

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
VOLUME 48, NO. 24 NOVEMBER 26, 1999

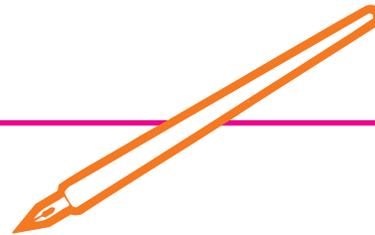


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Numbers

10:1-10

By G.Ph. van Popta



One little word

This past October 31st saw a remarkable meeting take place in Augsburg, Germany between representatives of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). At this meeting, the RCC and the LWF, representing all but three million of the world's 61.5 million Lutherans, signed the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification." The Lutheran Church of Canada does not hold membership in the LWF.

The signing culminates thirty years of discussions and goes a long way to bridging the almost half millennium divide between Roman Catholicism and Lutheranism. It is a critical breakthrough, the first major step toward reconciliation between the two churches since the Reformation.

October 31st marks the day that Martin Luther in 1517 launched the Reformation that restored the Church to its New Testament roots, but divided Christendom into its Roman Catholic and Protestant groupings. At the very centre of the conflict was the doctrine of justification. How is one made righteous before God? How does justification take place? Martin Luther, by a careful study of Scripture, and through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, came to the understanding that we are justified – made righteous before God – by faith *alone*. We are righteous before God only by a true faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross. The Roman church taught that God justifies the sinner, but it rejected that God does so by faith alone. It denied that the way to righteousness is by faith alone. It taught that salvation come from the sum total of faith and good works – that a life of devotion and service on earth earns the faithful salvation. For the RCC, sanctification is part of justification. Luther rediscovered, proclaimed and published abroad the blessed gospel truth that we are justified by faith alone apart from works (Rom 3:28). If justification were only partly dependent upon our good works, grace would no longer be grace.

Luther and the other Reformers were cursed to hell for their position of justification by faith alone. Between 1545 and

1563, the RCC met in the Council of Trent, Italy. Trent was the Roman church's first formal answer to the Protestant Reformation. The council issued a number of decrees, all of which served to codify and reaffirm Roman Catholic doctrine. Some of the decrees addressed the doctrine of justification:

CANON IX: If anyone says that the ungodly is justified by faith alone in such a way that he understands that

nothing else is required which co-operates toward obtaining the grace of justification . . . let him be anathema.

CANON XII: If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than trust in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this trust alone by which we are justified, let him be anathema.

CANON XIV: If anyone says that a man is absolved from sins and justified because . . . he confidently believes that he is absolved and justified . . . and that through this faith alone absolution and justification is effected, let him be anathema.

It could not be clearer. The canons declare that faith alone in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ is not enough to justify a sinner. Something more is needed, namely, the performance of good works. The RCC has not changed a jot or dropped a tittle from these canons. They still stand with all their damning force. How then could a meeting as the one held recently in Augsburg take place?

It could only happen because the declaration so fiddles with the

doctrine of justification by faith alone as to work it out of the statement. By skilful sophistry, the word "alone" is massaged away. The declaration says many true things. It says that ". . . to be saved one must have faith, must believe in Jesus Christ." It speaks of ". . . a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ." By it the LWF and the RCC together confess ". . . that sinners are justified by faith in the saving action of God in Christ."

Faith embraces Jesus Christ with all his merits, makes Him our own, and does not seek anything besides Him. For it must necessarily follow, either that all we need for our salvation is not in Jesus Christ or, if it is all in Him, that one who has Jesus Christ through faith, has complete salvation. It is, therefore, a terrible blasphemy to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something else is needed besides Him; for the conclusion would then be that Christ is only half a Saviour. Therefore we rightly say with Paul that we are justified by faith alone, or by faith apart from works of law (Rom 3:28). – Article 22, Belgic Confession

But it does not say that justification is by faith alone, period. One little word – the word “alone” – left alone on the sidelines, made all the difference.

No one can disagree with the formulations quoted in the preceding paragraph. Everyone, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed or Anabaptist, believes that to be saved, one must believe in Jesus Christ. All will confess that we are justified by God’s grace through faith in Christ. But where is the word “alone”? Without it, grace is no longer grace. The absence of one little word has felled them.

Who changed? Who “gave a little?” The Lutherans. The RCC has not changed a whit. Give credit where it is due! The RCC has not changed. The accord proves it. Further proof of how Rome has not changed is Pope John Paul II’s recent call for the manual on indulgences to be translated into modern languages for the benefit of the church at the dawn of the third millennium. What irony! Luther’s 95 Theses against the sale of indulgences catalyzed the Reformation. 61.5 million Lutherans are being led back into the present incarnation of the medieval church! Many things must yet be resolved: authority in the church; venerating Mary and the saints; the role of women. Such issues will keep the two bodies separate yet for years to come. However, a major hurdle has been crossed. The joint Lutheran-Roman Catholic worship services held this past October 31st in many cities the world over are a harbinger of things to come. The common mass celebrated before the signing at the Roman Catholic Basilica in Augsburg heralds the goal – full communion, or merger, between the RCC and the Lutheran Churches.

Martin would be aghast.



What’s inside?

Is the singing of hymns in the public worship service a form of self-willed worship and an idolatry forbidden by God? There are Reformed believers who answer Yes to the question. There are also a few from among our churches who hold to this sentiment. Is it valid? Rev. Richard Aasman of Edmonton continues his analysis of this view.

The Lord God has authority over us. He created us and we must obey Him. He speaks to us through his Word. However, He also enters our lives by way of several agents – specifically, parents, the church and the state. Undersigned writes about this.

Mrs. Ravensbergen supplies us with another Ray of Sunshine. May her article shine a bit of light into the lives of God’s special children and their care givers. Rev. Paul Aasman furnishes us with something to meditate on. Mrs. Sarah Vandergugten tells us about the memorial service for the late Rev. D. VanderBoom.

Then there are a few articles about various churches throughout the world – the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico; the recent Synod Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches; the recent almost unbelievable rapprochement between the Roman Catholic Church and most of the world’s Lutheran Churches.

We hope you will enjoy and be edified by our offering.

GvP



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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 Advertisements: \$11.75 per column inch

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Agreement No. 1377531
 Publications Mail Registration No. 09907
 ISSN 0383-0438

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By P. Aasman

Another Silly List?

“Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:12)

In light of the approaching digital event on the eve of December 31, the turning of the clock to year 2000, many periodicals have been busy in various ways reviewing the important events of the past millennia. People are looking to the past to find the courage to face the next millennium. In an effort to be honest, they not only celebrate the great things people have accomplished in the past (recounting the discovery of the new world, the printing press, penicillin, etc.), they also confront the horrors and atrocities which people have committed in the past (oppression spawned by feudalism, capitalism and imperialism; the madness of political experiments like communism and Nazism, etc.). But without fail, the fault for shameful deeds of the past is assigned to unenlightened minds gripped by medieval religions (like Christianity) or other demons from the past.

In two ways, then, people try to prepare themselves to meet the future: On one hand, people fix the blame for atrocities in history on isolated individuals, unique conditions or false world-views in order to cast off the guilt and shame of past sins. On the other hand, they celebrate man’s accomplishments in order to find hope in his greatness. Mankind refuses to be humbled, and insists on being exalted. Christ says that this is a recipe for bitter humiliation. *He who exalts himself will be humbled.*

It is important to come to grips with the past in order to meet the future. But

people need to select the momentous events in history with honesty. The list of man’s truly momentous deeds is three in number.

The first is what we did at the dawn of creation. The account of this deed is told by Moses this way: “She took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her and he ate it.” After all the love and kindness that God had shown to the man and the woman, after generously laying the entire garden at their disposal while urging them to keep their hand back from only one tree, after inviting them to embrace this as an opportunity to demonstrate their love and thanks to Him . . . after all this, they lifted their heel against God, and seized the only thing God forbade. Mankind would do well to reflect on what he did to God in the beginning and repent in deep humility because of it.

