

Clarion

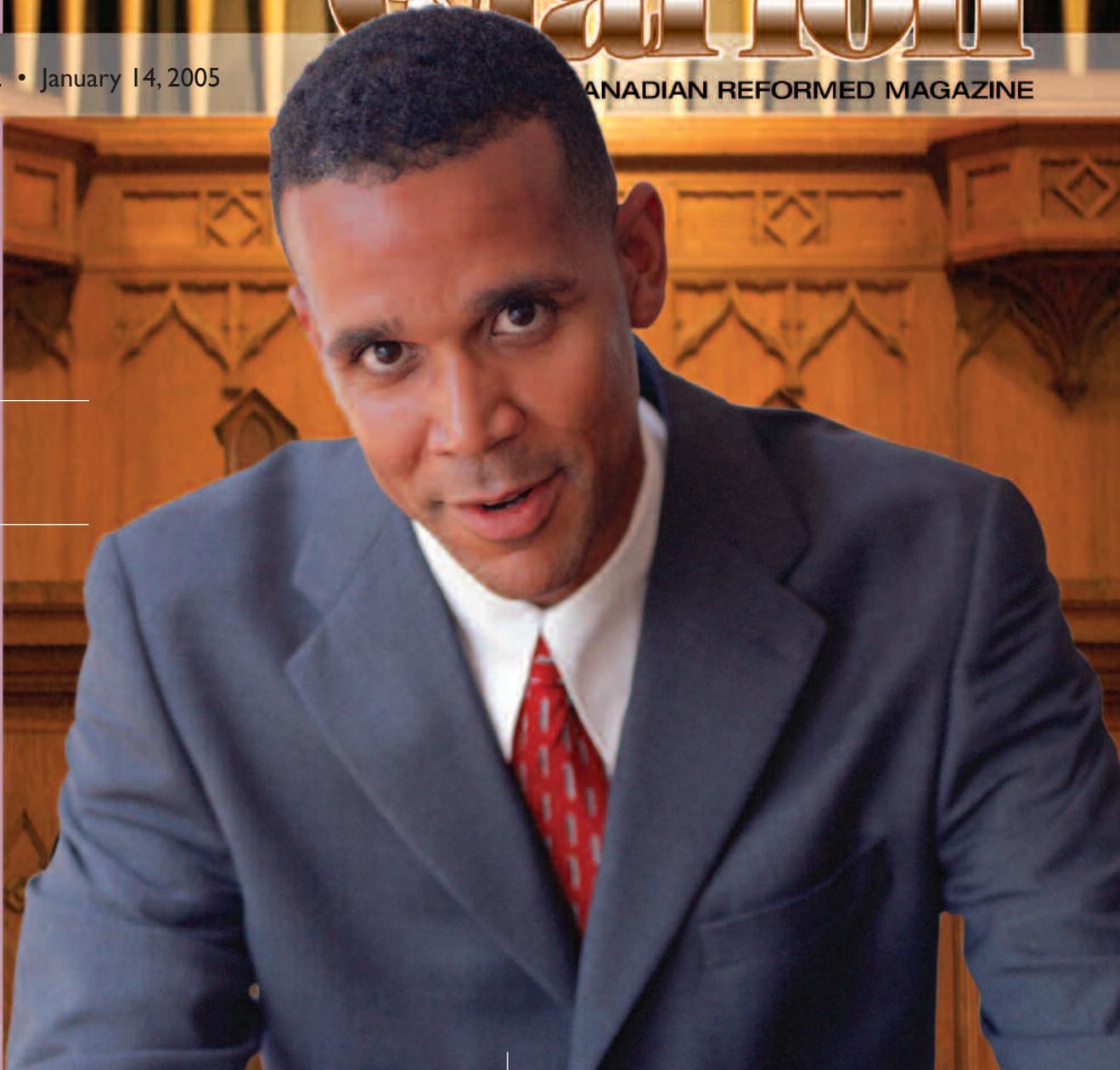
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CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

*Authority and
the Ministry*

*An Apostolic
Church*

*The Weakening
of the
Institution of
Marriage*



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of his church,
it pleases God to
use the ministry
of man. . .*



W.B. Slomp

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Authority and the Ministry

The minister plays a prominent role in the churches. He wields a lot of influence and has a lot of authority.

Introduction

The minister plays a prominent role in the churches. He is more visible than any other member of the church. He leads the public worship services, officiates at weddings and funerals, teaches the youth of the church, and usually chairs all consistory and council meetings. He is also often the first one called upon for advice and comfort when difficult problems and issues arise. In all this, it is his task to encourage and admonish all those who have been put in his charge. For these reasons, he wields a lot of influence and has a lot of authority.

Despite the fact that God does not need man to gather his church, it pleases Him to use sinful men in this endeavour.

Like anything else, this authority can be misused. Throughout my ministry, when dealing with difficult situations, I have had to struggle against this temptation. As a minister of the Word I know how easy it is to abuse one's position, and so this editorial applies to me more than anybody. We must all guard against the abuse of authority in the church, or the church will suffer and the proclamation of the Gospel will be hindered.

The purpose of authority

The minister receives his authority from God himself. He is, as the Form for the Ordination of Ministers states, God's gift to the church. In the gathering of his church it pleases God to use the ministry of man. He, of course, could have done this without the aid of man. Matthew 3:9 says, "I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham." Indeed,

He can even use an animal as an instrument of God's Spirit to proclaim his Word. That is what He did when He used a donkey to prophesy to Balaam.

Despite the fact that God does not need man to gather his church, it pleases Him to use sinful men in this endeavour. It is a beautiful task that He gives to them. Ministers of the Word are the heralds of good tidings. They may announce the coming of the King and they may invite God's people to a wonderful feast. They may declare to all those who put their trust in the Lord, and who do not want to live in their sins, that their sins are forgiven and that the gates of heaven are open to them.

However, the position of minister comes with great responsibilities as well. Ministers of the Word must also proclaim to all those who do not want to repent that the gates of heaven are shut to them. God gives ministers, along with elders, the authority to handle the keys of God's kingdom.

Ministers are in the service of the great key holder himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. They must use their authority in the way that Christ himself uses his authority. God holds them accountable for their words and actions. Ministers need to be continually aware of the fact that every gift from God is given for the further advancement of his Kingdom. The gift of authority, then, is also given to further the glory of God; it is not intended for the advancement of man's glory.

