



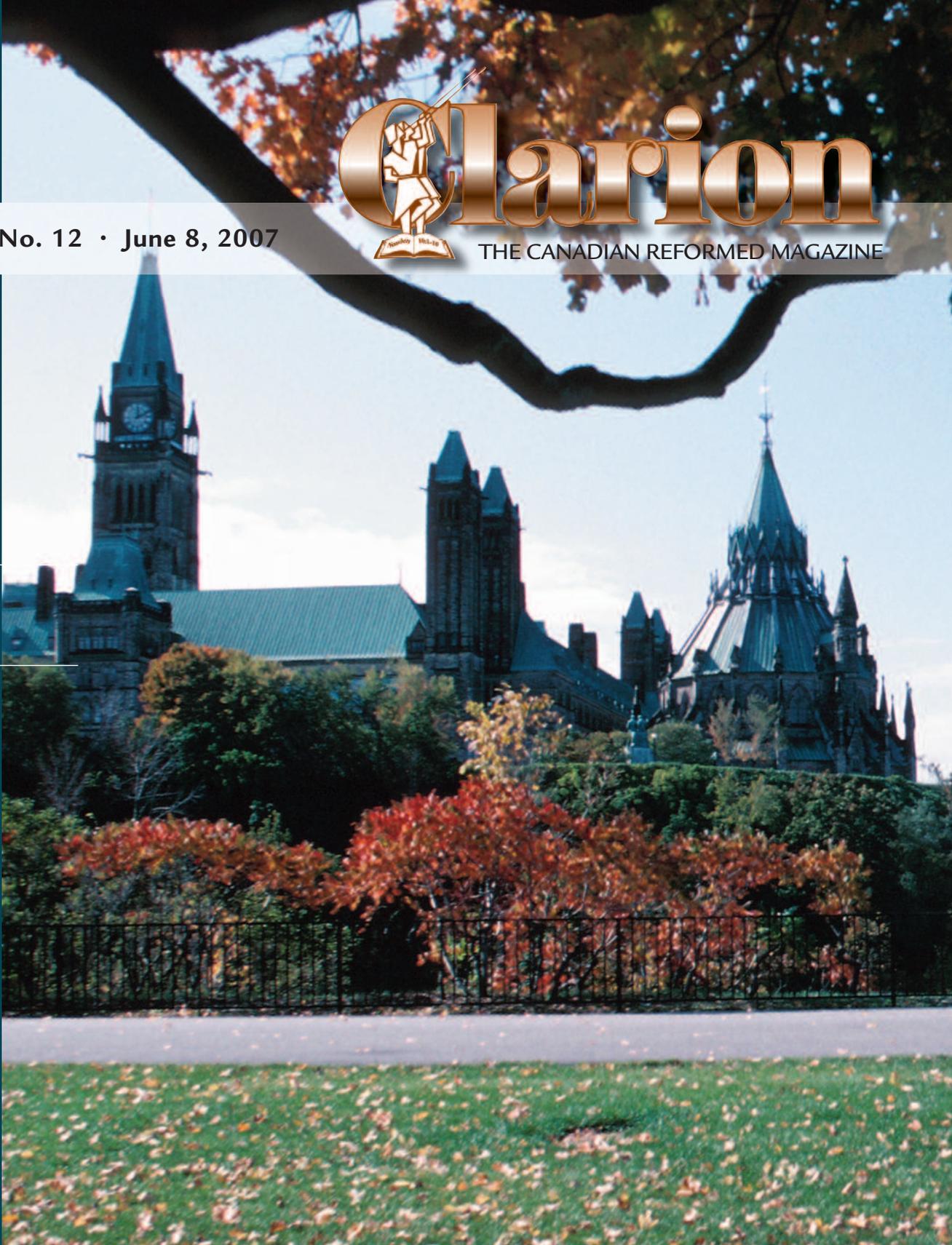
Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 56, No. 12 • June 8, 2007

*Cause for
Celebration?
25 Years of the
Charter of
Rights and
Freedoms*

*The Lamb
of God*



God's presence in the Charter has been ignored



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

Cause for Celebration? 25 Years of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*

The concern for human rights in the western world is for a large part due to our Christian heritage

It was about twenty-five years ago, on April 17 of this year to be precise, that the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* became part of the Canadian constitution. This document has enshrined many rights and freedoms as inviolable. The four basic freedoms mentioned in the *Charter* are freedom of conscience and religion; freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression; freedom of peaceful assembly; and freedom of association (Section 2). The rights mentioned include "the right to life, liberty and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice" (Section 7). Also important is the right to equality before and under the law as well as equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination (Section 15). With all these rights and freedoms guaranteed, it is small wonder that the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *Charter* has occasioned much celebration and laudatory commentary.

And should we not rejoice as well? How should we evaluate this anniversary? As Christians we realize that the trend of *Charter*-based court rulings over the past few years has been disturbing to say the least. For example, religious freedom has been eroded while new rights such as those of gays have been created. What are we to make of this?

The good

Good things can be said about the *Charter* and one can provide biblical justification for a national government to guarantee certain rights for its citizens.

After all, Scripture speaks of the need for governments to defend the rights of the destitute (Prov 31:8-9; Jer 5:28) and to exercise justice and righteousness (Jer 21:12; Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17). Indeed, the concern for human rights in the western world is for a large part due to our Christian heritage. Individual liberty, freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion (also for those who did not profess the true faith) have always been defended by Calvinists. After all, the state is not the church.

If man is to be the measure of things our country and civilization have no blessed future

It is the people of God who have the duty to seek the expansion of Christ's church and kingdom. And so the concept of the state guaranteeing certain rights and freedoms is a good thing. It belongs to the task of the authorities whom God has set over us. A major contribution of the Protestant Reformation was the redefining of the nature and authority of the family, church, and state to reflect biblical teaching. In the process, the liberties of those subject to the various authorities were more clearly articulated to prevent abuse of power.

We need to realize, however, that when the Reformers defended rights, they did so on the basis of



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: R. Aasman, E. Kampen, Cl. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:

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

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202
Subscriptions: clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca
Advertisements: clarionads@premierpublishing.ca
Website: www.premierpublishing.ca

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Subscription Rates for 2007	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$47.00*	\$ 77.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$57.00	\$ 72.00
International	\$84.00	\$123.00

*Including 6% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$14.00 per column inch

Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$20.00 per column inch

We reserve the right to refuse ads.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada,  through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date. Agreement No. 40063293; PAP Registration No. 9907; ISSN 0383-0438

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

Useful Link: www.canrc.org

the duties that God required to Himself and to one's neighbour. So the duty to honour and worship God alone, and to observe the Sabbath, means that one has the right to honour God and to have freedom of worship. These rights find their origin in God and his justice. Similarly, the duty not to kill your neighbour means that the neighbour has a right to life. Likewise, the duty not to commit adultery, to steal, or to bear false witness means that others have the right to property, marital faithfulness, and a good name. The duty to raise our children in the fear of the Lord implies that we have the right to do so. Rights are based on duties owed to God and to one's neighbour; ultimately rights have their origin in God. These teachings, among others, ultimately helped bring on Protestant revolts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in The Netherlands and Scotland against unjustly oppressive authorities.

