

Clarion

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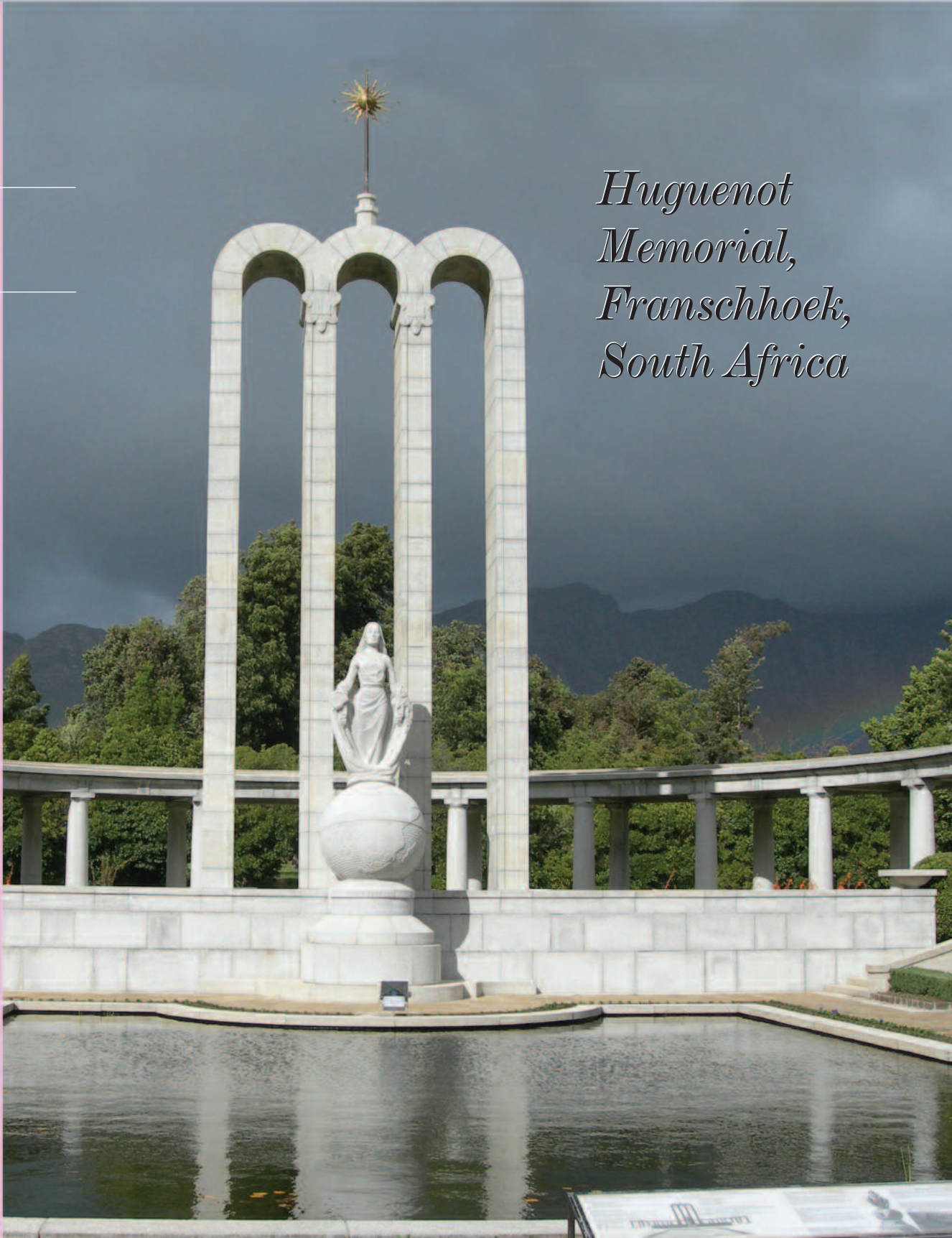
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*The Ministry
and
Counselling*

*All Scripture is
God-breathed*

*Overcoming
Discord in the
Communion of
Saints*

*Huguenot
Memorial,
Franschhoek,
South Africa*





W.B. Slomp

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The Ministry and Counselling (Part 2)

At times people encounter problems that are so great that extensive intervention is needed.

In the last editorial we saw that counselling is the primary task of the church. The whole church community must be involved in bringing relief to the distressed and lonely. It is done in the homes by all the office bearers and other members of the church. But, the most important counselling is done from the pulpit.

However, there are members of the church who also need professional help. What kind of help do they need from them, and how can the church help? That is what this editorial will deal with.

Mental illness

At times people encounter problems that are so great that extensive intervention is needed. That is the case, for example, with those who suffer from mental illnesses and mental handicaps such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depressive disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic and other severe anxiety disorders, autism and pervasive developmental disorders, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, borderline personality disorder, and other severe and persistent mental illnesses that affect the brain. These disorders can profoundly disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, moods, ability to relate to others, and capacity for coping with the demands of life.¹

It is not always easy to determine whether mental problems are due to genetic or other causes.

It is true that the relationship between biological and environmental causes is complex and that it is therefore not always easy to determine whether mental problems are due to genetic or other causes. The mind affects the body, and visa

versa. Scripture also shows the connection between body and mind. We read, for example, in Proverbs 14:30, "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones."

Generally speaking, however, such disorders mentioned above are not the result of wrong thinking or immoral living, or due to lack of character or poor upbringing or lack of faith. Most often the seeds of the disorder are present already at birth. Since they are biologically based brain disorders, they cannot be overcome merely through "will power." They need professional intervention that can provide them with drug treatment and counselling.

Professional counsellors

Depending on the need, we can make use of various types of professionals: psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and others. They are thoroughly trained in their profession and can be of great help to the mentally ill and mentally handicapped. It is a great relief for those so afflicted and for their families that such professional help is available.

A Christian ought not to be afraid to make use of these professionals. We also extensively use the medical profession to help us with our physical problems. Although we might prefer a Christian medical practitioner, that is not always possible. Our first concern is whether the person is properly trained and licensed.

The same thing is true of the mental health profession. The Lord has given mankind the ability to discover and to learn things. Such ability is not restricted to Christians. That is why we also use all kinds of people to provide us with various kinds of services. For example, we will bring our cars to be fixed by a qualified mechanic, even if he is an atheist.

It is wonderful that the Lord has made it possible to find help for the afflicted. Let us make use of it. But ultimately it is all his doing, and so we must give the honour and glory to God alone.



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Mental disorders fall along a continuum of severity, and the most serious conditions afflict approximately five percent of the population. You will also find the same percentage of people so afflicted in the church.

God's children

However, just because those who have been diagnosed with these severe mental illnesses and mental handicaps will receive such professional help, the church also has a pivotal role to play. Just as we do with those who suffer from physical ailments during their treatment, the mentally ill should also receive our support and understanding. In no way should they be looked down upon or marginalized.

On the contrary, these members are covenant children. They are precious members of the church of God, and make a unique contribution to the church. Because they deviate from the "norm" they stand out. They are a stark reminder that we live in a broken world. Yet, God loves them and wants to show his mercy and compassion through them.

God wants to display his mighty work in all his children, for ultimately we are all mentally and physically deficient.

The Lord Jesus Himself taught us by example to show compassion to the weak. While He walked on the earth, He went out of his way to be kind to the physically and mentally impaired. He did not resent them. Instead He showed them that they are very important members of his flock. At one point the disciples asked the Lord Jesus about a man born blind. They wanted to know whether his blindness was due to his own sins or due to the sins his parents. Then Jesus replied, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned... but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life" (John 9:3). And then He proceeded to heal the blind man.

God wants to display his mighty work in all his children, for ultimately we are all mentally and physically deficient. It is especially through his "special" children that we are reminded of his great power. For He alone can heal us. We may have a foretaste of that already in this life. And the church ought to proclaim and display that wonderful reality.

And so, as members of God's church, we should consider it a blessing that we may minister to these "special" members.

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We need these members to remind us of God's mercy and compassion. He gave us his dear Son to redeem us from sin and all the effects of sin.

Church involvement

With this in mind, the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped ought to feel very much part of God's church. They must experience kindness and inclusion, and be made to feel welcome as beloved members of God's church. This is the task of every member of the church, but especially the office bearer. He or she must feel that they are just as important as others.