The second thing was an act of murder. We murdered God’s Christ. It was necessary that Pilate should command Jesus’ execution because Pilate represented the Roman Empire, that is, he represented the highest system of justice mankind has ever devised. The Roman Republic, which Pilate represented, remains the model for justice and government for all great civilizations today. The most powerful nations on earth today are republics (USA, France, Russia) – the exact reflection of Rome. The only thing that mankind can do to a righteous

man, in the highest court of justice, is what he did through Pilate: Taking the judge’s seat, he decided to hand Jesus over to be crucified. It was a deliberate decision made by Pilate. People would do well to reflect on what they did to God’s own Son, and get down on their knees and repent in utter humility because of it.

These two deeds are among the most momentous of all that mankind has done. By virtue of the first deed, every human being is conceived and born in sin and inclined to all evil. The guilt for the atrocities in human history is not to be fixed on isolated individuals, unique conditions or false world-views but on a condition common to us all: a sinful heart. The sinful human heart is the source of all grief, pain and bloodshed, and ultimately, it is the root out of which the second momentous deed was committed. By the first we have condemned ourselves to lives of total depravity. By the second, we have sealed God’s wrath upon ourselves.

But thanks be to God for the man, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came down from heaven to conquer sin, the curse of death and the power of hell – all the ultimate afflictions on the human race. He did it by the power of righteousness, for he descended into hell and died without having done anything evil. Death and hell have no power over one who is righteous. So he rose from the dead and became the keystone of the Christian Church.

Whoever should reflect on what Jesus Christ did, will find the courage to face the next millennium. To reflect on Christ’s accomplishment means to acknowledge what we did – for we had put Him to grief. It is only when people humble themselves on account of their corporate responsibility for what happened in paradise and at Golgotha, that they might be incorporated into the glory of what happened on Easter morning. *Whoever humbles himself, will be exalted.*



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The Singing of Psalms and Hymns₂

By R. Aasman

The Second Commandment

In the first article, we were dealing with the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW) which essentially teaches: what is not commanded in Scripture is forbidden. Some proponents of the RPW insist: since hymns are not commanded in Scripture, they are forbidden. They try to claim that John Calvin strictly applied this principle of worship, but as we saw, this is not the case.

The upholders of the RPW also refer to the second commandment for proof that what is not commanded in Scripture is forbidden. The Heidelberg Catechism's summary in Q & A 96 is often referred to: "We are not to make an image of God in any way, nor to worship Him in any other manner than He has commanded in his Word." Since Zacharius Ursinus was one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, his commentary is also brought into the discussion to prove that this confession taught a strict view of the RPW. Ursinus wrote the following on Lord's Day 35:

The other species of idolatry is more subtle and refined, as when the true God is supposed to be worshipped, whilst the kind of worship which is paid unto Him is false, which is the case when anyone imagines that he is worshipping or honouring God by the performance of any work not prescribed by the divine law. This species of idolatry is more properly condemned in the second commandment, and is termed superstition, because it adds to the commandments of God the inventions of men. Those are called superstitious who corrupt the worship of God by their own inventions. This will-worship or superstition is condemned in every part of the word of God. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do

they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." "Let no man judge you in meat or in drink, &c., which all are to perish with the using, after the commandments and doctrines of men; which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh." (Matt 15:8, 9. Col 2:16, 22, 23.)

From this, those who advocate a strict RPW conclude that Ursinus and the Heidelberg Catechism teach that the singing of hymns in worship is a form of self-willed worship and an idolatry forbidden by God. However it is clear

Scripture does not give a detailed and exhaustive description of how the church must worship.

that Ursinus is talking here about hypocritical worship, the doctrines of men, the philosophy and traditions of men and the show of wisdom in will-worship. We appreciate Ursinus' comments deeply. To suggest that Ursinus is condemning something like the singing of hymns which is not expressly commanded in the Scriptures is forcing Ursinus to say something he does not mean with his commentary. Moreover, it goes against the point of the second word of the covenant. The second word forbids self-willed worship of God which attempts to control and manipulate God. We see an attempt of such idolatrous control in 1 Samuel 4 where Israel was in battle with the Philistines. Israel believed that by bringing out the ark of the covenant, the enemy would automatically be defeated. This was a form

of self-willed worship and the manipulation of God for man's own purposes. The second word of the covenant forbids such an attempt to control and manipulate God which minimizes the true way of knowing and praising God and which thus leads to a covenantal automatism. To take this commandment and apply it to the singing of hymns in the worship service is simply pressing the commandment too far.

Highly recommended is a reading of J. Douma's commentary on the second word of the covenant in *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life*. He not only outlines beautifully and powerfully the meaning of the second word, but he also has a warning against those who are more concerned about the issue of singing hymns than the true intent of the second word. This is not to suggest that the brothers who wrote to *Clarion* on the matter of singing Psalms and hymns misunderstand the true intent of the second word. I refer to Douma only to show how to be careful with the understanding and application of the second word (page 67):

Take for example, the liturgy, which can be of such a quality as to resemble image worship. We are dealing here with extremes. Because they oppose the central place given to preaching in the liturgy, people go in search of new liturgical forms and practices designed to facilitate contact with God. The image has disappeared, but rituals and ceremonies return in order to awaken new life in an otherwise dead church. But even in a church where, in good Reformed style, people want preaching to occupy centre stage, things can go awry. Only the King James Version, and no other; only Genevan tunes; no hymns; a particular style of preaching – these too can bind our course with God to habits that can become rigid forms. No longer are

the living preaching of the Word and the corresponding faith the decisive elements of worship, but the old, habitual forms and sounds that make people feel secure. The image fixates more than the word, but that does not mean that the word and the sermon will necessarily avoid degenerating into something automatic.

The point of the second word of the covenant is recognizing and holding in high esteem the Word of God which reveals the one, true God who has revealed Himself as the One who comes to us in Jesus Christ and calls us for a living faith in Jesus Christ. We are reminded here of what we said earlier about John Calvin: he had tolerance for differences in liturgy as long as the centrality of the Word of Jesus Christ was not compromised.

Scriptural warrants

It is time to look a little more closely at the statement that a biblical warrant is required for each and every aspect of worship. This sounds very good: to be Reformed is to abide with the Scripture. However there is an essential flaw in demanding a biblical warrant for all aspects of congregational worship. The fact is, Scripture is not specific and precise about how a worship service is to be conducted. How much do we really know about worship in the early Christian congregations? Apparently they were patterned to a certain extent or even a large extent on synagogue worship services. How much of synagogue worship is outlined in the Bible? The synagogue is not even prescribed in the Old Testament. Somehow it came into being before the time of Christ. The Bible simply does not give an exhaustive or detailed description of the worship service for the New Testament church. We know that there was congregational singing: "What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church" (1 Cor 14:26). But do we know what the congregation sang, how much they sang, and whether every congregation sang in every worship service? Here is another point of discussion: those who hold to a rigid view of the RPW say that Scripture mandates only the singing of the 150 Psalms. Where is it explicitly stated in Scripture that the

150 Psalms are to be sung in worship? Does it say that only the 150 Psalms are to be sung and that all of them are to be sung? We know that the Psalms are designed for singing and we infer from a passage such as 2 Chronicles 29:30 that they were sung. However the strict application of the RPW appears to undo itself when it says only the 150 Psalms are to be sung in worship because there is no clear and express command to do so. This is not to suggest that the 150 should not be sung. But we should see that in both the Old Testament and the New Testament there is not a detailed description of exactly how the church is to worship.

To reject hymns on the basis of there being no explicit command is a shaky proposition.

Proponents of the RPW bring forth certain Scripture passages to demonstrate the principle that whatever is not commanded is forbidden. One such passage is found in Deuteronomy 12:32: "See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it." But look at the context. In Deuteronomy 12 the Lord is commanding Israel not to worship Him in the way that the pagans worship their gods – some even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods. In this chapter the Lord teaches his people how to make proper sacrifices before Him. In the final line of this chapter there is the conclusion, "See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it." To conclude from this passage within this context that the Lord is laying down a general, regulative principle of worship which says about each and every aspect of liturgical worship, including the matter of singing, only do what is expressly commanded, is simply poor exegesis. This is a passage which deals with a specific aspect of worship: no one may add to or take away from what the Lord says about worship in this passage. The defenders of the RPW also adduce many other Scripture passages as examples of what God does to his people when they worship Him wrongly. However, it is both offensive and unfair to take passages from the Scriptures, such as Leviticus 10 where Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized fire before the



NOTICE OF CHANGE:

The Canadian Reformed Church at Guelph is currently worshiping in split services at 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. in their own building at 44 Short Street and is meeting at 4 p.m. at the New Life Christian Reformed Church building at 400 Victoria Rd. N., Guelph.

