gathering of those who believe in Christ. Thus the Son, whom we know by his name Jesus Christ, overcame death and "God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11). He sits at the right hand of God the Father to plead for us. He has promised to return at the end of time, being history's Beginning and End, to judge the living and the dead and to finally and fully accomplish God's plan of restoring creation.

2.1 * 16 *God the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit is together with the Father and the Son the one and eternal God. He moved over the waters at creation (Gen 1:2), guided the people of God throughout the Old Testament, and overshadowed the Virgin Mary (Luke 1:35). The Father and the Son poured out the Spirit on the day of Pentecost to bring the beautiful message of reconciliation to people of every language and nation, even to the ends of the earth. He is the Comforter of the church, the one who fills the disciples of Christ with courage and understanding, with faith and trust. He has promised to be with us in the new covenant, putting God's promises and demands in the minds and writing it on the hearts of the believers, bestowing God's precious gifts to proclaim the gospel, gathering and protecting God's people, and preparing them for eternal life on the new earth.

2.1 * 17 *Oneness and interaction*

Faith in this triune God is always focussed on communion with the one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, never on communion with one of the three persons alone. God the Father sent his Son and the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to accomplish one and the same goal. The Spirit brings us to the Son, the Mediator, and by the Son we have access to the Father, becoming his children, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (1 Pet 2:9a).

2.1 * 18 *People of the triune God*

As God's people we know that it is our responsibility and calling to obey our Lord. By our words and deeds we praise God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, from whom and through whom and to whom are all things (1 Cor 8:6). We encourage one another to eagerly long for the return of Christ, and to pray in communion with the Spirit "Maranatha, come, Lord Jesus, come soon!"

We confess that the doctrine of the Trinity is far beyond our human understanding, and we thank our God and worship the Trinity according to his revelation.

Refutations

8. We refute any teaching that distinguishes between three (or more) different dispensations, for instance the dispensation of the Father (which is in the Old Testament), the dispensation of the Son (which is the time of Jesus' life on earth), and the dispensation of the Spirit (which is the time after Pentecost until the second coming of Jesus). According to this teaching every new dispensation rendered the former as invalid and inferior. This teaching does not acknowledge the unity of God in redemptive history. It causes a separation where there should be communion inside the Trinity.
9. We refute the teaching that concentrates worship on only one person of the Trinity, worshipping only the Holy Spirit, or only the Son, where we should worship the Trinity. This results in a distortion of God's coherent redemptive plan. The work of the Spirit is ineffective without the Son, the work of the Son is ineffective without the Spirit, and the Father will not gather his people without the work of both the Son and the Spirit.
10. We also refute the view that the Christ has already returned in other human forms, or in invisible forms. We also cannot determine or prophesy when and where He will return to earth. No one knows about

that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Matt 24:36).

2.2 The experience of the Spirit

2.2 * 19 *Experience*

As the people of the triune God we live in faith; this faith is the knowledge and confidence that our sins are forgiven and everlasting life is guaranteed to us. This knowledge and confidence has much to do with our minds, but at the same time it also deals with our whole human being, addressing and changing all our human faculties. It touches our reality and becomes a true and vivid experience to our mind, will, and emotions; it comes into our daily lives, filling us and leavening us as yeast leavens the whole bread. It goes with us, moving with us wherever we go and in whatever we do. It covers our whole being.

In this life we are led by the Holy Spirit, who protects us from drifting away on the waves of our human desires and emotions. The ultimate goal of his work is not only to produce in us an intellectual understanding, but to reach our hearts and feelings through the Word, giving us true assurance of our personal bond with the triune God. In this process the Holy Spirit, through the Word, transforms our lives in all areas.

We confess that the doctrine of the Trinity is far beyond our human understanding.

2.2 * 20 *Experience and emotions in the Bible*

Experience and emotions form an integral part of our covenantal life. Paul shows us that love is the most excellent way (1 Cor 13). This is in line with the words of Jesus, when He said that the core of God's law is *love*. This has to do with our actions, feelings, and experiences. In the covenant of grace we

experience all kinds of emotions. For example, peace (Ps 131), joy (Phil 4:4), grief and sorrow (Ps 42; Ps 51; 2 Cor 7), anger (Gal 1:8, 9; Luke 19:45-46), contentment and satisfaction in all situations (Phil 4:11-12).

Our mind and thoughts are to be seen as essential levels of Christian experience; the Spirit guides us into the full understanding of the apostolic faith by providing insight and wisdom. The Apostle Paul was overwhelmed with joy and praise when he experienced the work of the Spirit in his life. Although he was aware of the limitations of human understanding, he could not help but express himself thus: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever! Amen" (Rom 11:33-36).

2.2 * 21 *Experience of the Spirit*

The church experiences the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in diverse forms:

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in Acts

We believe that Jesus Christ poured out the Holy Spirit upon his church in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). In accordance with the promise, the Holy Spirit guided the apostles into the full truth of Christ (John 16:13). In this way they became the legitimate, authoritative, and final witnesses of Christ in the times of transition of the church in the New Testament age. In order to overcome the problems associated with this transition, the Spirit gave extra demonstrations as signs to make the Jewish believers accept the spreading of the gospel beyond Jewish boundaries, thereby promoting the international and intercultural unity of the church. Firstly, in Samaria the Spirit publicly and immediately underlined the entrance of the first non-Jews to the New Testament church at the request of the apostles (Acts 8:14-17). Secondly, the

same happened when the first Roman believers in Caesarea confessed Christ to be their Lord (Acts 10:44-48), and so convinced Peter and the apostles too (Acts 11). Thirdly, in Ephesus the Spirit demonstrated his presence because John's disciples had an incomplete awareness of Christ, as well he emphasized Paul's authority (Acts 19:1-7).
The filling of the Holy Spirit

We believe that Scripture teaches Jesus' ongoing immersion of people with the Spirit and fire. This immersion represents blessing and judgment (Matt 3:11-12).

