

Clarion

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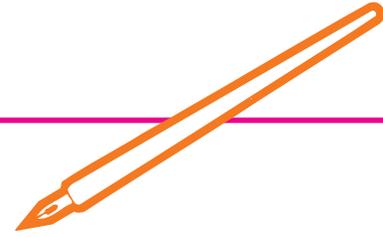


*Ascension from
Earth to Heaven*

Numbers

10:1-10

By R. Aasman



Ascension from Earth to Heaven

Forty days after His resurrection from the dead, our Lord Jesus Christ ascended from earth into heaven. The ascension took place in the midst of Christ's disciples. Actually, we read in Acts 1 that the disciples saw Jesus Christ being taken up until a cloud hid Him from their eyes. In other words, there is no eyewitness of Jesus Christ entering the place called heaven. Nevertheless, we know that the ascension of Christ was a literal going from earth into heaven. Christ himself had spoken of His imminent ascension a number of times to His disciples, and we read in Acts 1:11 that at the ascension two angels announced to the disciples: "*Men of Galilee,*" they said, "*why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*" Later on, in Acts 7, we have the eyewitness account of Stephen who saw the heavens open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. The ascension of Jesus Christ from earth into heaven is a clear teaching of the Scriptures which is to be received in faith.

This ascension is of monumental importance to us. It is to be seen in the light of the whole history of redemption. The ascension from earth into heaven connects the dwelling place of man with the dwelling place of God. Heaven and earth, the dwelling of God and man, is something introduced to us on the opening pages of the Scriptures. We know that in Paradise there was a perfect communion between God and man. There was the beautiful promise of God to man regarding eternal life and therefore an eternal communion between God and man. In that promise there is also the indication that the dwelling of God would be with man and that heaven and earth would be one. However, the fall into sin put a terrible rift between God and man and thus between heaven and earth. The dwelling of God is not to be in the midst of sinners. This is why Jacob's dream in Genesis 28 is so meaningful and promising. We are told the contents of that dream: He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying." Because of God's grace and promises, heaven and earth are not torn irreparably apart: there is a connection, a stairway, from earth to heaven. God stands at the top of the stairway to pour the blessings of an open heaven to the earth. Angels are ascending and descending for the benefit of God's covenant people who live under an open heaven and a loving Father. Now it is important to note that in John 1:51, at the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus Christ clarifies that He is that stairway, He is the connection between earth and heaven, He opens heaven once again to the earth.

The reason why Jesus Christ could be the connection between heaven and earth and thus draw the dwelling of God and man closer together brings us to the very heart of the gospel. This is something that has been so clearly and

richly foreshadowed in the Old Testament. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place with the blood of animal sacrifice to make atonement for the sins of the people. The Letter to the Hebrews makes clear that this blood could never take away sins. What it did very clearly and admirably, however, is point to the great high priest Jesus Christ who would make the perfect once for all sacrifice with His own blood to pay for the sins of His people. Jesus Christ fulfilled all righteousness. He was obedient to all the demands of God's law and He obediently took our sins on himself and paid for those sins by His death on the altar of God's justice and wrath. The shedding of His blood was the perfect, once for all sacrifice for our sins. This was confirmed when the Father rewarded Jesus Christ with a resurrection from the dead on the third day.

The ascension is the logical consequence to the resurrection. We see this so clearly in a passage such as Hebrews 9. Even as the Old Testament high priests entered the Most Holy Place with the blood of atonement, so Jesus Christ who made the true sacrifice for sins, had to enter the greater and more perfect tabernacle, to present himself to the Father as the one who had paid the ransom for sin and now had the right to be accepted into the Most Holy Place. Notice how calm and natural the act of Christ's ascension was. He did not have to force his way into heaven, nor did heaven force its way into the earth, storming Jesus Christ away with fiery chariots! Jesus Christ ascended into heaven naturally, blessing His disciples as He went, for it was His right to enter into heaven. He had made the sacrifice which was acceptable to God and which reconciled God to sinners. Now God and His dwelling place were wide open to man and the earth. There is a stairway between earth and heaven, and that stairway is Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man. As Christ said in John 14:6: "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*"

This has profound implications for those who by God's grace believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. We have in heaven, which is now open to us, an Advocate who daily turns His Father's eyes to His own righteousness, so that daily the Father forgives the sins of those who come to Him on the basis of Christ's blood. We are encouraged in Hebrews 4:16: "*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*" Heaven is open to us, God's justice has been satisfied, and Jesus Christ is a merciful and sympathetic high priest who understands our weaknesses and shortcomings and therefore continues to plead for us to the Father. We may, therefore, with confidence approach the throne of God's grace. This wonderful truth should be firmly engraved on our heart. Every day we should draw near to God in prayer and from the heart confess our sins to God, knowing that for the sake of Christ He will forgive us and send us on our way rejoicing! This is true for any and all sins that we commit. When we fall into a particularly hideous sin, or we find that we have sinned over and over again when we knew

What's inside?

Soon the church will commemorate the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. Before the eyes of his disciples, the Lord was taken up from earth to heaven. There He is, seated at the right hand of the Father, for our benefit – pleading our cause at God's right hand. There He will remain until the moment established in the eternal decree of God for Him to return to judge the living and the dead. Two articles focus on the wonderful gospel truth of the ascension. Rev. R. Aasman of Edmonton writes about it in the editorial, and Rev. J. van Popta of Ottawa provides you with a meditation on this theme.

Synod Fergus will soon be convened. This is our last pre-Synod *Clarion*. In recent issues, we began publishing condensed versions of the reports the standing committees have submitted. Here we publish the last such report – the one from the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise*. *Clarion* sincerely thanks the various committees for their excellent cooperation in cheerfully providing us with these articles. We know it meant extra work. An article about the report is a different piece of work than the report itself, and so puts extra demands upon already busy people. Thanks again! We hope you, the reader, benefited from these.

Some of the reports and overtures coming to Synod have generated a bit of discussion. You will find that reflected on these pages in two articles – one by the Rev. W.W.J. van Oene, and another by Dr. C. Van Dam.

All this and more. Read on!

GvP

better, we need not doubt whether Jesus Christ would plead our case under such circumstances and whether the Father would be willing to forgive us. Remember how in His ministry Jesus Christ came to seek and save the lost sheep of Israel, going even to the tax collectors and harlots. He said in Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." No matter how terribly we have sinned or how often, Jesus Christ, our merciful high priest, encourages us to come to Him, confessing our sin, and He promises us that He will turn the eyes of His Father to His precious blood offered on the cross. We will go our way rejoicing!

We know from the Old Testament that after the high priest sprinkled the blood of atonement on the mercy seat within the Most Holy Place, he quickly returned to his place among his people. Why does Jesus Christ not return from heaven and dwell with His church on earth? Of course there is a progression from Old Testament times: heaven has been opened to the earth and therefore Jesus Christ is never far away. There is also something else to consider. In John 14 and 16 Jesus Christ made very clear that it is to our advantage that He goes away. We have already seen how that is the case because Christ daily acts as our Advocate before the Father. But Christ also promised in John 14:2,3: "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." Our Saviour is preparing a place for all those whom He redeemed so the day may come when we will be all together in the New Jerusalem. Surely we

can wait a little while without seeing Jesus Christ face to face, knowing that soon the dwelling of God will be with man and then we can see Christ face to face forever.

Another blessing of Christ's ascension is that He is crowned as King at His Father's right hand as promised in Ps. 110. He has been given the scroll of history so that He controls and governs everything that happens in this world by His almighty power. And what do you think He is doing with His power and

government? He is seeking the welfare of His Church so that not one person for whom He shed His blood will be snatched back by Satan to become a citizen of hell. We know and trust that everything which happens in and around our lives, and in the whole world, is being orchestrated by Christ in such a way that it serves the glory of His Name and the coming of His kingdom.

Christ added one very specific advantage of His going away to heaven. He said in John 16:7: "I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." He was speaking here about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. When Christ dwelt on earth in human flesh, He was restricted as to how many people He could meet and how many places He could visit. With the sending of His Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ can work much more powerfully and effectively for the coming of His kingdom and the gathering of His church. Now through the spreading of the gospel and the work of the Holy Spirit in the gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ can reach all areas of this earth, bringing people to faith, leading them to the throne of grace, turning them into obedient citizens of the kingdom of heaven who seek their commonwealth in heaven.

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IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – Ascension from Earth to Heaven — R. Aasman	206
Treasures, New and Old — The Crazy Years — John van Popta	208
Confessionally Realistic Solution? — W.W.J. van Oene	209
Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise — C. van Halen-Faber.....	211
The OPC Report at Synod Fergus — C. Van Dam	212
Press Review – Catholics and Evangelicals Together — J. De Jong	214
Letter to the Editor	216
Ray of Sunshine — Mrs. R. Ravensbergen	217
Observation Deck — J. VanRietschoten	218
Is Arminianism a different Gospel? — E. Kampen	219
American Jews and the Persecution of Christians — F.G. Oosterhoff	220
Book Notices	221
Book Reviews – Notes on the <i>Belgic Confession</i> , C. Bouwman — reviewed by C. Bosch	222
I.L.P.B. Update April, 1998 — Jo Anne Werkman	223
Press Release — M. VanLuik	223

Christ is never absent from us. In His divinity, majesty, grace and Spirit He is always with us. He makes us experience the reality of an open heaven. He leads us daily to the welcoming arms of His Father. He leads us through life experiencing the joy of the forgiveness of sins and being able to use our lives in His service, as we fix our minds not on the things of this world, but lift our eyes on high to Christ who is seated at the right hand of God. Moreover we

know that our entire life rests secure in the hands of our King. He is preparing a place for us in His Father's house. The day will come soon enough when we will see Jesus Christ returning in the same way as He went into heaven, only this time it will not be to offer himself again, but it will be to take us to himself forever by establishing heaven on earth. As we are promised on the final pages of the Scriptures: "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down

out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'"



TREASURES, NEW AND OLD

MATTHEW 13:52

By John Van Popta

The Crazy Years

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:10-11)

Last week the newspapers reported a story about a cult leader in the U.S.A. who had predicted that God would appear on television screens around the world. God was going to return via Channel 18! Any TV tuned to Channel 18 would have the program interrupted by a direct broadcast from God. There is a certain thrill, craziness, that comes over society with the close of the millennium. Even *The Globe and Mail* runs a regular column (once every three weeks, I think) about the *crazy years*; the years at the close of the millennium.

