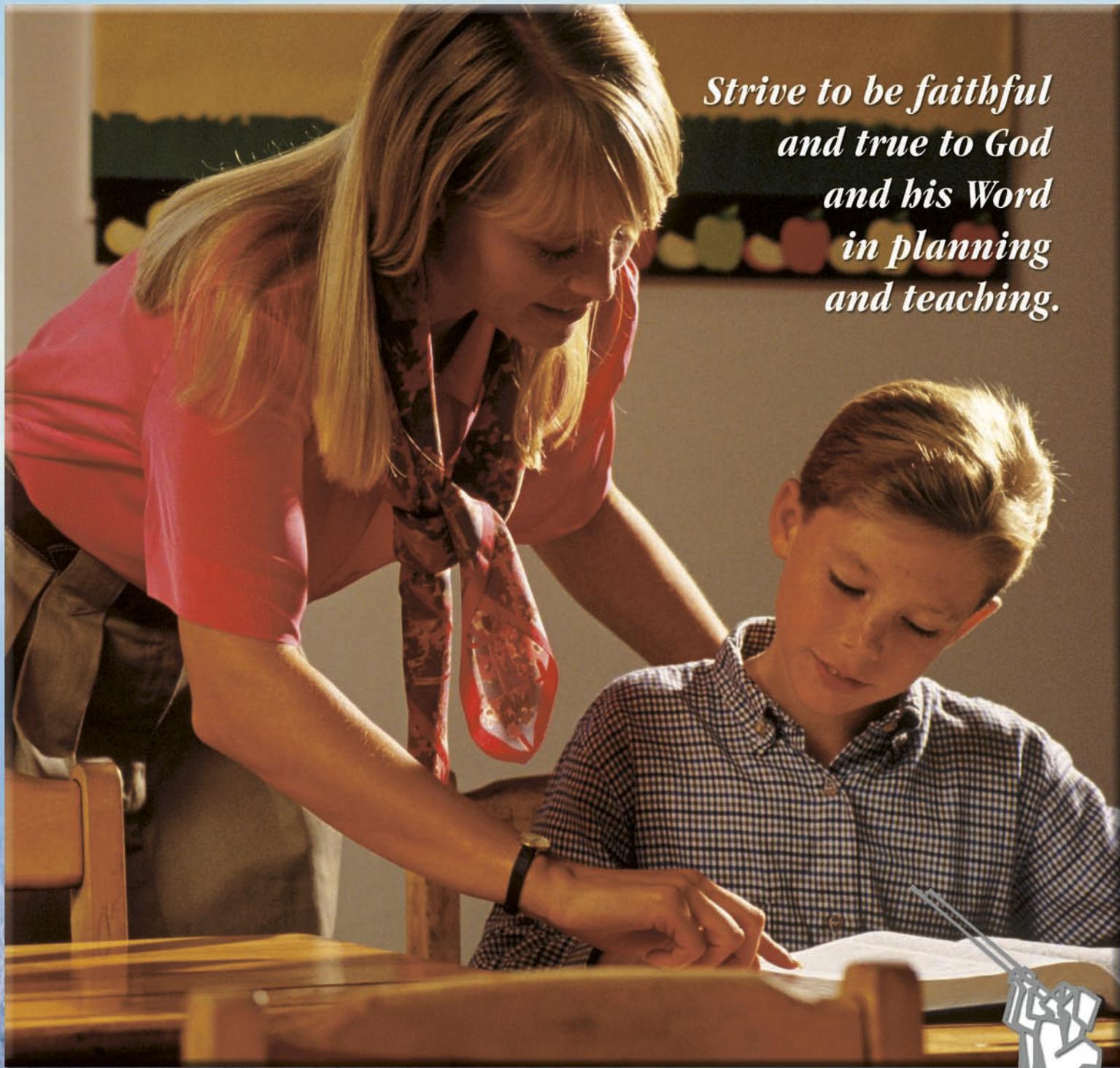


Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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*Strive to be faithful
and true to God
and his Word
in planning
and teaching.*

Inside this issue

- Federal Vision
- From Silence to Confession
- A Guide to Reformed Worship
- Teaching Ministry of Education Curricula
- Appealing Synod Decisions?





E. Kampen

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Federal Vision

*Further, by the very act of making a Statement,
you identify yourself as a group, a school of thought,
which in itself tends to be divisive*

Living on the North American continent, we are very familiar with hurricanes. We hear how they develop in the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic and can have devastating consequences on everything in their path. Generally speaking, however, as Canadians we are interested observers to these hurricanes. These hurricanes may be felt in Atlantic Canada, but for most of the rest of the country, they have little impact.

This image came to mind in connection with a theological storm raging south of the border for a number of years already. It goes by the name "Federal Vision" (FV). Its advocates would see it as a healing wind but its opponents see it as destructive. Assemblies of the Presbyterian Church of America, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church of the United States, as well as the Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America have felt threatened enough to make statements against it. The 2007 URCNA Synod appointed a committee "to examine by the Word of God and our Confessions the teachings of the so-called Federal Vision and other like teachings on the doctrine of justification; and present a clear statement on these matters to the next synod for the benefit of the churches and the consistories" (Art 72). In keeping with the hurricane image, we may not be feeling the full force of this theological storm here in Canada, but we feel enough air moving that it is worthwhile to get some sense of what this furore is all about.

The nature of an editorial dictates that our treatment has to be compact. This is a challenge considering how much has been written about the matter in the last few years.¹ I will limit myself to information provided by the proponents of what is called the Federal Vision, as can be found on the website <http://federal-vision.com/>.

Context

First, we need a bit of context. To continue our image, this storm began to brew a little inland from the Gulf of Mexico. On one of the links on the aforementioned website we read,

In January of 2002, the Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Monroe, Louisiana hosted a conference titled "The FV [Federal Vision]: An Examination of Reformed Covenantalism." The speakers at this conference (John Barach, Steve Schlissel, Steve Wilkins, and Douglas Wilson) highlighted the benefits of a covenantal perspective for issues such as the assurance of salvation and child training. Diagnosing a lack of these emphases in contemporary Reformed theology, the speakers presented their lectures as a healthy theological and pastoral corrective drawn from the wells of Reformed covenant theology.

These speeches were later published in book form under the title, *The Federal Vision* (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2004).

From this description we can understand the meaning of the term "Federal Vision." The word "federal" means "covenant." On the surface, such a conference might be of much interest to Canadian Reformed people.

Without going into details of what and why, it is sufficient to know that controversy soon developed and the orthodoxy of the speakers was questioned. Readers of *Christian Renewal* may recall a number of articles dealing with the fallout of this conference. Somehow these speakers were associated with what is called the New Perspectives on Paul. When all was said and done, they were challenged on their view of the covenant and their view of justification.



