

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
VOLUME 49, NO. 13 JUNE 23, 2000

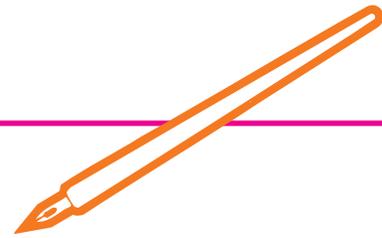


Be Shepherds

Numbers

10:1-10

By G.Ph. van Popta



Be Shepherds

By now the new elders and deacons will have been installed into their respective offices in our congregations. We call the offices of minister, elder and deacon the pastoral offices. In many places in both Testaments, the people of God are described as a flock, as God's sheep. Those whom God calls to lead them are often called shepherds.

When Paul took his farewell of the Ephesian elders, he told them to shepherd the church of God (Acts 20:28). Peter told the leaders of the church to be shepherds of God's flock (1 Pet 5:2).

This apostolic charge rings down through the ages to all who have been called to pastoral offices: Be shepherds!

What does it mean for the leaders of the church to be shepherds?

They must be courageous, like a shepherd. Remember the shepherd David! In order to protect his flock of sheep, he once killed a lion and another time a bear. The kings of Israel were called "shepherds." After the Holy Spirit had singled out the young David to be the future shepherd-king of Israel, David killed the giant Goliath. David courageously threw himself into the breach and defended the flock of God against the Philistine blasphemer.

That elders and deacons must do their work like shepherds means they must live near the sheep. A shepherd lived near his sheep. He was always there for them and with them. As he fed them, led them, found pasturage for them, there he was, near them. He knew them personally, by name, and they would recognize his voice.

Those who fill the pastoral offices must have the heart of a shepherd. A shepherd would climb mountains and descend into dangerous gorges to find that one lost sheep. And finding it, he would pick it up in his arms and bring it back to the flock, to safety.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Great Shepherd. In John 10 He calls himself the Good Shepherd. In Hebrews 13 He is called the great Shepherd of the sheep. In 2 Peter 2, Peter called him the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. And in 1 Peter 5, Peter called Him the Chief Shepherd.

When the Lord came and ministered among the people of God, He did so like a shepherd. He courageously took

on those who harassed the sheep – the Pharisees and Sadducees, among others. He personally reached out to the people. He went to the people, spoke to them, touched them, had compassion on them. He showed that He truly had a shepherd's heart. He did not do his work from a distance, from heaven. He, the eternal Son of God, was born in human flesh. He came into the midst of the people and personally laboured among them.

Ministers, elders and deacons labour as shepherds under Christ, the Chief Shepherd. They must follow his example. They cannot do their work of keeping watch over the flock by remote control. By assuming our human nature and working among his people, the Son of God forbids the shepherds of the flock (all three offices) to be aloof from the members of the flock. They've got to be out there, visiting, getting to know and becoming known by the members under their care. For things to work well, the sheep and the shepherds need to know each other. And they can only get to know each other by spending time together.

Each of the offices has its priorities. The minister is first a preacher and teacher. The elders' first concern is the supervision of the doctrine and life of the sheep. The deacons are the merciful hands of Christ. But the office-bearers must bring this work close to

the sheep, as the Great Shepherd did. In his preaching, teaching, encouragement, admonition, healing and feeding, he did so by coming near to the people.

Finally, He even died for his people

The sacrifice of the Great Shepherd proves the true value of the church. Every office-bearer must always keep this in mind. He is called to labour in the midst of the church of God that has been set free from sin and Satan through the blood of the Son of God shed on the cross. For the sake of Jesus Christ who bled and died for the church, for the sake of the high and precious value of the church, each office-bearer must be willing to pour out blood, sweat and tears, in season and out of season, for the life and well-being of the congregation.

Let all office-bearers – those ordained recently or earlier – keep this in mind. They are called to work in the midst of

“By assuming our human nature and working among his people, the Son of God forbids the shepherds of the flock to be aloof from the members of the flock.”



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: C. Van Dam
 Managing Editor: G.Ph. van Popta
 Coeditors: R. Aasman, J. De Jong, J. Geertsema,
 N.H. Gootjes, G.Ph. van Popta

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION
 46 Sulphur Springs Road, Ancaster, ON L9G 1L8
 Fax: (905) 304-4951 E-Mail: clarion@compuserve.com

**ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:
 (subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):**

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
 One Beghin Avenue
 Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
 Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202
 Email: clarion@premier.mb.ca
 World Wide Web address: <premier.mb.ca/clarion.html>

SUBSCRIPTION RATES		Regular	Air
FOR 2000		Mail	Mail
Canada*		\$36.00*	\$60.00*
U.S.A.	U.S. Funds	\$39.00	\$52.00
International		\$60.00	\$90.00

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

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

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

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – Be Shepherds – G.Ph. van Popta	286
Treasures, New and Old – Flags Unfurled	
– Th. Lodder	288
What is worship? – Some biblical principles of public	
worship – C. van Dam	289
Living by the Doctrines of Scripture – Angels	
from the realms of glory – P.G. Feenstra	292
Observation Deck – G.Ph. van Popta	294
Classis: A primer – E. Kampen	296
Reader's Forum – Length of days-plus-nights	
– W.W.J. VanOene	300
Book Review – The Challenge of Being Reformed Today	
– Bonita van Popta	301
Our Little Magazine – Aunt Betty	302

the precious congregation the Lord has bought for himself with his precious blood.

Let the congregations also keep this in mind. Let them accept the men the Holy Spirit has given them. The flock is of great value to God. It has been bought with the blood of the Son of God. He is our Chief Shepherd, the Great Shepherd of our souls. In his love and care for us, He gives us under-shepherds to work for our benefit. Let us accept them and work with them.

And so we will live together in humility under the Good Shepherd who personally came into our midst to minister to us, to lay down his life for us, to shed his blood for us. He is both Good Shepherd and Lamb of God. We will live peacefully and happily under his care until He comes again, personally, to take us to himself forever. And then we will live as his heavenly flock forever. 

What's inside?

In this issue, Dr. Van Dam concludes his mini-series on worship. This time the focus is on the “why” and the “how” of worship.

The focal point of the church's life is corporate worship. But, of course, that is not the only aspect of the church's life. Another side to church life is the relationship local churches have with one another. This aspect begins to show itself when a group of churches living in geographical proximity meet several times per year in a meeting called “classis.” Rev. Eric Kampen explains the basics of such meetings.

There is much fascination with angels in society, the media and entertainment today. If your only “knowledge” of angels is from *Touched by an Angel*, you do well to read Rev. Peter Feenstra's article on angels.

The meditation is by the Rev. Theo Lodder. The editorial and an Observation Deck are by undersigned. In addition, you'll find a couple of book reviews and a letter. Pleasant reading!

GvP

By Th. Lodder

Flags Unfurled

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Gen 1:27)



One of the small joys for school-children is having the fun duty of hoisting the Canadian flag in the morning, or taking it down at the end of the school day. Even if part of the thrill is being let out of class for a few minutes, a school child will realize that what he's doing is a special honour. The flag, after all, is an important symbol of the country to which he belongs.

Aware of how special the flag is, he will fold it with great care, and place it in its over-night storage place, from which it will be taken the next morning again, to be hoisted and unfurled. He knows what a dishonour it would be to take the flag and toss it into its spot crumpled up like dirty laundry. That would be a disgrace to everything the flag represents.

There is a sense in which our lives, as people who have been created in the image of God, can be compared to a flag. God created us in his own image, male and female. God looked at us and was pleased. Very pleased. It was very good. We were!

As those created in the image of God, we were his vice-regents. In other words, God made us his representative kings and queens, or princes and

princesses, if you will. He crowned us with glory and honour, made us rulers over the works of his hands, and put everything under our feet (Ps 8:6). How we carried out our royal duties would reflect on his glory and majesty.

But then sin came into the world. We let it in by believing the lie of Satan. We became traitors to God, rather than acting as faithful rulers. By doing this, we cheated God of his glory and honour and worship, which He had rightly claimed for himself alone.

A Canadian flag is a Canadian flag, whether it is unfurled and fluttering in the wind, or crumpled up in the corner of a closet somewhere. In the first case, it is doing what it is meant to do, bringing honour to the country it represents; in the second, it is desecrated as a symbol of the nation's honour. Our fall into sin was like the second. Although we were still the image of God, his glory and honour in us was violated. With our fall, we twisted God's image beyond recognition with our evil intentions and deeds, trampled on his righteousness and holiness, and threw the crowns He gave us to the ground for different ones, ones fashioned by Satan to suit our perverted fancies.

