

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
VOLUME 47, NO. 19 SEPTEMBER 18, 1998

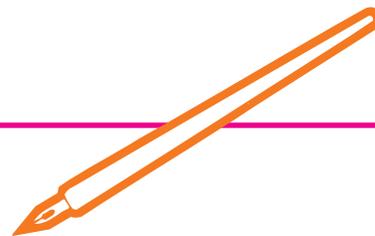


Sharing the Reformed Faith

Numbers

10:1-10

By G. Ph. van Popta



Looking outward from a position of strength

Elsewhere in this issue you will find an article by the Rev. J. Visscher entitled "Being Reformed Today." Rev. Visscher challenges us to reflect on how rich we are as Reformed believers. He makes the point that nothing compares with the heritage God has given us. All who love the Reformed faith and its confessions will want to say "Amen!" as they read this article. To be Reformed, to know and to love the Reformed confessions, is to be rich and at the same time strong. It is only from that position of strength that we have something to say to others as we look outward.

And outward we must look! We need to be outward-looking congregations of Jesus Christ.

God's blessings

The first Canadian Reformed Churches were established some fifty years ago. The first liberated Dutch immigrants, who had liberated themselves from the binding supra-confessional statements of the GKN Synods of the 1940s, initially joined the Christian Reformed Church and the Protestant Reformed Church. Quickly it became clear that to continue as members of these churches meant compromise. And so our fathers felt conscience-bound to establish Canadian Reformed Churches.

Establishing churches meant that all the aspects of ecclesiastical life had to be developed. Congregations were organized. Ministers were called. Old buildings were rented or bought. They needed cleaning and renovation. A church song book was developed. A church order was adopted. Life as a federation of churches was worked out. Theological training was begun. Our Theological College is almost thirty years old already! We also very quickly began fulfilling the church's missionary mandate by sending out preachers to other lands – Irian Jaya and Brazil.

Besides church life, our parents and grandparents had to establish themselves and their families in this country. They had to find work. Often they experienced frustration due to language difficulties. The brothers who had trouble expressing themselves on the job site had no trouble making their opinions known in church meetings. Sometimes

hard things were said. But the funny stories are countless. A Canadian farmer told his Dutch helper to get him a saw. The Dutchie came back some time later chasing the farmer's sow. The unilingual immigrant mother was nervous when a phone was installed in the home. What should she say if she were home alone and it rang? "Nobody is home," advised her sons. From work her sons called home by phone to see how mom would handle it. "My body is not home," said mom.

Because our fathers did not want to be bound to labour unions, many established their own businesses. They were self-employed and provided work for their brothers from the church. The LORD blessed this beyond measure. The Year End issue of *Clarion* with the many ads from the Canadian Reformed business community is a reflection of this outpouring of God upon the uncompromising faithfulness of our fathers.

Once family and church life had been built up our parents turned to establishing day schools based upon the Word of God and circumscribed by the Reformed confessions. The first teachers were imported from Holland. Schools were made out of scrap lumber. The children were bussed in from all over the region to attend "our school." Eventually, the old schools made way for better buildings.

Today the children of all but a few congregations are able to attend academically excellent, confessionally sound primary and secondary day schools. We even have a Teachers' College.

What now?

In every aspect of our lives, the LORD has blessed us richly and beyond even the most optimistic expectations of the early immigrants. We are firmly established on this continent. In general, we can say that we are very well off financially. We have good homes and good cars. No longer do we worship in Legion halls. We have beautiful and functional church buildings built to last. We have seniors residences. Our schools and colleges have been running well for many years. Now what? Our mothers and fathers

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worked their hands to the bone. They gave of their time, their abilities, their money – as little as it was. We are the beneficiaries of the hard work of our parents. Now what? What are we going to do with it? Now that church life, school life, and family life have been established and built up, what are we going to do? What *must* we do?

We need to look outward more than we have in the past. Our parents concentrated on building up Reformed life here. Of course! That's what they had to do. That was their primary obligation. But now that it is built up, we need to work with it. Woe unto us if we try to live off the capital of our parents' hard work!

We need to reach out beyond the church walls with the gospel of Jesus Christ. But we must do so from our position of strength. We must reach out as Reformed confessors. It will not do to be embarrassed, as some are, by the Reformed confessions. My experience with brothers and sisters who have recently joined the church, no matter what their religious background, is that they joyfully embrace the truths of the Reformed faith. They love the teaching of an absolutely sovereign God. They humbly confess that apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, they are completely dead in sin. They rejoice in the doctrine of election. They *know* existentially that it is true. They know that if it were not true, they would not be Christians today. As we reach out in the work of evangelism, we need to do so consciously as Reformed Christians who love and embrace the Reformed confessions. It will not do to be embarrassed by the Three Forms of Unity when we do home mission.

There are those, even among us, who push the catechism and confession aside when it comes to home mission. They want to play down the Reformed distinctives. But why bother do evangelism, then? There are many non-Reformed evangelism efforts everywhere. Why would we add one more?

We need to hold on to what we have received. Standing on the foundation our parents, by the grace of God, were allowed to lay, we need to stand up boldly in our communities with the unadulterated gospel of a sovereign God who calls and commands dead sinners to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Holding firmly to the Reformed faith, we need to share our spiritual heritage with others.

By the grace of God, our churches are *getting out home* (as the late Rev. G. Van Dooren called us to do quite some time ago). We now have two home mission projects with full time workers – one in the Smithers area, another in the Greater Hamilton area. As churches and believers we are reaching out to seniors' residences, men's and women's residences, the Carrier Indians, detention centres, prisons, and to the children of our communities. Our congregations are dotted with Black and Asian faces. God be praised! Let us continue this work. Let us develop it and expand it. But let's do so as distinctively Reformed Christians and churches. Otherwise, we are wasting our time. 



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES		Regular	Air
FOR 1998		Mail	Mail
Canada*		\$34.00*	\$59.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds		\$39.00	\$52.00
International		\$58.00	\$85.00

* Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$11.25 per column inch

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Publications Mail Registration No. 1025
 ISSN 0383-0438

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By J.L. van Popta

Treasures

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Revelation 1:3

The Apostle John wrote down the words of this book on the command of Christ that he write what he saw. It was to be written as a letter to the seven churches of Asia Minor. This letter would be read in the church services of these congregations. In 1:3 John gives words of blessing to those who read it and to those who hear it and keep it.

The word of God is to be read and heard in order to be kept. It is to be read and heard and taken to heart. The Word of God is not some form of entertainment. If it is not read and heard, then it cannot affect the heart. That's the point isn't it? The word must be heard in order for it to change us. But hearing is more than some sensory perception. It is hearing and listening and then acting. It is taking it to heart and then keeping it.

Do you read Scripture every day? I fear too many of us in our busy days do not. There are too many distractions. We think nothing of sitting down to watch two or three hours of TV a couple or three times a week but cannot find time to spend ten or fifteen minutes

reading and reflecting and meditating on Scripture.

We are to hear the Word of God and keep it. We are to hear it and take it to heart. Literally it says that we are to keep it. The word here for *keep* does not mean "keep safe by putting it into a safe or a safety deposit box." It means to keep at it, to put to use, keep in use, to keep something active in everyday life. We are to use the Word in every day life. It is to transform and change our lives.

As the NIV so beautifully translates: we are "to take it to heart." This echoes the words of Psalm 119:10-11. *I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.* "I have hidden your word in my heart." If ever there was a text to defend the need to memorize Scripture this is it. And if that does not do, then these words in Revelation 1:3 clinch it. "Hear the Word and take it to heart." "Hide the Word in your heart."

John wrote down what he saw; he saw the Word of God. This is very striking in Revelation 1:2 and 12. There we

can read that John "testifies to everything he saw – that is, the Word of God." And in v. 12 John turned around to see the voice that was speaking. He turned to see the voice. John sees the Word of God. He sees the ascended Lord Jesus Christ who is the living Word.

Too many people put off seeing and hearing to an other day. That happens many times in church as one or the other drifts off to sleep and fails to hear the Word of God preached. The intent of the Word of God is to bring us to our knees not to make our heads nod. Sometimes familiarity dulls our minds. But it does not dull the sharp edge of the sword of the Spirit.

The Lord Jesus says that those who are of his family are those who hear his Father's word and do them. His family consists of those who hear the Word and keep them; of those who hear the Word and take it to heart. Those who build upon the rock are those who hear his words and take them to heart.

