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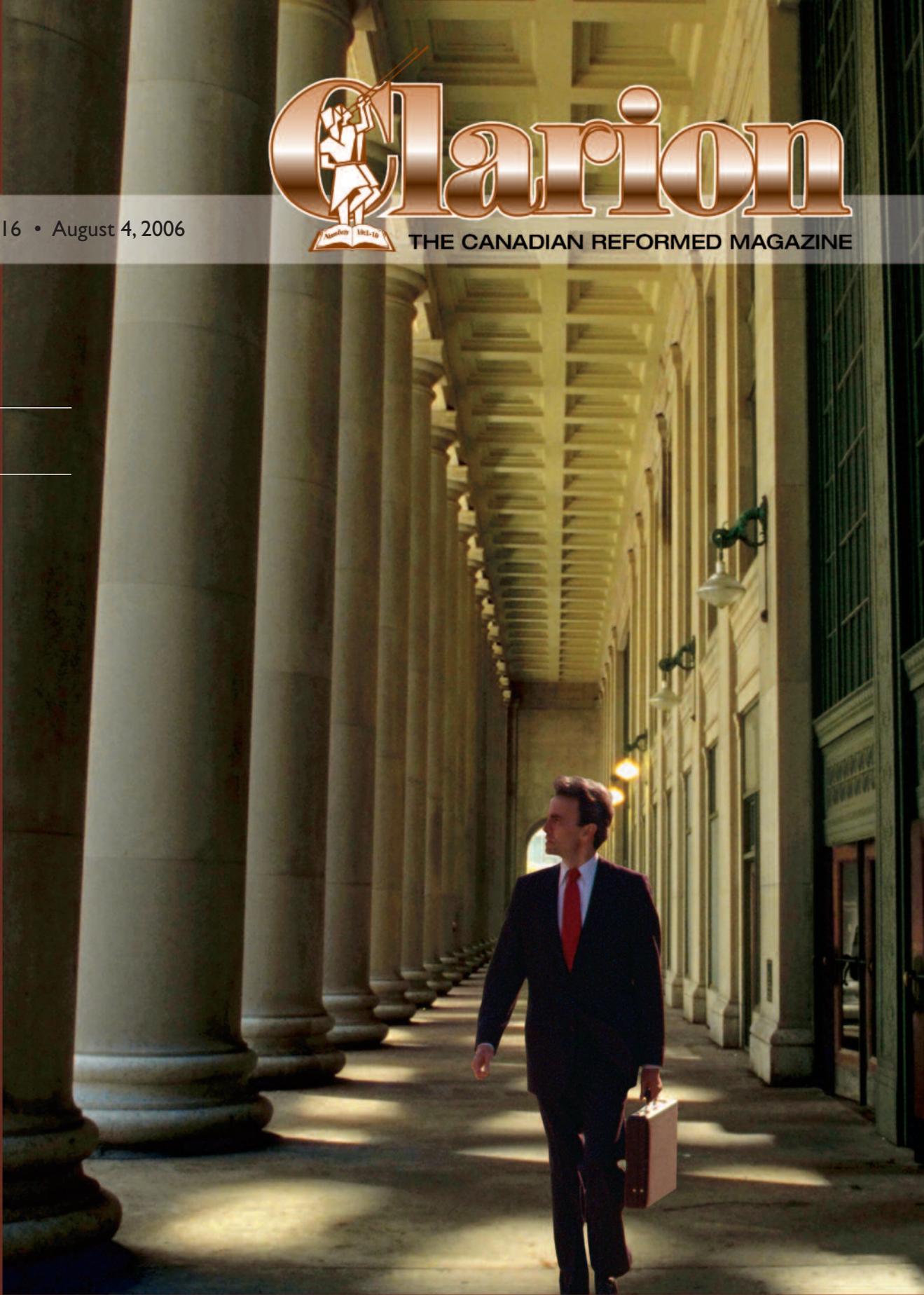
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*Sing a
New Song!*

The Plumb Line

*Covenant
Home
Chatham-Kent*



*Defending Christian Freedom:
Our Civic Responsibility*



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Sing a New Song!

God has given us a most unique and versatile musical instrument, an instrument we all have!

Within the federation of churches, one hears and reads more and more of special musical evenings. These events of both instrumental and vocal music are surely a wonderful additional feast for the ears and souls besides the much appreciated regular choir performances. Music after all is very important for the life of a Christian. Indeed, it is one of God's most precious gifts. Music can help make the spirit soar in gratitude to God for his blessings. It can also convey the powerful lament of the burdened heart whose only hope is in the God of life.

According to Scripture, God expects us to praise Him with music. For example, Psalm 33:1-3 urges:

Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous;
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
Praise the Lord with the harp;
make music to him on the tenstringed lyre.
Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully, and shout for joy.

The psalm goes on to note the reasons for the exhortations to music making. It is because the Lord is right and true and faithful in all He does. He loves righteousness and justice and the earth is full of his unending love (vv 4-5).

Each generation needs to express anew the miracle of God's great acts of salvation in their lives

Music, therefore, has an important place in our life of gratitude before God. Most importantly, the Lord delights in it. We can praise our God with all kinds of instruments and the Lord even urges us to "sing a new song." What is the significance of that?

Our personal involvement in singing

It is one thing to listen to music; it is another to actually be involved in making it yourself. Those who spend hours practising to play a musical instrument can eventually feel that the instrument is an extension as it were of themselves. Through their instrument they can express their feelings and emotions. The music produced speaks to them and can speak of them.

When it comes to singing, this is all the more true. In the human voice, the Lord our God has given us a most unique and versatile musical instrument, an instrument we all have! It is a remarkable fact that although the Old Testament is full of references to musical instruments, especially with respect to the temple liturgy (1 Chron 15:16; 23:5; 25:6-7; 2 Chron 5:12-13), the New Testament is for the most part silent about their use. The focus is on singing and the human voice. Indeed, God's Word presents singing as an integral part of the Christian life. This is no wonder. Could it not be expected that those who are a new creation in Christ are themselves, by means of the human voice, to be the most telling instrument to the praise of his glory?

