

# Clarion

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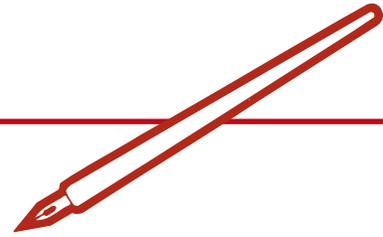


*Numbers*

*10:1-10*

*Ministerial  
Choir*

INSIDE!



By J. De Jong



## Cold Feet?

In a recent issue of *Christian Renewal* Rev. Jelle Tuininga, a retired minister of the URC in Lethbridge makes a plea for putting the unity process with the Canadian Reformed Churches on hold. He says:

To be honest I have my reservations about the whole matter. The fact that ratification of Phase two by the URC congregations was much lower than the vote of Synod Escondido is an indication that those reservations are widespread among the URC membership.

And why the reservations? He adds:

Especially on the side of the URC there are still sour tastes in their mouths due to past attitudes and actions on the part of our Canadian Reformed brothers. Understandably so, sad as it might be. Some of those attitudes and actions are still present.

But what of the unity process? Rev. Tuininga still wants unity, but then unity of a special kind:

My desire is that we promote unity which is short of federative bonds. Not only are there many things we can do together, but I don't believe the Bible necessarily calls us to such federative unity . . . All the Bible really tells us is that there are local (autonomous) churches which have a measure of contact and fellowship with other local churches. More you won't find in the Bible. And if federative union is going to cause a lot of trouble, then why not live and work next to each other . . . without becoming one federation?

*However, the fear of trouble does not qualify as a sound argument to abandon the process toward federative unity.*

The issue for Rev. Tuininga then appears to be: the fear of trouble. He continues:

There are going to be many hassles on the road to federative union with the Canadian Reformed: song book, admission to the Lord's table, seminary training, etc. I say again: let's live together with what we have now (row with the oars we have). That way God will be pleased and we will be edified.

### The fear factor

If I can summarize this argument then we may conclude that Rev. Tuininga wants to abort the process of federative

unity because it will only cause trouble and hassles. The end result in all this is not worth it for him. He even suggests that if Phase Two is promoted too vigorously we could end up with four denominations instead of two.

I can appreciate the frankness and straightforward approach of Rev. Tuininga. However, the fear of trouble does not qualify as a sound argument to abandon the process toward federative unity. The apostle John writes: "There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out fear!" (1 John 4:18). Paul warns us: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship" (Rom 8:15). The fear of trouble is precisely something that belongs to our old nature, and that must be overcome! We need to bury that fear and move forward, not get stuck in that fear and end up locked in an intransigent position.

*Can you have a complete spiritual unity without federative unity? Obviously not!*

### No scriptural call?

The other argument Rev. Tuininga introduces in his plea is that the Bible nowhere calls for federative unity. He defends the polity of "local autonomous churches which have a measure of contact and fellowship with other churches." But this is precisely where the shoe pinches! For what is the "measure of contact and fellowship with other churches?" Let's review some of the data.

Paul instructs the churches to care for one another in 1 Corinthians 16:1: "Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia so you are to do." Paul speaks here about directives given to *all* the churches of Galatia! From the concluding chapters in Romans we learn that many churches were involved in the care of the church at Jerusalem: churches in Achaia, Macedonia and Galatia, (Rom 15:26, 27). In 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul applies a rule which concerns *all* the churches of the saints. This is a rule the churches applied *together* under the direction of the apostle Paul. And in 1 Corinthians 11:16 we have a similar reference to communal solidarity: "If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice – nor do the churches of God."

In all of these cases – and more could be mentioned – we find the ground work for the development of the federative bond as it grew in the early Reformed churches in France

and the Netherlands. The local churches are indeed autonomous. But they also have the duty to help and assist each other. And that is clearly a divine obligation! Paul's language indicates that there was a firm tie holding the churches together both in doctrine and in their *practice*.

### Bound together

The scriptural evidence makes clear that the early churches were tied together in a common bond of fellowship, support and commitment. Precisely therein lies the blueprint for a Reformed church polity. To be sure, nothing can be taken away from the autonomy of the local churches. But for the sake of support of all the churches, local churches willingly sacrifice some of their autonomy for the good of all. Just as in a marriage there is give and take, and a conciliatory attitude on issues of direction, so the churches willingly subject themselves to the will and direction of all the churches as long as decisions are made in accordance with God's Word.

### What's inside?

The Lord has blessed the Canadian Reformed and the United Reformed Churches with ever-increasing unity in recent years. In fact, we have entered Phase Two of a relationship which includes such things as pulpit exchanges and table fellowship. However, from time to time, there are calls to slow down, and even to put the goal to federative unity on hold. In his editorial, Dr. J. De Jong makes clear that spiritual unity must work toward federative unity. Anything less would not be pleasing to God.

Dr. R. Faber is presenting the first of two articles on "John Calvin on Psalms and Hymns in Public Worship." The purpose of this article is to provide, in particular, a brief summary of the theological principles Calvin employed in promoting the Genevan Psalter. This is helpful for understanding the role of congregational singing today.

After a brief hiatus, Rev. P.G. Feenstra continues his column, *Living by the Doctrines of Scripture*. His focus is on the celebration of the Lord's Supper, outlining how this is a festival of praise and empowers us in Christ to separate ourselves from sin.

We also have our regular columns: *Observations*, and *Treasures, New and Old*. From a press release of a Classis Contracta of Alberta, we learn that Rev. G.A. Snip has relocated to the Gereformeerde Kerk at Zevenbergen, Netherlands. We wish him the Lord's blessings as he returns to his beloved homeland.

Rev. R. Eikelboom informs us of the activities at a western ministerial in Winnipeg. It is noted that ministers from the URC and OPC were also present. Ministers not only benefit from the academic and practical speeches, but also from the collegiality which they may enjoy with one another. What a blessing that the Lord allows such conferences.

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#### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher

Managing Editor: R. Aasman

Coeditors: J. De Jong, N.H. Gootjes, Cl. Stam

#### ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION

26 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J3

Fax: (780) 418-1506 E-Mail: [raasman@canrc.org](mailto:raasman@canrc.org)

#### ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

(subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.

One Beghin Avenue

Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

Email: [clarion@premier.mb.ca](mailto:clarion@premier.mb.ca)

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## Pleasing for God?

Will God be pleased if there is no effort expended to attain federative unity? Can you have a complete spiritual unity without federative unity? Obviously not! The heart of the communion of saints and the unity of the brotherhood is found in the unity that we share in public worship, and at the Lord's table. It is found in the mutual recognition of each other as faithful believers who want to uphold the Reformed confession and order their church life in a pattern based on this confession.

