

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 57, No. 9 ■ April 25, 2008

*The media
create a mindset
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hostile to God*

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- Repentance





C. Van Dam

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No Apologies!

What can Christians do about the apparent power and influence of the media?

It is no secret that the mainstream media are biased and their bias is overwhelmingly to the left of the political, social, and ethical spectrum. The moulding power of the daily barrage from radio, television, and newspapers can hardly be overestimated. The media create a mindset that is more often than not hostile to God and his wishes for this world and for our personal lives. What can Christians do about the apparent power and influence of the media? Complaining and moaning about it is not going change anything.

Building a new media

Last fall, the ECP Centre had its annual conference in Burlington, Ontario, with the theme "Building a New Media – Creating a New Culture." The ECP Centre is a relatively new organization which has as its mission to equip Christians for the public square (ECP). This conference was designed to provide a positive impetus toward concrete constructive action to counter the insidious influence of the secular media. Because of new technology and the availability of the Internet, the enormous control that the mainstream media have held in reporting news and events can now be broken. Joseph Farah's keynote speech at the conference was a solid testimony to this new reality. After having worked in the newspaper industry for about thirty years, in part as chief editor of a large daily, Farah left the industry and started a website, determined to get the truth about the news out. As a Christian, he knew how important this was for changing the culture. From humble beginnings about ten years ago, his website, www.worldnetdaily.com, has become the largest independent news service on the Internet with millions of unique visitors each month. Following his inspired example, the ECP Centre inaugurated at the conference a new website called "No Apologies" (www.noapologies.ca). With more and more people getting their news from the Internet, it is hoped that this site will become a favourite for Christians.

A multipronged approach

This new initiative has a multipronged approach. Its first mission is to broadcast news that will be of interest to Christians and which you likely won't hear anywhere else. Al Siebring, a thirty year veteran of radio newsrooms across Canada, is in charge of this program. No Apologies was the first to report on a number of developments of great interest to Christians. One example was the news that three complaints were filed with the Canadian Human Rights Commission against the Christian Heritage Party and its leader, Ron Gray, alleging "hatred"

The political landscape will only change if the culture and thinking of the nation changes

and "contempt" in the party's twenty-year-old policy of opposing special rights for homosexuals. This is a particularly important case, for here an attempt is being made to silence a political party to speak out on the issues of the day. No Apologies was also the first to reveal that the city of Brampton, just west of Toronto, had quietly been preparing policies that would greatly restrict churches in that city. Measures being considered included the taxation of church properties, severe restrictions on the approval of new "places of worship," and a curtailment of home-based gatherings of a religious nature. Because of the publicity, the Brampton Faith Coalition is now officially involved with city hall on the issues raised in the report.

A second, related purpose is to conduct interviews to provide some depth and background to the news items. Interesting interviews have included one held with Gwen Landoldt, a lawyer and the national vice-



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
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Subscriptions: clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca

Advertisements: clarionads@premierpublishing.ca

Website: www.premierpublishing.ca

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One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Subscription Rates for 2008

		Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*		\$48.00*	\$ 79.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	 	\$60.00	\$ 77.00
International		\$89.00	\$130.00

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Advertisements: \$15.00 per column inch

Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, Canada through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

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president of REAL Women, about Stephen Harper and the state of conservatives in Canada, and one held with Ron Gray, leader of the Christian Heritage Party, about the human rights complaints lodged against him and the party.

Thirdly, No Apologies features special presentations by the president of the ECP Centre, Tristan Emmanuel. These are hard-hitting presentations on a wide range of topics. They fit well under the overall banner of “punching a hole in political correctness” that characterizes No Apologies.

Last but not least, No Apologies also features and highlights new publications that are consistent with its mission. Michael Wagner’s book, *Standing on Guard for Thee*, is a good example. In this book, he provides a very helpful history of Christian activism in Canada. It can be of great encouragement to a new generation of those who seek to assert Christian values to the Canadian public square.

All of this can be accessed by going to www.noapologies.ca. To make the material as readily available as possible, there are several options for getting to the material. One can simply read the newscasts on the computer. A beneficial feature is the links to related websites where more details of the stories covered can be obtained. One can also listen at one’s computer, or one can get automatic downloads to one’s computer or MP3 player via iTunes. Instructions and even a how-to-do-it video are all on site. Interviews are available by means of audio files only.

Potential

Obviously, at this point, the No Apologies website is at its humble beginning, but under God’s blessing it has enormous potential. Traffic has been steadily increasing. The overall trend is that more and more people get their news from the Internet. Indeed, the mainstream print media is on hard times with increasing costs and declining readership. No Apologies offers a real alternative by giving news of interest to Christians that is often difficult to find elsewhere.

When thinking of how to change the direction of our country, we often think immediately about politics. However, the political landscape will only change if the culture and thinking of the nation changes. One way to try to change culture is to influence how people see the news and events of their day. The No Apologies initiative is a concerted effort in this direction. Log on to this website, spread the word, and provide feedback. Get involved.

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Believing is Seeing



MATTHEW 13:52

“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.”

Job 42:5

At first a believer may have a problem not only with this meditation's title, but even with the text that accompanies it. We ask, “Is it not so that the Bible never favours seeing over hearing?” Why, the Lord Jesus Himself rebuked his disciple Thomas for not wanting to believe without first seeing! And believers throughout the centuries have memorized Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Job, that suffering servant of God, certainly lived by faith. God Himself testified that he was “blameless and upright,” a man who “feared God and shunned evil” (1:1). He gave evidence of that faith, though confronted with his adversary Satan and the accusations of his “friends.” He maintained his integrity, rooted in faith in his God, despite prolonged wrestling to understand why God sent him so much suffering.

It is also clear that the Lord was pleased with Job's confession of faith (42:7). After all, Job's faith had not been a matter of words only, but was borne out by his exemplary conduct (Job 29).

And yet Job says, “My ears had heard. . . now my eyes have seen you.” In the same breath, Job humbles himself and repents “in dust and ashes” (42:6). This was no feigned humility. On the contrary, he said it in response to the revelation of God, the God who had taken Job into the “classroom” to speak to him there. This was the “classroom” of

God's sovereignty and of his creative genius; his almighty power and providence.

In doing so, He'd directed Job's heart, soul, and mind so that this frail, mortal, upright-yet-sinful soldier might rest in the knowledge that God is in heaven and we are on earth. Job's quest for answers might be satisfied – satisfied in the way of God's self-revelation, the knowledge that “Father knows best.”

