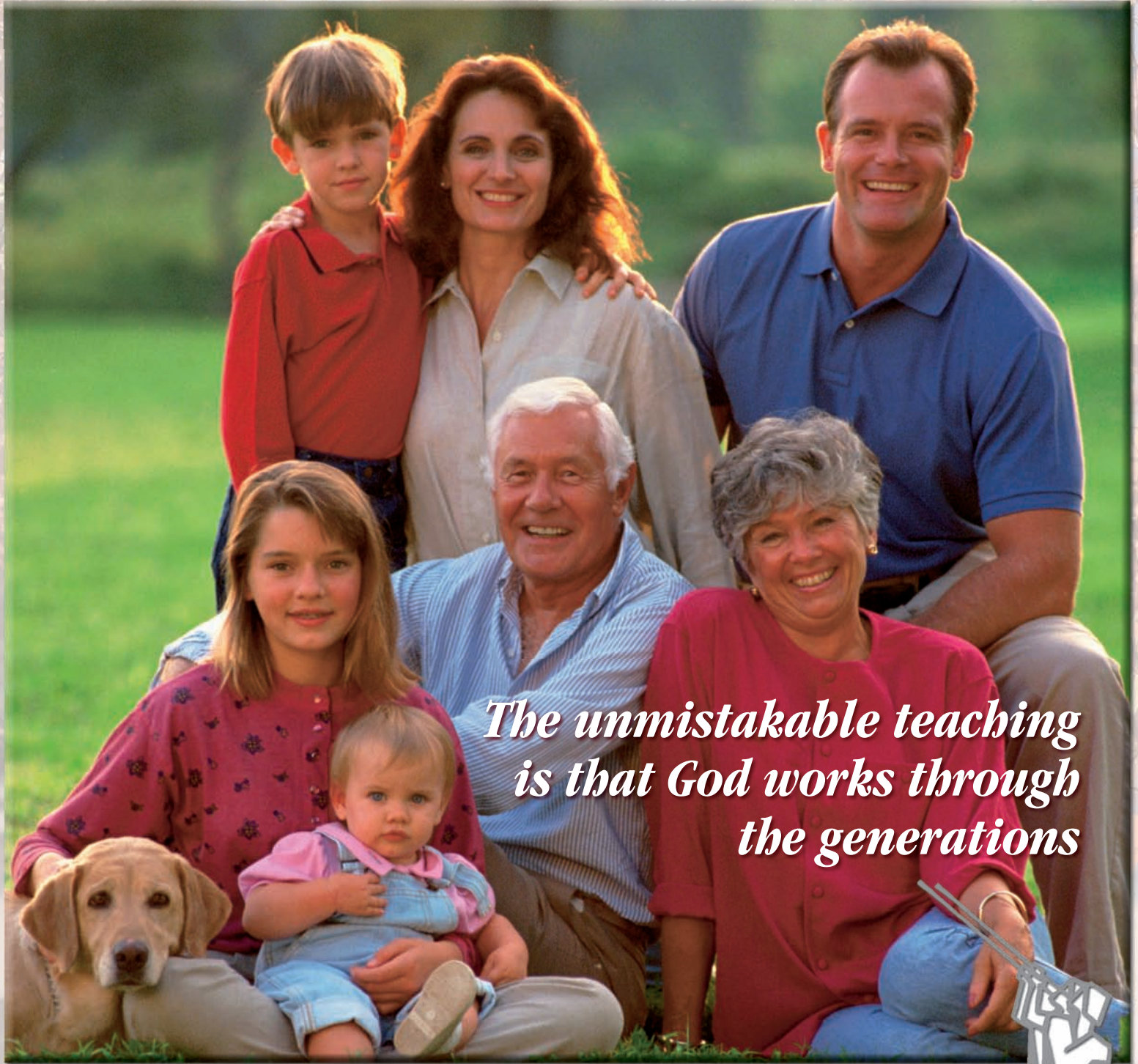


Clarion

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*The unmistakable teaching
is that God works through
the generations*

Inside this issue

- Regeneration and the Generations
- True Freedom
- 39th Anniversary Meeting and 34th Convocation of the Theological College





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Regeneration and the Generations

The foundational text for seeing how God works through the families is Genesis 17

Regeneration

In his conversation with Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus taught that “no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3). A little further he described this new birth as being “born of the Spirit” (v. 8). This new birth is also described by terms like conversion, new creation, raising from the dead, making alive, and regeneration (see CD III/IV 12; HC, LD 3, Q/A 8). The Form for Baptism also refers to it and indicates that this need to be born again is signified in baptism as it “signifies the impurity of our souls, so that we may detest ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek our cleansing and salvation outside of ourselves.” While in the Scriptures we learn of both the necessity of this new birth as well as how this new birth is the work of the Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, we also learn that the Spirit is pleased to work regeneration within the context of the generations. In other words, God is pleased to work through the families.

This is something that is worth some reflection, for it explains a great deal about our Reformed piety. Reflection should lead to a renewed appreciation of that piety as well as a renewed commitment based not on custom but on understanding. It will also enable us to explain ourselves not merely to the world, but also to others who confess Christ but do so with what is often described as an evangelical mindset. In our reflection we will first consider the scriptural link between regeneration and the generations. We will follow this by considering the various implications.

Generations

The foundational text for seeing how God works through the families is Genesis 17. In this chapter we read how the Lord established his covenant with Abraham. Specifically we read in verse 7, “I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.” This was underlined by the instruction to give the sign of the covenant, namely, circumcision, to all the boys when they were only eight days old.

How deeply this working of God through the generations was embedded in the hearts of God’s people appears in the Psalms. For example, in Psalm 103, written some one thousand years after the Lord established his covenant with Abraham, we read, “But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their *children’s children* – with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts” (vv. 17, 18). We find similar thoughts in Psalm 105, “He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a *thousand generations*, the covenant he made with Abraham. . .” (vv. 8, 9).

The fact the Lord worked through the generations showed up also in commands pertaining to marriage and raising of children. In Deuteronomy 7 we read the command forbidding inter-marriage with the people of Canaan, “For they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods. . .” (v. 4). This finds an echo in the words of Malachi 2:15. The context is about the priests who broke their marriage vows by

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divorcing their wives. The Lord was angry with this because He desired "godly offspring." As for raising children, in Deuteronomy 6 we read the instruction to impress the commandments on the children. This finds an echo in Psalm 78 where parents are told to teach the next generation about the great deeds of the Lord and his laws so that they may know and fear the Lord. In this connection we can also think of the second commandment as it pertains to the manner of worship. The Lord warned parents that if they strayed from his ways, He would visit the sins of the parents upon the children to the third and fourth generation.

This emphasis on the generations continues in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 7:14 Paul speaks about the way children born in a marriage where only one of the parents had become a believer are holy. Later in that same chapter, which is filled with instruction about marriage, he tells single women who desire to marry that they are free to do so but the potential husband "must belong to the Lord" (v. 39). As for the raising of children, Paul tells the fathers to "bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4).

The unmistakable teaching found in the Scriptures is that God works through the generations. In this respect, it is striking that the same type of language continues to be heard in the New Testament setting where the Gentiles were being grafted into Israel. At the same time, it should be realized that working through the generations does not mean that there is automatic regeneration for the children. There are many examples where children turned their back on God. We think of Esau. In Old Testament times, it led to the exile. To mention Psalm 78 once more, we can read there of the importance of the instruction by the parents so that the children may come to know and love the Lord. A lack of instruction will have sad consequences for the next generation. All this does not take away that God works through the families. Families are the basic nurseries of faith as within the context of the families the children learn about the Lord their God and are called to believe in his promises.

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Implications

When the relationship between regeneration and the generations is clear, it is not hard to see the implications. We will list the more obvious first, followed by matters that are logically deduced from them.

First, there is the implication for our youth in their search for a spouse. As the family is the nursery of faith, it is important that both father and mother belong to the Lord. How else can they bring forth godly offspring? In an age where appearance is everything, it will be hard to work on the principle that "faith is first" when it comes to marriage. When faith is first, then it will be clear that simply membership in the church is not sufficient. There is a need to look for someone who shows a living faith, a true love for the Lord. When faith is first, it can happen at times that one finds someone who is not of the same household of faith yet is drawn to the faith. One cannot forbid this by appealing to the way the Lord forbade the Israelites to marry the Canaanites. Commitment to the Lord, however, must always be first and very evident.

Families are the basic nurseries of faith

In the second place, we can see the implications for parenting. Regeneration is not passed on genetically. It always remains the work of the Spirit. At the same time, the sovereign Spirit sees to it that children are born in Christian families and He mobilizes the parents to bring up their children in the faith. Christian parenting is a holy and glorious, but also a most serious, calling.

