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*Something
about
Headship*

*The Good Fight
of Faith*

*Passed on to...
the Deacons*



*Hamilton
Cornerstone Canadian
Reformed Church
after renovations*



Cl. Stam

Rev. Cl. Stam is minister emeritus of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, Ontario.
clstam@canrc.org

Something about Headship

*Headship is an exercise in love,
not an expression of power.*

Recently in the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, in response to various letters received from the congregation, the Council organized a discussion evening by means of a panel on the issue of women's voting *privileges* in the election of office bearers. The panel consisted of Prof. G.H. Visscher, who was to review the biblical data, Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff, who was to explain the Dutch developments, and myself, who was to present the decisions of major assemblies in Canada.

The fact that the congregation is involved in the process of election is not a matter of rights but a matter of privilege.

The meeting was conducted in a harmonious manner and a good discussion followed the panel's presentations. The council will now take the information received to consider what can (still) be done to resolve this (outstanding) issue in a proper ecclesiastical manner.

Privileges, not rights

The attentive reader will have noticed that I avoided the use of the term voting *rights*. Frankly, I don't think anyone has the *right* to vote, for the church is governed by Christ, its Head, and not by any members, be they male and/or female. "And He [Christ] is the head of the body, the church" (Col 1:18). The fact that the congregation is involved in the process of election is not a matter of rights but a matter of privilege. It is evidence of God's grace.

This is not a matter of semantics but a matter of *principle*, which is important for the discussion that follows. Christ governs his church through lawfully chosen and appointed office bearers who rule by his Spirit in accordance with his Word, and this government is never given into the hand of sinful mortals.

Those called to govern the church are not obligated to call an election for the filling of vacancies in the offices. There were times when new office bearers were simply *appointed*. The fact that we now have elections in most places is something that has grown historically, but is not a right automatically given to some or all members. It is important to see things here in the proper perspective.

Synod Smithville, 1980

The Synod that has occupied itself most intensely with the matter of voting was Synod Smithville, 1980. There some important statements were made which were to be followed up by subsequent assemblies. Alas, this did not happen, but the decisions of Synod Smithville still stand.

This Synod considered (and its considerations were accepted as decisions) that if voting is an exercise of governing, we have "in essence a Fifth Assembly in the Church," and added, "This 'form' of democratic rule is basically strange to the stipulations of Article 22, Church Order."

It is clear that Synod Smithville did not see the voting for office bearers as a form of governing and rejected this as a ground for withholding of voting privileges from women. I sense that by now nobody anymore really sees voting as a form of governing. That is, really, an untenable position.

When men or women are asked to participate in the voting for office bearers, they are not asked to be involved in the governing of the church. All they are asked to do is cooperate



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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: R. Aasman, N.H. Gootjes, W.B. Slomp, Cl. Stam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:

Clarion, 57 Oakridge Drive South, St. Albert, AB T8N 7H2
E-Mail: veenendaal@shaw.ca

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with the council in expressing their preference for the candidates who have been presented by the council.

Meanwhile, if voting is not governing, why is this privilege withheld from the communicant sisters in the church? Should they not be *fully* involved in the life of the congregation, also when it comes to choosing office-bearers? That was the direction of Synod Smithville which it asked the following advisory committee to pursue.

The new advisory committee did not fulfill this mandate at all, but came up with totally different grounds and proposals. Hence the matter was bogged down and the subsequent decision-making process was stunted. To my knowledge, this has never been appealed at any major assembly. New grounds!

Headship

If the matter of governing has been satisfactorily resolved or, at least, been decided upon, there is still the matter of “headship.” Is voting by women in the church not an infringement upon the *headship* of the man? This point was also brought to the fore at the recent meeting in Hamilton.

In I Corinthians 11 we read that “the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” See also Ephesians 5: 22, “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.” This is preceded by the command: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.”

Would the granting of the voting privilege to a woman not mean a denial of the *headship* of the man? Besides, does the apostle speak here of *all* women or does he restrict himself to *married* women? What does this “headship” actually imply in the relations between men and women in the church? Is the expressing of a preference in the election of office bearers a negation of this headship?

In connection with headship, one speaker at the Hamilton meeting referred the participants to the Old Testament. Much was to be learned there about headship, it was said. Well, that needs to be carefully investigated and evaluated, for we do not live anymore in the time and place when society was theocratic. I’d like to see a Synod appoint a Committee to study this aspect and provide the churches with some careful and clear direction.

Like voting, *headship* is not a general, inalienable right simply received by gender. It is not merely a birthright to be

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exercised at will and by convenience. The apostle Paul reminds us that the husband is the head of the wife *as Christ is the head of the church*. In the Bible headship is carefully qualified. Headship is *an exercise in love*, not an expression of power.

The present situation

As it stands presently, the matter of women's voting privilege is unresolved and unsettling. Personally, I increasingly regret that Synod Neerlandia did not properly finalize the matter. *Mea maxima culpa*. Together we need to find a definitive scriptural answer, and if that answer is not evidently available or properly forthcoming, the matter should be left in the freedom of the churches.

I can see it happening that if the churches do not together take a balanced, scriptural position in this matter, some churches will move ahead on their own. Locally granting voting privileges to all communicant members is not against our confession or church order.

If voting is not governing, why is this privilege withheld from the communicant sisters in the church?

In 1974, Synod Toronto decided not to appoint a committee to study this matter. Perhaps in those days major assemblies were afraid of making binding doctrinal decisions. I understand that. But in 1977 Synod Coaldale concluded, "Since unity of practice is desirable, the introduction of women's voting rights by a particular church on its own would be regrettable." Therefore a committee was appointed. Now, more than twenty-five years later, we are not one step farther.

What is "regrettable" is not yet unlawful. I can see it that one day a local church will go ahead on its own in this matter. If we want to prevent that, we need to resolve the matter together. Time is running out.



Hamilton – auditorium



MATTHEW 13:52

The Good Fight of Faith

Rev. J.M. VanSpronsen is
minister of the Canadian
Reformed Church at
Smithers, British Columbia.
jvanspronsen@canrc.org

“[For] the Spirit [desires] what is contrary to the sinful nature.”