In those powerful lessons of what we might call “divine science” – a peek into God's “blueprints” and “engineering” of the earth's foundations, stars, planets, and the host of creatures large and small – God had first caused Job to put a hand over his mouth (40:4). Yet while there is a time and a place for everything, this was not a time for silence. When God displays a panorama of his faithfulness, surely man's mouth must be open! No, not to find fault with God his Creator. Certainly not to argue with God as if man was his equal (a sin of which Job was guilty). But God reveals his glory, so that Job and all sufferers, young and old, might confess, “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted” (42:2).

Job came to see this. He came to know and trust this God. For him, believing was seeing! Yes, prior to his confession in chapter 42, he already had an intimate knowledge of his God and Saviour. Though on a rubbish heap, he'd spoken those remarkable words: “I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end

he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes” (19:25-27).

But it appears that Job had lost sight of this redeemer in whom he trusted. No wonder he had, for the powers of evil persuaders were constantly trying to claim Job for their own. Yet even then, God Almighty, “strong to save,” was on the road: on the road of fulfilling his promise to crush the serpent's head while gathering to Himself a church chosen to everlasting life.

That church is still called to faith in her Triune God. And that faith must have eyes, the eyes of a heart that is not only right with God, but rightly knows, trusts, and loves Him! Hearts that do not cling to outward things, not even to the symbols of bread and wine at the Lord's Supper table. Rather, with “seeing faith” we look upwards and onwards: “We see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” (Heb 2:9).

Then one day, when all our “cataracts” are removed, we, together with Job and the church of all ages, will see the face of Christ Jesus (Rev 22:4). Let us then take Him at his Word – that indispensable Word of truth to which the Holy Spirit has bound Himself – that hearing it, we might see!





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Repentance

The other day I was discussing with some congregation members what we confess in the last part of the Canons of Dort. The last chapter, of course, deals with the perseverance of the saints. I thought it might be beneficial to share what we discussed.

Weaknesses

The Canons of Dort doesn't avoid the embarrassing reality we experience: all people are weak; even the people of God can fall into some pretty terrible sins. If Noah could get drunk and lie naked, if Abraham could lie about his wife being his sister, if Moses could kill the Egyptian, if David could commit adultery with Bathsheba and then kill her husband to cover his tracks, if Peter could deny the Lord three times in a row, shall we think we are above similar sins? It's our confession: "The converted [can] be seduced by and yield to the lusts of the flesh" and "can be drawn away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into serious and atrocious sins" (CD, V 4). Murder (think of abortion or suicide), drunkenness (think also of drug abuse), adultery (incest), and so many more "serious and atrocious sins" appear also among godly church people. That's to say nothing of the more "common" sins such as consumerism, hedonism, wasting one's time, being careless with the environment, etc.

Effect

The effect of sin is devastating. Unconfessed sin has a way of getting inside the heart of the child of God so that he feels guilty – thankfully. But not every child of God immediately admits his sin in repentance. Then it becomes difficult to pray, the desire to open the Bible evaporates, you end up going to church and to the Lord's Table because you don't want to draw attention to yourself, and God seems so far away – "until they return to the right way through sincere repentance" (CD, V 5).

For here's the gospel of the perseverance of the saints: even when his people fall into terrible sins, God will not desert his own! Rather, He works upon them through his Holy Spirit so that repentance comes about – eventually (CD, V 6). That's our God: He does not forsake the work his hand has begun.

Repentance

But what does repentance actually look like? In Lord's Day 33 we echo what we have heard God tell us in Scripture about repentance. It consists of two parts. "It is the dying of the old nature and the coming to life of the new." The dying of the old nature in turn is built on three aspects: it is to grieve with heartfelt sorrow that we have offended God by our sin

and more and more to hate it and flee from it.

Grief is not a sense of "oops." It's rather anguish of heart, "heartfelt sorrow" that we've offended holy God. Peter "went outside and wept bitterly" (Matt 26:75) – and that's obviously grief from a broken and contrite heart. His sin bothered him, deep inside he felt absolutely rotten.

Sorrow for the sin one has committed comes coupled with a sense of hate. No, it's not hatred for the neighbour, but hatred of the sin and all that led to the sin. It's a loathing of self, too, in the sense that one is far from proud of one's accomplishments and abilities. The hate leads to a deep sense of humiliation. It's what the psalmist called a "broken and contrite heart" (Ps 51).

The result in turn is that one flees, gets away from the proximity of whatever led to the sin – for he doesn't want to fall again into the snare of the devil or the world, or succumb to the weaknesses of his own flesh. Yet it's not just a fleeing from; at the same time it's a fleeing to – to Christ in whose blood there is abundant forgiveness. It takes quite a man to flee. One can assume that any true man will stand his ground and conquer his opponent. Yet any general out to win the war knows that there comes the moment when he has to retreat – and that's not an

admission of failure but a display of prudence. The child of God knows he has no chance against enemies such as the devil,

Sorrow for the sin one has committed comes coupled with a sense of hate

the world, and his own flesh, and so flees to the Christ who defeated the devil and the world and has poured out his Holy Spirit so that the fight against the flesh is possible. To stand and fight in this instance is actually a display of pride – and the taller one’s pride the harder one’s fall shall be.

Coming to life of the new nature

Repentance is more than the dying of the old nature; the other side of the coin is that a new nature is increasingly made alive. This coming to life of the new nature has two aspects: a heartfelt joy in God through Christ and a love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works.

Fleeing to Christ brings one into the arms of the Saviour who conquered sin and Satan and reconciled sinners to God. His good news is that my atrocious sin is washed away like gravy off a plate – irretrievably gone. Holy God, then, does not look upon me as the murderer or adulterer or thief or drunkard I am, but sees me as washed clean in Jesus’ blood. Instead of anger and judgment,

there is mercy and grace. That reality cannot leave the heart untouched, but fills it with grateful joy and songs of thanksgiving.

The sense of gratitude for deliverance from the righteous judgment of God results in a renewed determination to live for God in all I do. Instead of the environment that led to the sin, the repentant child of God actively pursues a different environment, one that promotes a lifestyle pleasing to the Lord God. He surrounds himself with friends and activities that encourage praise for the Redeemer and discourage another relapse.

In sum

The Canons of Dort capture what repentance is with these words: “They grieve from the heart with a godly sorrow for the sins they have committed; they seek and obtain through faith with a contrite heart forgiveness in the blood of the Mediator; they again experience the favour of a reconciled God and adore His mercies and faithfulness. And from now on they more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling” (V 7).

