



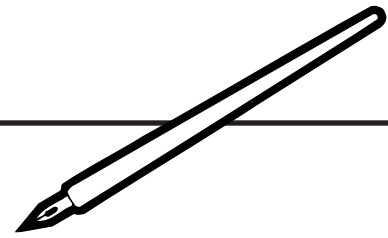
Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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Drenched with the Spirit

By J. Geertsema



What does God promise us in 1996?

We have entered the Year of our Lord nineteen-hundred-and-ninety-six. Also in this year we may rest in the promises of the LORD. This leads us to ask what our God promises us for 1996. We have a clear answer in Question and Answer 22 and 23 of Lord's Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Question and Answer 22 read:

What, then, must a Christian believe? All that is promised us in the Gospel, which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith teach us in a summary.

Answer 23 gives this summary in the Twelve Articles or the Apostles' Creed.

Dealing with Question and Answer 22 of this Lord's Day in the catechism class, I used to ask the students, "What does God promise us in the Gospel?" Often the answer was "Eternal life." My response would come somewhat as a surprise: "Poor boys and girls!" Explaining this response, I said, "What you say means that God's promises are merely something for the future, for the life after this life, and not for our life here and now on this earth."

When we apply this to 1996, it would mean: God's promise is that, if we die in this coming year, we shall depart to be with the Lord. This is, undoubtedly, a rich promise. But if this were all we could say, we would be in a very poor condition with respect to our life here on earth in 1996. For this present life in the new year we would be left to ourselves.

Why do we so easily link the promise of the Gospel with eternal life? Most likely, the cause is that the word "promise" seems to imply a future gift. If we promise something to someone, this means for us that that person does not now have this "something." At some future date we will give what we promise. Therefore, when we read in the Scriptures that God gives His promises, we think of fulfilment in the future, and this makes us think of eternal life after this life. However, even though the life that is to come certainly is included, God's promises are not restricted to a future eternal life on the new earth. God's promises are no less for this life here on earth in 1996.

What we confess in Lord's Day 7, as quoted above, makes this completely clear. For it says that we, Christians, must believe "all that is promised us in the Gospel." The word "all" points to all God's many promises in their entirety. We have to take them "all" together.

The Catechism defines the contents of "all that is promised us in the Gospel" by saying that these promises are summarized in "the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith" which we often call "the Twelve Articles" or "the Apostles' Creed." We could also speak of a three-fold promise, as Prof. Dr. K. Schilder wrote:

We do count twelve but, in fact, there are three: I (1); II (2-7); III (8-12). Those three main articles (or parts) are determined by the presence of three Persons.

The next Lord's Day (8) affirms this by stating that these articles are divided "into three parts: the first is about God the Father and our creation; the second about God the Son and our redemption; the third about God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification." Schilder, therefore, continues:

We see three *Persons*. . . . Three who are distinct from each other and who are known by us as distinct: . . . "the" Father, "the" Son, and "the" Spirit, the Three with whom we are acquainted, whom we have met because They met us, according to their eternal Plan.

Yes, that's what it is: we have *met* Them. For They *came*, each in his own way, in his turn; each according to the program and order of the part assigned to Him in the work of salvation. The One did this, the Other that, and the Third again something else.

Schilder places the coming of God to His people in the framework of the history of revelation. In this history we see the triune God come and give Himself to man in His three-fold work. (Compare here Art. 9 of the Belgic Confession.) In the beginning there is the action of God the Father regarding our creation. This includes His ongoing work of upholding what He created before and after the fall in sin. Therefore, we speak first of God the Father and our creation. We know Him as our Maker.

Then, in the "middle" of history, there is the action of God the Son in our redemption. Therefore, we speak in the second place of God the Son and our redemption. We know Him as our Saviour. And when this earthly work of salvation was accomplished, God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, sent the Holy Spirit from the Father, as He was promised to God's people, to work their sanctification. So, we speak in the third place of God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.

Clearly, when the Catechism says that our God wants us to believe "all that (He) has promised us in the Gospel," the contents of all these promises is the triune God Himself. He came to His people in the history of His Self-revelation – in the history of His great works of creation, of redemption, and of sanctification. In this coming to His people, He gave Himself to them as their God. To Adam and Eve, to Abraham, to Israel at Mount Sinai, when He established His covenant with them, God said: "*I am the LORD your God.*" This is the summary of all God's promises: "I (your triune God) am the LORD your God." This is the basic, all-encompassing promise of the Gospel. This basic promise is not only stated and repeated in the Gospel of both the Old and the New Testament. This basic, all-encompassing promise is also sealed to God's covenant children in their baptism.

This is not just a promise for the future. When God speaks His promise, "I am the LORD your God," He does not use the future tense: "I will be your God," even though this future is implied too. No, when He establishes the covenant, God uses the present tense. He does not say: "I will be" but "I am." It is a present reality. In other words, the term "promise" does not point as such to a future reality but rather indicates the *form or character* of God's speaking. When God addresses His covenant people with the words, "I am the LORD your God," and therewith gives Himself to them as their God, this speaking and giving is a promising speaking and giving. The promise-character of God's speaking comes out in the fact that God's speaking and giving of Himself is always accompanied by the implied

requirement of faith. God addresses His people with the words: "I am your God" as a present reality. This is how He has come, comes, and continues to come to His people. This is how He gave, gives, and continues to give Himself to them in His covenant Word: He is their God. And He wants His people not to reject Him, but to receive Him in faith and to rejoice in Him as their triune God.

Let me illustrate this promise-character of God's speaking with 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1 and its reference to the Old Testament. Paul admonishes the church at Corinth "not to be mismated with unbelievers" (v. 14). He adduces as ground, among other things, that the temple of God has no agreement with idols. Then the apostle adds (v. 16):

For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, I will live among them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

These words of God which Paul quotes can be found in several places in the Old Testament. They occur, for instance, in Lev. 26:11-12. Here God promises His people that, if they love Him in faith, He will make His abode among them and, so the LORD says, as promise:

I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. I am the LORD your God who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt.

In Lev. 26, the promise is in the future tense: "I will be your God." But this promise in the future tense has its basis in that promising speaking of God in the present tense: "I am the LORD your God." The future is rooted in the present reality.

We see the same in the passage in 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1. The quotation from the Old Testament applied to the Corinthian congregation is in the future tense: "I will be their God." This promising word of God in the future tense comes after a word of promise in the present tense: "We are the temple of the living God." This being God's temple implies the reality of God's basic promise: "I am your God." He is their God, they are His holy people. And they remain God's temple by reacting in faith to this word of Paul about their being God's temple. Precisely in the way of their believing this truth, while the LORD works this faith through this very word of promise, will God remain their God and will they remain God's people. In other words, the very fact that Paul, following God's Word in Lev. 26, continues a present reality (we are God's temple) with a future promise (God will be our God) makes clear that

the word about the present reality has also the character of promise. It is a word that God wants to be received in faith.


Another example of this promise-character of God's speaking is found in Luke 10:5-6. Christ sends out seventy disciples to God's covenant people. The first thing they must do when entering a house is greet the people in it with the greeting of God's saving kingdom which has come in and with Christ: "Peace for this house." This is the messianic peace that God gives them as their God in His Son Jesus, the Christ. The Lord continues to say: "And when there is a son of peace, the messianic peace that you give shall rest on that house. It is given in the greeting. It is there as a reality. And it will remain there. But, warns Christ: If there is not a son of peace in that house, the peace you give will return to you. This word "return" implies that the peace really was given and was there as a present reality, but that it was not received in faith. It did not meet with faith. Therefore, this gift of the messianic peace would return to the messenger of peace. We understand this when we keep in mind that God's speaking has the character of a promising speaking which must be received in faith.

Therefore, this is the great promise we receive also for the year 1996, that our God says to us, every day in this new year: I, the triune God, am your

God. He gives Himself to us: He, the Father, as our Maker who sustains us, and He the Son as our Redeemer who saves us, and He, the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier, who makes us holy for our God. With this God, promising and so giving Himself to us as our God, we have everything for this life and for eternity.

Indeed, this promising speaking of the triune God: "I am your God," is not based in any work or merit of ours. It is pure grace, totally undeserved. It is only true in Christ as our Mediator in the covenant. In Him alone do all God's promises find their "Yes," their reliable truth (2 Cor. 1:20). But in Him, then, this promise is true for 1996 too and holds everything that we need for our life and salvation in time and eternity. It holds everything that pertains to our being His creatures whom He sustains and leads. It is everything that pertains to salvation, to forgiveness of sins and righteousness and eternal life. It is everything that pertains to sanctification, the insight into God's will and the strength to walk in His ways.

Since we have God's great promises for this new year, we can enter it in this faith in Him as our God.