History, however, did not stop here. This concept of rights was, so to speak, hijacked by the man-centered thinking of the Enlightenment. The impact is still felt today.

The bad

In the thinking of the Enlightenment, human rights do not have their origin in God but in the basic goodness and potential of human nature. Each person is considered by nature to be equal in virtue and dignity and endowed with inherent and inalienable rights of life, liberty, and property. Each person is also entitled to and capable of pursuing one's happiness. To prevent chaos, rational people form a society by entering into social contracts and ratifying constitutions. Typically such a constitution insists on the safeguarding of one's inalienable rights. This thinking has heavily influenced the formulation of human rights in the western world from the eighteenth century on. It also undergirds the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

Now the remarkable thing about our *Charter* is that it is prefaced by the statement: "Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law." God's supremacy was officially recognized because of pressure from religious groups. However, God's presence in the *Charter* has been studiously ignored in judgments based on the *Charter*.

The results have been disastrous for Christians, for democracy, and for freedom generally.¹ With God out of the picture, man becomes the measure of justice

In This Issue

Editorial – Cause for Celebration? 25 Years of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* — C. Van Dam286

Treasures, New and Old – The Lamb of God — J.E. Ludwig.....289

Walking Together through the Valley (3) — R. Ludwig290

Covenant Canadian Reformed Church Official Opening — L. Stel and T. Ravensbergen293

What's New??? — E. Kampen295

Education Matters – Peregrine Survey — K. Sikkema297

New Powerful Tools for Discussions in Science — Reviewed by Margaret Helder299

Press Release – Classis Pacific West301

Letter to the Editor302

and equity. Human rights are no longer premised on man's duty towards God and his neighbour but on inherent rights to a host of things, whatever man imagines himself to have a right to, including sinful lifestyles and practices. In essence, God and his good law have been replaced by a false god, the idol of humanism and man's pretensions to decide for himself what is right and wrong.

By word and deed we need to affirm the sovereignty and supremacy of God

False gods and idols tend to be very cruel, for Satan, who is the power behind them, is no respecter of what is good and what makes for true happiness. For example, the worship of Molech in ancient Israel led to the sacrifice of children (cf. 2 Kgs 23:10; Jer 32:35) and undoubtedly many tears. The current worship of the idol of human autonomy and inherent human rights continues to fuel the ongoing slaughter of untold numbers of unborn children, the endorsement of dangerous gay life-styles, and the robbing of our society of a common day of rest. God gives man up to his sinful desires (cf. Rom 1:21-32). If man is to be the measure of things our country and civilization have no blessed future. For whose rights or which rights are to be paramount? For example, children's rights are generally being sacrificed for what adults want. The latest example is the Ontario Court of Appeal's decision of January 2, 2007 to recognize that a child may have more than two legal parents. Without God and his wisdom man is a fool and there is no end in sight for his foolishness.

With the Supreme Court consciously leaving God out of the picture, there is no outside absolute norm to govern the *Charter*. Nowhere does the *Charter*, for example, identify and define "the principles of fundamental justice" (Section 7). This means that whatever the judges determine these principles to be, they will be. Since the judges are in a sense products of our society, it is what society determines them to be. Thus, if there is to be real change, society will have to change. Herein lies the challenge for Christians to be a light and salt and influence society's understanding of justice and righteousness.

In conclusion

The *Charter* as officially set forth and adopted could work for the good of our nation if our country still respected God and his rights. But when God's rights are trodden under foot, and sinful human desires and self-styled rights are exalted, the path ahead is not very promising. In the end, man will take the place of God and declare himself to be God (cf. 2 Thess 2:3-4).

As Christians our task is clear. By word and deed we need to affirm the sovereignty and supremacy of God. Every opportunity must be used to show that God's will and way as summarized, for example, in the Ten Commandments, is the best route for our country and that rights presuppose the duties we owe to God and our neighbour. "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Prov 14:34).

As Christians we also need to recognize and oppose the unbiblical individualism and self-interest that saturates talk of rights and litigation in our day. We can and in some cases must insist on our rights. The Apostle Paul, after being beaten and jailed without trial in Philippi, did so as a Roman citizen when he had demanded that the magistrates escort him and Silas out of prison. He did this not so much for Silas and himself, but to show their innocence for the benefit of the young church at Philippi (Acts 16:37). On other occasions, Paul did not insist on his rights, again because of the gospel which he did not want to hinder (1 Cor 9:1-15).

There can also be times when we forgo our rights and remember the word of our Saviour that we turn the other cheek or be prepared to give up what is precious to us for the sake of the kingdom (Matt 5:39-4; cf. 16:24; Phil 2:3-7). After all, we are ultimately here on earth not for ourselves but to love and serve our God for the sake of his glory. Not our rights, but God's rights are of paramount importance.

¹ See, e.g., Rory Leishman, *Against Judicial Activism: The Decline of Freedom and Democracy in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006; reviewed in the *Clarion* of September 1, 2006).



J.E. Ludwig

Rev. J.E. Ludwig is minister of the
American Reformed Church at
Grand Rapids, Michigan
jeludwig@wmis.net

The Lamb of God

The above text contains a title of our Lord Jesus which is used for the first time in the New Testament and which has become prominent in many Christian hymns: Jesus Christ – the Lamb of God. John the Baptist publicly identifies Jesus to the people of Israel. We can assume that Jesus, who had already been baptized, was returning from the wilderness, where He had been tempted by the devil. His ministry of suffering and reconciliation, then, had begun. He had yet to be pointed out to the Jews, who He was and what He had come to do. When John sees Him coming he does just that. John directs the attention of the crowds to the promised Messiah, to the One for whom they had waited so long. John is in line with all the Old Testament prophets that preceded him and who foretold the coming of Christ. John is so privileged that he does not merely foretell of Him, no, he can say, "Look, there He is!"

This title for Christ underlines how important it is to maintain the unity between the Old and New Testaments. Without the Old Testament you would not have a clue what John means by the "Lamb of God." Perhaps John was thinking of the prophecy of Isaiah where the suffering servant is compared to a lamb. In 53:7 we read, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter. . . ."

In his suffering Christ remained as humble and as meek as a lamb. That's what a lamb does: it follows the leader, the shepherd. And yet the element of submissiveness and humiliation is not the only one in the title "Lamb of God." You have to remember that John came from a priestly family. He would have known how often the law required a lamb for a sacrifice. Every day two male lambs were slaughtered in the temple – one in the morning and one in the evening as a continual burnt offering before the Lord (Ex 29). The lamb was used for a peace offering, for a sin offering, and for a guilt offering. In the whole Old Testament sacrificial system the lamb was the central offering. And every Jew knew the purpose of the sacrifices. They all required the shedding of blood, for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

The law stipulated that the lamb had to be without blemish. It had to be perfect. Only a perfect life could make atonement for the imperfect. Only a life without blemish could take away the blemishes and the scars of sin. All these perfect lambs foreshadowed the coming of the great and final sacrifice. That's why John the Baptist says, "Behold, the lamb of God."

