

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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*Form(s) for
Subscription:
Do we need
one or more?*

Thanksgiving

*Houston
Farewell
Evening*



*Believing in Christ we
have every reason for
being thankful.*



N.H. Gootjes

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Form(s) for Subscription: Do we need one or more?

Should all office bearers make the same promises as ministers, in view of the fact that the three offices are rather different?

Introduction

The Reformed churches want to be confessional churches. Already hundreds of years ago they recognized the value of confessions summarizing the teaching of the Bible. That can still be seen in several ways. The Heidelberg Catechism is taught in catechism class. The Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort are discussed by study societies and in schools. And Catechism preaching is helpful for the believers to keep in mind the main issues taught us in Scripture.

And that is not all. To maintain their confessional character, the churches have decided that those who are called to be office bearers should subscribe to these confessions. By doing so the ministers, elders, and deacons are held accountable for maintaining the teaching of the Bible. A leader of the church should not deviate from biblical teaching; this would lead congregations astray. This is why we require office bearers to subscribe to the confessions. It is a good means to protect the churches from unbiblical teaching which, if left alone, has the potential to destroy the basis of the church.

The churches were strengthened by a preaching which stayed within the recognized scriptural doctrine.

Our previous synods had to deal with this issue, for at the direction of an earlier synod the Book of Praise Committee had submitted two models to be used for the subscription. A more comprehensive formula, to be used by ministers, was presented. In addition, a newly made formula for subscription was made to be used by the elders and deacons (see *Acts General Synod Chatham*, p. 170-172). However, Synod Chatham

did not accept this proposal. In its opinion the churches should not have different forms for subscription. One and the same formula should be used for all office bearers.

This means that the elders and deacons are obliged to make the same promises as the ministers. Should all office bearers make the same promises as ministers, in view of the fact that the three offices are rather different? It would be good to take a closer look at this issue. This article examines how this custom of subscription came about and how to work with it today.

The origin of ministers' subscription

Subscription began as early as the time of the Reformation, in the sixteenth century. The Synod of 1578 made the rule that the Belgic Confession should be subscribed to. Not only the ministers and the professors, but also the elders had to subscribe to this confession. They used a copy of the confession for that purpose. These office bearers wrote their names as a proof of agreement.

The purpose of this subscription was obvious: it meant that those who had a leading position in the church had to maintain the teaching of the church. They had to prove with their signature that they agreed with the documents adopted by the churches. However, there was no form for subscription. Rather, the names were written in a copy of the confession itself.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, some leaders of the Reformed churches disagreed with sections from the Confession and Catechism. Among them was Arminius, a professor of theology. They did not want to be bound to the confessions, causing a lengthy struggle in the churches which was finally determined at the Synod of Dort.

We know the outcome of that debate. With the support of the representatives of foreign churches, the Reformed confessions were maintained. These documents should continue to be used as a rule for the teaching and preaching in



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the churches. But that was not all. The issue of the subscription to the confessions was also dealt with. Synod of Dort changed the way in which ministers had to state agreement with the confessions. No longer would ministers express their agreement with the confession by simply writing their names under the confessions. Rather, a written statement was made to which they had to state agreement. The whole statement is too long to be printed out here in its entirety, but a summary will show what was required.¹

1. The ministers declare with their signature that they believe that all articles and sections of the Confession, Catechism, and Canons of Dort in every respect agree with God's Word.
2. They promise to teach and support this doctrine without teaching or writing anything against it, but rather they promise to oppose any view contrary to this.
3. They also promise that in the case they have some objection to this doctrine in the future, they will not make this public, but rather submit it to consistory, classis, and regional synod for their judgment.
4. Should the consistory, classis, or regional synod want them to explain their view on a doctrinal issue, they will be prepared to do that.

It is very clear that the church in the seventeenth century wanted the teaching in the church to be safeguarded. Ministers had to teach within the bounds of the confessions. And if they at a certain moment would find a problematic statement, they should not bring this out on the pulpit, but rather discuss it at the proper places: consistory, classis, and synod.

This rule, requiring the ministers to stay within the boundary of the confessions, has worked for the benefit of the churches. They were strengthened by a preaching which stayed within the recognized scriptural doctrine. Ministers were not free to simply say what they had thought up, or what they have read somewhere. Rather, they were to stay within the teaching of Scripture as it has been summarized in the confessions. This rule contributed to stabilizing the teaching in the church.

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Church News

WORSHIP SERVICE TIME CHANGE:

Starting November 6, 2005, Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Kerwood, Ontario will begin morning worship services at 9:30 a.m. Afternoon worship services will remain at 2:30 p.m.

Starting September 11, 2005, the afternoon worship service at Brampton, Ontario will commence at 3:00 p.m. Please consult the **directory**.

The Church at Kelmscott, Australia has called:

Candidate Erik van Alten
of Pretoria, South Africa.

Declined the call to the church of Fergus (Maranatha) Ontario:

Rev. J. de Gelder
of Flamborough, Ontario.

Elders and deacons

What, then, about the elders and deacons? Should they state their agreement with our confessions? Obviously, yes, they should. They have received a position of leadership within the congregation. When they are installed in their office they become responsible for the direction of the congregation. They are required to state officially and publicly that they agree with the doctrine of the Reformed churches: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort.

There are considerable difficulties when only one form for subscription can be used.

However, another question is whether this requires a special Form for Subscription for elders and deacons along the lines of the ministers' Form for Subscription. It is questionable whether that makes good sense. Not only does the tradition of the Reformed churches point in a different direction, there are also considerable difficulties when only one form for subscription can be used. This can easily be seen when we consider what is involved.

The first of the four rules is no problem. Actually, as leaders in the church, the elders and deacons should

declare publicly that they agree with the adopted teaching in the church. They should do their work in line with the three confessions adopted and maintained in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

However, the problems begin with the second rule. The Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons states that they "have to remind God's people of God's ordinances" (*Book of Praise*, p. 629). That is rather different from what the Form for Subscription prescribes: they have to "teach and support this doctrine." Teaching is more than reminding; it requires the ability to explain the content of the doctrines. And supporting the doctrine goes even beyond that, for it implies the ability to explain the scriptural basis of the many doctrines summarized in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. It would be overdoing it to ask this of the elders. They cannot with a good conscience affirm this question.

Something similar applies to the third rule, stating that "objections to the doctrine should not only be made known to consistory, but also to classis and regional synod." That is not in agreement with the fact that elders work primarily within the local church. It is the ministers who in preaching also work outside the local church, in the classis and the region. That is the reason why these ministers are obligated to make known their objections beyond the local level.

The fourth regulation concerns possible doctrinal problems. They "have to be prepared to explain their opinion

on doctrinal issues." This rule, as well, is obviously not something that must be applied to every office bearer. Rather, this refers specifically to the ministers, who by preaching and publishing can confuse or even contradict the doctrine adopted in the churches.

The offices of minister, elder, and deacon are different, as can be seen in their work. The work of ministers is more comprehensive, and their responsibility is greater. This is reflected in the fact that different forms were made for their installation. This should also be reflected in the use of different Forms for Subscription.

¹ This Form for Subscription can be found in H.H. Kuyper, *De Post-Acta*, (Amsterdam: Höveker en Wormser), p. 196-97.



J.D. Louwerse

Thanksgiving

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*“The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of
the LORD be praised.”*



MATTHEW 13:52

Job 1:21b

Thanksgiving Day! This special day on our calendars is a national holiday. One wonders why we have this day in Canada, for as our country becomes increasingly unbelieving, how do many celebrate? To whom do people give thanks? Rest assured that the media will not tell you! Strange, considering so many folks do enjoy the day by feasting with family and friends.