Galatians 5:17b

Place yourself in your lawn chair staring at a campfire in front of you. Notice how the fire slowly consumes the wood. Before the piece of wood is thrown on the fire it remains hard, cold, and unchanging. When you throw a piece of wood on the fire, immediately the fire begins to consume the wood – the wood puts up some resistance, and for a while you have both wood and fire in the same place, but if the wood is normal the fire will conquer it. We read in Galatians that when the Holy Spirit is present in your heart, He is waging war against the wooden heart of your sinful nature. Although your sinful nature puts up some resistance so that the two are in conflict with one another, the Holy Spirit will overcome. The sinful nature can be compared to a block of wood: firm, unmoving, and unchanging. The Holy Spirit can be compared to a fire that burns up a block of wood. The two are in conflict with each other.

The words of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5 remind us that in this life there will always be a conflict in the hearts of believers as the Holy Spirit battles with the sinful nature. We must be realistic about the ongoing struggle in the lives of every one of us. There is winning and there is losing – there is back and forth – one morning you feel ready to serve the Lord as the general

of his army, and that very afternoon you might be slinking away from your business, your husband or wife, or your parents. . . you failed again. Sin is a real and debilitating part of our lives. The sinful nature pulls us in one direction and shows itself in many ways in our own lives (Gal 5:19-21). We are grieved when we “do not do what we want” (Gal 5:17), and yet God does not make us face this struggle alone. In Galatians we read that the Holy Spirit is *in conflict* with the sinful nature. Like a fire in conflict with a block of wood, so the Holy Spirit continuously works to overcome the ongoing desires of the sinful nature in the heart of the believer. And as we see this struggle and this conflict, we know and believe that in Jesus Christ we will be victorious!

Do you continue to fight the desires of your sinful nature? Such a fight is evidence of the Holy Spirit in the life of those who believe in Jesus Christ. When we have faith in Jesus Christ, we begin to want to show our thankfulness; we begin to desire to keep in step with the Holy Spirit and fight against our sinful desires. In the Form for the Celebration of Lord’s Supper, the necessity of this fight against sin is stated very clearly. First we confess that we do not yet have perfect faith, and so we daily contend with the weakness of faith and

with the evil desires of the flesh. But then we confess: “Yet, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we are heartily sorry for these shortcomings and *desire to fight against our unbelief* and to live according to all the commandments of God (*Book of Praise*, p 596). The gracious message of the gospel is that in Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, sin and weakness remain in us *against our will* and cannot prevent us from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly food and drink.

The block of wood and the fire are battling each other in the fire pit before your eyes. In the heart of every believer the Holy Spirit battles the sinful nature so that the life of every Christian resembles a battlefield of desires. But in the midst of our battle we know that we have the victory in Jesus Christ. We may know that as we see this struggle in our hearts, it is evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence within us, and we may know He will overcome. It is then in thankfulness for the work of Jesus Christ in our lives that we desire to submit to God’s Word in Timothy 6: “But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Tim 6:11, 12).



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 4.0

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



The sixth commandment says that you shall not murder. You may think to yourself, "Of course you would not murder! Why is this commandment read aloud in church every Sunday?"

Because it is possible that it may happen once in a while. With a murderer it can happen like this: he meets someone that he dislikes. After a while, he cannot stand him any more. He begins to hate him. Then he becomes mad at him for saying something about his wife. His anger flares up and he hits the man hard. And that's how he became a murderer.



At times all of us become jealous and angry without good reason. Imagine someone in school saying something nasty about you. Would you not want to hit or kick that person? You won't do it, but you look for a way to get back at them. You decide that you will never play with them again, and you may think up a nasty rumour and spread it around school. You hope that others will hate that person too.

But in church you are told that "You shall not murder." By this command, God means that even the beginning of murder, namely anger, is wrong. Do away with your anger. Do not think evil about someone else. Do not be jealous. Stop hating! The Lord Jesus called all these evil and nasty feelings murder. Look it up in Matthew 5.

That is one part of this commandment.

Now the other part.

When your dad says that he is not going out tonight, you know what that means. He doesn't even need to say that he will be staying at home. In the same way, the Lord says only half of what He means. He says that we shall not murder. You know the rest, even when the Lord does not say it. Don't be angry; so, be nice. Don't be jealous; so, be happy when others are doing well. Don't hate someone; that means, like them. Don't tell a bad story about someone; think of something positive. In short, love your neighbour as yourself.

We may be thankful that our country has policemen and judges, because evil things do happen. These people have to catch murderers and punish them.

Do you know that there is something else you should not do? You should not act dangerously, so that you risk having an accident. You should be careful with the life the Lord has given you. For example, we know that smoking is very bad for your health. You can ask any doctor. Therefore, I want to ask you: does God approve of smoking?



Rev. W.W.J. VanOene is minister emeritus of the Canadian Reformed Church at Fergus-South. wwjvo@uniserve.com

Passed on to. . .the Deacons

It is the task of the deacons to provide for the individual members of the church.

Although for many years I have not had the privilege of reading many church bulletins, yet there are still a sufficient number of them that I have the opportunity to scan. In the course of the years I have seen a dangerous trend developing, and it appears prudent to draw attention to it and to raise a warning finger. What I am referring to is something that has become customary with many consistories: there comes a request for financial support and frequently the reaction is: "Passed on to the deacons."

We shall not try to answer the question of why a consistory with the deacons does not make a decision itself with respect to such a request. Let it suffice to say for the moment that it is an easy way of reacting to a request and of putting the responsibility for a reaction on the shoulders of the deacons.

In the course of the years the Lord has provided the churches with ample financial means. Various organizations both within and outside of the churches appear to be keenly aware of that. Some congregations may have difficulty providing for the needs of their members who require support, and they may even be compelled to ask for assistance from neighbouring church(es). In general, however, deacons are struggling with the question of how to distribute the available funds in a responsible manner.

As said, various organizations and societies are well aware of this fact. The result is that, in the course of the years, the number of requests for financial support reaching the consistories has multiplied. They approach the churches.

And what is easier, when such a request comes, than to pass it on to the deacons without judging the validity of the request and without investigating whether it is an ecclesiastical matter or whether it belongs to the office (task) of the deacons?

The deacons do not pay voluntary contributions or school fees.

When preparing for this article, I scanned various reports of consistory meetings and counted a respectable number of no fewer than twenty-nine (yes, twenty-nine) different requests for financial support that were simply passed on to the deacons. If I had continued my search I am certain that I could have reached the number of forty or even more.

What is the task of the deacons?