In the context of being holy (not filled with wine), Scripture tells unholy people to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). We also read the phrase "filled with the Spirit" when Scripture describes the state of the Son, being sent by the Father (John 3:34). The apostles were filled with the Spirit in order to confront opposition to the gospel (Acts 2:12; 4:8). Being filled with the Spirit is especially dispensed to believers in order to enable them to boldly bring the gospel of Christ at various times and to different locations, to encourage one another, to worship in truth, and to enjoy the Christian life.

The purpose of the filling

To be filled by the Spirit means that our heart, soul, mind, and will is led and governed by the Spirit to enable us to boldly confess Christ and to be fully committed to Him. The Spirit will then perform in us his ongoing comprehensive transformation of spirit, mind, emotion, desire, and will. The believer thus becomes like a spring of water to eternal life (John 7:38-39). This experience serves our sanctification and impacts on the preaching of the gospel. Believers are therefore urged to be eager in praying to receive spiritual wisdom and love, to live as children of light (Eph 5:8-21), producing the fruit of the Spirit and longing for the return of Christ.

The glory of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit grants us the joy of intimately knowing Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and unites us to the body of

Christ's world-wide church. We praise and glorify Him for his wondrous work of regeneration, faith, and transformation of our lives. We thank Him for interceding in prayer for us and for steadily renewing of our hope (Rom 8:26, 27).

The ultimate goal of the Holy Spirit's work is not only to produce in us an intellectual understanding, but to reach our hearts and feelings.

Glory, knowledge, wisdom, and power be to the Holy Spirit, in unity with the Father and the Son, for ever and ever. Amen.

Refutations

11. We refute the misuse of the term "baptism with the Spirit" as a separate experience to be expected or required in the lives of all believers as "a second blessing." It disqualifies the work that the Holy Spirit has already done and over-emphasizes the experience that is expected, especially the emotional and the extra-ordinary manifestation of it. The term "baptism with the Spirit" refers to the totality of the Holy Spirit's manifestation.
12. The event of Pentecost happened once and for all in redemptive history, and we refute those teachings that present it as a model for believers, suggesting that we all should have our own personal Pentecost.

2.3 Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, whom we glorify, graciously equips the church with various gifts, also called *charismata*.

2.3 * 22 Definition of gifts

Charismata are, by their literal meaning, to be understood as *gifts of grace* that are given freely by God and

cannot be earned or claimed by men. God will give these gifts, employing them according to his will, with the purpose of meeting the actual needs of his people and accomplishing his plan of reconciliation following the pattern of redemptive history.

This means that these gifts are always given to meet a special need or development, to guide the people of God, to found, unite, and expand the church. He gave gifts during the Old Testament, the New Testament, and He also gives them today.

2.3 * 23 Purpose of gifts

We add that the Holy Spirit dedicates his gifts *for the good of the church*, as it is written, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). From this imagery of the body we learn that the unity of the church has priority over the diversity of gifts. The diversity is given to the church to strengthen the unity and each gift that exalts itself above another disqualifies itself: "Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). It is therefore our desire and joy to see all the members loving and serving one another with the various gifts of the Holy Spirit.

2.3 * 24 Gifts in history

We learn from the Bible that the Holy Spirit bestows his gifts upon the church in various ways, and in accordance with needs, times, and circumstances:

Charismata in the Old Testament

God used a range of gifts among his people in preserving the covenant, protecting them, establishing worship, and preparing for the coming of the new covenant in Jesus Christ. For example: the judges, the prophets, the kings, gifts of speech and wisdom, gifts of interpreting dreams, gifts to build the tabernacle and temple. Thus God preserved the progress of his work throughout history.

Charismata in the New Testament

The Lord Jesus Christ sent out his disciples to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. This mission required enabling gifts, all serving God's purpose of reconciling Himself with creation and mankind. He gave his Holy Spirit, who is the most precious gift of all. To the first church He gave gifts fitting to the needs of young congregations. This tells us that the Spirit gives according to special needs and times. For example:

- Gifts to found the church: apostles, prophets, eyewitnesses, words of wisdom, signs of tongues, miracles;
- Gifts to unite and to guard the church: apostles, elders, shepherds, love;
- Gifts to prepare for the return of Christ: teachers, preachers;
- Gifts to worship God: ministers of the Word, presbyters, involvement of gifted members;
- Gifts to edify the congregation and shepherd its members: presbytery, wisdom, administrators, etc;
- Gifts to proclaim the gospel and preach the Kingdom of Christ: evangelists.

2.3 * 25 *Foundational gifts*

We receive "the apostles and prophets as the foundation of the church, with Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph 2:20). The office of apostle came to an end after the death of the last apostle. However, the fruit of their ministry, witness, and teaching lives on in the life and ministry of the church today. The Bible remains the basis of this apostolic faith. The office bearers of the church, namely the elders and deacons, are called to preserve the church on this foundation and to prepare God's people for various works of service (Eph 4:12). We accept these leaders as gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that faith, hope, and love are permanent and important gifts for the well being of the church. And even more, they are a witness to the world so that the world may believe that the

Father has sent the Son for our salvation (John 17:21).

2.3 * 26 *Additional gifts*

We believe that the Lord adds many kinds of blessings to build the church on this foundation. The continuity between the first church and the church of today is given and guaranteed in the living God and his foundational gifts. We gratefully admire his administration of additional gifts, as he determines in time and space. The authority of the Lord and the apostolic teaching governs the application and use of the gifts by believers. As a result, believers cannot claim specific gifts today or claim any permanent gift-related office or authority. We also state that believers cannot limit the Holy Spirit in giving what He wants. We cannot list all the gifts of the Holy Spirit or comment on them, because they are multiple. On the most debated gifts we want to give this comment:

About tongues

Tongues refer to speaking in strange utterances or real languages which are not understandable unless interpreted. We see it as a dispensable gift and we want to treat it according to the instructions of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

About healing

The Lord can heal the sick in answer to our prayers, but we do not believe that the authority of the healer exceeds the authority of Scripture, nor do we recognize the gift of healing as a permanent office (see *Earthly blessings*).