Within the context of the whole gospel, these words have special reference to the Passover lamb. The Apostle John, who wrote this gospel, structured his work around

the Passover feasts held in Jerusalem. At least four times at key moments in this gospel you find the words: "The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem." It is also of profound significance that John records for us that on the night of his betrayal, when the Lamb of God was about to be sacrificed, the Passover feast was being celebrated. And on that night Christ instituted the holy supper that we still celebrate today.

The Passover commemorated the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The blood of a male lamb – without blemish! – had to be smeared on the doorposts of their houses and then the angel of death would pass over their houses. But for all those without the blood, he slew the first-born child. Without the shedding of blood there is no deliverance from death. The symbolism this had for Christ can hardly be overlooked. John includes that in the second part of the text, "Look, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

This lamb is "of God." God takes the initiative in our salvation. He sends the lamb that will take away the sin of the world. None of the lambs that Israel offered, which over the years must have amounted to hundreds of thousands, not one of them could satisfy God's holy justice. No animal could redeem man. Israel knew that. For that reason she had to keep on sacrificing until God



MATTHEW 13:52

*"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away
the sin of the world."*

John 1:29

presented the perfect sacrifice. Was that also not foreshadowed in the offering of Isaac? Recall the words of Abraham to Isaac: "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." God provided. That's what the title "Lamb of God" loudly and joyfully proclaims.

Only a man without spot or blemish, that is, without sin, could make atonement. Therefore God

gave his only Son as a sacrifice who became man for us. He is "of God" in the sense that He and the Father are one. John uses the present tense, "Who takes away the sin of the world;" not will take away, but who is busy now already taking upon Himself and so removing from you your sin.

At the table of the Lord we commemorate this gracious work of redemption. We look to the past:

at the wonderful salvation we have in Christ. When we eat the bread and drink the wine in faith then our souls are nourished and refreshed to everlasting life. That's makes us also look in joy towards the future: when we will celebrate the marriage Feast of the *Lamb*. We will stand before the throne of God and of the Lamb purified in his blood. . . and we will follow the Lamb to springs of living water.



Rick Ludwig

Mr. Rick Ludwig is a licensed Ontario Funeral Director and owner of Kitching, Steepe & Ludwig Funeral Home located in Waterdown, Ontario

This seminar was recently presented by Mr. Ludwig in Carman, Manitoba

The pastoral friend

The Bible is filled with examples of the care of our heavenly Father for the widow and the orphan. There is a strong sense that God is well in tune with the plight of the bereaved. I won't cite all kinds of examples, but rather focus on the twenty-third Psalm as typifying the role of a pastoral support for the grieving. The words are very familiar to us: "He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Certainly these are words of

Walking Together through the Valley (Part 3 of 4)

consolation for the dying as well as those left behind. The grieving person will relate to the feeling of walking in the shadow of death, where every thought, decision, and action seems to be overshadowed by the reality of the loss of their loved one. The comfort offered in this passage is that they are not alone. The shepherd is with them and He has the tools to protect and comfort. Yet, He does not steer them off the path or introduce a new way. He does not suggest that a different road be taken so that one can flee from the shadow of death. He accompanies them on the journey and uses his resources to comfort and allow for safe passage. This then is the role for the pastoral friend.

Practically speaking, what does this mean? How can an office bearer or friend fulfill this calling?

The foundation for helping the bereaved is the need for a personal comfort level and acceptance of the grieving process. If you are a reluctant traveller on the grief journey, you may prove to be of little assistance to the grieving person. If your goal is to take the grief away, you will do everything possible to find the shortcuts, to sidetrack, to sit and rest rather than travel along on the hard journey. This is demonstrated by explaining away the need for grief because of our sure comfort and our heavenly perspective, by avoiding the topic altogether, by doing all the talking and controlling the direction of discussions, by cutting off, interjecting, providing quick solutions, by showing uncomfortable body language in the face of tears, etc. This must be

your initial consideration: am I prepared to make this journey? If not, I suggest you would be better off to turn the rod and staff over to another and not feign your assistance by asserting your own way. You cannot help the grieving, even when you come with the gospel of salvation in your hand, if you are unable to allow for and accept the expression of grief. God listens to and accepts our grief as evidence of our love, his shepherds must be willing to do as well.

If we are willing, that is a start. We will still need to employ the tools and resources. What exactly is the rod and staff that will comfort the weary traveller and maintain a safe way, and how do we use them? We all know the clear expression of the source of our comfort as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1, but we also need to know how to administer that comfort effectively to the bereaved. I suggest that when you accompany someone on the grief journey you need to adapt to the terrain. We need to be willing to respond to a differing set of needs as time moves on. I spoke earlier of the initial grief responses including shock, denial, numbness, and disbelief. At this early stage of grief it is important to be aware that our words are our least effective tool. This is because the hearing of the listener is muffled. The shock accompanying the finality of the death of a loved one, even when it is expected, reduces one's ability to absorb and digest what one is told. This is not the time for an eloquent explanation of God's eternal plan for his people. Yet this is a time for action for the caregiver. This is a time to "be

with" the bereaved. This is a time when our accessibility and presence is important, where simple words of support, love, and prayer are offered. A calm, caring, and supportive presence is what we can provide at this time. We need to be aware of the inadequacy of our words and be willing to accept that.

You cannot help the grieving, even when you come with the gospel of salvation in your hand, if you are unable to allow for and accept the expression of grief

We also need to be aware of the limits of our role at this point. We are not expected to take the place of family members by usurping their roles. There also needs to be an allowance for needed withdrawing and regrouping by the family. We need to be careful to allow time for decision making and be willing not to dominate, asserting our position as the "clear-headed" one. This can be a confusing time for the bereaved. Imposing all our thoughts and ideas in an effort to alleviate the burden from them will likely not be helpful. It has been suggested that "mouths closed, ears open, presence available" is the most effective help at this early stage. There is a great opportunity for the pastor to assist the family in planning liturgy for a fitting

funeral service. A visitation period often provides opportunity for the ward elder to provide comfort with simple Scripture reading and prayer. The deacon may naturally approach the family in a supportive role offering the hand of mercy. Friends may gather together to offer physical and emotional support. Again, the fact that you are available speaks more than any words you can say.

