

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

VOLUME 48, NO. 5

MARCH 5, 1999

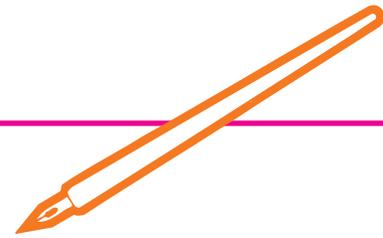


*"All covenant children are
holy . . . set apart and
dedicated to God"*

Numbers

10:1-10

By J. De Jong



Sister-Church Relationships and the Church Order

Over the course of the years, there have been a considerable number of changes with regard to our relationships with other Reformed Churches. The most recent synod of Fergus also had to deal extensively with a growing list of churches, some of which qualify as sister-churches, others which are potential sister-churches. If you look at the number of churches in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) and the number of churches our Dutch sister-churches are dealing with, all this can become a veritable maze. My remarks in this editorial are offered to suggest some pattern of order in an ever more complicated ecclesiastical environment, and to suggest some modifications in our approach to churches close to us, but with a different background.

The older view

Although the term is never explicitly mentioned in the old Church Order, sister-church relationships have always been implicitly assumed in it as a normal part of church life. Article 85 of the old Church Order of Dort stated that in non-essential matters foreign churches were not to be rejected. Non-essential matters referred to specific liturgical customs or traditions which differed from those practised in the Reformed churches.¹ One then thinks specifically of Reformed churches of different countries in which certain aspects of the order of worship or the manner of participating in the sacraments had developed in a different way. Confessional or major differences of church order were not in view.

This old article has since been transformed into a new Article 50 which includes the same provision, and specifies that the relationship between sister-churches is governed by a general synod. This article, which marks the introduction of the term “sister-churches” into the Church Order, now speaks of “minor points” rather than “non-essential” matters. There are also references to sister-church relationships in Articles 4 and 5, and in Articles 61 and 62 of the new Church Order. In the case of the latter two articles “sister-church” can refer to a church belonging to the federation, or a church of a federation with which we have a sister-church relationship.

So the revised Church Order first gives us the official term “sister-church relationship.” But this does not mean that a sister-church relationship was not understood before this revision. Here the revised Church Order simply brings to expression what for years had marked life in the Reformed

Churches from Holland, and what carried over into the various Reformed Churches as they sprang up around the world.

The regulations for sister-church relationships grew in the 19th century context in which mission churches began to form and immigration took place to other parts of the world. The sister-church relationships as they developed then were seen as relationships of close contact. They were maintained with churches of the same confession and essentially the same historical background. The rules for the relationship called for a careful watching of one another in terms of doctrine and life.² Those rules indicated that in many respects sister-churches were much the same as our own, all of one common heritage. So they were maintained in our “parent church,” the Reformed churches in Holland. Any proposed changes in doctrine or practice had to be reported to the other sister-churches. This is the sort of relationship the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) enjoyed from the beginning with churches in Australia, South Africa and Holland.³

Essentially this relationship was seen as congruent with the line of the Church Order. It was felt that to have a sister-church relationship required full confessional unanimity.⁴ All the references to a sister-church relationship in the revised (new) church order presuppose this view as to what the relationship involves. The church order “thinks” in terms of a very close relationship, especially in the area of the ministry and sacraments.

We have a much wider margin of acceptance embedded in the new rules of ecclesiastical fellowship than functioned under the old set of rules.

The more recent approach

It is only in the more recent years that a new approach has surfaced, one in which the rules were altered to allow for participation by Presbyterian churches as well. Since 1992 we have a new set of rules for a sister-church relationship, now termed a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship.⁵ The relationship now covers both Presbyterian and Reformed churches. This naturally assumes the acceptance of other Reformed confessions, even if one has misgivings about various phrases or formulations reflected in a particular confession, and also assumes acceptance of different traditions with regard to church government even if full unanimity cannot be gained on more or less substantial points, as for example the equality of officers, and the connection of officers to local churches. In other words, we have a much wider margin of acceptance embedded in the new rules than functioned under the old set of rules. From allowing strictly differences of custom or usage, we

have now also allowed differences of confessional formulation and ecclesiastical government to enter the equation as well.⁶

Throughout this process, with its new nomenclature – we now speak of ecclesiastical fellowship rather than a sister-church relationships – the Church Order has never been amended or adjusted. The changes of the early nineties were considered to be minor enough as to fit in our existing Church Order. But is this the case? I do not think so. Rather, the net result of this process has been a lack of congruency between the Church Order and the current relationship we maintain with sister-churches, especially those of Presbyterian background. The new rules cannot really be imposed on the old Church Order.

Even with all our revisions it is difficult to stretch the old Church Order of Dort to get it to wear the new dress of a full and unconditional recognition of churches with a Presbyterian background. For example, ministers coming into the federation from other federations are not required to submit to an extensive ecclesiastical examination. They only undergo a colloquium which has a particular emphasis on the polity and history of the CanRC.⁷ But does this rule adequately deal with ministers coming from a Presbyterian background, with an entirely different history and practice regarding church government? Our own history and experience indicates that these transitions are far from smooth.

Complications on the road

Over the years the churches have met with a few other thorns on the road as far as other churches are concerned. For example, we have consistently dealt with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) with a view to a full sister-church relationship, much in the same way that we maintain relationships with churches of a Reformed background. This goes back to the view of sister-church relationships prevalent in the sixties and seventies. Even though there is a marked difference of history, polity, and practice, as well as some differences in confessional expression, we have considered it our obligation to aim for a full sister-church relationship with the OPC. As the new relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship of 1992 took effect, this relationship was extended quite readily to other churches with a Presbyterian

background – the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) and the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK). Naturally, this has led some people, including various committees of the OPC, to regard us as maintaining a double standard with re-

Somehow we feel there's more at stake with regard to a full sister-church relationship with a close neighbour than with a church that is farther away.

gard to our relationships with other church federations. And even if we grant there are differences in approach between one Presbyterian church and the other, these differences are not of such weight as to fully account for the approach we have taken. A part of our hesitancy also concerns the *proximity* of the churches about which we have expressed our reservations. Somehow

we feel there is more at stake with regard to a full sister-church relationship with a close neighbour than with a church that is farther away.

Recently, the synod of Fergus decided to try put some "order in the chaos" by dividing the churches we deal with along continental lines. Hence, we now have a Committee dealing with churches in the Americas, and a committee dealing with foreign churches. The Committee for the Americas has various sub-committees to deal with specific church groups. But such a division can also bring new problems of its own. Churches in the Americas are also foreign, and the division of labour may well create a situation where many committees are working on all kinds of different things without a unified leadership policy.⁸

Another approach

We might consider the approach of other churches in our own environment rather than follow in all respects the approaches adopted by our sister-churches in Holland. The United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA), the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA) and the



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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Canada*		\$35.00*	\$59.00*
U.S.A.	U.S. Funds	\$39.00	\$52.00
	International	\$60.00	\$88.00

* Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT
 Advertisements: \$11.75 per column inch

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Agreement No. 1377531
 Registration No. 1025
 ISSN 0383-0438

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OPC are all developing a *tiered approach* to fraternal relationships. Their categories have different labels in each of their respective cases, yet the idea is the same.⁹ There are churches with whom you come into contact of which you say: This should end up in a full federative union. Domestic churches of the same confession and commitment are here the most likely candidates: the FRCNA, the URCNA, and the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). There are also foreign churches of the same shape and colour with whom we would desire to maintain a full sister-church relationship: foreign churches of a common heritage and background. However, there are other churches that, considering their entirely different history and culture, should fall under the area of a relationship one step removed from a full sister-church relationship.

This may be a more helpful and productive way to deal with our Presbyterian neighbours. This would allow for a form of provisional or qualified recognition with a commitment to discuss outstanding issues over an extended period of time. We could then cooperate on various levels, for example, on mission projects and team work in the context of the ICRC. Yet out of respect for one another's differing traditions and histories we would limit implementing all the rules concerning the calling of ministers according to Articles 3 to 5 of the Church Order. These articles clearly only apply to the *full* sister-church relationship. The arrangement could allow for occasional pulpit visitations and exchanges, and allow for admission of guests to the Lord's Supper; however, the exercise of a full sister-church relationship (which includes the right to call ministers from one another's federations) should be kept on hold until differences with respect to government and other lesser points of practice have been thoroughly discussed and some form of accord has been reached.

I would think that this particular category of relationship should be countenanced not only with the more geographically distant Presbyterian churches such as the FCS and the PCK but also with a more proximate federation like the OPC. Is it really necessary for us to develop a full sister-church relationship that includes the calling of one another's ministers and a complete mutually agreed upon system of attestations with churches of a completely different history and background? Why not opt for a relationship of table fellowship with some form of an ecclesiastically responsible procedure regarding guests, and an occasional pulpit exchange policy without the right to actually call ministers from either federation?¹⁰ In this way the advantages of a closer relationship can be exploited while, in deference to the varied traditions, one leaves time for the more detailed aspects of the relationship to be worked out.¹¹

I believe the tiered approach as it is currently developing in other orthodox Reformed churches is one that merits closer consideration. This approach, to my mind, does justice to the phrasing of Article 50 of the Church Order which calls us to maintain a sister-church relationship as *much as possible*. Wherever those possibilities are re-

stricted, we need to find more innovative ways of holding on to each other and sustaining relationships of mutual support and encouragement.