Related to parenting is education. Education has as aim to prepare the children for meaningful life in the world, acquiring the necessary tools to fulfill the creation commission. It is only to be expected that Christian parents want their children to do this in a setting where the Lord and his revelation are honoured. It is the desire that the children learn to see all of life as God's children. This is the motivation behind spending so much money and energy on Christian education.

Third, there are implications for worship. The second commandment comes to mind. The faithfulness, or lack thereof, on the part of the parents will have tremendous positive or negative consequences for their children. In this respect, church choice comes into the picture.

The sovereign Spirit mobilizes the parents to bring up their children in the faith

Related to this is the way a family attends worship as a family and spends the Sunday as a family. Worship is not just a gathering of individuals for worship but of families committed to the Lord. We lose something of this when parents sit by themselves while the youth sit with other youth, with the accompanying temptations and distractions. Further we lose something of this when the family hardly sees each other on Sunday because everyone is socializing everywhere else.

Fourth, there are implications for evangelism. There are numerous programs aimed at the children. How many programs are aimed at parents? Perhaps more specifically, how many are aimed at fathers as heads of the family? Where parents are brought under the influence of the gospel, the children will follow as they end up in a nursery of the Spirit. While there may be hope that what children learn will rub off on the parents that is not really how things work. In this respect, the mission work we read of in the New Testament always seems to have been adult oriented. Further, if one reviews the history of missions, it appears that often a breakthrough was made into a number of families. After the initial breakthrough in a nation or community, the church grows especially from those families.

When we consider all these aspects, it should be clear that saying God works through the generations does not imply we presume the children's regeneration. Regeneration is always the sovereign work of the Spirit. Just the same, the Spirit is clearly pleased to work through the generations to accomplish his work of regeneration. In the end, it is the honour and the responsibility of parents to work through all the implications.



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True Freedom



MATTHEW 13:52

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

Galatians 5:13

There is a close connection between physical freedom and spiritual freedom. When we celebrate Remembrance Day, we give thanks to God for the blessings of living in freedom in our land. We remember the many soldiers who have given their lives in the first and second World Wars, the Korean War, and subsequent conflicts. We recognize that if they had not sacrificed their lives, it is likely we would not enjoy the peace and freedom that we have today – a freedom that includes being able to worship the Lord and give praise to his Name, even in public life.

These freedoms came under attack from the totalitarian regimes in Germany and Russia. Both Nazism and Communism were a threat to our ability to live peaceable lives and to serve God according to his Word. Thus it is with great thankfulness that on November 11 we observe a minute of silence and remember God’s gracious care in providing us with the freedoms we enjoy today.

As Christians those freedoms extend beyond the physical. Our freedom is far greater than that. For the basic problem facing mankind is not slavery to another world power. It is slavery to sin, bondage to the evil one. By nature we are born corrupt; we are slaves to sin (Ps 51:5; John 8:34). But thanks

be to God for his grace in Jesus Christ! “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1). Christ has redeemed us from our sins with his precious blood, freeing us from the dominion of Satan by his death on the cross. And by the power of his Holy Spirit, Christ allows us to live in communion with God again. That is true freedom!

Yet this freedom is constantly under attack. Our communion with God is something that Satan wants to destroy. He doesn’t like it when we in freedom serve God with joy and thankfulness. He wants us to be in bondage to him. And so in the church of Galatia, Satan attacked God’s people from two different sides. He infected the church with legalistic attitudes. False teachers arose who said that it was necessary to keep the law in order to be justified. They promoted circumcision and a works-based faith, that we have to do something to contribute to our own salvation.

Now, we all know that salvation is by grace alone, through faith in Jesus Christ. We reject the idea that we can keep the law in order to be saved. But what then is the status of the law in the life of a Christian? Here Satan attacks the church from the opposite side, suggesting that since Christ has kept the law for us, we no longer need to keep it. Perhaps Satan can

ensnare those opposed to legalism with a lifestyle of licentiousness.

Paul opposes this teaching by reminding us that we were called to be free. He warns, “Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.” For we still have so many fleshly desires. At times we are tempted to indulge in things that we know are opposed to God’s Word and will. We want to live like there is no tomorrow. To partake in the pleasures this world has to offer. To get rich, to party, to have fun. But if we follow the sinful desires of the flesh, we lose the freedom that Christ has earned for us. We again become slaves of sin and come under the dominion of the evil one.

On Remembrance Day we remember the sacrifice of many men and women who gave their lives so that we may enjoy peace and prosperity in Canada today. But we should also be reminded of the far greater peace and freedom that Christ has earned for us with his sacrifice on the cross.

And then we all need to ponder the sacrifices we are willing to make today, to live in the freedom we now enjoy. We are called to live holy and thankful lives to the glory of God. We are called to serve one another in love. For when we live in close communion with God and our neighbour, we will enjoy true freedom, both now and forevermore!





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The Frequency of the Lord's Supper Celebration

(Part 3)

Last time we turned our attention from the testimony of Holy Scripture to the historical witness of the church. There we saw how the worship of the early church consistently stuck to the rubric of "Word and Table" as it emerged in the New Testament period, the rubric which John Calvin and other reformers of the sixteenth century made every effort to restore. Calvin was firmly convinced that "it is certain that a Church cannot be said to be well ordered and regulated unless in it the Holy Supper of our Lord is always being celebrated and frequented."

This is the view that has shaped our confessional standards. After briefly taking note of the places the confessions touch on the Lord's Supper, we will reflect on the spiritual benefits of a more frequent celebration, pulling together what is to be learned from the Word of God, and therefore also from church history and the confessions.

Confessional Formulations

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) formulates clearly the importance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Of the fifty-two Lord's Days, four are devoted to the sacraments generally (Lord's Day 25) and the Lord's Supper particularly (Lord's Days 28-30).

The Belgic Confession (1561) accomplishes this, too, in its treatment of the sacraments in general (Article 33) and especially in its extensive exposition of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper (Article 35).

The extensive attention our fathers devoted to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper illustrates that the churches of the Reformation recovered recognition of the great importance and spiritual significance of the scriptural, God-ordained use of the Holy Supper, as opposed to the corrupted, man-invented one that had developed over the preceding centuries.

The spiritual benefits

The scriptural, church historical, and confessional aspects of the Lord's Supper lend considerable weight to the plea for a more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. Continuing to draw from these, we will now consider the benefits of a more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper.

It aids our memory of Christ's atoning death

When the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper He said: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 11:19). Among the primary reasons for his contention that the Lord's Supper should be "used frequently among all Christians," therefore,

John Calvin mentions this essential element: "In order that they might frequently return in memory to Christ's Passion. . ." (*Institutes* 4.17.44). This remembering should not be sporadic, but continual. Furthermore, this remembrance should be elicited not merely by the Word, but also by the sacraments.¹ Surely a more frequent celebration of the sacrament is a great help to curb "our insensitivity and weakness," (BC, Art 33) not least of all our forgetfulness.

It strengthens our communion with God

Jesus Christ is our only source of true and eternal life. Apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). He also says: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him" (John 6:55). Whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper by faith, then, our communion with God is strengthened.

Elsewhere in Holy Scripture, the Apostle Paul teaches the same when he writes: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16). In this sacrament we enjoy intimate fellowship with Christ our Saviour.

In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, through the Holy Supper we are "united more and more to [Christ's] sacred body through the Holy Spirit, who lives in both Christ and in us. . . [so that] we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones" (LD 28, Q/A 76; 1 Cor 6:15, 17; Eph 5:29, 30; 1 John 4:13). Or, to put it the way the Belgic Confession does, in the Supper "Christ makes us partakers of himself with all his benefits..." (Art 35; Rom 8:32; 1 Cor 10:3, 4). By frequent use of this sacrament Christ solidifies our union with Himself and likewise moves us to a deeper and more "fervent love of God."

It strengthens our faith and imparts spiritual vitality

Related to this is the element of the edification of our faith. By faith we are united to Christ. The more we feed on Christ, then, the more our faith grows and becomes stronger. Reformed confessors are familiar with the Heidelberg Catechism's declaration that the Holy Spirit "strengthens [our faith] by the use of the sacraments" (LD 25, Q/A 65), as well as that of the Belgic Confession that God has graciously ordained the sacraments, "mindful of our insensitivity and weakness" (Art 35).

This is Christ's admonition to all who seek real life: "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:53, 54).² To partake of the Lord's Supper more frequently, then, is to participate in the life of Christ more fully.

