

Clarion

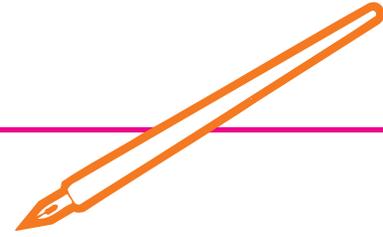
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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Enjoying our work

Numbers

10:1-10



Enjoying our Work

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink, and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God. (Eccl 2:24)

This issue of *Clarion* comes to you around the time of Labour Day, after which the schools, colleges, and universities open their doors, and work begins anew in earnest. The time of the holidays is over; a new season of work has begun.

I know that there are many among us who have seasonal work. I think especially of farmers and landscapers, and others who work in related professions. Some of these must take their holidays in the winter time. But for most of us, the summer is the season to break from our daily work and to relax more than at other times.

*When the summer is over,
people become serious again about work.*

Labour Day

Perhaps that is the reason why “Labour Day” has traditionally been held during the first weekend in September. When the summer is over, people become serious again about work. To mark the transition, Labour Day has been organized as a day honouring the many labourers who form the backbone of any industrial nation.

This day was instituted around 1882 as a recognition of the contribution of working people, i.e., the common labourer. In Canada and the United States, this day is always the first Monday in September. As an aside we note that there are countries which observe May 1 as a day to honour workers.

On Labour Day there is usually a parade with floats, bands, and other attractions. We also note that this is a day when leaders of the unionized labour movement love to stand in the limelight, deliver fiery speeches, and make general threats to management and ownership of various employers.

TGIF

I have the overall impression that many people do not like their work. I know that I speak in general, for there are those who truly enjoy their daily task. But we have many expressions which indicate that people are glad when the (free) weekend comes, and especially so when it is a long weekend. TGIF: thank God it’s Friday. Beer advertisements will proclaim: hey, Canada, the weekend’s coming.

There are other expressions in this respect. All work and no play, makes Jack a dull boy. We need our time off. Daily life with its work is called a “rat race.” This refers to strenuous and wearisome activity, where there is no real progress or change. Everyday one performs the same boring tasks. But these have to be done, and so we bend and “put our nose to the grindstone.” Ouch.

How many people will genuinely say: thank God it’s Monday? Then a new work-week begins. Life resumes its normal course after the weekend break. It has been said that the hardest time to get out of bed is Monday morning, especially if we have carried the weekend over into the wee hours of the night.

Work and vanity

In the Book of Ecclesiastes work and labour are mentioned many times. Generally speaking, work is considered to be wearisome, meaningless, and a chasing after wind. All that we build up in life is taken over by others when we die, and we do not know what they will do with it (Eccl 3:19). The preacher experiences a kind of despair over all his work under the sun; it seems so useless.

The work of some leads by God’s blessing to great riches in their lifetime, but in the end it means nothing. “Naked a man comes from his mother’s womb, and as he comes, so he departs” (Eccl 5: 15). Often the relationships are unfair and favour one above the other. The rich oppress the poor; the poor seek to outsmart the rich. Also in labour relations, this world is a sinful place where exploitation and sabotage occur daily.

*“My heart took delight in all my work,
and this was the reward for all my labour.”*

Must we then take a worldly view towards work? We do it, but we hate it, and we cannot wait until we no longer have to work but can retire? Some people become experts at appearing to be busy, while they are in fact doing nothing. Pupils have refined this tactic at school. Others are so busy that they hardly have time for anything else. I’ve heard the saying: my work is also my hobby.



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Focus on enjoyment

Yet the very same Bible book tells us at various places that we should enjoy our work. This enjoyment must be vigorously pursued and graciously given. In Ecclesiastes 2:10, the preacher does admit, besides the vanity of toil and labour, “My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labour.” And in Ecclesiastes 2:24 we read, “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink, and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him who can eat or find enjoyment?”

Despite the hardship and toil, we are encouraged still to find enjoyment and satisfaction in our work. In Ecclesiastes

What’s inside?

Rev. Cl. Stam presents his editorial in connection with the Labour Day weekend. He shows that for a Christian, labour is a matter of daily enjoyment. Labour is to the praise of God.

Due to the volume of submissions in this issue we will continue Dr. C. Trimp’s series of articles in the next issue.

In this issue we have two reports which were submitted at a meeting of February 3, 2000 between brothers of the Canadian Reformed and Free Reformed Churches. This meeting of synodically appointed committees was a part of ongoing discussions between our churches in the hope of realising church unity. These reports are very informative on explaining and understanding the significance and place of experiential preaching. See for yourself whether we are that far apart.

Rev. G. Ph. van Popta reflects on the 75th anniversary of the United Church of Canada. The history of the UCC has not been a happy one, considering the radical liberalism that confronts the United Church. At a time when some of our churches are celebrating their 50th anniversaries, this serves to make us thankful to God for his preserving work, and it serves as a warning to us to stay the course of faithfulness to God and his Word.

The meditation is by Rev. J. van Popta. In addition you will find a letter to the editor and some reports. One report is from the newly-formed Classis Manitoba.

RA

3:12 we read that finding satisfaction in all one's toil is called, "This is the gift of God." And in Ecclesiastes 9:7, we find a beautiful mandate, "Go, eat your food with gladness, with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favours what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun – all your meaningless days."

Life remains meaningless and vain in many ways, but under God's grace it can still be enjoyed, day by day, and God's gifts may be received with thankfulness and used with pleasure. We may pluck the day, enjoy the good times, especially when we are young and in the midst of the business of life. Time for toil does not exclude proper relaxation.