To whom do people give thanks? And for what do we give thanks? Consider who gives us all what we have! Who is the one who provides us with family, health, income, food, and drink? Who is the one who gave us the houses we live in, the cars we drive in, the beds we sleep in? As Job said so long ago, it is the Lord who gives! Our thanks for all the blessings of this life must be offered to the Lord our God, the creator and upholder of heaven and earth. Indeed, praise be to the Lord our God! For everything in heaven and on earth is the Lord's.

How abundantly the Lord God had blessed Job! Reading from Job 1, we know all that the Lord God had given to him. He had been blessed with seven sons and three daughters. He owned 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 donkeys, and a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.

Had the Lord God not promised such abundance to all who believe in Him, who walk in his ways? Job was blameless and upright, feared God and shunned evil. Did not God clearly teach in the Old Testament that a man like Job could count on his blessings?

But Job also acknowledged that the Lord who gives also takes away! The Lord had taken everything away from Job. How did this happen? Job had not been privy to what happened in the court of heaven between God and Satan! It was the Lord God who drew Satan's

attention to Job. God said of Job: have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like Job. He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil! Satan countered: does Job fear God for nothing? Satan was saying that Job only believes in God for what he gets from God. Anyone will serve God when God blesses him the way He blessed Job! Believers like Job only serve God for the goods received. Job knows better than to bite the hand that feeds him. Take away the blessings, and Job will curse God!

What an accusation Satan makes here! Do we only love God for the goods we get from Him? Are we only really concerned with earthly blessings? Why do we serve God? Do we serve Him because of his material blessings or out of thankfulness for belonging to Him, for being his child?

Our sovereign God gave permission to Satan to take everything away from Job. And so it happened. Job lost his children, his servants, his herds, flocks, camels, donkeys, and oxen! In a single day, Job, the greatest man of the East, lost all ten of his children and all his wealth as one calamity after another struck.

What a terrible blow for righteous and blameless Job! Who could really fathom such horrible losses in a single day? Job grieved his losses. In true mid-Eastern fashion, he openly mourned. Yet, in the midst of sorrow, Job continued to trust in the Lord. Job acknowledged the Lord God as truly sovereign. He who gave him all things had taken it all away. And then Job praised the Name of the Lord! Job did not curse the Lord God. In spite of all what had happened to him Job did not sin, but remained faithful and righteous. Righteous, by faith alone!

Job's righteousness was not his own doing but that of our gracious God. When everything was stripped of Job, who was

always there but our covenant God? It is God who holds his child Job right before Him. It is God who brings those words out of the mouth of Job. May the Name of the Lord be praised! The Lord God deserves all the praise and glory. Nothing that Job had received was deserved. All that Job had received, his children, possessions, and land, were gracious gifts from God! He was not entitled to anything. Yet, in his grace, God had given him many material blessings. In his grace God also promised a Redeemer!

What a God we have! He sent Jesus Christ not to promise us earthly riches but to reveal to us the love of our God who gave his only Son that we might live forever as his children. In his Son Jesus Christ we are righteous before God. Jesus Christ was a righteous and blameless man. In Him there was no sin. He did not curse God. Though He was rich, yet for our sake He became poor. When He died, even the clothing He wore was taken from Him. So He suffered! Unlike Job, Christ suffered as a substitute! Christ suffered for Job and for us all!

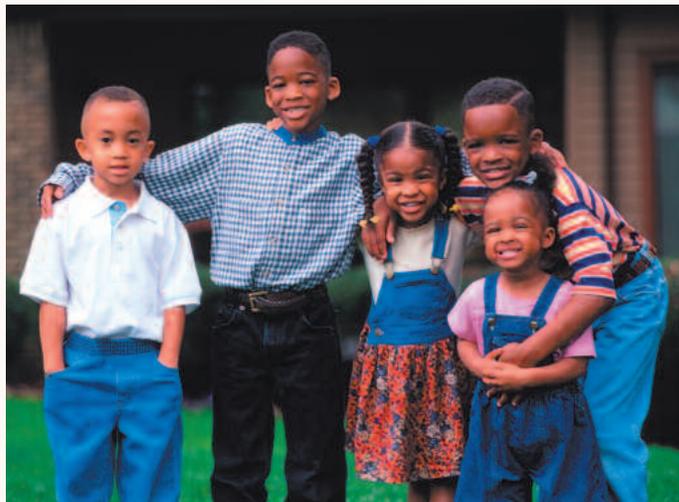
Thanks to Him who was forsaken by all, we God's children are never forsaken by Him. Thanks to Him we stand righteous before our Father! We have everlasting peace with Him. Believing in his Son's work we have every reason for being thankful, not just on Thanksgiving Day, but everyday! We may have received many gifts from the hand of God in the past year. Conversely, gifts may have been taken from us. Everything may have been taken. Yet we always have what is most important, namely Jesus Christ! By faith alone in Him we have our covenant God and Father always holding on to us and caring for us. What more do we really need?



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 45

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



We have spent a lot of time on the Ten Commandments. From now on we will deal with praying, for the next Lord's Days discuss the prayer.

Christians should often pray to God and thank Him. God requires us to pray. He wants us to knock on his door time and again. When you pray you can tell Him that you are a happy and

grateful child of God. He also wants to hear you ask for forgiveness, strength, and support. Children should not ask their parents for special treats every day, because special treats are not given daily. But you can ask God daily for strength and forgiveness; He will give it to you every day.

How do we pray in the right way? What makes the Lord listen to us gladly? First of all, we should pray to Him and to Him alone. The Bible has taught us this very clearly.

Further, we should realize that we are only small and sinful people. We should show humility in our prayers. We must also believe that God really listens to us.

A good prayer also means that we dare to ask for all the things we need, just as you would ask your mother or father for the things you really need. The Lord Jesus has taught us such a prayer. I am sure you already know it. It goes this way:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever.
Amen.

Isn't it great that we can speak directly with our Father in heaven? You can even sing about it:

I love the Lord, the fount of life and grace;
He heard my voice, my cry and supplication.



The Candlestand

Statement

Composed by 14
church-leaders from Kenya,
Indonesia, Uganda,
The Netherlands, South-Africa,
India, and Zimbabwe

Reformed considerations regarding the Charismatic Movement (Part 4 of 4)

Part Three: Christian life (continued)

3.3 The organization of the church

3.3 * 39 *The value of dogma*

From the beginning the church of God has always been under the attack of the Evil One, who seeks to destroy her. He does this through false teachers who secretly introduce destructive heresies into the church. The warning to believers to watch out for false prophets and apostate teachings is echoed in the teachings of the Lord Jesus and the apostles, who are united in their call for the preservation of the faith “that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3).

The Apostle Paul warns Timothy and Titus to teach the sound doctrine; this presupposes that leaders are instructed to know the truth and its arguments in order to oppose this falsehood. The value of dogma, therefore, is to honour God by obeying his commands, to build and strengthen the church through right worship and holy living, and to safeguard the church against the evil schemes of Satan.

3.3 * 40 *The value of church institutions*

We believe that the institutionalization of the church is rooted in the Bible. We see from the Old Testament that God provided the nation of Israel with priests, prophets, and kings to be responsible for his people, the church (Ezek 34). We therefore believe that God provides the New Testament church with the gifts to be responsible

for the church, that is to shepherd the flock (Eph 4:11; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2), to build the body of Christ, to protect, to watch over it against false teachings, and to oversee order in the congregation.