How remarkable, then, that just when we had made God's glory shame, God promised to make our shame glory again through the seed of the woman! He would restore us to our high commission by sending his Son to crush the Great Traitor, who had successfully tempted us to become turncoats against God. Through his Son, He would renew those He created in his image.

That is what He is now doing in you through Jesus Christ your Lord! You are being renewed by his Spirit in his perfect image again (Col 3:10). Christ sends upon you his Spirit so that you have the power to crucify your old nature and clothe yourself with the new nature that is recreated in God's image.

What are you doing with your life? Are you letting your life be unfurled by the wind of the Spirit, as it were, every new day again, so that the glory and majesty and praise and honour of your great God is visible to all? When we are silent about how God fills our hearts with praise, worship and adoration, and when it is not evident in our whole being that God's glory and honour is our supreme desire, the image of God is about as visible in us as a flag that has been neatly folded up and stored away. And when we let sin grow and take over our lives, God's image is tossed away and crumpled by us, as it were. The love of a people for its nation is hardly reflected in how many flags are neatly folded up and stored away, but in how many flags are flying unfurled. The love of the church for her Saviour and God is only apparent when her members are visibly lifting up his Name in their lives.

Rev. Theodore Lodder is the minister of the Canadian Reformed Church of Taber, Alberta.



What is worship?

Some biblical principles of public worship¹

(Third of three articles)

By C. Van Dam

WHY AND HOW DO WE WORSHIP?

These two questions are closely related and in a sense these questions have already been answered at least partly. But, let us note a number of things.

Why do we worship?

The obvious reason is of course because God demands it from us. The Old Testament church received clear instruction in worship, and we read in Hebrews 10:25 “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing.” These meetings are worship services. But why does God demand worship from us as congregation together?

In the first place, we do not worship for ourselves, because it is good for us. It is of course profitable for us, but that is not the reason for worship. *The* reason for worship is to bring praise, thanksgiving and honour to God. He is the focal point and object of our worship. He is at the centre. After all, we are not on earth for ourselves, but to glorify God. This means that in worship our needs are not at the centre. Our wishes are not in the foreground. But God is. He is the object and reason for worship.

This priority of God has two immediate consequences in our thinking about worship. First, ultimately the question to ask respecting worship is not, what did I get out of it, but what did I give to God in praise and thanksgiving, in listening and learning, in presenting our sacrifices and offering our prayers. Not what did I get out of it, but what did I give to God, is the critical point. And it is in giving to God that we receive. But God first, and then we benefit. For example, if we give God our adoration and praise, we will also con-

fess our sins and uncleanness, for these diminished the glory we were able to give to God. But in being sensitive to God’s untarnished holiness having to be reflected in his children, we certainly benefit from the forgiveness of confessed sins. But our need for confession is subordinate to giving glory to God.

“We worship
only after
properly preparing
ourselves.”

Secondly, if *God* is the primary reason for worship, we do well to realize that we do not worship in order to evangelize. To avoid misunderstanding, the point is that we are asking the wrong question if we *start* with the problem: how do we make the worship services more attractive for outsiders. If we seek to give to God our utmost in worship, in giving and in listening, and show clearly and unambiguously that we worship GOD, the Holy One, then we will convey the necessary message to those who come from outside. In worship there must be the clear sense of the holiness of God, who is deeply offended by our sins, but who in undeserving grace has provided the solution for our sins in Christ. Worship must never cater to the needs of the unregenerate so he feels comfortable, for the unregenerate’s greatest need is to be confronted by the awesome holiness and greatness of God. Unbelievers also need cleansing from sin, and so they have to

be confronted by God. That ultimately is the point of the apostle Paul’s writing to the Corinthians when he tells them to keep their worship understandable and lucid. Then, the apostle notes, the unbeliever “will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’ (1 Cor 14:25).

The second major reason for worship is closely related to the first. Public worship takes us from the hustle and bustle, and open sin and strife, of a fallen and filthy world to place us in the holy presence of God who gives his blessing and speaks his gospel of cleansing and reconciliation to us. What a joy on the Lord’s Day to go to church and to close the door, as it were, to the blatant degeneration and curse of the world and its propaganda, and to enjoy and savour the blessed presence of the LORD, and marvel at his holiness as He addresses us in his Word! It is like an oasis at which to rest and be refreshed, encouraged, exhorted, and admonished regarding God’s will and ways and holiness, and to be confirmed in the message of the Word by the use of the sacraments.

So, the two main reasons for worship are, first, to bring praise, thanksgiving and honour to God, and second, to place ourselves in God’s presence as congregation and listen to his Word and use the sacraments.

Now, if we go to church for the right reasons we will be able to reorientate our lives constantly to God and his cause and kingdom, and so be equipped to be pure and holy in a world lost in sin. The point is that true worship should enable us to live in the presence of God all the days of our life so that the oasis of his presence in church also fills our homes and goes with us on the job. Then we demonstrate God’s holiness and power in our

lives. Although we live in the world, we are not of it.

How do we worship?

In answering this question we need to be brief. We cannot, for example, go through the first four commandments or our liturgy. Let me mention the following points.

If God is the primary reason for worship, then we must worship in the full realization that we are confronted by *God*, and that it is to *Him* that we relate in adoring and praising Him and in listening to Him. How do we do that?

We must begin with the reminder that to worship God is not without danger. God is with us as never before in the history of God's people. Now if Israel was severely warned at Mount Sinai about approaching God correctly lest they die (Exod 19:10-25), then how much more must we be forewarned! We *can* approach God and come into his presence, but ultimately only in Christ. He is the way and it is through Him that we are ushered into the presence of God himself (cf. Heb 10:19-25). Because we are speaking of *God*, Scripture warns us not to think lightly about worship. Indeed, we are exhorted in Hebrews 12:28-29 to "worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." Now obviously God does not tell us this to discourage us, but to make us aware of what worship involves. In our godless age which mocks all things holy, this reminder is in its place for us.

So, how do we worship? First we worship only after properly preparing ourselves. This cannot be stressed enough. In view of the gravity and the momentousness of meeting with God in worship, we must adequately prepare for the Sunday worship. That includes recognizing the greatness of God and our creatureliness and natural depravity. We can only go to church with great humbleness in the realization that we must be holy as He is holy. In this connection we are reminded of the fact that before the Old Testament priest could enter the tabernacle and so come into God's immediate presence, he had to wash with water lest he die (Exod 30:20-21). If we take our identity as believers as priests seriously, we must be no less conscientious in making sure we are clean, body and soul. As the Psalmist said:

Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?

Who may stand in his holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart (Ps 24:3-4).

Or, in the words of Hebrews 10:22:

...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

All this requires preparation. It means that we separate ourselves more and more from the sins of this age and be holy, a separate people. That means as people of God we will spend the Saturday evening differently than the world does. The world goes to movies or watches videos that are not God-honouring and so often relishes in the sins of others. The church should reflect on the coming Sunday and prepare to meet their God! It is a horrible thing if a child of God comes to church with a head full of worldly entertainment from the night before. Such a person is not ready to meet God, the holy one.

"Worship can never be reduced to the outward parts of the worship service."

And so the first step that should be contemplated for good worship, or for improving worship, is to prepare oneself. That starts by practicing holiness and godliness all week long, and certainly on Saturday evening. One must be able to go to church with a clear conscience. If that is not the case, we must make sure that our heart and life have at least been made right with God, or at least are open to hear the Word of admonition and encouragement. It is no small thing to go to church. "Guard your steps when you go to church." (to paraphrase Eccl 5:1).

There is a second point. How do we worship? We worship with an incredible sense of gratitude because God in high heaven has come down to us here on earth (cf. Isa 57:15) and has had mercy on us in Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism is absolutely right in summarizing Scripture by saying that to know the joy of the only comfort in life and death, we must know how great

our sins and misery are (Q.A. 2). Spirit-generated gratitude for salvation impels us to worship. Again this presupposes a life of close communion with God. We can only see our sins when we stand in his holy presence.

