

Clarion

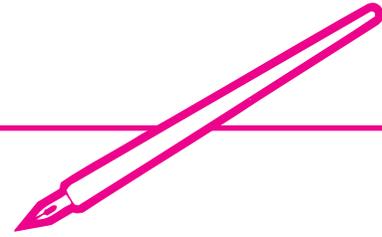
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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*Graduation
and Convocation of the
Theological College - 2001*

Numbers

10:1-10



By J. De Jong



Gains and Losses

Whenever one works on a committee of Synod, one must remember that the committee can only make recommendations or suggestions. The decisions are made by the churches as they are gathered together in General Synod. So it can hardly be expected that whatever the committee recommends, synod will do. More often than not, synods go their own way and make their own decisions, leaving the newly appointed committee members to pick up the pieces, scratch their heads, and see just how they will get on with it. And this sentiment is compounded when, as in the case of the Committee for Ecclesiastical Unity, one needs to consider the decisions of the synods of two federations, rather than just one.

We need to avoid a situation of prolonged ambiguity in our relationship with people wondering whether we are ever going to be united or not.

The title of this editorial is: gains and losses. Whenever you review the results of synodical decisions relative to committee input, you see some gains and some losses. Naturally I am very thankful that for the most part the recommendations of the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU) were accepted by Synod Neerlandia, and also that many similar recommendations of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) were accepted by Synod Escondido 2001 of the United Reformed Churches. We, as Canadian Reformed Churches, have decided to move ahead to Phase 2 in the road to Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the United Reformed Churches (URCNA). Yet not all the decisions represented a step forward. We see some gains and some losses. Hence we need to adopt a very cautious approach to the Phase 2 situation.

Losses

Perhaps it's best to take the losses first. In the first place, Neerlandia 2001, in dealing with the committee recommendations, decided that 2004 was too early a date for the full union. The target date for full union was moved to 2007. Apparently not only the delegates themselves felt this way, but also the URCNA observer present at the synod (who happens also to be a member of the URCNA Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity Committee) had the same sentiments. He was reported to have said that pushing the date

2004 would be like giving a "kiss of death" to the union, since it would put too much pressure on the UR churches.¹

Perhaps this is not too much of a loss, since squeezing the process towards a 2004 union would have put much pressure on the churches. On the other hand, we need to avoid a situation of prolonged ambiguity in our relationship with people wondering whether we are ever going to be united or not. A long period of going back and forth such as we experienced with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is something we should definitely not repeat here. Therefore, we certainly hope all parties to the agreement will work hard to meet the 2007 target date. We should strive to avoid a situation in which, while rejecting pluriformity of the church in theory, we end up supporting it in practice.

Article 34

Another area where we failed to make headway with the United Reformed was our request that while the unity process is taking place, Article 34 of the URCNA Church Order would be held in suspension. This article allows classes to enter into ecumenical relationships with other churches as long as these are ratified by a general synod. As a committee we felt that it was wiser for the UR churches not to pursue ecumenical relations with other groups while in merger consultations with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Further third party relationships could complicate the union process. However, the URCNA synod was very adverse to putting any article of the Church Order in suspension, since this happened so often in the Christian Reformed Church with regard to the issue of women in office.

Here as well I think we can understand the reasoning, and we need to make the best of the situation. Hopefully, other URCNA ecumenical contacts will not hamper our own unity efforts with them.

Theological education

With regard to the issue of theological education readers may recall that the Statement of Agreement included a detailed provision on the training for the ministry. The combined Committees (URC and CanRC) decided that the mandate of the Theological Education Committee working towards the union should include the following:

The unity committees recommend to the synods of 2001 that the mandates for the proposed theological study committee of both federations contain provisions for the commitment that should the Lord of the Church grant eventual Union, the resulting United Churches will

retain at least one federational theological school and that the synod recommend the school's professors and teaching staff for appointment. A further recommendation to be included in the study committees mandates is that the synod of the United Churches select those non-federational seminaries for the preparation of its future candidates for the ministry whose professors and all teaching staff sign the Form of Subscription indicating agreement with the Three Forms of Unity. Another recommendation for inclusion in the study committees mandates is that should an aspiring candidate's preparation fail to have adequate instruction in significant courses such as Reformed Church Polity or Reformed Church History, he will be required to supplement his education before being able to be declared a candidate for the ministry of the Word in the United Churches.

It was obvious that Synod Escondido 2001 did not like this part of the agreement. For although it willingly entered Phase 2, it did so on its own terms by brushing this agreement aside. The Theological Education Committee of the URCNA now has as a mandate "that this Committee work together with the Canadian Reformed Committee to draft proposals for theological education to our respective synods in preparation

What's inside?

During the preparations for this issue of *Clarion*, the horrible events of September 11 took place. Terrorists in the United States commandeered civilian aircraft, turning them into weapons of death and destruction. During the week, and particularly the following Sunday, our churches turned to God in prayer and sought their comfort in his Word. In this issue we have a meditation by Rev. K. Jonker and a poem by Cor Hoff which reflect on what happened on that terrible day, and how we find comfort in God alone. We remember the words of Psalm 23:4: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

In his editorial, Dr. J. De Jong writes about some of the positive and the negative results of recent synods of the Canadian Reformed and the United Reformed Churches with respect to developments towards Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Thankfully, the overall impression is good. May the Lord bless our respective churches in our working towards unity.

On September 7, the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches had its thirty-second anniversary meeting and twenty-seventh convocation. In this issue we have the principal's report, the report of the Women's Savings Action, and a press release of the Board of Governors. The speech which Prof. J. Geertsema delivered that evening is promised for a future issue.

Dr. N.H. Gootjes starts a series of articles on the topic of drugs. It seems impossible to eradicate the use of drugs in our society. The damage is tremendous. This is a most relevant topic.

Rev. J. Moesker reports on the 255th Synod of the RCUS.

RA



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IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – Gains and Losses

— J. De Jong494

Meditation on Psalm 130 — K. Jonker497

Poem: Buildings Fall but Faith is Strong

— Cor Hoff498

Principal's Report — J. De Jong499

Presentation of the Women's Saving Action

— Joanne Van Dam502

Treasurer's Report — Carla Zietsma503

Press Release – Theological College504

Drugs (1) — N.H. Gootjes.....506

Report of the Visit to the 255th Synod of the Reformed

Church in the United States — J. Moesker.....508

for an eventual plan of union." In other words, the URC brothers did not see the need to insist on at least one federational seminary as a necessary part of the plan of union right at the outset.

This matter of theological education will need close attention. On this point the CanRC Committee already offered a number of important concessions. We permitted non-federational seminaries in the United Churches, and even allowed that the professors teaching at non-federational seminaries could be appointed without synod involvement, as long as they would be bound by the Three Forms of Unity. Yet all this was ignored. Although the URCNA do not have their own seminary, and ultimately have no say over any school or professor, it appears they were not ready to accept the model that we defend, namely, that a united federation should have at least one federational theological school for the training of ministers.

The basis

The final loss concerns the wording of our report. The Committee stated that in Phase 2, the churches should work on the basis of the agreement reached in finalizing a more detailed plan of union. The report said:

On the basis of this agreement, we recommend that the URCNA be recognized as faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that both federations initiate steps to move to a second phase of discussions and consultations, including occasional pulpit exchange on a local level, with possible table fellowship in due time, particularly in those localities where discussions have progressed well for some time.

The URCNA synod came out strongly in favour of adopting a church order aligned with the church order of Dort.

Apparently both synods did not like the phrase "on the basis of the Statement of Agreement." They felt that is smacked too much of extra-confessional binding. The Canadian Reformed Synod published a correction in wording.² The URC synod took a considerably bigger step in stating that the "Statements of Agreement published in the 2001 Agenda for Synod by the CERCU do not exhaustively reflect the full spectrum of theological (doctrinal) positions of the URC congregations in some of its formulations, and that these Statements of Agreement have no official status in the URCNA."

It is very clear from this language that in fact the URCNA has taken quite some distance to the statement of Agreement. On the one hand it approved entry into Phase 2, on the other hand, it undercut the agreement by which this was done. So where does this leave us?

