

Clarion

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Ascension

*The Current
State of
Relations
between l' ERQ
and Our
Federation*



*Under the Blessing Hands
There is a curse over this world*



C. Van Dam

Under the Blessing Hands

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There is a curse over this world

Anyone in touch with what is going on in the world around us today needs no convincing that the curse on a fallen creation is evident everywhere. The weirdest crimes you can imagine take place; there are natural disasters that boggle the mind; and the wars and rumours of wars continue to occupy the media. And then, closer to home, we all know of the devastation that sickness and death can bring to those close and dear to us. Surely, the Reformed baptismal form accurately reflects the truth when it describes this life as "a constant death." Creation groans and the evidence of its anguish is evident to all. There is a curse over this world.

And yet, praised be to God, Christians may live under the blessing! We have a Saviour who ascended to heaven and as He did so He gave his blessing!

Christ ascended while blessing

Luke describes this tremendous event in a very vivid way in his gospel. After the risen Christ had explained from the Scriptures how He had fulfilled everything that was written about Him, He led his disciples out to the vicinity of Bethany. Then we read: "He lifted up his hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He left them and was taken up into heaven" (Luke 24:50-51). Notice how the act of blessing is stressed. It is mentioned twice. Clearly the blessing is of great importance.

Try to picture the situation. The Lord Jesus tells his disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on them and that they will be Christ's witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Then the disciples see their Saviour lift his hands above their heads as a priest to bless them. As He pronounces his blessing over them, He rises. His feet leave the ground. Before their very eyes they see it (Acts 1:9). And as He rises, the reach of his blessing hands goes beyond their heads and covers Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and eventually to the ends of the earth! A cloud eventually hides Him from their sight (Acts 1:9) but they know that He has gone to heaven in the body

for the angel told them so (Acts 1:11). He ascended to the heavenly temple.

Blessing, then and now

Today we may live and work under the blessing hands of our "great high priest who has gone through the heavens" (Heb 4:14). To appreciate what this entails let us step back and briefly walk through two historical events of importance in understanding the blessing of our ascended Saviour.

First, let us revisit the first worship service of Israel where the high priest for the very first time blessed God's people. We read of that event in Leviticus 9. It is noteworthy that Aaron gave the blessing after he had sacrificed the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the fellowship offering (Lev 9:7-22). The blessing was only given after the necessity of atonement for sins had been publicly acknowledged with the sin offering, the necessity of the life dedicated to God had been confessed with the whole burnt offering, and thanks had been given with the fellowship offering.

This order of events is reflected in the fulfilment of the blessing Christ as He ascended. It was only after He had given Himself as a sin offering on the cross and had given the whole burnt offering of Himself and so had provided for true fellowship between God and man that He gave the blessing as the one who had accomplished all that the Aaronic priesthood could not do.

What was entailed in this blessing? This question takes us to a second important historical event. When the Lord through Moses instructed Aaron in how to give the priestly blessing, then the words of blessing He gave to Aaron were: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace" (Num 6:24-26). This blessing was followed by the telling words: "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them" (Num 6:27). In other words, when the priest gives the blessing, He places God's name on the people, thereby claiming them for God. And then God Himself will

bless them. According to his word of promise He will keep his people, be gracious to them, and give them his peace. This implies that He will be with them and have fellowship with them. Indeed, when the blessing had been given in the first worship service, this blessing was followed by the manifestation of the glory of God. He appeared and showed Himself to be with his covenant nation (Lev 9:23)!

When our Saviour ascended while blessing his disciples, there is again a strong link between the blessing and God's presence. As He ascended and the distance became greater and greater, the disciples could remember that his parting words included the promise: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:20). Had the Lord Jesus not promised "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18)? Indeed, the glory of God's coming at Pentecost is intimately tied to the ascension. The one could not happen without the other (John 16:7).

Under the blessing

Where does all this leave us? We live in a world which our Saviour left with outstretched and blessing hands. In faith we know that we are privileged to be under the blessing hands of our Saviour. He has not left us to fend for ourselves. He is with us in the Spirit and through the Spirit he gives us what we need. He realizes in our lives the three-fold priestly blessing and promise that God will keep us, be gracious to us, and give us his peace. This three-fold blessing is recorded in the New Testament form of the apostolic blessing which speaks of our triune God. "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

Every time we receive these words of blessing through God's servants on the Lord's Day, we can rest assured that although we live in a groaning creation which often resembles a constant death, yet, there is the joy of new life with God through the work of our only high priest. He has given his Spirit as an assurance and guarantee that all is well and that He provides for us (John 14:15-31). And we may remember that the angels assured the disciples looking up at the ascended Saviour as He disappeared in the clouds, don't worry, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

Well, what a privilege to live and work under the blessing hands of our ascended Saviour, knowing that He is both with us in the Spirit and that He is on his way back! Creation may groan and death sighs may be heard but that's not the last word. Christ's blessing hands assure us of the victory that has been won, even over Satan, sin, and death. And so the last word is joy, peace, and life with God, now and for ever!



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Ascension



MATTHEW 13:52

In the annual remembrance of key events in the ministry of our Lord, his ascension into heaven is one that is always in danger of slipping by unnoticed. This is regrettable. Our Lord's ascension is a most significant event as it marks the beginning of the second stage of his ministry.

