

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
VOLUME 49, NO. 23 NOVEMBER 10, 2000

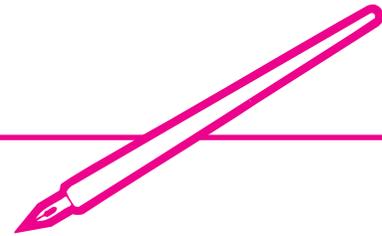


*Whoever believes in me, as the Scriptures
has said, streams of living water will flow
from within him. John 7:38*

Numbers

10:1-10

By R. Aasman



Pierre Elliott Trudeau 1919-2000

Pray for those in authority

On September 28, 2000, a former prime minister of Canada, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, passed away at the age of eighty. He became prime minister in 1968 and was in power for almost sixteen years. Since he was the leader of our nation, many prayers were offered up to God in connection with his office. The Lord tells us to do this in his Word, as we read in 1 Timothy 2:1,2, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." We also confess this in article 36 of the Belgic Confession. However, to pray for a prime minister and his government does not mean that we agreed with everything that Mr. Trudeau said and did. Prayers can also ask God to change the heart of a leader and so reflect that he is answerable to God.

Outpouring of emotion

At the death of Pierre Trudeau, there was an outpouring of public emotion in this country of Canada. Clearly his persona had burned deeply into the consciousness of our fellow countrymen. People absorbed once again all the details of his life. They listened over and over again to the eulogy of his oldest son, Justin, at the funeral. There was probably hardly a dry eye in the house when Justin concluded with the words, "Je t'aime, Papa!" Accolades poured in from all over the country and from every kind of person, young and old, expressing what a great man this had been.

One can indeed say good things about Pierre Trudeau. We recognize his deep love for his country and his efforts to keep Quebec in Confederation. Perhaps this is one of the strongest reasons why people so loved and still do love Mr. Trudeau. Canadians love their country and want to keep it together. In a world where so many nations are under siege and disintegrating, there is a passion to keep Canada united. Pierre Elliott Trudeau is regarded as the man who did much to maintain and promote this unity. Perhaps that is one reason for the public outpouring of emotion at the death of this man.

What did he really give Canada?

When we reflect over all the enthusiasm expressed for Mr. Trudeau, it raises the question: do we really understand the legacy of Mr. Trudeau for this country? It is not my intention to dwell on his economic policies which have riddled Canada with debt, or his policy of bilingualism which really has not

helped to allay Quebec's separatist spirit, or his open flirtation with communism in its various guises. The point of concern is his moral direction. What did Mr. Trudeau do for the culture and the moral climate of our country?

Trudeau's moral compass

The Achilles heel of Mr. Trudeau was his sharp intellect and his inclination to regard anyone with a differing opinion a fool. As a result, he was surrounded by a counsel of mediocrity where few dared to stand up to him and criticize him. Mr. Trudeau's moral compass became the compass of the government and it had a great and a devastating effect on Canadian society. Mr. Trudeau amended the Criminal Code and thus decriminalized homosexual acts and abortions; he also liberalized divorce laws and opened the door for government run lotteries. How quickly the moral fabric of society started to unravel after this. For instance, because of the easy divorce laws, the basic family structure has changed dramatically from what it was only a few decades ago.

Charter of Rights

The new moral direction under the leadership of Mr. Trudeau was solidified in 1982 when he saw to the patriation of the Constitution and the introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This ensured that the rights of an individual or a minority group were protected even at the expense of traditional morals and values. Suddenly a person or even a church could be charged if it spoke out against homosexuality or tried to persuade a woman not to have an abortion. Moreover, the relatively respectable judicial system of this country was exchanged for a radically new judicial system which began to interpret and form the laws of this country even when it conflicted with the original intent of the legislation. This is Mr. Trudeau's lasting and firmly entrenched legacy. It is a new world which shows that Canada exists now in a post-Christian era.

Present prime minister

Justin Trudeau, at his father's eulogy, encouraged all Canadians to continue what his father started. Prime Minister Jean Chrétien has made clear that he wants to do



Mr. Trudeau amended the Criminal Code and thus decriminalized homosexual acts and abortions; he also liberalized divorce laws.

exactly that. He wants to carry the flame. We read in the *National Post* of October 2:

Mr. Chrétien . . . went on to recall that Mr. Trudeau, as justice minister under Lester Pearson, liberalized divorce and abortion laws, and decriminalized homosexuality. "Something like that was important to modernize the country. We have to keep talking about such things – because you never know, sometimes in difficult times, people turn inward, they return to the past. We can't return to the past."

We observe two remarkable things about our prime minister's statement. First, he wants to maintain the corrosive moral compass of Pierre Trudeau. Secondly, this is meant as a clear shot across the bow of Stockwell Day's ship, the Alliance. Mr. Day is on record as wanting to turn around the morals and values of this nation in a way that accords with the Word of God.

Those in authority

By the time that you are reading this, a federal election may very well have been called. There are some important issues that every Canadian must face and for which he or she must take responsibility. Mr. Trudeau's legacy lives on to the acclamation of many in our society, including our present prime minister. As Christians we seek a different and better way. We pray for those in authority over us. We respect our leaders. But we also pray and work for a government which will show in its philosophy, policies and actions that it gives respect to the One from whom they receive authority. There are winds of change and new possibility stirring up in this land from coast to coast. Let us petition our heavenly Father to give Canada rulers who will create an environment where "we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."



What's inside?

On September 28, former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau passed away at the age of eighty years. In the following days and weeks praise for Mr. Trudeau poured in from around the country and even from different parts of the world. But is the legacy of Mr. Trudeau for Canada all positive? This issue's editorial takes a look at the legacy of Mr. Trudeau.

Dr. R. Faber investigates the historical background to the practice of admitting to the Lord's Supper only those who have made profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. He demonstrates that our present practice is rooted solidly in the history of the Reformed churches. Considering the discussions which we are having with other churches, this is a timely and helpful article.

Dr. J. Visscher completes his three-part series on "God's Truth Abideth Still." In this final submission, he outlines the calling of the church with respect to the truth of God's Word. For instance, the church has a duty to see to it that its ministers preach the Word faithfully, clearly and passionately.

Rev. J. Moesker presents the second part of his report on visits to the RCUS. He includes an address by himself to the Synod of the RCUS.

Dr. J. De Jong provides us with a press review of an article in the *Banner of Truth*. This article deals with the attitudes and life styles of the young people. Dr. De Jong uses this press release to make a strong plea for unity among true Reformed believers so that we may work together against covenantal automatism.

Included in this issue are a press release from Classis Alberta, a letter to the editor, as well as a book review by Dr. N. H. Gootjes on a small book by John Calvin.

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Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$39.00	\$52.00
International	\$60.00	\$90.00

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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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Admission to the Lord's Supper in the early Dutch Reformed Churches

By R. Faber

One of the distinguishing features of the American and Canadian Reformed churches is their practice of admission to the Lord's Supper. Unlike some other Protestant denominations, these churches instruct their consistories to "admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life" (CO Art 61). Members in good standing in a local congregation are invited to participate; members of sister-churches whose doctrine and conduct are commended by a formal attestation may be admitted also. These provisions, intended to preserve both the sanctity of the sacrament and the spiritual well-being of all concerned, have characterized the celebration in Reformed churches of Dutch background for centuries, and may be traced to their formative years. Already before the Synod of Dordt in 1618, several conventions of the Dutch Reformed churches determined to maintain a biblical and apostolic practice regarding the Lord's Supper.

A rash approach

In fact, well before the Dutch churches dealt formally with admission to the table, the Reformers considered the question, "who may attend the supper of the Lord?" For Romanist practices were evoking over-zealous reactions in some reforming congregations, and the requirement of confessing one's sins to the priest before attending mass was being replaced by indiscriminate admission in some cities. In Strasbourg, for example, John Calvin observed that "many individuals were in the habit of making a rash approach to the sacrament," while in Geneva "everyone wanted to partake by their own choice, even though the faith and conviction of most of them was unknown to us."¹ The Dutch refugee congregations in London were subject to this tendency

too, for Marten Micronius, one of the ministers there, notes "how few people examine themselves properly before coming to the table of the Lord," and he worries that it may be turned into a "pig-trough."²

No one may seek to hinder God's grace by means of extra-biblical restrictions.

