



Clarion

Numbers 10:1-10

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

*For Thou wilt light my candle:
the Lord my God will
enlighten my darkness. (KJV)*
Psalm 18:28

GOD MANIFEST IN THE FLESH

Of the Father's love begotten
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore!

At his word the worlds were framed;
He commanded; it was done:
Heaven and earth and depths of ocean
In their threefold order one;
All that grows beneath the shining
Of the moon and burning sun,
Evermore and evermore!

Righteous Judge of souls departed!
Righteous King of them that live!
On the Father's throne exalted,
None in might with Thee may strive :
Who at last in vengeance coming,
Sinners from thy face shalt drive,
Evermore and evermore!

He is found in human fashion,
Death and sorrow here to know,
That the race of Adam's children,
Doomed by law to endless woe,
May not henceforth die and perish
In that dreadful gulf below,
Evermore and evermore!

Thee let old men, thee let young men,
Thee let boys in chorus sing;
Matrons virgins, little maidens
With glad voices answering ;
Let their guileless songs re-echo,
And the heart its praises bring,
Evermore and evermore!

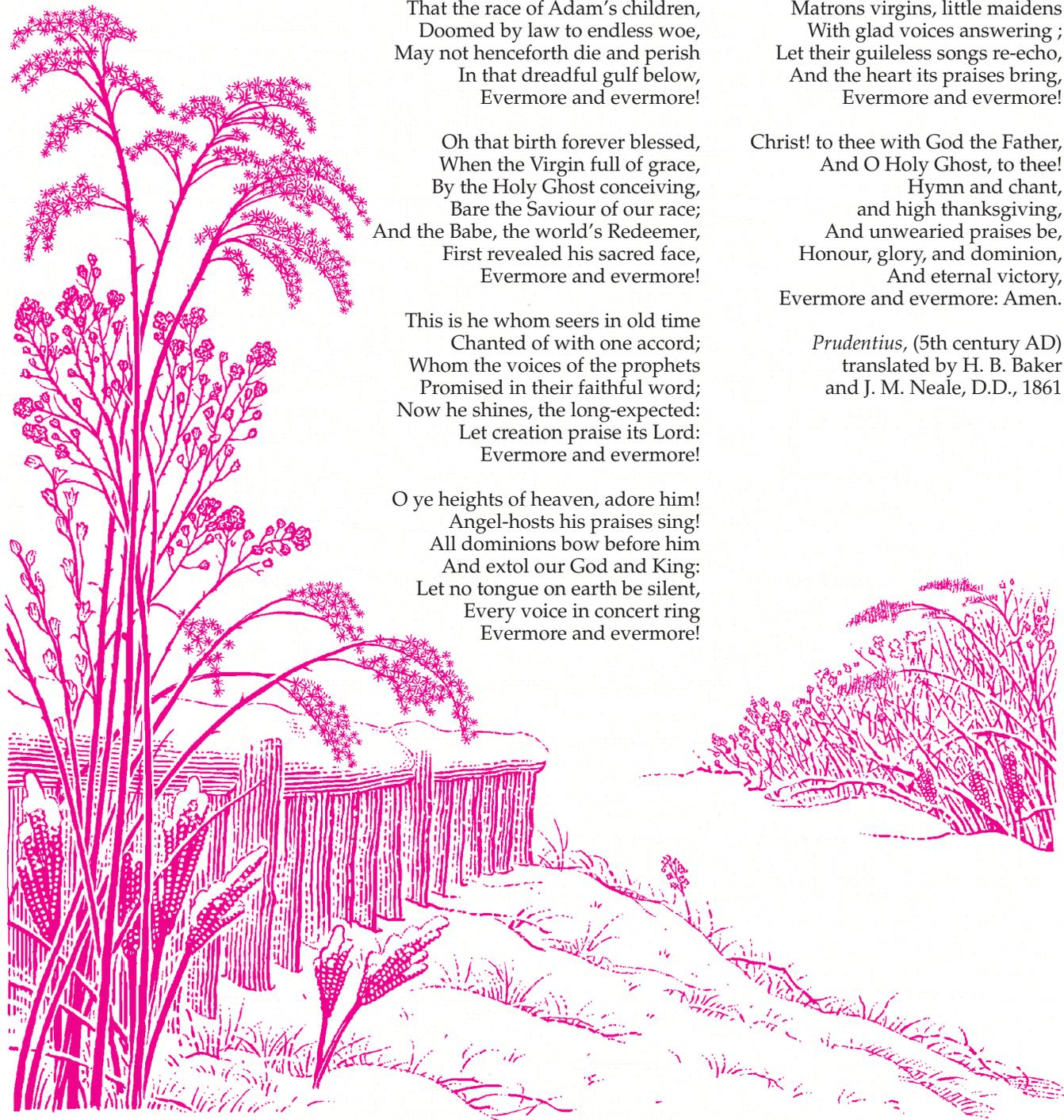
Oh that birth forever blessed,
When the Virgin full of grace,
By the Holy Ghost conceiving,
Bare the Saviour of our race;
And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
First revealed his sacred face,
Evermore and evermore!

Christ! to thee with God the Father,
And O Holy Ghost, to thee!
Hymn and chant,
and high thanksgiving,
And unwearied praises be,
Honour, glory, and dominion,
And eternal victory,
Evermore and evermore: Amen.

This is he whom seers in old time
Chanted of with one accord;
Whom the voices of the prophets
Promised in their faithful word;
Now he shines, the long-expected:
Let creation praise its Lord:
Evermore and evermore!

Prudentius, (5th century AD)
translated by H. B. Baker
and J. M. Neale, D.D., 1861

O ye heights of heaven, adore him!
Angel-hosts his praises sing!
All dominions bow before him
And extol our God and King:
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Every voice in concert ring
Evermore and evermore!



Candle in the Wind



When you read these lines, 1997 will almost have become part of the archives of history. At the close of another year we extend our best wishes to fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord and greet each other with God's continued blessing for the coming year. At the same time we tend to look back, to review and to reflect on what has happened.

Some events in 1997 brought joy and happiness. Children were born into covenant homes, marriages were solemnized in the name of the Lord, young people committed their lives to the Lord's service by making the vow of public profession. Every Lord's Day we were granted the privilege of coming together for worship and instruction.

Many in our community also experienced deep grief, pain, and hardship. 1997 was a year with numerous accidents that brought distress, hurt, and death into several families. Sickness claimed lives too. Prayers went up to the throne of heaven for those who were involved in serious accidents and for those whose loved ones were taken out of this life to be with the Lord. This year too has left us with physical as well as mental and emotional scars.

Accidents claimed the lives of people outside of our churches too. At the end of August the death of Princess Diana shocked and rocked the world. Millions tuned in to watch the funeral and to say "Goodbye" to England's rose. Afterwards scores of people bought the CD with the lyrics of the song Elton John sang at the funeral of the Princess. Etched in our minds is the picture of Elton singing "And it seems to me you lived your life like a candle in the wind, never fading with the sunset when the rain set in. . . . Your candle's burned out long before your legend ever will."

Diana's "legend" may live on for quite some time. Yet there is also a question looming in the background like a dark shadow, "Where is Diana today now that her candle is snuffed out?" Until Christ returns every candle of life, which may withstand the wind of trouble and strife, will in the end flicker and go out whether it be through accidents, disease or old age. Thus we can broaden the question to include ourselves, "Where will I be once my candle burns out?"

The Bible frequently speaks of life in terms of light, candles and lamps. It functions as either a negative or a positive symbol. For example, in the book of Job we read about the candle of the wicked being put out with him (Job 18:5,6). Proverbs 24:20 communicates to us this wisdom: "There shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out" (KJV).

The candle or the lamp of the wicked goes out because it lacks the life-giving light of the Lord. Its burning out symbolizes the destruction and ruin of both individuals and communities. The Lord warns a disobedient church in the days of Jeremiah with these words, "Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones, and the light of the candle" Jeremiah 25:10(KJV). The Lord also exhorts every New Testament church to repent and to return to their first love. Otherwise He will take away their light (Revelation 2:5).

The source of light for believers is the Lord. David confesses in Psalm 18:28, "For Thou wilt light my candle: the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness" (KJV). He lights up our life by His commandments and the Word which He gives as a lamp unto

our feet and guide for our paths (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 6:23).

Since we have been given light we have a responsibility to hold high and radiate the norms of God in all of life. Once we were darkness, but now we are light in the Lord, therefore we must walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8). Living in obedience and thankful service is walking in the light. It includes fulfilling the vows we made in the presence of God when we publicly professed our faith, were married, had our children baptized or when we were ordained to be an office-bearer in the church.

Those who are of the light will not hide it. Our Saviour, who is the Light of the world, says, "No one after lighting a lamp (candle, KJV) puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but on a stand, that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light; but when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light" (Luke 11:33-36).

A candle or lamp that is out in the open will pick up wind. It will feel the drafts of sin and the winds of false doctrine. Our candle will be under the stress which has come into the world because of sin. Yet our light will not fade or go out when our life remains in the Lord. Death cannot even take away our light.

Scripture cautions us not to be envious or to fret over the wicked who seem to prosper even though they live in sin. Their candle flourishes until it has kindled the fire of hell. Then it is extinguished and there will be nothing but everlasting darkness. In contrast, the candle of the righteous is put out in this life because in heaven and on the new earth candles and lamps are no longer necessary. The Lord gives us light; and we shall reign for ever and ever with Him (Revelation 22:5).

As we enter a new year let us remember what we have in Christ. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Let us live in the expectation of Christ's return when He will wipe away every tear from our eyes, when death, mourning, crying, pain shall be no more. On that day we will dwell in a city which "has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Revelation 21:23).



*And the Word
became flesh and
dwelt among us,
full of grace and
truth; we have
beheld His
glory, glory as of
the only Son
from the Father.*

John 1:14

WHAT'S INSIDE?

There is an old saying that the mail must get through. It used to be that way. No matter the weather – whether it rained or snowed – the mail would get through. It is not like that anymore. The powerful Canadian Union of Postal Workers has ground the mail service to a halt. No mail is moving in Canada. So much for old sayings! However, we, at *Clarion*, are convinced that **the *Clarion* must get through**. *Clarion* will not be stopped by a mail strike. Already for several years, some 95% of the words you read have been transmitted electronically to the managing editor, over to the executive editor and language editor, back to the manager, and then to the publisher. To get the finished product delivered to you, however, is a different matter. Traditionally, we have relied on the local correspondents to deliver the Year End issue. This year we had to engage them earlier. Through them you already got the previous issue. Thanks to all the local *Clarion* correspondents for their work in this, and for the other work they do in promoting *Clarion* within the congregations. *Clarion must get through*.

In this year end issue, you will find a review of the year of our Lord, 1997, written by the Rev. W. den Hollander – always a highlight, I'm sure.

The Rev. P.G. Feenstra has supplied a guest editorial.

Dr. N.H. Gootjes supplies an article on the topic of the virgin birth of Lord Jesus Christ. This is the seventh year in a row that our professor of Dogmatics has supplied an article on the theme of the virgin birth of Christ for the Year End issue of *Clarion*. (Hint: if you ever need to write an essay on the virgin birth of the Lord, dig out all the Year End issues back to 1991. You'll have found a gold mine for your essay.)

Not only is our current Dogmatics professor active for the benefit of the churches; our professor-emeritus of Dogmatics, the Rev. Dr. J. Faber, is too. Recently he spoke at a Reformation Day Rally in Ancaster on whether the Reformation was catholic or schismatic, focussing on the answer given by Melanchthon. We are very pleased to publish the speech at the end of this year commemorating the 500th anniversary of Melanchthon's birth.

The Rev. W.B. Slomp of Neerlandia has spoken several times on the topic of parenting. We are very happy to publish this speech as well.

You will also find some contributions from people living (or who have lived) in Brazil: Rev. J. Kroeze supplies the meditation; Mrs. Timmerman and Mr. and Mrs. Glas tell us something about life in the Reformed colony in Unai.

In addition, we've placed a few reports and book reviews.

We wish you much enjoyment as you read the articles, and the pages and pages of best wishes extended to you by brothers and sisters from every corner, nook and cranny of the federation of churches. God bless you richly in the year of our Lord, 1998!

GVP



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Riches and Poverty

Celebration

Christmas is the time of joy at the end of the year in which we rejoice in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the time when we often give presents to each other; when we receive pretty Christmas cards, and the well wishes of our friends and acquaintances. And all this joy is because we are celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. A birthday always calls for a feast. When our loved ones have their birthday we all come together to celebrate the fact that he or she received an extra year of life from the Lord. We rejoice in God's goodness to our loved ones, and so to us. We could enjoy their presence for one more year. A similar thing happens throughout all Christianity on the day we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ our Lord. We celebrate and we give presents, but are we celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, or who He is, or are we celebrating the fact that He has lived for one more year, or that He has ruled for one more year, or that He is still with His church after nearly two thousand years? Obviously a lot more is involved in celebrating Christmas than what appears on the Christmas cards. Let us look at what we are doing.

King in a manger

It hardly needs saying that what the world presents as the authentic Christmas celebration is a caricature of the true celebration. In the first place they would have us focus on a little baby in a manger. This picture effectively turns Jesus Christ the Lord into sweet Jesus, and not the almighty ruler of heaven and earth. We remember that our Lord was born in Bethlehem as a descendent of King David. But he was laid in a manger. There was no place for this king's son in his kingdom, neither for

*For you know
the grace of our
Lord Jesus
Christ, that
though He was
rich, yet for your
sakes He
became poor, so
that you through
His poverty
might become
rich.*

2 Corinthians 8:9

the Son of God in his world. In the eyes of the nation He was begotten outside the marriage bed. Even Joseph and Mary did not fully understand what had happened, and who Jesus was. Sure, they understood that Jesus was begotten by the Holy Spirit. They understood that a miracle had happened, but they did not understand that Jesus was God. They thought that Jesus was a human begotten by the power of God, and as such could be called the Son of God, but to understand that Jesus was God was beyond them.

That means that they could also not fully understand yet the grace of God revealed in this birth. That grace still had to be manifested, and was. When we remember the birthday of Jesus Christ, therefore, we should not think of a romantic little picture of a child in a manger, with the cows looking on and halos floating about, but on a tremendous act of grace. That child which was born and lay in the manger was God the Son incarnate. He was born just like one of us. He, the Creator became a creature. When we think of this act of grace we realize that our Lord humbled himself to an extent which we cannot understand. He emptied himself of His divine glory to become a man, subject to all the misery to which we are subject. There He lay in the manger as David's fallen house, and as God's Son who humbled himself to become a helpless baby in a hostile world.

Humiliation

On this day we also celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ himself was born. It is the person we are interested in on a birthday. He has shown us His character; He has shown us His love when He humbled himself to such an extent. This humiliation would come to a climax on the cross, where the hostile world would finally reject Him totally, and where

God in His hostility against sin would lay the sins of us all on His Son. The grace which the Son of God has shown us in becoming man is the same grace which He has shown on the cross. He loved us so much that He died for us. So we rejoice in the fact that He gained for us the forgiveness of our sins, but even more that God raised Him from the dead, that He lives eternally.

God with us

We also celebrate that He is still with us. He promised in Matt. 28:20 that He would be with us until the end of the age. We might not be able to see Him, but He has not left us. He is with us in His Spirit and power. So we rejoice. We have not been abandoned, but our glorified Lord continues to humble himself to continue with us. Therefore we may still rejoice, not only in the past, but also in the present and the future. The birth of our Lord was the beginning of our salvation, but we are far richer today than on that day. The Lord has received all authority in heaven and on earth since then, to gather and preserve His church chosen to everlasting life.

Presents

But we have forgotten an essential part of birthday celebrations. Normally when we go to someone's birthday

party we bring a present. Again the world knows all about giving presents at Christmas. They give presents to each other so that they too may have something to rejoice about on this day. They even turn this day into a day of general goodwill to all men, but without Christ. We should be different. We should bring our presents to our Lord. It is His birthday. Now perhaps you might ask how are we to do that? The text which stands at the beginning of this meditation comes from a part of the letter in which the apostle Paul is urging the Corinthians to help the poor of the church in Jerusalem. The linch-pin of his argument is that as we have received the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, so we ought to show this same grace to the saints who are in need. Our Lord has made us rich. He has given us life and everything in Him. Therefore He asks that we share with His needy ones. He who gives to the needy saints gives to the Lord. He who gives to the needy saints also causes those saints to give thanks to the Lord (2 Cor. 9:12-13) for the Lord supplies His poor ones with their needs through the generosity of His rich ones.

Gifts for the poor

In Canada and throughout the Western world there is great abundance, but even there there are poor saints. Re-

member them on this day that they may rejoice together with you in the grace of the Lord, and praise His name. I live in Brazil, and in the churches here there are many needy saints. Their better off brothers could remember them on this day. There is here a desperate need for finances to maintain the preaching of the Word. The churches in the North East of Brazil are finding it difficult to support their trainee ministers. A collection could be held to enable this work to go on. And so we may go on. There are more than enough opportunities to give presents to our Lord on the day we celebrate His birthday, presents acceptable to Him, which will cause His name to be praised. Remember our present giving is like that of dependent children who give presents to their parents. They buy their presents from their parents' money. We confess before God: "Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chr. 29:14). Let us remember our Lord on this day, not only with words, but also with actions, to build His temple, to supply His saints, and to cause the praise of our Lord to abound. Let us give Him what is His, in thankfulness for the grace shown to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.



Joseph and the Virgin Birth

By N.H. Gootjes

The two places in the New Testament that speak about the virgin birth display a remarkable difference. Comparison of the stories recorded in Matthew 1 and in Luke 1 brings to light that they focus on different persons. Luke describes the events through the eyes of Mary. An angel appeared to her and told her that she would have a son (Luke 1:31). Matthew, on the other hand, describes the events as Joseph experienced them.¹ An angel appeared to him in a dream to give him instructions. Even the birth of Jesus is described from Joseph's perspective: "He had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave Him the name Jesus" (Matt. 1:25).

What is Matthew's purpose in focusing on Joseph? Is Joseph here described as a faith hero, a role model for Christian behaviour? This is of great importance for our understanding and use of this story. If Joseph is portrayed as a faith hero, then we should concentrate on Joseph as an example and try to become as faithful in our situation as Joseph was in his. On the other hand, if it is not Matthew's intention to show Joseph as a hero of the faith, why does he concentrate on him? Matthew even records Joseph's thoughts. We have to follow closely Matthew's description to see what he wants us to learn from these events.

Joseph excluded

To understand the events we have to realize first of all that Joseph and Mary were already married at the time. The expression "betrothed" used by the RSV may give us today a different impression, just as the expression of the NIV: "pledged to be married." Matthew makes it very clear in this passage, however, that they were married. He calls Joseph "her husband" (1:19) and Mary "his wife" (1:20, 24). That Joseph considers divorce (1:19) puts it beyond

doubt that Joseph and Mary were man and wife.

The situation described here was common in Israel but is no longer known in our Western world. When a marriage contract has been made between two parties, the boy and the girl were considered to be married before the law. Such contracts could be made when the girl was still young, possibly not older than twelve years old. A number of years would go by before the lawful husband would bring his wife to his house and they would live together. They were considered man and wife, however, from the moment the marriage contract was signed.

*She was found to
be with child of the
Holy Spirit.*

That is the situation between Joseph and Mary, as described in Matt.1:18. It was during this period that it became apparent that Mary was expecting a child. Matthew uses an uncommon expression: "She was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit." At first glance, this may give the impression that other people began to notice that Mary was pregnant. The difficulty is, however, that other people may have noticed that Mary was expecting, but they could not know that she was pregnant through the working of the Holy Spirit.² There is only one who could notice the pregnancy and at the same time know that it was the work of the Holy Spirit: Mary herself.