But what then is the blessing which comes to the ones who read or hear and then take to heart these words? What blessing comes to them? Scripture teaches clearly that faith comes through the hearing of the Word of God. Faith is that blessing; and through faith all the benefits of Christ come to us. The time is near. The world around the early church was in uproar as kingdoms shook and crumbled. The church was given this book of prophecy as an anchor in a chaotic world. The goal of the book of Revelation was not written just as information about future events. Rather it was written and given in order to produce faith and trust in God.

This is true for us also. As Paul writes in 1 Timothy 1:5, the Word is written to produce "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." Revelation, not just this book, but all of Scripture brings us to obedience – to the obedience of faith.

We must hear the word of God, each of us taking the Word of God to heart. We often say that we learn things "off by heart." Of Scripture we should say, "we learn it on our hearts." 

What's inside?

It's a wonderful thing to be Reformed. Distinctively Reformed. Consciously Reformed. Confessionally Reformed. Several articles in this issue focus on that.

The Rev. J. Visscher writes about being Reformed today.

The editorial picks up on the theme.

In the past three years, two joint Evangelical and Roman Catholic statements have appeared which call for unity between the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation. Dr. J. de Jong has addressed them in *Clarion*. Recently, we received a response from Dr. Timothy George, one of the signers of the joint accord. We are pleased to publish the letter of a leading Evangelical and Dr. De Jong's response. We can applaud any efforts to span the five hundred-year old divide between the RCC and the churches of the Reformation, but what will be the basis of unity?

To promote the Reformed faith we need a place to train men to preach faithfully according to the Word of God. We have such a place in Hamilton, and are thankful for it. The library, the nerve centre of the College, has long run out of space. General Synod Fergus approved a proposal for the much needed expansion of the College that will especially accommodate the ever expanding library. Dr. J. Visscher, chairman of the Board of Governors of the Theological College, writes about the project.

You will also find a gem from the past, a Press Review and a Reader's Forum.

GvP

Being Reformed Today

By J. Visscher

Do you know what the word “Reformed” means? Are you happy that you are a member of a Canadian Reformed Church? Do you go out of your way to try to convince others of the richness of the Reformed faith?

I ask these questions because I sense that among us there are those who, if they were asked, would answer “No!” to all three questions. They do not know why they are what they are. They see their church membership as a burden. They speak to others, not about the richness of that faith, but only about what they consider to be “its warts and blemishes.” They have lost their first love. In some cases criticism and cynicism have set in big time.

How should one react to this type of negativism? I think the first thing that we need to do is go back to the basics and ask questions like: “What does it mean to be Reformed anyway? What are the qualities that best describe a Reformed person?”

No doubt, we will all have an image in our mind but allow me to give you my answer to these questions. To me a Reformed, biblically based believer is, among others, someone who is:

a) Awestruck

The first mark of such a believer is that their life centres on God and on His great deeds. Such a person just cannot get over the fact that the incomparable God of heaven and earth has made us, rescued us, redeemed us and desires to fellowship with us eternally. What are we that God is mindful of us? What are we that we are heirs to such a great and glorious salvation? These questions, and many like them, are the kind that should never stop circulating in our minds. All through our life we should walk in wonder with our God.

Indeed, such a sense of reverence and awe should be evident in the way we work, in our leisure, also in our worship. But is it? In this regard I commend to you a marvellous new book written by E.T. Welch, *When People Are Big and God Is Small* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1997). In it he shows very clearly that the problem of

our age lies in the fact that people want to be big and are content to let God be small. In work, the driving force is materialism. In leisure, the main aim is pleasure. In worship, the call is for ever increasing involvement. People are no longer content to let God be God, to obey Him, to listen to His Word, to praise Him, to petition Him – these things are no longer enough.

Does this mean that there is no room for human response to God? Of course, there is, but let it be a response driven by a deep sense of the majesty and holiness of our God.

The problem of our age lies in the fact that people want to be big and are content to let God be small.

b) Biblical

Yet a Reformed believer is not only someone who thinks great thoughts of God, but also a person who listens carefully, interacts constantly and adheres faithfully to the will of God as revealed in the Bible. He or she is not selective, pitting Old Testament against New Testament, law against gospel, Word against Spirit. No, such a person bows before the total Word, recognizing that while the shadows are fulfilled “their truth and substance remain for us in Jesus Christ” (Art. 25, B.C.).

In other words, the proper approach is not one of picking the parts you like and disregarding the parts you do not. Loving your wife as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25-33) is not an option but a command. Keeping your vows (Eccl 5:4-7) is not a “human maybe” but a “divine must.” Obeying your elders and minister (Heb 13:17) is not conditional advice but authoritative pronouncement. Holy Scripture is meant for “the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith” (Art. 5, B.C.).

c) Humble

Are we old people, new people, a mixture of old and new people? Some

see themselves as “old people” meaning that they are constantly busy with their sins and shortcomings. You would never know from talking with them that originally God created people in His image and still re-creates them today through the power of His Spirit. Others see themselves as “new people.” However, the problem is that they interpret this to mean that they have arrived. They no longer need the law of the Ten Commandments, not even as a rule of thankfulness. They have the Spirit! Still, others see themselves as a mixture of old and new, as multiple spiritual personalities. Sometimes they are living like “old people” and sometimes they live like “new people.”

So how should we see ourselves? If you are a Reformed believer, you should see yourself as “a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). Does this mean that sin lives in you no more and that perfection has arrived? No, for the apostle Paul makes this conditional, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” In other words, it is Christ who gives us a new status, a new life, a new future. Nevertheless, that does not mean that sin has been banished totally from our lives. For the same Word that tells us that we are “new creatures” in Christ also tells us “if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

Where does this leave us? As new people, but as new people who are not without sins and shortcomings. We are new but we shall not experience the total effects of that newness until that day when we come into the very presence of God. In the interim we are to live our lives in total dependence on God and on his grace. We need to realize that in and of ourselves we are weak and vulnerable and that only in Christ are we strong (Phil 4:13). A healthy dose of humility should clothe us all and a daily reliance on Christ should be our abiding strength.

d) Confessional

Perhaps you would not include this quality in your description of a Reformed believer. You are a purist and believe that in the Christian life all talk of confessions and being confessional should

be outlawed. Maybe you would even like to go further and say that Canadian Reformed people are “confessionalist” because, according to you, they place the confessions above the Word.

We have far too many Reformed believers acting like wimps.

Now it strikes me that the church has always had to steer a steady course between the two dangers of “confessionalism” and “anti-confessionalism.” In this regard there are two extreme positions. There is the view that the confessions are on par with or above the Word and at the other extreme, the view that we should have little or nothing to do with the confessions. Both are positions that need to be avoided at all costs.

How then are confessions meant to function in the church? Not as inspired writings and not as useless documents, but as necessary guides to which we are bound because they faithfully summarize the teaching of Scripture. They represent the voice of the church as it echoes throughout the centuries. They were written with the blood of the martyrs. In them you hear Irenaeus and Athanasius, Tertullian and Augustine, Luther and Calvin. Interacting with them brings you face to face with the struggle of the church to stay on course and not to be diverted into the way of heresy and blasphemy. Both to idolize them as well as to ignore them does a grave disservice to the manner in which Christ Jesus has used them to preserve his church.

e) Constructive

Another important quality of a Reformed believer is that he or she is a builder, not a wrecker. They see all that God has done for them in Jesus Christ and they want to give their all to Him. They want to build up the church and to promote the kingdom of God. They do not ask “what can this church do for me and how will it meet my needs?” but “what can I do for the church with the gifts that God has given me?”

Alas, however, this kind of a positive attitude is not always present. Some people only major in negatives. Even some who are in positions of leadership seem to get caught up in this. Instead of listening charitably and carefully to the church community in which God has placed them, they withdraw into clubs of like minded critics and lob their verbal or printed grenades. At the same time all who disagree with their ideas are mocked and dismissed. Such people, whether they are champi-

oning the cause of orthodoxy or invention, do not build up anything. They only disturb and polarize.

So what are you: a wrecker, a critic, a cynic, a fence sitter, a builder? I hope that you are a builder, that you are someone who wants to make a contribution. I hope too that when you run into things you disagree with you will do more than talk. If people offend you, go to them and confront them in love. If you do not like the way things are done in the church, come up with an alternative that both respects the reformational character of the church and enhances it. If you think you have a confessional problem, do your homework, ask advice, and, if necessary, file a gravamen. If you disagree with a synod decision, approach your church council with your concerns. If you want new songs in the *Book of Praise*, send your suggestions to the committee. I challenge you to be a constructive Reformed believer.

