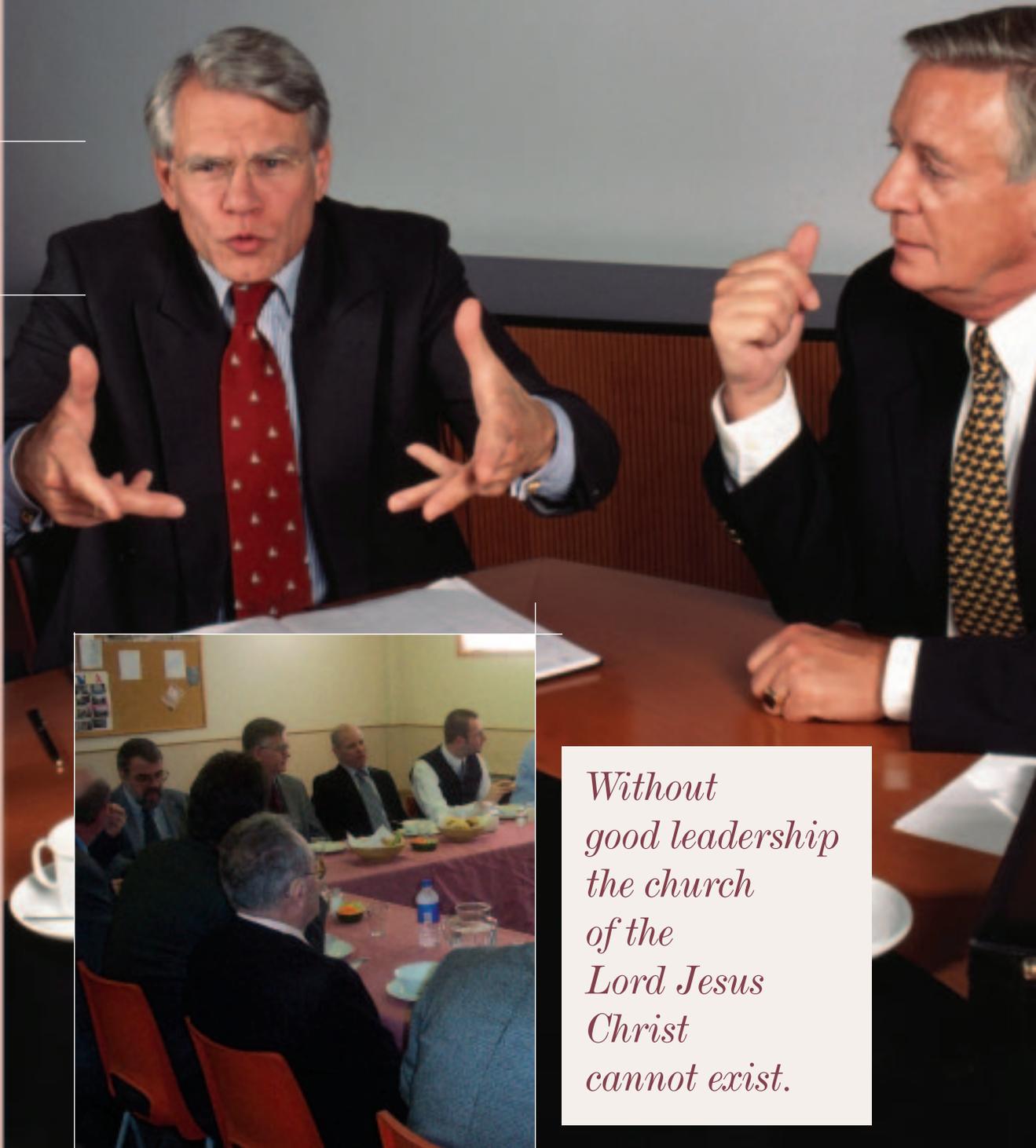


*Seeking Office
in the Church?*

*Lessons for
Unfaithful
Judah*

*Ray of
Sunshine*



*Without
good leadership
the church
of the
Lord Jesus
Christ
cannot exist.*



W.B. Slomp

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Seeking Office in the Church?

A consistory has to be careful that it does not exclude potential office bearers for the wrong reasons.

There is a constant need to fill the vacancies in the offices of the church. We may be thankful that time and again many of those vacancies are filled and that the Lord continues to provide leadership in the church. Without good leadership the church of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot exist.

However, there are often disappointments. Some people wonder why a certain person is chosen and not another person. They see flaws in the system and question whether or not biblical criteria were properly applied.

The Scriptures teach us that the office should seek the man, not the man the office.

The question is, who is qualified, how are those qualifications to be determined, and is the system flawed?

Who is qualified?

Technically, in the case of elders and deacons, any male member who is a communicant member and who shows that he takes his responsibilities to the Lord and his people seriously should be eligible for the office. However, some are automatically excluded because they are either too young, or too old, or because they do not have the necessary physical or mental health. These men, of course, are not lesser members of the church, or less worthy than others. On the contrary, the Lord uses all kinds of people to promote his kingdom, including severely handicapped persons who will never serve as office bearers.

The Lord wants to use qualified men to rule the church, and biblical criteria ought to be applied in determining their

eligibility. In applying these criteria, passages in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 usually receive the emphasis. Those passages, however, are far from exhaustive. All the qualities of a Christian ought to be considered. In addition, passages that speak about the fruit of the Spirit and other such passages must be taken into account as well.

A consistory has to be careful that it does not exclude potential office bearers for the wrong reasons. It is tempting, for example, to leave someone off the list who holds others accountable and who is not afraid to speak his mind. Such men are needed, for consistories can and do make mistakes, and they need to be pointed out and admitted, otherwise the congregation will become frustrated with the leadership and it will suffer.

The desire for the office

As stated earlier, people at times are disappointed about the process and the result of office bearer selection. For example, there are those who truly desire the office and who have even prepared themselves for the office in various ways but are often overlooked. Are they being unfairly denied the opportunity to serve as an office bearer in the church? For Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:1, "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task." This text seems to suggest that men who actively pursue the role of office bearer in the church should be given a position. However, it is important to understand Paul's intentions in this text. Paul is simply stating that it is good to desire office in the church. But it is important to distinguish between *desiring* the obtainment of office and *insisting* upon the obtainment of office. The Scriptures teach us that the office should seek the man, not the man the office. That is what we read, for example in Hebrews 5:4: "No one takes this honour upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was."



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If we carefully examine the passage in Timothy in light of the context in which it was written, then it becomes clear what Paul means in this text. During Paul's days it was difficult enough to be a Christian, let alone to be an office bearer. These people were persecuted. They suffered many hardships. Having an official function in the church only increased the likelihood and the severity of such persecution. Therefore, it was not an office that people desired. They saw the great sacrifices that would have to be made, and also the responsibility that came with the office.

Within that context Paul says in effect, "If you want to be an office bearer in the church then you are actually desiring a good thing. For when you desire that office, then you desire a noble task." As he makes clear throughout his letters, he knows how difficult it is to be an office bearer. He himself suffered many hardships and much abuse from without and within. But he also knows that the office has many rewards of its own.

Inside . . .

In his editorial, Rev. W. B. Slomp demonstrates that office bearers in our churches are chosen according to biblical directives and that it is important to keep this in mind. He also shows that not everyone is chosen or can be chosen to be an office bearer. However, everyone – office bearer or not – is fruitfully involved in the work of God's kingdom.

Dr. R. Faber continues his two-part series dealing with the relation of church and school in historical perspective. The following quotation makes clear where he is going with this: "I would suggest that we are living in a time when many Reformed believers underestimate the importance of the link between church and school, and of the significance of collaboration between home, church and school in the nurture and education of children."