Thirdly, Christ says we must worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). Much could be said of this passage, but let me only say this. It means that we must be totally committed to this worship with our whole being involved, and it must be done in communion with the Spirit of Pentecost and in harmony with the truth of God. Worship is never just going through gestures or forms. Our spirit must be involved in it. It must come from the heart. But it must also be in truth. We cannot just invent an entertaining liturgy. It must be in harmony with the Word of God. The liturgy of the Reformation is one that we can justly be very thankful for because it stresses that we worship in the realization of the covenant bond, listening to our covenant God and responding to Him. But, as just mentioned, we must realize that worship can never be reduced to the outward parts of the worship service. Also our going to church must never be a drag and forced routine. It must be in spirit and in truth.

We must go in faith, in great expectation (cf. Heb 11:6; Rom 14:23). Someone has rightly said:

Genuine faith generates an emotion of expectancy in worship: we trust God to keep his promises, to meet with us, to bless us in accordance with the gospel, to change our lives by the power of his word. A faithful worshipper will not go to church saying, "Oh, it's just going to be the same old thing again." And faithful worshippers will have their expectations fulfilled.²

Coming now to more specific elements of worship in answering the question of how we worship, we note the following. In our covenantal liturgy, the preaching is an important and central element. God speaks as the Word is administered. The minister speaks as a servant on behalf of his majestic Sender. He's not just the nice guy with a soft message moulded according to the latest congregational opinion polls. The man in the pulpit is not there to entertain and be humorous. No, he is a steward of the Word of God and he is to preach the whole counsel of God, whether that be popular or not. We go to church to hear GOD. And therefore,

our response is also important. We respond by listening to the Word read and preached. We also respond in singing, prayer, and offerings. Let us touch on these last three responses one by one, be it briefly.

Singing, one could argue, is an intensive form of speaking. Singing enhances the word, makes it easier to memorize, and so brings it closer to our hearts and lives. Singing Scripture parts, like Psalms and hymns, is therefore a great gift of God.

Singing and music making was a big part of the liturgy of the temple as organized predominantly by David. It was professionally and lavishly done. Four thousand Levites played instruments and a choir of 288 sang (1 Chron 23:5; 25:7). A wide variety of instruments were involved. Scripture mentions 15, the rabbis speak of 36. It appears that the role of the congregation was somewhat limited given the massive choir and instrumentation involved. This changes in the New Testament. The official temple service is given to the congregation, the temple of God. It is striking that in the New Testament all the stress is on the congregation participating in singing and praising in worship and elsewhere. Instruments are not even mentioned in the New Testament church. This silence in itself does not prove that musical instruments were absent from worship services, but it does underline the old Reformed principle that the organ, or whatever instrument is used in our worship service, is in the service of the singing of the congregation and not an end in itself. The congregation produces the music in singing.

As far as the contents of our singing is concerned, we can justly be very thankful for the *Book of Praise*. Synod Fergus of the Canadian Reformed Churches has happily decided that the music of every song should always be visible when singing any part of the psalm or hymn in question. This should help and encourage singing in the homes and in church. The Psalms and Hymns derived directly from Scripture are, as God's revelation, in a class by themselves. At the same time, the Psalms point beyond themselves and exhort us to sing a new song to the LORD (cf. Ps 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 149:1). That points ahead to New Testament hymns, but also leaves freedom for the making of new songs and hymns such as we have in the *Book of Praise* (cf. 1 Cor 14:26; Rev 5:9; 14:3; 15:3).

Prayer and offerings can be taken together for in the context of worship both are sacrifices. What really is a sacrifice? The basic idea of sacrifice is that of a gift. Thus the motivation for sacrifice is to give a gift to God. When you think it through, when we sincerely offer a gift to God, we show our dependence on God and we recognize God's pre-eminent place. In the sacrificial gift is the expressed wish to be a child of Father. Have you ever noticed how often children give, and they give so freely? That is inherent in being a child. You recognize your dependence, and you easily give gifts and acknowledge God's right to such gifts and to receive the best. By giving gifts and by sacrificing for God one also shows sorrow for sin done in rebellion against God. So our gifts can be a "fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice pleasing to God" (Phil 4:18; cf. Heb 13:16). Indeed, our whole life must be characterized as a thank offering to God (cf. Rom 12:1-2).

“Worship covers all of life, and our Sunday worship must spill over into a week of service, adoration, and praise to God.”

Today giving and offering is also part of our worship – in giving monetary gifts and in giving our prayer. According to Scripture, prayer is the sacrifice of our lips, a sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15; cf. Hos 14:2). In Ps 50 we read, “He who brings thanksgiving as his sacrifice honours Me” (v.23, cf. v. 14; cf. Isa 60:6). Prayer is also the sacrifice of the broken-hearted in sorrow for sin (Ps 51:19 [Eng 17]). Prayer is the giving of ourselves to God in gratitude as we seek communion with the living God (Ps 42:6-9 [Eng 5-8]). Do we not pray in thankfulness for his redemption, recognizing God's pre-eminent place and our dependence?

More specifically, Scripture also calls prayer an incense offering. In Ps 141:2 we read:

Let my prayer be counted (as) incense before Thee,
and the lifting up of my hands (as) an evening sacrifice.

One can also think of Revelation 5:8 where the 24 elders have “golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints” (cf. Rev 8:3-4). Incense offering therefore pictures prayer. It is a beautiful image for incense speaks of the sweet savour of fellowship between God and his people. Such incense must be offered continually. “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17). Such prayer is the chief part of thankfulness and is integral to worship.

A final comment regarding how we worship. Worship demands the participation of all the congregation. It cannot be left to just the minister who “does his thing”. One cannot just “be there” and let the rest happen – a one man show. No. We are all priests to God (cf. Rev 1:6) and we must participate in worship and not be onlookers only. How should we all participate? By all having a turn at being at the front of the church and “doing a number”? No. To involve all in the worship service means that all are ready to participate with an open Bible, an open ear, a pen and paper if necessary. Congregational participation can also involve responsive “amens,” confession of faith and other forms of congregational participation. However, there is no need to have congregational participation in the form of getting as many people as possible on the podium to make their contribution, as seems to be happening more and more in evangelical circles. After all, the purpose in participating is to keep the worship service God-centered! Let us not forget why we go to church. It is not to be entertained, but to worship . . . *God!!*

THE PERSPECTIVES OF WORSHIP

At the beginning of this speech we defined worship as “an attitude and activity of homage, service, and praise directed to God in response to his revelation of himself in Christ and his ongoing work in our lives by his Word and Spirit.” It is obvious that with such a definition, worship covers all of life, and our Sunday worship must spill over into a week of service, adoration, and praise to God. Worship is really everything in the life of a Christian (cf. Rom 12:1-2; 1 Pet 2:9).

Having said that, it is helpful to know “where we are at” in terms of

worship. What characterizes our place in the history of God's deeds and the church's service of worship? We have noted that in our corporate worship we as Pentecost congregation come into the very presence of God. What does that really mean in terms of the significance of our worship? Hebrew 12 speaks of that in a beautiful summary. It says to the church that when you draw near to God in worship,

then you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven (Heb 12:22-23).

Much could be said of this and the verses that follow. Let me only say this. The Old Testament people of God had at the centre of their worship the earthly Jerusalem or Zion (Heb 12:21), but we may have the heavenly Jerusalem as our focal point! Every time we worship, we are in Christ (Heb 10:19), in faith entering heaven as it were. In true worship, we get a taste of heaven's glory. Yes all worship is in anticipation of that perfect glorious worship that is awaiting the children of God. What an awesome assembly of thousands of angels! What a tremendous open space of worship and praise that must be! The song "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!" fills the air (cf. Rev

4:8). And there to see God, the Judge, the Holy One and the Lord Jesus Christ! Our praise and worship of God now, in spirit and in truth, will then find its climax. But already in this life, we can have a foretaste of that joy. May our worship on the Lord's Day indeed be experienced that way!

¹This series of three articles is an abridged version of what will appear in annotated form in a forthcoming publication of my lectures given in Australia (and partly New Zealand) in June and July of 1999, viz. *Perspectives on Worship, Law and Faith: The Old Testament Speaks Today*. (Kelmescott, WA: Pro Ecclesia Publishers).

²Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (1996) 81. 

LIVING BY THE DOCTRINES OF SCRIPTURE

Angels from the realms of glory (Part 1)

By P.G. Feenstra

Both among Christians and within our secular society there is a widespread and growing fascination with angels. At one time people outside the Christian community considered angels to be fantasy. Today, belief in angels is quite acceptable – even fashionable.