There is a madness that overtakes society at the close of the millennium. You can even buy a millennium countdown watch! It marks how many hours minutes and seconds to "the end." We know that each year end is marked by festivities. Each decade is marked and noted as it passes. . . . "This is the nineties, you know!" The close of a century is celebrated. But the millennium! Then there is millennial madness. There is a certain expectation that things will be different. There is both hope and consternation. In Korea, a few years ago, in 1996 if I recall correctly, there was a cult that predicted that the Lord Jesus would return at the end of the year. If modern historians are right then our year count is incorrect and the Lord was born in Bethlehem in 4 or 5 BC. The true millennial close would have been at the end of 1996. When the Lord did not return, this cult in Korea lost many members to suicide and others to despair. Martin Luther, in his day, believed that the end was near. He believed that history could not continue

beyond three half millennia. 1500 years after the ascension, that was all that history could bear. He anticipated the return of the Lord in about 1530 or so.

But now we are approaching 2000 years. Many will predict the return of the Lord. There will be a millennial madness. Some will say, "He is here!" or "He is there, in the wilderness!" or "He is in the inner room!" But Scripture teaches differently. The day and hour of the return of the Lord is not known. Each generation must live in joyful anticipation of that day, but no generation should get so heavenly minded that it becomes no earthly good.

The disciples saw the Lord ascend into heaven. They were looking into the sky, necks craned. Two men in white spoke to them, two angels. "Why do you stand here looking into the sky?" The Lord will return, but don't just stand there waiting for something to happen. We might say, "Don't watch Channel 18 waiting for something to happen." In that cult in Korea, many had quit working awaiting the day. They were going to be prepared. They were "looking into the sky" expecting the Lord to return. There were some in Thessalonica in Paul's day who did the same. Paul writes that the brothers are to warn the idle (1 Thess. 5:14). There were some who were not working. It seems they were so sure of Christ's imminent return that they quit their jobs and were "looking into the sky." The church however, is not to be standing about "looking into the sky." The Lord was taken up in a cloud. The NIV says that "a cloud hid Him from (the disci-

ples) sight (Acts 1:9). That seems to mean that a cloud lazily drifted by and obscured the Lord. This is not what it means. A cloud took Him from their sight. The men in white refer to the Lord being taken up into the cloud, the cloud of glory, as at the transfiguration (Mark 9). The Lord will return again, but not just sort of show up through the lazily drifting clouds to a select few in Korea, or on Channel 18 - "Be sure to tune in!" But He will return in glory. He will return in the glory of His Father.

Let us then not be "looking into the sky" but rather, down here where there is work to be done. The Lord commissioned the disciples to get to work. They were to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). They were not going to do that by standing about "looking into the sky" waiting for the return of their Lord. They were not going to do it in idleness with the Thessalonian believers. They were going to do it in and with the church (Acts 8:4).

Today we live in a multi-cultural nation. The "ends of the earth" have come to our cities and towns. Especially our metropolitan centers have become cosmopolitan. Cosmopolitan means "world city." Canada's metropolitan profile is no longer of Caucasian European Christian ethnicity. It is Arab Muslim, Asian Hindu, Black African Muslim, Indian Sikh, Chinese Confucian. It is cosmopolitan. The ascension of the Lord may not cause us to stand about "looking into the sky." It should encourage us to work to advance the gospel kingdom to the ends of our world cities.



Confessionally Realistic Solution?

By W.W.J. van Oene

In the issue of March 6, 1998 of *Clarion*, the Rev. C. Van Spronsen shared with us his thoughts and concerns about the relationship of the Canadian Reformed Churches with others who appear to be standing on the same basis and whom various ecclesiastical assemblies have recognized as faithful churches.

The desire for unity as expressed by our colleague cannot but have our wholehearted support and endorsement. He appears to have struggled with the question how such recognition can be realized in a closer relationship. It is excellent that this question is discussed among us and that clarity be achieved in this respect.

Rev. Van Spronsen, although maintaining that federative unity should remain the ultimate goal, suggests in the meantime, apparently as a sort of transition period, to have a less "formal" fellowship, which is to allow "time for a forum to grow towards this further expression of unity even if it would take another 5, 10 or 15 years."

It will, I hope, not be necessary to quote extensively from Rev. Van Spronsen's article, as at least the large majority of our readers will be familiar with it. We therefore proceed right away to the matter itself.

Is what Rev. Van Spronsen calls a "realistic solution" a confessionally realistic solution?

Solution to what?

In the first place we ask "To what has a solution to be found? What is the difficulty, the problem here?"

Is there unwillingness on the part of the Canadian Reformed Churches to seek unity? I have not noticed any sign of that. And therefore: apparently nothing has to be "solved" here.

Rev. Van Spronsen himself stated in so many words that with those with whom contact was sought "we have experienced a certain hesitation bordering on fear to push for federative unity." They are dragging their feet.

I agree with him that "brotherly love for one another should motivate us to respect these sentiments whether we feel they are justified or not." But the big question is whether the way he suggests us to follow is a cure for that fear and a solution to that "problem."

It appears that the problem to be solved is not to be sought with the Canadian Reformed Churches but with others who thus far have stayed away from every serious effort to come to federative unity.

But then it must be maintained and strongly upheld that the way to cure that fear is *not* a yielding to it in the manner which Rev. Van Spronsen suggests, but a constantly reminding them of the calling to come to federative unity. If they are not totally convinced that the Lord does not want a continued separate existence, nothing we do or do not do will help.

Giving time is fine

If they need time to come to that act of obedience, let's give it to them by all means. Even if it takes five years, we will have to show brotherly love and patience and keep up the discussions, although we should not forget that discussions have been going on already for several years!

We should, however, *not* accept a pattern that will only perpetuate the separate existence, *ad infinitum*, and THAT's what is going to happen if the course suggested by Rev. Van Spronsen is chosen. The result would be a "legalized (false) pluriformity" in which various groups live brotherly together, and following their own course, each retaining their own identity, each experiencing their own development. But that is not the unity of CHURCH.

Now already many who went the path of obedience by refusing to be any longer responsible for the deviation in the Christian Reformed Church deviated right away from that path of obedience by not continuing and preserving the unity and fellowship of the

church, but by forming two separate organizations. We have the United Reformed Churches of North America and we have the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches. Why? Because they have lost sight of what the CHURCH is. That was their "solution."

Whatever harmonious relationship they may claim to exist between these two "federations," they are disobedient by having formed two separate federations instead of just continuing together as the legitimate, faithful Christian Reformed Church. Although they may have been legally prevented from keeping that name, the *principle* remains the same.

If ever they appear to be unable to remain or to again become united but seem to be content with continuing a separate existence, what solid ground would an expectation have that federative unity will be achieved if they and we should enter into a relationship such as suggested by Rev. Van Spronsen? Zilch!

The ICRC

When the date for the Synod of 1983 approached and when I was delegated to that assembly, I was planning to vote against joining the ICRC, as I had serious reservation about joining such an organization as Churches.

As a result of the discussion at synod, however, I came to the conclusion that, however hesitantly, I should "give it a chance" so to speak, and voted in favour.

Seeing the whole development, I now am inclined to favour the position of our Australian sister churches that terminated their membership.

More and more, I am afraid, this organization becomes an Association of which birds of different plumage can be a member. I question, however, whether it is the style of the CHURCH to be a member of an association.

As far as I see it, Dr. A. Kuyper Sr. has "defeated" not his tens of thousands but his hundreds of thousands with his (false) pluriformity theory.

This danger is emphasized by Rev. Van Spronsen's argument that "we

already meet with the URCNA and the FRC in the forum of the ICRC." Thus the ICRC becomes the gate through which approval of an unlawful separate existence within the borders of the same country is seeking acceptance.

Different historical development

Certainly, "we deal with Churches who have been apart for many years and who have had their own historical development for so long and at times in totally different cultural settings, such as the ERQ, for example."

Although the hairs on my head have greatly diminished in number, I have a sufficient quantity left to give credence to my assurance that not a hair on my head would want to demand of others that they shall have the same judgment about their history and development that we have.

I shall, for example, not demand of the FRC that they shall acknowledge that the refusal of their ancestors to go along with the Union of 1892 was contrary to the will of the Lord (as I am proving in my forthcoming book), but I shall gladly stretch forth with them to what lies ahead, leaving the judgment about what is past for each one's responsibility.

But to permit, with an appeal to different historical developments two federations to continue side by side in an *association* without a definite *commitment* to come to federative unity, no, that would be unlawful.

As for the ERQ, we would have the same situation which existed in the Netherlands after the Reformation. Quoting from a handbook on church history, we hear the following: "The first national synod held on native soil was the one of 1578 in Dordrecht. Here the Wallonian and the Netherdutch Reformed Churches came together in one synodical bond as two separate groups, something which since has remained like that."

There is nothing against it having two linguistically different "federations" within one federation. But that is not in the least an argument in favour of a non-ecclesiastical association of different federations that "meet together in conference format like a regional ICRC." Conferences are not the style of the CHURCH.

Quoting the ERQ fails to have the force of argument in the present issue.