For this reason the Apostle Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders, thereby institutionalizing the churches (Titus 1:5). These gifts of elders and deacons are to be respected, as they will have to give an account of their work to God (Heb 13:17).

Unity should never be sought at the expense of doctrine.

3.3 * 41 *Renewal of the church*

We believe that the precious blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord, redeems our lives. The Holy Spirit renews us and we believe that this is an ongoing process, progressing day by day. We are taught that we will be made new in the attitude of our minds (Eph 4:23). Therefore, we acknowledge the need for a continuous transformation in church life. In the Old Testament we read about the renewal of the covenant (Josh 24), and we know the command of our Lord to the church of Ephesus: “Remember the heights from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first” (Rev 2:5).

Because of sin and corruption, a renewal or a revival of the church is necessary. We pray for this continuously

and hope the Lord will bless us with obedience and courage. Then we can renew ourselves on the basis of the Word.

3.3 * 42 *The Unity of the Church*

We believe in the existence of one universal church. The Lord Jesus Christ gathers this church from every nation, tribe, and tongue in all time and places, and it is spread throughout the entire world. However, it is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same spirit, by the power of faith. The unity of the church is founded in the sound teachings that conform to the glorious gospel of the blessed God (1 Tim 1:10-11).

We regret all the divisions within the church, made by selfish ambition or because of minor issues. We thank the Lord, however, for preserving the church, for blessing those who objected to false teachings or non-biblical traditions and who were expelled out of the church because of this. Being obedient to God, they served the true unity of the church and we commit ourselves to that same unity today. May the Lord unite all true believers in one faith to the glory of his holy name. Amen.

Refutations

32. On the basis of our convictions, expressed in this document, we reject the idea that dogmas or doctrines as such are a hindrance to the development of church life, causing lifelessness or rigid traditionalism. The Bible is very clear

about the need to safeguard the church by dispensing sound doctrine. That presupposes the possibility of formulating what doctrine is all about. Therefore we consider doctrine and dogma in the church (e.g. in the form of confessions) as indispensable tools to sustain obedience.

33. Organization and institutionalizing as such are not a threat to the church. We see the lines of good governance coming up in the Bible, especially when it comes to safeguarding doctrine, to missionary outreach, and to the fostering of church relationships.
34. We refute the exaggerated view that all mainline churches are guilty of dead orthodoxy. History shows tremendous church growth before revivalism, Pentecostalism, and the charismatic movement. In traditional churches we can see the wondrous work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the congregation, in missionary outreach, in the up-building of the church, and in social commitment. These churches long to meet the high standard of the Word and to be renewed in the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 3:18).
35. We refute the claim of unity on the basis of spiritual experience or the presence of manifestations of the Spirit. This is too small a basis and will not prevent church divisions. Unity should never be sought at the expense of doctrine.
36. We refute the “shepherding” style of governing and pastoral guidance found in some charismatic circles. Shepherding (a teaching that the believer can only grow in grace under the authoritative “covering” or spiritual “protection” of an older believer which often leads to pronounced hierarchical patterns in churches) opens the door for spiritual abuse.
37. The restoration of the office of apostle undermines the full authority of the Bible being the sufficient foundation for the church.

3.4 The life of the congregation

3.4 * 43 *Church life in the apostolic age*

We confess that the description of the first church after Pentecost stimulates us to continue in teaching, fellowship, prayer, sharing, and the breaking of the bread. It is a good example; however, it is not the only example of church life in the Bible. We should not idealize it or take it as a compulsory model for all ages. The church of Acts 4 was gifted in particular to lay the foundation for the church which was still in her infancy. Soon after this first report we see the emergence of other reports about the struggle against sin within the congregation. To persevere and to preserve the truth, church organization is needed in the form of office bearers as elders and deacons to dispense discipline, to admonish and strengthen, and to warn against falsehood.

Those who want to be leaders must be willing to be servants.

Churches are developing in patterns different from that of the first New Testament church because churches have to adjust to their own reality and face their own challenges. For instance, we see the struggle against divisions in Corinth, or the differences in church life pictured in Revelation 1-3. The apostles and the first church leaders had to deal with the reality of all kinds of shortcomings. In leading the churches entrusted to us, we should take into account this whole picture of leading the church as it is coming to us in the Scripture, and not focus only on Acts 4. These developments teach us to take into account the differences in context in various times and places.

3.4 * 44 *The life in the congregation*

We confess that God in his wisdom created all people equal before Him. In Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor

Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one (Gal 3:28). Man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God, having equal rights and access to Him, needing no other intermediaries except Christ, the only way to the Father.

We confess that the church of Christ is built up of many different members. In this difference both the weak and the strong are found (Rom 14). Based on this reality the Bible admonishes us not to look down upon one another; instead we must accept one another as Christ accepted us. Driven by love both for God and for our fellow brothers and sisters, we ought to do our best to seek those things that lead to peace and mutual edification in the unity of Christ. We acknowledge that in doing this the church of Christ will be built up, resulting in God being honoured and glorified.

3.4 * 45 *Unity in diversity*

We confess that we are the one body of Christ. We have diversity of gifts but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries but the same Lord. There are diversities of activities but it is the same God who works all in all. As the body of Christ the members should have the same care for one another. Differences should complement each other. In the acknowledgment of different talents and gifts, God empowers his church and gives it lots of energy. There should not be schism in the body, and, if one is honoured, all the members should rejoice with Him (1 Cor 12). God's holiness and grace unite us in one body in which no one can be proud and nobody should boast about his results or honour himself (Eph 2:9).

3.4 * 46 *Leadership in the church*

Those who have been entrusted to serve and take responsibility for leadership should seek humility. No one should think of himself more highly than he ought to, “but with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given him or her” (Rom 12:3). Jesus taught that those who want to be leaders must be willing to be servants. When He washed his disciples' feet, He set an example for all to follow (John

13:15). Paul, who had been commissioned by Christ as an Apostle, saw himself as the least of them all. He advises us to have the attitude that Christ had, “Who being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Phil 2:5-7). We should accept our ministries humbly as gifts from God for the edification and the building of the church.

3.4 * 47 *Living in the world*

We confess that we, as the holy church, have been brought out of the darkness into Christ’s wonderful light (1 Pet 2:9-10). By this we have been chosen out of the world and been set apart from the world to commit our lives to the true God (1 Thess 1:9-10; 1 Pet 4:1-6). Thus we became a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a precious people belonging to God. This is our identity, making us distinctive in the world. This identity implies that there will be misunderstanding, rejection, and sometimes even persecution from the world, as Christ was once rejected by the world of his days (John 15:19, 16:1-4). Since we live in this world we are tempted and sometimes led astray, hence we constantly need to be revived and transformed to really be a true and living church of Christ, his holy bride.

We confess that as the church of Christ we are sent into the world as God’s apostolic instrument to proclaim the gospel of salvation (1 Pet 2:9), to be a light and salt in the world. This implies that the church accepts the calling of her Lord to demonstrate the light by our personal Christian life, behaviour, testimony, and verbal witness (Col 4:5-6), and by the structure of our church life by which we are active in the realization of this calling. This also involves our being in the world as citizens of a country, a society. Christians should show social commitment, being the ambassadors of the Kingdom of Christ, reflecting the image of God, and fulfilling the cultural mandate.