After the funeral can be a complicated time for the bereaved and often a frustrating time for those trying to help them. This is the time characterized by feelings of disorganization, confusion, searching, and yearning for something lost. One widow describes it this way, "I felt as if I was a lonely traveller with no companion, and worse yet, no destination. It was as if I couldn't find myself or anybody else." This is often a period when the bereaved feel as if they are going crazy. Disorganized thoughts and a restlessness never before experienced become normal. Visual hallucinations in the form of memory pictures of the deceased are very common. The bereaved often feel as if they can see their loved one in places they would normally expect to see them. Difficulties with eating and sleeping can accompany these illusory moments, as well as recurrent dreams. This is a time when regular visitation is important. This takes patience, because you will need to listen to stories and feelings repeated over and over again. This is helpful for the bereaved as they begin to come to terms with the reality of the death. Good listening skills

are important, as the mourner will sense if you are interested or not. It is through the expression of these thoughts and feelings, at times confused and emotional, that the mourner will develop clarity of mind. Again the role of the caregiver is attentiveness, presence, and simple guidance. The bereaved should also be discouraged from making any rash or dramatic decisions at this time. It is a time for reflection, not more change.

Occasionally the caregiver may become the object of frustration or anger for the bereaved. Your help and attention may be rebuffed because along with it comes the experience of the pain of the loss that has occurred. This is a warning sign that we may be too willing to usher the bereaved along on their journey, while they are resistant and clinging to the past. This is not wrong. It just is. This is not a time to take sides with or against the mourner, rather it is a time to understand their feelings and comfort them. This does not mean that you are encouraging them to cling to the past, but that you are acknowledging their present need to do that. This is a key point in being helpful in a pastoral sense. Your role during the grieving process is not one of reproof or correction of the person's frustrations or feelings. Rather it is one of understanding and listening to difficult feelings, even spiritual struggles, accepting them as genuine, understanding why they feel them, and offering comfort and hope for the future.

The caregiver's role is not to explain away the feelings of the bereaved but instead to be attentive and supportive. We must remember that the bereaved are always facing the pressure of the society around them to get on with their life by moving away from their grief. The pastoral caregiver should be a grief facilitator, encouraging the expression and discussion of the feelings associated with grief. The fact that the loss is not talked about or mentioned, or that the bereaved never raised the subject at all,

This is not the time for an eloquent explanation of God's eternal plan for his people

does not constitute a healthy or helpful visit. Our duty is to provide a safe and comfortable environment to walk through the shadow of death. Our ability to convey a level of comfort in the presence of the expression of grief will help in this regard. We need to prepare ourselves for that task and be willing to address it by opening a way.

Hope

The ultimate goal in the grief journey is reconciliation and reorganization. The task of the caregiver is to expect that this will take place and hold out this hope for the bereaved. This includes the acknowledgment and acceptance

of the difficult road to get there. It also allows hope for a better day and encouragement that the grief journey does lead somewhere; not a recapturing of the past, but to a new future beyond the pain of the grief that is presently experienced. The pastoral caregiver must convey an awareness and acceptance of the normalcy of grief and also the expectation and hope that healing is possible. We must understand that this is an emotional, physical, and spiritual journey. The shepherd is equipped with rod and staff to comfort on the journey.

What are the rod and staff that we are equipped with? Without the gospel of Jesus Christ there is no real hope for anybody. Yet, used ineffectively, the Word may not be helpful to the mourner. So I suggest to you that the rod and staff are the gospel message combined with the communication skills we have been blessed with that enable us to be effective pastoral friends: persistent visitation, attentive listening skills, careful and simple expressions of God's love, sound guidance, willingness not to have "quick fix" solutions, patience, and perseverance. In summary, a truly effective shepherd needs to understand and accept the grief process and work within its confines. A healthy attitude towards grief and its healing pathway is instrumental for being helpful. In this way the child of God may be assisted in making the grief journey and also realize the fullness of the pastoral promises of Psalm 23. . . dwelling in the house of the Lord forever!



Covenant Canadian Reformed Church Official Opening

On Friday January 26, 2007 Covenant Canadian Reformed Church (Grassie) celebrated the official opening of their new church building. The theme for the evening, taken from the cornerstone text, was Psalm 100:2, "Worship the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs." Neighbours, government representatives, all those involved with the building project, representatives from sister congregations, and congregants were warmly welcomed into the narthex of the church with flowers and the sound of the grand piano expertly played by Brian Bosscher. Opportunity was given for all to sign the guest book and all received a pen and a program for the evening.

The MC for the evening was Mike DeBoersap. After extending a warm welcome to all those present he gave the floor to our minister, Rev. C. VanDam, who opened with a word of prayer and gave an address on the dedication text. When you enter a new building there are new impressions and one may become disoriented. In this building, however, one only needs to look up; the wall above provides the proper orientation in the words of the psalmist. The building is built so that we can worship God each first day of the week, but that worship must overflow into all of our lives. We have not been left in

the hopeless state into which we have plunged ourselves, but our covenant God has sent his Son and our Saviour to make payment for our pardoning. Because of this reality we worship the Lord with gladness and joy. Rev. Van Dam exhorted us to worship the Lord alone, because He is holy and awesome. Our lives must be marked with joyful song and gladness. With that we sang together Hymn 40:1 and 2.

Our MC then called upon the representatives from various congregations. Ken Jager from Attercliffe, Rev. DeBoer from Dunnville, Claude Boisvert from Glanbrook, Gary VanIperen from Lincoln, Rev. Souman from Smithville, Rev. VanderVelde from Spring Creek, John VanderWoude from Hamilton, Rev Bouwers from Emmanuel URC in Jordan, and Rev. Transky from Lincoln Pioneer

Church in Grassie all came up to take their turn at the microphone. Each in turn offered their congratulations and encouraged Covenant congregation to be a witness with their building and their lives in the (surrounding) community. The MC then invited up the government representatives and we received a congratulatory scroll from the MP Dean Allison as represented by Eric Bouwman.

The women's societies then presented their gifts. Lisa VanDam and Laura Feenstra presented a set of prints from the morning society, "Affirm the Covenant." They read a poem which spoke about the building's new walls becoming old but still echoing the preaching and they hoped these prints would adorn these walls. The evening society as represented by Lis Dykema and Monica VanLuik read a humorous poem and unveiled a





Ribbon cutting ceremony

pulpit chair and two artificial, beautifully potted maple trees for the church building.

We enjoyed a video presentation wonderfully put together by the "ComPost Editor," Fred Post, which visually walked us through the building project from groundbreaking to the final cleaning. In a year's time our building, under the blessing of the Lord, was completed and that with help from many volunteers and without incident or injury. We were awed and overcome with gratitude.

On behalf of the "five scrooges" (the seventy-year and up group of volunteers) Br. VanWoudenberg delivered a humorous address detailing the ongoing hardship and teasing endured by them at the work-site on account of their ages, and the fact that they were outside of the insurable worker group and without worker's compensation. They were restricted to hand tools as opposed to power tools since that is what they grew up with. They were forbidden to use nail guns even though the gun registry did not apply to those over seventy. They did get away with wheelbarrow use because even though their driver's licenses were taken away at age seventy, they were on private property, providing they

understood that they were driving at their own risk.