People will sometimes say that their weak faith prevents them

from coming to the Lord's Table. Such reasoning is faulty. Our weakness in faith is precisely what makes it so urgent for us to come feed on Christ. When you're hungry and weak, it's time to eat! Christ told his disciples, and still tells us when we celebrate the Lord's Supper: take and eat; this is my body, which is for you (Matt 26:26; 1 Cor 11:24).³ In the Lord's Supper Christ gives us food for our needy souls. For those who trust in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins, "their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ" (LD 30, Q/A 81). If abuse of the Lord's Supper makes people weak and sick, and even leads to death (1 Cor 11:30), so does neglect and infrequency. Like John Calvin asserts in his *Short Treatise on the Holy Supper*:

If we duly consider the end which our Lord has in view, we shall perceive that the use should be more frequent than many make it: for the more infirmity presses, the more necessary is it frequently to have recourse to what may and will serve to confirm our faith. . . .⁴

Indeed, Christ has become to our hungry and thirsty souls the true food and drink of life eternal. He "nourishes, strengthens, and comforts our poor, desolate souls by the eating of his flesh, and refreshes and renews them by the drinking of his blood" (BC, Art 35).⁵ The more we feed on Him, the better.

It imparts assurance and equips us for battle

Related to this is the matter of assurance. When we face doubts and struggles in our faith, through the bread He offers us Christ helps us fight and overcome these. In the Lord's Supper, Christ holds out his

hands, embraces, and feeds bruised reeds.⁶ Martin Luther states it powerfully:

For as long as we live on earth our lot is such that the evil spirit and all the world assail us with joy and sorrow, to extinguish our love for Christ, to blot out our faith, and to weaken our hope. Wherefore we sorely need this sacrament, in which we may gain new strength when we have grown weak, and may daily exercise ourselves unto the strengthening and uplifting of the spirit. . . (*Treatise on the New Testament*).

This aspect was recognized and expressed already by Ignatius, as we noted earlier. He encouraged the church at Ephesus to gather more frequently for worship, including Lord's Supper, "For when you meet with frequency, Satan's powers are overthrown and his destructiveness is undone by the unanimity of your faith. There is nothing better than peace, by which all strife in heaven and earth is done away" (*Letter to the Ephesians*).

It strengthens our fellowship with one another

Our communion with God is discernible in our fellowship with one another. The Belgic Confession states, in the section we mentioned earlier, that "we are moved by the use of this holy sacrament to a fervent love of God and our neighbours" (emphasis mine). Not only is our communion with God strengthened at this holy meal, but also our love for one another, as sharers in Christ's body.

When the Apostle Paul speaks of the drinking of the cup and the eating of the bread as communion

with the body of Christ, as we previously noted, he adds something about our fellowship with one another. "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor 10:17). Calvin recognizes this as one of the purposes of celebrating the Lord's Supper. By it, he writes, believers are "to nourish mutual love, and among themselves give witness to this love, and discern its bonds in the unity of Christ's body" (*Institutes* 4.17.44).

The Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper expresses it beautifully and familiarly: "As one bread is baked out of many grains and one wine is pressed out of many grapes, so we all, incorporated into Christ by faith, are together one body. For the sake of Christ, who so exceedingly loved us first, we shall now love one another, and shall show this to one another not just in words, but also in deed."

It is good for the spiritual health of the church

If the Lord's Supper is essential for the unity of the congregation, then surely a more frequent celebration is healthy.

For Calvin, in fact, it was a matter of proper order in the church that it should be so. In the *Articles for the Organization of the Church and Worship of Geneva*, which Calvin was instrumental in drawing up, it was stated that "[i]t is certain that a Church cannot be said to be well ordered and regulated unless in it the Holy Supper of our Lord is always being celebrated and frequented. . ." (Horton, p. 147).

This makes sense. Remember what Paul writes to the Corinthians:

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the

Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself (1 Cor 11:27-29).

We cannot rightly celebrate the Lord's Supper without dealing with sin in our own lives and in the life of the congregation. There has to be self-examination, let us call it personal discipline, and mutual admonition, church discipline.

This, too, was something that was recognized very early on in church history. In the *Didache*, cited earlier, the church was instructed:

On every Lord's Day – his special day – come together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. Anyone at variance with his neighbour must not join you, until they are reconciled, lest your sacrifice be defiled. . . (paragraph 14).

Surely a frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper, rightly used, would spur us on to a more diligent exercise of church discipline and self-examination. We can certainly agree that "Martin Bucer was correct to wonder at how our conduct toward each other would be improved if we were an eucharistically-oriented people."⁷

It is reasonable to expect that, rightly used, a more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper would be quite beneficial for the life and health of the church and all her members.

Not everyone agrees, though. So next time we will respond to the more common objections that have been raised.

¹ Lord's Day 25, Q/A 67 reminds us that "both the Word and the sacraments [are] intended to focus our faith on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation."

² See more on John 6 in Marshall, pages 133ff.

³ Jerome comments on Matt 26:26 as follows: "After the completion of the Passover which was a 'type,' and after he, with his apostles, had eaten the meat of the lamb, he took bread, which 'strengthens man's heart' (Ps 104:15), and proceeded to the true sacrament of the Passover; so that, as Melchisedech, the priest of God the Highest, offered bread and wine (Gen 14:18), and thus prefigured him, Christ himself should represent his offering in the reality of his body and blood."

⁴ Paragraph 28. In his Letter to the Ephesians, ch 20, Ignatius speaks of the Lord's Supper as "the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which wards off death but yields continuous life in union with Jesus Christ."

⁵ We confess earlier in this same article that in the Lord's Supper the church partakes of Jesus Christ, the living bread, "[f]or the support of the spiritual and heavenly life, which believers have...." Calvin speaks, too, of the importance of believers coming to the table "to sustain and strengthen their faith" (*Institutes*, 4.17.44).

⁶ Horton is surely correct when he asserts: "When it came to assurance, Calvin directed bruised reeds to Christ as he is objectively held out in the preached gospel and in the sacraments" (150).

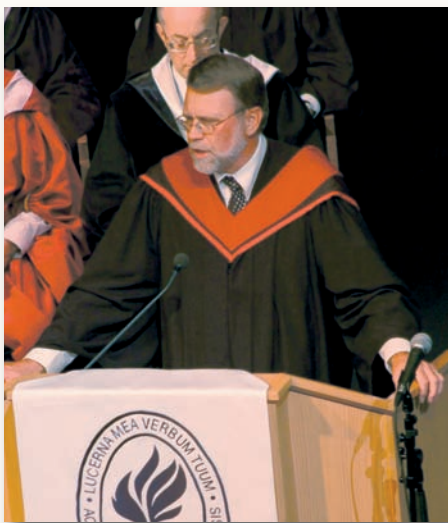
⁷ Horton, page 165. Here Horton also cites the suggestion of K. Deddens that the Lord's Supper is an ideal occasion to show compassion for the poor, and even contends that "it should be possible for the deacons to conduct their work of providing for the poor in the congregation from this [Communion] collection alone."

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Report of the 39th Anniversary Meeting and 34th Convocation of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches



On September 5, 2008, the Board of Governors of the Theological College convened the thirty-ninth anniversary meeting and thirty-fourth convocation of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed churches. Once again, the annual College Evening was held at Redeemer University College in Hamilton, Ontario. This time a beautiful new cloth with the College logo graced the lectern. We thank Mrs. Nellie Buitenhuis for this fine peace of work.

After the usual procession where the Board of Governors, the

Senate, and the graduating students filed into the auditorium, the assembly sang Psalm 96:1, 2, and 8. In connection with the featured address of the evening, the chairman of the Board, Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen, read Romans 15:14-21 and led in prayer.

In his welcome and opening comments the chairman expressed thankfulness to the Lord that the College was able to complete another academic year and that a new year is about to begin. He mentioned that besides the three graduates this evening the College has another graduate. The principal, Prof. Gerhard H. Visscher, successfully completed and defended his thesis at McMaster University and will officially receive his Ph.D. degree in the fall.

In the past year the Board of Governors was kept busier than usual. This was occasioned by the assignment of Synod Smithers 2007 to do a comprehensive review of the College and also by seeking a temporary replacement for Dr. Nicolaas H. Gootjes, who for health reasons was relieved from

his duties for the academic year 2008-2009. Gratitude was expressed to the Lord that brothers of solid academic calibre were found to fill the gap so that the students will continue to receive training at the academic level they have come to expect and appreciate at the College.

This time there were no letters of greeting from the sister churches in Australia. Instead, the greetings were brought in person by Mr. Murray Plug, one of the Australian deputies for the theological training. Mr. Plug expressed the appreciation of the Australian churches for the work done at the Theological College and pledged the ongoing prayerful and financial support of the College by the churches "down under." The chairman expressed heartfelt appreciation for this pledge of support. On behalf of the Board of Governors he declared the thirty-ninth anniversary meeting and the thirty-fourth convocation opened.

Dr. Visscher presented his Principal's Report as you will find it elsewhere in *Clarion*. Let me draw your attention to the end of the



Stuart Harsevoort, Rolf den Hollander, Cornelis Klein

report where he summarized the work of the College by turning wood into arrows.

Dr. Cornelis Van Dam, Professor of Old Testament Studies, delivered his address on "The Preacher as Priest." This speech will also be published in *Clarion*.