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In light of all the accusations that arose, a number of those associated with the Federal Vision published *A Joint Federal Vision Statement* in July of 2007 (<http://federal-vision.com/>). This Statement is not meant to be exhaustive but focuses on the issues that have caused the most controversy. Altogether, it covers eighteen topics each phrased in terms of “we affirm” and “we deny.” If one wants a quick idea of what FV stands for this would be the statement to consult. I suspect that most of the readers of *Clarion*, while being able to agree with some of the statements, in general would feel uncomfortable with a number of points. I will limit myself to two key issues, namely, the fact there is such a statement and secondly, the tone of the statement.

Making a Statement

First, there is the fact that there is such a Statement. In one way one can appreciate the fact that this Statement enables others to know exactly what is meant by those promoting the Federal Vision. Yet, the road that led to the formation of the Canadian Reformed Churches has been sprinkled with Statements or Declarations which were steadfastly rejected (e.g., Liberation of 1944; Protestant Reformed Declaration of Principles, 1951). Canadian Reformed Synods have refused to make general statements or adopt reports that gain some sort of quasi confessional status. It is true that in the preamble to the Statement the authors indicate that they are bound either to the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards and that this statement is merely a supplement. They take pains to say that it should not be taken as a confessional statement of any assembly or body. They see themselves as engaged in a conversation. This claim is undermined, however, by the “we affirm” and “we deny” language. It reminds one of the Canons of Dort as they first positively state what is believed and then go into a rejection of errors. Further, by the very act of making a Statement, you identify yourself as a group, a school of thought, which in itself tends to be divisive. One is made to think of Paul’s warning to the Corinthians. Here we have some who say, “We are of the Federal Vision.”

The tone

Second, there is the tone of the Statement. When I speak of the tone I do not mean whether it is rude or polite. In fact, it comes across as polite. Rather, I am referring to its theological tone rather than a

In This Issue

Editorial – Federal Vision — <i>E. Kampen</i>	2
Treasures, New and Old – From Silence to Confession — <i>W.M. Wielenga</i>	5
A Guide to Reformed Worship (4) — <i>W.L. Bredenhof</i>	6
Now We See Dimly — <i>H. VanderHoek</i>	8
The Feenstra Family Comes to Grand Valley — <i>J. Vanderwoerd</i>	10
Education Matters — <i>D. Stoffels</i>	12
Readers’ Forum — <i>J.L. Van Popta</i>	14
Book Review — Reviewed by <i>W.L. Bredenhof</i>	15
Letters to the Editor	16
Press Release – Board and C of A of Inter-League Publication Board	18

confessional tone. Upon reading this Statement, it immediately becomes clear that this is the language of academia and not of the pew. This is ironic for in the fifth Statement (*The Proclamation of the Word*) they say, "We reject the tendency to privilege the confessional and/or scholastic use of words and phrases over the way the same words and phrases are used in the Bible itself." In the process, by making a Statement, one defines what, at best, is to be considered as a theological opinion.

Understanding the covenant in terms of the relations within the Triune God is a theological construction. . . if we follow the language of Scripture, talk about covenant should take as its starting point the explicit covenant language found in the Lord's interaction with Abraham

This theological tone comes out already in the very first Statement, entitled, *Our Triune God*. It speaks about the Triune God as a reference point for the covenant. It is the covenant, in the end, that is the major concern of this Statement. Again, we are reminded of the Statements that clutter the path of history behind us which also had to do with fixing a certain view of the covenant. For the sake of clarity, I quote the first Statement in full:

We affirm that the triune God is the archetype of all covenantal relations. All faithful theology and life is conducted in union with and imitation of the way God eternally is, and so we seek to understand all that the Bible teaches – on covenant, on law, on gospel, on predestination, on sacraments, on the Church – in the light of an explicit Trinitarian understanding.

We deny that a mere formal adherence to the doctrine of the Trinity is sufficient to keep the very common polytheistic and unitarian temptations of unbelieving thought at bay.²

Now it will be immediately clear that a word like "archetype" is a theological term, not found either in Scripture or confession. Further, understanding the covenant in terms of the relations within the Triune God is a theological construction. To be sure, this idea has been around for many centuries in

theological discussions, but it never found itself into the confessional language of the Reformed churches. If we follow the language of Scripture, talk about covenant should take as its starting point the explicit covenant language found in the Lord's interaction with Abraham. Some may wish to speak of the covenant relationship already in paradise, but that requires a little theologizing already. It was one of the gains in understanding God's covenant through the work of Dr. Schilder that covenant language was freed from the speculative talk about a covenant within the Triune God.

In a way it is too bad that covenant talk got off to a bad start because later in the Statement many worthwhile things are said about the objective character of the covenant, which is a healthy corrective to the rampant individualism in matters of faith. Further, it is regrettable that they have to slip into the mix a promotion of child communion. All this appears to be tied in to their post-millennial leanings as outlined in the second and third statement³ where they affirm that "the Great Commission therefore requires the establishment of a global Christendom." Further, we hear theological language when Christ is described as the "new Adam" (Scripture speaks of the last Adam, 1 Corinthians 15:45) and when Christ is said to be the new Israel.⁴

If one peruses the criticism of the church federations mentioned earlier, these do not tend to focus on the points just raised. They tend to dig right in and get into theological formulations about the covenant and election. Our immediate history shows that the more you try to define covenant and election and you start making Statements that go beyond the agreed on confessions, the more trouble you get in and the more trouble you bring upon the church.

Let us hope and pray that this storm blows itself out as talk of covenant will limit itself to the scriptural givens and peace is restored by the calm, healing wind of the Spirit.

¹ Some examples: For: Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner (eds). *The Federal Vision*. (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2004); Against: R. Scott Clark (ed). *Covenant, Justification and Pastoral Ministry*. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2007).

² For an elaboration of this, see chapter 2 in "Federal Vision," *Covenant, Baptism and Salvation*, by Steve Wilkins.

³ These are titled, "As the Waters Covers the Sea" and "The Next Christendom."

⁴ See the Statement titled "Union with Christ and Imputation."



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From Silence to Confession



MATTHEW 13:52

1 Kings 18:20-40

This is not about what Baal couldn't do. It's not about what Baal didn't do. It's about that Baal is not. He is not God. He is not anything. But, then, the religion of Baal represents something. It represents trying to get milk and honey, inheriting life, without the Lord God who promises it and gives it. Baal religion is trying to get the kingdom apart from its sovereign King.