The prayer of the Lord Jesus was: "that all of them may be one . . ." (John 17:21). Was this a prayer for spiritual unity, but not federative unity? Did Jesus say: "let them be spiritually one, but as federations let them go their own way?"

*The churches of our respective federations will not eagerly move forward if they are continually inundated with the language of hesitation, doubt and reservation.*

## Edified?

Rev. Tuininga also adds: we will then also be edified. But this assertion too comes with little proof and no scriptural support. How will we be edified? Paul says to the Colossians: "For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is" (Col 2:5). Good order and edification here go together. Paul also says to Titus: "The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished . . ." The expression "straighten out" here literally means: "put in order." The unity of faith also requires at the same time the unity of confession and *practice*.

## Standing firm

The bond that stands firm and truly assists the churches is the federative bond in which there is a concern for each other's welfare. This bond does not rule out the autonomy of the local churches, but does qualify it. Churches do not live together in a sort of "free for all." The passages above point to a divine obligation to be of regular assistance and helpful to one another. And that is precisely the goal of the federation. The churches are to help and assist each other in matters of mutual supervision and oversight, and guard each other in the truth.

## Moving ahead

The churches of our respective federations will not eagerly move forward if they are continually inundated with the language of hesitation, doubt and reservation. That is the best way to lead the process to stagnation. Rev. Tuininga is obviously looking backwards to past squabbles and other undisclosed petty differences. He does not disclose any of the "past attitudes and actions" of the Canadian Reformed, but he does say some of them are "still present." If this is the case it would only be proper and brotherly to put these loose accusations on the table so that they can be dealt with fairly and cleared away.

I question Rev. Tuininga's explanation of the low level on the URC vote. Others in the URC have attributed the lower vote to the fact that the American churches hardly know what the CanRC are all about. If we uncritically accept Rev. Tuininga's general accusations, we cannot move forward. We can only look at each other with mistrust and skepticism. We cannot do much more than scowl at each other. And God will be pleased? And we will be edified?

## No dilemmas

It's time we all learned once and for all to abandon the false dilemma between spiritual unity and federative unity. As if you can have one without the other, and still say: this is pleasing to God! Spiritual unity requires federative unity! The two go hand in hand, because this is the love that we owe each other in the communion of saints. That communion must be more than a local reality in which each church "does its own thing." The communion of saints is also found in the regular and ordered assistance that the churches provide to each other not only in cases of discipline, but also in matters of financial support and mutual care.

## The way of love

God calls us all to walk the way of love. That is not a matter of living beside each other while keeping a certain measure of independence and distance from each other. The communion Christ requires is one in which we are bound together in a living faith that affects not only our perspective, but also our practice, and that in every area of life! It is a road of self-denial and growth in obedience. Only by a mutually willing journey on that road can the unity process bear good results. Let us then put away the fear of trouble and strife, and follow the norm of the Saviour. For He calls us to unflinching obedience, regardless of the cost! 

*Dr. J. De Jong is principal and professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario.*

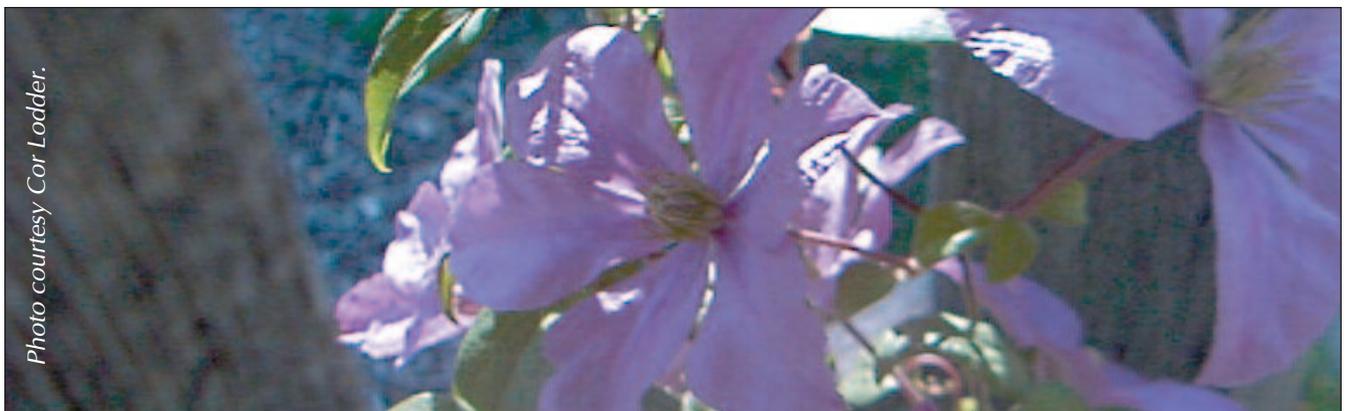


Photo courtesy Cor Loddler.

By M.R. Jagt

## More Victorious in Death than in Life

*“Let me die with the Philistines.” Judges 16:30*

Any person’s last words are noteworthy, but these are particular striking in light of Samson’s past. Twenty years ago, he demanded that his parents go and get him a Philistine girl as his wife. Imagine their shock!

Samson has been their hope for many years, the one who will save them from the Philistines. But the very first thing he does is take one as his wife! Samson dismisses God’s distinction between his people and the world. “Must you go to the *uncircumcised* Philistines to get a wife?” his parents ask (Judg 14:3, italics added). It is only by the grace of God that any good comes of this.

But in Judges 15 we see a different Samson. In the end he recognizes that his own personal struggles with the Philistines are much more than that. He is fighting God’s battles as God’s servant (vs. 18). He is part of that great antithesis between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. “Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the *uncircumcised?*” (15:19, italics added). After Samson recognizes this distinction, God does open up a hollow place and refresh his servant.

But Samson falters. In Judges 16 we read that well-know story of Delilah. Samson confesses to her that he has been a Nazarite since birth, set apart by God. But he doesn’t believe that this is the source of his strength. After his head was shaved and he awoke, he thought he would “go out as before .... But he did not know the LORD had left him” (16:20). It is only when one is set apart in God’s service that there is any strength and victory.

Samson is captured and imprisoned. But his hair begins to grow – what a wonderful sign of grace! God

had promised Samson’s mother he would be a Nazarite from his birth to the day of his death! (Judg 13:7). When the Philistines have a party to celebrate the power of their god (what a misguided delusion!), Samson prays to God with one last, and bold request. And just as he pushes on the pillars of the temple, he cries out “Let me die with the Philistines.”