Important?

One may wonder whether this summary of some pastoral work is worth passing on for general consumption. I’d argue that the answer is yes, simply because our culture does not know what repentance is. One “apologizes,” one says “sorry,” but the grief and the hate and the fleeing and the joy and the delighting to live God’s way is a rare thing in Canada’s

public and not so public life. To cry buckets of tears is not the same as repentance and an expression of remorse is not the same as repentance either. Judas Iscariot “was seized with remorse” when he saw that Jesus was condemned, returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests, and even admitted that “I have sinned, for I have betrayed innocent blood” (Matt 27:3, 4). But his remorse and his admission did not amount to repentance, for he did not flee to the Christ he betrayed and pursue a life of godliness. Similarly, Esau’s tears at missing out on the first-born blessing did not amount to repentance (Heb 12:17).

The child of God knows he has no chance against enemies such as the devil, the world, and his own flesh

Repentance is so much more than saying “sorry,” for it involves the heart. Repentance goes beyond remorse, for it involves a changed lifestyle. Repentance is not shallow, for it involves a deep awareness that none less than holy God has been offended. Repentance fills one with joy, because God’s declaration of forgiveness-for-Jesus’-sake heals and thrills the heart broken on account of sin. How merciful my God: He restores the undeserving!





Our Only Comfort

Adena Feenstra

“What is your only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him” (HC, Q/A 1).

These words are so familiar to us. We have heard them countless times in Sunday afternoon sermons; in catechism classes we have memorized these lines probably several times. But in our daily life, how often do we think about and live in the true joy of what these words mean to us?

The word comfort, when broken down, literally means “with strength.” When we are comforted,

we receive relief from our afflictions. Sin has caused us to be disobedient to the Lord and it is because of sin that we are faced with struggles in our lives. That is why it is so comforting to know that we are saved in Jesus Christ.

How do we know if we truly are a part of God’s people?

He is our safety and strength against the storms of life; as believers we may live and die in the joy of this knowledge.

Comfort in life

We face many struggles and decisions in our lives as young people. There are so many uncertainties and difficulties; we do not know what the future holds for us. As we face these decisions from day to day, our comfort can be found in the fact that we belong to Christ. As believers, we are God’s

children, belonging to his elect and thus receiving the promises of God, including the promise of comfort.

But how do we know if we truly are a part of God’s people? As those who fear and serve the Lord, we are his covenant children; this is signified and sealed to us in our baptism. Through his death, Christ unites us with the Father. In the covenant we have a living relationship with our God in which He promises to care for us and we promise to live according to his Word.¹

We know that we are in the covenant, but we also know that not all those who are in the covenant are part of God’s elect (Matt 22:14). Being in the covenant comes with the responsibility of living in obedience to the will of the Lord. So then where do we find the assurance that we do indeed belong to the elect? Thankfully, election does not depend on us at all. Election is God’s unchangeable purpose whereby He has chosen to salvation in Christ a certain number of persons no better or



more worthy than others (CD I 7). The Lord works faith in the hearts of those chosen as his elect people, giving us a firm confidence that Christ's saving work is not only for others but also for us personally (Eph 1:3-6). We can be assured of our election through the fruits of election that are visible in our lives – true faith in our Saviour, a desire to fear God and live in obedience to his Word, true godly sorrow for our sins and a heartfelt aspiration for righteousness (CD I 12).

And as God's elect, our comfort is in the Lord, our strength. God pulls us out of a world of evil and promises to guide and protect us always. "Believers are granted comfort because their election is sure. The elect cannot be led astray and will not perish. They may fall and do fall, but our Father in heaven is faithful and will not let go of the work of his hands."²

Through the promises we receive by belonging to our faithful Saviour, we can face each day with confidence, knowing that the One who knows the number of the hairs on our head will go with us, surrounding us with his love and care. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isa 43:2, 3).

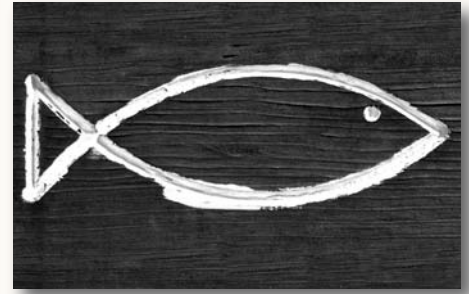
Comfort in death

The comfort we have as believers is not only for life but also in death. We may face, or have already faced, the death of a loved one. How can this comfort apply also in situations of death, when we cannot understand why someone dear is taken away from us? This seems especially hard when it is someone who is young, in the prime of their life. We may question why they had to be taken now, when they could still accomplish so much.

His plan is perfect

As believers we can have comfort in knowing that those who die in the Lord go to be with Him and are in his presence, free from pain and suffering. It may be true that we think this person could have done much work for the Lord on this earth, but God's ways are higher than ours. "God alone decides the length of our journey and the speed at which we travel it."³ Death for a believer is gain (Phil 1:21), as our death puts an end to sin and its effects and by it we enter into everlasting life. Those who die no longer have to face difficult decisions, hard choices, disappointments, and the pain of suffering. They have eternal comfort.

God is sovereign in everything and, although we do not always understand his purpose, we know that his plan is perfect. Death



reminds us that we are living in the hope of eternal life; we are only on this earth temporarily. Furthermore, God often uses death to strengthen us and to draw us into the comfort we have in Christ, turning more and more to Him in dependence and humility.

Our omniscient God has reasons for all the things that happen to us, both in life and in death. We can go forward with joy, letting go of our questions and putting our full trust in Him. We can face the future with courage, strength, and hope, being at peace knowing that we belong to our faithful Saviour. "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Rom 14:8).

*Who trusts in God, a strong abode
in heaven and earth possesses;
Who looks in love to Christ above,
no fear his heart oppresses.
In Thee alone, O Lord, we own, our
hope and consolation,
Our shield from foes, our balm for
woes, our great and sure
salvation.*

(Hymn 43:1)

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A Pastors' Conference in Sudan

During the reading week of the Theological College in the month of February, Dr. A. J. de Visser and I were privileged to be the speakers at a pastors' conference in Khartoum, Sudan. This conference was organized by the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) of North Sudan. Since it is not a regular occurrence that we get an opportunity to see something of what the Lord is doing in Sudan, I would like to report on this conference and so share what we experienced. First we need some context.