¹K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, vol. 2 (Lord's Days 5-7), Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1949, p. 595-596. 

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MEDITATION

By G.Ph. van Popta

Read Acts 20:17-38

“Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock. . . .”

ELDERS

Paul had laboured long and hard in Ephesus. It was time to move on. The tearful farewells had to be made. Paul was headed for Jerusalem. He did not know exactly what would happen; however, the Holy Spirit had told him that he would face imprisonment, afflictions, maybe even death. He knew that he would not see the elders of the church at Ephesus again. Because this was a final farewell, he charged them to remain faithful to their office and calling.

The apostles are gone. The office of apostle was a unique office held by only a few men. With their deaths the office disappeared. However, Christ has given elders. The office of elder will last until the return of the Lord Jesus. Wherever the apostles planted churches, they appointed elders. In letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul even gave very explicit requirements for the office. This instruction of Paul has served the church even until today.

Paul urged the elders to take heed to the flock in which the Holy Spirit had

made them overseers. Electing a man to the office of elder is not a matter of “getting your man into the consistory.” The congregation is involved in the selection process, but it is the Holy Spirit who makes them overseers.

They must care for the church which God has obtained with the blood of His own Son. The church is God’s church. He paid a big price for the church. It cost God the blood of His only beloved Son. The church is precious to God. Take care of it, elders!

As they care for the church, the elders must realize that fierce wolves are seeking to attack it. These wolves will come from the outside and from within. The attacks from the outside come from the world. One time the wolves will bare their teeth in blatant persecution. Another time the wolves will come in sheep’s clothing and seek to seduce the church with its music and night-clubs, its movies and its literature. Wolves are only interested in sinking

their teeth into the flesh of the sheep, especially the lambs of the flock.

Elders must also be alert for attacks that come from within the congregation. False doctrine will rot the church inside out. If people are allowed to speak perverse things, they will draw the disciples away after them.

Elders have a big job. They have to lead the congregation, teach and admonish it. They have to give oversight. It is a big job, but they can do it by the power of the Word of God. Paul commended the Ephesian elders to God and to the Word of His grace.

The Word of God is able to build up. The apostles spoke the Word while they were still alive. We have the written record of their teaching and admonition in the letters of the New Testament. Let the elders use the writings of the apostles and prophets to build up the church of God. Let us, members of the church of God, allow the elders to build us up in the apostolic doctrine of salvation. **C**

What’s Inside

Here you have issue number 1 of volume 45 of *Clarion*. For 44 years now, *Clarion*, and its predecessor, *CRM*, has been found in your homes and the homes of your parents and grandparents providing articles for your edification and enjoyment. In 1952 when some courageous brothers recently immigrated from the Netherlands decided to start a magazine, they stated that their goal was to publish a periodical for the development of life which is bound to the Word of God as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity. That remains our goal. May we be worthy successors of these courageous brothers.

In this issue, Prof. Geertsema writes about our faithful covenant God who gives Himself to us and so gives us everything we need for this life and the life to come.

We are very pleased to present you with a new (temporary) rubric which will run for seven issues called: “Theological Reflections on the Charismatic Movement.” Dr. Hans Boersma will take us through a lot of scriptural data to give a sound perspective on this movement.

Rev. Andrew Pol contributes a small piece on prayer and Bible study. This is meant for all, but especially the young people. Parents! Please place it in your children’s hands!

Dr. Gootjes reviews a book of speeches about aspects of the life and work of John Calvin.

You will find some reports about churches nearby and far away and, finally, the contributions of some readers.

May the Lord bless you in 1996!

GvP

Drenched with the Spirit

Theological reflections on the charismatic movement¹

By J. Boersma

What are we to think of the charismatic movement? What are we to think of speaking in tongues? What are we to think of continued prophecy? These kinds of questions seem to surface with ever greater urgency in today's theological climate. Perhaps this is partly due to the increased appreciation of the subjective and the emotional, both in society at large and in the church. It would be too easy, however, to write off the charismatic movement as being in tune with the general drift of society. Reformed churches cannot afford to ignore the charismatic movement or to close their eyes to its dramatic impact, also on our own tradition. Only carefully construed biblical and theological answers will do.

In this series of seven articles, therefore, I will pay attention to some exegetical and theological questions surrounding the issues raised by the charismatic movement. To do this, we will start with Spirit baptism. Spirit baptism is something which many charismatics regard as the foundation of the distinctives of their theology. This Spirit baptism is often seen as a spiritual experience which comes *after* faith, as a second experience which initiates a second, richly rewarding, and more mature stage of one's spiritual walk of life. Prophecy and tongues are usually regarded as the results of this second blessing which a believer may experience. Therefore, questions about tongues and prophecy are inseparable from the issue of Spirit baptism. What is Spirit baptism? Is it indeed a second blessing in addition to the gift of the Holy Spirit in regeneration? Can we still expect Spirit baptism today? These are the questions that must be asked first.

In particular, two contentious questions have to be raised: (1) Is Spirit baptism a second blessing in addition to the gift of faith? And (2) is the experience of Spirit baptism something which a Christian must still expect today? Many charismatics will answer both questions in the affirmative. If, indeed, Spirit

baptism is an additional blessing – one which moreover is normative for today – then it is reasonable to also expect tongues-speaking today. On the other hand, if Spirit baptism is identical to regeneration, or if it is something clearly tied to the early phase of the history of the New Testament church, then this gift of tongues is out of bounds for today. In the meantime, a positive answer to the first question does not necessarily entail a positive answer to the second. If Spirit baptism is a second blessing it does not automatically follow that such a second blessing can still be expected today.

The Holy Spirit in all believers

Many discussions on this topic centre around three or four passages in the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit is poured out. The question is often asked: Were the Samaritans (Acts 8), was Cornelius (Acts 10), and were the Ephesians (Acts 19) already believers when they received the Holy Spirit? If they were not, it becomes more difficult to make a distinction between the initial gift of faith and Spirit baptism. This would mean that faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit coincide, that both would stand at the beginning of the Christian life. In that case, every believer could say with Lord's Day 20 that the Holy Spirit is also given to me. If, however, the Samaritans, Cornelius and the Ephesian disciples were believers already before they received the Holy Spirit, a separation between faith and Spirit baptism becomes a possibility. In that case it becomes more questionable whether or not every believer has received the Holy Spirit. In fact, this may well lead to a distinction between two different groups, two different levels of Christians: one with and one without the experience of Spirit baptism.

While these passages warrant attention, it is nevertheless a good rule of thumb to first come to an understanding of how the Scriptures usually speak about the gift of the Holy Spirit and about Spirit baptism, and only then to

look at specific examples that are mentioned in the book of Acts. If the overwhelming picture of Scripture is one in which every believer has received the Holy Spirit, this should make one careful not to make a few examples in the book of Acts the foundation for an overall teaching of a second blessing. Therefore, John Stott rightly comments, "[I]t is a fundamental principle of biblical interpretation to begin with the general, not the special."¹

Let us, therefore, have a look at the general picture first. There should be no doubt that every believer in the new dispensation has received the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament prophets clearly foretold the liberal outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Isa. 32:15; 44:3; Ezek. 39:29; Joel 2:28). Christ himself, in his discourse in the upper room, promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to his disciples (John 14:18-23; 16:7-8). All believers have been born again (John 3:3-8). All believers are children of God through the work of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:14-16; Gal. 4:6). All believers have received the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; 8:9,14; Gal. 5:25; 1 Thess. 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). The body of each believer, as well as the church as a whole, are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19-20; Eph. 2:22). The Holy Spirit is the pledge of our eternal inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 8:11; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).²

These texts are not usually the focus of discussion in the matter of Spirit baptism. Still, the attention to the phrase "baptism of the Holy Spirit" should not be the sole point of attention. It is good to emphasize from the start that every believer has received the Holy Spirit. For how can Spirit baptism be a second blessing, how can it be the gate to a second stage in the life of a Christian if every believer has received the Holy Spirit? If every believer has received the Holy Spirit there cannot possibly be any believer still waiting for a second baptism. There can be no two-tiered approach to the Christian life.

This means that in their zeal for certain gifts Christians should be careful not to ask for the Holy Spirit as if he had not yet been given. To pray for a rich measure of the Holy Spirit, for a more powerful working of the Holy Spirit in one's life, or to be filled with the Holy Spirit, is something else. Also, if there is a clear need for certain gifts, the apostle Paul encourages us to pray for them, especially for the greater gifts (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1,5,39).³ Still, it remains important to distinguish such prayers for a particular working of the Holy Spirit from a prayer for the Holy Spirit *as such*. Nowhere does Scripture give any indication that the latter is something which a *Christian* must ask for. The simple reason is this: Every Christian already has received the Spirit.