It is not an appeal to God. Samson has already prayed for God’s help. This is a confession of a man whose eyes have been opened by the Spirit. The Philistines are not simply the enemies of Israel; they are the uncircumcised, the unclean, some of the seed of the serpent. Samson now recognizes that he is no different. He sees how greatly he has sinned against his God by forsaking his calling.

He sees that he deserves to die as a rebel. But does he? There are two kinds of death: the death that is “capital punishment” and the death of a soldier, a martyr. Samson dies the death of a soldier, although he deserves the death of a sinner. In fact, he is more victorious in his death than in his life, we read.

Truly this could only happen through the death of One who was greater Samson!

Our Lord Jesus Christ also made the confession, “Let me die with the Philistines.” He was crucified with two thieves, or better, two rebels on either side of him. These were the people that he identified with. He took our place – we who are rebels before God, by nature unclean, some of the seed of the serpent.

Through this death, Christ extends a great gift to us. We may be distinguished from the world, made holy to God, although we do not deserve it.

Christ creates antithesis, struggle and victory, which are beyond us as sinners. He makes us soldiers and victors with him. Our suffering, even our death, is no longer punishment, but can be used in the service of God. We do not die the death of the Philistines, but may die the death of martyrs! Look at what happens to Samson in the end. His family finds his body and buries him in the tomb of his father Manoah. Samson receives a place in the holy land of Israel.

We, too, confess before God that we deserve to die with the Philistines – and we do die in the midst of an unclean world. But there is more! Christ has taken our place! He separates and sanctifies, He takes up the struggle, He conquers for us and gives us a place in the great holy land!

Through him we can sing “I love Thy saints, with them I am united. And in their midst my soul will be delighted.” (Ps 16:1, *Book of Praise*).



Rev. M.R. Jagt is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Ottawa, Ontario.

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# The Lord's Supper: Feast of Christ's Love

By P.G. Feenstra

The Lord's Supper is a blessed institution established by Christ for the benefit and well-being of his church. At the Lord's Supper we partake of a wonderful spiritual feast! We celebrate the communion we have with the Lord and the unity which binds believers together. When we eat the bread and drink the wine we partake of the body and blood of Christ with the mouth of faith. Christ is our true food and drink unto life eternal. He feeds our hungry and thirsty souls. Every Lord's Supper celebration confirms Christ's immeasurable love for us sinners. He gave his life to give us life.

## The institution and the Passover

In order to appreciate the significance of the celebration of Lord's Supper we should take into consideration when its institution took place. Christ instituted the Supper during the celebration of the Passover. The Passover was the Old Testament feast which was held annually in commemoration of the exodus out of Egypt. The angel of death passed over those houses that had the blood of an offered lamb smeared upon the doorposts.

The Passover consisted of various elements: a lamb which lay roasted on the table, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and a kind of stewed fruit and wine. The lamb would be eaten first. Afterwards, as part of a thanksgiving meal, the bread and several cups of wine were served. The final cup at the table was called the cup of blessing. It was served at the end of the Passover as a climax to the celebration. The wine in the cup symbolized the blood which was shed and the new life which came forth from it. Today this cup of blessing, for which we give thanks, is the communion in the blood of Christ, our Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7). In other words, through his shed blood we share in his life.

Our Lord Jesus Christ takes the elements of the Old Testament sacrament and uses them to institute the sacrament of the New Testament. Notice, not the lamb, but the bread and wine are in the foreground. The symbols of bread and wine are taken from the congregational life of the Old Testament church. We read in Exodus 12 that once the Passover lamb had been eaten, Israel as a congregation, as a holy assembly, had to keep the feast of unleavened bread. If anyone did not keep the Passover, they would be punished with death! When the Lord called them to come and celebrate they had no reason to say, "I do not feel worthy enough to go!"

*Our Lord Jesus Christ takes the elements of the Old Testament sacrament and uses them to institute the sacrament of the New Testament.*

## A feast of remembrance

By celebrating the Passover, Israel would remember how the Lord God had led them out of the house of bondage and placed them in the freedom of his service (Exod 12:14). Not only were they to remember how they had escaped the misery of Egypt but more importantly how they had been freed from an old lifestyle. The Lord had delivered them from the despotism of Pharaoh but especially from the tyranny of sin and idolatry. Every year Israel was reminded of the freedom they received because of God's mighty acts of deliverance.

In Matthew 26, the Lord Jesus Christ celebrates the Passover. But He adds a new element. He does not say, "Take, eat, remember and believe the events

which took place in Egypt so that you can thank the Lord for this." He says, "Do this in remembrance of me!" Jesus sits at this table as the Passover lamb whose blood will be shed on the cross at Golgotha. Thus the exodus out of Egypt reaches its culmination on Calvary's cross. The blood of the true Lamb is shed. Behold the Lamb of God! At the cross, God brings his people out of the house of bondage and frees them through the blood of the Lamb. Our Christian freedom is received through the shedding of blood.

The Old Testament sacrament of Passover looked ahead to the redemption God would grant through the Messiah and we, through the celebration of the Lord's Supper look back to what has been accomplished. We may celebrate the Lord's Supper knowing that through the shedding of his blood Christ not only grants us forgiveness of sins but He also fulfills the righteousness and the holiness which was required of us in our priestly service before God.

## Proclaiming the Lord's death

At the Lord's Supper Christ calls us to remember and believe! To remember is more than to contemplate on something. Remembering is to recall what the Lord has done in the past and to let that determine how you live in the present. Looking back at what Christ accomplished for us we put to death what is earthly and walk in the new obedience – a life that seeks everything in Christ. Thus through the process of remembering we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Cor 11:26). We herald the all-sufficient merit of his perfect sacrifice.

Believers not only attend the Lord's Supper for the strengthening of their faith. By partaking in this celebration they proclaim the good news of Christ's love. John Calvin correctly warns us not to let ourselves get caught in petty disputes about things that are indifferent

(Institutes IV.17.43). Our time is better spent proclaiming, preaching and confessing the good news of the Lord's death. This is what the Lord, our children and the world should hear from those who have celebrated the Lord's Supper; this is the conversation we should expect to hear from each other (C. Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, p. 80).

### *The Lord's Supper is a festival of praise.*

#### **Thanksgiving**

Knowing the character of the Lord's Supper will help us in our celebration. We remember Christ's death but it does not stop there. Thinking results in thanking. The Lord's Supper is a festival of praise. All too often we overlook this aspect of the Lord's Supper. Why do we remember Christ's death? To celebrate and give thanks to the Lord for all that He has done for us. With joy we take the cup of salvation (Ps 116:13). The more we know our own sinful nature, and how we continue to fall short of what the Lord requires of us, the more we see that there is great reason for celebration. A broken spirit is combined with songs of praise! Thus the Lord's Supper is not a funeral service but a festival.