About prophecy

The application of the apostolic word can be considered as prophetic speech, but we don't expect any additional revelation and do not believe the restoration of this office (See *Revelation*).

2.3 * 27 *God's sovereignty and our responsibility*

It is our conviction that the Holy Spirit, in correlation with the triune Godhead, decides on what, when, and how He wants to bless us with his gifts. The

church has the responsibility to observe both the creational and the spiritual gifts, and to acknowledge them with discernment. The Apostle John admonishes us: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1).

With full dedication the church has to use the provided talents and received gifts. She should be open to reform habits, structures, and other practices that can hinder the building of the church as a royal priesthood. This responsibility compels the church to pray and to strive for the greater gifts, not in a way of claiming, pushing, and manipulating God, but always in dependence and accordance with his divine will and wisdom, saying, "Not our will, but Your will be done" (Matt 26:40).

Refutations

13. We refute the teaching that churches which do not practice speaking in tongues during worship service are guilty of having quenched the Holy Spirit, or of expecting too little from God.
14. We refute the teaching that the gift of speaking in tongues was ever meant to serve the enlargement or enrichment of Christian experience.
15. We warn against pride, because in church history additional gifts have prevailed often over love and distorted unity.
16. We also refute the view that we can push or even force the Lord to give special gifts by our prayers and fasting.
17. We reject all claims of divine authority that are not based on the Word. We also remember the warning of the Apostle Paul: "Savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!" (Acts 20:29-30)



J.J.D. Baas

Translated by P.H. Torenvliet

J.J.D. Baas is a regional principal of Reformed Schools in The Netherlands and lives in Barneveld.

Celebrating and Conserving the Treasure

A note from the Translator:

Reformed education and the covenant

Reformed Christian education in Canada has celebrated several anniversaries. In Surrey, British Columbia, William of Orange Christian School is almost fifty years old; John Calvin Christian School in Burlington, Ontario and John Calvin in Smithville, Ontario have reached their fortieth anniversaries. A previous article about the International Conference for Reformed Education briefly addressed some of the motivation that led to the establishment of these schools, motivation which was rooted deeply in the Dutch church conflict that led to the Liberation in 1944. Here in Canada Dutch immigrant members of the Canadian Reformed Churches would not join efforts to establish interdenominational schools, and the promises made at baptism were seen as unique injunctions that led to the establishment of Reformed schools that restricted membership to members of the Canadian Reformed Churches. By and large, only children from the latter church were permitted to attend these schools. Few school meetings or teachers' meetings passed that did not refer to covenantal education.

Though parents, students, and teachers formed an exclusive group as Canadian Reformed Church members, what was unique about the *content* of the instruction in the classrooms? What was unique about the *direction* of that instruction? What was characteristic of this education that distinguished it, for example, from the education given in interdenominational Christian schools?

What follows is an article that was originally written in *De Reformatie*, a Dutch language weekly published in The Netherlands. The writer, Mr. J.J.D. Baas, attended the International Conference for Reformed Education in May, 2004. With his article he wants to help stimulate the discussion which began at the conference.

P.H. Torenvliet, translator

profile these hallmarks frequently. Times have changed. That is why it is necessary to develop new themes which fit more appropriately with contemporary issues." In May 2004 an engaging international conference was organized by and for Reformed education. At this conference there were representatives from Reformed schools in Korea, Australia, South Africa, Canada, and The Netherlands. It was time, after more than fifty years of Reformed education, to evaluate our situation. Who are we? Where are we going? As such, it is a good exercise for every organization to pose these questions. It serves no good purpose to nod off; instead, we should be prepared to stride forth with fresh zeal.

The conference attendees did not arrive at a clear answer as to how we should continue. Via a website an opportunity will be created to continue the discussion. This article is meant to contribute toward reflection about this material.

Is covenantal education a thing of the past?

No one who cherishes Reformed Christian education will respond positively to the above question. Some people do not, however, feel that this issue should be a central theme for such education. Nor should Reformed educators dwell so single-mindedly on the issue of baptism, they claim. What are the criteria they submit for their arguments? They claim that these issues

Introduction

Traditionally both the covenant and baptism have been hallmarks of Reformed education. In the late 1940s these hallmarks were also central in discussions about education. But we now live in 2005. Has the time come to trim our educational sails in response to the new winds of thought?

I have noticed that you will often observe frowning foreheads when you choose to describe Reformed education in terms of "covenantal instruction." Some people even appear to pity you and say, "Beautiful, true words, indeed, but those times have definitely passed. Immediately after the Liberation of the church in 1944 it was necessary to

are dated, that they had relevancy immediately after the Liberation (1944). At that time these topics were burning issues in the context of the church struggle. Many Reformed schools in The Netherlands have admitted children who have not been baptized; for example, those from evangelical parents. Some will even opine that it's questionable whether you can clearly justify infant baptism from Scripture. Is it necessary to emphasize that difference? Does it make a real difference whether a child has been dedicated to God, or baptized? Do these two ceremonies not come down to the same thing?

Covenant and baptism

Many people who trivialize infant baptism emphasize arguments based on sentimentality. Some people also appear to assume that parents are given an open-ended choice to baptize infants – it is claimed that they have no obligation or commitment. Conversely, it must be said that baptism must never be done out of custom or superstition. Baptism is not a choice given to parents. Baptism is rooted in God's promises.