Do you know how rich you are as a Reformed believer?

f) Aggressive

Perhaps this one catches you off-guard. You associate being a Reformed believer with being meek and mild, passive and unresponsive. Well, maybe we have bought into that idea far too much. In a world where Jehovah’s Witnesses openly hawk their wares on street corners and Mormons are not afraid to go door to door with their heretical teachings, we have far too many Reformed believers acting like wimps.

Do you know how rich we are? I will never forget as a teenager reading a book written by H.H. Meeter called *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*. (It has since been re-published and edited by Paul Marshall.) It brought me face to face with the beauty, the depth and the breadth of the Reformed faith. It lit a fire in my soul that is, thanks to the grace of God, still burning. At the same time it, and other readings over the years, have convinced me that there is nothing as rich as our faith. The world is filled with isms, sects, cults and religions but there is nothing that compares with the heritage that God has given us.

I remember a man from my youth who became dissatisfied with the Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto. He was critical of the leadership, the liturgy, the people, the confessions, so he left together with his family. Years later I met him and I asked him how he was doing. He wasn’t! His life was a shambles. His children had gone off in different direc-

tions. Some tried this church, then that church. His grandchildren, however, were members of none. A steady dose of criticism had turned them off. Constant church hopping had left them rootless. With deep sorrow in his eyes he said “I have lived my life according to the words of Hosea 8:7 – ‘They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.’ All I ever did was criticize, criticize, criticize. I was always in the opposition. The grass was always greener on the other side of the fence. Finally, I withdrew. But look at what has happened to me and to my family? Only after I left did I begin to realize that people are people no matter where you go and that the church on earth will always be a struggling affair. One more thing, after I left I finally began to appreciate what I had left behind, but by then it was too late. I couldn’t go back.” I asked, “Why not?” He answered with one word: “Pride!”

What a tragic story! Sadly, there are many more like it. People who constantly criticize, people who have lost touch with the faith they once professed, people who are always negative, reap a whirlwind of bitterness in their own lives and in the lives of their children.

And so I ask: “Do you know how rich you are as a Reformed believer?” If you do, spread the word with zeal. If you do not, become a student and go on a journey of discovery. I guarantee you that you will not be disappointed.

Dr. J. Visscher is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Langley, B.C. This article first appeared in Information. 

Further Suggestions for Reading this Fall and Winter:

J. Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996).

If you want to understand the rule of thankfulness properly, you need to read this book.

D.G. Hagopian, ed., *Back to Basics: Rediscovering the Richness of the Reformed Faith* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996).

Deals with the basics of conversion, covenant, church and the Christian life from a Reformed perspective.

M. Horton, *Putting Amazing Back into Grace: An Introduction to Reformed Theology*. (Nashville: Nelson, 1991).

Shows how distinctive the Reformed faith is from evangelicalism in general. Includes a very useful list of reading resources.

H. Westerink, *A Sign Of Faithfulness: Covenant and Baptism*. (Neerlandia: Inheritance, 1997).

An excellent book on an always controversial topic written in a warm, clear and insightful way.

Protestants and Roman Catholics in Discussion

By J. De Jong

Some time ago (*Clarion* May 1, 1998) we published the statement "The Gift of Salvation," which has since received the name ECTII, which means: "Evangelicals and Catholics together, Statement Number II. In many ways the second statement was seen as an improvement over the first statement (ECT I) which appeared in 1995.

Since this time another joint statement has appeared with its own results and mixed responses, (cf *Time*, July 6, 1998, 46). None the less it all remains a sign that the call for discussion also at this fundamental level is still seen.

One can have mixed feelings about such an undertaking. These discussions can be condemned outright as being a

part of the false ecumenicity of our age. While some of this may be true, I would plead for a more careful judgment.

Discussions between Protestants and Roman Catholics are not to be rejected outright, especially if they incorporate a confrontation with the stand of early Reformers like Luther and Calvin. However, at some point the discussions will also need to deal with the question as to the validity of those confessional statements written in blood so many years ago, and what the current answer to those statements must be, especially regarding the many who lost their lives due to violent persecutions. Discussion which does not lead to these fundamental

confessional questions can only end up in shipwreck, as I indicated in my first response.

As for the piece we published, a response was received from Dr. George, a senior editor with *Christianity Today*. To this response I have also attached a brief rejoinder. The whole is being published with Dr. George's consent, and with the aim that we too, as Reformed believers, are made aware of current developments in Protestant and Roman Catholic discussions, and that we continue to work and pray that the Lord will gather his children, also from the bondage of Rome to the gospel of free grace and life in Jesus Christ alone.

Re: Press Review on "the Gift of Salvation"
(*Clarion*, May 1, 1998).

Dear Dr. De Jong:

Greetings in the Name of our Lord! Thank you for your kind letter of May 12 with the enclosure of your published evaluation of our recent statement, "The Gift of Salvation." Your review of this statement is one of the more thoughtful and balanced critiques we have received from the Evangelical side. Thank you for reading the statement with care and for understanding our motivation in crafting it. Your objections are well taken and will inform our continuing dialogue.

I shall respond briefly to two of your critical comments. You rightly observe that the doctrines of grace are not as explicitly set forth in this statement as they are, say, in the Canons of Dort and other confessional documents of the Reformed tradition. As a Reformed Baptist who wholeheartedly celebrates the Augustinian emphasis on God's sovereignty in salvation, I have no qualms about accepting the Reformed formulation of *sola gratia*. However, among the Evangelicals and Catholics who endorsed this statement, there were Armenians as well as Calvinists, and Jesuits as well as Dominicans. Without trivializing the important distinctions among ourselves, we wanted to make a thoroughly biblical statement about God's gracious gift of salvation which could be genuinely affirmed by both sides of this historic theological divide.

You and others must decide whether we were successful in that effort.

I must protest, however, your claim that this statement "betrays a latent universalism." "The Gift of Salvation" states that "many are in grave peril of being eternally lost because they do not know the way to salvation." That does not sound like universalism, latent or otherwise, to me.

I have more sympathy with your criticism of our grounding of religious freedom in "the dignity of the human person created in the image of God." In appealing to the *imago dei*, we were seeking to avoid a merely prudential or political argument for religious liberty. But I myself harbour suspicions as to whether natural law or the doctrine of creation alone is sufficient for a Christian understanding of religious liberty. Shortly before his death, Bishop Lesslie Newbigin wrote me a letter with his appraisal of "The Gift of Salvation." Among other things, he wondered whether religious liberty should not be grounded explicitly in the work of Christ on the cross.

Again, thank you for your thoughtful response. With all good wishes,

Yours sincerely in Christ,
Timothy George
Dean
Beeson Divinity School
Birmingham, AL

Response:

Let me respond briefly to two points raised in this letter. First, I am grateful that Dr. George is open about his standpoint, and about the attempt of the statement to build bridges between Calvinists and Arminians, Jesuits and Dominicans. After all, the call of Christ applies to all these people (and others as well) and we are all confronted with the question in what way we are responding to God's norm for unity among all true believers and confessors of Christ.

From my side I am not confident that the Arminians, not to speak of the others, can be kept in the process while holding to their positions, without in some way compromising the Reformation's *sola gratia*. At least, there is a point in the discussions where the *sola* will come under strain! The "Gift of Salvation" is very clear about its desire to maintain and promote a unity *in the truth*.¹ In order to prevent these words from losing their ring, at some point it will need to be articulated that the Reformed formulation of the *sola gratia* really cannot be compromised by lesser circumscriptions. After all, it is an essential article of faith. And it is explicitly implied in the statement when it confesses: "The catastrophic consequences of sin are such that we are powerless to restore the ruptured bonds of union with God."

Then a word about my comments on universalism in the statement. My comments regarding universalism in the "The Gift of Salvation" may have been too cryptic, but not incorrect. I only

meant to bring out that the mandate to preach the gospel to "everyone everywhere" must always reckon with the reality of the so called mother promise (*protoevangelium*, Genesis 3:15) *viz.*, that opposition to it, even to extremities, must be factored into our vision of its ultimate goal and completion. The statement that "many are in great peril of being eternally lost" still leaves me with mixed feelings, since I think a statement like "The Gift of Salvation" should be candid about the fact that some *definitely* will be lost. At the same time, I share with the Canons of Dort and with you the belief that the gospel must be universally proclaimed to all peoples, and that many and then more will indeed be present at the great banquet, since, in the words of Jesus, the master has said, ". . . compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled," Luke 14:23.