That we can see his ascension as the beginning of the second stage of his ministry comes out in the way Luke expresses himself in the opening verses of the book of Acts. He states that in his first book he "wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven" (Acts 1:1, 2). If the first book was about the beginning of our Lord's work this second book would be about the continuation of his work. The big difference was the location.

The way the book of Acts unfolds, we can say that it shows us especially how our Lord continues his work of being our chief prophet and teacher. He did that in a way He could never have done had He remained on earth. On earth, He would have been confined to being at one place at the time. From heaven, He was able to break through that limitation through the gift of the Holy Spirit. This took place on Pentecost.

We should have a sharp eye for the fact that the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was not with a view to regeneration but with a view to evangelization. This comes out in the way that the gift of the Spirit emboldened the disciples to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. The book of Acts shows us how, by the power of the Spirit, the apostles become the mouthpieces for Jesus Christ throughout the world, within a generation reaching the emperor in Rome. At the same time, the structure was put in place in the new Christian congregations so that the voice of the chief prophet could continue to be heard through ministers of the gospel.

It is from the letter to the Hebrews that we learn how our Lord continues his work of being our only High Priest. The superiority of our Lord's priesthood compared to that of the house of Aaron is shown

especially in light of the fact our Lord ascended into heaven. We read that "... Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did He enter heaven to offer Himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb 9:24-27).

This makes it clear that our Lord is not sacrificing Himself anew but his priestly work consists of intercession on our behalf, based on his sacrifice on the cross. His presence in heaven gives us confidence to approach the throne of God, assured that it is a throne of grace where we will receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need (Heb 4:14-16).

Besides being busy as our prophet and priest, our Lord is also busy in heaven as our king. Especially the book of Revelation shows us our Lord exercising his kingship. It is portrayed vividly in the vision John had of the Lamb taking the scroll and opening the seals (Rev 5). While we may be perplexed about various details of the book of Revelation, one theme resounds loud and clear, namely, the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ as He gathers and defends his people and pours out his wrath on the unbelieving world. The book concludes with the promise of the ultimate defeat of all the enemies of Christ and his church.

It is obvious then that we have a Lord and Saviour who is very hard at work for us from the heavens. An awareness of his work will give us renewed appreciation for the preaching of the gospel, as it is the prophetic voice of our Lord. It will reassure us as we daily struggle with our sins, for we have our high priest in the heavens to intercede for us. Finally, it will encourage us as we feel marginalized in society, because we have our Lord as king who governs all things for the benefit of his church.



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Knowing God: Knowing the Father

Lesson 2: God, The Father of Jesus

In the previous installment we thought about God the Father of creation and reflected about our experience of God as the creator of the world and as our creator. In this installment we want to think about God as the Father of Jesus and discover how Jesus is a revelation of the Father's love.

Lord, show us the Father

Begin with a short discussion of whether the previous session made any difference in how the members of the group thought about creation and the way they used it. Point out that one of the things the group learned in the previous lesson is that God is creative. Then have the members of the group list three or four other words they would choose to describe God. Do not discuss the list, but simply tell the group that you will come back to it near the end of the lesson.

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father

Have someone in the group read John 14:1-11. Explain the context of this passage. Focus on verses 8-10: "Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Don't you believe

that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?" Ask the group to say something about how Jesus shows them the Father's love.

I am the way to the Father

Summarize the teaching about Jesus being the way to the Father around the following points given in the members' handout:

- Christian faith entails a relationship with God in Christ.
- As Christians we believe that God has taken the initiative in this relationship by becoming a human being. The whole story of the Old Testament prepares the way for this coming of the Christ.
- Therefore, if we want to know what God is like, then we must first ask what Jesus is like. Jesus is God's way to God! "I am the way ... to the Father" says Jesus (John 14:6).

Allow time for questions and time to let this sink in.

I am in the Father and the Father is in me

Near the beginning of the lesson the members of the group wrote a list of three or four words they would choose to describe God. Now ask the members of the group to write a list of three or four words they would choose to describe the character of Jesus. Ask the members to share with each other their own knowledge and

experience of Jesus. Then make or draw out the following points:

- Often we make the mistake of applying one set of characteristics to God and another to Jesus.
- We should not think of Jesus as the nice man pleading with an angry God on our behalf (See, e.g., Romans 8:31-39).
- Jesus is the outpouring of the Father's love.
- Jesus is God come down to earth.
- Jesus is God "sharing human life."

In Jesus we see God's "face." Now ask the group to compare the two lists they made. Ask them to share the similarities and differences between the lists. Then ask the group to make a definitive list of the words they would choose to describe the character of God.

Suggestions for prayer

From everything that was explored during the lesson, ask each person to write down a single word that he or she thinks describes the character of God the Father as seen through Jesus. Have someone read Philippians 2:5-11. Then pray together.

If you would like to view the outline of this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. Next time, we plan to introduce "God, the Father of the Kingdom." Thanks for reading.

PSALM 119:

A Newly Revised Metrical Version

Tsadhe

53. Your promise is well tested and secure;
I cherish it as token of Your favour.
Though I'm of no account, despised and poor,
I love Your precepts and forget them never.
Your justice will eternally endure;
Your law is true and shall abide for ever.
54. Though I encounter anguish and distress,
Your laws are my delight and consolation.
Ever enduring is Your righteousness
And everlasting is Your revelation.
Your servant, LORD, with understanding bless,
That I may live, rejoicing in salvation.