The Reformers had good reason to be concerned about such carefree participation, and they took seriously the warning of 1 Corinthians 11:28-9: "any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment unto himself." Given this text, Martin Bucer asks, "how would it be permissible for ministers of salvation of God's elect to offer these most holy mysteries of salvation to those whose faith and piety they did not know?"³ Micronius refers to the following verse of Scripture, where we read that the Corinthians suffered illness and even death because some profaned the body and blood of the Lord. Just imagine, Calvin writes, "how wretched would be the state and condition of the church if she could be compelled to receive to the partaking in so great a mystery, those of whom she is altogether ignorant" (*Letters*, 1.185).

A gift of God's mercy

On the other hand, the Reformers also knew that the sacrament is a gift of God's mercy to strengthen the faith of believers and therefore may not be avoided lightly. The Lord Jesus Christ instituted the supper with the command to "do this in remembrance" of

Him and thereby to proclaim his death (1 Cor 11:23-6). No one may seek to hinder God's grace by means of extra-biblical restrictions. Such hindrances occurred in the Roman Catholic mass, which required a formal absolution of sins. What is more, lay-persons were prohibited altogether from the communion of the cup. There were also Anabaptist radicals whose perfectionist view of worthy participation led them to bar eligible people from the sacrament. Other believers abstained from the table out of an extreme sense of unworthiness. Calvin reminded such people that the table is for all of us who, despite the infirmities of our faith, "feel in our heart that, without hypocrisy and deceit, we hope for salvation in Christ, and desire to live according to the rule of the gospel."⁴ In other words, all who have true faith and repentance are worthy partakers in Christ.

It was clear to the Reformers that restoring a proper practice of admission to the table would have to be based upon the entire counsel of God, his revealed Word. In the sixteenth century several doctrines of the Romanist church were causing the Supper to be misunderstood and misused. False teaching about justification by faith alone, the priesthood of all believers, and the authority and duties of the ordained offices – to mention only three – were affecting the sacrament wrongly. Thus not only was the institution of the Supper, as recorded in Matthew 26:26-29 and further explained in 1 Corinthians 11:23-32, studied afresh, but so too the roles of the individual and the church regarding the sacraments. Mutual Christian reproof (Matt 18:15-18), proper self-examination, ecclesiastical oversight (Acts 20:28), and other matters relevant to the privilege of attending the Supper of the Lord were re-examined.

Consequently, the Reformers' writings on admission to the sacrament are littered with references to the Bible and the church fathers.

The duty of the elders

The decisions of the early Dutch synods were based on these biblical teachings as put into practice especially by Calvin and Bucer. For example, Calvin relates the biblical warning that no one eat and drink judgment unto himself to the teaching that elders heed the flock that is their charge (1 Pet 5:2-4). While each believer must examine himself, the elders also must see to it that the sacraments are not defiled. In the *Institutes* Calvin suggests that "lest this most hallowed mystery be disgraced, discretion is very much needed" in the distribution of the bread and the cup (4.12.5). For some may come forward rashly and unwittingly profane the sacrament; therefore admitting "all and sundry without discrimination is a contempt which the Lord cannot tolerate," he writes, and "no-one therefore ought to take it ill, when his Christian faith is tested at least very carefully when he is to be admitted to the sacrament."⁵ Bucer concurs, stating that ministers should distribute the elements "only to those whom they know to be holy and blameless according to the Word of the Lord" (*Kingdom*, 236).

The consistory in Geneva began to request all who wished to partake of the sacrament to declare their faith publicly. "That is to say," the order for the French country churches explains, everyone "must declare before the minister that he desires to live according to the reformation of the gospel, and that he knows the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, etc." (79). The Geneva catechism, composed to help one prepare for this dec-

laration, states that pastors may not "admit everyone always and without discrimination," for if they did the celebration "cannot be done without affront and profanation of the sacrament" (139). Restriction of access is not a trivial matter, however, and cannot be exercised by one person. The catechism teaches that such actions must follow the "legitimate enquiry and decision of the church," and by means of a "certain order of government" elders should "bar from communion those whom they do not believe to be capable of receiving the Supper or to be able to be admitted without profaning the sacrament" (139). Stated positively, the elders must promote a proper understanding of the Lord's Supper and encourage due self-examination.

This duty of the consistory extended to those who were unknown to the congregation. The Geneva church order of 1541 states that on "the Sunday before the celebration, intimation is to be made . . . that all strangers and newcomers may be exhorted first to come and present themselves at the church" (67). Elsewhere Calvin admits that such an announcement may be misinterpreted by some as too restrictive and reminiscent of Romanist custom. Indeed, he advises, "what we have most to guard against is this, lest the common people . . . may think themselves brought back under a new servitude" (*Letters*, 1.184). It must be explained carefully to all that this practice "in no way derogates from our Christian liberty, since I enjoin nothing whatever that Christ himself has not appointed" (185). Extending the privilege of the table to those who have true faith and demonstrate a life of repentance is an act of pastoral love and not tyranny.

Evidence of true repentance

Like Calvin, Bucer taught that ministers must "have evidence of true repentance for sins and a solid faith in Christ the Lord" (*Kingdom* 237) from those to whom they distribute the elements. And to him, too, it was only logical that those who publicly state their subservience to the Lord Jesus Christ should willingly submit to the supervision of the church. Therefore he made the "confirmation" or profession of faith

Restoring a proper practice of admission would have to be based upon the entire counsel of God.

a more formal component in the life of the congregation. This confirmation entailed a pledge of obedience to Christ; it also entailed an explicit submission to ecclesiastical discipline. The importance of discipline for Bucer cannot be overstated, and it was from him as well as from Calvin that the Dutch Reformed churches developed the close relation between sacrament and pastoral oversight. It is due to Bucer's influence also that they adopted the practice of requiring a public profession of faith as prerequisite to attending the sacrament. In fact, the earliest form for profession of faith in Dutch-speaking Reformed churches, the London *Form for Admitting Youth to the Lord's Supper*, includes questions about the chief points of religion, a declaration to renounce the ways of the world and to live for Christ, and a statement of willingness to give and receive Christian admonition according to the discipline of the church.

Admission to the table

In the Netherlands, the first significant formal gathering of Reformed churches was the Convent of Wesel, held in November of 1568. It made the following decisions about admission to the table. "No-one shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper, except he who has professed the faith in advance, and submitted himself to ecclesiastical discipline. Those desiring to be admitted to the Supper shall submit their names to the minister eight days before the appointed day of the Supper."⁶ Following the elders' due investigation into the former life and intentions of the persons



John Calvin



Martin Bucer

involved, it would be determined whether to proceed to examination and profession. “Those who have been examined duly, whether youths or adults, shall take their place in the front of the congregation on the day before the Supper celebration, and when the chief points of the faith and religion have been put to them, they shall be requested to give assent. At the same time they shall submit themselves to the ecclesiastical discipline, and their names shall be recorded in the public registers. And finally, they shall be presented to the people so that, unless there is a good reason against it, they may be admitted to the table on the following day” (29). Simply put, it was at Wesel that the Dutch churches adopted the practice of Geneva, Strasbourg, and London: admission to the Lord’s Supper via public profession of faith.

In 1574, at the so-called provincial synod of Dordt, this practice was clarified and refined. Thus it was determined that the Lord’s Supper may not be celebrated in places where no “form of congregation exists.” The reasoning was that the celebration may occur only in the context of the congregation, which includes ordained office-bearers responsible for admission to, and administration of, the sacrament. In line with this reasoning the national synod of Dordt (1578) stated that the supper may not be held in places where no church order has been established (250). In fact, the form for the celebration used currently in American and Canadian Reformed churches derives from one that is a section of a church order, the German Palatinate order of 1563. Seen in context, the substance of the form relates to the proclamation of the gospel, baptism, catechism, church discipline, and other matters treated in

the church order. In effect, the institution of a new, Reformed congregation was manifested by the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. And one’s membership in a congregation was shown by one’s participation in the sacrament. So, when the national synod of Middelburg (1581) agreed that it would be “profitable for all churches to keep a book in which the names of those who attend the Lord’s Supper are recorded,”⁷⁷ it recognized that full membership is “communicant” membership.