Five hundred years after Melancthon's death, the call to unity among all true believers still rings out, and our duty to find each other in the truth remains undiminished. Who then cannot be thankful, also with the new attempts to seek unity with those of the Roman Catholic faith? Let the discussions proceed! But what holds true for us as Reformed people (let us not forget!) holds for us all in whatever format of discussion we are involved: we need to bend both mind and will to the clearly formulated *norms* of God's Word.

J. De Jong

¹See the preamble and the last paragraph, *Christianity Today*, December 8, 1997, p. 34, 38

CHURCH NEWS



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Mr. Richard Bultje

has accepted an appointment to serve as Mission Worker in the Greater Hamilton Area.

This is a joint project of the Ancaster and Burlington-South churches.

DECLINED TO Fergus, ON:

Rev. P.G. Feenstra

of Owen Sound, ON

CALLED TO Cloverdale, BC

Rev. J. Huijgen

of Smithers, BC



The Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches

The Challenge

By J. Visscher

Steady growth in all facets of its operation, and of the library in particular, have made it necessary for board, faculty, and staff to plan for the first major expansion of its present premises since 1985. The planning phase took place over several years and resulted in an extensive report to Synod Fergus 1998. General Synod approved the Board's plans to expand the building, provided that the Board not raise the amount each congregation is assessed per communicant member and that 80 percent of the funds is in hand in cash or pledges before construction begins.

In this article, and in a second to follow, we have taken some parts of the report to Synod and added some information to help members of our churches better to understand the need for this expansion.

Our present facilities

During the early years of its existence, the College was housed in a stately old home in Hamilton. After some sixteen years, it relocated into a building acquired from a Presbyterian congregation. The purchase was very suitable because there were several small meeting rooms which could be used as classrooms, plus an existing office. The church auditorium did not contain pews, so it was easily converted into a library. The Presbyterian congregation had long-standing plans for expansion, and thus the College has always had a very large lawn! A number of additional offices and a large classroom were constructed and all of these rooms together served the College well over the years.

Since the library is housed in the former chapel, it has a very high ceiling. Early in the planning cycle, initiated when the Board realized that the library would outgrow its present facili-



ties, the possibility of a mezzanine or partial second floor had to be ruled out for structural reasons. The Board then considered a number of other options and after some discussion with an architect, it was concluded that the best option would be to build a facility specifically for the library and to keep it and its various activities all together. Books, journals, study areas, storage, and so on, could best be accommodated if they all remained in the same area.

The library at present consists of approximately 22,500 volumes and some 100 periodical titles. On average, the library grows by about 500 books per year, some of which are gifts. Occasionally the number is much higher because of large donations.

Very little space is devoted to study area and there is no space for processing and sorting new books and donations. Lighting has always been a problem in the library, partly because of the high ceiling, and partly because there are few possibilities when it comes to

electricity. This has also posed a number of problems in connection with the use of computers and student laptops.

The library itself is often used as a work room for processing the new books because there is no other place to do this. Students seeking a quiet study area are forced to move elsewhere because the acoustics of the chapel amplify the noise created by library staff, volunteers, and others working in the library. A former janitor's closet is the College's archive room at the moment and it is filled to capacity.

Why expand the library?

Libraries have certainly changed over the years, but one thing remains constant: libraries need to grow if they are to remain relevant. New ideas need to be examined critically if the professors and students are to keep current with what is happening in the world of theology. In public libraries, every so often, books are discarded and sold to the public. And sometimes they may

exchange books with other branches in the same library system so that there is always a fresh supply of books (especially fiction books) for the patrons to read. Similarly, public libraries do not always keep all the back issues of a magazine. Patrons are expected to go to the central branch or to a research or university library if they require older issues of certain magazines. The College's library, however, is the research library for the students and professors, and it must keep up not only with the present, but also with the past.

Two years ago, while the Board was studying the issue of expansion, the students were surveyed about their usage of the library. Appreciation was expressed by all of the students for the acquisitions, over the years, through the generous donations of the Women's Savings Action, which enabled the College to buy core books in the various areas of study. Certainly, the Lord's blessings are evident in this. Guest users from other schools or churches over the years have expressed appreciation and amazement at what the College library is able to offer the students. And yet, 73% of the students indicated that they use other libraries extensively to complete assignments. Clearly, the work of the library and the Women's Savings Action should continue.

Are books going to be around much longer?

Computers and related technologies have had a dramatic impact on libraries. Most people now expect to find computers, CD-ROMs, and modems in the library. In fact some even predict that the library of the future will be a virtual library: everything of importance will



be accessible via computer either from home or from a library. The reality is not so simple. When planning a library, most experts readily agree that to plan anything beyond two decades is foolish, but not all experts agree as to the real impact of the new technologies or the technologies which are yet to come! The College librarian contacted several publishers with whom the school has dealings. They all expressed reservations about entering the area of electronic publishing. At a recent library forum held this year in Toronto, a number of large libraries recounted their frustrations and consequent wariness of electronic publishing for various reasons. The consensus was to use and promote electronic publishing, but to retain subscriptions to the printed version.

The future

Obviously we cannot predict the future. And yet the Board must plan for it. Waiting until the library has used up every inch of available space and then adopting stop gap or hasty measures is not a responsible plan of action. The Board of Governors has for several years kept the idea of expansion in mind, and money has been set aside for it, thanks to the generous aid of the Women's Savings Action and of individual donors.

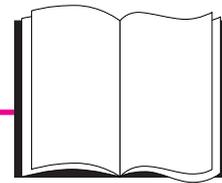
A study of the space needs of the library was undertaken, and it was decided to plan a library building which would be able to serve the College for twenty years. The addition would be built in such a way that many more years of usage could be gained without having to move to a larger location.

Benefits to the College

There will be numerous benefits when the College expands. Not only will the library finally have a building designed as a library for the first time in the almost thirty years of its history, but the space that the library vacates can be put to excellent use. Students and professors will all benefit from the changes the Board hopes to make with the assistance and support of the church membership here and abroad. More about this the next time.

Dr. J. Visscher is chairman of the Board of Governors of the Theological College. He pastors the Canadian Reformed Church in Langley, B.C.





Where are we going?

By W. Kanis

When I read the Pro Life Newsletter, and realized again the horror of the thousands of unborn murdered, I started thinking: What is the cause that this can happen in a country which 100 years ago was a *Christian* country, and which carried as its official motto "A mari usque ad mare" and the unique title "The Dominion of Canada?" The motto as well as the title come from Psalm 72:8, "May He (God) have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth."

And what do we have now, after 100 years of technological progress – cars, airplanes, followed by radio around 1920 and television about 25 years later, also computer, video, internet, to name just a few? Was this all progress as God intended? No, mankind could do it all by themselves. Regardless of two world-wars, man made their own welfare state and ruled the whole country without taking God into account. Take the human right act, by which

God's right and laws were pushed aside. In 1988 the Supreme Court ruled that Sunday shopping restrictions were unconstitutional. Also, 1988 abortion became legal. And immoral acts were promoted by placing condom-machines in schools and public places. AIDS is increasing. It makes one think: How long will the Lord tolerate this? On the other hand, there is nothing new. Falling away was there before.

But now we, the Church. The Lord has warned us time and again to be watchful. But are we? Let us see what Scripture says. We have the summary of the Law in Matthew 22:37-40, where we read, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." When we consider this summary of the Law, then we

ask: what is our first love? It should always be to love the Lord with all our heart, soul and mind, and only then as a second the neighbour.

Sometimes I see in our homes newspapers with whole pages "to have a good night, or name your own time, with whatever girl or man you want." Papers which are there for our youth to read as well. Don't we, as parents, have a task here?

Then the television. I notice how it is used as a baby-sitter by some church members, and often uncontrolled. The first commandment is not listened to, that is to instruct the children in the way of the Lord (see e.g. Deut 6) And how many hours are used by *the parents* to watch television? Also the use of the computer, video, internet, etc. They are also a big step to heaven or to hell.

We have to be watchful *all* the time. We do so easily get pulled along with the backsliding world in which we live, and we, too, have our idols, without noticing it, e.g. in sport. I heard a sermon on Romans 1, and then especially verse 25 about worshipping the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Then I thought of the many who display their sports-idols blatantly on their shirts. And I thought, no, this cannot be pleasing to the Lord. Here God does not come first anymore (Deut 6).

Back to the beginning: the mass murder. Yes we should arm our youth by living close to God's commandments and instructing them in the fear of the Lord, *and also walk that way ourselves* and be an example to them. And seek the welfare of our neighbour, the unborn, and show to the world that children are a blessing from the Lord. But, also, in this spiritually dark time we have the Lord's promise: ". . . and see, I am with you always, to the end of time" (Matt 28:20). Holding on to that we can live without fear, for we have a future.