Qoph

55. To You, O LORD, I cry with all my heart;
Be merciful and hear my supplication.
From Your commandments I will not depart.
I call on You and plead for preservation.
Save me, O LORD, and come to my support,
That I may keep Your laws with dedication.
56. Before the break of day I cry to You;
Your word I trust, for You are my defender.
I even lie awake the whole night through,
That I Your steadfast promises may ponder.
LORD, in Your righteousness my life renew;
Hear me and show Your love and mercy tender.
57. My foes draw near and malice they intend;
Far from Your laws are those by whom I'm
hounded.
But You are near, and I on You depend,
For true are all the words You have commanded.
Long have I known that they are without end:
All Your decrees You have forever founded.

Resh

58. See my affliction, LORD, and set me free,
For Your commandments I obey and cherish.
Defend my cause and win release for me.
As You have sworn, allow my life to flourish.
But far removed shall all salvation be
From those who spurn Your statutes: they shall
perish.
59. Great is, O LORD, the mercy You have shown;
Grant me the life by Your decree awarded.
Though countless foes may seek to hunt me down,
Your laws I've not forgotten or discarded.
I loathe the faithless for the wrong they've done;
Your word have they defied and disregarded.
60. See how I love and cherish Your commands;
I follow them in all that I endeavour.
Preserve my life by Your almighty hand;
O LORD, be mindful of Your love and favour.
In all Your words I see Your truth maintained;
Each one of Your decrees endures forever.

Sin and Shin

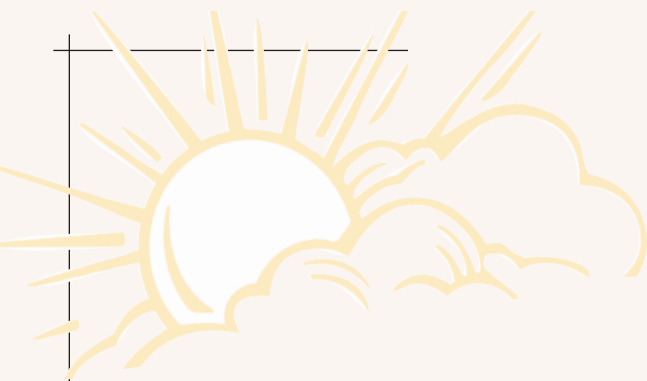
61. Though kings and princes hound me without
cause,
I stand in awe before Your revelation.
LORD, I rejoice at all Your promises;
They like great spoil rouse me to jubilation.
All falsehood and deception I despise;
Your laws I love and hold in veneration.
62. O LORD, I praise You seven times a day,
For righteous are the laws You have provided.
Great peace is theirs who cherish and obey
All Your commands and by Your word are guided.
No stumbling-block or snare besets the way
Of those who in Your justice have confided.

63. For Your salvation, LORD, I hope and pray,
And Your commandments I fulfil sincerely.
I follow Your decrees and will not stray,
For all Your testimonies I love dearly.
Your precepts and Your statutes I obey,
For You know all my ways and see them clearly.

Taw

64. May all my pleading reach Your holy throne;
Remember me in pity and compassion.
Bless me with insight, for I am Your own.
Draw near, O LORD, and answer my petition.
According to the mercy You have shown,
Deliver me from evil and oppression.
65. Now let my lips run over with Your praise,
For Your decrees You have in me implanted.
My tongue shall sing, a joyful anthem raise,
For in Your statutes justice is presented.
Let Your hand help me when Your servant strays;
I've chosen, LORD, the precepts You have granted.
66. I long for Your salvation night and day,
And Your commandments my delight awaken.
O let me live, that I may praise Your ways;
Let Your decrees lend me support unshaken.
I wander like a sheep that's gone astray:
Come, seek me, LORD! Your laws I've not forsaken.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."
Psalm 32:1, 2*

We have now come to the fifth petition: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." The catechism shows us that there is in this petition a very deep confession of sins. There can be no forgiveness unless we humbly and with a sincere heart confess our sins to our Father in heaven. We are all guilty every day before the Lord. His justice requires that we be punished.

We must not take this petition too lightly. It may be easy to use this petition in a very easy way; something like saying "sorry" when stepping on someone's toe and then just walking on. We should not overlook how terribly we have grieved and rebelled against Him. Every sin we commit makes us so guilty before the Lord that the just punishment we deserve would be eternal death. We may not simply say, "Oops, sorry" or "Oh, forgive me." For the Lord is terribly angry with every sin.

In the Old Testament we can read of all the many sacrifices and ceremonies of the law that had to be made. Offerings had to be brought for things which were the consequence of sin. When reading through all those ordinances, let us not forget that the Lord continues to make us look in the mirror of our own sin-filled lives. How rich the words of our Saviour are when, instead of commanding us to come to the temple with the blood of goats and bulls which can never pardon our sins, He tells us to ask his Father in heaven for the forgiveness of sins. How thankful we must be when we hear Him tell us to ask for forgiveness. Let us never forget just what we are asking; we are asking to receive the benefits of Him who has suffered and died for our sins.

