

# Clarion

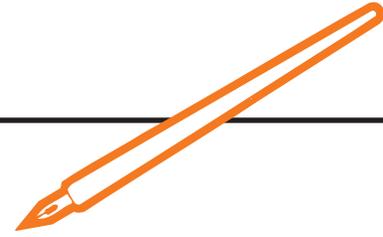
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*Willoughby Heights  
Canadian Reformed Church  
Langley, BC*



By J. De Jong



## Local pulpit exchanges?

### New developments

Some readers may be aware that the latest General Synod in the Netherlands gave the green light to a more advanced form of fellowship in certain situations with churches of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* (connected with what is here the Free Reformed) federation. The Synod, meeting last June in Berkel en Rodenrijs, indicated that churches of the two federations (Liberated and *Christelijke Gereformeerde*) could make agreements on “combined congregational meetings and Bible studies, along with – with approval of classis – pulpit exchange, admission of each other’s members to the Lord’s Supper, combined worship services, and combined celebrations of the Lord’s Supper.” According to the text of the decision, all stages of the process of getting to know each other must retain the goal of reaching ecclesiastical unity.

An accord like the one envisioned by the synod was recently reached in Goes, Holland. The two churches concerned have come to the point of permitting pulpit exchange in the local situation, and of admitting one another’s members to the Lord’s Supper. The churches had various contacts for years, including combined meetings of societies. Now they plan to cooperate in evangelism projects.

According to the report on the agreement in the *Nederlands Dagblad*, there is no intention of coming to a fusion. The minister of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* church indicated that the combined services are regarded as more of a symbol of unity. They currently experience their relations as one of growing towards each other.

Reaction on the part of representatives of the federation has been mixed. On the one hand there is thanksgiving for the progress made in coming to recognize one another in the unity of faith. But on the other hand there is a word of caution with respect to the effect of this move on the rest of the federation. Rev. J. Westering, a spokesman of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* who visited Canada in 1995, indicated that the deputies of the classis encouraged the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* church of Goes not to lose sight of the federation. Dr. A.N. Hendriks, speaking as deputy on the committee for ecclesiastical unity of the Reformed churches (Liberated), wondered whether this step does not run too far ahead of the national developments. In some places in Holland there is close contact between the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk* (the former “churches outside the federation” and the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* church. Yet the synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs specifically decided not to continue with unity discussions with the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*. Hendriks’ point is that the churches should not be giving two signals at once.

Reactions on the side of the *Christelijke Gereformeerden* have been generally positive. Elder D. Koole suggested

that, given the wide variety of opinion in the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* churches this agreement was a remarkable achievement. He indicated that people on both sides should not be too idealistic. The notion of reaching national or federational unity is in his view absolutely illusory. Local agreements of the kind reached in Goes are then seen as a positive means in order to strengthen the ranks in the fight against secularization and apostasy rapidly gaining ground all around us today.

### Assen 1926?

Another senior minister in the Liberated churches, Rev. C.J. Breen, maintained that before federational unity with the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* could be realized, there would need to be an agreement on the decisions of the Synod of Assen 1926 dealing with the authority of Scripture. This synod made far reaching decisions concerning the authority and interpretation of Scripture in the so-called Geelkerken case. Rev. Geelkerken took certain historical details in the paradise accounts as disputable, and this led to his eventual deposition. The *Christelijke Gereformeerde* churches have never taken an official stand on the decisions of 1926, and recent voices in the federation (Dr. J.W. Maris) have even expressed misgivings with the spirit behind the decisions of Assen.<sup>1</sup>

There is reason for Breen’s concern. Some years back, Dr. B. Oosterhoff spoke in an ambivalent way on the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis,<sup>2</sup> and more recently Rev. B. Loonstra<sup>3</sup> has also called into question the historicity and factuality of paradise events. All this indicates an opening for historical criticism among the more progressive sections of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*. While the recent synod of Zierikzee made some headway on the point of the appropriation of salvation, these elements of difference remain outstanding.

### The Canadian situation

It would not be appropriate to pass judgments on the developments in Holland and in particular in Goes from this distance. There are simply too many local details with which we have no familiarity. Yet we should allow these developments to function as a monitor for our own developments. Various opinions as to the possibilities of pulpit exchange on a local level, along with recognition of each other’s attestations are also found among us. Sometimes people think we must simply follow developments in Holland. And sometimes the suggestion is made that the federation simply functions as a hindrance to the great advances in union achieved on a local level. Is this a fair judgment? Perhaps a closer look at the church order will help us here.

## The role of Article 31

The Church Order represents a code of conduct to which we as churches in one bond have agreed to adhere. One of the more crucial points of agreement is that according to Article 31 CO we have agreed to accept as settled and binding all decisions of major assemblies lawfully taken, as long as they do not conflict with Scripture, confession and the adopted order. This implies that decisions of major assemblies relating to ecclesiastical unity with other federations must be received as settled and binding by all the churches. Is this hierarchical in itself? Not at all! The contact with other churches is regulated through the major assemblies. Article 50 regulates contacts with foreign churches. The reference to sister churches in the Church Order (see e.g. Article 4) clearly implies that we deal with those sister churches as a united group of churches, working as one bond through the lawfully appointed bodies. A united and federal approach to church relations is part and parcel of our church order, and an integral component of the agreements we have made together.

Let us give a few examples. As churches together in one federation we agree not to admit preachers who come from any other federation unless there has been an examination by classis, (Article 4 B 2). How is admission to be determined? Not through the local church, but through the classis, representing the churches of the region. The decision of classis is binding for the whole federation, and a minister, once admitted can be called to any church in the federation. According to Article 5, the churches may call a minister from a federation with which the Canadian Reformed Churches (as a federation!) maintain a sister church relationship. Admission is regulated by a colloquium.

Let us also look at the articles concerning admission to the Lord's Supper. According to Art 62 only members of the churches in the federation receive an attestation regarding doctrine and conduct. In Article 61, only members of a recognized sister church are admitted to the Lord's Supper with an attestation. What is meant in this case? Not simply another local church in the federation, but members of churches belonging to another federation of churches, that is, a federation of churches with which we have a sister church relationship.

In these examples, which concern both admission to the pulpit and admission to the Lord's Supper, the matters are clearly regulated from the standpoint of the federation as a united bond of churches. This does not mean that they are matters that must be decided by a "higher body," and that therefore the local church has no say in them. Rather, it means that these are matters in which the local churches have voluntarily agreed to abide by the approbation and will of the churches together, in order to promote the unity of faith and practice among *all the churches*, and to safeguard the true doctrine.

This principle is most succinctly expressed in Article 31, although it is reflected in the whole Church Order. Article 31 deals specifically with appeals, yet it incorporates within it a significant principle: "whatever is agreed upon by majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order." Here the churches willingly agree to abide by the decisions of major assemblies lawfully taken. Those assemblies are not hierarchical bodies, but represent the churches themselves, through their delegates.



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The Church Order clearly reasons from the standpoint of churches being obliged to each other by virtue of belonging to one federation. Therefore they make decisions regarding the admission of ministers from other churches to the pulpits or members from other churches to the Lord's Supper, only through the approbation of the federation, whatever "level" of assembly that may be.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, there is always the danger of abuses creeping in. But no one should disparage the process itself on that basis. If a decision is lawfully taken, and is based on the Word of God, it can only work for the well-being of the churches.