Angels have become the embodiment of innocence and endearment. How often don't you hear people refer to little children as being "cute little angels?" It has been estimated that one out of every 10 songs that has hit the airwaves mentions angels. Over the last decades a variety of popular magazines have carried articles about angels. Almost every major bookstore has a section devoted to the subject. Angels are very popular in the philosophy behind the New Age Movement. The proponents of this movement believe we can draw on the power of angels to reconnect with our lost inner selves and to realize our goals.

What are we as Christians to think of angels? Popular evangelist, Billy Graham, has called the angels "God's secret agents." They function in a manner similar to the CIA or the FBI. Others have speculated that UFO's (Unidentified Flying Objects) are part of God's angelic host.

Angel stories always fascinate people. Yet the answer to the question "Who are the angels?" is not derived from human experience but from the Word of God. A proper understanding of the doctrine of angels broadens our understanding of the Lord, who He is and how He fulfills his plan.

Our Reformed confessions on angels

Angels are mentioned several times throughout our Reformed confessions. In the Belgic Confession, Article 12, we confess:

He also created the angels good, to be his messengers, and to serve his elect. Some of these have fallen from the exalted position in which God created them into everlasting perdition, but the others have by the grace of God remained steadfast and continued in their first state. The devils and evil spirits are so depraved that they are enemies of God and of all that is good. With all their might, they lie in wait like murderers to ruin the church and all its members and to destroy everything by their wicked devices. They are therefore by their own wickedness sentenced to eternal damnation and daily expect their horrible torments.

Explaining the petition, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" the Heidelberg Catechism states, "Grant also that everyone may carry out the duties of his office and calling as

willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven" (Lord's Day 49).

Messengers of God

Angels fulfill an important role in the history of revelation. They are mentioned in almost all the books of the Old and New Testament. They are described by the author of Hebrews as, "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (1:14).

Both the Hebrew and the Greek word for angel means "messenger." A messenger is one who executes the will of his sender. Every angel stands in the service of the Lord and must do his bidding and heed his charge.

Not every mention of angels (messengers) is a reference to the celestial beings. Haggai 1:13 speaks of a human messenger bearing a divine message: "Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger (angel), spoke the Lord's message to the people, saying, 'I am with you, says the Lord.'" The ministers of the seven churches in Asia Minor are addressed as angels (Rev 2-3): "And to the angel of the church in . . . write . . ." The apostle Paul commends the churches in Galatia for the manner in which they received him: "And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus" (Gal 4:14).

How do we know whether angels are heavenly beings or men? Sometimes their origin is identified: ". . . the angels of heaven" (Matt 24:36). Yet in most cases the context of each Bible passage will determine if a human or heavenly messenger is in view. For example, in Genesis 19 two messengers came to Lot at Sodom but the context leaves no doubt these are angels from heaven.

The creation of the angels

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.

The Bible states that angels, like mankind and animals, were created by God. When exactly they were created is not told to us. From Job 38:6, 7 it appears the angels were one of the first to be created by God. The sons of God shouted for joy when the Lord laid the foundations of the earth. The angels witnessed the creation of the world.

The angels are sometimes referred to as "sons of God." This doesn't mean the angels were created as God's children but they were created with a high rank and position. They belong to God in a special way; taken up in God's house and family.

The angels have been given an honourable position. A highly esteemed person in Scripture is compared to the angels. A woman of Tekoa says to Joab about David, "my Lord the king is like an angel of God" (2 Sam 14:17). However, the angels do not have the same or a higher position than man. They were not created in God's image; to be his representative. The angels in creation and beyond are called to be God's servants whereas men and women are called to be sons and daughters of the most high God.

Other designations

The term angel immediately describes the task and office given to a special order of celestial beings. Yet these heavenly beings are not always called "angels." Other designations used by Scripture are "thrones," "dominions," "principalities," "authorities" (Col 1:16) and "powers" (Eph 1:21). Ethan the Ezrahite refers to them as "sons of the mighty" and "the assembly of the saints" (Ps 89:5-7). Remembering the covenant faithfulness of the Lord he exclaims, "And the heavens will praise your wonders, O LORD; your faithfulness also in the assembly of the saints. For who in the heavens can be compared to the LORD? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the LORD? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him." They are called an "assembly of saints" or "holy ones" because they were set apart by the Lord to serve as attendants to His holiness (see Isa 6).

The angels are also referred to as a "heavenly host." This is the manner in which they appeared to the shepherds and announced the birth of Christ (Luke 2:13). Angels form a heavenly army engaged in a spiritual warfare. They take their marching orders from the Lord of



Called to the Free Reformed Churches of Australia at West Kelmscott, Australia:

Rev. A. Veldman

of Albany, Australia.

Examined by Classis Ontario South on June 14th, 2000 and declared eligible for call:

Candidate Wes Bredenhof

Called by the church of Smithers, British Columbia for the work of mission among the native people of that area:

Candidate Wes Bredenhof

Examined by Classis Ontario South on June 14th, 2000 and declared eligible for call:

Candidate Dirk Poppe

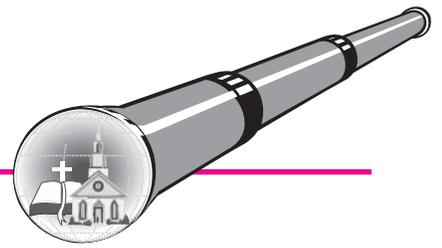
Official website of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches:

<http://www.canrc.org>

hosts. When the eyes of the people of God are opened to see them they are able to confess that those who are for them are more than those who are against them (2 Kgs 6:16).

Our walk with the Lord will be deeply enriched by studying what the Scripture has to say about angels. We should never assume that the doctrine of angels has nothing whatsoever to do with our lives. Over the next months I plan to continue writing about the office, task and nature of angels. May our study of these messengers of God serve the purpose of drawing us to a deeper understanding of the Lord's ways, comfort us in the struggles and trials of life, strengthen us in our task as children of the LORD and make us all the more eager to fulfill the duties of our office and calling toward the LORD and each other.





Observation Deck

By G.Ph. van Popta

Focus on North America

There are interesting movements among the large, mainline denominations in Canada and the USA.

Urge to merge

One of the movements is a type of “merger-mania.” Are the churches involved following the lead of big business in this drive to unity? We believe in church unity, but not at the cost of compromise. Last year, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the Lutheran World Federation signed a joint accord on the doctrine of justification by faith. However, the real question was skirted. Lutheran and Roman Catholic doctrine both include justification by faith, but whereas the former teaches an *imputed* righteousness, the latter teaches an *infused* righteousness. The first is biblical; the second is not.

Now the RCC is exploring ways to reunite with the Anglican churches of the world. As well, the National Council of Churches (USA) is exploring the possibility of rendering itself obsolete by forming a new organization that will include mainline Protestant and Orthodox churches as well as the RCC and evangelical denominations.

That is one movement present in North America – an urge to merge though it mean minimizing doctrinal differences.

Stresses

Another phenomenon is the stress that mainline denominations are presently under. They are annually losing members by the thousands. Many mainline North American church buildings are near empty on Sunday morning.

There is the anxiety caused by litigation. In Canada, the Roman Catholic, Anglican, United and Presbyterian churches are faced with thousands of lawsuits filed by natives raised in residential schools and who are now alleging physical and sexual abuse. The Anglican Church of Canada may well have to declare bankruptcy because of the suits.

The surprise

The denomination that continues to surprise is the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the largest Protestant denomination in the USA with 15.8 million members and 41,000 congregations. Over the past years, this church has been edging back from the brink of liberalism to more biblical positions.

Already some years ago, the SBC inclined away from an Ariminian to a Calvinistic view on the Five Points. Now they are moving away from the ordination of women. Recent resolutions state that people must profess faith in Christ to gain salvation, reject charismatic teachings, and oppose abortion, homosexuality, and mercy killing. There obviously are many points of difference between the Reformed and the Baptist faiths; e.g., on covenant, baptism, church gov-

ernment. Also, the SBC seems to be moving towards an incorrect view of the Lord’s day. And yet we cannot help but be amazed as we witness a return from liberalism to many biblical positions.