God, the King, knows that this cannot be done. God knows it's going to hurt if we try. This is why the Lord is busy doing what He is doing in these events. He stopped the rain so that Israel would learn the emptiness and the sure destruction of Baal worship. But now the Lord was going to bring back the blessing. That's what we read at the beginning of 1 Kings 18. The Lord initiated a new return to milk and honey so that his people could live. But it would only happen in a certain way, through showing the altar of Baal for what it is and through the return of his people which the Lord Himself would bring about. That's what the events on Carmel are about. It's not between the Lord and Baal. It's between the Lord and Israel. The Lord bringing renewal, return to kingdom life, through renewing his people, turning their hearts.

At first Israel had nothing to say – death's silence. Lifeless Israel. But see where the Lord brings his people through the events on Carmel. In the end the people declare, The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God! From silence to confession, from death to

life. Covenant renewal – through Elijah, Christ.

The first half of the story shows the prophets of Baal doing their thing. Everything is designed for their advantage. And they tried everything. Lots of religion, with lots of cutting of flesh and blood. In the end, these prophets are what? Tired, with sore throats, and bleeding – with nothing to show. There was no voice, no one answered, no one paid attention. Silence. Emptiness. And lots of pain. And that's what you get at the altar of Baal. The altar of Baal takes your blood and it gives nothing.

Sure, everybody is doing it. In the malls, in the halls of power, in the work place, and in the bedrooms. Baal. But he is not god. He can do nothing. This altar will take your everything and leave you with nothing but pain. Thank God that He exposes this through his living Word, through his prophet – through his Son.

Then comes the work of Elijah at the altar of God, at the covenant meeting-place. This is set up to Yahweh's disadvantage. There's not much time left in the day. There is lots of water. And just one prophet to pray, just a short prayer at the hour of prayer. But see: the Lord answers emphatically – at the covenantally-designed Israelite altar. The Lord, who is God. The fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench. An all-consuming fire, signifying consuming judgment fire, holy fire which took the ox and the altar and everything. Israel,

represented in that twelve-stoned altar, was utterly consumed.

But watching, Israel was entirely spared. Israel came out on the other side of that all-consuming judgment fire alive, confessing God's name and glory. "The Lord, he is God." And that is the point. The grace and power, the holiness and justice of God at the altar brings a people falling on their faces before Him, confessing Him.

And ready for blessing – kingdom life. Ready to receive the rain – the poured out Spirit. Nothing deserved, but repentance given. Restoration was given, life from the dead – through the altar. Yes, through Christ Jesus. God's judgment fell on Him and so God brought a people to Himself on the other side of that altar, the cross. A people spared the just punishment of God. We are spared the all-consuming judgment fire because God gave one to mediate for us. He gave a greater Elijah who built a last altar, made the supreme intercession, offered the definitive sacrifice, gave a better covenant meeting-place, gave the ultimate in covenant renewal that we may confess and worship Him: the holy, just, and merciful God.

From death to life, in Christ, by the Spirit, through the altar – the cross. And with the Spirit, pouring new life from heaven. Knowing the harm of the altar of Baal, the draining of life, we must come away to this altar, the only life-giving one. Come to Jesus. Who gives his Spirit, pouring rich kingdom life from above.



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A Guide to Reformed Worship (Part 4) – Preaching

Many years ago, when he was pastor of Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian Church, Donald Grey Barnhouse had a regular radio program. One day he asked the question of what things would look like if Satan took over a city. Most of us would probably imagine a community beset with violence and perversion. Barnhouse painted a different picture. All of the bars and pool halls would be shut down, there would be no more pornographic filth, the streets and lawns of the city would be tidy, and there would be no swearing or cursing. The children would all be polite and the churches would be full on Sunday...*where Christ is not preached.*

Satan wants nothing more than to see churches which get everything else right in worship, but neglect the preaching of Christ. After all, it is through the preaching of the gospel that sinners are saved: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom 10:17). It was passages like that which God used to stimulate the Reformers to bring back the biblical practice of regular preaching into public worship.

According to John Calvin, Martin Bucer, and the other Reformers, the preaching of the Word was an indispensable element of Christian worship.

However, the medieval church had not always seen it the same way. Over time, the mass came to be central, while preaching was rare and infrequent. God led the Reformers to see that this was entirely out of line with what the Bible says. Hughes Oliphant Old writes, "That the liturgy should be celebrated without the preaching and hearing of the Word was to the Reformers an unthinkable disobedience to the clear commandment of Scripture."

The clear commandment of Scripture

Besides Romans 10:17, one of the clearest passages of Scripture regarding preaching is found in 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." Paul was not writing to an ordinary believer, but to a man who had been ordained to the ministry of the Word. Timothy was a minister in Ephesus in the same capacity in which we find ministers today. Paul's mandate to Timothy was clear: he was to preach the Scriptures!

When we look closer at the Greek word that Paul uses for "preach," we discover some unique characteristics of biblical preaching. For one thing, it is *verbal proclamation*. It would be

unimaginable in the world of Paul to use the word *kerusso* to describe a drama or a play. It would also be unheard of to use this word to describe a dialogue or a conversation. The preaching Paul had in mind was a monological proclamation using words.

Besides that, it was *authoritative*. Timothy was called to "herald" the Scriptures. I already mentioned that the verb there is *kerusso*; this word is closely related to the Greek word *kerux*, which means "herald." In the ancient world, a herald was sent out by a king or a high-ranking official. He was endowed with the authority to represent the one who sent him. In other words, he did not present his own message and his own thoughts, but only the message he'd been given. In fact, there is evidence that heralds would not dare change the message for fear of death. Not changing anything, they could proclaim their message confidently and with authority.

Finally, Timothy was called to verbally and authoritatively *proclaim the Word*. In his time, before the completion of the canon, this meant the Old Testament. Timothy was mandated to exposit the Scriptures and from them preach Christ. He was not permitted to use any other source but that which is divine. From the written Word of God, Timothy and

other preachers of the apostolic era (including Paul), declared “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

Don't take it for granted!

Today, in our public worship, we cannot take for granted the centrality of the preaching of the Word. Around us, also in ostensibly Reformed circles, this biblical emphasis is under attack. A number of years ago, I wrote about a Christian Reformed pastor in Calgary, Alberta who was using a television show (*the Simpsons*) as the text for his sermons. The story was reported as some kind of novelty in one of the major daily papers. Unfortunately, this is no longer a novelty in the broader Christian world. Though thankfully there are still churches which hold to the careful, systematic, and expository preaching of Scripture, they seem to be rarer and rarer. I remember meeting a man in Fresno, California who was desperately looking for a church, just one church in this city of 600,000, that would preach the Word of God, rather than Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Life*.