*We have received
a valuable heritage
and should not be
ashamed of it.*

Profession and life

In the first decades of the history of the Dutch Reformed churches, then, admission to the Lord’s Supper was granted to those who had been examined by the consistory, publicly professed their faith, and submitted themselves to the oversight of the consistory. It should be noted, however, that the early Dutch churches also adopted the Reformers’ insistence that the profession of faith be supported by a life of repentance. The synod of Middelburg makes this requirement explicit: “No-one shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper, except he who according to the custom of the church to which he joins himself has given profession of the Reformed religion, at the same time giving evidence of a pious walk of life” (392). From this text it is easy to see the vintage of the first statement of Article 61 in our Church Order: the consistory

admits “to the Lord’s Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life.”

Guests and newcomers

Regarding guests and newcomers to the Supper there is little evidence from the sixteenth century synods. Two decisions, however, are worthy of note. The first concerns the acceptance of believers from elsewhere. The 1578 synod of Dordt established that “those who come from other churches with letters of attestation shall be admitted without making a new profession of faith; but those who have neither written nor oral testimony from trustworthy persons shall not be admitted to the table” (250). Part of this text may remind readers of the second statement in Article 61 of the modern order: “members of sister-churches shall be admitted on the ground of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct.” The phrase “sister-churches” does not appear in this or any other sixteenth century decision on admission to the table, for it is a qualification of a later period when the federation of Reformed churches was established more formally.

The second relevant decision is the one of the synod of Middelburg quoted earlier; the full text reads: “No-one shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper, except he who according to the custom of the church to which he joins himself has given profession of the Reformed religion, at the same time giving witness of a pious walk of life – without which also those who come from other churches shall not be admitted” (392). The original Dutch text makes it clear that both profession of faith and evidence of a life of repentance are required for granting admission to the table. It should also be noted that the identity of “other churches” is not specified. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the phrase refers to those congregations which were participating in the regional and national synods of the developing union. Yet it may also point to churches with which there was as yet no increasingly formal relationship. One should remember that at this time the state of the growing federation in the lowlands was far from constant. In some regions the churches were being persecuted, in others they were in hiding, while changing political fortunes affected them all. And individual believers were arriving in the lowlands from Germany, France, England, and elsewhere. There is also some reason to believe

that the decision may concern Christians coming from non-Reformed churches, as the exact phrase “profession of the Reformed religion” suggests. And lastly, the imprecise wording of “other churches” in this and the previously quoted decision permitted an individual application and avoided the risk of being too restrictive.

North American application

Let us conclude this brief survey of the practice of admission to the table in the early Dutch Reformed churches by applying it to the current situation in North America. During the nineteenth century there was a time when too many people stayed away from the table of the Lord from a pious sense of unworthiness. In the twentieth century notions of individual rights, freedom from corporate responsibility, and self-assertion affected the attitudes of many towards the privilege of partaking of the sacrament. According to one ob-

server of the contemporary scene, “the danger today in most Protestant churches is . . . to demean the sacrament to a meaningless rite offered indiscriminately to anyone.”⁸ This may be due to the weakening of church discipline in “a spirit of relativism and indifference, and a false understanding of ‘charity’ and Christian freedom” (163). Fortunately, however, the Reformed churches are able to benefit from the labour and experience of their ancestors in the age of Reformation. As another observer puts it, “we have received a valuable heritage from the sixteenth century and we would do well not to be ashamed of it.”⁹

¹Re Strasbourg: Letter to Farel, 1540, in J. Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin*, Vol. 1 (New York, 1972 [1858 reprint]), 176; re Geneva, Preamble to the 1538 (Latin) Catechism.

²Marten Micronius, *Claer Bewijs van het Recht Gebruyck des Nachmaels Christi*, in S. Cramer, F. Pijper, eds., *Bibliotheca Refor-*

matoria Neerlandica. Vol.1 (s’Gravenhage, 1903), 512, 515.

³*The Kingdom of Christ*, in E. Pauck, tr., *Melanchthon and Bucer*, Library of Christian Classics Vol. 19 (Philadelphia, 1969), 237.

⁴*Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper*, in J.K.S. Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*. Library of Christian Classics, Vol. 22 (Philadelphia, 1968), 152. This edition is also the source for citations of the *Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances* (1537), *Ordinances for Supervision of Churches in the Country* (1547), and *Catechism of the Church at Geneva* (1545).

⁵*Corpus Reformatorum* 38: 258.

⁶F.L. Rutgers, *Acta van de Nederlandsche Synoden der Zestiende Eeuw* (s’Gravenhage, 1889), 29. Unless otherwise noted, further citations of acts of early Dutch synods refer to this edition.

⁷W. Van’t Spijker, “De Acta van de Synode van Middelburg (1581),” in J.P. Van Dooren, ed. *De Nationale Synode te Middelburg in 1581* (Middelburg, 1981), 100.

⁸I.J. Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism* (Louisville, 1997), 164.

⁹C. Trimp, *Het Altaar Gebroken - de Tafel Hersteld* (Apeldoorn, 1979), 43. 

Light’s Abode, Celestial Salem

Light’s abode, celestial Salem,
Vision whence true peace doth spring,
Brighter than the heart can fancy,
Mansion of the highest King;
O how glorious are the praises
Which of thee the prophets sing!

There for ever and for ever
Alleluia is outpoured;
For unending, for unbroken
Is the feast-day of the Lord;
All is pure and all is holy
That within thy walls is stored.

There no cloud or passing vapour
Dims the brightness of the air;
Endless noon-day, glorious noon-day,
From the Sun of suns is there;
There no night brings rest from labour,
For unknown are toil and care.

O how glorious and resplendent,
Fragile body, shalt thou be,
When endued with so much beauty,
Full of health and strong and free,
Full of vigour, full of pleasure
That shall last eternally!

Now with gladness, now with courage,
Bear the burden on thee laid,
That hereafter these thy labours
May with endless gifts be paid;
And in everlasting glory
Thou with brightness be arrayed.

Laud and honour to the Father,
Laud and honour to the Son,
Laud and honour to the Spirit,
Ever Three and ever One,
Consubstantial, co-eternal
While unending ages run.

Trans. By J.M. Neale (1818-66)

God's truth abideth still (Part 3)

By J. Visscher

The calling of the church

Still, the fact that God keeps his Truth does not mean that the church has no duty with regard to it. Hardly! We can say that the church today has a four fold duty with regard to the truth of God's Word.

Preaching

In the first place, the church has a duty to see to it that its ministers preach the Word faithfully, clearly and passionately. In our day and age it has become the "in" thing for the church to allot less time to the preaching. Where once an hour was common, today even thirty minutes is deemed too much. The modern cry is "we need time for soloists, for testimonies, for children's performances" and the sad part is that it usually comes at the cost of the truth. God's infallible Word has to make room for man's fallible and sometimes funny words. Little wonder that many believers complain about receiving stones for bread, that spiritual muscle gives way to mental flab, and that many churches no longer stand for anything but fall for everything.

Teaching

In the second place, the church has a duty to teach its members the truth. In our Reformed tradition we have always placed a strong emphasis on teaching the young using the Heidelberg Catechism especially. What we need to do is maintain that, but also augment it. We need to augment it with more and more adult education.

In this regard it has always struck me as a curious thing that just when our young people really start to show an interest in the truth we graduate them through public profession of faith and leave them pretty much to develop on their own. Now, that is sad and that should be corrected. We need to teach, teach and teach the Truth. We need to do that especially in a world

filled with so many temptations and perverse philosophies.

Defending

In the third place, the church needs to defend the truth. We need to defend it from error both within and without. To those who are members but who stray from the truth of God's Word, we must insist, with both love and firmness, on a return to it. This insistence must be backed up, if need be, with admonition and admonition with discipline. For the church to allow its members to play fast and loose with the truth is not only a dangerous thing for them and a disrespectful thing for it, it is also a denial of the fact that this truth is God's truth. It is holy and divine.

The church has a duty to see to it that its ministers preach the Word faithfully, clearly and passionately.

Spreading

In the fourth place, the church needs to spread the truth. The Word of God needs to be taken into the world. It is needed to make disciples of all nations. It is needed to teach men and women everywhere about the things that God commands.

It has often been said of Reformed Churches that our defense is better than our offense, or that we are better at defending the Word than spreading the Word. Is that true? If it is then we need to take steps to correct this imbalance. The one should not come at the cost of the other. For it is not a case of "either or," but it should be a case of "both and." The One who is King of Kings expects no less and deserves no less. Does

He not call on the church to be the "pillar and foundation of the truth" in the midst of this world (1 Tim 3:15)?