At the Lord's Supper festival we have a full program. We are kept busy observing the riches we share in Christ. Our Lord invites and proclaims, "As certainly as you receive the bread and the cup so certainly I will nourish you, I will feed you to eternal life. Are you lonely? Come! Are you wavering? Come! Are you struggling with daily sins of weakness? Come! Do you live with doubts? Come to the festival where you can see before your eyes my love in action."

#### **A meal of communion**

Believers celebrate the Lord's Supper as communicant members – rejoicing in the communion they have with Christ and one another. Communion is to share a common life and a common goal. We are united together by one Lord and one faith. At the Lord's Supper we celebrate the rich bond we have with God and with one another. We do not celebrate as separate individuals but as a communion of saints, which means that we as members of Christ, have communion with Him and share in all his treasures and gifts (Heidelberg Catechism A. 55). This bond of commu-

nion must grow stronger all the time because Christ is united to us in the same intimacy present in a perfect marriage relationship.

The Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 28 A. 76) uses the language of the song Adam sang when the Lord created Eve to be his wife, to highlight how Christ and his church are one. Adam sang of the intimate communion which is found in marriage between husband and wife. The woman God created was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. This intimacy is also part of the relationship between Christ and his people. For the church is married to Christ. The church is one flesh with Christ her Saviour. That is why He died for her. His death speaks of his inexpressible love for sinners. Although Christ is in heaven and we are on earth there is an intimate bond between Christ and his people.

Living in communion with Christ we have to separate ourselves from sin. Paul warns the church at Corinth that they cannot partake of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. They cannot have communion with the Lord and at the same time hang on to sin and to friends who live in sin. They must shun the worship of idols (1 Cor 10:21). The Corinthians, as sensible people, must judge for themselves that they cannot have communion with the realm of the devil and at the same time consider themselves to be Christian. For the participation at the Lord's Supper pulls you away from the realm of darkness.

#### **Communion with one another**

The communion we have with Christ at the Lord's Supper determines the communion we have with others. More and more we become one with those who share the same faith. We overlook their quirks and weak points just as they will have to overlook ours. A common faith in Christ binds us together as members of the same body. "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of one loaf" (1 Cor 10:17).

John Calvin wrote these meaningful words in his Institutes:

The Lord has intended the Supper to be a kind of exhortation for us, which can more forcefully than any other means quicken and inspire us both to purity and holiness of life, and to love, peace and concord . . . We shall benefit very much from the Sacrament if this thought is impressed and engraved upon our minds: that none of the brethren

can be injured, despised, rejected, abused, or in any way offended by us, without at the same time injuring, despising, and abusing Christ by the wrongs we do; that we cannot disagree with our brethren without at the same time disagreeing with Christ; that we cannot love Christ without loving Him in the brethren; that we ought to take the same care of our brethren's bodies as we take of our own; for they are members of our body; and that as no part of our body is touched by any feeling of pain which is not spread among all the rest, so we ought not to allow a brother to be affected by any evil, without being touched with compassion for him (Institutes IV.17.38).

#### **A divine command**

Jesus Christ governs us by his Word and Spirit and keeps us in the redemption obtained for us. As our King He rules our lives and calls us to obey his commandments. This too is made visible at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is not our choice whether we wish to join the feast of communion. Christ commands me and all believers to bend under his authority and to eat of this broken bread and to drink this cup in remembrance of Him. It is Christ who makes it possible for us to celebrate and who requires that we celebrate. Those who neglect to come to the Lord's table, neglect the communion of the church.

### *Living in communion with Christ we have to separate ourselves from sin.*

Christ does not give the command to celebrate to chastise us but in order that we take with us the guarantee that in Him we are able to struggle against sin. He wants us to confess that we are weak but He is strong. Therefore, let us never devalue what goes on at the table of our Lord. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a feast of Christ's love. In the communion of saints we share in the riches of his grace. Let us, therefore, remember, believe and proclaim his death until He comes again and invites us to the marriage feast of the Lamb.



*Rev. P.G. Feenstra is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Owen Sound, Ontario.*

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# Western Ministerial

By R. Eikelboom

At the end of May, about twenty ministers of the Word exchanged their usual diet of study books, consistory meetings, and pastoral visits, for a couple of days of discussion and fellowship. Most of the ministers who were present are serving Canadian Reformed congregations in British Columbia, Manitoba and Alberta, but we also enjoyed the company of several ministers of the URC and the OPC, as well as a couple of retired ministers. The venue was the recently completed home of the Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church in Winnipeg. The program was prepared by the Revs. K. Jonker and T. van Raalte. In two days the participants were expected to digest and interact with no less than eight papers; tour the historic Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach; prepare for and perform in a concert as a "Minis-

ters' Male Choir." Along the way Rev. C. van Spronsen also taught us some of the finer points of 10- Pin Bowling. At the end of the conference we went home enthused and energized, convinced once again that it is truly a privilege to serve the Lord as shepherds and teachers in his congregations.

On Wednesday morning the Revs. J. Visscher and R. Schouten first presented exegesis papers on Ephesians 4. An exegesis paper is basically the spadework that every minister must do before he can write a sermon. It involves translating the text and developing an understanding of the context so that the message can be clearly explained. Although the two exegesis papers only covered a total of twelve verses, they touched upon numerous aspects of God's salvation work: the eternal purpose of God in choosing a

people for him; the work of Jesus Christ in creating a new mankind; the gift of the Holy Spirit who unites the church; as well as the many other gifts which our Lord and Saviour pours out upon us. Since interpreting and explaining the Scriptures is the ministers' primary task, it was only fitting that this aspect of our work should receive attention. There was also an opportunity to share insights on various commentaries.

The three discussion papers presented in the afternoon focussed on our situation in the world today. First Pastor van Raalte outlined the historical development of the evangelical movement, emphasizing the fact that the evangelical movement was initially a response to the unfaithfulness of the established churches. Especially in the eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield preached to



*Ministerial Choir*

the people “as if they mattered,” while the established churches were rationalistic and formalistic. In the following speech – from Rev. W. DeJong of the URC in Grande Prairie, Alberta – we were shown how far modern evangelicals have drifted away from their roots. In a dialogue between evangelical leaders and the Roman Catholic Church, on many issues the Roman Catholic position is more biblical than the evangelicals. Finally, Rev. Eikelboom challenged us to consider whether churches are still relevant in the twenty-first century. Because sermons are easily accessed via radio, television, and Internet, the need to attend worship services and belong to an actual congregation is not always obvious and continually needs to be demonstrated to God’s people.