### Be warned!

If I may venture an opinion regarding these developments, I think that the voices of concern as expressed by various representatives on both sides of the unity talks in Holland are very worthy of attention and consideration. We must not be out to kill existing unity, but we should be out to gain the most comprehensive and widely accepted unity that is possible, even if that means holding back in certain local situations. Otherwise one runs the risk and danger of friction within the federations on both sides of the discussions. And unity on a local level should not come at the cost of division or polarization in other local areas. The issues are too serious to allow for polarizations on this level. To my mind, an honest approach to the Church Order requires that we deal with these issues *together*, and hold off on pulpit exchange, or even on combined worship services, until we have reached a measure of federational agreement that is truly promising for all parties concerned.

### Assen in Canada?

Should an agreement on the decisions of the synod of Assen be mandatory for unity here in Canada? The point is worthy of consideration, but it cannot be maintained as an absolute prerequisite. In the first place, as a new federation of churches, we are not bound by all previous ecclesiastical decisions made in Holland. And secondly, a progressive wing as found in the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* churches in the Netherlands is not present in the Free Reformed Churches on the North American continent. It may be appropriate to come to a memorandum of understanding on decision like Assen 1926, stating that the decisions taken in 1926 were lawful and required *in their context*<sup>5</sup>. Such an agreement would most likely not be a problem for the Committee on External Relations in the Free Reformed Churches, and it would go a long way in bringing us closer together.

With a requirement like this we would only be maintaining the same rule which ought to be maintained in discussions with the United Reformed Churches, *viz.* that we reach an agreement that the decisions taken in 1944 were lawful and required in their context. This is simply a safety measure which allows us to stay on course, and prevents us from entertaining an entirely new stand on what we see as God's guidance in the life and history of His church.

May the Lord grant His blessing upon all the efforts to pursue ecclesiastical unity in all local situations! May God so lead us that by brotherly discussion and reflection we can together discover what the will of God is for His churches in Canada today.

### LIFE'S EVENING VEILS

Waiting. Endless waiting.  
Eager to see a face.  
Eager to speak, to tell,  
Of how they ran the race.

But few, so few do come  
to share a cup and be  
a listening ear for them.  
– An ear-less eye will never see!

Up, up. Yes, make the time  
Put yourselves aside.  
Visit those who sit alone  
From dawn to even-tide.

There's no excuse. We all confess  
There's a communion of saints.  
Then go and find the lonely  
And prove Christ's comfort reigns.

K. Janssen

<sup>1</sup>At the convocation address in Apeldoorn last year, Dr. Maris suggested that Assen's decision regarding the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 can function strictly as a rational truth without demanding faith in Scripture as the Word of living God, cf. *Nederlands Dagblad*, September 10, 1996.

<sup>2</sup>Dr. Oosterhoff maintained the historicity of the fall, but held that the historical record of the events is cloaked in symbolic language. On this basis he and others in his church were not favourable to the decisions of Assen.

<sup>3</sup>In a book called *De geloofwaardigheid van de bijbel*, published in 1995.

<sup>4</sup>I exclude here the question regarding the admission of a guest to the Lord's Supper in a one-time situation only. My focus is on members of other churches who are to be admitted for an indefinite period of time.

<sup>5</sup>Here we restrict ourselves to the doctrinal aspects of the decision, and leave church political aspects aside. 

## What's inside?

This issue of *Clarion* takes you for a tour around the world.

We start the trip in the Netherlands with Dr. J. De Jong who, in the editorial, discusses Dutch church unity actions. From Holland, he "jumps the pond" to Canada.

The meditation takes us to the ancient world of the Old Testament church.

Then we follow Rev. A.J. Pol to Sumba, Indonesia.

Sisters Jane DeGlint and Alida VanderHorst conduct us through the new Willoughby Heights church building.

From Willoughby Heights we go to Zaire, Africa.

Then it's for a visit with Mrs. R. Ravensbergen to some of our special brothers and sisters.

We listen in on a discussion Dr. Faber and the Rev. Stam have been having in the foyer of *Cornerstone Church* in Hamilton.

A letter to the editor from south of the border and a book review tidy things up.

Fasten your seat belts. Enjoy the trip.

GvP

By G.Ph. van Popta

## The donkey and the lamb

*Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck.*

*Exodus 13:13a*

Every firstborn male creature was the Lord's. The Israelites were to sacrifice every firstborn male animal of their livestock – of their clean domestic animals: cattle, sheep and goats. The blood of the ritually clean animal was sprinkled on the altar at the tabernacle; the fat of the animal was burned to the Lord; the meat was given to the priests and their families for food.

The firstborn son, on the other hand, was to be redeemed. The Lord rejected human sacrifice, and yet the firstborn son of every Israelite family was special to the Lord. That son was to be devoted to the Lord, to a life of service at the tabernacle. However, the Lord chose the tribe of Levi to do this work as a substitute for the firstborn sons of the other tribes. And so the young lads of all the other tribes were redeemed from the work which was transferred to the Levites – redeemed for 5 shekels of silver. Instead of the eldest son of every family in Israel devoting his life to service at the tabernacle, the whole tribe of Levi was set apart for this work. But then the families had to pay 5 shekels of silver to the tabernacle to buy their boy back.

So that was the law concerning clean animals and eldest sons. But there was one more law concerning firstborn. And that was the law which concerned the firstborn of unclean livestock – of donkeys. *What to do with a donkey?* It could not be sacrificed at the tabernacle. Its unclean blood could not be sprinkled on the holy altar. Its unclean meat could not be eaten by the priests and their families. *What to do with the unclean donkey?*

The Israelite had a choice. If he wanted to keep it (after all, donkeys were important as beasts of burden) – if he wanted to keep the donkey, he could redeem it with a lamb. He then would have to bring a lamb to the tabernacle for sacrifice. The lamb would have to die for the donkey. If he did not want to sacrifice a lamb, then he had no choice but to break the donkey's neck. He had to kill it.

What is this all about? The context tells us that it has to do with the consecration (the setting apart) of the firstborn male of every Israelite woman and every domestic animal because of what God had done in Egypt, in the tenth plague.

You remember how that went. Israel was in slavery in Egypt. Moses had

delivered the same message to Pharaoh king of Egypt many times: *Let my people go!* Pharaoh stubbornly refused. Plague after plague, he refused. And then the Lord really did something. He struck dead every firstborn in Israel, both man and animal. The firstborn children and animals of the Israelites were passed over. They were protected by the blood of the lamb.

The night was called Passover. On the eve of the night, each Israelite family had to slaughter a lamb. They smeared the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of the house. Then they ate the lamb. When at God's command the angel of death came to strike dead every firstborn, he passed over the homes of the Israelites. They were protected by the blood of the lamb. But he killed the firstborn son of every Egyptian family and every firstborn male animal belonging to the Egyptians.

That day Pharaoh had had enough. He told Moses to take the Israelites and go. And God delivered His people with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

God had adopted Israel as His own – to be, as it were, His firstborn son. As a sign of that adoption, God said every firstborn son in Israel is Mine. As a memorial of that evening when God saved Israel and destroyed Egypt, the Israelites were to devote their eldest sons to God, and to sacrifice the firstborn of their clean livestock. It was a sign, a symbol, a commemoration of how the Lord had brought them out of Egypt.

And yet, we are left with that donkey. *Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck.* What about this donkey? Every firstborn creature – man or domestic animal – must be given to the Lord. But since the donkey was unclean, it could not be presented in sacrifice. What then? Should it be allowed to go free from the universal law? No, it could not. God allows no exceptions. The donkey is rightfully his, and yet it cannot be offered to him. Catch-22. The Israelite seemed to be trapped by conflicting regulations.