This brings us to the second part of this petition. What does it mean to say "as we have forgiven our debtors"? Do we have to forgive others first before we can receive forgiveness ourselves? The reality is that

we would like God to forgive us but that we can hardly bring ourselves to forgive others. The hardest thing to do is to wholeheartedly forgive your neighbour.

Yet the catechism teaches us in Lord's Day 51 that our lives are being renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we have begun to forgive each other. It is only through God's grace towards us that we want to forgive our neighbour. We would never forgive each other on our own. No, it is God Himself who washes us in the blood of his Son and also makes us forgive each other by the power of his Spirit.

We, who have been shown mercy by God, must now show mercy to each other. If we do not then we despise the grace of God in Christ Jesus and we remain in our sins; it will be true of us what is said in the parable in Matthew 18:35, "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from the heart."

Each day again we must pray for the Holy Spirit to work mightily within our hearts. It is not always easy to forgive our neighbour because of the evil which clings so strongly to us. It is our nature to remain angry and to repay evil with evil. This truly is a natural reaction of our old nature. But it is only through grace that we now strive to live by the new nature. Just as his blood is mighty, so Christ's Spirit is triumphant in our lives. The miracle of grace is that we find ourselves wanting to forgive our neighbour – even if it is not easy. This change is the fruit of Christ's work in us. It shows the power of his Spirit who comes with the blood of his cross.

When we pray "forgive us our debts" then we speak of the blood of Christ. And as we continue to pray "as we also have forgiven our debtors" this speaks of the Spirit of Christ. Here we may see that as God has loved us, so we shall also love each other in

return. All glory and praise to Him alone for his grace and atoning sacrifice to pay for our sins!

*Our countless misdeeds and transgressions
Prevail from day to day;
But Thou, O God, in great compassion,
Wilt purge our guilt away.
Blest is the man whom Thou hast chosen,
And bringest nigh to Thee,
That in Thy courts, in Thee reposing,
His dwelling place may be.*

Psalm 65:2

Birthdays in May:

4th DEBBIE VEENSTRA will be 32
RR 1 Sherkston, ON L0S 1R0

10th ROB DE HAAN will be 41
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

30th BERNIE DE VOS will be 31
40 Kerman Avenue, Grimsby, ON L3M 3W5

Our sincere congratulations to all who are celebrating a birthday in the month of May. We hope that you will all have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends. Above all may our heavenly Father bless you in this new year with good health and much happiness as you continue in his service.

Till next month,

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548 Kemp Road East, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
905-563-0380



The Current State of Relations between l' ERQ and Our Federation

The official reporting of relations between l'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ) and the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) begins with *Acts General Synod 1995*. Given an extensive submission by the church at Ottawa, a Classis Ontario North in 1994 requested Synod that it should mandate "the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad to intensify and confirm the contact initiated by the church at Ottawa with a view to entering a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship" (Art 73). Besides the validity of a classical recommendation to Synod, the question was raised to which jurisdiction contact with the ERQ should be assigned, as it is not a "church abroad" but does function in a context of history, culture, and language that may prevent it from becoming one with the CanRC. Acknowledging the biblical and confessional duty to seek unity with other federations of true believers, in its wisdom Synod considered that, despite cultural and other differences, within one nation churches should seek federative unity.

Synod 1995 also decided to appoint deputies to discuss with their counterparts in the ERQ the apparent differences in confession, church polity, and worship. Furthermore, the deputies were to

evaluate correspondence of the ERQ with other federations (especially the Christian Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church of America) and to determine whether it is feasible for our federation to become one with the ERQ.

Synod 1998: fact-finding

The newly-formed Committee for Contact with the ERQ submitted an extensive report to the churches (see *Acts General Synod 1998*, App 7), in which it records especially an evaluation of the apparent differences in confessions, polity, and worship. It advised that on "the basis of confessional documents and their maintenance" in the ERQ, relations with these churches in Quebec "can and should be established." Regarding church polity, the Committee judged the differences to be "minor points of church order," while observations of worship and practice led it to conclude that "the commitment of these young churches who are attempting to mount a faithful Reformed witness in a secularized Roman Catholic culture and world must be acknowledged."

The report also summarizes the history of relations between the ERQ and other denominations that have supported it morally and financially throughout the years,

though without entering into official relationships with it. In sum, regarding relations with other churches, the ERQ "jealously guards itself from what it would consider to be potential unreformed influences."

Regarding the feasibility of federative unity, the Committee, having discussed at length with deputies from the ERQ (which had established its own Committee for Inter-Church Relations, or CICR), observed that the differences in language and culture preclude a practical federative unity, and moreover that recognition of the Lord's distinct church-gathering work in Quebec is not tantamount to advocating the pluriformity of the church. Relaying the *Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship* (in *Acts General Synod 1998*, p 300) and interpreting the import of them, the Committee recommended that ecclesiastical fellowship be established with the ERQ and that, besides discussing matters of confession, church polity, and worship, the churches assist one another, especially in mission.

The report that is summarized above was duly considered by the churches in anticipation of Synod. By means of letters and overtures, several congregations expressed concerns, of which the common ones pertain to fencing of the Lord's Table, confessional membership,

eligibility for the diaconate, and the apparent lack of liturgical forms. Synod considered the relative young age of the ERQ to be a factor in the non-articulation of certain matters (order of worship, fencing of Lord's Table, etc.) and that clarification was desirable on six topics: status of deaconesses, Sunday worship (liturgical forms, supervision of pulpit, Sunday observance), seeming differences in fencing the Lord's Table, confessional membership, the varying Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and the possibility of federative unity.