We have the next instalment of reformedevangelism.com, along with our regular columns *Ray of Sunshine*, *Treasures, New and Old*, and *Children's Catechism*.

We have press releases from Classis Niagara and Northern Ontario. We also have the official press release of General Synod Chatham. The press release is a little late and it has been pre-empted by the Internet, some articles and the official Acts. Nevertheless, it allows us to have a "refresher course" of the main decisions by our Synod. I enjoyed it.

RA

IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – Seeking Office in the Church?
— *W.B. Slomp*410

Treasures New and Old – Lessons for Unfaithful Judah
— *D.M. Boersma*413

Ray of Sunshine
— *C. Gelms and E. Nordeman*414

The Churches' Care for the Schools:
The Relation between Church and School in
Historical Perspective (2) — *R. Faber*415

reformedevangelism.com — *D. Moes*419

Children's Catechism — *J. Wiskerke Van Dooren*420

Press Releases — General Synod of the Canadian
Reformed Churches, Classis Niagara,
Classis Northern Ontario421

We can easily see a parallel to the situation discussed by Paul when we look at the state of the office of the teaching elder, the minister, in our current context. Nowadays there are few men who present themselves to the Theological College to begin training for the ministry. Many young men will tell you that they are not really willing to make the sacrifice. They find that the study is too long, and too difficult. They would rather go to work and make money.

And those who do not mind studying for a long time would rather pursue another professional career. The ministry is more demanding than many other professions because there is a lot of demand on your time. Also, as a minister, you live in a glass house – you and your family are always in the public eye. You are prone to be criticized. In addition, the material rewards of the ministry are often not as high as other professional or business careers. For these reasons, and others, most young men do not want to make the sacrifice required in becoming a minister.

Following a certain course of study or preparation does not automatically qualify you for the office.

Paul's words in I Timothy 3 remind the reader that we must consider other things as well when reflecting on whether to pursue office of minister in the church. He reminds us that it is a noble task. It is something you *should* desire. The rewards may not be the same as other careers, but the ministry has rewards not found in other careers. As a minister you deal with the hearts and the souls of God's people. You have to be busy all the time with God's works. And that comes with wonderful rewards.

And the same thing is true for all office bearers. To be an elder means that there will be demands on your time and energy. It means that you will have to make yourself vulnerable for criticism. For in leadership positions you are always being second-guessed. There are many sacrifices to be made. It is not easy to be an elder or a deacon. Yet, like the ministry, it has many rewards – spiritual rewards. The greatest reward is that you can be an instrument in God's hand to bring others to faith, and to bring about healing. Also, if you are not afraid of criticism, there is a great opportunity for personal growth in the Lord.

Personal honour?

Given all of this, let us return to the issue presented earlier. Some men are chronically left off the list, or are rejected by the congregation. Indeed, it may be because all their qualities are not properly considered. Everyone is responsible to the Lord to choose in accordance with biblical criteria. Nevertheless, the Lord calls through the congregation, and the congregation therefore has the final say as to who shall serve in the office. That is also the example we have from Scripture. When the church needed deacons in order to relieve the workload of the apostles, then all those assembled there were involved in choosing these men (Acts 6:1-6). They decided who possessed the biblical qualifications for the office.

Some men seek the office for personal honour. Others do not have the right temperament to be an effective office bearer. As James says, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1). And therefore not everyone should be an office bearer.

It is indeed disappointing when those who truly desire the office do not get chosen. But, just following a certain course of study or preparation does not automatically qualify someone for the office. There are other matters to take into consideration.

It is wonderful to be able to serve Him, no matter what your position.

It is true that our system of choosing office bearers is not perfect. Because we are sinful people, it can't be perfect. We certainly do not have perfect office bearers either. And that is why it is humbling that in spite of their sin the Lord allows them to serve in the office. But office bearers in our churches *are* chosen according to biblical directives. There is no better system.

For those who are not chosen, it is important to remember that you do not have to be a minister or an elder or a deacon to in order to be fruitful in God's kingdom. There are many other ways in which to serve the Lord. It is wonderful to be able to serve Him, no matter what your position. For then we honour God's Name, and that is what it is all about.



D.M. Boersma

Lessons for Unfaithful Judah

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MATTHEW 13:52

I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery.

Jeremiah 3:8

When you do something wrong, you can respond in different ways. You can try to cover up your mistakes and act as if nothing happened. Or you swallow your pride, admit that you were wrong, and learn from it.

How about learning from other people's mistakes? This is even better, if it prevents you from repeating their mistakes.

Downhill

This is what God was teaching the people of Judah: what happened to Israel (the ten tribes) should be a lesson for them.

God calls Israel by a nickname: Faithless. If you know the history of the ten tribes, you will not find this too harsh. The Northern tribes rapidly went downhill on the path of idolatry under Jeroboam, who introduced the golden calves, and Ahab, whose wife Jezebel introduced the worship of Baal and Asherah. Their sins continued to grow during many centuries.

They had been like an unknown girl who suddenly became a celebrity because she married a king. However, by their idolatry, the people of Israel had committed spiritual adultery and threw away the glorious position they had received. Therefore God put a stop to it and sent the Northern tribes into exile in 722 B.C.

No worries

When Jeremiah spoke these words, it was almost 100 years after the deportation of the Northern tribes. Judah should have learned from this and stopped with their sins.

Maybe you think Judah was not as bad as Israel. A short excursion to their history is enough to remove this wrong impression. The book of 2 Chronicles

describes how the downslide began under Solomon, the greatest of the kings of Judah. Under Rehoboam, having been brought up under the influence of the foreign wives of his father, the downslide continued. During his reign, the idol worship was in full swing and sacred stones and high places were strewn across Judah's landscape. Of all the kings from Rehoboam to Josiah, half of them actively promoted this evil. In addition, during the reign of five of the eight faithful kings the high places were not removed. Only three kings really tried to reverse the process and destroyed the places and objects of idol worship. This was Judah's track record!

They committed the same sins, yet they did not even blink when Israel was deported. Idolatry reached a new height under the reign of king Manasseh, who led Israel on the path of faithlessness towards God like never before. She is Faithlessness herself, and that is what God calls her.

They should have thought: "If this is the punishment on idolatry, we better remove our high places and tear down those altars immediately!"

Instead of learning from Israel's example, they said to themselves: "Hey, they went into exile, but we are still here! God loves us, He is on our side. Isn't his temple in our midst?"

The extra time God gave them (more than 100 years) led them to think they had done nothing wrong. They rocked each other to sleep with a false sense of security.

Wake up!

When we read these words, God is teaching us the same lesson. We may not like the book of Jeremiah because it is full of judgment and it describes the downfall

of Judah. It seems hard to regard the whole book as gospel: good news.

However, we can learn a lot about how God deals with his people in the covenant. It becomes clear that God is serious about the obedience of his people. When judgment does not come right away, people get careless and think that God does not punish their sins. When wars, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters rock the world, people are concerned about preventing the next event and don't even think that these may be the warning signs of the coming judgment.

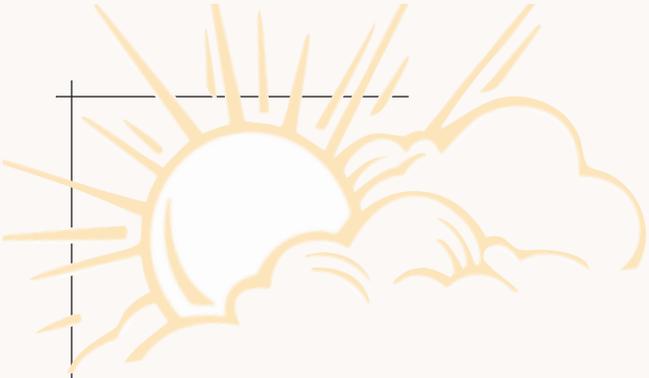
This thinking may influence Christians, as well. When sin does not seem to have any consequences, but looks attractive instead, we may get sloppy in our Christian lifestyle.