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LORD which led to their horrible deaths, and conclude: see how God condemns every form of worship not prescribed in Scripture, including the singing of hymns.

We believe that there are principles of worship in the Scriptures. This is seen in our Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 38. But the teaching of the Regulative Principle of Worship that there must be biblical warrant for all aspects of the liturgy cannot be maintained. Even the Old Testament does not elaborate on all the details of worship. One only needs to ask: where is the biblical warrant for the synagogues of Jesus Christ's day? Thus to reject and condemn summarily the singing of hymns in worship on the basis of no explicit command is a shaky proposition. In our next and final article, we will look at the positive reinforcement in Scripture for the singing of both Psalms and hymns.

(To be continued.) 

Authority₂

Agents of Authority

By G.Ph. van Popta

In the last issue, the source of authority was written about. God is the source of all authority. God the Father gave authority to his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ exercised authority while on earth – authority to forgive sins, to drive out demons, to teach, to judge, and to give eternal life. Today the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is seated at the right hand of God Father as King of the universe. The Lord God has given us his holy Word, the Scriptures. The Scripture is the God-breathed Word of God. Today God speaks to us by way of his Word. We need to listen to that Word. Now we go on to the topic of agents of authority.

Agents

Not only does the Lord come to us by way of his holy Word; He also enters our lives through different agents. God comes to us by way of different people whom He puts in authority over us. We need to understand that. By the same token, the one who is in a position of authority needs to understand that as well. And he had better not abuse his authority. From the Word of God we can even say: Woe unto that person who abuses his or her authority and who thereby hurts the one under their authority. We will write more about that in a future issue – about the abuse of authority. But let the warning ring out now already that it will not go well for those who abuse their authority and hurt a little one. If he does not repent, it would be better for that person to have a millstone hung around his neck and for him to be cast into the deepest part of the ocean.

But we have gotten well ahead of ourselves. This issue's topic is "agents of authority."

Basically, there are three spheres of authority that God calls us to place ourselves under. They are: our parents, the church, and the state.

Parents

The first persons in authority you came across in your life were your parents. Your mom and your dad. They

were given the task, the responsibility to raise you, to teach you, to discipline you. Children are to submit to the good instruction and discipline of their parents. The LORD God even had something to say about this in the Ten Commandments. The Fifth Commandment says: "Honour your father and your mother." There are many places in the Bible that teach children to obey their parents.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul mentioned this as well. In Ephesians 6 he said: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother. . .'" In this context, he had a special word for the fathers. He added: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

God comes to us by way of different people whom He puts in authority over us.

We can also think of the beautiful summary of what the Bible teaches about this in Lord's Day 39 of the *Heidelberg Catechism*:

104. Q. What does God require in the fifth commandment?
- A. That I show all honour, love, and faithfulness
to my father and mother
and to all those in authority over me,
submit myself with due obedience
to their good instruction and discipline,
and also have patience with their weaknesses
and shortcomings,
since it is God's will
to govern us by their hand.

Church

But God does not only approach us via our parents. He also draws near to us through the church. The Lord Jesus Christ has vested authority in the

church. This authority is, first of all, to preach the gospel. The church is Christ's preaching agency. Before He ascended to heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ sent his disciples out to preach the good news about salvation in his name and to teach people how to live in obedience to his will. He said to them: ". . . go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

The apostles took this command seriously. They themselves went out into the world preaching, discipling, baptizing, and teaching. Before they died, they trained others to preach. They told those they trained to train, in turn, others. In the last letter he wrote before he died, the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, minister of the church in Ephesus: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim 2:2). Timothy, taught by Paul, had to teach others who would, in turn, be able to teach others.

And so to this day the apostolic message has been handed down through the church. The faithful church of Jesus Christ has continued to preach the good news about salvation in the Name of Jesus Christ.

Not only does the church have the authority to preach the Word of God (to those who are already members of the church and in the context of mission work to those who do not yet know Christ). Christ, the Head of the church, also gave the church authority to exercise discipline over the members of the church – over those under its care.

In Matthew 16, the Lord told Peter and the other disciples that He was giving them the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and that whatever they bound on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever they loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven. The Lord hereby gave the church authority to announce guilt or innocence. If a member of the church is living in disobedience to



the commandments of God, then the church has the authority to tell that person he stands guilty before God. And when a person repents, again, the church has the authority to declare that person innocent – innocent before God on the basis of the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus worked that out more – what in fact He was giving to the church – He worked that out a bit more in Matthew 18. There He said that if a member of the church refuses to repent of a specific sin, if he hardens his heart and holds on to that sin, if he loves that sin more than Jesus Christ and obedience to his word, then the church has the power, authority, and responsibility to excommunicate that person. To bar him from the rights and privileges of membership in the church, and to declare that he, because of his hard-hearted sin against God, because of his unwillingness to seek forgiveness at the foot of the cross of Christ, no longer has a place in the kingdom of heaven.

We have an example of this process at work in the New Testament. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 5, Paul said that it had been reported to him that there was a case of sexual immorality in the church that shocked even the pagan unbelievers of Corinth. The case was that a member of the church was living with his stepmother. This was a case of incest. As depraved as Grecian society was, apparently incest was almost unheard of. Here in the church at Corinth, there was a case of incest. A man was publicly living together with his father's wife – his stepmother. And the church did nothing about it. In fact, the church was kind of

proud about how enlightened it was that it could tolerate such a thing.

Paul said to the church: Put this man out of your fellowship! He continued: "When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord."

... parents ... the church
... and the state ...

The church was to put this man outside, to excommunicate him, to hand him over to Satan. By expelling the man from the church, he would be thrust into the devil's territory, severed from any connection with God's people. The purpose was not only the preservation of God's good Name, but also that by being officially ostracized from the church, the man would experience such anguish that he would repent and forsake his wicked way.

So you see, do you not, that the authority to discipline that Christ gave his church is remedial? It is meant to reconcile the sinner to Christ and the church. All discipline is meant to be therapeutic. You can make the analogy with discipline in the family. It is supposed to be healing. Administered in a firm but loving way, it brings correction. Sadly, discipline is sometimes administered in a cruel, abusive and destructive way. That is no longer discipline. That's something else. It's abuse. We will turn to that painful topic in a future issue.

The point is that discipline in the family and in the church is meant to bring healing and correction – to reconcile the sinner to God.

State

There is a third agent of authority. And that is the state.

In Romans 13, Paul taught that the government authorities have been appointed by God. Paul even calls the government "God's servant." God has ordained kings and civil officers whom He calls to govern by laws and policies so that the sinfulness of man be restrained and things be conducted in our country in good order. God even gives them the sword to punish the evil doer. Article 36 of the *Belgic Confession* provides a wonderful summary of the Biblical teaching on this.

Typically, governments do not acknowledge that they have their authority from God. In our country, called a democracy, the governments of course think they have their mandate from the people who elected them. That is only partially true. The full truth is that God mandates them. God uses the election to bring them into power, but *He* gives them the authority they have. Governments ought to realize that. The authority and power they have, they have from God.

Now that we have considered the source of authority and the agents of authority, we need to think about the style of authority. How ought those whom God gives authority in this world – parents, the church, the civil government – to exercise that authority? What ought to characterize their authority? In a word: Service. All authority ought to be qualified by service. Servant-leadership. To that matter we turn next time. 

RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This month we hope to celebrate Christmas again. We remember that Jesus Christ was born some 2000 years ago. For most of us this is a busy time. There is much shopping to do, holidays to be prepared, dinners and get-togethers to attend.

That is what the people have made of Christmas. It was not like that in Joseph and Mary's days. Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth and were expecting the birth of their first Child. They knew that it was to be a very special child. The angel Gabriel had spoken to Mary about this baby. And the Lord had addressed Joseph, to warn him that he should not desert Mary, but that he should stay with her. They knew that together they would have to take care of this child who was to be God's Son, the Promised One. They thought their baby would be born in their own house in Nazareth.