¹The Latin text of the older articles on this subject use the word *ritus*: custom, rite, or ceremony, see F.L. Rutgers, *Verklaring van de kerkenordening van de Nationale Synode van Dordrecht van 1618-1619*. (Rotterdam, 1916) 166

²F.L. Bos refers to the decision of synod Amsterdam 1936, which, "with a view to the danger of possible heresy with foreign churches" required the provisions of a previous synod concerning the admission of ministers and candidates to the pulpit to be carefully observed, cf F.L. Bos, *De orde der kerk*, ('s Gravenhage, 1950) 341.

³The rules were adopted at the Synod of Hamilton, 1962, cf *Acta*, Article 139, (p. 39).

⁴See Acts Synod Edmonton 1965, *Acta* Art. 141, 30.

⁵Acts Lincoln 1992, Article 50, (p. 31).

⁶In its historical overview of the discussions with the OPC, Synod Fergus speaks of a "natural process and development" rather than a shift in approach, cf *Acts Synod Fergus 1998*,

Art. 130, (p. 151). However one interprets the pattern, the change cannot be denied.

⁷*Acta Edmonton 1965*, Art. 14, (p. 60).

⁸Here I share the concern of Rev. J. Visscher in the *Clarion* (January 8, 1999: "Inter-Church Relations: Where Are We Headed?") that to have 22 people working on what he calls "inter-church relations" of whom most are ministers, is rather excessive. On the other hand, I do not share his suggested solutions, which, I think, will be clear in this article.

⁹The categories adopted at the 64th General Assembly of the OPC (1997) are a) Ecclesiastical Fellowship, b) Corresponding Relations ("a relationship in which mutual contact with another church is undertaken to become better acquainted with one another with a view towards entering into ecclesiastical fellowship at some time in the not-too-distant future," and c) Restricted Contact, ("a relationship with another church with which it is desired to have some form of mutual contact...even though present circumstances are such that we are unable to have either Corresponding Relations or Ecclesiastical Fellowship with her" *Minutes 1997*, 30). Apparently this form of contact will be pursued to replace the Ecclesiastical Fellowship relationship with the Christian

Reformed Churches.

The *Study Report on Church Unity and Fellowship* submitted to Synod 1997 of the Free Reformed Churches in North America also lists three categories in the process of arriving at relationships fostering church unity: Full Correspondence, Limited Correspondence and Restricted Contact, *Acts 1997*, 117.

The Ecumenical Relations Committee of the United Reformed Churches has adopted a tiered approach to dealing with other churches based partly on the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

¹⁰This would blend with the rules of the OPC which speak of occasional pulpit fellowship and intercommunion, but call for "suitable inquiries upon requested transfer of membership" (*Minutes*, 29). So too, Synod Lincoln spoke of "certificates of good standing" with regard to guests, ostensibly allowing for other forms of membership recognition than that determined by our idea of "attestation" (*Acts 1992*, Art. 50, p. 33).

¹¹My remarks should not be construed as being critical of the decision of Synod of Fergus 1998 with regard to the OPC. The suggestions given here really aim for a broader focus on this issue not only with regard to the OPC but other churches as well, and, in the case of the OPC, may help to integrate the concerns of the various synods dealing with this matter since 1965.

The exercise of a full sister-church relationship (which includes the right to call ministers from one another's federations) should be kept on hold until differences with respect to government and other lesser points of practice have been thoroughly discussed and some form of accord has been reached.

By J. Louwerse

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return to me empty (Isaiah 55:10,11).

As the rain and snow has an effect, so does the Word. Rain and snow. This is the season for it to fall to the ground. After all, this is Canada. This is the great white North. As I walk through the northern bush on snowshoes, the several feet of powdery snow is being packed. Not just by me, but also by the rain that is now falling fast and hard. If you have not had the time or opportunity for snowshoeing, skiing, or snow-mobiling, perhaps you had your fill of the rain and snow of winter. Perhaps you are wishing that it would now stop falling and go away. For does not snow and rain have some destructive effects? Can snow not paralyze a city as big as Toronto? Can it not bring traffic on the highways and byways to a skidding stop? Can rain and snow not cause collisions and even deaths? Here in Canada it would be so easy to see snow and rain as a nuisance or even as a curse. Nevertheless, it would also be so easy to take all that snow and rain for granted. For what would our country and our lives be like without all that rain and snow?

In Israel, God's people would not take snow and rain for granted. Snow and rain were a blessing from heaven for the dry and dusty land of Israel. Snow and rain were a sign of God's care and provision for his covenant people. Without that snow and rain coming down in the hill country of Ephraim and Judah there would be no growth – no green plants; no seed; no food. The rain and snow which came out of the heavens on Israel had a powerful and life giving effect. That is what Isaiah the prophet tells us as he compares snow and rain to the Word of God.

In proper season, the heavens opened over Israel and the rain and even the snow came down on the Land of Promise. Then, in a mysterious yet familiar way, the land of Israel would come alive with new growth. The rain and snow did not return without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish. With the rain and the snow the Promised Land would turn into a beautiful paradise of green plants of all types, and of flowers in abundance. The watered earth would produce a harvest

and there would again be seeds for the sower. There would be bread for the eater. The rain and snow in the Promised Land had a very good and powerful effect.

The water of rain and snow went into the ground; seeds germinated; plants and flowers grew. Moreover, there were seeds for the sower, and there was food and drink for the eater. The physical needs of God's people were well supplied. So it is with the Word of God, Isaiah the prophet tells us. The Word that goes out from the mouth of God also has a good and powerful effect. The Word of God, which comes to us, does lead to a harvest. The Word does not return to God empty. The Word accomplishes what God desires. The Word achieves the purpose for which God sent it. Indeed God's Word does always have an effect. Just like rain and snow. God's Word has a two-fold effect. It is as a two-edged sword.

God's Word brings about blessing or curse, salvation or judgement. The Lord God is emphasizing blessing in this passage from the prophet Isaiah. God's Word does have the effect like that of rain and snow upon the ground in Israel. God's Word does have a good and blessed effect. God's Word brings about salvation and blessing for us. However, do we always realize this? Are you listening to God's Word as it is preached to you on Sunday? Are you working with God's Word during the week? Are you reading and studying God's Word? Can you see that all your growth comes by way of the Word of God? Or is there no growth in your life of faith? Remember the Word does not return to God empty. The Word of God has an effect like snow and rain. May the effect of the Word be as snow and rain with you. May it not be as a curse but as a great blessing for you today and every day.

Rev. John Louwerse is the minister of Houston, BC (where there is much snow in the winter).



What's inside?

ICRC, URCNA, CanRC, FRCNA, FCS, PCK, GKN (Lib.), ERQ, RCUS, OPC, RPCNA, RCNZ, ABCDEFG..... Many different churches! We pretty well use the whole alphabet to name them all. In the Americas, as in Australia and South Africa, we experience the phenomena of transplanted traditions. Churches whose historical and church political roots are in the British Isles meet with churches rooted in the Continental European tradition. How ought we to promote the unity the Head of the Church prayed for and commanded? Since we as Canadian Reformed Churches take the call to unity seriously, this is something we struggle with. Dr. J. De Jong puts forward a proposal in the editorial. Read it and talk about it.

From the Great White North, the Rev. J. Louwerse has contributed a meditation about rain, snow, and the mighty Word of God.

We publish part 2 of Dr. J. Faber's speech on the Confessional History of the Canadian Reformed Churches. He begins outlining the doctrinal issues that led to the ecclesiastical Liberation of 1944. Reading this will bring back many memories for those who underwent the struggles and will be very instructive for those who did not.

For the rest, Dr. N. H. Gootjes clarifies some things about the expression: "Articles of the Christian Faith," Mrs. Ravensbergen provides a "Ray of Sunshine," while Dr. J. De Jong updates us on mission work being done in the Congo. We round things up with a letter and a couple of press releases.

GvP

The Confessional History of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Part 2 of 3)

By J. Faber

Second part of a speech first delivered at Wellandport, Ontario on May 9, 1998 and subsequently also in a similar evening at Wyoming, Ontario on October 2, 1998. The speaking style has been retained.

In part one, Dr. Faber recounted the confessional history of the Canadian Reformed Churches by relating the events of the Secession (1834), the Doleantie (1886), and the Union of 1892, as well as its confirmation in 1905. In part 2, Dr. Faber speaks about the doctrinal issues leading to the ecclesiastical Liberation of 1944, dealing specifically with the topics covenant and election, and covenant and holiness. – Editor

IV. Liberation (1944)¹¹

In 1942, in the midst of the Second World War, Synod Sneek-Utrecht of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands pronounced doctrinal statements about five topics that had been hotly debated during the thirties. They dealt with common grace, the covenant of grace and self-examination, immortality of the soul, and the union of the two natures in Christ.