The calling of the members of the church

Now if the church at large has to recognize and work with the truth as revealed in Scripture, the same calling applies to its members. For handling the Word is not just a corporate matter, it is also a personal matter. So how are we to handle it as believers? A number of things come to mind.

Esteem it

You may have many books in your home, but what you need to do is to esteem this Book above all others. Realize that it is God's Word to you, or if you like, it is his book of letters to you. In those letters can be found all kinds of treasures, insights, teachings, and truths. In those letters you can even find God as the Triune God. You can find Him because the Holy Spirit uses it to lead you to Him and to his glorious salvation. So treasure the Word because it is treasure beyond price.

Read it

Yet do more than just treasure it: read it. Many people have books on their shelves that they have never read. They are part of the decor. That, however, is something that should never happen to this Book. It needs to be read. It has to be read. It has to be read as a family and it has to be read personally.

In addition, it also has to be read regularly, and that means that you have to make time for it. How do you do that in the midst of a busy life? Prioritize it. I am sure that you all take time out to eat. Well, it is just as necessary to take time out to read and digest the message of this book. What you get at meal time will feed your body but what you get at reading time will feed your soul.

Pray about it

Still, you also need to realize that reading the Word alone is not enough. From the Reformers we learn that this Word needs to be wrapped in much prayer. You need to ask God to teach you as you read it. Specifically, you need to ask for the guidance and working of his Spirit in your heart. Bullinger used to say that when it comes to the Word there is this constant need to invoke the Spirit. As he said, “for what will it avail to hear the Word of God . . . without the Holy Spirit of God to work or stir inwardly in our hearts” (Bromiley, 220)?

Depend on it alone

Yet I would also encourage you to do something else, and that is depend on the Word of truth. We live in a time when some Pentecostal leaders claim that God is again raising up prophets and apostles who receive special reve-

lations from God. We also live in a time wherein some believers put more stock in the revelations that they say they receive directly from God, than in the Word.

From the Reformers we learn that this Word needs to be wrapped in much prayer.

The Reformers, however, would warn you against both. In their time too they met people making both claims only to suffer disastrous consequences. Be on your guard, therefore, against everyone and everything that weakens your dependence on the Word.

Apply it

One last thing on a personal note is this: realize that the truth of God is

meant for more than reading and praying. It is intended for living. You need to take this Word and let it rule your tongue, your heart, your eyes, your feet and your hands. You need to apply it in your private life. Why? Because as Paul says to Timothy, this Word is “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16, 17). It will equip you better than anything else for daily, private living.

It will also equip you for public living. How do you do your work, how do you manage your business, how do you relate to others, how do you deal with issues of commerce and politics? The Word will equip you to deal with every area of life. So apply it privately and publicly.

May our gracious God help us as we seek to abide in the truth of his most Holy Word! “God’s truth abideth still!” 



Personal report of visits and contacts with the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) during 1999 and 2000 (Part 2)



By J. Moesker

Synod Hamburg, Minnesota – May 2000

From May 8-10, br. W. Gortemaker, Rev. K. Jonker and I made a visit to the 254th Synod of the Reformed Church in the US. We set out at just after three on the morning of May 8th for the town of Hamburg, near Minneapolis, as we wanted to be there in time for a meeting with their Committee for Interchurch Relations scheduled for 1:00 - 5:00 p.m. that day. We made it in time, and were warmly received at St. Paul's Evangelical Reformed Church. This church returned to the RCUS fold some years before, after going along with the 1934 union into the Evangelical Reformed Church and the 1957 union into the United Church of Christ. One of the "left overs" from that time away from the RCUS was an altar at the front of the church (see history of RCUS in the previous installment). We had intense and frank but also brotherly discussions with their committee concerning some matters which we were still not definite about (e.g., the authority of their classes and synods, Sunday as day of rest and reading of the law in the worship service, instruction of youth). After our meeting, we enjoyed supper with their committee.

Worship before synod starts

Then we prepared for the evening worship service before synod, which started at 7:30. Again, the liturgy in this service was similar to ours. The service commenced with the ringing of the church bells. It included recitation of the Apostles' Creed and reading of the law. There was also responsive reading of Psalms 121-122, and the congrega-

tional choir sang a couple of selections. The text for the sermon comprised the first few verses of Psalm 85, and was about the Lord reviving his church. After the doxology and a moment of silent prayer, the service ended with the ringing of the bells again. After the service there was roll call for synod. Ministers introduced elders who had not been delegated to synod before. Synod is an annual event, and has a good social aspect to it too. Many ministers from distant churches also brought their wives and some of their children.

Synod is an annual event, and has a good social aspect to it too.

Synod at work

In the RCUS all the churches delegate a minister and an elder to synod with credentials. The synod acts as a senate of the whole church. Every day, synod was opened with devotions and with roll call. At the initial roll call there were thirty-five ministers and twenty-seven elders present. The "bar" is then defined as consisting of those who may take part in the deliberations, namely delegates and fraternal delegates from other churches. There was a fraternal delegate of the OPC present. Visitors are not in the "bar" of Synod. We were seated as visitors along with two United Reformed brothers and an Associate Reformed Presbyterian representative.

The president, vice-president and clerk of synod were chosen by ballot. Rev. Vernon Pollema of Shafter, California was president, Rev. Robert

Grossmann of Garner, Iowa, was chosen vice-president, Rev. Frank Walker of Bakersfield, California was chosen as stated clerk, and Mr. Clayton Greiman of Garner, Iowa, was elected treasurer of the churches for the coming year. The president, vice-president, stated clerk and a ruling elder are constituted as an "Executive Committee," which carries out certain routine business enacted by synod during the ensuing year. Synods of the RCUS also choose standing committees to carry out synod actions in home and foreign missions, publishing, interchurch relations and several other functions.

Two new ministers and one new church (Minneapolis) were welcomed into the RCUS. During the course of synod, standing committee chairmen introduced their reports and recommendations, and the latter were voted on by oral "Yay" and "nay" votes. Everything was done according to parliamentary procedure. A number of overtures were dealt with in this fashion, including ministerial aid for retired ministers and their wives or for the widows of ministers. This aid comes from a common church fund administered by synods. Another overture concerned the searching for a more suitable hymnal for the RCUS. Unfortunately we were not present for the discussion of that one anymore.

Position papers

One interesting matter that was dealt with while we were present was the status of position papers on certain topics such as six day creation and women's voting at congregational meetings. Do these position papers have the authority of creeds and is assent required to

become a member or especially minister in the RCUS? Or do they have a lesser degree of authority? The body agreed that they are not to be sort of fourth Form of Unity or carry the authority of creeds, though they do have some judicial weight. This interested us since our churches originated from statements made by Synod in 1944 in the Netherlands about the covenant which were made binding on all the members as kind of "Fourth Form of Unity." We were glad that the RCUS brothers recognized the dangers of that sort of binding to those documents, as became apparent in the lively discussion about this matter. A motion was introduced which stated, "That the recommendations of position papers adopted by a judicatory of the RCUS are authoritative advice to the members under the authority of that judicatory and serve as its witness to the world of its understanding of Holy Scripture and our subordinate ordinances." An additional explanatory statement from the Committee's report was also adopted, stating:

That a position paper is intended to enlighten and instruct the Church on matters not spelled out in the ordinances of the Church, with the goal of promoting unity within the Church. That position papers are not judicial decision, nor can they be used as a charge in an accusation. Nevertheless, the expectation should be that when a matter relating to a position taken comes to the judicatory, the adjudication will be consistent with the position taken. Should the RC(US) desire to make a position strictly binding, it must use the process spelled out in Article 104 (of the RCUS Constitution).

Seminaries

Another matter of interest was the proposal of the Christian Education Committee to no longer consider Westminster Seminaries in Philadelphia and California as approved seminaries, due to the promotion in those institutions of questionable ideas about, for example, the origin of the world and about liturgy. These teachings were confirmed by committee members who visited these institutions and spoke with their senates. It was a heated and emotional debate. Some wanted to give Westminster another chance, while others said that enough time had already been given. We noted that there has been a long history of contact with both Westminster

Seminaries, and a number of RCUS ministers are graduates. However, it was ultimately decided not to continue support for Westminster West (California), but to continue to investigate Westminster East (Philadelphia) and as yet maintain it as approved institution.