The main highlight of every convocation is the conferring of degrees. The M.Div. degree was conferred on Mr. Rolf den Hollander, on Mr. Cornelis Kleyn, and on Mr. Stuart Harsevoort. The latter had been chosen by the graduates to speak some words on their behalf. Stuart's address gave a new perspective on college life. He compared their four years of study to travelling in a college mobile where the professors function as the GPS, the librarian and administrative assistant are the oil which keep it running, the students are the fellow travellers, and the wives. . . well, they served as the tires and suspension that absorbed and smoothed out the bumps in the road. The combined effort of all these brought the college mobile to the destination.

Let me simply express the wish that the "college mobile" will keep on rolling for the current students.

Once again a pledge of financial support for the library was made on behalf of the women in the Canadian Reformed

churches. This year's pledge was for \$35,000. The yearly contribution by the Women's Savings Action is truly a blessing for the college. Every year the funds are fully used-up to keep the library up-to-date for faculty and students.

There was also the customary intermission where a collection is held. This year the collection was once more for the organ fund to replace the electronic organ in the meeting hall where the students present their sermon proposals and where the weekly chapels are held. What was not customary was the musical interlude that went on during the collection. This time a

number of the students sang a couple of selections in four part harmony. The selections were "Lead on O King Eternal" followed by a couple of stanzas from Psalm 18 and the audience joined them in singing the last two stanzas of "Great is Thy Faithfulness."

This brought us to the end of the programme. In his closing prayer the Rev. Robert A. Schouten thanked the Lord for the many wonderful things we could hear and witness that evening and he also remembered the various needs of the College community during the new academic year. The assembly concluded with the singing of the National Anthem.

Of course, no College Evening is complete without an opportunity to congratulate the graduates, their spouses and family members, and to have something to drink while socializing for a while. With gratitude we can look back at a wonderful evening. And if this report makes you wish you had been there, we look forward to seeing you next year, Lord willing.



G.H. Visscher



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Principal's Report 2008



The academic year 2007 – 2008 has been a year in which we were reminded very acutely that our lives and the life of the churches are all in the Lord's hands. Concerns about the health of Dr. Gootjes were such that they led to his resignation as Principal as of January 1 and to his release of all his teaching duties as of Easter 2008. Also during this academic year, Dr. De Jong experienced increased health difficulties, precipitated by a significant hip injury, and the wife of Prof. Geertsema went through a life-threatening illness. As a community we were also deeply saddened when the son of one of our long-time volunteers was taken home to be with the Lord; we wish Henk and Harmina Vanderbrugghen continued comfort in Christ Jesus our Lord. It all reminds us of the fact that we are just so many earthen vessels, "jars of clay" who serve to make it clear that the all-surpassing power is from God and not from us (2 Cor 4:7).

We are thankful for the work of Rev. Feenstra, Rev. Kampen, and Prof. Geertsema who, without hesitation but with tremendous dedication, made themselves available so that the education of our students did not need to be interrupted by the indefinite sick leave of Dr. Gootjes. At the same time, we are honoured and pleased that both Prof. Dr. J. W. Maris and Rev. J. P. Van Vliet have been found

willing and able to teach during the academic year which is now before us.

Students

At the previous convocation, the degree of Master of Divinity was conferred on three students and the Diploma of Theological Studies on one. David de Jong and Rev. Jae Man Chae went on for further studies at McMaster University; Dmitry Kiselev has returned to Russia where he has found a role in which he combines his advanced education in both computers and theology, and Jim Witteveen has moved to Prince George, B.C. where he is engaged in mission work among our native people.

Tonight three students will receive the Master of Divinity degree. Mr. Rolf den Hollander, who has accepted a call to the Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Winnipeg, Mr. Stuart Harsevoort, who yet awaits a call, and to Mr. Cornelis Kleyn, who has accepted a call to Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Kerwood. While three students have exited, we are happy to report that the same number of students have made an entrance: Mr. Tim Schouten, of Yarrow, BC, Mr. Rob van Middelkoop, of Hamilton, Ontario (originally of Chatham, Ontario), and Mr. David Winkel, of Hamilton, Ontario. Along with them, we have fourteen other

students who continue to work through the various levels of theological training. While there is certainly room for more students, also more foreign students, we are appreciative of these seventeen young men, their commitment to the gospel, and to the goal of training in such a way that they can, D.V., play a significant role in the ministry and the mission of the church.

It is our impression as faculty that our students have a wonderful way of interacting with each other, both in and outside of the classroom. Recently, a new manner of doing so has also arisen in the form of a student choir. It is truly delightful that young men who wish to direct their lives to God display that intent with words and music directed to the glory of our great God. For the first time at a College evening, you may have the privilege of sharing in this delight.

Academic year

Lastly, a highlight for the seminary and for one professor in particular occurred on May 20, 2008 when in front of an intimidating body of academics, a PhD dissertation was defended at McMaster University. It is of course with great gratitude to the God of all grace, without whom we truly can do nothing, that this is mentioned. It is our prayer too that this may not have just been an

academic exercise, but one which will make a contribution to a subject that has been very controversial for Reformed churches.

Since in this case the author of the dissertation and the principal is one and the same, allow me from this place to excerpt what I wrote in a preface to the dissertation.

The journey that has taken me down this path of graduate study has been a long one. I have fond memories of all my instructors but think especially of those who in the field of New Testament study, the late Professor L. Selles, and Dr. J. Van Bruggen of the Netherlands. I have appreciated the support of many churches who allowed me to continue my formal education while I served as their pastor: the Canadian Reformed Churches of Houston, B.C., Surrey, B.C., Ottawa, ON, and Burlington-West (Waterdown), ON. Thereafter, I have enjoyed the support of my colleagues at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches and its Board of Governors.

Lastly, the person who has waited the longest for me to complete this endeavour is my dear wife, Teny, to whom I dedicate this work. She and our children, Brad (and Sarah), Charlene (and Chris), Daryn, Mark, Wayne, and Estelle, have been ever so wonderful as they looked forward to the day when their preoccupied husband and father would be less so. Of course, the path really began in that wonderful, small home in Richmond Hill, Ontario in which mom and dad instructed me and my siblings in the Christian way by their words and their walk. It is there that an

appreciation for the words of Scripture was first nurtured. The long journey has all been worth it if this work contributes in some way to a better understanding of that Scripture, and of the principles of grace therein.

I wish also to thank the many persons who have rejoiced with us in this matter. Cards and emails, too many to answer, arrived from across the nation conveying congratulations. It is wonderful to serve in such a supportive community.

Strengthening of the seminary

As the last General Synod mandated the Board of Governors to conduct a "full and independent review" of the seminary, the past year was also one in which the process of accreditation was initiated. The faculty, like the Board, is happy about travelling down this road, even though it surely will mean a tremendous amount of work; as we move towards our fortieth anniversary, we are convinced that such a review process will no doubt expose some weaknesses and areas where improvement is desirable, but will also acknowledge that we are being used effectively according to our stated goals. In fact, we are always working towards improvement. Of late, for instance, attempts have been made to cultivate

- more frequent communication with the churches about life at the College
- better awareness of what is being taught in all departments
- more effective use of physical space
- greater academic excellence by encouraging attendance at conferences.

Books

We also rejoice in the fact that despite having a small faculty, we do manage to publish in significant ways. We are very pleased that Dr. Gootjes' book, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* was published by Baker, and are looking forward to the publication of Dr. Van Dam's book, entitled *Rediscovering the Elder: an Ancient Office for Today's Church* (Presbyterian and Reformed), and to the publication of Dr. Visscher's dissertation, entitled *Abraham, Faith, and Works: the Role of Romans 4 in the Discussion concerning the New Perspective on Paul* (Peter Lang Publishing). Obviously, the work of disseminating that which we have learned and taught to a wider audience is something that we also desire to do.

Travel

The fact that we do not presently have any students from countries other than Canada and Australia should not be interpreted as a sign of decreasing interest among us to export Reformed theology around the world. We continue to receive inquiries from foreign students and are exploring ways to increase their enrolment. And also in the past year, members of the Senate have travelled to certain areas of the world where Christians are persecuted in order to teach those who would proclaim the gospel. Drs. de Visser and Van Dam also travelled to the Sudan to conduct a conference through the Middle East Reformed Fellowship. May the Lord bless his church around the world and may we be instruments of that blessing.

Meanwhile we continue to foster the contact we have with our own federation. The annual visits to West churches provinces



Back row (l to r): Rev. J. VanWoudenberg, L. Jagt, Rev. R.A. Schouten, Dr. G. Nederveen, Rev. E. Kampen, Rev. W.B. Slomp, Rev. A.J. Pol, H. Kampen, G.J. Nordeman, K.J. Veldkamp, A.J. Bax.
 Front row (l to r): Prof. J. Geertsema, Prof. Dr. A.J. de Visser, Prof. Dr. G.H. Visscher, Prof. Dr. C. Van Dam, Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes, Rev. J. DeGelder

continue; in the past year, Dr. Visscher travelled to Manitoba and to Colorado to speak and represent the College.