And mention of the Free Church of Scotland fails to take into account that they belong to a foreign federation that

we have acknowledged as a sister church. This is an exceptional situation which, as such, lacks the fibre to serve as an argument in favour of the suggested course of action. It is not in the least on a level with the existence and permissibility of different federations within our own borders.

Frustrations and tensions?

Rev. Van Spronsen also spoke of "present tensions and frustrations experienced by local churches . . . when different churches have come to mutual recognition of one another."

I ask: "What tensions and frustrations?"

By whom are these alleged tensions and frustrations caused then? By abiding faithfully by the rules adopted by the churches in their federation? Or by the lack of response on the part of the federations to which those other churches belong?

Certainly, abiding by the rules that the churches have adopted may not be easy at times, but if *for that reason* there are "tensions and frustrations," these are caused only by the fact that some churches want to go farther than the adopted rules allow them. Then it is unavoidable that they feel frustrated, but this is then not caused by their sister churches who hold themselves and them to the adopted rules. It is, in reality, caused by their own unwillingness to honour their commitments as members of one federation.

One should not turn things around to put the blame where it should not be put. Then things are muddled up.

Impression on those outside

If the rule is followed which Rev. Van Spronsen considers possible, there will be another conference, and then one that will not bring one step closer to union, to a merger. On the contrary, the result will be: Why bother, for we live brotherly alongside each other, happy and content in our own circle, and we have fraternal relations, don't we? No need to change!

In this manner the present situation is continued and made permanent, for there is no real incentive to come to true unity, such unity as is required by the Confession and is a testimony to those who are without.

"We could share our common calling in the world," Rev. Van Spronsen writes.

But what kind of impression would this make on those who are "in the world"?

Right now it is already difficult at times to explain the difference between others and ourselves. If an outsider is genuinely puzzled by churches that claim the same faithfulness to God's Word, but lead a separate existence, and asks us to explain what the difference is, we may try to inform him as well as we can. Then we have something solid to answer.

Now, however, envisage the scenario that they all live alongside each other, each having its separate existence, yet conferring fraternally together in a loose organization. What are you to answer in that case when the question is asked: "But why are you not one then?"

Such a separate existence, however lovely the conferences may be considered to be, is far from being an effective testimony to the world. It is, on the contrary, a testimony of poverty and disobedience, a sign of shallowness and of superficiality.

When someone is brought to submission to the Lord Jesus Christ by means of the spreading of the Gospel, where are you to direct him?

If the suggested course is followed, the advice would have to be: "It does not matter where you go; the one is as good as the other."

Would THAT be fulfilling the church's calling and acquitting ourselves of our responsibility towards the world? Rather the opposite would be the case.

Conclusion

And thus, while appreciating our colleague's serious effort to help matters along, we must reject his "solution" as confessionally unrealistic and unacceptable.

Ecclesiastical fellowship is still ECCLESIASTICAL fellowship, not a fellowship of like-minded societies that form an association within which they can retain and continue their own specific character, customs, and usage.

The mandate is and remains: come together, unite, and proceed as one body, the body of the truly Reformed churches of Christ that in their oneness present a powerful testimony to all who are without.

*This article was submitted to both *Clarion* and *Reformed Polemics* as it was considered mandatory to reach as many church members as possible. 

Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise*

By C. van Halen-Faber

With much thankfulness, the *Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise* is able to report to General Synod Fergus 1998 that the Committee was able to work in a spirit of harmonious cooperation. In carrying out the mandate given to the Committee by *General Synod Abbotsford 1995*, several aspects may be highlighted as follows:

Printing and Distribution:

A new printing of the *Book of Praise* was authorized shortly after *General Synod 1995*. Some typographical errors were corrected, the changes adopted by *Synod 1995* were incorporated and the provisionally adopted text of the *Nicene Creed* was included.

The appearance of the *Book of Praise* remained virtually unchanged, although a hardcover binding was introduced in an attempt to increase the lifespan of the book. A total of 4000 copies were printed and distributed. Presently, the current stock is virtually depleted and a new printing will have to be considered.

Publicity:

One of the gratifying aspects of the work within this Committee relates to the correspondence with respect to requests for information or special use of the *Book of Praise*. Frequently, these requests originate from individuals outside of our federation of churches. Many times, these individuals have received a copy of the *Book of Praise* as a result of personal contact with a friendly Canadian Reformed visitor or have discovered the *Book of Praise* in a library, a local bookstore or a catalogue. It is encouraging to note the interest in and respect for the rich heritage of the Reformed faith as it is expressed in the psalms, the hymns and the *Three Forms of Unity*.

The Committee deals with the requests for the use of materials from the *Book of Praise* on a per-request basis, and responds in a manner which seeks to maintain the purpose and intent of

the *Book of Praise*. Requests for the use of the materials under copyright protection are dealt with on a regular basis. Also in this respect, we are encouraged by recent audio recordings and concert performances by choral groups featuring selections from the *Book of Praise*. The *Anglo-Genevan Psalter* continues to function actively in all aspects within our federation of churches.

Mandate:

Other items related to the mandate received from *General Synod 1995* include an investigation of the feasibility of repeating the musical notation overleaf [*Acts 1995: Art.44 IV-L6*], a further review of a question raised regarding an expression in the *Canons of Dort* [*Acts 1995: Art.44 IV-G*], the provisionally adopted text of the *Nicene Creed* [*Acts 1995: Art.44 IV-F*], and the alternate melody for Hymn 1A [*Acts 1995: Art.44 IV-H-amended*].

With respect to the last two items, input from the churches was solicited. At the time the *Report to General Synod Fergus 1998* was finalized by the Committee, only a few churches had reacted to the request for further comments on the text of the *Nicene Creed*. Taking into consideration the recommendations of one of the churches, the Committee corrected typographical errors in punctuation and adjusted the appearance of the text on the page to facilitate the reading of the text. Regarding Hymn 1A, sixteen churches responded and a clear consensus was expressed to maintain Hymn 1A and 1B as found in our *Book of Praise* and not to consider the Zwart and/or Strasbourg melodies as alternate melodies. Several churches also requested that the matter of Hymn 1A be put to rest.

Other Matters:

Although not part of its mandate as received from *General Synod Abbotsford 1995*, the Committee has been proactive in its decision to initiate a review of the implications of using the NIV in the prose section of the *Book of Praise*.



The implementation of the recommendation to the churches regarding a new Bible translation may also suggest a possible need for a substantial modification in the rhyming of the psalms. Given the scope of this work, careful planning and a reasonable timeframe are essential.

From time to time, we receive requests to have parts of the *Book of Praise* available in electronic format. Currently, the *Three Forms of Unity* complete with a help file are available in electronic format and may be accessed via the website of the *Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches*. Given popularity of internet use, perhaps it is time to consider appointing a church to develop and maintain a formal website of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

Conclusion:

The Committee hopes to receive a clear mandate from *General Synod Fergus 1998*, so that we may serve the churches in maintaining the place and function of the *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter* in our worship services.

Hopefully this summary of the *Report to General Synod Fergus 1998* assists in informing the reader of some of the aspects of the work done by the *Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise*. May the *Book of Praise* continue to be a blessing to the church of Christ. May it continue to serve so that our God may be "enthroned on the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3). 

The OPC Report at Synod Fergus

By C. Van Dam

Recently, every household in the federation of churches has received the first of four free issues of *Reformed Polemics* (dated March 14, 1998). The hope is expressed by the publishers that their efforts be found to be edifying (p.1). My attention was immediately drawn to an article by Rev. B.R. Hofford, "Reflections on the CCOPC Report", in which he deals for a second time with the Report on the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (CCOPC) submitted to Synod Fergus. I have not seen the first instalment, but I do not find this particular article edifying. The purpose of this response is to show that Rev. Hofford's article is less than accurate, betrays prejudice and so does not serve the well being of Christ's church.

Rev. Hofford's article deals with the issues of confessional membership and the fencing of the Lord's Supper. On these points, Synod Abbotsford (1995) had given our CCOPC the mandate

to work towards formalizing the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules by using the statements of Synod Lincoln 1992 (*Acts 1992*, Art. 72, IV.A.1.e.i.ii) as a guideline to arrive at an agreement with the OPC on the matters of the fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership (*Acts 1995*, p. 75).

From this and other parts of their decision, it is clear that Synod expressed the hope

that in this way the protracted discussions between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC can be concluded by the establishment of a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship within the next three years so that, the Lord willing, it can be finalized by Synod 1998 (*Acts 1995*, p. 75).

Rev. Hofford maintains that our CCOPC "has not faithfully fulfilled its mandate" and that "we are no closer to agreement with the OPC on these is-

sues; we are in no position to enter into full ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC at this Synod" (p. 6).

Let us consider the issues and see if Rev. Hofford's response is fair.

Confessional membership

The guidelines of Synod Lincoln which the CCOPC had to follow included that the different situations in the OPC and the CanRC should be taken into account and that

all who profess their faith accept the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the confessions (standards) of the churches. This means that all members are bound by the Word of God in the unity of the faith as confessed in the accepted standards (*Acts 1992*, p. 50).

The OPC and our CCOPC agreed to the following:

The churches of the Reformation believe that they have to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and are called to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (Rom. 16:17). Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible. The patristic church has summarized this teaching in the Apostle's Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions. Every confessing member is bound to this doctrine and must be willing to be instructed in it.

What is now Rev. Hofford's reaction to the above agreement? He writes that "we have said to them [OPC], in essence, it is acceptable for you to continue your practice of non-confessional membership." This statement is in part based on his conviction that when one professes the faith in the OPC "only a minimal gospel must be confessed" (pp. 5,6). His proof is that there is no refer-

ence to the confessions in the questions asked.

Does Rev. Hofford not know that up to 1983 no explicit reference was made to our confessions either in our form for the public profession of faith and that as far as that goes this reference is not really necessary? For what did our old form and what does the OPC form bind new communicant members to? To "the Word of God and its doctrine of salvation" (OPC) and to "the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament and in the articles of the christian faith and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation" (CanRC). Note that in both cases it is the doctrine of Scripture which the church acknowledges to be the doctrine of salvation.