But God had made the prophets prophesy that the Saviour would be born in Bethlehem. Everything that has been told by the prophets has been or will be fulfilled. And also this prophecy would have to happen exactly the way it was written in the books. To that extent the Lord used Caesar Augustus who sent out an order that all the people had to go back to their place of origin, there to be registered by the authorities. And so it happened that Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem. Thus the Son of David was born in the city of David, in Bethlehem.

The birth of our Saviour did not cause a lot of commotion. Nobody celebrated this event. Hardly anybody even knew about it. The only people who knew were told so by the Lord. They were the shepherds in the field. They received the tidings and hurried to Bethlehem to see the Child who was wrapped in swaddling cloths, and lying in a manger. They were happy and excited about it; they even knocked on peoples' doors and told them what they knew. But the people did not listen to them. They would not pay attention to what these rough shepherds said. If anything would happen at all, then the Pharisees and the Scribes would tell them, for they would know it first!

So much has changed in these 2000 years. Then nobody knew; now everyone knows. Christmas Carols play wherever you go – in the streets and in the shopping malls. Everywhere you hear: "While Shepherds Watched their Flocks at Night"; "Away in a Manger, No Crib for His Bed"; "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"; "The First Noël"; and "Silent Night, Holy Night." The words of those songs tell us about the birth of Christ. That means everybody now knows about our Saviour!

Yes, but to really know about our Saviour we have to know more than the fact that He was born in Bethlehem. We have to know everything that was written about Him in the Bible. The story about Jesus Christ runs from Genesis to the Book of Revelation, and it even goes on today! After the fall into sin in Paradise, the Lord promised a Saviour who would come to us to free us from our sins. He would die in the place of us, sinners, and through Him we would be able to live. Everything happened as the Lord had promised it. Jesus Christ was born; He died for us on the cross; He was buried and rose again on the third day; then He ascended into heaven. Today He is with the Father in heaven, and He pleads us free from guilt.

We may celebrate Christmas and remember that God sent the promised Saviour to the earth. But we do not dwell on

Christmas as something that stands on its own. It is not like celebrating a birthday of someone you love. For we know that more is coming. Much more happened after Christmas. And much more is to happen still. Now sin still dwells on the earth with all its consequences. We are confronted with those consequences every day. We often see someone suffer and struggle to go on with her/his life, or we are suffering or grieving ourselves. There is so much sadness and loneliness, illnesses, mental and physical challenges. We hear of wars and earthquakes. We are confronted with our own sins and weaknesses. *But much more is to happen still.* We are only a little piece in God's plans. The Lord gave Mary and Joseph a very important role to play in his plan of salvation. But the same God gave also a small, tiny, and sometimes a very difficult role to each of us. He will help us to play that role all the way to the end.

We celebrate Christmas. Christmas was only one part in that whole big plan of the Lord. Together we continue on in his ways. When all the pieces are put together, then the final fulfillment will take place. Our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the clouds of heaven. He will gather His Church from all the quarters of the earth. The trumpet will sound, and we will celebrate with Him. That celebration will be so perfect that no pen can describe it, and no human mind can even imagine it. And it will go on forever!!

*The life of man is fleeting like the grasses,
And like a flower, when the stormwind passes,
It soon is gone: its place knows it no more.
But God's unfailing love shall never perish,
For everlastingly the Lord will cherish
Those who revere Him and His Name adore.*

Psalm 103:6

Birthdays in January:

- 2: LIZ KONING**
9905 152nd Street, Edmonton, AB T5P 1X4
- 7: CHRISTINE BREUKELMAN**
2225 – 19 Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4
- 17: HENRY DRIEGEN**
#19 – 31450 Spur Avenue, Abbotsford, BC V2T 5M3
- 17: GRACE HOMAN**
"ANCHOR HOME", 361 30 Road, RR 2,
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0
- 19: JANINE SMID**
510 2nd Street, RR 7, Strathroy, ON N7T 3H8
- 27: HANK ORSEL**
2424 Woodward, Apt. 10, Burlington, ON L7R 4E3
- 30: TYLER HOEKSEMA**
6755 Lorne Drive, Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

For Liz it will be her 39th birthday, for Christine her 28th, for Henry his 44th, for Grace her 44th, for Janine her 30th, for Hank his 69th, and for Tyler his 11th. I wish you all a very happy birthday!! And Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Reg. Road 20, RR 1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
Tel: 905-957-3007, e-mail: RWRavens@netcom.ca

By Dr. J. De Jong



We're Off!

A new facility

On Thursday, November 4, a small group of supporting people were present on our College "campus" to witness an important milestone in the life of the College: the sod-turning ceremony marking the beginning of the construction work on our new library building. Present at the ceremony were representatives of the Building Committee, the construction company, and the staff at the College: the faculty with their wives, the administrator and librarian, a couple of students, and even a representative of the College alumni (who happened to be in the building at the time)!

After a few words were spoken by the chairman of the building committee, the principal led in a short devotional dealing with Psalm 111:2. The goal of this new addition is that we may be more fully equipped in the task of studying and pondering the "great works of the LORD" especially as this ap-

plies to the area in which we are called to work, the study of theology and the training for the ministry. Thereafter one of our emeriti, Dr. J. Faber, spoke a few words. In his remarks he pointed out that the concern of building a sound and well developed theological library occupied the staff of the college from its inception. Visits were made to various booksellers in the Netherlands in order to establish an initial basis of material in our immediate Reformed tradition. An opportunity arose to acquire a large part of the library of the Rev. J. Wiskerke, who had died a year earlier at a young age, as well as a part of the library of Rev. G. Ph. Pieffers, all of which gave the library a good start. Then several contacts were established with important distributors on our continent to lay the foundation for a solid theological library highlighting specifically the areas in which we seek to specialize: the Reformed theology especially in the continental tradition.

Without neglecting the work of many people involved in the library through the years, Dr. Faber especially wanted to single out the work of the Women's Saving Action. "Without their help and support, humanly speaking, the library would not be where it is today, and this project would not be starting." He spoke a special word of gratitude to all the ladies involved in this work, and urged them to keep up this agency designed to provide support in a special way for the work of the College.

After his address, our emeritus was appropriately donned with a hard hat, and the ceremony began. For someone not used to handling a shovel, our emeritus did a fine job, and even insisted on getting it done all by himself. (However, his wife mentioned that he had been practising for most of the morning!) At his suggestion, our brief ceremony was concluded with the singing of the doxology.



Left to right: Mrs. Geertsema, H. Van Halen, J. Geertsema, G. Aikema, Dr. and Mrs. Van Dam, M. Vander Velde, C. Vermeulen, D. De Boer, Dr. Faber, Mrs. Faber, N.H. Gootjes, Mrs. Gootjes, Wm. Oostdyk, J. Vander Woude, Mrs. DeJong, Brandon DeJong (son of DeJongs), and Dr. DeJong.



Sod-Turning

Left to right: G. Aikema, Dr. Faber,
Dr. DeJong, Wm. Oostdyk



I may also express our deepest gratitude for the many gifts that have come in, all of which have helped to make this project possible. Anyone who is no stranger in Jerusalem knows that there are currently an abundance of causes asking for support, and our schools and other organizations have ongoing financial needs that must be met. It is then all the more reason for gratitude on our part that notwithstanding all of these demands, so many people were found willing to give for this cause as well. We are grateful that the College has not been forgotten, and we wish to thank our supporting community for their generosity. May the Lord bless all our efforts!

Funding an organ

Some staff members at the College received questions concerning the proceeds for this year's Convocation collection. The program had listed "Organ Fund" but unfortunately we had failed to provide an explanation about this fund. Why an "Organ Fund"? Last year, the instrument we had in our chapel room, which has consistently been used in our chapel times (held twice per week) failed on us, and turned out to be irreparable. The most economical solution was to have it removed. Since we have enjoyed the accompaniment of an organ since the College opened, the Convocation Committee thought that this was a worthwhile project (outside of the expansion itself) for the Convocation collection.