The Apostle Paul urges the Ephesians and us to be filled with the Spirit and then he continues: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:19-20). The life of gratitude is to be a life full of music! For those filled with the Spirit, it is to be a music and song moulded by the Word of God. As the same apostle put it to the Colossians: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16). When the Word of God shapes our thoughts and

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words, then surely God Himself gives to us the content of our singing. Then we sing in response to God's work in our lives and even if a song be old already, it becomes new for us again and again.

New songs

When David experienced God's forgiveness and deliverance, then he acknowledged in Psalm 40 that it was the Lord who "put a new song in my mouth" (v 3). A new song for each new deliverance that the Lord gave prompted another joyful response in song.

We today by God's grace may be the beneficiaries of the songs of praise and thanksgiving that David composed and sang. What a privilege to have the complete Psalter in our *Book of Praise* with which to articulate our thanks to God. And not only that, but in the Psalms we may have a tremendous inventory for all kinds of occasions. As Calvin wrote in his preface to his commentary on the Psalms, "the Holy Spirit has here drawn to life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men want to be agitated."

Singing and music puts an added emphasis on what we say

While we should thankfully recognize the great God-given heritage in the Psalter, we also need to do justice to the fact that we are also exhorted to sing new songs to the Lord. The Psalms given to us leave no doubt about that. They command us: "Sing to the Lord a new song!" (Ps 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 149:1).

What is the significance of this exhortation? It underlines the fact that each generation needs to express anew the miracle of God's great acts of salvation in their lives. Each generation needs to articulate their thanksgiving and praise for that. We can and should continue to use the Psalms for that purpose. They are our primary song book. But the Lord also expects his church to move on and to express their gratitude anew in each generation with their own words, provided that these songs are moulded by the Word and Spirit (Col 3:16). It is for this reason that our *Book of Praise* not only has all the Psalms as well

IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – Sing a New Song! — C. Van Dam	378
Treasures, New and Old – The Plumb Line — R. Schouten	381
Defending Christian Freedom: Our Civic Responsibility (I) — C. Van Dam	382
Towards a Common Songbook (4) — Rev. R. Lankheet and Rev. G.Ph. van Popta	386
Letter to the Editor	387
Covenant Home Chatham-Kent	388
Education Matters – Peregrine Survey — K. Sikkema	390
Press Releases – Classis Alberta, Classis Niagara	392

as other compositions from Scripture, but also hymns that were composed after God's Word had been completed. We have hymns from the time of the early church, from the time of the Reformation, as well as from quite recent times. And this is how it should be. "Sing to the Lord a new song!" These are songs moulded by the Word of God and therefore focus on God and his glory.

Singing in fellowship

One of the marvels of singing is that it intensifies our everyday language and brings it to new heights and ways of expression. Singing and music puts an added emphasis on what we say. It is therefore a powerful way of communicating our thanks to God, as well as our pleas and supplications. This is especially true when a group of people or an entire congregation sings the same song together. Indeed, it is a moving experience, for singing psalms and hymns is a form of praising God and praying to Him. When done in unison, it is most encouraging and we feel a fellowship with one another as believers who confess the same Saviour.

This fellowship can also be experienced with the saints of old. When we sing a psalm of David, like Psalm 51, recognizing our unworthiness and sin, then we experience fellowship with him. Or if we sing Psalm 90, we sense our kinship with Moses and his perception of the transitoriness of life. All of this is encouraging for the faith. After all, the psalms are a reminder that we are not the first to journey through this life with all its joys and sorrows. We can be strengthened by the knowledge that the Lord our God has been faithful to countless past generations, as articulated also in the psalms. These songs are also a reminder that He will continue to be faithful in the time to come.

Yes, He will! As a matter of fact the future will be better than we can ever imagine. One day there will be an innumerable multitude from all nations singing God's praise in the presence of the Lamb. This large throng will be the complete number who have been



claimed by God and have the name of the Father written on their foreheads (Rev 14:1). "They sing a new song before the throne" (Rev 14:3).

When we reflect on all of this, we realize that when we sing God's praise we are in fellowship with the church of all ages. In the delight of praising Him we may also have a foretaste of the joy to come when literally everyone on earth will be praising God in a new world. As Psalm 98 already exhorted: "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth." One day that world-wide song in fullness will be a complete reality! Praise the Lord!



R. Schouten



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The Plumb Line



MATTHEW 13:52

This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel; I will spare them no longer. The high places of Isaac will be destroyed and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined; with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.

Amos 7:7-9

Every now and then, you see a building that you would not want to enter. As you look at it you can see that the roof is sagging, the walls are crooked, and the foundation is crumbling. If a building inspector ever took a close look at this structure, he would have no choice but to condemn it.

In the vision of Amos, the Lord is both the builder and the building inspector and He has come to check out the building called Israel. God wishes to determine whether his church is still standing straight and true.

In his vision, the prophet Amos sees the Lord with a plumb line in his hand. A plumb line is a string with a weight attached. As you hold the string up, gravity pulls the weight down. The result is that the string always forms a perfectly straight line. This perfect line can be used to test whether or not a wall is straight.

Amos tells us that the wall which God is now inspecting had originally been built true to plumb. This means that God had built the church in harmony with his own righteousness and holiness. Having established a good foundation for the lives of his people, God then gave her the law to keep her straight. By hearing and obeying the gracious commands of the Lord, Israel would remain the sound and sturdy building God had called her to be.

What was true for the Old Testament church is also true for the

New Testament church. In Ephesians 2:20, we read that God has built his church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone. Only as we hold on to the teaching of the apostles and prophets are the walls of the church kept straight.

