

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 55, No. 2 • January 20, 2006

*Professing
Your Faith*

Weepers

*The Need for
Bible Study*



*Canadian Reformed Church
at Toronto, Ontario*



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Professing Your Faith

Those who have been born into God-fearing homes need to indicate that they have made the Christian faith their own.

In many of our churches at this time of year catechism instruction is in full swing. Among the various classes being held there will most likely also be one called "the pre-confession class." In it young people who have expressed a desire to become communicant members of the church are being instructed in the fundamentals of the faith. And that is a most beautiful thing!

Nevertheless, it has struck me that it is often not without some questions and challenges. As a result, it merits some special attention and additional explanation. We begin by looking first at the reason for it.

Why – profession?

With regard to its rationale, the short answer is that public profession is something that has always been a part of the Christian faith. There comes a time or a moment when a person has to declare openly and personally what he or she believes. It is not enough to have your name inscribed automatically on the register of a church somewhere. It is not sufficient for everyone to assume that you naturally belong.

Profession should not be considered an escape, or be part of a herd mentality, or be connected to pressure or tradition.

Rather those who have been born into God-fearing homes and who have received the sacrament of baptism as infants need to indicate that they have made the Christian faith their own. There is this basic call to take ownership of the gospel and to verbalize your commitment to the Lord. There is this need to embrace it and to live out of it every day.

It is with this background in mind that the Bible says to believers, "Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess" (Heb 4:14) and, "Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess" (Heb 10:23).

Now, some of you may wonder why such a profession cannot simply remain a private affair. Why does it have to be done publicly? The answer to this resides in the words of the Lord Jesus found in Luke 12: 8-10. There He speaks about "whoever acknowledges me before men" (v. 8). Christ demands a public profession, both before the church and before the world.

Having thus looked briefly at the reason for public profession of faith, we should also deal with those who make this profession.

Who – profession?

Several Scripture passages are helpful when it comes to identifying properly the true participants of profession. In Acts 16 we come across the case of the jailer in Philippi who asks in desperation, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (v. 30) He receives the answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household" (v. 31). From Romans 10:9 we learn that this is something that must be done from the heart. Those who profess must believe sincerely from the heart. They must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and especially Paul says, in his resurrection from the dead.

At times you can hear people give wrong reasons for taking this step. Some remark later that they took it because they were tired of going to catechism class. Others reveal that they did it because all of their friends were doing it. Still others say that the parental pressure was on. And then too there are those who relate that they were simply doing what was expected of them.

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

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(subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):**

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


Subscription Rates for 2006	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$44.00*	\$72.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$46.50	\$60.00
International	\$72.00	\$108.00

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

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All such reasons, however, miss the mark. For profession should not be considered an escape, or be part of a herd mentality, or be connected to pressure or tradition. No, true profession, as we have seen, involves personal faith in the risen Christ and a heart commitment to Him.

Of relevance here is also what the Belgic Confession states about the marks of true Christians (Art 29). They include the following:

- Believing in Jesus Christ the only Saviour
- Fleeing from sin
- Pursuing righteousness
- Loving the true God and their neighbour
- Crucifying their flesh and its works.

Having looked now at the “why” and the “who,” there is also a need to look at the content of profession of faith.

What – profession?

The day has arrived and you are standing there “before God and his holy church,” the questions are asked one by one, and then the answer “I do” is given. But to whom or what are you giving your “I do”?

There are those who insist that when you profess your faith you are really committing yourself to a particular church and to staying in that church no matter what for the rest of your life.

There are others who say that “church” really has very little to do with it because profession is something solely between you and God. You are making a promise to Him alone. So, what is it – church or God?

People who frame the question in this way are creating a wrong dilemma. They are setting profession up as an “either-or” scenario. Yet the truth of the matter is that it is really a case of “both-and.”

When you profess your faith you are first and foremost professing your faith in God – in the Triune God. You are declaring that you love the Father who created you, the Son who saved you, and the Spirit who renews you. Profession is always in a person and Christian profession is always in God.

Having said this, we must not think, however, that such a profession has no consequences for our relationship to the church. If we believe, as the Scriptures tell us, that the church is the body of Christ, how can we say that our profession relates only to Christ and not to his body? Such a position makes no sense.

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Where does that leave us? With insisting that while profession of faith is a profession in God, it is not without consequences for the church. If Christ loves the church, his followers must love her too. Believers have a calling to love, serve, and defend the church. Membership in the church is both a privilege and a responsibility.

While profession of faith is a profession in God, it is not without consequences for the church.

We have looked briefly now at the "why," "who," and "what" of profession, but that still leaves the question of "where."

Where – profession?

There is no shortage of churches today and this naturally raises a question about the place of our profession. Can it be done anywhere, in any church?

Unfortunately these questions cannot be answered in the affirmative. Why? For the simple reason that not all churches have a proper respect for the authority of the Bible. Many question, ignore, or distort its teachings. You need to profess your faith in a church that considers the Bible to be the inspired and infallible Word of God – the only rule of faith and life.

And something else as well: you need to profess your faith in a church that adheres to those confessions that faithfully summarize the main message of the Bible. Which confessions are they? We would be so bold as to assert that those confessions called "Reformed" do this best. Among them are included the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. Together with the "ecumenical" creeds (the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian), they represent bold, clear, and accurate statements of the faith.

So where should you make your profession? In a church that is biblical and Reformed. In a church that acknowledges the absolute authority of the Bible and the subordinate authority of the ecumenical creeds and the Reformed confessions.

Finally, there is one more word that starts with the letter "w" that we need to examine. It is the word "whither."

Whither – profession?

Profession of faith is not the end of the road; rather, it represents an important stop on the road of the Christian life. Sometimes people are confused about this. There are those who treat their profession as if it were a graduation ceremony, or else a retirement ceremony. However, it is neither. In some ways profession of faith may be compared to a lifting-off ceremony. It is like a rocket that ignites, rises from the ground, detaches itself from its secure base, and moves out into space to fulfill its purpose.

Well, much the same applies to profession of faith. It represents lift-off time. It represents that stage of your life when you need to step out and get busy applying yourself and your talents in the service of the Lord Almighty. Strive through the power of the Holy Spirit to be

- A sincere and holy believer
- A dedicated student of the Bible and its confessions
- A living member of the church
- A true witness in the world.

In closing

Profession of faith really is one of those great moments in the Christian life. It's that special moment when you thank God for adopting you as one of his children and receiving you into his covenant. It's that moment when you acknowledge that fundamentally this wanting to profess is not your doing but a desire that God graciously works in your heart by his Holy Spirit. Lastly, it's that moment when you look forward with anticipation as it gives you access to that special supper of the Lord Jesus Christ and so to the strengthening of your faith.