It thus appears necessary to reflect on the task or the office of the deacons. Their task also determines, and consequently also limits, their authority to ask the congregation for their donations or "offerings." If they exceed the boundaries of their task or authority, they thereby also forfeit the right to "demand" of the congregation that it shall fill their hands so that they can indeed distribute. They are not like the federal government which distributes at will from what they take from the citizens.

When reading the Form for Ordination, we become aware that it is the task of the deacons to provide for the individual members of the church. It will not be necessary, I think, to quote extensively from the Form for Ordination. I consider it to be one of the most beautiful sentences when we read, "No one in the congregation of Christ may live uncomforted under the pressure of illness, loneliness, or poverty."

Our conclusion from what the church has summarized concerning the office or the task of the deacons can be no other than that they extend support (not only financial aid) to individual members. If a member falls short of seeing his or her needs met, there is this help that the Lord has provided in his office-bearers. No where do we read that the deacons are to support organizations, not even those who are formed exclusively by members of the church.

They do not support organizations

When, for instance, a member claims that he cannot pay voluntary contributions to the church or that he cannot pay the school fees for his children's Reformed education, it definitely is not the task of the deacons to pay those contributions or fees for him.

In the first place, such a member has his priorities wrong. First he must fulfill his obligations towards the church of the Lord, as well as to the school and whatever other obligations he has. If then he does not have sufficient means to meet his other expenses and cannot give

to his family what his family needs, he may ask and will receive from the deacons what is lacking in order that he and his family may “not live uncomforted under the pressure of . . .poverty.”

The deacons do not pay voluntary contributions or school fees; much less do they pay the requested amount directly to the church treasurer or the treasurer of the school. They provide what persons are lacking, not what organizations come short.

Deacons are permitted, of course, to extend help to persons outside the church when the needs of the members of the congregation can be met. Also here, however, it must be borne in mind that help may be extended only on an individual basis. The ancient church was well-known for showing compassion and extending help to prisoners and slaves. Thus we would do well to follow the same course.

It is a different thing, however, to extend financial aid to organizations that provide help to prisoners and others who are in difficult circumstances. Much less would it be permitted to give from the moneys collected for the care of the needy to organizations that have nothing to do with providing for the needs of those who lack the necessary things.

A few examples

Let me give some examples, and this not in order to single out any organization, but just to make it more concrete.

Personally, my wife and I are regular contributors to the Canadian Bible Society. But what does this Bible Society have to do with providing for the needs of someone in order that he or she “may not live under the pressure of loneliness, illness, or poverty”? Consistories that pass a request from this Society on to the deacons fail to distinguish well and do the deacons a disservice.

Here is another example. We greatly appreciate the work that Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) is doing. Without this organization and the dedicated service of those who are active in it, the work of our missionaries would be much more

difficult and would be severely hampered. But is it correct when a consistory passes a request for support from this organization on to the deacons? Not when I understand correctly what the task of the deacons is according to the Form the churches have adopted.

If a consistory with the deacons is convinced that an organization deserves our support (and, for one, the MAF certainly does), it would be wrong to ask the deacons to take from the moneys collected for providing for the needs of those who otherwise would live under the pressure of poverty and to give this to MAF. The proper way would be to ask the deacons whether they have sufficient means for the fulfillment of their task and would not get into difficulty if they dropped one of “their” collections in favour of one for MAF.

It is not necessarily the duty of the deacons to serve as “money gatherers” for all sorts of causes.

The same applies to all organizations irrespective of what they stand for. It applies to societies taking care of homes for the aged, societies that provide counselling in difficulties, home mission work, education all over the world, and so on, and so on.

Churches should not be easy sources for financial support and the deacons are not office-bearers to whom many requests may be passed on. They are allowed only to use the funds for the purpose to which they have been gathered, otherwise they lose the right to ask the congregation to contribute.

Prevent difficulties

At the same time they would bring the members into the temptation of withholding their “offerings,” because they are convinced that these gifts are being used in a way that conflicts with the purpose for which they were collected.

To make it very concrete: some years ago a society (which could issue “charitable donation receipts”) that we supported for many years appeared to have set up a business (with the help of our donations, of course) that competed with legitimate businesses. In addition, its business practices were such that we wrote them a letter in which we pointed out their actions conflicted with God’s Word and told them that from that moment on they would not receive a penny from us. What are we to do if “our” deacons should take from their funds and support that society? On a regular basis I see its name mentioned in consistory reports with the usual “passed on to the deacons.”

Special decision necessary

There may be societies which a consistory considers worthy of our support. In such cases, as stated above, the consistory could ask the deacons whether their cash position would warrant the loss of one or more collections, so that a collection could be taken for that specific purpose. In such a case every member could give whatever he or she considers necessary. As for the above-mentioned society, I would pass the collection bag on without depositing anything into it.

Also, the body to decide about collections during the worship services is not the body of deacons, but the consistory with the deacons. Decisions about collections may not be left up to the deacons but must be made by the body of all office-bearers together.

If the consistory with the deacons has decided that a collection shall be taken for a specific purpose, they may ask the deacons whether the brothers are willing to take up that collection or whether some members of the congregation should be asked to do it. It is not necessarily the duty of the deacons to serve as “money gatherers” for all sorts of causes. It does not belong to their office or their task.

Thus matters are kept in proper perspective and order.



Tim Challies lives in Oakville, Ontario, where he is a web designer. He may be reached at www.challies.com

Just How Generous is this Orthodoxy? (Part 1 of 2)

An overview

We live in a day where relativism is quickly becoming the dominant philosophy in our postmodern society. It exists in all spheres of our culture: political, moral, governmental, and even religious. Relativism is even gaining ground within the realm of those who consider themselves the church of Jesus Christ. Tragically, it has even begun to pervade Reformed churches.

One of the most recent conduits of relativism into the church is known as the Emergent Church (or the Emerging Church). It lacks the cohesiveness to be considered a movement, but instead is a loose grouping of leaders and individuals characterized by several areas that ought to be of great concern to Reformed Christians.

1. *An emphasis on ecumenism.* The Emergent Church downplays doctrinal distinctives in favour of broad ecumenism. Some would even extend this beyond those who call themselves Christians and seek unity with all religions.
2. *Mysticism.* It is not overstating the case to claim that without mysticism the Emergent Church would not exist. Drawing much from ancient and contemporary mystics, primarily Roman Catholic, Emergents place high value on contemplative prayer and mystical experiences.
3. *Relativism.* The relativism inherent in our society is finding its way into the church in several ways, but one of the more significant is through the Emergent Church. This

movement rejects absolutes in favour of the relativism of our postmodern society.