So what does God find when He comes to check out the wall of the church? Amos the prophet knew all too well what the result would be. God would find that his people were no longer true to the plumb line of his law.

In his law, God called his people to trust Him alone. But Amos knew that God's people were putting their trust in the gods of the nations.

In his law, God called his people to practice justice and righteousness towards each other. But the Lord's evaluation revealed that love had grown cold among the people of the covenant.

In his law, God called his people to display thankfulness to Him for his many gifts. But God's people had become so absorbed with the gifts that they forgotten all about the Giver.

Oh yes, Amos knew exactly what the result of God's inspection would be. The walls of the church were sagging – badly so! There was only one thing for the building inspector to say. This building would have to be condemned.

Do we realize that whenever the Bible is read, the Lord is evaluating

his church? The Word points us to Christ. Every part of the Word proclaims Christ's victory over sin, Satan, and death. This implies that whenever we hear the Word, we're being asked: are we living in terms of the blood and the Spirit of Christ?

What happens if we refuse to re-align our lives to Christ? The latter part of this vision show us that God responds with judgment when his people fail inspection and refuse to set their lives in order. In the end, the Lord responded to the sins of his people Israel by sending them into exile.

But let's not forget that even in Israel's exile, God was preparing the way for Christ Jesus. When Christ came and when God tested his life by the plumb line of his law, He found that it was perfectly straight. In the life of Christ, there was no sagging but only uprightness of heart and mind and soul.

How can our crooked lives today be made straight? In one way only: by a true and living faith in Christ. Faith in Christ means forgiveness for all our sinful failures. But faith in Christ also means that more and more we will live "true to plumb." Through the Spirit, we'll be willing and able to observe the righteous requirements of the law. In this way, we'll be a church that can stand the test of God's searching judgment.

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Defending Christian Freedom: Our Civic Responsibility (Part 1 of 3)

This article was originally a speech delivered at the Second Annual ECP Centre Conference in Burlington, Ontario on November 12, 2005.

1. Our present context

Freedom?

For centuries our society functioned within a more or less Christian framework that helped shape our values and goals. Now our culture is rapidly descending into the darkness of egoistic pleasure seeking and self-gratification with a growing disregard for the ethical norms rooted in biblical and traditional values. Indeed, what used to be called sin is now often exalted, admired, and virtually always tolerated. People on the whole don't seem to care. No matter how corrupt past Liberal governments got, they still enjoyed the confidence of surprisingly large parts of the population. The attitude seems to be: as long as the economy is okay, who cares about the rest. No matter how devastating it is for one's health and well-being, gay lifestyles are praised and promoted. No matter how obviously wrong it is to kill the unborn, the slaughter continues.

The only consistent norm is: my desire and my pleasure must be

satisfied. No one can tell me what to do. After all, we now live in a neutral society where everyone is free to do what they like. We are no longer restricted by our Christian past and its rules. Now we are free! Yes, people call this freedom, but what kind of freedom is this? It is a bondage to sin and evil that ultimately leads to death and death comes in many forms in our present world.

What used to be called sin is now often exalted, admired, and virtually always tolerated

Is this freedom? Also in a political sense, it certainly is not. Our Christian heritage has been exchanged for the religion of secular humanism. It is a religion that brooks no opposition and it is tyrannical and leads to bondage. All must bow to its ideals. The person of God is not to be mentioned in political discourse. It is not politically correct and divine norms are despised.

At the moment Canada is ruled by those who essentially champion

such secularism in the name of freedom and human rights. But the freedom is truly illusionary. It has been rightly said that "when a democracy does not recognize a transcendent moral standard, the only way to resolve the conflict within it is the exercise of force by one faction over another."¹ A recent blatant example of this use of force was Paul Martin's government not even allowing for a free vote of conscience on the moral issue of same-sex marriage. Because God is no longer recognized as the moral arbiter, immorality is being imposed on our land. This imposition is essentially tyranny – the opposite of freedom. For no government has the right or the authority to bind the conscience of its citizens with ultimate claims of what is just, right, or true independent of the standards of the living God of heaven and earth.

What we are witnessing is of course part of the gigantic clash between good and evil, the antithesis, the spiritual warfare between Christ and Satan. It was always there, but the gloves are starting to come off in Canada. Religion is being relegated to one's private life, but in public, toe the line and be tolerant and don't dare call sin a sin. That

could be a hate crime.² Indeed, along with the decline of religious freedom, there is a growing animosity against Christians that is sometimes openly fomented in the media.³

Where are the Christians?

But where *are* the Christians?⁴ Many still talk about a silent majority that is essentially Christian in outlook if not in name. But where are they? If we don't rise up to the challenge, who will do it? An old maxim puts it well: "All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."

Our Christian heritage has been exchanged for the religion of secular humanism

Now it is not unusual for Christians to be apathetic and stay on the sidelines, away from the fray in the world. It is remarkable that when a man like the nineteenth century Dutch Christian statesman Groen van Prinsterer complained that The Netherlands of his days was being abandoned to unbelief and revolution, then he also blamed the Christians. He suggested that Christians neglected their duty in society at large and said: "Though rightly apprehensive of the *philosophy of individualism*, let us be especially on guard against the individualism of our *hearts*." He continued by quoting Tocqueville who defined individualism as "a considered and peaceable sentiment which disposes every

citizen to isolate himself from the mass of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of his family and friends, such that, after having thus created a small society for his private enjoyment, he is quite happy to abandon society at large to its own devices." He concluded with the comment: "The patriotic citizen dissolves into the devoted husband and father."⁵ In other words, as H. Ivan Runner put it, we abandon our political calling by assuming to an exaggerated degree our obligations as heads of our families.⁶

Surely a striking assessment and accusation! It is indeed easy for Christians to withdraw into the comfort zone of their family, church, school societies, and other obligations. After all, these *are* all every important! However, Groen's point is that if we spend so much time on them to the detriment of our duties to society at large, we fail to do an important part of our God-given mandate. Surely this is something to ponder. Indeed, more importantly Scripture teaches us, as we shall see, that we must be involved in the weal and woe of our country and we must be in the forefront of the fight for all that is pleasing to God also in the public life of our nation.