Profession represents that stage of your life when you need to step out and get busy applying yourself and your talents in the service of the Lord.

What an event! May all of you young people out there realize what a privilege it is to profess your faith and may God bless you richly as you live it out every day.

"For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." (Rom 10:10)



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Weepers



MATTHEW 13:52

“When the angel of the Lord had spoken these things to all the Israelites, the people wept aloud, and they called that place Bokim. There they offered sacrifices to the Lord.”

Judges 2:4, 5

When God’s people entered into the Promised Land, we might have expected them to be filled with thankfulness. We might have expected their lives to reflect thankful and loving hearts. However, what we find is disobedience: Israel didn’t drive out the inhabitants of the land as they were commanded to do. This disobedience didn’t escape God’s notice. God wasn’t sleeping when this happened. No, we’re told in the opening verses of Judges 2 that God sent his angel to reveal his judgment on them for their failure.

Traditionally, the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament has been identified with the pre-incarnate Son of God, our Lord Jesus. The Angel of the Lord is often identified with God Himself, yet in some instances it is also clear that he is different. His precise identity remains unclear, but the fact that he authoritatively speaks for God is very clear. And the content of his message is equally lucid. There is no question about what God wants to say to his people through this messenger.

This Angel of the Lord indicates God’s displeasure. The people have disobeyed the requirements of God’s covenant. Yet that covenant still stands. It stands with both its blessings and curses. In the beginning of Judges 2, it is the curses that stand out. Yahweh promises Israel that the nations will

always be there as a thorn in the side. They will be as traps or snares.

In response, the people weep. The weeping stood out as something so significant that the place was named for their weeping: *Bokim*. This is a Hebrew word which means “weepers.” Was this a godly sorrow over sin? Was this a sorrow that God had been slapped in the face and offended with Israel’s failure? Or was this the type of sorrow over sin where the sinner feels sorry for himself because he was caught and has to suffer the consequences? In 2 Corinthians 7:10 we read, “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

The Scriptures don’t tell us what lived in the hearts of the Israelites. With so many individuals, there were bound to be differences. Further, we have to be careful about speculating where the Scriptures are silent. However, we are told that as a whole they offered sacrifices to God. This indicates, at least, something that looks like communal repentance. Finally, there was a realization that the way things were going was not right. Yet, God did not reverse his judgment. “Why not?” we might ask.

Sin always has consequences, even when there is sincere repentance. By his atoning sacrifice, the Lord Jesus takes away the sins of our youth, but oftentimes we have to live with the

consequences into adulthood and beyond. For example, couples who are sexually intimate before marriage often experience difficulties in later years. This especially holds true for those of the fairer gender, but it inevitably impacts men too. Individual believers who smoke or abuse other drugs often have health troubles at some point that may be directly related to their past or ongoing addiction. Numerous other examples could be given.

But why doesn’t the Lord take away not only our sin but also its ongoing consequences? After all, it is in his power to do it. The answer to this can only be that He does it for the amplification of his glory in us. When we struggle with the consequences of sin, we’re reminded that we live in a broken world. We’re reminded to constantly flee to the Saviour – the one in whom we shall some day be perfected and glorified. We don’t depend on ourselves for redemption and strength, but only on Him. As we do this, God is more glorified through us. The magnification of God’s glory could be the only answer for Israel in Judges 2 and it can be the only answer for us. It is not a hopeless answer. For the glory of God guarantees that the weeping of those who believe shall someday be turned to rejoicing! “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt 5:4).

J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 51

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



The fifth petition says "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Basically we are praying to God to forgive us our sins as we also want to forgive other people.

We have often talked about the Lord Jesus. He was willing to be nailed on the cross for our sins. You believe that he did that for you, don't you? However, if you do not ask Him for forgiveness, then you will not receive it. Nor do you receive forgiveness if you rattle off this prayer without thinking.

But there is something else that needs to be said. Do you remember the story of the slave who had to pay a huge amount to his king? "Sir, I am sorry," said the slave, "but I do not have that money." The king answered, "No? Then I will sell you, your wife, and your children." This was just like what Joseph's brothers did when they sold him to those traders travelling to Egypt. "No, sir, please don't do that," the servant begged. The king took pity on him. And what did the king say to the slave? "You will be free and you don't even need to pay me back what you owe me."

You also know the rest of the story. This happy slave who had been set free by the king met someone who owed him money and demanded to be paid back immediately.

When the king heard what had happened, he said, "You evil servant! How could you do that? Now I will have you punished until you have paid everything." And that was a lot!

The story teaches us that if your own sins are forgiven, then you need to forgive the people that you are angry with. And do you know something? You can ask the Lord to help you forgive others. With God's help you will be able to do it! At the same time you will know that your sins, too, are forgiven for Christ's sake.



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The Need for Bible Study: Why Must I Do Bible Study? (Part 2 of 2)

In a previous installment I drew out the necessity for God's people today to be busy with daily Bible study. As persons ordained by God the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit to be kings (LD 12), the principle of Deuteronomy 17:18, 19 is still valid for us today.

That conclusion raises another question. How shall the younger generation learn the art of being busy with the Scriptures in the midst of life's questions? They certainly will not learn it without guidance from someone. But who must give the guidance? And how?

In first place it must be said here that we may and must be thankful for the blessings the Lord gives in the Bible-centred education our children receive in our Christian schools. That observation, however, takes nothing away from the fact that parents fail in their task when they (think to) leave the education of their children to the teachers. Nowhere in the Bible do we find any passage that lets us conclude that the Lord has entrusted his children-by-covenant to the care of teachers. Instead, we find ample evidence in Scripture that the Lord has entrusted his children-by-covenant to the care of parents.

Parents

Let me attempt to be clear. The Lord God is almighty and so able

to place people on earth today in the same way as He put Adam on earth: gathering soil together into the form of a man and breathing into him the breath of life (Gen 2:7). Today He no longer creates people that way. Instead, He ordained that man and woman should be fruitful and multiply. That is: one generation brings forth the next generation. That is the means God uses to bring people into his world.

*There's not a moment of
life when parents are freed
from the obligation to
speak with their children
about the way and will of
the Lord God.*

Jesus said that God is mighty to raise up children for Abraham from the stones of the field (Matt 3:9). However, God doesn't do it that way. Instead, He has ordained that godly parents should train up their children to know their God. That is God's ordinance: believing parents are to cause their children to know their God so well that they learn to answer life's questions in God's way.