Most important was the pronouncement on *the covenant of grace*. Synod reiterated a part of the declaration of Utrecht 1905 and stated that the seed of the covenant, by virtue of the promise of God, must be held to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ until, upon their growing up, the opposite should become apparent from their conduct or doctrine.¹² This statement was only *part* of the Pacification Formula of 1905. It was, so to speak, only the Kuyperian part. Synod 1942 left out that it is less accurate to say that baptism is administered to infants on the ground of their presumed regeneration, since the ground of baptism is the mandate and the promise of God. It also left out that in the preaching we should be admonished seriously to examine our-

selves, since only those who believe and are baptized, will be saved. It left out that it cannot be proved from Scripture or confession that every elect child is really regenerated *before* baptism, since in his sovereign pleasure God fulfills his promise at his time, be it before or during or after baptism. In other words, 1942 left out the doctrinal concerns and emphasis of the Secession.

Moreover, Synod 1942 accompanied its pronouncements with an explanatory statement that was called *Toelichting* (Elucidation) and worst of all, Synod attached to its doctrinal pronouncements a strict binding.¹³ Classes had to examine candidates for the ministry on these doctrinal points and to assure themselves that the candidates agreed with Synod's pronouncements. In this way Synod placed its doctrinal statements on the same level as the Three Forms of Unity. In reality they became a *fourth* Form of Unity and they were binding for all office-bearers who had signed the Form of Subscription.

"All the children of believers are children of the covenant (Acts 3:25)"

The following Synod, the Synod of Utrecht 1943-1945, not only rejected all objections against the contents of and the binding to the doctrinal statements of 1942, but issued another explanatory statement. It was called *Praeadvies* (Pre-advice). It made the drift of the Synod's doctrine, especially with respect to God's covenant and baptism, abundantly clear.¹⁴

In November 1943, six concerned ministers – among whom was my catechism teacher, the Rev. M.B. van 't Veer – sent to Synod a *Verklaring van gevoelen* (a Position Statement) in which they

positively declared their views and stated what they thought of God's covenant and baptism.¹⁵

Doctrinal Differences

In order to see now the doctrinal differences that played a role in the Liberation of 1944, let us deal with the following topics:

1. Covenant and election
2. Covenant and holiness
3. Covenant and promise
4. Covenant and baptism
5. Covenant and responsibility

1. Covenant and election

God's covenant is the wonderful relationship He established between Himself and his people. It is the reality in which God speaks to us and we may respond to Him.

The question, however, was and still is: How do you define and describe God's covenant? There are here two different approaches. I call the one approach that of an *election* covenant and the other that of a *promise* covenant.

There is no Reformed person who will not speak of God's sovereign election before the foundation of the world. And there is no Reformed person who will not speak of the covenant in which God gives his promise of salvation.

But one of the main questions is the *relation* between God's election and God's covenant. Is God's election distinct from God's covenant or are the two to be identified? Are election and covenant identical and has the doctrine about God's covenant at least to be dominated by the doctrine of God's election? Or is there a difference between God's eternal decree of election and his covenant in the history of this world?

Or to put the question a little bit differently: Who are the parties in God's covenant? With whom did God establish his covenant? With the *elect* or with Christ as the head of the *elect*? That would be what I called an *election*



covenant. Or did God establish his covenant with Abraham and his descendants and therefore with the believers and their children? This is what I called the covenant of God's *promise*. You will understand that in these questions we touch the tremendous realities of eternity and time, of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.

With respect to the order of God's eternal decrees – his decrees of creation, fall and predestination – there had always been the difference between infra- and supralapsarians. The most important theologians of the Secession of 1834 – men like Helenius de Cock, Lucas Lindeboom, T. Bos in the Netherlands and men like Beuker, Hulst and Ten Hoor in America – had been infralapsarians. Abraham Kuyper and his followers in the Netherlands and men as Van Lonkhuyzen and Herman Hoeksema in America were supralapsarians. Supralapsarians let the doctrine of God's covenant be dominated by the doctrine of his election. The *essential* covenant or the *internal* covenant is established only with the elect or with Christ as the Head of the elect. Only the elect are both *in* the covenant and *of* the covenant.

Infralapsarians, however, regard God's election as one of the hidden things and God's covenant as one of the revealed things. And does Moses not warn us, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever . . ." (Deut 29:29)? The

covenant is not a secret thing at the election but a revealed thing for us and our children. God therefore established his covenant with the believers and their children, *all* their children. He established it with Esau as well as with Jacob.

The doctrinal pronouncement of Synod 1942 stated that the Lord, in the promise of the covenant, no doubt promises that He is the God not only of the believers but also of their seed (Gen 17:7); but that He no less reveals to us in his Word that they are not all Israel who are of Israel (Rom 9:6). This doctrinal statement placed the doctrine of God's covenant under the domination of the eternal election.

***"All covenant children are
holy . . . set apart and
dedicated to God"***

Two texts are here brought into contrast with one another. Synod says: Indeed, there is Genesis 17:7 *but* there is also Romans 9:6. And Romans 9 speaks of eternal election and reprobation of individuals like Jacob and Esau. The doctrine of predestination from Romans 9 becomes a wedge in the doctrine of God's covenant of Genesis 17. In its *Elucidation* Synod acknowledged that the offer of the gospel is to be presented to all those who have been baptized. But Synod immediately declared that this does not give us the right "to

identify this special position of all those who are baptized with the covenant and to let the covenant *consist of this*."¹⁶ So the position of all those who are baptized may be called special but it is not the covenant position. The covenant is more and this more is not for all those who are baptized but only for the elect. Or to quote another phrase, the position of all who are baptized is only a position of those "who *outwardly* have received a place in the covenant and in God's congregation."¹⁷

The *Pre-advice* explains the Synod's decisions as saying "that being a covenant-partner or being a real-covenant-partner is *not* the privilege of all those who outwardly belong to the covenant. . . . Covenant-partners are those who are saved . . ."¹⁸ "God's election or disposition reaches as far as the covenant and is therefore to be taken either in a broader or in a narrower sense."¹⁹

It is clear: Synod basically identified election and covenant. What did the six concerned ministers declare in their *Position Statement*? Well, after having confessed that all children are conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all sorts of misery, even to condemnation itself, they stated that God in Christ has established his covenant of grace with the believers and their seed (Gen 17:7; Gal 3:14 and 29) and that therefore all the children of believers are children of the covenant (Acts 3:25). We are not amiss when we place the emphasis here on the word "all." "All the children of the believers" means here: not only the elected children, but Esau as well as Jacob. In Acts 3 the apostle Peter says to the Jews in Jerusalem who had crucified the Lord Jesus: You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers. Peter calls them sons of the covenant, covenant children, and they were.

It is clear: the concerned brothers did not want to know of an identification of election and covenant. They did not want to speak of a twofold covenant either: an external covenant and an internal one. God established the *one* relationship of his covenant of grace in history. And He did so with Abraham and *all* his descendants, when He said: And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.

2. Covenant and holiness

The doctrinal statement of Synod 1942 read that, therefore – according to what the Synod of Utrecht 1905 declared – “the seed of the covenant must be taken for regenerated and sanctified in Christ until the opposite shows when they have grown up; even though the Synod (1905) correctly added that this “does not mean at all that therefore every child truly has been regenerated.”

This pronouncement calls for consideration of several points of doctrine, namely covenant and holiness, covenant and promise, and covenant and baptism.

Let us begin with the expression that “the seed of the covenant must be taken for regenerated and sanctified in Christ.” The Dutch original has the famous expression “houden voor wedergeboren en in Christus Geheilgd.” “Houden voor” can be translated as “to hold for”, “to take for”, “to regard as” or “to presume or assume to be.” Kuyper had spoken of “veronderstelde wedergeboorte”, that is, “presumed (or assumed) regeneration.”

Synod 1942 meant the expression in this sense. For we have to read it in context. The previous statement said: Indeed, there is Genesis 17 but there is also Romans 9. There is the eternal election of individuals. This is a secret or hidden reality. And *therefore* – note this word “therefore” – the seed of the covenant is to be held for regenerated. It can *not be known* to be born again *but* at least it is *presumed* to be so.

Another element is that covenant children are to be held for “regenerated and sanctified in Christ.” What does “sanctified in Christ” mean? There is a combination and order of words in Synod’s expression “regenerated and sanctified in Christ.” It leads to the idea that according to Synod “sanctified in Christ” is the same as “regenerated.” The issue is important because the words are well-known from the first question at baptism: Do you confess that our children . . . are sanctified in Christ and thus as members of his church ought to be baptized? So the expression “regenerated and sanctified in Christ” in the doctrinal pronouncements provoked controversies about covenant and baptism and about the meaning of the sacraments in general.