Matthew's story, however, does not focus on Mary and her predicament, but

on Joseph. Matthew implies that Mary told him that she was expecting a child. Did she also tell him that this was the direct result of the working of the Holy Spirit? There are two details in the story indicating that she did. There is in the first place the fact that Joseph considers to divorce her quietly. If he thought she had committed adultery, there would be no reason for him to leave her quietly. Joseph was planning effectively to divorce her, but not in such a way that she would be put to shame. This implies that he did not think Mary had done something dishonourable. In the second place, when the angel encourages him to bring Mary to his house, he makes the strange remark: "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary, your wife." Joseph, obviously, was not angry at Mary or disappointed in her, he was afraid. Joseph, then, was aware that the Holy Spirit had required Mary for the important task of bearing a special child, and he did not dare to press his marital right.

In this situation where his rights had been overruled by the Holy Spirit, Joseph was looking for an honourable way out. He could have gone to the judges and received an official divorce on the basis of Mary's pregnancy before she began living with him. Such a course of action, however, would expose Mary as a adulteress in the view of people. Or he could give her a private letter of divorce. In that case, Mary would be clear in the public eye, but the blame would be laid on Joseph for leaving his young wife. And only Mary would have the proof that he had divorced her and that she was free from him.

The end result would be that Joseph would lose his wife Mary. Joseph was willing to bring this sacrifice, since God had clearly shown that He needed Mary for his purposes. That brings us back to the question whether Joseph showed a strong faith. Obviously, this cannot be

denied. He was willing to do something that was both painful and shameful for him. Even if it was an arranged marriage, we should not suppose that he did not love her. Moreover, the way Joseph planned the divorce meant that he would end up bearing the blame for leaving his wife. And yet Joseph went ahead and gave Mary her freedom. Joseph's faith proved to be strong.

But we should also consider another question: Does Matthew in his description of Joseph portray him as a faith hero? Honest reading of the text shows that is not the case. To give an example, Matthew does not write at the beginning of 1:20: "As Joseph was agonizing about this. . . ." Any feelings Joseph may have had are not described. His disappointment, his uncertainty, or his grieving over the end of a marriage before they had begun to enjoy it, none of this is mentioned. The spotlight is not on Joseph and on his experiences and emotions.

Although the event is viewed from the position of Joseph, it focuses on someone else, as the very beginning of this passage indicates: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way." Matthew is not so much describing how Joseph was tested in his faith and overcame the temptation, he is recounting the story of Jesus Christ's birth.

The point of the story is to prove beyond doubt that Joseph is not the father of Jesus. Jesus is truly born out of Mary, but Mary's husband before the law, Joseph, is not his father. No human agency could bring the Christ into this world, not even the righteous Joseph. Jesus the Saviour came into this world through a divine miracle, through the extraordinary work of the Spirit of God. Joseph is not described as a faith hero, he is described as being excluded.

That affects all of us. We need a Saviour, but He cannot come into this world through our effort. We are sinners and we cannot contribute anything to our salvation. Our Saviour had to come into this world through the Holy Spirit. Our salvation is from beginning to end the work of God. That pattern is visible here, at the very beginning of the life of the Saviour. Even the righteous Joseph (1:19) had to be excluded. Joseph is not an example for us as a faith hero, rather the exclusion of the faithful Joseph in the virgin birth is the living proof that we cannot contribute to our salvation.

Joseph involved

While Joseph was considering secret divorce, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. He was commanded not to leave Mary but to

take Mary to his home. The first, legal part of their marriage should now be followed by the second, personal part. Mary should leave her parents' home and move in with Joseph, her husband.

As a result, Mary's child will be born in Joseph's house. Joseph has to accept her son as his own son, and he must assume responsibility for him. Although the boy is not Joseph's son, he must receive the place of Joseph's first born.

*Only through
adoption by
Joseph could the
Saviour become
the legal heir to
David's throne.*

The angel mentions yet another task for Joseph to fulfill: he has to call the child "Jesus." We need not now go into the meaning of this name, although the angel indicates that the meaning is important. The issue is that Mary should not name her son, but Joseph has to give this name to the boy. This underlines that Joseph publicly adopts Mary's son as his son.³

Joseph faithfully follows the two instructions given by the angel. He brought his wife home, although he did not live with her (1:24). This was not something expressly commanded by the angel. Moreover, when Mary gave birth to her son, Joseph called him Jesus.

Again we are confronted with the question whether Joseph shows himself to be a faith hero. If faith is to accept what God has said, and to act accordingly, then Joseph undoubtedly proves to be a believer. Yet it is difficult to judge how much heroism there was in his behaviour. Was it a struggle for Joseph to follow the command of the angel, or was he glad, at any rate, that he could marry Mary? What did he think and how did he feel? We have no way of knowing since the Bible does not give us insight into the struggles and triumphs of Joseph. The Bible appears to be focused on a different, far more factual aspect.

This is indicated in the way the angel addresses Joseph as "son of David" (1:20). David was Israel's great king. In the genealogy with which the gospel of Matthew begins, Jesus Christ is right away presented as "Jesus Christ, the son of David" (1:1). Later, David is called the king (1:6). Jesus, as the adopted son of Joseph, is legally included in the royal line. He is the great king promised to the house of David (Isaiah 9).

David's line, however, had gone into decline, not long after David. Eventually, his offspring had become unknown and unimportant figures during the Babylonian captivity. Rather than producing a new king, David's line had fizzled out. The final proof that the promised king could not come from David is the virgin birth itself. Only through an adoption by Joseph could the Saviour become the legal heir to David's throne.

To be sure, Joseph had to act in faith to make this possible. But the emphasis in this section is not on the faith of Joseph but on the faithfulness of God. God had given great promises to the house of David; history had made it painfully clear that David's house could not make these promises come true. Then God remembered His promises and addressed Joseph, an unknown son of David. He sent an angel to order Joseph to bring Mary into his house and to adopt Mary's son. In this extraordinary way, God made all his promises come true.

The story of the virgin birth in Matthew does encourage us to live in faith. It does not, however, do that by holding out Joseph as a good example of a faith hero. Rather, it does this by showing us God fulfilling His word. Joseph's example would not help us much, since we do not know his struggles and triumphs. It is God's work here, that is the real reason for us to live in faith. When we meditate on how much God did for us in the virgin birth, we will learn to trust Him to continue His salvation work today in us. 

¹See e.g. the commentary of J. Van Bruggen, *Matteus: het evangelie voor Israel* (Kampen: Kok, 1990) 34.

²This difficulty causes Davies and Allison to take the words "by the Holy Spirit" as an editorial comment. According to them, Matthew added for the benefit of his readers already at this point that there was no guilt in Mary but that the Spirit had caused this; see W.D. Davies, D.C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 200.

³See e.g. D.A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WORD, Dallas: Word Books, 1993) 21.

Was the Reformation Catholic? Melanchthon's Answer

By J. Faber

This address was delivered during a Reformation Rally in Ancaster, Ontario, on Friday October 31, 1997.

Introduction

October 31 will always be for us a day of thankful remembrance of the great work our gracious God brought about in the history of His church during the sixteenth century. Reformation Day reminds us of that important moment when Martin Luther published his ninety-five theses. The story goes that he nailed them to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg on the eve of All Saints Day of the year 1517.

The church of God was brought back to the basics of the gospel: forgiveness of sins is freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits. God imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me, if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart.

Those words of our Heidelberg Catechism, and many more, come to mind when we think of the message of the Reformation. One could speak of it with those five Latin expressions that all use the adjective *solus* (alone): *sola Scriptura, sola gratia, solo Christo, sola fide, soli Deo gloria*. Scripture alone, grace alone, through Christ alone, by faith alone, and therefore glory to God alone. What a glorious and joyful tidings this is! We may as children of the Reformation together sing our psalms and hymns with deep gratitude to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the one God who lives and reigns forever.

I would like to deal with a specific topic that is dear to my heart, and that I

phrased in the form of a question: *Was the Reformation catholic?*

Let me first elaborate on the question before I come to the answer, and then give you some application.

The question

Someone could say: Why do you ask this question? Well, for two reasons. The first one is that already in the sixteenth century the Reformers were branded as being no catholics anymore but lately come heretics and schismatics.

They were accused of schism. Did they not break the church of God asun-

der and is the unity of the church not immediately connected with its catholicity? The Reformation was painted as a schismatic movement. Its adherents were regarded as sectarians and often compared to the Donatists of the fourth century. Donatists did not acknowledge a baptism that was administered (presided over) by an unworthy minister. They made the validity of the sacrament dependent on the holiness of the minister, and they broke the unity of the church for the sake of its purity. Were not Luther and Melanchthon, Zwingli and Bullinger, Bucer and Calvin, the



Donatists of the sixteenth century? Were they not typical sectarians and schismatics?

And even worse: Did the Reformation not teach heresy. Was its doctrine of original sin, its attack on the so-called free will of man, and its doctrine of eternal predestination not a revival of the heresy of the Manichaeans? Had the Manichaeans not spoken of an eternal realm of darkness?

The Romanist adversaries in the sixteenth century were quick with their judgment. They strongly alleged: the Reformation is not catholic but is nothing else than a schismatic and even heretic movement. So there is the first reason to pose the question: Was the Reformation catholic?

The second reason is because of a tendency of this century, especially of the last decades. I noticed that some historians now act as if there were three Reformations: the first the Protestant Reformation, the movement inaugurated by Luther and Melanchthon in Germany. Then there is the radical Reformation, the movement of the spiritualists, people like the revolutionaries of the Peasant War (1524) and of the insurrection in Muenster (1534), or people like the quiet Anabaptists. And then there is what some now call the Catholic Reformation, the movement that wanted to improve the church of Rome. One may think of the establishing of the order of the Jesuits in 1540 or the council of Trent that began in 1545.

Therefore, nowadays historians sometimes speak of three Reformations: the Protestant, the radical and the catholic. This terminology gives at least the impression that the Protestant Reformation was not catholic. Here we have another reason for our question: Was the Reformation catholic or not?

Now that we have dealt with the reasons, let us for a moment consider the word "catholic" in our question. It is clear that an answer is also determined by the meaning of the question. In this case it will especially depend on the word "catholic."

"Catholic" is an original Greek word and its use in Christianity goes back to the early church. Ignatius used it in a letter to the church of Smyrna in the year 110. It found its way into the ecumenical symbols: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. Every one of us knows those words of the Apostles' Creed: I believe a holy catholic church, and most of us know the somewhat broader confession in the Nicene Creed: I believe one holy catholic and apostolic church.

What does the word mean? Well, "catholic" means universal. It indicates entirety. The church of God is being gathered throughout the entire world, from all places and every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues – as we read in Revelation 7:9.

The church is a universal gathering. It is so not only geographically and ethnically but also chronologically. The catholic church of God is the church of all ages. There is continuity throughout history. There is an assembly of God's people at all times. We confess with the church of all ages that there is a church of all ages. The catholic creeds speak of the catholic church.

And – last but not least – this church of God adheres to the entire truth. Catholicity has nothing to do with heresy or sectarianism.¹

The answer

Now that I have explained the question – its reasons and its terminology – we come to the answer. Was the Reformation catholic? Our answer is a heartfelt "Yes." Luther and Melanchthon, Zwingli and Calvin, Guido de Brès and Zacharias Ursinus, and all the other reformers and children of the Reformation, were and remained, by the grace of God, members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

I could illustrate this from Calvin's Institutes or e.g. his letter to Sadoletto, or demonstrate it from the works written by Guido de Brès.

I only mention now the beautiful words in Article 27 of our Belgic Confession. We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers. This church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end. Moreover, this holy church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world.

But this year is a Melanchthon year. It is 500 years ago that Philipp Melanchthon was born. He lived from 1497 till 1560. In 1518 he was appointed professor of Greek at the University of Wittenberg – not even a year after Luther had published his Ninety-five Theses. Melanchthon became Luther's most important co-worker for the Reformation in Germany.

In 1521, when he was only 24 years of age, Melanchthon published what is called the first handbook of Reformed doctrine, his *Loci communes*. In 1530 he composed the Augsburg Confession and defended it in his Apology. In 1539

he wrote a book, entitled *The church and the authority of the Word*. Via his student Zacharias Ursinus he had quite an impact upon the formulation of our Heidelberg Catechism.

So there are reasons enough to listen to Melanchthon when we seek an answer to the question: Was the Reformation catholic?

First of all, let us take note of the fact that during his whole life time Melanchthon maintained: "We ought all to be catholics."²

Already in 1519 he defended the thesis: "It is not necessary for a Catholic to believe any articles of faith than those to which Scripture is a witness."³

Sola Scriptura! Scripture alone is the rule or norm for our faith, and not the tradition of the church. The views of the synods, of the fathers and of the schools, ought to yield to clear Scripture.⁴

In 1521, the year in which Luther stood before the Diet at Worms, Melanchthon defended him over against the Paris theologians. They asked: "How will he be reckoned among the Catholics who does not hear the church?" Melanchthon answers: "I ask you, masters, what do you call the church? Is it that French Sorbonne? But how can that be the church which is foreign to the word of Christ, since Christ testifies that His sheep know His voice? We call the church that which has been founded by the Word of God, which feeds on the Word, which is nourished, fostered, and ruled by the Word and, in short, that which compares all things according to the Gospel: 'For he who is of God heareth God's words.' Again, those who do not hear are not of God. And besides, since the church has been born of the divine Word, there is no doubt but that she must be nourished by the same."⁵

Here we see that the debate between Rome and the Reformation was not only about the meaning of the word "catholic" but also about the church itself. What is the church? Melanchthon writes: "When I use the word 'church,' I do not have in mind pontiffs, bishops, and others who approve their opinions. For these are enemies of the true church. . . . But I call the church the assembly of true believers who have the Gospel and the sacraments and who are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit, as the church is described in Ephesians 5 and in John 10: 'My sheep hear my voice. . . .'"⁶

The church is born out of the Word, out of the gospel of Christ. The Son of God gathers, defends and preserves for himself a church and He does so

through the gospel. When in Lord's day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Ursinus formulated our belief concerning the holy catholic church, he clearly followed his teacher Melanchthon.

Melanchthon always stressed: The church is catholic, because the gospel is catholic. The church is from the beginning of the world because God himself first revealed the gospel in Paradise. In the foreword of his textbook on Christian doctrine, Melanchthon gives this wonderful sketch of the catholic church: With the promise in Paradise "God once more established a Church, His own people, who are to have eternal salvation. . . . For the sake of His Son Jesus Christ He wants always to have among men a small company (*Haueflein*) to know and invoke Him, and later to live with Him in eternal blessedness, wisdom, righteousness, and joy. This Church of God is thus reconstructed when Adam and Eve are consoled with the promise of God's Son: 'The seed of the woman will tread on the head of the serpent' (cf. Gen. 3:15)!"

With this promise, says Melanchthon, a Church is once again instituted, and Adam and Eve know that, on account of the promised Saviour, they have been received out of grace, and once more justified and regarded as children of God. Adam and Eve were justified by faith alone, by grace alone, through Christ alone! So our first parents were the first members of the catholic church. The Son of God gathers His church by His Word and Spirit, in the unity of the true faith, from the beginning of the world. When Melanchthon answers the question why the church is called catholic, one is immediately reminded of the description in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21, with its elements: "out of the whole human race," and especially "in the unity of the true faith," which faith characterizes the church in all ages, "from the beginning of the world to the end."⁷

There is the antithesis in history. Melanchthon writes: "Mankind always has two parts; on the one hand God's people; and on the other, a larger company of those who despise God. . . . However, the Son of God throughout all time abides in the true Church of God; He watches over the small company in which His word shines, and He disperses the devils and does not allow tyrants completely to devour His Church."⁸

The Reformation is catholic, because in the Reformation God restored the true doctrine of the Gospel. The assembly of the church is not bound to the regular succession of bishops, but to the

Word of God. Reformation is rebirth from the everlasting seed of the Gospel: "The church is born again where God restores the doctrine and confers the Holy Spirit. . . . The true church . . . retains the true doctrine of the Gospel or the articles of faith, just as Paul calls it the seat of truth."⁹

It warms your heart when you hear Melanchthon sing of the glory of this catholic church. "Let us not think, says he, that the church is only a Platonic state." The Reformation was accused of fleeing into a Platonic concept of an invisible church. Melanchthon rejects such a Platonic idea. Indeed, he often speaks of the church as a remnant as in the days of Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah and portrays the church as the hidden church or the church under the cross. But he does not want to forget that this hidden church is the concrete assembly that Christ gathers here on earth. Therefore the church is no Platonic idea but earthly reality.¹⁰

He then continues: "That assembly is the true church in which the pure doctrine of the Gospel shines forth and in which the divinely instituted Sacraments are rightly administered." Here you hear the author of the Augsburg Confession with his well-known description of the true church, a description that Calvin took over.

"And this (the true church), Melanchthon says, I hold our churches to be, by the blessing of God, since they profess the pure evangelical doctrine. And this doctrine without doubt has the unanimous approval of the universal church of Christ (*the Catholica Ecclesia Christi*, J.F.).... How great a glory and blessedness it is to be a member of this assembly!" There is "that procession which Christ leads and over which the holy angels hover, and in which walk such princes as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and other men endowed with extraordinary gifts! In this procession you already have a definite place, if you do not aid or approve the wickedness and cruelty of the enemies of the church, but embrace the true doctrine and confess it and adorn it with reverent character. The Psalmist says: 'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Blessed will be they who love her'. "¹¹

We heard Melanchthon say that the true church retains the doctrine of the Gospel or the articles of faith. This expression, "the articles of faith," reminds us of the creeds of the early church. The Reformation did not do away with the ecumenical creeds. The Reformation was catholic because it retained

not only the doctrine of the gospel, but also the articles of our undoubted Christian faith. For Melanchthon, the gospel and the creeds are even so closely connected that he always mentions them almost in one breath.

In his short history of the catholic church, in his textbook on Christian doctrine, he quotes one of his beloved texts: "No other foundation can any one lay than this which is laid, which is Jesus Christ, the Saviour." "And then the Church in the time of the apostles set forth the chief articles of Christian doctrine in the Apostles' Creed, and afterward, in the Nicene and Athanasian Creed, a true explanation of the previous creed is given. At this point, says Melanchthon, I want sincerely to give my eternal confession. All the articles in these creeds I truly hold, believe, and accept as divine truth, and with God's grace I will always keep them, and I might add that all angels and men are obliged to accept these same creeds with true faith."¹²

It is generally accepted that our Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 7 uses a definition of Melanchthon when it asks, What is true faith? True faith is not only a sure knowledge but also a firm confidence which the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the gospel. I would like to suggest that also the following question and answer are phrased after a formulation by Melanchthon, "the teacher of Germany," the teacher of Zacharias Ursinus: What, then, is necessary for a Christian to believe? All that is promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith teach us in a summary. This wonderful combination of the promise of the gospel and the Apostles' Creed is typically Melanchthonian: The catholic creed summarizes the catholic gospel. The Reformation was not an innovation. It did not bring new dogmas but restored and unfolded the ancient catholic doctrine of the triune God. Melanchthon strongly stated: "I would not want to stand forth either as the author or the defender of any new dogma in the church."¹³

Was it not precisely for this reason that in 1540 Melanchthon changed Article 10 of the Augsburg Confession (the Lord's Supper)?

The gospel, first revealed in Paradise, is summarized in the articles of our catholic faith. By the grace of God the promise of this gospel was again forcefully proclaimed in the Reformation. Our question read: Was the Reformation catholic? Melanchthon's answer is simple and short: The Reformation

was catholic, because it rediscovered the gospel.¹⁴

Application

Allow me now to give a short application of this answer.

Returning to my introduction, I would first urge you not to yield the word “catholic” to the Romanists. *Roman Catholic* is anything but catholic. The holy catholic church is not confined, bound or limited to a certain place – Rome, or to certain persons – the pope and the clergy. Roman Catholic is a contradiction in terms. Melanchthon rightly stated: The papists falsely call themselves Catholics, because they do not keep the uncorrupted doctrine of the Word, according to the agreement of the more pure ancient church.¹⁵

I will not now go into Melanchthon’s appeal to the more pure ancient church. He, the professor of classical antiquities, knew his Greek and Latin perfectly. He quoted what he called the testimonies of the fathers. Besides Calvin, especially Melanchthon was the Reformer who defended the Reformation as catholic also in references to the Scriptural thought of brothers like Athanasius, Ambrose, and Augustine. “Augustine is mine,” he even said. It does not mean that he did not have any criticism of brothers as Augustine or even of ecumenical councils as that of Nicea.¹⁶ Melanchthon’s own thoughts and actions were not perfect either.