God declares in his Word that children of believing parents are children of the promise: his personal property (Gen 17:7; Acts 2:39; 1 Cor 7:4). Therefore they must be baptized. The fact that they have been chosen by God to receive his rich promises is not a reward, but God's inimitable love. Baptism is not a confirmation of faith, but rather, a seal of the authenticity of God's promises given to these children. He gave the command to administer this sign to children (Matt 28:19; Acts 2:39). Children belong to God's covenant and congregation just like their parents. By means of baptism they are separated from the children of unbelievers. Do you still stand in amazement about this fact? Does it still give you a deep feeling of fondness for your God? This knowledge should never become a truism, or an issue that elicits a sigh: yeah, right, we know that already; let's move on. The covenant is the basis of your existence.

Baptism is not only a divine command, but additionally it's a formidable proof of his love. Why, then, would someone want to make this into a difficult issue, or remain indifferent about it?

Promised is promised

You've promised that you agree with the doctrine of the church, and that you would instruct your children and have them instructed. You made this pledge when you did public profession of your faith, and once again at the baptism of your children.

In fact, with your affirmation you also agreed with the content of the confessions. You promised that your children should be baptized (HC, Q/A 74). At that time you also promised that you agreed with the Canons of Dort, and therefore, also with Chapter 1, Article 17 (Children of believers who die in infancy).

What if, after the fact, your knowledge of the Bible has grown and you develop objections to some of the formulations in the confessions? In such situations there are proper protocols laid down in the Church Order to deal with those objections. You've also promised to do that. It's certainly inappropriate to change your views and then act as if that really does not matter.

Additionally, Lord's Day 38 states that proper care must be given to maintaining the schools. If we carefully consider the context in which this statement is made (the fourth commandment), you may draw the conclusion that this also concerns the schools where children are instructed in accordance with the doctrine of the church. When you made your vows, you actually undersigned the spirit of this catechism question and answer.

Finally, from the vows of the Form for the Solemnization of Marriage and the Form for the Baptism of Infants, promises were made concerning the children that the Lord would entrust to us. You promised that you would educate them in the promises given by the Lord. In short, you have made repeated promises

that you cannot easily ignore. Those promises were made "*coram Deo*" (before the face of God), where the whole congregation served as witnesses of your promises.

Covenant and education

What makes the covenant so important in the context of education? The beautiful thing about the covenant is that it was not your choice, not your seeking of God. No, in his great love, He chose *you*, sought *you* out, and gave you the rich promises of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Why? Was it your pious heart? Or the choices you made? Absolutely not. Throughout the whole Bible you can read that God is constantly the first, the instigator. Why? In Ezekiel 36:22-27 the Holy Spirit provides us with his beautiful affirmation:

"Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'when I show myself holy through you before their eyes.

'For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.'"

Though there was no sign of repentance on the side of the exiles, the Lord spoke these words. Isn't the message of verse

22 striking? That is typical of our God! In that way He is inimitable, because He is God: the Almighty, the Most Holy, totally different. That could be the first hallmark of Reformed education: astonishment, amazement about the fact that God chose us; it was his initiative and his work. Even our faithful response comes from Him (Phil 2:13).

The God of the covenant

Another aspect that the Bible profiles is how the Lord God presents Himself to his people. God's revelation to Moses at the burning bush brings this clearly in to focus (Ex 3:13-15). Through Moses God presented Himself to his people as the "I Am," that is to say, the God of the covenant. In our Bible translations the God of the covenant is rendered "LORD" with four capital letters. Every time you see LORD spelled with capitals, Scripture is talking about the God of the covenant. That is the God who wants to do something with you, for eternity.

Also pay attention to the title given to the Law: the Torah, which can also be translated as "direction" or "the way of life." In the Law God has described your way to life. What does He say in the introduction? "I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Ex 20:2). Consequently, your whole life stands in the light of the God of the covenant, the Almighty who has delivered you. That guiding light must be the heart, the central theme that drives the instruction given to our children. There's no way we can avoid such an obvious directive. Teachers must be totally imbued with this intimate relation.

God has established a relationship between us and Himself. From week to week this relationship may be strengthened in church services and in our personal Bible study. Administrators and school boards have the responsibility to provide leadership in the development of this faith and to stimulate its growth. Bible study within the faculty and the discussion of identity issues within school

and community are only two means to promote this faith development. Such reflection is critical because our deliverance and the God of that deliverance are the heart of Reformed education, and certainly not antiquated themes. In fact, that is the theme of both your and my Bible, the light of your and my life. Reformed education rises or falls with that covenant education. Those are our identity papers. Therefore, if we abandon this identity, we've lost our right to exist.

Practice and profile

How do we provide "hands and feet" to such an identity? What should Reformed education look like in practice? What follows are only a few practical points, each of which could be focused more sharply.

The covenant is the basis of your existence.

Reformed schools are identified by means of:

Amazement

Daily instruction must be permeated by amazement. In the first place that means that the teacher should be imbued with amazement at God's love for him or her. Only when someone is really amazed him/herself can (s)he pass on such amazement to others. Clearly, there is a task here for school leaders to develop this sense of amazement within the teaching staff as a whole, on an individual basis, and by means of personal discussions.

Gratitude

Why should gratitude characterize our Reformed schools? Because we have been privileged to be beneficiaries of the great miracle of God's love for teachers, parents, and children. Isn't it amazing that one sinner is able to instruct another? With gratitude you may emphasize that the Almighty God even gave the most

cherished thing He had to save everyone from their sins. Isn't it amazing that He is willing to put as great a distance between you and your sins, as east is separated from the west? It's simply incredible that He wants to do that! That also means that our gratitude toward Him should be the driving force of our life. In fact, gratitude determines our entire course of life. Therefore, in Reformed schools students are not managed by means of military regimentation; instead, the discipline breathes gratitude for God's love.