The mentally ill and their families are frequently under a lot of strain and are in need of understanding and relief. Their lives are often stressful and at times overwhelmed with their problems. And so the office bearers should take careful note of these precious brothers and sisters and their families, and give them special attention. An office bearer should regularly check to see whether or not there is anything the church can do to help. Perhaps the church can lend a hand by assisting with medical needs, or by looking after the mentally ill person, giving relief to the family.

They are a stark reminder that we live in a broken world. Yet, God loves them and wants to show his mercy and compassion through them.

Such a member of the church should also be remembered in public and private prayers. Perhaps there are financial implications as well. The mentally ill and their families are often reluctant to involve others, for fear of being a burden. Within the church they should have no such fear.

Although within our churches the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped are mostly well-received and well-treated, they do not always have all the proper support they need. Since many people are not familiar with these afflictions, they will either ignore these brothers and sisters or give unhelpful advice.

There are those, for example, who think it is wrong to go to professional counsellors, psychologists, and psychiatrists, or

to receive medication. They believe that only the church should deal with mental problems and that mental illness can be overcome with a stronger faith. And so they make others feel guilty for seeking outside intervention. This is devastating for those who are already feeling low because of their condition. That is not how we would treat anyone with a physical illness either.

The mentally ill and their families are often reluctant to involve others, for fear of being a burden.

Each person is unique, and has his or her specific needs. This is especially true of the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped. If we want to be able to help them, we must listen to them and their caregivers to find out what their needs are. By making wrong assumptions a lot of damage can be done.

Conclusion

In summary, the church of God has a unique position in the midst of this sinful world. The Lord God has made us a church community, and given us the command to display his compassion and mercy to those with special needs. Although professional counsellors also have an important role to play in the lives of the mentally ill and the mentally handicapped, the church has a unique task as well.

In the next editorial, the Lord willing, we will deal with those people who require help for other reasons. There are those, for example, who are alcoholics or drug addicts, or those who have severe marriage problems or other relational problems. These issues also cause much anguish and distress. Typically they are not due to biological factors. Professional counsellors also have a lot to offer in those situations. But, in those cases the church has a unique role to play as well.

Both the counselling profession and the church must carefully consider their respective roles. Generally the church and the medical profession respect each other's roles when dealing with physical healing. In the same way the counselling profession and the church respect each other.

¹The Nation's Voice on Mental Illness, *About Mental Illness* (<http://www.nami.org>)



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All Scripture is God-breathed

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MATTHEW 13:52

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. . . .”

2 Timothy 3:16

These words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy give us perspective as we begin a new season of organized Bible study.

In 2 Timothy the Apostle Paul was encouraging Timothy in his work of preaching the gospel in Ephesus. Paul warned Timothy that he would face opposition – false teachings and teachers, and immoral lifestyles, also in the midst of God’s people. In that context, Paul urged Timothy to continue preaching and teaching the Scriptures. Nothing must deter him.

In this text Paul explains why the Scriptures are so important. They have an exalted character, and are very powerful.

Their exalted character is that they are God-breathed. The Bible was clearly written by people – for example, Moses, David, and Luke. That all Scripture is God-breathed means that the words these men wrote were written under the guidance of God. To give an example, David endured terrible suffering and anguish at the hands of Saul and other enemies. David wrote down how this treachery made him feel. But God was guiding the circumstances that David experienced and the way he wrote about those experiences, so that the Psalms we now have are the very words of God through David.

Therefore the Bible has absolute authority. Other books need to be read critically. Does the author do justice to the topic? Can I believe everything he wrote? But the Bible is what God has said – and He is the God who does not

lie. His Word must be believed, accepted, and obeyed. Scripture is the final authority, because it is what the almighty, all-wise God has said.

It is useful for teaching. That means it is the Word of God which teaches God’s people true doctrine. Particularly because the world is full of heresies and false teachings it is so necessary that God’s people be taught sound doctrine. For then they are able to be on guard against the tempting heresies that attack the church.

The Scriptures are useful for rebuking. The word used here has the sense not only of rebuking but of actually being convincing in your rebuke. It is one thing to rebuke someone. The Lord Jesus Christ was often accused of sins, but those accusations did not convict his conscience or make Him feel guilty, because He had no sin. To be rebuked in the sense of our text means to be brought to genuine knowledge of your sins in such a way that you know the accusations are just. The powerful Word of God will reach into our hearts and convict us of sin.

The Scriptures are useful for correction. They are powerful to change us, exposing what is wrong in our doctrine and conduct and also directing us back to the right path. They point us to Jesus Christ, and direct our faith and life to Him.

Finally, the God-breathed Scriptures are useful for training in righteousness. God’s Word has the power to teach us

about the lifestyle that is pleasing to the Lord, about what are appropriate activities and habits and entertainment for the child of God and what are not.

This was important encouragement for Timothy in his work as an office-bearer. No matter the opposition or the pressure to tone down the message, no matter the temptation to find other methods to work change among God’s people, Timothy had to remain steadfast in preaching and teaching the complete Word of God. That is how God’s people would be brought to repentance and daily increase in obedience.

It is for us to apply this truth also in our Bible study. For us to be servants of God fully equipped to serve Him in all good works (verse 17), we need to be instructed, rebuked, corrected, and trained by all parts of the Word of God.

This is a task that will often require hard work. One passage of God’s Word may seem more useful than another. But the promise of God’s Word is that all Scripture is God-breathed – a list of names in a genealogy, a historical account about David and Saul, a passage from a New Testament letter – and it is all useful. He is the all-wise God who knows all that we need to know. His Word will equip us to be faithful servants in the midst of all the challenges that will come our way. With this conviction in mind we can eagerly begin a new study season, as we saints assist each other in being equipped by the God-breathed Word for a life full of good works.



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 44.

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



The tenth commandment says that you shall not covet what belongs to your neighbour. You are coveting when you constantly think about what someone else has, and you won't be satisfied until you have it. In this commandment the Lord says that you should not be jealous of people who have something that you don't have. Jealousy itself is evil.



When evil coveting takes hold of you many other sins come up as well, sins that we have already mentioned. For example, if you absolutely have to buy something a friend has, you may think about stealing money. Even if you do not steal, it went through your mind.

You might be so angry that you say something rude. In fact, you may also feel angry at God. Why does your friend get something which your father and mother do not want you to have? When you go to bed, you are still angry and skip your evening prayer.

And secretly you hope your friend will get a bad mark tomorrow.

You can see that several other sins are included in sinning against the tenth commandment. Therefore do away that nasty coveting. Be content! That is part of this commandment.

Of course it is not wrong to want something. You may save money to buy it, or you can ask for it as a birthday gift. Or maybe you will receive it even though it's not your birthday. But you should never desire something because you are jealous.

We have come to the end of the Ten Commandments. Have you always been fully obedient to these ten laws of the Lord? Everyone's answer will be "no." But God's children must still try to be more obedient. You cannot be obedient on your own; pray for the Holy Spirit to help you be obedient.

The Ten Commandments teach us something else as well: we need the Lord Jesus.

Even when we try to do everything good, so often it goes wrong. When we sin we can only go to the Lord Jesus. Because of Him there is forgiveness. You may respectfully ask the Father for this.

We should continually pray for forgiveness. We cannot do without forgiveness, not even for a day. And at the same time we thank God: Lord, you are so good to us!



The Candlestand Statement

Reformed considerations regarding the Charismatic Movement (Part 3 of 4)

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

Part Three: Christian life

3.1 Spiritual blessings

3.1 * 28 *Spiritual blessings and our deliverance*

We confess that God made man in his own image, good, righteous, and holy. However, man disobeyed God's commands and subjected himself to sin and consequently to God's curse and also death. This original sin has been inherited by all generations of the human race (Rom 3:23). They cannot deliver themselves from the slavery of sin.

We believe that God, who is merciful and just, took the redemptive initiative by sending his Son to reconcile us with Him and provide eternal salvation for us. We believe that we are saved and justified by grace alone, through faith, which is also a gift of God (Eph 2:8-9). In this faith we, as adopted children of God (Gal 4:5-7), have our assurance of salvation, as stated in Romans 8:38-39: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

3.1 * 29 *Spiritual blessings and our responsibility*

We confess that we are saved by grace alone and have a firm assurance of salvation. However, we have the

responsibility to live our Christian lives according to God's will (Eph 2:10). The freedom we have in Christ is not a freedom to sin but that of our submission to the will of the Spirit (Gal 5:1). We read in the Bible time and again the call for holiness. We are commanded to be holy because of the holiness of our God and Saviour (1 Pet 1:15), because of the power of the Spirit who works in us (2 Tim 1:7), and because of the return of Jesus (Heb 12:14). The Bible urges us to "continue to work out our salvation," that is to live out our Christian lives in holiness in accordance to the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ (Phil 2:12). We confess that our "good deeds" are the proof of our true Christian lives.