Furthermore, let us remember that the apparently unstoppable drift to the left that we have witnessed ever since the French Revolution is not inevitable. There is no inevitable historical necessity. History is not autonomous. God is in control as sovereign Lord. Christians need to vigorously testify to the goodness and wisdom of God's will for our nation over against the leftist agenda. Biblical principles need to

be articulated over against the foolishness of men. Ultimately, the only force that will break the power of secular liberalism is the Holy Spirit as He converts the hearts of men to see the truth.⁷

It is easy for Christians to withdraw into the comfort zone of their family, church, school societies, and other obligations

Since the Word of God is authoritative for us, let us go through some of the biblical evidence of why and how we should be actively involved in shaping the future of our country.

2. Our relationship to the government

Our duty to the governing authorities

Obey and pray

First, we should note that the civil authorities are established by God. When Jesus was on trial before Pilate He said to this Roman judge and ruler: "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:11). In other words, not Rome, but God in heaven actually put you in this position of power, Pilate. And so today it is ultimately not the people who put our politicians in power in Ottawa and Queen's Park. It is ultimately the sovereign God, the ruler of heaven and earth, who is the one who uses the means of democratic government to place

people in authority in the capitals of our land.

Second, because all authority is from God, we need to realize that God expects us to obey those in authority over us. We read in Romans 13:1-2 that

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

This is clear language. God has ordained authorities so that society can benefit from rule by law.

Therefore, Christians must be at the forefront of respecting the rule of law. To rebel against the lawful authorities is to rebel against God. We live in a time when authority and governmental office is often derided and ignored. As Christians, we must refuse to be identified with that mind set. Christians must be known and recognized as those who are in the forefront of honouring those set above us and respecting the authorities that rule this land.

At the same time, the Apostle Paul also tells us that the reason we must submit to the established authorities is because "he is God's servant to do you good" (Rom 13:4; also see 1 Pet 2:13-14). This truth is further explained in 1 Timothy 2:1-2 where the Apostle Paul urges "that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for. . . all those in authority, that we may

live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." In other words, the authorities have to make it possible that we have the freedom and liberty to live in all godliness and holiness. They owe that to God who ultimately put them in power. Government is not a law to itself and it should never pretend to be its own legislator. There is a higher authority to whom it owes allegiance. Therefore the government has the

Christians need to vigorously testify to the goodness and wisdom of God's will for our nation

duty to lead the way in championing good over against evil. It has the duty to identify evil for what it is and to call sin what it is, sin. Yes, government has the duty to steer a nation into righteousness. As the book of Proverbs puts it: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (cf. Prov 14:34). The God-given task or office of government is not to condone or even exalt sin but to contain its influence as much as possible so that good can flourish in the land and so that there is freedom for God's children to live holy lives.⁸ When that freedom is threatened, or our Christian walk of life becomes very difficult, we need to be vigilant. After all, we are part of this country and we become co-responsible for the troubles of our nation.

Interact

This element of co-responsibility is built into our democratic system and it is also a biblical principle. One could say that there was a democratic impulse in ancient Israelite government. Let me take you back for a moment into Old Testament times to illustrate this.

One of the most important offices in Old Testament government was the office of elder. They ruled and judged the people. The people were, however, involved in placing them in their high position. They had to pick the elders and they had to choose men who were wise, understanding, and of good repute (Deut 1:13; 16:18).

Yet, the responsibility of the people did not end here. The people also had to work to safeguard justice and fight against corruption of the courts. The entire nation was admonished in this respect. Even when Moses specifically admonished the judges to uphold justice, he spoke this warning in the hearing of all the people (Exod 23:6-8; 20:22). The people were not to tolerate any injustice (Deut 16:18-20).

An important way for the people to ensure that justice would be done was to be involved in the justice system. If conscientious Israelites had been involved in the judicial process, some of the gross abuses of justice would probably not have happened, for God set standards of justice (Exod 23:1-3; Deut 17:7). It is telling, for example, that Queen Jezebel apparently had little difficulty in getting co-operation for the perversion of

Church News

Accepted the call from the church at Ancaster, Ontario, to work as missionary for *Streetlight Ministries*:

Rev. P. Aasman
of Grand Valley, ON.

Declined the call to Winnipeg (Redeemer) MB:

Rev. R.A. Schouten
of Abbotsford, British Columbia.

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justice in the judicial murder of Naboth. False witnesses readily stepped forward and secured his execution (1 Kgs 21:9-13). As a result, judgment would come over the house of Ahab (1 Kgs 21:17-29). One also wonders whether the high priest Eli, who also served as civil leader of Israel, would have been so lax in disciplining his corrupt sons if the people of Israel had vigorously complained about his sons' sins and demanded that the Lord's offering not be treated with contempt (1 Sam 2:12-17). The best ally of wickedness is an apathetic citizenry. But such a citizenry gets its due. Also in the days of Eli, the entire nation of Israel endured the judgment of God. The implication is they were co-responsible.

Indeed, it should be noted that God had warned his people that if justice was not upheld, God would punish the entire community and fulfill his covenant curses (compare Lev 18:26-28; 26:3-45; Deut 28). This fact alone would have provided considerable motivation for the believing Israelite to be active in maintaining the integrity of the judicial process. After all, "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the wicked and the good" (Prov 15:3). Thus the Lord repeatedly reminded his people that the people as a whole had the responsibility to purge the evil from among them by using the means available (Deut 13:5, 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21, 24; 24:7).