Some background

The Republic of Sudan is the largest country in Africa. The country is divided east and west by the Blue Nile and the White Nile which join to form the Nile at Khartoum. There is also a clear division between the north and the south of this country. The north is dominated by Muslim Arabs who wield most of the political power, although the number of Christians is increasing. The south has a non-Arab, mixed population of predominantly Christians but also those adhering to animistic religions. The north borders on the Sahara and has a fairly dry climate. The south receives more rain and is productive in agriculture. The country has

untapped natural resources, especially oil, much of which is found in the south of the country. Considering the differences between north and south, it is not surprising that throughout history there have always been tensions between these two regions. This remains the case today.

In 2005, Sudan emerged from a civil war that had run from 1983. The results of this second civil war (the first ran from 1955-1972) were devastating. Almost two million people, mostly civilians, had died due to starvation. Furthermore, almost four million southerners were displaced and many of them

ended up in the capital city of Khartoum.

It is within this context of the brokenness and frailty of life that MERF can broadcast the glad tidings of Jesus Christ to a hurting people. This work is being richly blessed. The gospel goes out by radio and television, each one hour a week by means of officially government sanctioned stations. Dr. de Visser and I were able to visit the radio and TV production facilities and it is amazing what is being done with a very small staff under the leadership of Nasir Zaki.

Over the years, MERF has also been involved in much diaconal aid, especially in the Nuba Mountains in the south of the country. This assistance has included providing food, growing seeds for wheat and maize, medical supplies, clothing, shelters, and hand-operated pumps for clean underground water. In recent years MERF has taken on projects that help people become self-supporting, such as providing people with grinding mills, milking cows, and sewing machines.

From time to time, MERF arranges pastors' conferences. Dr. de Visser and I were invited to take care of the speeches and discussion for this particular conference.



Rev. Aiely Mangasha Kassa organized much of the conference and saw to our every need



Nasir Zaki, director of the radio and television broadcasts in his office

The pastors' conference

On Monday evening, February 4, 2008, the conference was officially opened with singing, prayer, a devotional meditation, and fellowship. The total number of those who registered was 142, although for various reasons the average attendance per session fluctuated from sixty-five to eighty. Most participants were pastors or elders and they came from both Arabic-speaking congregations as well as those with southern tribal languages. Those who helped with the meals and the organization of the events also attended.

The two main churches that were represented at the conference were the Presbyterian Church of Sudan (PCOS) and the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church (SPEC). Both churches date back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The PCOS is for the most part the result of American mission work. The SPEC has historic roots in the Coptic Evangelical Church of Egypt.

Sudan has two official languages, Arabic and English, and many in the audience knew English. However, the language that everyone knew was Arabic and this was the language of the conference. Our English

presentations were therefore translated.

The schedule that was followed for the three-day conference was as follows:

- 8:30-9:00 morning devotions
- 9:00-10:30 first speech and discussion
- 10:30-11:30 breakfast
- 11:30-1:00 second speech and discussion
- 1:00-1:30 tea
- 1:30-2:00 devotion
- 2:00-4:00 rest and dinner
- 4:00-5:00 tea
- 5:00-5:30 devotion
- 5:30-7:00 third speech and discussion
- 7:00-7:30 prayer
- 8:30 supper

This schedule left time for talking to the conference participants and continuing the discussion. It also gave us an opportunity from time to time to slip out and meet people with whom MERF was working (for example the radio and TV broadcasts), as well as to see an Egyptian evangelistic tent in central Khartoum. During the devotion times there was much music making and singing. It was quite an experience to witness the enthusiastic singing of hymns by our African brothers and sisters.

Dr. de Visser and I spoke at alternate times. Dr. de Visser gave three speeches on the work of the Holy Spirit. He dealt first with the means that the Holy Spirit uses by explaining the account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. His second speech dealt with the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people. The gifts of the Spirit formed the core of his final presentation.



Dr. Arjan de Visser giving a speech with the help of a translator

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam giving a speech with the help of a translator



My five speeches dealt with the office of elder. Topics dealt with included: the elder as leader and as judge in both the Old and New Testament church; the difference between the ruling and teaching elder; the functioning of church discipline; the issue of women in office; and finally the privilege of the eldership.

All the lectures were followed by excellent questions which provided a very good basis for further discussion. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, the discussions did have to come to an end without being able to answer all the questions. The audience clearly appreciated hearing the Reformed teaching which we did our best to present to them. On Thursday, when it came time to say farewell, we realized that special bonds had been formed between us and these African Christians.

In closing

Dr. de Visser and I are both very thankful for the opportunity we had to be of service to MERF and to form the agenda of the pastors' conference. It was obvious to us that there is a great desire to know what the Bible says and to remain faithful to God's Word. The Scriptures are normative. It was also very clear to us that MERF does vital and biblical work in Sudan. Its chief work is the broadcast ministry in both radio and television, but also conferences like the one we were at are very important for biblical teaching.

There are many opportunities for the gospel in Sudan. This nation is slowly emerging, battle weary, from its dark years of civil war. At the moment, Islam is somewhat tolerant and the one and only gospel is making inroads in Sudan, also among the Arabic population of the north. MERF is doing what it can with the limited funds on hand to spread the Good News and we would commend the work of MERF Canada to you. This is an excellent investment in the work of the Lord, also in the Sudan.



Part of the outside conference dining hall

MERF-Canada

1225 Dundas Street
RR 1, Burlington, ON L7R 3X4
905-332-3285

*For more background,
see the article
"Reformed Witness in the Sudan"
at
www.merf.org*

What's New???

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It is time once again to pass on some of the gleanings from the various church bulletins, both in Canada and Australia. The first two items have a thematic link, while the rest are of a general nature that may give some food for thought and discussion.

First, the Committee of Administration of the Immanuel Church in Edmonton informed the congregation that "beginning in 2008 Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church will now be offering electronic funds transfer for its members to make their regular contributions. This service is intended for those members who wish to donate the same amount every month. . . any member wishing to take advantage of this option can request to have an application form." This comes across as a good idea. For one thing, it helps in the regular giving of the first fruits. When one has to write a cheque, it is easy to find reasons why other expenses should be covered first. Further, it will be a great help to the bookkeeper in knowing that there is a regular income to cover the expenses. All too often it can be read in church bulletins that the treasurer has had to delay paying some bills. This method, of course, does not prevent

anyone from giving extra as opportunity arises or situations change. It is always possible to write a cheque.