Below you’ll find some news clips on these matters. – GvP

Southern Baptist Position on the Ordination of Women

Southern Baptists are planning to declare that women should no longer be ordained as pastors. The country’s largest Protestant denomination released a statement May 18 that reads: “While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture,” Baptist Press reported. The statement cites 1 Timothy 2:9-14, which says in part, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.”

The approximately 1,600 Southern Baptist clergywomen would be allowed to continue to serve, but the Southern Baptist Convention would oppose future ordinations, The Associated Press said. The statement will come up for ratification at the SBC’s annual meeting June 13-14 and is considered likely to pass.

Southern Baptists declared in 1998 that a wife should “submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband.” – *Religion Today*

Roman Catholics and Anglicans in Canada

Catholics and Anglicans from 13 regions around the world are holding important reunion talks in Canada. Roman Catholic and Anglican churches are hoping a meeting this week [mid-May – GvP] will help bring them closer together after centuries of feuding. Twenty-six bishops from around the world are taking part in the conference near Toronto. The two churches have a lot in common, but differ on the ordination of women and married clergy.

The biggest area of disagreement is the authority of the pope. The Anglican church was created in 1534, when King Henry VIII was incensed that the pope had refused to annul his marriage. Differences remain over the role of women, who are not eligible for ordination as Catholic priests, and distribution of power in a unified Catholic-Anglican church, bishops from both churches said. But many people believe closer ties still are possible, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation said. – *Religion Today*

Articles from *Religion Today*, <http://www.religiontoday.com> and *REC News Exchange* used by permission.

Potential Bankruptcy

Bankruptcy is looking more inevitable for the Anglican Church of Canada. Canada's third-largest denomination, with 800,000 members, is facing 1,600 claims from native Indians who are demanding to be compensated for physical and sexual abuse they endured at residential schools run by the church from 1800 to the 1970s, news reports said. The lawsuits amount to \$1 billion and the church's parent organization, the National Synod, has less than \$7 million in assets and is expected to run out of money in 12 to 18 months, church spokesmen said.

"If bankruptcy becomes inevitable, we really are called to be the body of Christ. Dead. Absolutely dead. And just as absolutely destined to rise," Anglican Archbishop Michael Peers said.

Four churches that ran the schools – the Anglican, Roman Catholic, United Church, and Presbyterian – along with the government of Canada, are being sued by about 7,000 survivors of the schools. – *Religion Today*

Canada's Ecumenical Body Elects Roman Catholic as New President

The Canadian Council of Churches (CCC), Canada's ecumenical body, just elected a new president, Andre Vallee, the Bishop of Hearst in northern Ontario. There are 19 denominations/churches represented in the CCC. Bishop Vallee is no stranger to ecumenism. He has been involved in international Anglican/Roman Catholic dialogues as well as various coalitions to address social issues.

When interviewed during the CCC's recent governing board meeting, Bishop Vallee said that his goal as president is not necessarily to make great decisions, but to "discuss topics of common interest. Sometimes we come to a consensus, sometimes we don't. But the idea is to dialogue."

The recent meeting of the CCC did discuss some very contentious issues, including the financial problems facing four member denominations because of court cases against them for alleged abuse at residential church-run schools for indigenous peoples in the 1960s. "What are we going to do to support them [the four churches involved]?" Also, the challenging issues of biotechnology were discussed. "What are the moral consequences of these actions?" Bishop Vallee asked. "It [having discussions on contentious issues] does not mean that we at the CCC will be making decisions, but we will be discussing the matter, supporting one another." – *REC News Exchange*

Unity Talks Between RCC and NCC

The National Council of Churches will meet with Catholics and evangelicals to explore starting a new organization, The Associated Press said. The council's 50-member board endorsed a plan to pursue a cooperative effort with all major branches of Christianity in the United States. The NCC is comprised mostly of mainline Protestant, Orthodox, and black Protestant denominations, but Roman Catholics, Pentecostals, and evangelicals do not belong.

The future of the existing NCC is uncertain. "Sometimes an organizational structure has to be willing to die. We have to be willing to entertain that," said Wesley Granberg-

Other Southern Baptist Positions

Southern Baptists are tightening their boundaries on biblical interpretation. In addition to discouraging the ordination of women, a revised statement of faith by the Southern Baptist Convention emphasizes that people must profess faith in Christ to gain salvation. It also rejects charismatic teachings and opposes abortion, homosexuality, and mercy killing.

Changes to the statement of faith, called the Baptist Faith and Message, were made public last week [mid-May – GvP] by a drafting committee and will be considered when the SBC meets June 13-14 in Orlando, Fla. The statement, which reflects a continued rightward turn in the nation's largest Protestant denomination, is not binding on local congregations, which are self-governing, but is influential and is used as a guide in hiring denominational employees.

The SBC also plans to soften requirements for keeping the Sabbath. A previous faith statement called for Baptists to avoid "worldly amusements" and secular work, but the revision suggests that Baptists spend Sundays doing things "commensurate with the Christian's conscience."

Baptists "are a people of the Book, who recognize no other authority for faith and practice but God's Word," said Adrian Rogers, who led the committee. "We are unembarrassed to take our stand upon the solid rock of biblical authority." The Bible "is the source of our authority, not merely a support for our historic doctrines," he said. – *Religion Today*

Hemorrhaging of the PCUSA

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) thought it had plugged a leak, but that isn't the case. The church has been losing about 30,000 members a year since the mid-1960s before that trend slowed to 20,000 in 1997 and 1998. But membership loss speeded up again last year to 27,473. Adult professions of faith, adult and child baptisms, and transfers from other denominations all showed declines.

Members keep slipping out "the back door," an official said. Figures show that 106,419 people dropped out of the 2.56 million-member PCUSA in 1999. That shows that "our discipleship and nurture of members is not as it should be," denominational leader Clifton Kirkpatrick said.

A bright spot is the growth of men's groups. There are 6,000 in PCUSA churches that hold prayer breakfasts, teach church-school classes, work on Habitat for Humanity crews, support soup kitchens or shelters, mentor young men, and help in disaster relief. – *Religion Today*

Michaelson, chief executive of the Reformed Church in America. A notice of the proposal has been sent to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the National Association of Evangelicals.

NCC members at the group's 50th anniversary in November decided a new ecumenical venture is needed, Clifton Patrick of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) said. The council also voted to allow Church World Service to have independent financial control. CWS, the council's relief and development arm, brings in 85% of its revenues, AP said, and its leaders have expressed dissatisfaction with the council's high administrative costs. – *Religion Today*

Classis: A primer

By E. Kampen

Shrouded in mystery

In our church vocabulary we have the word “classis.” For many, a classis is surrounded with a sense of mystery. Especially elders who are delegated to attend a classis for the first time may feel a sense of discomfort, perhaps resolving to sit through the classis quietly and observe how things go. After all, you don’t want to make a fool of yourself. The problem is that, especially in a large consistory, an elder might only go once in his three years in office. By the time he is delegated again, the lessons learned the first time will be long forgotten.

Since classes (plural of “classis”) are a regular feature of church life, it will be helpful to take some of the mystery out of them by means of an article. In the title you find the word “Primer.” That means, it serves as an introduction to what a classis is and how it operates.¹

Definition

The word “classis” is derived from Latin meaning “a collection, a fleet.” It is related to the familiar word “class.” It can thus be applied to a group of individuals or items ranked together because they possess common characteristics.

The churches in the age of the Great Reformation adopted this term to describe a group of churches in a particular district. The term was also used to describe the meeting of delegates from these churches.² To this day we use the word “classis” to refer both to a meeting of delegates from the churches in a district as well as to a grouping of churches (eg. Classis Pacific West).

When we keep in mind that the root idea of the word is “a collection, a fleet”, we can see that there is a similarity between the churches. They all believe in Jesus Christ. They are, so to speak, sailing as ships in a fleet. Classis (the meeting) is when each ship in the fleet sends two of its crew members (usually the captain and an assistant) to discuss matters that pertain to the fleet as a whole.

Scriptural basis

There are a number of Scriptural principles which form the basis for organizing churches in “classes” (regions) and holding a classis (meeting of the churches in that region).

First of all, there is the principle of the unity of the church. A local church does not exist in isolation.

Secondly, there is the principle of the communion of saints. Just as the communion of saints puts obligations on individual believers in a local congregation to work for the common good, so it puts obligations on those congregations as they exist side by side.