But he was right when he stated: the Romanists falsely call themselves Catholics. Therefore, we should not speak of a Protestant, or even evangelical, Reformation besides a Catholic Reformation. In the sixteenth century there were many movements but there was only one Reformation. The so-called evangelical or Protestant Reformation was the catholic Reformation.

But what remains most important is that the Reformation was catholic because of the gospel. The eternal gospel is the joyful tiding of forgiveness of sins and eternal life *solo Christo*, only through Jesus Christ. He is our Saviour, the only Mediator between God and man. The promise of the gospel was signed and sealed to us in holy baptism. Do we believe this promise of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?

Christ gathers His congregation from everywhere and throughout all ages. I believe a holy catholic church. But when we say or sing that, we should also have this firm confidence: I am, and forever shall remain, a *living* member of this holy catholic church. A living member is he who believes: Not

only to others, but to me also, remission of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God, merely out of grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits.

And now a third application that is also dear to my heart. It concerns the unity of the church. The Reformation was catholic, but catholicity and unity belong together. I believe *one* holy catholic and apostolic church. Indeed, the unity of God’s church is unity of *faith*. But faith shows itself in works and the catholic church is no Platonic state. If we as Reformed people are one in faith, we should show this towards one another not only in words but also in deeds.

The last application we could make together. Let us together sing *Te Deum*, the hymn composed probably in the fourth century by Nicetas of Remesiana in what is today Yugoslavia. As far as we know, Nicetas was the brother who for the first time wrote the word “catholic” into what is now our Apostles’ Creed.¹⁷ He put it also in this hymn:

*Thy prophets’ and apostles’ glorious company,
The martyrs robed in white – all sing their praise to Thee.
Thy holy catholic Church in worship stands before Thee,
Confessing Thee: the Father, infinite in glory;
Thy true and only Son, worthy of veneration;
The Holy Spirit, source of strength and consolation.*

Soli Deo Gloria!



¹See for a broader exposition my *Essays in Reformed doctrine*, J. Boersma and W.M. Wielenga eds., Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications 1990, 71-99, 107-109.

²Corpus Reformatorum 24, 399. The context is important. Melanchthon states that to be called Catholic and to be really Catholic are two different things. Only he can be called a real Catholic who embraces the doctrine of the true Catholic Church. It has the testimony of all times and all ages. It is in agreement with the teaching of prophets and apostles. It does not tolerate divisions or heresies. “Omnes debemus esse Catholici, id est, amplecti hoc verbum, quod tenet Ecclesia recte sentiens, aliena a sectis, seu non implicita sectis pugnantibus cum illo verbo.”

³Melanchthon: Selected writings, ‘Baccalaureate theses, 1519,’ tr.C.L.Hill, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962, 18.

⁴‘Luther and the Paris theologians’, 1521, o.c., 80.

⁵o.c., 81.

⁶‘The church and the Word’ (1539), o.c., 135, cp. 133. Just before he published this treatise,

he wrote to Archdeacon Heath in England that he did not call “church” that Roman assembly which oppressed the church by godless tyranny but those lights of the pious, Adam, Noah, the prophets, Christ, the apostles, and other pious persons, who have kept the purity of the heavenly doctrine: “Nec ego ecclesiam voco illum coetum Romanum, qui nefaria tyrannide ecclesiam oppressit . . .” *Corpus Reformatorum* 3, 679.

⁷Melanchthon’s answer to the question why the church is called catholic reads in *Corpus Reformatorum* 24, 398: *Quia est coetus ubique terrarum passim dispersus, Et quia membra eius, ubique sunt, quantumvis locorum intervallis disiuncta, in externa tamen professione amplectuntur unam et eandem omnibus aetatibus, ab initio usque ad finem, verae doctrinae vocem.*

⁸Melanchthon on Christian doctrine: *Loci communes* 1555, tr. C.L. Manschreck, New York: Oxford University Press, 1965, XLVI and XLVII.

⁹Melanchthon: Selected writings, 137.

¹⁰Cf. *Corpus Reformatorum* 8, 619: *Non loquimur de Ecclesia, ut de Idea Platonica, sed coetum visibilem monstramus. . .*

¹¹o.c., 185. The Latin original is in *Corpus Reformatorum* 23,640s.

¹²Melanchthon on Christian doctrine: *Loci communes* 1555, XLIX and L.

¹³“Letter on the Lord’s Supper” 1529, Melanchthon: Selected writings, 126. Cf. *Corpus Reformatorum* 3, 321: *Nec nos ulium novum dogma inveximus in Ecclesiam, sed Ecclesiae catholicae doctrinam renovamus et illustramus.*

¹⁴“For there is no doubt that the kind of doctrine we profess expresses the very consensus of the catholic church of Christ, as indicated by the confessions, the saner synods, and the more learned fathers,” Melanchthon: Selected writings, 177.

¹⁵Corpus Reformatorum 24, 398 (De appellatione Ecclesiae Catholicae): Papistae falso se nominant Catholicos, quia non retinent doctrinam incorruptam Verbi, iuxta consensum purioris Ecclesiae veteris.” Cp. CR 12, 489: “Non igitur recte arrogant sibi titulum catholicae Ecclesiae hi, qui defendunt opiniones ignotas veteri Ecclesiae.”

¹⁶See especially the booklet “The church and the authority of the Word,” 1539, in Melanchthon: Selected writings, e.g. 176f.: “. . . it is clear that we truly hold the same doctrine as the catholic church of Christ. I add this also, that distinguished writers such as Ambrose, Augustine, and a few others think the same way, if they are properly understood and if they are forgiven for some few things which were not matters of controversy in their day.” Peter Fraenkel dealt with the topic of the testimonies of the fathers extensively in *Testimonia patrum. The function of the patristic argument in the theology of Philip Melanchthon*, Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1961.

¹⁷J.N.D. Kelly, *Early christian creeds*, second edition, London, Longmans, 1960, 385.

Year-End Review 1997

By W. den Hollander

It was during the week following the *International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church* that this review was due. By means of information reaching church leaders and congregations through various channels the organizers of this *Day of Prayer* intended to shatter the silence internationally concerning the plight of believers who are imprisoned, beaten, raped, enslaved, even martyred as a direct consequence of the practice of their faith. This year's focus was especially on Moslem countries. Whether in Iraq, Egypt, Sudan, or Saudi Arabia, or in countries where relative freedom of worship is officially guaranteed, the satanic enmity against the rise of Christianity and the individual hostilities against recent converts are clear evidence that true believers have their precious faith not unassailed!

Against such a background of persecution and martyrdom we must be very thankful that during this past year the service of our God and the worship of His Name could continue pretty much unhindered. By contrast, a snow storm in the Fraser Valley or a flood in the Carman/Winnipeg area, certainly cannot compare to the magnitude of casualties due to persecution in China. A van was stolen from London's parking lot and the Winnipeg church building needs to stay locked during the services, but these events should seem insignificant to us when we hear that children are being stolen for slavery in Sudan or that church buildings are being broken down to the ground in Iraq. The overwhelming grace of God is evident in the freedom we enjoy and in the privileges we receive. This should make us feel ashamed when we do not make use of these freedoms and privileges more fruitfully than we do. Even the opportunity of daily morning-devotions or evening Bible study in our families or



Willoughby Heights Canadian Reformed Church, Langley, BC

with fellow-believers could easily be taken for granted. A year end review, therefore, which sets out to draw the attention to the many special occasions during this past year in our churches should first and foremost express deep gratitude for every-day blessings and liberties enjoyed in God's mercy!

Ministry of the Gospel

The heart of a Reformed church is in the proclamation of the gospel. No wonder that we focus, first of all, on the progress of the ministry of the gospel in our churches. The importance of faithful and steadfast preaching is undisputed in a Reformed federation of churches. Its precious value is appreciated especially in vacant churches. Hence it is of foremost significance that a vacancy be filled, once it arises. For this reason the churches at Calgary and Lincoln in receiving the Candidates R. J. Eikelboom and J. Van Vliet, respective-

ly, as their own pastors and teachers, were very happy. Both ministers were graduates of the Theological College last year.

During this past year much activity took place in vacant churches to have their vacancies filled. The church of Coaldale extended calls to the Revs. C. Stam, J. de Gelder, W. Huizinga (Armadale W.A.), J. Van Woudenberg, and W. B. Slomp, but these calls were all declined. The church of Fergus is also vacant in spite of much internal activity to come to such calls and due to declines received from the Revs. J. de Gelder and J.E. Ludwig.

After the departure of the Rev. P.K.A. de Boer, to Bedforddale, W.A., the church of Carman went to work in the field of calling. After a review of their calling procedures the consistory decided to do away with the congregational vote. Instead, they now propose a name to the congregation, thoroughly explain and

discuss their proposal, after which the congregation receives the opportunity during the week following to voice objections. After careful preparation, Carman called the Revs. P.G. Feenstra, R. Aasman, and D.G.J. Agema, but none of these ministers could see his way clear to accept this call. Orangeville saw her vacancy filled by the Candidate R.E. Pot after the Rev. D.G.J. Agema and the Rev. J. Moesker declined the calls extended to them. Ancaster received the Rev. G. Ph. van Popta as their new pastor and teacher after declines from Rev. C. Stam and Rev. W. Wielenga. Meanwhile the church of Taber saw the place of the Rev. G. Ph. van Popta filled by the Candidate Th. Lodder. The church of Chatham, which also became vacant this past year, due to the move of the Rev. G. Wieske to the church of Rockway, received as its new minister the Rev. H. Versteeg, former Missionary in Irian Jaya.

During this past year the number of vacant churches was increased by one with the positive development in the Rehoboth Church of Burlington West. After trying for many years to solve its growth "problem" with various plans and in several ways, on September 7 this church ceased to exist. It continued as two new churches: Burlington-Waterdown and Flamborough. The former kept the Rehoboth minister, the Rev. G. H. Visscher, while the latter has already extended a call to the Rev. J. de Gelder, who declined. Plans for the institution of new congregations are under way as well in Carman and in Winnipeg. Winnipeg has received approbation at the October Classis for its plans to institute on January 4, 1998. In this context we may note a similar decision of Classis Pacific: to split its entire Classis into two, Classis Pacific East and West, commencing in 1998.

Memorabilia

There are several other events worthy of mention. Prof. Dr. J. Faber marked his 45th year in the ministry. Among the younger generation, the Rev. C. Stam and the Rev. Dr. J. Visscher celebrated their 25th anniversaries in the ministry. The Rev. J. Mulder became subject of much concern and prayer after he suffered another heart attack. We are thankful that the Lord spared his life and granted him recuperation after undergoing by-pass surgery. Among the active ministers there are also at times reasons for health concerns. Many consistories are aware of this and seek to alleviate the prob-

lem of the heavy workload in one way or another (e.g. a free 5th Sunday of the month). Another observation in this regard is the decision of the consistories of Langley and Hamilton to grant their pastors a sabbatical of about half a year.

A development which is of a totally different (and rather sad) nature, however, took place in the church of Denver, Colorado. The Rev. M. Pollock was released from his ministry for four months.

Theological College

From the circle of ministers, the step to the Theological College is not too great. (The step from the College to the ministry may be somewhat different, however!) The Board of Governors of the Theological College came to the churches with plans for a program of practical training leading to a Pastoral Proficiency Certificate. After having considered the feedback from churches and students, the Board will submit this plan to General Synod in 1998.

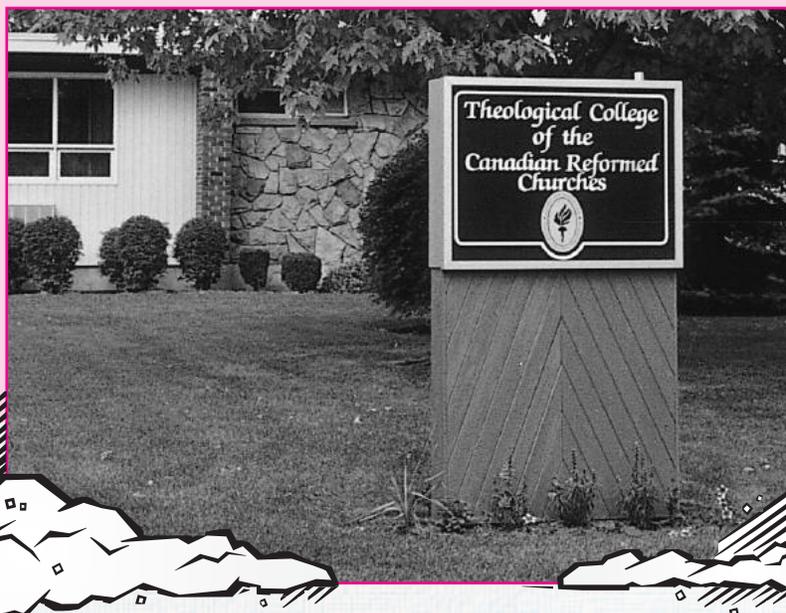
In view of vacancies, growth, and development among the churches, the College is still very much needed! A recent graduate of the College has found a place in the mission field. Cand. S. 't Hart is the missionary for the Church of Toronto and supporting churches. He accepted a call for their new mission field in Papua New Guinea. Other mission fields also need missionaries: the Church of Surrey needs to replace the Rev. R.F. Boersema who retired early from the work in Brazil due to his failing eyesight. The Church of Hamilton is seeking a replacement for the Rev. J. Kroeze. Various churches are consider-

ing work in urban mission, home mission, or for the work in Quebec.

The horizons of the College are widening. This was evident at the graduation of Yonson Dethan of Timor; it can be deduced from the presence of other foreign students; it is accented by requests and inquiries made time and again. Prof. Dr. C. Van Dam visited the *Juan Calvino* Seminary in Mexico City. He was invited as guest lecturer and spoke on the book of Leviticus. He also became involved in an orientation among Independent Presbyterian Churches of Mexico. The professors of our Theological College must be mentioned for their other contacts. Prof. Dr. N. H. Gootjes attended the ICRC in Seoul, Korea. He also toured the churches in Alberta and Manitoba. Other professors made contributions to conferences and ministers' workshops in East and West.

Congregational life

We began this review by observing that much of our regular congregational life might be taken for granted. We should, therefore, note with thankfulness the many regular activities which take place in and among the congregations. Much of the work in the Kingdom of God is done by volunteers who go about their tasks in societies, and in committees for one project or another. For example, we may have considered for many many years that the work of an organist is just one of those services in which hobbyists employed their talents. Br. Van Dijk, of the church of Coaldale, has served that congregation ever since its institution. Lately, however, many congregations struggle with a



shortage of organists. (Not so the church of Grand Valley! There, five organists take turns rendering their services.) Recently the suggestion has been made to compensate members in the congregation who are willing to take organ lessons. In other congregations this issue triggered a renewed discussion about the use of musical instruments in general, with the consideration whether perhaps the time may be ripe to make changes in this respect. There is also a need for choir directors; the lack of them makes the presence of choirs in the congregations a precious possession. Let us be thankful for the talents in the congregations. We may not take for granted members who employ their talents readily and cheerfully.

The topic of Bible translations occupied much attention in the churches. Due to information that became available after General Synod 1995 concerning plans for the publication of a gender-inclusive version of the NIV, some churches became reluctant to follow the recommendation of Synod. These plans have now been withdrawn due to a general outcry against them. Nevertheless, there have been congregations which rescinded their decisions to use the NIV in the worship services. Others are waiting till after the next Synod in order to see what the sentiment is among the churches concerning this matter. In connection with a possible, or definite, switch to the NIV, the matter of the language used in prayer received the attention of several congregations or ministers.

At times councils or congregations request discussion of practices to which we are accustomed, but which may be done differently. As innocent a discovery that the use of red wine leads to migraine headaches (as the church of Watford observed) necessitated a switch to white wine. This request for discussion could also result from discussions, practices, or studies in other congregations. For example, the use of individual cups for the celebration of the Lord's Supper in Burlington-South. The Church of Edmonton-Providence (among others) discussed and introduced the possibility of receiving tax-receipts for donations made for the support of the needy. Another issue for regular consideration is the manner of voting for office bearers. Hamilton has changed its practice from voting taking place in a meeting of the congregation to the use of voting stations which are used before and after the worship services. Even in regard to the nomination for office bearers, considerations come up that never used to play

a role: smoking, for instance. In all these matters, however, we may observe again, how important it is when Council and congregation are able to discuss these matters in an atmosphere of openness, harmony, and edification.

Congregational life shows its vibrancy in the activities of the various societies among the congregation as well. Certain societies may flourish more than others. Sometimes it helps to restructure the operation of a society, or to introduce new approaches to the meeting. Yet, throughout the federation we see these activities continue. Some congregations developed new initiatives for the care of the little lambs (as in Cloverdale, in a nursery program of Bible stories and crafts) or for the elderly; in the way of special societies (e.g. *College and Careers* in Coaldale); or by means of meetings at different times during the day. In congregations such as Vernon and Toronto, certain study groups even decided to continue their Bible discussions during the summer season. In the context of these local activities, it is always a very stimulating and exciting experience to come together as men or as women or as young people in regional meetings such as League Days, Ensemble Evenings, and Youth Rallies. Also during the past year meetings like these were held in East and Middle and West.

In order to keep all this work operating fruitfully, we must mention the work of the ILPB, which continues to translate and publish Reformed Bible study material, promoting the study of God's Word, in order to equip God's people to serve Him in true obedience. Publications like that of Prof. Dr. C. Van Dam on *Divorce and Remarriage* or of the Rev. J. Mulder (ed.) of *Marriage and the Family* make for excellent material for discussion and study in societies. In one of his articles in *Clarion*, however, Dr. Van Dam observes a decline in the study of political issues in general, and of a lack of active involvement in the work of ARPA or in local or provincial political activities in particular. A renewed development of a vision and incentive in that regard may be necessary, or otherwise at least a renewed vigor in the field of political action.

In regards to other congregational activities, it may be noted that in more and more congregations the deacons intend to visit all the families (addresses) in the congregation, at least once every three years. In this way they seek to raise the profile and level of understanding of the work of mercy, encourage mutual service of mercy, and

acquaint themselves with the needs of the congregation. In this way councils and consistories become aware of the potential of the congregation. In the church of Aldergrove this led to greater attention for the possible involvement of the many young people of the congregation. In other congregations such special approaches also led to more attention for the elderly and to a greater sensitivity for their needs. The possibility has been considered to conduct weekly devotionals and bi-monthly worship-services in Manoah Manor (including the administration of the Lord's Supper).

All these activities and more underline the importance of good congregational facilities. Many congregations have been working on the improvement of facilities or in projects for the building of their own or of a new places of worship and meeting-rooms. The church of Taber is enjoying its new building. Calgary will soon enter its new facility where church and school activities will be accommodated. The church of Houston as well became involved in the erection of a new church-building. The church of Port Kells, now known as the church of Willoughby Heights, opened its new facilities on April 11, 1997. Also the church of Chatsworth, now known by the name of its new location in Owen Sound, officially opened its new facilities on Feb. 7, 1997. The church of Elora, on the other hand, completed its building ventures by raising a beautiful new manse on the premises of the church-building. They received assistance in their building-project from members of the churches at Fergus and Grand Valley.

All these activities can be observed and seen very clearly, but we should certainly not underestimate the activities which take place while going unnoticed. Among them are the prayers of the saints, especially in times of need, of sorrow, or anxiety (as occurred in several congregations due to accidents this past year). Activities of *Helping Hands*, of *Sisters' Help*, and the like also may not be overlooked. Further, there is the work of mutual upbuilding and discipline, which is an essential and central aspect of healthy congregational life. All in all, the fruits of the Spirit can be seen. These enhance and enrich the functioning of the communion of saints very much.