However, we have the responsibility to live our Christian lives according to God's will.

We are called to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18; Col 2:6). By doing this we will enjoy the reality of the Holy Spirit working in our lives, allowing us to grow in all aspects and enabling us to respond to the gifts and talents that God has given us.

We confess that our Christian lives must bear fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit affirms that our Christian lives

are true. Since we live by the Spirit we are to keep in step with the Spirit, and we begin to produce the fruit of the Spirit, "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23).

We confess that our Christian life is an ever-progressing life. It is a lifelong process of sanctification towards a perfection or glorification which will be attained in future when Christ returns. In this process we struggle between the desires of the flesh and the desires of the Spirit (Gal 5:16). Therefore we continually need to repent and to pray for forgiveness, as well as a willingness to submit ourselves to and be transformed by the Spirit.

We believe that in the process of sanctification, we are not struggling by ourselves but are totally dependent on the help of the Holy Spirit. The sanctification process is inner-transforming, wrought by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. It testifies in us that we belong to Christ and therefore we have crucified our sinful nature with its passions and desires.

Refutations

18. We refute the teaching that justification by faith alone is not sufficient and should be complemented by "full justification," that is by the way of strict discipline, ascetic lifestyle, lengthy prayers, etc. This teaching depends largely on our human abilities and works. It makes

salvation man-centred instead of Christ-centred.

19. We refute all teachings that we are capable of achieving perfection, freed from the flaw of our sinful nature. Such teachings will lead us into distress and uncertainty, causing desolate and fruitless struggle in our lives or hypocrisy.
20. We refute the teaching that a believer can obtain a higher level of holiness by following special prescribed steps, such as baptism in the Spirit or speaking in tongues.
21. We refute an exaggerated stress on covenantal assurance, causing an abuse of grace in our churches, a neglect of the necessity of regeneration, a laziness in living a new sanctified life, a failure to produce the nine-fold fruits of the Spirit, and a giving up in our struggle against our sins and shortcomings.

3.2 Earthly blessings

3.2 * 30 *Our almighty, sovereign God and his covenantal faithfulness*

We confess that our God is the almighty and sovereign God. He is independent in his ruling and governing of the world. He is the almighty creator and we are his creatures. "By Him all things were created: things in heaven and

We are called to grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him" (Col 1:16). He sustains and governs the whole creation and by his almighty power He holds in check our enemies, the devil, demons, and spirits. What is impossible for man is possible for God (Mark 9:23). He speaks and it will be done.

We confess that this almighty and sovereign God is our faithful Father in Jesus Christ. He loves us as his children, and by this we know for sure that "in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28).

3.2 * 31 *Sin and suffering*

We confess that by the rebellion of man sin came into God's beautiful world, causing the world to be cursed and man to be deprived of his ability to do good. Due to this fall into sin, all living creatures are subject to suffering and finally to death.

To show his mercy God established the covenant of grace, promising the Saviour. He does not abandon his world, nor does He give up on sustaining all things. His ultimate goal is complete deliverance and the recreation of all things. He comforts his people with his promise that "He will wipe every tear from our eyes; there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:4).

This "old order of things" is the order to which we, although being in Christ, are still subjected during our earthly lives. All men, regardless of their belief or unbelief, face suffering of all kinds. Death comes to us by means of illness, accidents, wars, and famines. Moreover, many times believers are killed as martyrs, as stated in Hebrews 11 and 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 and verified in church history. It is impossible for man to escape the conditions of this "old order of things," but in all this we, as God's children, trust the almighty God as our Father, who by his providence will surely fulfill all his promises.

3.2 * 32 *Our caring God and our responsibility*

We confess our God to be a caring God. He promised his chosen people, "I will be your God and you will be my people" (see Genesis 17:3-8 and Exodus 3:14). By this He established his covenant, and He related Himself directly to the history of a sinful but also a suffering people. He sustains us and helps us during our times of suffering. So we

confess that He is a comforting God, giving hope and light in the valley of death (Ps 23:4; Luke 1:79). We experience his providence toward us, sometimes in extraordinary ways, for example in healings or in unexpected relief in the midst of hardship. These miracles are the proof of God's care and loving presence, intended to carry us to the core of the gospel. They are the signs of the coming kingdom, signs of a glorious time and place to come.

God provides his children with all they need, and often more than that, but not always according to our human understanding or expectation.

We confess that when relief is not given we do not need to despair, because God's covenantal promises will endure. Many believers have experienced that sufferings have a positive meaning and impact as we learn to submit ourselves to God's sovereignty and plan. In times of suffering we become more active and we pray to our God as the Almighty who also can and does perform miracles.

3.2 * 33 *Prayer*

When we pray we commit ourselves to our gracious God, both confessing his sovereignty and pleading with Him to realize his redemptive plan. Living in God's covenant makes us eager and bold to pray with persistence, but always in line with the teaching of Jesus which He gave us in the Lord's Prayer. This prayer shows the priority within our prayer, reflecting the "needs" of the two partners of the covenant: firstly, the fulfilment of God's plan and his glory, and secondly, our human needs regarding food, forgiveness of sins, and his guidance in temptations. Prayer should always follow this scheme, and it should prevent us from praying beyond the range of the promises of the covenant.

3.2 * 34 Prosperity

God provides his children with all they need, and often more than that, but not always according to our human understanding or expectation. During the old covenant God promised his people many earthly blessings. God's people often rejoiced in the bounty of the Lord, who turned their mourning into gladness (Jer 31:11-13; Ps 126:4-6). During the new covenant He continued to show his care, especially his concern for the poor and needy people of his covenant. While Jesus is fully oriented towards the coming kingdom and the forgiveness of sin, we also see Him emotionally touched by the sick and the poor. He acts to heal, to feed, to comfort, and to help the sick, the poor, and the needy. He teaches us to do the same.

3.2 * 35 Offering

We ought to share our richness with the needy inside and outside the church. We also acknowledge that all our possessions and earnings are given to us by the Lord who owns the whole creation. We express our dependence on God and show our gratefulness to Him in giving our offerings. In the Old Testament the Lord commanded his people to give tithes, meaning one tenth of the harvest, cattle, and any other earnings (Num 18:21-29; Deut 14:22). In doing this the Old Testament believers confessed that all their possessions belonged to the Lord, and they symbolically returned it to the Lord for his covenant service and worship.

During the New Testament times God expects us to freely give our offerings (2 Cor 8:8-9; 9:5-8). We have to give ourselves as living sacrifices, including our belongings, worship, and thankfulness to God (Rom 12:1-2). We are to use our riches for the edification of the church and the proclamation of the gospel in the world.

3.2 * 36 Dangers of wealth

We are to avoid focusing on earthly richness. We, of course, may enjoy the good things God's creation; however, the expectation of a glorious state on the new earth fills us even more, and this is what we pray for. In the Christian life, especially

in healthy and wealthy circumstances, temptation is near. Material bounty often leads God's children to forget God and worship earth-oriented idols, suited to fleshly desires. God often receives ungratefulness, unfaithfulness, and discontentedness as a response to his care.

Especially the appointed and anointed leaders tend to become corrupt, misusing their office to enrich themselves. Money and power easily corrupt our minds and make us forget that we have a treasure in heaven "that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys" (Luke 12:33). The prophets, the apostles, and Christ Himself teach us to acknowledge the danger of wealth (Matt 6:21; 7:13-14; 13:22; Luke 12:15; 16:25; 18:25; 2 Cor 5:11-15; 1 Tim 6:9-10; Rev 3:17).

Material bounty often leads God's children to forget God.

3.2 * 37 Dealing with illness and healing

We confess that Jesus healed many people in Israel, although He did not heal them all. By this He did not only show his divinity, but also his compassion for the sick. Jesus promised his disciples that those who believed in Him as the resurrected Lord would be accompanied by signs during their journeys of proclaiming the gospel (Mark 16:16-18). These promised signs marked the apostles (2 Cor 12:12), witnesses, and evangelists of the first period of Christianity, underlining their authority, confirming their founding of the New Testament church (Eph 2:20), and demonstrating the message of the kingdom to come.