With the proceeds we hope to purchase a smaller instrument for the auditorium which can be used at chapels, and on special occasions. Meanwhile the Fellowship church of Burlington has placed its newly purchased organ on loan at the College until the time that their planned facilities have reached completion. Thank you, Fellowship! It's always appreciated if we can add accompaniment to our singing! And once again, our heartfelt gratitude and deepest appreciation for all who were able and willing to give to this project, too!

So we are witnessing a period of growth and expansion at our seminary in which we see many people from different trades walking and working around our building. Please pray with us for the safety of the workers and for the successful completion of this project under the guidance and blessing of the Lord. Till next time! 

Stars of the Morning, so Gloriously Bright

*Stars of the morning, so gloriously bright,
Filled with celestial virtue and light,
These that, where night never followeth day,
Praise the Thrice-Holy for ever and ay:*

*These are thy ministers, these dost thou own,
Lord God of Sabaoth, nearest thy throne;
These are thy messengers, these dost thou send,
Help of the helpless ones, man to defend.*

*These keep the guard amidst Salem's dear bowers,
Thrones, Principalities, Virtues and Powers,
Where, with the Living Ones, mystical four,
Cherubim, Seraphim, bow and adore.*

*Then, when the earth was first poised in mid space,
Then, when the planets first sped on their race,
Then, when was ended the six days' employ,
Then all the sons of God shouted for joy.*

*Still let them succour us; still let them fight,
Lord of angelic hosts, battling for right;
Till, where their anthems they ceaselessly pour,
We with the angels may bow and adore.*

Trans. J.M. Neale (Hymns of the Eastern Church, 1862)

Supporting the Reformed Faith in Mexico

By C. Van Dam

The Partners In Reformational Education – Latin America (PIRE-LA) have been supporting the work of the Juan Calvino Seminary in Mexico City. Through the pages of *Clarion*, updates have been regularly published. Through a variety of circumstances, the primary focus of this work of support is now shifting to the Yucatan where great opportunities and needs also exist for the advancement of the Reformed faith.¹

From time to time questions are asked about this organization and about the kind of work that is being done. Let me take this opportunity to elaborate. I will make extensive use of the summer and fall *Newsletters* of PIRE-LA.

How the work got started

After the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) ceased supporting Juan Calvino Seminary in the early 1980s by suddenly cutting off all assistance, this faithful Seminary struggled under considerable hardships, especially financial. Not everyone in the CRC was happy with this development but Mexico was far away and little could apparently be done.

Through God's providence, contacts developed between the Seminary and sympathetic members of the CRC, which led to the founding of a support group called Partners In Reformational Education – Latin America in 1996. Founding members were: Messrs. Harry Antonides (former director of the Work Research Foundation), James Antonides (a St. Catharines business man, who is now United Reformed), Wybe Bylsma (a veteran of many years of service with the CR World Relief Fund), Arthur Joosse (an Ancaster business man), Johan Tangelder (retired CRC pastor), and Rene Vander Spek (a retired plant maintenance supervisor). The format was simple: Make the needs of the Seminary known and send any financial gifts on to the Seminary to help them in their struggles. As time went on the Partnership expanded. In 1997 I was asked

to join, and in 1998, Mr. Cris Diomedi, a Spanish-speaking deacon of the Canadian Reformed Church in Thornhill (Toronto), also joined this group.

Necessary changes

During 1998, the Partners were able to assist the Seminary with money received from individual donors and (mostly) from a number of churches in Canada. Last year we sent a total of \$52,120 Canadian to the Seminary.

Thankfully, due to the generosity of donors, both in money and free labour, the worst financial troubles at the seminary are now over and the building has received a badly needed facelift. Also essential equipment could be donated or purchased and other material support given. Having reached this situation, it was necessary that we reflect on how to proceed from here.

Such reflection on a future course of action was necessary for two reasons. First, in order to avoid creating too great a dependency on outside funding at the Seminary it is advisable from now on to target specific needs, in consultation with the brothers in Mexico. This school is and remains a seminary of the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico (IPCM) and their history has shown that it would be to their detriment if the Seminary becomes too dependant on foreign money.

Secondly, the IPCM has indicated that they do not want to see one institution assisted to the exclusion of others as this causes jealousies and divisions in the churches. We are sympathetic to this position and are therefore in contact with the IPCM to work out agreements to assist in the needs that exist in the Yucatan peninsula. This involves areas such as financial aid to promising students, library development, and equipment.

Other opportunities

Needy graduate students have approached us for financial assistance. They

either want a Reformed education or want to equip themselves professionally for service as Reformed confessors. They are convinced that after graduation they can make a worthwhile contribution to the expansion of God's Kingdom in Mexico or in other Latin American countries. We are in the process of carefully investigating the requests and hope to be able to give some support for these budding Christian scholars.

Translation work is another area where promising new opportunities have come our way. It is important that scholarly Reformed works be made available in the Spanish language. But we do not want to limit ourselves to funding academic works only. We believe that there is a great need for good "popular" Reformed literature the average church member can read. This whole area of translation is being investigated before final decisions are made as we realize that others are also involved in this type of enterprise.

PIRE-LA are proceeding carefully and slowly for we are deeply aware of the great responsibility incumbent on us to make the very best use of money entrusted to us for the Lord's work in Mexico. The opportunities are many. May these efforts be blessed!

The Canadian address to which money for Mexico can be sent is:

*World Wide Christian
Schools-Mexico Project,
P.O. Box 81129,
RPO Fiddlers Green,
Ancaster, ON,
L9G 4X1 Canada.*

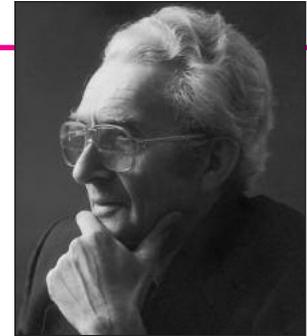
Donations should be clearly marked; "Mexico Project." In due time an acknowledgment and tax receipt will be sent.

¹See C. Van Dam, "The Light of the Gospel in the Land of the Mayas", *Clarion* March 19, 1999. 

A Celebration of Life:

A Memorial Service for Rev. Dirk Vanderboom

By Sarah Vandergugten



October 5, 1999. We thought we were early, but the parking lot was full. Cars spilled onto 52nd Avenue. We parked well past the church and walked back briskly to the open doors of the church. We joined a line of people waiting patiently to sign the condolence book. We climbed the stairs to the balcony and sat on the highest row, right in the center. The church was packed. Organ music swelled, wafting upward. We heard Rev. James Visscher's voice below, "Will you please rise." He came into view, ushering the Vanderboom family into the front pew. It was time.

Rev. Visscher began this memorial service for Dirk Vanderboom by confirming that we would be doing what Langley's pastor emeritus wished – no gloom and sadness, but a celebration of life. Rev. Visscher related a brief life-history of his senior colleague, beginning with his first pastorate in 1954 to his retirement in 1983. Retirement was a not a time for inactivity, but a time for hobbies and his greatest love, preaching. With thankfulness, he reached the 45 year mark of his ministry. When illness forced the realization that death was imminent, he helped plan this memorial service. "Do lots of singing," he said, "and listen to the Word." And so we did.

Dirk Vanderboom loved Paul's letters, especially Romans, which so clearly lays out the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. In compliance with these sentiments, Rev. Visscher led us through a study and meditation on Romans 5:1-2. "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of sharing the glory of God." This is a deep and complex doctrine, and the tendency may be to shove it aside to let

feelings and experience have free reign. Who needs doctrine? Rev. Vanderboom's emphatic answer would be, "We do!" We need to know the central doctrines of the Reformed faith. Right doctrine leads to right thinking which leads to right living! Rich blessings and peace will be the consequence. As royalty we have access to the palace, to the glory of God. Our friend and pastor had this confidence, this peace, this hope. Do we? May God grant that we do.

At a time like this, we may reflect on what the Lord has accomplished through his servant, Dirk Vanderboom. The Rev. W.W.J. VanOene – with the passing of his colleague now the most senior minister in the Canadian Reformed Churches – received the honor to speak first. He noted this was the third time he was speaking at the funeral of a colleague. The older you become the more lonely you become. He reflected on the seven years they worked side by side in the fledgling congregations of New Westminster and Cloverdale. Rev. VanOene read to us excerpts from the sermon he preached for the installation of Rev. Vanderboom in 1957. The text, Matthew 13:16-17, where the Lord calls blessed those who see and hear him, and tell it to others. This is what Dirk Vanderboom loved to do – repeat what the apostles had seen and heard. That's why churches he served were edified. For those who die in the Lord, their works follow them. He sees what we do not yet see, and hears what we cannot yet hear. He has become part of that great cloud of witnesses that surround us.