On the basis of this two-fold principle (God uses parents both to

bring more people into this world as well as to train up the next generation to know their God) the Lord God caused Moses to stress the role of parents in Israel. Moses said to the people before they crossed the Jordan to inherit the Promised Land: "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them" (Deut 4:9). Those words are obviously spoken specifically to the people in their role as parents. What were the things their eyes had seen? They'd seen forty years of the Lord's care for them in the desert, with manna each morning and water when they needed it. Moreover, those people to whom Moses spoke had seen their parents die, every last one of them; forty years ago God had punished the people with a sentence of death for everyone older than twenty. And it happened; God was holy. The older of the generation to whom Moses spoke could vividly recall the fearful display of God's majesty at Mount Sinai when He came in fire and smoke; they could recall the tension at Pi-Hahiroth when Egypt's armies closed in on them and God opened the sea so that they could walk between two walls of water; they could remember the

plagues on Egypt and the slavery before the plagues. In a word, the things written in the Bibles they had – specifically Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers – they knew from personal experience. God’s command was to make sure you don’t forget the things your eyes have seen, the things recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Teach those things to your children and to their children after them. (Note here the task God gives to grandparents!) These parents of Israel, then, had to make a point of teaching the Bible to their offspring!

That task of the parents is repeated two chapters later. “These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing over the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live” (Deut 6:1, 2). It shall not go well with the children if they do not fear the Lord and the children shall not know the Lord if their parents do not instill God’s commands, decrees, and laws in them. That is why the Lord adds: “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (v. 6, 7). Those commands included instruction about what foods were clean and which were unclean (Lev 11).

As Dad and the boys went hunting and slaughtered their catch, Dad was to teach the children to discern what they could eat, *and why*. Those commands included instruction about uncleanness as a result of childbirth or periods. As they sat in

the house (on this chair and not on that one), mother and father were to teach the children about the effect of the fall into sin on childbirth and the redemption God would work through a Saviour (Lev 15). Parental instruction from the Word of God was to touch every area of life; parents in Israel were always to impress God’s commands upon their children.

Individual Bible study leads to family Bible study.

We’d say today that parents need to speak with their children of the will of God when they sit in front of the TV and when they drive home from hockey, when they labour in the garden and when they fish in the river. There’s not a moment of life when parents are freed from the obligation to speak with their children about the way and will of the Lord God.

Solomon

It’s something Solomon understood. Time and again he gathered his children around him and taught them. Consider the refrain that recurs throughout the book of Proverbs: “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction” (1:8). “My son,” said Solomon to Rehoboam and his other children gathered before him, “if sinners entice you, do not give in to them” (1:10). “My son,” he continued (perhaps on another day), “if you accept my words and store up my commands with you. . .” (2:1). Again: “My son, do not forget my teaching. . .” (3:1). Here Solomon the father was making a point of impressing upon his son the commands and ordinances of the



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Lord his God. Solomon’s words were not directed to his son alone; this wisest of kings wrote it all down for the sake of the people as a whole (and God put this book in the Bible for our instruction). But none of that takes away from the fact that in the book of Proverbs Solomon was carrying out his God-given role of father, seeking to impress God’s Word on his children.

The question arises: from where did Solomon get all the wisdom he taught in the book of Proverbs (and, for that matter, in Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon)? From where did he gather the material he needed to teach his children? One could refer to the promise of the Lord in 1 Kings 3, where the Lord promised to give Solomon “a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you” (v. 12). At the same time, though, one must be aware that God did not promise to inject Solomon with wisdom and discernment without any effort on Solomon’s part. The Lord gives his blessings through the avenue of man’s obedience. Solomon could receive wisdom and discernment only by means of his faithfully obeying the command of Deuteronomy 17. Solomon would get his wisdom through being daily busy with the Scriptures. When he taught his children the wisdom

recorded in Proverbs, his children were benefiting from the diligent efforts of their father's persistent meditation on the Word of God in the midst of life's tough questions.

The elders must see to it that parents are carrying out their God-given role.

So we see a pattern. Individual Bible study leads to family Bible study. Parental obedience to the command of God to kings (and we all are kings!) leads to parents making a point of speaking with their children of the way and will of the Lord in all sorts of situations. It leads to families living around an open Bible.

Home visits

If this is the will of the Lord for parents, it follows that the elders have a task here. Elders are to "keep watch over [themselves] and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made [them] overseers" (Acts 20:28). In the context of the subject at hand, the command to keep watch over themselves requires that elders be busy with the Word of God day and night; their office, after all, is kingly! But more, elders are responsible for all the flock, including both parents *and children*. In their role as overseers over the lambs of God's flock, the elders must see to it that parents are carrying out their God-given role in the families, including that role of teaching their children (and their grandchildren) the ways and deeds and will of the Lord God. Each home visit to parents (and grandparents) must

include reference to the means God uses to teach his little ones; each home visit must inquire about whether parents are in fact busy with the Scriptures themselves and whether they are teaching it to their children in the context of any and all the nuts and bolts of daily living.

In fact, this task of the parents needs extra attention in our contemporary culture. There are so many questions for which children seek and need answers. Society tells us that specialists are best equipped to answer children's questions and give them the guidance they seek. Life is so busy that parents scarcely have the time to listen to children's questions, let alone be busy with the Scriptures "day and night" to come up with good answers. The inevitable result of such trends is that the children get neglected in that most basic of parental tasks; they no longer hear answers with depth from the people closest to them of what it means to live close to the Lord. The consequence in turn is that the children are not trained sufficiently in Bible knowledge and not trained sufficiently in the art of thinking through life's questions with an open Bible. That lack invariably impoverishes the next generation – to the detriment of society as a whole and the generation after them. To encourage parents in the wonderful responsibility they've received in parenting God's little ones, elders need to raise the topic and discuss the struggles that parents encounter here.

Encouragement

I am aware that this task God has given to parents can seem –

and be! – very daunting. For that reason I refer to the promise the Lord has given in Romans 8. "If God is for us," Paul writes to saints in Rome beleaguered by the challenges of living as weak sinners in a sin-filled world, "who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?" If the Lord God gave up his only Son to ransom parents *and children* from bondage to the devil, will this God now fail to supply the needs of the children? He is pleased to have his children-by-covenant trained through the labours of Godly parents; then He will certainly supply parents with the strength they need! That is his unchanging promise.

God looks after his little ones through you as parents and He does not fail to supply the strength and wisdom you need.