When the committee inserted the words that the churches move forward *on the basis of the Statements of Agreement*, it was not at all thinking of creating a binding confessional document. However, it was charting out the parameters within which we could work together in the future. Now from both sides (!) – albeit in different ways – these parameters have been bypassed, and we have in essence a much more open playing field. Indeed, in the case of theological education, we have no fixed parameters at all.

I surmise that these are losses because here not only the committee's intentions were misunderstood, but part of the committee's work has been undone. If next to the covenant

view as articulated in the agreement there are a host of other covenant views, do we carry on with this process? And if, in terms of theological education, the URCNA, who do not have a federational seminary, don't at all see the need for one, can we expect a homogenous federation to grow from this union?

Gains

Still it must be said that my fellow delegate and I left Escondido with a fairly positive feeling, a view that something had been gained. Why? The openness to the Canadian Reformed was much more noticeable in Escondido than in Hudsonville. There was a greater interest to find out more about us, and at the same time, some curiosity as to where this all might lead.

It should not be necessary to remind both the churches and the church members that this Phase does not mean full unity, and should not be treated as such.

What do I see as the essential gain at Escondido 2001? The URCNA synod came out strongly in favour of adopting a church order aligned with the church order of Dort. The Synod agreed to draft a new church order which would include "suitable and agreeable adaptations of the Church order of Dort, retaining and maintaining its principles, structure and essential provisions." And that is indeed to be considered a major step forward! Ultimately theological education, the *Book of Praise* and other matters of liturgy are governed by the Church Order. So if the churches are found willing to move forward on this point, there is a good chance that in the other areas agreement can be reached!

The balance

So we have gains and losses. But what's the overall balance figure? In my assessment, there is every reason for a cautious and careful interaction in Phase 2. It should not be necessary to remind both the churches and the church members that this Phase does not mean full unity, and should not be treated as such. The pulpit exchanges are designed to enhance unity in *local situations*, and especially in those situations where extensive consultations have taken place prior to this point.

However, let's by all means go forward! The Lord calls us to pursue unity, as long as this unity may take place without losing anything of what we have received. We may not sacrifice our inheritance. And as it stands now, all that is still in place. And we may trust that also in the future, the Lord and Head of the church who oversees everything will continue to guide and to lead through his Word and Spirit, so that we may rejoice in his glorious work in us who believe.

¹See *Christian Renewal*, Volume 19, No. 17, (May 28, 2001), page 7.

²The Synod stated: "Some wrong terminology has crept into the CPEU report when it states on pg. 6, "On the basis of the Statements of Agreement which are the results of our discussions regarding the marks of the true church ad Art. 29 B.C., we recommend that Synod recognize the URCNA as faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (emphasis added). We do not recognize each other on the basis of the Statements of Agreement. Rather, we recognize each other on the basis of Scripture and confessions."



Meditation on Psalm 130

The Only Lasting Hope is Found in Turning to God

By K. Jonker

On Tuesday, September 11, 2001, we all stood aghast when evil terrorists struck their targets in New York and Washington (USA). The glory and power of the world collapsed into an inferno of fire and billowing dust. The whole world more or less came to a sudden stop. We, too, were shocked, feeling a sense of total helplessness. It had never come up in anyone's mind that such a thing could happen. The buildings involved were all reinforced steel, they could withstand the powers of hurricanes and earthquakes. But they were not secure from the evil power of man.

We witnessed that this world cannot provide security. Of ourselves we don't have words which help us to react and evaluate the devastation and feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. We heard many people scream out their horror in words which we cannot repeat here. We also saw and heard many others who prayed. That is the only and proper way for Christians to find new strength and hope, especially in times as we experience today.

How do we pray and for what do we pray?

In this respect we are not at a loss. In his Word God shows us the way. We can turn to many passages which show us what is pleasing to the Lord what we should say and ask. Psalm 130 is one of those passages. The poet finds himself in devastating circumstances. The whole world around him seems to have collapsed. He ended up in the deep depths of misery.

What do we see? The poet doesn't scream; he isn't swearing, throwing out empty words.

He doesn't keep gazing at the rubble and smoke around him, but he turns his eyes to God and cries to God. He clings to his almighty God who keeps all things in control. Then the poet

doesn't say, "Lord, please explain why did this happen?" "Lord, this is totally out of the ordinary." "The world and I don't deserve this."

On the contrary, in this Psalm we hear a cry for mercy! It is a cry for help and salvation.

On what grounds? Beloved, we read this wonderful confession in his prayer: "If you, O Lord kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?" This short sentence shows the evil force behind the miseries of our life, also of the depth of the devastation of today.

The evil is sin! And sin is man in his terrible disobedience to the holy God; sin is man's arrogance and pride, his greed and living for self. Since the fall in Paradise man's sin has billowed onto the earth and has caused the dark cover of misery and evil over this world. No human power can clear our world of this dark veil of death and sorrow. And because of man's sin and guilt, we don't even deserve to be rescued.

However, to whom is the poet praying? To whom do believers pray? They pray to the living God who says and promises, "I will fight for you; I will help you; I will save; I will forgive your guilt." The poet appeals precisely to these amazing promises of our God. His confession of sin turns into a confession of faith. For he says: "But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared." In these words of Psalm 130 lie the secret of our life. For the gospel of the Bible is that God saved our life through Christ.

Today when we pray in relation to the terrible attack on the peace in this world, we don't pray to "a" God. But we pray to the forgiving God – He is the God who has revealed Himself through his Son Jesus Christ. On Golgotha the whole sinful world came collapsing down on Him so that we can go in prayer to God, pleading for mercy: "O, God, pardon fully all our iniquity, that we may serve Thee truly And fear Thy majesty!"

Twin towers under attack.



God is our security

God is and must be our security. The poet says: "You are feared." – Oh, God my trust and refuge is in you! Or like the poet of Psalm 46 says: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way, . . ." Though the whole world would be totally destroyed, the believer has hope.

At the end of the Psalm we see that the confession of sin and faith flows over into a confession of lasting hope. In the devastation of his miseries he says: "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits and in his Word I put my hope." This hope is much stronger than the hope of a victim, who using his cell phone, is calling from beneath

the rubble. The rescue workers might come too late for him.

The Psalm actually speaks about watchman who waits for the morning. The hope of man concerns temporary relief and his joy is not definite and secure. However, the hope of Psalm 130 is certain; our hope will be established. The biblical hope is that God will clear all darkness for always. He will wipe away all our tears. He will restore us to full glory. He will stop all evil and sin. The Bible is full of this truth.

Now, we cannot ignore that God will establish this hope through terrible calamities. We only have to read the book of Revelation to learn that our earth will be pulled off its foundations. Everything will collapse with a greater roar than we witnessed on September 11. And we are rightly terrified and

grieved about those who lost their lives and we deeply feel for those who miss their loved ones.

But our word of encouragement to a grieving and crying world is: Our Lord Jesus Christ is strong! Listen to what He says in Revelation 21: "I am making everything new." Look, we don't have firm ground under our feet. All worldly firmness and security will have to give way. But on the rubble of this world God will build his new city of righteousness and eternal glory. Our Rescuer says: *Behold I am coming soon!*

May we take comfort from this Word, encourage one another and pray for our world in need. Let us take a confession of guilt upon our lips, confess our faith in Christ, and hold on to our Christian hope. Let us be assured: With God is full redemption! **C**

Buildings Fall but Faith is Strong

by Cor Hoff

One building is aglow
Then two buildings on fire
Next three buildings are burning
10,000s are caught in the inferno
Buildings are collapsing
1000s are dying
or injured

Grief and disbelief
Is everywhere
Why?
Why did this happen?
Why did God let this happen?

Why not blame God?
He is Almighty isn't He?
Surely, He could have prevented this!

Yes, God could have prevented this!

But why should He?
Is He acknowledged
In all his ways?

There is no God they say
Come, let us be merry and play.
We have no care
Anywhere
We are invincible!