3.4 * 48 *Worship*

We confess that the nature of our worship is covenantal. In worship God is meeting his covenant people. We enjoy the presence of the Lord; we come together to glorify his name, listen carefully to his voice, and to receive forgiveness. We praise Him because of his great works, receiving cleansing by the blood of Jesus Christ (symbolized and experienced in the Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper) and a reassurance of our trust in God’s faithfulness. In worship we see his power, glory, majesty, and faithfulness. We meet the triune God and we experience God’s power in the renewing work of the Spirit.

There will be misunderstanding, rejection, and sometimes even persecution from the world.

We feel the certainty of being the children of the covenant and are at home in the church of Christ, our mediator. During worship we express our faith and feelings by confessing our faith and surrender our wilful attitudes by listening and submitting to the Word of God. We respond to his Word and we communicate with the Lord in our hymns and prayers. We enjoy this fellowship and the love of Christ, gathering with brothers and sisters in the unity of the body of Christ. We are encouraged and empowered by the Spirit to go out into the world, to bear witness to the salvation of Jesus Christ. Worship ignites mission; it is God’s divine call-and-response strategy. Worship causes people to encounter Christ and makes them respond to his call to witness.

Refutations

38. Teaching that claims the model of Acts 4 to be the biblical image of the

church for all places and ages does not take into account the differences of circumstances and the reality of sin in the church. The Bible also shows the images of other churches, for instance Corinth.

39. We refute the emergence of two levels in church life, or the presence of a kind of “spiritual elite” in the congregation, a practice caused by overemphasizing holiness and the need for “second blessing.”
40. We refute the teaching that Christians should retreat from the world for the sake of their holiness and to live in so called holy cities.
41. We admit that ongoing discussions on the topic of liturgy are contradictory to the Spirit-given freedom to worship. We refute styles of worship that are focused on creating an emotional atmosphere in order to open the way for all kinds of ecstatic expressions of faith. The proclamation and teaching of the Word of God should attract our heart and mind, not long singing, praising, dancing, praying, shouting, music, laughter, speaking in tongues, and the like.

Doxology

We pray that this Statement may be blessed by the Lord, giving light to the churches. With the Apostle we praise our Lord with the words:

*Now to Him who is able to establish you
by my gospel and the proclamation of
Jesus Christ,
according to the revelation of the mystery
hidden for long ages past,
but now revealed and made known
through the prophetic writings
by the command of the eternal God,
so that all nations might believe
and obey Him –
to the only wise God be glory
forever
through Jesus Christ!
Amen.*

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Psalms and Hymns in the Dutch Reformed Tradition: The Twentieth Century

(Part 2 of 2)

Introduction

In the history of liturgical singing in the Dutch Reformed churches, the twentieth century is a period of change and development. During this century the churches shook off the influence of the Secession, in which the reaction to non-scriptural hymns in the song-book had reached a climax. Leery of hymns that might be cause for another schism, the churches exercised considerable caution; during the first decades of the twentieth century the Reformed churches maintained the metrical psalms in the so-called *Staatsberijming* that had been employed since 1773, and a modest number of hymns in *Eenige Gezangen*, or *Several Hymns*. The experience of the nineteenth century (sketched in *Clarion*, Volume 54, Issue 12) was not forgotten.

For the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, which have instructed the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* to consider and propose suitable hymns to expand the second portion of the song-book, the experience of the Dutch Reformed churches is instructive. As we shall see below, during the twentieth century the orthodox Reformed churches in The Netherlands studied the principles supporting the singing of hymns in corporate worship, and sought to exercise these principles in compiling and composing psalms, hymns, and spiritual

songs. In what follows we shall focus upon the various arguments against and for the inclusion of hymns in the churches' book of worship. The history of the formation of a contemporary psalm- and hymn-book for the liberated churches will receive special attention: from the beginning of the twentieth century until the most recent synod in 2005, the official decisions of the churches reveal both the principles and the practices in our sister churches.

Abraham Kuyper: against and then for

The influence of Abraham Kuyper upon the Reformed understanding of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs was considerable. The change, between 1900 and 1911, in his view of hymn-singing during the worship services reflects the uneven progress in the Reformed churches since the Secession of 1834. At first Kuyper held that only the metrical psalms should be sung during church services. According to the sound Reformed conviction that the worship service should be marked by the Word of God rather than the words of humans, Kuyper uttered the statement that would be repeated frequently by others: "In the house of God only the Word of God." The psalms, Kuyper argued, surpass the hymns in spiritual depth and meaning; they are catholic insofar as they belong to the church of all times and places.



A. Kuyper

Moreover, Kuyper feared that the increase of hymn-singing in the worship services would lead to a reduction in psalm-singing.

A little more than a decade later Kuyper changed his view on congregational hymn-singing on Sundays. In a book entitled *Our Worship Service (Onze Eredienst, 1911)*, Kuyper observes that the metrical versions of the psalms in the book of praise are human renderings of the Bible; although they are based on the text, they are modern poetic compositions and so are not, strictly speaking, "God's Word." Like the public, non-formular prayers that are offered during the service, the psalms that are sung are man made expressions arising from the hearts of the believers in response to the Word of God. Following Calvin's definition of song as analogous to prayer, Kuyper points out

that the Lord Jesus Christ taught his disciples a new prayer, one that arises in the second, new dispensation. Consequently, the singing of “a new song” concerns the events and revelation of the New Testament.

Kuyper also observes that in the history of the Dutch Reformed churches no solid argument against the singing of hymns has been produced. From the time when Petrus Datheen published *The Psalms of David* (*De Psalmen Davids*, 1566) – which included a selection of scripturally based songs such as the Ten Commandments – the synods did not determine the singing of hymns to be contrary to the Scriptures or the Confessions. Kuyper interprets the oft-debated text of 1 Corinthians 14:26 (“each one has a hymn”) and especially Ephesians 5:19 (“psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”) not as denoting only three kinds or categories of Old Testament psalms, but as referring also to songs other than the 150 poems.

It should not be concluded, however, that Kuyper has a low estimation of psalm-singing or an exceptionally high view of hymns. From his neo-Calvinist perspective, with its emphasis on the application of the Christian faith in all spheres of life, on the integration of the Reformed faith in society, and on the rejection of mere semblances of a devout lifestyle, Kuyper identifies the hymns of the Pietists as characterized by anti-cultural and other worldly features that should not be emulated by Reformed believers. Thus while he promotes the composition of hymns for use by the churches during special services (e.g., Christmas, Easter) and on specific occasions (e.g., installation of office-bearers, administration of the sacraments), he does so upon the following conditions: that the hymns be Reformed in character; that a moderate number of hymns be used in the services, and that the hymns be approved by lawful synod.

Synods, deputies, and more synods

In 1920 the Synod of the Reformed churches (*Gereformeerde Kerken*) appointed five deputies to collate a few “hymns” for use by the churches as they see fit. The Synod voiced no objection to the composition of songs based on the text of the Bible besides the psalms. It was thought that as long as the text is scriptural there should be no objection to the modest increase in the number of songs in the second part of the book of praise.

As so often happens in the history of our churches, however, the process was slow and uneven: Synod Leeuwarden (1923) found that the proposed collection was generally deficient. It in turn appointed another committee, to which was given the expanded mandate to examine the arguments behind the use of the so-called “*vrije kerklid*” (scriptural songs that are not a literal rendering of the poetic text).