Baptism with the Holy Spirit

Of course, somebody might wish to argue: If every Christian has received the Holy Spirit does this necessarily mean that every Christian has also experienced Spirit baptism? Perhaps there is a difference between the two. Perhaps the Spirit is indeed given to every Christian as he is regenerated at the beginning of his Christian life, but does this exclude the richer and separate experience of Spirit baptism? Could there not be a second stage in the life of a Christian? This means that our discussion should now focus on the question whether Spirit baptism is identical to the Holy Spirit being given in regeneration or whether it is an additional blessing.

The phrase "being baptized with the Holy Spirit" occurs seven times in the New Testament (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:15; 1 Cor. 12:13). Let us have a look at these passages. The phrase is first of all connected to the event at Pentecost. When Jesus ascended to heaven He reminded His disciples to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). In all four gospel accounts we read that John the Baptist foretold this baptism with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33).

In the five passages mentioned so far, baptism with the Holy Spirit is connected to the day of Pentecost. However, Spirit baptism is also something which occurs after Pentecost. When Peter came to Cornelius' house in Caesarea he remembered the words of his Lord at the time of His ascension: "As I

began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as He had come on us at the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 11:15). This is the sixth occurrence of the expression "being baptized" with the Holy Spirit. Peter's words indicate a close similarity between what happened on the day of Pentecost and on the day that Cornelius came to faith in Christ: On both occasions the Holy Spirit "fell" on people;⁴ and on both occasions the words of the ascending Lord were fulfilled.

The unity of the church

A final text which speaks of Spirit baptism is 1 Corinthians 12:13: "For we were all baptized with one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free men – and we were all drenched with the one Spirit."⁵ As he does elsewhere, so also here the apostle disqualifies all distinctions that are irrelevant when it comes to faith in Christ, such as racial, social, and gender distinctions (cf. 1 Cor. 7:17-24; Gal. 3:28). In this connection, the apostle states in Galatians 3:26-27: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." In other words, the distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female are irrelevant when it comes to the one baptism in which all believers share. This mention of baptism alongside the unity of racial and social groups is found both in Galatians 3:26-28 and in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

This baptism is something in which all believers share. Baptism means to be washed with the Holy Spirit, "to be renewed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified to be members of Christ" (LD 26). When Paul says that all were drenched with one Spirit he refers back to an image which Isaiah used: "For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants" (44:3). The promised Holy Spirit is like a refreshing shower, an abundance of water pouring down from heaven. The result is that life begins to blossom. The church will spring up like grass in a meadow, like poplar trees by flowing streams (44:5). It means that the desert becomes a fertile field, and the fertile field seems like a forest. Justice will dwell in the desert and righteousness live in the fertile field (32:15).

The apostle Paul picks up on the agricultural images of Isaiah. When the

Corinthians came to faith, when they were baptized into the one body of the church, they were drenched with the one Spirit.⁶ They had the Spirit poured onto them like a rain shower. Since *all* were baptized with the Spirit and *all* were drenched with the Spirit it is impossible to restrict Spirit baptism to some believers. Paul emphasizes the unity of the church. This unity comes from baptism, which symbolizes baptism with the Holy Spirit.⁷ This baptism is a blessing. But it is not a *second* blessing which comes with certain gifts, such as prophecy and speaking in tongues.⁸ The blessing of Spirit baptism does not refer to certain gifts in the plural, but it speaks of the one gift of the Holy Spirit in the singular. John Stott aptly concludes: "Thus the gift of the Spirit (God's gift of the Spirit to us) creates the church's unity, while the gifts of the Spirit (the Holy Spirit's gifts to us) diversify the church's ministry."⁹

This conclusion does raise a number of questions. 1 Corinthians 12:13 is the only place where the apostle Paul speaks of being baptized with the Spirit. By using this terminology he clearly refers back to its use by John the Baptist, Jesus Christ and Peter. Yet, there is a difference. John the Baptist and our Lord spoke of Spirit baptism in connection with Pentecost. Peter, who speaks of it in connection with Cornelius' conversion, also refers back to Pentecost. Paul, however, connects Spirit baptism to regeneration and the initiation into the church by water baptism. Does this mean that Spirit baptism is not the same for the apostle Paul as it is for the rest of the New Testament? If this is not so, then how does Paul's use of this concept relate to its use in the gospels and in the book of Acts? Or, to put it differently: How does the event of Pentecost (the first six occurrences of Spirit baptism) relate to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit by faith (the last occurrence of Spirit baptism)? And what is the real significance of Pentecost? In the next issue I hope to make a start in answering this question.

Rev. J. Boersma is minister at the Canadian Reformed Church in Aldergrove, BC.

¹Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, 2nd ed. (London: Inter-Varsity, 1975), p. 31.

²On this general aspect of the Holy Spirit being present in all believers, see Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, pp. 19-28, 38.

³Gordon D. Fee argues, somewhat laboriously I think, that Paul does not place one gift above the other. He insists that Paul only

argues for variety in gifts, and that he does not place the one gift above the other (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], p. 623, n. 34; p. 643, n. 16). It is true that Paul stresses the interdependence of the gifts by means of the body imagery (12:21-26). He does so against the Corinthians' over-emphasis on tongues. But Paul's warning to put tongues in their proper place does not mean that there no longer is any difference in importance among the gifts. Paul's encouragement to "eagerly desire the greater gifts" (12:31) is too explicit to be avoided (cf. 13:13; 14:5). Furthermore, Paul compares prophecies and tongues in chapter 14 precisely to illustrate the superiority of the former over the latter. Of course it is true that there is a fine line to tread. Striving for higher gifts may never lead to boasting over against other members of the body (12:21-26).

⁴The verb "to fall upon" (*epiptō*) is used both of the initial outpouring of the Spirit in Jerusalem (11:15) and of the outpouring in Caesarea (10:44; 11:15). In Acts 8:16 it is also used of the Samaritan believers.

⁵My translation (HB). I have translated the Greek preposition *en* as "with." Some might take exception to this and prefer the translation "by." This would make the Holy Spirit the agent who does the baptizing, rather than the element with which one is baptized. All other six references to Spirit baptism have Jesus Christ as the agent and the Holy Spirit as the element of baptism. All

these texts use the same preposition *en* (cf. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, pp. 40-43). I have translated the phrase *hen pneuma epotisthēmen* with "we were drenched with the one Spirit." For a justification of this translation, cf. G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962], p. 170; D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], p. 46; J. Van Bruggen, "Baptism with the Holy Spirit," in *Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, June 19-28, 1989* [Winnipeg: Premier, n.d.], p. 202.

⁶Some are of the opinion that Paul does not allude to water baptism at all in 1 Corinthians 12 (James D.G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in relation to Pentecostalism today* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970], pp. 129-131; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, pp. 604-05). Beasley-Murray convincingly shows that Paul does allude to water baptism (*Baptism in the New Testament*, pp. 169-70). Especially the similarity between 1 Cor. 12:13 and Gal. 3:26-28 is striking.

⁷To be sure, Paul's emphasis in this chapter is not on uniformity but on diversity in the church. But this diversity comes from the unity through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Cf. J. Van Bruggen's comment that "Paul does not speak about things that all the believers have in common (their confession), but

about the individual gifts of the Spirit, attributed to the believers in diversity and according to His will. The different gifts are the result of *one* baptism with *one* Spirit" ("Baptism with the Holy Spirit," p. 201).

⁸Van Bruggen goes as far as to reject entirely the phrase "baptism with the Holy Spirit." He is of the opinion that there is "something very dangerous in this expression. It suggests that there is *one act* or *one experience*, which we can designate as *baptism with the Holy Spirit*. The idea of "once-for-allness" is carried over from water-baptism to Spirit-baptism because of the *word* baptism" ("Baptism with the Holy Spirit," p. 191). According to Van Bruggen, Paul does not connect the Holy Spirit with the initial act of faith ("the primary act of becoming a confessing Christian"), but only with the addition of the gifts of the Spirit (p. 203). However, whereas the *noun* "baptism" indeed does not occur in connection with the Holy Spirit, the *verb* does occur seven times. To speak of "Spirit baptism" is therefore biblically warranted. Moreover, Paul does allude to water baptism in 1 Cor. 12:13 in connection with Spirit baptism (see above). Finally, while I am sympathetic to Van Bruggen's emphasis on the continuous life in the fullness of the Spirit, he seems to exclude the Holy Spirit from the initial act of faith. This raises the theological question what role the Spirit plays in the initial work of regeneration.

⁹John Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, p. 86. 