For the CanRC, "the doctrine of salvation" was never meant as a minimal gospel. The same holds for the OPC. Indeed, Rev. Hofford senses himself that he goes too far for he also writes: "In a sense it is true that every confessing member of the OPC is bound to the doctrines expressed in the Westminster Standards and must be willing to be instructed in them." Having acknowledged that he then writes that "the standards do not function as a norm" because people are not required to be instructed in them prior to confessing their faith (p. 5). What does Rev. Hofford base this on? The agreement quoted above shows that knowledge of the doctrine is necessary for every confessing member is bound to it! This fact can be substantiated from the practice of life in the OPC and has been done, for example, by the retired and highly respected OPC pastor, Rev. G.I. Williamson. After he heard Prof. J. Kamphuis' speech on tolerance at the 1993 ICRC, Rev. Williamson wrote in an OPC magazine for office bearers, *Ordained Servant*, "it is my conviction, after hearing what he [Prof. Kamphuis] had to say, that there is very little difference between us.

Anyone who answers the four membership vows of the OPC in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible. And the doctrine of the Bible is the doctrine summarized in our confessions."¹ In light of the above, Rev. Hofford's objections cannot be maintained. It must be concluded that the CCOPC has done justice to its mandate as received from the Synod of Abbotsford.

Fencing of the Lord's Table

Synod's Lincoln's guidelines mentioned that

It appears, in view of the OPC's ongoing internal deliberation . . . that there is still reason to continue the discussion on this point. It is hoped that in time the OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches may come to a common understanding and unified practice regarding the supervision of the Lord's Table.

This is not to say that an identical practice is required with respect to the supervision of the Lord's Table to come to ecclesiastical fellowship. It should be agreed, however, that a general verbal warning alone is insufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required in the presence of the supervising elders from the guests wishing to attend the Lord's Supper (*Acts 1992*, p. 50).

The OPC and our CCOPC agreed to the following:

The churches of the Reformation confess that the Lord's Supper should not be profaned (1 Cor. 11:27; see Heid. Cat. Lord's Day 30, Q&A 82; Westminster Confession, ch. 29,8). This implies that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the Church exercises discipline and manifests itself as true church. This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church as well as to the guests. The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord's Supper.

Although Rev. Hofford agrees that it could be argued that the CCOPC reached an agreement with the OPC, he calls the statement a compromise, an agreement of accommodation but not a resolution. He even judges that the CCOPC "has not fulfilled its mandate with integrity." The basic reason for this harsh verdict is that the statement that was agreed upon does not insist on a fencing of the Lord's Supper the way we do it. But did the guidelines of Synod

Lincoln which the CCOPC had to follow not explicitly state that identical practice is not required to come to ecclesiastical fellowship? Biblical principles had to be agreed on, such as a credible commitment to the Reformed faith on the part of those participating and an acknowledgement that a verbal warning alone was insufficient. This agreement was obviously reached by the affirmed need to supervise the Table and so to exercise discipline and show oneself to be true church. It is explicitly added that this supervision applies also to guests, thus addressing a key concern of the CanRC. We can be happy with this agreement which is clearly Biblically and confessionally supported. It is an excellent basis on which to continue discussions on this issue within a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship.

Indeed, the report of the CCOPC to Synod Fergus notes after the text of the proposed agreement for opening the way to ecclesiastical fellowship that

It may be added that these statements are not intended to prevent further discussions. Rather, it is agreed that there is need to continue to discuss the differences in confession and church polity which can take place within the relation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The intention of such discussions will be mutual upbuilding in the faith to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

Related concerns

There are two other issues that need to be mentioned here because Rev. Hofford raises them. Rev. Hofford contends that "There are members in good standing in the OPC who are admitted to the Lord's Supper, yet reject infant baptism." It should be noted that in view of the requirements for admission to communicant membership in the OPC this is clearly an exceptional situation, just as having members in the CanRC Church that do not believe in infant baptism is an exception as well.

The exceptional nature of such a situation in the OPC was underlined by the report on this matter that served the Thirty-third General Assembly of the OPC (1967) as well as the decision made by the Thirty-fourth General Assembly on this matter. Such a person who, for example, does not accept infant baptism also has to promise to submit to the Reformed teaching on this point.² As for our own heritage, one can



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of Owen Sound, ON.

point to the Synod of The Hague (1914) which decided that toleration could be exercised toward a brother who in good conscience errs in a point of doctrine (in that case infant baptism). Once again, such a person was expected to submit to the Reformed teaching of the church. The same would apply for such exceptions in the CanRC.³

The second issue is one that is understandably dear to Rev. Hofford's heart, namely that he and others (Laurel and Blue Bell) left the OPC because of concerns directly related to the issues dealt with in the proposed agreement. Whether their leaving the OPC was justified is a matter for their conscience.⁴ But, one thing should be kept in mind. Rev. Hofford should not forget that according to Synod Lincoln 1992, Laurel and Blue Bell were admitted into the federation of the CanRC in such a way that, "these admitted churches are therefore under obligation to pursue together with the Canadian Reformed Churches, unity with the OPC" (*Acts 1992*, p. 51). Obviously such a statement is based on our recognition of the OPC as a true church of Jesus Christ. Rev. Hofford's greatest difficulties would be over if he would acknowledge this Biblically and confessionally justified longstanding recognition of the OPC as a faithful church of Christ. That is the underlying issue.

¹*Ordained Servant*, 3:1 (1994) p. 2 (the emphasis is in the original). See also *Clarion*, Year End Issue (1994) pp. 601-602. On the preparation for the public profession of faith in the OPC, see also *Clarion*, 38:7 (1989) 205.

²See on this, *Clarion*, 43:3 (1994), 69 and especially *Clarion* 44:5 (1995), 118-119.

³See further on this point, F.L. Bos, *De Orde der kerk* (1950), 226 and *Clarion* 44:5 (1995) 119. For an example of such tolerance in the CanRef Churches see *Clarion* 38:9 (1989) 205.

⁴See on this point, *Clarion* 43:3 (1994) 69; 44:5 (1995), 117-118.



Catholics and Evangelicals Together

Last October a group of evangelical and Roman Catholic theologians meeting in New York City hammered out a statement of faith to which all parties could agree. The statement was published in *Christianity Today* (December 8, 1997), and Timothy George, a leading Calvin scholar at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, has invited “all Christians to consider what we have been able to say together about the gift of salvation.” The list of participants in the joint statement includes many well-known evangelicals in the US, such as Mark Noll, Thomas Oden, Max Lucado, Os Guinness, and Charles Colson (among others), as well as Dr. James Packer from Vancouver, BC. On the Roman Catholic side, familiar names also appear: James Buckley, Avery Dulles, Ralph Martin, Richard John Neuhaus, and George Weigel.

At the outset we can state that the document is a remarkable achievement of new concord and understanding. We cannot but call it a crowning achievement, and that in the Melancthon year! I mention this for he was the first person I thought of when reading the document. How much does not the tone, style and approach breathe the spirit of Philipp Melancthon! Everything revolves around the cardinal doctrine of justification by faith!

Yet, there are other things to say about the document. Let’s listen to what I see as the more positive side of the statement, and then reflect on elements that raise questions and concerns. The document is very strong on the central confession of the gospel: justification by faith. The *sola fide* is unreservedly professed, to the point that we can only express heartfelt agreement at both the irenic tone and calm theological sensitivity reflected in the statement.

God created us to manifest His glory and to give us eternal life in fellowship with himself, but our disobedience intervened and brought us under condemnation. As mem-

bers of the fallen human race, we come into the world estranged from God and in a state of rebellion. This original sin is compounded by our personal acts of sinfulness. The catastrophic consequences of sin are such that we are powerless to restore the ruptured bonds of union with God. Only in the light of what God has done to restore our fellowship with Him do we see the full enormity of our loss. The gravity of our plight and the greatness of God’s love are brought home to us by the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. “God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

God the Creator is also God the Redeemer, offering salvation to the world. “God desires all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). The restoration of communion with God is absolutely dependent upon Jesus Christ, true God and true man, for He is “the one mediator between God and man” (1 Timothy 2: 5), and “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Jesus said, “No one comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6). He is the holy and righteous one who was put to death for our sins, “the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

The New Testament speaks of salvation in various ways. Salvation is ultimate or eschatological rescue from sin and its consequences, the final state of safety and glory to which we are brought in both body and soul. “Since, therefore, we are now justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.” “Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.” (Romans 5:9; 13:11).

Salvation is also a present reality. We are told that “He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy” (Titus 3:5). The present reality of salvation is an anticipation and foretaste of salvation in its promised fullness.

Always it is clear that the work of redemption has been accomplished by Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). Scripture describes the consequences of Christ’s redemptive work in several ways, among which are: justification, reconciliation, restoration of friendship with God, and rebirth from above by which we are adopted as children of God and made heirs of the kingdom. “When the time had fully come, God sent His son, born of a woman, born under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5).

Justification is central to the Scriptural account of salvation, and its meaning has been much debated between Protestants and Catholics. We agree that justification is not earned by any good works or merits on our part; it is entirely God’s gift, conferred through the Father’s sheer graciousness, out of the love that He bears us in His Son, who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead for our justification. Jesus was “put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25). In justification, God, on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer His rebellious enemies but His forgiven friends, and by virtue of His declaration it is so.

The New Testament makes it clear that the gift of justification is received through faith. “By grace you have been saved through faith, and

this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). By faith, which is also the gift of God, we repent of our sins and freely adhere to the gospel, the good news of God's saving work for us in Christ. By our response of faith to Christ, we enter into the blessings promised by the gospel. Faith is not merely intellectual assent but an act of the whole person, involving the mind, the will, and the affections, issuing in a changed life. We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).