The Synod of Groningen (1927) decided that a thorough exegetical and historical investigation should be made into the principles that support the singing of hymns as well as psalms. And so it transpired that by the end of the third decade of the twentieth century the Reformed churches were supplied with a report giving an historical overview of hymn-singing in the church of the apostolic age, the Middle Ages, and the Reformation. Instructed by Synod to complete its study with several recommendations, the committee came to the conclusion that restricting the liturgical song to the 150 Psalms is not Reformed.

Principles for singing hymns in church

The main points of the report submitted by the committee to the Synod held at Arnhem in 1930 may be listed as follows:

1. Scripture neither demands nor forbids the use of the “free song” (“*vrije kerklid*”) in worship;
 2. Whereas God has granted a collection of songs in the 150 Psalms for the Old and New dispensations, the churches are at liberty to employ hymns in addition to the metrical psalms;
 3. Whereas history reveals that some Reformed churches have restricted the singing to psalms, the recurring inclusion of some hymns in the book used for worship indicates that there was no objection in principle to singing hymns;
 4. The fear of introducing hymns is due to the fact that there has been abuse of the “free song” by heretics and to the fact that in some places the singing of hymns was disproportionately greater than that of the psalms;
 5. The concerns expressed in #4 are legitimate and the churches that have limited or proscribed the use of hymns are not deemed to have erred. The psalms should receive primary attention in the singing; nevertheless, it is appropriate for the church of the new dispensation to sing the “new song” that brings honour and glory to the Lamb that was slain. Thus the commemoration of the deeds of salvation (such as Christ’s birth, resurrection, and outpouring of the Spirit) may be sung in the form of hymns. The deputies also consider invalid the argument that in the house of God only what was inspired by the Holy Spirit must be sung.
- It should be noted that Synod did not approve this report; it did, however, determine to increase the number of hymns that may be sung during the worship services. Furthermore, it appears from various publications of the time that the arguments of the deputies reflect the thinking of the church members generally; the recommendations indicate the direction



K. Schilder

in which the churches were moving with respect to hymn-singing. Change was in the offing: the Bible translation from which the 1773 metrical psalms derived was considered outdated and exegetically weak, the language of the book of worship (now more than a century old) was deemed obsolete, and the desire to increase the singing of hymns was growing.

Klaas Schilder: “sing a new song”

Some readers may be surprised to learn that Klaas Schilder took considerable interest in the issue of hymn-singing and in metrical psalms generally. In fact, from 1924 until shortly before his death in 1952, he wrote numerous articles in the magazine called *The Reformation* (*De Reformatie*).

Leery of hymns that might be cause for another schism, the churches exercised considerable caution.

Admitting ignorance in matters musical, Schilder focused on the exegesis and text of the metrical psalms; he exposed outmoded or otherwise unhappy expressions in the churches’ liturgical song-book, the *Staatsberijming* of 1773; he reviewed newly published versifications; and he wrote about the role of

congregational singing in the context of the liturgy as a whole. It is beyond the scope of this article and magazine to treat everything Schilder wrote on these subjects; we shall restrict our comments to Schilder’s thoughts on the congregational singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Schilder emphasizes the accuracy of the text of the metrical psalms; as much as is possible, the text of the rhymed version should be true to that of the original Hebrew. At the same time, he suggests, the translation should take into consideration the fulfilment of the psalm in the New Testament: the Messianic qualities should be evident. For this reason Schilder urges contemporary poets to write translations of the psalms in free verse. He also encourages a modern translation of which the vocabulary, style, and modes of thought are in keeping with those of Scripture; undignified or mundane language should be avoided. After all, he writes, while the psalms “in form are literature, in substance they are revelation” (*Reformatie*, v. 6, 41). Schilder repeatedly promotes renewal of the outdated book of praise used by the Reformed churches.

Regarding the increase in the number of hymns, Schilder does not hesitate to reveal his progressive view time and again. With the intent of influencing the 1933 Synod’s treatment of the collection of hymns prepared by the deputies, he writes in his characteristically matter-of-fact tone: “No objection can be raised against the singing of ‘hymns’” (*Reformatie*, xiii.8, 58). He repeatedly uses the biblical phrase, “Sing a new song” (Ps 96, etc.), to promote the expansion of the modest hymn-section in the *Eenige Gezangen* (*Several Hymns*).

To those believers who uttered the slogan, “In God’s house only God’s Word,” Schilder replies: “The worship service entails the words of God to humans (such as the preaching, the reading of the law), and also the words of humans to

God (e.g., prayer, the Apostles’ Creed, and singing)” (*Reformatie*, xiii.20, 154). Like Kuyper before him, Schilder makes a sharp distinction between the Word of God and the words of mortal creatures. Congregational singing may not be equated with the administration of the Word of God. The church may adopt the Word of God, such as a passage of prophecy – that is, God’s Word spoken through the mouth of his servant – but that Word of revelation becomes a human *confession* in the mouths of the believers. The psalms include

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compositions of mere mortals, albeit inspired ones: prayers, laments, and offerings of thanks. But even when the words of an inspired poet are sung, they become nothing more than expressions of a congregation in song. In short, Schilder states, whatever the congregation sings is not the Word of God but the word of man. What matters most, therefore, is that the human song of the congregation must not oppose the divine Word of God, but accord with it in every respect.

The report to Synod Middelburg (1933)

The Synod held at Middelburg in 1933 continued the trend established at the preceding assembly and made an important alteration to the article in the Church Order pertaining to liturgical singing. It decided that the 150 Psalms be sung in the churches, “together with *Several Hymns* as these are approved and determined for ecclesiastical use by the Synod.” Having received a report of the deputies for the Expansion of the Hymn

Section, the Synod increased the number of hymns in the collection of *Eenige Gezangen* (*Several Hymns*) to twenty-nine.

The hymns recommended in this report fall under the following headings: 1) Advent and Christmas; 2) The Passion of Christ; 3) Easter; 4) Ascension and Pentecost; and 5) A few Classic Songs. The first four rubrics are self-explanatory; examples of the fifth are the ancient “*Te Deum*” and Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress.” With one exception, none of these hymns is based directly or solely on a Bible text. It may be observed with some irony that twelve of the twenty-nine hymns in this collection had appeared previously in the *Evangelical Hymns* (*Evangelische Gezangen*) of 1807 and in the supplementary *Vervolgbundel* (1866) that were reviled so roundly by many church-goers. Another five hymns,

The committee came to the conclusion that restricting the liturgical song to the 150 Psalms is not Reformed.

authored by Isaac da Costa, had been published in the collection *Voices and Strings* (*Stem en Snaren*, 1882), about which we wrote in *Clarion* (Volume 54, Issue 12). Synod was careful not to impose its decision regarding the expanded hymn section upon the churches; in matters of doctrinal indifference the local consistories were free to implement or forego Synod’s recommendation.

Dutch developments post-1944

In the 1940’s a “liberation” (*vrijmaking*) of many congregations from the Reformed churches (*Gereformeerde Kerken*) occurred. Readers may recall that these congregations freed themselves from the binding of synodical

declarations in matters of doctrine and from the juridical measures imposed by synod. This newly formed federation of liberated churches is the direct “ancestor” of the American and Canadian Reformed Churches, and its decisions in matters of liturgical song are of direct relevance.

Following the liberation, the movement to revise the traditional psalter gained strength. As time passed, the versification of the 1773 *Staatsberijming* sounded increasingly alien in the ears of church-goers. Believers expressed a desire to replace the archaic metrical psalms, and wished for an increase in hymns. Thus the need arose for a clearer articulation of the function of spiritual songs in the worship services; from 1948 until the end of the century, the churches would be occupied with this matter.