The *Pre-advise* stated that the first question at baptism only speaks about the children that are elect. Literally it says, “The first Baptismal question has

neglected the exceptions – those who are not elect.”²⁰ But one may ask: How can parents then *confess* that our children are sanctified in Christ and how do they know that this their child does not belong to the exceptions that according to Synod the baptismal question has neglected? And are these so-called exceptions, according to Scripture and our experience, not numerous? What did the six concerned ministers in their *Position Statement* say about this point? Well, after they had declared that all the children of believers are covenant children and had referred to Acts 3:25, they continued by saying “that all those children are holy (1 Cor 7:14) or sanctified in Christ (1 Cor 1:2, Form of Baptism)”

“Eternal election and real regeneration are not implied in the word ‘holy’ or in the expression ‘sanctified in Christ.’ ”

Again, the emphasis is on “all.” All covenant children are holy. In 1 Cor 7:14 the apostle Paul writes about the marriage of a Christian woman who has a husband who is an unbeliever. She should not divorce him. “For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy.”

We may ask: What do the words “consecrated” and “holy” in this text mean? The answer is: “Consecrated” means “sanctified” and “holy” means “set apart and dedicated to God.”

But Synod took “sanctified in Christ” as identical to “regenerated.” The apostle Paul, however, does not say that the children in such a mixed household are regenerated. He assures us that also this marriage relationship and the children therein are *set apart* from the godless world *and dedicated* to God. I do not think that we should use here the term “objective holiness” but rather “covenantal holiness.” Those children are within the covenant and characterized by covenantal holiness. It does not say anything about their real regeneration or their presumed regeneration. Eternal election and real regeneration are not implied in the word “holy” or in the expression “sanctified in Christ.”

At the baptismal font parents should not presume that their child is regenerated. The question is not: Do you *assume* that your child is sanctified in Christ? We assume an unknown thing. But the question reads: Do you *confess* that our children – and we may add: therefore also your child – are sanctified in Christ and thus as members of his church ought to be baptized? If we assumed, then it was an unknown thing but we confess on the basis of God’s revelation. The hidden things are for the Lord our God, but the revealed things are for us and our children. God reveals that all children of believers are covenant children and therefore sanctified in Christ and members of his church.

So, while in the synodical construction “sanctified in Christ” meant the same as regenerated, the concerned ministers took the expression “holy and sanctified” as meaning “distinct from the world and included in God’s covenant and church.” “Sanctified in Christ” indicates covenant holiness.

¹¹This part is an abbreviation of my essay “The Liberation: the Doctrinal Aspect” in C. Van Dam, ed., *The Liberation: Causes and Consequences* (Winnipeg: Premier, 1995), pp. 1-29.

¹²*Acta van de voortgezette Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland gehouden te Sneek en te Utrecht, 1940-1943*, Art. 82. It can also be found in G. Janssen, *De feitelijke toedracht* (3rd ed.; Groningen: De Jager, 1955), pp. 268-269. For an English translation see Van Dam, ed., *The Liberation*, Appendix I.

¹³See *Acta, 1940-1943*, Bijdrage CVII. For the text of the *Toelichting*, see G. Ch. Aalders, G.C. Berkouwer, S.J. Popma, J. Ridderbos, *Toelichting op de uitspraken van de Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland inzake eenige punten der leer, in opdracht der synode opgesteld* (Kampen: Kok, n.d.).

¹⁴For the text see *Praeadvies van Commissie I inzake de bezwaarschriften tegen een zinsnede uit de verklaring van Utrecht 1905 of (c.g. en) tegen de uitspraken van Sneek-Utrecht 1942 en tegen de daarop verschenen toelichting* (Groningen: Niemeijer, 1943).

¹⁵For the Dutch text see Janssen, *De feitelijke toedracht*, 270. For an English translation Van Dam, ed., *Liberation*, Appendix II.

¹⁶Aalders et al., *Toelichting*, p. 16.

¹⁷Aalders et al., *Toelichting*, p. 17, Emphasis is mine.

¹⁸*Praeadvies van Commissie I inzake de bezwaarschriften*, p. 44.

¹⁹*Praeadvies van Commissie I inzake de bezwaarschriften*, p. 45.

²⁰*Praeadvies van Commissie I inzake de bezwaarschriften*, p. 24.

(To be continued and concluded in the next issue.)



The Articles of the Christian Faith

By N.H. Gootjes

The expression “articles of the Christian faith” is well-known among us. These words occur in three places in the official documents of the church: in the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord’s Day 7, QA 22), in the Form for Baptism (the second question, where the phrase has been changed in our *Book of Praise* to “the confessions”) and in the Form for Public Profession of Faith (the first question). What does this expression mean?

Br. R. Dykstra has recently brought up this issue in *Reformed Polemics*, (November 1998). He follows the conclusion of J. Munneke published in *Diakonia* (June 1989):

The phrase following “taught here in this Christian Church,” however, makes it clear that our fathers intended the articles of the Christian faith to mean the three forms of unity for they are taught here in the Christian Church. Evidence for this is to be found in the form for public profession used in the church at Batavia (1621) where the confessor promises “to acknowledge all the doctrines of God’s Word and the Christian reformed religion briefly explained in the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism.”¹

This statement of Munneke is surprising. As said, the expression “articles of the Christian faith” occur three times in our official church papers. Of these, the Form for Public Profession of Faith does not help much for the original meaning. This form was made in this Century,² and the expression is undoubtedly

dependent on the Catechism and the Form for Baptism. Both of these were made in the early 1560s. Then why does Munneke prove this with a quote from sixty years later and in a different country altogether? The church of Batavia was not even located in the Netherlands; it was in Indonesia.

There is another problem with Munneke’s statement that the expression “articles of the Christian faith” refers to the Three Forms of Unity. Both the Heidelberg Catechism and our Form for Baptism have their origin in Germany, in the Palatinate in 1563. By this time, the Belgic Confession existed only in a French version among the churches in Belgium. It is unlikely that the theologians of the Palatinate would know about this confession, let alone recognize it. Even more problematic is the Canons of Dort, which was made at the Synod of Dort in 1619. How could the brothers in the Palatinate refer to a confession which would be made more than 50 years later?

**The expression
“articles of the Christian
faith” indicates the
Apostles’ Creed.**

To find out what the expression “articles of the Christian faith” means we have to look at the people close to the Heidelberg Catechism.

Ursinus and Olevianus

The Catechism itself gives the first indication of the meaning of this expression. Lord’s Day 7, Q22, asks: What, then, must a Christian believe? The answer is: All that is promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith teach us in a summary. This is followed by the question: What are these articles? Then the Apostles’ Creed is quoted. The Catechism gives the clear impression that the expression “articles of the Christian faith” refers to the Apostles’ Creed. Can that be confirmed from the authors?

We are in the fortunate situation that Ursinus gave an explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism. Since he is the main contributor to the Catechism we will begin with him. Before discussing QA 23 he says: “Further, the sum of the gospel are the articles of faith, with which we will deal immediately.” This is followed by quoting the whole of the Apostles’ Creed. Even clearer is what he says after quoting the Apostles’ Creed: “The Articles of the Christian faith are called in Latin, taken from the Greek, Symbol of the Apostles, that is mark of the apostles.” And the first question he is going to discuss is: “What is the Symbol of the Apostles, and why are the articles of the faith called thus.” For Ursinus, the meaning of the expression “articles of the Christian faith” is clear. It means the statements of the Apostles’ Creed.

What about Olevianus, who was heavily involved in the making of the Heidelberg Catechism? Olevianus wrote an explanation of the Apostles’ Creed. He opens the book with the sentence: “The kingdom of Christ, offered to us in the articles of the faith, is now, in this life, experienced by the believers.” This seems to imply that the articles of the faith are identical with the Apostles’ Creed. A few pages later he says so explicitly: “The articles of the faith or the Apostles’ Creed.”

The other early source for the expression “articles of the Christian faith”

continued on page 106



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

It is a new condition

Rev. Eikelboom in his letter to the editor (*Clarion*, Jan. 8, 1999) denies that Synod Fergus introduced a new condition for ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC and refers to Synod Lincoln, 1992. But Art. 72 of the *Acts of Synod Lincoln 1992* does not speak of a condition, but as a matter of continued discussion. It was never judged to be a doctrinal matter but a practical matter, which has never been proven to be in conflict with Scripture and Westminster Confession. Therefore it is correct to say that Synod Fergus came with a new condition. The main barriers: Relationship with GKN (Synodical), membership of RES and relationship with CRC have all been removed. Synod Fergus should have offered full sister relationship to the OPC. Instead they came with a new condition.

Rev. Eikelboom asked for more evidence; may I refer you to the *Acts of Synod Abbotsford 1995*. Art. 106B 3,4,5,6 and also the bottom of page 72.c. Synod Fergus overturned a previous Synod decision without any solid reasons or grounds.

There will always be differences even among our churches within our own confederation, and that in itself is not a bad thing, it gives more reason for further discussions. But to tell the OPC you must do things exactly as we do them or else no Ecclesiastical Fellowship, is undermining their serious desire to keep the table holy, and is doing gross injustice to our brothers and sisters in the OPC. This is no way to treat another true church. It also means that we put no value in the OPC church history with their traditions (for centuries).