Prayer and Bible Study

By A.J. Pol

Covenant

The Bible is a covenantal book. God graciously reveals Himself to sinners and commands us to respond in faith. Faith comes from the Word that is proclaimed (Rom. 10:17). The Holy Spirit strengthens our faith through the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. That is why going to church is important. However, a week is long and further interaction with God is essential for a healthy spiritual life. Reading the Bible as a family at mealtimes is a good habit, but you don't always have time in that context to focus on the meaning of what was read and to apply it to your own life. That is why it remains impor-

tant to take time for personal prayer and personal Bible study. A book with daily devotions can be useful, but such material should not take the place of reading and meditating on the Word of God yourself.

Prayer

Lord's Day 45-52 of the catechism present us with vital instruction on the importance of prayer and how to go about it. If you have trouble knowing what to pray about, read the explanation of the Catechism on each petition of the Lord's Prayer. This will give breadth and depth to your prayers. Do remember to pray for God's guidance before you begin your personal Bible

study and when you are finished, respond to His Word in prayer again.

Meditation

As far as Bible study goes, we must realize the importance of not just reading Scripture but also *meditating* on its meaning. Scripture teaches us about the words and works of the LORD. To know Him, we must study what He has revealed to us and think about its meaning for our own lives. The Psalmist takes time to think about how the LORD has revealed Himself: "I *meditate* on all your *works* and consider what your hands have done" (Ps. 143:5). He *meditates* on God's *promises* (Ps. 119:148). He also declares: "I

meditate on your precepts and consider your ways" (Ps. 119:15).

Guidelines

Here are a few tips for Bible reading and meditation. These are basic guidelines. In-depth study would require attention to more aspects.

1. Summarize *what the text says* in your own words. Do you understand its meaning?
A Study Bible or a one-volume commentary on the Bible can be helpful here.

2. What is the *purpose* of this text (understood in the light of the section in which it occurs, the chapter, the Bible book, and all of Scripture)? To answer this, keep in mind the following questions:

- a. What is revealed about the LORD?
- b. What is the connection with Jesus Christ?
- c. What is the link between the text and our lives?
 - * Is there a promise?

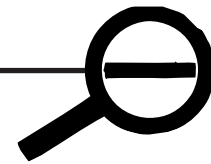
- * Is there an obligation (a command or prohibition, an encouragement or admonition, a positive or negative example)?
 - * Is there a warning or threat to keep in mind?
3. Having thought about this, what can you bring before the LORD in prayer?

Rev. A.J. Pol is minister at the Canadian Reformed Church of Guelph, ON.



PRESS REVIEW

By C. Van Dam



Christelijke Gereformeerde Synod meets in Holland (part 2)

The synod of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGKN), meeting in the Dutch city of Zierikzee, has for the most part concluded its work after meeting for three weeks spread through September, October and November 1995. What follows are some highlights of decisions made since the last report on their work was published in *Clarion*.

Relationship with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK)

For years the CGKN has had a relationship with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK). These are churches which came out of the federation of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) during the late 1960s. Concern has been growing within the CGKN about certain issues within the NGK such as the relationship between Scripture and confession, the rather free and easy-going church order of the NGK, and the decision of these churches to open the office of deacons to the sisters in the congregation. Another problem area was that there was still not a clear agreement between the two churches on the meaning of the appropriation of salvation. Because of these concerns

the synod urged churches which were seeking or developing relationships with a local NGK to exercise restraint.

The hope was expressed by the synod of the CGKN that their decision would not block ecumenical endeavours but that it would lead to serious reflection on these matters within the NGK and that in the end Scripture and confession would be more honoured in the midst of the NGK.

Women in office

The synod decided to appoint a study committee on women in office which would report to the next synod in 1998. Its mandate is to give a Scripturally based justification of the Reformed standpoint with respect to women in office. Within the context of the discussion that means a clear Biblical account of why the CGKN does not admit women to the ecclesiastical offices.

The need for such a study has been felt for at least two reasons. Local contacts with the NGK often mean that church members and office bearers are asked to give an account as to why the CGKN does not admit women to the

office. Also, it would be useful in contacts with foreign churches to be able to point to an official position with respect to this modern problem.

The debate about this issue was sometimes emotional and the fear that this was an opening to women in office within the CGKN had to be countered repeatedly.

Psalms and hymns

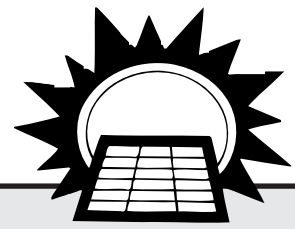
The CGKN are free to sing in their worship services the 150 Psalms, nine select hymns, "Ere zij God," and 40 rhymed Scripture passages which are available in a provisional edition ("proefbundel"). Apparently some churches consider this restrictive and sing all kinds of hymns. Synod therefore received a request to expand the number of hymns to include songs not directly based on a Scripture passage. Synod however rejected this option.

In another decision, Synod decided to adopt definitively the 40 hymns that up to now had only been provisionally accepted within the churches.

(The above was based on reports in Nederlands Dagblad)



RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

“..so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”
1 Peter 1:7

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Every week starts off with Sunday. Sunday is a special day, different from all the other days of the week. Not only because most people do not have to go to work, but because it is the Lord's Day, a day set apart for us by the Lord. The Lord knew that we, His children, needed a day to rest from our regular work. Even more important, we would need that day to concentrate on serving the Lord. It is a day where we meet each other as God's people. During the church service we praise the Lord together, in our prayers we bring all the needs of the church and of its members to the Lord, we also offer our gifts for the church and those who are in need. Best of all the Lord Himself speaks to us through the reading of His Word and the preaching of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit uses the preaching of God's Word to work faith into our hearts. That faith makes us rich.

Yes, faith makes us rich. It does not safeguard us from sadness, sorrow and suffering. We even may still have to experience financial disappointments, or unemployment, or other major struggles to look after ourselves and/or families. As long as we live here on earth we have to face all the consequences of sin: nothing here is perfect. Yet faith makes us rich in the knowledge that Jesus Christ has paid for all our sins. And that enables us to look beyond the earthly limitations and anxieties to the future. Our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, paved for us the way to a future without sin.

Sometimes we see people who do not serve the Lord and yet they seem to be very happy. Maybe they are rich and they seem to get everything just the way they like it. A fancy house, a nice family, health, a well-paying job, we would almost envy them the easy life they have. And yet they never go to church and do not want to listen to us when we try to talk to them about the Lord. They have no worries, for they have a large bank account, nothing can happen them! And they see us, church members, who maybe are struggling with childlessness, or loneliness, or poverty, or sickness and handicaps. So is it really beneficial to be a member of the church?

The Lord is wise in all His ways. He does not make any mistakes. The Lord knows all His children. Even when He gives us trials to endure, He does not forsake us! He *tries* our faith. That means that through the difficulties He helps us to come closer to Him. And we can show that to our rich, unbelieving neighbour! It will show when we do not complain when our allowance is cut as a result of the budget cuts, and when we do not support protest groups. We can show that our God did not forsake us when we continue to go to church on Sundays, and do not change our lifestyle and the way we behave and talk, even when we were hit with accidents or illness. That is how we can show that our wealth is our faith and that the Lord is with us.

Being wealthy does not make us rich. When the day comes that we have to die, there is nothing that we can take along. Money may make our life here on earth easier,

and maybe in some ways very pleasant. But how could we enjoy that wealth if we had to live without the Lord?

As God's children we are rich in the Lord. It is important that we read the Bible and listen to the words of the minister on Sundays. The more we read and hear about the Lord, the better we know Him and that knowledge is what the Holy Spirit uses to strengthen our faith. For with what we hear every Sunday we become more certain that Jesus Christ is our Saviour. He died for our sins, He is preparing a place for us with Him in heaven. Life here on earth is not the most important. What we are here is not what counts. We are travelling only on our way to the heavenly Jerusalem. Maybe we have to miss out on many beautiful and interesting things. But that does not matter when we think of the future that is awaiting us!

This does not mean that we will not have times when we struggle with our difficulties and maybe sometimes we even have doubts in our hearts about the Lord and our faith. We are also allowed to pray for better times when we feel that we can hardly handle any more problems. Some of God's children have very many disappointments in their lives. But nobody has to carry his/her own problems. The gift of prayer is there for all of us. And God will hear and comfort and give the strength to continue as long as He want us to. Wealth and health cannot give us that comfort, but faith does.

Let us be thankful that we may live in a country where we can freely serve the Lord, where we have the possibility to attend the church on Sundays. And let us thank the Lord that He works with His Holy Spirit the desire into our hearts to be members of that church and to go there to be strengthened in our faith. For that faith is our stronghold. It will help us to serve and praise the Lord. It will remind us that there will come a time that we, gathered together from all corners of the earth, may sing and praise and honour His glorious Name for ever and ever.