In 1953 an interdenominational committee was established to advance the publication of a more contemporary versification of the 150 Psalms. Various Protestant denominations participated in the process, including the liberated churches, from 1966 onward. The product of this committee’s work was the *Songbook for the Churches* (*Liedboek Voor de Kerken*, 1973); this influential and significant collection was adopted widely in Protestant churches. Of the 491 songs included in the *Songbook* 115 are called “biblical songs” (in Dutch: “*Bijbel-liederen*”), a term that denotes a close rendering or paraphrase of the text. Ninety-eight of the songs were penned by active, contemporary poets. The biblical songs are more or less close paraphrases of the text of Scripture; while not literal renderings, they are true to the Word. Intended for use in the worship services, this thick collection consists also of songs for particular times in the year of the church, including the sacraments, marriage, profession of faith, and the like.

Within the Liberated Reformed Churches, however, the *Songbook* received mixed reviews, and the churches



chose to form their own collection by selecting psalms and hymns on an individual basis. The adoption of the *Songbook* by other denominations did increase the pressure upon the liberated churches to re-evaluate its teaching and practice regarding the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. A discussion ensued about the nature of

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congregational singing. Certain psalms and other Bible passages express the Word of God to his people, while others convey the response of the congregation. The conviction emerged that a feature of congregational song is the proclamation of the gospel, so that the entire Bible may be viewed as suitable material for singing. There developed a greater nuance in the characterization of psalms and hymns: some are declarative, others experiential; some pertain to God’s actions for his people, others convey the actions of God’s people, etc.

Developments in recent decades

Having received an updated version of metrical psalms in 1985, the liberated churches also fixed upon their own collection of hymns, in 1986; it was called *Gezangbundel* (*Collection of Hymns*). However, the dissatisfaction with this collection of forty-one hymns led the Synod of 1991 to alter and expand it considerably. Over time, it was decided that a selection of the better hymns in the *Songbook* should be considered. In 1998 an anthology of no less than 255 of the songs in the *Songbook* (*Liedboek Voor de Kerken*) was issued for testing in the churches on Sunday mornings. This is the “green” edition of the *Songbook*, so-called to distinguish it from the original “red” edition.

Human song must not oppose the divine Word of God, but accord with it in every respect.

In 1999 the Synod at Leusden deemed the number of proposed hymns too great; it approved for first reading in worship services 121 of the 255 songs in the anthology. Synod also stated the criteria congregations were to apply in testing the hymns: 1) a good song functions well in the liturgy of the church in which the words and works of God are central; 2) in substance the song must accord with Scripture; 3) the diction, music, and style should be appropriate to the worship service; 4) the song should speak to contemporary society.

The Synod of 2002 gave definitive approval to 114 of the 121 songs in the working, “green”, edition of the *Songbook*. Earlier this year, in 2005, the Synod

decided for the time being to maintain as the official hymn-book of the churches the forty-one hymns that for decades comprised part of the book of praise. Synod also approved for use a collection of another ninety hymns to be tested and exercised in the worship services; at the same time, the churches may continue to use the revised (“green”) edition of the *Songbook*. While a new Bible translation and updated book of liturgy have been approved at this synod, the plan regarding hymns is that by 2011 a definitive edition of the hymns will be issued.

Conclusion

This brief survey concludes that the twentieth century was an important period in the history of liturgical song in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The time from the unification of the *Gereformeerde* and *Dolerende Kerken* in 1892 until the post-modern age of the

Western world witnessed a development in the understanding of hymn-singing. From great caution that harks back to the Secession, the Reformed churches progressed to an articulation of the principles supporting biblically-based songs in the book of worship. The Canadian and American Reformed Churches can learn much from the experiences of the Liberated Reformed Churches, with whom they have been in close ecclesiastical fellowship for many decades.

At the same time it should be noted that the churches established in Canada in the 1950's quickly developed their own concept of a Reformed psalter, and did so in the context of North American culture and the English language. Both the applicable lessons from the Dutch experience and the unique opportunities for the Canadian Reformed Churches, however, are subjects best left for another occasion, *Deo volente*.



Pisew Falls, Manitoba

Photo courtesy Cheryl Harke

Overcoming Discord in the Communion of Saints (Part 2 of 5)

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In the first installment I introduced my premise, that “it is more important for each member of the Body of Christ to ‘show true thankfulness to God with his entire life and, laying aside all enmity, hatred, and envy, to live with his neighbour in true love and unity,’ than for all members to follow the same model for educating their children.” James addressed a church torn by persecution and earthly wisdom, and I illustrated how personal conflicts are very much a part of our lives. Rather than bringing glory to God, disputes bring out the worst in us. We depend on the guidance and mercy of our God to resolve them according to scriptural principles.

Rather than belabouring personal conflict escalation, I turn now to group discord. Personal conflict takes on an additional dimension and dynamic when it involves groups of people. Such discord is also more difficult to resolve, if only because more people are involved. It is one thing to have one person repent and humble himself, but quite another to have a whole faction seek conciliation. I specifically studied discord around the rise of home schooling, and will now first present the context of my study: the effort of our communities to establish Reformed day schools.

Raising covenant children

Parents are responsible for raising their children. That is natural, but also an explicit command in Deuteronomy 6 and 11, and in Paul’s apostolic instruction about bringing up children (1 Tim; Eph 6; Col 3). However, as I have elaborated in

Clarion (Volume 54, Issue 13), raising children is also integrated in the covenant community. Deuteronomy 6 follows on the heels of the Ten Commandments; it decrees that the law which parents must teach their children must also be posted at the gates. Furthermore, there are public monuments, communal feasts, and even dress codes that support the parental tasks. Elders, priests, and Levites instruct; teaching fathers in Proverbs are not just biological dads; Elisha curses the youths of Bethel. The community may not be silent bystanders in bringing up the next generation, but must take roles of participation, modeling, and even correction and discipline. This would, quite naturally, be increasingly the case as the child grows older and becomes more socially involved.

There must be full unity of purpose between home, church, and school.

In Bible times children received much of their education at home, while the community played a big role in their acculturation and socialization. In the New Testament, after the exile, some schooling was received in synagogue schools. However, there is no scriptural imperative to institute schools. Neither does Scripture condemn them. According to Scripture children must be raised by their parents in the fear of the

Lord, in the context of an interested, supportive, involved, and responsible covenant community.

Day schools

We established and maintained Reformed day schools. For a good part that goes back to the reformers. Luther implored the princes of Germany to take care of educating children, as parents were useless for this lofty task. Calvin held that all education must direct people, and must therefore also itself be directed, to God’s honour. He saw an important role for the church in education, and acknowledged the government’s interest. He also believed that schools must prepare students for both theological studies and for government office. The Great Synod of Dort (1618-1619) by-and-large accepted Calvin’s ideas on education.

The Dutch did not accept Calvin’s notion that a school teacher was an office bearer (Eph 4:11), but maintained that it was the government’s responsibility to establish schools and the church’s task to see to the teachers’ soundness in conduct, doctrine, and curriculum. After the Secession of 1834 parents began to establish Christian schools because the public schools had become unchristian by definition; Synod Dordrecht (1893) urged the parents to also apply for government recognition of their schools. It was understood that schools are not extensions of the churches, but should be parental. Upon receiving full government recognition and funding, Synod Leeuwarden (1920)

elaborated on this. It urged parents, as first responsible, to establish Christian schools, and suggested that the consistory oversee the school's scriptural and confessional aspects using a locally designed mechanism. Article 58 of our Church Order (adopted at Synod Coaldale, 1983) reflects the notion that there should be unity of purpose in the triad of home, church, and school, and should not be misconstrued to suggest that these three are entities of equal origin or stature.