John Werkman,
Edmonton, AB

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.

Clarification

Re: "Inter-church Relations: Where are we Headed?" *Clarion* Vol. 48, No. 1.

Having been in the Advisory Committee of Synod Fergus 1998, which dealt with the Report of the Committee for Contact with the ERQ, I would like to make a point of clarification. The Advisory Committee met with two delegates from the ERQ who urged us not to make all sorts of statements on the Report of the Committee appointed by Synod 1995. They believed the report was inaccurate. Therefore Synod Fergus was careful and refrained from evaluating the Report or the many letters of the churches that were written against the Report. It should be noted that before anything was discussed on the floor of Synod both the delegation of the ERQ and the RCUS were consulted and they were very pleased with what was being presented for discussion.

It should also be noted that the advisory committees of Synod, while working with the material assigned to them, spoke with members of the committees which had been appointed by Synod 1995. For example, Advisory Committee III consulted with two out of the four members of the ERQ Committee, who were present at Synod. Advisory Committee I invited three out of the five members of the CCOPC to speak with them. Synod also invited the faculty of the Theological College and allowed them to participate in the discussion during plenary session when matters relating to College were being debated.

Please do not let *Clarion* become a magazine that continually voices grievances against the decisions of the major assemblies. It will drive away an audience which is looking for a magazine that gives constructive and positive direction as to how we are to serve the Lord both in doctrine and conduct.

P. G. Feenstra
Owen Sound



is the Form for Baptism. C. Trimp writes about the second question:

This question contains an explicit reference to the doctrine of the church, which is a very old element in the administration of baptism. In Calvin's Geneva, the Apostles' Creed was read at this point as summary of the doctrine of the church and as early-Christian baptismal symbol. Something similar used to take place in the Palatinate.³

It can now be established that the expression "articles of the Christian faith" indicates the Apostles' Creed.

That leaves us with the question how Munneke's misunderstanding could arise that the articles of the Chris-

tian faith mean the Three Forms of Unity. The article translated in *Diakonia* did not include the statement from 1621 that was the basis for his opinion. It can be found in the Dutch original.⁴ Here we find the document that formed the basis for establishing the Reformed church in Java, Indonesia, in 1621. At the end of this statement it says:

In opinion, conviction and faith, in everything in agreement with the doctrine of God's holy Word and the Christian religion. Briefly summarized in the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism.

To this was added later: "Recently, in the year 1619 at the Synod of Dort further explained and confirmed."

This statement does not speak of "articles of the Christian faith." The interpretation of this as "Three Forms of Unity" rests on a misunderstanding.

As churches, we have adopted the Three Forms of Unity. We are confessional churches just as the Reformed Church in Java of 1621. The expression "articles of the Christian faith," however, does not refer to the Three Forms of Unity. It refers to the Apostles' Creed.

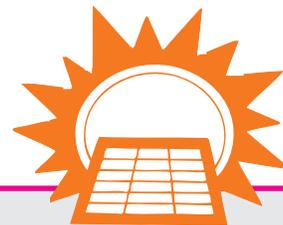
¹J. Munneke, "The Church and the Confession," *Diakonia*, June, 1989, 85.

²C. Trimp, *Formulieren en Gebeden* (Kampen: Van der Berg, 1978) 43.

³C. Trimp, *Formulieren en gebeden*, 39.

⁴J. Munneke, *Het historisch fundament der kerk* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1972) 26f.





By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:10,11).

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Have you ever seen a gun, or a sword? Or have you ever touched one? Hopefully, you did not. We do not hear often about swords being used anymore, but we do hear about guns. And that is usually not much good. What is a gun used for? It is something that is used to kill. Some people go hunting, and they try to kill a deer, or a moose, or a bear with their gun. That is a kind of a sport. But even when someone goes hunting, he has to be very careful, for a gun is a dangerous weapon. If you are not careful, you can hurt or even kill yourself or someone else.

But a gun is not only used for hunting; it also can be used to kill *people*. When there is a war, the soldiers use guns. That is a scary business. We don't like guns, because they cause death. Only when we use them to fight a dangerous enemy, can guns be useful. Fortunately, most of us never have used and never will use a gun.

Yet, maybe we should. Did you know that we do have a dangerous enemy? He is always around us, even when we do not see him. He is with us when we get up in the morning, and he follows us around wherever we go: to work, to a birthday party, to the store, even to church! He will never leave us alone, and he is trying to kill us! That is very scary!

That enemy is Satan. He is lurking around everywhere. He is not just in bad places. If that were the case, it would be easy for us. We would just stay away from those places and be safe! No, he is especially around God's children. For that is where he can find people that are not in his grip yet. That is why he is following us! We do not see him. We do not hear him, and if we do not watch out, we will not notice him at all. Yet, he is there, and he is very sly. He tries to work things into our hearts. He may tell us all kinds of things. Things like: *You do not have to pray before you go to bed, or at lunchtime at work you do not have to pray. You do not have to listen when someone reads from the Bible. And why should you read the Bible before you go to bed?* He may try to make you go to places where the Lord does not want us to go. He tries to tell you not to believe what the minister is preaching. He even might try to make you stay home from church on Sundays. Yes, he is constantly trying to make us disobey the commandments of the Lord.

Does that mean he is trying to kill us? Yes, that is what it means. For the Lord is our God and Maker. He adopted us, out of grace, as his children. Our Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins. Through Him we belong to the Father. Through Him we may trust that we receive eternal Life. But that also means that we have to obey our Father. We have to listen to his commandments on Sunday, and try to obey them. We have to show in everything we do, that we belong to the Lord. So if we disobey the Lord, and do all the things that Satan tries to make us do, then the beautiful promises of the Lord are not for us anymore.

How can we ever be strong enough to fight against Satan? We need something to fight this dangerous en-

emy! The Lord provides us with everything we need to do that. We read that in Ephesians 6. We read there about truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. The Lord does not make us fight our own battle, but He gives us all we need to be strong. We will be strong when we read and study his Word, when we pray to God constantly, and when we sing to Him our songs of praise and thanksgiving. It may be hard for us to read. It may be difficult for us to understand what the minister preaches. But all of us can pray. Every one of us can sing at least some of the beautiful Psalms. When we do that with all our heart, there is no chance for Satan to snatch us away and kill us. For then the Holy Spirit will be there to fight for us.

Thanks to the Lord for his faithfulness to us, in spite of all our sins. Thanks to the Son, who paved the way to the Father for us. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, who fights our daily battle for us. To God be the glory now and to the day of eternity!

*Thee, Lord, I love; Thou art my strength and power.
My fortress is the LORD, my rock and tower;
He, my Deliverer, to Him I flee,
My shield, my Helper, who will rescue me.
My stronghold and the horn of my salvation,
To Him I bring my praise and adoration.
I call upon the Lord; He hears my pleas,
And I am saved from all my enemies. Psalm 18:1*

Birthdays in April:

- 2: Derek Kok**
Spruce Dale, 160 Fraser Street,
Strathroy, ON N7G 2C4
- 19: Marinus Foekens**
290 Forest Street, Apt. # 4,
Chatham, ON N7L 2A9
- 23: Arlene DeWit**
c/o P. DeWit, Barnston Island,
Surrey, BC V3T 4W2

Derek will celebrate, DV, his 29th birthday, Marinus his 47th, and Arlene her 38th. I wish you all a Happy Birthday!

Mary VandeBurgt writes:

I like to thank everybody sending me birthday cards and presents. I got over 50 cards and Christmas cards. Thanks a lot, appreciated very much. Thanks a lot again!

Thank you for the nice letter and the Christmas card, Mary! It sounds like you have a very busy life with so many different jobs!

Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen,
7462 Reg. Road 20, RR #1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
(905) 957- 3007, email: rwravens@netcom.ca

By J. De Jong



Mission in the Congo

In the *Reformed Herald*, the paper of the Reformed Church in the US (RCUS), Rev. Robert Grossmann writes about the developments in the RCUS mission in the Congo, formerly Zaire. As readers may recall, their mission is supported by our sister churches in Holland. Here follows part of Rev. Grossmann's report:

The Reformed Church in the U.S. has been engaged in mission work in Africa for the last fourteen years. Ever since 1984 when Rev. Paul Treick and Rev. Aaron Kayayan of the Back-to-God Hour travelled to Lubumbashi in what was then Zaire, but is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we have been working with and supporting our brothers and sisters in the Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo (ERCC). Several years after the 1984 founding of the ERCC, Rev. Treick and Rev. Maynard Koenner were in the capital city of Kinshasa helping the ERCC to become recognized by the government of Zaire as a legitimate church. This was finally accomplished in 1990 after more paper work and expenses than any of us wishes to remember.