Surely all of this highlights the underlying principle that it is also our duty as godly citizens of our country to be vigilant. It is easy enough to sit on the sidelines and say: "I'm too busy." But we need to

be involved and to be active where we can to safeguard justice and righteousness in our land, that is, justice and righteousness according to the norms of the great lawgiver, our God. The Almighty expects it from us! And moreover, does not our very own Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) start off with the preamble: "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law. . . ." The judges in the Supreme Court may ignore this, but we can take encouragement from this preamble.

Christians must be known and recognized as honouring and respecting the authorities that rule this land

For it is true that God is the Almighty One! He is the "only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15). To Him we always owe first allegiance.

¹ J. Tangelder, "Freedom's Christian Roots," *Reformed Perspective* 24:11 (September 2005), 25.

² Bill C-250 was approved by the Canadian House of Commons on September 17, 2003. It includes sexual orientation to the list of those protected in the hate propaganda sections of the criminal code. See http://www.religioustolerance.org/bib1_hate3.htm.

³ See, e.g., Kevin Libin's editorial, "Fear of the Faithful: Evangelicals are this century's scapegoat," *Western Standard*, October 17, 2005, 4

and the news items in <http://www.christianity.ca/news/weblog/2005/9.21.html>.

⁴ For declining numbers of Canadians believing religion is important to them, see Centre for Research and Information on Canada website.

http://www.cucweb.ca/index_en.html.

⁵ See Groen van Prinsterer's magnum opus, *Unbelief and Revolution* as translated in abridged form by Harry Van Dyke, *Groen van Prinsterer's Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Jordan Station, ON: Wedge, 1989) Lecture XV, note 17 (the emphasis is in the original).

⁶ H. Evan Runner, *Scriptural Religion and the Political Task* (Toronto: Wedge, 1974), 98-99.

⁷ See further H. Evan Runner, *Scriptural Religion and Political Task* (Toronto: Wedge 1974) 99-100.

⁸ On the proper role of government, see, e.g., the essay by Charles Colson, "The State Under God," in Kenneth S. Kantzer, ed., *Applying the Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 277-290.

⁹ The text can be found at http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/const/annex_e.html#l.

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Towards a Common Songbook (Part 4)

The Foundational Role of the Psalms

Before hiring an architect to design a new home, one usually begins with a list of "must have's" for the new structure. The father of the family might say, "I must have a larger garage, with more room to store my tools and yard equipment." Others "must have" more kitchen counter top space and larger closets.

Our songbook committee developed a "must have" list for the kinds of songs the church needs to sing. And as a top item on this priority list, we agreed we must have songs which are based upon the Psalms. So, the second guideline for our song selection:

The Book of Psalms is foundational for the church's songs. Therefore, all of these Psalms, in their entirety, ought to be included in the church's songbook.

The 150 Psalms are God's own "songbook." God Himself has directly revealed to us the kinds of songs He enjoys, the types of songs that give Him glory. The ancient Israelites worshipped God by singing psalms, among other elements in their worship. New Testament congregations are commanded to sing "with psalms" (Col 3:16). And, of all the music potentially available to them, what do we find the saints in heaven singing? A psalm-like composition, the Song of Moses (Rev 15, Ex 15)!

From the ancient church in Israel to the glorified church in heaven, believers have always sung psalms.

No wonder the Westminster Directory of Public Worship, approved in England in 1645, states, "It is the duty of Christians to praise God publicly, by the singing of psalms together in the congregation, and also privately in the family." Likewise, the current Church Order of the URC (Art 39) states: "The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. . . ." And a similar article in the Canadian Reformed Church Order (Art 55) also mandates the singing of psalms in worship.

With this as our biblical and historical background, it is not surprising that the current songbooks used in our federations give a numerical predominance to the psalms. The *Psalter Hymnal* has 310 psalm-songs in it, followed by 183 hymns. The *Book of Praise* contains 150 psalm-songs and 65 hymns. Our committee hopes to keep a similar predominance of psalms over hymns in the new songbook.

And not only in a numerical sense. The biblical psalms are "foundational" in the sense that the wording of the psalms, the themes in the psalms, the different genres (literary types) of psalms, etc. give rise to the criteria by which we are

evaluating potential hymns. The biblical psalms are the "gold standard" by which all other church music is judged.

Our second guideline states that psalms "in their entirety" must be included in the new songbook. At least one version of each of the 150 biblical Psalms will be included in the new songbook.

So many contemporary choruses take a snippet of a psalm and never go on to finish the psalm. Sometimes one "snippet" misrepresents the psalm as a whole. For example, "Thy Word" was a popular chorus from some years ago. It's a rendition of Psalm 119:105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." This verse is accurately quoted in the refrain. But the song writers include the following in their stanzas: "When I feel afraid, think I've lost my way, still you're there right beside me;" "Jesus be my guide, and hold me to Your side." When you read Psalm 119:105 in its original setting, God's Word is said to be a norm for right living. The psalmist declares that he will obey God's Word. The psalmist does not speak in that context about "feeling afraid" or about having Jesus as "my guide." So, this "snippet" misrepresents the psalm as a whole.

Our joint committee purposely set the psalm section of the new songbook to one side and began working first on the hymn section. We all realize that we have some differences in our traditions of psalm-singing. Rather than

starting with those differences, we began our work with the hymns, where we find general consensus.

But the 150 Psalms are always in the back of our minds. These psalms are God's inspired songs.

The lyrics of these songs in their original form are without any fault or defect. Thus, these psalms shape our evaluation of each hymn we consider for possible inclusion in the new songbook.



Letter to the Editor

Letter to the Editor

I read with interest the editorial "Juice" by Rev. Cl. Stam and agree with many of the points made. I do have some thoughts, however, with respect to comments made on alcoholism. Working as a physician in a psychiatric hospital doing addiction medicine, I am well aware of the risks associated with alcohol as most of us are. About 65-70% of people abstain or use alcohol responsibly; the rest fall into risky, harmful, or dependent use, the latter being 10-15%. I am sure that these figures are not much different amongst the Canadian Reformed membership.