However, God not only sent Israel into exile, but Judah as well. They did not learn from the example God set before them. They rejected all the opportunities for repentance. Jeremiah was rejected, scorned, even threatened with death because they hated his message.

God's Word continues to shake us out of our complacency. We can remind ourselves and teach unbelievers how God has shown that his words will happen. No doubt about it: God has added Judah to the list of examples.

The New Testament is no less solemn in its warnings against sin. The light of the gospel shines clearly since Jesus has come and paid for the sins of the world. But this also brings more urgency in the gospel message: repent now, do not cherish sin any more. The door of God's kingdom is wide open, but remember that the final hour of world history has begun. Time is almost up. Any minute now, and the doors of the kingdom will be closed. Now is the time to repent from your sins and receive God's grace.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

For the word of the LORD is right and true; He is faithful in all He does. The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.

Psalm 33:4, 5

We have come to the next beatitude namely, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." When the Lord Jesus was teaching on the mountainside, He had a certain order to his message. The other beatitudes deal more with our weaknesses and all the problems of our own sinful nature. We have found that we cannot rely on ourselves – we are to fully rely on our God.

In this beatitude we are made aware of our deliverance from all sins – including deliverance from our self. Here we come to a climax in light of the previous beatitudes. We have been told to examine our heart and mind closely. How do we do this? Through the message of Matthew 5:6, the Lord Jesus speaks the heart of the gospel to us. We know from this verse that our salvation is entirely by grace and is given to us as a free gift of God. Let us explain.

What does the word righteousness mean? It is a desire to be free from sin and so have a desire to again live rightly before God. It is sin that separates us from God. We must hunger and thirst to live holy before God as once our first parents did. They were made righteous in God's eyes and were able to walk in his presence. This was broken when sin came into the world. The relationship was broken and had to be restored. The Lord Himself restored that relationship to his people, with his covenant promises. We are called to live out of these promises.

The Lord asks from us today to use this beatitude in our daily life. We have to pray for righteousness and pray that we may always be able to fight our many sins. In all we do we have to live the fruit of the Spirit, and so long ultimately to be like the Lord Jesus Himself.

To be hungry and thirsty can be painful. We all may have experienced this at some point in our life. It is not till we fill ourselves up with food and drink that we will be satisfied. So it is with Christ Jesus. Our soul longs to live rightly before God. It can be seen as a desperate need that has to be filled and it hurts just like that of hunger pains. When we are truly "hungry and thirsty" God promises to fill us. We are promised forgiveness of sins and life eternal, if we totally see our need in Him. Day after day we are refreshed. We no longer have the sin and guilt, but are filled with the righteousness of God. Through Jesus Christ's death on the cross we are made right before God. He looks at us as if we have not sinned, if we only seek our forgiveness and salvation in Him alone.

It is truly awesome how God continues to work in us. Through the Holy Spirit we may "hunger and thirst" and so be filled. But it does not end there. The more we are filled the more we hunger and thirst for righteousness. Day by day we must long to live right before the Lord. One day we will stand before the Lord in all perfect righteousness and glory; we will no longer hunger and thirst but will be forever filled with the glory of our God!

*Rejoice ye in the LORD, O righteous,
And let a new song fill the air.
Praise is becoming to the upright;
With harp and lyre His fame declare.
For the LORD has spoken
Words of truth unbroken;
He is faithful still.
Righteousness He treasures;
Earth is with the measures
Of His goodness filled.*

Psalm 33:1

Birthdays in September:

- 8 MARSHA MOESKER will be 27**
5770 Pleasant Valley Road, Vernon, BC V1B 3L6
- 11 MARY VANDEBURGT will be 48**
c/o Fam. W. Togeretz
32570 Rossland Place, Abbotsford, BC V2T 1T7
- 14 JERRY BONTEKOE will be 40**
Anchor Home
361, Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
- 29 PAUL DIELEMAN will be 35**
3 Northampton Street, Brampton, ON L6S 3A2Z5

There is also an address change for Jim Wanders who has celebrated his birthday on July 28: 2142 Deerwood Drive, Burlington, ON, L7M 2Y3. It would be greatly appreciated if he still would get some birthday cards, even if it's somewhat late.

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday this month. May you have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends. May God graciously bless you in this new year with much health and happiness. Till next month.

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
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The Churches' Care for the Schools: The Relation between Church and School in Historical Perspective (Part 2)

Introduction

In the first instalment of this article we examined the changing relationship between church and school from the beginning of the Dutch Reformed Churches until the end of 1800s. It was noted that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the churches sought to influence the state, which was deemed to be responsible for the education of the youth. Cooperating with various levels of government, the consistories exercised supervision over schools by recommending the appointment of teachers, and by supervising instruction. Article 58 of the Church Order, which states that the consistory shall ensure that parents have their children attend a school where instruction is in harmony with the Word of God, was first assigned to the duties of the elders. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, the Dutch Reformed Churches realized that the responsibility for education lies not with the state but with the parents of the children. By the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, the relationship between consistories and schools was expressed in the biblical terms of God's covenant with his people and their offspring.

*Church Order, Article 58:
The consistory shall ensure
that the parents, to the best of
their ability, have their
children attend a school where
the instruction given is in
harmony with the Word of God
as the church has summarized
it in her confessions.*

In what follows, we shall trace the history of the relationship between church and school from the late nineteenth century until the present time, observing that the Canadian Reformed Churches have maintained the emphasis on the churches' care for the schools. Although the article pertaining to the schools has been moved from the section in the Order dealing with the offices in the church to the one about the sacraments, the expression of the elders' duty in encouraging parents to provide Christian education for their children remains. As we shall see, the parents' responsibility rests especially upon the vows performed at the baptism of their children. The nurture in the home, the instruction at school, and the

indoctrination of the church work together in effecting a life that in its entirety is devoted to the service and worship of God. This harmony is expressed by the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 38, in the phrase, "the ministry of the gospel and the schools." We shall conclude that the harmony of school and church rests in the basic teaching of the Christian faith that every aspect of life is governed by the teaching of God's Word, the Bible.

The twentieth century

The reconsideration of the relation between church and school that developed since the Reformation culminated in the early twentieth century with a report about Article 21 to the General Synod held in Leeuwarden (1920). This report defined the responsibilities of the elders regarding the schooling of the youth as follows:

- I. Schooling is the responsibility of the parents, not of the state or the church. The Bible teaches that instruction of the children is, in the first place, the task of the parents (Gen 17:7; Deut 4:9-10; 6:7,20; Eph 6:4; Col 3:20-21, etc.). The consistory supervises the doctrine in church and home, and the latter by extension also in school.