The building construction manager from Hawkey, Ken Matthews, was invited up to speak to us. He introduced Mr. Bruce Stanley and Mr. Dan Stanley as integral men in the project. While working on this project, they ran into more than a few "different opinions" and while that has its challenges, they were thankful to have been part of this project. He expressed that they all considered it a privilege to work with our building committee and that in solidarity and commitment, this project stood above the majority of the other 450 church projects that they have worked on. In his opinion, without God's direction, it would have been chaos. The building stands as a tribute to the Lord. God also honoured the prayers for safety through out the project. He expressed his thanks for the hospitality shown to his builders who were billeted with members of the congregation and said this is becoming a lost art. A round of applause was given for all the trades represented.

Another round of applause followed as the members of the building committee came forward.

Speaking for the committee, Dave Van Amerongen said that the mandate given them in September of 2000 had now been completed. He gave the appropriate thanks to many and varied people involved in the project and presented an insurance policy to the organists who were concerned about water in the organ pit. Pete Ravensbergen was called forward and received a pair of flippers. In conclusion, he gave thanks to our heavenly Father. As an official gesture Br. Jager and Br. Van Amerongen were given the honour of cutting the ribbon and Dave presented the official occupancy permit to Br. Rolland VanAndel, Vice-Chair of Council.

Appropriately, the "Voice of Praise" choir closed our evening with an arrangement of Psalm 23, by Jonathan Kingma, offering praise to our God and Saviour. We were given a taste of the beautiful acoustics of our building. Br. R. VanAndel closed with thanksgiving prayer and we rose to sing two stanzas of "O Canada." We were invited to tour the church following the program and to enjoy refreshment in the fellowship hall.

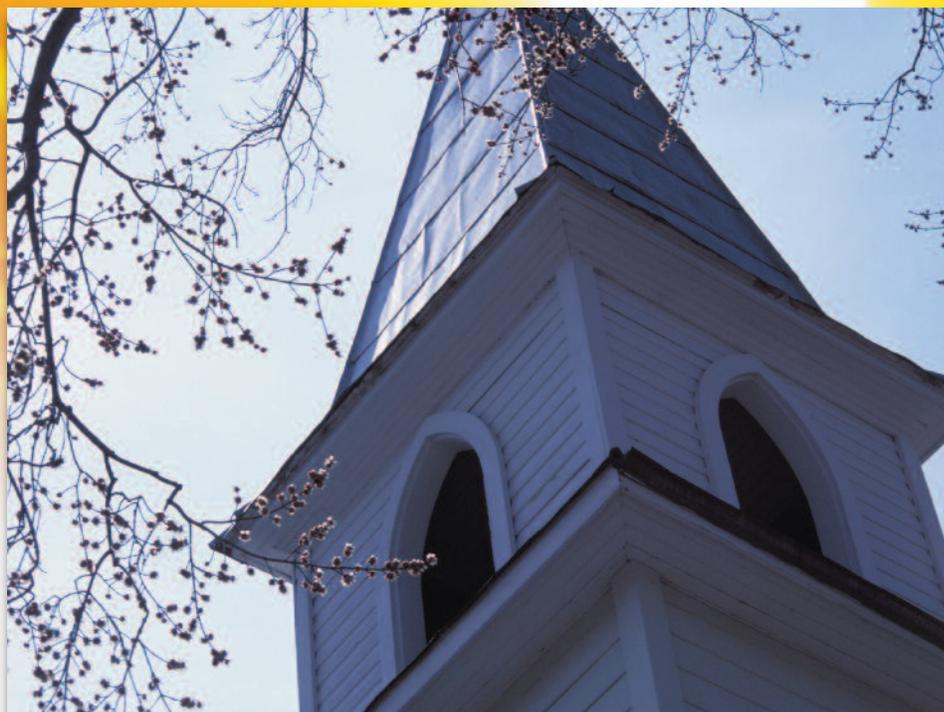


What's New???

Rev. E. Kampen is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Orangeville, Ontario
eric.kampen@canrc.org

Perusing the various church bulletins, I am reminded of the contrast between what makes it into the history books and what actually keeps people busy day by day. To think of general history, many books are devoted to wars and political intrigue. Only in the last century or so has there come a serious interest in the lives of the ordinary people. It is difficult to study this, however, because ordinary people don't leave behind extensive records of their activities. Nevertheless, the study of what is available indicates the issues that make it into the books are not necessarily the things that really concern people in daily life. The same goes for Church History. Many books are devoted to ecclesiastical wars as well as church political intrigue. There are Acts of many assemblies. While church bulletins don't quite get you into the personal lives of people, they do bring you closer to real life as they give a glimpse into the local congregations. What stands out is that the issues that might fill the Acts of General Synods are not always the concern of the people in the pew. So, here are some items that pertain to the lives of the people in the pew.

First, there is the perennial matter of liturgy. Some churches have adopted changes and others



are considering changes. Since many people visit the Church at Vernon for holidays, it may be helpful to know that it was decided that after the shaking of the minister's (or reading elder's) hand, the minister (or elder) will proceed to the pulpit and make various announcements, to be followed by a pre-service Psalm or Hymn. After that, the congregation will be asked to rise and the votum and salutation will follow. Visiting ministers don't have to worry about not knowing the exact procedure, for, "In the case of a visiting minister, the elder of service will

ascend the pulpit and give announcements, song and welcome and after that will exchange places with visiting minister with a handshake."

Continuing on the theme of liturgy, in the Fellowship Church at Burlington the council decided to have the congregation sing a "Three-Fold Amen" after the blessing at the end of the service. This will be tried for a two-month period.

The Church at Carman West is just beginning to reflect on some liturgical matters. The Council Report of April 2 referred to a

Church News

The Canadian Reformed Church of Ottawa has changed its summer celebration of the Lord's Supper from July 8, 2007 to July 1, 2007.

The Correspondence Clerk for Grace Canadian Reformed Church (Winnipeg, MB) is: Richard Buist
Ph. (204)663-1237,
email rbuist@mts.net

"request to review our order of worship. Dissatisfaction has been expressed about the fact that, at present, about a third of the worship service passes by before we even pray. Other suggestions are also made." The same report indicated that there was a "request for more 'standing' while singing." Discussion on both these matters was to take place at a subsequent meeting.

Undoubtedly, talk of possible changes in liturgy will always lead to some discomfort and perhaps at times even intense discussion. Just the same, it is good to think about liturgy. Discussions need not necessarily lead to change. In fact, a discussion may lead to a confirmation and renewed appreciation of current practices. The exercise of speaking about it is good for all involved.

Right next door to Carman West, namely, in Carman East, a practical matter required attention. The Council Report of March 21, 2007 mentioned that the "Congregation will be requested to shut off cell phones when they come into the church building unless they are associated with emergency response services. Concerns have been expressed re:

the disruption caused by members who use their phones to text message during services." I am sure it is not only worship services facing this problem. In fact, it is a potential problem also in the Catechism classes as well as consistory and other meetings.