*Let me now hear what God the LORD will speak,
For to the saints who in their hearts Him seek
He will proclaim His steadfast words of peace.
From chains of bondage He will grant release.
For surely His salvation is at hand,
Prepared for those who honour His command.
Then in our land may radiant glory dwell,
Which on the earth shall have no parallel.*

Psalm 85:3

Birthdays in February:

2: Keith Ypma

P.O. Box 4583, Taber, AB T1G 2C9

12: Conny Van Amerongen

35 Bredin Pky #102, Orangeville, ON L9X 3X1

18: Cora Schoonhoven

24 James Speight, Markham, ON L3P 3G4

I wish you all a happy birthday.

Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Hwy. 20, RR 1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

THE HI-LITER

News from Here and There

By C. Van Spronsen



One of the ministers complains about the behaviour of the catechism students. (To protect our neighbour's honour and reputation no names will be mentioned!) He therefore lays down some ground rules: "1) Everyone shall be in the catechism room on the hour, sharp. Those who are elsewhere in the building or on the grounds will not be allowed in, unless parents give a lawful reason. 2) The downstairs meeting hall is not to be used as a gymnasium where all kinds of activities from soccer to wrestling may take place. The noise level is sometimes deafening. 3) All students are to leave the piano alone. Budding rock artists are to show their talents elsewhere." In class the constant talking is disruptive, besides being offensive and rude. Parents are reminded of their duty to talk this over with their children. More of us can identify with this problem, I think!

There is a follow-up. Two weeks later this same minister comments: "A few weeks ago I expressed some concerns about the catechism classes. Things are going much better these days in this regard. I am grateful for the cooperation of parents and students together. It makes the work much more enjoyable and profitable. May this trend continue." And may more of us be able to say the same thing!

It seems a new format is followed for Church Visitation in Western Australia. We read that "the visitors request written answers from the Consistory to the set of questions, thus allowing opportunity to discuss particular questions at greater length." However, not all support the new procedure. Byford expresses as its preference for now to "conduct Church Visitation as done in the past by responding to the prescribed questions off the cuff."

The long awaited visa to enter Australia has been granted to Rev. W. VanderJagt who had accepted a call from the Church of Byford. He was expected to arrive the end of November.

The Churches in Australia are seeking to strengthen their ties with the GGRI, their Indonesian sister churches. The Deputies Relations with Churches Abroad have invited a candidate minister from the GGRI to Australia. His name is Pila Njuka and he is a member of the church at Kataka, Sumba. Pila is an evangelist working at Rende, about 30 km. from Kataka. "The purpose of Pila's visit is not only to supplement his grasp of the English language but also to familiarize himself with church life in the Free Reformed Churches. . . . In this way the ties between the FRCA and the Indonesian sister churches will be strengthened."

More and more churches are developing a year-round program to reach out to children in the neighbourhood as a followup to the Vacation Bible Schools. A program was developed by the CBS Program Development Committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches. In Burlington West this pro-

gram will begin early in the new year, every other Monday evening from 6:30 - 7:30. Success!

Regional Synod East of November 15th gave concurring advice supporting the decision of the Council of the Church at Rockway, ON and Classis Ontario South to release Rev. T. Hoogsteen in accordance with art. 11 C.O. It is good to take note of Rev. DeGelder's comments in the "Family Post" calling it "a very difficult and painful decision with radical and far-reaching consequences for Rev. and Mrs. Hoogsteen, as well as for all the members of the Rockway congregation. Let us pray for all those involved that the Lord may give wisdom and compassion, as well as openings for healing and restoration."

The Theological College is organizing a Calvin Seminar for the general public in January on John Calvin. Dr. J. Faber will speak on the topic "Calvin in Conflict." The only requirement to attend is that you read about forty pages of Calvin's institutes per session!


In Kelmscott (WA) the consistory dealt with a request of the Free Reformed Retirement Village Association requesting the consistory's assistance in stimulating its members to become members of this association. The consistory wisely noted "that it is first of all the duty of the family members to care for the elderly. (1 Tim. 5:8) and **then** as communion of saints we have to share one another's burdens."

The council of the church at Langley, BC is entertaining various proposals, one of them being "to eliminate the segregated seating arrangement for elders (ie. to remove elders from "the penalty box") and instead have these brothers sit with their families." It would be interesting to study the original reasons for this "segregation!"

New technology can be put to good use for the Kingdom of God. In Edmonton, AB, a brother requested and received permission to publish information about the church on the Internet.

In a similar vein we read in the Fraser Valley Church News that cable is being utilized. "For the last couple of years much work has been done to bring the gospel of salvation via television. Rogers Cable 3 has a weekly program called "The Real World" on which Christian churches may evangelize. As a result of many hours of work, we gained a five-weekly slot for the Canadian Reformed churches."

Rev. P. Kingma, retired minister of Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA is seriously ill and was undergoing chemotherapy. May the Lord bless the treatments and be with him!

We wish all the blessing of the Lord for the New Year! 



Press Release of Regional Synod East, November 15 and 16, 1995 held in the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church, Toronto, ON

1. On behalf of the convening Church at Toronto the meeting was called to order by br. H. Kampen. He requested to sing Ps. 47:1,3 and read 1 John 2:18-29. In prayer a blessing was asked over the work of Regional Synod.
The chairman welcomed all the delegates and mentioned that the Church at Toronto recently called Rev. R. Aasman from Edmonton.
2. The credentials were examined by the brs. C. Lindhout and Rev. G.H. Visscher and were found to be in good order. Regional Synod East 1995 was then declared to be constituted.
3. The following officers were chosen: as chairman: Rec. D.G.J. Agema, as vice-chairman: Rev. J. DeGelder, and as clerk: Rev. G. Nederveen.
4. The chairman thanked the Church at Toronto for the preparatory work done, as well as br. Kampen for the opening of Regional Synod.
5. After a short break the agenda was adopted after the addition of 12 appeals which were all related to one issue on the proposed agenda. Three committees were appointed to prepare proposals to enable Synod to deal with two appeals, as well as with the matters concerning the request of the Council of the Church at Rockway to approve the dismissal of its minister Rev. T. Hoogsteen.
6. Synod was then adjourned for committee work during the rest of the morning and during the afternoon.
7. After supper Synod was reopened by the chairman. Psalm 118:1 was sung and roll call was held which showed that all brothers were present.
8. In closed session Synod dealt with two appeals.
 9. The acts of the session of Synod of November 15 were read and adopted.
 10. The chairman requested that Hymn 62:1,2 be sung and led in thanksgiving. Synod was then adjourned till the next morning.
 11. On November 16, at 10:00 a.m. the chairman called the meeting to order. Psalm 67:1,3 was sung. 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 was read and the chairman led in prayer.
 12. Roll call was held. The same brothers as the previous day were all present.
 13. Synod entered into closed session for a first discussion on the report of the Deputies of Regional Synod with regard to the decision of Classis Ontario-South of August 23, 24 and October 11, 1995 to approve the dismissal of Rev. T. Hoogsteen, minister of the Rockway Can. Ref. Church, as well as on the request of this Classis to judge the decision of the Deputies for not giving their concurring advice.
 14. Synod was then adjourned for committee work again.
 15. After supper the chairman reopened the meeting. Hymn 29:1,2 was sung and roll call was held.
 16. Synod entered into closed session again. After a lengthy discussion Synod decided
 1. Not to support the conclusion of its Deputies that concurring advice could not be given to the decision of Classis Ontario-South of August 23/24, 1995 and October 11, 1995 to approve the decision of the Council of the Rockway Can. Ref. Church to dismiss Rev. T. Hoogsteen from his service within the congregation according to Art. 11 C.O.
 2. To give concurring advice to the Council of Rockway to proceed with the dismissal of Rev. T. Hoogsteen, according to Art. 11 C.O.
 3. To deny the appeals of members of Rockway concerning this matter.
17. The Deputies ad Art. 48 C.O. for Classis Ontario-North reported that they were not called to act in this capacity.
Synod dealt with the report of the Deputies ad Art. 48 C.O. for Classis Ontario-South in the discussion mentioned in the articles 13 and 16 of this press release.
18. Synod thankfully received the financial report of the treasurer of Regional Synod, covering the period of November 1, 1994 - October 31, 1995. It was decided to keep the assessment for 1996 at \$1.00 per communicant member. The church at Lincoln reported that the books of the treasurer were audited and found to be in good order. Synod then discharged the treasurer from his responsibility for the period Nov. 1, 1994 - October 31, 1995.
19. Synod received with thankfulness the report of the Church of Brampton with regard to the inspection of the archives of Regional Synod, maintained by the Church at Toronto. It was reported that the documentation of Regional Synod 1994 were found to be in good order.
20. Regional Synod made the following appointments:
 - * Deputies Art. 48 C.O. for Classis Ontario-North: Revs. D.G.J. Agema and Cl. Stam, (alternate Rev. J. DeGelder) for Classis Ontario-South: Revs. P.G. Feenstra and G. Nederveen, (alternate Rev. W. Den-Hollander)
 - * Treasurer: Br. D. VanAmerongen, Grimsby.
 - * Church to audit the books of the treasurer: The Church at Lincoln
 - * Church to maintain the archives:

- The Church at Toronto
- * Church to inspect the archives: The Church at Brampton
- * Convening church for the next Regional Synod East: The Church at Ancaster; date: November 13, 1996

21. The personal question period was briefly made use of.
22. The chairman noted with thankfulness that censure ad Art 34 C.O. was not necessary.
23. The Acts of the session of Synod of November 16 were read and adopted and the Press Release was read and approved for publication.
24. The chairman requested the brothers to sing Psalm 146:1,2,3 and led in closing prayer. Then Regional Synod East 1995 was closed.