Christ's Example of Authority

When the Lord Jesus came to earth full of divinity and authority, He did a remarkable thing. Rather than retain his glory, He gave it all up. Christ emptied himself of the glory He had with his Father. And even though He was endowed with the highest authority, and had every right to exercise that authority without delay and concession, He held back. He did not use his rightful authority in a heavy-handed way. Jesus could have insisted on exercising his rights and immediately destroyed those who questioned his position. However, for the sake of sinful man, He did not do so. It would have meant the end of us all. Instead, He was gentle and humble in the

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application of his authority. Christ restrained himself because He understood that the only way to lead sinful man to the Father was by demonstrating patience, humility, and compassion (Matt 11:28).

Implications for the Ministry

Christ's example provides an enormously beneficial insight into the proper application of authority for the office of minister. Although ministers (and elders) have been given a great deal of authority, they must restrain themselves in the use of their authority. In the first place, ministers, unlike Christ, are sinful. They are therefore limited in their understanding of human nature, including their own human nature. Sinful man wants to protect his own honour and glory. He is afraid to have his authority questioned by others. And if his authority is questioned, his inclination is to lash out.

Ministers are in the service of the great key holder himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A minister has to be careful that he does not give in to these inclinations. He is a servant of God, and he must lead the sheep to the Father. He may not be insecure about his position of authority. Christ wasn't. He knew that the Father would vindicate Him. He knew that ultimately his position was not being threatened when others did not listen to Him. He understood that the disobedient threaten their own standing with God. All those who do not accept Christ's authority reject the Father's authority and stand condemned. God does not endow any of us with authority for our own sake and honour, but for the sake of God who wants all mankind to be reconciled to Him. After all, ministers are engaged in a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18ff).

Practical Implications

Like Christ, the work of ministers needs to be characterized by humility, compassion, and patience. 2 Thessalonians 2:7 provides an illustration from the work of the apostles. Here Paul compares the work of a minister to a mother and father with their children. Like parents with their children, the task of the minister is to encourage, comfort, and urge those under their care to live lives worthy of God. Likewise, the apostle Peter reminds those in positions of authority to be careful how they utilize their authority when he writes, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers –

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not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”

Ministers abuse their authority when they make the people feel the heavy hand of authority by insisting on texts such as Hebrews 13:7 and 17, which exhort readers to respect their leaders and to obey them. Such individuals ignore texts such as Mark 10:42-45, 2 Corinthians 1:24, and 1 Peter 5:2, which remind those in leadership positions that their authority ought to be characterized by selflessness, gentleness, and restraint.

Conversely, ministers who endeavour to use their authority as it is intended to function recognize that everything given to us in this life, including authority, is given to us to help us attain salvation and to help us serve others in their pursuit of salvation.

Like Christ, the work of ministers needs to be characterized by humility, compassion, and patience.

Conclusions

Authority in the church is a gift from God. Those who have been given such authority can be thankful that the Lord entrusts them with such a wonderful gift. It is amazing that He uses sinful men to gather his church, even though they often do not use their positions properly. In spite of their many shortcomings, God wants to use ministers of the Word. However, those who have been given positions of authority must be aware of the great responsibilities that come with authority. Also, church members must realize that men are placed in positions of authority in the church for their benefit and for the furtherance of God’s Kingdom. For this reason, they owe them proper respect. We will visit this more in the next editorial, the Lord willing.



E. Kampen

An Apostolic Church

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MATTHEW 13:52

“We proclaim to you. . . so that you may have fellowship with us.”

1 John 1:3

In the opening words of what we call the first letter of John, we hear John say, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you may have fellowship with us.” Take note of the way he indicates that the purpose of preaching is “so that you may have fellowship with us.” Should the purpose of John’s preaching not be that his readers might have fellowship with the Father and the Son? It is true that the Father and the Son soon enter the picture. John continues by writing, “And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” What stands out, however, is the way John puts fellowship with him and the other apostles before fellowship with the Father and the Son.

A reading of this letter in its totality reveals why John expressed himself in this way. His readers were faced with false teachers who promoted what appears as an early form of Gnosticism. They contradicted John’s preaching by denying the divinity of Jesus Christ and downplaying the call to love one another. In the process, they drove a wedge between the believers and the apostles, who had preached that Jesus Christ was the Son of God come in our human flesh.

According to John, the apostles form an essential link in the way God grants salvation. They had heard the Lord Jesus preach and teach. They had seen Him. They even had been able to touch Him. They were the eye and ear witnesses to the Son of God come in our human

flesh. Their unique association with the Lord Jesus put them in a position of being true witnesses to the gospel message. We sometimes use the term “witnessing” to describe evangelizing, but only the apostles were able to witness, as witnessing requires personal experience. In Acts 1:8 we read how the Lord Jesus told his disciples, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

John’s words about the importance of the apostles are reinforced by the way Paul writes about the apostles in Ephesians 2. There he describes the New Testament church, made up of Jews and Gentiles. He calls the church “God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. . .” (Eph 2:19, 20). We find this same terminology of the apostles being the foundation of the church in Revelations 21:14, where we read that “The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”

It becomes clear that we cannot speak about fellowship with the Father and the Son apart from the apostles. They are the link between Christ and the believers throughout the ages. In light of this, we can well understand why the Nicene Creed, when it speaks of the Church, speaks of one holy catholic and apostolic church. The first generation

Christians heard the gospel message from the mouths of the apostles. We hear the message from the pens of the apostles as we read God’s Word. Lest we think that this makes the Old Testament irrelevant, we should remember that they always explain the gospel message against the background of the Old Testament. Further, when we today read the Old Testament, we always have to do so in light of what the apostles have told us about the Lord Jesus.

It is this awareness of the apostolicity of the church that continues to guide us. It impresses upon us our dependence on the apostolic testimony to Jesus Christ, as found in the Scriptures. We need to hear that apostolic testimony through the preaching of the Word in order to enjoy fellowship with the Father and the Son. We need to place our children under that apostolic testimony if we desire that they learn to know and love the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We can add to this the importance of spending personal time with the apostles through reading the Scriptures. There is also direction with respect to reaching out. To get to know the Lord Jesus and the Father, people need to become thoroughly familiar with the apostolic testimony.