There was only one thing to do – *break the unclean animal's neck.* Or . . . redeem it. The donkey could be saved by the substitution of a lamb in its place.

That unclean animal, that donkey (let the reader not be too greatly offend-

ed) is us. Like it or not, we are the donkey. We are rightly the property of the Lord – the Lord who made us. But the problem is that we, because of our sins, are unacceptable to God. Our sins make us unclean. There is only one thing to do with the unclean – break their necks. Destroy them. Get them away from the presence of God. Or . . . redeem them. Redeem them with a lamb, with *the* Lamb, the Lamb of God. The clean, pure, spotless Lamb of God, Christ Jesus.

The Lamb of God must stand in our stead. He must stand in as our substitute. If not, we must die eternally in the land of the broken necks.

Know and understand, beloved, believe and confess that the spotless Lamb of God has already been offered for you. He has redeemed you from the deadly curse of the law.

The Israelite must have wondered what to do when a firstborn male donkey was born. Which should die, the donkey or the lamb? He would have paused to estimate and compare. Which was more valuable to him: the lamb, or the donkey? Should he sacrifice the lamb to redeem the donkey, or should he break the donkey's neck?

The value of the two animals could be considered and compared. Which ever was of less value at the moment would die. But surely, there was no comparison between the value of our souls and the life of the Lord Jesus. And yet the Lamb dies, and man the donkey is spared. Christ died that we may live. Sinners bought with the blood of the Son of God! The blood of the Lamb was more precious than silver and gold. And yet that blood bought us – dust of the earth.

The breaking of a donkey's neck is one thing – a rather small thing. A small thing when compared to the wrath to come. The eternal wrath of God – that's much greater, much worse than the breaking of a donkey's neck. But that is the everlasting death from which Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, has redeemed us. As the donkey ran free when the lamb was sacrificed, so we run free because the Lamb of God was sacrificed. Sacrificed on the altar of the cross. Like the donkey, we run free. 

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# A visit to Sumba, Indonesia<sub>2</sub>

By A.J. Pol

## An independent federation of churches

The Reformed Churches in Indonesia – NTT are no longer “mission churches.” They form an independent federation of churches. They have four classical regions: three in East Sumba and one in which the Reformed Churches of Savu and Kupang, Timor, meet. Once every three years they have a synod.

These Indonesian churches manage their own affairs. They are quite active in establishing mission posts in various areas to reach out to the heathen in their own neighbourhood. Ministers and evangelists generally have to support themselves since the contributions from the churches are not enough to take care of them and their families. Nevertheless they show extraordinary dedication, sacrificing much of their time and energy for the benefit of the churches. The (liberated) Reformed Churches in the Netherlands continue to give some financial aid. This is, however, primarily restricted to support for the Reformed Theological School on the island of Sumba and for the superannuation fund for retired ministers and evangelists. Besides this, church members in the Netherlands give support for *Yakerrsum*, an organization in the midst of the churches in Sumba. It is mainly devoted to stimulating various initiatives undertaken by groups of farmers. The churches are largely composed of people who depend on their gardens and small “farms” for their livelihood. So they can benefit from instruction designed to help them intensify their production and diversify their products. Aside from this, courses are also given to young women who are interested in learning to weave cloths to help support their families.

## A proposal from the Canadian Reformed Church of Barrhead

In 1962, the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches held in Hamilton focused attention on the churches of East Sumba and Savu. The reason for this was that the church in



*The Reformed Church of Tana Rara, East Sumba*

Barrhead proposed to establish a sister-church relationship with both church groups there. The motivation was that because of political tensions between the Netherlands and Indonesia at the time, those churches were deprived of virtually all contact with the churches in the Netherlands. Support for them in their difficult circumstances would be very beneficial.<sup>1</sup> In the discussion that followed, objections were raised concerning two issues. First the language barrier would make it impossible to engage in a correspondence with those churches in accord with the rules established by the synod of Homewood-Carman in 1958. Secondly, entering into such a relationship of correspondence would mean becoming involved in the difficulties of the churches of East Sumba and Savu. The Synod of Hamilton finally decided unanimously not to seek a relationship with the churches there. The grounds were that such a relationship could only be considered if it could be established that the churches with which such a relationship was being proposed maintain the Reformed confession in doctrine, worship, church government and discipline. It was observed that the church of Barrhead had not shown the synod that both of the groups of churches met these criteria, nor that it would be pos-

sible to have a relationship with both groups of churches at the same time.<sup>2</sup>

## Thirty-five years later

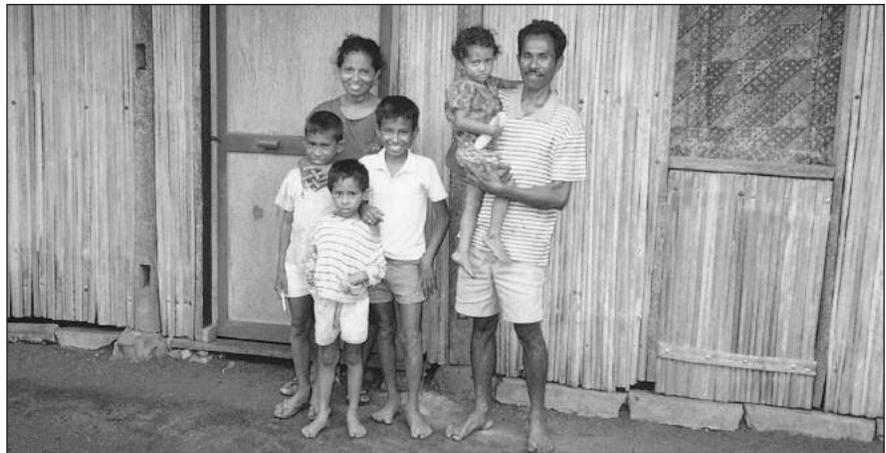
Almost two generations have passed since a Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches considered the matter of ecclesiastical relations with the churches of East Sumba and Savu. Much has happened since then. As described above, the group initially supported by the Reformed Church of Zwolle has developed into a full-fledged federation: the Reformed Churches in Indonesia – NTT, now including a church in Kupang, on the island of Timor. These churches adhere to the Reformed Confessions and Church Order as we have them. They have ongoing contact with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (Irian Jaya), that are in part also the fruit of mission work conducted by the Canadian Reformed Churches. They also maintain contact with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (Kalimantan Barat), which have arisen as a result of mission work undertaken by the (liberated) Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The churches in these three provinces of Indonesia hope one day to be able to form one national federation.<sup>3</sup> There are practical problems that need to be dealt with. For example, there are the geographical distances between these

provinces and the economic problems associated with maintaining regular contact. There are also differences in culture and background, although they are all part of one country. But there is doctrinal unity. And there is a common desire to reach out with the Gospel to the people around them.

### Obstacles?

The differences in language no longer form an insurmountable obstacle for the Canadian Reformed Churches to have contact with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia – NTT. Through the Canadian Reformed Church in Toronto we have already shown the ability to maintain bonds with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (Irian Jaya). Our sister churches in Australia have ecclesiastical relations with the brothers and sisters in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT). And the Reformed Churches in Indonesia – NTT have been represented as an independent body at the International Conference for Reformed Churches (ICRC)<sup>4</sup>, an organization we participate in to further the cause of the Reformed faith in other parts of the world.