Library and administration

We continue to be very pleased with our Library facilities and the almost 28,000 titles that make up our library. What a blessing to have this available to faculty and students! It would not be possible without the support of the Board, the work of the Women's Savings Action, and the dedication of our librarian, Ms. Van der Velde, and our administrative assistant, Ms. Mechelse. In fact, it would not be possible without the donations made throughout our federation. We thank you for whatever amount you have donated and assure you that it is carefully and so beneficially spent.

Calvin, Faber, and Arrows

As principal, I stand before you this evening, aware that it is again circumstances regarding health that has prevented the previous principal from completing his term. It is our wish that the Lord would

continue to give full health and strength to Dr. N.H. Gootjes. May the Lord so bless him that the indefinite sick leave which he is on may soon become a true sabbatical instead – a time when rest and a slower pace of life is combined with study and writing and renewed interest in the field in which he is so very well trained.

As this is the first time that I write a principal's report, my thoughts also turn to the memory of the brother who served as principal when I was a student. In this year when the work of John Calvin receives so much attention, I still remember how in the principal's report of 1977 he referred to an expression which Calvin directed to the churches in France: "Send us wood, and we will make arrows." It was Calvin's way of saying: send us the raw material, send us the young men, and we will return to you men ready to serve as Ministers of the Word. It reminds us how Dr. Jelle Faber and all our previous instructors were committed to that same principle. And in this time when the 500th anniversary of Calvin's birth is

celebrated,¹ this is our commitment as well. So convinced was John Calvin of the belief that the way to build and direct the church was to be involved with the shaping of present and future ministers that he set up what was called "the Company of Pastors;" believing that faithful ministers were essential for the renewal of the church he recognized the necessity of not only thorough instruction but also continuous renewal of ministers themselves.² Because the church was in flux at the time, Calvin seems to have been busier with influencing and redirecting men who were already pastors and in need of new direction. Ours is a day Calvin would have envied. We are not working with broken and bent arrows. We are working with young men, fresh wood, who can be carved into arrows. To the best of our ability, we seek to give you back young men who with all their abilities will move you on to the praise and worship of the only God. Under God's blessing, we enter this new academic year with the conviction of the truth of the words of John Calvin, "Neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life, as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth."³

¹ See www.calvin500.org.

² "The Company of Pastors was responsible for examination and ordination of ministers, continuing biblical and theological education, mutual theological and ethical encouragement, and missionary work in neighbouring countries," Joseph D. Small, "A Company of Pastors," *Calvin and the Company of Pastors: Papers Presented at the 14th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society May 22-24, 2003* (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services, 2004) 11. In the same volume, see also Erik A. De Boer, "An In-service Training Center for Preachers to the People of Geneva" (57-88).

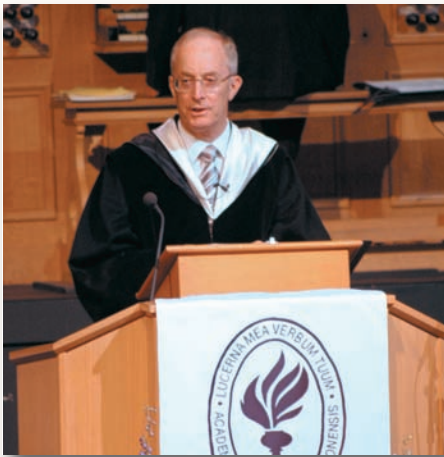
³ *Institutes*, 4.3.2.



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The Preacher as Priest



Speech held at the *Thirty-ninth Anniversary Meeting and the Thirty-fourth convocation of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches* on September 5, 2008. More detail on this topic can be found in my forthcoming *Rediscovering the Elder: An Ancient Office for Today's Church*.

One of the major differences between Rome and the Reformed churches is that Rome has priests and the Reformed churches have ministers of the Word. So, why should we now speak about the preacher as priest? Are we not going down the wrong track when we do that? We have ministers, not priests! Yet, if we are to do justice to Scripture, we need to recognize that the office of preacher does indeed include a very important priestly element so that in a restricted biblical sense we can indeed speak of the preacher as a priest.

In order to see why this is so, we will need to see something of the background of the office of minister as we find it in the Old Testament. One part of that background is the office of elder. The ministerial office is an elder office. Another part of the background is the office of priest. As we shall see, an important aspect of the priestly office is continued in the office of the minister of the Word. So let us begin by briefly considering the elder part of the background of the office of minister as it appeared in the church after Pentecost.

The minister as elder

After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, elders were soon found in every church. That was to be expected. After all, the first Christians were Jews and their synagogues had always included elders. That was part of their ecclesiastical heritage. Why should they not have elders now that the Messiah had come? Indeed, the first Christian congregation at Jerusalem was called a synagogue (James 2:2) and the apostles saw to it that every church had elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

Now it is important to realize that the term elder could also be used of other offices. That was already the case before Christ's coming. For example, although the Jewish Sanhedrin included both

the chief priests and teachers of the law (Luke 22:66; cf. Acts 5:21), yet the Sanhedrin was known as the Council of the Elders. The office of elder was therefore considered to encompass the chief priests and teachers of the law, although these offices remained distinct from the eldership. Another example of this sort of thing is the Apostle Peter identifying himself as a fellow-elder when addressing the elders in the congregations to whom he is writing (1 Pet 5:1). The Apostle was also an elder but there remained a clear distinction between the two offices.

That the term elder could encompass more than one office in the church is also clear from the fact that the eldership can refer to both the teaching and ruling elders. We read in 1 Timothy 5:17, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." This passage has been correctly interpreted as indicating that there are two elder offices: the ruling elder and the teaching elder, or, as we usually identify them, the elder and the minister. There is an underlying unity between these two offices. They are bound together in the eldership. Yet, there is also the distinction. It is a distinction that goes back to Old Testament times, namely the

distinction between the tasks of ruling and teaching.

Ruling was done in the Old Testament by the elders; teaching was primarily done by the priests (Lev 10:11; Deut 33:10; Mal 2:4-9), although the elders also had teaching responsibilities (Deut 31:9-12; 32:7). But it was up to the priests and the tribe of Levi in the first place to expound the gospel and to proclaim it (Deut 33:10; cf. 18:1-8). It was not for nothing that the Levitical cities were spread over the entire country (Num 35:1-8; Josh 21:1-42). There had to be preachers of the gospel for the people. And so, although elders also had teaching responsibilities, it was in the first place the task of the priests. As the prophet Malachi put it, the priest "is the messenger of the Lord Almighty" (Mal 2:7).

Now if the Old Testament had a ruling office in the elder and a teaching office in the priest, then one would expect that in the new Israel of God, the church (Gal 6:16), there would also be two distinct offices with similar responsibilities. Indeed, in the light of the Old Testament, we can better understand that when the Apostle wrote to Timothy he distinguished between "the elders who direct the affairs of the church well" and the elders "whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Tim 5:17). The New Testament indicates that those whose work is preaching and teaching have inherited that task from the priests. There is a direct continuity between the teaching task of the priest and the office of the minister of the Word.

Let us now turn to the New Testament to see this continuity.

The minister as priest

There are especially two passages that we will consider. First there is Romans 15:16 and then 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. After looking at these passages, we will also consider some implications.

Romans 15:16

In Romans 15 the Apostle Paul describes himself as "a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles." He continues by saying that this identity means that he has "the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:16). Notice that the preaching of the gospel is here understood as a priestly task. One can also translate the phrase "the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel" by "ministering as a priest the gospel of God" (NASB). It is in preaching the gospel that Paul and any subsequent preacher acts as a priest. Given the Old Testament background, such a description of the office of minister is not unexpected. The preaching task of the Levitical priests has been taken over by the New Testament office of the proclamation of the gospel. Now the purpose of his preaching is that "the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God sanctified by the Spirit" (cf. Isa 66:18-19). In an analogous way,

There is a direct continuity between the teaching task of the priest and the office of the minister of the Word

the modern preacher as Christ's servant proclaims the gospel in the expectation that God may receive the Spirit-sanctified offering of a congregation eager and willing to serve Him, as is their spiritual service (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Pet 2:5). All of this is a far cry from the Roman Catholic position that the priest offers up Christ again and again in the mass. No, when a minister of

the Word acts as a priest he is preaching the gospel so that people – old and young – may be an offering acceptable to God because they have been brought to the obedience of the gospel. The purpose in view for a preacher is, to use Calvin's expression, "the offering to God of souls purified by faith."

When speaking of the present day minister taking over the proclamation task of the priest, we should also take note of a prophecy in the Old Testament. When Isaiah predicted the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church, he included the promise that the Lord would select some of them to be priests and Levites (Isa 66:21). Since the Old Testament worship has been abrogated, these priests and Levites can only mean the ministers of the gospel. They are the priests and Levites of today.