John’s words therefore impress upon us that the church is an apostolic church. The more familiar we become with the apostles and grow in fellowship with them, the more we will grow in fellowship with the Father and the Son.



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 27



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

This is the second Lord's Day explaining baptism, for much can be said about it. When a baby is baptized in your church, the minister scoops water from the baptismal font. He sprinkles it on the forehead of the baby. In the time of the apostles, many people heard the good news about Jesus and became believers. Then they were baptized in a brook or in a river. For a moment, they completely disappeared under water. Of course, that was done with adults, not with babies. This still happens often on the mission field when people believe and want to be baptized. You may have seen the pictures in *Mission News*; that is a real bath.

Baptism can be called a washing that renews you. In the words of the Bible you can say it is a washing of regeneration. Now a question: does the water of baptism remove our sins? I am sure you will say "Of course not. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can do that." But this does not mean that everything is

back to normal when the water of baptism has dried. For, once baptized means baptized for always. Even if you want to run away from the Lord, you cannot wipe off your baptism. After the water has dried up, your forehead still says without letters that you belong to the Lord! And that is great!

Many things follow from that: forgiveness, safety, eternal life. But what if someone does not want to follow the Lord and goes his own way? People who do that throw away all the promises of baptism. At their baptism they were privileged to be God's own children, but now they become disobedient children. They may always return to God, but if they don't, their punishment will be greater, because at one time they did receive baptism.

Do you remember the story of Paul and Silas in prison? They prayed and sang psalms. Then there was an earthquake that opened the doors of the prison and

unchained all the prisoners. The jailor thought they had all run away, and he wanted to kill himself. Just on time Paul told him to put away his sword, for all the prisoners were still there. After that, Paul and Silas told him about the gospel. When the jailor asked to be baptized, his children had to come too, for he was told that God was not only his friend, but also the friend of his children. You can call this friendship a covenant. This also happened to you, for children of believing parents belong to the church.

Sometimes, a newborn baby dies. A small baby can not even believe. The parents cry and are very sad, but they know that the Lord has taken their child to himself in heaven.

We can say that the Lord is the God of the covenant. He was that already before children were baptized. At that time, boys were circumcised. A small piece of skin was cut away from their penis. That must have hurt, and there was some blood. Just as that skin had to be removed, so also must the sins be removed from their lives. When these boys grew up, they themselves would become fathers of a family. And the children of these circumcised fathers belonged to the covenant of God, just like their father and mother.

Now God no longer wants circumcision, but baptism. Look, when you see a baby baptized in church, tell yourself: "I have been baptized, too. I belong to the Lord."



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The Weakening of the Institution of Marriage (2)¹

Marriage as God designed it is all about being one, in mind, goals, aspirations, and commitments.

Today same-sex “marriage” is in centre stage, and all indications are that it will become a legal form of cohabitation. This distressing state of affairs did not, however, just drop out of the sky. There has been a gradual weakening of marriage in our country long before the present crisis. It may be helpful prior to discussing same-sex marriage to identify briefly two major contributing factors. These relate directly to the two purposes of marriage, which are: first, to help each other in all things that belong to this life and the life to come, and second, under the blessing of God to be fruitful and multiply. Both of these purposes of marriage have been under sustained attack, especially by individualism and the separation of sex from marriage. We need to consider both of these, for today we are left with the end result of the effects of these forces.

Individualism

Individualism is putting your own interests over those of others. “I come first and everyone else comes second.” Obviously such an attitude undermines marriage, which depends on submitting to each other in love and service (cf. Eph 5:21-33). Marriage as God designed it is all about being one, in mind, goals, aspirations, and commitments. Each partner in the marriage is to help each other to achieve the common good for which they are united in holy wedlock.

When there is no common purpose to help each other and build a solid family, a marriage is under great stress and can fall apart. Then the very opposite of God’s design for marriage takes place. Where God intended love and helping each other to rule, a divorce fuels estrangement and hostility. Where happiness had once been experienced, grief and suffering now take over. Symptomatic of the rot of individualism is the fact that many marriages

When sex and marriage were separated, marriage and the family unit came under great stress.

solemnized in the last number of years apparently end up in divorce. This is an enormous tragedy, especially if children are involved. The family, as the basic building block of society, is not something that can be readily taken apart. A child has a blood bond with both parents. When they decide to part ways, the child’s world falls apart, the bottom falls out. Such children need to redefine their identity so to speak. Not surprisingly, these children often become a problem for society, and they are also more likely to cope with poverty and

abuse. They also lack a good model on which to build their own future with a marriage partner, and marital problems tend to be repeated in the next generation. When marriage is no longer a binding force and an honoured institution, much grief results.

A marriage can be undermined in subtle ways by expressions of individualism. In many quarters today there is a degrading of the role of mother and home maker. For example, the message from society today is that you can only reach your full potential with a career outside the home; if you don’t have a job outside the home, you’re a nobody.

Now this is not to suggest that a woman cannot work outside the home. Indeed, there can be legitimate reasons making it necessary to seek employment elsewhere. However, the point here is that we should not underestimate the tremendous importance of a mother and homemaker. It is good to remind ourselves what a beautiful and rewarding role the calling of being a helper fit for him can be as a full-time homemaker who is there for her husband and children. The art of homemaking is an art that is being lost in many homes, but it is an art that binds a marriage and family together, because it counters individualism and knows of service and love.

Unfortunately, in our society marriage and family are often undervalued, also and perhaps especially in the nurturing role of raising offspring. In some ways, government policy undermines the place and duty of marriage and family. Tax laws often benefit those who work outside the home and the promised federal legislation on child care has the potential of further eroding the attractiveness of the role of the stay-at-home mom. We should recognize this as a threat to marriage and the stability of society.

Marriage is about being there for each other and helping each other. And as Christians we may do so in the service of the Lord. When individualism takes over, marriages suffer.

The separation of sex from marriage

God entrusted his gift of sex to marriage because He wanted the begetting and nurturing of children to take place within the confines of wedlock. This is the second purpose of marriage. The Lord has designated marriage to be the basic building block for society. Not the individual, but the family has been designed by God as the fundamental sociological unit. The tragedy of sin is that sin separates sex from marriage and jeopardizes both the gift of sexuality and marriage.