On Thursday morning Mr. Frank Ezinga, organist of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, B.C., spoke to us about the history and character of the “Genevan tunes.” Mr. Ezinga rejected the popular myth that Genevan tunes were based on folk songs or other popular tunes. Instead, he demonstrated that (at least some) Genevan tunes are adaptations of the tunes that were being used in the churches before the Reformation. From a more practical perspective, the speaker did not insist that we must maintain “Genevan Psalmody” (or: Calvin’s Psalter as he calls it); nevertheless he was able to point out numerous qualities which we should not dismiss lightly.

Another very worthwhile contribution was made by Mr. Allard Gunnink, principal of Immanuel Christian School. Mr. Gunnink explained the Song of Solomon for us. You may wonder why a school-principal should be explaining



*Rev. W. De Jong, guest speaker from the URC*



*Frank Ezinga, guest speaker*

the Bible to ministers. The speaker answered this question by pointing out that he has to deal with many teenagers while the world is bombarding these teenagers with sexual images. Thus the Christian school has a duty to counteract, even to pre-empt these images, and this can be done biblically using

the Song of Solomon. Again the presentation was followed by a discussion that did not answer all questions, but instead whetted our appetite for a deeper understanding of the Scriptures.

The rest of the conference was less academic, but no less stimulating and satisfying. Our visit to the Mennonite village of Steinbach gave us a wonderful impression of what life must have been like on the prairies a century ago. However, it was also a most sobering experience because we saw what appeared to be a closely-knit cultural group without a firm religious basis. After a delicious meal at “The Dutch Connection” we hurried back to Winnipeg where we enjoyed an evening of music and singing with our Manitoban brothers and sisters. And then it was back to our families, and our congregations; back to the wonderful work of ministry of the Word. 



*Rev. J. Mulder, retired minister*

*Rev. R. Eikelboom is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Calgary, Alberta.*

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# John Calvin on Psalms and Hymns in Public Worship

## Part 1: Introduction, Sources, and Influences

By R. Faber

### 1. Introduction

The Genevan Psalter is enjoying a remarkable amount of scholarly and popular interest around the world. Earlier this year the second of three international conferences dedicated to the song book was held in Germany. The theme was the reception of the Genevan Psalter in Germany and the Netherlands during the sixteenth century, and presentations ranged in topic from the influence of John Calvin to the early Dutch psalters. This continued interest by theologians, musicologists and historians is of benefit to modern Reformed churches, including those in North America. Not only do the current studies serve to answer some long-standing questions about the Genevan Psalter, but they also remind our generation of the historical significance and present value of the song book. Like a gem inherited from distant ancestors, the Genevan Psalter continues to shine with unfading lustre. And given the increasing contact between churches of Reformed and other backgrounds, it is useful to know the exact worth of this psalter.

The *Book of Praise* used by the Canadian Reformed Churches and some of their English-speaking sister churches is a collection of psalms and songs from various ages and cultures, from the early Christian church to the English Puritans. The largest and most prominent section comprises the versified psalms of the Old Testament. Many of these appeared in the Genevan Psalter, published in definitive form in 1561. The single most important influence in the formation of the psalter was that of John Calvin, whose theological writings and system-

atic organization of the church greatly affected the composition of the book. Indeed, from the beginnings of the Dutch Reformed churches until the present, it is Calvin's influence which has affected the worship of the church in song.

While it is well-known that Calvin played a role in the formation of the Psalter, the principles and expressed basis for the song-book are not discussed frequently. The modern Reformed believer may know little of the reasons for the choice of songs in the psalter, of the music that accompanies it, or even why the psalms are so prominent. The purpose of this article is

*The single most important influence in the formation of the psalter was that of John Calvin, whose theological writings and systematic organization of the church greatly affected the composition of the book.*

to provide a brief summary of especially the theological principles Calvin employed in promoting the Genevan Psalter. In the first part we shall consider the background to Calvin's thought, and note the various influences upon him; these include the Bible, church fathers, classical principles of music and song, and contemporary influences like fellow Reformers and personal experience. In the second installment we shall examine Calvin's definition of psalm-singing, his un-

derstanding of the purpose and goal of congregational singing, the contents and form of the psalms to be sung, and some practical considerations.

### 2. Sources

Calvin's views of the nature and purpose of singing in corporate worship are expressed in a variety of sources, which should be noted briefly. The role of singing is mentioned first in the *Draft Ordinances for the Organization of the Church at Geneva* (1537), in which Calvin points out that "the psalms can incite us to lift up our hearts to God and move us to a zeal in invoking and exalting with praises the glory of His name."<sup>1</sup> A first, small edition of some psalms appeared in 1539, and it reflects Calvin's early thought about singing in worship. Then there are the more developed *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of 1541, which were followed a year later by the *Form of Prayers and Ecclesiastical Songs* (1542) with an introductory "Epistle to the Reader." This preface is an important source for our understanding of Calvin's attitude towards music and corporate worship. Yet another important source is the Introduction to the *Commentary upon the Psalms*, which appeared first in 1557; readers of this magazine who possess the series of Calvin's commentaries may wish to read this introduction. One could consult the commentaries also for Calvin's observations upon several relevant texts in the Old and New Testament. And there are several sermons in which Calvin touches upon worship in the old and new dispensation; we shall have occasion to refer to his sermon on 1 Samuel 18:1-16. The commentaries and sermons are significant sources, for they concern

the Reformer's understanding of how Scripture applies to public worship. Lastly, we should note the *Institutes* (esp. 3.20.32), in which public prayers and singing are placed in Calvin's broader theological system. Taken together, then, these writings provide a considerable body of evidence for Calvin's thinking about the singing of psalms and hymns in public worship.

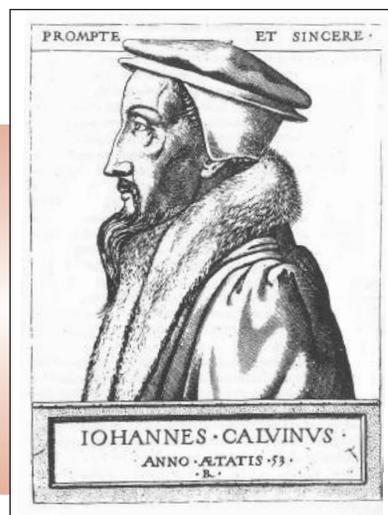
### 3. Influences

In developing his thoughts on the use of psalms and hymns in public worship, Calvin was influenced primarily by the Bible and the writings of the church fathers. Other influences include classical principles of music and song, the works of contemporary Reformers such as Martin Bucer, and Calvin's own reaction to Roman Catholicism.