We have a demonstrable unity with these churches in “doctrine, worship, church government and discipline,” conditions listed at the Canadian Reformed Synod in Hamilton in 1962. It is refreshing to see our brothers and sisters in Christ in that part of the world reaching out to their neighbours with the Word of God. You would rejoice at seeing the joy of their faith and their perseverance in the midst of much poverty. This small group of churches faces a huge task. They struggle to maintain their Reformed identity in the context of their culture. They live in a country in which Islamic fundamentalists are be-



Evangelist Amos Tuka Njodi and his family in Wulla, East Sumba

coming increasingly militant. They must reach out with the Gospel to a multifaceted population where ancient forms of heathendom<sup>5</sup> live side by side with modern secularism.<sup>6</sup> Aside from this, they must also contend with the negative influences of the liberal theology that is making inroads in the *Gereja Kristen Sumba*, the large group of churches in Sumba that still maintain a relationship with the now liberal (synodical) Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.<sup>7</sup>

Is it not time to revisit the question once faced by one of our synods? What can we do for them? How can we give further expression to the unity of faith with brothers and sisters in that part of the world?

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

<sup>1</sup>See Article 128 of the Acts of the General Synod of Hamilton, 1962.

<sup>2</sup>See Article 146 of the Acts of the General Synod of Hamilton, 1962.

<sup>3</sup>First steps have already been taken to accomplish the goal of becoming one national

federation. The Reformed Churches of the provinces of Irian Jaya, Kalimantan Barat and Nusa Tenggara Timur have already had a series of conferences to discuss matters of common concern: in Kouh (IrJa) in 1976; in Lai Handangu, Sumba (NTT) in 1979; in Sentagi (KalBar) in 1983; in Bomakia (IrJa) in 1987; in Wai Marangu, Sumba (NTT) in 1991; and in Sentagi (KalBar) in 1995.

<sup>4</sup>Rev. D.H.Doko (B.Ed.), who teaches at the Reformed Theological School in Wai Marangu, Sumba, represented the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (NTT) at the ICRC held in Zwolle in 1993.

<sup>5</sup>For a general impression concerning the island of Sumba, but largely written from a Roman Catholic perspective, see: Hermann-Josef May, Felicitas Mispagel, Franz Pfister. eds., *Marapu und Karitu* (Bonn, 1982); Hermann-Josef May, Felicitas Mispagel, Franz Pfister. eds., *Die Insel Sumba* (Bonn, 1988). Detailed research has been done by Gregory L. Forth: *Rindi – An Ethnographic Study of a Traditional Domain in Eastern Sumba* (The Hague, 1981). For an analysis of some elements in the tribal religion of Sumba in comparison with the teachings of Scripture, see: A.J. Pol, *Agama Suku atau Firman Allah?* (Wai Marangu, 1994).

<sup>6</sup>Even in outlying villages, an increasing number of people now have a television. In a collective society, watching T.V. is not a “private” matter. I have seen televisions on the verandas of homes, with a crowd of people sitting in the yard for hours to see the programs. In this way large groups of people get exposed to a totally secularized world-view and lifestyle. The negative impact of such “entertainment” should not be under-estimated.

<sup>7</sup>Liberal theology is imported by certain foreign professors who have come to teach at theological faculties in Indonesia and by Indonesian theologians who have received their training at liberal institutions abroad and now pass on the “insights” they have acquired to future generations of church leaders. The impact of this can be felt in Sumba too. This means that those who are being trained for the ministry at the Reformed Theological School in Sumba have to be taught to discern and reject such unbiblical thinking.



The elected officers of the 1991 Conference of the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (Irian Jaya, Kalimantan Barat and Nusa Tenggara Timor)

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# Port Kells becomes Willoughby Heights

*Reported by Jane DeGlint and Alida VanderHorst*

## Inaugural Worship Service

Sunday March 2, 1997 marked a special occasion in the history of the Canadian Reformed Church at Port Kells. After seven years of worshipping in the Port Kells Community Hall this congregation came together for the first time in its own building, located in the Willoughby district of Langley. The sound of the piano was about the only thing reminiscent of the previous meeting place. But not very many people missed the squeaky chairs, the wailing siren and the occasional floating balloons. It was a great blessing to be able to come together as congregation in an environment that is designed and constructed specifically for the purpose of worship and proclamation.

It did not seem that long ago that Mrs. Wendt, Mrs. VanDelden and Mrs. DeWit forced a shovel into the soil during a sod turning ceremony last June. After all the red tape was finally cut, the actual construction began in July 1996.

During the inaugural worship service the Rev. E. Kampen preached on the words of Matthew 5:13-16. He sum-



marized the text with the following theme and points: "By the image of salt and light the Lord teaches about the nature and purpose of His church. From these words we learn, 1. Who we are; 2. What we ought to do; 3. Why we ought to do it." He emphasized that we ought to be have an impact on the world by being salt which purifies, and by being light which brings out the truth. This

should especially be obvious to those who witness us frequenting this building. In that way our Father in Heaven will receive glory. After the sermon the Rev. Kampen read a Dedication text from the Form of Government of the OPC (please see sidebar).

## Official Opening

As soon as April 11 was announced as the date for the official opening, many members switched into high gear. The greatest outburst of energy erupted among the organ constructors, who managed to convert piles of pipes and bundles of wire into a majestically sounding instrument. But flurries of increased activity were noticed everywhere. For that reason it cannot really be surprising that the evening lasted for almost four hours! Though this length was a test of patience and wakefulness for some, it certainly indicates that the congregation of Willoughby Heights is extremely thankful to the Lord for the many blessings it received.

During his speech the Rev. Kampen referred back to a sermon series on Nehemiah which he held in the fall of 1993, when plans for a church building were still in the very preliminary





*Council Room*

stages. Very many obstacles obstructed the path. But under the guiding hand of the Lord our plans could become a wonderful reality, in spite of our own human weaknesses. Also the hearts of the local authorities were plied into co-operation. In this context the Rev. Kampen mentioned the blessed fact that right at that time the mayor was a member of our Langley sister church.

The program provided much opportunity to enjoy the many local musical talents. These musical activities culminated in a performance by the "Willoughby Choir."

The Mayor of Langley, Mr. John Scholtens, welcomed us to the neighbourhood and stressed the important role we as church have to our neighbours. As did several of the other speakers, he encouraged us to be a shining light in order to be a blessing to our community.

The Rev. J. Moesker spoke on behalf of the Cloverdale congregation. He referred to the fact that "Port Kells" had been able to make use of the Cloverdale facilities for catechism classes and the occasional worship service. He suggested that Willoughby Heights would charge the same rates (no charge) if Cloverdale ever needed a place to stay. The Rev. J. Visscher welcomed us to Langley. He granted that the joy at the rebuilding of the temple was great. But our joy can even be greater, since we do not need the sacrifices anymore as an essential part of our worship service. Through the ministry of reconciliation we can have fellowship with our God. Our previous Surrey neighbour Rev. VanSpronsen expressed well-wishes. The Nestor of Canadian Reformed ministers, the Rev. D. VanderBoom, congratulated us on behalf of all the Canadian Reformed people! Gifts were

presented by the churches of Lynden, Langley and Abbotsford.

The Rev. J.W. Wullschleger of the neighbouring Free Reformed Church expressed the hope that our efforts in outreach to the same neighbourhood will complement each other.