As we are on the topic of church contributions, I also came across a statement in another consistory report that raised a question in my mind. It stated,

Discussion takes place concerning those who do not contribute financially to the church. It was asked whether those who are delinquent in showing thankfulness to the Lord should be withheld from the Lord's Supper. It was suggested that a form letter should be given to these members if they do not respond positively to the admonitions of the ward elders. If there is still no response, after having received a letter, consistory will advise them that they are to be withheld from the Lord's Supper.

To be sure, unfaithfulness in giving the first fruits is something that needs to be addressed. Such giving is one of the very basics of our life of thankfulness. However, it seems a little peculiar to come up with a form letter. Such letters are associated with charities asking for your money or perhaps collection agencies. Perhaps there is more

than the short report indicated which was lost in transmission of the information.

Various bulletins had a short write up on the new hymns and revised Psalms. This came originally from the pen of Rev. G. Ph. van Popta, who is a member of the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*. It is worthwhile for the benefit of all to share it via this column. Under the title, "A Word on the New Hymns and Revised Psalms" it read,

A few of you have asked whether we are not being inconsistent in that the revised Psalms have the old pronouns, "Thee", "Thou", etc., removed while we are introducing hymns that use the old pronouns (with the appropriate verb endings). That is a very worthy observation. What is going on?

The hymnal side of the songbook will always be somewhat eclectic since the songs come from many sources, places and eras. The older songs address God with "Thee" and many even address man with "thee." As much as possible, one tries to respect the style of the author and the integrity of the song. Its very eclecticism as evidenced by the

different styles found in it demonstrates the (temporal) catholicity of the church. If the hymn is in the public domain, changes may be made, but one ought to be reticent about doing so. If it is copyrighted, no changes may be made, at least not without the permission of the copyright holder.

Many of the old hymns are so familiar that changing "Thee" to "You" would make the song virtually unsingable. Try singing: "How Great You Are" or "Great is Your Faithfulness." It wouldn't work.

The Psalms side of the songbook, on the other hand – based on God's own songbook that He gave to his church of all ages – should be redone every generation or two so that it continues to speak in fresh, current and vigorous language. It was contemporary when King David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, first wrote it; the church should, as much as possible, always be singing from a contemporary version of it. Furthermore, if we want our children to love and understand the Psalms – which we most certainly do! – then we do well to give them a translation in a language they understand. We look forward and not back. That was the same argument for moving from the King James Version of the Bible (1611) to the Revised Standard Version (1952) and, eventually, the (1985) New International Version.

The 150 Psalms are a unit and there should be consistency within the unit. The hymns are an eclectic mix and inconsistency can be expected. Reading the pastoral columns one often comes across practical advice that is worth receiving a broader audience than just one congregation. After all, we are

involved in a common struggle. With that in mind, it is helpful to pass on some practical advice found in the Aldergrove Pastoral column of December 16, 2007. Rev. Schouten wrote,

I was asked by the consistory to say a few words about what is appropriate dress for worship. While the consistory has no desire to make rules for what constitutes proper dress for worship, we do wish to provide guidelines.

The main guideline is that we should not dress for worship in the same we do for work or for leisure activities like a hockey game or an afternoon of shopping in the mall or washing our car. Dressing in a casual way for worship conveys the thought that worship is recreational. If we have the (Biblical) thought in our minds that worship brings us into intimate contact with God who is holy and glorious and yet present with His believing people, this does not seem to go with the leisure-style mindset, dress and attitude.

Some might respond by saying that "all of life is worship" and that since we are always in the presence of God, whether at work or at school or in a worship service, our way of dress doesn't matter at all. If we define worship in a very broad way as "glorifying God," then, yes, all of life is worship. Yet, the Bible shows that there is a distinctive time and place for special worship. When we come together on the Lord's Day, God is present among us in a special way. His special presence among us as Saviour and Lord should fill us with reverence and our reverence should be reflected in our way of dress.

It can also be said that the church should be a refuge from the immodest fashions of the

world. Modesty may be hard to define but someone once said that it can be achieved with three adjectives: lots, loose and long. Clothing which draws undue attention to one's physique or reflects the culture of skin that predominates in the world has no place in the daily life of a Christian and certainly not in worship. It's true, as one might be told in response to these paragraphs, that God looks upon the heart. However, what is in the heart also shows up in our conduct and also in the way we project ourselves in dress. Please reflect about these matters.

The points brought forward are indeed worthy of reflection.

In reading the bulletins from the churches in Australia, I came across this item in the Baldivis Congregational News of December 23, 2007:

We also encourage you to come to our church on the Sundays during the holiday period (if you are not too far away) rather than visit one of the other congregations so that the church service will not be too empty. Consistory has made arrangements for some of the consistory members to come back from their holiday destination so that at least 3 consistory members will be present. All holiday makers are welcome to join us for church (our hall is air-conditioned and very comfortable during this hot season).

Undoubtedly, there will be a longing for the return of summer warmth as you read these words during the tail end of winter. At the same time, let us hope that the pews are not too comfortable. That presents another challenge for the minister.

With this we wrap up another "What's New?"



Book Review

Reviewed by W.L. Bredehof

Seeing With New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture

**David Powlison (Phillipsburg:
P & R, 2003).**

Additional Information: Paperback,
274 pages, \$13.21.

Whether we like it or not, we live in a psychologized world. By that I mean that psychology and psychiatry have donated various concepts to our general societal outlook. As believers, we are not immune to these trends – in fact, there are a good many authors who would try and have us accept various psychological theories and perspectives as consistent with the Christian worldview.

We can thank God for an author like David Powlison who thinks critically about these developments. Powlison teaches Practical Theology at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia and is also on staff at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation in that same city. He has years of practical experience in the field of counseling and anyone who has heard him speak will remember his deep insights and strong commitment to the gospel of the Scriptures.

That commitment comes through consistently in this book, a collection of (revised) articles that have appeared over the last few years in the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* (a very worthwhile periodical). This is the first of a three-volume set on Christian counseling. This first volume deals with conceptual questions; the

second (*Speaking Truth in Love*) deals with methodological and institutional questions. A third volume will deal with apologetical issues.