I agree that those who cannot take wine should abstain from using it. From the editorial, I gather "the believer is not encouraged to switch beverages" and can only assume that the alcoholic in recovery should abstain from using it (alcohol or

other beverages) at the Lord's Supper. My question being: is the Lord's Supper to be celebrated vicariously by the recovering alcoholic? The concern that I have with this view is that the alcoholic deals with a lot of shame related to the disease and the sinful behaviours associated with the addiction. To state that the alcoholic should abstain from using another beverage (i.e. grape juice) may only add to and maintain the shame and guilt that she/he is trying to dispense of in recovery.

Thank you for allowing me to share some of my thoughts.

G. Veenman MD
Elora, ON



Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.

Covenant Home Chatham-Kent

One day last fall, John and Rita Sullivan, landowners and Christian school supporters, were clicking through the website of Worldwide Christian Schools (WCS), a non-profit organization that seeks to make Christian education available to all people. At www.wwcs.org they read about WCS' Building Hope Worldwide program and Covenant House concept:

Building Hope Worldwide is a fundraising program that involves building first-class homes using professional craftsmen. Proceeds from the sale of each home help develop Christian schools around the world.

Non-profit organizations, such as schools and churches, join with WCS by using a volunteer committee to coordinate the construction of each home. If the proceeds from the sale of the home are split between WCS and another non-profit organization, it is a Covenant Home...

The purpose of the project is to raise money for your local school, church, or other non-profit, and for WCS partner schools in the developing world. When sold, half of the profits will go to the Canadian school or non-profit, while the other half will be delivered to the selected mission school(s) through WCS.



An idea began to take shape in John and Rita's minds. The previous year, God had blessed them with the opportunity to purchase a ten-acre property in Dresden, Ontario, that was ideal for development; in fact, besides the lot they built their new home on, it already had an additional four severed lots. They sold two of these lots, one to a local builder who put up and quickly sold a house on speculation. Since it had held crops until they purchased it, they continued to have the remainder of the property farmed and, as a way of giving back to the Lord for his gracious providence, donated the proceeds to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. After reading about the concept, they realized that building a Covenant Home would be another great way to bless others through the gifts God had given them. Not only

would it allow them to decide what kind of house would go up next to theirs, two causes close to their hearts would benefit greatly.

John had participated in a WCS Help Another Nation Develop Schools (HANDS) work team in Nicaragua, an experience which expanded his desire to help brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who struggle with poverty and lack of education. Contact with WCS revealed that the Building Hope program had been utilized by the organization's U.S. branch with great success for a number of years, raising over \$1.6 million for Christian schools in third world nations, but had not yet been brought to Canada. In addition, the local Christian school Rita's three daughters had attended was constantly looking for new ways to raise needed funds and a number of school supporters



had skills or connections in the building trades to contribute to such a project.

They quickly discussed the idea with the contractors and tradesmen that they knew in their church and community. It was met with interest and excitement, so they went ahead and formed a steering committee to head up the building project dubbed Covenant Home Chatham-Kent – a first for Canada!!

Even before the ground-breaking at the end of March, the Chatham-Kent committee had a long list of local companies and contractors willing to donate or discount materials, provide services at cost, or defer payment on their invoices. And the excitement is spreading: for the “building blitz” days on May 12 and 13, when the entire 1586 square foot home was framed, WCS supporters came from as far away as Fergus and Niagara areas to volunteer their time and skills. At the time of writing, shingles and windows have been installed and trades people are busy roughing in the home’s plumbing, wiring, and heating/cooling ducts.

Proceeds of the sale of this home will benefit Eben-ezer Christian School in Chatham, Ontario and Apocalipsis Christian School in the Dominican Republic. The latter is the only school in the isolated, rural village of Bermejo, providing elementary education to approximately 300 children and



also serving as a centre for community functions. Plans for this school include building two classrooms and a meeting room and funds from the Covenant Home Chatham-Kent will be directed to the cost of this expansion.

Please visit the Covenant Home Chatham-Kent website for more information, photos, sponsors, volunteer opportunities, and

appeals for skilled trade workers at www.covenanthomechathamkent.com.

To learn more about the work of Worldwide Christian Schools or for more information about starting a Building Hope Worldwide project in your area, go to www.wwcs.org, send an e-mail to canada@wwcs.org, or call 1-866-360-4274.

Worldwide Christian Schools



Worldwide Christian Schools invites applications for:

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT/BOOKKEEPER

Worldwide Christian Schools is a Christian, non-profit organization providing Christian education for children in developing countries.

Due to the growth with which God has blessed us, we require additional administrative and bookkeeping support and are seeking to increase our staff beginning September, 2006.

We are seeking applicants with a University/College degree/diploma in business administration, accounting/bookkeeping, or marketing with above average computer skills. Administrative experience in a non-profit organization is an asset.

Please send cover letter and resume to:

Worldwide Christian Schools

5100 South Service Road, Unit 49, Burlington, ON L7L 6A5
canada@wwcs.org

Full job description available upon request.

Keith Sikkema

Mr. Keith Sikkema is principal of Dufferin Area Christian School in Orangeville, Ontario
ksikkema@istop.com



Peregrine Survey

Before long we will be starting a new school year, with fresh ideas, insights, and enthusiasm. Summer holidays are times for parents, teachers, and boards to reflect on the *raison d'être* of our schools. What makes them tick? What are they all about? What defines their purpose – or their mission, as some would prefer to say in business lingo? Several items in this Peregrine Survey address such questions.