After the Reformation few people were as concerned with schooling as the Dutch. Other immigrants to North America did not hurry to establish schools. In Puritan settings, such as Dedham and Plymouth, Massachusetts, children were home schooled, participated in community activities, and were apprenticed to learn needed skills; but one of the first things Dutch pioneer Rev. A.C. VanRaalte thought of in 1847 was to establish a school in Michigan's wilderness. A few years after, in Ontario, the Methodist clergyman and later chief superintendent of education, A. Egerton Ryerson (1803-1882), pioneered to develop and establish a universal, compulsory, comprehensive, and publicly funded Protestant school system.

Ontario's public schools still had a Protestant flavour when our parents or grandparents came to Canada. However, as they had just painfully learned in the Liberation of 1944 that there could be no ecclesiastical unity even with other Reformed people, they realized that "religiously neutral" Protestant schools could not be good enough for covenant children. Raising the children of the covenant was a 24/7 kind of task, and devotions at the beginning and end of the day just didn't cut it. There must be full unity of purpose between home, church, and school. When the Ontario government's Mackay Committee began to formally secularize the public schools in 1969, our communities were

establishing their own Reformed day schools.

It wasn't easy. There was no government funding and no full community support. Dads worked many hours, mothers were frugal beyond grasp to feed and clothe the children, and frustration and fatigue took their tolls; but the efforts bore fruit. The schools came: Burlington, 1962; Smithville, 1964;

Children must be raised by their parents in the fear of the Lord, in the context of an interested, supportive, involved, and responsible covenant community.

Fergus, 1967 (high school in 1977); Orangeville, 1967; Chatham and Hamilton, 1973; Guido de Brès Christian High, 1975; London, 1976; Woodbridge, 1979; Covenant Teachers' College, 1981; Millgrove, 1987; Owen Sound, 1994; and Attercliffe, 1995. The schools, though by no means perfect, were and continue to be an answer to many prayers; they filled, and still fill, a deep need. Our communities continue to thank God for Reformed day schools and work hard to make them the best they can be.

Community

It was not just parents who established schools, but communities. Sure, there were dissenters and disagreements. There was no concord on what Reformed education was like, or how it was done. However, to those who did start a school, it was part of the call to be a covenant community. The Lord had given Himself to them and them to each other, as believers and members of Christ, in order that they might have communion with Him and share in his treasures and gifts, and

further, in order that they would use their gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well being of the other members. This tied them together in getting to church, catechism, societies, choir, church picnics, in building a church, filling offices, calling ministers, worship, and also in building a school. Their children grew up in a covenant community in which all were involved, as all belonged to Christ. It was a time in which Sundays were highlights, because they constituted communion with people who sought to serve God as they did, and who experienced the same hurdles of immigrant life. Sundays were the heart throb of being church.

Scripture depicts the church as the body of Christ. He is the Head, we are his members. The body has different parts, each with their own function: eyes, mouth, feet, etc. As a body, it also consists of cells – say, individuals. Cells work together to make tissues – say, families. Tissues work together to make organs – say, various groups or associations of church members. Organs work together to make organ systems. Organ systems work together to make the whole body work. The body's parts are intimately knit together, and interdependent. With David we are awed at how wonderfully God had knitted him together in his mother's womb (Ps 139). Like that, God knits together the fabric of the body of Christ in the church. While not instituted by God, the school functions as one of the parts, as an organ that fulfills a specific role. Much like a men's or women's society, it is not itself the body or communion of the saints, but, as it aims to provide community assistance to other tissues and organs, it is an active part of it. It does not replace the parents, and it also is not the only way in which the parents may receive help from the community. Yet the effort necessarily expended in the school is a weighty element in the fabric of the communion of saints.



Houston Farewell Evening for Rev. and Mrs. Poppe and Family

As congregation of Houston we came together on June 26, 2005 to say farewell to Rev. Dirk Poppe, his wife Amanda, and their children, Ben, Angelica, Caleb, and David.

Farewell sermon

Rev. Poppe had a farewell sermon in the afternoon service on Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom but fools despise wisdom and discipline."

He began his sermon by saying this is the time to say goodbye. It is a custom to wish people well as they part ways. Peace, joy, prosperity, health, and contentment are a result of the Lord's blessing – not just something that happens. The book of Proverbs teaches us how to live this good life. If you fear the Lord you will have the wisdom to live a good life.

In this chapter he is not talking about some professor-type person, but rather one who truly fears the Lord. To fear the Lord is to stand in awe and respect, in wonder of all that He has done in this world. When we face troubles the Lord wants us to fear Him and continue to grow in the knowledge of Him, that we may have peace and contentment in whatever comes our way. We are encouraged to listen to what He tells us in his Word, follow his ways, and ask Him for help. He loves it when we call to Him. If we hold fast to the wisdom of the Word He will grant us eternal life with Him.



Farewell evening

The evening began with the singing of Psalm 121:1 and 4, where we sing that we lift our eyes to the hill of the Lord and realize our help comes from the Lord who made the whole earth; He will guard us and keep us at all times in our life.

Everyone was welcomed from Houston, Smithers and Telkwa, and the children ages 4-15 sang "We will follow."

Rev. VanSpronsen from Smithers Canadian Reformed Church and two ministers from the United Reformed Churches in our area spoke, and they all agreed that they could hang on their wall "WWDD" (What would Dirk Do) as different circumstances came up in their ministry. He was someone they could rely on for advice. They would miss him as a friend and colleague

especially at the unity meetings. Dirk, they said, was always well prepared and willing to stand up for the truth. They wished him well in that windy place of Coaldale.

The different study societies, Ladies Bible Study and Men and Women's Society, thanked Amanda for her participation, where she always gave lots of food for thought. Her presence would be missed but we wish her well in her new congregation of Coaldale.

The catechism students thanked Rev. Poppe with a picture of him and the children at a surprise party they threw for him earlier.

The bus driver and all the children who rode the school bus came up and told about all the things that happen on the bus, all the wildlife they saw through the years, and they presented Ben and Angelica with a balloon.

Men's Breakfast thanked Rev. Poppe for the good talks and fellowship they had, which included many Saturday morning conversations starting with breakfast, followed by shop talk, bush talk, and then on to good Reformed Bible study on various topics.

The young people sang a song and individual young people performed songs and solos accompanied by piano. They also thanked Rev. and Mrs. Poppe for their involvement with them – they always felt welcome and they always had good talks, played games, or just enjoyed each other's company.

Houston Ladies Aid presented a picture of the Telkwa Range painted by a member of the congregation.

The minister was also presented a photo album in which one or two pages were done by each family of the congregation. A couple of members also put together other various activities the minister and his family were involved in.

A play was done about life in a small town where the minister and his family were driving down the road with their



children, reminiscing on their life in Houston. The nearest McDonalds was seventy kilometres away and "you don't need a signal because everyone knows where you are going..."

The congregation presented Rev. and Mrs. Poppe and family with a beautiful picture done by an artist in the congregation.

Rev. and Mrs. Poppe thanked everyone for the time they had here in

Houston – four and a half years. We all felt thankful for the time we had together. He encouraged us to continue in faith and grow together in love, building each other up in the body of Christ.

A time of good fellowship was enjoyed by all and Rev. and Mrs. Poppe and family are wished the Lord's blessing as he continues his ministry in the Coaldale congregation.