J. DeGelder,
vice-chairman of
Regional Synod East 1995

Press Release of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad

Synod Abbotsford mandated the CRCA to continue "to investigate the RCUS with a view to entering into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, making use of the findings of the Church at Carman." (Acts 1995, art 55. III.C.1 – p. 58). In order to fulfill that mandate, the CRCA delegated Rev. E. Kampen, br. A. Nap and Rev. C. van Spronsen to attend a meeting with some representatives from the Reformed Church in the United States. This meeting was held on October 18, 1995 in Spokane, WA. The RCUS representatives who met with the three Can. Ref. delegates were Rev. N. C. Hoeflinger, Rev. N. Jones and Rev. T. Jorgensen.

Opening

Upon mutual agreement, Rev. Norman Hoeflinger was appointed moderator. Rev. Hoeflinger read from Ps. 48 and Ps. 87 and led in prayer.

The first part of the meeting was spent giving brief overviews of our respective histories. The main focus of the meeting however was to obtain clarification about a number of points concerning confession, church order and practice in the RCUS. The RCUS dele-

gates had a similar focus with respect to the Can. Ref. churches.

Confessions

At the May 1995 Synod of the RCUS, the process of (re)adopting the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort was completed. A small number of changes were made to the language prior to adoption. Upon discussion it became clear that some of the changes had been made due to incomplete understanding of the original intent of some parts of those confessions, while some other changes were linguistic. Any change that was made had only the intent to clarify the Reformed doctrine. It was noted with gratitude that none of the changes affected the substance of the confessions.

Questions of interpretation of the Confessions:

- a. Attention was paid to how the Confessions are applied with respect to *Creation*. It could be noted that in the RCUS it is accepted that the creation of the world took place in six days, as taught in Genesis 1.
- b. With respect to *Sabbath Observance*, it was noted that in the RCUS there is generally only one worship service per Sunday. The RCUS however also uses the Sunday for Sunday School activities. According to the Constitution of the RCUS those who profane the Sabbath are worthy of censure (Art. 113). It was acknowledged that there was not as widespread consistency in this matter as is desirable.
- c. *Covenant and Election*. There is no additional statement beyond the confessions in the RCUS about this.
- d. *True/False Church*. Based on a document submitted to the last RCUS Synod entitled *Report of Committee to Study and Defend RCUS Polity* it is clear that the concept of true and false church does function in the RCUS, but there is more latitude than we are accustomed to in considering which bodies should be considered as unfaithful.

The function of the Confession – subscription and discipline

- a. *Confessional Membership*. The RCUS requires its officers to subscribe to the confessions. As for those who wish to publicly profess their faith, they are asked specifically if they believe the doctrines as

taught in the Heidelberg Catechism. Since the B.C. and C.O.D. have only recently been adopted, this form may be revised to include them.

- b. *Discipline*. The RCUS takes discipline seriously. There was a growing in applying stricter discipline.

Church Polity

- a. *Hierarchy/Autonomy*. With respect to the impression of hierarchy in RCUS church government, it was made clear that this is indeed an impression only. Though there is definitely a Presbyterian element mixed in with continental Reformed polity, many safe-guards are in place to prevent hierarchy. The representatives of the RCUS felt that historically the RCUS has not experienced the same degree of problems with hierarchy as we have experienced in our history.
- b. *Control of Pulpit*. In the RCUS, ministers are answerable to Classis. They are not members of the local congregation. The minister, however, must have consent of the consistory before another minister can be admitted to preach. (It was noted that though on paper there may appear to be significant differences, when it was discussed how things are worked out in practice there is much similarity in the practice of church polity.)
- c. *Admission to the Lord's Supper*. The RCUS does guard the table, and all who attend must receive permission from the elders. More latitude is allowed in that confession of the Reformed faith is not necessarily required of visitors. It was noted though that this is more a *theoretical* problem rather than a *practical* one. There were cases in the RCUS where visitors were denied the Lord's Supper. Those who did not hold the Reformed faith would not very likely attend a reformed worship service nor seek to attend the table if they did happen to attend.

Rules for contact

The RCUS delegates received a copy of our Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Since they already have a relationship with our Dutch Sister churches using the same rules, no difficulty was seen in entering a relationship under such rules.

Miscellaneous

A number of issues were briefly discussed, like: Theonomy, Evangelism procedures, attitude toward parachurch ministries like Bible leagues, use of alcoholic beverages, attitude toward smoking, amusements, TV/movies, eschatology, constitutions of local churches, apologetics, divorce/remarriage, and Bible versions. The RCUS delegates were surprised that apologetics did not

seem to receive much attention at our Theological College. As for Bible versions, there is no official policy in the RCUS, though versions like the KJV, NKJV, and NASB are most commonly used. No differences of sentiment were expressed that give reason for concern about the various issues

Closing

All present expressed their joy at the good meeting we could have together.

The atmosphere was brotherly. It was reason for marvel and gratitude that despite having separate existence and history since the time of the Reformation, we were still so similar, not only in our confessional position but also in our practices.

Rev. Van Spronsen read Ps. 133 and Ephesians 4:1-16 and led in thanksgiving prayer.

E. Kampen 

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address. They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length.

Dear Editor:

In the November 3, 1995 issue of *Clarion*, Br. W. de Haan wrote an article in "Reader's Forum" entitled "The rest of the story. . . ." He disagreed with the opinions of Prof. Douma published in the July 28, 1995 issue. He stated: "I am convinced that Br. Hordijk has done a bad service to the readers." I fully endorse Br. de Haan's statement. What possible profit could be derived from a personal opinion of Prof. Douma's that is not substantiated by Scripture?

"Was General Synod Hooegeveen 'unwise' as Prof. Douma suggested?" says Br. de Haan. Prof. Douma was delegated to Synod Hooegeveen and was reporter concerning the double delegation to this synod. Amongst other things, he wrote concerning the brothers who fought against the apostacy and tolerance of those who are now "buiten verband": "They have listened to the voice of Christ: 'Hold fast what you have' (Rev. 2:25)" (*Acta*, page 526, translation mine). If the latter was considered after the fact by Prof. Douma to be *disobedience*, then he should have proved this from Scripture, otherwise such an opinion is slanderous.

Br. de Haan is "very concerned about the situation in our federation." I share this concern. As a demonstration of the need for concern, I point to the June 8, 1990 *Clarion* in which we are told by Prof. J. Geertsema "that a sincere evangelical or Pentecostal believer is a fellow Christian" (page 255),

while Prof. C. van Dam writes in the same vein in an article entitled "Reformed or Evangelical?" in the October 1990 *Clarion* (page 470). He speaks of "severe weaknesses," not *errors*, as the Canons of Dordt do. Indisputably, the thinking of these so-called Christians is Arminian in nature, which is rejected in the Canons of Dordt. When beliefs and sentiments come first, and not the Lord Jesus, do such people then have a complete Saviour as confessed in Lord's Day 11? When people within the Canadian Reformed Church teach these types of things, they are placed under discipline – when outsiders have these beliefs, they are Christians! Does not Lord's Day 7 say something quite different?

The above was written by our professors in 1990 – how far have we progressed (regressed) since then? Much more can be said, but it could become an endless story. Thank you kindly for publishing this letter.

With brotherly greetings,
H. DeJong,
Edmonton

Dear Editor

Though I do not like to disagree publicly with one of our professors I did not think that Dr. De Jong's charge that the NIV is a "thought" translation should go unchallenged (*Clarion* 44.24 pg. 551). This charge is made time and again by many people who oppose the

acceptance of the NIV. The advisory committee to Synod '95, however, has shown in their carefully documented (250 pages with appendices) *Report to General Synod-Abbotsford 1995 – NASB, NIV, or NKJV: Which Version Now* that this charge is unfair and untrue and unsubstantiated. A careful reading of this *Report* shows that this assessment of the NIV is actually a caricature. This concern is dealt with extensively in appendices 1, 2, & 3 – almost one quarter of the *Report*. The *Report* concludes ". . . when all the factors have been considered, the NIV can hardly be characterized as paraphrastic or excessively free (95)." In fact the *Report* says in another place, ". . . the NIV is more idiomatic than the NASB and NKJV, but at the same time, as accurate as the NASB and NKJV. When all the factors are taken into consideration, it can be said that the NIV is *more accurate* since it more easily communicates the message as the original text did to the original hearers (p. 63 emphasis added)." Everyone who has doubts about the NIV should obtain a copy of this *Report* and read it carefully before they accept as true the charge that the NIV is a "thought" translation. The *Report* clearly proves this to be wrong and shows that the NIV is a faithful, accurate, literal and beautiful translation that should be received in the Churches without fear.