4. *Elusiveness.* It is difficult to critique the beliefs of those within the Emergent Church, because discerning what they actually believe is far more difficult than finding what they do not believe. Settling on those beliefs is akin to nailing Jello to the wall - it is a near impossible task. Their beliefs, as with Jello, have no consistent form or shape, and are always changing, always conforming to their surroundings. We are often left to read between the lines, interpreting what the author believes in light of what he rejects.

As a means to introduce the Emergent Church and postmodern Christianity, I will be reviewing Brian McLaren's book *A Generous Orthodoxy: Why I Am a Missional, Evangelical, Post/Protestant, Liberal/Conservative, Mystical/Poetic, Biblical, Charismatic/Contemplative, Fundamentalist/Calvinist, Anabaptist/Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Green, Incarnational, Depressed-yet-Hopeful, Emergent, Unfinished CHRISTIAN*, known hereafter simply as *A Generous Orthodoxy*. McLaren, a prolific author and pastor of Cedar Ridge Community Church, is considered the leader within this "conversation" (he refuses to acknowledge it as a movement), and was recently named by *TIME Magazine* to be one of the twenty-five most influential Evangelicals in America. This book is an introduction to the type of Christianity McLaren envisions for a postmodern society.

Because of the importance of understanding this movement, this is going to be quite a long book review that will examine McLaren's claims in some detail. To spare you having to read the full text if you are not so-inclined, I will ruin any sense of expectation by giving in advance my general impressions of this book. In short, it is awful. I consider it, in terms of content, one of the worst I have ever read, and it stands as a damning indictment of what passes for Christian reading in our day. Though it was easy to read, and even enjoyable at times, throughout the text Brian McLaren has consistently, deliberately and systematically dismantled historical Protestantism. From *Sola Scriptura* to hell to biblical inerrancy, nothing is sacred. Those who have been Christians for some time and have been blessed with the discernment that wisdom brings will be grappling already with an all-too-familiar feeling that this book represents yet another attack on the faith. And that is exactly what this book is. It is an attack from within the visible church, from one who considers himself a brother in Christ. The remainder of this review will concern itself with showing how this book does away with biblical faith, replacing it with something far less godly and far more human. In short, something that is simply not Christianity.

One has to become accustomed to McLaren's rather odd style of writing. He is an able author who writes in a conversational tone, continually pokes fun at himself, uses many long sentences, and, by his own admission, uses parentheses far too often. The reader

also needs to get used to near-constant use of the prefixes “post” and “pre.” Much of what McLaren writes about has no clear identity of its own, so can only be defined in terms of what preceded or followed it. While we may not know exactly what postmodernism is or what form it will take, we do know that it follows, and hence is not to be equated with, modernism. He constantly throws about terms such as post-liberal, post-conservative, post-protestant, pre-modern, post-medieval, and so on.

To understand what this book claims to be, we need look no further than the back cover. It tells us that McLaren “calls for a radical, Christ-centered orthodoxy of faith and practice in a missional, generous spirit. He argues for a post-liberal, post-conservative, post-protestant convergence that will stimulate lively interest and global conversation among thoughtful Christians from all traditions. Instead of defining what is and what is not orthodox, McLaren walks through many traditions of the faith, bringing to centre a way of life that draws us closer to Christ and each other.” Thus, while this book primarily intends to draw us closer to Christ, it is also ecumenical in its desire to break down barriers that separate the various traditions within Christianity. To this end, the cover claims it will draw the reader “toward a way of living that looks beyond the ‘us/them’ paradigm to the blessed and ancient paradox of ‘we.’”

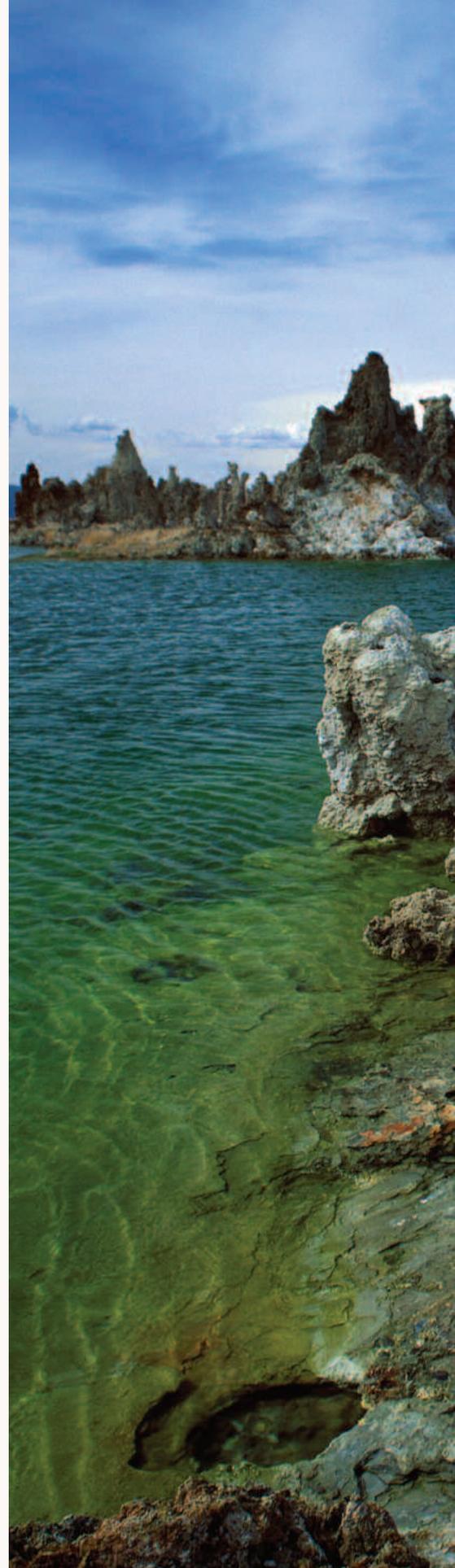
Upon reading that description, I immediately became curious as to what McLaren’s authority will be. As he examines the wide divergence of traditions with Christianity, how will he decide which to hold on to, which to cast aside, and which to adopt as his own? Will he test all things in the light of Scripture and follow Paul’s directive to Titus to “teach what accords with sound doctrine,” or will he rely instead on his own wisdom and experience? It does not take long for the answer to

become clear. We will turn now to a synopsis of the text.