2. The calling of the consistory is to encourage parents to establish schools in places where such do not exist. The ongoing reformation of the church extends to the ongoing reformation of schools.
3. Supervision of consistory over instruction is desirable, for three reasons. As the foundation of parental school-societies is the Bible (and the Confessions), the elders must see to it that nothing is taught contrary to this foundation. Elders also should encourage parents to keep their baptismal promise to have their child instructed in the faith. Parents and teachers, as confessing members in the congregation, are subject to the oversight and discipline of the church; also their conduct and teaching in the service of the schools falls under this supervision.
4. The consistories' supervision does not concern the curriculum, hours of instruction, and other features of the schools' operation, but the biblical and confessional substance in the instruction. All subjects are to be taught in accordance with the Word of God.
5. The manner in which supervision is exercised is determined by mutual input of school board and consistory: the former should acknowledge the role of the consistory, and determine whether it is best that elders serve on the school board, or whether the consistory should appoint a committee for such supervision.
6. If there are concerns of a religious or spiritual nature at school, the advice of consistory should be received.

The General Synod of Leeuwarden approved the recommendations in this report, and decided moreover that a change in the wording of Article 21 (CO Dort) was not required. It may have struck the reader that while the report expresses a formal distinction between the roles of the church and the school, it recommends considerable direct

involvement of the consistory in the education of the youth, thereby playing down the autonomy of the school-teachers. It is clear that the weight of the interpretation of Article 21 in the history of the churches, and especially the long-standing participation of consistory in the operation of schools, was felt even at the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet one may note also that whereas this report grants too much involvement to the consistory, it correctly expresses the duties of the church towards the school in biblical terms.

Relocation of the article concerning schools

As the twentieth century progressed, the churches perceived that Article 21, located in the section on the offices in the church and the duties of elders in particular, was in the wrong place. Schooling is not the mandate of the church, but of the parents. First in The Netherlands, and then in Canada –

*Form for Baptism:
“do you promise, as father and mother, to instruct your child in this doctrine... and to have her instructed therein to the utmost of your power?”*

following a report requested by General Synod at Coaldale (1977) – Article 21 was moved to a different section of the Church Order, namely the part dealing with the sacraments. The wording of the article remained largely unchanged, and the statement that consistories shall ensure that parents send their children to a Christian school was left unaltered. But what about the new location of the article? Why, one may ask, is it found among the articles on the two sacraments? From the reports and recorded decisions of the relevant meetings, one may gather that the change occurred for the following reasons.

Article 58 now appears between the articles on Baptism and Lord's Supper. This new placement suggests (and the 1978 report states so explicitly) that education of children is to be regarded in the context of the parents' vows at baptism to instruct the child in the Christian doctrine. Following Article 58 is a treatment of the Lord's Supper; with God's grace, the parents' instruction in doctrine and godliness will lead the child to her profession of faith and consequent participation in the sacrament. Although the parents' care for the child does not cease entirely when she professes her faith, the principle purpose for their vow to instruct their child has been achieved. (For this reason, too, the elders' care for the education of the youth pertains primarily to elementary and secondary education) One will recall the words in the Form for Baptism: “do you promise, as father and mother, to instruct your child in this doctrine . . . and to have her instructed therein to the utmost of your power?”

Here “doctrine” refers especially to the teaching of the Christian faith, that is of the Old and New Testament, summarized in the confessions, and taught in the church. This second baptismal vow means that parents instruct their child in the home, encourage her to read the Bible for herself, bring her to church where she will receive indoctrination from the pulpit, and send her to catechism classes, while also encouraging her to attend the young people's society and similar functions.

Now the question may arise, “if the baptismal promise pertains to the doctrine taught in the church, why does the Church Order place the article on schooling next to the one on infant baptism?” The answer is that instruction is the common denominator linking church, home, and school. Insofar as the promise affects schooling, it would be inadvisable for parents to execute the vow by sending their child for five days of the week to a non-Christian school,

where instruction is secular, while bringing the child to church on Sunday in order to have her taught from the Word of God. To express this inter-relation of church and school in theological terms: the Reformed faith assumes that all of life is a unity. John Calvin, and especially Abraham Kuyper after him, stressed that one cannot divide life into spiritual and secular, as though what one does during the week need not be permeated by God's grace so evident on Sunday. Christ has laid claim over every aspect of life. In the context of education this means that the instruction by the teachers must accord with the instruction by the minister. Thus the baptismal vow to instruct the child and have her instructed pertains to the doctrine of Scripture as it pervades all nurture and education of the child. From the perspective of the consistory: the elders are concerned about the spiritual welfare of the congregation not on the Sunday only, but also during the entire week.

The ministry of the gospel and the schools

The harmony between what is taught in church and what is taught during the week, is expressed by the Heidelberg Catechism. This is not surprising, for as we observed in the first instalment of this article, the Heidelberg Catechism is a manual of instruction intended for use at school, home, and church. In Lord's Day 38, which deals with the fourth commandment (regarding the Sunday), the question "what does God require in the fourth commandment?" is answered thus: "first that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained."¹ One interpretation is that the schools referred to are only theological colleges, where men are trained in order to proclaim the Gospel that is so central to the Sunday. Of course, establishing and supporting theological schools serves the ministry of the gospel. In his brief commentary on this phrase in the Heidelberg Catechism, Zacharias Ursinus focuses on this aspect, noting that for the

preservation of the ecclesiastical ministry the arts and sciences must be taught properly; schooling is important for future ministers who must be qualified to teach and to refute heresy.

The intent of the catechism

Whereas it is clear that the phrase "ministry of the schools" refers to theological colleges, there are three reasons why it may be concluded that Christian day-schools are included also: 1) the original text and context of the words; 2) the interpretation of it by the early Dutch Reformed Churches; and 3) the explanation of it in this two-fold sense by Abraham Kuyper. The Heidelberg Catechism was included in the Church Order of the Palatinate in Germany (1563). The original title of this order was "Catechism, or Christian instruction, which shall be provided in the Churches and Schools of the Palatinate."² In the first edition of the catechism, included in the list of professions addressed by this Order are schoolmasters ("*Schuldienern*," p 138); moreover in the received text of the fourth edition, the address includes the following: "all and every one of our Superintendents, Pastors, Preachers, Churches, and Schoolmasters. . ."³ What is more, in the section of the Palatinate Church Order that introduces the Catechism, one reads that "all believers from the beginning of the Christian church onwards strove to instruct their children in the fear of the Lord in School and Church."⁴ Thus when the first readers of Lord's Day 38 encountered the phrase "ministry of the gospel and the schools," they perceived that day schools for the youth as well as other institutions of learning were meant.

Interpretation in the early Dutch churches

Also the early Dutch Reformed churches perceived that schools as well as theological colleges are included in the phrase "ministry of the gospel and the schools." For example, the Synod of



Abraham Kuyper

Dordrecht (1578), in a chapter entitled "Concerning Schools" (Chapter 3), in one breath treats instruction in elementary schools, the encouragement of young men to study for the ministry, and theological colleges.⁵ This progression from education at the elementary, secondary, and theological levels, was understood as normal and appropriate. Similarly, the Synod of Middelburg (1581) links general education with theological training in Act 12, which determines that there should be "professors and schoolmasters, who teach not only the liberal arts and eloquence, but also theology and the catechism; the professors instil theology, the latter catechism, and altogether their students in piety." In other words, the link between elementary and higher education, which was generally less distinguished during the sixteenth century than it is today, was common and natural. In the German reformation (which had considerable impact upon the composition of the Catechism), it was the norm that a close relationship between church and school be effected by the teacher, who questioned students about the sermon they had heard on Sunday, and instructed them in the Catechism. In fact, the wording of the answer in Lord's Day 38 reflects that of several earlier school-constitutions. The reformation of church and ministry was combined with the reformation of school. So when the phrase "support of

the schools” occurs in Lord’s Day 38, it was understood at the time to mean elementary day-schools as well as schools of higher education.