The Old Testament

This is not a new problem. In the Old Testament, this separation of sex from marriage was already evident in the decadent culture that Israel met when coming from Egypt to take the promised land. However, even before entering Canaan, Israel herself fell prey to the sensuous nature of the fertility cult at Peor, where they prostituted themselves with Midianite women (Num 25:1-9, Deut 4:3, Ps 106:28). Also, once in the land of Canaan, the fertility cult of Baal plagued Israel throughout her history. This was a cult that condoned and

encouraged sexual sin in the name of religion. The prophet Amos lamented the fact that "Father and son use the same girl" (Amos 2:7-8). Hosea wrote, "A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God." Both men and women were into this, both married and single (Hos 4:12, 14). Sexual gratification had become of paramount importance, and everyone seemed to be involved. Jeremiah wrote, "On every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute" (Jer 2:20). It was no longer the worship of God, but of sex. It became an obsession, an end in itself. This happened to the people of God's own choosing, who had seen the mighty deeds of God! Clearly sexual sin has a strong drawing power and we need to be aware of this.

One cannot at the same time be for Christian values and also promote what God calls sin and an abomination.

The Old Testament also teaches us that when sex and marriage were separated, marriage and the family unit came under great stress. God had strictly forbidden extra-marital sexual activity, for He wanted to protect the family and society (Lev 19:29, Lev 21:9, Deut 23:17). To safeguard his people from the lure of sexual sin, God had demanded that Israel destroy the sensual Canaanite population and culture when they conquered the land (Exod 23:23-33, Exod 34:11-16). To the great detriment of God's people, this never happened. Life is a unit, and when God is disobeyed in one area, such as in not honouring marriage, He is also scorned in others, and society drifts into bondage to evil in different forms.

Today

We see that in our present society. Many men and women want so much to be free and to throw off the supposed restraints of our Christian past. One result is that sex and marriage have clearly become separated in our times. To be sure, the process has been going on for a long time. A defining moment in recent history was when the birth control pill became readily available. For the first time in the history of the world, it was very easy and simple to separate sex from the institution of marriage.

Casual premarital and extramarital sex are very common in our day because the pill is such a convenient way to prevent pregnancy. The beautiful gift of sexuality which was once reserved for marriage is now for many a toy to be used whenever passions are aroused. So-called "sex education" and the ready availability of condoms feed this attitude among youth. Teenagers are often counselled simply to do what feels good whenever you feel ready for it. Instead of counselling teenagers to wait until marriage to enjoy this wonderful gift of God, teenagers are being abused with foolish advice which is sinful and yields only bitter fruits of experiencing guilt, loneliness, and frustration. And if an unwanted pregnancy occurs, there is always an abortion that can be had quickly and easily, paid for by the government.

The consequences of separating sex from marriage are pernicious. It is no accident that our society is now infatuated with sex. Our sensuous culture idolizes it. Sex is everywhere, along with a growing tolerance of pornography. Again the most vulnerable are children. For many, their age of innocence has been taken away from them and they suffer from abuse as a direct result of porn. Many will have difficulty in establishing a healthy view of their own identity, and many will never know the beauty of a normal healthy family and marriage. Other victims

include men who become entrapped in pornography and are unable to function properly as husbands and fathers. A beautiful gift like sex can enslave and hurt if idolized and taken out of its God-ordained context.

The current infatuation with sex is also surely judgment from God for the abuse of his gifts. God says in his Word that He:

Gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator. . . Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts.

Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. (Rom 1:24-27)

God's judgment on our society includes the growing acceptance of a homosexual lifestyle. We need to be aware of this. Our society is openly embracing sin; it is defended and promoted, and woe to those who would say anything critical about it or against it. The acceptance of homosexual behaviour by so-called

churches and by the courts of our land is a warning light that something is dreadfully wrong with our country. One cannot at the same time be for Christian values and also promote what God calls sin and an abomination. Our culture needs to be called back from this way of evil, but instead the growing sympathy for homosexual behaviour has only emboldened the gay community to ask for more. They now also demand same-sex marriage. More about that the next time.

¹ A short version of this material was presented at "Ignite our Culture Conference" in Burlington, Ontario, on November 13, 2004, sponsored by Equipping Christians for the Public Square Centre.



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Part 2: How Christians Grow – Celebrating the Lord's Supper

This is the last lesson of part two. In the three previous lessons, we saw that we grow as Christians through prayer, reading the Bible, and belonging to the church. Now we will see how we grow as Christians through celebrating the Lord's Supper.

Sharing together

The Lord's Supper is a meal. In order to introduce the participants to this concept, divide them into groups and have them discuss the following questions:

1. What are the three most significant (or enjoyable) meals you have shared in throughout your life so far?
2. Whom were you with?
3. What did you eat?
4. Why was the occasion significant?

5. Why do we mark special occasions with special meals?

Besides introducing the concept of the Lord's Supper as a meal, this exercise also enables the participants to share another dimension of their life story with each other.

Why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper?

Read together one of the following Scripture passages to introduce this part of the lesson: Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-20, or 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Then do some teaching following the outline on the handout. Show the Old Testament background of the Lord's Supper in the Passover. Clarify how Jesus takes two elements of the Passover and gives a new meaning to them. Point out that when we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are remembering not only Jesus' death, but also his resurrection from the dead. Point out that just like baptism, so the Lord's Supper is a sacrament. Have the participants share together in small groups what celebrating the Lord's Supper means for them.

Looking in four directions

In order to understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper, it is beneficial to look in four directions. First, we look back and remember that Jesus died on the cross some 2000 years ago. Draw out the implications of this by reflecting on Galatians 2:20, 1 John 3:16, and 1 John 4:9-11. Second, we look up because Jesus arose from the dead and returned to heaven. Point to the comfort of this by reflecting on 1 John 1:9-2:1. Third, we look forward to the time when Jesus

Christ will return and we will celebrate the marriage of the Lamb. Read Revelation 19:6-9 to support this. Fourth, we look around because we celebrate the Lord's Supper together as members of one body. Draw out the implications of this by reflecting on 1 Corinthians 12:14-21. At the end of this teaching session, have the participants discuss together in small groups which way they tend to look when they celebrate the Lord's Supper and how they would now answer the question of what the Lord's Supper means for them.