Now they come calling
On every one's god
Instead
of trusting God
The God who can save you
When you believe in his Son
Your Saviour

Terrible infernos
Disintegrating buildings
Horrendous calamities
Unspeakable loss
Crying humanity

America's pride
Man's achievements
Humiliated

He executes justice
On those who don't acknowledge Him
Gives peace to those who trust in Him
To people, dying in infernos
To people, mourning loved ones

He is King over all
Without his will
Not one hair
From my head shall fall
Exceedingly great comfort
In Life
And in Death.

Written for the World Trade Centre and Pentagon destruction – September 11, 2001

By Dr. J. De Jong

Principal's Report

It's a privilege to be able to recount God's unfailing goodness in allowing the College to operate unhindered through the past academic year. In some ways, it was an uneventful year, particularly when we recall the busy time of the librarian expansion during our previous academic year. However, the work could proceed under God's providence and for this we are most grateful.

Faculty

Tonight is a very important milestone in the history of our College in that we may witness the installation of our newly appointed professor of New Testament, Rev. G.H. Visscher, formerly pastor of the congregation of Burlington-Waterdown. Rev. Visscher was appointed by Synod Neerlandia 2001 upon the recommendation of the Board of Governors of the College made last fall. His qualifications for this

task are known to most of you, so we need not elaborate on them in this report. However, we can say that our brother is still actively engaged in doctoral studies at McMaster University in the area of the New Testament disciplines, and we hope and pray that he receives all he needs to bring this work to a completion. Rev. Visscher, may I with these words also formally welcome you to the Senate and faculty, and express the hope and the prayer that you will be able to labour fruitfully among us in a spirit of support and mutual co-operation in the one challenging and rewarding task of the ministerial training.

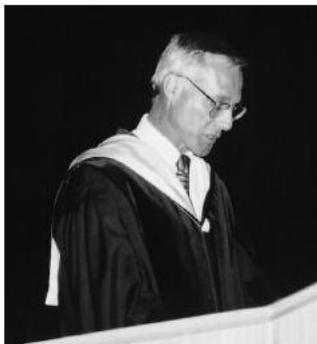
Meanwhile this means that the person you see on stage as the former professor of New Testament has now been enlisted in the ranks of the emeriti professors. Colleague Geertsema, it has been a great pleasure working with you for the last number of years, and I speak for all at the College when I express

my gratitude for your faithful service in all areas of College life over the last fifteen years. In a small College such as ours, the professors are also required to fulfil various administrative tasks, and our colleague has secretly admitted to me that he will not miss some of those administrative tasks too much. But over the years the lecture hall became his favourite place to be, and besides that, many hours of interacting with his students one-on-one, or in smaller after-class groups. And that will be the part of this work that he will surely miss, and that not a little! Again, brother, our most sincere thanks for all your efforts, and may God also guide you in service in years to come! We also look forward to your farewell address later this evening.

Students

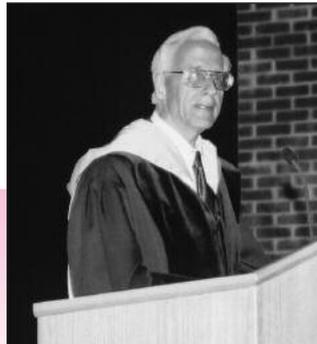
One student, our most recent Australian import, has completed his studies for the M. Div. and he will be receiving his degree this evening. Next to him Rev. Wes Bredenhof, of Smithers, B.C., will receive his Diploma of Missiology *in absentia*, the certificate marking the one year Advanced Missiology programme that we have introduced at the College some time ago. Rev. Bredenhof has immersed himself with enthusiasm in the work among the First Nations people at Fort Babine and you can read interesting reports in the regular *Mission News*. We wish him and his family well in their new surroundings, and God's blessing on all his work.

We may welcome three new students to the College this evening. The first is Mr. Dong Woo Oh from Pusan, Korea. Mr. Dong is a member of our sister church in Korea, and comes to us with a Bachelor of Theology degree from Pusan University. Second, we welcome as a part time student in the first year, Mr. Francis Van Delden of Ancaster, Ontario. We welcome these brothers to the M. Div. programme at



Prof. Dr. J. De Jong

Prof. J. Geertsema



Kristen Kottelenberg, Ian Wildeboer, Edwer Dethan, Julius Van Spronsen.



Back Row (l-r): Rev. Cl. Stam, Rev. G. Nederveen, Rev. B.J. Berends, Rev. J. Moesker, Rev. R. Aasman, Mr. G.J. Nordeman, Mr. W. Smouter, Rev. R.A. Schouten, Mr. J.H. VanderWoude, Mr. M. Kampen, Mr. W. Oostdijk.
Front Row (l-r): Rev. G.H. Visscher, Prof. Dr. J. De Jong, Prof. Dr. C. Van Dam, Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes, Prof. J. Geertsema.

the College. We also welcome Ms. Kristen Kottelenberg of Brampton, Ontario, to the Diploma of Theological Studies programme.

The academic year

The year opened with our annual convocation last September, in which Dr. J. De Jong presented a speech on Luther's "Theology of the Cross" and its implications for today. The following Monday we set down to work, with an orientation period for our new group of students. It was also an orientation for Rev. J. M. Batteau, of Wageningen, Holland, who was taking all of Dr. Gootjes' courses while the latter was on sabbatical. Rev. Batteau fit in among us very well, and we had an enjoyable semester of fellowship with our brother and his family. We wish them well in their continued ministry in Holland.

Colleague Gootjes used some of his sabbatical time to visit the churches in Manitoba and Colorado in October, 2000. From the reports we receive, it appears that the trips are appreciated, and that people in this way keep informed about the work of the College. A second expanded edition of his book *The Theory and Practice of Dogmatics* has been published in Korea in 2001.

Our emeritus Prof. J. Faber was willing once again to open the second semester of classes on January 3, 2001 with a guest lecture on "Infant Baptism in Calvin's *Institutes*." On Monday,

January 22, 2001, Dr. J. Boersema of the faculty of Business and Economics at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, presented a guest lecture on the "Foundational Principles for Business and Economics." Many aspects of the ethical questions in business and public policy were treated in this lecture and ensuing discussion period.

On May 28, Prof. Geertsema addressed the annual meeting of the

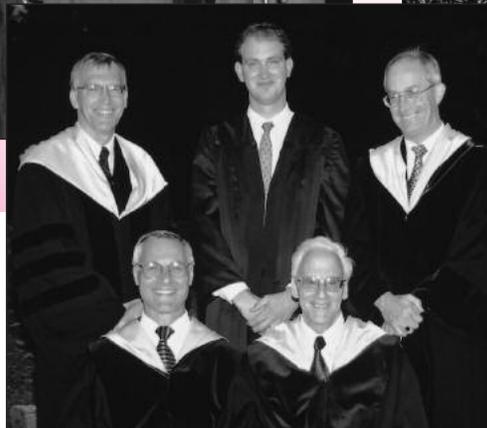
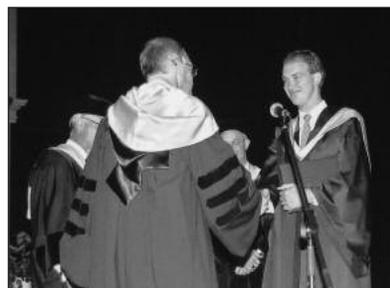
Ministers Conference with a speech entitled "Christ Redeems All Creation." It was an interesting topic which provoked some good discussion.

We are all able to benefit from Colleague Van Dam's trip to Australia, since several of his speeches held there are being published through the services of our Australian brotherhood. Pro Ecclesia published *Perspectives on Worship, Law and Faith: the Old Testament Speaks Today*, (2000), and in the Reformed Guardian Series, Colleague Van Dam published the book *Fathers and Mothers at Home and at School*.

Dr. J. De Jong presented a paper on "The Biblical Principles on the Unity of the Church" for the meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, June 2001, in Philadelphia, PA.