ICRC Pretoria, October 12-19, 2005

Delegates from Reformed and Presbyterian churches will trek to Pretoria, South Africa from around the world to meet at the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) from October 12 – 19. Four years have gone by since its last meeting in Philadelphia, USA, and another meeting is in its last stages of organization. The hosting churches are the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA), in particular the congregations of Pretoria.

It is no simple task to host well over a hundred guests from many different parts and cultures of the world!

Sometimes the comment is heard that this might be interesting for those who attend but that the average church member knows little about it and does not seem to be much affected by this international organization. For this reason it might be good for all to become more familiar with what the ICRC is all about.

Purpose

What is the purpose of this organization of which the Canadian and American Reformed Churches are also members? Its constitution and regulations state this very clearly in Article III:

The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;

2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
3. to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

Members

The requirements for membership are, amongst other things, that these churches “faithfully adhere to the Reformed faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed faith” (Art IV, Constitution). The basis of the Conference is Scripture as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards (Art II, Constitution).

The number of members has been steadily increasing. At the present there are twenty-two members worldwide, with several more applications for membership to be dealt with at the upcoming meeting in Pretoria. A list of all the members will give you an idea of who they all are and where they come from. They are: the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (USA), the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the Evangelical Presbyterian Churches in England and Wales, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Free Church in Southern Africa, the Free Church of Central India, the Free Church of Scotland, the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa, the Free Reformed Churches of North America, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA), the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin), the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, the Reformed Churches in Indonesia, the Reformed

Churches in the Netherlands (liberated), the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, the Reformed Church in the United States, the Reformed Calvinist Churches of Indonesia, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India, the United Reformed Churches in North America, and the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

This shows a wide spectrum of larger and smaller churches, a number with whom we have a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, others with whom we are in the process of establishing such, and still others with whom we experience unity in many ways but have not yet come to the point of having an established relationship for various reasons (because of distance, difficulty in communications, unfamiliarity, etc.). However, at these conferences there is a real sense of fellowship and unity as well as a strong awareness that we need each other more than ever in an often hostile world. It is always amazing how similar we are as children of God even if we are of different nations and races; the issues and problems we face are similar as well. It is a real blessing to be able to help and encourage one another in our service to the one Lord and King.

Agenda

The main items on the agenda are several presentations on the theme of “The Lordship of Christ.” Dr. A.J. de Visser (Canada) will present “In the Life of the Believer;” Dr. J.W. Maris (the Netherlands) will present “In the Church;” and Rev. Y. Dethan (Indonesia) and Rev. D.A. Robertson (Scotland) will present “Proclaimed in the World.” The speakers will also be expected to conduct and facilitate workshops on these topics where the practical aspects of the topics and case studies can be further explored.

The Missions Committee of the ICRC will also present an extensive report. Recently the 2005 *Mission Field Study* has been published by this committee providing an overview of all mission fields and activities conducted by the members. (If you are interested in obtaining a copy, please contact the undersigned.)

The provisional agenda also shows some proposals and recommendations from member churches as well as several applications for new membership. However, the greatest benefit is probably the opportunity for informal contact, consultation, and interaction between delegates of churches, of whom a number hardly ever can and do meet. One can hardly begin to imagine what it means for someone coming from a small Reformed church in a remote area, being threatened and overwhelmed by a hostile environment, to meet with so many Reformed and Presbyterian brothers from around the world who share the same faith and often the same struggle, yet all having received the same riches in Jesus Christ.

The Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad of the Canadian Reformed Churches has delegated one of its members, Brother Henk Hoogstra, and myself to represent our churches at the Conference in Pretoria. At the same time I will be there as the corresponding secretary of the ICRC. The United Reformed Churches delegated the Revs. Ray Sikkema and Dennis Royall.

Hopefully this article has increased your interest so that you will look forward to a press release afterwards. Please do remember this assembly and all the traveling delegates in your prayers. May it be a blessing for the brotherhood of believers throughout the world.

Rev. Cornelius Van Spronsen
ICRC Corresponding Secretary,
Minister emeritus of Surrey, BC



Letter to the Editor



**Re: Praise the Spirit? by Rev. W. L. Breidenhof ,
Volume 54, Issue 13**

Dear Editor,

We were glad Rev. Breidenhof brought up this long overdue subject. As several of our ministers and faculty members of our Theological College have purposely ignored to publicly comment on this, a frank discussion is necessary.

We do not agree with Rev. Breidenhof on this. We don't have any objections with using Hymn 6, where our Triune God is glorified in unity, mentioning all three "persons" together. However, we do object to using Hymns 36 and 37, where the Holy Spirit is praised alone. We had objected to the Hymns 24 and 25 in the old blue book also.

Over the last years we frequently approached ministers who had us sing one of these hymns, and asked them why they didn't pray to the Holy Spirit themselves from the pulpit. We received many different answers, none of them explaining their reasons in a concrete way. The late Rev. Van Dooren listened to our comments in 1991 and answered us back some six weeks later, informing us that after much extensive studying he agreed with us, and that he would never ask a congregation to sing those verses again. Some time later he published an article on this issue in *Horizon* (Volume 7, No. 3, February 1992).

What should we think of what Synod Cloverdale 1983 answered London in regards to their letter on "Praise the Holy Spirit"? Praise of the Holy Spirit is not found in Scripture, but according to the Athanasian Creed we can. That is not much different than what Rev. Breidenhof speaks about in his third argument. On his confessional argument let's look at the Nicene Creed, which the Canadian Reformed Church conveniently changed. The word "together" was removed in the newer translation. Did we remove it so we would not read it as "not apart from"? Was it to improve our English? What about the rest of the confessional argument? We use the same argument so as not to pull the unity apart. His argument of praying to the individual "Persons" would lead to a requiring of equal prayer time for each "Person" of the Godhead. We know he has not gone that far.

We believe in the Trinity. That's how God revealed Himself. We can't explain the Triune God, but He has given us the whole Bible, inspiring every word by the Holy Spirit. He has never instructed us to, and how to, pray to the Spirit. As to Rev. Breidenhof's covenantal argument, he brings the late Rev. Van Dooren to bear, who didn't come to the same conclusion.

Rev. Breidenhof's first argument is a very dangerous one, as we could invent all kinds of heresies as the Church of Rome did. The Reverend's two examples are infant baptism and women taking part of the Holy Supper. According to the Bible, circumcision was done eight days after birth, and women took part in the Passover lamb. If the Reverend wishes to deduce by good and necessary consequence, we ask whether they are good and necessary. The disciples are taught by Jesus to pray to the Father for the Spirit. He Himself "prays to the Father for the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16, 17). Why is there this roundabout way of communication? Some of our hymns have a much more direct way! This has everything to do with Divine worship. It is the Bible that teaches God's children how He wants to be worshipped. He would have shown us how to address or pray to the Spirit. The Bible teaches that the Spirit dwells in our hearts and we are his temples. Anything we know about the way of salvation is due to the working of the Spirit in our hearts. He constantly points to the Father and the Son for the way of redemption. He also inspires us, causing us to pray. He prays for us. Would He then cause us to pray to Himself? We are to "pray in the Spirit," not to the Spirit (Eph 6:18). We ascribe praise and honour to the Spirit when we let ourselves be led by that Spirit and fall on our knees before our Triune God, and do so as the Bible has taught us. Even then, our prayers would not be acceptable without the "unutterable groanings" of the Spirit before the Father (Rom 8:26, 27).

Respectfully submitted,
H.J. and H.P. Endeman
Palgrave, ON