An important meal requires a good preparation

Point out that the Lord's Supper is a reflective moment that focuses our attention on the center of our existence: everything revolves around the Lord Jesus Christ who laid down his life for us. Explain why the apostle Paul exhorts the Christians in Corinth not to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a thoughtless manner. Let the participants know that they have to prepare themselves by looking at their life in the light of the Bible. Illustrate how our life easily disintegrates into fragments. Show how the gospel integrates and brings cohesion to our life by establishing a connection between our internal and external life. For instance, God accepts and loves you on the basis of the accomplishment of someone else: Jesus Christ. Do you live in this grace and out of this grace or you do still try to earn or coerce God's favour with your own good behaviour? Does being conscious of the fact that you have been set free because Jesus offered himself for you lead you to being willing to offer yourself

for others? Also, show how the gospel brings cohesion by establishing a connection between our personal and communal life. For instance, you are a member of the body of Christ. Are you a real member of this community who gives something, or do you only come to receive because you attend church with a consumer mentality?

The Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper

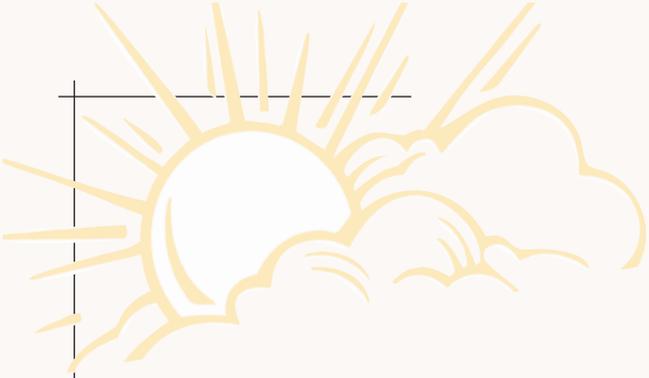
Hand out a photocopy of The Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper to everyone. Have them discuss in small groups how this form tells us how to prepare ourselves for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In addition, have the groups discuss how the Lord's Supper helps them to grow in faith. Have the groups share their findings with the whole group.

If your church will be celebrating the Lord's Supper soon, consider inviting guests to this worship service. Be sure to convey who may celebrate in your congregation and who may not (yet).

Have everyone take home a copy of the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper. Encourage them to read through the form carefully and to think about the words and what they mean. Tell them to make note of anything they do not understand so that you can deal with this the next time you meet.

If you would like to view the outline for this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. We have added an article to our Emmaus library by Dr. N. H. Gootjes on "The Meaning of the Lord's Supper." Next time, we hope to deal with "Living God's Way."





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:10)

We have now come to the last Beatitude, which describes what is going to happen to those who are Christians. It is of interest to note that this Beatitude dealing with persecution follows the one which dealt with the quality of being a peacemaker. Throughout the study on the Beatitudes we could also see that each one received a blessing. It is of interest that the first and the last Beatitude have the same blessing: “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The Lord began and ended with these particular promises in order to impress upon his listeners that the important thing was membership in the kingdom of heaven.

In this Beatitude, we must understand that it does not just deal with Christians who are being persecuted or having a hard time. We can bring endless suffering upon ourselves, and can create difficulties for ourselves which are quite unnecessary. Rather, this Beatitude refers specifically to suffering “for righteousness sake.”

What then, does this Beatitude mean? Being righteous and practicing righteousness really means being like the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, those are blessed who are persecuted for being like Him. What is more, those who are like Him will always be persecuted. This is also taught to us in John 15:18-20a. “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master’. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”

Paul also speaks to Timothy in regards to persecution in 2 Timothy 3:10-12. Here it reads, “You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings – what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, the persecution I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

We must all daily strive to be like Christ, in every way. We must get rid of our old nature that hates Christ and hates righteousness. We must daily pray that the Holy Spirit may cleanse our hearts, make them humble and pure, and so love Him, and thus become like Him.

May God graciously give us much wisdom, knowledge, and understanding in these things. For then, if and when we are called upon to suffer, we may know for certain that it is for righteousness sake, and thus may receive the full comfort of this Beatitude. May we end with the comforting words of James 1:12. “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him.”

*I cried to God in my affliction;
He answered me and set me free.
The LORD Himself is my protection.
What can a man then do to me?
On all my foes I look in triumph;
With God I face them fearlessly.
I'll put no confidence in princes;
The LORD, He shall my refuge be.*

*I'll thank the LORD; now let me enter.
Unlock the gates of righteousness.
The righteous shall here be admitted,
For this indeed the LORD 'S gate is.
I thank Thee, LORD that Thou hast heard me
And rescued me from my distress.
Thou hast become, LORD, my salvation;
All those who seek Thee wilt Thou bless.*

Psalm 118:2, 5

Birthdays in February:

- 12 CONNY VANAMERONGEN will be 40**
C/O Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B0
- 18 CORA SCHOONHOVEN will be 54**
180 Valleymede Road
Richmond Hill, ON L4B 3J4

Congratulations to you both, Conny and Cora. May our heavenly Father graciously keep you both in his care and grant you his blessings in this new year. Till next time,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East
RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
Phone 905-563-0380



C. Van Dam

Dr. C. Van Dam is principal and professor of Old Testament at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario.
cvandam@canrc.org

First semester events

As we are well into our first semester, I would like to update you on what has been taking place at the Theological College. The transition for Dr. A.J. de Visser from his work in South Africa to his task at the Theological College has gone quite smoothly. He and his family have settled into their new surroundings and we are grateful for the Lord's provision. Rev. J. De Gelder is once again teaching the church polity course this semester and we are thankful that he and his consistory make this possible.

The end of an era and preparing for the future

As mentioned earlier in *Clarion* (Oct 22, 2004), the last member of the original faculty has been called by the Lord to glory. The death of Dr. Faber on September 30 made us realize again the transitory nature of life here on earth, and that our present labours are only really fruitful if done for the Lord. With great gratitude we could reflect on what the Lord has given us in the work of this scholar and teacher.

With a view to the number of vacancies and the likelihood that this number will grow rather than diminish in the foreseeable future, the College organized an evening for all those interested in some way in pursuing study for the ministry of the Word. On October 7, thirteen potential students of different educational backgrounds, along with family and friends, showed up.

Professors Van Dam and Visscher introduced the topics "Preparing for the Ministry" and "Life in the Parsonage." An interesting question and answer session followed. We hope that an evening like this will help clarify some of the issues involved in seeking to serve as a minister and so ultimately encourage more students to consider the beautiful calling of proclaiming the glad tidings of salvation. We hope to continue to sponsor evenings like this from time to time.