Love

If one word could capture the essence of God, then it would be the word *love*. God is love (1 John 4:8). The teacher and the student are both his image bearers, created in his image. This means that love should also typify the behaviour of his children. That love is the beating heart of Reformed education, of Reformed instruction and upbringing. Love is the driving force, the motor. The school stands for the fact that everything is imbued with his love. You will notice this love in interpersonal relations: there is mutual respect; there is genuine interest in each other. Students who need extra attention are assisted with love and patience. In the Reformed school the fruit of the Spirit should be clearly in evidence: happiness, peace, patience, friendliness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Inside the school forgiveness should characterize interpersonal relations. The forgiveness given to us by the Lord can never be separated from the forgiveness that we owe each other as his children.

Risk-free environment and a sense of security

To function properly and effectively, everyone needs an environment free of risks, an environment that provides a sense of security. Such security is provided by love, openness, and authenticity. Security is also created by means of clarity: clear rules and routines that are fairly maintained.

Uniqueness

Each child must be recognized as a unique person. Teachers must accept each child as the Lord has put him on his path and entrusted him into his care, with whatever talents or limitations that the child may have. This means that within the bounds of the possibilities, teachers will work to meet the needs of all those students. Each child may be recognized as a unique pearl in God's hand. Such an approach demands a careful consideration of each child. Correlatively, each child will sense whether you take that task seriously.

You have made repeated promises that you cannot easily ignore.

The atmosphere in the classroom will be characterized by acceptance of the child as he or she is. It is not just the parents who place this child on the teacher's path; it is the Creator Himself. This does not mean that the teacher will accept everything the children do. On the contrary, misbehaviour will be addressed and corrected.

Task orientation

Another characteristic of Reformed schools is the attention they give to task-oriented learning and working. How do you expect students to approach an assignment? How are they expected to work? How well should they deliver their finished work? Among others, they will be taught to work on their assignments independently. A task-oriented approach will be promoted.

Openness

The Reformed school will be characterized by its openness. Openness toward:

- a) *The students.* You, as caregiver, are a visible, tangible representative of the invisible God. Through your behaviour the child will develop an image of God. How will the students learn to see God through your actions and words?
- b) *Each other.* Teachers will have an openness for each other: they will be a support for each other, a hand and a foot. In a Reformed school, a teacher should not be an "Einzelgänger" (a loner or a maverick). (S)he contributes his/her talents to serve everyone. The principal will actively promote such behaviour by modelling openness toward his colleagues. He is leader and servant of all, just like his great model, Jesus Christ. The performance review or evaluations will also be directed to the enhancement of the identity of the school and the teacher him/herself.
- c) *Parents.* The parents are welcome at school. The school staff will make sure that there is a climate of openness in which the parents will genuinely feel welcome. The staff should not forget that they are entrusted with God's pearls, on whose behalf the parents made serious promises. In the latter context it is paramount that there is a good, open relationship. Parents are not adversaries. On the contrary, teachers and parents must stand shoulder-to-shoulder to help direct the children in the way of life. A Reformed school will not take it for granted that parents will send their children to their school. The school must appeal to the parents by means of special meetings where parents, especially parents whose first child will attend school, can meet with the principal and board members. In such a discussion, clarity can be created by stating what the school expects of

the parents, and what parents expect of the school.

- d) *School board.* Together you serve the same cause, though board members have different tasks in the context of their governance role: together you want the best instruction possible for the students. To promote such a goal, openness toward each other is essential. The board should know what is going on in school, and the staff should know what issues the board is dealing with.

The covenant must be the central theme that drives the instruction given to our children.

- e) *The church.* In the church the parents made their vows. Many other church members witnessed their vows and are also witnesses of the way in which these parents carry out the requirements of their promises. That is why church members are also welcome at school events, open houses, or special evenings. They should also be addressed in special newsletters or monthly bulletins sent into the supporting community. The Reformed school shows them that it values their support and interest. How will it show such openness? By investing time and effort to provide information about the school and its programs, in special events, grandparents' days, open houses, etc. These are investments which will richly provide returns.
- f) *Interested people in other church communities.* Many schools often receive questions from people from other church denominations whether their children can attend. That question has become more frequent in the last years. How open must you

be to such requests? Also in this latter situation it's important to be open: such and such are the principles that drive this school; this is our position concerning infant baptism, covenant, and such and such are the consequences for the atmosphere in the school. Can these people accommodate themselves to such views? Will the child be pedagogically jeopardized because the differences between home and school are too great? Especially here we must be vigilant and be prepared to safe-guard the Reformed identity of our school. Just as we read in the Law ("nor the alien within your gates"), the guests must accommodate the "rules of the house." We should not abandon the Reformed character of our school for the sake of "love" toward our neighbour, but on the contrary, we should heartily embrace this unique character and maintain it.

The teacher should be imbued with amazement at God's love for him or her.

g) *The neighbourhood.* The school is part of a community, a neighbourhood. Often the children of a Reformed school do not come from the school's neighbourhood. This does not mean that the neighbourhood does not have a critical eye on the school. Have the courage to let them know who you are and inform them of activities they will notice. Invite them into the school, for example, if there have been renovations or a new addition has been completed. Let your faith shine out into the surrounding community. Let them see that you are plain, ordinary people who want to provide good education. Ask them to help you maintain the neatness of your playground and school property. Offer the use of your playground facilities.

The groups represented in b, c, d and e have another important role: ask them to surround the school with a wall of prayer. If you expect them to pray with you and for you, then it should go without saying, that you should inform them what is going on in the school.

The atmosphere in the classroom will be characterized by acceptance of the child as he or she is. It is not just the parents who place this child on the teacher's path; it is the Creator Himself.

Quality

The Reformed school is characterized by good quality education. The teachers provide expertise by means of continued professional development and education; by means of professional literature, they remain up to date in their area of expertise. The school is constantly active in reflecting how it can best serve the educational needs of the community. Everyone works at developing and maintaining high quality professional instruction, and the Reformed school takes her task seriously in keeping a watchful eye that the quality does not deteriorate.