So, parents, carry out your God-given task in faith. Take the Word of God with you into every corner of your life and always meditate on that Word. Then use the insights gained from your personal Bible study to enrich your family Bible study. Moreover, cause your children to learn how to live this modern life with an open Bible. Your God looks after his little ones through you as parents (and grandparents). And He does not fail to supply the strength and wisdom you need.



How are We Doing? The Canadian Reformed Churches Today

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In the fall of 2004 a conference was held at the Free University in Amsterdam on developments within various Dutch communities in North America. I spoke there about the Canadian Reformed Churches. The larger part of my presentation concerned the origins and history of these churches, the means they have been using to guard their distinctiveness, and the extent and nature of their relationship with others. In the final part I turned to the present situation, giving special attention to the challenges the federation faces today, fifty-five years after it was established. The following article consists of a slightly-adapted version of this concluding section.¹ Focal points here were declining membership and its possible causes.

Membership: losses and gains

The number of people joining the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) is smaller than those leaving them. The growth that the federation enjoys (an average of 2.9% per year over the past fifty-five years, but less than 1% over the last four²) is the result of natural increase.

The federation as such has not kept records of the numbers leaving and joining, and to get an impression of the pattern of membership change I have had to rely on information supplied by the pastors and administrators of the

individual churches. Although not all of them responded to my questionnaire, a large majority did.³ The responses indicate that over the past four years the churches in question have for every 100 baptisms lost ten members by death. This should imply a minimum growth of ninety for every 100 births. The average growth over the period in question, however, is only seventy,

Of those leaving the federation, far more join a Reformed church than an evangelical church.

indicating a net loss of twenty per 100 births. Included in the number seventy are twenty-one who have come in from elsewhere. Six of these joined because of courtship and marriage, five as a result of evangelism, and ten for other reasons (such as transfers from other churches). The number of those leaving the CanRC is considerably higher, standing at forty-one per 100 births. Of this number, eighteen have become members of other Reformed churches (such as the URC, CRC, FRCNA, and Presbyterian), nine have joined evangelical churches, and fourteen have no known church affiliation.

Patterns

Among the more remarkable findings of the statistical analysis is that of those leaving the federation, far more join a Reformed (or Presbyterian) than an evangelical church (eighteen versus nine). This contradicts a widespread impression about the strong appeal of evangelicalism. It is true that the evangelical movement draws members from old-line churches like the CanRC. My statistics show that this is the case in many localities and that it is an especially important element in heavily urbanized regions such as, for example, the Fraser Valley in southern British Columbia. In the words of a local pastor, in this area we find "in a sense the headquarters for Canadian evangelicalism with the presence of the national headquarters of Focus on the Family, Crusade for Christ, Promise Keepers, and other para-church organizations. It is also the site of [evangelical] Trinity Western University. In such a setting it is a challenge for more traditional churches like the Canadian Reformed to hold on to its members."

Nevertheless, even in the Fraser Valley the number of those leaving for Reformed and Presbyterian churches appears to be more than twice the number of those who turn to evangelical ones.⁴ Loyalty to Reformed doctrine

continues to be strong. Most of those who join the CanRC do so, a pastor writes, because they want faithful, biblical preaching, and most of those who leave are moved by the same consideration. Other respondents voice similar opinions. This leaves us with the question about the reasons why more leave than join. What do other Reformed churches have to offer that the CanRC does not?

Explaining the losses

The responses received from local pastors, administrators, and others suggest that an important reason is the ethnic colouring of the CanRC. They are seen as still too “Dutch” and, by implication, too insular and isolationist. Indeed, the entire CanRC community is perceived as part of a Dutch subculture. Especially young people often see this as a serious drawback and so, we may assume, do people who otherwise might consider joining. Some members, on the other hand, consider it an asset. As one pastor-respondent remarked, these members believe that it will help guard the churches’ Reformed identity and traditions, while at the same time reducing the obligation to invite outsiders to join.

Related reasons for the limited appeal of the churches appear to be their perceived conservatism and exclusivism. The churches’ liturgy, including the use of the Genevan Psalter, constitutes a stumbling block for some. The same applies to their manner of “fencing” the Lord’s Supper table (the rule that visitors are admitted only upon submission of a written attestation from an affiliated church) and to the fact that women are not allowed to vote or to serve in church offices. In addition, there is the perception that far less emphasis is placed on the need for a Spirit-filled, Christ-centred life

than on doctrinal purity. The need of the latter is not denied, but the question is being asked whether this doctrinal orthodoxy always translates into a life of true discipleship.

The level of evangelistic outreach remains lower than that of other church communities.

Yet another widely-heard complaint is that there is insufficient investment in evangelism. The situation has been vastly improving in recent years with respect to both regional projects and local ones. Nevertheless, in many cases the level of evangelistic outreach remains lower than that of other church communities – Reformed, Presbyterian, and evangelical. Furthermore, as some younger people in the CanRC remark, they have not really been *taught* to witness to others in their environment – whether that environment be the neighbourhood, the work place, or the school or university. Witnessing to their faith comes more naturally and more spontaneously to many other Christians, especially evangelicals. Here as elsewhere, the younger people in question insist, the churches will have to adopt different policies and approaches if they want to be relevant in Canadian society.⁵

Two solitudes?

The question about the necessity of adjustments, then, receives different responses within the Canadian Reformed community. There is the growing demand for change, but there is also a strong element that wants to preserve the churches’ traditions at

all costs. This type of situation is of course not uncommon. Practically all Reformed immigrant churches have had to face it. In most cases it has meant a struggle between first- and perhaps second-generation immigrants on the one hand and the members of subsequent generations on the other. Although at least in the case of the Canadian Reformed the line cannot be drawn neatly between age-groups (among those denying the need for change are younger people, and among those demanding it are older ones, including first-generation immigrants), it remains true that the demand for change is strongest among the younger members.

The differences between the age groups are in large part a result of different backgrounds and experiences. The men and women who founded the CanRC spent much of their energy and resources in establishing a Reformed infrastructure – consisting of churches, schools, colleges, various other institutions, publications, and so on – and desire to preserve it. These people, moreover, had gone through the *Vrijmaking* of 1944 and want to remain faithful to that heritage. For many this implies a strict confessionalism and a strong adherence to the ecclesiastical customs and traditions they were used to in The Netherlands. Liturgical changes are often frowned upon and theological novelties rejected. The disastrous effects of such changes and novelties, people are frequently reminded, are only too evident in the so-called synodical churches in The Netherlands and, more recently, in the Christian Reformed Church. And so the threat of feminist, evolutionist, and Bible-critical influences, for example, is being countered with a veto on women’s voting in church, a marked appreciation for what is

called scientific creationism, a fundamentalist view of biblical inerrancy, and (in general) a preference for a conservative-literalist hermeneutic.