Synod 2001: moving towards the goal of ecclesiastical fellowship

By the time Synod 2001 was convened, a subcommittee for contact with the ERQ had been formed within the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA), and that is how the bureaucratic structure remains to this day. This subcommittee was charged with an investigation of the topics of concern (listed in the previous paragraph) that had been conveyed to Synod 1998. The CICR informed the deputies of our federation of various developments and challenges facing the ERQ, some of which touched upon the features of the mandate given to our deputies. The ERQ was in the process of addressing the internal variances, which it felt needed to be treated first. The report of the Canadian Reformed committee appears as Appendix 2.4 in the Acts General Synod 2001 and it includes an assessment of each of the six topics. Among the recommendations to Synod, the CCCA included a restriction of further discussion to confessional membership and admission to the Lord's Table.



Ordination of Rev. Jason Zuidema in 2005

When Synod convened in 2001 it had received a few submissions from congregations commenting on the report. Upon making its observations Synod considered, among other things, that "varying practices in applying principles" does "not constitute scriptural unfaithfulness." It moreover observed that the following topics of concern have been addressed adequately and satisfactorily: the status of deacons and deaconesses; liturgical forms; order of worship; Lord's Day observance; differences in rules for ecclesiastical fellowship; the desirability of federative unity. It pointed out that supervision of the pulpit, confessional membership, and fencing of the Lord's Table remain as topics of concern. Synod therefore decided that "progress has been made in advancing the development of the relationship" and that the committee be reappointed "with the goal of establishing ecclesiastical fellowship."

Synod 2004: careful continuance

As for previous Synods, so too for the one held in 2004 the subcommittee for contact with the

ERQ submitted a report on its operations, including important discussions with the ERQ's Committee for Inter-Church Relations. While the CICR had not been mandated to interact with the remaining topics of concern to the CanRC, it stated that fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership were being studied and addressed. By 2003 these topics were added to the responsibilities of the CICR: admission to the Lord's Supper; supervision of the pulpit; adherence to the confession of the ERQ by its members. In the report submitted prior to Synod 2004 (see *Acts General Synod 2004*, p 247 ff), the CCCA states that while it would "love to recommend that Synod Chatham decide to establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the ERQ," internal discussions within the ERQ on the three topics mentioned above are not complete, so that the concerns raised within the CanRC cannot be deemed as removed. Continuation of mandate was advised.

Synod 2004 examined this latest report and recommendation as well as other admissible material. Considerations included that "the respective committees can come to an agreement which will provide



Rev. Jason Zuidema

the framework for further discussions and growth within the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship" (*Acts General Synod 2004*, Art 25). Synod decided that the committee should continue its investigations, with especial focus on clarification of pulpit supervision, fencing of the Lord's Table, and confessional accountability. Moreover, the committee should "work towards formalizing a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules."

The current state of relations with the ERQ

The broad assembly of the ERQ, a federation consisting of seven congregations, is called "synode," a term that should not be understood as equivalent to "synod" in our federation. Given the size and relative young age of the denomination, the quarterly "synodes" also treat matters that would appear on the agenda of classes in the CanRC and generally last two days. In 2005 the ERQ invited us to attend the November Synode as observers; delegated were Rev. P. Feenstra

and the undersigned (who was asked to serve on the CCCA when a synodically-appointed brother had declined in 2004). One of the highlights was the first attendance of *Pasteur* Jason Zuidema, who had been ordained as minister of the congregation at Repentigny. As usual, delegates of the seven consistories were given the opportunity to report on developments in their congregations: the size of the obstacles and the amount of opportunities facing the small and financially-challenged congregations were not lost upon the observers. In closed session Synode deliberated upon a matter of church discipline.

The next day's activities began with devotions; when Synode was reconvened, the *observateurs* were invited to address the assembly. The unity of the faith and the bond we share with ERQ were mentioned especially in our address; the questions posed revealed the Synode's interest in the growing relations between the federations. The remainder of Synode treated reports of various committees, notably the Committee for the Ministry (re procedures of examination, ordination, and installation of candidates for the ministry), the Committee for Education (which is responsible for disseminating materials of use to the men in ordained office), and the Committee for Inter-Church Relations (CICR). In both the formal meeting of Synode and in informal conversation, delegates enquired about church polity and liturgical practices in the CanRC. The delegated brothers could report to the committee that the visit served to advance our relationship with the ERQ.

In its work towards formalizing a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship under the adopted rules, the subcommittee has been interacting with the CICR and in 2005 met in Hamilton, Ontario to address matters of mutual interest. Also at its own regular meetings the subcommittee is paying special attention to the principles and practice in the ERQ regarding supervision of the pulpit, admission to the Lord's Table, and confessional accountability. A working document is in preparation, a meeting of the CCCA (East) with the CICR is in the offing, and an invitation to attend another Synode this year is eagerly anticipated.