The overall biblical view gives evidence that we ought to pray for the sick (2 Kgs 1; Ps 35:13; Matt 25:36-44), hoping that they will be healed by the Lord. James 5:13-16 also teaches us to pray for healing, confessing our sins to one another, comforting those who are

suffering from a deathly disease, and proclaiming the forgiveness of sins. However, the focus of the Bible is not on healing, nor on promising the healing of every believer. Instead, the Bible shows that every human being, one day or another, will face death.

The biblical message gives hope for a future earth free from suffering. On this earth we ought to pray whenever illness is troubling us. We pray for healing and for miracles to happen in times of suffering. We also pray that God may bless the creational ways of caring for the sick by means of medical care.

We confess that we should do our best to give pastoral care and comfort to the sick and the dying people. Indeed, the church has a pastoral heart to comfort those who may not recover and continuously suffer from all kind of disease and distress. As God's children we know with certainty and reassure one another that God our Father will help us. He will raise us up, if not in this earthly life then in the resurrection of everlasting life on God's new earth. With fear and awe we submit ourselves to his sovereignty and wisdom. The Christian faith makes us, who are limited in the understanding of all things, patient and humble. It generates in us full confidence to pray that not our will but God's will be done. In his immense suffering Christ Himself prayed this way, providing the supreme biblical example of faith in God, his heavenly Father (Luke 22:42).

3.2 * 38 Our spiritual warfare

We acknowledge that we are engaged in spiritual warfare. Satan, with all his demons, is trying to win our souls by every means. He performs signs and wonders and he attracts people by all kinds of supernatural phenomena; he has been given much power with which he tempts God's chosen people. "For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect" (Matt 24:24). The beast out of the sea will perform great and miraculous signs to deceive the inhabitants of the earth (Rev 13:13). Evil spirits of demons will perform

miraculous signs to deceive the kings of the whole world (Rev 16:14).

Jesus Christ Himself foresaw the appearance of many false prophets performing signs and miracles in his name: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matt 7:22, 23) These are the devil's schemes, deluding and blinding the world with the suggestive power of earthly happiness, encouraging it to focus on the human self, and again suggesting that man can become like God. This is our struggle "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12).

Refutations

Worldviews

22. We refute the western worldview that makes a separation between the supernatural and the natural. This dualistic worldview denies the reality of the sustaining and governing God, as well as the presence of the spirits of evil demons empowered by Satan. This worldview also leads to idolizing human capabilities and science and focuses on mere human and natural inventions. It will lead to the "deification" of man, not acknowledging the omnipotence of the Creator, and denying the influence of evil powers ruled by the father of all lies.
23. We refute the mechanic and anthropocentric worldview of traditional pagan religions that considers God to be a divine power or factory, automatically fulfilling human needs at their wish.

Manipulation of God

24. We refute the teaching that uses the slogan "Name it and Claim it," declaring that we can claim prosperity, that we can claim healing, and all the ideological views accompanying healing sessions or meetings around famous healers,

especially those who deceive people by means of the mass media. God's plan of reconciliation is not a promise of complete healing from all earthly diseases, nor a plan of liberation from all evil forces (see Hebrews 11). This plan assures us that we will overcome death and receive heavenly glory.

25. Though we should be persistent in our prayers, we refute the teaching that we can move God by a manipulative style of praying. This style is contradictory to Jesus' teaching about prayer: "When you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matt 6:7, 8). God is not a god who can be manipulated. He is the sovereign God and a faithful Father.

God's plan of reconciliation is not a promise of complete healing from all diseases to live on this earth, nor a plan of liberation from all evil forces.

26. We refute those who claim that so called "possibility theology," or the frequent repeating of Bible words or even visualization, helps to move God and to obtain whatever we want. We do not see any differences between them and occult practitioners and the like, however successful they might be.

Prosperity

27. We refute all "prophets" of the so called prosperity gospel, proclaiming that Christians are little gods with creative power, promising to the poor and the needy that if only they believe, God will supply health and wealth.
28. We declare all "prophets" portraying Jesus as a rich person, loving good food, loving a good life, promising

prosperity, etc., to be false prophets. We admonish all believers not to listen to them, but openly to reject them and not to answer their invitations to come to their meetings.

29. We refute the teaching that we should give tithes in order to obtain the full promises of God, especially with regard to health and wealth. Those who do this promise the giver prosperity; however, this teaching usually enriches only the preachers and not the ones offering the tithes.

False prophecy

30. We call upon all believers to use their faith and understanding and not to follow the occult practices of miracle performers who, in the name of Jesus, promise healing or prosperity. They lead astray many people, leaving them in frustration, disappointment and utter distress. This will harm the growth of the church of Christ, as well as blaspheme God's holy name. These charismatic teachers attract many people because they give the hope of riches to the poor and health to the sick. They cause and have caused ecclesiastical divisions, discouragement, disappointment, apostasy, and finally secularism.

Spiritual warfare

31. We refute all teaching suggesting that illness and misfortune are always caused by demons and evil spirits to whom our sin or unfaithfulness has given an "open door." Although we acknowledge that sin has caused the world to be cursed, we ought not to suggest that a suffering person is suffering because of his personal, probably hidden, sins, and that by repentance and the casting out of demons he will be healed. This teaching causes unbearable tension in an ill person, accusing and, in the case that no recovery is forthcoming, making him or her desperate and uncertain of his salvation.

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Overcoming Discord in the Communion of Saints

(Part 1 of 5)

What follows in this and subsequent installments is based on a presentation at an office bearers' conference in Burlington, Ontario, held April 23, 2005. This presentation drew on findings from my M. Ed. thesis, "Home Schooling in View of John Calvin: A Study in Education and Communion of Saints" (Brock University, 2004). The specific situation of discord referred to in the thesis concerned the rise of home schooling in a Canadian Reformed community that had maintained a day school since the 1960's. Since the dynamics of social conflict are similar for any other "hot" topic, the validity of the findings stretches well beyond tension around home schooling. The text has been edited and expanded somewhat to accommodate the printed medium and to incorporate points raised during the discussion.

It is with some trepidation that I introduce this topic. For starters, home schooling stirs up strong emotions. Furthermore, what bias would you expect me, a teacher, to have on this issue? James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1) warns that "not many should even presume to be teachers. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check" (3:1, 2). Identifying the corruption caused by the tongue, James stops to ask, "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in

the humility that comes from wisdom" (3:13). I have much wisdom left to learn. I need God's grace in Jesus Christ, by which we are declared righteous.

However, I should speak at an occasion such as this. I first observed the magnitude of the tensions around the rise of home schooling when preparing for a *Clarion* article about home schooling. To write this as a teacher, I believed, I should at least first listen to people involved in home schooling. I did,

The exercise of the communion of saints is a scriptural principle, and therefore of a higher order and more important than the manner in which we apply it in our age and our culture.

and found that the tension was too much and ran too deep for a single article. It was distressing to see such discord among God's people. Does not the Form for the Lord's Supper stress harmony, love, unity, and fellowship in words and in deeds? I ended up writing an M.Ed. thesis about the topic, and found that it was

not a simple matter of whether home schooling was okay or not, but of a fundamental understanding of what is the communion of saints. I formulated the premise for my thesis as:

It is more important for each member of the body of Christ to 'show true thankfulness to God with his entire life and, laying aside all enmity, hatred, and envy, to live with his neighbour in true love and unity,' than for all members to follow the same model for educating their children.

This premise implies a challenge to the conception that the school equals the communion of saints. It implies a recognition that the institution we have designed and built with God's help and blessing is not necessarily the only way in which we can help parents fulfill their baptismal vows. It does not deny that the school constitutes a significant, laudable, and necessary effort undertaken within the communion of saints. Schools are virtually indispensable to most people, and we should do everything we can to make them the best they can be. However, the exercise of the communion of saints is a scriptural principle, and therefore of a higher order and more important than the manner in which we apply it in our age and our culture. We must not make a human tradition, or our application of a principle, equal to God's Word.

Dynamics of Conflict and Principles of Christian Conciliation

Escalating Conflict !		Common Intervention	Christian Conciliation
Intractable	Increasing Discord!	Murder/Suicide	Glorify God <i>1 Cor 10:31</i>
Attack/Escape		Litigate/Self-help	Get the log out of your own eye <i>Matt 7:5</i>
Contest		Mediate/Arbitrate	Go and show your brother his fault <i>Matt 18:15</i>
Disagreement		Communicate/ Negotiate/Mediate	Go and be reconciled <i>Matt 5:24</i>
Problem		Avoid/Communicate	

Those who are of the church may be recognized by the marks of the Christians.