In church life we all stand in need of mutual support, encouragement, correction and rebuke. All wisdom is not

found in a local church. A local church would act contrary to the unity of the church if it was content to do all things merely on its own. It would be like a ship turning aside from the general direction of the fleet as a whole. This interaction between local churches is worked out further in Regional Synods and General Synods, which involves an increasing number of churches. It all begins, however, at the level of classis. That’s where it is most evident that a church is part of a fleet under the direction of its only Admiral, the Lord Jesus Christ, and is not sailing alone. In the fleet there is the protection and accountability that comes from the communion of saints and it is an expression of the unity of the church.

A very defined agenda

It is helpful to keep in mind the image of a fleet of ships to understand the agenda of a classis. You can well imagine that the real life of the fleet plays itself out on the individual ships. That’s where the action is! Each ship has to navigate through the stormy seas and the treacherous waters of life. The captain and officers of each ship have to make many decisions to keep the ship safely on course.

At the same time, there are matters that all the ships have in common. Rather than each ship having to figure things out for itself, it is more efficient to share information and have common approaches. After all, it is a fleet sailing in the same direction! A common approach will keep it on a common course. Furthermore, problems can arise on a particular ship. The captain and his officers are not perfect and can make grave errors in the way they handle the crew. The fact that the ships sail in a fleet means there is an opportunity to seek redress of injustice.

The Church Order in a succinct way describes what should be dealt with by an assembly like a classis when it says that *“A major assembly shall deal with those matters which could not be finished in the minor assembly or which belong to the churches in common”* (Article 30). Further, it says that *“If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to the major assembly;...”* (Article 31).

Some elaboration on this is required.

“Could not be finished . . .”

This phrase initially might give the impression that if a consistory ran out of time the matter can be finished off by the classis. This is not the meaning. Rather, there are certain matters in church life which the churches have agreed require the involvement of a classis. For example, if a minister accepts a call to another church, a local church cannot finish the matter of releasing its minister. A classis is

called upon to check that everything was done properly. This is also the case where a candidate accepts a call. It has been agreed upon that the classis is to be involved in examining the candidate before he can be ordained as a minister. Further, the churches have agreed that church discipline requires the involvement of a classis before the name of a hardened sinner is made known to the congregation.

Note that it is by common agreement that churches have decided certain matters cannot be finished in the local church. This is a safety mechanism. To think of the last example mentioned, church discipline, the involvement of a classis acts as a safety mechanism preventing a local consistory from hastily pushing someone out of the church without sufficient effort to call him to repentance.

“Which belong to its churches in common.”

At the level of classis there may not be too many items in this category pertaining only to the churches in that district. When a classis is called upon to deal with a common matter it will have to decide whether it pertains only to the churches in its region or whether it applies to all the churches in the federation. If it is the latter, a classis will have to direct it to the next major assembly, namely, a “Regional Synod.”

Appeals

It is evidence of humility that there is a provision for “appeals.” Here it is clear that Reformed churches recognize the fallibility of local consistories. There is thus a process in place by which a member can try and have a perceived wrong corrected. In such a situation, the classis is like a court called to make a judgment. It’s task is judicial.

Mutual supervision

Supervision is exercised over the churches in the classical region. This is done in two ways. First of all, at each classis the president of the classis has to ask *“whether the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured, and whether there is any matter in which the consistory needs the judgment and help of classis for the proper government of their church”* (Article 44). Further, a classis appoints Church Visitors whose task it is to visit the churches to *“to inquire whether all things are regulated and done in full harmony with the Word of God, whether the office-bearers fulfill the duties of their office faithfully as they have promised, and whether the adopted order is being observed and maintained in every respect, in order that they may in good time fraternally admonish those who are found negligent in any thing, and that by their good counsel and advice all things may be directed toward the edification and preservation of Christ’s church”* (Article 46).

A typical agenda

In order that this may truly serve as a primer, taking away any mystery, some attention should be given to the details of a classis. What follows is a typical agenda of a classis:³

1. Opening on behalf of the convening church
2. Report on the examination of the credentials by the delegates of the convening church of the previous classis (Note: Churches take turns convening Classis, usually in alphabetical order)
3. Constitution of classis
4. Appointment of officers
5. Adoption of the agenda

6. Correspondence Received (eg. appeals, requests for examination or approval of calls).
7. Proposals or instructions from the churches
8. Reports
 - a. April classis – Treasurer
Church for the Inspection of the Archives
Church Visitation Reports
 - b. October classis – Church for Auditing the Books of the Treasurer; Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry;
Committee for Needy Churches.
Church Visitation Reports
9. Question Period according to Article 44 C.O. (under this point of the agenda, churches ask classis for advice in discipline cases)
10. Appointments
 - A. Each classis
 1. Convening church for the next classis, place, and time.
 2. Suggested officers for the next classis
 - B. April classis
 1. Committee for Examinations
 2. Church Visitors
 3. Church for taking care of the Archives
 4. Church to inspect the Archives
 5. Treasurer
 6. Church for Auditing the Books of the Treasurer
 7. Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry
 8. Committee for Financial Aid to Needy Churches
 9. Deputies for preaching arrangements in vacant churches
 - C. As needed
 1. Counsellors for vacant churches
 2. Delegates to Regional Synod at the last classis before the next Regional Synod
11. Personal Question Period
12. Censure according to Art. 34 C.O.
13. Adoption of the Acts of classis and approval of the Press Release
14. Closing.

A very simple meeting style

All this might still appear rather intimidating. There is the question of the “how”, the “rules of order.” Does a classis function by “parliamentary rules”, or “Robert’s Rules of Order”?

A number of things can be mentioned. First of all, every classis will have some sort of “Classical Regulations.” Every elder should have a copy of these regulations and read through them and the Church Order on a regular basis to be familiar with church polity. It’s not difficult but it does require some effort.

Secondly, most classes will work with what is called the “Round System.” Perhaps many larger consistories function this way too. This is a very effective way of meeting. The process works as follows:

- a. An agenda item is introduced.
- b. It has to be decided whether it is admissible (remember that a classis has very specific, clearly spelled out responsibilities)
 - i. Round 1: Members of classis can state their opinion as to whether it is admissible.

- ii. Round 2: Members can interact with arguments presented in round 1 and motions can be made to declare it admissible or not.
- iii. Round 3: If necessary, interaction can take place with arguments put forward in Round 2. If not, a vote takes place and a decision is reached.
- c. The matter itself:
 - i. Round 1: Members of classis can state their opinion about the issue.
 - ii. Round 2: Members can interact with arguments presented in round 1 and a motion can be made on how to answer.
 - iii. Round 3: If necessary, interaction can take place with arguments put forward in Round 2. It is also possible to start a few rounds on any motion put forward. If not, a vote takes place and a decision is reached.

Elaboration on the “Rounds”

For the Round System to function, a number of things are necessary. First of all, each member of classis must come thoroughly prepared. This is not unreasonable since generally it is a rule that delegates to a classis should have the material in their possession about three weeks before the meeting takes place. This gives enough time to study the material and form an initial impression and opinion.

Secondly, all members should be asked to express their opinion on the matter under discussion. Elders who come to their first classis should not feel obliged to sit by and merely listen. Delegates are sent to participate, to make contributions by means of their insights and understanding of the matters at hand. At times silence may seem golden, even giving the impression of wisdom, but one is not delegated to be silent but to speak. It is true that a delegate may have it all wrong, but then again, he may have it all right. Delegates should not hesitate to, in a humble way, share an opinion on the matter. A meeting can be greatly helped when it is not left optional to speak on the issue at hand but when the chairman systematically works his way through the delegates, asking them for their input. Just as at consistory level it is not only the ministers who speak, so it should be at classis.

The third point to keep in mind is that speakers must not stray off course. When one hears an opinion in the first round with which one strongly disagrees, it is tempting to try and react to it as soon as possible. The first round, however, is strictly for stating one’s initial opinion, being open to further insight and correction. Reactions have to wait till Round 2. Should it happen that one speaker in Round 1 says the same thing another planned to say, there is no need to repeat. One can simply indicate that he shares the sentiments expressed by a previous speaker.

Fourth, it is important to stay focussed on content, not the person who said it. This can be very difficult. We easily confuse the two.

Fifth, while ideally a discussion should be able to come to a conclusion after 2 or 3 rounds, this is not always the case. Nevertheless, if all the delegates have done their homework and share their insights in the first round, it should not be necessary to prolong a discussion. After a while, the same things will be said over and over again.