Bible instruction

Does it need to be said that the Bible lesson is one of the core subjects in Reformed education? This subject is indispensable. The same thing has to be said about church history for the older groups. Sharing God's mighty deeds with the students is a godly command (see Deuteronomy 6 and Psalm 78:3, 4).

Behaviour expectations, code of conduct

In a Reformed school sound rules have been written to circumscribe good behaviour and interpersonal relations. Such a code of conduct describes what

Church News

Declined the call to the churches of Aldergrove, BC, Brampton, ON, Calgary, AB, and Houston, BC:

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

can be expected of a Reformed school teacher. Additionally a code of conduct will describe the expectations for proper interpersonal relationships. These will embody Christian expectations that reflect a loving relationship between all the different parties present in the school.

Complete?

Have we thoroughly covered the "water front"? No, that would be quite difficult, if not impossible. I have provided you with the means to maintain a Reformed school community. With the code of conduct, for example, you have the means to talk to all the relevant parties if some of the relationships run off the rails.

The identity of a school requires constant vigilance. Perhaps the appointment of an official identity coordinator whose task it would be to keep an eye on identity issues and motivate discussion and re-evaluation would be a timely addition to keep this issue front and central.

The Reformed school especially needs prayer, which should form a protective wall around the school. This prayer must address the need for faithfulness in teaching God's promises and the need to practise godliness in the school. Prayer must also address the teachers' and students' needs to remain faithful to God's Word. That prayer must constantly ascend to God's throne because God Himself, the LORD, the God of the covenant, shall protect his city. Blessed are they who walk on his ways. They may expect prosperity and blessing: "All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant."

*Dr. C. Van Dam is principal and professor of Old Testament at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario.
cvandam@canrc.org*

Our Sister Churches in South Africa (Part 2 of 3)

A new beginning

Shortly after our arrival we were able to rejoice in celebrating the Lord's Day on May 22, 2005. Our celebration was memorable in several ways. For the morning worship we travelled with Rev. and Mrs. C. Kleyn to worship at the church in Soshanguve-North. Well before the official service started, worship commenced with the lively singing of many songs and hymns in the Sotho language. African culture certainly impacted on the worship and it was wonderful to witness this and to join in. Rev. P. Boon conducted the official worship by preaching on Acts 11:19-26. One of the points he emphasized was that the church grew and increased because ordinary members of the congregation spread the gospel. After the worship service there was opportunity to meet many members of the congregation. It was most encouraging to see the desire to serve the Lord in this newly instituted congregation. This desire was also evident in the Christian school that had been established and was found behind the church. With very little means they are providing an education for their children that is in harmony with their Christian faith.

In the early afternoon there was a special lunch at the Pretoria church to accommodate visitors who came for the installation of Rev. P. Boon as missionary for the Soshanguve area. In the installation service, Rev. C. Kleyn preached on 2 Timothy 2:1-2 and exhorted the new missionary to entrust to others the precious gospel of salvation. After the installation Rev. Boon proclaimed the Word, using four passages from Acts (6:7,

12:24, 13:49, 19:20). He stressed how the Word of God continued to increase and spread through all kinds of challenges and ended by reminding his listeners of the victory of Christ that was apparent in all of this. As noted in the previous article, the new missionary's duties include coaching and encouraging the mission workers in the area. Somehow it seemed quite appropriate that someone from the Theological College could be present at the installation service of a successor of Dr. A.J. de Visser who now serves in Hamilton.

A special synod

The following Monday evening, May 23, 2005, a prayer service was held for the synod of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA) that convened to elect a moderamen later that evening. This was a very special synod in a number of ways. For the first time in the history of these churches two Sotho-speaking ministers were present as official delegates. Rev. Tebogo Mogale and Rev. M. Peter Magagula are ministers of the newly instituted black churches at Mamelodi and Soshanguve-North respectively. Because of their presence, the language to be used at synod was for the very first time English instead of Afrikaans (which the blacks do not speak).

The convening church had also invited to the Synod as advisors all the missionary ministers labouring in South Africa. Others were also given a seat as advisors to Synod: Rev. K.J. Kapteyn, who was in South Africa to help the Marantha Church in Pretoria during their vacancy, Br. G. B. Veenendaal, who represented the Australian Free Reformed Churches, and Prof. C. Van Dam, who was there on

behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Our official presence was much appreciated. Two official observers were present from the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RSCA, the so-called *Dopper* churches): Rev. B. Fourie and Rev. N. Smit.

Under the capable leadership of the chairman, Rev. C. Kleyn, the Synod moved through their agenda in the days that followed. It is neither possible nor necessary in an article like this to mention everything that transpired. Let me mention some of the highlights.

Synod decisions

A new Bible translation is being prepared in Afrikaans which appears quite promising. Deputies were appointed to monitor developments and to keep the churches informed.

An interesting decision was the appointment of an administrator for the church federation. This administrator can be more than one person. The task description includes taking care of all financial matters and all administrative tasks which the convening church requests be done in preparation for the next synod or which a previous synod had requested to be done. Given the financial priorities in the federation, this will be an unpaid position. The advantages of such a position are obvious. There can be greater continuity and consistency in preparing for synods and taking care of administrative matters between synods. It is obvious from the structures that the Synod placed on this position that they want this to be a purely serving function to facilitate matters related to the federation, especially in the convening of synods.



Thabo Matlaela, a theology student, addresses the congregation of Soshanguve-North after the sermon of Rev. P. Boon.

A special difficulty that faces our South African sister churches is that with the admission into the federation of former mission posts as full-fledged congregations, the current method of raising money for various federational needs is no longer fair given the widely varying economic circumstances among the different congregations. To address this concern, Synod decided to set financial obligations to the federation on the basis of each local church's income. Deputies were appointed to work out this basic principle in accordance with guidelines that synod gave.