Gerry Vandeburgt, with a fine blend of humor and pathos, spoke on behalf of the church at Langley. When Rev. Vanderboom received the call to Langley in 1977, rumor had it that his bags were already packed. He loved the idea

of having his own home, and even helped design it. Perhaps that's why it had room for an organ, but no back door. As pastor, he took an active role in planning Langley's church building. He insisted on as small a distance between pulpit and congregation as possible. He was a frequent visitor on the job site, walking around with nails jingling in his pockets.

Rev. Vanderboom's greatest joy was preaching. Who can forget his sermons on the Sons of Jacob? Or the sermon on the broad and narrow way? The narrow way is not just narrow; it is a counterflow lane that goes directly against and through the traffic on the broad way. Time and again, Rev. Vanderboom's emphasis was God's grace and his faithfulness. When illness struck and an operation was imminent, his initial comment was, "That's a long time to be away from the pulpit." During one bedside visit, Gerry read Psalm 84. Rev. Vanderboom's response? "You could preach a sermon on every verse of that Psalm."

Michelle Faber, the eldest of the Vanderboom children, thanked all those present for their kind words and deeds. As the family reflected on their father's life, they realized he truly belonged to the people he pastored. They had buried their beloved father in a private ceremony that morning – that is how he wanted it – but they were happy to share the evening memorial service with the church community. Michelle noted that her Dad had a human reaction to his illness, but that God's care for him was real. The Lord granted his desire to mark his 45th anniversary in the ministry, and called him home soon after. His earthly life of praise to God had ended, but echoes of it remain for us to hear and act upon. "Till we like them, forever, Shall be with glory crowned." 

By C. Van Dam

Panflute and Organ

Abide With Me. A Selection of Instrumental Hymns. Noortje Van Middelkoop, Panflute and Harm Hoeve, Organ/Grand Piano. Total time: 73'15" (order no. CD CMR 106-2). Available from Church Music & Records, Box 154, Neerlandia, Alberta Canada T0G 1R0. Price: \$ 21.99 CDN (toll free order phone and fax number: 1-800-563-3594)

This CD of instrumental hymns will quickly become a family favourite. The music is of a very high quality and the selections played are bound to have a wide appeal (e.g., Genevan, traditional and more modern hymns, as well as some classical such as Handel, Purcell and Mozart). The sen-

sitive opening solo selection, "Abide With Me", by Noortje Van Middelkoop on the panflute is superb and sets the right tone (pardon the pun) for what follows. Together with Harm Hoeve on the organ, this duet brings to new life and vigour tunes one may not have been aware had such potential for sparkle and appeal. Some of the selections also involve Anja Van Der Maten playing the oboe, Edith and Arjan Post with trumpets and Hendrie Westra on the xylophone. All in all a very delightful and uplifting recording which I hope will be enjoyed by many in our midst. In an age of much trash music, a CD such as this needs to be heard in our families. May it also be used to build appreciation for good music. 

Observer's Report of the

Synod of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches

held on October 21-22, 1999, at Cambridge, Ontario

1. The meeting

On Thursday, October 21, at 9:00 a.m., the Rev. C. DePrine led in opening devotions. He delivered a meditation (sermon) on Deuteronomy 32:36. It took the delegates quite a long time to go through the proceedings in order to come to the constitution of Synod and the adoption of the Agenda. As first item on the Agenda each church reported on the local situation and well-being of the congregation. Upon the completion of three reports three members of Synod took turns leading in prayer for these congregations; this way all fourteen churches shared their concerns and received the prayers of the assembly. Upon a word of welcome to the Invited Observers, each of them received the opportunity to address the Synod: for the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) – Rev. R. Stienstra; for the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) – Rev. W. den Hollander (please see elsewhere in this issue for Rev. Den Hollander's speech); for the Free Reformed Churches (FRC) – Rev. L.

Roth; for the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC) – Rev. Van Eyck.

At 2:30 p.m., finally, Synod started its work on the Overtures and Reports on the Agenda.

2. Overtures and reports

a. The churches of Nobleton, Ontario, and Sunnyside, Washington, submitted overtures with regard to Synodical Deputies. Due to confusion and uncertainty about the place, task, and function of such deputies at the examination of students for the ministry by a Classis (C.O. art. 4), these churches were seeking clarity. Article 4 of their C.O. does not give these deputies much of an involvement in the actual examination; neither does it stipulate that these deputies should give concurring advice. Synod supported these overtures insofar as the deputies' participation in the examination was concerned. In regard to the matter of concurring advice, however, Synod did not establish a practice to which the Classes should be bound. An inconsistency was noted between the procedure in connection

with ministers *entering* into the ministry and the procedure at the time of *dismissal* (art. 11 C.O., when concurring advice is required). In order to correct this situation a new overture to change the Church Order would have to be submitted to a future Synod.

b. The church of Wingham, Ontario, overtured Synod to amend C.O. art. 68, seeking to facilitate the possibility that churches allow their ministers also to preach on the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort besides the use of the Heidelberg Catechism in the afternoon service. This overture, seeking to change the Church Order, did not receive the required support of a two-third majority (one vote short!).

c. Synod, further, discussed the provisions which are in place for the financial assistance to students for the ministry among the O CRCs. In its discussion the question whether this support should be considered a grant or a loan was debated extensively (it ended up being a forgivable loan). The point of contention related to the fact that students leave the denomination (or the ministry). Now,

when they leave the ministry, each year of service will have decreased the loan with 10%, while the loan will be forgiven when they join another "Bible-believing" or "confessionally reformed" church (and complete in such a church at least 10 years of ministry).

d. The churches of Cambridge and Nobleton, Ontario, overtured Synod on the matter of life-time eldership. The former requested a change in the C.O. to make this possible, while the latter requested Synod to appoint a committee to study the matter of "allowing a lifetime option for service as elder or deacon." Synod decided to appoint a Committee of two churches in the West (Cambridge and Nobleton) and three churches in the East (Burlington, Washington, New Westminster, and Surrey, BC) to study the matter and report to the next Synod.

e. Synod decided to continue in the same fraternal relations with the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico (IPCM) as had previously been established, even though it was not clear what exactly this relationship entailed. Due to lack of documentation and preparation, the plan contained in the "Vision for Mexico" was put off to a future Synod.

f. Finally, Synod discussed the "Invitation" of the United Reformed Churches in North America to unite with them in federative union (to be received immediately into the federation without conducting a *colloquium doctum* for their ministers). This discussion took place in a format which was called "a committee of the whole," which means that the entire Synod turned into a committee in order to prepare proposals for Synod regarding the issue. In this "committee meeting" also the overtures submitted to Synod by the churches of Cambridge, Ontario (against) and Everson, Washington (in favour), could be considered. Upon the return to the Synod-setting, the proposals adopted by this "committee-meeting" were to be discussed and voted upon by Synod.

The delegates of each congregation received the opportunity to report on the outcome of local meetings, discussions at local councils, and their resulting positions. The reports showed that only two churches expressed a majority support for acceptance of the invitation. Some of the churches supported the idea initially, but upon further reflection and discussions had second thoughts, and became reluctant to pursue the matter at this time. The main issues which became obstacles in the way toward acceptance of the invitation were the Creation issue (URC has not expressed itself on the Framework Hypothesis of Dr.

Meredith Kline, i.e. 6 regular 24 hour days of creation or not; some among the URCNA have spoken positively about this theory), the absence of a "regulative principle of worship," and the fact that some churches use the NIV translation.