In justification we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, through whom the love of God is poured forth into our hearts (Romans 5:5). The grace of Christ and the gift of the Spirit received through faith (Galatians 3:14) are experienced and expressed in diverse ways by different Christians and in different Christian traditions, but God's gift is never dependent upon our human experience or our ways of expressing that experience.

While faith is inherently personal, it is not a purely private possession but involves participation in the body of Christ. By baptism we are visibly incorporated into the community of faith and committed to a life of discipleship. "We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

By their faith and baptism, Christians are bound to live according to the law of love in obedience to Jesus Christ the Lord. Scripture calls this the life of holiness or sanctification. Since we have these promises dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything, that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Corinthians 7:1). Sanctification is not fully accomplished at the beginning of our life in Christ, but is progressively furthered as we struggle, with God's grace and help, against adversity and temptation. In this struggle we are assured that Christ's grace will be sufficient for us to persevere to the end. When we fall we can still turn to God in humble repentance and

confidently ask for, and receive, His forgiveness.

We may therefore have assured hope for the eternal life promised to us in Christ. As we have shared in His sufferings we will share in His final glory. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). While we dare not presume upon the grace of God, the promise of God in Christ is utterly reliable, and faith in that promise overcomes anxiety about our eternal future. We are bound by faith itself to have firm hope to encourage one another in that hope, and in such hope we rejoice. For believers "through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).

Thus it is that as justified sinners we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. All this is the gift of God. Faith issues in a confident hope for a new heaven and a new earth in which God's creating and redeeming purposes are gloriously fulfilled. "Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father," (Philippians 2:9-11).

Up to this point, as I have hinted, we can find ourselves in the agreement that has been reached. I would also say: this concerns the heart of the statement, and therefore we have both a duty and a privilege to speak the appropriate word of commendation to those who have expended so much effort to come to this kind of a statement. Up to here we can say that we recognize the stated desire to promote unity in the truth, and not a superficial unity. Indeed, this statement flies in the face of the reductionist approach of the World Council of Churches!

But now the reservations. The second part of the report concerns putting faith into practice, and also reflects on outstanding issues. Let us listen to the participants' statement:

As believers we are sent into the world and commissioned to be bearers of the good news, to serve one another in love, to do good to all, and to evangelize everyone everywhere. It is our responsibility and

firm resolve to bring to the whole world the tidings of God's love and of the salvation accomplished in our crucified, risen, and returning Lord. Many are in grave peril of being eternally lost because they do not know the way to salvation.

In obedience to the Great Commission of our Lord, we commit ourselves to evangelizing everyone. We must share the fullness of God's saving truth with all, including members of our several communities. Evangelicals must speak the gospel to Catholics and Catholics to Evangelicals, always speaking the truth in love, so that "working hard to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace . . . the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God" (Ephesians 4:3, 12-13).

Moreover, we defend religious freedom for all. Such freedom is grounded in the dignity of the human person created in the image of God and must be protected also in civil law.

We must not allow our witness as Christians to be compromised by half-hearted discipleship or needlessly divisive disputes. While we rejoice in the unity we have discovered and are confident of the fundamental truths about the gift of salvation we have affirmed, we recognize that there are necessarily interrelated questions that require further and urgent exploration. Among such questions are these: the meaning of baptismal regeneration, the Eucharist, and sacramental grace; the historic uses of the language of justification as it relates to imputed and transformative righteousness; the normative status of justification in relation to all Christian doctrine; the assertion that while justification is by faith alone, the faith that receives salvation is never alone; diverse understandings of merit, reward, purgatory, and indulgences; Marian devotion and the assistance of the saints in the life of salvation; and the possibility of salvation for those who have not been evangelized.

On these and other questions, we recognize that there are also some differences within both the Evangelical and Catholic communities. We are committed to examining these questions further in our

continuing conversations. All who truly believe in Jesus Christ are brothers and sisters in the Lord and must not allow their differences, however important, to undermine this great truth, or to deflect them from bearing witness together to God's gift of salvation in Christ. "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

As Evangelicals we thank God for the heritage of the Reformation and affirm with conviction its classic confessions, as Catholics who are conscientiously faithful to the teaching of the Catholic Church, and as disciples together of the Lord Jesus Christ who recognize our debt to our Christian forebears and our obligations to our contemporaries and those who will come after us, we affirm our unity in the gospel that we have here professed. In our continuing discussions, we seek no unity other than unity in the truth. Only unity in the truth can be pleasing to the Lord and Saviour whom we together serve, for He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Here any Reformed reader cannot but see weaknesses in formulation, and the dangers of opening the door to compromises, even though the stated intention is not to compromise the truth. Where are the gaps?

1. This statement is weak on a clear statement concerning the counsel and decree of God. Can we say that our mission mandate is "evangelizing everyone everywhere?" Here we have the tone of Rome, but one which differs markedly from the Canons of Dort. For although Dort acknowledges a universal proclamation of the gospel, this cannot be done without the recognition of God's own discrimination, that is, all "to whom God in His good pleasure sends the gospel." If one truly confesses that salvation is entirely a gift of God, he must at the same time confess that it has pleased God to give it to some, but to withhold it from others (Canons of Dort I/6 and I/8). That is the depth and essence of the *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. In other words, the statement betrays a latent universalism, rather than holding to

the universal truth of the gospel. To be sure, we must live the gospel before "everyone everywhere," but the sheer magnitude of the task precludes that everyone conceivably could be reached, much less will be reached.

2. A similar comment applies to the statement on religious freedom. It is questionable that this freedom can be grounded in "the dignity of the human person created in the image of God." Why not ground this freedom in Jesus Christ, who has received all power and authority in heaven and earth, and who also governs the lives of leaders, rulers, and presidents called to maintain order and promote the common good? I mention this because we cannot (in a rather simplistic mentality) defend religious freedom with a *carte blanche*. We defend religious freedom, but always within the limits of public morality and in the confines of obedience to the law in all other areas.

Then we have the issues of worship and the "interrelated questions" that require further study and exploration. Included here are terms such as "sacramental grace" and "Marian devotion," "purgatory" and "indulgences." Who cannot but think here of what Calvin wrote to Philipp Melancthon:

"Truly if I have any understanding in divine things, you ought not to have made such large concessions to the papists; partly because you have loosed what the Lord has bound in His word, and partly because you have afforded occasion for bringing insult on the gospel . . . In our day indeed the enemy has not

troubled us about circumcision, but that they may not leave us anything pure, they are tainting both doctrine and every exercise of worship with their putrid leaven."¹

You can take away with the one hand what you have given with the other. One can, after a clear expression of the *sola fide*, still end up shortchanging the gospel by limiting the *sola gratia* and *sola Christo*. That will not do. The differences mentioned in the statement are more than internal congregational disputes which can be neatly covered with a reference to 1 Corinthians 1:10.

So our final assessment is: very mixed feelings. We have in the statement the looming danger of moving one step forward but two steps back. Melancthon's own disappointments should be a warning for us today! Unity in the truth implies more than just holding out one central doctrine. We need to set forth the entire doctrine of salvation and insist that, although there are indifferent matters regarding practice and worship, the entire doctrine of salvation must be maintained and confessed in order for the unity to be one in the truth, and a lasting reality.

The "Gift of Salvation" gives us a strong basis for unity on one point, (justification) but this is joined with weak supporting structures on others (mission, sanctification, glorification). At the end of the day, if these matters are not adequately tackled, this unity too will suffer the shipwreck of appealing too much to human ingenuity rather than divine obligation.

¹Calvin, Tracts and Letters, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) V, 272-273



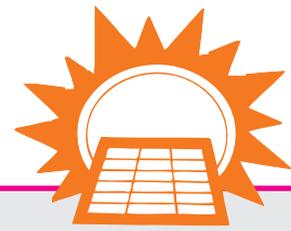
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Re: Letter to the Editor (Secession and Doleantie)

I'd like to make a large correction to my letter to the editor (47:05). I mixed up the people of the Doleantie and the Secession. It was not the Secessionists who were exclusivists in their teaching and practice. In fact they were quite ecumenical. Even during the 1800s they were not afraid to allow Baptist parents to send their children to Secessionist schools. My father's father was a child of the Secession, not of the Doleantie.

Pete Scholtens, Langley, B.C.

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address.
They should be 300 words or less.
Those published may be edited for style or length.
Please include address and phone number.



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

“... and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Rev. 21 : 3,4

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Spring is an exciting time of the year. After the cold winter, when most of nature seems to be asleep, suddenly everything comes to life again. The birds are among the first ones that announce the change of the season. You hear their songs in the early morning, robins return from their winter outing. As soon as the last snow is gone, they are flying around with little strings and other nesting materials in their beaks. And all of nature follows. Bulbs are peaking out of the earth, the grass turns green, the trees' buds are getting bigger and get ready to pop open, and all kinds of little plants are showing their heads out of their winter hiding places. Also the people seem to get more active and happy. Children are playing outside everywhere, adults start working in their gardens, they sit on their patios, or they linger outside to enjoy the change in temperature. Yes, spring is a happy time. New life and the anticipation of another summer, that is what makes us happy. Yet we know, that all the expectations and hopes for a new growing season will come to an end again. Six months from now it is all over. All those nice flowers and green plants, all the tedious work we did in our gardens will be wasted. Everything dies, the summer birds will leave us, the camping equipment will be packed away, and we will have to get ready for another winter again.

Does not everything in our life follow that same order? Something new is built, but after some years it starts to deteriorate. The car is washed, nice and shiny, a few days later it is dirty again. A delicious meal is cooked, the table is set for a special dinner, when it is done there is a lot of mess to clean up. A baby is born, soft and cute, but we all know that one day there will be much sorrow when that same person dies. Is there any use getting excited about anything at all if nothing of it lasts anyway?