The subcommittee would fail in fulfilling its mandate if this report ended without encouraging individual members and congregations in the CanRC "to continue supporting the ERQ financially" (*Acts General Synod 2004*, p 22), as the federation continues to operate under financial deficit due to the small number of members and despite conservative fiscal policies and prudent management. The person one should contact regarding donations to the ERQ is a newly appointed treasurer:

Mrs. Lucie Bedard
5475 rue Gadbois
Trois-Rivieres Ouest, Quebec
G8Y 6A6
(Email:
bedard.normand@sympatico.ca)

May there be an increase in the Reformed witness in Quebec through the efforts of L'Église Réformée.

On behalf of the Committee for
Contact with Churches in the
Americas – East, R. Faber



Arthur Kingma

Mr. Arthur Kingma is principal
of Attercliffe Canadian
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in Ontario
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CRTA Convention November 3-4, 2005



Note to Readers:

Our Apologies! A report mix-up has taken place! The CRTA Report that was submitted for Issue 7 was the 2004 report. So here is the real 2005 CRTA Report.

Cottage country

The 2005 CRTA Convention experience was unique! We travelled up north on Highway 6, past all the well known southern Ontario cities and towns, into cottage country. Once there, vehicles laden with anticipating teachers, teachers-to-be, presenters, and organizers turned off the Six towards the Owen Sound Church/School building. Beautiful! The setting, the decorations outside, as well as the delightfully sunny weather filled

our sensory experiences, making us eager to jump out our vehicles and join the rest inside the building. Canoes, pine trees, tents, a beach, seasonal displays, and delicious aromas greeted us as we walked into and throughout the building. It was quite evident that the whole community was involved in preparing for this 2005 Teachers Convention. Well done, Owen Sound!

Once the greetings and name tags were taken care of, Miss Jane Holtvlüwer, chair of the CRTA, opened the annual Canadian Reformed Teachers Convention. Then Rev. Feenstra, minister of Owen Sound Canadian Reformed Church, greeted us, alerting us to his three stuffed animal friends: a wolf, an owl, and a bear, who each

had an important word of advice for us. A minister supported by three stuffed animals – unique!

Behold what manner of love . . .

Once Rev. Feenstra began his devotional, any stuffiness one may have felt wore off quickly. The speech explained the theme of the Convention, taken from John 3:1-3: "Behold what manner of love the Father has lavished upon us that we should be called children of God." He showed us, teachers, how the love of God is the strength of our schools and urged us to think of seven implications of God's love for us. Knowing that his love is there for us should make us look to the Father at any time. Second, as education is done in the context of relationships to God and to fellow students, schools should provide a secure setting for the development of these relationships. Third, Christian teachers must seek connections with students, fellow heirs in Christ. Fourth, teachers should look at a behavioural problem in the context of the students' relations to God and to his fellow students. Fifth, if there is a void of attachment to teachers, parents, and fellow students, children will often fill it with often negative results to their upward





orientation. Sixth, students respond to their day in terms of attachments, not in terms of what they learned; therefore, attachments to students are so important! And last, every student is the teacher's sister or brother in the Lord. We look forward to the full edition of Rev. Feenstra's presentation in a later issue of *Clarion*.

After break, four presenters shared their thoughts about relationships in Reformed communities. Mr. Hans VanDooren, Director of Christian Counselling Centre in Burlington, shared how important it is for us to "story our lives." He urged all of us to look back at our footsteps and to ask good questions about them and about where we like to go. He urged us to look ahead, realistically and ideally. As we look back or ahead, we also must look at Scripture, for it shows us how to deal with disapproval, with sin, with personal struggles, or with set backs. He also urged us to seek spiritual guides, directors, or mentors and to be one for our colleagues. Mrs. Rita VanDooren shared with us how difficult it was and is in our community for the

"unaccepted or marginalized ones" among us to find a voice and to be heard. She urged us to not minimize people's problems, but to ask understanding questions and to help them seek their own solutions. We should also ask whether and how the church is helping. As teachers, we should always watch out for marginalized students in our classes. The third presenter, Mr. Keith Sikkema, shared how easy it is for us to have conflicts and how difficult it is for us to handle conflicts at times. He provided us with a few principles: conflict is usually a result of elevating oneself and forgetting God; restoration in God allows harmony among people; resolving conflicts can take much of our time – be patient. The fourth presenter was Mrs. Christine vanHalen, who addressed the notion of bread and fish. We must give bread and fish to our students, but do we have enough good diet ourselves to do so? Or to use another metaphor: Christian education must be banana bread in the classroom. Teachers should address both the cognitive and the affective domain of the students in their care.

Discussions

The presentations were followed up by opportunities to ask questions. To get the flavour of the discussion, I will share some of the questions that were raised and addressed: Do we have or need protocol (beyond Matt 18) to tell the truth in love to our colleagues? How do we deal with conflicts between generations? Do we really recognize what anger is and how to deal with it properly, especially in conflict situations? God is a Father of love, and in love He provides us with policies and procedures, or tools and rules, to help us show his love: his law. True, but both parties need accepted structure to resolve conflicts, right? The questions and answers helped the audience to more actively focus on connecting what we heard to our personal, daily practices.

After a hearty meal of soups and deliciously fresh buns, about 180 teachers broke into small discussion groups to look at vignettes of "relationship" issues. Some groups dealt with problems and sought solutions, while other groups shared positive experiences to their peers. The small group discussions enabled teachers to refer to the morning's talks and to get their heads wrapped around the fact that our schools are not just about curriculum but about relationships between or among students, teachers, parents, and board members – all in the covenantal relationship of love to and from God. Key words that stood out in the discussion included: avoid stereotyping; listen; communicate; express expectations; build

connections between home, church, and school.