Our insistence on preaching the Word is one of our strengths as Canadian Reformed churches. We have no reason to boast in this, but we certainly can be thankful for it. It is a gracious gift of God. So, when we have friends or acquaintances who ask about our churches and what they're like, this should be the first thing that we draw their attention to. We ought to make clear that, in our churches, the Bible is an open book from the beginning of the service to the end. Not only that, but the Word is laid open through the preaching and in that Christ is vividly portrayed and preached for the wonderful Saviour

that He is. If we wish to see our churches grow from the outside, let us make known what is most important in our churches: the preaching of Christ crucified! This is such a rare commodity in today's milieu that God will surely use it to draw those who are hungering and thirsting for his Word.

Satan wants nothing more than to see churches neglect the preaching of Christ

As for us, we should be careful not to take the preaching for granted. In an egalitarian age, it is easy to dismiss the preaching as just another man's opinion about what the Bible says. However, if we understand Paul correctly, we do not hear the voice of a man in faithful Biblical preaching. So long as the Word is faithfully preached, it is the Word of God itself. This was captured quite strikingly in the Second Helvetic Confession: “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.” I sometimes wonder whether we believe that.

Coming to the preaching with a right attitude is important. We need to be humble and teachable. However, we can also improve our reception of the preaching through some simple practical steps. One of the most obvious is to get a proper night's sleep on Saturday night. Though an occasional lapse is perhaps understandable, regular habitual sleeping in church shows contempt for God's Word. In Matthew 10:15, the Lord Jesus warned that the covenant people who openly displayed contempt for

his Word would be punished more harshly on the Day of Judgment than Sodom and Gomorrah.

In addition, it is worthwhile to cultivate a habit of note-taking in church, particularly if one finds it difficult to focus. Listening is difficult work and our minds easily wander. We hear the preacher mention a word or a concept, perhaps he uses an illustration, and before long our thoughts are wandering down some rabbit trail. Some of us are more prone to this than others and for those of us who are, let me commend the habit of note-taking. Not only does it help to focus in church, it also gives you a permanent record of what was preached for future reference. Those sermon notes can be very helpful for your own personal study of Scripture and also for group Bible study.

There is much more that could be said about preaching. For our purposes in this series, it should be emphasized that we have preaching as central, not only because it is commanded, but because Christ is central and Christ is revealed in his Word. The church without preaching is in danger of losing its very status as a church. Let's hold on to this biblical practice! 

The reference to D.G. Barnhouse comes by way of Michael Horton in various articles and speeches. See, for instance, “Christless Christianity,” *Modern Reformation* May/June 2007. The quotation from Hughes Oliphant Old is from his dissertation: *the Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975), p.184.



Now We See Dimly

As Christians we have to humbly admit that there is much of God's nature and his will for our lives that we do not understand or appreciate well.

"Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face, now I know in part, but then I will know fully, even as I also have been fully known" (1 Cor 13:12 NAS / NKJ).

We receive with gratitude those moments when God gifts us with simple understandings or confirmations from his creation that help us grow in understanding and love. Those are often metaphors such as the mirror mentioned in Corinthians 13. The metaphor is a picture that functions to give us a new insight and deeper understanding, or it simply moves our hearts to give us courage, or it strengthens our will to act as we know we should.

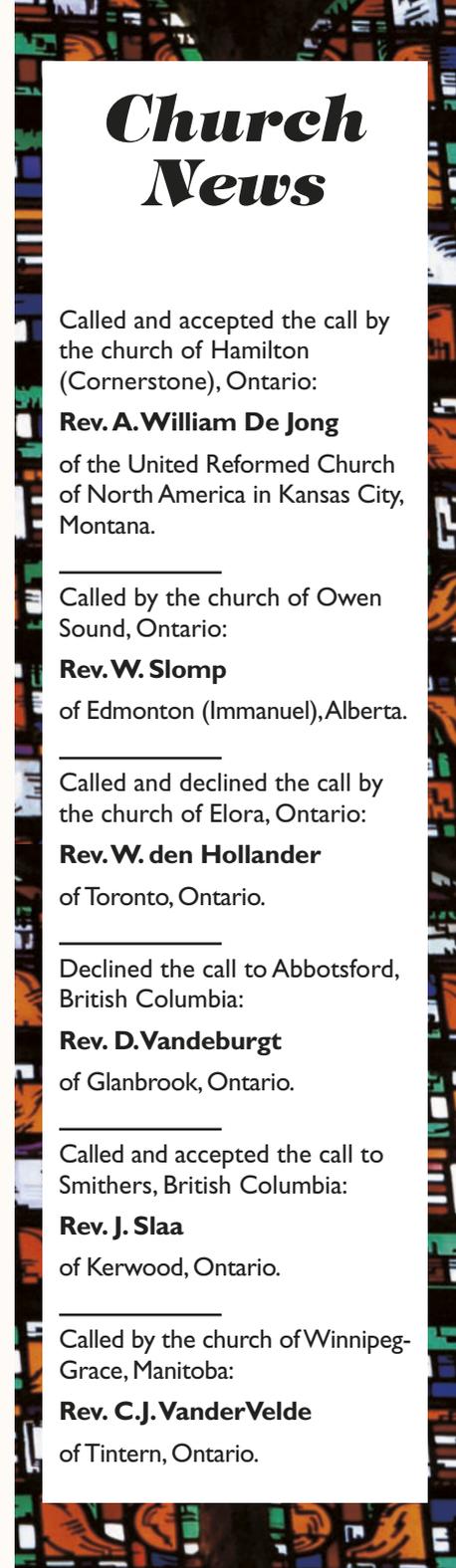
Our Lord has infused his words and works with those pictures that remind us and help us see. Jesus had a particular fondness for word pictures that use common objects and events to teach the things of God. And He cautioned his disciples that the parables that were meant to help them see would in the mean time keep many others in the dark. The blind leaders of Israel really had no physical problem with their eyes but their minds and hearts and volition were closed as a vault where light can not enter. Even the disciples themselves needed time and work of the Spirit to see what Jesus was clearly laying out before them.

And so do we today. The noise and glare of our culture makes it difficult to distinguish the music and colour that tell the gospel story. Jesus has said that He is present in everything but we have such a hard time seeing Him in our every day affairs. Psalm 8 often functions for us as a

description of the way a poetic man saw the skies at a time when they knew little about astronomy and when no city glare obscured the view. But the heavens do really declare the glory of God and the skies do really proclaim the work of his hands. They have no speech but their voice is heard. The question is whether we are still listening. Are we still staring intently to see and perceive how Jesus holds all things together? Do we notice that He causes every tree to point up to Him, that He appoints the forests to exclaim, as Moses did with his staff, that "our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth"? Our scientific and mechanistic view of the world often robs us of the vision to see God at work.

Our seeing is often not seeing at all. John Newton admitted that it required a meeting with the God of grace to lift the cloud of darkness from him. "I once was blind but now I see." Elijah's servant, with eyes wide open, was staring blindly at hostile hillsides till God showed him what was really there. When we actually begin to see we realize that, what at first glance may seem evident and simple may actually carry a whole lot more meaning.