Mrs. Joanna VanderPol presented a interesting video chronicling the building process. The Men's Society's representative, Harold Jansen, pointed out that he would leave it to the women to make public fools out of themselves. He stuck to explaining the beautiful meaning of Christian hope. The Young People treated us to a very appropriate play (by Focus on the Family) dealing with the fact that as parts of the same body we cannot continue to exist without each other. The Women's Society took up the challenge offered to them by the Men's Society and provided some lively entertainment by enacting a number of extraordinary incidents related to life at the Port Kells Hall in particular and church life in general.

It is our prayer that the Lord will use this building to be a blessing to the members of the congregation at Willoughby Heights as well as to the residents of the neighbourhood.

### THE DEDICATION OF A HOUSE OF WORSHIP

Beloved in the Lord, we are gathered to consecrate and set apart this house for the worship of the one living and true God. Let us therefore dedicate this place to its proper and sacred uses with the following words:

On this second day of March, in the year nineteen hundred and ninety seven, we dedicate this house:

To thee, God and Father of Jesus Christ, our Lord;  
 To thee, eternal Son of God, Redeemer of thy people and Head of thy church;  
 To thee, Spirit of God, Lord and Giver of life, our Teacher, Sanctifier and Comforter;  
 For the worship of God in praise and prayer;  
 For the preaching of the gospel of the grace of God;  
 For the celebration of the holy sacraments;  
 For the diffusion of sacred knowledge;  
 For the promotion of righteousness;  
 For the extension of the kingdom of God;  
 For release to the captives;  
 For recovering of sight to the blind;  
 For rest to the heavy laden;  
 For comfort to those who mourn;  
 For strength to those who are tempted;  
 For assurance to those of little faith;  
 For the sanctifying of the family;  
 For the nurture of the young;  
 For the perfecting of believers;  
 In gratitude for the gracious keeping of the divine covenant throughout past generations;  
 In reliance upon the promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church;  
 In the hope of the eternal glory of the church triumphant.

Amen

Dedication text from the Form of Government (FOG) of the OPC.



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

“... the ordinances of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. . . . More-over by them is thy servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”  
Psalm 19:9b, 11

## Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Every Sunday morning in Church the minister reads to us the Ten Commandments, or the Law of the Lord. We have heard those words so often that many of us have memorized them. When we hear the words of the Ten Commandments, we are reminded that the Lord has made His covenant with us. In His covenant the Lord promised to be our God, and to be with us always. But He also expects from us that we serve Him and keep His commandments. That is how a covenant works: there are promises, but there are also obligations.

Sometimes people, who do not go to Church, will say, “Oh yes, Church. Nothing for me. There you are not allowed to do this and that, and you *have* to do other things. That is awful!” Are those people right? Is it awful when there are laws and regulations? Of course not. Laws only help us, they are there to protect us.

We have laws of the land, too. Even people who do not go to church know that they are not allowed to steal, or to kill. If you do steal or kill, you have to go to jail. Those laws are there to protect us all. It is good that we have those laws.

There are also traffic laws. If you do not stop for a red traffic light, or if you do not stay on the right side of the road, if you speed, or if you disobey traffic signs, you will be caught and you will have to pay a fine. You also endanger your life and that of others if you do not obey the traffic laws. Those laws are there for our protection. Without them it would not be safe for anyone to go on the road.

If a government wants to make its country a nice place to live in, it will make and uphold laws as a protection for its citizens. The Israelites have lived for many years as slaves in Egypt. They were not free to do what they wanted. They lived under the burden of Pharaoh’s cruelty. They groaned and cried out to the Lord to free them out of Pharaoh’s hands. And the Lord listened to His people. He brought them out of Egypt, and set them on the way to the promised land of Canaan. Before they were in Canaan the Lord Himself spoke to the Israelites the words of the Ten Commandments. Then He wrote the same words on tablets of stone, and gave those tablets to Moses. Now the words were written down, so that they could never be forgotten. Moses had to remind the Israelites to keep the commandments of the Lord. They were there for their protection. For even though the Israelites were freed from Pharaoh’s burden, there still was the other enemy: Satan. While they were travelling to Canaan, and when they would be living in Canaan, Satan would always be there to try to get God’s people in his power. Therefore the Lord gave His people His law. It was a gift of love. The Israelites never had to be afraid that Satan would gain power, as long as they tried to keep God’s commandments. Without them, they would not know what to do or what not to do. They would not have any protection against Satan. But with His law the Lord told them, “As long as you stick to all the things I told you, I will be with you and you will be safe.”

That is still the same today. God’s law is still the same. It is God’s covenant law for us, it is His gift of love to us. If God’s law is such a beautiful thing for us, it should be easy for us to keep the law, why then do we have to be reminded

of it every Sunday? That is because we live in sin. Until the return of Christ, there will be our enemy: Satan, who tries to lure us into his grip. The power of sin is so strong, that we are unable to keep God’s law. Every day we sin against the Lord by not keeping His commandments. We even confess in the Heidelberg Catechism that we are unable to keep them, and that we are inclined to all evil, even to “hate God and our neighbours.” Yet this does not have to discourage us. For God is also a forgiving and loving Father. And that is again where the commandments come in. The Lord loves us and forgives us, and promises us eternal life through our Saviour Jesus Christ. But He can only love and forgive, if we repent, and ask Him for forgiveness of our sins. How could we know our sins if there were no law? You could not be given a parking fine if there were no sign that told you you were not allowed to park at that particular spot. The same if the Lord had not given us His law, we would not know what we had done wrong; we could not repent and ask for forgiveness, and the Lord could not forgive us. Then we would fall prey to Satan, and there would not be any hope for us. So we can be thankful that the Lord gave us His covenant law. For God’s law makes us see our sins and our inability to do anything on our own.

So, on Sunday when we hear the words of the Lord which He spoke to the Israelites and which He still speaks to us, our hearts run over with happiness. It is the Lord Who set the Israelites free from the slavery in Egypt, and Who brought them into the land of Canaan, Who still speaks to us today. That same Lord sent us His Son, Who freed us from all our sins and misery, and undid Satan’s grip on us. God gave us His holy law, so we would know how we have to serve Him. And He is there to help us keep His commandments, all the way until we will enter the gates of the Promised Land.

*How blessed are those upright in their way,  
Who keep the Lord’s decrees with dedication  
And in their walk of life His law obey.  
How blest are those who with determination,  
Wholeheartedly , seek Him by night and day  
And look to Him for guidance and salvation.*

Psalm 119:1

## Birthdays in July:

### 4: James Buikema

c/o N. VanderHeiden, 7162 Canboro Rd, RR 1,  
Dunnville, ON N1A 2W1

### 20: Charlie Beintema

29 Wilson Avenue, Chatham, ON N7L 1K8

### 28: Jim Wanders

538 Wedgewood Drive, Burlington, ON L7L 4J2

### 29: Tom Vander Zwaag

“ANCHOR HOME,” 361 30 Rd, RR 2, Beamsville,  
ON L0R 1B0

James and Jim will be 36, Charlie 22, and Tom 44. I wish you all a happy birthday! Until next month,

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



## Mission in Zaire

In the *Reformed Herald* of April 1997, the magazine of the Reformed Church in the United States, the Rev. Robert Grossmann reports on the mission work of their churches in Zaire. They receive support in this work through our sister churches in Holland, and we receive in Grossmann's report a survey of the work done by our brotherhood in Holland. Rev. Grossmann writes:

Our partners, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), called GKN, also continue their work in southern Zaire. They are not involved with us in the work in Kinshasa. The GKN work includes providing the seminary in Lubumbashi as well as working with the local congregations to build them up in the Christian life. The Dutch folks are also present in Zaire through the "Verre Naasten," which means "Far-away Neighbours." This is a voluntary organization made up of GKN people. The DVN, as it is usually abbreviated, carries on family, medical and farming development among the Reformed Confessing Church in Zaire (ERCZ). The DVN does this by training ERCZ folks in everything from nutritional cooking to good farming and business methods. It also provides seed money to Zairian families who wish to farm or go into small businesses, and trains them in management. The RCUS, through the DVN and a Zairian Committee also continues to help with church building projects.