While I have gleaned a number of items from the churches in Manitoba, one more item merits mention, namely, their combined Church News. It must be the only Church News in the federation that is a combined effort of Canadian Reformed Churches and a United Reformed Church, namely, the Providence URC in Winnipeg. This is a good example to imitate by other Canadian and United Reformed Churches living in close proximity. It may help bring the unity process to the grassroots as members can become more exposed to what lives in the neighbouring congregations of the respective federations.

Another of the concerns of the people in the pew is gathering the funds for all the things that come our way as kingdom citizens. A considerable portion of bulletins is taken up by pleas to support various causes and to attend fundraisers. Among the interesting ones was a Trapshoot Fundraiser at the local gun club. Another one that caught the eye was a widely advertised Euchre tournament. With respect to the latter, it would make an interesting study to see how the people in the pew have looked at games involving cards over the centuries, even as a fundraiser for a good cause. With respect to the sheer multitude of causes seeking support, one wonders if an outsider reading the bulletin might perceive the church

more as a fundraising community rather than a worshipping community. I mention this just as a thought to consider.

Finally, a continued concern is the spiritual welfare of the members of the congregation. A Guelph consistory report stated, "The consistory again discussed the matter of praying by name for the spiritually sick in the congregation, this time having had the benefit of some congregational input and time to reflect further on the matter. Considering the seriousness of many of these pastoral issues, the vital importance of prayer in receiving the Lord's blessings and healing in such situations, and how the congregational prayers affect personal and family prayers, the consistory decided to have as a specific agenda item at the end of every consistory meeting for the matter of discussing and deciding on what pastoral matters should be specifically mentioned in the congregational prayers. It was also decided, as a general rule, to mention names of individuals only with consent of the individuals involved in order to avoid the impression of the congregational prayers being used inappropriately." Looking after the sheep is the essence of the offices.

With this, we conclude our look into some of the regular concerns of the people in the pew. Again, I end with a word of thanks to all who faithfully send their bulletins and an invitation to others to join in. My email address is eric.kampen@canrc.org.

Till next time.



Keith Sikkema

Peregrine Survey

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

Funds

Funding frequently occurs on the agendas of our school societies. John Calvin School in Smithville has been blessed with sufficient funds to pay off the remaining debt of its latest expansion, now in use for two years. Its local treasurers will also be "working diligently with the promotion members who will actively visit those who provide us with no financial support." The PTA of Covenant Christian School (Millgrove) contributed \$20,000 to the school budget with the condition that the majority of funds be used to "provide relief for category 3 members." An initial drive for expansion funds in Neerlandia added up to \$600,000. Rumour has it that Credo Christian School in Woodbridge, which draws students from the Toronto and Brampton areas, has a contest to raise funds by the pound. In Stage 1, people sponsor contestants *per pound lost* by the end of June. Stage 2 requires weight-losers to pay \$2 for every *pound gained* between July 1 and December 31. Participants are encouraged to lose as much weight as possible before the end of June. After, the advice is to "start feeding the skinny boys to bring the school totals as high as possible."

This is also the time of year when most boards present budgets for 2007-2008 to the societies. Putting those together is hard work, as there are always conflicting interests that boards

like to meet as well as possible. Transportation needs a new bus, education expects to pay proper salaries to all staff, maintenance requires a new roof, administration and staff need a new photocopier, expansion requires another classroom, and members don't usually cherish tuition hikes. One treasurer mentions that budgeting would be much easier "if we had the support of 100% of our church membership." It is not surprising that there are ongoing efforts everywhere to help all covenant wage-earners understand that they are allowed to use the gifts God gave them to help support the school. Some societies also hold drives, grand dinners, or other feasts for capital expenditures such as buses, roofs, photocopiers, and resources. Some have tuition reduction drives or participate in the TRIP (tuition reduction incentive program) approach. Some keep costs down with significant amounts of varied forms of volunteer labour (Cornerstone Christian School in Lynden, for instance, calculated that 100 volunteer hours are spent in school each week).

Despite all these fund-raising efforts, the bottom line question remains: if funds are scarce, what should prevail? This question is really about the school's core value and business, as expressed in the school's statement of purpose, or mission statement. If the school is to provide quality Reformed

education to all children of the church community, that principle should also guide the budget discussion. It helps to focus the funds on essentials, rather than on "what would be nice to have." There can be a new bus or a new roof or a new photocopier only if it enhances and does not jeopardize the school's core task.

Futures

The Board of Covenant Christian School (Millgrove) is contemplating its future. This pertains to its location, as it continues to seek approval for building behind Rehoboth Canadian Reformed Church in Waterdown (together with John Calvin School in Burlington), but also to other aspects of being a Christian school. It agreed to devote one executive meeting per year to long term planning and anticipates requesting another school evaluation by the evaluation committee of the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies, probably during 2008-2009. The Board of Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton is also contemplating the future of the school in a comprehensive context of strategic planning, considering "enrolment and staff changes, technology, staff and community, students and programs, school vision, and board and committees." Its enrolment is expected to peak in the 2007-2008 school-year; one third of its staff is



currently over fifty, and a declining family size may make replacements for retiring teachers harder to find.

The chairman of Maranatha Christian School in Fergus reflects on the school's identity and keeping its awareness alive:

Some 20 years ago, Vaclav Havel was the hero of the Czech struggle for democracy against Soviet Communism. . . In his fight for democratic freedom, he claimed that clichés, by supporting accepted ways of thinking, encouraged dictatorships: "The cliché organizes life; it takes away people's identity; it becomes ruler, defence lawyer, judge and the law." His point was clear: If we repeat something often enough, we are bound to forget its meaning. We, at MCS, have organized large parts of our life around this school, and it has rightly become part of our identity. Around us we see evidence of God's countless blessings. The question is: have we repeated the foundational statements so often that they have become powerless? The members of the education committee, which is constantly supporting the continued improvement of the spiritual and academic caliber of the school, attempt to make words like "Covenant" and "Historical-Redemptive" fresh, real, and relevant.

One way in which this is going to take shape during the first week of July is the presentation of a mini-course in teaching Bible History. Rev. D.G.J. Agema of Fergus, who has also been the instructor for the Bible course at Covenant Teachers College, will present the course. Bible History is also on the summer



agenda of the CARE (Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Education) committee in Ontario, as a writing team will come together again for further development of a Framework for Bible History Instruction. This framework is intended to form the basis for ongoing developments in this central part of the curriculum.