Staff

Another highlight of our closing ceremonies this year was a special commemorative day for our administrative assistant Catharine Mechelse. This past April 21, 2001 she marked a period of fifteen years of service at the College. This was remembered in a fitting way with a number of brief addresses, including one from the students in which the impact of Ms. Mechelse's work with regard to the students was described in a delightful and humorous way. Mr. Martin Kampen, the chairman of the Finance and Property Committee was



Back Row (l-r): Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes, Mr. C. Vermeulen, Prof. Dr. C. Van Dam.
Front Row (l-r): Prof. Dr. J. De Jong, Prof. J. Geertsema.

also on hand to speak a few congratulatory words, and make a presentation on behalf of the Board of Governors.

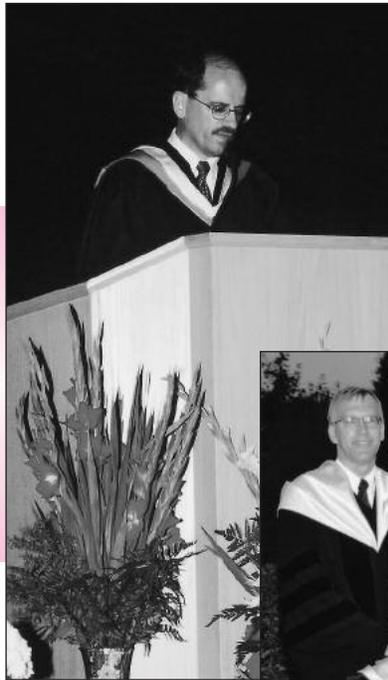
We owe Catharine our sincere thanks for her willing and faithful service at the College for these last fifteen years and we wish her God's continued guidance in her life of service in the future. Catharine, our sincere congratulations to you, and may God continue to bless your work at the College in the years to come!

We are also grateful for the faithful and very helpful service of our librarian, Ms. Margaret Van der Velde. Besides handling all the books and requests for information, she has become very adept at helping distraught faculty members through the moments of crisis when computers fail, the screen does funny things, or perhaps more commonly, when unbeknown to the professor himself, in one way or another the wrong button has been pushed. We are all learning a new dimension of meaning to the verb: "to save." Next to all this, she not only introduced several of us to the opportunities of exploring the web, but even participated after hours in helping to install the networking system, and has also spent many extra hours in maintaining it. Thanks ever so much!

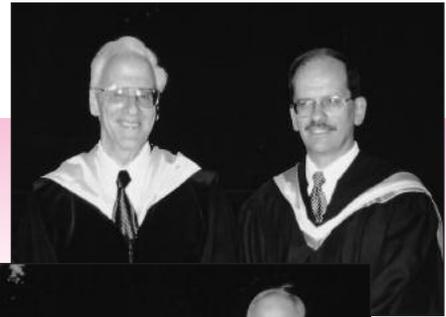
While speaking about the library, I would also like to express our gratitude for the faithful service of our sisters across the country who do so much for our library through the Women's Saving Action. Every year we are able to purchase a good number of acquisitions through your kind services. May the Lord continue to bless your efforts, and please accept our sincere thanks for all your work!

Pastoral training

Our most recent synod in Neerlandia encouraged the continued development of the Pastoral Training Program. It remains in a trial phase, but the results and the feedback is generally very positive. This year, two students completed their summer internships after their third year of theological study, an option that the program provides for. It was a challenge for these students to spend their summers being introduced to the work of ministry, rather than following the normal routine of summer jobs that take them into different trades and occupations. Probably the most challenging work for them was the demands of the regular preaching, a cycle which every minister must get used to. But from all reports I have received so far,



Rev. G.H. Visscher.



under the able directorship of Rev. J. De Gelder this new dimension of the College activities is working very well.

Future planning

The work of charting the future course and development of our College continues to take up part of our agenda as Senate. At its meeting last February, the Board of Governors approved the appointment of a Governance Committee which has as a mandate develop and maintain *Handbooks and Policies and Procedures* guides for all participating branches contributing to the functioning of the College. We realized that we have gaps with respect to codifying our policies and procedures, and that in the world around us, most post-secondary academic institutions of all kinds now have formal policy statements in place. Besides, these *Handbooks* are a great help to newly incoming faculty and Board members. Further, if the College wishes to meet the requirements of formal accreditation with the Association of Theological Schools, much work in this area needs to be done.

Conclusion

God has been good to us in allowing us to carry on with the work of the College for another year. We are grateful for your prayers and support. We are thankful to be able to train additional students this year. What about the

needs of our church federation? Let me quote from a press release on the work of the College which I wrote not all that long ago:

Occasionally we as faculty hear the remark that the churches are more or less provided for, and that new candidates are hardly needed. However, the growth patterns with the accompanying changing developments indicate that the churches will continue to need a steady flow of ministers for some time to come. Do the churches and ministers pay enough attention to this matter in regular prayer, and also in the congregational prayers? Let us with a lively zeal and firm conviction continue to pray that God will send labourers into the harvest. For his kingdom comes, also through the fervent and constant prayers of his faithful children who seek all their needs and help with him alone.

May the Lord in his mercy continue to grant labourers in the harvest and grant a steady growth in and among our churches, spiritually first of all, but also in strength and numbers – all for the glory of his holy name!

J. De Jong, "Preachers of the Cross. The enduring heart of the reformational impulse." *Clarion*, Volume 49, issues 21 and 22, (October 13 and 27, 2000) 473-474; 495-497.



Presentation of the Women's Saving Action at the College Evening

September 7, 2001

By Joanne Van Dam

Mr. President, Members of the Board and Faculty, Graduate, Brothers and Sisters:

We thank you for the opportunity to say a few words on behalf of the Women's Savings Action. With gratitude to God we may report that our work could continue unhindered during this past year.

As Women's Savings Action we do a lot of counting. Just ask anyone involved! When the donations have been gathered in, a date is set for "the counting." The volunteers come with jars and tins and bags full of change, the one heavier than the next and some at the breaking point. The change is spread on the table, and the sorting can start. Wow, what a lot of pennies – have you ever stopped to think how many pennies it takes to buy an average priced theological book of seventy-five to eighty dollars – about seven to eight thousand pennies! All the pennies and nickels and dimes and so on all have to be rolled – the pile gets higher and higher. And then there are always some loonies and toonies and dollar bills and a few cheques which are welcome additions to the total. When the job has been done the representative thanks every one and the next day she heads to the bank with back packs full of her congregation's contribution.

Throughout the year, representatives send money orders and cheques or make direct deposits to the Women's Savings Action account in Hamilton. And now it is the turn of our treasurer to do her counting. As each contribution comes in, she joyfully adds it to her total. May and June are the really busy times, when most of the contributions come in. At the end of June the final tally can be made. What will the total collected be this year? As board we always await the answer with anticipation. Will we be able to maintain our level of support, or will we be able to increase it for this year?

Especially at this time of the year we also take time to count our blessings, and they are very many. The Lord has blessed us in many different ways.

We thank the Lord that so many congregations faithfully every year send their contributions for the library; many representatives and their teams give willingly and cheerfully of their time and energy. It is a labour of love. No congregation is assessed; it is all done voluntarily for the work of the Lord at the Theological College. Our work is never taken for granted by the College community; great appreciation is always shown. Please continue to give generously so that we can keep counting!



Prof. Dr. J. De Jong,
C. Zietsma, J. Van Dam.

Treasurer's Report of the Women's Saving's Action

By Carla Zietsma

Well . . . who would you rather see up here . . . me or one of the professors . . . I know . . . I feel exactly the same way. I would rather not be up here either – although . . . besides having these kind gentlemen behind me *and* . . . knowing that for me this is the last time does make it a bit easier!

I fondly recall our beloved late Mrs. Selles, one of the founders of the Women's Savings Action, doing these little talks. They were always light, deep and humorous. I can't match that, I know.