Ecclesiastical unity

As we continue to review the work in our federation over the years, one striking development which can be

observed is the increased attention to "ecclesiastical unity." Also during this past year many activities served this pursuit of unity. There is the official contact which has been established between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Free Church of Scotland. In Toronto, the vacancy which existed in the FCS congregation gave occasion for many a request to Rev. W. den Hollander to lead the evening worship service. With the Induction of the Rev. D. Allan Macleod on September 19 this vacancy came to an end. This facilitated a new phase of contact at the level of both councils. Classis Ontario-South received visitors from the FCS congregation in Livonia (Detroit) at its September meeting. Classis Alberta-Manitoba likewise decided to invite observers from the FCS station in Edmonton. The Rev. R. Aasman conducted a service there in which baptism was administered.

The Committee for Contact with the OPC reported on its good progress in mutual understanding on matters such as the "fencing of the Lord's Table" and "confessional membership." The committees of both federations agreed that this better mutual understanding could be the basis for ecclesiastical fel-

lowship. The Committee also reported progress with respect to clarity in the OPC's relationship with the CRCNA, as well as on the acceptance by the CEIR of our rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Evidently, Synod 1998 at Fergus, Ontario, will be decisive for the evaluation of this progress and for the direction and extent of the relationship between the two federations.

In magazines such as *Clarion* reports were given on activities of the "Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity." These deputies attended meetings of the "Alliance of Reformed Churches" and the Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America. In *Clarion* the discussion continued about the dilemma between the progress in contact between churches at the local level and the pace of this same progress at the level of the federations. Proposals for local initiatives and possible organizational structures (such as the ARCH form of cooperation as proposed by Dr. J. Visscher, and discussed by the Rev. D.G.J. Agema) received widespread attention. At such an ARCH meeting in the Fraser Valley some twenty churches belonging to various federations participated. At the occasion of

the commemoration of the great Reformation, rallies were held at several locations in our country, involving members of the CDNRC, URCNA, FRC, OCRC and other independent Reformed churches.

At Classis Pacific, the matter of contact between our church at Aldergrove and the Free Reformed Church at Abbotsford found a place on the agenda repeatedly. As a result of the progress in these contacts and of the discussions at classis, proposals have gone to Regional Synod West to overture General Synod Fergus 1998 to appoint deputies for contact with the Free Reformed Churches. In regard to these matters concerning ecclesiastical unity, Synod 1998 is anticipated with a great measure of eagerness and expectation.

Mission

We will begin with looking at the work of mission in our own country. We may conclude from the interesting reports of br. H. de Haan that work in Smithers is progressing well. On the Fort Babine reserve, meetings are now held in the community hall which resulted in greater attendance. The Christian Indian Centre in Smithers is frequented by more



Mission on the Fort Babine Reserve, Smithers, BC



Church in Maragogi, Brazil

people because of the operation of a "soup kitchen." This progress has proven beneficial for purposes of establishing counseling contacts as well. For the promotion of a good understanding and acceptance by the older generation, br. De Haan has been enrolled in language studies and will continue to seek opportunities to improve his use of the native language dialects.

The institution of the church in Maragogi was one of the highlights in the history of the work in Brazil. This work is initiated by the church of Surrey and supported by other churches. On April 6, office bearers were ordained in São José, facilitating a separation of São José and Maragogi as two autonomous churches, each with its own council. The government of the local church according to Biblical principles was the main topic of discussion at the 11th Latin American Mission Conference, held from October 1-8. Other papers at this ICRC Regional Conference addressed *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, *Family Planning in Brazil*, and *Strategy Planning*. During this past year both Mission Aid couples of Surrey and Hamilton, the Kuiks and the Plugs respectively, came home on furlough and visited the supporting churches. Especially the work of Jake and Darlene Kuik, carried out in São José is supported in many ways by volunteers and schools and women societies on the homefront. They even have volunteers coming out to São José and

Maragogi to alleviate some of the pressures in their task and to take over some of their activities.

During the month of April, the Rev. and Mrs. H. Versteeg made their farewell visit to the churches in Irian Jaya. In the case of the Rev. Versteeg, his farewell will only be temporary. The council of his new congregation, the church of Chatham, granted him permission for three week-visits to Irian Jaya for the next three years. Before entering upon his regular ministry in Chatham, Rev. Versteeg also completed his book on the Islam, *Love Your Neighbour*. This book was written to prepare our Reformed brothers and sisters for the influx of Moslems. Sister Versteeg left a legacy behind in the form of a book with Bible stories in pictures. She discovered great interest for this work during this final trip.

Meanwhile, Clarence and Jeanette Togeretz and their daughters came home on furlough this past July instead of the planned April 1998. After all the pressures and experiences of their first term for Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF), a successful term at that, they came back to family and friends, to churches and to some more training and courses. In January 1998 they hope to return to their much appreciated service supplying communication and transportation to the many who would otherwise depend on boat or travel on trail.

Another couple working hard to facilitate the work of mission and the good progress of the spreading of the Gospel is the newly wed couple James and Linda Baartse. They completed their work for Wycliffe Bible Translators in Guatemala and came on furlough in order to complete the preparations for their next mandate. First and foremost among these preparations was their wedding-day on August 30. Being supported or sponsored by many churches in Ontario, they treated these churches to very informative evenings speaking of and showing much about their work. In some cases, such as in Toronto, this was in combination with the presentation of the Togeretzes.

Evangelism

Also the work of outreach at the local level continues in the churches. The work of the *Reformed Evangelism Taskforce* still provides literature and publishes magazines such as *Evangel* and *Outreach* to equip the membership for its local activities. There is need for further training and instruction as well. Articles (and speeches) by the Rev. J. L. Van Popta filled a great need. His many evaluations and suggestions had the result that, on the one hand, some churches gave a critical scrutiny to the work of Vacation Bible School (with subsequent discontinuation in some places), and on the other hand, other forms of outreach were considered and implemented. In his home congregation of Ottawa some members have started a *Men's Breakfast Meeting*. Ottawa is also in the process of testing the airwaves for the proclamation of the Gospel using the material of the *Voice of the Church*. This work of radio broadcasting in the nation's capital region is being financially supported also by the church of Toronto.

Another new endeavour which took place during this past year is the *Camp-Fire* outreach in the Orangeville area. With the endorsement, support, and guidance of the Consistory of the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton, a group of enthusiastic young people organized two camps. One was intended especially for the Hamilton downtown, inner-city children. The other was organized for youngsters of the church. These camps are reported to have been a success and worthy of follow-up in the coming years. Another Hamilton project is the *Bible Study Group with Asian Students*, which is held on Saturday afternoons in the Theological College. These students are

studying English as foreign students. These afternoons provide opportunity not only to overcome the loneliness and culture shock of being in a foreign land but especially to introduce them to the Gospel of salvation in Christ.

Other activities also deserve mention. The CRBA promotes the message of the Gospel through the radio broadcast entitled the *Voice of the Church*. At several places in Ontario we also find the *Bibles for Missions Thrift Stores*. In Chatham and Burlington our members are intensely involved with it. They use the profit of selling second hand clothing for the purchase of Bibles for China. With the help of br. Richard Bultje, the Church of Burlington South pursued the possibility of establishing a permanent mission project in the downtown Hamilton area. Through the work of the many local Evangelism Committees, the gospel of salvation is brought to old age homes, nursing homes, Saturday Morning Children's Bible Study classes, and the like. These committees work hard in many places to keep the congregations informed and involved in local issues and activities.

Other events

Covenant Canadian Reformed Teacher's College still occupies a pivotal position among the important activities and institutions. This does not depend

so much on the number of students (although it would be a great blessing if more young people would make use of the excellent training and academic instruction which is offered by a competent staff) but more on the need for and importance of in-depth orientation in the fields of the history and philosophy of education, psychology, and related subjects. Our Teacher's College has temporarily re-located to the Cornerstone Church building in Hamilton (a familiar location, I'm sure!), pending their move to the facilities of the former Timothy Elementary School in Hamilton. They continue to re-assess their program in order to answer the needs of those who seek their Reformed training, and to improve the possibility for recognition by meeting provincial standards. One of the teachers at this College, sr. Christine Van Halen-Faber, saw her own studies crowned with a Master of Education degree. The operation of the College is served well also by the assistance of an Academic Advisory Committee, which in the past year studied *The Profile of a Teacher*.

In regard to the care for our brothers and sisters who have special challenges in life, the organization of Anchor Home certainly fills a need. Yet Anchor Home continues to operate its activities with severe financial constraints. Sr. R. Ravensbergen radiates her *Ray of Sunshine* through the columns

of *Clarion*. In her column she provides a source of comfort and warmth, spiritual encouragement and edification for our seriously challenged brothers and sisters and for those who love and care for them.

What more could be mentioned in a review of blessings and fruits and evidences of God's goodness among us? We certainly should mention the activities of the CRWRF and its work for the African Children's Homes in Kenya. Where unemployment is rampant, and poverty brings severe suffering, the CRWRF extends our hand of mercy to our distant neighbours. The CRWRF also supports the activities of *Faithworks*, in which young people give up some of their holidays or study-breaks to work in places like Kentucky, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, or elsewhere. Our attention is regularly drawn to the work of the *Middle East Reformed Fellowship* (MERF), which seeks to equip evangelists and others for the work of outreach in the Middle East. The MERF international support organization sponsored the building of a new centre in Larnaca on Cyprus, the John Calvin Centre, to support this work. In the same vein of international outreach we could mention the trip made by the Rev. A.J. Pol, who returned to the Reformed Churches in Indonesia for a visit. A Theological College for the training of evangelists is located on the island of Sumba; the Rev. Pol taught at this College for many years and returned to confirm the brethren in the faith.

Reflecting on the host of activities listed in this *Review*, one becomes overwhelmed by the greatness of God's work and the amazing grace of His recruitment of weak and sinful servants who have the treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels. With thanks for the peace and freedom and the many liberties He allows us, and through the guidance and working of the Holy Spirit, we may look back on the past year of service in His Kingdom. We owe the praise and thanks to Him alone! Whether we observe the local activities or the events taking place throughout the globe, even to the ends of the earth, we must acknowledge the faithfulness of the Head of the Church. He has promised: "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." May the progress in the work and the continuation in the activities serve to bring the day of his return near! May we all continue to pray in the New Year, "Maranatha come Lord Jesus!"



MERF
International –
John Calvin
Centre,
Larnaca,
Cyprus



*“ . . . for that which has not been told them they shall see,
and that which they have not heard they shall understand.”
Isaiah 52: 15b*

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

It is the time of the year again that we are celebrating Christmas.

If we entered our country now from a foreign planet, it would not take us long to notice that something was going on. Decorations, lights, excitement everywhere, it cannot escape anyone's attention. We would soon ask the question what the lights and decorations were all about. Then we would be informed that Christmas is coming up. Probably we would also be told that Christmas means presents, dinners, parties, and all kinds of other fun.

Yes, for that is what it means for most people. Christmas is the highlight of the year. Presents and food are being collected for those who cannot afford it themselves, for how could one ever live without Christmas presents and a nice dinner! And when the holidays are all over, then it seems that the whole world is falling down like the London Bridge. There is nothing left of all that excitement, and people have to face the bills and the dull every day life that will go on for a whole year before they finally can start celebrating once more.

But is that really how it is? Is that what we feel, too?

Fortunately we do not learn that in the Church. As children of God's covenant we are much richer. In the Church we do not celebrate an empty Christmas as a once-a-year event. In the Church we celebrate Christmas all through the year. And because we know why the Lord Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the celebrations do not stop as His birth. Christ's birth cannot be separated from the other things He did for us. For Jesus was not just born as a baby. He was God's Son. He left His Father's house, because the Lord had given Him a task: He had to die on the cross for our sins. And even that was not the end. After His death, He rose from the grave because he conquered death for us. Then He ascended into heaven, and from there He sent us His Holy Spirit.

In the Church we celebrate all those different things that Christ accomplished for us. Our world does not tumble down after our celebrations, but we have hope and comfort. And that is not only for the present time. Some of us might not even have the opportunity to do a lot of "feasting!" But our hope and comfort is for the future. Because Christ paid for all our sins, we can look joyfully into the future. For He prepared the way for us to go to His Father. With His suffering and His death He opened the way for us to eternal life.

Yes, we are celebrating Christmas again. We thank the Lord for sending us His only begotten Son. We thank Him that He enabled His Son to become our Saviour. We thank Him that Jesus Christ could fulfill His work as

it was prophesied. We thank Him that through Him we may come to our Father with our pains and anxieties. And we look forward to the eternal celebrations in Heaven. Then we will see things that we cannot even imagine, and we will understand that which we have never heard!

*The little that the just possess in token
Exceeds the wealth of evil men who stray.
The arms of all the wicked shall be broken
But God upholds the blameless in their way.
He knows their days and verily has spoken,
Awarding them their heritage for aye.*

Psalm 37:7

Birthdays in January:

2: Liz Koning

Dicken's Field, Extended Care Centre, Room 210,
14225-94th Street, Edmonton, AB T8E 6C6

7: Christine Breukelman

2225-19 St., Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

17: Henry Driegen

72 Ross Rd., RR 1, Abbotsford, BC V2S 1M3

17: Grace Homan

"ANCHOR HOME," 361 30 Rd. RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

19: Janine Smid

RR 1, Arkona, ON N0M 1B0

27: Hank Orsel

705 Surrey Lane, Apt. 1201,
Burlington, ON L7T 3Z4

Liz hopes to be 37, Christine 26, Henry and Grace 42, Janine 28, and Hank Orsel 67.

We also have a new name added to our list this month. This boy was diagnosed with leukemia in October. He has been in the Children's Hospital in Vancouver, receiving treatments. If all went well, he should be home by now, but he will have to undergo chemotherapy for the next 1 1/2 years. He hopes to be 9 in January, and I am sure he would be very happy with cards and letters. His name and address are:

30: Tyler Hoeksema

6755 Lorne Dr., Sardis, BC V2R 2G3

I wish you all a happy birthday, and until next month,
Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Hwy. 20, RR #1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

FROM THE PUBLISHER

His Purpose

*As I have planned, so shall it be, and
as I have purposed, so shall it stand. Isaiah 14:24*

Almost every day we read about a business merger of one kind or another. It seems small is out and big is in. The forming of world-conglomerates is on the rise. This is so not only in the business sector, but also in the political arena. The unification of Europe moves forward in order to counterbalance the influences of the North American and Asian blocks. Even church bodies seek integration and unions to present their voice in a wilderness of unbelief. These powerblocks in business, politics, and the church may intimidate and scare us as to what the future might bring.

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established, so we read in Proverbs 19:21. That is indeed the comfort we may draw in view of the awesome world movements taking place. As Christians we acknowledge that God will accomplish His purpose no matter what the overwhelming proposals of men. Therein lies also our challenge. As willing instruments in His service we must humbly work in this changing world to the praise of His glory.

When our mind is focused on God's greater purpose there is no need to be afraid. This perspective should spur us on to use the time allotted with zeal and enthusiasm for God and the benefit of men in a world driven by self-willed disobedience and a thirst for a self-styled world order. In these circumstances may we all share the hope that is within us.

For He has made known to us all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Him, according to the purpose of Him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of His will, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of His glory. Ephesians 1:9-12

THANK YOU, CLARION TEAM

Our editorial team has spent much time and effort to provide you with interesting articles and news items. It is our hope you have been blessed by reading them. Our heartfelt thanks to Dr. J. De Jong, Prof. J. Geertsema, Rev. R. Schouten, Dr. C. Van Dam and Rev. G. Ph. van Popta for the fruits of their pen. As of January 1, 1998, a number of changes will take place in the editorial committee. Prof. J. Geertsema, our chief editor, will elaborate on these changes in the first issue of January.

A special thank you to Rev. G. Ph. van Popta who, as managing editor, must be ready every two weeks to deliver the written materials to us. He performs this task admirably and cheerfully. In the coming year he will be assisted by language editor, his brother, Rev. John van Popta.

Our boys and girls must have noticed that Aunt Betty's column, "Our Little Magazine" appeared irregularly. It is also missing in the year-end issue. We hope that this column will become a regular feature again in 1998.

Thank you, Rev. van Spronsen, and Mrs. R. Ravensbergen for providing your regular contributions, the "Hi-Liter" and the "Ray of Sunshine," respectively.

You, the steady and faithful subscribers, advertisers, correspondents and other contributors, make it all possible for us to publish *Clarion*. Thank you.

HOLIDAY GREETINGS

The time of remembering the birth of Christ seasonally is near. God's gift to us, His Son, is a gift of grace. This Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, is our Way, our Truth, our Life. Let us therefore continue to *be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord y(our) labour is not in vain.* 1 Corinthians 15:15

We wish you a blessed 1998.

W. Gortemaker



The Function of the Promise of the Covenant in the Rearing of Children

By W.B. Slomp

This is a condensed version of a speech held last year in Edmonton (April 22, 1996), Coaldale (Aug. 24, 1996), and earlier this year for a Teacher's convention in Neerlandia (March 20, 1997).

Do you have some advice?

Recently Dr. James Dobson was on the radio speaking about the rearing of children. He told a story about Charlie Shed, the author of the well-known book, *Promises to Peter*. Before they had any children of their own, he and his wife used to go around the country giving advice to parents about how to raise children. As they received children of their own, their advice began to change. They began to realize that everything was not always so cut and dried. When their children became teenagers they would start their presentation by asking, "Do you have any advice for us?" That is also how I feel this evening. We have in our midst many seasoned, professionally trained teachers, many parents and grandparents

with a wealth of experience. I too am a father of seven children, a good portion of them in their teenage years. Daily I am reminded of how inadequate I am, and of how much any success depends on the grace of God. Nevertheless, I will try to impart to you some wisdom about the rearing of children. That wisdom is not my own, however. For I have no wisdom of my own. It is wisdom imparted to us in God's Word.

Human theories

What happens when man relies on his own insight? John Locke saw a child as a tabula rasa, a white piece of paper, or a blank slate. Parents are rational tutors who can mould the child in any way, good or bad. Jean-Jacques Rousseau taught that children are actually noble savages who were naturally endowed with a sense of right and wrong. He discouraged parental involvement and taught that the adult should be there mostly to be receptive to the child's needs. Later theorists became influenced by Darwin's teaching about the survival of the fittest. From then on the discussion ensued as to how nature influences the behaviour of children, and how much their behaviour is due their environment. This is the "nature – nurture" controversy.

These theories are based on human observations and human wisdom. We must go to God's Word, however. David said in Psalm 58: 3, "The wicked go astray from the womb, they err from their birth, speaking lies." Solomon said in Proverbs 22:15, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him." The same thing we also confess when we present our children for baptism. In The Form for the Baptism of Children

we state that "our children are conceived and born in sin and are therefore by nature children of wrath."

Modern human behaviour theorists would shudder at those words. "That is much too negative. If you begin by seeing children as totally evil from birth, then you have a negative view, and you will affect them negatively." Many ridicule how the Puritans viewed and treated their children. A book on child psychology says,

According to Puritan doctrine, the child was a fragile creature of God who needed to be safeguarded but also needed to be reformed. Born evil and stubborn, children had to be led away from their devilish ways. Therefore, it was necessary to take them firmly in hand and civilize them toward a destiny of virtue and salvation.... Harsh, restrictive child-rearing practices were recommended as the most efficient means for taming the depraved child.... In schools disobedient pupils were routinely beaten by their schoolmasters" (Laura E. Berk, *Child Development*, 3rd ed., 1994, pp. 7-9).