Finally, to finish a matter, someone has to put forward a motion, accompanied by grounds or reasons. Once the

motion is on the table, it too can become subject to the Round System.

Judging appeals

While the “Round System” applies also in the case of appeals, it is warranted to give some extra attention to them.

The first thing to be dealt with is admissibility. It has to be asked if the appeal was submitted on time. This may seem like a technicality. One must ask, though, how brothers can do justice to an appeal when it is given to them on the same day as the meeting. Sometimes appeals have many pages of appendices. It is impossible to make proper study of the matter and come to a good decision. Also relevant to the question of admissibility is whether it appeals the decision of a minor assembly, that is, the consistory. If it meets those criteria, the appeal itself can be examined.

Classis then has to proceed and ask itself, “What exactly is the complaint? How does the appellant feel he has been wronged?” Note that well: How does he feel he has been wronged, and not how does he feel another person has been wronged. Further, an appeal should not just be a matter of disagreeing with a consistory decision and now seeking support from a classis. One must clearly indicate how he has been wronged. It is also possible to appeal to a classis for a judgment when one feels that a consistory has departed from Scripture as summed up in the Confessions, and from the way agreed upon by the churches in the Church Order.

Writing appeals

One of the greatest difficulties in dealing with appeals is that most appellants have difficulty putting together a clear appeal. As a result, the delegates may wonder what exactly the point at issue is. It is helpful for appellants to realize a few basic rules in writing appeals so that a classis will be able to deal fairly with them.

First of all, one who wishes to send an appeal to classis must be sure that he has been wronged, or that there is a clear deviation from Scripture, Confession or Church Order and that it is serious enough to warrant an appeal.

Second, the appeal should begin with a clear presentation of the issue, giving evidence of efforts to resolve it locally.

Third, the appeal should contain a very specific request. A classis should not have to guess what the appellant wants. It is helpful to formulate the request in a sentence like, “We hereby ask Classis to judge that the Consistory erred in . . .”

Fourth, reasons or grounds should be given as to why the appellant feels the Consistory erred. If there are multiple requests, these should be listed separately, each followed by their grounds.

Fifth, some appendices (letters to and from Consistory) may be necessary to substantiate the appeal.

Every effort must be made to keep an appeal short and to the point. Appellants should remember that delegates at a classis have not lived through the whole situation, nor are they able to make a visit to discuss the issue. An appeal should be written with an imaginary reader in mind who knows nothing about the situation at all. That’s how a member of a classis approaches a matter before him. Even if he knows various details by hearsay, he may only go by what is written.

It is hoped that these instructions on how to write appeals will not lead to a flurry of appeals at the various classes. The

aim is to take the mystery out of a classis, to enable an elder to participate meaningfully and confidently. Furthermore, there is the provision about “appeals” in our Church Order. This means that the members must have to tools to make use of it should it ever be necessary. One should never appeal to a classis just to make a point. Rather, one has to have a genuine concern for justice, the honour of God’s name and the well being of the church. The churches have classes for this very purpose!

Other matters

As a final section in this “Primer”, some other matters will be briefly considered as they might appear on the agenda of a classis.

There is the matter of approving calls. The role of classis here is administrative, to ensure that everything has been done properly. Thus, a number of documents have to be presented such as a letter of call, a letter of acceptance, a letter of release from the church the minister is leaving, a letter of agreement assuming responsibility by the church he is going to, as well as a letter indicating that the congregation he is going to has approved of the call. In the church things must be done in an orderly way.

There is also the matter of examinations. Again, this is an area where elders may feel intimidated, especially in the presence of so many ministers. Yet, it is important that elders take a full fledged role in this matter. At the consistory level they will be expected to evaluate the faithfulness and competence of a minister’s preaching. Perhaps elders are far more qualified to evaluate a sermon than a minister, as

they are called to do that every week. With respect to the rest of the examination, again, they should be able to detect competence and faithfulness.

There will also be “housekeeping” items, like appointments of deputies for various tasks. Also here, every elder has a right and responsibility to speak up to ensure that faithful and competent people are appointed.

Sailing on in unity and harmony

When all things are considered, there is no need for an air of mystery to surround a classis. There is nothing secretive about it. Even if an elder is rarely delegated, he should not hesitate to be a full participant. If one decides to sit in on the proceedings, it should be easy to know what is going on.

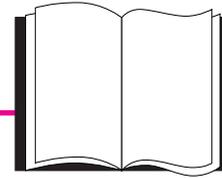
Having read this Primer, the next time an announcement is made of an upcoming classis, why not make a point of attending? Especially if one is in office, go to a classis as a visitor and observe before one is delegated. It is a good opportunity to sit silently and watch how it is done. When a classis has knowledgeable participants, the business of Christ’s fleet can be conducted swiftly and efficiently and the ships can sail on in unity and harmony.

¹This article is not meant to be exhaustive. One would do well to also read some of the available books on the topic. Recommended is: Van Oene, W.W.J. *With Common Consent* (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing Winnipeg, MB. 1990) See esp. pp 203-212.

²*Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, s.v. “Classis.”

³This is the agenda used for meetings of churches in Classis Pacific West.





Length of days-plus-nights

By W.W.J. VanOene

It certainly is not my intention to prolong the debate about our understanding of the LORD's revelation in Genesis 1. I am deeply grateful for the firm stand taken by the brothers J. Bijl and J. DeJong.

Why, then, should I nevertheless like to make a few remarks in this context? There is just one point that I would like to refer to, namely the thesis that the – indeed normal – days of creation were of exactly (our) twenty-four hours of duration.

I am neither a scientist nor a mathematician, but it is not necessary to be one either when we try to combine some givens from Scripture. I'll give up my view in favour of another if it is demonstrated that such is a better understanding of those givens.

Even if one is convinced that the (normal) days mentioned in Genesis 1 were not of the same length as our days, this does not imply that one gets into an evolutionary track or is on the way towards heresy.

The difference would be the difference of a few (of our) hours. This, I hope, will become clear from what follows.

Sun and moon

Qualifying the second group of three days as "solar days" necessitates taking the first group of three days as being of the same duration. I do believe that they were indeed. That there was as yet neither sun nor moon does not make any difference. A day is a day.

Speaking of sun and moon, we read that "God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night."

To me this means nothing else than that the sun was shining every day and that the moon was "shining" every night.

Genesis 1:16,17 does not say "the greater light shall rule every day and the lesser light shall rule only part of the

nights." No, each and every day the sun was shining and each and every night the moon provided its reflected light.

What is the situation today?

We have moonless nights! To me this can only mean that either the length of day-plus-night was more (or less) than (our) twenty-four hours or that the moon's rotation around the earth has slowed down.

As I understand Genesis 1:16,17, there were no moonless nights in the beginning. There are now. This means that a change has taken place, a change that caused our days-plus-nights to be exactly twenty-four (of our) hours long.

What caused this?

This change I understand to have been brought about by the flood. For this understanding I would refer to what the LORD said to Noah in Genesis 8:22. It was after the flood that the seasons started.

It is my understanding that it did not rain on the earth until the flood.

We are told in Genesis 2:5, that the LORD God had "not caused it to rain upon the earth." The soil and plants received their moisture from a "mist that went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground." This, I believe, continued until the flood.

Seasons are the result of the earth's axis not being at a right angle to the sun. If the north-south axis of the earth were at a right angle to the sun, there would be an even temperature all year round.

When, at the same time, an enormous layer of moisture was enfolding the earth, this distributed the sun's heat evenly so that there was very little variation in temperature around the earth, if any at all.

The same layer also prevented the sun's harmful rays from reaching the creatures on earth.

We cannot visualize the tremendous and devastating impact the flood had on all of creation.

When the LORD opened the windows of heaven, Genesis 7:11, that enormous layer of moisture around the earth came down for the larger part, as much as was needed, in combination with "the fountains of the earth," to cover what were then the highest mountains. The enormous pressure of the water pushed dry land down and caused deep chasms in the oceans, pushing other parts of the earth up to heights that were not seen until that moment.

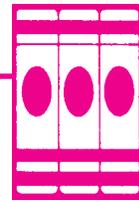
Whether the LORD used the flood to change the stand of the earth's axis or did so by direct action of his is something we do not know. In any case: after the flood there came the seasons. And much of the moisture that had come down when the windows of heaven were opened was stored in the polar regions and in the snowcaps on the highest mountains.