The present work of the RCUS focuses on direct contacts and teaching with the ERCC congregations in Kinshasa, and in supporting a minister and elder in the city of Lubumbashi, 1500 miles to the south, where our partners, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) (Liberated), operate a seminary for ERCC ministers. We also provided funds in the amount of \$30,000 to help construct the building which houses the seminary, a congregation's worship services, and the medical work of the ERCC in Lubumbashi. We and the GKN (Liberated) have also provided funds to build a number of local church buildings in the area of Lubumbashi, and we supply funds for students to attend the seminary operated by the GKN (Liberated). All of this work resulted from following up response to the radio preaching of Rev. Kayayan in the

French language, which is the public language of the Congo.

Our mission work in Kenya officially began in 1998 when Rev. Harvey Opp and the undersigned visited a group of churches in the Ogembo area of south Kisii which had been founded by Elders Meshack Nyarango and James Aunga. These men had invited the RCUS to help them officially organize as a church and to educate them in the theology and practice necessary to church leadership. Mr. Kurt Schimke, an elder of our congregation in Lodi, California, had laid much of the groundwork for our ministerial visit by himself visiting the churches in Kisii during the eighteen months he served as a missionary mechanic in Nairobi during 1996 and 1997. Mr. Schimke and his wife Marlene also accompanied the Revs. Opp and Grossmann on their visit to Kisii in February 1998.

Our work in Kenya continues by providing written materials and funds to help the churches operate. While the high mountain climate along the Equator where Kisii is located is fairly temperate, thunder storms are quite regular and a good roof is necessary for housing and church buildings. The Synod of the RCUS budgeted \$6000 for Kisii in 1998 and part of that has already been used to provide a sound roof of corrugated steel over the open-walled church in Rionchogu, which is near Elder Meshack's home. The churches served by brothers Meshack and Aunga, who do all of the preaching, number seven and are spread across an area over thirty miles wide. The men walk to these churches along mountain trails in order to serve them.

The present situation in Congo

In recent months there has been sporadic fighting in several areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as another group of rebels tries to overthrow the government of Laurent Kabila, who attained power in 1997 by military victory

over the forces of the former dictator Mobuto. This fighting has been mostly in the Eastern border regions of the Congo, where its forces are the most vulnerable, and around the capital city of Kinshasa in the extreme northwest of the country. The southern regions, especially around Lubumbashi where the ERCC has most of its congregations, has been quite free of fighting and the missionary professors of the GKN (Liberated) are living and working peacefully in the area. There is always some danger in an unstable society and they are aware that military danger may erupt quite quickly. Therefore they are prepared to move south into nearby Zambia on short notice. Nevertheless, their work does carry on and we have been in regular contact with them by e-mail over the past several months.

The fighting in and around Kinshasa has caused most of the problems for our churches in the Congo. The four congregations we help support there face great difficulties in finding food or medical supplies, and other necessities of life. Of course these items have vastly increased in price and we have sent them our whole budget for the year in the first six months since our Synod met in May. We have described some of these problems in another article requesting extra giving to help our brothers and sisters there.

In spite of the dangers and problems, the three Responsible Elders (elders who are empowered to preach and do the sacraments) are safe and continue their work among the four congregations. These men are all survivors who have skills at travelling and living in conditions in which westerners are completely lost. We have been able to receive communications from them through fax since they seem to be able to find functioning phone lines out of the Congo all right. We have had much more difficulty finding phone lines into the Congo that work. The English bank we use for transfers of

funds still functions as well, so that we have been able to provide help for them with the funds we have had available. Clearly the banks are necessary for both the government and rebel alike, so they seem to be off limits to military activity, although there were soldiers on guard at all banks when we were in Kinshasa in February of 1998.

The unity we were able to establish among the Churches in Kinshasa during our visit in February is also holding up very well. The brothers have seen the great benefits of working closely together and they meet together quite often. The receipts we request for funds distribution among them are always signed by the elders of each group receiving help. They report that the work of their churches in preaching and teaching goes on quite well. Their hunger for more Reformed teaching material continues strong. This causes a great problem since almost every package sent to them is opened and looted before it arrives, if it even arrives. We are able to mail things to Lubumbashi quite reliably by sending them

to nearby Kitwe in Zambia, where the Dutch have a courier pick up the mail regularly.

Extra help needed

In the midst of worldwide focus on problems in Central and South America due to hurricanes, we sometimes miss the other problems in the world. In the providence of God there is another revolution sputtering in the Congo. The fighting has been limited mostly to the border areas and the area of the capital in Kinshasa, but there have been many problems for ordinary folks to live. This is especially true for our Christian brothers and sisters in the four main congregations in the suburbs of Kinshasa. The fighting has not spread to the far South of Zaire where the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) maintain a seminary. The Dutch folks are in Lubumbashi and at last report things remain quiet there.

It is encouraging to hear that despite many difficult conditions, these young churches are continuing to grow and the move to federational cooperation is accelerating. We wish the RCUS well



CHURCH NEWS

CALLED to the Free Reformed Church in Legana, Australia
Rev. C. Bosch
of the Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington, ON

CALLED to Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church
Rev. M.H. Van Luik
of the Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church

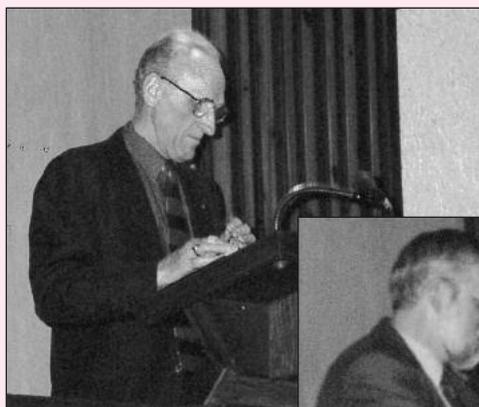
in this mission. It's also a blessing to hear that the colleagues in Lubumbashi are safe. May God guide and protect them in their politically volatile circumstances!



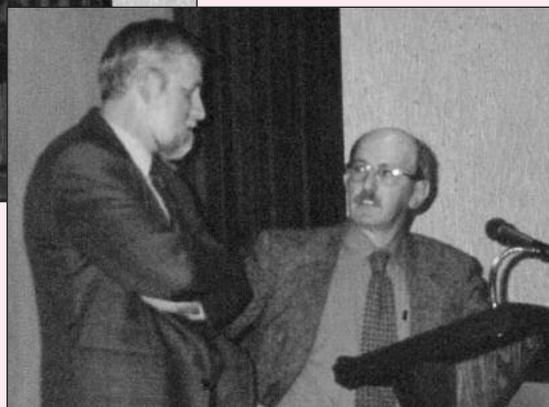
Farewell Rev. J. DeGelder

On January 26th the congregation of the Canadian Reformed Church at Smithville gathered in the church to say their good-byes to Rev. J. DeGelder and family. Several presentations were made, representing the various societies . . . songs were sung, skits were performed, and the consistory put Rev. DeGelder to a final test. Although it was both an enjoyable and a sad event, the refrain throughout the evening was thankfulness to the Lord. The evening could be closed with the surety that as the Lord has blessed both minister and congregation in the past, He would continue to do the same in the future as well. Rev. DeGelder then closed the evening in prayer, after requesting us to sing of the unchanging faithfulness of the Lord in Ps. 63.

On Sunday, January 31st we all gather together again to listen to Rev. DeGelder's farewell sermon. The text



*Chairman for the evening
Br. P. Oosterhoff*



*Rev. DeGelder and
Vice-Chairman
Br. G. DeBoer*

for this sermon was taken from 2 Peter 3:17,18. The theme was *The urgent call for the Church of Jesus Christ on the way to the glorious future*. The points were: 1. *Constant watch*; 2. *Spiritual Growth*; 3. *Everlasting glorification*. 1. We must be watchful, Peter writes this warning from Rome where he would later die a martyr's death. We are confronted as well with the teachings of lawless men, and the false prophets may sound reasonable. Those who stand firm are scoffed, but this scoffing cannot nullify the truth of Christ's imminent return. This stability does not come from the teachings of men but from the foundation of Jesus Christ. 2. But constant watchfulness is not enough. We must be active in our faith. There will be either development or deterioration. Faith is not stagnant. This growth must be in grace and in knowledge. In order for this grace to grow we must remove ourselves from things that frustrate this growth. Our life must therefore be determined by this grace. Growth in knowledge is not primarily of a factual nature. The nature of knowledge is to know that Jesus Christ is the **only** source of salvation. This involves facts, but so much more . . . it involves life. This growth cannot come without a balanced and wholesome diet. We must pray for this. 3. The book closes with praise, for He owns us, He delivers us, and He saves us. Thus He is the **only** center for our lives. He only deserves this honour, today and everyday. He is worthy of praise for countless reasons, for He is the faithful God of the Covenant. People may come, and people may go, but He never changes.