We now turn to a second passage, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

The preaching of the gospel as a priestly task can also be seen in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. In Old Testament times, a priest administered the reconciliation between God and his people. He did this by way of offering sacrifices, teaching the law, and giving the priestly blessing. It was this ministry of reconciliation which God gave to his apostles and their co-workers. The Apostle Paul writes:

(God) gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5: 18-20).

Within our present context, three inferences can be drawn from this passage. First, as in the Old Testament, there is also in the New Testament church a special service or ministry (*diakonia*) – “the ministry of reconciliation.” This ministry is the ministry of restoring peace between God and human beings, a peace that had been lost because of sin (cf. Rom 5:1, 10; 16:20; Col 1:19-20). Second, this ministry of reconciliation, which had been entrusted to the priests in the Old Testament, has been committed in the New Testament church to Christ’s ambassadors, such as Paul and his co-workers. Third, as the priests in ancient Israel not only acted, but also spoke for God when teaching and explaining his Word to the people, so the ambassadors in the New Testament church speak for God with the authority given by Christ. Such ambassadors speak not only on behalf of God, but also in his place (“as though God were making his appeal through us”). The enduring ambassadorial office in the church is that of minister or teaching elder. Those holding this office are charged to proclaim the Word of God, as a herald (Rom 10:14-15; 2 Tim 4:2; cf. 1 Tim 4:13-14). This proclamation is central for the ministry of reconciliation. The message is: “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20).

And so the office of preaching and teaching the gospel essentially replaces the Old Testament priest in the official ministry of reconciliation and it is little wonder that the preaching and teaching task is mentioned as a separate office. We see this, for example, in Ephesians 4:11 where besides apostles, prophets, and evangelists, also “pastors and teachers” are mentioned as Christ’s gift to his church. It has traditionally been understood that the reference to “pastors and

teachers” refers to the same office, namely that of the teaching elder. The ruling elder is not mentioned. Teachers are also mentioned as being present, along with prophets, in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). Furthermore, the Apostle Paul mentions the office of teacher after apostles and prophets in 1 Corinthians 12:28. This clear differentiation of the teaching office, with its own special responsibilities and accountability, sets it apart from the ruling elder.

Now the qualifications for the elder or overseer are listed in well-known places such as 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These qualifications count for both the teaching and the ruling elder. No distinction is made in these passages. This seems to imply that beyond these basic qualifications,

Only the best preparation possible is sufficient to honour the responsibilities that the risen Christ gives to his ambassadors and messengers

the teaching elder must have a special gift for teaching and exhortation. That seems to be the point of the Apostle Paul when he combines different gifts with different people in Romans 12 where he writes: “We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is exhorting, let him exhort (Rom 12:6-8).

The one with the gift of teaching should use it as a teacher and the

one with a gift of exhortation, as an exhorter. These last two gifts are vital for the office of teaching elder or pastor. It stands to reason that as a priest in ancient Israel would have been specially trained for his task in the ministry of reconciliation, also in the New Testament church only the best preparation possible is sufficient to honour the responsibilities that the risen Christ gives to his ambassadors and messengers. In light of the special demands and expectations for the teaching elder, beyond that of a ruling elder, it is understandable that a distinction was made between the teaching and ruling elder as two separate offices. It is in this light that we must read 1 Timothy 5:17, which speaks of the elders who direct the affairs of the church, or rule, and the elders who preach and teach.

Some consequences of the distinctions

The whole issue of distinguishing between the office of ruling and teaching elder, or minister, is not just an academic exercise. It has some very real ramifications. I would like to mention three implications, first, for their specific tasks; second for their support, and finally the matter of equality.

First, with respect to their task, in Old Testament times, only the priests were ordained and designated by the Lord to function in the official service of reconciliation, be it by sacrificing, teaching, and blessing the people. Anyone else who attempted to do their specific task had to be put to death (e.g., Num 3:5-10, 38; 16:40).

Ministers of the gospel, the teaching elders, may function in the *fulfilled* ministry of reconciliation as spokesmen for God (cf. 2 Cor 5:18-20). In this sense they are heirs of the Old Testament office of priest. As the priests of old,

they may teach, exhort, and bless the congregation before God. The force of the analogy would seem to indicate that normally only the teaching elders may administer the Word officially as spokesman for God in the public worship services. We therefore have the practice that when no ordained minister is present, the officiating elder reads a sermon prepared by a minister. Also, in giving the blessing, an officiating elder simply reads the words of Scripture (e.g. Num 6:24-26; 2 Cor 13:14), but he does not raise his hands in blessing. That has always been the prerogative of the priest (Deut 21:5; Num 6:22-27; cf. Lev 9:22) and thus today is the sole privilege of an ordained minister. It is of interest to note that synagogue services normally ended with the priestly blessing given by a priest with uplifted hands (Num 6:22-27). If there was no priest, no blessing with upraised hands was given; instead, the words of benediction were simply recited.

A second implication of the distinction between the ruling and teaching elder (or minister) relates to their support. Because the priests and Levites were employed full time in the ministry of reconciliation, the Lord guaranteed the livelihood of the tribe of Levi by granting them the tithes as their inheritance (Num 18:21-24). Ministers of the gospel are likewise to receive their livelihood from the gospel (1 Cor 9:9-14). As in Old Testament times, there is no general mandate for God's people to support the ruling elder. We do read in 1 Timothy 5 that "the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour,

especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,' and 'The worker deserves his wages'" (1 Tim 5:17-18).

This would seem to indicate that those labouring in preaching and teaching, namely the minister of the Word, should especially be honoured and such honour should include wages. The ruling elder should also be honoured and financial support is not necessarily excluded in showing that honour.

The relationship of both elder offices to each other as well as towards the congregation is one of serving

A third implication relates to the equality of the elder offices. Although the teaching and ruling elders are distinct offices, they share the fact that they are both known as elders and they are both called to serve the church (cf. Matt 23:8). One could say that the minister of the Word is in essence a specialized elder. Recognizing the common element underlying both offices undercuts any idea of clericalism or ecclesiastical hierarchy in the church. Also, the ruling elder is a shepherd of the flock with all that this entails. There is to be no domineering of the one elder office over the other. The only "boss" in the church is the Lord Jesus Christ who rules the church as the head the body (Eph

1:20-22). The relationship of both elder offices to each other as well as towards the congregation is one of serving (cf. 1 Pet 5:3, 5).

In conclusion

The minister is a teaching elder, an office distinct from the ruling elder. In order to fully appreciate the office of a minister of the Word we need to realize that this office continues a vital task which the Old Testament priests had. That task is the administration of reconciliation by way of teaching and preaching.

It is a great tragedy in the history of the church that elders came to be called priests in part because of the erroneous belief that the Lord's Supper was to be regarded as a sacrificial meal where Christ had to be sacrificed over and over again. By God's grace the Reformation of the sixteenth century set us free from that heresy. We may know that the office of priest in administering reconciliation has been taken over by the herald of the glad tidings of the fulfilled sacrifice of Jesus Christ who was raised for our justification and ascended into glory (Rom 4:25; Heb 10:11-14). We have no need for Old Testament priests, such as Rome has. But we do have need of priestly preachers who administer the redemption in Christ through the proclamation of the gospel and so are instruments to prepare a people as an offering of praise to God.

May the Lord our God bless the ministers in their labours and bless the College in continuing to train new ones.





Presentation of the Women's Savings Action at the College Evening, September 5, 2008

Mr. President, Members of the Board and Faculty, Graduates, Brothers and Sisters,

When Dorinda gets up in the morning she is all excited. They are going on a class trip today. She has been on a number of class trips. They visited the local apple orchard. They sang in a nursing home. They went to a provincial park. Today they are going to the Theological College. The teacher had explained that this is where they train ministers. Their new minister also went to school there. While they were vacant they often heard professors who teach at the Theological College preach.

It is a long bus ride to Hamilton. Lots of time to think and to talk. They are all sure that this trip won't be as exciting as some of their other trips. There won't be a horse drawn wagon, like in the apple orchard. Wouldn't that be fun: bumping up and down the stairs, then a stop in the lounge for apple cider and water from the kitchen for the horses. Nor will there be deer tracks to follow, like in the provincial park. Well, maybe mouse tracks in the kitchen, but that is hardly the same.

Finally they are there. And the tour begins. Catharine welcomes them and shows them around. They see classrooms, a lounge, a bookstore, and a kitchen. They were right, no horses or deer here. But Dorinda can't resist asking if they ever see a mouse in the kitchen. And then they hear that a bat has been seen a couple times. Dorinda will keep her eyes peeled, though not everyone seems to be eager to meet a bat. . . . Then it is upstairs to the offices and a chapel. The principal of the College also comes to tell them something about the history of the College. And he even writes Dorinda's name on the board in Greek.