Some of the highlights from this book include Powlison's expositions of passages from Ephesians and the Psalms in the first part, "Scripture Opens Blind Eyes." I deeply appreciate Powlison's pointed applications of God's Word and his powerful use of illustrations and word pictures. In the second part, "Reinterpreting Life," Powlison deals with a number of topics. For instance, the question, "What If Your Father Didn't Love You?" is tackled in chapter 10. Can you have a proper understanding of God as Father if your earthly father was absent or abusive? In another chapter, Powlison deals with the nature of God's love. He shows us how it is "better than unconditional." I came away from that chapter much more impressed with God. As one last example, he works through Gary Chapman's idea of love languages in chapter 14. Is that a concept that we can work with? Powlison gives a balanced, biblical analysis that you won't find elsewhere.

Who can I recommend this book to? Definitely to pastors and elders. But this book is also for teachers and others who are involved in helping people develop and change (parents too!). It isn't a technical counseling manual that requires specialized knowledge. Rather, it's written at a popular level and above all, *Seeing With New Eyes* endeavours to work consistently with the Scriptures and point people to the Saviour. I think Powlison succeeds.

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Book Review

Reviewed by C. Van Dam

Stop the Presses! The Inside Story of the New Media Revolution

Joseph Farah (Los Angeles: WND Books, 2007).

Additional Information: 273 pages, about \$25.00 CDN

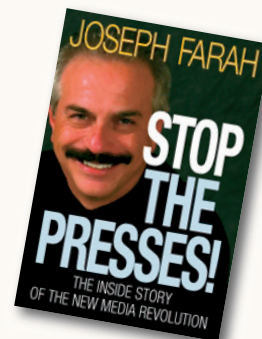
This is a fascinating book, written by a pioneer of the new media, the Internet. Joseph Farah, a former newspaper editor and one with some thirty years experience in the newspaper business, at a certain point realized that newspapers were not telling the truth. As a Christian he finally got his chance to do something about it by starting a news website. His wife Elizabeth was co-founder with him of worldnetdaily.com, started from a computer in their home in May 1997. It is now the largest independent news service on the Internet and the website draws about five million unique visitors every month. Every day it is read by the most influential newspapers in over two hundred nations (p 74).

The driving philosophy behind World Net Daily (WND), apart from the duty to get the truth out, is that we are in a culture war and the only way to wage that war is "for responsible, freedom-loving people to fight back on all fronts, to stop surrendering in the Culture War, to reclaim and redeem those lost cultural institutions" (p 36). A timely message, also for Reformed people!

In case you ever doubted, this book shows that the media today are biased, not neutral, not fair, and not balanced. They have a very clear agenda. Christians are often accused of trying to impose their morality on society, but as Farah cogently notes, everyone has a world view and the media has been attempting to impose their godless view of reality on their readers (pp 28-29).

Although the author is not shy about promoting himself or his enterprise, this book is a very worthwhile read. Farah is a good story teller and the book is larded with true anecdotes from the media world that give the reader a rare

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inside look at what goes on in the newsrooms and editorial offices of the press. Some of the examples he gives include how news from the Middle East or about climate change is reported. On the political front he tells how WND defeated Al Gore in 2000 and how his political foes tried to put him out of business. He also exposes Google for what it is in its philosophy and hence its business dealings.

This book can be an encouragement for Christians not to give up in spite of seemingly overwhelming odds. With the Internet come new dangers, but also new possibilities! Recommended.



Short Report of the Annual General Meeting of the Board of Governors of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College held on February 15 and 16, 2008

Br. Peter Vandersluis, Chairman, opened the meeting in the usual Christian manner and welcomed all present: Gerrit Bos, Shirley Broekema, Martha de Gelder, Harry Harsevoort, Sharon Hofsink, Eric Jans, Debby Lodder, Len Lodder, Aaldert Otten, Dave Pruijm, John Schoon, Sandra VanderWoude, Heather VanWoudenberg, and Anthony Vis. Also in attendance periodically were faculty members, Judy Kingma and Christine van Halen-Faber, as well as Eleanor Boeringa, librarian. The college secretary, Donna Van Huisstede, attended to record the minutes. Absent with notification were Peter Aikema, Jane DeGlint, Allard Gunnink, Jeff Scheper, and Willa Dale Smid.

Governance and Handbook Committee

Sr. de Gelder reviewed on the report provided, briefly looking at the background of the activities which led to the draft Board Handbook. It was noted that this remains a work in progress. She outlined the committee's current activities. Most recently they have developed a document entitled, "Scope of Financial Responsibilities." This details the range of responsibilities which should have the attention of the Board of Governors. It is the intent of the committee to develop a road map that will guide both the board and its committees in the fulfilment of their specific tasks.

After this introduction, the governors divided into four discussion groups to discuss how it might be possible to increase the

level of engagement of board and committee members. Upon reconvening, a number of suggestions were tabled for further discussion. It was noted that each governors must become more involved in their local community. The community, too, should seek engagement. Several recent and upcoming events were shared as good examples of active engagement on all sides.

Course presentation

In keeping with the tradition of having a presentation on a specific course taught at the college, Sr. Boisvert introduced the governors to the French Methods course that she teaches. A course outline was provided and elaborated upon. In an effort to have the governors get a feel for what takes place during her classes, Teresa challenged them to participate in a number of exercises en français. Oh la la!

Harvest Foundation

Br. G. Nordeman was welcomed to the meeting and given the opportunity to introduce the Harvest Endowment Foundation, its history, structure, and intent. It was determined that the college would participate for a one-year trial. Ongoing participation will be determined after this time.

Secretarial Report

Sr. Hofsink elaborated on the report in which highlights of the past year were outlined. It was noted with gratitude that the executive positions and all committee liaisons have been filled.

Library Report

Sr. Boeringa elaborated on the report provided, highlighting the new Dr. Oosterhoff book collection. It is hoped that within the next academic year, a new software program can be selected. Eleanor will prepare an article for the

upcoming newsletter in which mention will be made that the college library is open to all – both near and far.

Financial Report

Br. Vis elaborated on the report provided. Included was the annual motion regarding setting tuition fees for the next several years. For 2008/09, tuition will be \$5,300.00. It will increase to \$5,475.00 for 2009/10. An additional fifty percent is required as a donation from those who are not Canadian Reformed. It was noted that this amount is often provided by individuals within that student's church community.

During the financial review of the past year, it was noted that there was a dramatic increase in our budget. While this resulted in a larger deficit, more funds were collected than in previous years. The Finance Committee is encouraged to determine trends regarding revenue sources and to find target areas for promotion. It was noted that the committee is currently in contact with a representative from one school community. A campaign is in the works.