Covenant promises

Are children nothing more than evil creatures who need some sense beaten into them? That is the conclusion some might draw from the Form for the Baptism of Children. Why is it that this form speaks about the depravity of children? To impress upon us their need to be washed in the blood of Christ. That is why baptism was instituted. With baptism are spoken wonderful words of promise. Baptism into the name of the Father testifies and seals to us that the He establishes an eternal covenant of

grace with us. He adopts us for His children and heirs, and promises to provide us with all good and avert all evil or turn it to our benefit. He also promises that through Christ the child will be washed from all his sins, and that through the Holy Spirit he/she will be made a living member of Christ. God adopts that child as His own. Along with that adoption comes the promises of the washing away of sins, the rescue from all evil, and the assurance of eternal life. The children are heirs; something more is coming. In this life they have only the first fruits of those promises. Not only do they have the assurance that they are children of God now, they also have a foretaste in this life of the wonderful future that lies ahead for them. This knowledge help us in the rearing of our children. God does this because He loves us with an unconditional love. God showed this love in the way that He treated His people as they were poised to receive the promise of their own heritage, a land flowing with milk and honey.

Before God's people could go and inherit the promised land, the Lord God gave them the Ten Words of the Covenant, written in stone. He gave those commandments to them at Mount Sinai. But before they had come to that mountain, a lot had happened. They had just been delivered from the land of Egypt. God did some miraculous things in order to bring that about. In Egypt they were treated as nothing more than worthless slaves. The only interest the state had in them was economic. They were exploited in every sense of the word. The Lord God rescued them from there. As soon as they were delivered from the land of Egypt, however, they began to complain and to murmur against Moses and against God. They forgot about the miserable existence from which they had been delivered. They complained about the food and the drink, and about everything else. To top it all off, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai to give them the ten commandments, he found that they had had one great big party while he was gone. Like a bunch of adolescents left without restraints, they behaved very badly. They had asked Aaron to make a golden calf to worship. Then they danced around it in a drunken orgy. When Moses came down and saw what happened, he was so angry that he smashed the tables of stone God had given him. He was incensed. He was disgusted and angry. He acted like most parents would who happen upon such a scene.

Unconditional love

God, however, did something quite unexpected! He told Moses to ascend the mountain once more. Once again God gave him the Ten Commandments. He gave His Ten Commandments with the following words, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." These words show that God had not rejected His people, His chosen nation Israel. In spite of their terrible behaviour, He continued to affirm His commitment to them. "I am your Father, and you are my children." He said this after their bad behaviour, as well as before he gave them the commandments

*... begin by
accepting your
children the way
God accepts you.*

to live by. O sure, He did punish them with the sword and a plague. He took their sin very seriously. He disciplined them. But when He gave the law for the second time He did not change the wording by stating, "You terrible people. Look at the things you have done wrong. And now, if you want to again come into my favour, you had better prove yourself. Here are the ten rules by which you can prove yourselves. If you keep them, then I will be your God." No, He begins once again with the words: "I am the Lord your God." For you see, the Lord knows that there are lots of things wrong with His children. That became clear to Him already in Paradise. Therefore we have nothing to prove to Him. The prologue shows, however, that our heavenly Father loves us in spite of our sins.

What the people did was terrible, but if He was going to have any impact on them they first had to realize the kind of relationship God had with them. Only then could they appreciate why their actions are so terrible. He put the relationship before the rules. The rules are nevertheless put into effect. Without

rules there is no relationship. He did not give them so that He could interfere in their lives. He did not give them in order to stifle their existence. He gave the commandments because He wanted to protect them from themselves. He says, "I know that you are sinful. I know that you will not be able to keep my commandments. But do your utmost to keep them. Because that is the only way that you can be happy."

If you want to be a good parent, if you want to be a good teacher, you must begin by accepting your children the way God accepts you. Our heavenly Father accepts us the way we are. We do not have to prove ourselves to Him. Our children should have the same sense from us. We must teach our children about God about who He is, and what He means for you. Your children should learn from you how much you love your Lord and Saviour, how glad you are to be forgiven your sins. Teenagers typically do not have a lot of self-esteem. Teach your children from where you get your self esteem. You get it from knowing that you are a somebody – you are a somebody in God's eyes. You know He loves you because He has told you He does. Teach your children to sing about and speak about the love of God. Children so badly want to be accepted. They are constantly looking to their parents, and also to the teachers, for approval. You can only give them that feeling of belonging if you yourself do not suffer from an identity crisis. Your identity is given to you by God alone. If your identity is tied to your possessions, or to your prestigious position in the community, or whatever, then you will miss the mark in your own life and in the way you relate to your children's lives. And do not ridicule our children or make fun of their less desirable attributes. Accept your children for what they are; they are God's children, with their own unique talents and abilities. Your child does not have to come home with all A's on her report card in order for you to love her; he does not have to be best baseball player, or hockey player, or musician. Parents should not live their ambitions through their own children.

Too many rules!

Do not have too many rules in your home. Don't have too many in the classroom either. The more rules and regulations you have, the more dysfunctional you, as a family or a class, are in danger of becoming. In a proliferation of rules there is much confusion. Before you establish the few rules that

are necessary, make sure you have a relationship with the children in your charge. Make sure that the children know that you love them, no matter what. They should know that even if they make a very big mistake you will not reject them but that you will love them nevertheless. There are consequences for mistakes, but there are also lessons to be learned from them. Children need to feel safe. Show that you love them unconditionally, just like your Father in heaven. Think of the father's love shown in the parable of the prodigal son. That is the kind of Father we have in heaven. That is the kind of parent God wants each and every one of us to be as well.

Our children must feel our love every step of the way as they grow up. You must allow them to make their own mistakes, painful as that may be. God Himself is not a tyrant. He does not force us to serve Him. He does not compel us. He tells us about the consequences if we do not serve Him. He tells us, "Your end will be disastrous. If you reject me, even though I did everything possible to hang on to you, in the end I will also reject you, and say to you, I do not know you. Away from me. Go to your father the devil. It is him you wanted to serve, not me." However, He does not force us but says, "If you do serve me, I want you to serve, because you love Me, not because I forced you." That is why the ten rules can be reduced to one: the rule of love.

It is possible to get your children to obey by forcing them to obey. You can lay down the law and enforce the rules with a heavy hand. They will obey them, at least for a time – not because they want to, but because they have to. They will obey only because they are scared. On the outside they may look like well-behaved children, but inwardly they will seethe with anger and resentment. As soon as they are away from under the supervision of their parents, they will throw all the rules aside, and do whatever pleases them. The Lord God starts with love, and that is where we must also begin. Therein lies the basis for our relationship with our children. Children do not respond to rules, they respond to love, to a relationship. If that is the kind of love they feel in the home, then they do not so easily become a victim of negative peer pressure. They will not have such need to fit in some place; they know they already do.

Unique children

Parents must know the uniqueness of each child, their idiosyncrasies. "What makes her tick? What are his ambitions?" It is also important to reflect on how you relate to each other. It is very disturbing when you encounter teenagers who do not relate to adults. They are sullen and seem angry. You cannot allow them to remain in that way. Parents and teachers alike must observe them carefully and try to have an open relationship with them. Ask them about the way you are treating them. How do they feel about that? Think about what they say. Above all don't be afraid of criticism. Don't be on the offensive. They may be angry about something very significant, and something which needs to be changed on your part.

A relational parent knows how to keep a good balance between freedom and restrictions.

Solomon says in Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." A lot of people have difficulty with this verse. They say, I have done everything I could for my child. I have sent him to all the right schools. I have taken him to church; I have provided for him to the best of my ability, and done all the things I am supposed to do. And now look at him. Look at the how he turned out. How can Solomon say what he says? He must have meant that there are exceptions to the rule.

Well, in the first place we have to remember that we are not dealing here with a command and a promise. We are dealing here with a proverb. It is giving you a word of wisdom. It tells us that normally, if that is how you conduct

yourself, then that is what will happen. But that is not always the case. There are exceptions to that rule. Children also make their own choices.

And in the second place, our modern translations do not do justice to this text. Literally it says in the Hebrew, "train up your child according to the demand of his way." That is also how an old Dutch translation has it. Indeed, that is the actual wording of this verse. The text shows that each child is unique, and that he ought to be treated as such.

I think that as parents and teachers we must want our children to be anything and everything God will allow them to be. Let me tell how I, in my bungling ways, try not to anger my children. I try not to stifle their initiatives. I try to teach them that in everything they are accountable to God. Within that God-given framework I try not to impose my personal tastes and likes and dislike on my own children, and that includes the music they listen to, or the entertainment they enjoy. If you push your child to do and be what they do not want to be, then they are going to be angry, and resent you. I once spoke to a man in his eighties, whose father tried to force him into becoming a butcher, while he himself wanted to be a farmer. That old man was still angry at his father for trying to shape him into something he did not want to be shaped into. He did not grow up believing that his father loved him. In his old age he still did not think so.

Four styles

How then do we teach our children to become what God wants them to become? Josh McDowell and Dick Day identified four different kinds of parenting styles: autocratic, permissive, neglectful and the relational styles. Let me summarize for you what each one is all about. First then the autocratic style. The autocrat says, "My way or the highway. I am the boss here, and you had better listen to me, or else." Autocratic parents usually provide good homes to their children. The parents are industrious and well-meaning. They provide their children with all the physical needs. And autocratic teachers run a tight ship. They have the class under control. But there is one big thing very wrong: They are big on rules, but low on relationships. Children living in an autocracy will respond differently. Some will try as much as they can to flee. They would rather be anywhere but home or in the classroom. They don't feel loved or appreciated. Others will resort to fighting. They are angry; they are angry at home; they are angry



at school. They are likely either to belong to the controversial group, or the rejected group. Others hide their feelings. They load themselves down with guilt. They blame themselves for not being able to keep all the rules. They are very unsure of themselves and have a great need somehow to measure up.

The permissive parent says, "You can do anything you want. Whatever you do is fine with me, and I will defend your freedom to what you want over against any one who would dare say anything about it." These are the modern parents. They are always trying to reason with their children. I give them

credit for their patience. They will try to grant any wish of the child. The child knows how to exploit that. A child growing up in a permissive home is just as confused as a child growing up in an autocratic home. Such children do not grow up to be happy adults. For children need a firm hand. Just like our heavenly Father sets certain limits on our behaviour, so must we with our children. A child growing up in a permissive atmosphere also grows up with the feeling that he is not loved. Such children think that the parents cannot be bothered with them; that they do not care enough to protect them from

themselves. They know for themselves that they need limits for their behaviour.

Some parents have a neglectful style. Such a parent communicates to his child in one way or the other, "I don't really care what you do. Leave me alone. You are only there to serve me. You are there to fulfill my needs, not the other way around. A neglectful parent is an abusive parent. Quite often such a parent is abusive because he himself was abused, either physically, emotionally, or sexually. Abusive parents use their children to their own ends. The parents have compulsive behavioural patterns, and such patterns can, and often does include substance abuse, such as alcohol, drugs of various kinds, including over the counter drugs, etc. These children often become dysfunctional in their own adult lives and continue the cycle of abuse.

And finally, there is the parent with the relational style. A relational parent communicates in every way possible to his child, "I love you, and I am trying very hard to understand you, and to realize your needs. I really care about you and your needs. Nevertheless there are rules which I want you to stick to, only because I do care." A relational parent knows how to keep a good balance between freedom and restrictions. He knows that if you give them too much rope they will hang themselves, and too little rope and they suffocate. This is the kind of parent we should strive to be.

Children are precious

Our children are very precious in the sight of God. We all are. He reminds us time and again how much He loves us. He does that as He opens His word. He does that as together we sit under the preaching every first day of the week. That is how we start off our worship services. God pronounces his blessings upon us: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. He continues to proclaim His relationship to us, and to realize His promises in our lives. He comes to us with the wonderful content of salvation. In that framework He gives us His rules and regulations. He accepts us in spite of who we are, miserable sinners, with no redeeming qualities of our own. That is how He walks with us. That is how we too must relate to those whom He has put in our charge. Our task as parents is not an easy task. But it is a beautiful one. ❁

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The “Appropriation of Salvation” in the Creeds

– AN OVERVIEW – (Part 2)

By Rev. A. Baars

5. Regeneration

At times it is asserted that the beginning of spiritual life is a moment about which we really cannot say very much. True, inasmuch as we mean that we are speaking here about a mystery which supersedes our thinking and description we could agree. In fact, the *Canons of Dort*, about the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, say that

... it is evidently a supernatural work, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable. . . (C.D. III/IV, Art. 12)

A little further we read,

The manner of this operation cannot be fully comprehended by believers in this life. Notwithstanding which, they rest satisfied with knowing and experiencing, that by this grace of God they are enabled to believe with the heart, and love their Savior. (C.D. III/IV Art. 13).

This emphasis on the mysterious character of the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration does not mean that nothing whatsoever can be said about it. In Scripture and the Confessions the limits of mystery are fully respected; yet they do also describe how the Holy Spirit works and what the Spirit does in the hearts of people.

As far as our Confessions are concerned, we may first point to a number of expressions which indicate that the Holy Spirit makes dead people alive and imparts to them the gift of faith. We meet such expressions everywhere in the creeds. Just a brief sampling: We read several times that the Spirit “works faith in our hearts” (*Heidelberg Catechism*, L.D. 25, Q.A. 65, L.D. 27, Q.A. 74; *Belgic Confession*, Art. 24). The *Belgic Confession* expresses it beautifully: “the Holy Spirit kindleth in our hearts an upright faith” (art. 22). In the *Canons of Dort* we

come across a different kind of expression. There we read that God “graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe” (C.D.1, Art. 6). Regarding the elect He has determined “effectually to call and draw them to his communion by

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*The Holy Spirit,
Who is pleased to bind
Himself to the Word,
is still completely
sovereign.*

*

His Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith” (C.D. 1, Art. 7). The latter work is also described to God,

who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He (effectually calls them in time), confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son (C.D. III/IV, Art. 10).

The following phrase is also of fundamental importance: “. . . but because it (faith) is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him”) C.D. III/IV, Art. 14).¹³

In these brief descriptions the “how” of the appropriating work of the Spirit at the beginning of spiritual life is for the most part hidden. In order to get more clarity regarding this “how” we turn in particular to certain portions of Head III/IV of the *Canons of Dort*, where we find descriptions of regeneration. As we do so we must remind ourselves that our creeds do speak of regeneration in more than one sense. In Article 24 (B.C.) it

states that true faith “regenerates (a person) and makes him a new man.” Here regeneration is viewed as the *manifestation of new life* which is the fruit of faith. The *Canons of Dort* speak of regeneration as *the beginning of new life*.

In this overview we will concentrate on what the *Canons* teach. There we read that God

by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man; he opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, he quickens: from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, he renders it good, obedient, and pliable: actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions. (C.D., III/IV, Art.11)

In the next paragraph this description is filled out:

. . . so that all in whose heart God works in this marvellous manner, are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe. – Whereupon the will thus renewed, is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received. (C.D., III/IV, Art. 12)

Here it is said that God does not only influence and actuate the will, but that by the power of God this will itself acts. The *Canons* do warn that this must in no wise be construed in a synergistic spirit:

because he who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe, and the act of believing also. (C.D., III/IV, Art. 14).

However, this does not mean that the Spirit works in people as “stocks and blocks”:

. . . so also this grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor takes away their will and its properties, neither does violence thereto; but spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it; that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed, a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign; in which the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consist. (C.D., III/IV, Art. 16).

It is in this manner that our Confessions seek to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. It would be wrong if we would neglect all this teaching without putting it to use. It ought to function in our preaching and pastoral labours, in our discussions about spiritual guidance and spiritual life.¹⁴

6. The “Three Things” of the Catechism

Whoever thinks the matter of appropriation through, cannot avoid the “three things” (or parts) which are discussed in our Heidelberg Catechism. The Question and Answer in which they come up are very familiar to us:

Q. How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort, mayest live and die happily?

A. Three; the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be delivered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance.

It is clear that these “three things” do not simply function for the sake of a principle of division for the material of the Catechism. They represent three fundamental aspects of spiritual life. We could put it this way: around these three moments in the life of faith the Catechism expounds the whole Christian doctrine of faith. And this is done for the specific purpose of nurturing children toward faith and godliness. The knowledge of these three things – misery, deliverance and gratitude – concerns the manner in which faith is experienced. In this knowledge the appropriating work of the Holy Spirit becomes evident.

Now there is (has been) much ado about these “three things.” We do not have to bring up everything that happened. It is sufficient to emphasize that it is not so that in Question and Answer 1 a Christian is speaking, while Ques-

tion and Answer 2 the reference is to a person who is not a Christian (yet). The latter question also relates to the confession of a *Christian*.

Furthermore, we may not take the order of the three points to be chronological, as though a person would first experience the “part” about misery, after that the “part” of deliverance, and finally the “part” about thankfulness. This avoids allowing the three “parts” to become separated from each other.

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The knowledge of these three things: misery, deliverance and gratitude — concerns the manner in which faith is experienced. In this knowledge the appropriating work of the Holy Spirit becomes evident.

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However, we are obliged to continue maintaining that the three parts do (or, ought to) function in spiritual life. The *Catechism* itself clearly shows this in various places. We point to the following: when justifying faith is described the “three things” are discussed. In Lord’s Day 23, Q.A. 60, it is said that this faith experiences the bitter sense of an accusing conscience (misery) and that it directs itself toward the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ (deliverance). Q.A. 64 adds that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith will also certainly bring forth fruits of thankfulness (gratitude). In Lord’s Day 30, A.Q. 81, it becomes clear that the Lord’s Supper has been instituted for those who have a spiritual knowledge of these three things.¹⁵

Lord’s Day 44, Q.A. 115, reveals that the preaching of the law is intended to nurture a deeper knowledge of misery, deliverance and gratitude in the life of a believer. We could also point to Lord’s Day 51, Q.A. 126, and even to *Canons of Dort* 1, Article 13,

and V, Article 2, where we hear the echo of the familiar trio of the Heidelberg and also see how it functions in the context of our spiritual life.

In connection with the “three things” the sensitive issue must be addressed as to the place which the knowledge of sin or misery has, especially *at the beginning* of spiritual life. It is clear that we must be on the alert to avoid systematizing, or giving the impression that (a certain degree of) the knowledge of sin is a condition which must be met before we (may) come to Christ. On the other hand, it is hard to deny that the Holy Spirit, also when He *begins* to apply salvation, teaches us something of misery, deliverance and gratitude. The knowledge of misery clearly has its role there. From our own church history we could cite a number of noteworthy declarations in which this is clearly emphasized. We are thinking, for example, of one of the statements of the Synod of the *Christelijke Afgescheiden Gereformeerde Kerk* (“Christian Seceded Reformed Church”) of 1846 and of the testimony of the General Synod of 1953 (i.e.) CGKN.¹⁶

7. Marks and phases of spiritual life

We can be brief about the **marks of faith**. In our Confession they are discussed in various places and with various designations. We think of the marks of Christians in Article 29 of the *Belgic Confession*:

With respect to those who are members of the Church, they may be known by the marks of Christians, namely, by faith and when they have received Jesus Christ the only Saviour they avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbour, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. But this is not to be understood as if there did not remain in them great infirmities; but they fight against them through the Spirit all the days of their life continually taking their refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they have remission of sins through faith in Him.

In this connection the fruits of election mentioned in the *Canons of Dort* are also important:

The elect in due time, though in various degrees and in different measures, attain assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election, . . . by observing in themselves with a spiritual joy and holy pleasure (2 Cor. 13:5), the infallible fruits of

election pointed out in the Word of God – such as a true faith in Christ, filial fear, a godly sorrow for sin, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, etc. (C.D., 1, Art. 12).

What comes into discussion in this article is closely connected with what we read in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, L.D. 32, Q.A. 86, where, in connection with good works, it is said:

. . . also, that everyone may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof, and that, by our godly conversation, others may be gained to Christ.

In conclusion we may say that there is room to speak about the marks of the appropriation of salvation. These marks belong to the fruits of the Spirit. His work can be recognized by these marks.