Actually, when I was asked to take on the treasurer's job many years ago, my first question was "Will I have to do anything in public on stage?" I was reassured that pretty well . . . no, not to worry! Well here I am again, this time with a kind of bittersweet feeling. I have enjoyed the meetings with Lies Mulder, Joanne Van Dam and Liz Hof-sink. I have enjoyed the excitement of seeing money come in year after year for an excellent purpose. I have enjoyed the contact with all the different representatives from all over Canada, as well as those from the US and Australia. They all work so hard to make this money tree grow every year so it can eventually be turned into books and periodicals to help theological students with their study of the most precious book, the Bible. I am, of course, most familiar with how money is collected in my own congregation, Hamilton, where under the efficient leadership of Grace Vanderwoude a team of ladies is formed each year who help collect the money. Grace is one of the best examples to prove that teamwork works! Thank you, Grace, and thank you to each representative. Our final total collected each year shows there are many such dedicated ladies in the various congregations.

Yes, for me it's the last time. After a few years of searching and asking, finally a person was found who graciously said, "Yes, I will take over as treasurer." We are happy to tell you that Chris Nienhuis from Hamilton is that person. As a bank employee, she has the financial expertise which helps with keeping the finances in order. I know it will be in capable hands. This spring Liz Hof-sink resigned from her position as president. From this place we would also like to thank her for the excellent cooperation which we could enjoy during her time on our board. It was decided that Joanne Van Dam would take over as president. Dinie Gootjes accepted the position as secretary. We are very grateful for that. She brings with her not only a love of books and the College library where she works as a volunteer, but also knows what it is like to do all that counting as representative for the Ancaster congregation. Chris and Dinie, a hearty welcome to you both!



We give thanks to the Lord that during the past year a total of \$31,257.03 was collected. Dr. De Jong, it's my pleasure once again, to present you with a cheque – this time for \$27,000 (an increase of \$2,000.00 from the last year) for the library for the coming year. To God be all praise!

Joanne Van Dam then spoke a few words of appreciation to Carla for her years of service as treasurer.

As Carla has indicated, the time has come for her to pass on the reins to someone else. We would like to take this opportunity to thank her for what she has done for the Women's Savings Action since 1989 when she took over from Lorraine Lindhout. Thanks, Carla, for the many hours spent as treasurer during the last twelve years. Those of you who know Carla know that she is always looking for opportunities to serve her Lord. Juggling her responsibilities as a wife and mother, her employment outside the home and her many volunteer activities brought its own challenges. We thank you from the heart, Carla, for your dedication and willingness to put your love for the Lord and the training for the ministry of the gospel into action with your work as treasurer of the Women's Savings Action. We wish you the Lord's blessing as you use your gifts for other kingdom causes. And now, on behalf of all of us, we would like to present you with these flowers as a token of our appreciation. 



Press Release of the Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches held on September 6, 2001

Opening

Rev. R. Aasman opened the meeting with the reading of Hebrews 2:10-18 and led in prayer. All governors were present as well as the principal, Dr. J. De Jong.

Signing of declaration of governors

The incoming governors, the brothers B.J. Berends, G. Nederveen, G.J. Nordeman, R.A. Schouten and Cl. Stam, as appointed by Synod Neerlandia, signed the declaration of governors. They promise to do all things in keeping with the Statutes and By-Laws for the governing of the Theological College on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Election of officers

Rev. R. Aasman was appointed as chairman of the board, Rev. B.J. Berends as vice-chairman, Rev. R.A. Schouten as secretary and brother W. Oostdijk was appointed as treasurer.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of September 2000 and February 2001 were tabled, and after giving some clarification to the new governors, were adopted. The secretary was given some instructions about organizing the agendas for the Academic Committee and the Board of Governors meetings.

Mandate General Synod 2001

The mandate received from Synod Neerlandia was taken note of. Special attention was drawn to the three letters referred to in 5.5.

The first letter expressed the wish to see the professors make more visits to the churches. In response it will be made clear that in view of their overall workload, the professors should as a rule not be expected to visit the churches more than once every three years.

The other two letters concerned themselves with the Pastoral Training Program (PTP). They suggest that the PTP should be completely integrated with the basic program offered by the College, believing that "the practical components of the work of ministry is *integral* to the Theological College and therefore belongs to its basic program."

After a lengthy discussion it was decided to appoint Prof. J. De Jong, Rev. Cl. Stam, and brother W. Smouter to form a committee and to have them look at all the ramifications involved (including the possible need of a fifth professor) and to present a report on their findings at the next annual meeting of the governors.

Incoming mail

Two letters came with the request to hold the next annual Theological College evening and convocation in the West. The Finance and Property Committee was appointed to investigate the overall financial cost involved and to report their findings to the next meeting.

A letter came from the Deputies Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, in which appreciation is expressed for the Reformed training given at the Theological College, as well as for the appointment of Rev. G.H. Visscher as the new professor New Testament. They express special gratitude for what the Lord has given to the College in the work of Prof. J. Geertsema.

The deputies also requested the Board of Governors to discuss the possibility of the Australian churches becoming "full partners" of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, having representation on the Board.

After a lengthy discussion it was decided to communicate to the Australian churches that such a full partnership would be in conflict with article 5.6 of the By-Laws and would negatively affect the official corporate status the Theological College has gained as an academic institution in Canada.

At the same time the Board of Governors would like to assure the deputies that they will endeavour to keep them well informed of all the College activi-

ties and Board decisions via documents and reports. The governors would also welcome the deputies to attend their Board meetings where they would be given the privilege of the floor.

In response to a proposal of the outgoing secretary, Rev. D.G.J. Agema, the Board decided to purchase a fire-proof safe for storing the archives and to give it a permanent place at the College.

Prof. N.H. Gootjes gave a written report on his Sabbatical Project. Prof. Gootjes spent his sabbatical on a special study on the history of the Belgic Confession.

Dr. J. Faber gave a written report on his, Dr. J. De Jong's and Dr. Gootjes' attendance of the Calvin Studies Conference 2001, which had as theme: "Calvin and the Church."

Report of Finance and Property Committee

A report was presented on the financial affairs and property of the Theological College. The audited financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2000, and the proposed budget for the year 2002 were discussed and approved. Even though there was a deficit of \$10,925.00 at the end of the year 2000 (which was covered by monies out of the surplus fund), it was decided to keep the assessment per communicant member at \$63.

Special appreciation was expressed for the fifteen-year service to the College and the churches by Ms. Catharine Mechelse, the College's administrative assistant.

The Finance and Property Committee concluded its report as follows: "With thankfulness and in humility, we render all honour and glory to Christ, the Head of the Church who again was pleased to enable the entire College community to work for the benefit of our congregations especially in Canada, the United States, Australia, and abroad in the mission fields."

Report of the Convocation Committee – June 2001

All arrangements have been made for the convocation evening of September 7, 2001. The main speaker will be Prof. J. Geertsema, who will speak on

Hebrews 6:4-6. His successor, Rev. G.H. Visscher will be installed, and Candidate C. Vermeulen will receive the Master of Divinity degree.

Reports to the lectures

Visits were made by governors to classes at the Theological College during the past year. One report was submitted by Rev. D.G.J. Agema and Rev. W. den Hollander. A second was submitted by Rev. J. Moesker and Rev. J. Visscher. These reports spoke very positively about the quality of teaching at our college. Visitors were appointed for the new academic year: for the fall classes, Rev. B.J. Berends and Rev. G. Nederveen, and for the spring classes, Rev. R. Aasman and R.A. Schouten.

Report of the Senate

The professors gave a written report on the course work and activities of the year 2000- 2001. With thankfulness to the Lord the governors could observe that the professors have been very busy indeed, and that they have acquitted themselves very well of the task with which the Canadian Reformed Churches have charged them.

Principal's report

The principal's report (which would be read at the convocation and published in *Clarion*) was read and approved after a few minor changes to facilitate a better understanding by the listeners.

Report on visits to the churches

Prof. J. Geertsema gave a written report on his trip to the churches in British Columbia. He spoke on the topic "Christ Jesus Redeems Creation Already Now." The meetings went quite well. The attendance was from meagre to quite good. He also had the pleasure to be present at the ordination service of brother F. Dong. Overall, there was the strong impression given that the professorial visits enhance the bond between the churches and the Theological College.