In the discussion on these reservations it became clear that the delegates would first want to receive a response from the URC. A motion proposing to request the URC to keep the invitation open till such a response will have been considered by the OCRC was defeated by Synod. In the end this response was requested by Synod on the matter of the Creation issue only. The members realized that the OCRC themselves do not have an official position on the "regulative principle of worship" either (except for the expression of it in LD 35 HC, "... or to worship Him in any other manner than He has commanded in His Word"). Hence, they could not request an official response and position from the URCNA on this matter. On the Creation-issue, however, the OCRC did adopt an official position in the past, which it wants to see supported by the URCNA. Synod decided to adopt its reply to the invitation of the URCNA as the answer to the overtures from Cambridge and Everson as well.

In the course of the discussions it became clear that those churches which were in favour of accepting the invitation had difficulty with their position within the OCRC federation. In the end they were instructed to report Synod's decision at home and to make a decision regarding it as local congregation. A real tension appeared between the obligations and responsibilities of churches within a federation, while also the meaning, place, and purpose of a federation of churches was viewed in different ways. The contentious question was whether a federation is an expression of the "one-ness" of the church (and thus belongs to the "essence" of the church) or just an arrangement for the "well-being" of the local churches (and therefore does not belong to the "essence" of the church). The views concerning this question clearly expressed a thinking about the church in terms of the pluriformity of the church and of "the church" being invisible.

3. Observations

The meeting was held in a brotherly spirit and conducted in an orderly fashion. The views that were expressed concerning the issues before Synod showed a weakness in the way the Confessions and Church Order function in the thinking and argumentation of the brothers.

Especially the discussion on the matter of the invitation of the URCNA brought out a lack of understanding of the Confession regarding the Church, the function of art. 31 C.O., or the process of admonition and discipline in the case of deviant ideas among the officebearers (e.g. art. 71, 72 C.O.). There clearly was no consensus on the general principles for a living together in a federation of churches. Confusion could be observed in regard to the place and status of the position-paper on Creation (extra-confessional or "just" a position-paper).

Finally, the opinions that were expressed and the approach that was taken concerning the invitation of the URCNA were disappointing to say the least. Although your observer agreed that the wiser course to follow was the way of preliminary discussions between committees representing the federations (the three-phases-approach we are taking with the URCNA), the discussion about "views" on Creation, about "practices" that were tolerated in certain congregations (e.g. choirs during a worship-service, soloists, musical instruments), or about "lifestyles" that have become apparent among some of the UR Churches, was regrettable. The latter resulted from a lack of ability to discern the principles and points of consideration that are important and relevant in terms of confessions and church polity. The OCRC federation will need to go through an extensive period of maturation and self examination before a union with the URC can be realized.

As observer I found especially the lack of desire and of the consciousness of our calling to pursue the unity of the church in this broken world discouraging. Also, the weakness in dealing with this issue in a confessional way, with a Reformed approach to matters of church polity, was disconcerting. I am afraid that in this way a small federation like this will continue to splinter, while the matters that bind them won't be confessional and Reformed so much but rather moral and man-made distinctives. Also in regard to our request to facilitate a format for further contact we did not receive any response. It is our sincere prayer, therefore, that perhaps at the local level our contacts with the churches in the OCRC may be blessed and may serve to promote the confessional approach to the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity.

For the Committee for the Promotion
of Ecclesiastical Unity,
W. den Hollander, observer. 

Here follows the text of the address of the Rev. W. den Hollander, member of the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches, to the Synod of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, convened at Cambridge, Ontario, on October 21-22, 1999.

Esteemed brothers,

It is a privilege and honour that I may stand here to convey Christian greetings on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. We greet you in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Head of his Catholic Church. We confess Him in the unity of the true faith with the Church of all times and all places. With you we share in this confession, not only *in name*, by way of the Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity which we have in common, but also *in deed*, in the way we seek to abide by these standards in our participation in the church-gathering work of this our Head and our Lord. We both pursue this work in loyal observance to what in essence is the Church Order of Dort. We are convinced that in this Church Order our confession of the Word of God is worked out faithfully by applying confessional principles in practical ways and beneficial arrangements. It is our sincere desire that you may be blessed in your Synod and may be fruitful in your meeting, by remaining faithful to your confession. May the Holy Spirit lead and guide you in your deliberations by his Word.

In a Synod you are involved in this work as a federation of churches. In the past you founded your federation on the confessional basis which I just described. You recognized the calling for such a federation in the Scriptural notion of Christ's walking among the candle-sticks and other Scriptural inferences. You bound yourselves together, vowing faithfulness and loyalty to each other. At least, that's what the root-word for federation, *foedus*, denotes! You established this bond in order to help one another, support one another, and to

hold on to each other for the preservation of this unity of faith and confession. In this Synod also, you are called to deal with matters which pertain to the entire federation. Together you are at a cross-road situation, and together you are responsible for the direction and decision-making of the federation. We wish to express our heartfelt prayer that the Spirit may help you to fulfil your vows of faithfulness and loyalty to each other.

As federations we have been living beside each other for a few decades now. That situation is a reflection of the brokenness of life due to sin. This brokenness does not pass by the Christian's life; also the church gathering work of Christ takes place in the midst of this sorrowful reality. Thankfully, at the local level there have been contacts and interactions, especially out West. Initially, during the early years of your existence, there were the hopes for greater unity. At the local level, however, these hopes were not fulfilled. In the broader context of our federations we have not had an opportunity yet to pursue and promote such ecclesiastical unity. However, there are encouraging signs that in both West and East these local and regional contacts may lead to the establishment of such an official pursuit of unity on behalf of our respective federations.

Indeed, it is this *"in tandem"* approach which we pursue: as local addresses of the church of Christ *and* in the context of the federation we are called to promote the unity and catholicity of the church. The efforts at the local level should be supportive of the unity-pursuits on the federal level, and *vice versa*. Thus also this promotion of ecclesiastical unity should be done in accordance with the principles of loyalty and faithfulness in a covenant bond of churches. On behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches I urgently entreat you to *facilitate* such contact at the level of our federations, so that we may renew our acquaintance of each other and in due time find each other in a mutual bond and unity which is pleasing to the Lord.

You will understand that as Canadian Reformed Churches we are keenly interested in the debates and decisions of this Synod in regard to the invitation from the federation of United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). We ourselves rejoice in the progress we have made with the URCNA over the past years in our mutual understanding

of the matters and issues which play an important role in the process toward merger. The points on which we have expressed our common agreement are very essential and crucial for the mutual recognition as true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the course of our contact and interactions with them we have pursued the *"in tandem"* approach as well. We have found them to be mandatory as well as beneficial for the pursuit of unity, locally and federally. We sincerely hope that we may engage in a similar pursuit with your federation. We, also, honestly and openly express the hope and advice that *you* will follow the *same* approach in *your* considerations of unity with the URCNA.

In the discussions which we should have together, we should come to better understanding of our history. Our primary concern should not be *"who was there first"* and *"who should have joined whom."* At *this* time in the history of each of our federations we should come to understand the *reasons* for the course we have walked. Together we will have to evaluate the causes behind the separate existence of our federations. Especially when we agree to submit our discussions to the Word of God and use the confessions as normative for our life as churches, we should be able to agree on a process toward unity in which the oneness in the Lord, in hope, faith, and baptism comes to fruition in a church-unity which is pleasing to our one God and Father, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:4-6).

In order to establish a true unity, which is a unity in the truth (John 17:17, 21), we cannot be too presumptuous as believers who still struggle with weaknesses and sins. We should only submit ourselves in all humbleness to the Spirit of truth, and in that spirit seek each other in true brotherly love. We pray that this spirit may pervade your meeting and that it may move us as federations to continue in our pursuit of ecclesiastical unity in obedience to our Head and Lord, Jesus Christ. May we acknowledge with thankfulness that the momentum for such unity is growing. May we also, together, receive the wisdom and patience of the Spirit to come to a true and lasting Union at God's time and under his blessing. I thank you heartily for your kindness shown in inviting us and granting us this opportunity to express our greetings to you and our petitions for you. 



Press Release of the Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches held on September 9, 1999

Opening

Dr. J. Visscher opened the meeting with the reading of Psalm 44:1-8 and led in prayer. All governors were present along with the principal, Dr. N.H. Gootjes. Dr. J. Visscher was reappointed as chairman of the board, Rev. R. Aasman was reappointed as vice-chairman, Rev. D.G.J. Agema was reappointed as secretary and brother H.J. Sloots was reappointed as treasurer. Minutes of the meeting held on September 10, 1998 were approved.