With regard to relations with foreign churches, the Synod decided to reaffirm sister relations with their foreign sisters and also to send a delegate to attend the next synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. A request for a sister relationship with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (the so-called *Reformanda* group) was denied because the request was based on an incorrect presentation of the situation in the Reformed Churches-Liberated and their synodical decisions. The so-called *Reformanda* churches were urged to reconsider their decision to leave the Liberated churches and to go the church orderly way with their concerns.

Closer to home, Synod decided to intensify contacts with the Free Church in Southern Africa. These churches with a membership of about 2500 are dominantly Xhosa and are the result of mission work done by the Free Church of Scotland. The language of their

General Assembly is English and they are also a member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

A matter of great importance to the FRCSA is their relationship with the RCSA, with whom they seek unity. The discussion about this issue was done in the presence and with the participation of the two official delegates from the RCSA. It was clear from both the report and the discussion that there are concerns about developments within the RCSA. The Synod decided, among other things, to instruct their deputies to ask of the RCSA to give a confessionally based judgement on their relationship with the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk*) and the *Nederduits Hervormde* Church. Deputies were also charged to evaluate admitting women to the office of deacon and to seek ways and means to work together with the RCSA for the propagation of the gospel.

In their deliberations regarding contact with other churches, the synod was sensitive to the fact that they are a small federation of churches and cannot do everything, but should concentrate with new contacts on churches geographically closest to them.

Synod went through some final revisions of the Church Order, as well as rules governing the convening and holding of synods. Many additional items were discussed at Synod as reflected in the number of deputies appointed. Deputies were appointed for the following areas: relations with foreign churches, contact with South African churches, Church Order and liturgical forms, mission, liturgical music, Bible translation, assistance to needy students, assistance to needy churches, correspondence with the governing authorities, and governors for theological education.

One of the final acts of Synod was to send a letter to the President of South Africa, Mr. T. M. Mbeki, assuring him of the prayers of the churches for his government and expressing the prayer "that through your government the kingdom of Christ may be promoted and his church may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. May you seek your help in Jesus Christ, the saviour and ruler of the kings of the earth, and in the Word of God."

There is one major issue that has not yet been mentioned and that is theological education. More about that the next time.



Synod at work.



Forty-second Annual Women's League Day



*The morning session speakers from Cloverdale
(l to r) Rita Visscher, Nora VanOene, Helen Bulthuis.*

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one. (John 17:11b)

Ladies of the Fraser Valley, Lynden, and beyond met in the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church building on June 22, 2005 for the forty-second annual Women's League Day. Women came in various stages of their lives: singles, mothers, empty nesters, widows, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers. Each came with her own joys, difficulties, and sorrows, and everyone set their focus on the theme of prayer.

A welcome was given by Jenny Pruijm on behalf of the hosting church, Abbotsford. The Cloverdale women chose as the morning topic "Christ's Prayer of Intercession." Rita Visscher read Romans 8:28 - 39 and John 17. The speakers, Nora VanOene and Helen Bulthuis, presented a scriptural view of prayer. The main points were the

headings given in John 17: Jesus prays 1) for Himself, 2) for his disciples, 3) for all believers. We can receive great blessing and comfort from this prayer; for God is both awe-inspiring and loving.

After a discussion, the floor was given to Willoughby. Jane DeGlint delivered a touching poem called "Homeless" which she had written. It reminded us that God doesn't look to outward appearances but hears the prayer of all those who humbly seek Him.

After lunch devotions by Lorraine Louwerse, the ladies made their way to the tables filled with salads, sandwiches, and dessert. The lunch hour passed quickly with lively conversations and book and CD buying.

The afternoon session was chaired by Janey VanSeters, who read James 4:1-17 and 5:14-20. An introduction was then given by Linda Rook on "Prayer in the Life of Christian Women." 1) How and what to pray. Jesus Christ is the key by whom we enter the door to a Father who loves us. We can come to Him with our thanksgiving. 2) Tools for prayer.



After lunch, the ladies settle in for the afternoon address on prayer.

ACTS: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication; PRAY: praise, repentance, ask, yield. 3) Look at prayer in an average day. Seek God at all times and make prayer a part of your daily routine. Teach children how to pray not only with a traditional prayer but

also in relation to what is happening in their individual lives. Become aware of the needs of fellow Christians and pray for them. "Come near to God and He will come near to you" (James 4:8a).

The day concluded with general business and the League Day song. Evelyn

Driegen closed with prayer. Two hundred and twenty-five ladies, each with different needs and concerns, could go on their way knowing that in their joys or difficulties God is close at hand and is always willing to hear the prayer of those who seek Him with a contrite heart.

Book Review

Reviewed by C. Van Dam

You Only: A Popular Commentary and Study Guide on the Prophecy of Amos

Peter G. Feenstra (Xulon Press, 2004).

Additional Information: 160 pages, \$13.00 (\$18.00 Canadian).

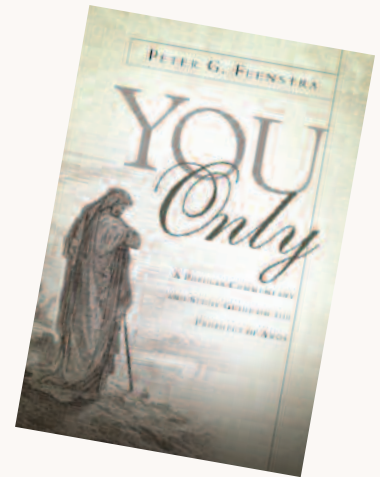
Available from Glenda Kapteyn
281135 Shouldice Block Road
RR1, Shallow Lake, ON N0H 2K0
phone: 519- 935-2471
ckapteyn@log.on.ca

Rev. Peter G. Feenstra of Owen Sound, Ontario has done us all a favour by repackaging his sermons on Amos in this easy-to-read and instructive study book on this part of Scripture. Although the entire text of Amos is not dealt with, in a sense the entire book is covered; he has taken key passages which, properly understood, helps pull the whole book together.