They believe in Jesus Christ the only Saviour, flee from sin and pursue righteousness, love the true God and their neighbour without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works.

Although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life.

They appeal constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him.

Belgic Confession, Article 29

This premise may also be adapted to relate to other sources of discord within the church. The last clause, for instance, could be replaced by “than for all members to use the same Bible translation.” The communion of saints applies to much more than education, and discord arises around many issues. However, the dynamics, the sins, and the grief are similar. In this and subsequent installments of this article I consider what James says about discord, the dynamics of disputes, the context and outcomes of my study, and the divisions in Corinth. Finally, I offer some thoughts that may help office bearers prevent or deal with disputes.

James

James addresses a congregation that is not only scattered by persecution but in disarray because of an infiltration of earthly wisdom. It has replaced true heavenly wisdom by proud and devilish envy, by ambition, boasts, and denials of the truth. The result is disorder and every evil practice. Quite obviously, people don’t love their neighbour as themselves. They claim faith, but their deeds don’t show it (2:8, 14, 18; 3:14-16).

With deep pastoral concern for this congregation, James both chastises the people and points out the way to comfort and restoration. They must resist the devil: Wash your hands, you sinners! Purify your hearts, you double-minded! Grieve! Mourn! Wail! Change your laughter to mourning, and your joy to gloom. Your boasting is evil. (4:7-11, 16.) Your words, behaviour, and attitude are in opposition to the Holy Spirit. You oppose God, who opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble; who comes near to those who come near to Him; who is the Lord Almighty and decides the success of your plans. You should cry to God (like David did in Psalm 32) to receive heavenly wisdom, which is pure,

It is not for lack of scriptural direction that we still have disputes.

peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere. Such wisdom produces peacemakers who sow in peace and raise

a harvest of righteousness (3:17-18). Indeed, “Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins” (5:20). Humble yourselves before the Lord, James says, and He will lift you up (4:10). When we read this let us do so as looking in a scriptural mirror, see ourselves, and also remain humble.

Paul addresses division among the Corinthians. Perfectly in line with Jesus’ command to “love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12), he shows that love is key to how gifts ought to be used for building up the body (1 Cor 12:31-14:1). To the Philippians he writes that peace with God, based on forgiven sins, passes all understanding (Phil 4:7; see also Isa 44:21-22). It is God’s gift of reconciliation in Jesus Christ which allows us to reconcile with others (2 Cor 5:18; Col 1:20 ff.; Matt 5:24). It is not for lack of scriptural direction that we still have disputes.

Dispute

Twenty-some years ago I inadvertently became privy to a dialogue between an elder and a much older and more vocal brother of his congregation.

Church News

Declined the call to the church at Taber, Alberta:

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

Called to the church of Fergus (Maranatha) Ontario:

Rev. J. de Gelder
of Flamborough, Ontario.

Council had just published a decision about a piece of church property without explaining the reasons very well. The elder supported the decision, but the brother was not pleased. Slightly disturbed, and probably lacking some wisdom, he postulated that the decision lacked wisdom and foresight. The brother had a point, and felt rather certain of himself. (Perhaps he had found others who supported him: such coalitions improve our sense of security.) As the elder got trapped in the challenge, feeling that he had to defend Council's decision, he turned somewhat crimson. He also exhausted his arguments before the brother did. The elder then made a comment typical for escalating disputes: "I don't care what you think. I don't want to talk with you anymore," and walked away. Clearly, he momentarily lost sight of James' counsel that "everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (James 1:19).

Of the Ten Words of the Covenant, we break virtually all, and commit the sins that would bar us from the Lord's table.

By the grace of God the dispute between this elder and brother was settled before long, in keeping with Matthew 18 and Paul's command, "In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Eph 4:26-27; see also Ps 4:4). If I understand our depravity correctly, this outcome was the result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. If I understand James correctly, this will only happen when we, by the grace of God, cry to Him (see Canons of Dort, V).

Disputes keep popping up in our lives, about all sorts of topics, and they do not always end well. As they escalate

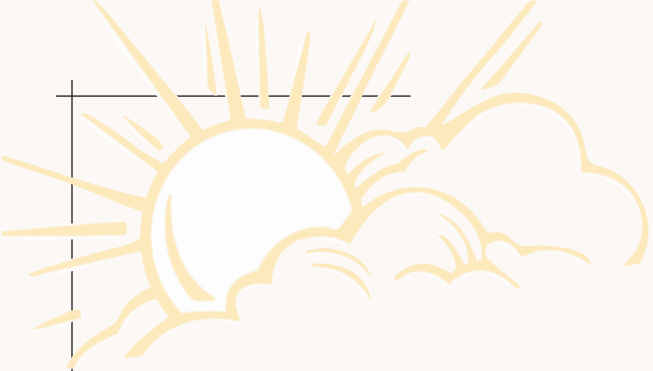
tempers rise, files increase, original issues may be forgotten, and resolution is increasingly difficult (see Diagram 1). While a simple problem may be talked out, escalating conflicts often involve increasingly unsatisfying steps of negotiation, mediation, arbitration, or litigation to resolve. The dispute between the elder and the brother started with a basic question about the use of some property, and might have been resolved with an additional clarification from Council. However, when it became a personal disagreement, misconceptions surfaced about roles and responsibilities. Soon it was a win-or-lose contest of arguments, which often involves personal charges and factual distortions. The elder lost, and walked away angrily. The conversation ended, but it was an escape, not a resolution of the dispute. Escape can take the form of flight, denial, or suicide (see Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*, Baker, 1997). Sometimes people attack rather than escape: They resort to litigation, assault, or murder. Whether people escape or attack, the dispute reaches a stage of intractable escalation. It is shameful, Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians 6, that such should happen in the church.

Much like Adam and Eve we are good at justifying our behaviour and at blaming others. This easily leads to more grievous error and sin. We entrench ourselves in our position. We lose all humility. Our complete love for and devotion to God and our love for others turns into devotion to the dispute. Wanting to resolve things ourselves, our way, we may even believe it is God's way. Inadvertently we no longer praise God in all our words and works. Our worship and prayers are hindered or distorted, and we do not rest from our evil works. We have no patience for office bearers, and slight their admonitions. We have negative feelings about our opponents, neglect their good, twist their words, condemn them without listening, and seek revenge (Rom 12:19). The fruit of the Spirit disappears (Gal 5:22). Of the Ten Words of the Covenant we break virtually all, and commit the sins that would bar us from the Lord's table.

The catechism rings true: "But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined to all evil? Yes, unless we are regenerated by the Spirit of God" (HC, Q/A 8).

By the grace of God, and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, a deadly dispute can turn to brotherly love.

The Lord's command to love Him with our whole heart, soul, strength, and mind, and our neighbour like ourselves, does not jive with the attitudes we easily assume in dispute escalation (see Matt 5:21-26). Can one still duly examine himself when involved in a heated conflict, and can we defend admission to the Lord's table before parties are reconciled? Sande rightly calls for church discipline in an escalating dispute, and seeks Christian conciliation of the parties. He reminds combatants of the Lord's standards for resolving differences. Christian conciliation is based on four basic principles: glorify God (1 Cor 10:31); get the log out of your own eye (Matt 7:5); go and show your brother his fault (Matt 18:15); go and be reconciled (Matt 5:24). By the grace of God and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit a deadly dispute can turn to brotherly love (Titus 2:11-14).



Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.”

Psalm 150:6

In this article we will focus on the praise that we owe our heavenly God and Father. How often do we truly praise the Lord? Have you ever gone through a day and thought to yourself, “I have not praised and showed thankfulness to the Lord in all that I have done today.” Sure, we read a lot in the Bible about giving praise to God, but how much does He really require of us?

Let us begin with the words of Psalm 113:3 where it says, “From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised.” In short, this means that in all that we do, from the moment that we wake up in the morning till we go to sleep a night, we are to praise the Lord.

Turning to our Bibles and going through the Old Testament we can see how music and singing played a big role in the worship of God. In 1 Chronicles 16:4-36 we read how David appointed various men to play a variety of musical instruments. The music must have been loud and joyous, for these instruments also accompanied choirs and song leaders. As we continue into the New Testament we also see how Paul encourages the Ephesians to praise God. “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:19, 20).