A look at the status of position papers on certain topics such as six day creation and women's voting at congregational meetings.

The interesting thing about seminaries is also that the RCUS draws its candidates for the ministry from a number of different seminaries, including Mid-American Reformed Seminary near Chicago and New Geneva Seminary in Pennsylvania. These institutions all had representatives who spoke at length at synod to "advertise" their seminaries as good institutions of learning. It made us all the more thankful for the Theological College in Hamilton which belongs to the churches themselves. Some years ago the RCUS had entertained the idea of an own college, but that did not get off the ground. It leaves them to send their students for the ministry to a variety of seminaries with all the dangers associated with that. We did notice, however, also a growing appreciation for Mid-American Reformed Seminary.

As one of the observers from the Canadian Reformed Churches, I was given the opportunity to introduce our

churches as well as the college in Hamilton at Synod. It seems that this address was appreciated by the men at Synod. This address will also be published in *Clarion*.

We had many informal discussions with RCUS as well as the URCNA men during the good meals provided there at St. Paul's Evangelical Reformed Church in Hamburg. It was good to get to know more of the people in the RCUS, and we had a definite and growing sense that they very much want to be Reformed in doctrine and practice. May God bless also the contact we had at these meetings for his church-gathering work. After all, we do not look for the work of people in these contacts, but for his work.

Address to 254th Synod of Reformed Church in the US May 8-10, 2000

Esteemed brothers, officers of synod:

I consider it a great honour to be able to bring you and the churches of the RCUS sincere greetings on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Rev. Jonker, elder Gortemaker and I are three quarters of the Subcommittee for Relations with the RCUS. Our other member, elder Art Poppe, who is a farmer, was unable to attend because of fieldwork. We thank you for the hospitality and kindness which we again experience being among you.

Past Activities

Last year, Rev. Syms made a quick visit to Carman, Manitoba and met with our committee to sort of introduce us to your churches, as we are a new



St. Paul's Evangelical Reformed Church.

subcommittee appointed by Synod Fergus 1998. It was a good beginning, which made us all the more eager to get to know the RCUS better. Near the end of last year, then, three of us on the way to a Regional Synod West meeting in Taber, Alberta, drove in a loop and made a Sunday visit to South Dakota and attended worship in Eureka and Herried. We enjoyed this worship and were privileged to enjoy supper and some good conversation with Rev. Robert Davis. Then, in March all four of us were able to worship at Salem-Ebenezer Reformed Church in Manitowoc and meet extensively with your Committee for Interchurch Relations. We were well-received and had very warm and frank discussions with them, not only in our meetings, but also over some excellent meals provided by the ladies of that church. I think we went home with expanded girths as well as hearts.

We again took the opportunity provided by the occasion of this synod to continue discussions with your committee. We also wanted to see your synod in action. And again, I must say we have been well received and also well fed. It is a real joy to get to know you and to see for ourselves the evidence of the Lord's work among you.

Historical review

Compared with the RCUS, the Canadian Reformed Churches are just infants in diapers yet on the North American continent. Over the past month or so, two of our churches celebrated 50th anniversaries, having been instituted in 1950. Immigrants from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) tried to join the Christian Reformed Church as well as the Protestant Reformed Church first, but found they could not do so. The Christian Reformed Churches continued relations with the Synodical Churches in the Netherlands, the same churches which had bound its membership beyond Scripture in 1945 and had thrown those immigrants out in the old country. The Protestant Reformed Churches adopted a Declaration of Principles in 1950 which bound its members to a doctrine of the covenant which was basically the same as adopted by the Synodical Churches in the Netherlands. So in 1950 those immigrants instituted churches which they called the Canadian Reformed Churches. They did so because they wanted to remain Reformed in doctrine and in church government. In other words, biblical in

doctrine and non-hierarchical in church government.

From those couple of churches in 1950, the Canadian Reformed Churches have grown into forty-eight churches and three small home congregations. Four of those churches and one home congregation are in the US. The initial growth in the 1950s was through immigration from the Netherlands, but that is now a trickle. Some of the growth is through others joining these churches. More and more names of non-Dutch origin appear in the membership lists. A number of churches now have local home mission efforts. A new one is just underway in Vancouver, where a minister of Chinese descent is about to begin urban mission in the large Chinese community there. Most of the growth by far, however, has been internal growth, through the birth of covenant children. Canadian Reformed people in general are convinced that the Lord desires covenant children, godly offspring as He says in Malachi 2:15. So the families are larger than the average Canadian family, and there is much emphasis on Reformed instruction and education.

Immigrants from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) tried to join the Christian Reformed Church as well as the Protestant Reformed Church first, but found they could not do so.

Most of the youth attend catechism classes for six or seven years before profession of faith, or confirmation as you call it in the RCUS. And almost all Canadian Reformed youth attend Reformed elementary and high schools or are home schooled. Covenant education and instruction is one of the strengths of the Canadian Reformed Churches. However, no matter how strenuous our own efforts, it is still the Lord who works faith, and we see the Lord's blessing in that strong internal growth. We have to do our best, but it is the Lord alone who gives blessing on what we do.

The Canadian Reformed Churches convene a synod normally once every three years. Our next synod will be

convened, the Lord willing, by the church of Neerlandia, Alberta, in May 2001. The last synod, Synod Fergus, dealt very much with relations with other churches. One of the more difficult matters which that synod had to deal with was the matter of our relations with the OPC.

Relations with other churches

In our relations with the OPC there were still two outstanding issues which previous synods wanted dealt with, namely confessional membership (holding of all members to the confessional standards) and fencing of the Lord's Table (mainly about supervision of the Lord's Supper for guests as well as members). Synod proposed an agreement on these two matters to the General Assembly of the OPC. Unfortunately, however, contact has in the meantime been terminated by the OPC because of statements made in the past about OPC ministers by someone who is now a minister in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Hopefully this matter can be resolved and the Proposed Agreement on Fencing of the Lord's Table and Confessional Membership can be tabled again.

The Canadian Reformed Churches are also in the midst of talks with the l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (Reformed Church of Quebec). We are excited that in predominantly Roman Catholic Quebec there are churches of distinctly Reformed character. They wish to carry on the heritage of the French Huguenots, and though they are very small, they are aggressive in outreach. We hope that our relations with these churches may blossom into close fellowship and cooperation. One of their churches is presently actively exchanging information and visits with the church of Owen Sound in order to learn more about each other.

Relations with the United Reformed Churches were also dealt with by Synod 1998. The so-called Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity (with those who have left the Christian Reformed Church) were given the mandate to continue fraternal dialogue with the United Reformed Churches in North America with a view toward establishing federative unity, and to continue exploring possibilities of federative unity with the Orthodox Reformed Churches. I might add that there appears to be a growing toward each other especially of the United Reformed and Canadian Reformed Churches. This is also due to

local talks between churches taking place in numerous locations.

As the RCUS has taken a strong stand contra women's participation in election of office bearers, I might mention yet that Synod Fergus 1998 also had to deal with some appeals and overtures regarding that. They were all denied on the ground that the proper route for these matters to come to synod, namely via the minor assemblies, had not been followed.

With regard to relations with the Reformed Churches in the US, Synod 1998 received letters from various churches in the federation with questions about some views and practices in your churches. Synod acknowledged with gratitude the commitment of the

RCUS to the Word of God and the Reformed heritage, but declined your invitation to enter into a fraternal relationship at this time. Our committee was mandated to continue pursuing a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, and to look into some of the questions from some of our churches concerning supervision of the Lord's Supper, the doctrine of the church, Sunday observance, the concept of erasure, and membership in NAPARC.

We are trying to fulfill this mandate, and we have found your committee and our visits most helpful in that. We have to draw up a report after this meeting for a September meeting of the full Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad, and that report will

then be finalized for next synod to be convened in May 2001.

Delighted to be here

Brothers, we are delighted to be among you here, among people who, by God's grace, cherish the Reformed faith and want to continue in that. This is a great encouragement to us, and it's our hope and prayer that it may come to a close relationship with each other as churches who want to "keep the pattern of sound teaching" as the apostle Paul says 2 Timothy 1. God bless you in your work here, and may it all lead to the glory of the Saviour who is our Chief Shepherd. *(This address was followed by a short introduction to the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches).* 

The Glorious Work of Home Visits

by
Peter G. Feenstra



Home visitation is a long-standing practice in Reformed churches. But why do we go through this exercise year after year? Does it really benefit the life of the congregation or is it merely a custom we follow? Is there enough direction for those who bring such visits and for those who receive them so that the practice is not robbed of its meaning? How do we keep it from degenerating into a mere routine?