ASC

The ASC committee (Assistance for the Special Child) of the Ontario League of Canadian Reformed School Societies (LCRSS) annually organizes a presentation relating to the field of special needs. As a rule, these meetings are attended by parents of special needs students, teachers, and board or education committee members. At the May 2006 events (the same topic was introduced first in Hamilton and then in Guelph), two vignettes were presented to illustrate how far we have come in paying attention to special needs children. One vignette related to the early days of our schools, when nothing was available at all in terms of advice, accommodation, and integration in our schools. The other was a present-day example of integration; people became aware of the blessings (for the child, its parents, as well as the school

community as a whole) of integration in the regular program. ASC presented the outlines of a vision related to where we may be going in the future. In particular, and among others, it envisioned the creation of special needs departments in our high schools.

*Summer holidays are times to reflect on the *raison d'être* of our schools*

ASC is quite aware that many practical and professional aspects must yet be considered, but the vision was met with general enthusiasm. Without a doubt, implementation of the vision will require a careful reconsideration of the purpose of our schools: are our schools meant to pursue only academic goals (with sideline attention for social and emotional aspects), or should they also consider some of the other aspects as part of their core programs? The implications are significant and our communities do well to give careful thought to this matter. Part of the process could be to learn from ways in which several schools west of Ontario have implemented similar ideas in their programs.

Ontario

In Fergus, the board received "a letter from a group of people in the Guelph congregation that is making preliminary investigation into the feasibility of starting an elementary school in that congregation. . . . As part of its reaction, our board struck a small ad hoc committee to examine the board's constitutional mandate and to propose an appropriate method of dealing with this development. . . ." This is interesting in view also of the developments at the Fergus Emmanuel Christian High School, where membership continues to grow, leading to reflection on the necessity of a separation of Emmanuel High School facilities from Maranatha Elementary. This fall, grade 12 will be added to the school's roster and staff has been found to teach the necessary courses. The school has also worked out a novel approach to teacher compensation, which adds an element of evaluation-based remuneration to the common elements of qualification and experience. A vote to introduce uniforms in the school didn't meet the needed support.

In Chatham, a joint fund raising effort is underway between Eben Ezer Christian School and World Wide Christian Schools. Under the banner of Covenant Home, the effort entails the building of a quality home in Dresden, Ontario,

with free labour, reduced prices on many of the building materials, and much enthusiasm. The proceeds of the sale of the home are to be split between Eben Ezer School in Chatham and Apocalipsis Christian School in Bermajo, Dominican Republic. See www.covenanthome-chathamkent.com for details.

Timothy Christian School adopted a budget with 4.7% reduced membership fees, as "expenses have been neutralized and our membership continues to grow. . . How blessed we are!" The actual fees will drop from \$628 to \$594. A voucher program also contributes \$35,000 towards reducing membership fees. An open house for the school's new facility at 430 East 25th in Hamilton is scheduled for June 10, 2006. As increasing numbers of families take an extended March break in warmer climes and the children are absent, affecting what can be done in class during that time, the principal suggests that, "if parents feel that one week is not sufficient for the March break, [they] band together and make a formal request/proposal to the School Board for a longer break. Then we can deal with the issue and come up with an amicable solution."

Owen Sound Canadian Reformed School Society has taken a significant step by hiring a fourth teacher. When the school started with just one teacher and a host of volunteers twelve years ago, it would have been difficult to imagine such growth. In the words of the chairman of the board, "it is truly amazing to see God's hand in providing the means for our members to contribute to this worthy cause." The school also had its first crack at mentoring student

teachers from Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College – and enjoyed the experience. Finally, it adopted a mission statement: *Our aim is to assist parents in educating covenant children in accordance with God's Word as we confess that in the three forms of unity, to equip and assist them in developing their individual gifts and talents for a joyful life of responsible stewardship to God's glory.*

Are our schools meant to pursue only academic goals, or should they also consider some of the other aspects as part of their core programs?

BC and WA

Cornerstone Christian School in Lynden, Washington reflects with gratitude on the smooth ongoing operation of the school, a healthy financial position, and the prospect of being able to add a gymnasium and two more classrooms to its facilities. With \$525,000 pledged and another \$175,000 to go, expectations are high that this project can be completed before the start of the 2007-2008 school year. Students in Canada may be learning French as a second language; in Lynden the language of choice is Spanish. The report did not say whether they are also learning the Spanish version of their *Nuestro Himno*.

John Calvin School of Yarrow has been working hard on its music program. Its male grade

seven students experience normal changes in their voices, but will have to keep singing. In addition, the school is seriously looking at introducing a band program. If you have a good used instrument you'd like to donate, they welcome your generosity.

William of Orange Christian School in Surrey has sufficient funds on hand to finish several capital and renovation projects and to keep tuition and membership fees at the 2005-2006 level. The school continues to face the reality of declining enrolment and is keen to "make hay while the sun is shining." It has also been considering its mission statement and the society was scheduled to vote on a proposed text on May 31, 2006.

Conclusion

The time is here soon for a new start. Whether that is with a freshly minted mission statement, a new vision for the future, enlarged facilities, a fresh music program, another version of a national hymn, or different fees and new-to-them teachers, our schools will still seek to assist the parents in their task. May the Lord bless our communities also through their joint efforts in educating the youth of the church.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us

Press Release of Classis Alberta, June 13, 2006

On behalf of the convening church at Calgary Rev. J.P. Kalkman opened the meeting by asking the assembly to sing Psalm 33:1 and 6, after which he read John 13:1-17 and led the assembly in prayer. He welcomed all the delegates and also welcomed the fraternal delegate from Bethel United Reformed Church at Calgary, Mr. Bill Oostenbrink.

The credentials were examined by the delegates of the convening church and found in good order; every church was properly represented. There were special instructions on the credentials of the church of Coaldale. Classis was declared constituted.

The executive officers were: Chairman - Rev. R. Bredenhof; Vice Chairman - Rev. Kalkman; Clerk - Rev. J.D. Louwerse.

After a few additions the agenda was approved.