Prof. N. H. Gootjes gave a written report on the Theological College tour to the churches in Manitoba and in Denver, October 2000. He spoke on the Belgic Confession, with the catchy title "What is so good about the Belgic Confession?" This topic gave him the opportunity to share some of the results of his special sabbatical project. He also took the opportunity to attend the Office bearers' Conference in Win-

nipeg. He could not but conclude that these visits "proved to be useful for us to know the congregations, and for the churches to know their professors and their work at the Theological College." Many people expressed appreciation for these visits.

Library report

The library contains approximately 24,133 volumes in a variety of languages. It subscribes to approximately 100 periodicals and journals. Much appreciation was expressed by the college community for the new library facility.

The Women's Savings Action donated \$25,000 at the convocation of 2000, allowing the purchase of many more books and periodicals. Thus far, some 408 books have been purchased and received by the library since June 1, 2000, and many more are on order.

One noteworthy acquisition this year was the collected works of John Calvin. A high quality reprint of the accepted academic edition (a sub-series of the *Corpus Reformatorum*) was offered to the library, with the result that the library now finally has this primary source available.

This report was received with much gratitude to Ms. Margaret Van der Velde. May she keep up the good work!

Registrar's report

An update of the students at the college was presented to the Board of Governors. The following students were admitted to the first year of study after a successful interview with a professor and governor,

- to the Master of Divinity program: **Dong - Woo Oh** (Bachelor of Theology, Kosin University) of the Presbyterian (Kosin) Church of Korea, Pusan, Korea, and **Francis van Delden**, of the Canadian Reformed Church at Ancaster, who will be enrolled part time this year to catch up on his study of the languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin;
- to the Diploma of Theological Studies program: **Kristen Lorraine Kottelenberg** (Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Honours) of the Canadian Reformed Church in Brampton. Inquiries regarding the admission to and study at the Theological College were made by persons from the Canadian Reformed Churches or their sister churches, from other churches in Canada, and from churches outside Canada.

Other matters

A written report and financial statement was given on the Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund. Support was granted to students, mostly for the purchase of books for their personal library. In some cases assistance was also given to students in a very tight financial situation.

The Governance Committee, which was struck to review the College's by-laws and regulations and to develop handbooks, policies, and procedures, presented an interim report. It consisted of the first draft of the proposed Handbook for Board members. Copies were distributed for review by the governors for discussion at the next meeting. As recommended, Rev. G. Nederveen was appointed as a new member of this committee, and Rev. D.G.J. Agema was appointed as an additional member for the sake of continuity.

The report on the Practical Training Program was not available. It will be sent to the governors before the next meeting.

In response to a letter from the Senate and a draft memorandum from the Finance and Property Committee re financial assistance to foreign students, the Board of Governors decided to set up a "Foreign Student Bursary Fund." Guidelines will be drawn up by the senate, for approval by the governors at the next meeting.

In response to a letter from the Church at Blue Bell, requesting visits from professors, it was decided to inform this church that the professors will endeavour to visit it once every three years.

A written report was received on the attendance of Professor C. Van Dam of the annual Conference of the Evangelical Theological Society, Nashville, Tennessee, and of the thirtieth anniversary meeting of the Institute for Biblical Research. This report was received with gratitude.

Appointments

Br. G. Nederveen was appointed to the Convocation Committee.

Br. B. J. Berends was appointed to the Publication Committee.

Closing

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, January 30, 2002, 6:00 p.m. at the Theological College. Br. M. Kampen led in thanksgiving and prayer. The chairman, Rev. R. Aasman, closed the meeting.

For the Board of Governors,
B.J. Berends 

Drugs (Part 1)

By N.H. Gootjes

It seems impossible to eradicate the use of drugs in our society. The hippie generation of the 1960s celebrated their alternative lifestyle by using drugs. During the great music festivals many were stoned while listening to their favourite bands. The same music was put on in the discos, and enjoyed by young people high as a kite. The hippie generation has grown up but that has not put an end to the use of drugs. In our own time, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is still going on everywhere.

The Reformed community is not immune from this either.

In the USA, the government attempted to stop the increase of illegal substances by increasing the sentences. People caught with drugs were put behind bars, sometimes for many years. The result was that the population of the prisons increased but the use of drugs did not decrease. As strict punishment did not appear to solve the problem, several authors have been pleading for treatment as a more effective counter measure than imprisonment. There are indications that drug related crime has decreased recently where people caught with drugs are educated about the dangers rather than punished. But it remains to be seen whether this new policy will result in diminishing the use of drugs.

In the Netherlands, another solution is being tried out. The use of marijuana is decriminalized in the hope that the people will stick to using this, rather than go on to the more powerful drugs. The first reports appear to indicate that this has not led to the anticipated decrease in the use of those drugs and in drug related problems. In

Canada, a shocking picture of gas sniffing native youths was on the front page of the papers. Even if this picture was staged, the reality of drug use among the native people is not denied. Nor is the problem limited to these young people. The Reformed community is not immune from this either. It happens that Reformed young people also use drugs, for example, at parties. Some are even selling it to sustain their habit.

We need to take a careful look at drugs. Can they be used, or are there good reasons for outlawing them? But we first need to ask what drugs are and what they do.

What are drugs?

The word itself is used in two different senses.¹ In a more general way, the word is used as an indication of any kind of medicine. Drugs are used to treat, and hopefully to cure, diseases. In this sense it also occurs in the word "drug store," where prescriptions from doctors are filled out and sold. However, when someone is said to be "doing drugs," this has nothing to do with making or selling medicine. The word has a second, more specific meaning. In that case, drugs are substances taken to affect the mind.

There are many kinds of drugs, and they can be ingested in different ways. Some drugs are inhaled while smoking, and others are directly injected into the bloodstream. Other ways are chewing leaves containing a drug and sniffing fumes of volatile substances. Whatever means are used, the purpose is always to alter the mental state of the consumer. Drugs affect the way people think, feel, and experience the world.

In a long process of thousands of years, people have learned to recognize the natural substances which exercise a direct influence on the mental state of people. In South America, the

stimulating qualities of the coca plant were discovered. In China, the dreams caused by the "magic mushrooms" were enjoyed by the sages. The oriental poppy was brought to Western Europe in the Middle Ages, because its sedative qualities brought the people relief from pain.

During the twentieth century, developments in chemistry have led to the (sometimes accidental) discovery of many more drugs which alter the mental state. Those who want the extraordinary experiences drugs provide, can now choose from an astonishing variety of means to change the way they feel and perceive the world. These drugs provide different kinds of sensations, ranging from very relaxing to very intense. In several countries, they are relatively easy to obtain. However, drugs are not merely exotic substances produced and used in foreign countries, they can be produced in our own country and sold in our own cities. They can easily be avoided but they can just as easily be obtained.

Most people want to get more out of life than the monotonous everyday events.

How to evaluate drugs?

It would be too easy to simply state that using drugs is always wrong. Many of the substances now outlawed as drugs, were once used for medical purposes. As mentioned before, opium was used as a pain killer during the Middle Ages. Particularly in the case of painful cancers, the pain could only be alleviated by pills containing an opiate. Cocaine was used as a local anaesthetic in the nineteenth century. It made it possible to perform eye

operations. Amphetamine was originally made synthetically to treat asthma. And cannabis has helped patients suffering from nausea and vomiting, and it can be used to reduce damaging pressure in the eyeball.

Today, these drugs are seldom used for medical purposes, if at all. Better medicines are available, which are more helpful to alleviate pain and to treat diseases. The issue is not the medical use of these drugs, but their recreational use. Can these drugs be taken for enjoyment? Is that a proper application of these created substances?

Some approach this question from the perspective of benefits and risks. Most people want to get more out of life than the monotonous everyday events. They want some excitement. They think that drugs are a good way of providing themselves with enjoyable and extraordinary experiences. At the same time, the possible dangerous side effects of drugs must be considered. That requires them to make an informed decision whether it is worth it to use certain drugs. They have to ask themselves the question whether the benefits of this experience outweigh the risks involved.