Rev. Paulin Bédard

The Reformed Church of Quebec (*L'Église Réformée du Québec*) was brought very close to the College community by Rev. Paulin Bédard when he spoke on October 22, 2004. Rev. Bédard was born in a large Roman Catholic family near Quebec City. He was converted at age 18 and left the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually he became Reformed. After studying for two years at the Roman Catholic Seminary at Laval, he went to

the Reformed seminary in Aix-en-Provence in France, where he completed his studies for the ministry. After working for the French language "Back to God Hour" in Chicago (with Rev. A.R. Kayayan), he was ordained in the Reformed Church of Quebec. There he has served in several congregations and presently he is minister of a Reformed congregation in St. Georges-Beauce.

Rev. Bédard outlined the enormous challenges the Reformed church faces in Roman Catholic and secular Quebec, and showed how they try to meet the challenge by being faithful to the Lord and his Word. A special concern is the well-being of the young people who go to public schools and have little interaction with other like-minded young people outside their small community. Catechism classes, Bible study, and young people's societies are of course very important. There is training for the ministry in Quebec, Farel Reformed Theological Seminary, located in Laval, just outside Montreal. Although it is independent of the Reformed Church of

Rev. Paulin Bédard





Dr. Adolfo Garcia

Quebec, it has an important place in the life of this church.

There are seven churches in the Reformed Church of Quebec: three in the Montreal area, one in Trois-Rivières, two near Quebec City, and one in St. Georges-Beauce. Total membership is about three hundred. Four times a year the churches meet together as a synod. Through the church at Owen Sound, Canadian Reformed Churches support the work of the Reformed Church of Quebec.

Dr. Adolfo García de la Sienra

On October 27, 2004, the College had the opportunity to host a special presentation by Dr. Adolfo Garcia de la Sienra on "The Reformed World and Life View in Mexico." Dr. Garcia was born into a Roman Catholic family but was led by the Lord to the Reformed faith as a university student at the National University in Mexico City. The John Calvin Seminary in that city was also instrumental in introducing him to Reformed philosophy. Now as a professor in the faculties of economics and philosophy at the University of Veracruz in Xalapa, he is very active, and passionately so, in promoting a Reformed world view in Mexico. At the moment he is preparing Groen van Prinsterer's *Unbelief and Revolution* for publication into Spanish. Prior to that he translated Herman Dooyeweerd's *The Roots of Western Culture*, Evan Runner, *The Scriptural Religion and the Political Task*, and Evan Runner, *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*.

In his lecture, Dr. Garcia gave a brief overview of ecclesiastical history in Mexico. Among other things, he noted

that areas in the south of the country are predominantly Presbyterian. The state of Tabasco is a Presbyterian stronghold and the National Presbyterian Church even runs two university level schools in the state capital of Villermosa. After running annual conferences on Reformed philosophy in these schools, he has now been invited to set up a Master's program in Reformed history and thinking. They hope to start this in September of 2005. The program will offer courses in the history of Reformed thinking from the Reformation in the sixteenth century to the work of Groen van Prinsterer, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Dooyeweerd. For a country completely dominated by Roman Catholic thought patterns, this is quite a breakthrough.

Twenty-fifth anniversary of Professor Visscher

On October 30, the College community, along with family and friends, could officially celebrate the twenty-fifth

anniversary of Prof. G.H. Visscher in the ministry of the Word in a joyous evening of celebration. Representatives of the Theological College, colleagues, and friends spoke, reminisced, and recalled noteworthy events and tidbits from the past. As could be expected, the students also contributed to the evening in an original and humorous way.

Also from this place we congratulate Prof. and Mrs. Visscher on this important milestone and wish them the Lord's continued blessing. Besides Prof. Visscher's work at the College, his research and the writing of his dissertation is also progressing. May the Lord prosper his work both within and outside the College.

Other news

Our diligent librarian, Miss Margaret Van der Velde, has been able to continue the upgrading of our library by making it possible for library users to sign out their books electronically. This is not only more convenient for the patrons of the library, but it also simplifies the librarian's work considerably.

Dr. N.H. Gootjes was able to benefit from the Sixteenth Century Conference which was held in Toronto from October 27-30. It is very good for our professors to interact with scholarship done outside our institution. It is both educational and very stimulating. By meeting those who work in similar fields, we are able to benefit from their insights and study.



Prof. G.H. Visscher and Mrs. Visscher



News from the Women's Savings Action



College Evening

Those of you who were able to be present at the College Evening on September 10, 2004, have seen and heard some things dating from the very first beginnings of the Women's Savings Action. There was one of the original "Pink Pages" of the *Clarion*, in which the birth of the Women's Savings Action was announced. This took place at the meeting with delegates of the League of Women's Societies in Ontario, held in Fergus in 1969. One of the tins that were used for many years to collect change for the library of the Theological College was shown. We also read part of the speech Mrs. Geraldine Selles held at the College Evening of 1970, on the first birthday of both the College and the Women's Savings Action. She reported that drapes and glass curtains, china and flatware had been provided for the College building. She also presented a Gestettner Stencil Machine and a cheque for the amount of \$500, to be used for the library.

Change

Thirty-five years have passed since the Women's Savings Action was founded. In great thankfulness we look back at the early years. Some of you will remember those first years, others may realize for the first time how many

years money has been collected by the women of our churches. The stencil machine, and the dirty fingers that went with it, are a memory now. This year we were able to present a hand held bar code reader with mini computer that makes keeping track of the inventory of the library a comparatively simple operation. The cheque for this year was not \$500, but \$35,000 (including the bar code reader), a special gift for a special occasion.

Continuity

Many things have changed over the years. The stencil machine has been replaced by the photocopier, and the cards in the books have been replaced by a bar code. But all through the years there has been God's faithfulness. People have been inspired by our Lord to give and to collect gifts so that our future ministers and their teachers could work with an up-to-date library. The tools for their job were always provided.

Appreciation

In great thankfulness we may report that in the past year \$32,760.61 was collected from all over Canada and even the United States. At the closing of the book year, we had \$46,079.86 in the bank. By using part of the reserve that

had been built up in the past years, we were able to celebrate 35 years of the College and 35 years of the Women's Savings Action with a gift of \$35,000. A heartfelt thank-you from the College community to all who again gave generously, and to the representatives of the Women's Savings Action who collected the funds for the annual gift for the library. After all these years the gift to the library is expected, but never taken for granted.