We have dedicated some space to a discussion of the phrase “ministry . . . of the schools” in Lord’s Day 38 because we wished to show that the Catechism expresses the importance of not separating instruction in the schools from that in the church. We may deduce from the Catechism that it is the duty of the elders to supervise what is taught in the church and to care for what is taught in school.

Abraham Kuyper

Of the several modern leaders in the Reformed churches who stress the link between church and school on the basis of Lord’s Day 38, we select only one. Abraham Kuyper, in his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, dedicates a chapter to the phrase, “maintaining the ministry. . . of the schools,” explaining it as referring to training for ecclesiastical ministry as well as at Christian day schools.⁶ First Kuyper explains the phrase in light of its historical context: the Catechism reveals the error of the spiritualist or Anabaptist position, prevalent in the sixteenth century, which devalues intellectual learning and champions the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as the only requirement for the preacher. However, those who are to become ministers must receive rigorous training at all levels. Kuyper goes on to argue that not only he who speaks, but also those who listen to the preaching must be properly educated, so that all the riches of the gospel may be received. In fact, the phrase in the Catechism applies to every kind of education and to the preparation for every vocation to which God calls each child. So that what is preached on the Sunday (i.e., the fourth commandment of Lord’s Day 38) and what is taught during the week may work towards the common goal, the

“ministry of the gospel and the schools” must be maintained.

Instruction in harmony with the Word

We have dwelt upon Lord’s Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism in order to appreciate that the confession expresses the nature of the relationship between church and school in terms of the distinct but co-ordinated functions of preaching and teaching. Now we return to Article 58 of the Church Order and consider lastly the final clause, “where the instruction given is in harmony with the Word of God as the church has summarized it in her confessions.”

In light of the link which the Catechism draws between church and school, this clause may be interpreted as expressing the point at which these institutions join. The article instructs elders to see to it that what is taught during the week does not contradict or undermine what is proclaimed from the pulpit on Sundays and taught in Catechism classes. The responsibilities of the parents (in fulfilling their baptismal vows), of the consistory (in supervising doctrine), and of the school (in providing an education in accordance with the Bible) must be executed in harmony. Kuyper rightly points to the significance of the antithesis in the link between church and school: if the latter provides education that opposes the Word of God, it is an instrument of Satan and not of God. To put it positively, when church, home and school collaborate in the nurture of the children, we may be confident that the child receives the best possible training for a life of service that brings glory to God in every respect.

Conclusion

In tracing the fortunes of Article 58 of the Church Order, we have seen that in the early history of the Dutch Reformed Churches there existed the notion that the state, with the assistance of the church, is responsible for education. Over

time, it was realized in light of Scripture that the primary responsibility for upbringing lies with the parents; the churches relinquished their direct control over the schools. Lest we regard this history with the arrogance of the modern, however, I would suggest that we are living in a time when many Reformed believers underestimate the importance of the link between church and school, and of the significance of collaboration between home, church and school in the nurture and education of children. Throughout history, and despite the changing social and political circumstances, the churches have rightly insisted that parents send their children to schools where instruction given is in harmony with the Word of God; for the spiritual and earthly realms are one. This unity of life is proclaimed from the pulpit, explained in the home, and taught in the school.

¹ Readers of German will wish to note the original text, taken from the edition of W. Niesel, *Bekennnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen* (Munich, 1938): “Gott will erstlich daß das Predigamt und Schulen erhalten werden” (p175). Future references to the original text of the Catechism derive from this edition.

² In German: “*Catechismus oder Christlicher Unterricht, wie der in der Kirchen und Schulen der Churfürstlichen Pfaltz getrieben wird*” (Niesel, 136). The title of the Latin translation likewise included schools: “*Catechesis . . . quae traditur in ecclesiis et scholis Palatinatus*” (Niesel, 137).

³ “. . . allen und jeden unseren Superintendenten Pfarherren Predigern Kirchen und Schuldienern unsers Churfürstenthumbs der Pfaltzgraffschafft bey Rheyn.” (Niesel, 140).

⁴ “Dann es haben alle Gottseligen von anbeginn der Christlichen kirchen sich beflissen ihre kinder daheim in Schulen und Kirchen in der forcht des Herrn zu underweisen one zweifel auß nachfolgenden ursachen welche uns auch billig darzu bewegen sollen.” (Niesel, 148).

⁵ J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, *Documenta Reformatoria*, vol. I (Kampen Kok, 1960), p.198.

⁶ A. Kuyper, *E Voto Dordraceno. Toelichting op den Heidelbergschen Catechismus*. Vol. 4 (Kampen, 4th edition, n.d.), p. 32-39.



D. Moes

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Part 1: What Christians Believe – Becoming a Christian

The goal of this lesson is to draw the first five lessons together. In these lessons, you covered the basics about what Christians believe about God the Father and our need of Him, about God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This lesson pulls this teaching together into a very simple outline of the gospel based upon the Apostles' Creed.

What is a Christian?

By now the participants should be familiar with the idea of journey to faith. Remind them of some of the things you discussed when you dealt with the prodigal son in lesson two. Then ask them to break into groups and to share something about their journey of faith: whether they are Christians and if so, how they came to faith? Once they have done this, run through the list of descriptions on the handout. The facilitator should ask people to say what is wrong with each of them. These descriptions include: I went to Sunday School; I am a good person; I believe God exists; we were married in the church; I enjoy songs of praise; I was baptized as a child; I'm not anything else; and my wife goes to church. After having pointed out what is wrong with these descriptions, the participants are asked to formulate how they would describe a Christian. Write down some of the descriptions that are offered on a whiteboard or a flipchart.

The facilitator now goes into a teaching session explaining what a Christian is. He does this by expanding on and illustrating the statements listed on the handout. These statements include:

- Many people in our society believe themselves to be Christians but have only begun to understand the Christian faith.
- Being a Christian is not something vague and private but something definite and public. Jesus makes it clear He expects us to stand up and be counted.

- No one is born as a Christian (although you may be born into a Christian family). No one becomes a Christian by accident either.
- You become a Christian by recognizing that you are unable to bring about a positive change yourself in the fact that you are guilty before God, but only by appealing to the only One who can make a difference in this situation: Jesus Christ who transfers his perfect righteousness and holiness to your account when you place your trust in Him.
- You become a Christian by making a deliberate decision to follow Jesus Christ. Jesus calls us to wholehearted commitment.
- Jesus calls this process being born again. Just as with a normal birth, this is not something you do yourself; it happens to you. As a Christian you will increasingly discover that long before you were busy with God, God was already busy with you.

The Christian Gospel

Having given a description of a Christian, the facilitator proceeds to give an outline of the Christian gospel. This outline first focuses on **God and his love**:

- He made us.
- He loves us.
- He wants the best for us.

Then it focuses on **our need**:

- We were created to know God.
- We have turned away from Him.
- We have rejected his love.
- We are sinners.

After our need, the outline focuses on **Jesus Christ as the solution to our need**:

- God sent his Son Jesus to draw us back to Him.
- Jesus lived a life without sin.
- He died on the cross and arose from the dead.
- Through Jesus, God promises everyone (a) forgiveness of sins, (b) a

new relationship with God and his people (c) the gift of eternal life.

Then comes **our response**:

- Repentance
- Faith
- Becoming a full member of the church.

How do I become a Christian?

After having outlined the gospel, the facilitator focuses on how someone becomes a Christian. He should emphasize that becoming a Christian is a process that may take months, sometimes years. In a certain sense, it looks like a journey back to God. Then he expands on the significant points in this journey as listed on the handout. These points include:

- Wanting to know more.
- Finding out about Christianity.
- Sensing your own need of God.
- Making a commitment to follow Christ.
- Baptism.
- Membership of the church.