There are often multiple meanings and understandings behind the simple things and events around us. Learning to see them allows us a moment of deeper understanding and appreciation, a growing in love



Church News

Called and accepted the call by the church of Hamilton (Cornerstone), Ontario:

Rev. A. William De Jong

of the United Reformed Church of North America in Kansas City, Montana.

Called by the church of Owen Sound, Ontario:

Rev. W. Slomp

of Edmonton (Immanuel), Alberta.

Called and declined the call by the church of Elora, Ontario:

Rev. W. den Hollander

of Toronto, Ontario.

Declined the call to Abbotsford, British Columbia:

Rev. D. Vandeburgt

of Glanbrook, Ontario.

Called and accepted the call to Smithers, British Columbia:

Rev. J. Slaa

of Kerwood, Ontario.

Called by the church of Winnipeg-Grace, Manitoba:

Rev. C.J. VanderVelde

of Tintern, Ontario.

for our God who does not sleep, who is not far away and on whom no detail of his physical world is lost.

You are invited to comment and interact with this column. Visit: nowweseedimly.com

The Feenstra Family Comes to Grand Valley

After a busy summer in which most of the congregation worked diligently to complete an addition and renovations to the manse, the great day had arrived!

Installation

It was Sunday, September 2, and the Canadian Reformed Church of Grand Valley was filled to capacity in anticipation, for this morning Rev. P. G. Feenstra was to be installed as our own minister! Delegates from Classis Northern Ontario and from a number of neighbouring congregations were present, as well as members of the extended Feenstra family.

Rev. Kampen, from Orangeville, chose as text John 21:15-17. In this portion of Scripture, the risen Lord Jesus asks Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you truly love me?" and Peter answers, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus then instructs Peter to "Feed my lambs," to "Take care of my sheep," and to "Feed my sheep." The theme for Rev. Kampen's sermon was, "Our risen Lord's interaction with Peter shows us the validity and character of the special offices." Christ shows that He restores the disciple "Peter, son of John," to his office. Christ uses flawed men to do his work. So we as congregation must not expect a flawless man in Rev. Feenstra, but receive him as a man chosen by Christ to do God's work.

After the service, opportunity was given to delegates from



Mrs. Feenstra receives the prize for the "Who's who?" game

classis and neighbouring congregations to offer their congratulations. A number of comments alluded to the "beautiful feet of those who bring good news." Letters from other congregations were then read as well as a letter from our former pastor and his wife, Rev. and Mrs. P. Aasman.

After this joyous occasion the congregation had an opportunity to congratulate Rev. and Mrs. Feenstra and wish them strength in their new calling.

During the afternoon service, we were able to hear Rev. Feenstra preach to us as minister of Grand Valley for the first time. The text was 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, which reads "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know

nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I come to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." The theme for his sermon was, "Through the preaching, our faith is directed to Christ and Him crucified." Again we were told not to focus on the preacher but on the preaching and what we must do with that preaching. We must be directed to focus on Christ who was crucified.

Welcome evening

On Friday, September 14, we gathered for the official welcome evening in the community hall of

the Grand Valley arena, which had been festively decorated for the occasion including two large concrete patio stones in the shape of footprints. We opened with the reading of Romans 10:5-15 and were reminded of the beautiful feet of Rev. Feenstra (which he had modestly kept covered up). After prayer and singing, the entertainment for the evening began with the "Welcome Choir" singing "Great is Thy Faithfulness" and "Dona Nobis Pacem." Next the children from grades 1-6 sang two amusing interactive songs to welcome the Feenstra family and introduce the congregation to them.

This was followed by a power point presentation which required Rev. and Mrs. Feenstra to look at pictures of grades 7 to 9 students taken when they were younger and to find the child in the audience. This was set up as a competition between Rev. and Mrs. Feenstra and began with Mrs. Feenstra taking the early lead. Rev. Feenstra soon tied the score and the lead



The Grades 1-6 children sing a Welcome Song to the Feenstra Family

see-sawed back and forth. For the record, Rev. Feenstra did narrowly defeat his wife in the end, but I think there was some outside assistance involved.

The Young Peoples also had a matching game, this time requiring Rev. and Mrs. Feenstra to work as a team. They did amazingly well in matching up the young people to their parents.

The Ladies' Aid presented a scrap book picture album of all the families in the congregation to the Feenstras. No doubt this will help the Feenstras put names to the faces. This was followed by the Women's Society presentation in which a gift had to be passed to the

member of the congregation who fit the description given. However, each time the gift reached the designated person, we were told that the gift was to be passed on to a person fitting a new description. This continued on until finally Rev. Feenstra was instructed to pass it on to the woman he considered to be the most beautiful. Mrs. Feenstra, as recipient of the gift, was then informed that it was meant for her.

After all these presentations, the Men's Society was finally given a turn. The delegate informed us that since there had been singing, matching games, and introductions of various sorts, there was nothing left for him to do. However, rather than do nothing, he gave the Feenstras a tour of local geography and history, which he compared to that of Owen Sound. While it appeared that the city to the north of us might have a few more interesting places than we do, he finished off by remarking that here in Grand Valley, we have something they don't have: Rev. Feenstra as minister!

After the choir sang two more selections, we prayed with thanksgiving.



The Grand Valley Welcome Choir



Derek Stoffels

Mr. Derek Stoffels is principal of the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed School in Smithers, British Columbia
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What is it Like to Plan to Teach Ministry of Education Curricula Christianly?

Teachers have a moral and legal obligation to teach the designated content in each course's curriculum document. For many courses the government dictates quite specifically the things that one must teach. Fortunately, what they don't usually dictate is the perspective one approaches the material from. In this article I will provide a bit of a glimpse into a teacher's life as we grapple with teaching a particular learning outcome or theme.

I will use as an example the British Columbian course called Social Studies 11 (a history, civics, human geography course) and the learning outcome: *the comparison of Canada's standard of living with that of developing nations*.

This may seem like a straightforward, factual topic and it indeed can be taught very clinically, using statistics as the primary source of comparison. In my opinion, I believe that a learning outcome like this should be addressed quite differently. To me it is the type of learning outcome that forces teachers, and ultimately their students, to reflect on things that will disturb their comfortable lives. As I prepare to teach this learning outcome, I look at the vision statement of the school, the course content, my responsibility to God, the students,

and their parents. I am also forced to evaluate once again what it means to live christianly in different areas of life.