There was a time that everything was perfect, and when all that was nice was meant to last. That was in Paradise, where the Lord placed Adam and Eve. But the fall into sin changed that perfection. Everything was lost, because man spoiled it. That is when all the difficulties started. There was no hope that it ever would clear up, because man broke the relationship with the Lord, and what we deserved as a result was death. But the Lord was merciful. He did not kill, but man was allowed to live. Someone would come to die in man's place. He came, and He died, and He paid for all our sins. He was the Lord Jesus Christ, who is now in heaven, until the Father will send Him down to earth again.

In the meantime we keep on living on the earth, where the consequences of sin are still noticeable. We notice it in the things that I mentioned before. It sometimes is even worse than that. There are people who have so much sorrow, or who are very sick, or in other ways challenged, that it is hard for them to be happy, even in

the springtime. Yet God's children never have to despair. There is always a reason to be happy and thankful. Because what we deserved was death, eternal death. Christ took that punishment from us, and carried all our debt. He suffered such immense humiliation and anguish of hell as we would never have been able to carry. Nor will we ever have to suffer as much as He did, while He was without sin.

As a result of His suffering for us, there is even more comfort for us yet. For the Lord has promised us a new life on a new earth. And that will be perfect again. There will be no sins anymore, nor any of the consequences of sin. It will be so unbelievably wonderful, that no one can imagine it, or describe it. There are a few places in the Bible where we can read a little bit about it. Like in the passage out of Revelation 21: God will be dwelling with men, there will be no crying, no mourning, no pain, no death. Can you imagine that? No crying, ever? No pain, no illnesses, no sadness, no brokenness. Everything will be just wonderful and perfect. Think of that.

Think of it all the time. Also when the nice things that we have here, turn ugly. If we think of what is awaiting us, then we will enjoy what we have. For it is the Lord Who gives everything to us, and He wants us to be happy now with what He grants us! The Lord is in control. In spite of our sins, He still makes nice things happen, and He wants to be praised for it. Then we do not have to cry when we receive a new baby, because we know it will die some day. No, then we can be happy, and thank the Lord for His good gifts to us.

So let us thank the Lord for everything we receive here on earth, and let us be happy in the Lord. When we remember what Christ suffered for us, and the great promises that are awaiting us, then we can also accept in faith the difficulties and the sadness that comes our way. For one day, all God's children will be there, and God will be in our midst. He will dry our tears, so that there cannot be anymore crying! Praise the Lord that we may belong to Him!

*Remember me, O Lord, when Thou
Thy own with favour dost endow;
When Thou dost save them, me deliver,
That with Thy flock I may engage
In praising Thee, O gracious Giver,
And glory with Thy heritage.* Psalm 106:2

Birthdays in June:

- 17: Joan Koerselman,**
Box 1312, Coaldale AB, T0K 0L0
- 20: Daniel Stroop,**
193 Diane Dr, Orangeville ON, L9W 3N3
- 30: Beverly Breukelman,**
2225-19 St, Coaldale AB, T1M 1G4

Joan hopes to be 41, Daniel 17, and Beverly 36.

I wish you all a happy birthday!
The mother of Gregory Aikema asked me to thank everyone who has been sending cards to Greg and his family.

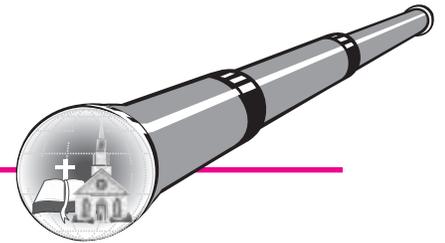
During the past year Gregory has been doing a little better as a result of the treatments he receives. Because of his low immune system and hypersensitivity he is not able to attend school, but receives home schooling. He has been able to go to church again.

Not only Gregory, but his brothers and sister also deal with chronic illnesses due to a weakened immune system. So mail is welcome to the whole family.

We are thankful that this family receives their strength from our heavenly Father, and that God's Word helps them to find comfort. May the Lord also use the communion of saints to give comfort to those who need it most.

Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Reg.Rd. 20, RR 1
Smithville, ON, L0R 2A0
e-mail: RWRavens@netcom.ca



Observation Deck

By J. VanRietschoten

Training of Elders and Deacons

Someone approached my observation deck and presented me with an item which should interest us at this time of the year. Once again the churches find themselves in the process of preparing for the election of elders and deacons. From a booklet called *The Visitors Class*, we clip this item:

Nominations for officers are to be made in July of each year where vacancies exist or increases are needed. Nominations shall be made by a Nominating Committee, appointed by the Session and chaired by a member of the Session. Members of the Congregation will be free to submit names of nominees to the committee. *Those nominated are to receive instruction concerning the requirements and duties of the nominated offices.* Election from those declared to be eligible by the Session is then to be held at the Annual Congregational Meeting. At the Annual Congregational Meeting, nominations from the floor will not be in order.

(*The Visitors Class*, p. 26; Covenant Presbyterian Church, Chattanooga, Tenn.)

I emphasized one section. This section stipulates that those nominated for office shall for a number of months re-

ceive instruction. After that the session decides who of those will be proposed to the congregation for election. In our Reformed churches I have heard desires for training of office bearers but I never have noticed any progress in this direction. Elders and deacons often tell me of not feeling adequately trained for the tasks entrusted to them. A school for training elders and deacons is out of the question in most of the country. Here, however we are presented with a solution which the local church can handle, sometimes in cooperation with neighbouring churches. Separate the time of nomination from the time of election and you create space and time for training.

Indonesia

Indonesia is in the news. The Asian monetary crisis is sharply felt. The demands of the International Monetary Fund for monetary reform are considered too stringent. The result is that the population in general feels the pinch and looks for scapegoats. During riots specially the Christian minority and the Chinese minority are targeted. The Chinese are not allowed to practice their Confucian religion. The Chinese of necessity must choose one of the state approved religions. Apparently every one in Indonesia must belong to one of five religions: Islam,

Buddhism, Hinduism, Protestantism, or Roman Catholicism. Many of the Chinese join a Protestant church, sometimes out of conviction, sometimes because of convenience. The Reformed Ecumenical Council News Exchange reports the following:

The Christians are a minority in this mainly Muslim population. One of the dangers is that the Christians will become the scapegoats for the problem. Already in the past few weeks, several more churches have been burned. The other target of the Indonesian riots has been the Chinese minority. The Christian Church of Indonesia (GKI), one of the co-sponsors of the meeting, is a multi-ethnic church, but dominated by the Chinese. The Chinese have been successful in Indonesia in many areas of distribution of goods; they are the nation's shopkeepers. As such they are a frequent target of anger.

Radius Prawiro, a former government minister and GKI member, told the group that there was a leadership problem in both the government and the church. He said religious life has become ritualized, without spiritual warmth.

[News Exchange of the REC, March 20, 1998].



Is Arminianism a different Gospel?

By E. Kampen

The seriousness and extent of Arminian thinking can be a point of contention at times. It is not unheard of that in Reformed circles critical comments about Arminianism are met with blank stares, a degree of indifference, or even a degree of hostility. The hostility may arise as it is felt that the criticism is unjust, extreme, inaccurate, or, even if it is correct, unnecessary as despite the differences those holding to Arminian theology are still Christians.

In recent reading I came across some remarks concerning Arminianism which showed both the seriousness and extent of Arminian thinking and how it is incompatible with the Reformed faith which, after all, is the Scriptural faith. In essence, in Arminianism we have a different gospel (see 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6-8), a gospel which denies salvation is the complete gift of the sovereign God who graciously justifies sinners through faith alone.

Just to refresh your memory, Arminian thinking, so soundly renounced in the Canons of Dort, denies God's sovereign eternal election unto salvation. While affirming God's grace, Arminianism claims that God merely offers salvation and it is up to man who decides to accept or reject the gospel. One author summed up how in Arminian thinking ". . . God was made dependent on free-will-equipped-men for whom He politely had to wait, looking to see whether the man would be so kind as to believe."¹

Though the Reformers of the early 16th Century did not have to contend with Arminianism as such, since Arminianism arose late in the 16th century and early in the 17th century, they did have to contend with its theological cousin, Semi-Pelagianism. Semi-Pelagianism teaches that man is spiritually sick. As such he does need the help of God's grace in order to get better. However, it is up to man to take the spiritual medicine which God offers. God must have man's cooperation. In theological terms this was called "synergism." You can see the similarity

to the Arminian position. The Reformers responded to this by stressing the sovereign grace of God, as heard in the cry "Sola gratia." God calls those dead in sin to new life (see Eph. 2:1-10). The Reformers stressed the helplessness of man in sin and the sovereignty of God in grace. This was a point of unity between the Reformers despite differences about other issues.² In his book, *The Bondage of the Will*, this was the point that Luther argued with Erasmus.

We should note then that Arminianism is a reincarnation of Semi-Pelagianism with its emphasis on man's freedom. This explains why the churches acted so resolutely with respect to Arminianism. They saw it as a serious threat to the gospel and condemned it "as being in principle a return to Rome (because in effect it turned faith into a meritorious work) and a betrayal of the Reformation (because it denied the sovereignty of God in saving sinners, which was the deepest religious and theological principle of the Reformer's thought). Arminianism was, indeed, in Reformed eyes a renunciation of New Testament Christianity in favour of New Testament Judaism; for to rely on oneself for faith is no different in principle from relying on oneself for works, and the one is as un-Christian and anti-Christian as the other."³

The Reformed faith thus teaches the helplessness of man in salvation. Arminianism, in typical Semi-Pelagian style, teaches self-help religion. It is sovereign God versus sovereign man. It is indeed the different gospel which Paul warned about. It is appealing because it extols the dignity of man. It is a lie because man is dead in sin, totally helpless.