General Question Period

As with all the lessons, also this lesson should end with a general question period. It may very well be that some would like to make a commitment to Christ. It could also be that some have already made this commitment, but would like to become a member of the church. Whatever the case may be, the facilitator should deal with the questions with great care and sensitivity. Then, the evening should be closed with prayer.

If you would like to view the outline for this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. We have added John Blanchard's little booklet *Ultimate Questions* to our site. It will prove to be good background reading for this lesson.

Next time, we hope to introduce lesson seven which is the first lesson of section two: "How Christians Grow: Learning to Pray."

J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 17



Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.

After the Lord Jesus had died, He was buried. We talked about that last time. This proved that He had really died. But that was not the only reason. It also takes away our fear of death. Because of what happened to his body in the grave.

For three days later the Lord Jesus came out of the grave. That is great news: Christ left the grave! And we, too, will later leave the grave!

I hope you will live for a long, long time. Who does not want to live long?

But now already you know that dying is not as bad as it sounds.

You are probably apprehensive and say: But I really hate a grave! And that is true, no one likes it. But you should first listen to the rest. For more is said in this Lord's Day.

Imagine you are at home, waiting for someone. The door bell rings, and you walk to the front door. The grave will become a hallway, and the door is open.

When our Saviour returns on the clouds, we walk from that hallway straight to the Lord Jesus. And from there we go to the great feast on the new earth. With our new and beautiful body. So you see: Christ left the grave. And we, too, will leave the grave!

We leave that hateful grave. But sin and illness, and all sorrow, will be left behind. They will remain buried for ever.

Then the endless celebration begins.

All these good things, keep them deep in your heart. Never forget them. Keep them in mind when you go to school, when you study and when you play. And you will live joyfully. And you will obediently do what you have to do. Because you are a child of God, grateful to God the Father in heaven. Ask him for this.



Press Release of the 17th General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches, held in Chatham, Ontario, February 10 – 21, 2004

Opening and beginning

On Tuesday, February 10, 2004 the Rev. H. Versteeg opened the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches on behalf of the convening Church at Chatham. The evening before, the usual prayer service for the work of Synod was held, led by the Rev. Cl. Stam, chairman of the previous Synod of 2001, who preached on Psalm 131.

Rev. Versteeg welcomed the delegates from both Regional Synods, who were seated with proper credentials. The ministers K. Jonker, J. Moesker, W.B. Slomp and C. Van Spronsen, and the elders J. Kuik, W. Pleiter, J. Vander Stoep and P. Van Woudenberg came from the West, and the ministers D.G.J. Agema, J. De Gelder, W. den Hollander and J. Ph. Van Vliet, and the elders J. Jonker, F. Kampen, H. Vander Wel and G. Van Woudenberg came from the East.

The following officers were chosen to serve Synod, as chairman the Rev. C. Van Spronsen, as vice-chairman the Rev. J. De Gelder, as First Clerk the Rev. J. Van Vliet, who was responsible for the Acts, and as Second Clerk the Rev. D.G.J. Agema, who was to take care of the correspondence.

After General Synod was constituted, the chairman spoke a few words of appreciation, but then quickly adjourned Synod. This allowed the executive to finalise the proposed agenda, and to prepare the necessary arrangements for the proceedings of Synod.

The agenda was adopted, and Synod decided to include three late submissions, since sufficient reasons were given for late arrival. The policy of the last Synods to maintain the rule for late material seems to have the desired effect. There were only four late

submissions, and only one came without any reason for arriving late.

Four advisory committees were appointed, the agenda items were divided and the work could begin. During the next two weeks excellent working relationships could be established in the committees, as well as in the plenary sessions. Every day the proceedings of Synod began with bringing glory to God, prayer, and reading from Scripture with a brief meditation on the passage that was read. In this way the chairman, Rev. Van Spronsen, led us through Paul's letter to the Philippians. All members of Synod took turns in leading the evening devotions.

Theological College

In the evening session of the first day Synod made an important decision for the work at the Theological College. Since the summer of 2003 Dr. J. De Jong, professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology, has been struggling with a serious disease, and in light of his deteriorating health, the Board of Governors of the College has granted Dr. De Jong an indefinite leave of absence.

Upon recommendation of the Senate and the Board of Governors of the College Synod decided to direct the Board of Governors to appoint Dr. Adriaan Jan de Visser as professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology at the Theological College. Dr. De Visser is from South Africa, and comes with a wide experience as a missionary, a pastor, and a teacher.

Synod also expressed deep gratitude for the work Dr. De Jong was able to accomplish at the Theological College since he began his work in 1990, and asked that the churches continue to remember the needs of Dr. De Jong and his family before the throne of God. These feelings were also conveyed directly in a letter from Synod to Dr. and Mrs. De Jong.

Dr. De Visser was informed of the decision, and about a week later, on Monday Feb. 16 he was able to visit

General Synod, accompanied by the faculty of the College. The newly appointed professor, Rev. J. Moesker as governor, and Dr. C. Van Dam as Principal of the College addressed Synod, while there was also ample opportunity for informal contact. On Friday Feb. 20, Synod received with thankfulness the news that Dr. De Visser had accepted his appointment.

Synod received with thankfulness the report of the Board of Governors of the Theological College that the work at the College could continue, and decided to approve all decisions and actions of the Board and its committees for the years 2001, 2002 and 2003. Gratitude was expressed for the work done by the Board and its committees, as well as by the faculty during the last three years. Synod considered the Pastoral Training Program to be a desirable part of the training for the ministry, and directed the governors that the funds required for this program be included in the regular operating budget. Synod decided to express its heartfelt appreciation to the Free Reformed Churches in Australia for their active involvement, as well as their ongoing financial and prayerful support for the Theological College.

Contacts with churches in the Americas

The Canadian Reformed Churches maintain contacts with various churches on the American continents. Two of these churches had sent fraternal delegates. The Rev. G. Syms of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) and the Rev. J. Ferguson of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) addressed the assembly on behalf of their respective churches.

With regard to the RCUS, Synod considered with thankfulness that the frequent interactions between our Committee and the various assemblies and committees of the RCUS show the positive effects which our relationship has for both federations, although there is still a need for further interaction.

Synod decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCUS, and to encourage the churches to pursue this actively.

Although there is informal contact and much support for L' Eglise Reformée du Quebec (ERQ), the official relations are moving slowly. While waiting for the outcome of the internal discussions and study in the ERQ on the matters in the mandate of the Committee (pulpit supervision, fencing of the Lord's table, and confessional accountability), the Committee was instructed to continue to work towards formalising a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the ERQ.

The Committee had reported that it had not been successful in contacting the Korean Presbyterian Churches in North America. However, Synod did not follow the recommendation to discontinue this part of the mandate, but instructed the Committee to continue its search with the help of our sister churches in Korea.

The Igreja Reformadas do Brasil (IRB) has enjoyed growth, and is experiencing positive developments towards a mature federation. Synod decided to continue also with this church the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, although at this time it will be most feasible to maintain indirect contact via the sending churches.

Despite its numerous attempts the Committee had been unable to establish any real, meaningful contact with the Independent Presbyterian Church in Mexico (IPCM). Synod concluded, therefore, that at this time an ecclesiastical relationship with the IPCM should not be pursued.

The previous Synod had instructed the Committee to investigate the usefulness, and the benefit of possible membership of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). The evaluation of the Committee was helpful, but Synod questioned the need for another organisation beside the ICRC, when there is significant duplication in basis, purpose and function. The mandate was given to continue the research, and to

initiate discussion on the relation NAPARC – ICRC.