In all of the work done in Zaire, the very poor economic situation, the lack of infrastructure supplied by stable government, and the tribal, social and economic tradition make Christian progress doubly difficult. Indeed, each of these problems only serves to compound the others. In a tribal social structure, ownership is communal with all decisions made by the "chief." The family has little integrity in this situation, especially with respect to ownership. Any assets acquired are

quickly gobbled up by the tribe so that there is little possibility for progress up the economic ladder. For example, should one family or individual somehow acquire a cow, it is immediately taken by the chief for the use of the whole tribe. Nine times out of ten, since everyone is hungry, the cow is slaughtered. While everyone has a feast, the opportunity for milk or breeding the cow to multiply resources is gone. In reality, very few cows exist in Zaire, but the example demonstrates that very few have any idea about how to forward economic progress. It is impossible to develop when the tribal tradition rules social and economic realities. This is one large reason why the removal of the colonial governments from Africa has resulted in disaster. One of the important tasks of our mission work is to break up this tribal tradition and replace it with the responsible Christian family system. In this, the DVN is a key element.

### The work in Kinshasa

During their last trip to Zaire in 1991, Revs. Maynard Koerner and Paul Treick spent their time in the great capital city of Kinshasa. They did this to work on obtaining government approval of the ERCZ as a legitimate church organization. This approval was eventually gained. While in Kinshasa our pastors met with two small groups of Christians which had grown out of the Back to God Hour ministry. They were worshipping regularly under the leadership of Elder Abel N'tita. Mr. N'tita is a very capable and honest man who has been well educated. We promised to help him with the work.

Rev. Grossmann then writes about the work of the Dutch missionaries:

### The seminary in Lubumbashi

It will be remembered that the RCUS provided half of the funds to provide facilities for the seminary

begun by the GKN (our sister churches in Holland, JDJ) in Lubumbashi. There are presently about 20 students who spend 6 months serving as leading elders in their home churches. This is a burden for those students who live outside of Lubumbashi because they are also separated from their families while attending classes.

In September 1996, the author of this article spent a good part of a day with Rev. Wisselink, who is one of the three missionaries teaching in the Lubumbashi seminary. Rev. Wisselink was home on leave. We (Rev. Ad Kooij and I) visited him and his family at a seaside resort about thirty miles south of Rotterdam.

We found Rev. Wisselink to be a very bright and committed young man in his mid-thirties. Rev. Wisselink is very self-consciously Reformed and Biblical in his thinking. He and the other professors have been writing short booklets for their students on subjects ranging from sermon preparation to exegesis of Old Testament stories. Out of this conversation came the resolve to provide some financial help from the RCUS to the seminary students. Our Foreign Ministries Committee agreed. We have since sent \$2,500, enough to support ten students through one six-month seminary term. This is very important, since most of the students have absolutely no other means of support. The missionaries in southern Zaire are some 700 miles from the border of Zaire with Rwanda and so have not had direct contact with the problems there. Nevertheless, the danger of guerrilla action or rebellion by government troops is always present. Lubumbashi is only about 25 miles from Zaire's border with the stable nation of Zambia. The large Zambian city of Kitwe is some 100 miles from Lubumbashi. Dutch missionaries maintain a mail box in Kitwe from which they have mail delivered

about once a week. Kitwe also serves as an easily reachable refuge should the situation in Zaire deteriorate too much.

There is much to be done in Zaire, both by and among the people of the ERCZ. These brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as the Dutch missionaries and development workers who labour there, should often be in our prayers. Please also pray for the Foreign Ministries Committee of the RCUS as it works to keep up with this and other mission projects of our Church.

### Recent news

The latest news, as of March 5, 1997, is not good. More trouble seems near at hand as guerrilla rebels advance on one of the largest cities in eastern Zaire in hope of taking it from government forces. The fall of the city seems certain as gov-

ernment troops have begun looting the city to get out of it what they can before it falls into rebel hands. Since their pay has been very uncertain, this has been their common practice in recent months.

President for life Mubuto has reportedly left Zaire to "vacation at his villa in southern France." (he has since returned – editor.) Whether this means he is leaving his post to others or is just tired of the unsettled nature of his existence is hard to say. In any case, his absence from Zaire leaves his government even more vulnerable to attacks from within and without. It seems only a matter of time before the aging leader steps down or is ousted. At that point the future of Zaire is anyone's guess.

Closer to our RCUS mission work in Zaire, it is worthy of notice that the Verre Naasten development families who have been working

about 200 miles north of Lubumbashi in southern Zaire have moved back down to the city because of unrest among government forces in their area. This puts the possibility of danger much closer to the large part of the ERCZ which is found in the Lubumbashi area. Lubumbashi is of course also the place where the Dutch missionaries and other Verre Naasten families work.

We commend the work of the Dutch brothers to the grace of God. We can only endorse the remarks of Rev. Grossmann. This work, too, should be often in our prayers. Particularly when we recall how volatile the situation is in and around the capital Kinshasa today (May, 1997) we can only hope and pray that the RCUS mission work will be able to continue in this time of upheaval and strife.



## LETTER 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:

I read with interest and appreciation J. De Jong's editorial in the April 18, 1997 issue of *Clarion*, "In our own right line." In footnote #2 De Jong notes that in the 1920s, "H. Hoeksema stood in the camp of Van Lonkhuyzen" maintaining the principle of the autonomy of the local church. I was, however, dismayed by the next sentence in that footnote. There without any documentation whatsoever De Jong writes, "It is questionable whether the PRC still maintain this standpoint."

I have been teaching Church Polity in the Protestant Reformed Seminary for twenty-four years and can assure Brother De Jong and the readers of *Clarion* that the PRC maintain both in theory and in practice the principle of the autonomy of the local church. We have held this principle by the grace of God for over seventy years. In fact I teach my students that this is the chief principle of the Reformed system of church government.

Cordially in Christ  
Prof. Robert D. Decker

### A Brief Response

I am glad to hear that Prof. Decker teaches what he sees as a chief principle in Reformed church polity, and I hope he will continue to do so with conviction and resolve.

The reason for my comment regarding the current position of the PRC lies in other statements I have read in the *Standard Bearer* from time to time. For example, in the issue of Feb. 1, 1992, D. Engelsma wrote the following: "What is called for by these ominous developments is a clear, strong testimony that synodical union is basic to the Reformed or Presbyterian view of the church." And further: "For the standard that determines what is Reformed, or Presbyterian, is the creeds and church orders. And they plainly affirm that genuine Presbyterianism is synodical."

This stirring defense of "synodical union" is so forceful that it takes away with the one hand what it gives with the other. A blanket defence of the authority of synods (without any clear

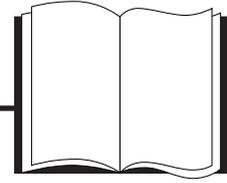
limiting qualifications) certainly does not speak well for the principle of the autonomy of the local church. In Engelsma's own words: "synodical union is a fundamental aspect of the Bible's teaching about the church."