While the aforementioned points show the seriousness of the Arminian teaching and how it stands in contrast to true Reformation theology, to what extent is it found today? One author stated that "Arminianism . . . has had American evangelicalism in a stranglehold since the days of Charles Finney."⁴ Charles Finney (1792-1875) was a revivalist preacher who was very influen-

tial with his revival techniques. Another author states that 86 percent of American evangelicals hold to the Arminian position as comes out in their agreement with the phrase, "God helps those who help themselves."⁵ This comes out very clearly in the writings of the well known Billy Graham who has even written a religious self-help manual titled *How To Be Born Again* in which the various steps to salvation are clearly spelled out.⁶

The apostle Paul fought with great vigour against the "different gospel." In that gospel they will speak of Christ and use words like grace, election, faith, regeneration, etc. Yet, it is not the gospel of sovereign grace received through faith but of grace received on the ground of one's faith. The earlier mentioned reference linking Rome and Arminianism is worth drawing to your attention again. Actually, there is a common denominator in all false religion in that it ascribes ability and free will to man by which he can effect his own salvation if he so wishes. It displays the arrogance of sinful man, even more so when he dresses lies with words of the gospel. That makes the enemy all the more difficult to detect as he works in his subtle way. We can all the more understand Paul's warning about Satan disguising himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).

Personally I don't enjoy having to harp on the point of the Arminian danger. I fear, however, that it is necessary because it is often not realized how serious and extensive a threat it is. The true church glories in the gospel of sovereign grace where God rescues dead sinners and grants them the righteousness of Christ through faith. Let me conclude quoting in full Paul's words in Gal. 1:6-9: *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel – not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be*

accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

Notes:

¹K. Schilder, "Extra-Scriptural Binding – A New Danger", in *American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism & Extra-Scriptural Binding* (Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1996) 131.

²J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston, "Historical and Theological Introduction," in Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (trans. J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston; Cambridge: James Clarke and Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1957) 57-58.

³Ibid., 59

⁴R.C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997) 180.

⁵M. Horton, *In the Face of God* (Word Publishing, 1996) Appendix CURE (Christians United for Reformation).

⁶To give just two examples, Graham writes "The context of John 3 teaches that the

new birth is something that God does for man when man is willing to yield to God", and "He gives the Holy Spirit to draw you to the cross, but even after all this, it is your decision whether to accept God's free pardon or to continue in your lost condition." (B. Graham, *How To Be Born Again* (Word, 1989 [originally published 1977]) 150, 162.

Rev. E. Kampen is minister in the Willoughby Heights Canadian Reformed Church, Langley, BC. 

American Jews and the Persecution of Christians

By F.G. Oosterhoff

During the Cold War, western Christians who were concerned about the persecution of fellow-believers used to concentrate on the situation in the Soviet Union, rather than in other areas of the world. With the fall of the Soviet empire, persecution in most of eastern Europe ceased. Worldwide persecution, however, continued, and even intensified during the last decade.

A deafening silence

One of the reasons for this intensification is the effect that Christian churches had on the defeat of communism in eastern and central Europe. The remaining communist strongholds (such as Cuba, China, North Korea, and Vietnam) have noted that effect and redoubled their efforts to restrict the freedom of Christians. At the same time the spread of a radical, intolerant, and often nationalistic Mohammedanism has resulted in violence against Christian believers in various Muslim countries, such as Sudan, Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.

These persecutions have been well-documented. Advocates of religious liberty have long complained that, nevertheless, western Christians continue to ignore them. "Since the end of the Cold War, there has been a deafening silence from the church," according to Nina Shea, director of the Center on Religious Freedom of Freedom House in Washington, D.C. There has, she adds, been a deafening silence from major American newspapers as well. As a result the State Department also has tended to ignore the persecutions.

Jewish involvement

The situation now appears to be changing. Continued agitation by religious and civil liberty groups is having an effect. These groups have had support from what may seem to be an unlikely quarter, namely part of the American Jewish community. The catalyst here is Michael Horowitz, formerly an official in the Reagan administration and now a scholar at the Hudson Institute, a conservative think-tank.

Horowitz, whose grandparents came to the United States from Poland, is aware of the fact that throughout history anti-semitism has been rife in many areas of Christian Europe. He nevertheless believes that Jews will be well advised to cooperate with Christians in the campaign for religious liberty, arguing that "Jews are safest from the world's Hitlers when the populace is worshipping a God of faith rather than a God of politics." The Holocaust, he says, began after religious faith declined in Europe, and he adds that "his family was able to avoid the gas chambers and the ovens because it immigrated to a country where totalitarianism never caught on."

It is this Jewish scholar, then, who has served as the major organizer in the American crusade against persecuting regimes. Calling Christians "the Jews of the 21st century, the scapegoats of choice for many of the world's thug regimes," Horowitz allied himself with a number of American religious-freedom activists. Subsequently, with the help of the Puebla Institute (Freedom House), he organized a conference

ORGANIZATIONS THAT HELP THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Among the various organizations that help persecuted Christians and need support are:

- Middle East Reformed Fellowship-Canada, 1225 Highway 5, R.R.1, Burlington, ON., L7R 3X4
- Frontline Fellowship, P.O.Box 74, Newlands 7725, South Africa
- Christian Solidarity International, 1101 17th Street NW, Suite 607, Washington D.C., 20036
- Open Doors, P.O.Box 27001, Santa Ana, Calif., 92799
- Amnesty International, 440 Bloor St. W., Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1X5

to establish a wider evangelical alliance. The attempt succeeded. As the *Jerusalem Post* reports:

A 'Statement of Conscience,' drafted by Horowitz, was adopted by the National Association of Evangelicals and several other organizations with millions of followers. Christian broadcasters began talking up the subject, generating a prairie fire of agitation, as did columnist A.M. Rosenthal in the *New York Times* who wrote that Horowitz had "screamed me awake."

Several lawmakers have come on board as well. They include two Jewish senators, the Republican Arlen Specter and the Democrat Joseph Lieberman. Specter joined with Republican Congressman

Frank Wolf in proposing legislation aimed at instituting sanctions against persecuting countries. And the Clinton administration responded by instituting a State Department advisory committee of scholars and religious leaders to promote religious freedom. Another effect of the conference was the proclamation of an international day of prayer for November 16 of last year.

Persecution and politics

Not everyone is happy with the reliance on the government and secular media. Because the Bible tells believers that persecution is inevitable, and

that it is glorious to suffer for Christ's sake, some Christians believe that appeals for help should be discontinued. Christian activists have responded to these objections by arguing that the Bible tells us also that the poor will be with us always, but that nevertheless we are commanded to feed and clothe them. So, they believe, it is with the persecuted: we must do what we can to relieve their suffering as well. Furthermore, as Nina Shea writes in the Roman Catholic periodical *First Things*, "There is precedent for appealing to the government for justice. In Acts, when the mob wanted to lynch

Paul, he laid claim to his Roman citizenship and demanded a hearing before Caesar."

Indeed, while we may not neglect to pray for persecuted believers, in attempting to help them we should also continue to make use of the possibilities provided by political action, the secular media, and the various civil and religious freedom groups.

(Based on information in *The Jerusalem Post*, *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, *First Things*, *Christianity Today*, and *Commonweal Foundation*.)

Dr. Oosterhoff is a retired teacher of history living in Hamilton, Ontario. 

BOOK NOTICES

by C. Van Dam

Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches. October 15-23, 1997. Seoul, Korea. Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1997. Paperback; 243 pages. \$ 9.95 Can.; \$ 8.90 U.S.

The Fourth International Conference of Reformed Churches in Seoul has come and gone, but all matters relating to this conference have now been made available in the printed page with the publication of these *Proceedings*. There are four clearly defined sections: the minutes of the conference, the speeches and reports, the conference papers, and the miscellaneous items such as the constitution, address list and press release.

It is especially the conference papers that give this volume an abiding value for the average church member. These are understandable essays on a wide variety of topics and provide wholesome food for thought. In order of publication the addresses are: Mr. Mark T. Bube of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on "The Principles of Reformed Missions;" Dr. Soon-Gil Hur of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) on "Women in Office; especially about 'Deaconesses';" Dr. Robert C. Beckett of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland on "Biblical Principles for the Relation Between Church and State;" Dr. Richard B. Gaffin of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on "Challenges of the Charismatic Movement to the Reformed Tradition;" and Rev. David John of the Free Church of Cen-

tral India on "The Ministry of the Word amongst Asian Religious People (Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, and Zoroastrians)."

Robert P. Martin. *A Guide to the Puritans*. Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997. Paperback; xiii plus 532 pages. Price \$ 25.99 U.S.

This is a useful topical and textual index to writings of the Puritans. That statement and the title of the book could however be somewhat misleading for the term "Puritan" is used in a very broad sense. Normally, the term Puritan refers very specifically to "those in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who desired reformation in the national church of England" (p. x). Martin has however included all those who advocated the experimental, Calvinistic religion in a broad sense of the word. Thus one also finds included in this work men such as Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, Herman Bavinck, John Murray, Cornelius Van Til and G.I. Williamson. Casting this wide a net was a very good idea and enhances the usefulness of work. On the other hand, only a selection of the available contemporary writings was used which is regrettable.

With respect to the older writers, Martin has limited himself to works recently republished. Understandably, commentaries were usually not indexed. An exception was made when a commentary was included in an author's collected writings. Then it was indexed.

The index is divided into two main parts, a topical index and a Scripture index. In his preface Martin admits that compiling a list of topics was difficult

and it was composed as he proceeded on the project. The Scripture index however presented few problems.

John M. Brentnall, editor. *Just a Talker. Sayings of John ('Rabbi') Duncan*. Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth, 1997. Paperback; 271 pages. Price \$ 15.99 U.S.