The problem is how can we know God's will concerning drugs, since the Word of God does not speak about drugs in any direct sense.

Some negative results are that drugs sometimes cause someone to have a bad trip, and people who use them regularly may experience health problems in the future.² Many, in particular many young people, will accept the risks. They have a whole life ahead of them, and they want to enjoy life to the max. The danger of future problems cannot compete with the craving for enjoyment today. But parents will point out the negative effects of drug use. They attempt to convince their children that it is better to leave drugs alone.

There are valuable aspects to this approach of considering the pros and cons, but it appears impossible to convince other people. It leads to individual solutions. Everyone will make his own judgment concerning what is acceptable and what is dangerous.

Some people will not be deterred by any risk. Their experience is much more important than any danger which may be the result of it. The basic reason why this approach fails to convince is the fact that no appeal is made to God and his will. Everything is decided on the basis of human insight concerning benefit and danger. People will make their own decisions, under the influence of their reason and of cravings which are hard to control. Our own view on right and wrong cannot be a good guide for we will bend it according to our liking.

We should listen to the will of God who has created all things, and who has revealed his will to us. He is the God of the universe and we have to obey Him. He has even sent his Son into the world to save us from our sins. The problem is how can we know God's will concerning drugs, since the Word of God does not speak about drugs in any direct sense. We do not know whether opiates and products of cannabis were known in Israel, and we do not read about them in the Bible. Where do we find our basis for addressing the issue of drugs? Some Reformed studies have argued that using drugs is a form of slavery which Scripture condemns. It speaks of the slavery which makes people slaves of sin (Rom 6:6), slaves of impurity and wickedness (Rom 6:19). They are enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures (Tit 3:3). They are slaves of gods who by nature are no gods (Gal 4:8), in slavery under the basic principles of the world (Gal 4:3). Only Jesus Christ saves from the curse of this slavery. Set free by him, we may take off the chains of slavery to serve Christ in newness of life (Rom 6:19, 1 Thess 3:13).³

On closer inspection, these texts are not helpful in evaluating drugs. For example, the texts from the epistle to the Romans do state that we should no longer be slaves to sin (Rom 6:6) and that our bodies should be in slavery to righteousness (Rom 6:19). However, these texts do not indicate why using drugs should be seen as slavery to sin. In the epistle to the Galatians, Paul says that when they were Gentiles, they were slaves to gods who are not gods (Gal 4:8). Now, they are in danger of becoming slaves of a system of observing days, months, seasons and years (Gal 4:9). There is no indication that



Declined the call from Toronto to work as second missionary in the Port Moresby region of Papua New Guinea:

Rev. R.H. Knigge

of Leidsche Rijn, Netherlands.

• • •

Examined by Classis Northern Ontario on September 21, 2001, and declared eligible for ordination:

Candidate Carl Vermeulen

The ordination will take place October 7, D.V., in Elora, Ontario.

these warnings have anything to do with drugs.

We need to consider the biblical basis from which to approach the issue of drugs.

¹W. Pouwelse stated that the word "drugs" was related to the Dutch word for "dry" and had its origin in the dried herbs formerly sold by the pharmacists as medicines; see the chapter on drugs in *Like Living Stones* (Winnipeg: Premier, 1989) 78. This was also stated by J. Douma, *Capita Selecta Ethiek*, vol. 2 (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1972) 79. Douma does not mention this in his later publication on drugs, in *Christelijke levensstijl* (2. ed.; Kampen: Van den Berg, 1993) 171ff. The derivation of the word "drugs" from the Dutch word "droog" is doubtful, see *The Oxford English Dictionary* (compact edition; Glasgow a.o.: Oxford University Press, 1971) vol. 1, 687.

²See the explanation of H.T. Engelhardt, "Drug Addiction" in J.F. Childress, J. Macquarrie, *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (2. ed.; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 63f. This approach is reminiscent of the pleasure-pain calculus of the philosophy of Bentham, see S.E. Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre* (5. ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993) 368f.

³See J. Douma, *Capita Selecta Christelijke ethiek*, vol. 2, 89f. and W. Pouwelse, *Like Living Stones*, 85, who also speaks of slavery, without mentioning texts from Scripture in support for this. Later, Douma appears to have dropped this slavery argument. In his section on drugs in *Christelijke levensstijl*, Douma briefly mentions slavery but he no longer used the texts on slavery to sin from Paul's Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians to reject drugs.

Report of the Visit to the 255th Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States

May 14-17, 2001

By J. Moesker

To the Dakotas

On the morning of May 14, Rev. K. Jonker and I headed straight south towards the Dakotas. As we progressed southwards across the border, the land became more rolling and the trees were more in leaf. At around 5:00 p.m. we arrived in Menno, South Dakota, located about an hour from Sioux Falls, not far from the Nebraska border. Menno is a town of about 1500 inhabitants, and we had no trouble finding Zion Reformed Church, where the 255th Synod of the Reformed Churches in the United States (RCUS) was being convened. Synod Neerlandia of Canadian Reformed Churches had decided in the previous week that our churches would enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCUS. In Proverbs 25:25 it says that good news from a distant land is like cold water to a weary soul. We felt as if we were bringing cold water to thirsty souls in the USA. The RCUS is our first sister-federation in North America.

Again, as with all the RCUS church buildings, Zion congregation possessed a beautiful and well-maintained church building. The congregation is pastored by a Canadian of Dutch origin, Rev. Hans Kalkmann. Zion has around 266 members, of which 42 are unconfirmed (non-communicant). I obtained some literature about the history of Zion RCUS. German-speaking immigrants had originally migrated to Bender on the Dnister River in South Russia from Germany, Prussian-Poland, and Switzerland in the first decades of the nineteenth century. They suffered severe hardship due to crop failures, grasshoppers, cattle disease, etc. They immigrated to the USA, to the Menno area in 1872. In 1874 they established Zion Reformed Church. Some of the last

names of those early settlers were Hieb, Mettler, Bender, Preszler, Melhaf, Schnaidt, Schnabel, Wahl, Neuharth, Brandt and Maier. The first services were held in a granary near Menno. In 1879 the first church building was erected. This structure served the congregation until 1967, when the present solid brick church building was constructed. The first pastor of Zion Church was Rev. Jacob Orth, who served from 1879 to 1883. He was a former school-teacher from South Russia who was trained for the ministry in an RCUS seminary near Plymouth, Wisconsin and sent to the Dakota Territories where he organized approximately fifteen congregations. In the late nineteenth century the writings of Dr. Kohlbrugge of the Netherlands and Dr. Zahn of Germany made a strong impact on the Reformed people in South Dakota.

The first services were held in a granary near Menno.

We were warmly received at Zion, and invited to supper with the delegates to Synod. Every church in the federation is invited to delegate a minister and an elder to synod, and there were thirty-seven minister and twenty-six elder delegates present. On the Monday evening, a worship service was held for Synod. Again, the worship service was similar to our services. Rev. Vern Pollema (Ebenezer RCUS, Shafter, CA) delivered a sermon on Revelation 2:1-11 with the theme: "Remembering your first love." He urged the RCUS delegates present to continue in love for the Lord and his church. The offerings taken at these worship services are to

defray the costs of hosting synod. Rev. Jonker and I and a number of other Synod delegates were comfortably billeted at a Super 8 Hotel in the nearby town of Freeman.

Synod convened

The next morning, Tuesday, May 15, Synod was convened at 8:00 a.m. sharp. After devotions, roll call was held to determine who was present and if there was a quorum of delegates. Officers were chosen by vote. Rev. Vern Pollema became president, Rev. Paul Treick (Modesto, CA) was made vice-president, and Rev. Frank Walker (Sacramento, CA) was elected stated clerk. The bar of the house was defined. This means it was determined who were delegates of RCUS churches and delegates of churches with whom the RCUS has fraternal relations. These delegates were invited to be seated within the body of Synod, and have the right to request the floor to speak. Rev. G. Syms (Sutton, NB) arrived at synod and passed on the news that the previous week Synod Neerlandia had accepted the RCUS offer of ecclesiastical fellowship. He expressed thankfulness for this recognition of each other as works of God. He requested that Rev. Jonker and I be seated in the bar of the house as fraternal delegates, and this was approved by synod. Brother Syms then led in prayer of thanksgiving to God for this unity between our churches. We took our seat along with the fraternal delegate from the OPC, Rev. R.K. Klynsma (Trinity OPC, Bridgewater, South Dakota). There were also representatives from the United Reformed Churches of North America (Rev. R. Pontier of Redeemer URC in Orange City, IA and Rev. L. Johnson of Doon URC, IA).