One of the great blessings of the format of using former sermons is that the prophecy of Amos gets an immediacy and relevance that is refreshing. As the author points out in his preface, Amos is part of God's self-revelation and we do well to heed the message. After all, this prophecy with its warnings and promises is also for us who live in the world we do today.

The title of the book "You Only" derives from Amos 3:2, "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins." This passage stresses the covenantal relationship and the responsibility that the covenant brings to God's people. God has chosen of mere grace a people for himself. This privileged holy nation must reciprocate and live up to the obligations of the Lord's electing love. By drawing our attention at the outset to this truth, the book reflects the tone of Amos. It is full of warning, but the promises of God who is gracious are also there. Feenstra repeatedly notes these as he also does the central importance of the work of Christ.

Our day is a day that can use prophetic warning. Also the church needs to be on guard, for we live in a prosperous and seductive age when many cry peace although there is no peace. Amos also lived in such a time. Like today, it was also a time of great immorality, religious smugness, and open corruption. In many ways the bygone age of Amos parallels our own. For that reason, issues which are familiar to us also confront us in the prophecies of Amos – issues such as the worship of sex (p 41), religious complacency (a recurring theme), and man-made and man-centred worship (p 90 ff). The fourth chapter of Amos gets



the most attention (p 57-98), but the themes that Feenstra brings forward are important, such as those of self-willed worship and spiritual blindness that can plague the church.

Like the book of Amos, this publication also ends on the high note of God's promises for restoration. Feenstra notes that these promises do not undo the warnings. The promises are for the faithful remnant, promises which find their fulfilment in Christ.

The author has included many questions for discussion at the end of each of his thirteen chapters. Furthermore, he has given suggestions for further reading.

This book is heartily recommended. It would make an excellent study guide for Bible study groups. Why not make Amos the next Bible book you are going to study?

Press Release of the Meeting of Classis Niagara, Held June 15, 2005 in Lincoln, Ontario

On behalf of the convening church of Lincoln, Br. DeVries opened the meeting. He read Titus 2:1-8, and after Hymn 22 was sung he led in prayer.

The credentials were found to be in good order and there were no instructions.

Classis was constituted. Chairman: Rev. Agema; Clerk: Rev. VanderVelde; Vice-chairman: Rev. Souman. The Chairman thanked the Church of Lincoln for the preparatory work. He remembered that the Church of Lincoln was still vacant. Rev. P. Feenstra declined the call extended to him. The Chairman also remembered that Rev. VanderWel passed away. He used to serve in Classis Ontario South.

In question period ad Article 44 of the Church Order the Chairman asked the questions mentioned in this article. The delegates answered that the ministry of the office bearers is being continued in all churches; the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured by all the churches. The Church of Lincoln asked for pulpit supply. This was granted for one Sunday a month, for a year or until Lincoln receives a minister. A schedule for pulpit supply will go in the Acts. Spring Creek Church of Tintern asked if the Acts of Classis could be e-mailed to the churches in addition to the paper-copy that is sent to the churches. This was approved.

Classis dealt with an appeal in closed session.

The reports of church visitation to all the churches in the classis were read. All were received with thankfulness.

An e-mail from the OPC with greetings to Classis was read and received with thankfulness.

The convening church for next classis is the Church of Smithville. The date for this meeting is Wednesday, September 21, 2005. Suggested officers are: Chairman: Rev. DeBoer; Clerk: Rev. Agema; Vice-chairman: Rev. VanderVelde.

If necessary Rev. Agema will represent our Classis at the next URC Classis meeting.

Censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order was not needed. Personal question period was made use off. The Acts were read and adopted. The press release was read and approved. After he led in prayer, the Chairman closed the meeting.

A. Souman
Vice-chairman



Advertisements:

Announcements of Weddings, Anniversaries (with Open House) should be submitted six weeks in advance.

BIRTHS

The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever. Psalm 12:6, 7
With all praise to our Heavenly Creator, we announce the birth of our second covenant child

HANNAH PIETERNELLA HOMAN

July 27, 2005

John and Johanna Homan (nee Van Iperen)

A sister for *Kathleen*

53547 Smith Road, Wainfleet, Ontario L0S 1V0

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father. . .

With praise and thankfulness to our heavenly Father, we announce the birth of our son

HAYDEN MATTHEW

Born July 12, 2005

Marcel and Sheryl Kampen

A baby brother for *Alexa*

8th grandchild of Leo and Diane Kampen

32nd grandchild of Ken and Tina Linde

641 Cumberland Avenue, Burlington, ON L7N 2X4

For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.

With great joy and thankfulness to the Lord who has entrusted us with one of His covenant children, we announce the birth of our first child

DEREK THOMAS

Born July 25, 2005

Chris and Charlene van Popta (nee Visscher)

4th grandson for John and Bonita van Popta

2nd grandson for Gerhard and Teny Visscher

3529 Carp Road, Carp, ON K0A 1L0

See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.
Isaiah 49:16

Praising God for the miracle of new life, we joyfully announce the birth of our little daughter and sister,

HADASSAH DANIËLLE

Hadassah was born at home on Aug. 12, 2005 and received the sign and seal of His covenant promises on Aug. 21, 2005

Bernie and Joanneke Kottelenberg

Caleb, Rebecca, Josiah, Seth

18th grandchild for Rev. and Mrs. W. denHollander

15th grandchild for Mr. and Mrs. Ben Kottelenberg

RR 2, Hillsburgh, ON NOB 1Z0