After the sermon the opportunity was given for the churches of Ontario-South to make comments. Some were represented in person, and others by letter. All were thankful for Rev. DeGelder's faithful execution of his work, and wished him the blessing of the Lord for his new task in Flamborough. They also wished the congregation the Lord's blessing on finding a new minister, and urged them to remain as faithful as the One Who had called them. After this the vice-chairman, Br. G. DeBoer, said some words of thanks on behalf of the congregation and wished the congregation's blessing for Rev. DeGelder and his family. Rev. DeGelder closed this portion of the day by thanking the congregation and the consistory for the past years in Smithville, and urged them all to remain faithful to Him, the Lord and Master of Life.

R. Hoeksema



Mrs. DeGelder accepting a gift from the Women Societies



Rev. and Mrs. DeGelder and family enjoying the farewell evening



Sister Vis and Br. Yonson Dethan accompanying some singing

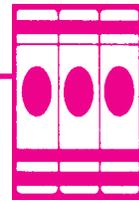


John Calvin School children singing at the farewell evening



BOOK REVIEW

By J. De Jong



Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church. Volume 1: The Biblical Period and Volume 2: The Patristic Age.* Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Vol 1: 387 plus x pages US \$35.00, Vol 2: 487 plus viii pages, \$42.00; Paperback.

Hughes Oliphant Old, a senior member of the Centre for Theological Inquiry in Princeton, New Jersey, has taken on a mammoth project with this initiation of a series of books on the reading and preaching of the Scriptures in the Christian church. The series, which is being planned as an extensive multi-volume project, has as its goal to highlight the importance of the reading and preaching of the Scriptures as a central element of public worship throughout the life of the Christian church. In these books Old unravels a fundamental thesis which, with a couple of necessary qualifications, we can endorse, that is, that preaching is in itself an act of worship and so a central element in the experience of the presence of God in a liturgical setting. Old is not fully explicit about his view, but one does get the impression that along with the sacraments the reading and hearing of the Word form central or focal points in the liturgy.

In working out his thesis, Old distinguishes five different genres or types of preaching which he sets out to trace in his subjects: expository, evangelistic, catechetical, festal and prophetic preaching. In the course of the presentation, several of these categories overlap at various points. Yet on the whole, Old is able to cover all these aspects in each specific period he introduces. Old is able to come up with some lesser known representatives of each genre, sometimes drawing on sources that for the average scholar in the field are not readily available.

Given the vast amount of material he needs to cover, Old must be commended for striking a good balance between depth and breadth. Without get-

ting lost in details, he is able to give the reader a distinct flavour of preachers of the early era of the church and their primary areas of activity. Old has opted for a popular, almost conversational style, one directed more to preachers than to academics, and this gives his books a highly readable character among the current stock of resource material on the history of preaching. Yet one should not be fooled by Old's conversational style. The treatment of each subject includes an extensive bibliographical note, and the text also indicates that Old has spent a good deal of time preparing his work and reflecting and meditating on the preaching of each subject that passes his revue.

Problem areas

The essential weakness of Old's approach, however, is to hunt for evidence of preachers at every turn in antiquity and in Scripture, when in fact, all who then spoke and wrote cannot be said to actually fit the office of preacher. In order to squeeze his subjects into this mould, especially his Biblical figures, Old relies heavily on conjecture. For example more than once he says, "If we may be allowed to read between the lines. . .," assuming of course that his readers will readily do so. Well, I suppose we can grant him his wish, but with ancient texts the real art is to stick to the lines themselves and interpret exactly what is there. On one occasion he says, "We do not really know . . .," and on others he often uses phrases like "might have been," "would have been," "he would no doubt have said. . . ." Added to this are several turns of phrase like "it is possible that . . ." or "I would suggest that. . . ." All this arm chair dialogue is helpful in portraying an image of honesty and homeliness, but does not really elucidate the subject matter! In fact, sometimes one gets the impression that for Old later developments colour his interpretation of earlier preaching situations.

The second volume of the series is much better on this score than the first,

and it is in this volume that Old proves himself to be a scholar in his own right, one whose primary focus is homiletics, but without ignoring all the details of doctrine, interpretation and exegesis. For in this volume, following through on his freer conversational approach, Old has gone to great lengths to paint a good picture of the preachers he is reviewing, and takes fairly lengthy chunks of space to elaborate on detailed aspects of the preacher's theological situation before actually getting to his preaching. In fact, on some occasions, after detailed and colourful descriptions, Old is forced to come up short shrift on the preaching. For example, after an interesting and fairly detailed description of Theodore of Mopseuestia's theology of worship he says: "Unfortunately we do not have all the documents we need to study him as a preacher."

Humour

Old's homely American style makes for some humorous descriptive statements. Commenting on one of the great Cappadocians of the fourth century he says: "No Bible Belt evangelist of our grandparents' day ever argued his hearers into the creek more unrelentingly than Gregory." Describing Origen's love for numerical speculations: "Such discussions in the sermons of Origen probably turned on his congregation as much as if a preacher in the Silicon Valley were to present the gospel in computerese." And then comparing Hippolytus to Tertullian: "Whereas Tertullian is brilliant and sparkling, Hippolytus, who comes a generation later, is just plain stodgy." Well, if Old perhaps doesn't quite know his people, I guess he knows his wines! Throughout he maintains a steady, free-flowing pace in his writing, which helps to keep the reader's attention, but sometimes the words seem to topple on top of him, as in one curious phrase about Cyril of Jerusalem: "We hear nothing of the daily preaching he may or may not have done."

Perspective

Old's theological perspective is slightly stronger in the second volume than in the first. In Volume I exegetes and scholars of the most liberal stripe are brought in to add support to his arguments, begging the question just exactly how Old sees Scripture. For example, Old leaves open the question whether the book Deuteronomy is dated in the mosaic period or whether it is post-exilic; both ways, it is preaching. It seems that here the written text only qualifies as scripture in some curious unexplainable fashion, that is, when a preacher is properly using the older texts. Essentially the Old Testament writings are all seen as products of human reflection which in their own special way *become* the Word of God. Old says: "The task of the minister today . . . is to bring the written Word to living speech." How is this to be done? While the same thought reappears in the next volume it is less noticeable, and Old even seems to lend credence to Chrysostom's view that the written text is God breathed, the very Word of God itself. However, some words of respect are also directed to Ephrem of Nisibis' more fluid and poetic view in which Christ, or the text, or the preacher's sermon may constitute the Word of God. And, perhaps to bolster this position, the name of Karl Barth is brought in as a contemporary example of similar sort of prophet as graced the world in the 4th century.

Here we can only wish that Old had chosen a more clearly defined perspective and a more clearly circumscribed view of Scripture. As it is his view seems to allow you to take what route you want with the text, as long as one doesn't become too disrespectful towards it. Hence the likes of a Fosdick and Barth also come up as the great theologians and preachers of the modern age. But that standpoint should be reviewed. For while there may be some similarity in motivation between Chrysostom and Barth, the contrast is simply too overpowering for it to qualify: Chrysostom led his subjects into a world of ever 'higher' levels of asceticism, while Barth relentlessly hammered on the doors leading to increased secularism.

All this is an important point if Old wishes his work to generate reformational reflection among the preacher's of his own day. For he is eloquent in his description of the boldness of a preacher like Chrysostom. Here was a

preacher who dared to stand up to the corruption in the imperial court! The opulence of the court could be compared, says Old, to any dinner going on in Washington DC today. "Luxurious entertainments seem to be a part of the political process, be it at the imperial courts of antiquity or in the democracies of our own day." "Luxurious entertainment" is an understatement for the kind of things happening in Washington today, but at any rate, we can certainly wish and pray for a 'court preacher' like Chrysostom in that part of the world.

One regrettable element in Old's approach is the conceptual framework. He has not allowed an opening for the continental tradition of *textual* preaching which in itself is different from the American tradition of expository preaching. Textual preaching has gone through its own ups and downs through the generations, but certainly in the Reformed context, it is still the form or genre of preaching that must be highlighted before the other genres that Old introduces. In fact, one wonders if Old's categories are not in part determined by his weaker view of Scrip-

ture. From a Reformed standpoint, we would be more inclined to say that all preaching is prophetic, but it should first of all be textual, that is bound to a specific text of Holy Scripture. And although festal preaching may be regarded as a genre coming to its own in the patristic period, it remained a form of textual preaching.

These critical notations are not meant to take away from the great respect I have for this author and his abilities. Although he purports not to write for academics, he clearly "knows his stuff" and is able to pass it on with a sense of passion and love for the material. The presentation shows that Old is not the stuffy and distant scholar; rather, his work reflects one who shows himself to be a seasoned minister of the Word who has used his ministry to avidly read and reflect upon the many great preachers who have gone before him. A laudable homage to the profession! These two volumes not only commend the patience and careful study of the author, but also whet the appetite for the rest of the series. We hope he may receive the strength and the years to get the job done. 

PRESS RELEASE

HAMILTON – The editors and publishers of *Clarion* and the editors/publishers of *Reformed Polemics* met in Hamilton on February 1, 1999 to discuss matters of mutual concern relating to their respective publications. In attendance were Br. P. de Boer and Br. R. Dykstra of *Reformed Polemics*, Dr. C. Van Dam, editor of *Clarion*, and co-editors Dr. J. De Jong, Prof. J. Geertsema, Dr. N. H. Gootjes, and Rev. G. Ph. van Popta. Br. W. Gortemaker and Br. G. Kuik, organizers of the meeting, participated as publishers of *Clarion*.