J.L. Van Popta
Ottawa 

Middle East Reformed Fellowship

A special report from the Sudan

Recently MERF's Chairman, Dr. Abdel-Masih Istafanous, received leaders of the Nouwairi Reformed communities of Southern Sudan. Some were former government ministers who were repeatedly detained and tortured by the Northern Sudanese Muslim authorities. Not long ago they were released and allowed to leave the country in exchange for government prisoners in the hands of the Southern Sudanese guerrillas. These men carried greetings in the name of Christ to all the believing Reformed communities outside of the Sudan. They also asked MERF to report to the Christian world on the extremity of the sufferings of the Christian communities throughout their country. They spoke of severe cases of starvation, numerous cases of mass killings and an open agenda to enforce the Islamization of the entire population. In several instances tribal leaders were detained and brought in front of the rest of their own tribe in order to pledge allegiance to the Muslim government and its anti-Christian constitution. They were also asked to publicly call on their own people to convert to Islam. Those who refused to do so have been taken away to be persuaded by different means of psychological and physical pressures. Those who persist either have been publicly killed in front of their own people or are taken away to unknown destinations. Close to 400 tribal leaders and prominent Southern Sudanese Christians are still unaccounted for. Several hundred are lingering in jail cells, being subjected to torture and psychological harassment.

The pressures are so inhuman that some of the Muslim military commanders have refused to carry out the government's orders and have instead helped men escape their ordeal. They then report them as killed or released after conversion to Islam. Food and medical care continue to be one of the most powerful weapons in the Muslim authorities' hands. One of the men said: "There is only so much hunger and sickness one can endure. The tempta-

tion is always there for one to say no harm is done in temporarily pledging allegiance to them or in just pretending to have converted to Islam."

Despite all of that, there are very few defections from the Christian faith. Most defections have been temporary and not genuine. Recently one of the Southern Sudanese evangelists (supported by MERF) reported the conversion of two Muslim army officers in the Malakal area.

The leader of the delegation says to us all: "We need your prayers. We also need your actions on behalf of your Christian brothers and sisters in Southern Sudan. Our sufferings are those we have in Christ's fellowship. In that way we suffer on your behalf and on behalf of all those who are truly willing to offer their lives for the honor of Christ. The question is – how many confessing Christians in the so-called free world are willing to stand by us? How many of them will actually stand up and be counted for Christ if they were to be called to suffer for Him the way we are now called to continue to do so?"

Biblical training news

The 83rd Augustine Programme Study Term was held at MERF's Evangelical Study Center in Larnaca during the first half of November. Laymen from Egypt and the Sudan were led by two guest instructors in the study of the Scriptures and Christian doctrine. Rev. Dick de Jong of the Netherlands led the group in a series of Christ-centred studies throughout the Old Testament. Rev. Ray Sikkema of Hamilton presented a series on God's sovereignty in the salvation of his people. Rev. Victor Atallah led the group in a lengthy exposition of Psalm 19 during the morning devotions. Many discussions were conducted on the need for true biblical piety among the Christian leaders.

Gospel broadcasting news

The MERF Gospel Broadcast Committee has finalized arrangements for two additional weekly broadcasts to be

aired on a short wave station based on the Seychelles Islands. These broadcasts are aimed mostly at those living in Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen and the Arabian Peninsula. The arrangements begin with a special series of broadcasts on the true meaning of Christmas.

Final drafts for a new building structure in Larnaca are now approved

The new building is designed to provide both a much expanded Evangelical Study Centre (ESC) and more suitable facilities for local outreach. The plans call for demolishing the old one-story ESC building and replacing it by a five-story structure (a basement and four floors). MERF's Gospel broadcasting recording studio and administrative offices will be moved from the present rented flat to the new building. The basement is designed for dining, recreation and other physical services. A large worship and outreach facility occupies a major portion of the ground and the first floors. This includes Trinity Chapel, nursery and Sunday school rooms as well as the pastor's study. The new ESC facilities will occupy the second and third floors. That will include two large study rooms and a sizable Research Library, in addition to housing for up to 40 trainees. The process is expected to start at the end of February 1996. Alternative rented premises have been secured to carry on with the work during the building process.

The Lebanon Reformed Fellowship (LRF), MERF's daughter organization in Lebanon, reports much hunger for the Word of God

Despite relative (temporary) stability now experienced by the Lebanese people, there continues to be much anxiety about the future. A Reformed Lebanese pastor recently remarked: "People are seeking alternative answers in the spiritual sphere. That is why oriental mysticism, new age religious beliefs and sectarian groups like

Jehovah's Witnesses are having much success in the country. Yet we have the true power of God unto salvation, the Gospel of Christ. Everywhere I turn there is interest in the Gospel. People are interested in deep and searching answers and we have them."

Thank you for your much needed support!


The Middle East Reformed Fellowship is very grateful for the continued

and growing support received from MERF-Canada. During this past year donations more than doubled with a total of \$49,305.57 received, including \$1,200 from the AlmSong evening held in Hamilton, enabling us to send \$47,000 to Cyprus. We sincerely thank all of you for your support. All those making personal donations will receive donation receipts. Please continue to support MERF with your prayers and gifts as they strive to

spread and strengthen the Reformed faith in the Middle East.

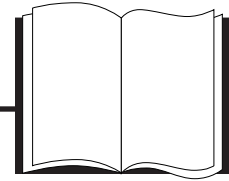
If you would like to make a personal donation please make your cheque payable to MERF-Canada and send it to
MERF-Canada

1225 Highway 5, R.R. #1
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

On behalf of MERF-Canada,
Rev. J. Mulder, chairman
Mrs. J. Van Dam, secretary 

READER'S FORUM

By H. Vanderbrugghen



Addressing God in prayer

Much controversy about how we address Almighty God has come to the fore lately. The recent decision by General Synod Abbotsford "to recommend the NIV for use within the churches" has added another dimension to this discussion.

As a lay person who admittedly speaks about the original languages in terms of, "It's all Greek to me," I never thought much about our use of "Thee" and "Thou." After all, we had always used these pronouns – we grew up with them – and our parents used them; therefore, it must be proper to address God as Thee. End of discussion!

Yet, in the last few years we see that the NIV has done away with the use of "Thee" and "Thou." Also the NKJV (which is the translation recommended by our Australian sister churches) has switched to You and Yours. Some of our church members have followed suit and address the Lord as "You" in private as well as public prayer. This has prompted others to ask, "What's wrong with it anyway?" Yet others accuse these members of being disrespectful, too familiar, or downright sinful.

The dictionary definition of *Thou* is "An archaic pronoun: the second person singular pronoun in the nominative case, used to represent the person or personal being who is spoken to: 'Thou wilt never get thee a husband' (Shakespeare)."

If we read the Bible as translated in the King James Version, we will notice that the dictionary definition is indeed correct, "Thou," "Thee," and "Thine" are in no way reserved for God alone.

e.g., "Thou shalt not steal" Exodus 20:15

"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are. . . ." Matthew 6:5a

This should make one wonder why the RSV retained the archaic form of pronouns like "Thou," "Thee" and "Thine" for our God, but switched to present-day English when addressing men, especially since no such difference is indicated in Scripture itself.

Allow me to quote from the preface to the NKJV, "*Students of the Bible applaud the timeless devotional character of our historic Bible (KJV) yet it is also universally understood that our language, like all living languages, has undergone profound changes since 1611. The real character of the Authorized Version does not reside in its archaic pronouns or verbs or other grammatical forms of the seventeenth century, but rather in the care taken by its scholars to impart the letter and the spirit of the original text in a majestic and reverent style.*"

The confusion about which pronoun to use when addressing God seems to stem from the fact that "Thee," "Thou" and "Thine" were retained in some Bible translations as the proper way to address God.

As reformed Christians we ought to question whether this is right. Is it right and proper to change from the archaic use of a pronoun to the contemporary use in an arbitrary way? Is there good reason to retain the use of "Thee" and "Thou" in some instances? Is there a good reason to give special status to

the use of "Thee" as opposed to "You?" We simply cannot conclude that "You" is a familiar form of "Thou." As shown earlier in quotations from both the KJV and secular literature like that of William Shakespeare, "Thou" is simply an archaic form of "You" and not in any way an elevated form. "You" is the only form of the pronoun in common use today. From queens and presidents down, everyone is addressed as "You." Also our earthly fathers are addressed as "You," at least I am not aware of an instance where a child would say, "Daddy, dost thou love me?"