*One will find a suitable psalm to sing in times of persecution, bereavement, or temptation. In the sixteenth century people were conscious of what they were singing.*

### 3.1 Scripture

As we shall observe below, Calvin extracted from the Old and New Testaments as much evidence as he could regarding corporate worship. While demoting the power of ecclesiastical tradition and canon law, Calvin promoted the significance of biblical teaching that pertains to communal singing. This desire to return to the source of the Christian faith was premised on the conviction that the old and new covenants were essentially one, and that the Old Testament continues to inform the current worship of the church. Furthermore, Calvin sought to place the singing of psalms and hymns in the broader context of the relation between God and the chosen people who worship Him. An appreciation of Calvin's interpretation of the relevant Bible passages is useful for the modern Reformed believer, for it helps one to understand the scriptural grounds on which the views were based. Later in this article we shall see the number of occasions Calvin uses Scripture for the basis of his writing on psalm-singing.



### 3.2 Church fathers

Calvin found confirmation of the importance of biblical teaching for corporate worship in the writings of the church fathers, especially Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers, and Augustine. In their writings Calvin also was reminded of the abiding value of the Book of Psalms. In the preface to Jerome's commentary on this bible-book, Calvin could read that "although David wrote the Psalms, nevertheless they all pertain to the person of Christ." This Christological interpretation, according to which the psalms are read as having an important function in the history of redemption and revelation, gives the psalms a role in the church of the second dispensation. Hilary of Poitiers had written in the introduction to his treatise on the psalms that "those things which are said in the psalms ought to be understood in light of the evangelical gospel." By this he meant that the psalms speak not only of the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, but also of justification, sanctification, and other doctrines whereby believers conduct their lives.

Of the church-fathers it was Augustine who most influenced Calvin in the matter of psalm-singing. Augustine interpreted the psalms as expressing the bond between the Lord Jesus Christ and the church. The psalms are to be sung not only as the psalms of David, earthly king of the people of Israel, but as the songs of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the church that is his body. The psalms of prayer, of lamentation, and of praise lend voice to the prayers, laments and praises of Jesus Christ and of the church. This interpretation of the psalms is based upon biblical evidence: witness the many times

when the Lord Jesus, or the apostles, or other believers in the New Testament quoted or referred to passages from the psalms in their times of distress, joy, or worship.

While the generation before Calvin had not employed the Psalms in a way that sees the unity of the old and new covenants, the Geneva Reformer understood that their catholic character leads to a new appreciation of their current value. Perhaps there are believers today who question the relevance of the psalms for their own circumstances and the circumstances of the church. In contrast to scholastics and Anabaptists Calvin and the other Reformers argued that the substantial identity of God's revelation to the Hebrew people and to the Christians proves the ongoing relevance of the psalms. Since the Old Testament is to be read together with the New, the prophecies and psalms pertain to current life. For matters of politics, history, culture, and so forth,

*Contrary to this sacral view of singing, Calvin and the other Reformers stressed the priesthood of all believers, according to which everyone, as member of the body of Christ, should participate.*

the Old Testament remains relevant; the people of God today are one with the people of Israel. In practical terms, this means that the psalms address the



Psalm 137 in the 1539  
Aulcuns Pseaulmes et  
Cantiques

Psalm 23 in the 1561  
Geneva Psalter



entire life of the modern believer: the sorrow caused by sin, the plight and hardships of life in this broken world, the antithesis between faith and unbelief, forgiveness, and so forth.

This immediate relevance of the psalms is shown in the 1561 edition of the Psalter. In it each psalm is prefaced by a brief summary of its content and meaning. For Psalm 2, for example, we read that “here we see how David and his kingdom form a true image and sure prophecy of Jesus Christ and his Reign.” In other words, when the congregation sang a psalm, it knew its subject and theme, its historic and Christological context, and its application to the life of the believer. What is more, the edition has a two-page topical index, listing psalms appropriate for each circumstance. One will find a suitable psalm to sing in times of persecution, bereavement, or temptation. In the sixteenth century people were conscious of what they were singing.

We have lingered over the matter of the primacy of the Old Testament psalms for two reasons. First, it is characteristic of Calvin and the Reformed churches to see the Book of Psalms as the primary source of the songs of the catholic church. Second, the observa-

tions above help to explain why the Genevan Psalter and modern psalters based upon it, give pride of place to the versified one hundred and fifty psalms. When we recall the historical context in which David or another psalmist was inspired to compose the psalm, when we understand the prophetic quality in the psalm, and when we see the place of it in the history of redemption, we appreciate better its current value. Most importantly, perhaps, to grasp the role of psalm-singing in the liturgy, we need to recall the Reformed understanding of Scripture, of the unity of the testaments, and of the place of the psalms in the history of revelation. In an age of countless religious songs, we do well to sing the Psalms understandingly.

### 3.3 Classical principles

Regarding theories of music and song, Calvin was influenced especially by the Greek philosopher Plato. The ancient Greeks were interested in the relation between music and poetry, which often was sung to the accompaniment of an instrument. Plato had argued that there is a close parallel between music and the human soul; the ability of music to influence the soul,

therefore, was considerable. Calvin was affected also by the simple statement that singing consists of two elements: music and text. Since the combination of music and text is a powerful one, great care should be taken to determine that both the content of the song and the nature of the accompanying music be beneficial to the soul. Plato – and Calvin following him – considered music secondary to the text; music serves as a means whereby the words touch the human soul more effectively.

Plato’s thinking affected Calvin also through the intermediate influence of Augustine, who in the *Confessions* (bk. 10, ch. 33) discusses the fine line between proper and improper worship of God in song. According to Augustine, singing affects the mind and the heart, and so alters one’s knowledge as well as feelings. He writes, “our spiritual feelings, in keeping with their variety, have corresponding modes of voice and song, and are excited by a kind of inner familiarity.”<sup>2</sup> What he means is that the type of music which accompanies the text should be appropriate to the contemplation of God and the praise of his mercy. When the music is proper, it causes one’s spirit to rise and aspire to greater piety; when it is improper, music can cause the feelings to surpass the thoughts, and “when it so happens that I am moved more by the singing than by what is sung, I confess that I have sinned (247).” Augustine records the story of another church-father who held that the psalms of David should be recited and not sung, in order to avoid the danger of giving a dominant role to the emotions. Augustine concludes that we should be “not moved by the singing but by the things sung, when they are sung by clear voices and fitting modulation (247).”