Do the creeds also provide us with any occasion to speak about **various phases** of spiritual life? For an answer to this question we direct our attention once more to the *Canons of Dort*. In Canons of Dort, 1, Article 12 it is stated the “the elect in due time, though in various degrees and in different measures, attain assurance” (cf. C.D., V, Art. 9). In C.D., 1, Article 16, with a special pastoral sensitivity, a distinction is made between those “who do not yet experience a lively faith in Christ, . . . efficaciously wrought in them, and do nevertheless persist in the use of the means which God hath appointed for working these graces in us” and those who “seriously desire to be turned to God, . . . cannot

yet reach that measure of holiness and faith to which they aspire.” In addition, the end of this Article has a serious warning to those who “regardless of God and of the Saviour Jesus Christ, have wholly given themselves up to the cares of the

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*The Creeds also pay
 attention to the periods
 of darkness and
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 believers.*
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world, and the pleasures of the flesh, so long as they are not seriously converted to God.” In fact, the creeds also pay attention to the periods of darkness and struggle in the life of believers (cf. C.D., V, Art. 5, 11, 13). In addition to all of this we could list the other confessional references which are discussed by Professor Kremer in his essay on spiritual guidance in preaching.¹⁷

It is not correct, in connection with what the Confessions present in relation to the marks and phases of spiritual life, to use the term “classification.” The observation of Professor Kremer is especially to the point: This is not a mat-

ter of classifying or labelling, but of spiritual leading and guidance.”¹⁸



Footnotes

¹³The Dutch phrase “*in de tijd krachtiglijk roept*” (Latin, *eosdem in tempore efficaciter vocat*) was omitted in the English translation. (cf. Schaaf *Creeds of Christendom*, III p.566, 589-590.

¹⁴See also W. Kremer, *Priestelijke Prediking*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁵We could also refer here to the classic Lord’s Supper Form in which we are called to examine ourselves as to our spiritual knowledge of these three things.

¹⁶See, *Handelingen en Besluiten der Synodale Vergadering van de Christelijke Afgescheidene Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland: gehouden den 16 September en volgende dagen van het jaar 1846 te Groningen*, (Amsterdam: P. Groenendijk, 1854), Art. 18, pp. 7-8.

Also: *ACTA van de Generale Synode der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, gehouden te Apeldoorn 8,9,10 en 15,16,17 September 1953*, Art. 130, p.54-55, Cf. Bijlage XLVI, “Getuigenis van de Generale Synode der Chr. Geref.Kerken aan de Kerken,” p.228-229.

¹⁷Kremer, W. *Priesterlijke Prediking*, pp. 25,26

¹⁸Kremer, *Priesterlijke Prediking*, p.27.

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The Reformed Church of Unaí, Brazil

By Yke Timmerman

Sunday morning in Unaí, Brazil. The truck slowly drives over the red hard-packed dirt road. I am sitting with my parents, brother, and a small niece, close together in the cab, while the two who did not fit in anymore stand on the back. It is a five kilometre drive to the morning church service which is held in the school building. On our way we enjoy the beautiful, warm weather and comment on the corn that stands tall on both sides of the road, the full ears promising a good harvest. As we come closer to our destination we see more cars and pick-up trucks coming from all different directions.

At the 'church' door, the brother who will be reading the sermon welcomes us with a cheery "goede morgen" and hands us a summary of the sermon in the Portuguese language. We manage to sit together by rearranging some chairs, leaving the smaller ones for the children. Slowly the church fills with dark-haired Brazilians, typical blond Dutchmen, and many children some of whom are clearly a bit of both.

A boy in shorts expertly plays the organ. Genevan tunes fill the classroom-auditorium that is crowded by now. Hastily I shake a few more hands and nod a greeting across the room. It is good to be among the brothers and sisters at Unaí again.

The consistory files in. There is a handshake. Then we are first requested to sing a hymn in Portuguese. The tune, unfamiliar to me, seems to be a favorite. From all sides I hear the voices rising in song, praising God who is the Lord over all the earth!

We all rise. "Our help is in the name of the Lord. . . ." The familiar words sound from the improvised pulpit, this time in the Dutch language. Last week, in Canada, my family and I worshipped God in English; now here in this part of



The sign in front of the school "Arco Iris"

the world, we may do so in other tongues. It is a moving experience to see a little of His church-gathering work.

As I look around, I see the children who had previously chattered my ears off in Portuguese singing enthusiastically in Dutch: "How glad I was when unto me they said, 'Let us with one accord go to the temple of the Lord, there to adore God's majesty.'" In my heart I pray for these children who, in some ways, have so much less than ours in Canada. As the service moves on the brother reading the sermon is quite relaxed, making gestures and eye contact. After all, he has had quite a bit of practice! The sermon, about the mustard seed, is easy to understand and rich in meaning. God works His kingdom.

Later at home, as we sit around the kitchen table enjoying a cup of strong flavorful Brazilian coffee and occasionally check the dinner (including the ever-present rice and brown beans) cooking

on the stove, we reminisce about the past. How thirteen years earlier they came to this place, living in temporary dwellings at first, without electricity, running water or telephone. About the work involved in clearing about half of the land of low trees and shrubs before anything could be planted.

There were struggles and setbacks. The climate in the interior of Brazil has very different weather patterns. Summer and winter are not distinguished by how warm or cold it is, but by how wet or dry. A market had to be found for the farm products in an economic climate very different from what they were used to. Then there were the struggles with loneliness, isolation and adaptation to a different culture.

Despite all this, the blessings of the Lord could be clearly seen. The small community grew, and year after year there was progress, albeit more slowly than hoped for. Not only the farms grew

in size and number, but also the school expanded its program and its building. It was indeed a rich blessing when, in 1991, Dr. K. Deddens could work in their midst, during which time the church was instituted. Now prayers go up to the Lord, to provide a Shepherd for the flock.

The Lord has also blessed with good health. From the beginning in 1984, the Lord has spared everyone's lives and recently given miraculous healing to a child with a brain tumor. For health care, banking and shopping they depend on Unaí, a city which has about 80,000 inhabitants and is 45 kilometers away. It is a typical Brazilian city where advanced technology and primitive tools go side by side. In a poor district, with financial assistance from the Netherlands, the colony is able to reach out with the Word of God and other help. Recently this program also had its setbacks, as it had to be cut back, due to a lack of money.

Gerrit and Aafke Glas, former Mission Aid workers for the church of Surrey, BC, wrote a letter to inform the Canadian churches about life in Brazil.

Yke Timmerman writes the following about herself:

I live with my husband and six children in Elora, Ontario. I was born in the Netherlands and made the big adventurous trip with my parents and ten brothers and sisters to Brazil in 1963 when I was ten years old. We were members of the church of Monte Alegre, which existed until 1971. Then we moved close to Curitiba, where my parents lived until 1984. At that time they and most of my brothers and sisters decided to make the trek to Unaí, to become once again part of a Reformed church. In 1975 my husband (who also used to live in Brazil) and I made our home in Ontario, Canada.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We were asked to write a short article about our Church at Unaí. As you may know, Brazil has three places where, through mission work, congregations exist and churches have been instituted. They are in Curitiba, São José/Maragogi/Recife and in Maceió.

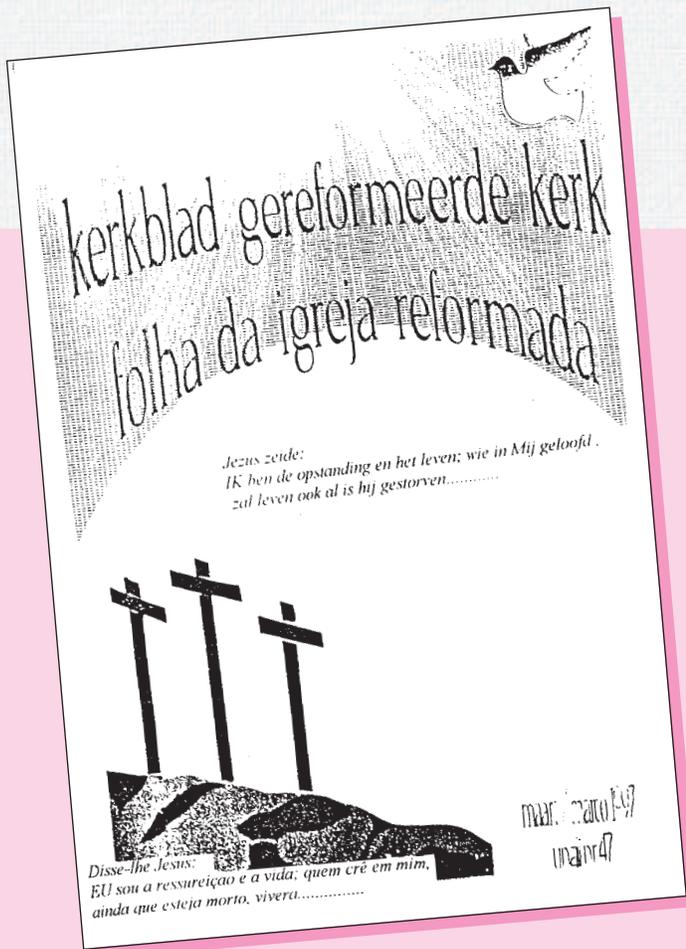
In the state of Minas Gerais, about 120 km south/east of the capital city Brasília, is also an 'Igreja Reformada do Brasil' (Reformed Church of Brazil). Our congregation consists of immigrants. In 1984, four families from the Netherlands, together with four families from the former colony Monte Alegre, settled here and started a house congregation. Throughout the years we have grown in number, from within through marriages and birth, and from the outside through new immigrants from the Netherlands, and members of the congregation of São José and Maragogi. We now have 105 members of which 47 are communicant. The majority are under forty years old. This makes us a young congregation.

Our consistory consists of two elders and one deacon. Because we have members who only understand Portuguese and others who only understand Dutch, we try as much as possible to do everything in both languages. This requires much effort and determination. Our church bulletin as well as our school paper is bilingual.



Pictures taken just before the morning church service.





The church bulletin of Unaí issued monthly, is totally bi-lingual

On Sundays we have one worship service in Dutch, with a summary hand-out in Portuguese, and another service in Portuguese with a summary in Dutch. This doesn't always happen, but it is something we strive for. Four brothers take turns leading the services in Portuguese, and five do the same in Dutch. Four times a year we invite a Missionary to lead us in worship and administer the sacraments. On these days we also have public profession of faith, installation of office bearers and weddings. As you will understand, these days are very special for our congregation. We long to have our own pastor and teacher, as is understandable after thirteen years of reading services. Also for our youth, who do not even know what it is to have their own minister, it is about time. We pray the Lord for wisdom and patience in these matters.

Catechism classes are taught by Sr. J.C. Dees. We are active in society life. We have a Dutch and a Portuguese speaking Men's Society as well as Women's Societies. We have also a Youth Society and a Boys and Girls Club.

The children go to our "own" school, named Arco-Iris (Rainbow). They receive Reformed education for two years of kindergarten in Dutch. Grades one through four are taught in

Portuguese. Children of the Brazilian employees also come to these classes. They hear the Bible stories and learn songs and psalms, as well. After grade four the children have to continue their studies in the nearest town Unaí. Two afternoons a week (the regular school is only in the morning from 8 - 12) the children have Dutch school, from grade one to six. This way we hope to bridge the gap between the two languages and the children will learn to understand both

church services. At this time, speaking each other's language is not as important as understanding your brother and sister who expresses himself in his own language.

In a poor district of Unaí we operate a Social Assistance Project, a place where lessons are given in sewing, woodworking, etc. Every other month we organize a Vacation Bible School in this area and also for the people living in the area of our colony.

Plans are well underway for the construction of a church building. Up till now we have our worship services in a classroom of our school, but we are growing out of it. So far our plans have not materialized, due to financial constraint. We sincerely hope that in the foreseeable future, we may have our own church building. Also this concern we lay before our Heavenly Father, as well as the need for a pastor and teacher. In this also we request your prayers.

The colony "Brasolandia" is mainly for agriculture, as you may have understood. We have mostly mixed farms, including cash crops, dairy, pork, chicken, beef, vegetables and flowers. Most of the products are sold in Unaí, or go to Brasília. We have our struggles and disappointments, yet looking back over the years we see that the Lord has blessed us richly! Our colony is growing and we hope for more growth. Here is plenty of land and opportunity.

Sunday after Sunday we may hear God's Word, even if we do not have a minister yet. We may do our work under the grace of our Heavenly Father. We, as church of Jesus Christ, pray that He also may bless you richly.

With Christian greetings,
Gerrit en Aafke Glas



Joy in Blue Bell

"... that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ..." (1 Peter 1:7)

Most joyfully, the congregations in Blue Bell, PA and Laurel, MD joined together to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Rev. Kenneth A. Kok as minister in Blue Bell. Happily, we were able to hold our program and dinner on the actual date of April 12, 1997, since it conveniently fell on a Saturday this year.

What a wonderful fellowship we had! After opening with the words of 1 Peter 1:3-21, some reminisced, some

sang or played recorders. Others came up with creative and hilarious wit. John and Nathanael Bogedain, the twins whom Rev. Kok baptized on April 12, 1987, recited Isaiah 52:7-10 together. A few shed tears as they spoke of their appreciation and thankfulness. The sanctuary was converted into a dining room for 67 people, probably the largest group ever to share a meal together here.

On Sunday we were able to celebrate the Lord's Supper together in the

morning; then, in the afternoon, Rev. Kok baptized Justin Stel, marking the 18th baptism he performed in the 10 year (and one day) period.

We all give thanks to God for providing us with our minister, and his family. We thank Rev. Kok for his faithful preaching and teaching of God's Word, for his love for us, and his patience with us.

Sharon L. Bratcher



Orangeville welcomes the Rev. and Mrs. Pot family

Sunday, September 28 dawned with an air of joyful anticipation for the Canadian Reformed Church at Orangeville. After being vacant for more than a year, the LORD, in His merciful goodness, had again provided them with their own pastor and teacher. Congregation and visitors alike scrambled to be ready earlier than usual to witness the ordination of Candidate R. Pot; the auditorium was filled to capacity a full half hour before the service began! What a momentous occasion! This was the first time that a candidate would be ordained in the Church at Orangeville in its forty-seven year history!

Our former pastor, Rev. W. den Hollander, led the ordination service, adding to the special nature of this event for the congregation. His message, based on 1 Cor. 2:1-5, was summarized as follows:

Paul's focus in the proclamation of the gospel.

1. Its purpose
2. Its power

The Greeks had expectations of philosophical wisdom and the Jews wanted signs. But Paul resolved to bring to his new congregation "nothing . . . except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." The greatest need was to know God and His salvation, so Paul preached about judgment on sin, the need for salvation, and the call to repentance. That is to be the focus of the preaching: God, Who brought salvation, and not an eloquent preacher. Preaching is not rooted in man's abilities. Paul even denigrates himself; he is weak. But the power of the gospel is shown in that the message brings about change. Hearts of stone are turned into hearts of flesh when both the preacher and listener seek God's gospel of salvation in the message.

After the sermon, the form of subscription was read and signed by Can-



didate Pot. The congregation could then witness the laying on of hands. Candidate R. Pot was now officially Rev. R. Pot.

Many congratulatory messages were received from the surrounding congregations and from Classis Ontario North, along with many offers for pulpit exchange.

After a quick lunch, the congregation returned to hear the inaugural sermon of our new minister. As text, Rev. Pot chose Ezekiel 3:16-21. From God's instruction to Ezekiel to be a "watchman," we were shown how we must view our new situation. The text was summarized as follows:

Christ gives His people a "watchman" to protect their life:

1. the task of the "watchman"
2. the message of the "watchman"
3. the response of the "watchman"

Israel was a disobedient people, deserving their punishment of exile. They sought sin and death, not obedience and life. Yet God wanted them back. He

used a man to be their watchman. The job of the watchman was to WATCH for God's Word and to use the Word to WARN the people, even if the message was not popular. This is also the task of our minister. Along with the elders, he is sent to keep watch over our souls. He does that by bringing the message of Life and not his own opinions or what the congregation wants to hear. By preaching the covenant promises and obligations, the listeners are assisted in the perseverance of the saints.

When the watchman sounds the alarm, the listeners must respond. We must respond to God's free gift of Life by believing that, through the saving work of Jesus Christ, our sins are washed away. If we truly believe, we will respond with a life of obedience and thankfulness.

The watchman will also be judged for his faithfulness. If he fails to warn the people, he endangers their lives and will be held accountable for the lives of those



not saved. This is a great responsible: it is a matter of Life and Death!

On Friday, October 3, the congregation again assembled to welcome Rev. and Mrs. Pot and their son. The evening was opened with the reading of Psalm 146 by Br. A. Kieft, reflecting the spirit that prevailed; "Praise the Lord!" The M.C. for the evening, Br. J. VanEerde, skillfully organized the many contributions from societies, organizations, choirs and individuals, which were enjoyed by all. From the congregation, Rev. and Mrs. Pot received a book on the geographical features and history of the local area and a decorative pine shelf on which NO books may be displayed. A presentation was also made to Mr. and Mrs. S. Boersema who had recently retired as caretakers of the church building after many years of service.

On behalf of his wife and himself, Rev. Pot thanked the congregation. He also admitted that he himself had learned something new on his arrival here; that the word "manse" was a short form for the word "mansion." He was going to suggest that each family of the congregation move in with them for a week to become better acquainted but thought better of it. Before closing in prayer, he stated that, even though he and the congregation were originally from different countries and a different federation of churches, we are already united by the common bond of faith, the vital component of a good relationship. May the Lord bless this relationship as He gathers, defends and preserves His Church.

Marg & Marg



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:

Why is it necessary to revise the Nicene Creed? What is wrong with the old text? W.W.J. Van Oene raises this question in the Sept. 19 issue, page 413. Since creeds are an interpretation of God's Word and help specify our faith, their particular wording is important. Creeds should not be changed unless they are found to be anti-scriptural, and not because they do not agree with the style of today. When creeds are modified to

meet "contemporary" styles, they can only serve a short time; the next generation may think differently about the wording. As a result, the church through the ages becomes unable to confess with one voice.

There is another issue. The proposed revision uses the plural "We believe" rather than the old "I believe." This is a major change in thinking about confessions. When I recite "I believe," I confess personally what I believe, but can I be sure that the man next to me

believes the same? Can I look into his heart and confess for him? No, I can confess only for myself.

If we adopt "We believe" in the Nicene Creed, will it stop there? Will we change Lord's Day 1 from "What is your only comfort" to "What is our only comfort?" The difference is whether we are confessing our personal, heartfelt faith, or assenting to a church teaching. Let's keep the "I believe."

Gordon Ritsema
Silver Spring, MD



Open House for the Official Opening of the Guido de Brès Christian High School Expansion Project

S on Saturday, September 13, 1997, members, donors and interested parties, came to together to an Open House at Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton to help celebrate the completion of the expanded facilities.

This school had its beginning twenty-two years ago in the old Central High School building in downtown Hamilton and two years later moved to its own building on Stone Church Road. When the school opened in 1975, there were seven teachers and approximately 100 students. This September we have grown to 340 students, and by the year 2002 the enrollment is projected to increase to 430 students. This rapid growth meant that we were rapidly running out of room and something needed to be done.

Starting in April, 1995, a massive fundraising campaign was undertaken. This campaign was called "Building in Faith." By December, 1995, the target was surpassed when a total of \$2,500,000 was pledged. Construction began in May, 1996, and today we could witness the completion of the final phase of the construction. This construction has nearly doubled our floor space and useable areas.

At 11:00 a.m., the Vice-Chairman of the Board, Mr. B. Poort, opened the program by requesting the singing of Psalm 92: 1,2. This song set the tone for the Open House when the approximately six hundred people could sing, "Tis good with jubilation, to sing and glorify, Thy Name O Lord most high, and thank Thee for salvation." The Scripture reading, taken from Psalm 78 and Matthew 6: 24-34, was followed by opening prayer.