McLaren’s introduction

The book begins with an introduction in which the author establishes the audience this book is intended for. McLaren states that the book is especially directed at “Christians (or former Christians) – evangelical, liberal, Catholic, whatever – who are about to leave (or have just left) the whole business because of the kinds of issues I raise in this book. And equally I’m writing for the spiritual seekers who are attracted to Jesus, but they don’t feel there’s room for them in what is commonly called Christianity unless they swallow a lot of additional stuff” (p. 39). While I do not fit in either category, I felt I should read the book as a means to attain a greater understanding of Brian McLaren and the Emergent Church. His popularity, especially among young evangelicals, is growing by the day. My interest, then, is in knowing who this person is that commands such a following, and in discerning just where he is leading these people.

In the introduction the author also states that he has gone out of his way to be “provocative, mischievous, and unclear, reflecting my belief that clarity is sometimes overrated, and that shock, obscurity, playfulness, and intrigue (carefully articulated) often stimulate more thought than clarity” (p. 23). Within the text there is no further reference to where he is being serious and where he is being provocative, mischievous, or unclear. Hence I have no option but to approach everything he says as if he really means it. I would also like to point out that I do not claim any sense of absolute objectivity. I have an objective standard to which I will hold this book – the Holy Bible – but cannot let go of my Reformed, Protestant heritage and understanding of Scripture as I examine this book. I read the pages with a spirit of





humility, always seeking and willing to be taught, but without letting go of the Word of God.

Chapter 0, entitled “Mature Audiences Only,” is where we will find our first clues as to what McLaren considers to be a generous orthodoxy. It is a term coined by Hans Frei, a key figure in the emergence of what is now known as post-liberal theology. A typical definition of the term “orthodoxy” might be “a belief in the standards of accepted and true doctrines taught in the Bible.” In other words, the Bible defines within its pages what true doctrine is, and those who believe in and adhere to these doctrines are orthodox. McLaren defines it differently. “Orthodoxy in this book may mean something more like ‘what God knows, some of which we believe a little, some of which they believe a little, and about which we all have a whole lot to learn.’ Or it may mean ‘how we can search for a kind of truth you can never fully get into your head, so instead you seek to get your head (and heart) into it’” (p. 28). He believes most Christians are far too serious and busy for the typical definition of orthodoxy. I do not wish to belabour this point, but this is important. Look at what McLaren has not said. He has rejected the view that the Bible exists to give believers a consistent knowledge of God. He rejects the idea that we can have a consistently accurate orthodoxy from the Scripture. In his view we cannot know absolute truth from the Bible; hence we must search the vast gamut of Christian experience to find “a kind of truth.”

A second observation about this generous orthodoxy is that McLaren has cleared the playing field, so to speak, eschewing all current systems of orthodoxy and beginning anew. But on what authority will he do this? The answer, as becomes clear later, is that he will do so on his own authority - with what feels right. His generous orthodoxy will not be a biblical orthodoxy, for it

does not begin and end with Scripture. He does not weigh each and every doctrine or experience by the Word of God. In his concluding chapter he tells us that “to be a Christian in a generously orthodox way is not to claim to have truth captured, stuffed, and mounted on the wall.” Parenthetically, I would like to point out that this is an irrational statement, for I know of no Christian who would make the claim that he has arrived at absolute truth in every area of doctrine. McLaren says that orthodoxy is a “loving community of people who are seeking truth on the road of mission and who have been launched on the quest by Jesus, who, with us, guides us still.” Again, notice that he refuses to acknowledge that perhaps we have captured much of objective truth through the Scripture. Orthodoxy is “a way of seeing and seeking, a way of living, a way of thinking and loving and learning that helps what we believe become more true over time, more resonant with the infinite glory that is God.” So to McLaren, orthodoxy is thinking or opinion, not doctrine. Furthermore, it becomes “more true” over time. How can something be more or less true? It is either true or false, unless of course, one is fully absorbed in the relativism of postmodernism.

Chapter 0 concludes with an acknowledgment that many parts of this book are far too simplistic, and affirmations of the dangers of absolutism and relativism, of inclusivism, exclusivism, and universalism. He also acknowledges his unfair bias, in which he is overly harsh towards conservative Protestants and overly sympathetic towards Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and liberals.

The remainder of the book is divided into two uneven sections. The first, with four chapters, explores why the author is a Christian. The second, with fifteen chapters, identifies the kind of Christian he is by investigating Christianity in the light of the emphases of fifteen different traditions.

Why he is a Christian

“The Seven Jesus I Have Known” explores seven traditions McLaren has been part of or has investigated, and shows the emphases each of them places on Jesus. The seven in question are: Conservative Protestant, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Liberal Protestant, Anabaptist, and Liberation Theology. One has to question how well he understands each of these, especially the Roman Catholic Jesus. He says that he came to know this Jesus through the writings of Flannery O’Connor, Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, Romano Guardini, and Gabriel Marcel, as well as various medieval mystics. He believes that the focus of Roman Catholics is how Jesus rises from the dead to save the church. This is inconsistent with the obvious, for a survey of Catholic writing and art will show that they emphasize Jesus as a baby and Jesus’ suffering and death. The resurrection, while integral to Catholic theology, can hardly be considered the main focus. There can be similar concerns with his understanding of Eastern Orthodoxy, which he typifies as valuing Jesus’ birth above all. Yet the Eastern Orthodox revere Easter above other liturgical celebrations. McLaren proposes that we, as believers, unite our emphases on Jesus and celebrate a richer, multidimensional vision of the Lord; that we “acknowledge that Christians of each tradition bring their distinctive and wonderful gifts to the table, so we can all enjoy the feast of generous orthodoxy” (p. 67).

“Jesus and God B” contrasts two prevailing views of God – God as the authoritarian sovereign and God as a mysterious saving force. He describes the universe one might expect of God A: “a universe of dominance, control, limitation, submission, uniformity, coercion.” From God B he would expect a universe of “interdependence, relationship, possibility, responsibility, becoming, novelty, mutuality, freedom” (p. 76). The reality, as we find in Scripture, is that God contains elements of both of these views. God is sovereign and has full authority to do what He wishes. However, He also desires relationship and gives us responsibility and freedom.