Facilities

The growth of the schools in Fergus has led to obtaining town and board approval for adding a portable. That is, of course, a temporary fix, as the "Guelph Initiative" to start a new elementary school is also considered in the context of the growing student population at both the elementary and high school and future facility needs. Several options relating to this need for expansion are being studied in detail with regards to capital costs and membership fees, as well as pros and cons for education, the feeder school model, and expressed desires. Meanwhile, at Parkland Immanuel Christian School (PICS, Edmonton) a facilities development committee is "engaging staff and students" as it explores ways to "meet the needs of a growing student population and enhanced programming." The committee is studying options that explore a wide spectrum of possibilities right from portable

classrooms to total relocation. Cornerstone (Lynden) sees continuing progress on the construction of its new addition. A different kind of expansion is considered at Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Elementary School (ACRES), where the board received "an official request to take over the running of the Kindergarten as part of the school." An anonymous donation to Eben-Ezer Christian School in Chatham allowed for the addition of proper staff-room and office facilities and enlargement of library and computer-lab spaces. A story in the local newspaper quoted the principal's acknowledgment of the Lord's blessings received in the donation and in parental involvement in the school.

As we finalize the planning for the next school year or consider what lies beyond, and as we contemplate the upcoming holidays, let us continue to acknowledge the Lord in all our ways. Then we can rest assured that He will make our paths straight (Prov 3:5-6).

*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*

Dr. M. Helder is a botanist who specializes in scientific issues of interest to the Christian. She is based in Edmonton, Alberta
mhelder@telus.net

New Powerful Tools for Discussions in Science

Illustra Media set a new high standard for Christian scientific commentary when the program *Unlocking the Mystery of Life* was released in 2002. This video and the subsequent *The Privileged Planet* have actually been developed by advocates of intelligent design. The material is so excellent however, that supporters of six day creation also greatly benefit from these discussions. These programs are not just for students of science, but also for ordinary people who enjoy interesting information.

The first video, *Unlocking the Mystery of Life*, discusses important molecular machines found in living cells. With animated sequences, the workings of these molecular machines are portrayed. The bacterial flagellum, which works like a miniature outboard motor, is portrayed and discussed first. Secondly, and even more exciting, is the working of a regular cell. There is a breathtaking animated sequence which shows how information is read from DNA in the nucleus, copied onto another molecule which exits the nucleus, and is later used to put together a specific protein out in the cell proper. The machines depicted look very impressive, but the real machines

are actually much more intricate and precise.

The discussion and visual components certainly give us a good idea of what is involved. A machine, of course, is made up of component parts which enable the device to perform a specific task. Be it large or small, there is no doubt in our minds that every machine we have ever encountered was designed and manufactured. Machines are not "mere" works of art, made to be admired. If anything does not work, it is not a machine. Some of our machines are quite simple devices. Others are very intricate. In every case, however, we understand that a designer/manufacture was involved. Machines do not develop by change, not even (or perhaps especially) submicroscopic machines. The implications of this obvious fact are very important to Christians. This issue is the subject of the first video.

Among the scientists interviewed for this first video is Dr. Michael Behe. He recounts how he chanced to read Michael Denton's book, *Evolution: a Theory in Crisis*. At the time, Dr. Behe was already on the faculty at Lehigh University. He had completed his education including years of scientific research, but he had never heard the arguments in the

Denton book. Dr. Behe says he felt angry and cheated. Why had he never been made aware of this interesting information? Thus started Dr. Behe's new research program. The evidence for irreducible complexity fairly leaped out of the laboratory and from the scientific literature. The rest, for Dr. Behe and for intelligent design advocates, is history.

Dr. Dean Kenyon is another scientist featured on this video. He is a well known expert on origin of life theories, partly because he and a colleague wrote a book entitled *Biochemical Predestination* (1969). In 1976, while Dr. Kenyon was a professor at San Francisco State University, a student urged Dr. Kenyon to read John Whitcomb and Henry Morris' *The Genesis Flood*. Later Dr. Kenyon also read Dr. A.E. Wilder-Smith's book, *The Creation of Life: A Cybernetic Approach to Evolution*. Dr. Kenyon decided that he could not refute these books which support the young earth creation model. So, for Dr. Kenyon too, the rest is history.

Thus, *Unlocking the Mystery of life* is a powerful video which demonstrates visually and through argument that the living cell bears irrefutable testimony to the work of the Creator (our Lord). This video is divided into two parts and is altogether 70 seventy minutes long.

The video *The Privileged Planet* does for astronomy what the previous video did for biologists. The newer video features beautiful photography and also many computer animated images of space. Another interesting feature is the commentary by well known experts like astronomer Robert Jastrow and Donald Brownlee (co-author with Peter Ward of the book *Rare Earth*). These famous experts do not support the conclusions of this video. They are merely making statements of fact. The video however draws these statements of fact together to draw some very interesting conclusions.

The discussion begins with the image, captured by Voyager I on February 14, 1990, of our sun and six circling planets. Among the latter planets, was a tiny dot representing our planet, recorded by the spacecraft from four billion miles away. The focus of this part of the video is to assess the significance of this tiny dot. Is there anything special about our globe, or is it just another artifact, among many, in space?

The modern view that our earth is an insignificant globe had its roots in the description of our solar system by Nicholas Copernicus in the sixteenth century. Previously, based on Greek thought, everyone believed that the earth was the focal point of the heavens. This displacing of earth from a central position has been extended by modern scientists into a philosophy. They consider that nothing about our globe, ourselves included, is at all special or remarkable. The work of Edwin Hubble in the 1920s also contributed to the same view. Based on his work, scientists realized that our galaxy is only one among billions in space, not the only one as had formerly been assumed. Despite all this, the video discusses how new scientific studies are making it harder and harder to sustain ideas about our lack of significance in the universe. It is clear that our globe is uniquely designed to support life.

The second half of the program is based on a book by astrobiologists Guillermo

Gonzales and Jay Richards (both intelligent design supporters). Beginning with the remarkable situation which allows our moon to completely eclipse the sun, thereby allowing the sun's corona to be seen and studied, these scientists assess the significance of earth's position in space. They establish that the earth is in the best possible location in our solar system and in our galaxy, not only for life to exist on earth, but also for us to view and appreciate the heavens. Moreover, Australian astrophysicist Paul Davies points out that we have been provided with brains which are able to study the universe at the same time that our remarkable position in space allows us to do so. The question as to why this is so takes us to the final discussion of this program.

The universe is obviously ordered and suitable for study. The source of the order is beyond the material universe itself; indeed, it is obviously God the Creator who has wrought this wonderful design. Thus concludes the discussion. After this, in a computer animated sequence, we retreat through space from the earth, from the solar system, from the galaxy, and through deep space which is characterized by its own three-dimensional frothy arrangement of the celestial bodies. Even in deep space there is structure and order, however subtle.

Unlocking the Mystery of Life.
(Illustra Media, 2002.) 70 minutes.
DVD or VHS formats.

The Privileged Planet.
(Illustra Media, 2004.) 60 minutes.
DVD or VHS formats.



**Press Release of the
Classis Pacific West of the
Canadian Reformed
Churches meeting on March
27, 2007 in Langley, B.C.**

On behalf of the convening church, the church at Houston, the Rev. H. Alkema welcomed the brothers and opened the meeting in the usual Christian manner. Several highlights since the last classis were mentioned: the church at Willoughby Heights remains vacant after a recent call was declined, the church at Surrey has called the Rev. J. VanSpronsen for mission work in Brazil and is awaiting his decision, and the church at Smithers is busy preparing to host the upcoming general synod.