On that Tuesday, the real work of synod got underway. I won't report on every matter Synod dealt with. Allow me to mention a few items of interest. The RCUS constitution does not make provision for church visits as prescribed in our Church Order, but there is a system of reporting which has a very similar intent. Interesting that though the method is so different, the result is basically the same! In the RCUS every minister makes an annual report of his charge to the president of classis. The President of each of the four classes in the RCUS in turn submits an annual report to the president of synod on the state of the churches in classis. Finally, making use of parochial and classical reports, the President of the Executive Committee of Synod gives an overall report on the state of the church in general. These reports are intended to promote unity among the churches to prove evidence for the three marks of the true church (Art.29 Belgic Confession).

In the RCUS every minister makes an annual report of his charge to the president of classis.

A report

For interests sake I pass on the following quotation from the Northern Plains Classis president's report:

As I have again read the parochial reports of the pastors I am struck with the emphasis upon the authority of the Word of God and the faithful preaching of that Word . . . All of the congregations report a strong desire on the part of the members to receive the ministry of the Word, including Bible studies and instruction of the youth as well as fellowship. At the same time there is the ongoing concern about those who do not attend, especially Bible studies, as well as they should. Several pastors reported the need to deal with difficult discipline problems. Many of our congregations have a significant number of elderly which is reflected in the number of funerals that were held. Though there is an ongoing difficulty of many congregations being small rural churches, God has truly been good to the congregations of the Northern Plains Classis.



Rev. G. Syms

The President of the Executive Committee of Synod peruses these classical reports and submits an annual report on the state of the church to synod. Rev. Pollema, summarized his impression of the classis reports with the following words:

As I read the reports of the Presidents of the Executive Committees of the Classes, the three marks of the true church were most evident. I was especially impressed by the agreement and unity that exists among us which I believe the above excerpts demonstrate. This is the result of God's grace causing the church to heed His admonition to return to her first love and do the first works (cf. Rev 2:5,6) . . .

The system of reports and the reports themselves demonstrate, we believe, the deep desire of the RCUS to be reformed and always reforming (semper reformanda).

Foreign ministries

The Foreign Ministries Committee Report to Synod 2001 was presented by Rev. R. Grossman (Vermillion, South Dakota). The RCUS supports the French Broadcasts of Reformed Radio Administration Committee which works out of South Africa (Rev. E. Kayayan). There is also support for Reformed Churches in the Congo (where the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt are also active), though that work has been hampered by political instability in that region. The RCUS supports the Free Reformed Church of Kenya, and Pastoral elder Meshack Nyarango was present at synod and presented an overview of those churches.

Home missions

The Permanent Synod Home Missions Committee reported on the

progress of the various mission churches and the plans for additional ones. There are presently a number of home mission works in progress, including four in California, two in South Dakota, one in Minnesota, and one in Colorado. A considerable amount of effort and financial support goes into home mission. I pass on the report concerning one of these works, Rehoboth Chapel in the Los Angeles Basin in California:

Rehoboth Chapel made several strides to moving ahead this year. They entered into a lease agreement for an 850 sq. ft. store front in La Habra at \$750 a month. They held their first service on Christmas Eve. Rev. Jay Fluck was called and installed as an Associate Pastor of the Ebenezer Reformed Church of Shafter with the specific duties of work with the Rehoboth Chapel. He reports that this year has seen ups and downs in visitors and members and giving that fell short of their budget. However, there is also much to be encouraged by as new visitors attend services and members continue to grow in the grace of God.

The RCUS is very motivated and active in the area of home mission, and this is something the Canadian Reformed Churches can learn from.

I think the RCUS is very motivated and active in the area of home mission, and this is something I believe the Canadian Reformed Churches can learn from.

Church relations

Interesting to us was also the Report of the Permanent Interchurch Relations Committee to synod. The RCUS has fraternal relations with the OPC, Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN-Liberated), Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. Unless there is more correspondence from the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico by August, this official relationship will terminate. There are on-going discussions with the URCNA to also hopefully work towards official relations with this federation. Rev. L. Johnson addressed synod on behalf of the URCNA. He expressed the hope that the relations between the two churches would continue to develop in the direction they are going now.

Synod Neerlandia

Rev. Syms reported extensively on the decisions of Synod Neerlandia of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Rev. Jonker addressed the assembly on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches, expressing thankfulness for the patience after the initial offer of relations in 1997, and indicating our joy at the sister-church relations which we now have with the RCUS (see *Clarion* issue 14 for Rev. Jonker's speech).

NAPARC

Also of interest was the report concerning NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council). This council is composed of representatives of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Christian Reformed Church in North America – whose membership is suspended, the Korean American Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America, the Reformed Church in the United States, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. Much of the November 2000 NAPARC meeting was taken up by a discussion about the distinctives held by the various member churches. Especially interesting was the discussion about "confessional membership" which ensued. I quote from the report:

Members of our delegation each read a couple of papers and at the end fielded questions and comments. The most heated comments resulted from our position on Confessional Church Membership. This is not a position held by the other

Presbyterian bodies, but it is held, very similar to our own statement, by the CRC. Both observing churches (URCNA and FRCNA, jm) also agreed with our position of requiring the creeds to define what we believe the Bible teaches. The consistency of our stance as a confessional and covenantal church became apparent as we saw what we considered to be an inconsistency on the part of the others. One individual felt that to include the vow that we believe the doctrine of salvation taught in Scripture is summarized in the vows was tantamount to idolatry and even similar to the requirements of the Jehovah's Witnesses! It became clear that some churches would not require a person to be a five-point Calvinist or to agree to paedobaptism before joining the church.

We hope that our sister-church relationship with these brothers and sisters may be a growing and living relationship.

In response to this report, the OPC fraternal delegate Rev. Klynsma, in his address to synod quoted from Chapter V of the OPC Directory of Worship concerning Public Profession of Faith in Christ: "In order to aid those who contemplate making public profession of faith in Christ to understand the implication of this significant act and to perform it intelligently, the pastor shall conduct classes in Christian doctrine both for the covenant youth and for any others who may manifest an interest in the way of salvation." He told synod that he understood this to mean that those joining the OPC were to be instructed in the doctrines before they could make profession of their faith. As far as he was concerned, the OPC

Directory therefore espouses confessional membership.

The various positions delineated at the November, 2000 meeting of NAPARC will be compiled and compared by a committee for the next meeting. Also at this meeting, the PCA moved to expel the CRCNA from membership in NAPARC. Since no grounds were given as required for this action, this matter had to wait until next year.

On Wednesday evening another worship service was held in connection with synod. Rev. W. Embree (Nebraska) preached on Romans 7:7-25 with the theme "Understanding the Will." He emphasized the corruption of our own wills and the necessity of the renewal of our will by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is important, then, that Christ is proclaimed.

Time to go

We attended the Thursday morning session of synod, but due to the fact that we had to make preparations for preaching the Word in our own congregations on the following Sunday, we said farewell to the brothers and sisters in Menno after a hearty lunch. We then took to the road north and rejoined our families in Manitoba about nine hours later.

Both Rev. Jonker and I were very much encouraged by the reception we received in Menno. The RCUS brothers are hearty towards us and spiritually we felt at home among them. This is a church which, though not perfect, is definitely striving to be Reformed and to abide by the Word as also confessed in the Three Forms of Unity. We hope that our sister-church relationship with these brothers and sisters may be a growing and living relationship. Some plans for future contacts between ministers and memberships were discussed. We look forward to sharing with each other the rich heritage which God in His grace has kept in these two church federations. 



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