At 2:30 the discussions were ended and all teachers were given the opportunity to become physically involved in building relationships with one another. Some went hiking, others sat for a chat or arranged for a meeting, others decided to explore the city of Owen Sound. Most returned for supper and the CRTA business meeting, after which some time was taken for socializing. However, before long, all teachers were on their ways for a good night's rest.

Courageous conversations

On Friday morning the teachers trickled into the church building at first, but the closer it came to 9:00 the thicker the stream became. Stories were exchanged about playing games and singing songs around the campfire at Campfire!, not getting to bed until the wee hours, and about the motels, the

cottages, and the billets. Together with the Thursday afternoon leisure activities, it certainly made for a perfect setting to start "courageous conversations."

In her introductory comments Christine VanHalen linked the plans for the day to the outcome of the previous day. Reading from Ephesians, she pointed out that Paul wrote about himself to bring greater glory to God for his grace, which also directs us to live a life worthy of the calling we received. After prayer and song (The Lord is my light...), she introduced Peter O'Donnell of the Healthy Futures Group (www.healthyfutures.ca), who would facilitate the courageous conversations we were to have that day.

Tying in to Ephesians 4:14, 15 and 25-27, Peter pointed out that quality conversations free people up to do all sorts of good things and result in better progress towards set goals. The question,

then, was first, how can we create environments in our communities in which truly productive communication can flourish; and second, what gets in the way of that happening, even though we all claim to want it? Through explanation and role play Peter demonstrated that communication is hampered by our blind spots, the ladder of inference (assuming we captured what one is saying and stopping to listen), poor discussion techniques, and the things we choose to leave unsaid. He then prodded us to think of courageous discussions that we were not having (or avoiding) with significant people in our lives.

World café

In a second session, after the coffee break, Peter started with an activity that demonstrated how self protection ("if I'm right, all others are my enemies") leads to group breakdown, while efforts to stay connected ("we are in this together") lead to group cohesion and community. With the help of a bell-curve Peter illustrated how, in many situations, a few people make things happen and move forward in setting and accomplishing a goal; a far larger number jumps in to help make it happen; a similar size group watches it happen; a smaller group tries to hold back; and a small minority are absolutely against. He suggested that we usually spend too much time and energy arguing with the people who are against renewal and too little on listening to the concern-raising "watch it happen" group. As a practical exercise we had to solve the question of how to engage



people more fully and effectively in some school quality improvement program, from the perspective of parents, teachers, the church, or the wider community. We did this using Edward DeBono's Six Thinking Hats, which each represent different kinds of thinking.

After a great lasagne lunch Peter led a world café (see www.theworldcafe.com) in which he set the early church (Acts 2:42-47) as an example of an "intentional Spirit-led learning community" that was "transformational, restorative, engaged, affirming, celebrating, attractive, and growing." In contexts that changed after time was given for each person in groups of eight to express and then to discuss and record answers, several key questions were discussed and the key ideas and common threads raised were shared with many others. The questions were: what does it look like when such a community is real in your life? What sustains it? What threatens such a community? What must be done to deal with those threats? What can you do to build and sustain intentional, spirit-led learning communities in your schools? For the last question, staffs of individual schools were sitting together, facilitating the opportunity to bring concrete ideas home from the conference.

Conclusion

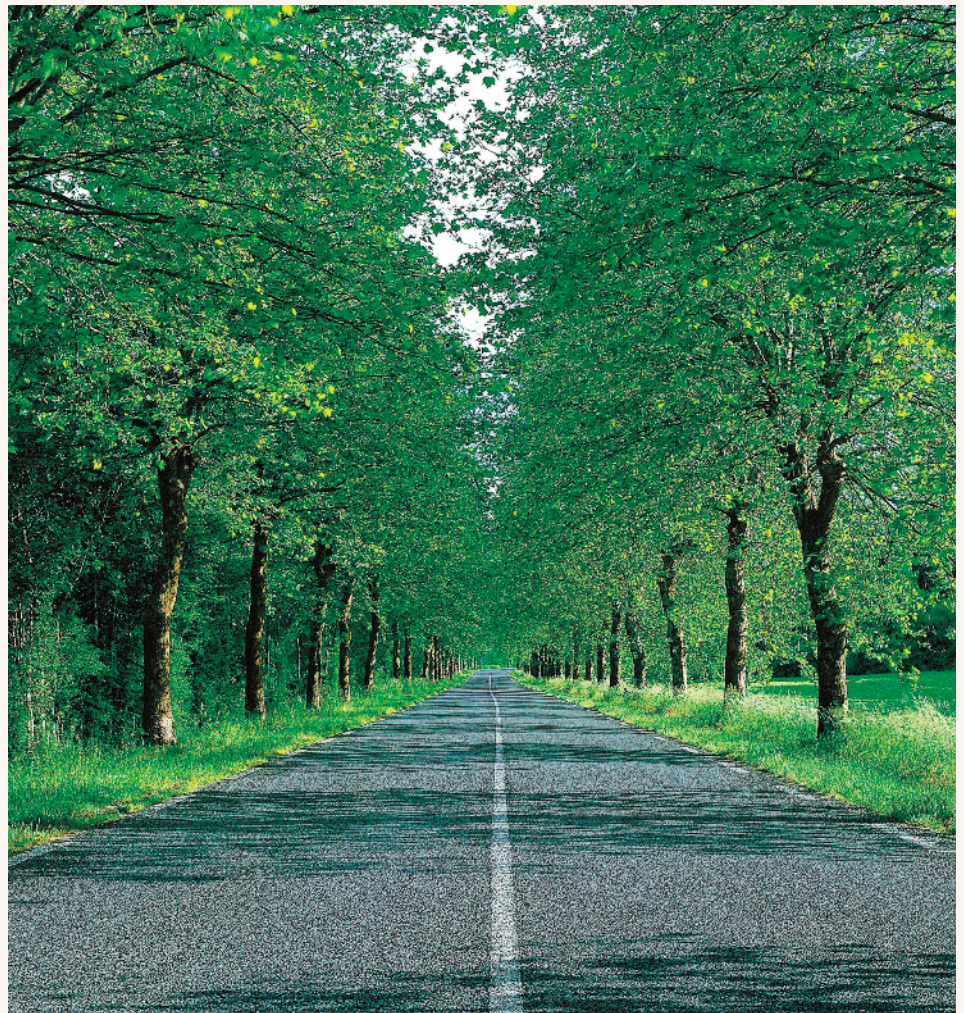
Christine vanHalen provided a few brief closing comments, after which Matt van Popta closed in prayer. It was a great convention, in which many people took courage to tell stories and share insights that might have been left unsaid without it. It was a special convention as well, in particular because the main fare was not