You cannot have it both ways! The unity of the churches working together in a federation is a unity of churches holding to the promises they have made, (Art. 31 CO) and not the expression of a "synodical union." The major assemblies have jurisdiction over the minor assemblies, but only in their proper sphere, that is, only in matters lawfully brought forward by the churches themselves, and matters that concern the churches in common.

The position above basically equates the Presbyterian and Reformed systems, and thereby takes a standpoint quite different from that of Van Lonkhuyzen. Hence my additional comment on this point.

J. De Jong





## Re: A flag in the church

Dr. J. Faber's recent submission regarding a "flag in the church?" had been received earlier in a letter to the council in question. Considering the serious and sincere manner in which Dr. Faber's reasons were put forward, I am sure that the council will certainly reconsider its decision to have a flag placed in the lobby of the church building. It is only of benefit when one takes a "second look" at a specific decision and examines the manner in which it is interpreted. Dr. Faber's contribution on this point is much-appreciated.

Evidently Dr. Faber feels that the matter is serious enough to take "national" action and to nip all potential ecclesiastical flag enthusiasts in the bud. For the sake of interest and further information, some comments in response, then, may also be considered.

The council did not necessarily see a connection between showing a flag and falling into nationalism, let alone "false nationalism." It should be understood that nationalism means placing the nation first above all other things, and false nationalism takes this a step farther by forcing the citizens to total allegiance. The council does not espouse any such ideals. References to the extremism of the Vatican and Hitler may seem appropriate but are in reality irrelevant. Germans would in this respect themselves speak of "Konsekwenzmacherei," that is, forcing someone's position to its most extreme consequence. *In extremis* almost any decision can be made to look bad.

Since we live in this country and call ourselves the *Canadian* Reformed Churches, the showing of the flag was seen simply by council as an appropriate and commonly-accepted expression of the fact that we live also as congregation in this land of which the government has the duty also to protect "the church and its ministry" (Art. 36, Belgic Confession). There is, therefore, no inherent endangering of the confession concerning the catholicity of the

church, a confession which this council cherishes very much.

"Catholicity" is a precious gift. It does not, however, a priori forbid any token of nationality. *Nota bene*: the same council decided in the same meeting also to have a plaque installed, in the same lobby, listing the sister-churches abroad as well as churches with whom we have official contact. These two items should not be separated: we are a church living and functioning in Canada, yet bound in the true faith with all other faithful churches throughout the world! Nationality does not at all preclude catholicity but may even give it the colour and depth it deserves. Psalm 87, for example, mentions various nations, (even hostile) nations, out of whom also the catholic church will one day be gathered. "Catholicity" does not per se require a super-nationalistic emphasis.

Dr. Faber now adds that he does not even favour the name *Canadian* Reformed Churches (and would rather see *Free Reformed Churches*) and this is a logical consequence of his position. But the name exists and it is not without meaning. The catholic church does have its own history and place in each and every country. Sometimes we do not properly appreciate this and we tend to regard all other churches from out of the development as it took place in our churches, here or (mostly) in the Netherlands. Here lies a real danger of a "nationalistic" ecclesiology.

Following the same reasoning as Dr. J. Faber does, we might also question whether it is proper to sing the national anthem (be it outside the official church service) in the church building, e.g. at times of remembrance. The anthem functions in much the same way, if not stronger, as the flag does. For the church building is then also not a place for any activity that might be considered by some as giving evidence of national identity or festivity. The "character" of the church as spiritual body would then also be at stake.

I agree heartily that "not a flag of Canada . . . should remind us [of our civil duties]" . . . but "the Scriptures." For this reason also, not to detract from the Word and its central function, the council had consciously decided that the flag would be placed in the lobby. We are not sure whether the statement "A church building is the place of worship of God" ought to be taken in such an inclusive manner. The auditorium has a different function than the lobby, and this should be taken into account. Otherwise the whole building becomes somewhat of a *sanctuary*, a notion which the Reformed Churches have strongly rejected. Therefore, I do not think that the good point of "the soberness of reformed liturgy" has much to do with a flag in the lobby, unless liturgy is commonly conducted in the lobby and the flag somehow functions in the liturgy.

Moreover, the practice in the Netherlands and the trials of Revs. Hoeksema and Weersing in the U.S. (which may be related) did not play a role in the considerations of the council. We were not aware of such an incident. However, after reading the quote given by Dr. Faber, I did wonder why besides the minister also the *teacher* of the local Christian school was forced to leave town. Was the school also somehow involved in the campaign not to show the flag? What terrible misunderstanding can easily arise if we are not prudent. Most Americans tend to be patriotic and the wisdom of a decision not to show the flag anywhere in the church building in a difficult time of war may certainly be questioned. This is especially so when the refusal comes from people of European extraction, from the very Europe where American soldiers were giving their lives.

Dr. Faber raises an interesting point in questioning whether this matter of the flag is indeed an "ecclesiastical" matter (Art. 30 C.O.). In his line of thinking, the response must be a clear negative: the flag belongs to the political realm and not the spiritual. It could

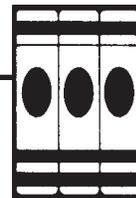
be argued, however, that the flag is not a "political" symbol but a *national* symbol. The council was not confused about the "two kingdoms" (the spiritual and the political) and thus mixing church and state, for the point of the exercise was to recognize thankfully that *the Lord* has given us as church a place in this land, where we may serve

Him freely and in which we also have certain duties. This could very well be seen as an "ecclesiastical" matter, i.e. something which belongs to the task of the church, precisely in the line of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession.

Anyway, when such serious objections are raised, even with an abundance of Bible texts, a decision ought

to be reconsidered. Decisions which introduce a "new" practice must be so strongly founded that the convictions and consciences of the members are not grievously offended. Reviewing this decision, the council may conclude that it should not be maintained since the objections contain important elements which require more thought. 

## BOOK REVIEWS



**Hesba Stretton, *Pilgrim Street*. Inheritance Publications (Box 154, Neerlandia, AB T0G 1R0 Canada) 1996; 144 pages; softcover. \$ 8.95 Can (\$ 7.90 US)**

*Reviewed by M. Van der Velde*

The life of poor children in nineteenth-century England was far from easy. Consider the life of Thomas and Phil Haslam. No social safety net exists for poor young Tom and his little brother Phil, and when their parents are imprisoned, Tom has no choice but to make a living as best as he can. Home is under the stairs of a cellar dwelling and work is selling coals and other items on the street.

Hesba Stretton's *Pilgrim Street* is essentially the story of Tom's conversion and maturing in faith. The book, the third in the Golden Inheritance series, opens with Tom in jail and his young brother desperately wishing to speak to him. Their mother has died in prison and their father must still complete his sentence. But Tom has yet to be tried and through a series of events, Phil comes in contact with Mr. Hope, a lawyer. Mr. Hope takes on the case of Tom and in the process tries to teach him about the love of God the heavenly Father.

In the course of the book, readers are also introduced to a policeman, Mr. Banner, who believes in God the Judge, but not God the Father. Banner and Tom fail to understand that through the work of Christ, God the Judge is also God the Father. Tom's life takes a turn for the worse and he falls back into a life of greed and sin because he cannot serve the God whom he only fears. Thus the story of Tom becomes a classic riches to rags story, until Tom is caught up short by the memory of a Bible text

and he finally learns that God does love him. But as Tom's faith increases, so do the trials in his life.