The fear of contamination and assimilation affects the relationship even with churches of Calvinist background and confession. Not everybody is happy, for example, with the attempts to unite with other Reformed and with Presbyterian churches, no matter how orthodox. Warnings are also regularly issued against "modernistic" trends not only in other churches but within the Canadian Reformed community itself (and within the Dutch mother church).

That is one side of the coin. The other side is that opposition to an isolationist and potentially sectarian attitude exists and is growing. The demands for greater involvement in the orthodox-Christian *oecumene*, for more openness to the needs of a secular and postmodernist society, and for a differentiation between merely ethnically-based and truly biblically-based traditions, are increasingly being heard. The Canadian Reformed community and its leadership must, to quote one pastor, learn "to distinguish between the unchanging core of the Reformed faith and the various Reformed traditions. What holds back our witness...is not the Reformed faith *per se* but certain cultural habits we've acquired along the way (lack of emotional openness, a stiffness in our relational style, our very formal worship services, and sometimes a measure of religious pride)." One of my younger respondents complains that, rather than reaching out in love to the outside world, the Canadian Reformed tend to restrict their love and concern to their own church community. This same inward-

looking attitude, the writer remarks, causes the churches to worry about the way in which new songs, new music, new youth programs, non-Reformed Christian literature, and non-Reformed Christians may negatively affect their traditions and style of worship.

On the credit side

Is there, in the opinion of younger members, nothing positive to be said about the CanRC? According to various respondents, there is. Even some of those who have left express their appreciation for the CanRC – specifically for the support and instruction they received there. A respondent who has withdrawn because of emigration to the USA but expresses doubt that upon returning to Canada she will rejoin the CanRC, admits that "...one of the great things about the CanRC is that it holds in high regard the Word of God, as is evident [in] the organization of the worship service, with the sermon as the 'high point.' Children... are thoroughly immersed in Scripture, learning to memorize verses and becoming familiar with Scriptural concepts (salvation, sacrifice) early on in life. Sermons are 'meaty' and pastors are scholars with backgrounds in the languages of the Bible."

Another respondent (a young man who continues to be a member of the CanRC in spite of misgivings) agrees. He writes that those of his friends who have left for evangelical churches carry with them priceless traditions, including an emphasis on solid biblical knowledge and the possession of a holistic worldview – traditions that are sorely missing in the evangelical world. The true benefits of a Reformed upbringing, he adds, do not really become apparent until one has the

opportunity to compare Reformed teachings with those of evangelicalism.

Here we no doubt have a major reason why the majority of those who are leaving join Reformed rather than evangelical churches. It is probably also a factor in the conviction of several Canadian Reformed young people I have had contact with that regardless of their view of the present situation, their primary responsibility is to stay with the churches wherein they have been baptized and publicly confessed their faith. Change, these young people are convinced, is possible and will come, and in any event, as confessing members of their churches they have promises to keep.

The challenge

Although the Canadian Reformed community experiences polarization, there are as yet no debilitating ecclesiastical or theological struggles. In the opinion of one church leader this situation makes it possible for the churches to think seriously about their calling and, in the process, to concentrate on their obligations toward the world. "If we do not start expanding," this theologian observes, "we will start using our energy to fight amongst ourselves about issues of secondary importance and our best younger people will leave the churches. I believe that the CanRC are at a decisive point in their development. Everything has been built up, and it has been built up well. . . . The situation calls for new initiatives and expansion."

Such sentiments are shared by others. Many a pastor, as the information I have received makes clear, sees it as his task to lead the legitimate desire for outreach and biblical ecumenicity into the proper channels. This is often done

with a good deal of success. For one thing, attempts to establish relationships with other churches continue, and for another, young people in the CanRC are able to engage the surrounding society without turning their back on the church. Evangelistic and missionary outreach across and also outside the country relies heavily on young people – students of secondary schools, colleges, and universities, as well as working young men and women – and in the majority of cases it is supported and guided by the local church. It is in this direction – that of attempting to preserve continuity while allowing for necessary changes – that I expect the CanRC to move into the future.

It is tempting to draw parallels with the situation within the Dutch mother church. It is true that there are dissimilarities as well – at least in part because of differences between the North American and the European backgrounds and cultures. It is therefore not at all a foregone conclusion that the CanRC will go through exactly the same development as the one being experienced in Reformed Holland. But similarities do exist – for example, in the demand for a committed Christian life, in the trend toward greater involvement with the outside world, in the desire to lower the threshold for outsiders, and also in the reactions to which these demands give rise. True, things are moving more slowly in Canada, but that is what one would expect. As historian Harry Van Belle has pointed out, immigrants of the 1950's and 60's escaped the rapid cultural and social changes that affected the European mother churches after World War II and because of their relative isolation retained pre-war traditions and customs much longer.⁶

Here again the differences between the generations come to the fore. Among many of the younger people there is evidence of a declining interest in the history and identity of their own churches. These young men and women may be loyally Canadian Reformed, but their church-consciousness and commitment to preserving the churches' traditions are often weaker than those of their parents and grandparents.

That kind of development, too, is not confined to the Canadian Reformed community. There is a general trend to replace emphasis on tradition and "grand stories" with one on action, involvement, and greater inclusiveness. We are dealing here with a global paradigm shift. In addition there is, in the case of the CanRC (and of the ecclesiastical world in general), the example of North American evangelicalism with its tradition of evangelical outreach and a practical Christianity.

All these influences will, I believe, ensure that the demands for change and for greater involvement with the outside world will continue to be heard within the Canadian Reformed community. The challenge the churches face is to meet these demands without jeopardizing their Reformed character.

¹ The entire paper, together with those of the other participants, will appear later this year in a volume to be published by the VU University Press, Amsterdam, under the title *Morsels in the Melting Pot*. Editors are the organizers of the conference, Dr. George Harinck of the Historical Documentation Center of Dutch Protestantism, Free University, Amsterdam, and Dr. Hans Krabbendam of the Roosevelt Study Center, Tilburg.