Several churches had appealed the decision of Synod Neerlandia (Acts, Art 45) to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC by accepting the original Proposed Agreement with the OPC on the supervision of the Lord's table and confessional membership. All letters requested Synod to return to the Agreement as amended by Synod Fergus 1998. In its considerations Synod confronted itself extensively with the arguments of the appellants, acknowledging certain weaknesses in Neerlandia's considerations, but at the same time explaining that Synod Neerlandia did not err when it established Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC. Synod decided not to accede to the appeals.

Concerning the contact with the OPC, Synod decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, and instructed the Committee also to continue the discussions on the existing differences in confession and church polity. In this respect Synod considered that the goal of these discussions should be to determine whether the unity of faith regarding the church, the covenant and the sacraments is adequately and faithfully expressed in our confessional standards. The focus of the discussions should be twofold: on the one hand, the scriptural faithfulness in the confessions and, on the other hand, the actual application in the reality of church-life.

The Committee was also instructed to publish a synopsis of the discussions on the various issues and of the position papers that have been written over the past twenty years. Such a synopsis will be helpful for the churches, and could also benefit the discussions with other churches.

Contacts with churches abroad

Another Committee maintains the contacts between the Canadian Reformed Churches and faithful churches in other parts of the world. Two of these churches had also sent fraternal

delegates to attend Synod Chatham. The Rev. R.C. (Karlo) Janssen addressed Synod as representative of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKN), and br. G. B. Veenendaal spoke on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA).

The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) are a small but vibrant federation. They have many missionaries in the field, work among concerned members in other church federations and operate their own Theological College, which offers a well-rounded academic program. Synod decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with these churches, and instructed the Committee to look into possibilities for our Theological College to support the training for the ministry in South Africa.

In Scotland there is still a lack of clarity as to what caused and what is behind the division of January 2000, which led to the situation that we have the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) and the Free Church of Scotland (continuing) (FCS[c]) beside each other. Synod concluded that it cannot judge this division at this time, and decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with both. The Committee received the mandate to continue to monitor the situation, to assure both groups that they have our prayerful support, and to encourage them to reconcile.

Our relationship with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, Liberated (GKN) has always been strong. And so it is understandable that many members of the Canadian Reformed Churches feel involved and affected when changes and new developments in these churches occur. The Committee report gave a critical evaluation of various developments in our Dutch sister churches, of which the most significant are: the addition of more and more hymns; the decisions about the fourth commandment and the new Marriage Form.

In its considerations Synod expressed appreciation for the extensive work done by the Committee. Synod agreed with some of the critical questions, as is clear from the mandate given to the Committee. However, Synod's considerations were more cautious and restrained than some of the Committee's conclusions. "It is important to keep in mind, that we should not judge the GKN on the basis of what we know from personal observations, hearsay, or from articles in papers, but on the basis of its official documents."

Synod distanced itself from several unproven statements about the GKN in the Committee report, such as, "The Reformed character [of the Dutch churches] is almost unrecognizable." Such statements may come across as a generalization that does not do full justice to our sister churches as a whole.

Synod decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GKN, and added to the mandate that the Committee must seek clarity into the legitimacy of the recent "Vrijmaking" and monitor further developments. The Committee was also instructed to inform both the GKN (liberated) and the group that has departed that they have our prayerful support in the hope that by God's grace they will come to reconciliation.

The relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship was also continued with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), while their continued support of the Theological College was noted with much appreciation.

Since it was established in 1982 the Canadian Reformed Churches have been a member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). Synod instructed the CRCA to continue to represent our churches in the ICRC and send a delegation to the Conference scheduled for 2005 in South Africa. Although our deputies can only sponsor new member churches for the ICRC with which we are in Ecclesiastical Fellowship, Synod judged that the delegates should not be limited in voting

for membership decisions at the Conference.

At Synod Neerlandia 2001 concern was expressed about the limited communication with the Presbyterian Church of Korea. This time Synod acknowledged with thankfulness that the lines of communication are more open than they have been in the past, and decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the PCK. As in the relationship with other Presbyterian Churches the mandate was also given to continue the discussion on the differences in confession and church polity.

Synod agreed with the CRCA that at this point in time there is not enough information available to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with two churches in Indonesia and the Reformed Churches in New Zealand. The Committee was instructed to continue the contacts and make further information available, especially in consultation with the Australian sister churches.

Promotion of ecclesiastical unity

The Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU) was instructed to maintain the contacts with the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), the Free Reformed Churches in North America (FRCNA) and the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC).

Since the CanRC Synod of Neerlandia and the URC Synod of Escondido, both in 2001, our churches are in Phase 2 of the unity process with the URCNA.

In response to appeals from the churches of Chatham and Grand Rapids against the decision of Synod Neerlandia 2001 to implement this Phase 2 Synod upheld Neerlandia's decision to recognize the URCNA as true churches and to move to Phase 2 in the relationship. Synod also clarified that Phase 2 is the equivalent of Ecclesiastical Fellowship as it is maintained under the adopted rules.

Synod expressed thankfulness for the various activities and interactions that are taking place between CanRCs and URCs on the local level, and instructed the CPEU to pursue continued fraternal dialogue with the URCNA with a view towards entering the final phase of federative unity. The report for the next Synod should also include a recommendation for a definite time-frame for federative unity.

Since Synod Neerlandia most of the work for the promotion of ecclesiastical unity was done by the subcommittees that dealt with Theological Education, the development of a common Church Order, and the production of a common Song Book, in cooperation with their counterparts of the URCNA.

These subcommittees had submitted separate reports. Since all three of them are dealing with work in progress, Synod took note of the interim reports, without interacting with the results, and reiterated the mandates for these committees.

Synod emphasized at the same time that for the next General Synod the results should be coordinated and presented by the CPEU in one comprehensive report, to be prepared jointly with the CERCU of the URCNA. Rev. H. Zekveld, pastor of the URC in Strathroy, Ontario addressed Synod as fraternal delegate of the URCNA.

With regard to the contacts with the FRCNA and the OCRC, Synod agreed with the committee that it is important to maintain the scriptural requirement for federative unity, and to consider this unity the goal of our discussions with these churches. The committee was therefore instructed to continue these discussions and to focus specifically on the question whether the OCRC and the FRCNA share this desire to work towards federative unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Rev. Dr. L.W. Bilkes, pastor of the FRC in Abbotsford, B.C. addressed Synod on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches.

Church Order matters

In response to an appeal from one of the churches against Art 75 of the Acts of Synod Neerlandia 2001, Synod decided to amend the first paragraph of Art 49 of the Church Order to read: *The general synod shall be held once every three years. Each regional synod shall delegate to this synod six ministers and six elders.*

In the past Synods have been inconsistent in the practice of admitting submissions from individual church members that interacted with reports of synodical committees, or that appealed directly a decision of a general synod on matters pertaining to the churches in common. This became a cause of concern at Synod Abbotsford 1995, and since then general synods have declared this kind of submissions inadmissible. Synod Neerlandia stated that *individuals who wish to interact with decisions of Synod should begin by addressing their consistories (articles 30 & 31)*. Two churches appealed this and requested that Neerlandia's decision be rescinded, claiming that it has changed our previous understanding of Art 30 and 31 of the Church Order by denying to individuals what used to be an accepted practice. By denying these appeals Synod maintained the position of Synod Neerlandia, but gave in the considerations a detailed outline as to what the proper procedure is, according to the Church Order, when an individual church member feels concerned about, or disagrees with a decision of a general synod.