Was it only after the flood that there came "moonless nights"? We do not know. What we do know is that it was not so from the beginning.

It is, therefore, quite possible that also the length of days-plus-nights was affected and that there has come about a difference of some (of our) hours.

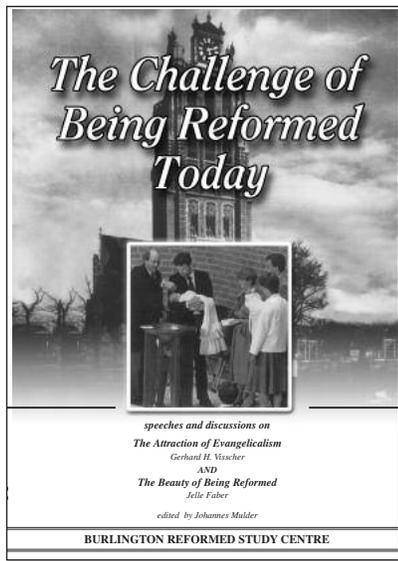
In view of the above I am convinced that it would be wrong to bind the church to the thesis that the days-plus-nights mentioned in Genesis 1 were exactly the same length they have in our days.

It is a long time ago, perhaps even more than thirty years, that I read the books of Immanuel Velikovsky. Although there is much in them with which we cannot agree, I would recommend their reading. As far as I recall, they were the titles *Earth in Upheaval*, *Ages in Chaos*, and *Worlds in Collision*. vO 



The Challenge of Being Reformed Today

By Bonita van Popta



The Challenge of Being Reformed Today. Edited by Johannes Mulder. Premier, 1999. Paperback, 122. \$ 8.50 CDN

Unashamedly Reformed

More than ever we need to learn and study in order to be able to defend the riches of our Reformed faith. If we are thankful for our heritage and believe that Reformed Churches have the truth of Scriptures embodied in their Confessions of Faith, then why are we so often afraid to speak what our hearts are full of? A convert to the Reformed faith once spoke to me of her joy after searching long and hard for the truth. She spoke of a disappointment as well. "It astounds me," she said, "that those who have been raised on these truths do not more readily speak of the riches which they possess." According to her, we should proclaim them unashamedly.

The Word of God has been presented in the world in many different ways and with untold variety of interpretation. How do we present to others what we confess to be the truth of Scrip-

ture? How do we boldly defend and define these riches?

This book succeeds, in a lively and engaging way, in defending the beauty of remaining Reformed today. The speeches and discussions boldly define and interact with the character of the Reformed faith. Rev. G. H. Visscher, minister of Burlington West Canadian Reformed Church and Dr. J. Faber, Professor Emeritus of Dogmatics at the Canadian Reformed Theological College, speak about *The Attraction of Evangelicalism* and *The Beauty of Being Reformed*. These speeches were sponsored by the Burlington Reformed Study Centre. Of particular interest (a detail which should have been included with other particulars recorded on the cover of this book) Rev. M. Pawelke, minister of Burlington's Brant Bible Church, was also invited to this conference as a respondent to Rev. Visscher's speech.

**"Why do
Reformed believers
love the Psalms
rather than the
"Jesus-and-me"
songs?"**

In the first speech, Rev. Visscher explains that the roots of evangelicalism are found in the Reformation. "The Roman Catholics often referred to the Protestants as evangelicals. The word itself comes from the New Testament word for the gospel, the *evangel*. The fact that some have claimed this term as their distinctive trademark does not mean that Reformed people should abandon it. We must be Reformed and evangelical."

Without definition, theology is thin

Rev. Visscher proceeds to point out that evangelical churches hold to a cluster of six convictions that control evangelicalism, and that this theology though true, does not go deep enough. These six convictions compared to the Three Forms of Unity, lack definition. Without definition, theology is thin and open to broad interpretation. Some of the issues dealt with in Rev. Visscher's speech are the differences we have with respect to baptism, the work of the Spirit, and the work of evangelism.

One of the things that really struck me as I read Rev. Pawelke's response and the discussions that ensued later, was the focus that the evangelical world has on the *individual believer who has faith* in Christ. The Reformed Church, by contrast, puts emphasis on *the body of Christ*. Its members have union and communion with Christ their head. There is a fundamental difference between these two perspectives. This seemingly small difference, as you will understand from reading this book, has an enormous impact on how evangelical theology is worked out today.

Covenant promises: personal or individual?

The second speech harmonizes with the first. Dr. Faber speaks about five characteristics of the Reformed religion. He explains clearly and concisely how the Reformed faith is centered on the Triune God, is christological and pneumatological (*Pneuma* meaning Spirit), conforms to the canon of Holy Scripture, and is covenantal and catholic. Using Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity, Dr. Faber wraps a beautifully coherent package of the Reformed faith. He deals with some thought provoking questions that teach us how to think and do in a Reformed fashion. For example: What

is the difference between a) asking your neighbor if he is born again? and b) asking him if he knows Jesus as his Saviour (p. 65)? What is the difference between christocentric and christological (p. 66)? Why do Reformed believers love the Psalms rather than the “Jesus-and-me songs” which some have become enamoured by (p. 67)? Do the covenant promises of God speak to us *personally* or *individually* (p. 76). Answers to these questions help us to further understand the contrast between the Reformed religion and evangelicalism.

Two appendices have been included. Dr. C. Van Dam, professor at

the Canadian Reformed Theological College, has contributed an article entitled “Reformed or Evangelical?” Rev. G. H. Visscher has contributed an article entitled “Toronto Blessing or Temples of the Holy Spirit?” Both of these additions serve to complement the material in this book. Rev. Visscher’s article is very helpful in understanding the work of the Holy Spirit. This article should receive careful attention by anyone studying this topic.

Evangelical and Reformed

The Burlington Reformed Study Center has presented us with a very

thought provoking book. If you think you know enough about the Reformed faith, read this book. It will encourage you to become ‘evangelical’ in the truly Reformed sense of the word. If you are a believer who is tempted by the evangelical movement for various reasons, read this book. It will lead you gently yet boldly into a renewed understanding the riches found in the Reformed faith.

Bonita van Popta is a member of the Canadian Reformed Church of Coaldale, Alberta.



OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Story

Grandad's New-Old Nursery Rhymes – *continued*

At tea-time, after she had eaten her bread and butter, Louise reached out her hand for one of the cakes, which all had different coloured icing on top. She couldn't make up her mind which one to pick, but finally selected the pink one. “That reminds me,” said Grandad. “Oh dear,” said Louise. “Here we go again. I suppose it's another new-old one?” “You're right,” he said, and began,

“I had a little pony once.”

“But we've had that one, Grandad.” “Oh no,” he said, “this is quite different”

*I had a little pony once,
His name was Dapple Pink
I took him to the water
But couldn't make him drink,
I pushed him and pulled him
And got in quite a state;
I never knew a pony
To be so obstinate!”*

Louise smiled. “I like that,” she said. “That little pony is showing some spirit at last. I wonder what he'll do next?”

“Wait and see,” said Grandad.

Next day when Louise came home from school, Grandad asked her what she had learned. She said, “We had a lesson about astronauts going up into space in rockets. Two of them landed on the moon, and others

went round and round the earth.” “I know,” said Grandad, who knew everything. “Once round the earth is called a circuit. The Man-in-the-Moon in the nursery rhyme – he must have been an astronaut, don't you think?” “I suppose so,” said Louise doubtfully, “but that was a long time ago, before space travel was invented.” “Oh, I think he was,” said Grandad, “but he couldn't have been a very good one if he came down too soon and had to ask the way to Norwich. And then he went and burned his mouth through eating cold pease porridge, silly fellow.” “I don't see how he could burn himself with cold pease porridge,” said Louise. “Well,” said Grandad, “perhaps up on the Moon cold is hot and hot is cold, and he'd got used to things being like that.” “Anyway,” said Louise, “it doesn't make sense, so let's do a new-old one.” “Right you are,” said Grandad, “I've just made one up:

*The Man-in-the-Moon
Came down too soon,
He'd only done one circuit;
He said, “I mean, it's this machine,
– I don't know how to work it!”*

He laughed a lot at that. Louise had noticed that Grandad often laughed a lot at his own jokes, and when he did, she couldn't help laughing with him.

More next time.