From the Board

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Women's Savings Action

Contributions for the year July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004

(With comparative figures for the previous year)

Congregation	2004	2005
Abbotsford	—	—
Aldergrove	1157.12	821.00
Ancaster	937.81	843.66
Attercliffe	765.50	1181.00
Barrhead	665.00	685.00
Brampton	355.83	123.85
Burlington Ebenezer	910.35	1236.55
Burlington Fellowship	572.75	509.00
Burlington Waterdown	755.00	885.00
Calgary	436.75	323.29
Carman East	425.00	268.00
Carman West	137.00	207.00
Chatham	605.00	464.00
Chilliwack	582.00	500.00
Cloverdale	380.00	890.00
Coaldale	600.00	665.00
Dunnville/Wainfleet	594.00	—
Edmonton Immanuel	2290.50	1897.65
Edmonton Providence	1086.70	1262.69
Elora	726.00	650.00
Fergus	734.18	623.93
Flamborough	—	1093.50
Glanbrook	628.10	529.00
Grand Rapids	76.11	—
Grand Valley	128.05	151.50
Grassie	305.20	530.21
Guelph	1111.00	1049.50
Hamilton	1586.64	1471.00
Houston	540.00	608.00
Kerwood	—	—
Langley	1930.00	1725.00
Langley Willoughby Heights	885.00	1265.00
Lincoln	1133.00	1150.50
London	156.00	275.00
Lynden	—	—
Neerlandia	1511.00	—
Orangeville	—	249.25
Ottawa	195.45	135.00
Owen Sound	275.00	200.00
Rockway	377.50	450.00
Smithers	1161.61	1172.77
Smithville	1692.83	1115.03
St. Albert	1216.00	—
Surrey	270.00	330.00
Taber	—	—
Toronto	109.46	164.00
Vernon	321.00	276.00
Winnipeg Grace	887.00	711.25
Winnipeg Redeemer	825.00	948.00
Yarrow	—	—
Royalties Selles	723.17	428.61
Total Collected	\$ 32,760.61	\$ 30,064.74

Church News

Called by the church of Coaldale, Alberta:

Rev. D. Poppe

of Houston, British Columbia.



Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College

HAMILTON, ONTARIO

ADMISSIONS SEPTEMBER 2005

The **Board of Covenant College** invites applications from prospective students for the 2005-2006 academic year.

The College offers teacher training programs to prepare candidates for teaching positions in the K-Grade 10 range.

Admission Requirements:

For the 1-year Diploma of Education program:
a suitable university degree.

For the 3-year Diploma of Teaching program:
a grade 12 diploma with university entrance equivalence.

Prospective candidates are invited to contact the College for more information and/or to obtain an enrolment package. **Students are encouraged to apply before March 31, 2005.** Those who plan to seek admission in the year 2006 are also encouraged to contact the College as soon as possible.

Visit our website: www.covenantteacherscollege.com

Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College

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P. Torenvliet

Mr. Pieter Torenvliet is principal of John Calvin School in Yarrow, British Columbia, and co-author of the church history series, "The Flame of the Word." pietertorenvliet@shaw.ca

International Conference for Reformed Education



From May 10-12 the first International Conference for Reformed Education was organized at a conference centre in Lunteren, the Netherlands. This was the first for Reformed education. Approximately 70 educators met, primarily to discuss the identity and character of Reformed education in the twenty-first century.

Reformed schools, established by the members of the Reformed churches, have existed for more than fifty years. Especially in The Netherlands, Christian schools with a Reformed character have been around since the mid nineteenth century, after the Great Secession of 1834 and the Second Secession of 1886. Parents believed they could not send their children to schools that did not wholly accept God's Word in accordance with the Reformed standards as articulated in the Three Forms of Unity. The Conference concentrated primarily on the original reasons that motivated parents to establish Reformed schools after the Liberation of the church in 1944. For similar reasons, post-WWII immigration led to the establishment of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the schools associated with these church communities.

Keynote address

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. G.J. Oosterhuis, principal of the Guido de Brès Secondary School in Amersfoort, The Netherlands. Briefly he sketched the historical developments in the Reformed schools in the Netherlands since 1953, when the first school was

established. (William of Orange Christian School in Surrey, B.C. was established in 1955.) By and large, the people who spearheaded the establishment of these Reformed schools felt that in the wake of the church reformation in 1944, they could no longer send their children to a school where the teachers and many parents did not worship with them on Sundays. Their views on the covenant and other church issues set them apart. Therefore, the new Reformed school societies articulated constitutions that restricted staffing and enrolment to members of the (Liberated) Reformed Churches. During the mid 1960s the Dutch churches were again involved in a doctrinal conflict that led to an emotional struggle, and a schism in the Reformed churches.

Dr. Oosterhuis stressed that the prime motive for the establishment of Reformed schools stemmed from the church conflict. However, it has been sixty years since the Liberation of 1944, and almost forty years past the doctrinal struggles of the 1960s. Consequently, the primary motivation that drives parents to maintain Reformed schools has changed.

Identity of Reformed education

Elsbeth Vonkeman summarized the following changes typical of many Reformed people today:

- Reformed people have become more aware of the need to experience their faith, and are directed less by the more formal statements of faith such as the Reformed confessions.

- As a result of this awareness, clear uniformity of thinking within and between congregations of the Reformed churches has become less prevalent. We (the Dutch) are more inclined to accept these differences.
- We have developed greater appreciation for the breadth and depth of God's work, also in other denominations in our environment. This appreciation also brings other church denominations within the horizon of our Reformed schools.
- Loyalty, which was assumed to be a matter-of-course, toward our "own" Reformed organizations has been replaced by an evaluation in which quality and performance are placed beside the issue of Reformed identity, and these new criteria are used to make a choice whether such an organization should receive support.

Therefore, many of the present generation of parents in the Reformed churches no longer look upon the church issues of the past as prime or definitive reasons to maintain distinctive Reformed education. Other reasons more relevant to the present educational needs of our children will supersede the motives that drove parents in the past. In the context of this identity malaise, the International Conference for Reformed Education was convened, among other reasons, to reflect on the distinctive character and identity of Reformed education.