These are some of the questions that are addressed by the author of this book.

Rev. Peter G. Feenstra is minister of the Owen Sound Canadian Reformed Church, Ontario. He has served this church since 1992. He previously wrote

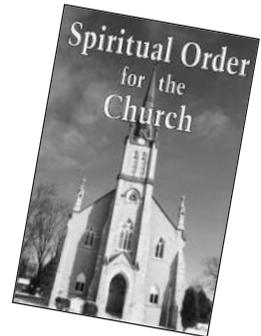
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by
Clarence Bouwman



The ascended Saviour is Head of the Church. People, then, may not regulate matters in Christ's Church as they see fit. Instead (as the *Belgic Confession* has it), "we believe that this true Church must be governed according to the Spiritual order which our Lord has taught us in His Word."

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Our talk and walk

In the *Banner of Truth*, the official paper of the Netherlands Reformed Congregations in North America (NRC), I came across an article by one of the ministers of that federation dealing with the attitudes and life styles of the young people. The article reflects a tone of concern and warning with regard to the NRC young people which may be instructive for us. Here follow some segments of Rev. A. Hoogerland's article:

A public confession in the midst of the congregation obligates also to a walk according and this confession. Confession and walk go together.

It is a great sorrow to all upright ministers and other office-bearers if it must be said that there is much lacking in this respect. This is not only an occurrence of these times, but of all periods. Think of the children of Israel in the Old Testament – God's words were despised and the confession of the true God shamefully rejected. Hear the sad complaint of Jeremiah in chapter 8:21, "For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me."

In the New Testament Paul pointed to a godly walk in Philippians 3:18, where he said, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." In the 19th verse he said, "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."

Paul had sorrow about this. It concerned the honour of God and the salvation of souls. Ministers must insist upon a holy walk. How must this insisting be done? In his commentary on 2 Corinthians 2:4, Calvin said the following, "For there are many noisy reprovers, who, by declaiming, or rather, fulminating against vices, display a surprising ardour of zeal, while in the meantime

they are at ease in their mind, so that it might seem as if they exercised their throat and sides by way of sport. It is, however, the part of a pious pastor to weep within himself before he calls upon others to weep; to feel tortured in silent musings before he shows any token of displeasure; and to keep within his own breast more grief than he causes to others."

Our walk is seen by God. He sees all the children of men. He sees our public and secret walk. Young people, and all who have made confession, keep yourselves far from those who say, "If the internal condition is but good, the external need not be so particular." The Lord says, "Be ye holy: for I am holy." Our baptism and our confession separate us from the world, which lives on unfettered, but also lives fully to itself.

The world conformity of confessors of the truth is alarmingly great.

The world conformity of confessors of the truth is alarmingly great. The boundaries between the church and the world are being eradicated. For example, if our confessing members live next to those who have no religion or have a religion not according to God's Word, and in both of the homes there are television sets, tell me, where is then the difference? If in both homes the same God-dishonouring and immoral literature is to be found, where is then the difference? If confessors of the truth imitate the world in apparel contrary to God's Word, in hair style contrary to God's Word, and in desecrating God's day and God's name, then the boundaries are eradicated.

The Lord requires in his Word that we do not neglect the assembling of ourselves together. If we do so anyway then it usually leads to a further slipping away and finally a letting loose of the means of grace. In all their letters, the apostles have urged a holy walk, not to earn salvation thereby, but as a consequence of the salvation work in the heart. And what about those who with their confession remain unconverted? They also have the continual calling to live agreeably to their confession.

Many reply to this that it is impossible to do so in these modern times. Then I ask you, especially our young people, who compels you to spend your time in bars and taverns late Saturday evening, in the theatre, or in similar places? Who compels you to join with all sorts of amusements? Who compels you to neglect church services? Perhaps you answer: "My friends do." Seek then for friends who do not lead you astray, who faithfully and honestly desire to arrange their lives according to their confession. Oh, that your walk might be in honesty among the people!

God's people often suffer tribulation when they do not walk in conformity to the world. The young people who yet faithfully attend church services are sometimes laughed at and mocked by worldly people. If worldly and non-church people do this, it is not so bad. We can expect insults from them. However, if our own people who sit in the same church and confess the same confession do so, it is very painful. Do not let yourselves be hindered from persevering, for the Lord shall one day require an account.

Most often mocking arises from a speaking conscience which a person wishes by all means to silence. The greater the crowd who join in doing

that which is contrary to God's Word, and confession, the easier it is to do likewise. Where the large crowd is, we must not be. If in the summer the crowds spend their time at the beaches, and we are also there, what do you think of the "yes" you gave at confession? If the large crowds provoke God in their indulging in sin, we must be separate from them. Let us consider well that God never becomes modern. He always remains unchangeable.

Where are the praying young, the youth crying unto God?

Where are the praying young, the youth crying unto God? Where are their righteousness? Where are they who seek salvation outside themselves in Christ, and who may find their life in Him? Fathers and mothers, do not hinder your children from entering in because you yourselves do not wish to enter in. Husbands, do not hold back your wives if they desire to go to God's house, and wives hinder not your husbands from doing so. Families, live according to your confession and pleadingly pray for conversion.

The word "time-bound" (restricted to a certain period of time) is frequently heard. God's Word is not time-bound; it is always the same. God's Word is violated, and people write of "good news for you." If our walk is contrary to our confession, we have bad news for you. They are the words of the Lord to John on Patmos in Revelation 22:15: "For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." For those who may bow in truth before God, are sheltered in Christ, and therefore may hear and do his commandments, there is truly good news. They are the words in the 14th verse of that same chapter, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

A living issue

The concern for the youth reflected in this article is one that speaks to us as

a federation of churches as well. Our churches are often singled out by other Reformed bodies as promoting a form of covenantal automatism whereby one can be assured of his salvation as long as he pays his dues and is by appearances an upstanding member of the church. In other words, young people can be approved for confession of faith while there is still much wanting in terms of their personal commitment, lifestyle, and active involvement in the things of God's kingdom. Our young people go to our schools and come to church – but are they really converted? That is a recurring question which comes our way.

On this point we wholeheartedly agree with Rev. Hoogerland that a public confession requires an accompanying godly life. And if our young people exhibit the behaviour that he himself singles out among some NRC young people, we must say that there is something seriously wrong among us. Scripture repeatedly stresses that with the confession of God's truth there must be also a living walk in that truth. With all shortcomings and sins – which are there among adults just as much as the youth! – there ought to be a firm resolve and a living attempt to lead a godly life.

Is the actual possession of a television set a sign of worldliness?

Remedies

Nonetheless I must question the extent of Rev. Hoogerland's critique, and, perhaps more accurately, the effectiveness of his proposed remedies. To be sure, there is much we can agree with, and I hope our young people will also take the warnings of concern to heart, wherever it applies. But some misgivings arose for me as Rev. Hoogerland developed his argument. Is the actual possession of a television set a sign of worldliness? Should we not much more warn against the *abuse* of the television, rather than concentrate on the ownership issue? Naturally, if our homes let in the empty pursuits of this world as reflected on television without any restraint, there are problems. But a monitored or controlled use of a television set should also be possible in a Christian home.

And then there is the matter of the avoidance of the crowd. Rev. Hoogerland

seems to suggest that we cannot be in a crowd. "Where the large crowd is, we must not be." How many others have not called for the same thing! But I would suggest that it depends *how* we are among the crowd, and what *sort* of crowd we are speaking about. Indeed, there is no place for us in a crowd of revelers and fun seekers, and that appears to be Rev. Hoogerland's focus. Even at large scale sports events we should be very careful. "Bread and games" was the slogan of the decadent Roman empire, and our age does not appear any different. Yet avoiding a crowd in itself should not be our aim; rather, it depends where we are, what we are doing there, and how we behave and act in a crowd.