There is no warrant to tell believers they need to choose one of these views or the other. In this chapter McLaren pauses to apologize for his continued use of masculine pronouns to describe God. He proposes several solutions to this dilemma, including interchanging ‘he’ and ‘she,’ or using the clumsy ‘s/he.’ In the end, he merely apologizes for the use of ‘he,’ affirms that he considers God neither male nor female, and tries to avoid using pronouns altogether. He goes on to say that the usage of the Father/Son imagery so prevalent in Scripture “contributes to the patriarchalism or chauvinism that has too often characterized Christianity.”

“Would Jesus Be a Christian?” asks the difficult question of whether Jesus would identify with what we have constructed and named in his honour. In this chapter he acknowledges the influence of N.T. Wright in shaping his view of the apostle Paul, stating in a footnote that we have “misunderstood and misused Paul” (p. 86). He believes that traditional views of Paul have pitted him against Jesus so that we have “retained Jesus as Saviour but promoted the apostle Paul to Lord and Teacher.” He tells us that the result of today’s Christianity is “a religion that Jesus might consider about as useful as many non-Christians consider it today” (p. 89). This is consistent with the New Perspective on Paul, a theological view espoused especially by N.T. Wright that is gaining prominence and teaches that the Reformers misunderstood Paul, interpreting his writing through their medieval mindset rather than through Paul’s own context. This view necessitates radically redefining the doctrine of justification and is, at its core, ecumenism, making light of the differences that have separated Protestants and Catholics. That is a subject unto itself and not one that can be covered in this review. Suffice it to say that it is clear from this book and McLaren’s other writings that he does hold to the New Perspective on Paul, a view that has been condemned by most Reformed Protestants as a serious, critical deviation from the scriptural model.

“Jesus: Saviour of What?” provides as clear a definition of salvation as McLaren gives in this book. This is not to say it is,

Church News

Called to the church of Houston, British Columbia and the church of Calgary, Alberta:

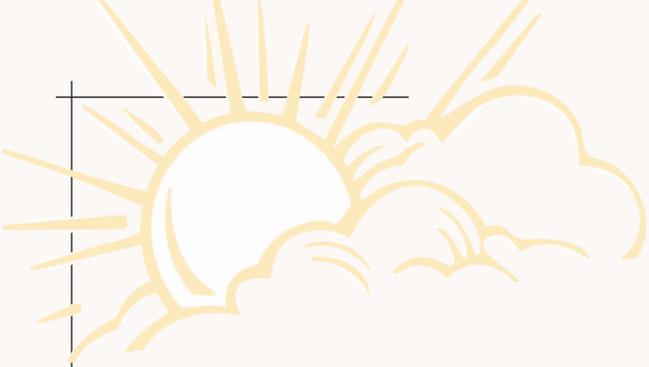
Rev. P.G. Feenstra
of Owen Sound, Ontario.

Called to the church of
Orangeville, Ontario:

Rev. R. Schouten
of Abbotsford, British Columbia.

by any means, lucid. Drawing from the Catholic missionary Vincent Donovan, he believes we need to rethink what Christians have long called salvation. Quoting Donovan, he says we need to move beyond the theology of salvation and towards the theology of creation. He encourages the reader to suspend any knowledge of what it means to be saved and examine the issue with fresh, unbiased attention. Salvation is then redefined in a way that is consistent with the New Perspective on Paul. He tries to challenge those so fixated on salvation being an issue of saving people from hell that they forget salvation also necessitates action and responsibility in this life. He contends that contemporary Christians are largely fixated on salvation being “all about them.” While this may be true in some regard, today’s emphasis on worship being extended to all areas of life is certainly beginning to give people fresh eyes about what it means to live for God. In this chapter he also toys with the concept of hell, neither rejecting nor affirming any view. Reading between the lines it would seem that he does believe in some non-traditional concept of hell, but he merely says that “radical rethinking is needed” (p. 100). He suggests that he will deal with the subject more thoroughly in a later book (which is due to be published this year).

Part 2 of this article will review the second half of McLaren’s book, investigating Christianity in the light of the emphases of fifteen different traditions.



Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“I have set the LORD always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”

Psalm 16:8

Psalm 16 is a very beautiful psalm in which David confesses his faith and trust in God. David loves the Lord, and has full confidence that God will grant him everything he needs for body and soul. But David does not stop here, for he also wants to show his thankfulness and gratitude for all these rich blessings. His life is completely dedicated to God and he does not want anything to do with those who hate God.

With this knowledge, we must also reflect. How strong is our faith and trust in the Lord? Do we only need God more when we face difficulties and struggles in life? Do we daily want to grow in our faith?

Let us be encouraged with the words of this Psalm, for we read of a marvellous confession in verse 6, “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.” No matter what happened in David’s life, he was completely content with it. He recognized that everything came from God’s fatherly hand. When we are faced with temptations and desires in life, let us remember and recognize the contentment that David shows here. Our life here on earth is not meant to be lived to the fullest extent of its earthly pleasures and possessions. Rather, we must recognize that whatever we receive from God is sufficient for us to be content. For he who has God as his portion will most definitely have a happy life.

David kept his mind so intently fixed on the providence of God, that he was certain that whenever any difficulties or troubles would come his way, God would be near and would guide and carry him through. We too must have this complete dependence on God alone. When we place our lives under the protection of God, our bodies and minds will rest secure. This leads to an inner peace and happiness which can only overflow into thankfulness to God. When we have God as our Father, we can turn to Him in all our difficulties and also in our happy times; indeed, we can do so throughout our life’s entire path. We can also have a taste of true happiness and peace which is still to come.

Let us all search our hearts and always set the Lord before us. In good days and in difficult days, let us keep our eyes fixed

on Him. For with God on our side, we will walk in confidence, knowing what is right in God’s eyes. Study God’s Word and grow in faith, for the world around us is filled with much evil and sin. It is only through God’s grace that we are able to turn to Him in humble prayer. We must have a true faith and accept all that God has revealed to us in his Word. Pray each day anew for the working of the Holy Spirit within our hearts. Then we can face whatever comes our way.