It will be obvious to the reader that Augustine reflects ideas of his time, such as self-denial, the dominance of reason over feeling, and a general austerity in worship foreign to our normless age. To some extent he influenced Calvin with these values, and especially in the notion that music has a powerful influence upon the soul. Several times, when discussing the impact of bad music accompanying a good text, the Reformer quotes the saying that bad company ruins good morals. Calvin therefore makes a sharp distinction between music that serves as entertainment and music that supports worship. The song, he thinks, should be expressed in a manner that befits its nature

and purpose. Stated positively, Calvin holds that singing may encourage the soul to aspire to greater devotion and piety. Indeed, when one considers that the purpose of psalm-singing is the glorification of God, the edification of believers, and the betterment of morals, one realizes how much care should be taken in determining the type of music that accompanies the text.

### 3.4 Contemporary influences

There are two major influences from Calvin's own time that affected the Reformer's thinking on psalm-singing: 1) the teaching of Martin Bucer and the practice of the Church at Strassbourg; 2) Calvin's own reaction to Roman Catholic ideas about worship. When Calvin was developing his own ideas, Martin Bucer already had formed a clear program for the public worship services at Strassbourg, where Calvin first was exposed to congregational song in 1538. Although it appears Calvin didn't read German, it seems that Bucer's model for the Reformed liturgy depicted in *Justification and Demonstration from Holy Scripture* (1524) was known to Calvin. This tract, which includes a discussion of the various elements of the worship service, concludes with a chapter on congregational prayer and song. With references to 1 Corinthians 14, Colossians 3:16, Matthew 16:30, and Ephesians 5:19,

Bucer applies biblical teaching to his understanding of corporate worship. This scriptural basis for including both public prayer and public song in the service was later used by Calvin to justify congregational singing in Geneva. In a letter to his colleague Farel (1538), Calvin expresses the desire to compile a collection of psalms, and the little booklet that appeared in 1539 became the basis for the Huguenot Psalter.

It was also in response to Roman Catholic principles and practices of singing during the services that Calvin developed his ideas about corporate song. In Calvin's time the view that psalm-singing belongs to the special office of priest was prevalent; believers had no active part in the offering of praise to God. Specially trained choristers would perform the Graduals and Alleluias, while worshippers listened. Contrary to this sacral view of singing, Calvin and the other Reformers stressed the priesthood of all believers, according to which everyone, as member of the body of Christ, should participate. Calvin did not promote choir-singing in worship services on the grounds that it suggests the active participation of the entire congregation is not required. Reformed worship involves the congregation in every element of the liturgy. For the modern Reformed church Calvin's reaction is a healthy reminder that the worship service cannot be divided into



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sections in which certain people perform; rather, from the preaching of the gospel to glorification in song, the service requires the intimate involvement of all believers.

<sup>1</sup>Quotations of Calvin derive from the Works of Calvin (*Opera Calvini* = CO) within the series *Corpus Reformatorum*; the passage cited occurs in CO 10, 5.

<sup>2</sup>Augustinus, *Confessiones*, X, 33, ed. M. Skutella, Stuttgart 1969, 246; further quotations of Augustine derive from this edition.



*Dr. R. Faber is professor and chair of Classical Studies at the University of Waterloo. [rfaber@watarts.uwatero.ca](mailto:rfaber@watarts.uwatero.ca)*

## PRESS RELEASE



### Press Release of Classis Contracta, Alberta, June 11, 2002

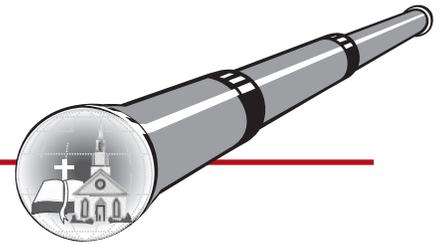
On behalf of the convening church at Calgary, Rev. R. Eikelboom opened the meeting by reading Proverbs 15:16-29 and prayer. He welcomed the brothers and noted that this Classis Contracta was convened because Rev. G. A. Snip, minister of the Immanuel Church at Edmonton, had accepted a call to the Gereformeerde Kerk at Zevenbergen, the Netherlands. Rev. Eikelboom informed Classis that all the churches in Alberta had been informed of this

meeting. It was noted that only the churches at Calgary and Coaldale sent delegates.

After the credentials were examined, Rev. J. van Popta was appointed chairman and Rev. Eikelboom was appointed clerk. The agenda was adopted, and then the documents provided by the Church at Edmonton were examined. They were all found to be in good order. Consequently Classis decided to grant an honourable release to Rev. Snip. A Classical Certificate of Release was approved and signed.

During question period it was noted that some of the documentation was in Dutch, and no English translation was provided. Classis concurred that it would be beneficial for the churches if all foreign language documents were translated into English. Classis noted, however, that the classical regulations do not require this. The acts were adopted and the press release was approved before the chairman led in closing prayer.

*For Classis,  
Rev. R. Eikelboom*



## Drama in the Worship Service

By G.Ph. van Popta

In my last column I noted some observations I had made during a monthly local event billed as a “Contemporary Worship Service.” I had said that the service consisted of three main components: a message, songs, and a drama clip. I reflected somewhat on the singing and ended by saying that I would, next, write about the drama clip.

The play was performed behind a white sheet with a bright light shining on the back of it. Between the light and the sheet were the performers. It starts with a man attacking another man. He clubs him over the head and steals his wallet. At this point a third man walks on to the scene. He talks to the thief who then breaks down to cry and to worship in front of the third man. More people enter the scene. They roughly grab the two men and hoist them up on crosses. Obviously the one man is the Lord Jesus Christ and the other is the thief who repented.

### Appropriate?

Is drama appropriate in a worship service – even a “Contemporary Worship Service?” The question of the dramatization of the biblical narrative has been dealt with at least twice in this magazine. Back in the mid-1970s, a series of articles by the Rev. G. van Rongen was published.<sup>1</sup> In the 1995, this magazine returned to the topic when it published an article by the Rev. J. L. van Popta.<sup>2</sup> Both authors concluded that the dramatization of biblical narrative is inappropriate and ought not to be done. Repeating all the arguments put forward cogently by the Rev. Messrs. van Rongen and van Popta would take us too far afield. Let these questions posed by Rev. van Popta in his article suffice:

Bible dramas . . . present us with some . . . problems:

- a. Who would dare to play God?
- b. Who would dare to play the sinless Jesus Christ?
- c. Who would dare to play Judas, the son of perdition?
- d. Would anyone dare to play Satan in a drama about the Fall, or in the story of Job or the account of Christ’s temptation?
- e. Who would dare to play the resurrection of the Lord?
- f. Would anyone dare to repeat the words of Thomas, “My Lord and my God,” as he knelt before a sinful creature, a fellow student?
- g. Would any dare to be Peter and deny the Lord?