After having read "My Struggle with Porn" (Vol. 47, No. 16), Mr. W. Kanis of Smithers, BC shared his concerns with us by submitting this article.—Editor. ©



By J. De Jong



The Common Cup

In a recent issue of *Una Santa*, Rev. C. Kleyn, formerly minister of our sister church in Legana, Tas., and currently working in Pretoria, South Africa, writes about the age old practice of the common cup, as used in the communion services in the Reformed tradition. He gives some exegetical and church historical material on the question:

When the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to his disciples, saying, "Drink from it all of you." (Matt 26:27). This instruction is striking. It stresses that the disciples must drink together from the one cup.

The use of a common cup is generally claimed to be unusual for the Passover. Everyone had his own cup. Yet here Christ says, "Drink from it, all of you." Notice also that Christ does not give an instruction to His disciples that parallels His instruction about the bread ("Take and eat"); He doesn't tell the disciples to "Take and drink." He says, "Drink from it, all of you." Apparently that drinking together from the same cup is part of Christ's command. In that light we need to understand what Mark mentions, "and they all drank from it" (Mark 14:23). The one cup coincides with the one bread and expresses the oneness that is central to the meal (1 Cor 10:16,17).

There is therefore no doubt about it that the Lord Jesus took one cup and that the disciples drank from it. The apostle Paul also speaks of "the cup of the Lord" (1 Cor 10:21; 11:25-27).

What about the health risks involved in drinking from the same cup? Serious diseases can easily be spread. In the past the church took that into account by making rulings with regard to certain members. The Synod of Middelburg 1581 decided that lepers should be given the

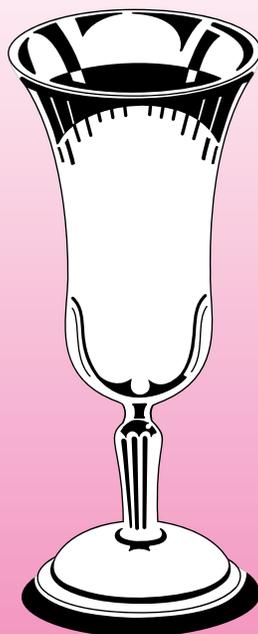
Lord's Supper in a separate corner of the building or at the final table. The Synod of Leeuwarden 1920 determined that the consistories may, after consulting with the doctors, take such measures as seem fit at the celebration in a medical institution, in order to prevent infection if members with contagious diseases

time it is clear that the churches wanted to maintain as much as possible the normal pattern indicated by Christ. The exceptions should not destroy the rule.

But are the health risks not greater today than they were in the past? This is questionable. In the past the hygiene was far worse than it is today. In the past the people were often struck by epidemics. It would seem that the difference today is that people are far more conscious of the risks of spreading or catching diseases by using a common cup. That is one of the reasons why some are requesting that we change to individual cups. Is this a good reason to change the pattern Christ has set and the church has followed throughout the centuries?

It is true that Christ did not give a strict and binding command that the church should always and under all circumstances drink from the one cup. That is why the church has always been open for exceptions. That is also why we have no problem using four cups in our congregation instead of one for the practical reason that one cup would be too heavy and cumbersome if all the members had to drink from it.

What about individual cups? Many churches have that practice, including churches which share the Reformed faith with us. When and why they introduced the individual cups would be an interesting subject for someone to study up. Do individual cups do justice to Christ's institution? What was the purpose of sharing the one cup? It was to emphasize the unity of the believers in Christ. That unity is still expressed with the individual cups in the fact that they are all filled from the one source and that the



(especially tuberculosis in those days) wish to participate. They had in mind special little cups.

In these rulings, attention was given to exceptions within the congregation. The churches sought a way to enable lepers or members with a contagious disease to celebrate the Lord's Supper. At the same

members wait for each other and all drink at the same time. When the synod of Sneek 1939 allowed for the use of special little cups in specific circumstances it stressed that the unity of the cups should be made visible by the use of one single jug. Our shared salvation in Jesus Christ, the only source of life, and our fellowship with one another ought to be visibly portrayed in the way we celebrate the Lord's Supper. One cannot deny that these two fundamental characteristics of the Lord's Supper are present when individual cups are used. Yet the question needs to be asked: Which practice brings out those two characteristics better, the use of the common cup or the use of individual cups? Drinking together from one cup does have stronger symbolic value than drinking simultaneously from separate cups. Drinking from the same cup expresses a close relationship. In everyday life you will, for example, not easily drink from the same cup your neighbour has drunk from whereas

you would have no problem drinking from the same cup one of your loved ones has already drunk from. Besides, passing on the cup to each other also expresses unity. That element is lost with individual cups. A point we may also need to consider is the joy of the celebration. The Lord's Supper is meant to be a festive occasion. We receive a foretaste of the abundant joy which Christ has promised. In what way ought we and may we take this element of joy into account when considering the possibility of separate cups instead of a common cup?

Any decision to move away from the pattern Christ set at the institution of the meal, and which the churches have followed throughout the centuries should not be taken lightly. We would need to be convinced that there is a real need for it and that the change would be an improvement.

With regard to exceptions we would do well to now already consider options for those who have something that is considered to be

contagious. They could either be requested to be the last ones to drink from the cup or be provided with special cups which are filled with wine from the common jug.

The remarks of Rev. Klein (to which I have made only minor stylistic changes) indicate that there are many sides to this discussion. Yet on the whole the Reformed tradition favours the communal cup because of closer reflection of Scriptural norms. The practice of using individual cups stems from the Puritan rather than Reformed tradition.

These remarks may not serve to convince everyone on a sensitive issue like this. But I would hope that at least we all can accept that on such points there is no room for polarizing approaches. Churches should be hesitant to introduce a new practice if it meets with stringent objections from the membership. At least it does not seem to me to be wise to drive through a stand on an issue which not only has so many aspects to it, but also involves some deeply rooted religious sentiments and convictions. 

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We read the article, "My Struggle With Porn" (Aug. 7), and found it to be extremely thought-provoking. Initially, we appreciated the author's desire to warn others from engaging in pornography. However, upon further reflection, we feared the article could, unintentionally, lead others into sin. Some readers may become curious to discover what many others seem to find so appealing, while others, already struggling with the sin, could find an excuse in the fact that the problem seems to be so pervasive. In addition, the cynical among us could be made more so, by the description of hypocrisy among the leaders of the church. We hope that our fears are unfounded and that the author's purpose is fulfilled.

Andrew and Petra Douma
Ancaster, ON

The item titled *My Struggle with Porn* in the August 7 issue of *Clarion* came across as a cry from the heart and a dire warning to all. It was sensitively written and highlighted the effects of this insidious evil on the spiritual well being of any one involved in it. What strikes me is the fact that pornography has a profound *lingering effect* on those involved with it. It seems particularly difficult to *kick the habit*, once involvement has begun. Perhaps it is more or less every man's struggle to keep the mind and body pure and unadulterated as God has so clearly stipulated in the seventh commandment. This may be particularly so during pubescent, teen and later youthful years, when testosterone levels may be running high. Couple this with endless beautiful and apparently

sexy girls to which we're exposed in all types of media, and the Christian male has a real struggle on his hands. If there is one sin from which we must flee with all haste, then surely this must be it.

For those for whom pornography is a struggle (and even for those whom it isn't), I would highly recommend a book titled *An Affair of the Mind*, written by Laurie Hall. (ISBN:1-56179-464-3 and published by Focus on the Family, Colorado Springs, Colorado). It is an eye opening book on one Christian woman's struggle to salvage her family from the devastating effects of her husband's secret addiction to pornography.

Ron Bergsma
Cardup, Western Australia



Walking with God*

Enoch walked with God. (Gen. 5:24)

By K. Schilder

Indeed, we have been guilty of a great shortcoming overagainst Scripture that around the word which it has preserved for us concerning Enoch and his walk with God we have drawn a circle that had to be above all *soft* in colour; that we thought we could not present this word in any way other than in a *soft* voice, in *subdued* tones, and with *restrained* gestures. We reminded each other that there were all giants on the earth in those days, and that everything was therefore gigantic in that iron-age of the "seventh from Adam," i.e. in the days of Enoch; but among all that was gigantic we would then find this tender-loving, this *soft* word about Enoch, who walked with

God. We saw him in our imagination: behind an iron curtain, the wicked generation of Cain, but behind a black-velvet curtain, in a prayer-seat, this Enoch. That "walking" we did not take too seriously. We would spiritualize it, so that it became something like sitting, lying, or, at the most, reciting a breviary. A hermit, absorbed in prayer, who does not open the door to the titanic struggle outside? And those fighting giants, do they consider his abode too humble to force their entrance?