Challenged by blessings

This learning outcome seems like a mixed blessing. On the one hand there is cause for rejoicing and thankfulness as you see the incredible material blessings God has poured out on us as a church, community, province, and nation. We have a nice school with all our needs being met amply. We have church communities that prosper. On the other hand, this unit doesn't prick, but rather stabs or blows a hole in your conscience when you see your wealth contrasted with the poverty that so much more of the world experiences. You try to reconcile how you can live as a light in this world in relation to that difference in living conditions. One reads passages like Isaiah 58:9-10 where it says, "...And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed then your light will rise in the darkness..." or Isaiah 58:6-7,

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor

wanderer with shelter – when you see the naked to clothe him and to not turn away from your own flesh and blood?

You are confronted by one of God's strong and unequivocal commands. As I look at my own life and see if I do these things, I can't help but think that I fall very short of fulfilling the command. Try to imagine what is meant by "spend(ing) yourself in behalf of the hungry." This picture is one of totally exhausting yourself in your effort to ensure the hungry are fed. Since the Bible so often has a balancing or tension between two points in it, I search for understanding so that I can teach a balanced biblical perspective on this point. I recall many of the basic teachings of the Bible such as Jesus' comment, "You will always have the poor among you" (John 12:8). I recall some Old Testament passages where God blesses and promises to bless his faithful people with material wealth (e.g. Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Malachi 3:10-12.) Once that is done I can begin to try and plan for a biblically balanced approach to the topic. However, what if I have some loose ends arising from the texts? For instance, I have not yet resolved to my satisfaction if there is a change in the teaching about wealth in the New Testament.

There seems to be some indications that it does change but so far I am without a conclusion on this point. This uncertainty has to be worked with in the planning. I need to deal responsibly with the texts and towards the students.

As mentioned earlier, there is a certain "agony" in working through units like this. There is tension and frustration with the consequences of sin. There is tension and frustration as you look at your own life and see how you could live differently in connection with this point and don't. There is a humility brought about by seeing that still I can't figure out how exactly to live biblically. There is also a longing for that day when sin will be no more, when poverty will cease to exist, when we will know exactly how to serve God best. There is also always the driving force of your hope and prayer that your teaching will be effective in helping the students to better understand what it means to be a Christian, that they might really wrestle with applying the Word to their lives. There is the hope and prayer that you will see understanding take root and grow. You also realize that you might very well not see that and that conclusions are to be left in God's capable hands.

Remaining questions

As I work through a learning outcome like this one I plan for ways to encourage the students to consider whether we as a community need to significantly change our lifestyles. We look at the waste in our society when it comes to food, packaging, what we spend our money on, or how we use the resources in creation. I try to get the students to examine carefully how the call or command in Isaiah 58 is being met by them. Are we tossing it off too easily with thoughts like, God gives us good jobs so that we can give money to

causes like CRWRF, the needy collection, disaster relief, and so on? Do we carefully examine our lifestyles and measure them against the call to "spend ourselves"? This is a picture of all-consuming sacrifice rather than the donation of amounts of money or energy that really do not make a difference to our own standard of living and recreation. Isaiah 58 is a picture of active reaching out and concrete caring for others. As a class we hopefully will come to the point where we wonder: what does God require of us? Are we to abandon Canada and go out to Africa or Asia and work to help the oppressed? Are we to go to the poor in our own communities and spend our days and nights helping them? Do we all have to become Mother Teresas? If so, why are there so many very wealthy and faithful believers in the Bible such as Job, Abraham, Joseph, David, Daniel, or in society today as well? The answers to those questions are different from student to student, person to person. The direction at this point is that each one needs to prayerfully consider the call God places before them individually and act in response to it. God calls us individually and consequently diversity should be expected in our responses.

To help me teach a unit like this I also turn to books that will help provide me with insight into the topic. As an example, in preparation for that unit I read an excellent, very readable book called *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* by E. F. Schumacher. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in better understanding the economic imbalance in society and how we can counter that. Don't let the word economics scare you off. Think of it as "doing business as if people mattered." Just before I started *Small is Beautiful* I read a book (not as easy to read but very

good and more detailed and specific in its solutions) called *Beyond Poverty and Affluence: Towards a Canadian Economy of Care* by Bob Goudzwaard. I also re-read an article of Goudzwaard's called "Economics and Ethics: Starting Point or Afterthought." The books *If the World were a Village* by David Smith and *Material World: A Global Portrait or The Hungry Planet* by Peter Menzel are also useful resources for this unit. United Nations statistics, particularly the Human Development Index, are incorporated into the lessons as well. These resources help to show students more clearly the huge gap between our lifestyle as Canadians and that of the bulk of the population of the world. These resources tie in quite well with the whole human geography unit of the Social Studies 11 course, of which this is only one learning outcome, and help me to bring Christianity into the picture of comparing standards of living. Each time I teach this learning outcome I need to be careful to search out new material to challenge my thinking and ensure that I have not settled into a comfortable rut from which I do not see perspectives or insights that I should and could see.

That is a broad sketch of the "joy and suffering" of planning how to present a topic in a Christian manner. As a Christian teacher, I need to face this again and again as I strive to be faithful and true to God and his Word in my planning and teaching.

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

J.L. Van Popta

Appealing Synod Decisions?



Canadian Reformed Churches hold it as an important principle that decisions of the broader assemblies are settled and binding unless proven to be against the Word of God or the adopted Church Order. This principle is rooted in Article 31 of the Church Order. Members and churches cannot simply ask for revision or rejection of decisions made by previous assemblies. They must demonstrate, instead, how a decision is contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order. All decisions of the broader assemblies must be tested by the churches and then either accepted or overturned on that basis only.

The recently published *Acts of Synod 2007* offers examples of this in Articles 17-19 where we read about submissions that were judged to be inadmissible. In these cases, the members did not have the right to put material on the synod agenda because they were not appealing a decision of a previous assembly according to Article 31 of the Church Order. In another case, in Article 55, the appealing church did "not demonstrate how [previous decisions] violate the principles of Scripture." This appeal was denied. Each of these cases adheres to the procedure for appeals as it is outlined in Article 31 of the Church Order.

However, in Article 110, the recent synod followed a different course when it decided to overturn a decision made by the synod of 2004.

In 2004, Synod Chatham had agreed with a duly submitted overture to include the Apostles' Creed in the baptism forms (*Acts 2004*, Art 115 section 4, p 116). Cornerstone Church of Hamilton had submitted a proposal that had been initiated by the now late Dr. J. Faber. Following proper procedure, Cornerstone had first presented the overture to the churches in classis, which brought the overture to the next regional synod, which then, in turn approving the overture, submitted this to the general synod in 2004. The synod, held in Chatham, accepted the submission and decided that "the grounds provided by the Cornerstone Church, as supported by Classis Ontario West September 10, 2003, and Regional Synod East 2003 are valid." Synod, adopting this overture, mandated the *Book of Praise* Committee to come with a recommendation on how best to implement the synod's decision to incorporate the Apostles' Creed into the baptism forms.