Discussion continued regarding the expense portion of the budget proposal. Since few reports had received the attention of the meeting, it was agreed that the budget would be finalized at the end of this meeting.

Program and Personnel Committee

Sr. de Gelder elaborated on the report provided. She noted with thanks that recently Br. Harry Harsevoort joined this committee. Martha advised that the recent interviews conducted with the full-time faculty members were very good. Upon completion of a third positive performance review, it was proposed that Allard be offered tenure. Mention was made

regarding the heavy workload of our faculty members. Discussion ensued. Faculty workload will certainly be a part of the decision making process that is to result from establishing vision for the college and its involvement in distance education.

The proposal to add a fourth year to the Diploma of Teaching program was outlined. The intention of this addition is to bring this program in line with that of other post-secondary institutions, most of whom have adopted a four-year BA. Discussion followed. Of primary focus was the implication this may have on the college's ability to attain its goal of accreditation. It was noted that unless the college were to grow significantly and become a general arts facility, it is unlikely that it would ever be given a degree-granting status for its Diploma of Teaching program. As a program, it is more likely that this be achieved for the Diploma of Education program. Individual courses taken as part of the Diploma of Teaching program already receive recognition and course credit from a variety of post-secondary institutions.

Faculty Report

Sr. van Halen presented her report. Once again, a heartfelt thank you was expressed to the many associate teachers and school boards who participated in the practicum component of our programs over the past year. A practicum placement proposal was provided which outlined the cycle which the college intends to follow regarding out-of-province placements in the future. The governors are encouraged to use this information to organize a community event in conjunction with faculty presence in their local school.

The course taught by Rev. Agema in Fergus this past summer was reportedly successful. Upon request from Immanuel Christian

School, Rev. Agema plans to travel to Winnipeg in July 2008 to present, "A Reformed Perspective on Biblical Instruction." A request has also been received from Coaldale, so Christine hopes to travel there to present a course on Reformed Education.

A new and exciting venture that is upcoming – the Science and Math Teachers Conference – was reported upon. Speakers and panellists have been secured and at least forty attendees have registered. It is hoped that this will be the first of many such subject-specific conferences.

Accreditation Committee

Sr. van Halen elaborated on the report provided. Work with Redeemer College University has been very slow due to their review by the College of Teachers during this past year. The focus of the committee has been on preparing for an external review. Such a review would provide answers regarding how best to move forward, would highlight internal areas for improvement, and would externally provide recognition. The committee was granted board approval to move forward with taking the steps necessary to begin an external review.

Building Committee Report

The report provided by the committee was reviewed. Requests regarding upgrades to the building are granted. It was noted that since this report was prepared Dan VanDelden has been found willing to be the convener of this committee.

Public Relations Committee

Sr. Hofsink presented the report as provided. She noted that Heather VanWoudenberg has officially taken on responsibility for this committee. The next newsletter is currently in the works. An updated poster should be available this coming fall.

Technology Committee

Br. Bos elaborated on the technological developments at the college during this past year. Our principal noted that students are increasingly tech-savvy.

Visitation Report

Br. Vandersluis referred to the reports provided. He advised that class visits are well worth the time and effort and encouraged all governors to take the opportunity afforded them.

Women's Savings Action (W.A.T.C.H.) Report

The report, as prepared by Sr. Robin Westrik, was reviewed. Gratitude was expressed for the monies raised and the ongoing support for items not covered in the budget.

Western (of MB) Governors Report

Reference was made to the report previously received. Sr. VanderWoude added that regulations regarding certification for teachers at independent schools in BC seem to be ever-changing. Sr. van Halen requested that the college be kept abreast of all such changes. Some question was raised concerning the development of a local needy student fund. Such a fund could assist out-of-province students attend the college to take its one-year program. All governors are encouraged to promote this idea locally.

Distance education workshop

Br. Bos presented a power point presentation that was developed from the data received from the distance education questionnaires. A number of conclusions could be drawn from this survey. Need determines course offering. Program drives technology. Focus should be on in-service teacher development. A focused plan of action is required. Local governors must be involved – they are the key to success.

After this introduction, the governors were divided into three discussion groups. A set of questions was provided to focus discussion on identifying the needs and expectations of local school communities. Upon regrouping, reports were shared. Discussion followed. A number of action items were assigned, including the (DVD) taping of the Bible course that is planned for presentation in Winnipeg.

Financial Report (cont'd)

With the completion of all other committee reports, attention was

once again turned to matters of finance. It was noted that a number of building committee items were determined to be capital expenditures. A motion was adopted to increase the nominal fee paid by some school societies from \$2.00 to \$5.00 per student. Mention was made of the fact that to meet the income requirements of this budget, each governor will have to find twenty new members within his or her community. After a final round of discussion, the newly revised budget was adopted.

Ratification

Following proper procedure all actions of the Executive Committee and of the Board of Governors from February 8, 2007 to February 14, 2008 were ratified.

After each governor was given the opportunity to provide a local report/update, a date was established for the next directors' meeting. Br. Vandersluis thanked all in attendance for their participation. Following closing devotions led by Br. Pruijm, our Chairman adjourned the meeting.



By D.G. J. Agema and G. Nordeman

Report on URCNA General Synod 2007

From July 10 till July 13 the undersigned visited the General Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America as fraternal delegates. This synod was held on the campus of Trinity Christian College in Schererville, a suburb of Chicago, from July 10 - 13. Considering that there were over 160 delegates, the organization was done very well. Indeed, the synod consisted of over 160 delegates, two from each consistory. Compared to even our expanded synod of twenty-four delegates, this is quite a different scenario. If you add to this that Synod has to complete its business in four days, you get an impression of the stress of such a synod.

We arrived Tuesday after supper and were welcomed. During our stay we were made to feel at home and had opportunity to attend a few advisory committee meetings and speak with many delegates. It was good to be able to do this. As to the matters that involve our contact we can report the following:

1. The synod took over the recommendations of the Joint Church Order Committee, much like our synod did. The churches will now have an opportunity to study this Church Order and give their reactions to the Committee.
2. With regard to the Common Songbook Committee, the

decisions were a bit more ambiguous. While affirming commitment to continue dialoguing with the Canadian Reformed Churches regarding a common song book, Synod decided to mandate its Songbook Committee to produce a new song book specifically for the URCNA. Also, the commitment to have a common songbook as the official book in a joint federation was not accepted. At this point it is not clear what all this means for the work on a common songbook.