"That 'walking' we did not take too seriously. We would spiritualize it."

Oh, so we thought, that is an expression suitable for a velvet wall-text, but not something to be embroidered on our flying banners and to be carried along in the tumult of battle. Enoch walking with God – we did think we were able to picture him in and to follow him into the inner chamber, into

the prayer-room, but not into harsh everyday life, or into public witnessing, not into the storm and the thunder.

Enoch walked with God.

Yes, we associated these words with mystical ecstasy; with a saint's life, withdrawn, far from the wicked and bustling world; with silence and contemplation. We thought of him as a man attired like an ascetic, shuffling through life in strict abstinence, his gaze directed inward; as a man who, on the few occasions that he was seen at all, would move through the multitude as a silent figure: Enoch dreaming of God.

And so we believe that in his days the storms could indeed



roar and the wind blow, but that *Enoch* could somehow find the gentle, hushed paradise atmosphere, in which God lets himself be found in the cool of the day and in the tranquil evening breeze – as in the old paradise, to which no *city* was yet connected (as in Rev. 22). . . .

Is this not how we have pictured Enoch? Hermit, yes – crusader, never?

But –

Walking with God – surely that is something entirely different. To start with that paradisaical *calm* – of course, that simply will not do. Insofar as the word "walking" implies movement, and the expression "walking with God" points to a human being going along with Him who set the world clock in motion and regulates it, it cannot mean: ignoring the world clock and *refusing* to know what time it.

Well then, the *old* paradise was a garden, but it was not connected with a *city*: there were as yet only two people.

But the *new*, the *future*, the promised paradise, toward which He with whom Enoch walked, always directs everything, will be a *garden* with a *city* annexed to it (Rev 22).

Between the old and the new paradise stands Enoch. He would be turning his back on God and letting the world "Bell-ringer"¹ walk alone if he did *not* concern himself with the "city," the city of God, the city which had to come. One who says "city," also says

"people." One who says "city of God" while facing a city of rebellious and drifting people, *also* says "struggle" – struggle of people *against* people. Enoch's devout "walk" is in *contrast* with that of his contemporaries. His "struggle" is *church struggle*.

And further, is the "Bell-Ringer" then so quiet perhaps? Is "walking" with Him the same as being locked up with Him in his little room high up in the bell-tower, close to the belfry? It is then a looking down once in a while, but mostly a gazing up?

Certainly not. The "Bell-Ringer" is also the Warrior, the Commander, the King.

" 'Walking with God' points to a human being going along with Him who set the world clock in motion and regulates it."

Walking with God – that is at the very least: walking with the consuming fire; walking with the "jealous" zeal; walking amidst the gigantic powers that are round about and that do not allow themselves to be captured.

Walking with God – that is: walking with the All-sided One, who demands our full attention for every aspect of the manifestations in which He appears to us with revelational intent.

Walking with God is: seeing a thousand roads which *all* have to be walked to the end.

“To walk with God – that is: to pay as much attention to his judgment as to his love.”

It means: seeing virtues in God that everlastingly support each other while you are unable to distinguish them by name or to take history, *without* considering *faith*, as proof for your contemplations of these virtues.

It is: saying again and again: I am divided, He is “simple,” undivided.

It is: viewing God’s works, which seemingly consume each other in their contradictions and which yet, for everyone who believes, in each other and all together fill history with his praise.

It is: paying full attention to contrasts, and even at times being consumed by fire because of contradictions of thought. It is having eyes before and behind (Rev 4:6) and knowing that none of them may ever be closed.

It is: having wings to cover the eyes which yet must exercise vision; wings to cover the feet that must nevertheless be ready for service; wings to fly and yet being able to say in the intent of the attentive life: “I will hear what God the Lord will speak” (Isa 6).

“God comes . . . also in the quiet and continuous working of the gospel.”

To walk with God – that is: to pay as much attention to his judgment as to his love; not to separate promise from demand, nor lure from threat; to see heaven just as clearly as hell; to draw

as well as to repel; to be as patient in mercy as quick with a word of denunciation in accordance with the law; to be as dependent as free; to be as desirous to receive with the weak as to give with the strong; to call upon the name of the Lord in quiet hours no less than to proclaim his name amidst the noisy tumult of the people; to search not only the depth, but also the breadth and all height; not to forget for a moment the spherical shape of the earth, nor its flight through space and time.

To walk with God is: to search for grace within nature, and nature through grace; it is silence *and* tumult; it is talent *and* character; it is contemplating *and* practice; it is dogma *and* confession; it is to listen to both storm *and* rustling

wind; it is to find God in the roaring deep no less than in the still small voice.

It is, to put it briefly, an *impossibility* as long as what is meant by it is the fulness of intensity and the perfect equilibrium of all that was just mentioned. Except by One, it can be done only in weakness, in sin, and with many shortcomings. If Scripture had told us that Enoch walked with God perfectly in the strict, *dogmatic*² sense of the word, we would have to revise the conclusions of the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon. *We would then have received at least one additional messiah.* And, consequently, we would have lost both.

But the above-mentioned “equilibrium” still remains of first and utmost importance.

“God did not plant a little paradise for Enoch in the midst of a storm-troubled world. . . . Enoch stands in the midst of his time.”

When Elijah, as far as he himself is concerned, can recognize his walking-with-God as real only there where God allows him to use the beating of drums and the flying of banners, then God meets him, *not* in storm, thunder, and earthquake, but in the still small voice, as if to say: that is also part of it, Elijah (1 Kings 19). For Elijah it was necessary that this “*other*,” which also belongs to it, was pointed out to him, for he had overlooked something. He failed to realize that God comes not only in the roaring battle with the gods and in the strong language used by Elijah on such an occasion, but also in the quiet and continuous working of the gospel. He did not realize that to walk with God also includes: to expect along with His expecting. Just look at *Enoch*. When he walks with God, then God goes with him and he with God, in the storm *and* in the fire, *and* in the earthquake, *and* in the still small voice. Then

there is the above-mentioned equilibrium: an ever-returning light of wisdom which makes him rejoice with trembling.

Therefore Enoch does not allow himself to be brought on stage *by* the man of contemplation, nor *by* the advocate of “organization,” nor *by* the prince of intellect as the “special feature” used by each of them to promote his own cause. He is *for them all* and, in that respect, ahead of them all. For *not only* the tender piety of the line of Seth flourished in Enoch; he has also inherited from the generation of Seth such a thing as a *will to form and strengthen a counter-congregation*, i.e., overagainst

that of Cain. *He, too, comes to his world* and stands prophesying on its squares (Jude 14); and *he, too*, sees things develop towards the all-consuming judgment.

That is why Enoch is not the man who would “sacrifice grace to nature,” *as if such a thing were possible*; for Enoch as “*the seventh from Adam*” in the holy line takes a stand overagainst the other seventh from Adam, in the line of sin: Lamech, who desires to be either culture-prophet or culture-hero, but in unrighteousness. But neither does Enoch “sacrifice nature to grace,” as if that possibility existed – did he not have *his son*, and was it not precisely *because of this son and with this son* that he so much the better found his God? (Gen 5:24).

***“To walk with God is:
the joyful pain of a
burning heart that ignites
other hearts.”***

Therefore Enoch is not the man who in his own mind would give second place to the energetic propagation-indeed of his God’s covenant of grace – second, that is, to the joy of his individual friendship with God as covenant gift. For when around him the sons of the pious fall into apostasy, then the birth of his *child*, his firstborn son, becomes for him, in a special sense, all the more a reason for the public accentuation of that mighty postulate: to walk in newness of life. For “*renewal*” is more than an occurrence in the “*initima cordia*” (inmost heart, Ed.); it is at the same time *world renewal*; and this is the *Messianic act*; the reality of every symbol, the root of all fruit. It is precisely *after* the birth of his son that he “walks with God.”

But neither is the covenant as it propagates itself through the generations a reason for Enoch to deny *personal, individual* responsibility. Does he not prophesy to those who are *in*, but not *of*, the congregation that judgment is coming? (Jude 12, 24; Gen 6).