Having "been agreed upon by a majority vote" (CO 31), this decision of a synod should have been settled and binding unless it was proved to be against the Scripture or the Church Order. However, three years later, Synod 2007 received letters from three churches that were, for various other reasons, against the recommendation made by the *Book of Praise* Committee for incorporating the Apostles' Creed into the baptism forms. What these churches did not do, was appeal the decision of Synod 2004 on the grounds that the decision to include the Apostles' Creed went against Scripture or the Church Order. Instead, they outlined why they did not like the proposal. Their protests should have been inadmissible according to Article 31 of the Church Order, or at least their appeals should have been denied. The delegates at the synod, however, agreed with the objections of these churches. The previous decision to incorporate the Apostles' Creed in the baptism forms was undone. This synod now told the *Book of Praise* committee not to include the Apostles' Creed in the baptism forms.

Overtures that have been approved and adopted by synods should not be undone simply because of a few dissenters. The procedures outlined in the adopted Church Order should be followed in all cases: decisions are settled and binding unless they are proved

to be unscriptural or against the agreed upon Church Order. Synod 2007 did the Cornerstone Church of Hamilton, the churches of that classis, and those of Regional Synod East a disservice. Those churches and assemblies followed the agreed upon ecclesiastical

process. But the recent synod did not. This kind of inconsistency in applying the established rules of procedure undermines the confidence of the members and the churches and therefore makes participation in the whole process quite unappealing.

Book Review

Reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof

Son of Secession: Douwe J. Vanderwerp,

Janet Sjaarda Sheeres
(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).
Additional Information: Paperback,
231 pages, \$20.15.

Though we have long ago gone our separate ways, we have a lot of history in common with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC). This book is part of a series that occasionally explores that common history, *Origins Studies in Dutch-American History*. It is jointly published as a volume in "the Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America," reflecting the ever closer ties between the RCA and CRC. The author is a free-lance historian and chair of the CRC's Historical Committee.

Douwe Vanderwerp is one of the lesser-known figures associated with the Secession (Afscheiding) of 1834 in The Netherlands – a movement in which our churches also have roots. Originally a school teacher, he slowly progressed from being a lay pastor to being a fully ordained minister of the Word and sacraments. Sheeres vividly relates the drama of the Secession and Vanderwerp's role in it. She

concludes, "If Hendrik De Cock may be considered the Saint Paul of the Secessionist movement, then surely VanderWerp may be likened to Timothy, his faithful worker in the kingdom" (p 172).

In time, Vanderwerp immigrated to the United States and became one of the founding fathers of the CRC, having founded ten congregations in Michigan, New Jersey, Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Ohio. He remained a central figure in the early history of the CRC and his death in 1876 was acutely felt. Vanderwerp was not only a church pastor, but also a prolific writer, organizer, church politician (in the good sense!), and a trainer of new pastors. However, the protagonist is not idolized – Sheeres notes that he really should be called a son of "secessions," for he was involved with three different seceder movements in his life. To be sure, Sheeres is generous in her evaluation, but the reader will note the cautionary lessons here about church splits.

One of the features that makes this book so readable is the fact that the author has included many fascinating details of nineteenth century life in The Netherlands and the United States. For instance,

many of our forefathers were vehemently opposed to such things as vaccination (p.40) and insurance (p.153), feeling that such things indicated a lack of trust in God. We discover how clerical attire was crucial in The Netherlands, but entirely inappropriate in America!

Sheeres makes accessible an important part of our Reformed heritage and I can highly recommend this book, not only for its educational value, but also for the fact that it's a plainly enjoyable book to read. One small drawback is the fact that there are no maps – the author seems to assume that we're to know where such places as Ulrum, Uithuizen, and Smilde are in relation to one another. Aside from that, this is one of the best church history books that I've read in a while.

Readers interested in learning more about the Secession of 1834 will want to read *Patrimony Profile: Our Reformed Heritage Retraced, 1795-1946*, by W.W.J. VanOene (Winnipeg: Premier, 1999). This is the most complete work in English on this subject.



Modernism, Post Modernism, Need for Change?

Over the past year there have been several thought provoking articles written by Dr. Oosterhoff, Rev. Stam, and others around the topic of modernism and post modernism. The question was also raised about the need for change in worship services in the liturgy or makeup of the services to make them more appealing to the youth and non-members. I have especially enjoyed Rev. Stam's candid editorials. There were also writings published in other magazines on this issue, giving reasons for change and using the excuse of "post modernism" and the effects it is having on the churches at large. It is a concern, especially to read an article from a local minister and his interpretation of trends and labels within the church. The concerning issue from some articles read is that there seems to be a cry out there for change and adaptation or modification of our worship services to address today's so called "worldview or post modern" influence within the churches. If we don't adapt, we will lose members especially young members and the church will deteriorate.

The question needs to be asked, "Who is in control? God or Man?" It may seem obvious, but some want to assume control. The point to be reinforced is that God is unchanging and his Word is sure. He is the same today as He was from the beginning. God's saving grace and salvation given to man is no different today as it was in the early church. What has changed is man, and man's desire. The world is influential on the idealism of church and how the church is to operate. We have to guard against the "worldview" changing the church. In this view, man's importance is elevated and God is diminished. The authority of Scripture is being challenged and man's experience matters.

Changes in liturgy or order of worship in itself is not bad. All that we do in our worship service needs to be in agreement with God's Word and his view, not man's view.

I struggle with all this terminology of modernism, post modernism or the labelling of groups within the church such as liberal vs. conservative or legalists vs. gospelists. In short,

these "man-made" labels and the effects of the "worldview" on our churches is an excuse for allowing sin and man's desire to do things his way and disguising it as improvements to the church liturgy, worship styles, in order to attract young people or "outsiders."

It is also necessary to hold on to our Reformed traditions, as well as our creeds and confessions, for these were gifts given by God to help the church stay faithful. In times past, when the "worldview" was impacting the ways of the church, the Reformations happened because of deformation within the church. Deformation is caused by sin and man centered worship.

The reason that some feel there is a need for change in the church today is because the younger generations are losing interest. Are they losing interest because God's requirement in worship changed, or are their perceived needs changing? If we are not watchful, the desire of man is to move away from God-centred worship and to centre on man and his desires for change. Throughout Scripture we are told it is our heart that needs constant changing. We are to allow God's faithful preaching and active study of his Word to initiate that change in us by his Holy Spirit. We are to faithfully respond in singing, praising his name in worship, and during the week be good stewards fulfilling our daily occupations to his glory.