² The percentages for the four years up to 2005 are respectively 0.69, 0.54,

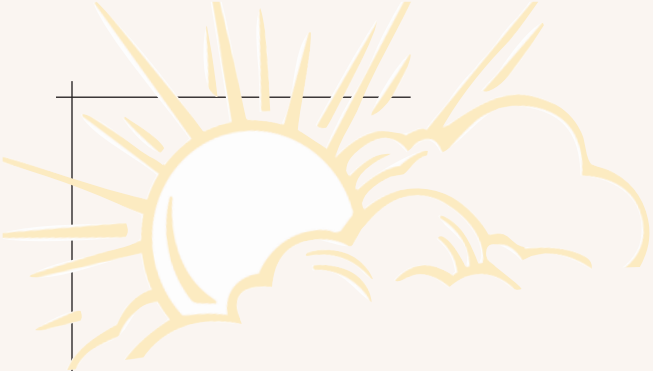
1.13, and 0.90, for an average of 0.82. For these statistics I thank the Rev. Eric Kampen, pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley-Willoughby Heights, B.C.

³ I received responses from 43 congregations, out of a total of 49. Because of special circumstances two of these 43 suffered a more than an average decline in membership during the past four years, and in order not to slant the outcome for the federation as a whole, I have left these two out of the calculation. Meanwhile my sincere thanks to the pastors, clerks, and administrators who responded to my questionnaire. Several of them supplied, moreover, a helpful analysis of the pattern of change and the apparent reasons for the losses and gains. I also thank Bill Smouter of Ancaster and Art Witten of Hamilton for their advice in organizing the project and Hank Vanderbrugghen of Hamilton for helping me analyze the statistical information.

⁴ I base this conclusion on the statistics I received from 7 of the 8 Canadian Reformed churches in the Fraser Valley. They indicate that 55 members left for a Reformed or Presbyterian church during the past 4 years, and 26 for an evangelical one.

⁵ "Younger people" in the present context are primarily those in their twenties and thirties, and, in a few cases, in their late teens. My observations concerning this group are based on responses to questionnaires and on oral discussions. I thank all those who, both in East and West, have helped me in carrying out this project.

⁶ Harry A. Van Belle, "From Religious Pluralism to Cultural Pluralism: Continuity and Change among the Reformed Dutch in Canada," in Rob Kroes and Henk-Otto Neuschäfer, eds., *The Dutch in North America: Their immigration and cultural continuity* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1991), pp. 308-337



Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“Your kingdom come.” Matthew 6:10a

As we begin this New Year, we will continue with the series on the petitions in the Lord’s Prayer. Standing at the beginning of a New Year, we continue to pray and draw closer to the fullness of God’s kingdom when He returns.

The word “kingdom” refers to the reign or sovereignty of God. It very simply means that God alone rules. Now, when we pray this petition “Your kingdom come,” then the Lord Jesus continues to focus our thoughts and attention on Him alone.

We surely would have no difficulty with what He teaches us to pray if we were fully faithful. But, because of our sinfulness, it may be difficult for us to pray the petitions Jesus teaches, including this one. When life is going well, there are so many things we may still want to do and so many plans to fulfill. We may be too attached to things on this earth. The Lord Jesus knows well our human weaknesses and difficulties with which we struggle.

Therefore, it is so important to realize that when we pray this petition we are also praying for the guidance and ruling in our lives by God’s Word and the Holy Spirit. For by doing this we more and more submit to Him alone. David prayed in Psalm 143:10, “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.”

The catechism also teaches us in Lord’s Day 48 that we pray for the preservation and increase in the church. We are to ask God to destroy the works of the devil and every conspiracy against his holy Word.

The rock on which Jesus built his church was on Peter’s confession of Christ Jesus Himself. For in Matthew 16:18 Jesus says “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.” Peter had taught fellow believers that they are the church built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone. More can be read about this in 1 Peter 2:4-6. All believers are joined into this church by faith in Jesus Christ as our Saviour. As members of the true church, we ought to be diligent in studying and being ever watchful of anything that goes against God’s Word. All our life we must do this until the

fullness of God’s kingdom comes, wherein He will be all in all. Thus we can only acknowledge that it is by God’s grace and mercy that we are able to pray this petition. For He who saves us for the kingdom of his Father teaches us to ask it. It is only by faith in Him and the strength of the Holy Spirit that we are enabled to really ask for his kingdom. He gives us the assurance that with God it will be made possible for us to seek his kingdom. 1 Corinthians 15:24, 26 speak of the end of times when the kingdom of God will be handed over to God the Father. “Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power. For He must reign until He has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

May we all long for the day when Christ comes back to redeem us his people. Pray fervently for his kingdom to be in fullness soon. May his Holy Spirit renew us each day again and make us grow in our faith, that we submit to his ways alone!

*Lord, may Thy kingdom come with haste;
Lay Satan’s dark domain to waste;
And rule us by Thy precious Word,
Till everywhere Thy praise be heard.
Let all the earth Thy Name revere,
For Thou in glory shalt appear.*

Hymn 47:3

Birthdays in February:

- 12 CONNY VANAMERONGEN will be 41**
361 Thirty Road, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
e-mail: cvanam@sympatico.ca
- 18 CORA SCHOONHOVEN will be 55**
24 James Speight, Markham, ON L3P 3G4

Congratulations to Conny and Cora who are celebrating their birthdays. May God richly bless you in this new year together with your family and friends. Till next time,

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



D. Vandeburgt



In Christ Alone: Reflecting on the Foundation

Rev. D. Vandeburgt,
minister in Glanbrook, Ontario
was a speaker at a CRTA
conference in Ontario last fall.

In the title of this meditation you no doubt notice two major elements of this convention. The first is the title of the theme song¹ and the second is drawn from Dr. John Van Dyk's work on teacher reflection.² In particular I was drawn to the phrase "foundational reflections," which he says is the first of three distinct facets of reflective practice. With that term he addresses what he calls, "two closely related domains: our fundamental worldview and our philosophy of education emerging from our worldview."³ From this I received encouragement to head in a somewhat different direction and yet remain in tune with the two major elements of this convention.

It is important to consider your fundamental worldview, not only in terms of your philosophy of education emerging from out of it, but also in terms of understanding who you are as educators. Who you are as educators is determined by your relationship to Christ. First and foremost, you are Christians. To understand what that means is imperative for all Christian educators, but even more so for Christian educators in Christian schools; you are teaching the next generation to build their lives on Christ, this cornerstone, this solid ground.

This morning I want to reflect with you for a few moments on your relationship to Christ. When I was reading the first of the two articles of Dr. Van Dyk, there was a nagging thought in my mind that Christian teachers are a lot like Christians in general. The latter also do not have much time for reflection. Then, even if this and other obstacles are removed, they do not know how to engage in reflection. We have been given a few minutes of time so that first obstacle has been removed.