The Bible is directly teaching and commanding us to praise God. God is faithful and just. When we trust in Him, He quiets our hearts. Because He has been faithful throughout history, we can trust Him in times of trouble.

Why must we praise God? For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods. Indeed, He created and still upholds all parts of creation. Who is a king or god like Him? There is no other. He has sent his only Son to lay down his life for us sinful people. Through God’s grace we may stand righteous before God. We need to truly examine ourselves and see how God has delivered us from our sinfulness. Seeing how God has delivered us from our sins through his ultimate sacrifice will lead to thankfulness and praise to God.

The more that we study and learn about our God and Father, the more we can begin to appreciate all that He has done for us. When our thoughts are focused on God we also praise Him. God is all-powerful, and He always acts at the right time. He is sovereign over every situation. God’s power is shown by the way He reveals Himself in creation, history, and his Word. True praise comes from a totally thankful and obedient heart. Throughout our life here on earth we may face difficulties and hardships. Yet our heavenly Father has promised to stay near us. Our path moulds us and strengthens our faith. He has given a purpose to all mankind, whom He has so wonderfully created. In whatever capacity of talents that we have been given, we have all been given the purpose of praising and glorifying Him. Trust in Him and his promises, in true faith for all the days of our life, till we will reign with Him eternally. Let us strive to live in obedience and gratitude to his holy will. Continue to praise Him each day in all you do, for He is our only creator, sustainer, and redeemer!

*Sing to the Lord, a new song voicing,
For mighty wonders He has done.
His right hand and his arm most holy
The victory for Him have won.
The Lord displayed his just salvation;
His vindication He has shown,
Revealing to the heathen nations
That judgement issues from his throne.*

*Join to the harp your glad rejoicing;
A psalm of adoration sing,
With trumpet and with cornet voicing
Your joyful praise to God the King.
Let oceans roar with all their fullness,
The world and all that dwell therein.
Acclaim the Lord’s great power with boldness;
Exalt Him ever and again.*

Psalm 98:1, 3

Birthdays in October:

- 6 HENRY VANDER VLIET will be 38**
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0
- 17 ALAN BREUKELMAN will be 39**
225-19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4
- 22 NELENA HOF SINK will be 45**
Bethesda Clearbrook Home
32553 Willingdon Crescent, Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2

- 28 MARY ANN DE WIT will be 49**
31126 Kingfisher Drive, Abbotsford, BC V2T 5K4

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday this month. May our heavenly Father bless you in this new year with good health and much happiness. Have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends.

Till next month,

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



C. Van Dam

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

A unique situation

Theological education was a major issue at this synod. To appreciate the dilemma facing our brothers and sisters in South Africa, we need to understand their situation. South Africa is called a rainbow nation. Many languages, tribes, and nations are represented in this country, and this variety is also reflected in the composition of our sister churches. There are the Sotho-speaking black churches in Soshanguve and Mamelodi, townships found outside Pretoria, the Afrikaans-speaking coloured churches in Belhar and Wesbank, townships found outside Cape Town, and the Afrikaans-white churches in Pretoria, Johannesburg, Bethal, and Cape Town. Each group has its own unique culture and way of doing things. Theological students from all three groups are preparing for the ministry of the Word.

It had been the hope that our sister churches could run a full-fledged seminary to train these diverse students,



The Free Reformed Church building in Belhar where the teaching of theological students took place.

but the experiences of the past years have shown that this is not feasible. This was not for lack of trying. Synod expressed its thanks for the tremendous amount of work that had been done since 1997 in the training of theological students of all backgrounds. This had

been a labour of love and dedication which had been accomplished by full-time ministers who had responsibilities for their congregations. However, as mentioned, in the light of past experience Synod decided that a new approach was necessary.



The classroom (left to right): Dr. C. Van Dam, Dr. J.A. Breytenbach, elder C. Van Wyk, and elder P. Abrahams.

The decision of Synod

Although new directions were taken, Synod did declare that “it is the churches’ calling to accept responsibility for the training of theological students and that it is desirable to establish a single theological training.” Thus the principle “of the churches, for the churches, by the churches” was maintained, as was the desirability to maintain as ultimate goal the establishing of a single institute for ministerial training. However, Synod also recognized that “it is important to distinguish between the calling of the churches and

Each group has its own unique culture and way of doing things.

how the calling is realized,” and that “accepting responsibility for the training of the students does not automatically mean that the churches do everything themselves. This depends on circumstances, resources, and opportunities.”

Consistent with the churches’ calling and present circumstances, the Synod then decided “to work towards a new

structure such as a Ministerial Training Institute with a full time director under the responsibility of a board appointed by synod.” Such an institute would oversee the theological education of students seeking admission to the

It is the churches’ calling to accept responsibility for the training of theological students.

ministry of the Word and supplement the education as needed. One of the grounds for this decision was that “such a training institute could be the first step towards establishing a well structured own theological seminary.” Deputies were appointed to work out the details and report to the churches by the end of November so that Synod could be reconvened for the end of January, 2006.

With regard to the students who are already engaged in their studies, the Synod decided that the Sotho-speaking students in the Pretoria area would continue their work at Mukhanyo Theological College with the recommendation that they upgrade

their biblical language skills to a second year level. After their graduation from Mukhanyo, the Ministerial Training Institute would provide a final year to prepare students for ministry in the churches; pastoral accompaniment of these students by the missionary churches in greater Pretoria was also requested.

Here is a small federation that seeks to do everything possible to be a church that makes a difference in their country.

The students in the Cape would remain the responsibility of the Church at Cape Town until it is possible to put them under the direct responsibility of the churches as that will be organized by the Ministerial Training Institute. A responsible use of existing institutions to help in the training of these students was urged upon the mission church, as well as the use of individual ministers from both inside and outside the federation of churches.

Synod appointed governors to oversee the training given to the Sotho-speaking students and those in the Cape, and to continue representing the interests of the churches on the Board of Governors of Mukhanyo.

Synod recommended that white students who are contemplating studying for the ministry make use of the existing theological training institutes of our sister-churches overseas.

It was a great privilege to witness the work done at Synod Pretoria of our

South African sister churches. Here is a small federation that seeks to do everything possible to be a church that makes a difference in their country. Much work was done and the atmosphere at this assembly could not have been better.

In conclusion

Much more could be written about our experiences in this vast and challenging country. Let me mention just one more thing, namely the work of Mrs. N. Kleyn, whose husband pastors one of the two FRCSA congregations in Pretoria. Mrs. Kleyn has organized an AIDS hospice in Soshanguve in a large former farm house. It is called *Kagisong*, which can be translated as “a place of peace” or “a place of encouragement.” Here about seven patients are lovingly provided for during their last weeks of life in this world. Needless to say, this also presents a marvellous opportunity to present the gospel. The leaflet distributed at the hospice gives a



A front view of the Huguenot memorial. Some of the symbolism: three arches symbolize the holy Trinity, above that is the Sun of Righteousness and above that the cross as symbol of the Christian faith.

summary of the gospel and stresses on its cover that AIDS is not hopeless. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The gospel is the only real answer to the

tragedy and death of AIDS. It was moving to see the smiles on the faces of the patients when Mrs. Kleyn would visit each of them. This ministry of mercy makes a difference; also, we hope and pray, for eternity.

We started this article with mentioning that South Africa is a rainbow nation because of the many languages and cultures represented there. For that reason our sister churches can also be called a rainbow church. This identity brings its unique challenges, but our God is faithful. While in the Cape Town area we visited Franschhoek. There a beautiful Huguenot memorial commemorates the arrival of Calvinist refugees from France in 1688. As we were approaching this memorial nestled between the mountains, a rainbow appeared overhead. One could not but help think of the rainbow as a sign of God’s faithfulness (cf. Genesis 9) for the church in difficulty, and the surrounding mountains reminded us of God’s embracing care (Psalm 125).

May the Lord continue to bless the labours of our brothers and sisters in their unique situation in South Africa.



Mrs. N. Kleyn with the manager of the Kagisong AIDS hospice.



Mission Conference 2005

On May 31 and June 1, 2005, about forty participants gathered at the Mission Conference held at the Theological College in Hamilton. The participants included missionaries, ex-missionaries, mission board members, ministers, and college students from the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), the United Reformed Churches (URCNA), and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). They came from across Canada as well as from Brazil, Papua New Guinea, and Irian Jaya. The aim of the conference, organized by Prof. J. Geertsema and Dr. A.J. de Visser, was to bring all these participants together in one place to meet, discuss, share, and build each other up, with a special focus on preaching in the missionary context.