The Scotsman 'Rabbi' Duncan (1796-1870) was famous for his encyclopedic knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish literature and as missionary to the Jews in Budapest, Hungary – a work that was greatly blessed. When the Disruption in the Church of Scotland took place in 1834, Duncan threw in his lot with the Free Church and soon occupied the Chair of Hebrew in the Free Church of Scotland College in Edinburgh. In this book of sayings, Brentnall introduces Duncan with a fine biographical introduction, detailing his spiritual struggles and his eccentricities, as well as the ways in which the Lord used this servant of his.

'Rabbi' Duncan, as he was affectionately called by his students, had marvellous conversational powers. He had the habit of taking his students for a walk talk twice a week. He would then discuss and by his turn of phrase and way of putting things imprint philosophical and theological matters on the minds of his students and others who would listen. In Brentnall's book, the most memorable of these sayings are brought together and arranged alphabetically according to topic. The book concludes with longer extracts of Duncan's spoken word on various Biblical and theological topics.

George Horne, *Commentary on the Psalms*. Foreword by Rev. J. Greer. Audubon New Jersey: Old Paths Publications, 1997. Originally published 1771. Hardcover, xxvii plus 659 pages. Price \$ 32.95 U.S.

George Horne was a noted scholar and preacher in the Anglican church whose best known legacy is his commentary on the Psalms which were originally published in 1771. This work was characterized by a devotional suggestiveness and messianic orientation. The Psalms speak of Christ (cf. Luke 24:44). The commentary proper is preceded by a lengthy preface in which Horne deals with matters of introduction such as the place of the Psalms in Scripture and the themes and topics found in this part of the Bible.

This reprint which is beautifully produced and of a very high quality is introduced by Rev. J. Greer, Minister of the Free Presbyterian Church of Malvern, Pennsylvania. He observed that "The

popularity of Dr. Horne's work on the Psalms is due to his heart-warming, Spirit-induced ability to take his readers to the Savior."

By G. H. Visscher

Herman Ridderbos *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*. Translated by John Vriend. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997) 721 pages; paperback, \$ 42 U.S.

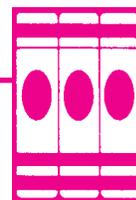
The pastors among us will be very interested to note this publication. The author of Paul: An Outline of his Theology (Eerdmans, 1975) and The Coming of the Kingdom (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1962) has spent his retirement years studying the Gospel of John and writing two volumes (*Het Evangelie naar Johannes: Proeve van een theologische exegese*. Kok, 1987) of which the work being noted here is a translation. What makes this commentary stand

out among so many others? The fact that here we have a scholar with a Reformed background who examines the gospel and is particularly concerned with the theological issues and implications that arise. Since John's gospel is so rich with theological themes and allusions, such a commentary is a valuable resource. Another remarkable feature of the commentary is how up-to-date Ridderbos is regarding modern (including North American) scholarship. One finds, for example, an extensive discussion about a possible "Johannine Circle" in an appendix. The commentary is also considerably more readable than, e.g. his work on Paul; in the body of the text he deals with the exegetical and theological issues while leaving the interaction with other scholars to the footnotes. It is clear that no serious scholarship on John's gospel can ignore this work. Those earnestly engaged in preaching the gospel will not want to ignore it either. 

BOOK REVIEWS

By C. Bosch

Notes on the Belgic Confession



C. Bouwman, *Notes on the Belgic Confession*. Published by the league of Free Reformed Women's Bible Study Societies in Australia and Pro Ecclesia Publishers, P.O Box 189 Kelmscott, W.A 6111. 156 pages; no price given.

This comprehensive study guide to the Belgic Confession, "is the result of the notes taken during the lessons presented at the Post-Confession class of the free Reformed Church of Kelmscott, held during the year 1996" (Foreword). No less than 60 to 70 students regularly attended these classes. Mr. H. Terpstra who wrote the "Foreword" to these notes says that the course approached the study of this confession from the perspective of, "Who is God." He expresses thankfulness for this course which "brought our confession to life for us."

I share br. Terpstra's appreciation for these are rich notes! Not only because they give a comprehensive explanation of the thirty-seven articles but because they are thoroughly based on God's precious Word. Rev. Bouwman shows that every aspect of this confession is based on God's revelation and not on human

opinion. The author gives many excellent explanations and his work shows him to be a student of history. Although this work is a result of "notes" these are by no means dry lectures. Rev. Bouwman has an eye for the personal nature of confessing the faith. Time and again you read statements such as, "This is a covenantal concept," "Hence I delight in . . .", "It is the sign and seal of God's Gospel to me: You are mine." Here and there you find an "excursus" on such topics as the perfections of God and the Lord's Prayer. The book also has many simple illustrations in the form of diagrams, a number that are quite helpful.

Although Rev. Bouwman does interact with other reformed confessions, it would have been helpful to see more cross-references. A bibliography would also have been useful as would a brief history of the life of Guido de Brès and the purpose for which he wrote his Confession. Since these "Notes" will be valuable to all teachers and students of the confessions, perhaps a future edition might also include a series of questions for discussion or assignment?

This book will not necessarily replace Rev. Cl. Stam's *Everything in Christ*. That work has seen much use in our churches over the years and it remains an excellent guide to understanding the Belgic Confession. I'm sure however that Rev. Bouwman's "Notes" will find a prominent place alongside it. May it serve Christ's Church well and may it cause us to bow before the Word of God. Only that Word is God's power for our salvation. May we also "Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to (us); guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us" (2 Tim. 1: 14). Preachers are under obligation to, "teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). Though you meet people who are not happy with hearing "true doctrine" yet we may give thanks for it. We are called to confess it, and to uphold it. May our faith be anchored in the truth concerning our Triune God.

Rev. C. Bosch is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington South. 

I.L.P.B. Update April, 1998

The Lord has blessed the societies with another Bible study season and this is a good time to prepare for the next by choosing a topic and obtaining Reformed outlines.

Please contact the I.L.P.B. representative in your congregation for a brochure on the outlines available. They will be pleased to help you.

The ILPB is a joint venture of the Men's, Women's and Young People's

Societies. Our mandate is to translate and publish Reformed Bible study material and our goal is to promote the study of God's Word.

Currently we are working on *Acts; II Corinthians; Believe and Confess; Joshua; Een Koning naar Gods Wil; Jona, Profeet van God; Wat is Hierop Uw Antwoord; You, His Child and You, His Guest; James & 1 and 2 Peter.* New publication available now:

I Corinthians by Rev.L. Selles; reprints: *Colossians* by Dr. W.G. De Vries; *Infant Baptism and Conversion* by Dr. J. Douma; *None like Thee* (Micah) by Rev. Cl. Stam.

Thank you for your support and may the Lord establish the work of our hands and continue to bless our endeavours.

For the ILPB,
Jo Anne Werkman 

PRESS RELEASE



Press Release of Classis Pacific East, March 31, 1998 held in the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church.

On behalf of the convening Church at Abbotsford, Rev. R. Schouten welcomes the delegates to the first Classis Pacific East and after singing, opens with Scripture reading and prayer. The credentials are found to be in order and Classis is constituted. The moderators are appointed as follows,

Chairman Rev. D. Moes,
Vice-chairman Rev. M.H. VanLuik
and Clerk Rev. H. Boersma.

The agenda is adopted.

Classis adopts the proposal of the Church at Abbotsford to implement the regulations of the previous Classis Pacific.

Classis adopts the proposal of the Church at Yarrow that the meetings for a Classis be held at the various churches on a rotating basis.

Classis adopts the proposal of the Church at Chilliwack that Classis meet on Thursday so as not to interfere with catechism instruction.

A request from the Church at Willoughby Heights to note in the Acts of Classis the decision of Regional Synod West of December 2, 1997. This is declared to be inadmissible on the ground that it is redundant since the churches have been informed of the decision by Regional Synod.

Reports:

Classis receives reports from Classis Pacific Needy Fund for 1997 and Classis Pacific Fund for 1997. A letter of thanks will be sent to the treasurer.

Question Period Art. 44 Church Order. All the churches maintained that the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued and the decisions of major assemblies are being honoured. There were no churches who needed the help of Classis.

Appointments:

The church at Aldergrove is appointed to convene the next Classis either on Thursday June 4 or October 1, 1998.

The suggested officers are:

Chairman Rev. M.H. VanLuik,
Vice-chairman Rev. H. Boersma,
Clerk Rev. R. Schouten

Appointed to Committee for Examinations of candidates for the Ministry are Rev. D. Moes and Rev. M.H. VanLuik

Appointed as examiners for the examination of candidates for the Ministry:

Old Testament Exegesis:
Rev. R. Schouten

New Testament Exegesis:
Rev. M.H. VanLuik

Knowledge of Scripture:
Rev. B. Wielenga

Doctrine and Creeds:
Rev. H. Boersma

Church History:
Rev. C. VanderVelde

Ethics:
Rev. B. Wielenga

Church Polity:

Rev. D. Moes

Diaconology:

Rev. C. VanderVelde

Appointment of Church Visitors:

Rev. M.H. VanLuik (convener),
Rev. D. Moes and
Rev. R. Schouten

Alternate visitors:

Rev. B. Wielenga and
C. VanderVelde

The Church at Abbotsford is appointed as the Church for maintaining the Archives of Classis.

The Church at Yarrow is appointed Church for the inspection of the Archives. Appointed as Classical Treasurer:

br. R. Leyenhorst.

The Church at Vernon is appointed to audit the books of the Treasurer.

Appointment of Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry:
Rev. M.H. VanLuik (convener),
br. K.F. Huttema and
br. J. Schutte.

Appointment of Committee for Needy Churches:

br. H.A. Berends,
br. G. Boeve,
br. K. Louwerse.

Personal Question Period is briefly used. The Chairman notes with thankfulness that Censure according to Art. 34 C.O. is not needed.

Acts of Classis are adopted and Press Release is approved.

After singing, the chairman led in prayer. Classis is closed.

M.H. VanLuik 