And so Enoch becomes *the man of the preached Word*, who prophesies universally; but at the same time the *man* whose thankful “testimony” (Heb 11:5) speaks of the truth of that Word from *his own* experience of it. He becomes the man who speaks but also listens; the man who sees the future in the present when he declares with re-

spect to the future appearance of God: God *has* come (Jude 14), but also the man who carries the present towards God’s future and thus calls all men to repentance.

Therefore he is always of current significance (“*actusel*”) and will never be antiquated. In *his* being so, there is every time again a fresh claim-for-the day on account of God’s eternal Word.

God did not plant a little paradise for Enoch in the midst of a storm-troubled world, so that he, with special, divine permission, could live there in solitude as “*father Enoch*,” communing only with God and forgetting the time and place to which he belonged. Only hasty Peter’s and tearful Mary’s will sometimes say: Rabbi, Rabboni, let us make tabernacles and forget about the others, for it seems so good to us (Luke 9:33; John 20:16-17). But Enoch stands in the midst of his time; he preaches the antithesis in the two-fold *community* – the “seed of the serpent” and the “seed of the woman” – which since the apostasy of Cain in the world strives for the same name. He is filled with it at the birth of his son, and the tension of this antithesis is present within him. Indeed, in him it concentrates, overagainst the *other* seventh from Adam. Enoch did not walk with God just to be able to hear Him in the cool of the day, as if in a little proleptic or imitation paradise, but also when, in the very real wilderness of a world that has degenerated into a battlefield, the storm roared, judgment threatened, and heaven already called for vengeance. *Then* this man walked with God. For walking with God is walking with One who never stands still or retraces his steps, and who nevertheless is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever – Father of both time and clocks.

Thus Enoch is for us the man who before the Flood preached to us that our urge to abstract things (which, first in the formation of our ideas and, as a result, in our entire behaviour, causes us to divide what God has joined together) is proof that we are diseased in the very root. That is why even the most “decent” man, *even one who is believed to be some kind of Enoch*, “eats and drinks damnation to himself.” *That never begins at the communion table.*

Furthermore, Enoch teaches us that the “Simple One,” the God who addresses us in this life, claims us as his *witnesses*. He tells us that “walking-

with-God” is not a sublimely delicate experience during moments devoted to the singing of our favourite song (in which we so often deny a place to other songs), but, rather, that it takes hours of shock-producing discovery, of penetrating deeper, of lifting higher, of disseminating further.

***“God’s walk in Christ
established . . . a struggling
and, hence, already
triumphing church.”***

To walk with God is: the joyful pain of a burning heart that ignites other hearts. When *today* a *son* of Enoch comes to a standstill, his eyes fixed on the “*Bell-ringer*,” on his time schedule, and on the clock, then he shall say: he who has seen Christ, has seen the Father; *he who walks with Christ, walks with God*. He shall say to *father* Enoch, not as a result of studying comparative psychology but as word of wisdom received from *Christ’s* lips: the least in the kingdom of heaven – in the New Testament – is greater than you. This is not due to the human party in this walk of God-with-man but in the Divine party, who came, since the days of Enoch, to walk-with-us in the flesh. God’s walk in Christ did not establish a school of peripatetics (walkers, Ed.) but a struggling and, hence, already triumphing church. And it gave us the new, i.e. clearer, but unrevised interpretation of Enoch’s walk in the walk of the believers who, for instance, read the epistles of Paul (Col 1:10; John 12:35). To walk-with-God therefore means also to walk-with-man. Only, it does not mean “to walk according to man” (1 Cor 3:8), but: to walk-with-men-together-subordinate-to-and-along-with-Immanuel. Now we have arrived where we should be. It is: to be a living member of the church. For, to be a church member means: to *gather* the church.

*Translated from K. Schilder, *Licht in de rook* (3rd ed.; Delft: Meinema, 1951) 79-86. Previously published in *The Canadian Reformed Magazine*, April, 1972.

¹Literally “Carillon-Player.” The image is from medieval Europe and calls to mind the man who rung the great cathedral bells to warn the citizens of danger or prepare them for battle, etc. – Ed.

²In biblical (non-scientific) language such a thing can be said of an ordinary man and, indeed, it is said. – K.S.



NEWS from MERF-Canada

Sudan appeal

The news from the MERF local Committees and the churches in South and Central Sudan confirm the worst fears. More than 35,000 families within the community of Reformed churches are facing starvation and life threatening diseases. Most at risk are infants and young children where the death rate continues to climb. At an emergency meeting, MERF's Executive Committee decided to make an appeal for at least US \$300,000 in order to provide direct funding for the relief of at least some of these families. It was also decided to appeal for an additional US\$80,000 for the relief of the families of pastors and evangelists operating in those areas in order to encourage them to remain in those areas to minister to their own suffering people. Commenting on the seriousness of the situation of the Lord's people in the Sudan MERF's Executive Committee issued the following communique:

It is imperative for Reformed Christian throughout the world to realize that they now have a God-given opportunity to share of the abundance of the Lord's blessings to them and their families with other like-minded saints who no longer have the strength to even ask for help. We, therefore, appeal to all believers and Reformed church to meet these very urgent needs, remembering that the Lord Jesus assures us that there is more blessedness for giving than for receiving. (Acts 20:35)

Medical project for Sudan churches

Dr. Abdel Masih Istafanous, MERF's Chairman, has appointed a Committee of four Egyptian medical doctors to carry out a plan proposed by the General Director and two Arab Christian physicians for medical care to the Christian communities in the Sudan. The plan



calls for setting up an association of Arab and other Reformed medical doctors to provide medical teams (male and female) for short-term service in Sudan. Teams of 2-4 volunteer medical personnel would carry out the work, which will require one or more full-time administrator/coordinator, for periods of 3-4 months. Each team would serve in one particular region of South, East, West, North or Central Sudan, under the oversight of local church committees. Such teams will carry out medical check up; vaccinations and emergency minor surgeries as well as provide sanitary and first aid training for local people. Funds, medical equipment and medications will be needed for the project, which will aim at serving a constituency of 1.6 million. Alongside the medical work, pastors, evangelists, elders, deacons and others provide spiritual comfort and biblical instruction to those being served.

The medical workers themselves will be given training in the area of

biblical diaconal aid and evangelism. It is anticipated that about 40 doctors from Egypt alone will commit themselves to participating in this project. Dr. Elia Anees, MERF's Vice Chairman who teaches medicine at Cairo University, will chair the project's special Committee. The Committee is now seeking a volunteer, with medical, pharmaceutical or nursing experience to coordinate its many activities in Sudan under the direction of Dr. Anees.

Further update from Sudan

Contact with the Reformed church in the northern two thirds of Sudan is relatively easy. Ground and air transport is generally available. So is regular communication by phone and fax. MERF's Cairo office keeps in close touch with the MERF local administrative committee, churches, evangelists and pastors in those areas on a regular basis.

The situation in the southern third of the country is quite different. There are

no phone lines and most roads are either impassable by normal vehicles or too close to the war zone. So, for the most part, it is not possible to have direct contact with the MERF committee or the churches there. Most contact with them takes place through Kenya and Uganda. A MERF delegation of one pastor and two elders, however, has recently spent three weeks in the area. Guided by local believers, they moved around several parts of the region. Using relatively safe narrow roads and foot paths, they moved around under the guidance of assigned local believers. For the most part, four-wheel drive vehicles and animal drawn wagons were available for their movements. In several instances, they had to make their way on foot.

They visited 29 parishes which include more than 50 congregations in areas of Sudan north of the Kenyan and Ugandan borders. They report much hunger and thirst for biblical teaching as well as much economic deprivation. The vast majority of the people have no contact with loved ones who fled these areas over the past eleven years. Some are still able to live off their meagre animal stocks. Others

managed to get hold of maize and other seed grain which they plant in their primitive farms. Still, the majority have neither animals nor hope for grain harvest.

Simple food stuff is available for those who can pay. Most of the material is transported by land from Uganda and Kenya. Items like powdered milk and flour which originate from relief donations through the United Nations and other major relief agencies, which should be distributed free of charge, are not free. (This is because of administrative/bureaucratic charges or corruption and greed.) Yet, in most cases the very low prices wanted for them are not within the means of the people. Medical care and medication are rarely available for the people.

The delegation was impressed by the way church and local Christian tribal leaders organize diaconal aid among their own people. So far, MERF has been able to provide them with about US\$70,000 to meet some of these needs. US\$23,000 is needed every month (for the foreseeable future) to meet the bare minimum needs of Reformed families in those areas.

Help from Canada for the Sudan

Although MERF-Canada was set up especially to assist with radio broadcasting and biblical training in Cyprus, we have decided to make an exception and assist with diaconal aid at this time because of the very great need.