Sabbatical

A request by Dr. N.H. Gootjes for a sabbatical during the fall semester of the year 2000 was approved. Dr. Gootjes plans to use this time to devote more study to the background and history of the Belgic Confession. Drs. J.M. Batteau of the Netherlands has already been contacted as a replacement during the time of the sabbatical. Drs. Batteau is well qualified to teach Dr. Gootjes' subjects. Further arrangements will be made to prepare for the sabbatical.

Finance and Property Committee

A number of matters were presented to the Board by the Finance and Property Committee. It was made clear that the Lord has blessed the College with good financial support and thus made it possible for the work at the College to continue unhindered. It was also reported that sufficient money has been donated to proceed with the library expansion. Since substantial support has come from our sister churches in Australia, it was decided to invite a delegation of up to two people from Australia when, the Lord willing, the new library is officially opened. It was also decided to invite to the official opening of the library the brothers G. Kuik of Manitoba, P. Lindhout of Alberta and H.A. Berends of Washington who have been involved in the funding drive for the library. By-law No. 10 was adopted re the establishment of a Publication Committee. This is a committee comprised of the faculty, one member of the Property and Finance Committee and one member of

the Academic Committee whose objective is the publication and dissemination of scholarly writings of the faculty and other Reformed scholars, along with the establishment of a periodical publication containing scholarly work. The budget for 2000 was approved as well as the financial statement for 1998.

In connection with the convocation evening, there was a discussion whether governors who do not have an academic degree could forgo wearing a gown. A decision which was made the previous year was maintained: members of the Finance and Property Committee need not wear a gown if so desired. The convocation committee was mandated to review the convocation exercises, particularly with a view to the length and purpose of the speeches.

Reports

A report by Revs. D.G.J. Agema and P.G. Feenstra and a report by Revs. R. Aasman and J. Visscher on visits made to lectures at the College demonstrated that the teaching at our College is both academically sound and faithful to the Word of God. Deep thankfulness was expressed for this. Reports were also received from the Senate, the Principal, the Librarian, Dr. J. DeJong who visited the churches in Alberta/Manitoba, the Faber-Holwerda Fund, Prof. J. Geertsema re his sabbatical, the Bingham Conference on "Prayer" attended by Prof. J. Geertsema, and Dr. C. Van Dam who made trips to Australia and Mexico.

New students

The following new students were admitted to studies at the College: David de Boer of Calgary, Nick Gunnink of Abbotsford and Michael Ten Haaf of Ancaster. These three brothers are all members of our churches. Gratitude was expressed that the Lord has provided more men to be admitted to the Master of Divinity program.

Visitors' schedule

Revs. W. DenHollander and P.G. Feenstra were appointed to make visits to lectures in the fall of 1999. Revs. R. Aasman and J. Moesker were appointed to make visits to lectures in the winter/spring of 2000.

Library expansion

The funding needed for the library expansion is in place. The Property and

Finance Committee felt it was getting close to receiving a building permit. Contractors have been approached for prices. Building might start this fall and, the Lord willing, be completed by the end of next July. This would have the library up and running before the new school year.

Pastoral proficiency program

Reports were submitted by students P.H. Holtvluwer and T. Van Raalte who carried out summer internships at the Churches at Smithville and Langley, respectively. Rev. J. de Gelder submitted a report regarding the internship of P.H. Holtvluwer. Rev. J. de Gelder was appointed as coordinator of the Pastoral Proficiency Program. The reports demonstrated that this program is most beneficial in preparing students for the practical aspects of the ministry.

Master of Theology Program

Some information has been received about possibly starting a Master of Theology program. Since the information was recently received, this will be dealt with at the next meeting.

Correspondence

A letter was received from the Church at Orangeville requesting the Board to "increase the weight of the Poimenics course" and "to appoint another faculty member." It was decided to send this letter to the Senate for further study. The Finance and Property Committee was also asked to look into the costs of implementing this request.

Accreditation

Recognition by the Association of Theological Schools will allow degrees granted by our College to be recognized at other academic institutions. This would allow students from our College to be admitted to further study at other institutions. Senate was charged to investigate the viability of this accreditation.

Closing

Dr. N.H. Gootjes was thanked for his work as principal at our College. Dr. J. De Jong will commence his duties as principal after the convocation evening. The meeting was closed in a Christian manner.

For the Board of Governors
R. Aasman

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers

Do you enjoy doing the puzzles which I put into *Our Little Magazine*? I always love doing the ones from the other Busy Beavers. They show that our Busy Beavers are busy little beavers and making me little puzzles. It takes a lot of thought to make up a puzzle. And then it takes a lot of thought to figure out the puzzles.

I hope you all enjoy them as much as me. Try thinking up a different puzzle and send it to me. Even a name search, where you put in all the children in your class would be fun. Or find lots of girls or boys names, animals, birds, etc. There are so many ideas, and so much fun to make them.

Have fun.

Love from Aunt Betty

PENPALS WANTED

Tineke Bouma

P O Box 267
Barnwell, AB T0K 0B0
Age: 14

Loves football, volleyball, baseball, baking, cooking and doing jobs around the house. Also likes animals.

Rhonda Wiersma

P O Box 687
Coaldale, AB T1M 1M6
Age: 12

Loves reading, baking and helping people. Lives on a farm and loves animals.

UNSCRAMBLE THE WEAPONS

By Busy Beaver Nadine Barendregt

- | | | | |
|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|
| 1. xa | _____ | 5. blcu | _____ |
| 2. wbo | _____ | 6. rawro | _____ |
| 3. pearss | _____ | 7. elatnr | _____ |
| 4. crko | _____ | | |

DECODE THE TEXT FROM THE BIBLE

by an unknown Busy Beaver.

A Δ	F X	K ◇	P ©	Y E
O O	g W	L B	α Π V	V S
C <	H □	M ♥	R ∩	W 4
D J	I □	N ⊕	∂ T	X 3
E √	J ◊	O ⊠	T ⊞	Y 2
				Z 1

E B E M O Δ B B B B S N
 B O N B B N J E B E N W B J
 G I B O Δ B B E B E N O N A N B

STATEMENTS

Match what was said with the person about whom it was said.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Enoch, Genesis 5:24 | a. There is none like him in the earth |
| 2. Noah, Genesis 6:8 | b. In love with this world |
| 3. King Solomon, 1 Kings 11:1 | c. Walked with God |
| 4. John the Baptist, Luke 1:17, John 1:23 | d. Cephas, a stone |
| 5. Abraham, James 2:23 | e. Found grace with God |
| 6. Demas, 2 Timothy 4:10 | f. Voice of one crying in the wilderness |
| 7. Peter, John 1:42 | g. He went away sorrowful |
| 8. Mary, Luke 1:30 | h. Chose the good part |
| 9. Job, Job 2:3 | i. Friend of God |
| 10. A rich young man, Luke 18:23 | j. Loved many strange women |
| 11. Mary, Luke 10:42 | k. Found favor with God |
| 12. Judas Iscariot, Matthew 26:24 | l. Would have been good if he had not been born |

JOKES

from Busy Beaver Rhonda Wiersma

Steve: "What kind of stew is this?"

Tim: "Rabbit stew. You can tell by the hares in it."

A man drove up to a police officer on Fifth Street. "Can I park here?" he asked. "No", answered the police officer. "But all those other cars are parked here," the man said as he pointed down the street.

"Yes", said the police officer. "But they didn't ask."

Mother: "Doctor, Doctor, my son has just swallowed a roll of film."

Doctor: "Let's hope nothing develops."



FROM THE MAILBOX

Thank you, Rhonda Wiersma, for your letter and your jokes. They are really funny, so I will put them into *Our Little Magazine*. I hope you had a great birthday on November 24th. Did you get lots of presents, and have a party with all your school friends? Write again, won't you, Rhonda and tell me about your pen pal.

Hi also to Nadine Barendregt. Thank you for your letter and puzzle. I'm really glad you have lots of fun writing to your pen pals. They are always fun to write to, especially because you can tell them all kinds of funny things, sad things and nice things. I hope you get to see your pen pals soon. Bye now, Nadine.