The scriptural foundation for mission

After the conference was opened by Dr. de Visser and the chair was handed to Rev. J. Van Spronsen, Prof. Geertsema was invited to present his paper titled, “*The Scriptural Foundation for Mission and its Biblical History and Normative Direction.*” He began by using the well known verses of Matthew 28:19-20:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

This Great Commission gives us the climax of what the Scriptures have already extensively dealt with in events of the Old Testament; further, these verses give direction for mission work today.

Already in the Old Testament we are given a clear mandate for mission work. In

the first chapter of the Bible we read of God creating man, male and female, with the intent to multiply, fill the earth, and have dominion over it. In the last chapter of the Bible (Revelation 21:2-3) we see this promise coming to its fulfillment in God dwelling with his peoples:

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now 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.

The foundation for mission work is firmly laid in the Old Testament.

Prof. Geertsema also referred to Genesis 3:15:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

This Word of God is accompanied by his deed. He says that He puts enmity, and He does put enmity. All of the Old Testament in both its promising words and in its description of his works are a working out of this Word and work in redemption and in judgment, while leading to the fulfillment of this “mother promise” in the coming of the “Great Seed.” In God’s calling and dealing with the forefathers of Israel we see the manner of God’s Word and work. It is God’s revelation of sovereign election in grace in Christ, and his reprobation of

others whom He leaves in the state into which they plunged themselves, in sin.

In the Old Testament the saving work is the same as in the New Testament. God chose a nation to whom special promises were given, for example, Exodus 19:5-6:

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.

In this NIV text we read, “*Although* the whole earth is mine,” while a footnote presents an alternative translation which is present in many other versions: “*For* the earth is mine.” This is a better rendering of the Hebrew text, and this alternative reading clearly shows that God makes a covenant with his one people Israel, with regard to the other nations which are his concern. This is confirmed in Deuteronomy 4:5-8.

Through Israel’s life according to God’s laws the other nations have to see how good and gracious Israel’s God is and how wise his laws are. Israel is to be light for the nations.

Throughout the Old Testament the Israelites did have a special calling in respect to mission work, but they were not required to send out missionaries. Other people were incorporated into their nation, but the ingathering of the nations was yet to come. We read of many promises which show this. In the Davidic kingship we see a foreshadowing of the Messianic kingship to come, and the Psalms frequently make mention of the nations coming to God. The prophets also often speak of God coming to the nations. The Israelites were to be a light

for the nations around them. Yes, the foundation for mission work is firmly laid in the Old Testament.

In the transition to the New Testament, the focus is still on the *incorporation* rather than the *ingathering* of the nations. This focus only changes after Christ made the ultimate sacrifice, once He ascended into heaven having paid the price for sin. Then the ingathering of the nations takes place. To make this possible the Holy Spirit is sent. The “Great Seed” of the woman has come; Christ is the fulfillment.

Christ gave the command to make disciples of all nations. This can only be done by preaching Christ. The promises of the Old Testament are fulfilled as the apostles witnessed. The task of the apostles then, as witnesses, was not to reinterpret the Old Testament, but to bring the message of the truth. Missionaries have the same task to bring the truth. They are to be faithful and trustworthy in the task to which they are called by the church of Jesus Christ who sends them. It is the church who has the task to send out the workers. The church does so under the Lordship of Christ, her head.

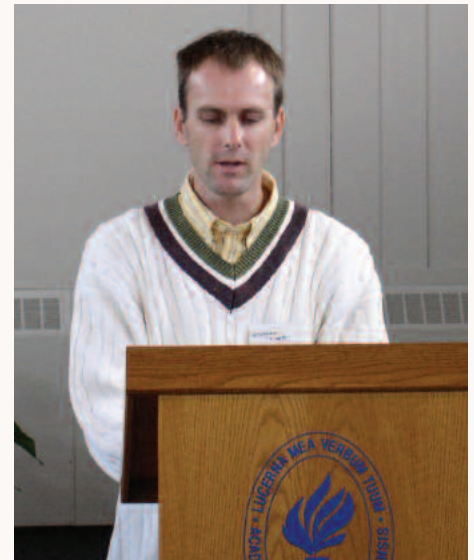
Mission work in Papua New Guinea

We were then privileged to listen to Rev. S. ‘t Hart, missionary in Papua New Guinea (PNG), present his address titled, “*Melanesian Marathon: Preaching Beneath a Blue Canvas.*” Rev. ‘t Hart explained that, although many in PNG have appeared to embrace Christianity, many of these people do not have the awareness that Christ is king over their whole lives. The missionary’s first challenge is to understand his own culture and worldview properly (so he can understand the position from which he is coming), and then also the culture and worldview of the Papuan people (so he can understand the position from which they are coming). Only then will his preaching be effective.

To illustrate the dichotomy of Western/Papuan worldviews several examples were given, taken from recent events in PNG. The missionary’s culture and worldview explained a drought as a direct result of *El Nino*; the drought was explained by science. The solution to the drought was seen in irrigation. The bus accident near Sogeri in PNG was explained as an accident waiting to happen given the state of the roads and the condition of the vehicles. A solution was seen in better roads and a well maintained vehicle. In both these incidents the Western worldview ignores the sovereignty of God. A Papuan worldview, however, would see the same incidents as a result of the spiritual forces. The drought was caused by an imbalance in the spirit world while the bus crashed because of witchcraft. The challenge for the missionary, then, is to bring across in his preaching that God is the sovereign King. He is not a god to be manipulated, but the God who is to be worshipped.

The missionary’s first challenge is to understand his own culture and worldview properly.

In the worldview of the missionary hard work and careful planning is seen to ensure success, while the eschatological perspective is mostly ignored. To the Papuan success is ensured through the use of magic. Witchdoctors are consulted prior to a rugby match or before planting a crop. The name “Jesus” is often used in the same way. The missionary needs to preach the gospel message. The lasting happiness which we have in Christ needs to be preached. It also needs to be explained that prayer is not a form of magic, and the reason for suffering needs to be shown.



Rev. Stephen ‘t Hart

In the worldview of the missionary the individual is seen to be more important than the group. To the Papuan the individual is subservient to the group and being part of the group is essential. Gossip is a means to shame a person in order to lead them back, while salvation is seen as the restoration of relationships. Personal ambition is frowned upon. The preacher must show what it means to be created in the image of God, the importance of love and concern for others must be made clear, and the importance of being good stewards must also be stressed.

The preaching must transform the worldview of the listener. To help achieve this end some other considerations were also raised, elements to be remembered to “reduce the static”: the church need not be a building (starting under a blue canvas is fine); a clear and simple liturgy is a good way to start; it is important for the preacher to build relationships with the listeners; the preaching must be at the right level, and the preacher must commence at the level where the people are at; and preaching must be Christ centred, but story telling and illustrations are very useful.

Preaching Christ to the Babine

Rev. W. Bredenhof then presented his address titled, “*Preaching Christ to the*



B. Vanderlugt

Babine: A Case Study in Cross-Cultural Communication of the Gospel.” He explained that, although indigenous cultures are different to our own, it must also be remembered that within indigenous cultures there are many differences as well. To preach effectively one must understand social sciences and cultural anthropology. For example, in many indigenous cultures they think in a concrete relational manner, with gestures often more important than written words. To bring across the Reformed message, where the Word is so important, obviously has its challenges; the emphasis on visible elements and on feelings are not as emphasized as they may be in other faiths. The structure of a sermon in a typical Reformed church service is not necessarily the most effective method when preaching to the Babine. Rev. Bredenhof mentioned that although narrative passages are very effective ones to preach on, it is nevertheless necessary to cause the Christological component to come out after explaining the text. Application to the people should be dealt with; an application which must often be more subtle and less direct than what many of us are used to, because of the Babine culture. Incorporating the surroundings and the culture of the people as much as possible was also seen as important.

The law in mission preaching

The first speaker on Tuesday afternoon was Dr. de Visser, presenting “*The Law in Mission Preaching*,” in which it was explained that the preacher must keep away from the notion of cheap grace on the one hand, and on the other hand he must not give the idea that salvation is achieved through good works. Neither moralistic nor legalistic preaching should be practiced, nor should a sermon deal with what God has done for us in the first point, and then in the second state what we must do in return. The type of sermons preached should show that man is 100% responsible for his actions, but that God will establish obedience in our hearts; the preaching should be covenantal. Our covenant relationship with God is more like the relationship between a father and his son, as opposed to a contractual relationship. The promises outweigh the demands, yet both components need to come out in the preaching.