We must not allow post modern worldviews to harm the progress of God's church-gathering work. Today's generation must embrace God's Word as generations have done in the past. We all struggle with the influences of the devil, the world, and our own desires, no differently then generations of the past. Let's not use the excuse of the "post modern movement" or the "world view perspective" and its effect on our children, to make changes that are unfounded and unnecessary in the church. Allow God to control his church-gathering work and hold on to his promises. He is faithful and He will not let his chosen people lose sight of the goal.

*Respectfully submitted,
Henry Nieuwenhuis*

Letter to the Editor

After reading Rev Stam's article on our "frozen" psalms and traditionalistic services we just had to add our two cents worth! We agree that we need to be careful not to reject new ideas based only on the fact that we do not want to change because we like it the way it is. We also think that we should look at each change that comes along in the light of the Bible and ask, is it more biblical? We will be the first to admit that we are not fond of change. This subject is very near and dear to us and when we heard that the Psalms were going to be revised we were really upset about it. (As one of us is an organist in one of our churches, and have been playing these Psalms in church for the past twenty years, we still haven't grown tired of the tunes nor the words!) Why must the Psalms be revised? They are written beautifully.

We have spent some time looking at the revisions on the Internet and must question *why*? Why are we spending the time and effort on these revisions? Take Psalm 1, for example. Has the language gotten any easier? (No disrespect to the people who have spent countless hours doing this work; please do not be offended.) But in order to get rid of a few thees and thous we have shuffled the same words around, thus causing us to have to start our memory work all over again! Some of us already went through the revisions in 1984 and if we're not paying attention we'll find ourselves singing the Psalms how they were formally written. Now it seems that learning them for the second time was rather redundant. Let's face it, once the revised book comes out, we won't be singing this version anymore, just like we don't sing from the last version (1984). That's really quite sad.

Looking at the new changes, a lot of the Psalms are hardly recognizable to what they are right now, i.e. Psalm 122. Can someone please explain to me any biblical advantage? As for clarity? We certainly don't see any difference. It's not easier to understand, but it seems that it's changed just for the sake of change. We don't believe that our children don't understand the language of the Psalms. Every one of them knows what Thee, Thou,

and Thy mean and it would be no more difficult for them to learn than it was for us. If the language of the Psalms was the same as the King James Version or even of Shakespearian style (maybe we should revise him), we would say it is time to revise it, and yes there are a few psalms in the psalm book that are difficult to read, but do we have to make it so simple that there is no poetic beauty left? It is good to have some solid food rather than watered down gruel. As for some of the other words or phrases that the children might not understand, well, isn't that what we as parents are here for, to teach our children? (As a side note, if Thee, Thou, and Thy are supposed to be gotten rid of, why are there four hymns in the new book that still use these words?)

We have spoken to many people about these revisions and haven't yet come across anyone that likes the idea. Look around yourself next Sunday when you sing some of the more familiar psalms and see how many can sing them without having their Psalm book open. Is that not a wonderful thing to see? Do we want to change that? The Psalms are very beautiful and there is a Psalm for every occasion whether you're happy or sad. It's a wonderful blessing to be able to use these Psalms in our daily lives as we go about our work without having to read them out of the Psalm book, just singing them from memory.

We hope that we don't just decide to go along with the changes because it seems like the thing to do. As congregations, we should have some input over whether we want to change and you will find a lot of us really like the Psalms just the way they are. As a church we have, with the Lord's blessing, continued to grow, and we have not had, and are not facing a mass exodus of any age group. This is the Lord's blessing, this has nothing to do with how old or new our Psalms are and how traditionalist or not, our services are. Let's trust God's wisdom and strength to keep us on the right path and not rush senselessly forward to changes that we believe may cause problems.

Kind regards,
Ed and Jennifer Vander Vegte

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.

Press Release of the Combined Meeting of the Board and Committee of Administration, Inter-League Publication Board, November 14, 2007, Fergus, ON



The chairman of the Board, Mike Vandeburgt, opened the meeting in a Christian manner, and welcomed everyone.

Roll call: For the Board – representing the League of Men’s Societies in Ontario, Mike Vandeburgt and Dan VanDelden. Representing the League of Women’s Societies in Ontario, Mary DeBoer and Betsy Kingma. For the Committee of Administration (CoA) – Paul DeBoer, Cathy Jonker, Brian Jager, Annette Nobel, Debbie Swaving, and Theresa Westrik.

The agenda was established.

Progress Report

Cathy Jonker reported on the progress of books being printed or

reprinted. A study on the *Song of Songs*, by Prof. Ohmann, has been printed, and *Purim: The Book of Esther*, by Rev. J. R. Wiskerke, has been updated. Both are now available for purchase.

Marketing Report

Theresa Westrik gave an update on efforts made to promote the ILPB. Bookmarks have been printed to be distributed with the *Horizon* magazine and at the men’s league day. Representatives continue to receive regular newsletters. Book reviews on new books available are requested from *Clarion*, *Christian Renewal*, and *Horizon*. A mid-winter sale will be held to promote some books.

Financial Report

Brian Jager distributed the balance sheet and income statement. The financial situation is good; funds are available to print more books. The receivables are mostly current and expenses are in line.

Sales Report

Debbie Swaving presented her sales report showing sales are slightly down.

Website

Paul DeBoer reported that the ILPB now has its own website, www.ilpb.ca. There is a link on the website so that users can e-mail orders directly to the ILPB.

Board updates

Mike Vandeburgt gave an update on the progress of books that the Board is considering to publish. Discussion was held as to how the ILPB could promote good study books from other publishers.

General

Mike Vandeburgt has completed his term on the ILPB and he was thanked heartily for all his time and effort expended on its behalf. Dan VanDelden will be the new chairman. General question period was held and the press release approved. Paul DeBoer closed the meeting with prayer.



Clarion Advertisements

Advertisements:
Announcements of Weddings, Anniversaries (with Open House) should be submitted six weeks in advance.

BIRTHS

*I will sing of Thy steadfast love, O LORD, for ever; with my mouth
I will proclaim Thy faithfulness to all generations.
Psalm 89:1*

With great joy and thankfulness we announce that the Lord has entrusted into our care another covenant child,

ANNIKA NICOLE

Born on August 17, 2007

Hilco and Ann Tamminga (nee Koster)

Jodi, Joshua, Kyle, Lauren and Nathan
hat@ciaccess.com

RR 1, Bothwell, Ontario NOP 1C0

With joy and delight, and thankfulness to the God of Life and Grace, we have been entrusted with two healthy daughters

SAMANTHA JOY

and

EMMA GRACE

Born on November 5, 2007

to **Laura and Francis VanDelden**

2nd and 3rd grandchildren for Gerry and Gayle Jansen van Doorn
15th and 16th grandchildren for Sijzo and Lynn VanDelden
920 52nd Street SW, Wyoming, Michigan 49509 USA