If neither the Hebrew, Aramaic nor Greek text of Holy Scripture recognizes a pronoun used for addressing God which is different from one used for addressing man, why do we? If God in His perfect wisdom wished to use the same pronoun for man as for Himself, why would we change that? Is there something lacking in Scripture that we feel compelled to add?

Remember that this distinction is relatively new. No distinction between addressing God or man was known to the English-speaking world in 1611 or for many years thereafter. While God was addressed as "Thee," so was the murderer on the cross!

Once more allow me a quotation, this time from the preface to the NIV. "*As for the traditional pronouns "Thou," "Thee" and "Thine" in reference to Deity, the translators judged that to use these archaisms (along with the old verb forms such as "doest," "wouldest" and "hadst") would violate accuracy in translation. Neither Hebrew, Aramaic*

nor Greek uses special pronouns for the person of the Godhead. A present-day translation is not enhanced by forms that in the time of the KJV were used in everyday speech, whether referring to God or man."

Perhaps we should not be asking what is wrong with addressing God as "You," but what is right about addressing God as "Thou" Again I ask, if Scripture recognizes no separate pronoun for addressing God, why do we? Arguments such as: "It just sounds better," "It shows more respect," "It is more dignified," "We have always done it," are not rational or scriptural. These are emotional arguments and do not in any way explain why we compromise accuracy in translation.

The use of "Thee" and "Thou" exclusively for God may stem from pious ideas, but these ideas are not necessarily scriptural. Certainly, berating those who choose to use "You" in addressing the Most High, stems from a misguided piety. In my opinion, it is not only acceptable to address God as "You" but scriptural and proper. I do realize that change is difficult and even scary at times. Addressing God as "You" can seem to be disrespectful after a lifetime of using "Thee" and "Thou." However, try to consider that this change does not show a lack of respect at all, but rather a holy respect for the infallibility of Holy Scripture itself.

The time has come to accept that "thee" and "thou" are human terms and as such have no special status. Any rev-

erence attached to the exclusive use of "Thee" and "Thou" for God, is contrived and has no basis in Holy Writ. This should not mean that everyone must immediately drop the use of "Thee" and "Thou," but it does mean that we must accept "You" as a proper, respectful and a scriptural way to address our God and Father.

Webster's Illustrated Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1990 Tormont Publications Inc. **C**

The views expressed in Reader's Forum are not necessarily those of the editorial committee or the publisher. Submissions should not exceed 900 words. Those published may be edited for style or length.

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

Here are some puzzles to keep you busy in the cold winter weather.

CHARIOTS

Fill in each blank.

1. The Ethiopian eunuch was reading _____ as he travelled between Jerusalem and Gaza, Acts 8:27-28.
2. Pharaoh used all the chariots of Egypt to chase the _____, Exodus 14:6-8.
3. _____ saw a chariot of fire before being taken to heaven by a whirlwind, 2 Kings 2:11.
4. God commanded _____ to cripple the horses and burn the chariots of King Jabin of Hazor, Joshua 11:1,6.
5. Pharaoh gave his ring to _____ and made him ride in Pharaoh's second chariot, Genesis 41:41-43.
6. In a war with Israel, the _____ had thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, 1 Samuel 13:5.
7. When he saw the sword of Barak, _____ got out of his chariot and fled on foot, Judges 4:14,15.
8. Elah, king of Judah, was killed by _____, the captain of half of the king's chariots, 1 Kings 16:8-10.
9. Isaiah rebuked _____ for taking pride in the multitude of his chariots, Isaiah 37:21-24.
10. After he was healed, _____ got out of his chariot when he saw Elisha's servant following him, 2 Kings 5:21.
11. _____ told Solomon that God said to use gold for the pattern of the chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings over the ark of the covenant, 1 Chronicles 28:18,19.

THE DISCIPLES

Fill in each blank with the name of one of the twelve disciples whom Jesus chose to help Him in His ministry.

1. _____ and _____ were good friends, John 1:45.
2. _____ was a tax collector before becoming a disciple, Matthew 9:9.
3. _____, _____, _____, and _____ left their jobs as fishermen to become disciples, Matthew 4:18-21.
4. _____ betrayed Jesus, Matthew 27:3.
5. The son of Alphaeus was _____, Matthew 10:3.
6. The disciple Lebbaeus was also know as _____, Matthew 10:3.
7. _____ wanted to see the nail prints in the hands of Jesus, John 20:24,25.
8. The name used to tell the difference between Simon Peter and the other Simon was _____, Mark 3:18.
9. _____ took the place of Judas after Jesus ascended into heaven, Acts 1:26.

SCRAMBLED WORDS

by Busy Beaver *Henriette VandeKamp*

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. kross _____ | 5. Gpi _____ |
| 2. norc _____ | 6. ehors _____ |
| 3. klim _____ | 7. sgeg _____ |
| 4. wco _____ | 8. osoge _____ |

PSALMS PUZZLE

By Busy Beaver *Denise Vis*

Fill in the blanks.

- The LORD is my _____, I shall not _____. Ps. 23:1.
- The LORD is the _____ of my _____, whom shall I fear? Ps. 27:1
- As a hart longs for flowing _____ so longs my _____ for Thee, O God. Ps. 42:1.
- I lift up my _____ to the _____, from whence does my _____ come. Ps. 121:1.
- Hear my _____ O LORD, give ear to my _____. Ps. 143:1.
- I will extol Thee my God, and _____, and _____ Thy Name for ever. Ps. 145:1.
- I will _____ the LORD as long as I _____. Ps. 146:2.
- Hear my voice in Thy _____ love; O LORD, in Thy _____ preserve my life. Ps. 119-149.

WINTER WORD SEARCH

by Busy Beaver *Sharalee Vandenbos*

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

WORD LIST

Snowflakes	Holidays	Shopping
New Years Eve	Sports	Shovel
Snowman	Volleyball	Greetings
Presents	Hat	Sledding
Gifts	Cold	Skating
	Snowpants	Ice
	Wintercoats	Sleet

RIDDLES

Sent in by Busy Beaver *Kayla Vanderhorst*.

- What has teeth but never eats?
- What horse is found only at night?
- A dime and a quarter stood by a cliff, The dime fell over. Why didn't the quarter?
- Where do lambs get their hair cut?
- Why can't your nose be twelve inches long?
- What has keys but no door?

1. A comb
2. A nightmare
3. It has more sense (cents)!
4. At the bar-shop.
5. Then it would be a foot.
6. A piano.



From the mailbox

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Kayla Vanderhorst*. Why is gym your favourite subject in school? You are a very neat printer! Have fun doing the puzzles! Bye, Kayla

Hi, *Sharalee Vandenbos*. Wow, that was a big word search you sent in. It must have kept you busy for a while! Did you move to a new place? Bye, Sharalee.

Hello, *Henriette Vandekamp*. Sounds like you are a busy person! Have fun in the snow this winter! Bye.

Hello, *Marja Vandekamp*. Thanks for the drawing you sent in for the contest. It sounds as if you are going to have a busy winter, inside and outside! Have fun! Bye, Marja.

Hi, *Jason Vanderhorst*. Sorry, but I received your puzzle too late to put it in the Christmas issue. Hopefully, next year I can put it in. What kind of books do you like to read? Hope to hear from you soon. Bye, Jason.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Pieter Agema*. Do you enjoy your new school? How old are you? Your field trip to Hamilton sounded very interesting. Hope to hear from you soon. Bye, Pieter.

Hi, *Kristina Fennema*. I got your poem too late to put it in the Christmas Clarion, maybe it can go in next year. Did you spend a lot of time with your grandparents during the holidays? Bye, Kristina.

Hello, *Justin Broekema*. Yes, your picture is still in time for the drawing contest. It sounds like you keep very busy, too. How were your holidays? Bye, Justin.

Hi, *Dorothy Gunnink*. How is your new dog? Is she allowed in your house? I hope you had nice holidays! Bye, Dorothy.

Hello, *Pauline Boeve*. You have had a busy year! Sounds like it was also a lot of fun! Bye, Pauline.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Jonathan Slaa*. We're glad to have you join us. How are your finches doing? It's been pretty cold, so your skating rink must be lots of fun. Hope to hear from you soon. Bye, Jonathan.

Hi, *Tamara Dejong*. Thanks for the picture you sent in, and your letter too. I hope you have had a good holiday. Bye, Tamara.

That's all for this time.

Love to you all,

Aunt Betty 