Then they come to the library. What a lot of books. All kinds of books. New books. Old books. Really, really old books. Some of them are so old that they are kept in a special room. Even the professors need permission to use one of those. But most of the books are in the regular library. There is also a bookcase with the books that are new in the library. Then the professors and students can see what new books have come in.

You need a lot of money to buy so many books. And all the women

of the church collect that money. It is called the Women's Savings Action. There is even a plaque which says: the Canadian Reformed Women funded this Library through their Savings Action.

On the long bus ride home once again there is lots of time to think and talk. Boys can become ministers. But girls can do something too.

At home Dorinda tells her parents about the school trip to the Theological College. And she finds out that her Mom helps to count the money for the Women's Savings Action and her grandmother is even in charge in their congregation. And Mom says – you can do something now already. Put some pennies in the jar! Mom explains that every little bit counts. But books do cost a lot of money – they need more than pennies. Every year many people give something, the one can give more than the other, but all together it works out to a lot of money.

Well, the school trip that Dorinda and her friends thought would not be so exciting did turn out to be exciting and special, even though not even a little mouse poked its head around a kitchen



cupboard! And Dorinda and her friends decide they will put some change in the tin at home for the Women's Savings Action. They want to do their part now already. And Dorinda thinks to herself, one day when I am older I will help out too – maybe I will even be in charge just like Grandma!

Of course, this is just a little story. But all around us we do see how the enthusiasm for the work of

the Women's Savings Action continues, also through the generations. And during this past year the Lord has blessed our efforts again. And we have also seen again how all the donations – whether big or small – add up to one big amount.

It is with great gratitude to the Lord that we may announce that during this past year a total of \$37,998.44 was collected, an

increase of \$4,000 from last year. Because of this significant increase in contributions from last year, we decided to increase our pledge for the library to \$35,000 this year, \$5,000 more than we have given the last three years. A heartfelt thank you to all of you for making this possible. Mr. Principal, it gives us great pleasure to present you with a pledge for \$35,000 for this coming year.





The Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund

The Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund was initiated in 1990 by the late Dr. Jelle Faber at the time of his retirement as Professor of Dogmatology at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches. He chose to name the fund in honour of "the wife of his youth," Mrs. Wieke Faber-Holwerda.

The aim of the Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund is to provide some limited financial aid to students engaged in full-time studies at the Theological College. This assistance is not intended to replace assistance received from ecclesiastical and/or other sources. All students admitted to the Theological College on a full-time basis are eligible to apply for financial assistance. Those who decide to apply proceed to complete an application form and are then invited for an interview.

The Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund is described in the by-laws governing the operation of the Theological College. The Fund is administered by the Faber-

Holwerda Bursary Committee consisting of a member of the Faculty of the College (Dr. C. Van Dam), the Treasurer of the College (Mr. H. Kampen), and a representative of the Faber family (Dr. C. van Halen-Faber).

The Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund is wholly funded by donations that are invested in long-term secure bonds. We remind you that tax-receiptable personal and corporate donations are most welcome. In addition, we urge you to consider this Bursary Fund in your planned giving.

With your help, the Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund will continue to have its place in the lives of those who prepare themselves for the Ministry of the Word.

Donations and/or requests for further information may be directed to:

Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund
c/o Theological College
of the Canadian Reformed Churches
110 West 27th Street, Hamilton, Ontario L9C 5A1

The Selles Book Prize

The Selles Book Prize Fund was initiated by the children of the late Professor and Mrs. L. Selles in memory of their father, who was the first Professor of New Testament at the Theological College. The Selles Book Prize Fund is administered under the auspices of the Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund Committee.

The Selles Book Prize consists of a public presentation of a Certificate and a cheque.

The prize may (or may not) be awarded at the time of the Convocation to a graduating student whose performance in New Testament Studies has been outstanding throughout his course of studies at the Theological College, and who shows exceptional promise in the field of New Testament Studies.

Prior to the Convocation, the Professor of New Testament will present the name of a prospective candidate recipient of the Selles Book Prize to the Senate at its May meeting. Upon agreement of the Senate, the Professor of New Testament will prepare the certificate and cheque, and will present these to the recipient at the Convocation.

We note with thankfulness that during the past years, several students could receive the Selles Book Prize.

Tax-receiptable donations to the Selles Book Prize Fund may be sent to:

Theological College
of the Canadian Reformed Churches
110 West 27th Street, Hamilton, Ontario L9C 5A1



Further Discussion

Dear Clarion Editor:

RE: Are Christians Sinners or Not?

It was with great anticipation reading the heading of this article that I looked forward to the answer to the above question. For already in early 2006 I addressed this exact issue in my own article, which I presented to various ministers and professors for input. Rev. W. Bredenhof was one minister willing to discuss this question with me and he ended by "agreeing to disagree." Others found out they were too busy to deal with my pointed questions, while stating that to argue from Scripture that Old Testament and New Testament believers should not be "called" sinners is to believe that Christians do not sin anymore. In my many Internet and personal discussions, as well as in my correspondence with my consistory concerning this issue over a sermon preached on Psalm 104, I always state clearly that I accept that saints still sin, and that we may and do struggle with sin, confirming Romans 7 and our confessions which speak of believers falling into serious sins (CD, V). I continue to maintain the words of 1 John 1:10, where John writes "If we claim that we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."

Since I addressed this topic in early 2006, the Holy Spirit has directed me to sources which confirmed that other believers have reached the same conclusion.

A walk in the local Christian bookstore brought my attention to a book on sale for \$1.99. At this price I took a second look! To my surprise, the author was Isaac Smit, a former teacher at Guido De Bres Canadian Reformed High School. You may recall that in 1998 this book was published, called *Praying for Rain, A call for renewal in the Canadian Reformed churches*. Isaac Smit dealt with this very issue in chapter 8, headed "Sinning but not Sinners." I was also thrilled that Rev. Bredenhof has pointed out in his first installment that many other Christians also taught this very doctrine. And I later heard a sermon which called this very theory – calling believers "sinners" – a lie and a misrepresentation of God's work in his people. I purposely refer to *believers* as saints, for this theory includes both the Old Testament and the New Testament church teachings. Yes, Christians sin, but we are to be "called" saints (Romans 1:7, Philippians, etc.)

So I maintain that the Bible does not call righteous believers who have died to their old sinful nature and has put on the new nature "sinners." The Apostle Paul clearly addresses God's people as saints throughout his writings. This should be the starting "context" that Rev. Bredenhof maintains is so important in studying the Bible.

Rev. Bredenhof also wrote that he "needs to point out that there are three different ways that the Bible uses the word sinner" in his article. But there is no basis for it. In Hebrew and Greek, there is only

one word for "sinner." The Bible clearly defines sinner, more importantly, contrasts "sinner" with the "righteous." Many passages contrast the two, including Paul in one of the key passages under consideration, 1 Timothy 1. Just after Paul teaches Timothy to watch out against false teachers of the law, he writes in verses 8-10 about the law not made for the righteous, but for the ungodly and unholy. Paul writes that "we know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me." So this contrast can also be found in Psalm 104 (David vs. sinners and the wicked), Proverbs 29 (contrasting righteous vs. wicked, evil man vs. righteous, wise men vs. fools), and many other passages. Both in the eyes of God and men, the Pharisees, including Paul, understood and called those outside the synagogue "sinners;" those people that the Jews were not to associate with. Jesus clearly understood the distinction of "sinners," as He taught in Luke 6:32-35 and Luke 13:2-5. Who are we to twist God's Word around to suit our theology? Even a careful reading of the Three Forms of Unity will show that believers are called saints, with the one exception Rev.

Bredenhof points out. And the form for excommunication properly addresses those refusing to repent as sinners.

Rev. Bredenhof also turns to Romans 7 and 1 Timothy 1 as his basis for calling believers "sinners." He claims on one hand that the passages are complicated and need careful exegesis within the context, while in his third installment he tells us "therefore, the broader context supports the traditional Reformed reading of Romans 7. So does one more basic rule of proper Bible reading. Whenever we read the Bible, we should stick with its natural, literary sense. Paul was not playing games, he was writing to be understood." So let's look at these passages in context, in a clearly to be understood manner. Again, the context of Romans 7 – Paul wrote to those "called to be saints." Nowhere does Paul call any believers "sinners," so where does the theology come from? We know saints still fall into sins. We confess that we do not "live in sin," our sinful nature died, we were reborn with a new nature, as Paul explains it so very clearly! What it means to live in the Spirit continues in Romans 8. Romans 7 is an interlude. Paul discusses the very fact that believers "struggle" with sin. That is the heading of the verses Rev. Bredenhof dwells on. Reformed people always understood the distinction of living vs. falling in sin, but these days the emphasis is clearly on daily struggle and living with our sinful nature. Rev. Bredenhof tells us that "this is the normal Christian life." He writes, "So, as we go through this life, we have this struggle, this conflict. It causes us pain and frustrates us." But Christ said, "It is finished!" He went to Heaven to send his Holy Spirit on his believers. The old nature has died. "The fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature, with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:22-24). Do the ministers thank God for Christ's historical work of salvation, or pray in the present/future tense for the salvation of wretched sinners?