It was recognized that both magazines have the stated goal to build up the membership of especially the Canadian Reformed Churches by way of articles based upon the Word of God and faithful to the Three Forms of Unity. It was acknowledged that both magazines strive to inform and educate while seeking the well-being and unity of the churches.

After a wide-ranging and brotherly discussion, the participants realized that the two magazines have, at times, a different approach and method on a number of issues. It was agreed that we would respect each other's specific concerns and editorial perspectives.

Neither *Clarion* nor *Reformed Polemics* intends to be one-sided. Both magazines want to deal incisively with the issues and avoid personal attack.

All agreed that the meeting was worthwhile. The meeting was opened and closed in a Christian manner.

Editors/Publishers of *Reformed Polemics*
Editors of *Clarion*
Publisher of *Clarion*



Press Release of the February 12th and 13th, 1999 Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College Board of Governors annual meeting.

The meeting which was held in the College's library, was opened at 1:00 p.m. by the chairman Jack Pieterman. He welcomed everyone present, especially the western governors who were present for this annual meeting. After adoption of the January 23, 1999 minutes and approval of the agenda, the secretary read the incoming mail. A letter was received from the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed School Society which operates John Calvin Elementary School in Yarrow, BC. The letter stated that since the College's graduates are not certified to teach in BC, and due to the lack of students at the College this year and local budgetary constraints, the school society decided to reduce its funding to the College for this year. They also urged the Governors to augment its distance learning program.

A letter was received from the College's principal, Mr. Tony Vanderven concerning his transfer to Timothy Canadian Reformed School in Hamilton next year.

The meeting then dealt with various executive reports including reports from the Secretary, the Program and Personnel Committee, the Academic Advisory Committee, the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies (LCRSS), the Women's Saving Action, the Building Committee and the Finance Committee. The Treasurer reported that donations and membership

fees are down substantially from previous years, but because of a significant bequest received this year, the College is currently operating without using its line of credit. At the moment, the account has about one month's operating funds, and the College continues to rely heavily on continued support from its members and donors.

The meeting then entered into a discussion concerning the future principalship of the College in light of Mr. Vanderven's upcoming retirement from that position.

The budget for the upcoming academic year was placed into discussion and approved. Following are some of the highlights:

- Annual tuition fees are increased from \$3,000 to \$3,500;
- The number of full time faculty will be reduced from three to two;
- The budget is premised on the enrolment of six students;
- The membership fees are reduced from \$300 to \$250 to reflect the overall reduced costs of operation for next year. It is hoped that faithful supporters will continue their level of support and that new supporters will join as the College struggles to maintain its operations in a fiscally responsible manner.
- The overall budget is reduced from the current year's level of \$322,500 to \$234,500.

The Library Committee reported that it has now computer-indexed 2,700 of the College's 11,000 titles using the new Athena program.

The College's representatives to the LCRSS reported on a recent presentation they made to representatives of the local school societies in which they promoted the importance of hiring graduates from the College.

Mr. Vanderven presented the Faculty report. The following decision were made:

- The one year program will be continued;
- The two year program will be discontinued
- The previously popular three year program will be revised, improved

and reintroduced for September 1999. It is noted that this program will not lead to Provincial certification.

- A new distance education course will be introduced next year. This course will be offered to existing teachers and will lead to a certificate of Advanced Studies in Reformed Education. This will be a post graduate program and a certificate will require successful completion of six university level courses. The faculty will investigate whether these courses could be recognized by universities such as Trinity Western.
- The teaching responsibilities for next year will be as follows:
- Mr. Horsman and Mrs. Van Halen will each teach three courses in the first semester and four in the second;
- Mr. Vanderven will be "on loan" from Timothy Canadian Reformed School to teach one course;
- Rev. Agema will again teach the Bible Study course and Dr. Oosterhoff the Church History course.

The next day, after the opening, we met in small groups to discuss board governance issues. A committee was appointed to review governance and local representation for the College and in particular to address the question of how governors should be appointed and how they should report back to their communities. The committee is comprised of Mrs. M. DeGelder, Mr. J. Stieva and a faculty member. They will draft a suggested mandate and report to the May meeting of the executive.

The local governors were each given the opportunity to make comments concerning the relationship between their constituency and the College. Many of the governors expressed appreciation for the faithful and committed work Mr. T.M.P. Vanderven did for the College over the last 18 years.

The chairman thanked everyone for contributing to the Christian atmosphere of this two day meeting and the meeting was closed with a prayer of thanksgiving.

For the meeting,
T. van Popta

In LINK with you



Check out Clarion's website at:
<premier.mb.ca/clarion.html>

Churches Note: We invite you to link Clarion's homepage to your church's homepage.

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers

Are you enjoying school life? Have you got lots of friends in your class? Do you have a really nice teacher, who lets you do all kinds of fun things during school time? I remember when I went to school. We used to do lots of great activities – singing, art, sport, and lots more.

But there are also times when the things your teacher makes you do aren't so much fun. Yet you still have to do them because that is all part of learning. And you have to do them as well as you can because that is what God has asked of you. He knows that there are subjects at school that you can't do so well, but through His Holy Spirit, He helps you to do your very best. Make sure you keep trying your best.

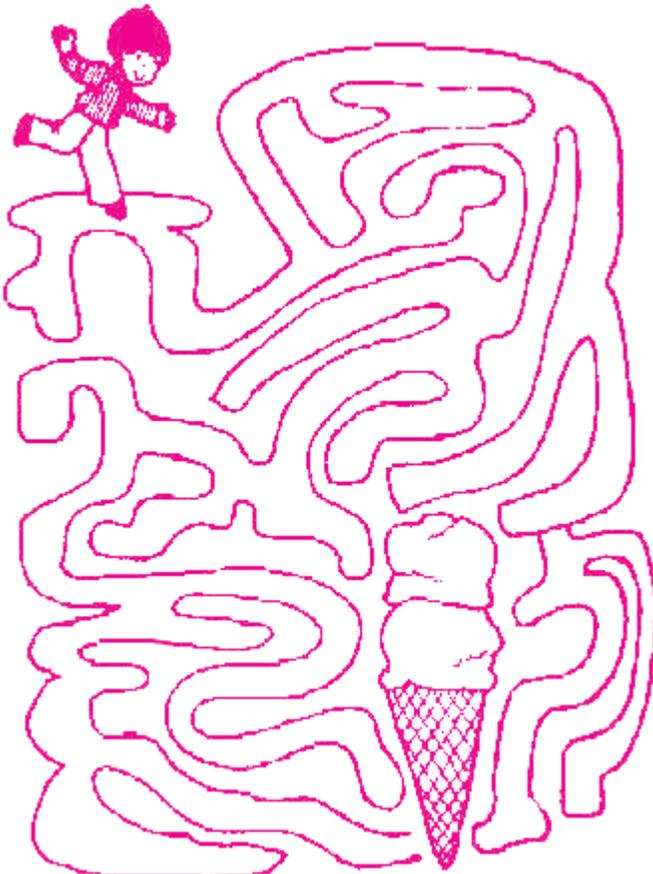
Lots of love,
Aunt Betty

WORDSEARCH

By Busy Beaver Diana Nobel

C	O	W	I	K	L	H	O	R	S	E	R	FIND: COW PIG GIRAFFE HORSE SEAL KANGAROO WALRUS MONKEY MOUSE
A	F	H	D	M	C	N	O	T	P	S	Q	
G	B	E	J	G	I	R	A	F	F	E	U	
V	Z	A	B	E	F	G	N	I	J	K	N	
W	Y	K	C	M	O	N	K	E	Y	O	P	
X	P	P	A	H	W	X	L	L	M	R	Q	
A	I	E	C	N	I	K	W	V	U	S	T	
B	G	Y	D	M	G	J	A	W	S	E	A	
G	V	T	L	U	S	A	L	F	E	E	G	
F	R	N	Y	Z	Q	P	R	K	A	M	A	
X	A	Z	O	C	I	R	U	O	L	N	H	
B	M	O	U	S	E	G	S	D	O	L	E	

HELP THOMAS TO FIND THE DELICIOUS ICE CREAM



MOTHERS

What was the name of the mother of each of the following?

1. Jesus _____
2. Isaac _____
3. Solomon _____
4. Esau _____
5. Samuel _____
6. John Mark _____
7. Benjamin _____
8. Obed _____
9. Cain _____
10. John the Baptist _____
11. Mahlon _____
12. Absalom _____
13. Reuben _____
14. Moses _____



FROM THE MAILBOX

Hello, *Diana Nobel*, for your letter and puzzle. It was very nice to hear from you once again. You must have lots of fun in the snow you have now. And to have 2½ snow days must have been great. I suppose you go home and play in the snow after school each day. Write again soon, won't you Diana?