3. With regard to the matter of Theological Education, further clarification was given. Prior to

our respective synods the synodically-appointed committees have been at an impasse, with the CanRC committee maintaining that Scripture mandates at least one federationally-controlled seminary, while the URC committee maintained that it does not. Synod Smithers 2007, while affirming their "strong preference" for at least one federationally-controlled seminary, acknowledged that this is not a matter of principle, but one of application. Therefore, it declared that this matter should not impede movement toward unity between the URC and CanRC. Synod Schererville 2007 affirmed the six points of agreement arrived at by the URC and CanRC committees.

In addition to these matters, General Synod had to deal with other reports and overtures from several classes. To highlight some, Synod had to deal with an overture to adopt the RCUS statement on the teachings of what is called the "federal vision" and the teachings of Dr. Normal Shepherd. Synod did not accede to this request but did appoint a committee to study the matter and come with a clear statement concerning this matter to the next general synod. In the meantime it adopted nine statements, which it termed pastoral advice to the churches. We quote them in full:

Synod affirms that the Scriptures and confessions teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone and that nothing that is taught under the rubric of covenant theology in our churches may contradict this fundamental doctrine. Therefore Synod rejects the errors of those:

1. who deny or modify the teaching that "God created man good and after His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness," able to perform "the commandment of life" as the representative of mankind (HC 6, 9; BC 14);
2. who, in any way and for any reason, confuse the "commandment of life" given before the fall with the gospel announced after the fall (BC 14, 17, 18; HC 19, 21, 56, 60);
3. who confuse the ground and instrument of acceptance with God before the fall (obedience to the commandment of life) with the ground (Christ who kept the commandment of life) and instrument (faith in Christ) of acceptance with God after the fall;
4. who deny that Christ earned acceptance with God and that all His merits have been imputed to believers (BC 19, 20, 22, 26; HC 11-19, 21, 36-37, 60, 84; CD I.7, RE I.3, RE II.1);
5. who teach that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified, and adopted by virtue of participation in the outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness (CD, I, V);
6. who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC 21, 60; BC 29);
7. who teach that Spirit-wrought sanctity, human works, or cooperation with grace is any part either of the ground of our righteousness before God or any part of faith, that is, the "instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness" (BC 22-24; HC 21, 60, 86);
8. who define faith, in the act of justification, as being anything more than "leaning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified" or "a certain knowledge" of and "a hearty trust" in Christ and His obedience and death for the elect (BC 23; HC 21);
9. who teach that there is a separate and final justification grounded partly upon righteousness or sanctity inherent in the Christian (HC 52; BC 37).

We will have to see what comes out of the study committee appointed by Synod, but these statements do already raise some concern. Not only are we, because of our history, leery of doctrinal statements adopted by a synod without any consistory having seen them, but also the content of them raises some questions. These nine statements do not mention that God's covenant is with believers and their seed. In our history we have learned the pitfalls of equating covenant with election, while losing sight of Scripture's teaching that God's covenant is with believers and their seed. It will be a matter we will need to discuss in the coming years.

Another decision that affects us has to do with the structure of ecumenical relationships. To quote the official press release:

When they convened, delegates to Synod 2007 faced a pair of requests to change the URC's guidelines for ecumenical relationships. The URC's relationships with other federations are governed by its Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity, which includes three phases.

- * Phase One calls for correspondence and dialogue between the URC and another federation, so that mutual understanding and appreciation might grow between them.
- * Phase Two brings another federation into a "sister-church" relationship in which the URC recognizes it as a true church and encourages closer relationships between the two federations. In its pre-synod form, this phase was explicitly declared to be "in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated federative church unity."
- * Phase Three calls for movement into full integration between the two federations.

Both overtures facing Synod 2007 sought to alter Phase Two by removing the phrase "in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated church unity." They then called for Phase Three to become a multi-step process of preparing for and entering into full unity.

After discussion led by its advisory committee, Synod 2007 amended its rules for Phase Two by replacing the contested phrase. The rules for Phase Two now declare that: "The intent of this phase is to recognize and accept each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus, in acknowledgement of

the desirability of eventual integrated federative church unity, by establishing ecclesiastical fellowship. . . ." Entering this phase would continue to require ratification by the consistories, as required by Church Order Art. 36.

The rules for Phase Three then were amended to create two steps. In the first step, a plan of ecclesiastical union would be developed to outline the timing, coordination, and integration of six broad areas of the structure and life of the two federations. The second step would involve implementing the plan of union.

Ratification by the consistories, according to Church Order Art. 36, would be required to begin both of the steps in Phase Three.

Having adopted those changes, Synod 2007 then addressed a point of possible confusion. Currently, the URC has several committees which are working to lay the groundwork for eventual union with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Under the new rules, the work of those committees properly belongs to the first step of Phase Three – yet the URC has only approved Phase Two relations with the CanRC.

To clarify the relationship and safeguard the work of the committees, Synod 2007 approved an exception to the newly adopted guidelines to allow the current unity committees to continue working with their corresponding CanRC committees while the two federations continue to function in Phase Two. This work would then pave the way for the federations when the URC does move to Phase Three.

Thus far the Press Release. This decision constitutes a change to our mutual agreement and thus

involves the decisions our respective synods had reached in 2001. It is regrettable that such a change was made unilaterally. Though Synod made special provision for contact with the CanRC, the result of this change is that two other ratification votes are required.

We left at Friday noon and Synod completed its work that evening. Looking back we note that there were good moments, you could feel that sense that there is commitment to remain faithful to God's Word and the Reformed Confession. With regard to working towards a joint federation the decisions were not as positive. Our Synod Smithers made clear its commitment to unity. This was not reciprocated by Synod Schererville of the URCNA.

What does this mean for the future? We want to stay away from making predictions or recommendations; the coming years will show what lives in the URCNA. We continue our work in the knowledge that the future of the church is in the hands of the Lord. We have to do this work in dependence on Him. Much wisdom and humility will be required as we seek to continue to work towards what we believe the Lord requires of us, federational unity. Some obstacles could be removed by our synods, perhaps others have come in the way. Since we take the Lord's call to unity seriously we are not looking for an easy way out, but hopefully can continue an open and honest dialogue with the URCNA, learning from each other as we go along, without sacrificing what we believe to be the truth. In 2001 both federations could recognize each other as faithful churches, on the basis of God's Word and the Three Forms of Unity. On that basis we must go further in the humble prayer that the Lord may bless our work for his glory and the coming of his kingdom.