*I praise the Lord and bless Him all the day
For what He by his counsel has provided;
E’en in the night my heart expounds the way
That I should go; thus I am safely guided.
I worship Him with joy and adoration;
None can deprive me of his preservation.*

(Psalm 16:4)

Birthdays in August:

- 4 TERRANCE BERENDS will be 29**
361 Anchor Home, Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON LOR 1B0
- 5 PHILIP SCHURMAN will be 46**
C/O R. Draaistra
117 Diltz Road, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W2
- 9 ROSE MALDA will be 48**
Oakville Centre, 53 Bond Street, Oakville, ON L6J 5B4
- 18 FENNY KUIK will be 53**
140 Foch Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2C 5H7

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

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

Calgary Says Farewell to Rev. Eikelboom

On Friday, March 19, 2005, the members of the Canadian Reformed Church at Calgary, together with a number of guests, gathered in the church building to bid a fond farewell to Rev. Eikelboom and his family. The evening was scheduled to start at 7:30 p.m., but it soon became apparent that there was not enough seating available, and more chairs and tables had to be brought into the auditorium. It was also apparent that the fire regulations regarding seating capacity would have to be temporarily put aside.

After everyone was settled, Br. Ray Noot officially opened the evening by reading Psalm 23 and praying. After the singing of "How Great Thou Art," Co-M.C.'s Rob Appleyard and Lyndon Kok welcomed everyone on behalf of the organizing committee and explained the format of the evening, which was meant to be fun and informal.

The kindergarten children started things by singing "I'm a Little Cowboy." They were followed by the students of Tyndale Christian School, who



entertained us by singing a song called "Christmas at the Beach."

Rev. Theo Lodder brought words of greeting and farewell behalf of the church at Taber and also on behalf of the churches of Classis Alberta. He spoke of Rev. Eikelboom's deep and unselfish love for Christ's church, of his pastoral concern for the salvation and well being of Christ's sheep, and how he constantly placed the interests of others ahead of his own. On a more personal level, he spoke of the friendship that he enjoyed with Rev. Eikelboom – a friendship that

began when they were both studying at the Theological College in Hamilton – and of the bond between the two families.

Words of farewell were spoken by Gerald Van Seters on behalf of the church at Coaldale, and by Barry Van Ankum on behalf of Bethel United Reformed Church at Calgary, thanking Rev. Eikelboom for his faithful service and wishing him and his family the Lord's blessings in their new congregation.

A number of letters were read: from St. Albert, Barrhead, Neerlandia, and Edmonton Providence. Rev. Eikelboom was thanked for his work within the classical district and for his visits and pastoral care when members from other churches were admitted to Calgary hospitals with serious health problems. The Eikelboom family was also thanked for their hospitality to visitors from other congregations. On behalf of Tyndale Christian School, Br. Ray Noot thanked both Rev. and Mrs. Eikelboom for the countless hours they spent volunteering at the school.

The next item on the agenda was a PowerPoint presentation by Lyndon Kok





and Rob Appleyard. It started with a geography lesson, showing how far Launceston, Tasmania is from Calgary, Alberta, followed by a description of a few of the many differences between the two – differences in climate, size, population, and culture. The bulk of the presentation was a list of the top ten similarities between Launceston and Calgary. The slide show also featured a rarely seen photograph of Rev. Eikelboom fly fishing.

The Calgary church choir appeared for the first time ever in public, singing “The Song of Ruth.” Young Peoples said a poem and presented the Eikelboom family with a gift consisting of chocolate bars, smarties, and other goodies, no doubt to keep them awake on the long flight to Tasmania. They were followed by the students of Tyndale Christian School, who sang their theme song, after which the Tyndale Christian School band played three pieces.

Diny Kok presented Rev. and Mrs. Eikelboom with a scrapbook consisting of seventy-two pages, ninety-three photos, 180 pages of coloured cardstock, approximately 1000 adhesives, and hundreds of stickers. The scrapbook was put together by the ladies of the congregation, and involved approximately 100 hours of labour, twenty bottles of water, two paper cuts, uncountable phone calls, and numerous children being neglected by their mothers. It featured photographs of the congregation, along with memories of some of the social events that have taken place throughout the years.

Henry Ostermeier, Chairman of Consistory, then spoke on behalf of the

congregation. He thanked Rev. Eikelboom for his dedication, and mentioned some of the joyful events that took place in the congregation (the construction of the church and school building, and the parsonage), but also some of the difficulties, both within the congregation and the classical district. The Eikelbooms, as a ministerial family, were never above the congregation, but instead were right beside us, both in church life and in school life. Speaking to the children, Br. Ostermeier talked of how they have grown up in the congregation, and the difficulties that come with saying goodbye. He encouraged them with the story of Abraham – how they too had to leave their familiar surroundings, and how the Lord looked after them. He also thanked Mrs. Eikelboom for her work in the church and in the school. He ended with a few words from Isaiah, directed not only to the Eikelboom family but to the congregation as well: “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”



Finally, Br. Ostermeier presented Rev. and Mrs. Eikelboom with two gifts from the Calgary congregation. The first gift was a framed and mounted montage consisting of pictures of Calgary and of the church building. The second was a painting of the three peaks of the Three Sisters Mountain, one of the most famous views in the Canadian Rockies. To be more precise, he presented them with a picture of the gifts, projected on to the wall of the auditorium. This was because the gifts had already been packed away in preparation for the move. The Eikelboom family would have to wait until they arrived in Tasmania to view the actual gifts.

At last it was time for Rev. and Mrs. Eikelboom said goodbye to the congregation. Calgary had become their home over the past eight years, and Rev. Eikelboom thanked the congregation for allowing him to do his work. We were kindred spirits, children of God on a road together, and by the grace of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit we could walk that road together.

Br. Henry Ostermeier closed the evening in prayer. Then came a time to sit down, relax, look through the scrapbook, and just enjoy each other’s company. As congregation we will miss the Eikelboom family, but it is our fervent prayer that they will be as much of a blessing in their new congregation at Launceston as they were in Calgary.

Reviewed by **W.L. Bredenhof**

Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love with the Family of God

Joshua Harris (*Sisters: Multnomah, 2004*).
Additional Information: Hardcover, 138 pages, \$18.99.

Joshua Harris is well known as the author of the bestselling *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. In that book, and in a follow-up, he presented a rather novel idea with respect to dating: get rid of it and replace it with biblical courtship. In this little book, Harris presents another novel idea to North American Christendom: start loving and valuing the local church.

Like many evangelicals, Harris was drifting from church to church for many years. He had never considered it important to be a member of a local church. Instead, he was “dating the

church.” He was eventually convicted from the Scriptures that it was high time to “get married” to the church and become committed.