The response to date has been heartwarming. Many gifts have come in, including a sizable donation from the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund.

If you would still like to contribute to this very worthwhile cause, please indicate that this amount is in response to the "Sudan Appeal." The cheque sent by MERF-Canada to Cyprus will indicate that these funds are to be used for this purpose only.

Please make your cheque (clearly marked – Sudan Appeal) payable to MERF-Canada and send it to

MERF-Canada
1225 Highway 5, R.R. #1
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

Encouraged by your continued support, on behalf of MERF-Canada,

Rev. J. Mulder, chairman
Mrs. J. Van Dam, secretary 

PRESS RELEASE



Press Release of Classis Ontario South, September 2-3, 1998, held in Ancaster, Ont.

The delegates of the Church at Grand Rapids called the meeting to order. We sang Ps. 107:1,2, read of Psalm 107, and prayed the Lord to bless the meeting. Classis was constituted. The Rev. Cl. Stam served as chairman, Rev. J. Ludwig as clerk, and the Rev. G. Ph. van Popta as vice-chairman. The agenda was adopted.

A proposal of the Church at Grand Rapids to continue this classis on October 7, 1998 was defeated. The decision was made that this classis would deal only with the request of Grand Rapids for approbation of the dismissal of the Rev. B. R. Hofford ad Article 11, Church Order, and related appeals.

Because of the request of Grand Rapids, Deputies of Regional Synod East, the Rev. W. den Hollander and the Rev. G. Nederveen, were present. The chairman welcomed these reverend brothers.

Classis recessed for about two hours to give the delegates an opportunity to read through the mail received that morning. Classis then went into closed session. The request of Grand Rapids was put into discussion. After several rounds, the delegates formed into three committees to serve classis with proposals on the Grand Rapids request and the appeals. At about 9:00 p.m., classis recessed for the night.

Classis reconvened at 10 a.m., September 3. The chairman opened the day's session with the reading of 2 Timothy 2:8-26.

The proposals of the committees were put into discussion in closed session. The request of Grand Rapids was denied and the appeals were answered.

The next classis will be held, DV, on October 7 in Attercliffe. Hamilton is the convening church. The recommended moderamen are: Chairman, Rev. G. Ph. van Popta; Vice-Chairman, Rev. J. Ludwig; Clerk, Rev. Cl. Stam.

At around 9:30 p.m., after the adoption of the Acts and approval of the Press Release, the chairman concluded the meeting by reading Proverbs 14:5-10 and meditating for a few moments especially on verse 10a. Ps. 138:1,4 was sung and the Lord was appealed to for his continued blessing.

G. Ph. van Popta
Vice-chairman, e.t. 

BOOK REVIEW

By J. De Jong

G. Van Rongen, *Our Reformed Church Service Book, Neerlandia, Alberta, 1995, 250 pages, \$15.95 CDN.*

The liturgy of our churches has become a focus of discussion in our circles. Young people are increasingly asking why we do things in certain ways, and why we need to adhere to them so strictly. To some of them our patterns appear to be unnecessarily formalistic and rigid. And when we try to speak a word in defense of our approaches, many find this difficult. It is not easy to account for Reformed style in a few words!

For those who often feel inadequate with today's questions an excellent book has appeared in the above volume: indeed, everyone can benefit from it. In the book Rev. Van Rongen, emeritus minister of the church at Launceston, Australia and no stranger to our own federation of churches, provides a brief introduction to the Reformed church service book in use in the Canadian and Australian Reformed churches, that is, the *Book of Praise*.

Rev. Van Rongen's study begins with the matter of Bible translations, and which translation might best serve in the public worship services. This is in my view the proper place to start, since the matter of determining which translation to use is also a liturgical matter. Besides the matter of accuracy in translation, liturgical considerations should be factored into a final judgment. The Bible should be seen as part and parcel of the material used in our services, having the central place in public worship. As Rev. Van Rongen says, "what is a Church without a Bible?"

Rev. Van Rongen gives a brief history of the English Bible, dwelling more extensively on the Authorized Version of 1611 (KJV), and the chief modern translations such as the RSV, the NIV, and the NKJV. His descriptive surveys are good, but he himself refrains from offering any suggestions here, stating that the churches have been vigilant in the matter of Bible translation. He rightly points out that in its use of inclusive language, the NRSV, shows the influence of feminism. On the other hand, we can hardly ignore the fact that the English language itself has changed over the years, preferring to steer away from the formerly common generic use of the masculine pronoun "he." Perhaps some of this is attributable to feminism, but once the language itself begins to change the pulpit cannot close its eyes

to this. The main point, however, is that Bible translation, as well as our usage in prayer and worship is not just a matter of language, but a liturgical matter.

Rev. Van Rongen goes on to discuss the history of psalm singing in the churches. Psalm singing has an old history! Following the line of Holland, the Canadian and Australian churches wanted to create their own Psalter. This was never seen as an incidental or secondary matter, but one which concerned a liturgical custom with strong historical credentials, and solid scriptural argumentation. While Rev. Van Rongen does not enter into the chief arguments in favour of psalm singing, he rightly points out that the references to "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs," (Col 3:16, Eph 5:19) need not include three distinct categories of songs of which psalms are only one. The word for "hymn" in Greek means: "a spiritual song." Thus, while it cannot be maintained that all songs that Paul here mentions were necessarily psalms, it certainly may be concluded that hymns as we know them are not explicitly enjoined or defended by the apostle in this passage.

Rev. Van Rongen also deals with the role of creeds and confessions in our churches. He shows that fixed credal formulae do not represent a human invention above the Bible, but were already found in Scripture itself. With regard to the text of the Apostle's creed, Rev. Van Rongen – rightly I believe – suggests that the word "Christian" does not belong in our text, since it is not a part of the generally adopted English versions of the text, and, more importantly, not a part of the original fifth century text. He does indicate that the Calvinist reformation showed an immediate preference for the Apostles' Creed, since it forms the most succinct formula of faith, being the easiest to retain and recite. It is the most commonly used creed in the catechisms of the Reformation. It is also clearly the most suitable for liturgical use, and therefore should retain a central place in the afternoon service.

In his discussion of the orders of worship as printed in the *Book of Praise*, Rev. Van Rongen does not cover up his distinct preference for the "B order" in both services. The "A order" has no historical credibility, and there is little in the way of sound liturgical argumentation that can be brought forward to defend it. It was, as Rev. Van Rongen points out, introduced for psychological reasons, that is, to make the flow of the service easier to absorb for the participants in the pew, including, I suppose the younger ones. Rev. Van Rongen shows how historical precedent clearly comes out on the side of the "B order." Over

the years however, the "A order" has become customary, and perhaps the psychological considerations carry some weight in the equation as well. In his review of the prayers, Rev. Van Rongen notes that at the dawn of the Reformation, Luther put the intercessory prayer (the so-called 'long prayer') where it belongs, that is, after the sermon. As Luther put it, first we must hear God's Word before we come to Him with our petitions! This is also the structure of the Lord's Prayer. This too forms an added argument favouring the "B order."

Rev. Van Rongen's approach to the texts of the prayers and liturgical forms is in my view one worthy of serious consideration. He does not refrain from voicing his concerns and criticisms with regard to some of the more recent changes in the book, arguing in specific cases that the older formulations, while appearing somewhat cumbersome, are actually stronger in their content. In short, he exhibits what I would call a healthy respect for liturgical tradition without falling into a slavish and thoughtless conservatism.

Here and there we might have expected a little more expansive treatment of the subject. For example, Rev. Van Rongen includes little on the history of psalm singing in the Netherlands, and the development of the Dutch Psalter. There is also little in the way of background with regard to the texts of the forms as they were first found in the *CRC Psalter Hymnal*. The forms as we have them actually go back to the early translations as they were used in the Reformed Church of America in the 18th century.¹ Although the translations are quite faithful to the Dutch text, it can be said that the Canadian Reformed Churches did not opt for a simple replica of the Dutch liturgical documents, but made use of the translations that were present here on this continent.

On the whole Rev. Van Rongen has presented us with a valuable book, one that every Reformed person and family can benefit from! It would also make good study material for our societies! I hope this book will find its way into many of our homes and that it will also provide some necessary help in dealing with those recurring questions as to why in our services we do the things we do, and why we chose to maintain and promote our own liturgical habits and customs. Heartily recommended!

¹The first English translation of the Dutch church book that appeared on American soil was the Forrest version of 1748. Subsequent generations of immigrants (including the seceders) made use of existing translations in the development of their own church books. 