The following reports were in thankfulness received: the treasurer's report; the report on the inspection of the books of the treasurer; the report on the inspection of the Classis Archives; Report of the liaison to the Provincial Government of Alberta; Report on visit by Rev. Louwerse of the meeting of the south Central Classis of the RCUS in Rock Spring Wyoming; and a church visitor's report.

The delegate of Bethel United Reformed Church at Calgary, Mr. Oostenbrink, addressed the assembly and Rev. Kalkman responded.

Question period according to Art 44 of the CO was held and showed that in all churches the ministry of the office bearers is

being upheld and the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. Advice regarding two discipline matters was given to Providence Canadian Reformed Church at Edmonton.

A request from the Council of Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Surrey regarding the date of the next classis meeting was denied.

The Canadian Reformed Church at Coaldale was appointed to be the convening church for the next classis, which will be held on October 17, 2006; the alternate date is set on December 12, 2006. The suggested executive officers for this classis are:

Chairman - Rev. D. Poppe; Vice Chairman - Rev. Bredenhof; Clerk - Rev. Kalkman.

The delegates to the Regional Synod were appointed. Elders: Mr. T. Veenendaal and Mr. A. Dykstra; alternates: Mr. E. VanLeeuwen and Mr. M. Tams. Ministers: Rev. Poppe and Rev. Louwerse; alternates: Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar and Rev. W.B. Slomp.

Personal question period was held, in which the delegation of the church at Taber thanked Classis for the frequent pulpit supply the church receive in their time of vacancy.

The chairman judged that the brotherly censure according to Art 34 of the CO was thankfully not needed.

The Acts of Classis and the Press Release were read and adopted.

In closing the chairman requested the singing of Hymn 58 and, after some final comments, closed the meeting in prayer.

*On behalf of Classis Alberta,
J.P. Kalkman, vice chairman
at that time.*

Press Release for Classis Niagara, June 14, 2006

On behalf of the convening church of Attercliffe, Rev. D.G.J. Agema called the meeting to order and requested the brothers to sing from Psalm 103:1 and 7. Scripture reading was from Revelation 1:9-20 and Rev. Agema opened the meeting with prayer. Rev. Agema spoke some words about the Scripture reading. The brothers were welcomed. The Grade 8 class from Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Elementary School were also welcomed.

The delegates of the convening church reported that all the credentials were in order and that all the delegates were present. The church at Bluebell was represented by a single delegate. Classis was declared constituted. Rev. Agema invited the moderamen to take their place: Rev. A. Souman as chairman, Rev. K. Kok as clerk, and Rev. D. de Boer as vice-chair. The chairman thanked the convening church for their preparations and made mention of several special circumstances. Rev. Agema has accepted a call to the Canadian Reformed Church of Fergus-South. This means that Attercliffe will be vacant. Lincoln also continues to be without a minister. Rev. S.C. Van Dam was not present at the classis meeting because he had received a four month sabbatical. The work of mission was remembered.

Some additions were made to the agenda and the agenda was adopted. The chairman inquired, according to Article 44, CO, whether the office bearers continued to carry out their duties faithfully and whether the churches continue to uphold the decisions of the major assemblies.

The churches answered positively. Two churches had requests to make of Classis.

A proposal from the church of Smithville regarding the status of the minister as a member and chairman of the church's governing body was addressed. The church of Smithville requested Classis to review whether there is a conflict with the laws of the Government of Canada regarding the charitable status of the churches. Classis decided not to deal with the proposal, since there was insufficient information to make a decision in this matter.

The church of Attercliffe requested that Rev. Agema be honourably released from his duties in Attercliffe for service in the church of Fergus-South and that he be provided with an attestation concerning his life and doctrine. All the necessary documents were present and Classis honourably released Rev. Agema. The chairman thanked Rev. Agema for the service he has done for twenty-two years in Classis Ontario South and Classis Niagara and he commended Rev. Agema to the Lord in his future service in his new congregation and classis. Rev. de Boer was appointed counsellor for the congregation of Attercliffe. The church of Dunnville-Wainfleet will represent Classis at the

farewell service for Rev. Agema. The church of Lincoln, with the departure of Rev. Agema, requested that Rev. C. VanderVelde be appointed their new counsellor. Pulpit supply will be provided on a monthly basis to the churches of Attercliffe and Lincoln.

The ACRES students left and were thanked for their interest and their visit. In closed session, Classis dealt with an appeal from a brother. A report from the auditors of the Fund for Needy Churches was dealt with. A report from the church at Lincoln regarding the Fund for Needy Students was dealt with. The reports of the church visitors were heard in closed session. Visits to the churches of Attercliffe, Dunnville-Wainfleet, Grassie, Lincoln, Smithville, and Spring Creek were reported on. With thankfulness, the visitors reported that these churches all continue in faithful service to their Lord, adhering to Scripture and the confessions and governing themselves in accordance with the Church Order.

The church of Bluebell was appointed to convene the next classis, to be held in Spring Creek. The date is September 20, 2006, with the suggested officers being Rev. Van Dam as chair, Rev. Souman as clerk, and Rev. Kok as

vice-chair. Rev. Agema and Rev. Wieske were released as church visitors and Rev. Kok and Rev. Souman were appointed in their place, with Rev. VanderVelde as alternate. Rev. Souman, as chairman, will represent Classis at any upcoming assemblies of our sister-churches. Rev. Agema was released from the committee for the preparation of examinations and Rev. Souman was appointed in his place. The church at Bluebell was reminded to invite observers from the URCNA, the FRC, and the RCUS to the next classis.

Personal question period was used. Rev. Agema spoke a few words about his experience in Classis Niagara and Classis Ontario South and he wished the churches of Classis Niagara the Lord's blessing. Some words of gratitude and farewell were spoken in reply to Rev. Agema.

The chairman concluded that there was no need for censure according to Article 34, CO and he thanked the brothers for their participation and co-operation. The Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was read and approved for publication. The chairman closed the meeting with prayer.

*Vice chair at the time,
D. de Boer*
—+