Hesba Stretton is actually a pseudonym for Sarah Smith who lived from 1823-1911. She wrote several novels, but most of her writings were smaller works, many of which were written for the Religious Tract Society. This British society was set up in the late eighteenth century and its aim was to provide good Christian literature for the reading masses. Books written for the society were intended to familiarize adults, and to some extent children, with the Gospel and so bring them to faith. *Pilgrim Street*, therefore, should not be viewed strictly as a children's book, because the full impact of the author's message will not be understood by children. Instead, the book would be suitable for parents who wish to read the book aloud to their children. Parents can then ensure that their children will understand not only the story, but also the message of the book. The book will probably not be appealing to teenagers.

Readers might at times be confused with some of the language in the book. Delicacies such as "tripe" (ox stomach) and old-fashioned legal terms such as "assizes" (periodical court sessions) are simply not well-known anymore. Problems like this are to be expected when one reads an older work. On the other hand, the reader is rewarded with a glimpse into a society which is much different than ours and which will make them question aspects of twentieth-century society.

Despite the fact that a number of deaths occur in the course of the story, the author still provides a satisfactory ending. Death is not portrayed as the end of a futile and hopeless life, as is often the case in modern books. Indeed,

the book is rather refreshing in that problems are dealt with in a Christian manner and Christian hope is always present. However, the reader must suspend his or her belief in realism from time to time. The rapid maturity in Tom's faith or the good fortunes which consistently befall Phil, seem somewhat unrealistic at times. But on the whole, young readers and not so young readers will find that the escapades of Tom and Phil Haslam do create some suspense.

**Bennet Tyler and A.A. Bonar, *Nettleton and His Labours: The Memoir of Dr. Asahel Nettleton, The Banner of Truth Trust, reprint of 1854 edition, 454 pages, price \$ 10.99 U.S.***

*Reviewed by J. De Jong*

The book gives us a more detailed glimpse of the life and work of Asahel Nettleton, a noted preacher of the second awakening in New England. Nettleton, who lived from 1783 to 1844, was converted to the Gospel in his early twenties, and after a period of agrarian labour went to Yale College to train for the ministry. He was ordained in the Congregational churches, and became a travelling preacher, spending most of his time preaching in his home state of Connecticut. However, he travelled all around new England, especially in Virginia and North Carolina, and even went as far as Charleston, South Carolina on one campaign. According to this account, partial to Nettleton, his preaching had great success among the people.

Nettleton was a preacher with special charismatic gifts that made him stand out among his peers. Despite a continued combat with ill health, he was able to work with great energy for a decade, (about 1817 to 1827) and this

preaching left a noted mark on the history of his home state. At the close of the 18th Century Protestantism was in a serious state of decline, around the world and also in the New England states. The spirit of modernism and rationalism dominated the theological schools. Yet the dawn of the 19th century brought a noted revival in America, called the second Great Awakening. According to the defenders of this movement, the awakening was marked by special effusions of the Holy Spirit. Tyler and Bonar, followers of Nettleton's preaching, make many references to singular physical signs and manifestations pointing to the presence of the Spirit.

Nettleton had a simple and direct style of preaching, one which sought to avoid complex issues or doctrinal controversies. He made use of what he called "inquiry meetings" in which the preacher with his assistants would spend time individually with all attendees of an evangelistic campaign. The time of personal interaction was designed to apply the Gospel message personally to new believers, increasing the consciousness of sin, and calling for a greater patience and reliance on the expected and hoped for work of the Spirit.

Nettleton held to the Calvinist doctrines as set forth in the *Westminster Confession* of Faith. Yet he must be seen as preacher marked by his time. For example he held to the doctrine of election, but he would make the doctrine a disputable point in his preaching. In this way he tried to steer people away from controversies about doctrines to the issue of conversion and faith. The primary emphasis of his preaching was on personal commitment and the order of salvation: conversion, faith, and obedience to God as it is lived and experienced by each believer in a personal way.

The style of the preaching in many ways modelled that of the later *Nadere Reformatie* in Holland: the hearer first has to be brought to a sense of sin and guilt, that is to a disposition of conviction. Only then could he come to the sweet assurance of salvation in Christ. Nettleton championed the movement from emotion to instruction, and was critical of new methods of preaching around him which included the demonstration of violent manifestations of feeling among hearers.

One preacher falling under the sceptre of Nettleton's critique was Charles Finney, who at the time was a new light rising on the horizon, and who applied many novel and disconcerting practices to evangelistic preaching of the Gospel. A former lawyer,

Finney invented the practice of having would be converts sit on the so-called "anxious seat," a religiously qualified imitation of the witness stand. Once in the "anxious seat" one was as an accused before God, who also had to go through the process of conviction and sentence before the good news of salvation could be experienced.

Nettleton was critical of the more Arminian approach defended and applied by Finney. His view was that feelings which are not founded on a correct theology cannot be right. As he put it, the religious experiences of those whose doctrine and views were defective will likewise be spurious and defective.

From a Reformed perspective the question is whether Nettleton himself did not open the door to more far reaching deviations that came with the second part of the second awakening. As a protégé of Timothy Dwight, his preaching is marked by the climate of the day: a spirit of rationalism coupled with its

reaction, a spirit of emotionalism and personalism. Instead of reforming the rationalist approach to doctrine, people simply added a new emphasis on personal experience. The real question is whether the so-called effusions of the Spirit were true manifestations of reformation, or whether they were an ongoing step in the decline away from the principles of the Reformation on which the colonies were first founded.

From a church historical perspective this is an interesting book, since it gives us another glimpse of the background to what has become a broad nation-wide evangelical movement incorporating many Baptist and Pentecostal themes. The Holy Spirit is clearly the central person of the Trinity in most of 19th and 20th century conservative American Protestantism. But is it the Spirit that truly represents and sets forth saving work of Christ? This remains a question in my mind after reading this book. 

### In Memoriam

### Adrianus (Adri) Van Egmond

1940 – 1997

It came as a big shock to all who knew Adri, that he was taken from us so suddenly on May 15. After all, he was a vibrant, hard working man, who had no desire to retire like some of us, but expected to keep working until the end of his life. "I would not know what to do Arie," he told me about a month ago, when I suggested for him to take it a bit easier.

After all, he had a fairly large business, built-up from scratch. Most of his 150 or so employees were members of the Church, which by itself is quite a challenge. He thrived in the world of negotiating. He had to make sure that he could keep his people going. His competitors had made him lucrative offers for take-over, which he always refused. I think he was worried about the future of the brotherhood among his staff.

He was not a slave of his company. He saw the duty to use his talents for the Kingdom as well. He was one of the key figures in the early seventies instrumental in the founding of Guido de Brès High School. I hate to think about how many kilometres he accumulated on his Oldsmobile driving Jack Schutten around Southern Ontario for this very good cause. He served the Guido Board a number of years, and was Chairman of the Building Committee when the school was built. His local Church saw him as elder for a number of terms, and Synod appointed Adri to the Board of Governors of the Theological College for a nine year term. He was always open to help for a good cause.

We became friends during the "formative" Guido years. And we both discovered that there is really not such a thing as a "more" or "less" Reformed congregation in our area! We spent a fair bit of time fishing together during our holidays, and when they did not bite too well, we did a lot of talking. And we always came together at our bond of salvation and faith. Undeserved grace through our Saviour. He would sometimes recite the well-known Dutch hymn about "the great morning of our resurrection."

Little did we know that for one of us the final step towards this Resurrection would come this soon. But the comfort, for all those who will miss him, is that our God and Father will unite us all in Paradise when He is ready for us.

Arie J. Hordyk