The above also applies to the mission field, Dr. de Visser explained, yet the tendency for converts to want a legalistic religion on the mission field is often even greater. The pagan background sees God as a creator who is far removed, with spirits filling his place. The misery of man is that he is poor or ill, for example, and salvation is the removal of this misery. All that is required for this salvation is the performance of certain rituals; they are used to a very legalistic religion and see Christianity as another religion where certain laws are to be abided by. A missionary must stress that the obedience to the law is God working within us, that Christ has done the work on our behalf. God enters into a covenant relationship with us and we can trust in our faithful Father.

Mission in Brazil

The next speaker, Rev. A de Graaf, titled his address, “*Prophetic Preaching among Pagans, Papist, and Pentecostals.*” He

explained that in Brazil the pure preaching is incredibly vital and important in an environment where the preaching of so many other religions plays a minor role. The Reformed message is one where the Word is important. The unity between the Old and the New Testaments is stressed, with the liturgical year being used to form a preaching outline with time being taken to preach on books from Scripture from both testaments.

Rev. K. Wieske, also serving as a missionary in Brazil, then presented, “*Preaching in a Latin American Urban Environment.*” It was explained that in Brazil (as Rev. ‘t Hart also noted in PNG) many claim to know the name Christ, but in reality many of these same people are not aware of who Christ really is. In fact, many do not even speak of the Christ of the Scriptures, for although there are churches who claim to be Christian, in many of them the gospel message is not heard. To make this point clear Rev. Wieske showed that, in many respects, the various evangelical churches are nothing more than a reflection of the church from the medieval Roman times. Repentance is not seen as a turning to God but something you do from yourself; it is the chance to prove yourself before God. The Bible is often a



Rev. F. Dong

closed book with power coming from other mystic means, pastors are seen as being able to give you access to sacred powers within yourself, congregational members are in many ways simply spectators to what takes place in a worship service, and the bigger and grander the church the better. Many people are left feeling obliged to give to the church beyond their means. In fact, Jesus Christ as the only Saviour is denied, so Reformed preachers are required to expose the heresies of the day for what they are, and to preach the gospel truth. The people need to be called from darkness to the light; the listeners need to be fed with the Word.

Intercultural Reformed Theological Training Centre

The session on Tuesday evening was held in the Ancaster church building, where Br. B. vander Lugt, the director from the Intercultural Reformed Theological Training Centre (IRTT) in The Netherlands presented his first address titled, “*Ecclesial Partnership.*” In this speech he explained the process of a mission post coming to the point where the institution of a local church must take place. In this process there should be transparency from both the side of the missionary and the sending church as well as the locals, with the aim to be equal partners working for the benefit of the churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. Both sides should be seen as complementing each other and mutuality is needed in the structures in place.

On Wednesday morning Br. vander Lugt presented a second paper, “*Designing Educational Programs,*” where he explained that qualified professional leadership is required in the church because, as societies are modernizing, the churches must also go through this process; the churches need capable leaders who are well trained. Educational programs, therefore, need to be organized in an appropriate way to facilitate this.

Only after the needs of the specific local church have been determined can the desired outcomes be listed. From this list the components of the program can be determined. Such a program will not only include a theological component, but may also include topics such as management and administration. The focus should be on the future development of the church.

Proclaiming the gospel among the Chinese

The first of Wednesday afternoon’s sessions was presented by Rev. F. Dong, and was titled, “*Proclaiming the Gospel among the Chinese.*” Rev. Dong first provided an outline on the major influences on religion in China, and then explained why many of the traditional ways used to bring the gospel to the Chinese people were not effective. The main reason was that many missionaries attempted not only to bring the gospel, but also to make the Chinese reject their own culture and way of life. Another reason for the lack of success was that in some cases aid was given priority over the gospel, meaning that when the money ceased, so did the churches; many were simply “rice Christians.”

Preaching should show that man is 100% responsible for his actions, but that God will establish obedience in our hearts.

In the third place, Rev. Dong explained what the Reformed approach to missionary work should be. In the work being done in Vancouver among the Chinese the first step is to develop a friendship with the people. Through this a bridge is built so that the gospel message



Rev. Ian Wildeboer

can be delivered. Often the text which will be used in the preaching will first be studied at a Bible study session to familiarize the listeners with the passage prior to hearing a sermon on it.

Mission among the Sikh community

The second speaker for the afternoon was Rev. T. Zekveld, a missionary from the URC who is working among the Sikh community in the Toronto area. He stressed that getting to know the people and building a relationship with them was a very important starting point. Another challenge is to make the people realize that Christianity is not simply another religion that leads to God, but that it is the only religion that leads to God. The gospel truths need to be made clear to them.

Conclusion

To conclude the conference Rev. I. Wildeboer presented the final address in the Ancaster church building on Wednesday evening. It was stated that Scripture is clear on the fact that the message must go out; the Word must be preached. Even though the exegesis of a passage never changes, how the message is communicated may well change. We do not preach in a vacuum, so time is needed to learn the culture and the

tradition of the people to whom the Word is being preached. Nevertheless, care is needed to ensure that stereotypes are not made; these are often detrimental to the message going out.

The gospel message which is preached must give meaning to the world in which it is preached, with the challenge for the missionary being to bring a message which is clearly discernable to the listeners. When this is done the culture will be able to be transformed from the inside out; it will be transformed by the message of Scripture. To make all of this possible the missionary must preach the whole council of God, show how all things point to Christ, show how God works

through history, and preach within the framework of the covenant. One method that could be used is the concentric circle manner. The gospel is presented in a "nutshell" and from this the preacher over time moves out from this core, taking the listeners further and further without forgetting the "nutshell."

Although the focus of the conference was on missionaries and how they are to preach the gospel, Rev. Wildeboer explained how the whole world is the mission field of God. We all live in a society where many are without Christ. Therefore all of us, through the power of Christ, need to share the message of salvation.

Wednesday evening saw the conclusion of the Missionary

Conference 2005. It was the first time amongst our churches that such a conference had been held. It was a truly worthwhile experience in which the guidance of the Holy Spirit could be clearly seen. With thankfulness the many participants can reflect on an informative and enjoyable conference. From the formal speeches to the discussions that followed, from the fellowship over mealtimes to the opportunity to share something of the glorious task of mission with coworkers and fellow believers, it was clear that the love for God and his Kingdom was an overwhelming bond joining this gathering together. We praise Him for this blessed opportunity!



R. Aasman

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During the past year the Edmonton Canadian Reformed (CanRC) and United Reformed Churches (URC) have been able to call on Rev. J.P. Kalkman to fill the pulpit during times of vacancy or during the absence of their own minister. Rev. Kalkman is a minister of the Reformed Churches of the United States (RCUS) from Menno, South Dakota. He was serving in Menno but he could not get his Green Card and was asked to leave the US about a year ago. Finally, this past August, Rev. Kalkman realized that the door to returning to the US was closed. At this time he is eligible for call in Canada.

Rev. Kalkman was born in The Netherlands in 1950 and at the time of his immigration to Canada with his wife Gerda and children in 1982 he was a member of the *Nederlands Hervormde Kerk – Gereformeerde Bond*. In Canada he became a member of the Orthodox

Rev. Johannes Kalkman

Reformed Church in Edmonton which eventually became part of the URC. From 1994 to 1997 he studied at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He served the URC in Leduc, Alberta from 1997 to 1999 until he received a call to the RCUS in Menno, South Dakota. During the past year while Rev. Kalkman resided in Canada at the insistence of the US government he has worshipped at the Edmonton URC.

While it has been a difficult year for Rev. Kalkman and his family because of great uncertainties and a longing to return to Menno, local CanRC and URC congregations have enjoyed his preaching. In fact, he preached extensively in the Providence Canadian Reformed Church during the three month sabbatical of the undersigned.

Because the door to the US is closed, Rev. Kalkman has ceased his relationship with the RCUS in Menno, and he is



available for call within the URC and the CanRC. From a church orderly point of view, since the Canadian Reformed Churches have ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCUS, should a CanRC congregation call Rev. Kalkman he would have to undergo a colloquium (CO 5C).

Should anyone or any congregation desire to have more information about Rev. Kalkman, the undersigned can be contacted. Sermon tapes are available. Rev. Kalkman's email address is Hans Kalkman (hans54@telus.net). His phone number is 780-962-0864.