dished up in the form of workshops, but in sharing and in community-building or relationship-building activities. All were also impressed with the excellent community effort of virtually all members of the Owen Sound Canadian Reformed Church to provide for this large group of guests and for generating a welcoming and pleasant atmosphere.

On Friday afternoon, teachers with heads full of sensory experiences, speeches, and stories piled back into their cars for another run down the Number Six. On the way, in many a vehicle, further discussions about the convention took place. I am sure

that the range of conversation extended from jokes to dead serious talks, from platitudes to deeply personal experiences. Also, whether verbalized or not in those vehicles, I am sure that most participants were enabled to give thanks to God for the "manner of love the Father has lavished upon us."

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





Letter to the Editor

Re: Dr. R. Faber's article on the new Dutch Bible translation

The latest theory of translation called "functional-equivalence" is yet another attempt by translators to impart to the reader what they believe the source language is saying. One very serious problem with this type of translating is captured in this statement by the author: "Especially when a theological point is at stake, such interpretive translation may amount to a suppression or exaggeration of a doctrinal point that may be abused in the churches' teaching. In my view, then, the translator who over-explicates the original words by means of translation has assumed the task of the exegete." This is a problem common to all non-literal translations – excessive interference with the text.

Translators definitely have to make choices when they are translating, such as distinguishing Hebrew and Greek idioms, for example. But translators already did that with the Reformation-era translations of Scripture. The direct method of translating which became known as "formal equivalence" was to render the text in as straightforward a way as possible unless the original languages used expressions which required a less-literal handling of the phrase. Thus the translators' desire was to stick as close as possible to the text as originally penned. This resulted in translations of Scripture which were faithful to the Hebrew and Greek texts in the vernacular languages (German, French, English, Dutch, etc.) Dr. Faber mentions the NKJV and ESV as two examples of modern versions that use this word-for-word method of translation.

In his conclusions Dr. Faber states: "When a federation of churches adopts a new rendering of the Bible, it implicitly adopts the theories of translation and interpretation that come with it; the next generation of readers will be affected by the principles that are practiced in the modern edition." Thus churches are liable for the whole Bible translation that they adopt. Churches cannot plead innocence when the modern-theory versions they adopt have mistranslations/interpretations due to the speculative theories of translation used to make them.

The reformers treated the Word of God very reverently when they were translating. This awe for the Word is also very evident in how they translated that Word. Very carefully! With precision! With minimal interpretation! Let the exegete interpret the Bible. Yes, have the Bible in the modern language, but maintain the formal translating principles that guided our faithful forefathers. Then the common people can truly trust that what they are reading in their own language is true to the very words of God.

*Rick Duker
Edmonton, Alberta*

Letter to the Editor

After reading the Letter to the Editor about Women's voting privileges in the February 17 issue, I'd like to respond. I have struggled with this issue for some time now, and I agree with the letters and the question "Why is this (voting) privilege withheld from the communicant sisters in the church?"

For widowed or single female members such as myself it feels as though your voice is not important, whereas single men or widowers don't have this dilemma. And for married couples it shouldn't matter if either the man or the woman (or both) vote. The response: "find a husband so you can vote through him" doesn't do it for me because I don't believe that obtaining the "right" to vote is a strong enough basis for marriage, and also, why should this privilege be denied to me as a single person?

No, it's not a question of "where does it stop?" since there is a big gap between women having the right to vote and having women elders and deacons! In my study of the Bible I haven't found anywhere where it says that women cannot vote. Whenever someone asks me why females can't vote in our church I don't have an answer, because I don't understand it myself.

I have heard some wonderful sermons lately about the roles of man and woman, that each has a special task, whether married or single, and that they are equal before God. I pray that allowing women to vote will reflect this.

Monique Graafland

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.