Weeping for sin

Rev. Hoogerland rightly remarks on the attitude of pastors and ministers as they rule and admonish the flock. Let them indeed weep within themselves! Let them also, with the prophets of old, recognize their own share and place in a world of sin. The prophets never stood above the people as if they were void of all sin; rather, they shared the guilt of the people, and while weeping for the sin of the people, they also wept for their own sin. Isaiah said: "Woe to me, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips . . ." (Is 6:5). However, let us remember what sort of weeping this is. For God's Word also speaks about a false show of weeping and a hypocritical display of repentance. Let the weeping of the ministers and pastors, as well as that of the people, be weeping from the heart, before God, and not as a show before the people! The true marks of rebirth are hidden, and only appear, in the final analysis, in a godly walk and a life of good works.

Do we not share the warnings and corrections of the gospel with all true Reformed believers?

And yet . . . !

With all this, however, more should be said. One can easily make some critical notations to anyone's admonitions. But I make my comments in the framework of an essential recognition of the voice of the Good Shepherd! Here the *gospel* speaks, with its warnings, its

threats, and its rewards! Which only leads me to ask: must we as historically separated Reformed believers really remain apart? Is not the concern to promote a godly life, to warn against automatism and a casual approach to the gospel a *common* and *shared* concern? Do we not share the warnings and corrections of the gospel with all true Reformed believers? Why then does the NRC choose to remain separate from other Reformed bodies, in-

cluding our own? To be separate from the world is one thing. But should true believers who seek to renounce themselves and find all their salvation in Jesus Christ still insist on living in separate federations, without seeking unity with each other?

May the Lord grant that true Reformed believers, among us and also in the NRC, reach out to each other, and call each other to a living and supportive unity in the truth of the gospel. Thus they

will honour the call of Christ that they may "all be one." We can all take Rev. Hoogerland's warnings to heart. One hears the voice of Dort, the voice of the Reformed confession, and of the living Word! But should we then not seek each other according to the call of the Master? Let us then continually seek to couple a godly walk with a godly talk, and work so that *together* in the unity of a true faith, we may in *word and deed* seek the glory of his name! 

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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

Dear Editor,

Studying at a Christian University

In his article entitled "Studying Reality at the Secular University" (September 29, 2000), Rev. J. Geertsema wrote, "Most universities and colleges are secular institutions of learning. Few are Christian. I am not dealing here with the question whether one should study at a Christian or at a secular university."

Is there a question? Is the choice between a Christian university and its secular counterpart really that difficult to make? Does the need for Christian education simply vanish after high school? At such a critical juncture in their lives, it is absolutely essential for Christian young people to see and understand the world, its intricacies and philosophies, from a Christian perspective. Where is God at the secular university? In the present day academic pursuits, He is either ignored or belittled or outright disdained. We must see university education as a privilege which God grants to us in order to cultivate love for Him with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. The reality of Christian university education is a divine gift which is as exciting as it is gracious. How thankful we ought to be to have two such universities virtually in the backyard of numerous Canadian Reformed churches: Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C. and Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario.

I do not know too much about Trinity Western, except that a number of

our Canadian Reformed students attended there and were happy they did. In the very same issue of *Clarion*, you will find an article by Dr. J. de Jong about this institution's legal battles in which the following statement is highlighted: "All students are to refrain from practices that are contrary to biblical teaching." Certainly no one could disagree with this. Redeemer University College, with which I am more familiar, has a Mission Statement which reads as follows:

The Mission of Redeemer College is: first to offer a university-level liberal arts and science education which is Scripturally directed and explores the relation of faith, learning and living from a Reformed Christian perspective; and second, to support research and creative endeavour in this context. Central to this mission are the following objectives: to equip students for lives of leadership and service under the Lordship of Jesus Christ; to advance knowledge through excellence in teaching and scholarship; to be an academic community in which faculty, staff and students can develop intellectually, socially and spiritually; to reach out through academic service to society; and in all things to glorify God.

All members of the faculty and Board must subscribe to this statement.

We need Reformed professionals: lawyers, teachers, business men, accountants, scientists, medical doctors, etc. What better place to prepare for

such vocations than at Redeemer University College? Consider some of these advantages: the small classes ensure not only academic maturation, but social and spiritual growth; all morning classes and exams begin with prayer; no exams are scheduled for Monday, except in the evening; there is a distinctively Christian flavour to dorm life, the student newspaper, meal times, athletics, etc.; and unlike Bible colleges, Redeemer operates under a charter from the Ontario government to grant Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Christian Education degrees.

Permit me, in conclusion, to respond briefly to two often alleged criticisms: first, Redeemer is not a Canadian Reformed university. This is true: the faculty and students come from a variety of denominations. But is not this a wonderful opportunity for young people to learn why they are Canadian Reformed? The second criticism is that Redeemer is for "the wealthy." It is true that tuition is high, but numerous grants, bursaries, forgivable loans and employment opportunities are available. Since Redeemer receives no government support (as is the case for all Christian schools in Ontario), it costs money.

Let us encourage our children and each other to support Redeemer and other Christian universities! Let us also support Canadian Reformed young people and faculty members presently studying and teaching at these Christian universities!

Albert de Jong,
Hamilton, Ontario



Press Release of Classis Alberta held on October 3, 2000 at the Providence Canadian Reformed Church building in Edmonton

1. On behalf of the convening church, the Providence Canadian Reformed Church at Edmonton, Rev. R. Aasman opens the assembly. He welcomes the delegates. He reads Psalm 119:97-112 and leads in prayer. He requests the assembly to sing Ps.119:40. He mentions the following memorabilia: this is the first Classis Alberta; Rev. R. Eikelboom declined the call from the church at Houston; the churches at Coaldale, Edmonton-Immanuel, Edmonton-Providence and Neerlandia celebrated that they existed for 50 years; Rev. T. Lodder and his wife were blessed with the birth of a daughter; Julian van Popta, son of Rev. J. L. van Popta, is doing well; the brs. W. Bredenhof and D. Poppe will have their peremptory examinations this week; Rev. K. Compton from the Presbyterian Reformed Church at Edmonton will come later this morning.

2. The credentials are found to be in good order. The churches at Calgary, Edmonton-Immanuel and Neerlandia have instructions.

3. Rev. R. Aasman declares Classis constituted.

4. Classis appoints the following executive officers: Chairman: Rev. R. Aasman, Vice-chairman: Rev. G.A. Snip, Clerk: Rev. J. L. van Popta.

5. The agenda is adopted.

6. Classis decides to continue with the regulations of Classis AB/MB with the necessary adjustments.

7. Reports

- The treasurer of Classis AB/MB reports to Classis concerning the closing finances of Classis AB/MB and the need to appoint a treasurer. A motion to appoint br. J. Buitenbos is carried. A motion to change the name for the bank account to Classis Alberta is carried. The financial statements will be added to the Acts.
- Classis approves the report of the Committee for Aid to Needy Churches. The assessment for 2001 will be \$10.00 per confessing member.
- Church visitation reports are read from the churches at Calgary, Coal-

dale, Edmonton-Immanuel and Taber. Classis takes notice of these reports with thankfulness.

8. A proposal from the church at Neerlandia to hold classis only in Edmonton is defeated.

9. The chairman asks the three questions mentioned in article 44, CO. The churches respond with the words "Yes, yes, no" with the exception of the churches at Calgary and Edmonton-Immanuel who ask advice in disciplinary matters. Advice is given.

10. An appeal is dealt with in closed session.

11. Appointments:

- Convening church for the next Classis: Neerlandia, Place: Neerlandia, date: December 12, 2000 (alternate date: March 6, 2001)
- Suggested executive officers for next Classis: Chairman: Rev. R. Eikelboom, Vice-chairman: Rev. R. Aasman, Clerk: Rev. G. A. Snip.
- Appointments as per Acts Classis AB/MB, April 11, 2000, article 7,a,B: Treasurer: br. J. Buitenbos. Church for auditing books of treasurer: Edmonton-Providence, Church for taking care of archives: Edmonton-Providence. Church to inspect archives: Edmonton-Immanuel. Church visitors: Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. W.B. Slomp, Rev. G.A. Snip, Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar (convenor). Committee for examination: Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. J. L. van Popta, Exam-

iners of sermon proposal: Rev. R. Aasman and Rev. J.L. van Popta, Exegesis Old Testament: Rev. R. Aasman, Exegesis New Testament: Rev. G.A. Snip, Knowledge of Scripture: Rev. T. Lodder, Doctrine/ Creeds: Rev. W.B. Slomp, Church History: Rev. E. J. Tiggelaar, Ethics: Rev. R. Eikelboom, Church Polity: Rev. J.L. van Popta, Diaconology: Rev. T. Lodder and Rev. W.B. Slomp.

Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry: br. J. Moedt, br. M. Tams and br. A. Leffers.

Committee for Aid to Needy Churches: br. P. Groenwold, br. W. Noot and br. J. Vanderdean.

Deputee for Contact with Provincial Government: Rev. E. J. Tiggelaar.

- Delegates to Regional Synod: Ministers: Rev. R. Aasman and Rev. J.L. van Popta (alternates: Rev. W.B. Slomp and Rev. R. Eikelboom in that order). Elders: br. T. M. Veenendaal and br. C. Deboer (alternates: br. I. Veurink and br. A. VanLeeuwen in that order).

12. Personal question period is made use of.

13. The chairman expresses gratitude that brotherly censure is not needed.

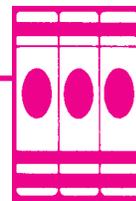
14. The Acts of Classis are adopted and the Press Release is approved.

15. The chairman asks that Hymn 40:1,2 be sung. Rev. G.A. Snip leads in prayer after which Rev. R. Aasman declares Classis closed.

For Classis, G.A. Snip



First meeting of Classis Alberta.



Calvin in a Nutshell

By N. H. Gootjes

John Calvin, Truth for All Times: A Brief Outline of the Christian Faith. Carlisle: The Banner of Truth, 1988. 77 pages. \$5.99.

The great theologian John Calvin has written an astonishing number of books. Through his writings, he has been very influential throughout the centuries. That began in the 16th century, during his own lifetime and it continues today. Calvin's books are still being published, read and studied. There is even a society of scholars devoted to the study of this theologian in his context. Calvin is generally recognized as a man gifted by God to grasp the meaning of the Scriptures.

Anyone who wants to know Calvin's thought, should read his *Institutes*. Calvin began writing this summary of

the biblical doctrine at the age of 27, and he continued improving on it and expanding it, so that it became a book of over one thousand pages, a great work in more than one sense of the word. Here he discusses the main doctrines, carefully explaining them, proving them from the Scriptures and defending them against misunderstanding and heresy. There will not be too many people, however, who have read the *Institutes* from cover to cover. It is an impressive book, but it is too much.

Another way to become acquainted with Calvin is reading his commentaries. He wrote explanations for many books of the Bible. His explanation does not lose itself in technical detail, but emphasizes the main teaching of the biblical text, and adds appropriate remarks. Reading through Calvin's commentaries still provides insight into Scripture, but this does not provide an overview of the teaching of Scripture.

Whoever wants to read Calvin at his clearest, should read his *Brief Outline of the Christian Faith*. The publisher has given it the strange title *Truth for All Time*, but in fact, it is the first catechism Calvin published, in 1537. Here, the young Calvin is teaching the people the doctrines of the Bible as if he were teaching a catechism class. The form is not in questions and answers, but in brief explanations. He begins with the difference between true and false religion, just as he does in the *Institutes*. But here he is very concise and very clear. This is important for our own time as well, for Christianity is often seen as just one of the many religions.

The next section is an explanation of the law, where the Ten Commandments are discussed. To give an example, the last sentence of the explanation of the ninth commandment is: "Just as the previous commandment ties the hands, so this one ties the tongue." Calvin also explains the Apostles' Creed, prayer, and the sacraments. At the end, there are some assorted topics: the ministers, human traditions, excommunication, and the government.

This last section indicates that this is not the Calvin of the comprehensive system; all that is yet to come. Calvin gives a simple and straightforward summary of the Reformed faith, in an uncomplicated way. The freshness is attractive. So many quotable quotes could be taken from this, but I will pass on only one to give a taste of this book.

Comparing the translation with the original text it can be noted that Calvin's small book has been freely yet faithfully translated.¹ The elements of the original are all present, but in a easily accessible rephrasing. For all who want to begin reading Reformed theology at its best, this is the place to begin.

¹The original is entitled *Instruction et Confession de Foy*, the text can be found in P. Barth, *Opera Selecta*, vol. 1 (München: Kaiser, 1926) 378ff. I noted some mistakes in the translation. On p. 14, "Spirit" should not be written with a capital S, for it is a reference to John 4:24. On p. 51, "our desires, our joys, our complaints" should be "our desires, our joys, our sighing." 

Calvin on the difference between faith and hope

*Faith believes God to be truthful:
hope waits for him to display his truthfulness
at the appropriate time.*

*Faith believes that God is our Father:
hope reckons that he will always act as such towards us.*

*Faith believes that eternal life has already been given to us:
hope waits for the day when it will be revealed.*

*Faith is the foundation on which hope is built:
hope feeds faith and keeps it alive.*

*And just as no one can expect or hope for anything from God
without first believing his promises,
in the same way the weakness of our faith
(which, weary, must not falter)
must be supported and preserved by persevering
hope and expectancy.*

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

When I was young, and my birthday was coming up, I would get lots of mail from uncles and aunts, particularly ones living in different countries. Even now, I love to get mail from my uncles and aunts, but I especially love getting mail from other people. Unfortunately, my mail box has been very empty lately, and I haven't had any mail for quite some time. Even the Busy Beavers don't write me letters any more. I don't have anyone sending me puzzles or jokes, either.

Is anybody out there ready with a pen to write me a letter and send me a puzzle, riddle, joke or anything else? I would really, really, really, love to hear from you.

Lots of love, Aunt Betty

Puzzles

JOSEPH

One of the first Bible people that children learn about is Joseph. Match the following facts about Joseph found in Genesis.

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Home country | a. Jacob, 30:25 |
| 2. Father | b. Reuben, 35:23 |
| 3. Master | c. Simeon, 42:24 |
| 4. Oldest brother | d. Potiphar's wife, 39:7 |
| 5. New country | e. Canaan, 33:18 |
| 6. Purchasers | f. Egypt, 37:36 |
| 7. Mother | g. Rachel, 30:22-24 |
| 8. Grandfather | h. Ishmaelites, 37:28 |
| 9. Temptress | i. Pharaoh, 41:25 |
| 10. Interpreted dreams | j. Laban, 29:5-7 |
| 11. His hostage | k. Potiphar, 37:36 |

Missing Animals

Which animals are needed to complete the following?

- "Behold your King comes to you, meek and sitting on a _____."
- "And bring out the fatted _____ and kill it; let us eat and be merry."
- "It is easier for a _____ to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."
- "The _____ have holes and the _____ of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."
- "Do not give that which is holy to the _____, nor cast your pearls before _____."

Riddles

I thought you might enjoy some riddles, to share with your friends and family. So here goes.

- Why shouldn't leopards try to hide in the jungle?
Because they are always spotted.
- What do you call a pig thief?
A hamburger.
- What is yellow with black stripes and red spots?
A tiger with the measles.
- What is black and yellow and goes zzub zzub zzub?
A bee flying backwards.
- Which creature has a terrible memory for faces?
The owl, they always ask "who, who."
- What sea creature is best at addition?
The octopus.
- How do you start an insect race?
"One, two, flea, go!"
- What happens if you leave your frog in a No Standing zone?
He might be toad away.
- What breakfast cereal goes snap, crackle and squeak?
Mice Crispies.

Slaves

Slaves were common in Bible days.

Name the person involved.

- Who was the slave Paul wrote his friend Philemon about, Philemon 10? _____
- Who was told of a way to be cured from leprosy by a slave girl, 2 Kings 5:1-3? _____
- Who made slaves of the Israelites, Exodus 1:7-11? _____
- Who was sold into slavery by his brothers, Genesis 37:26-28? _____
- Who killed an Egyptian for hitting a Hebrew slave and then had to run to save his life, Exodus 2:11-13? _____
- Who sent a slave to find his son a wife, Genesis 24:1-4? _____
- Who was the slave who told David where Jonathan's son was, 2 Samuel 9:1-3? _____
- Who was Elisha's slave, 2 Kings 4:12? _____
- Who cut off the ear of a slave, John 18:10-11? _____
- Who had a slave inform him that his sons and daughters had all be killed by a great wind, Job 1:18-20? _____
- Which prophet left his slave and went a day's journey, sat under a tree and wished to die because Jezebel was trying to kill him, 1 Kings 19:1-4? _____