Many colleagues stressed that the redefinition of the character and identity of Reformed education does not deny the relevance of the past, but

acknowledges that our children must be equipped to live as Reformed Christians in the twenty-first century.

Contemporary problems for Reformed education

Dr. Oosterhuis' keynote address and the subsequent presentation by Elsbeth Vonkeman highlighted several of the contemporary problems that have caused disquiet among Reformed people in the Netherlands.

1) Governance

The Ministry of Education has forced schools to amalgamate, either physically, or from a board governance perspective. As a consequence, large secondary schools cater to a very large catchment area. The cost of transporting students to these schools, usually borne by the parents, may run into several thousand euros per year. Both the distance from the various homes to the central address of the board and school administration, and a growing indifference of parents' responsibility to the schooling of their children, has led to very poor attendance at society meetings. As a consequence, 5% of the society elects the board. Needless to say, such a board ends up being a poor reflection of the parent



International Conference for Reformed Education, Lunteren

community that has enrolled their children in the school.

Dr. Oosterhuis expressed worry about possible government intervention that would force boards to become more representative of the parent body. If, for example, such a parent body has a substantial number of students from non Liberated Reformed families, the parents who want uniquely Reformed education for their children will lose control of staffing and the curriculum.

Elsbeth Vonkeman has assured me that there are already means in place for all parents to express their influence via a form of Parent Advisory Council (*Medezeggenschapsraad*), and that the membership of school societies is not anchored in educational law, but in a form of "society law." This law provides the legal right for societies to limit or

de-limit membership based on their own criteria.

2) Loss of historical roots

Dr. Oosterhuis stated that many parents no longer consider the reformatory events of 1944 or 1967 primary motives to establish and maintain unique Reformed schools. The doctrinal issues that were relevant and dominant in the fifteen years after the Liberation of 1944, such as the views on covenant, election, and the church, are no longer viewed as central issues for today. Other issues have taken centre stage: the expression of meaningful and authentic faith, an appropriate response to post modern thinking, and equipping students to counter other contemporary issues.

Elsbeth Vonkeman stressed that society has become individualistic, pluralistic, secular, and experiences rapid and dynamic development. In the latter context, the central question has become: *how do we remain Reformed A.D. 2004?* It has become especially important that Reformed parents work out and validate the foundational context of their schools. In other words, if fairly recent church history has lost its formative significance in shaping our Reformed thinking, how do we profile the identity of our schools? Moreover, Vonkeman emphasized that this identity must be more than a paper trail of foundational statements. Identity is what you experience; we must constantly reflect on what makes a Reformed school unique.



The Canadian delegation at Lunteren

3) Secularism, individualism, indifference, consumerism

Not unlike other Western countries, the banes of individualism, materialism and secularism have not passed by the Netherlands harmlessly. The keynote speaker stated that under the influence of these “isms”, some parents now view the choice of a school for their children in a consumerist fashion: it must be conveniently close, provide options, variety, and provide satisfaction. If you (the consumer-parent) feel short-changed by the Reformed school in any of the above, then you look for a better provider.

Other presentations and suggestions

At least four major presentations dwelt on foundational issues, and the change of past values. In each case, the presenters made suggestions for change. Dr. Oosterhuis, for example, suggested revisiting our shared vision with the parents, and redoubling our efforts to make our schools identifiably Reformed in *what is seen in the classroom*. Teachers are the closest to the students, and therefore they must model the identity of Reformed education by providing an inspiring and personal relationship with the students. Teachers must be more than simply communicant members of the church; they need to be able to uphold the mission statement of the school.

Mr. A. Breen from Australia pleaded for a tighter relationship between the school and the established church. Together they work within the grand context of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Mr. H. vanLeeuwen, divisional principal of the Rotterdam Secondary school, suggested changing the Church Order to tighten the responsibility of consistories in steering parents toward Reformed education, following an Australian model. Elsbeth Vonkeman suggested that more effort should be spent on faith experience in the attention given to the breadth of God’s work by inculcating a sense of awe in the students. But she also added that school renewal cannot go without rekindling the school’s relationship with the parents. Such a relationship is essential to the Reformed identity of the school.

Devotions
in the
Amerikazaal



Workshops

There were numerous workshops and smaller presentations that highlighted good educational practices: adaptive instruction, “dreaming about the future of Reformed schools,” narrative teaching, school climate, the triangle: school, family and church, media education, etc.

The plenary sessions of the conference discussed and formulated characteristics of Reformed education. The brisk discussion and the exchange of ideas at the Lunteren conference was very similar to such discussions we’ve experienced in several places in Canada. The issues and perspectives on Reformed education are quite similar. Furthermore, it is important to note that the differences in opinion were not principal, but more a question of a somewhat different emphasis driven by local circumstances. Most of the suggestions underscored values that have long been associated with Reformed education.

Initially these identity statements were formulated in the form of questions and answers. *For whom?* Children of God’s covenant. *Under whose responsibility?* The parents, with the cooperation of the church community of Jesus Christ. *By whom?* Faithful and professional teachers. *What?* Guide God’s unique children by means of developmental teaching and learning God’s Word and work. *To what end?* To glorify God, follow Christ, and carry out their responsibility in obedience to God. The conference organizers took many of the identity suggestions and formulated a single statement:

“With the cooperation of the church community of Jesus Christ, parents

organize primary and secondary education for their children.

Therefore, the Reformed school is responsible to the school association, but first and foremost to God who builds his kingdom out of the mouths of his children who glorify his name.

Identity is recognized by how it faithfully and professionally guides God’s unique children in following Christ in his kingdom, by means of developmental appropriate teaching, and learning God’s work and Word.”

In conclusion

Did we always agree? No, there was a variety of opinions and different emphases. However, the exchange of ideas was done in a spirit of brotherhood and trust: iron sharpening iron as we read in Proverbs. In so many ways it was truly a discussion within the big Family, brothers and sisters in the Lord. Though the challenges of language remained, the strong spirit of collegiality and unity in faith prevailed throughout the conference.

The discussion has not ended, and nor should it end. The Dutch folks are going to create a website which will serve as a vehicle and medium to continue the discussion about Reformed education, and work toward the development of a focus for the next conference.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers’ Association East. Anyone willing to respond or interact to an article or anyone willing to write an article for us is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman (bouwman@surepost.net).