Some of these apathetic church attitudes in Christian circles around us are seeping into our Reformed churches too. A book like this can help in plugging some of those leaks with scriptural truth. For instance, we’re accustomed to evaluating churches according to three marks – Harris goes further and gives ten. There is some overlap with our three marks. For instance, number nine: “Is this a church that is willing to kick me out?” And number three: “Is this a church in which the gospel is cherished and clearly proclaimed?” But others are worth adding, like number four: “Is this a church committed to reaching non-Christians with the gospel?”

Rev. W.L. Bredenhof is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia [wbredenhof@canrc.org](mailto:wbredehof@canrc.org)

Harris presents some good solid scriptural teaching on the nature of the church and why it’s so important to be a committed member of a local church. With a highly readable style, he argues that Christians are not to be spiritual loners. “The church is the place God grows us, encourages us, and uses us best. Loving Jesus Christ involves a passionate commitment to his church – around the world and down the street.” The second last chapter of the book deals with “Rescuing the Sunday” – you’ll find plenty of valuable scriptural teaching there!

This book does have some deficiencies in its approach to church matters. Harris is obviously a (Calvinistic) Baptist and his doctrine of the church is not as tight as it should be. Nevertheless, the main gist of this book definitely makes it worth recommending.

Press Release

Press Release of the Combined Meeting of the Board and Committee of Administration, Inter-League Publication Board, held on May 16, 2005

The chairman, Don Bos, opened the meeting with Scripture reading and prayer.

Roll call

For the Board: representing the League of Men’s Societies in Ontario, Don Bos and Mike Vandeburgt were present. Representing the League of Women’s Societies in Ontario, Mary DeBoer was present.

For the Committee of Administration (C of A): Paul DeBoer, Cathy Jonker, Bernie Kottelenberg, Annette Nobel, Debbie Swaving, and Theresa Westrik were present.

The agenda was established.

Marketing report

Theresa Westrik reported on progress of the establishment of the “ILPB Direct” book club. This is a new initiative in which book club members can receive all new books published by

the ILPB at a 25% discount. Information about this club will be mailed out to the ILPB representatives in each congregation immediately so that everything can be in place when new books are published for the new study season in September.

An offer has been received for free graphic design of book covers. The C of A recommends utilizing this offer for some books we publish.

Sales report

Debbie Swaving reported that sales are down from last year, mainly due to the fact that not as many books were published.

A request was received from a minister in a third-world country for complimentary copies of our books for preaching and teaching purposes. This request will be passed on to a deaconry for their consideration.

A report was presented showing how many copies of each title were sold in the last year.

Progress report

Cathy Jonker gave a review on the progress of all books being worked on.

A new printer is being used that is more local for the C of A. It was decided to remunerate authors of English books in the form of royalties at 10% of revenue for ten years.

Financial report

Bernie Kottelenberg presented a report on an audit. The books were found to be in good order and suggestions will be implemented. Financial statements were reviewed. The budget for the upcoming year was presented. This was approved subject to some minor changes to the printing schedule.

A discussion was held whether materials not published by the ILPB would be included in our advertising to promote them. Books that we have reviewed and can recommend may be listed in our marketing materials.

The CoA was updated by the Board on the progress of books being reviewed as to possible printing. Suggestions were received for books that could be reviewed for possible printing.

The Press Release was read and approved.

Paul DeBoer closed the meeting with prayer.

Our Little Magazine



Dear Busy Beavers

I expect you are all enjoying your summer holidays. There are so many things to do in God's beautiful creation. Some of you probably go camping or to a cottage. Do you like to do things like swimming, fishing, sitting by a camp fire or going out on the lake on a boat? Others may go travelling and see different areas of their country or maybe even another country. If you are staying at home I'm sure there are lots of things which you can find to do. Whatever you are doing, I hope you are having fun.

Love, Aunt Betty

From the Mailbox

Thank you for your letter **Hannah Olij**, also for your pictures. Your baby sister's hair looks a lot darker than yours. Do you have any other brothers or sisters? I hope you are having a good summer. I'm glad you enjoy the puzzles. Have fun doing these with your mom!

Puzzles

Names from the Bible with Four Letters

S	H	E	M	A	D	A	B	E	L
E	R	A	N	H	O	J	R	Q	H
T	U	D	D	M	A	R	K	P	A
H	T	E	H	A	Q	E	A	X	O
S	H	B	E	S	R	U	L	S	N
U	E	O	O	R	L	Q	U	A	O
C	S	M	Z	A	O	B	K	U	L
C	A	I	N	X	I	V	E	L	E
Q	U	A	H	A	S	O	N	E	O
Y	R	A	M	O	D	E	D	U	J

ABEL	EDOM	JUDE	NOAH	ADAH	ELON	LEAH
OBED	ADAM	ENOS	LEVI	PAUL	AMOS	ESAU
LOIS	RUTH	BOAZ	HETH	LUKE	SAUL	CAIN
JOEL	MARK	SETH	CUSH	JOHN	MARY	SHEM

Bible Foods

Unscramble the following

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. ANGIR (Gen. 42:2) | 2. LKIM (Prov. 30:33) |
| 3. TRUIF (Gen. 3:2) | 4. DRABE (Luke 4:4) |
| 5. NYHEO (Matt. 3:4) | 6. OFRUL (Rev. 18:13) |
| 7. GOATEPT (Gen. 25:29) | 8. SHIF (John 21:13) |
| 9. MCNIONAN (Rev. 18:13) | 10. VOILE (Rev. 11:4) |
| 11. LSAT (Gen. 19:26) | 12. SWRAEF (Ex. 16:31) |

Abraham's Relatives

Match the correct person, place, or thing with the description that best suits it.

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 1. MICAH | His first wife (Gen. 11:29) |
| 2. ISAAC | His daughter-in-law (Gen.24:15) |
| 3. LOT | His nephew (Gen.11:27) |
| 4. SARAH | His son by the Egyptian maid (Gen.16:15) |
| 5. NAHOR | His father (Gen.11:26) |
| 6. KETURAH | His sister-in-law (Gen. 11:29) |
| 7. ISHMAEL | His second wife(Sarah's maid) (Gen. 16:1, 2) |
| 8. REBEKAH | His last wife (Gen.25:1) |
| 9. TERAH | One of his brothers (Gen.11:26) |
| 10. HAGAR | His son by Sarah (Gen.21:2, 3) |

Twelve Leaders

Each of the leaders was one of the heads of Israel's twelve tribes. (Gen 49: 1-28)