Another argument was that in 1 Timothy 1 Paul called himself a sinner, in the "present" tense, after his conversion. But that is not the context. The chapter starts with clearly contrasting the righteous with the sinful. Verse 13 goes on to explain what Paul was, but "I was shown mercy." Paul's message does not dwell on his conversion, or even his struggles as Rev. Bredenhof writes. Paul teaches about the centrality of the gospel, God came to save sinners! By using the present tense, he points to the "worst." He compares himself to all sinners, past, present and future, as he writes in verse 16 that "Christ might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who *would believe* in him and receive eternal life." The gospel is for all times and no person can ever say that Christ can not die for them, since they are "worse" than Paul. But then Rev. Bredenhof must use his own standards. Paul did write many times in the past tense. The sinful nature has been crucified, past tense. Not daily, not in the future. As with the contrast the Bible repeatedly makes, also in Galatians 5:19 the "acts of the sinful nature are obvious," and "those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Paul does not say you may live like this every day, as you struggle with your sins. We live under grace, but the law is for those who are not under the Spirit.

So do we fall under Roman Catholic teaching, where the Christians are sinners, maybe one day attaining to sainthood? Or do we fall into Lutheran tendencies,

where we rely on the legalistic laws to deal with sinners in the church? Or do we imitate Paul and greet each other as saints? Do we focus on our sinful nature, quenching the work of the Holy Spirit, or do we always give thanks and live in our redeemed new nature, enabling the Holy Spirit to work the fruit of the spirit (love, joy, and peace, etc) in our lives? Can others see that we are a light on a hill, a thankful people, or do we excuse our sinful lifestyle, hoping for perfection one day? Do we admit our sins, confess them to fellow believers, and hold each other accountable? Do we do all things without complaining, or do we fall into depression? Do we view fellow believers as saints – holy, saved, redeemed to do good works to glorify God? Or as miserable (contrast to joyful) sinners, living in willful disobedience to God? I submit, as do many others, that our perspective on us and others will determine our witness to those outside the communion of saints. As sinners, we can offer no hope to a justified, sanctified, thankful life in this sinful world. And so I challenge you: do a study of "sinners" and "saints" on a program like biblegateway.com and reconsider what the Bible says about those called "sinners." Then go forth and greet our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord as fellow saints.

*In Christ alone,
Henry Salomons*

Please see xanga.com/henrysca for my blog, which provides my article and more.

From time to time Clarion will publish longer responses to articles received. The decision as to which responses to publish will rest with the Editor.



Re: Rev. Cl. Stam, "Missionary Go Home" and the ICRC

In his article "Missionary Go Home" (Sept. 12, 08) Rev. Stam also speaks about the role of the ICRC, the International Council of Reformed Churches, and its standing Missions Committee. Seeing as I am involved in both, this drew my extra attention, especially when it became obvious that Rev. Stam is not up-to-date on the latest developments in the Regional Conferences.

He correctly draws our attention to the decision of the ICRC held in 1993 where it was decided that four regional mission conferences were to be held every second year after the ICRC, one in the West, one in Africa, one in the East, and one in Europe. However, Rev. Stam gives the impression that this decision was never implemented and even concludes that therefore the ICRC "is a waste of time and money" and a "luxurious humbug" if things would not change.

Now, it is Rev. Stam's prerogative to have his own opinion about the ICRC, but he should have his facts straight and maybe read a few more of the proceedings of subsequent Conferences. Then he would have known from the various reports that a number of Regional Mission Conferences have been held since 1993. The ICRC website will also give him more information: www.icrconline.com.

The Asia Pacific Regional Mission Conference has met several times, so has the one on the African continent, and recently there has also been a very successful European Regional Conference. The member churches and mission workers on these various conferences benefit greatly of these gatherings. Regional churches do assist each other in discussion and seeking to resolve rising problems in their particular region. Only North and South America still lack such a Regional Conference. At one time there were Latin American Mission Conferences as well, but these fell by the wayside when the Spanish speaking participants formed their own conferences.

This criticism does not take away from the positive points made by Rev. Stam in his article, promoting that mission work should preferably be done by churches closest to a mission field.

C. Van Spronsen,
Vernon, BC

Response

I am grateful for this additional information. Glad to hear that the ICRC is still alive and kicking. My source of "Proceedings" died out with my retirement. Now I will on a regular basis visit the website www.icrc.com.

I still have one question regarding the ICRC. It is probably my oversight, but material on the ICRC is hard to find e.g. in *Clarion*. Should reports not be published on a regular basis on all ICRC conferences? How effective, really, are these conferences? Methinks the jury is still out.

Now we also know that Regional Conferences are not held in North and South America. I know that this has its own history (Spanish vs. Portuguese) but the language barrier can be overcome.

Cl. Stam

Dear Rev Stam,

I write to you in response to your recent *Clarion* editorial titled "Missionary Go Home." In this editorial you come with some "solutions" to problems this missionary couple experienced. By and large I agree with your comments; however, there are two aspects I would like to touch on. Though looking forward to reactions on this topic from retired missionaries, I can only respond from the perspective of a mission board member of the Australian churches.

Papua situation

Australia, who you mention as a possible helping hand, with their small bond of churches already has their hands full supporting two missionary families and a possible third one for PNG, as well as supporting work in China, Sri Lanka, and Sumba.

Mission work is for "seasoned" men and women:

Now my main reason for writing. I agree with you that on hindsight (and isn't that a wonderful thing, with it we're able to make all sorts of



profound statements) it may have been better for the Dutch churches to have sent an older, experienced missionary to deal with the changed situation. That's assuming they had ones to send. However, when you in general suggest that mission work is for "seasoned" men and women, I balk and beg to differ.

Rev. Stam, please, *please* don't discourage young brothers who have a love and zeal for mission work! Mission is *not* better suited for the seasoned, battle-scarred warriors, it is for trusting Davids whatever their age!! It is for those who go to battle in the name of the Lord and fight their Goliaths three times their size! It is for the Daniels who dare to stand-alone. Seasoned men and women? Yes, certainly, but seasoned *in faith!* Like those young men Paul writes about who have overcome the evil one.

And yes, it's true, mission work is not for the fainthearted. However, it's not any less difficult for those who have served their first congregation at home. They will have acquired some experience, true, but it is experience focused on a congregation in a western society. Many of those experiences won't quite fit in a foreign culture. Also, by that time they usually have a young growing family, so that after six years, for the sake of their young teenagers, they really need to repatriate. Nor is it a breeze for the next stage, the Opas and Omas, who have become rather set in their ways and don't have the resilience of the young. Who (and here I'm showing my age), based on their experience, may think they know it all. What a dangerous situation that could be, worse than the young seeking answers.

Mission work is tough on the missionary families; therefore what is crucial is that the missionaries we send out get our support. Not just talk, action! And that's often where the shoe binds. Send your young missionaries by all means, but follow it up with regular support. It's imperative you have a good relationship between the missionary and his Mission Board, who has the finger on the pulse so that problems can be regularly talked through and advice given. Our missionaries need the prayerful support from congregations. And they need to *experience* that support by action, by the mail or the phone calls they receive.

As congregations we're called to spread the gospel, *mission work!* It's our God-given mandate; we didn't ask for it, God demands it of us. But isn't it true when as church members we've dropped our money in the collection bag that's often where our involvement stops?

Rev Stam, you asked for questions at the end of your editorial, I'm sorry I didn't ask questions. Instead I've bombarded you with my unsolicited view. However, I still hope this is of use for your next instalment on this matter.

*With Christian Greetings,
Jack de Vos*

Response

Obviously the author of this letter lives in Australia, which supports the work in Papua. The main point of critique is that we should not in any way discourage young brothers who have a love and a zeal for mission work.

Well, I didn't mean to discourage anyone. I was writing about a young family who left Papua very discouraged. I also commented on the fact that mission work in far-away places is becoming increasingly difficult. The direction of the work is that we support indigenous men in the mission work.

Perhaps the writer of this letter still has a idealistic view on mission. I think he underestimates the effect of living and working in a troubled third world area. We also must protect our young families from adventures that they cannot possibly manage. I know that this warning leaves us with a certain vacuum. This is sad, but letters and telephone calls from the home front do not make the local situation any better. The missionaries still have to decide on the spur of the moment. The best solution, I think, is to send a team of missionaries. But even that does not always work.

I do reject the false dilemma that it is a matter of having enough or not enough faith. All our young ministers have faith and some have shown this on the mission field as well. Using David to slay Goliath is quite different from taking your family to a far-away mission field. Faith must always be combined with wisdom.

Cl. Stam

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.