In 2003 the two churches appointed by Synod Neerlandia for days of prayer as referred to in Art 54 of the Church Order, denied a request from the church at Winnipeg-Redeemer to declare such a day of prayer because of the moral apostasy of our country. The church at Winnipeg-Redeemer questioned the grounds for this refusal, and asked Synod to clarify the meaning of Art 54 CO in the context of the moral decline of our country. Synod responded as follows: *The plain reading of this article does not include the issue of general moral decline as reason for calling a day of prayer. The examples*

mentioned in the Church Order make clear that these afflictions must be of an acute nature, of extreme severity and posing an immediate crisis for the life of the church and/or the nation. Synod added that the general moral decline of our nation should be a constant matter of congregational prayers.

Bible translation

The translation of Scripture continues to need the attention of the churches. The Committee on Bible Translation was again instructed to keep an eye on what is going on in this field, and to monitor in particular the developments with regard the NIV as the translation in use by most of the churches. A special mandate was given to do a preliminary investigation of the ESV (English Standard Version) and provide Synod 2007 with a report on this translation.

Book of Praise

The Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* has again been authorized to do all the things necessary to make sure that the *Book of Praise* will continue to be available. Besides this general and ongoing task, Synod also decided to mandate the Committee to present to the next General Synod proposals for the inclusion of the Apostles' Creed in the baptismal forms, and for a Form of Subscription, one for the local congregations and one for Classis.

With regard to the ongoing development of the *Book of Praise*, Synod decided to continue the mandate of Synod Fergus to prepare the prose section of the *Book of Praise* with NIV Bible references, to recommend that the Committee proceed with the Overleaf Musical Notation Edition, and not to proceed with the requested changes to the Psalm and Hymn sections at this time.

The matter of expanding and/or improving the hymn section of the *Book of Praise* is still part of the mandate of the SCBP and a proposal is expected for next Synod. Some of the parameters are:

- To maintain the current structure of our hymn section.
- To use the "Guidelines and Principles" agreed upon by the committee together with the Psalter Hymnal Committee of the URCNA
- To set the limit at 100 hymns.

Website

Synod expressed its appreciation for the extensive and well-researched report of the Committee for the Official Website of the Canadian Reformed Churches and for the excellent service this committee provided for the churches. The committee was instructed to continue its work in the same way, to maintain the existing content of the website, and to add new content, like, basic information about local churches, limited links to other websites, sermons, as well as press releases of broader assemblies. Another new feature could be a mailing list for council or consistory clerks.

Other matters

Synod also dealt with various appeals from some churches and church members, as well as with some smaller items as the report of the Address Church for the Canadian Reformed Churches, the financial report of the General Fund, the Synodical Archives, and the suggestion to publish a glossary of the acronyms in the committee reports.

Closing

On Saturday February 21, 2004 at noon Synod Chatham was closed. This makes this seventeenth General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches the shortest ever, with only one exception. The very first Synod of Homewood/Carman was held from November 4-9, 1954. The chairman, Rev. C. VanSpronsen, who led the meetings in a dedicated and efficient manner, expressed appreciation for the good harmony enjoyed at this assembly. Thankfulness was also expressed for the wonderful hospitality shown by the congregation in Chatham.

J. DeGelder

Press Release of Classis Niagara June 16, 2004 held in Lincoln, Ontario

Opening

Rev. K.A. Kok calls the meeting to order on behalf of the convening Church of Blue Bell. Scripture reading is Ephesians 4:1-16. All present sing Psalm 48:3, 4. Rev. Kok leads in prayer. The delegates from Blue Bell report that the credentials are in order and Classis is declared constituted. The moderator is as follows:

Rev. J. vanVliet – chairman
Rev. K. Kok, – clerk
Rev. D. Agema – vice-chairman

The chairman thanks the Church of Blue Bell for its preparatory work. The proposed agenda is adopted.

Art 44 CO

The chairman asks the required questions. The churches of Attercliffe and Lincoln request advice in matters of discipline. Advice is given in closed session.

Request Rockway

A letter from the Church at Rockway requesting to be relieved from the assessment for the Fund for Needy Churches is considered by Classis. Classis decides not to grant this request. If Rockway cannot meet its classical obligations, it can approach the neighbouring churches for temporary help, or, if the need seems to be of a more than temporary nature, it can approach the church administering the Fund for Needy Churches for assistance.

Approbation call Rev. C.J. VanderVelde

Classis deals with the approbation of the call from the Church at Rockway to Rev. C.J. VanderVelde. The appropriate documents are presented by the Church at Rockway and found to be in order. Classis decides to approbate this call.

Church visitations

Reports of visitations to all the churches in the Classis are read and received with thankfulness.

Appointments

Next Classis
Convening Church: Dunnville/Wainfleet

Date: September 15, 2004
Officers: Chairman: Rev. A. Souman
Vice-chairman: Rev. K. Kok
Clerk: Rev. D. Agema

Closing

After Personal Question Period and Censure ad Art 34 CO, the Acts are read and adopted. The Press Release is read and approved. Classis sings Psalm 133. The Chairman leads in prayer and closes Classis.

*For Classis,
Rev. D.G.J. Agema*

Press Release of the Classis Northern Ontario of June 25, 2004

On behalf of the convening Church of Grand Valley, Rev. P. Aasman welcomed the brothers to this meeting, extending greetings also to the fraternal delegate from the United Reformed Churches. He invited the brothers to sing Psalm 9:1,2,4,5 and read 2 Chronicles 32:24-33, and led in prayer for God's blessing.

When it was shown that the churches were properly represented, the Classis was constituted. The officers recommended by the previous Classis were seated (P. Feenstra, chairman; P. Aasman, vice-chairman; B.J. Berends, clerk). The chairman observed for memorabilia that Rev. R. Pot had accepted a call to the Church of London and will, therefore, soon depart our classical district; the Lord continues to bless the Reformed Church in St. Georges, Quebec, and that a new church plant has begun in Laval, south of Montreal; finally, he observed that a United Reformed Synod had recently been held in Calgary.

The agenda was adjusted and adopted.

Reports were read for church visitations to the Church of Elora, Fergus, Grand Valley and Orangeville. These reports demonstrated a commitment on the part of these churches to be faithful to God's holy Word.

All the churches indicated that the ministry of the gospel is being continued and that the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. One of the churches asked for the advice of

Church News

Eligible for call:

Candidate Walter Geurts

3417 Rockwood Drive,
Burlington, ON L7N 3H6

905-631-8433

wgeurts@cogeco.ca

Classis for a matter of discipline (advice was given in closed session).

The Church of Fergus requested the advice of Classis (according to the Church Order article 40) on their decision to split/separate the congregation into two congregations, that of Fergus South (Maranatha) and Fergus North. Classis was grateful for this development and gave concurring advice. The Church of Fergus further requested Classis to appoint Rev. Louwse as counsellor to the Church of Fergus North, and to grant the Church of Fergus North pulpit supply once per month, beginning in August. These requests were granted.

Rev. F. Folkerts, fraternal delegate from Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches and minister of the Listowel URC, gave thanks for the fellowship he could enjoy with the Canadian Reformed Churches, felt gratitude for the privilege of joining hands with us to promote faithfulness to God's word, and expressed hope that practical unity may develop further among Canadian and United Reformed Churches in our classical region.

The Church of Guelph was appointed to convene Classis September 24, 2004. Officers were recommended. The Church of Elora was appointed to represent Classis at the institution of the Church of Fergus South and North on July 11.

Question period was held. The Acts of Classis were adopted. The press release was approved for publication. The chairman gave thanks in prayer and Classis was closed.

*For Classis,
P. Aasman*