*Who you are as educators
is determined by your
relationship to Christ.*

But how are we to engage in reflection? This is a question that does not just apply to the teacher, but to all Christians – whatever their profession. I believe it begins with a re-evaluation of the foundation of our lives in the light of God's Word. I know the word "re-evaluation" assumes you and I have at some point evaluated the foundation of our lives but we must continually re-evaluate it. Why? Because, like the teacher, the Christian easily gets caught up responding to feelings and

circumstances rather than living out of the unchanging truth of the gospel. It is not just the teacher in his or her teaching that drifts away into a quagmire of pragmatism. As Christians we do the very same things. When we do that, pressures begin to build. Anxiety and fears increase as our sense of security decreases and our ability to fulfill our tasks as teachers or as minister is hindered. All too often it takes a major event that impacts our lives – whether in the classroom, the school, the home, the church, or even the world – to cause us to re-evaluate the foundations. But then what happens? With time we all too easily slip back into living thoughtless and mechanical lives. We cannot wait for these major events, indeed we will not be properly prepared for them, but rather we must continually be reflecting on the foundation.

The theme song for this convention directs us back to the only real foundation for our lives: in Christ alone. When summarizing reflection, Dr. Van Dyk writes that in sum it is "essentially awareness imbued with the ability to place classroom events, both as they happen and later on, in the context of what we know, believe, and anticipate and to respond intentionally and wisely."⁴ I like that word

"awareness." Are you aware of who you are in Christ? It is this awareness that this song teaches. It is a theological song which shows great depth. I say it is theological because it teaches us about God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It teaches us about his incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection. It takes the truths about Christ confessed in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and draws out what this means for your life – past, present, and future.

This is a scriptural truth that you find reflected in our reading from Romans 6. In this wonderful passage that addresses our union with Christ, the Apostle Paul says in verses 4 and 5, "We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with Him in his resurrection." And then in verse 8, "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him."

This is the firm foundation of our lives as Christians. Our lives are bound up in Christ. Our baptism is a reminder that we have been united with the Son of God in his incarnation, suffering, and death, as well as his resurrection. What is his is ours. To quote the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." There is so much comfort in that. In fact, this song reminds me of that foundational question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism: what is your only

comfort in life and death? Then the catechism teaches you to speak of how belonging to Christ addresses not only your guilty past and insecure present, but furthermore how belonging to Christ brings with it the promise of a glorious future. "What heights of love, what depths of peace, when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!" When do your fears arise? When do you strive? Does this not happen when you are no longer standing in Christ alone? Does it not happen when you have shifted from off that solid ground? But in Him you have present and eternal security.

Part of your task is to communicate to them the importance of being aware of who they are in Christ.

Yet, reflection is more than awareness, writes Dr. Van Dyk. Is that not Paul's point as he reflects on Christ in his letter to the Romans? For not only does he teach you awareness of who you are in Christ, but he also says you must act out of that awareness. You must be who you are in Christ. "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness" (Rom 6:11-13).

In the classroom, as in all of life, you are offering yourselves to God as instruments of

righteousness. You are educators. You are Christian educators. As those who have the wonderful task of educating Christian children, part of your task is to communicate to them the importance of being aware of who they are in Christ. But to do this, you must first yourself be aware of who you are in Christ. You must take the time to reflect on the foundation. I have come to learn that as a minister it is only as I am aware of who I am in Christ that I can teach others about Him. This is true not only of the minister. It also applies to the teacher. Take the time, as we did this morning, to reflect on the foundation of your life in the light of God's Word. For then you will be secure and in the power of Christ you will stand, also in the classroom.

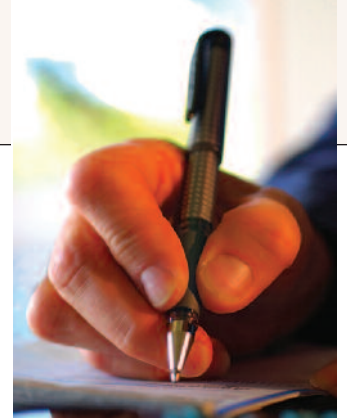
¹ The theme song for this convention was *In Christ Alone* written by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty

² Dr. John Van Dyk was the main speaker for this convention. The quotations that follow are taken from two published articles. *Reflection: An Alien in Our Christian Schools?* Christian Educators Journal Vol. 43 No. 2 (2003) pp. 3-6; *Reflection: An Alien in Our Christian Schools Part II* Christian Educators Journal Vol. 43 No. 3 (2004) pp. 18-20.

³ Van Dyk, p. 18

⁴ Van Dyk, p.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us.



To the Editor,

In his article "Trouble in the Church" (November 11), Rev. J. Visscher is referring to the stories of developments in the Dutch sister churches. Dr. Visscher describes the four different reactions on the trouble in the church and goes on to evaluate which of these different groups or reactions is correct. It's about the same as studying the cloud of smoke on the battlefield without discerning where the battle is about.

More important than the four reactions is the question where do they react upon. Does that mean that we have to look for a fifth group? One which is introducing the cause of the trouble as Dr. Visscher mentions: changes in worship services, the unsatisfiable hunger for more hymns, a growing laxness on issues such as marriage and divorce, Sabbath observance, co-habitation, biblical criticism, church relationships, and much more accepting practicing homosexuals at the Lord's table.

We may conclude that we need to study the issues which cause these reactions; we need to discern what spirit is behind all this (1 John 4:1). Why are some pressing so hard after these things? What are the motives; in what direction do they want us to go? Is it a striving to let the church grow in purity and holiness or are we after a (temporal) growth in numbers by lowering the threshold and raising the "fun level"? Is our CanRC free of this pressure to introduce certain issues?

Dr. Visscher also mentions that the separation in Holland has not helped matters. He sees separation as a reaction solely undertaken by the members who separate themselves. Is he right? Or is this separation a product of the interaction between the groups? We have observed this process: faithful, discerning men are withstanding the products of deformation in the church. If they do not conform, re-align to, or tolerate all of these developments, they will be labelled stubborn, loveless, narrow-minded, old fashioned, troublemakers, and more. Their names are not found on the list for office bearers anymore. Their capabilities are not used in the church body anymore; more or less they become dead members. Separation is a subcutaneous process in the body of Christ, not a decision made by a group. It has to do with isolation; nobody (if sound in doctrine) seeks it, but it is inevitable. Dr. K. Schilder said, "One who seeks isolation is sick, one who shuns it is sicker."

We agree that the vital and fundamental question remains: have these churches turned their back on the gospel? In Dr. Visscher's view that has to be proven yet. We read in 1 Corinthians 19, "For there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized." This tells us that we will get this proof now or somewhere in the

near future. By the fruits we shall know. Watch these fruits as you can find them in the Reformed press, on the internet, or visiting the old country. . . .