- h. Would any dare to be Pilate and condemn the Lord Jesus?
- i. Dramas depicting the crucifixion would necessarily become very emotional and superficial. The audience as it participated and experienced the pain of the cross would miss the real meaning of the cross. The Lord Jesus would become a tragic figure in a martyr play.<sup>3</sup>

### Closer to home

Shortly after I had visited the local “Contemporary Worship Service” someone mentioned to me a worship service of one of our Dutch sister churches that included drama and could be viewed on the Internet.<sup>4</sup> I took a look and was somewhat taken aback. It went like this:

It is a Palm Sunday service, March 24th, 2002, in the Gereformeerde Kerk (vrij-

gemaakt) in Groningen-Oost. After the consistory entered, the children of the congregation spent about 10 minutes walking up and down all the aisles waving (palm?) branches in the air. Meanwhile, a fellow, in dungarees, was standing on the podium playing a guitar. Once the service had begun with votum, salutation and a song, all the little children were invited forward for a children’s sermon delivered by the minister. On the pulpit was a large 4 x 8 poster of Jesus on a donkey being praised by the pilgrims. Up and down the sides of the auditorium were banners of pilgrims (at one point the minister asked everyone to look around and see the pilgrims). Then the children, led by some well-meaning moms, sang for the congregation accompanied by the fellow with the guitar. Chaos reigned when the children returned to their pews. Some young people led in a prayer for a blessing over the service and did the scripture readings. The minister preached on Matthew 21. After the sermon another group of children (a little older than the first group) came forward to sing some more songs for the congregation. This was led by some more well-meaning moms and accompanied by the fellow on the guitar.

The contrast between the traditional black-suited consistory and the “contemporary” service was very striking. I thought to myself: “I know synods don’t read newspapers or watch worship services on the Internet, but really, ought we not to be calling our Dutch sister churches to account for this kind

*The preaching of the gospel of Christ has been relevant for 2000 years.*

of stuff?" And then I thought: "If this were going on in the United Reformed Churches, Phase II would be phased out pretty quickly."

The move to be relevant tends to make a church irrelevant. The preaching of the gospel of Christ has been relevant for 2000 years. Likely it will remain so. After all, it is the way God ordained for the seed of regeneration to be sown. The Word of God says that people are born again by the Holy Spirit who works faith by the preaching of God's Word. A church that sticks to that and eschews every attempt to be relevant by adding drama – or children's sermons and special music – to the worship service will still be relevant long from now.

<sup>1</sup>Clarion, Vol. 24 (1975): 22, Year End issue; Vol.25 (1976): 1-6. These articles can also be viewed on the Internet at [http://spindleworks.com/library/vanrongen/word\\_play.htm](http://spindleworks.com/library/vanrongen/word_play.htm).

<sup>2</sup>Clarion, Vol. 44 (1995): No. 22. This article can also be viewed on the Internet at [http://www.spindleworks.com/library/vanpopta/bible\\_play.htm](http://www.spindleworks.com/library/vanpopta/bible_play.htm).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>See [www.gvgroningen.nl](http://www.gvgroningen.nl), the website of the Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) in Groningen.



Rev. G. Ph. van Popta is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Ancaster, Ontario.

## *“Passover” Fulfilled by a new “Lord Supper” Covenant*

All those in me, come, celebrate,  
Eat your unleavened bread!  
My saving Grace commemorate,  
Held Pure from plague and dread.

Exodus 12:14-17

Now come, eat, drink, in Me anew,  
Feast on My Heavenly Bread!  
My Manna pours forth like the dew,  
My love-feast I have spread.

1 Corinthians 11:24

“Until I come,” such Love, these words,  
Let every soul proclaim  
In songs of praise with heartfelt chords,  
For Christ knows us by name.

My broken body ransomed you,  
Take, eat, My bread I give,  
Likewise the wine poured out, it's true,  
My blood, so you may live!

Come to His feast with contrite heart,  
Trust Christ the King, believe.  
He cleansed us, set from vice apart,  
Absolved! All sins that grieve.

“Until I come!” How His words soar,  
They fill the whole wide Earth;  
Redeemed! His bride forever more . . .  
Nothing has greater Worth!

A. Blokhuis  
April 7, 2002

By Aunt Betty



## Dear Busy Beavers

I haven't had any mail for a very long time. My mailbox is very empty. It seems that all the Busy Beavers are really busy beavers.

Do you think you can spare a little time during your holidays to write to me? Will you make up a puzzle for me to put into Our Little Magazine? Can you whip up some jokes and riddles to share with the rest of the Busy Beavers? I love jokes and riddles.

I would love to hear from you all.

Lots of love,  
Aunt Betty

## Jokes

There was confusion at a bank today. A man rushed in and pointed his finger at one of the staff.

"This is a muck-up," he said.

"Don't you mean a hold-up?" said the bank teller.

"No, it's a muck-up. I've forgotten my gun!"

Why is a pearl small and white?

*If it was big and red, it would be a fire engine.*

What lies under your bed at night with its tongue hanging out?

*Your shoe!*

What did the egg say to the whisk?

*"I know when I'm beaten."*

Why was the musician arrested?

*For getting into treble.*

What is the best way to tell people they have bad breath?

*By telephone.*

## Puzzles

### Right Relations!

What relation was:

- |                          |                                    |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Jethro to Moses       | 7. Ahab to Jehoram?                |
| 2. Rebekah to Laban?     | 8. Enoch to Noah?                  |
| 3. Lot to Abraham?       | 9. Naomi to Ruth?                  |
| 4. Jonathan to Saul?     | 10. Lois to Timothy?               |
| 5. Jesse to Boaz?        | 11. Esther to Mordecai?            |
| 6. Andrew to Simon Peter | 12. Elisabeth to John the Baptist? |

## Give the Direction

1. God planted the garden ... of Eden.
2. The temple in Jerusalem, the Lord's house, looked . . .
3. An . . . wind brought locusts during the plagues in Egypt.
4. The men from the . . . came to Jerusalem seeking the Christ Child.
5. Jonah sat on the . . . side of the city of Nineveh.
6. Abraham traveled in this direction when he left Haran . . .
7. After the Flood, God made a . . . wind to pass over the earth.
8. Galilee was . . . of Samaria.
9. Jesus said to the people, "When you see a cloud rise out of the . . ."
10. Mt Carmel was . . . of Jerusalem.



## Birthdays

### July

### August

- |                       |                      |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Janelle VanHalteren | 4 Michelle DeBoer    |
| 13 Rebekah Barendregt | 6 Hannah Bergsma     |
| 16 William Bouma      | 10 Debbie Olson      |
| 24 Jessamy Vegter     | 28 Nathan VanderLaan |
| 30 Becca Brasz        |                      |



**Aunt Betty**

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