The delegates from the church at Cloverdale reported on the credentials. Classis was declared constituted. The executive was composed of Rev. T. Lodder, chairman, Rev. J. Visscher, vice-chairman, Rev. Alkema, clerk. The agenda was adopted. The Rev. F. Dong, as missionary of the church at Cloverdale, was welcomed and received as an advisor.

The chairman as yet congratulated the church at Houston on receiving a new minister in the person of Rev. Alkema. He mentioned the departure of the Rev. C. Macleod to Scotland and the Free Church. The passing of Sr. H. van Popta, the widow of the late Rev. J.T. van Popta, was recalled. As well, the recent trip of several area ministers to China and Australia was noted.

The Form of Subscription for ministers of Classis Pacific West was read and signed by Rev. Alkema.

A report was received from the committee appointed to review the manner in which classis deals with students for the ministry. It was discussed, amended, and adopted. The result is that Classis Pacific West has revised its approach to theological students, their promotion, preparation, supervision, and funding. It also changed the name of the committee from "The Committee for Financial Aid to Students" to "The Committee for Theological Students."

The church at Smithers requested and received clarification on the travel costs of delegates.

A number of reports were received. The treasurer, Br. K. Bulthuis, submitted a report that was received with thankfulness. The treasurer was thanked for his work. A report for auditing the books from the church at Cloverdale was also received. The church at Houston submitted a report on the inspection of the archives. An oral report was received from the convener for church visitations, Rev. Visscher, proposing that all of the churches in classis be visited in 2007.

The following appointments were made.

Convening church: the church at Langley. Dates: June 7, 2007 (alternate date: October 16, 2007). Time: 9:00 a.m. Officers: W. Bredenhof – chairman; H. Alkema – vice-chairman; J. VanSpronsen – clerk.

The Committee for Examinations: the Revs. J. VanVliet and J. Visscher. Subjects and examiners: OT – J. VanSpronsen; NT – T. Lodder; Doctrine and Creeds – J. VanVliet; Knowledge of Holy Scriptures – H. Alkema; Church History – J. Visscher; Church Polity – W. Bredenhof; Ethics – W. Bredenhof; Diaconology – T. Lodder.

Church visitors: J. Visscher (convener), T. Lodder, J. VanVliet.

The Church for the Archives: the church at Smithers.

The Church for the Inspection of the Archives: the church at Houston.

Classical treasurer: Br. K. Bulthuis.

The Church for Auditing the Books of the Treasurer: the church at Cloverdale.

The Committee for Theological Students: Rev. W. Bredenhof (2011), Rev. T. Lodder (2009), Br. J. Winkel (2009), Br. M. VanDriel (2011).

The Committee for Needy Churches: Br. H. Leyenhorst, Br. P. Vandergugten, Br. R. VanOene.

Deputy for preaching arrangements in vacant churches: Rev. T. Lodder.

Deputy for Coordinating Ecclesiastical Contact: Rev. J. Visscher.

Question period was used.

Censure according to Article 34 C.O., was not deemed to be necessary.

The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved.

Rev. Lodder requested the brothers to sing Hymn 46: 1 and 2 and led in prayer. Classis was closed.

For the Classis Pacific West,
J. Visscher, vice-chairman
at that time

Dear Editor,

In the *Clarion* issue of August 18, 2006 Rev. W. B. Slomp wrote a not very complimentary editorial in regards to the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA). Rev. Slomp is especially grieved by the fact that the External Relations Committee (ERC) of the FRCNA expressed in a letter to the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU) to that they no longer have "no longer any motivation to meet together." The literal wording in our letter was that "at this point there is not much motivation for the scheduled meeting [of January 2006, JWW]." We still wish to maintain the first level of official brotherly contact as has been established in the years past. Today's letter is a late response, but we thought better late than not to respond at all.

As ERC, and especially as members of the sub-committee in contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), it should be stated in fairness that we likewise were frustrated when we read your views on the subject in an editorial. We did not and still do not think it was right for you to publicly critique our letter before first acknowledging receipt of it to the proper bodies involved. You want to be open with all things, and we agree, but that should not negate the call to common courtesy.

What seems to be a point of friction is a different approach to unity talks between the two churches. Your committee is set up for the purpose of promoting ecclesiastical unity, as its name indicates. In pursuing this, talks are very much geared to procedure. Whether or not we should come to a union between our church federations appears to us a mute issue for our Canadian brothers. The main question for them is how this objective is to be accomplished. To us, however, it is not a settled matter that we should unite, let alone how this should materialize. We have no agenda that outlines procedural steps toward federative union. In fact, we have no agenda at all except that we are willing to discuss matters of mutual concern and interest. We both agree that Scripture and the confessions are the basis for unity. But as it is in a marriage, you cannot legislate love.

Historically, there are differences between both churches. It is not the place here to give an exposition on what our differences are. Much has been written about that. The position of the Free Reformed ChurchesNA reflects the "old" Calvinism tradition with its experiential emphases as opposed to the "new" Calvinism the Canadian Reformed Churches and others hold to. That such differences exist between these two schools is widely recognized. Ignoring or denying this will not help establishing

closer contact. We are speaking here categorically and generally. But we believe that it is a fair statement.

Does that mean that we see no use in further discussions? We do see use in it. Discussions are a way to get to know each other better, to spell out differences, to remove stereotypes, and this way to open the way to a better understanding and greater appreciation for each other. Our agenda does not go much beyond that. Our approach is therefore much more open-ended. We do not wish to be pressured. We do not wish to commit ourselves to a track, and 'be "hooked up to the unity train."

Does that mean that we believe in a pluriformity of the church, as we have been charged with? Neither formally, nor practically. We do not glorify the existence of different churches or denominations, as A. Kuyper did. We believe that they are the result of the brokenness of this world and alas the church as well, caused by human sin. We lament that, and seek to foster contact with those that have a likeminded faith. For example, the FRCNA are members of the ICRC and NAPARC. We have fraternal relations with other churches; we are in the process of establishing closer bonds with the Heritage Reformed Churches; we cross the ocean to visit other synods. Such contacts may not result in a complete correspondence or union due to various reasons. We do not think it necessarily disobedience to our Lord to allow different churches to exist alongside each other. In a broken situation we believe that it is sometimes better to let a situation exist rather than causing more damage by forcing unity.

Our report to Synod 2005 states the following and we still stand fully behind that: "While the goal of eventual union with churches with whom we have developed an ecclesiastical relationship may seem unattainable in most cases, we do not wish to preclude this ideal in our dialogue with other denominations. We lament the brokenness of the Church. We encourage more prayer in our churches for the unity of the Body of Christ. Upon believing prayer we may expect wonders of grace, not only personally but also as church federations."

*For the External Relations Committee
of the Free Reformed Churches of North America
Rev. J.W. Wullschlegler*



*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.*