The Board Chairman, Mr. J.H. VanderHoeven, spoke a word of welcome to those assembled and proceeded to give a brief history of the building cam-

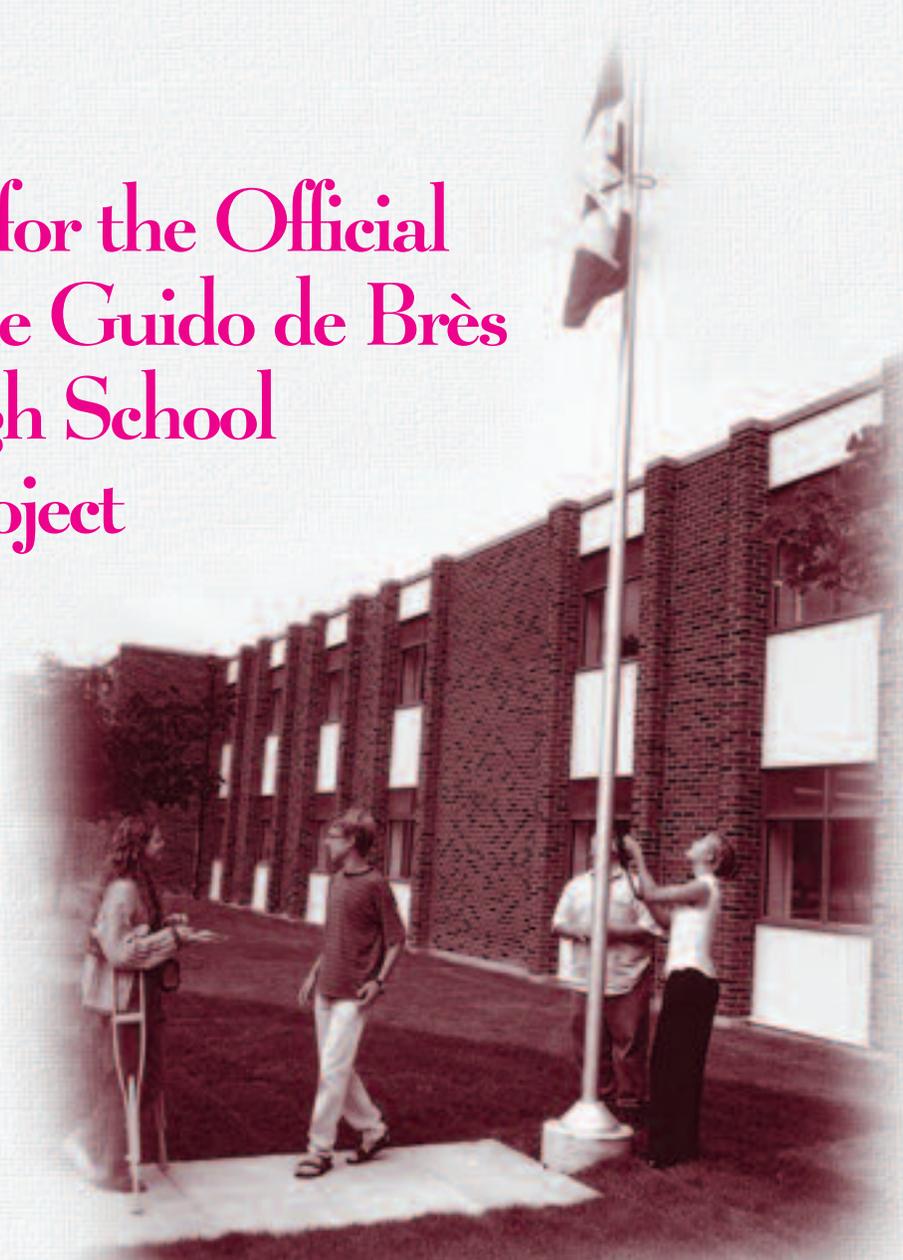
paign. There were many times that we worried, but the Lord has kept His promise as outlined in Matthew 6: 24-34. A special word of welcome was extended to Mayor Bob Morrow, Mayor of the City of Hamilton, and to Terry Cooke, Regional Chairman for the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth, as well as the former Board chairmen and/or their spouses. Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff, or Dr. O, as she is fondly remembered, and Mr. E. Gosker were also welcomed to the festivities.

The Chairman of the Building Committee, Mr. W. Oostdyk, next took his place on the podium and, after offering thanks and praise to all who worked with him, he "officially" handed over the key to the expanded building to the Board Chairman. The Board Chairman in turn handed the key to the School

Principal, Mr. J.G. vanDooren, who spoke a few words of appreciation for all the work done by all involved. He compared the opening of our extended facilities in a very small way, to the opening of the temple in Solomon's time. The Lord has also indeed been with us, and has not let us down.

The official ribbon-cutting ceremony was performed by His Worship Mayor Bob Morrow, Mr. W. Oostdyk, Mr. J.H. VanderHoeven, and Mr. J.G. VanDooren. Mayor Morrow spoke a few words of congratulations and recognition of what the Dutch Reformed community had brought to the community of Hamilton. He also recalled having attended the first opening of Guido as an alderman.

The Guido de Brès Christian High School Girls' Choir entertained us with



The Students' Council Executive raises the flag on the new pole that they bought for the school.

their beautiful voices raised in praise to God. Mr. E. Gosker, representing the "SHGOB" in the Netherlands, spoke on how we were all travelling down the road together, the road to eternal life. He pointed out that the Foundation in Holland, by supporting Christian education, was wishing us a good journey on the road to salvation.

Mr. T. Cooke, brought greeting from the Regional Municipality and was glad

that he could also share our pride in the beautiful new addition.

Mr. W. Oostdyk closed the assembly with a word of prayer, after which we sang, "O Canada."

Following the official program, everyone was invited to tour the new facilities and enjoy the food and refreshments offered in the gym. Staff and Board members were on hand throughout the school to answer any questions.

It was indeed a day of celebration as we walked through the newly renovated and expanded school facilities. We realize that the Lord has provided our school community with many blessings during the past twenty-two years. We pray that the Lord will continue to guide us as we go into the future.

For the Board,
J.H. Harsevoort 



The new addition on the right and the renovation section on the left.



Building Committee Chairman, Bill Oostdyk on the right and Construction Superintendent, Nick VandenOever on the left.



Official opening ceremonies in the new double gym.

Guido de Brès Christian School HAMILTON, ONTARIO

High School Commencement '97 Friday, October 24, 1997

The fact that there was no rain at this year's convocation was not the only change from previous years. The new facilities at Guido allowed ample space in the gymnasium for the staff and students, parents and family, and friends to gather and talk leisurely to one another.

And, there was no supper for the graduands either. Instead, an impressive variety of "finger foods," coffee and punch was made available. This allowed for more freedom to converse while eating, without the confines of sitting at assigned tables.

All around there was a "buzz" of activity. While background music played over the school's P.A. system, crowds moved around interacting, discussing, laughing, reminiscing. The graduands were getting reacquainted with each other after a summer apart from one another. The relaxed atmosphere allowed for a greater amount of mingling among the many people who attended. For a full hour there was a restrained enthusiasm while all waited for the main event.

Although the parking was cramped, we were all safely guided into our parking places on our way to Bethel Tabernacle. While anticipating the official opening of the program and waiting for all to be seated, the audience was well entertained through the organ music of John Vanlperen. Eventually, the program was started. The chairman of the Board, Mr. J.H. VanderHoeven, opened with the reading of Psalm 8 and the celebration of the 21st commencement began.

The seventy-five graduands and the audience were welcomed by Mr. J.G. VanDooren, who proclaimed the evening as a time of reflection: reflection on the students' 3,700 hours of instruction time, reflection on the changes to the school building, reflection on hopes students have had for their future,

and the anticipation to pursue individual goals in life. Also, our principal reminded the students that their diploma was a visible sign that they are "living letters" of Christ.

The evening was also a time of reflection for Dr. J.Faber, who was the first Chairman of the Education Committee for Guido de Brès High School and the keynote speaker at our graduation evening. Dr. Faber reinforced Mr. VanDooren's opening remarks that we are living letters of Christ. He explained the reasons for the choice of a quotation from Article X11 of our Belgic Confession, as the school's motto: "To the end that man may serve His God." This text hangs in the main entrance – and exit – of Guido, and is there in lieu of a physical portrait of Guido de Brès, the author of the Belgic Confession. Instead the text functions as not only a "spiritual" portrait of Guido de Brès, but of all those who pass through the halls of Guido who commit their life to Christ.

With this the tone for the evening was set. We sang and listened to the Guido Choir sing, as we praised God's sustaining work in our lives. And of course, the diplomas were handed out. The various gifts of students were acknowledged through scholarships handed out, and a solo which was sung by Annette VanHengstum, called "Travel on, dear friends." The valedictory address was given by Ike Alkema who, in reflective humour, looked back on the graduates' days at Guido.

All good evenings must come to an end. To close the evening we sang from Psalm 90, "May the LORD, our gracious God and Savior, Shed on us all the riches of His favour." This was the theme for Commencement '97, that education in Christian Schools is to the end that man may serve his God. With this as the context, graduates and parents of the graduates could be thankful for their achievements and hopeful for their future.

S. Foster



Mr. J.G. VanDooren displays one of the diplomas to be awarded



Dr. J. Faber speaking about "Guido's Portrait."



The class of '97

Gert Aalbers
 Tracy Aikema
 Ike Alkema
 Mark Alkema
 David Bartels
 Karen Bartels
 Ryan Bos
 Tim Bosch
 Emily Bosscher
 Nadine Bosscher
 Janine Breukelman
 David Buist
 Mark DeBoer
 Melvin DeBoer
 Daniel DeBruin
 Alko DeGelder

Ben DeJager
 Nicole DeJonge
 Christina Douma
 Rachel Dykema
 Andrea Feenstra
 Richard Feenstra
 Albert Gootjes
 Laura Harsevoort
 Stuart Harsevoort
 Elizabeth Heemskerck
 Rebecca Hekert
 Denise Hoeksema
 Michelle Hordyk
 Harold Horlings
 Henry Hulleman
 Gerald Hummel

Carrie Jagt
 Sarah Jagt
 Harm Kelly
 James Kingma
 Melissa Kingma
 Leslie Knegt
 Theodore Knegt
 Julie Komdeur
 Maria Lof
 Mary-Lynn Lof
 Sarah Ludwig
 Michell Meyer
 Shawn Muis
 Kelly Oosterhoff
 Melissa Piper
 Carrie Poort

Brenda Porter
 Christopher Postma
 Marc Ravensbergen
 Nicole Roodzant
 Abraham Roza
 Joel Sandink
 Guido Schenkel
 Peter Scholtens
 Suzanna Scholtens
 Shawn Schutten
 Margie Sieders
 Josh Sieders
 Gary Smid
 James Spoelstra
 Kyle VanBrederode
 Jenny VanDam

Brian VandenOever
 Sarah VanderBruggen
 Jack VanderHorst
 Brendan VanderVelde
 Gregory VanderVelde
 Patricia VanderVelde
 Annette VanHengstum
 Melissa VanHuisstede
 Jason Vanlperen
 Cynthia VanWouden-
 berg
 Adrian Versteeg
 Henry Vis



*Mrs. Wilma Jairam,
 Corresponding Secretary of the
 Board, presenting the Governor-
 General's Bronze Medal to
 Albert Gootjes*

AWARDS

The George DeBoer Memorial Scholarship
Albert Gootjes

The Harry Aasman Memorial Scholarship
Rebecca Hekert

The Guido de Brès Alumni Scholarships
David Buist
Nicole Roodzant
Sarah VanderBruggen

The Premier School Agendas Ltd. Scholarships
Rachel Dykema
Carrie Jagt
Harm Kelly
Abraham Roza

The Edward M. Stam Memorial Scholarship
Denise Hoeksema

The Guido de Brès Participation Awards
Emily Bosscher
Albert Gootjes
Rebecca Hekert
Carrie Jagt
Abraham Roza
Peter Scholtens
Josh Sieders

The Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award
Emily Bosscher

The Governor-General's Bronze Medal
Albert Gootjes



Ike Alkema, valedictorian



The graduands: a relaxed but attentive audience



Mr. J.H. VanderHoeven, Chairman of the Board, presenting Janine Breukelman with her diploma



Emily Bosscher is about to receive the Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award

Covenant and Election

Reviewed by N.H. Gootjes

J. Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election* (tr. C. Pronk; Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1995)

Every reformed believer will deny the importance of the doctrine of the covenant. Every time a child is baptized, solemn words are spoken about the covenant: "When we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father testifies and seals to us that He establishes an eternal covenant of grace with us." And every time the Lord's Supper is celebrated in the midst of the congregation, the covenant is mentioned again: "In order that we might firmly believe that we belong to this covenant of grace, the Lord Jesus Christ during His last Passover instituted the holy supper." Both baptism and Lord's Supper testify that the covenant has a central place in our faith. It indicates our relationship to the Triune God.

Since the time of the Reformation when our Forms were made, the doctrine of the covenant has been further developed and debated. Our century has its share in controversies on the covenant. To mention a few: The Declaration of 1905 which received an important role in the developments leading up to the Liberation (see the chapter by Dr. J. Faber in C. Van Dam, ed. *The Liberation: Causes and Consequences*); the 'Declaration of Principles' in the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1951 and the new view of Karl Barth on the covenant.

Dr. J. Van Genderen, the retired professor of dogmatics at the Theological College of the "Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken" (sister churches to the Free Reformed Churches in Canada) has long been interested in this area. He gave radio lectures on the history of the doctrine of the covenant in 1975, and gave an academic speech on this topic in 1981, which he expanded later. The two were published in one volume in 1983. Rev. C. Pronk did us a great service by translating this material, which

is now published under the title *Covenant and Election*.

It can easily be demonstrated that Van Genderen's discussion impacts directly on our situation. Take for example the first chapter, dealing with the question whether there are two or three covenants. This issue was debated by two Dutch theologians, G.H. Kersten and J.J. Van der Schuit. Those who recognize three covenants distinguish between the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Those who recognize only two covenants identify the covenant of redemption with the covenant of grace.

At first glance, this may look like a technical, academic discussion, but it is of great importance for our faith, as can be discovered when one sees what is at stake. If one identifies the covenant of redemption with the covenant of grace, the parties of the covenant are God, on the one side, and Christ and in Him the elect on the other side. In essence the covenant only includes the elect. Often it is added that this covenant has an outward administration, extending beyond the elect. This is done since it cannot be denied that God made His covenant with Abraham and his offspring, Gen. 17. In the two covenant view, then, the question becomes urgent to what covenant a baptized member of the congregation belongs. Does he belong to the essential covenant or to the outward administration of the covenant. Were God's promises to him meant or not? The debate concerning two or three covenants is, in fact, a debate on the issue with whom God has established his covenant. Did He establish his covenant with the elect only (two covenant view) or did He establish it with the believers and their offspring.

Van Genderen does not quickly write off one of these views. He recognizes that the view that the covenant was made with the elect only has old roots and that it was the prevalent view around the year 1700 (p.14). On the

other hand, Calvin and the Forms do not identify covenant and election. After a discussion of relevant texts (pp.18ff) he concludes that the two covenant view does not agree with Holy Scripture and with the Reformed Confessions (p.23).

How relevant this issue is for us in Canada is demonstrated at the end of the first chapter, where Van Genderen discusses the "Declaration of Principles" (1951) of the Protestant Reformed Church. This document rejects not only the doctrine of presumptive regeneration of baptized children, it also rejects the teaching that the promises of the covenant are addressed to all baptized children. According to this Declaration, the promises of God proclaimed by the gospel and signified by both sacraments is not meant for all but only for the elect (p.24). Van Genderen, in his discussion, has provided the theological background for this view and given a valuable evaluation of it.

From our perspective, the second chapter is hardly less important. Here, Van Genderen discusses the doctrinal background of the Liberation of 1944: The decisions of the Reformed Synods of 1905, 1942, and the decisions by Synods after the Liberation, 1946 and 1959. The views of A. Kuyper as well as of H. Bavinck are presented as the background of the whole debate. It is interesting to read how Van Genderen compares the "two covenant view" of the first chapter with the covenant view of the Synodical decision of 1944 (p.36). They are very similar, in fact he notes three similarities between the two views, but he also indicates there is an important difference. The two covenant view is pessimistic: all are regarded as unregenerate unless they show in their lives marks of election. The Synodical view of 1944, on the other hand, was optimistic: everyone is presumed elect unless doctrine or life proves the opposite. This is a useful reminder for us that both being optimistic

and being pessimistic is wrong. Rather, those whom God has included in the covenant should see how greatly they are privileged, thank God and honour Him as the God of their lives.

I have to resist the temptation to continue quoting from the following chapters. The third chapter deals with the radically different views of K. Barth and later theologians. This chapter is followed by three chapters in which aspects of the covenant are presented. Chapter four discusses the distinction and similarity between election and covenant (for theological students: here L. Berkhof's view is presented in its context). Ch. 5 deals with the important issue of the connection between promise and demand. And ch. 6 shows the harmony that exists between covenant and election.

In this last chapter, the danger of individualism is discussed. Van Genderen mentions that we generally think in terms of individual persons, but he points out that the Old Testament speaks of the election of Israel as God's chosen nation, and that the New Testament calls the congregation God's special and chosen people, 1 Pet. 2:7 (p.77). There is personal election but the Bible does not give room for individualism. He refers to Eph. 1:4: God has elected us in Christ. In being connected with Christ one is at the same time connected with all the elect. He agrees with Van der Zanden that each is elected personally, in and with the congregation which will forever sing the praises of God and of the Lamb (p.78). An excellent reminder.

We are grateful for Dr. Van Genderen's study on the relation of covenant and election and for the clear translation by Rev. C. Pronk. Those who own the book should correct one confusing misprint, on p. 64: "But once we realize that the God of the covenant of grace comes to us with His promises as well as with His demands in (not: as) the Mediator of the covenant, this will become for us a marvel rather than a problem."

The book is not hard to read, with the possible exception of ch. 3, on the views of K. Barth. It does happen that Dr. Van Genderen suddenly picks up on an earlier thought, and one would then have to go back a few pages. But careful reading will be rewarded by greater insight.



The Urim and Thummim

Reviewed by R. Aasman

Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997). Pp. xxiii + 296. \$34.50 US.

This book is a revision of a doctoral dissertation submitted by Dr. C. Van Dam to the Theologische Universiteit in Kampen in 1986. Since no exhaustive study of the Urim and Thummim has appeared since 1824, this full study made available to the public is much welcomed. Dr. Van Dam clears up some popular myths and misconceptions about the Urim and Thummim (hereafter abbreviated as UT) and gives the reader a good grasp of the use of the UT in ancient Israel. Since this is a scholarly work, it does go into technical detail. Nevertheless, it is quite readable and understandable. The book stirs up and keeps the reader's interest from beginning to end. The author also skilfully leads the reader through all the material by giving good summaries throughout the book and explaining where the study is heading in the next chapter or the rest of the book. The book comes with good bibliography, indexes and extensive footnotes. One of the indexes is to Scripture passages which makes this a handy and valu-

able reference work. The footnotes give more detailed information and references to other materials, which is particularly helpful to those engaged in scholarly study. The book itself is beautifully bound and laid out.

The first major section of the book gives a historical overview of the interpretation of the UT. Some interpretations reduce the UT to being of little practical importance. The dominant and most widely accepted theory about the UT is to identify it with the lot oracle (the casting of the lot to receive a decision from the LORD). Later on in the book, the author shows very clearly that this identification of the UT with the lot oracle is incorrect. The most obvious reason is the lot can only give a yes or no answer, whereas the use of the UT led to far more involved and even lengthy answers by Yahweh to his people. Dr. Van Dam also examines cultural institutions in other nations around Israel which might be analogous to the UT, but there appear to be few if any similarities. The UT seems to be utterly unique to the relationship between Yahweh and His covenant people. Finally, the author outlines that in the history of translation people have struggled to translate the Hebrew words Urim and Thummim. However there is considerable support for trans-

lating Urim as "light" or "lights" and Thummim as "perfection" or "perfections." In his concluding remarks on this section, the author points out that what is really needed to form a view of the UT is to turn to the Scriptures and study all relevant data on the UT.