If faithful members cannot be fruitful in the church anymore we end up in a situation where we cannot avoid separation. But what will the consequences be for the extended family of believers? It will be interesting to see how our synod will deal with the Continuation of the old *Vrijgemaakte Kerk* (the "breakaway") in Holland. Will we accept them as a sister (like the URC or OPC) or refuse them as troublemakers or schismatic?

We are called to discern; to test the spirits, to look for the fruits. We also have to examine ourselves and ask the question if it is worthwhile to press after our own preferences to introduce them or to lower the Christian standards in some cases. Put in the Apostle Paul's language, "Will we still eat the meat if we are a stumbling block for the neighbour?"

The church is precious, paid for not by silver or gold but by the blood of our Saviour. This should determine the nature of our relationships in the church.

*Yours in Christ,
John de Boer*

Letter to the Editor

In his editorial "Trouble in the Church" (November 11), Dr. J. Visscher responds to "rather disturbing stories of developments and happenings in our [Dutch] sister churches." He observes that in our fallen world we cannot expect a trouble-free church and that "the vital and fundamental question remains: have these [Dutch sister] churches turned their back on the gospel?" For Dr. Visscher that "is something that remains to be proven."

I would like to ask Dr. Visscher: is God's command not to work on Sunday not part of the gospel?

*Jelte Numan
Mt Nasura, Western Australia*

Editorial Comment:

You ask a question which is really an accusation; however, you supply no proof. Please be so kind as to support your allegation with a quote from an official document or statement made by our sister churches in The Netherlands.

JV

Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.

Press Release of the Joint Church Order Committee of the CanRC and URC

Approximately 100 people gathered from southern California and elsewhere on the evening of August 5 to hear a presentation by the members of the Joint Church Order Committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and the United Reformed Churches (URC). The meeting was hosted by First United Reformed Church of Chino, California. Rev. Ron Scheuers, minister of the host church and member of the committee, called the meeting to order with the reading of John 17:20-26. He reminded us of the importance of being one in the Lord.

Rev. Scheuers introduced each of the members of the committee (with the exception of Rev. Ray Sikkema, who was absent for health reasons) who then gave a presentation to inform those present about the history of the CanRC and the work of this particular committee.

Rev. Bill Pols, minister of the Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton, Alberta, gave a report about the process toward church unity. He highlighted the important decisions made by various synods of the URC and CanRC. He also reminded us that the prospect of greater church unity was part of the original vision of the URC already back in its root in the Alliance of Reformed Churches in the early 1990s.

Dr. Art Witten, an educator within the CanRC, gave a presentation about the historical background of the CanRC. In order to acquaint us with the churches, he began with some numerical and geographical statistics. He then spoke of the reason for the

existence of the CanRC, demonstrating that the churches are "a continuation of the Reformed church." He traced the history from the Synod of Dort to the present, through the various secessions and mergers in The Netherlands. Dr. Witten reminded us that the Church Order of Dort is a common frame of reference between our two federations.

Dr. Bert Nederveen, pastor of the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church of Burlington, Ontario, spoke about the theological foundations of the CanRC. He traced this back to the solas of the Protestant Reformation, affirming salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, revealed in Scripture alone. He then spoke of the desire to seek unity with others who share these theological convictions. He told us that the unity of the church is related to the catholicity of the church.

The next presenter was Mr. Gerard Noordeman, also of Burlington, Ontario. He reported on the missionary endeavours being conducted by the CanRC. Their mission work takes place abroad, in places like Brazil, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea, and locally, with missions in British Columbia to both the native inhabitants and the Chinese immigrants. He went on to talk about their commitment to Christian day-school education for the children and concluded by describing the development of the Theological College of the CanRC in Hamilton, Ontario, the school for the training of their ministers.

Rev. John Van Woudenberg, minister of the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church of Guelph, Ontario, was given the task of covering the various practices in the CanRC with regard

to worship, the Lord's Supper, Sabbath observance, etc. He highlighted that fact that while there may be some CanRC distinctives in these areas, many of the fundamental convictions and practices are the same with those in the URC. He described worship as a covenant dialog between God and his people in which God takes the initiative and the people respond. He explained the use of "attestations" for the movement of members from one church to another, as well as the specific use of travel attestations for the purpose of celebrating the Lord's Supper in a church other than one's home congregation. We can certainly appreciate the high regard for the Lord's Table and its proper fencing practiced in the CanRC.

Mid-America Reformed Seminary professor, Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, reported specifically on the work of the committee in their progress toward producing a joint church order. He reminded those present that the mandate for the committee came from Synod Escondido (2001), which is, "That the current Church Orders of the two federations be evaluated in the light of the scriptural and confessional principles and patterns of church government of the Dort Church Order; that the Church Order committee work together with a Canadian Reformed Church Order committee to develop a suitable and agreeable adaptation of the Church Order of Dort, retaining and maintaining its principle, structure, and essential provisions." He pointed out the challenge of evaluating the church orders of two distinct federations with an eye toward a third church order, that of Dort, having the

desire to uphold the principles, but not slavishly follow, the almost 400 year old church order. Dr. Kloosterman reviewed the structure of the new church order and highlighted some of the returns to a more traditional understanding of the Reformed system of government.

Finally, Mr. Harry Van Gorp, member of the Bethel United Reformed Church of Aylmer, Ontario, talked about some of the cooperative experiences that are currently going on at the local level between CanRC and URC, including occasional pulpit exchanges, joint schooling efforts, and the use in URC churches of the CanRC Heidelberg Catechism curriculum *I Belong* by Dr. James Visscher.

The two hours that were taken to give these presentations went by

very quickly. The next hour was spent with those present asking questions of the presenters. The questions ranged from church polity to Reformed theology to the benefits of moving toward union. Rev. Scheuers answered the third question in three parts. "Unity," he said, "is a good idea because we become more obedient to the command of Christ to be one. Also, we get a great appreciation of each other's heritage. And finally, we can do more together than we can do alone."

Throughout the evening it became evident that the members of the committee have a great amount of trust and respect for each other. They commented about their appreciation for each other's particular history. Dr. Witten said, "Experiencing the unity of faith which exists among

the members of the committee and developing a high level of trust in working together toward a joint church order has been one of the greatest blessings in working on this committee."

Now the challenge for the churches will be to develop that same trust and confidence. Hopefully a joint church order will be one step in the ongoing process of church unity. "The most significant challenge [toward unity]," said Dr. Kloosterman, "is the will to be united, the willingness to recognize that our respective federations are not destinations but milestones along the route of living faithfully in our generation."

Respectfully submitted,
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