In the second part of the book, Dr. Van Dam engages in an extensive and fascinating study of all Biblical data connected with the UT. The author shows that the UT probably do mean literally "light(s)" and "perfection(s)." At the same time he also proposes that the structure of these two words could allow them to be translated as "perfect illumination." He explains this very well and convincingly. The beauty of this translation is that it makes so much sense: the UT is a means of revelation from God to His people and God's revelation is perfect illumination or light. For the Bible student or preacher, there is an obvious fulfilment of the UT in Him who is the light of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The UT are not physically described in the Scriptures and therefore we do not know what they looked like. We do not even know whether it was one or two objects. However the author shows from a passage such as Exodus 28 that the UT was or were real physical objects placed within the

breastpiece of the high priest. One of the many passages that the author focuses on is Numbers 27:21. He points out how Yahweh revealed himself to Moses face-to-face. Since Moses' successor Joshua would need to be a good shepherd to Israel, and since he would not receive the same direct revelation from Yahweh, he was allowed access to the UT which resided with the high priest. Whenever an important matter came up where a clear revelation from the LORD was needed, Joshua could approach the high priest who in turn would inquire of the LORD by means of the UT. Through the high priest, the LORD would give revelation to His covenant people. The author shows the importance of the UT being kept and used by the high priest: this underlines that communication between God and his people and the blessing of revelation rests on the fact that the ministry of reconciliation has taken place through the high priestly service.

A very important thesis raised by Dr. Van Dam is that the Hebrew expression in Numbers 27:21 "inquiring . . . before the LORD" is a fixed terminology for the use of the UT. He proves this from a number of passages in Judges and the books of Samuel. In passages where the UT are not mentioned, but

there is a legitimate inquiry of the LORD in a very pressing situation, then inquiry was made of the LORD by the use of UT. Understanding this helps us in the interpretation of such passages where legitimate inquiry is made of the LORD. Dr. Van Dam also explains the procedure of using the UT. As we see from Numbers 27:21, when Joshua or a later ruler needed very important revelation from the LORD, then he would go to the high priest to make his request to the LORD. This was done in public. It is significant that when inquiry was made by the UT, then whatever revelation came from God was not questioned by anyone: everyone knew the LORD had spoken. Revelation would come from the LORD through his high priest who would function as Yahweh's inspired spokesman and would speak like a prophet. The revelation would be an articulate and clear message which answered the query of the ruler. Now exactly how the UT functioned in all of this is something that the Scriptures do not make clear. The UT were in the high priest's breast-piece and were, in all probability, brought out by the high priest, but what the UT actually did, is not known. At this point, Dr. Van Dam proposes that what might have happened is that the

UT lit up with a special and miraculous light, thus proving that the LORD has spoken. This is an old tradition and it makes some sense in that the UT may be translated "perfect illumination" and that miraculous signs did happen in Old Testament times. Dr. Van Dam is careful not to say that this is what really happened, but he leaves us with the possible conclusion that the UT functioned in such a way when the LORD revealed His Word through His high priest. God's Word is the perfect light! The author also shows that the UT were not used after the time of David. That was partly due to priestly unfaithfulness, but also because David and his successors began relying more on advice of professional counselors than on the LORD their God.

In the third and final section of the book, the author examines the theological implications of the UT. The UT was a great blessing of Yahweh to His covenant people, for in any time of need they could receive His Word. But the UT also demanded the faith and obedience of the covenant people: at all times they should turn to the LORD for guidance. The demise of the use of the UT led to the fulfilment of all Old Testament revelation: the promised Messiah who is the Word made flesh. With His coming, God's people are left with the inspired Word of God for their constant perfect illumination. The author could have written so much more in this final section of the book, but that of course, was not the intent of his study. What he does do is give us all the information and insight we need to see that the LORD God still gives His people great privilege in guiding them with the Word of His Son Jesus Christ. Whoever faithfully and prayerfully studies the Word of God will be illuminated by the Word and Spirit of Christ so that they know what to believe and how to live in each and every situation of life. God's people today have something even greater than the use of the UT.

Dr. C. Van Dam's book on the Urim and Thummim comes highly recommended not just for scholars and preachers but for all who long to dig into the rich mysteries of the Word of the Lord and to be enlightened by God's perfect revelation.

(Anyone wishing to order this book can write Eisenbrauns, P.O. Box 275, Winona Lake, IN 46590-0275, or phone 219 269 2011 or faxing toll free to 800 736 7921 or email to orders@eisenbrauns.com)



*For there is one God
and there is one
mediator between God
and men, the man
Christ Jesus.*

1 Timothy 2:5



PRESS RELEASES

Press Release of Classis Alberta/ Manitoba, November 4, 5, 1997

The chairman of the convening Church at Winnipeg, Rev. K. Jonker, welcomed the brothers to Classis. He asked that Hymn 28:1-4 be sung, he read 1 Peter 1:1-21 and led in prayer. The chairman remembered the three vacant churches in the classical district: the Churches at Carman, Coaldale and Taber. The Church at Carman extended calls to Rev. R. Aasman and Rev. D.G.J. Agema and received declines on both calls. The Church at Coaldale called Rev. W. B. Slomp who declined that call. The Church at Taber became vacant when Rev. G. Ph. van Popta left for the Church at Ancaster. Since then, the Church at Taber extended a call to candidate Richard Pot who declined the call. More recently another call was extended to candidate Theodore E. Lodder who accepted the call and asked to have his peremptory examination at this Classis. The Church at Denver granted Rev. M. Pollock a leave of absence for four months which explained his absence at this Classis. The chairman also expressed appreciation that Rev. R. Aasman saw his way clear to stay in this classical district by turning down the call to the Church at Chatham. A special welcome was extended to brother and sister T. Lodder, brother and sister M. Hoogerdijk, the deputies of Regional Synod, namely, Rev. C. Van Spronsen and Rev. J. Visscher, and to fraternal delegates from the local Free Church of Scotland, namely, Rev. K. Compton and Dr. P. Heaton.

Classis was constituted and the officers took their places: Rev. W.B. Slomp as chairman, Rev. R. Aasman as vice-chairman and Rev. G. A. Snip as clerk. The chairman thanked the convening Church at Winnipeg for all the work in preparing for this Classis.

Classis proceeded to the preparatory examination of brother Mark J. Hoogerdijk. Brother Hoogerdijk presented his sermon proposal on 1 Peter 4:17. It was decided in closed session not to continue with the examination. This was communicated by the officers to brother Hoogerdijk.

Classis proceeded to the peremptory examination of brother Theodore E. Lodder. Brother Lodder presented his sermon proposal on Psalm 112. It was decided in closed session to continue with the examination. Brother Lodder was

examined on Old and New Testament exegesis, knowledge of Scripture, doctrine and creeds, church history, ethics, church polity and diaconology. In closed session it was decided with the concurring advice of the deputies that this was a satisfactory examination. This was joyfully communicated to brother Lodder and his wife. He signed the subscription form. After singing and prayer, opportunity was given for the brothers of Classis to congratulate brother and sister Lodder.

The report of the Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry was received for information. The report indicated that there were no theological students requesting assistance from this classical district. The report of the Committee for Aid to Needy Churches was adopted. Aid will be given to the Churches at Barrhead and Denver. The level of assessment was set at \$29.35 per communicant member. The Churches at Coaldale and Taber were not assessed for the Church at Denver at their request.

A discussion was held regarding the report from the ad hoc committee which had been appointed by the previous Classis to discuss with the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC the charge of Rev. M. Pollock breaking his vows. This report clarified what exactly was meant by Presbytery's charge that Rev. Pollock had broken his vows. The following decision was made.

Based on the report of the ad hoc committee, Classis decides:

- A. To acknowledge and agree with the POD's request that Rev. Pollock send Presbytery a letter in which he states the following:
 1. Acknowledge that although he wrote a letter to Presbytery on October 28, 1991, he did not discuss with the Presbytery in March 1992 his reasons for breaking his vows (by which is meant renouncing the vows he made at Presbytery in March 1991) and leaving the OPC without a letter of transfer, and
 2. Asking forgiveness for these things.
- B. To ask Rev. Pollock to send such a letter to the POD.
- C. To offer sincere apology to Presbytery for not having been more careful when receiving Rev. M. Pollock into our federation when there were charges by Presbytery against him.

- D. To apologize to Rev. Pollock for not giving him proper guidance after he left the POD.

The report of the Classis Treasurer led to a decision to form an ad hoc committee to come with general guidelines regarding travel expenses of delegates to Classis. Brother John Buitenbos was appointed as treasurer of Classis.

Reports were presented on visitations made to the Churches at Carman, Denver, Edmonton-Immanuel, and Winnipeg. These reports were gratefully received.

A report on a visit by observers to the POD of the OPC was gratefully received. The report concluded with thankfulness that things are being done decently and in good order in the POD.

The Church at Barrhead notified Classis that it made the decision to recognize the Church at Denver as a sister church within the federation.

The Church at Coaldale requested and received pulpit supply one Sunday per month. The Church at Denver asked for and received pulpit supply for December 7, 1997 when the Lord's Supper is scheduled to be celebrated. The Church at Denver also apprised Classis that Rev. M. Pollock has been granted a four month leave of absence according to article 14 CO, beginning September 1, 1997.

The Church at Winnipeg requested advice from Classis regarding institution of a second church in Winnipeg. Accompanying material outlined how such an institution would be effected. Classis gave positive advice which permits Winnipeg to go ahead with this new institution. Words of gratitude and encouragement were expressed by the chairman.

Classis Pacific advised Classis Alberta/Manitoba of its decision to divide into two classical districts. This would have implications for the convening of Regional Synod West 1998 according to article 47 CO, namely, that three ministers and three elders should be delegated from each classical district to Regional Synod. This was gratefully noted.

Rev. R. J. Eikelboom was delegated to represent Classis at the ordination of brother T. E. Lodder in Taber on November 30, 1997.

The next classis was scheduled for January 13, 1998, starting at 9 am, with alternate date of March 10, 1998, also at 9 am. The Church at Barrhead is

convening church; venue is the Immanuel Church at Edmonton; suggested officers are Rev. R. J. Eikelboom as chairman, Rev. W. B. Slomp as vice-chairman and Rev. R. Aasman as clerk. Minister elect T. E. Lodder was appointed to be examiner Bible Knowledge. Rev. W. B. Slomp was appointed as alternate to the examination committee. The Church at Carman was delegated to represent Classis at the institution of a new congregation in Winnipeg. Brothers H. Baker, J. Buitenbos and B. Vegter were appointed to the ad hoc committee to draw up guidelines for travelling expenses to Classis.

The following ministers were delegated to Regional Synod West of December 2, 1997: Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. R. J. Eikelboom, Rev. W. B. Slomp and Rev. E. J. Tiggelaar; as alternates: Rev. K. Jonker and Rev. G. A. Snip (in that order).

The following elders were delegated to Regional Synod West of December 2, 1997: H. Baker, T. Termeer, W. Van Assen and T. Veenendaal; as alternates: I. Veurink, B. Vegter, W. Gortemaker and D. Willis (in that order).

Question period was held. Censure according to article 34 CO was not necessary. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release approved. Classis was closed after singing and prayer.

R. Aasman

PRESS RELEASE OF REGIONAL SYNOD EAST of the Canadian Reformed Churches held at Burlington

November 12, 1997

1. On behalf of the convening church at Brampton, Rev. B. J. Berends called the meeting to order. He requested the singing of Hymn 19, read Philippians 2:1-18 and led in prayer. He then welcomed the delegates.
2. The credentials were examined by brs. J. Boot and L. Kampen and found to be in good order. Regional Synod was constituted.
3. The following officers were elected: Rev. J. DeGelder as chairman, Rev. A. J. Pol as clerk and Rev. P. G. Feenstra as vice-chairman.
4. The chairman thanked Rev. Berends for opening Regional Synod and expressed appreciation for the preparations made by the church of Brampton as convening church for this Regional Synod.
5. After several additions were made the agenda was adopted.

6. On behalf of the church at Toronto br. C. Lindhout prepared regulations for Regional Synod as mandated by Regional Synod East, November, 1995. After several amendments were made the regulations were adopted.
7. In closed session Synod dealt with an appeal of two brothers.
8. The Deputies ad Art. 48 reported that they gave "concurring advice to Classis Ontario North of September 11, 1997 in connection with the peremptory examinations of the brs. R. Pot and S. 't Hart."
9. The Deputies ad Art. 48 reported that "Classis Ontario South did not seek the assistance from the Deputies of Regional Synod."
10. Synod thankfully received the financial report from the Treasurer of Regional Synod, covering the period of Nov. 1, 1996 - Oct. 31, 1997. On the suggestion of the treasurer, Regional Synod decided that no assessment for 1998 is necessary.
11. The church at Lincoln reported that the books of the treasurer were audited and found to be in good order. Synod discharged the treasurer from his responsibility.
12. Synod received with thankfulness the report of the church at Brampton with regard to the inspection of the archives of Regional Synod which are taken care of by the church at Toronto. It was reported that the documents of Regional Synod, Nov. 13, 1996 were found to be in good order.
13. The following appointments were made:
 - a. Delegates to General Synod 1998:
As ministers: W. den Hollander, P.G. Feenstra, A.J. Pol, G.H. Visscher
Alternates: D.G.J. Agema, J. de Gelder, K. Kok, J. Ludwig (in that order).
 - As elders: L. Jagt, W. Oostdyk, J. Schouten, W. Smouter
Alternates: K. Sikkema, E.H. Pol, A. de Jong, K. Post
 - b. Deputies for Classis Ontario North: D. Agema and J. de Gelder, alternate: G. Wieske.
 - c. Deputies for Classis Ontario South: W. den Hollander, G. Nederveen; alternate G.H. Visscher.
 - d. Treasurer for Regional Synod: Br. D. van Amerongen, 343 Russ Road, Grimsby, ON, L3M 4E7.
 - e. Church to audit books of the treasurer: the church at Lincoln

- f. Church to maintain the archives: the church at Toronto
- g. Church to inspect the archives: the church at Brampton
- h. Church for convening of the next Regional Synod is the church at Attercliffe. Date: Nov. 11, 1998.
- i. Nominations for the Board of Governors for the Theological College: D. Agema, W. den Hollander, P. Feenstra; alternates: G. Nederveen, P. Aasman, C. Bosch in that order.
14. Personal question period was held.
15. The chairman noted with thankfulness that censure was not necessary.
16. The Acts were read and adopted and the Press Release was read and approved for publication. The chairman requested the brothers to sing Psalm 85:1,4 and led in prayer. Regional Synod East 1997 was closed by the chairman.

For Regional Synod East 1997
P.G. Feenstra

Press Release, Regional Synod West, December 2nd, 1997

Opening: On behalf of the convening church of Lynden, the Rev. W. Wielenga called the meeting to order. He invited the delegates to sing Psalm 97:1, 5, after which he read Psalm 97 and led in prayer. He urged the delegates to let themselves be ruled in all their deliberations and decisions by God our King. Rev. Wielenga then gave a survey of recent developments among the churches of Reg. Synod West. The credentials were checked by the convening church and were found to be in good order. Present as delegates from Classis AB/MB were: Elders H. Baker, T. Termeer, W. Van Assen and T. Veenendaal and the Revs. R. Aasman, R. Eikelboom, W. Slomp and E.J. Tiggelaar. Present as delegates from Classis Pacific were: Elders G. Boeve, R. DeHaan, C. Leyenhorst and W. Pleiter and the Revs. E. Kampen, J. Louwerse, R. Schouten and W. Wielenga. Regional Synod was declared constituted. Elected as officers of Synod were: Rev. R. Aasman as chairman, Rev. R. Schouten as vice-chairman and Rev. W. Slomp as clerk. The agenda was adopted.

Correspondence received by Regional Synod:

- a) An appeal was received from the church at Willoughby Heights against Article 6E of the Confidential

Acts of Classis Pacific Dec. 10-11th, 1996. This appeal was declared admissible and was dealt with in closed session. The appeal of the church at Willoughby Heights was sustained.

- b) An appeal was received from the church at Yarrow against several decisions of different Pacific classes. This appeal was declared admissible and was dealt with in open session. Yarrow argued that if a classis is asked for advice according to Article 44 of the Church Order, then classis should give advice *as a body* and that if churches seek advice according to Article 44 of the Church Order, they should seek advice from classis *as a body*. The appeal of Yarrow was sustained.
- c) Regional Synod received correspondence from Classis Pacific Oct. 7th, 1997 informing Regional Synod of the decision of this Classis to split Classis Pacific into two different classes to be called Classis Pacific West (Smithers, Houston, Surrey, Cloverdale, Willoughby Heights and Langley) and Classis Pacific East (Aldergrove, Lynden, Abbotsford, Yarrow, Chilliwack and Vernon). This information was gratefully acknowledged.
- d) An overture was received from Classis Pacific Dec. 10th and 11th, 1996 requesting Regional Synod to overture the next General Synod (1998) to appoint a committee to take up contact with the Free Reformed Churches of North America. Regional Synod gratefully adopted the overture of Classis Pacific and will forward it *in toto* to General Synod 1998.

Reports received by Regional Synod

- a) The deputies of Regional Synod (J. Visscher and C. VanSpronsen) reported that they could give concurring advice to Classis AB/MB Nov. 05th, 1997 at the peremptory examination of candidate Mr. Theo Lodder.
- b) The deputies of Regional Synod (R. Aasman and E.J. Tiggelaar) reported that they were present at Classis Pacific April 8th, 1997 and could give concurring advice to the decision of the church at Surrey to grant early retirement to the Rev. R. Boersema.
- c) The Immanuel Church of Edmonton reported that the archives of Regional Synod are in good order.
- d) The treasurer of Regional Synod presented an audited report showing the state of the Regional Synod Fund. The funds are in good order.

Appointments made by Regional Synod were as follows:

- a) Delegates to General Synod 1998: The following **elders** were elected: Primi delegates: W. Pleiter, P. Van Woudenberg, C. VanLeeuwen, T. Veenendaal
Alternates: P. Lindhout, W. Gortemaker, H. DeLeeuw, W. VanAssen (in that order)
The following **ministers** were elected:
Primi delegates: R. Aasman, J. Moesker, R. Schouten, W. Slomp
Alternates: R. Eikelboom, E. Kampen, J. Huigen, W. Wielenga (in that order)
- b) Board of Governors, Theological College.
Reappointed were R. Aasman and J. Visscher. Appointed was J. Moesker.

Alternates: Reappointed: R. Schouten. Appointed: W. Slomp and E.J. Tiggelaar.

- c) Treasurer of the Fund for Regional Synod: reappointed was Mr. H. Lubbers.
- d) Church for the Archives of Regional Synod: reappointed was Edmonton Providence.
- e) Church for the inspection of the Archives of Regional Synod: reappointed was Edmonton Immanuel.
- f) Deputies ad Article 48, Church Order. Given that there are now three classical districts within Regional Synod West, Regional Synod decided to appoint one deputy plus two alternates from each classical area. Appointed were the following:
Classis AB/MB: Rev. R. Aasman. First alternate: Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar. Second alternate: Rev. W. Slomp.
Classis Pacific West: Rev. J. Moesker. First alternate: Rev. C. VanSpronsen. Second alternate: Rev. E. Kampen.
Classis Pacific East: Rev. R. Schouten. First alternate: Rev. M. VanLuik. Second alternate: Rev. D. Moes.
- g) Convening Church for next Synod: Taber was appointed. Date for next Regional Synod: December 01, 1998.

Closing matters:

Personal Question Period was held. Censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order was not necessary. The Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was read and approved. The chairman led in prayer and Regional Synod came to its end.

R. Schouten, vice-chairman, e.t.



*All glory to our God
on high and on the
earth His peace for
men to whom He
favour shows which
nevermore shall cease.*

Hymn 17:6 (Book of Praise)



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Greetings*

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