"You know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain."

In the Lord

All this finds greater and deeper expression in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, we are only at a halfway point in the history of redemption. The Bible tells us also about the coming of our Lord into this world, about his death and resurrection.

It is in the light of this resurrection, which is a guarantee of our own resurrection, that life gains new meaning. We may no longer simply say: vanity of vanities, all is vanity. For Christ has risen. This life of toil is lived under his dominion. And he promises us new life, even eternal life, free from sin and its effects, free also from the pain of useless toil.

After Paul has at length demonstrated the truth and the meaning of Christ's resurrection, he ends with this word, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor 15:58).

I know that "the work of the Lord" means especially work done in ministry and service to build Christ's church. But our daily work is to be seen along that line also. All our work has taken on a new meaning: it is not vain in the Lord. We may build with Christ the kingdom of heaven, and be assured that he will return to exclaim, "Well done, you good and faithful servant."

Perhaps we should in our daily work focus more on the Lord Jesus Christ and the coming of his kingdom. This gives sense and direction to our work, at home, on the job, in the factory, at school, or whatever we do. When you work with Christ, you can enjoy your work. There will still be dreary days, but we may always look to the Lord who gives strength and blessing. This alone gives enjoyment to our work.



By John van Popta

John Mark

When they (Paul and Barnabas) arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper

Paul and his companions sailed to Perga in Pamphylia where John left them to return to Jerusalem Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.

(Acts 13:4,5,13; 15:37 NIV. See also 2 Timothy 4:11, Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; 1 Peter 5:13b)

The assistant

In Paul's letters we read of the many men and women whom he calls his fellow workers. Among them were men of the stature of Barnabas and Silas. He worked with Luke and Silvanus; these were faithful fellow workers who contended for the faith and wrestled in prayer. But there were also others. Some were well known for their failures.

John Mark worked with Paul and then later with Peter. It is from him whose hand we have the gospel named after him. What do we know of John Mark? In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas are about to set out on their first missionary journey. They needed a helper, an assistant. Barnabas suggests that they take his cousin: he should make an excellent companion. Remember Barnabas from Acts 4, the last verses. His name is Joseph, but he has a nickname: Barnabas – Son of Encouragement. Barnabas is a gentle kind soul; one who gives away his wealth to the church. Now he is about to set out with Paul. He is giving his life away to the Lord. He takes along his cousin, John Mark.

All went well for a time. Mark must have thought, "I love this!" What excitement as they made their way to the coast and set sail for the island of Cyprus. "New faces, new marketplaces, new cities to visit." Paul and Barnabas were tent makers. They would have worked in the marketplace, cutting and sewing their tents for travelers and soldiers. Perhaps Mark was a young apprentice who was working for Barnabas and so he went along.

Desertion

We do not know, but maybe John Mark thought that they would only go to Cyprus, a few days sailing from home. But this was not the case. They traversed Cyprus and sailed on to what

we now know as Turkey. As they arrived there, John Mark decides he has had enough. The stories in the Bible are told with swift brevity. In Acts 13:13 we read that John left them and returned to Jerusalem. John Mark chickens out. He does not stick to the task at hand. He decides he has had enough. Without the consent of Paul or Barnabas he heads for home, for Jerusalem!

And so we see in this young man an image of ourselves. When the going gets tough we quit. This was what John Mark faced: To be a plodder or a quitter? To be loyal to Christ, to family, to fellow Christians, or to myself? That was the battle. What of John Mark? What of him? Well, he heads for home. He quits his task. He will not do what he must do. He deserts the work.

How do we know that he went home against the will of his cousin and Paul? We can read in Acts 15:37 how Paul and Barnabas were going to head out on another preaching journey. They plan to visit the many churches that the Lord had established. And who does Barnabas, that gentle man, want to take along? John Mark! Here is a man who repented of failure. He had gone home, to Jerusalem from where he came. But he must have realized that he had done wrong. He had run away from duty. Jesus had taught that his bread and drink was to do his Father's will. He had taught that discipleship might well cost everything: lands and homes; family friends; even life itself. But John Mark had chickened out. He had run from the big task, from real duty, from his Lord.

Two years later

Paul and Barnabas, when they had returned from their journey, went up to Jerusalem. They went there for what we call "the Jerusalem Council." There they must have met John Mark. Gentle, kind Barnabas took him back to Anti-

och. When Paul and Barnabas decide to head out again to visit the churches, Barnabas wants to take John Mark along. Paul, however, says, "No way! We cannot take him." Barnabas says, "Yes, we must, he has repented."

Two years have passed since Paul and Barnabas had returned. Now as they set out they again need an assistant. Mark? Paul thought it best not to take one who deserted the work. Who was right? Barnabas or Paul? Perhaps Paul was right! Deserters need a time of proof. Not just promise but proof of amendment. Perhaps Barnabas was right! Accept the repentant sinner with grace. Even so, the fact remains that John Mark's return and repentance was real and glorious. Even Paul in the end is at last convinced of the young man's restoration and they take him along.

Many years later

More than ten years have passed since that day that Mark walked out. Paul is a prisoner in Rome: an apostle in chains. He writes to his spiritual son, one of the other young men who had become attached to Paul's work. He writes to Timothy who is about to set out for Rome from Ephesus. Paul writes, "Take Mark with you: for he is very helpful in serving me." Amazing! What a tribute to a young man who failed and then made good! What a tribute to the Lord Jesus Christ who can work with failures and quitters and turn them into faithful helpful servants. He can take failure and turn it into success. He can take fear and turn it into courage. He can take prejudice and turn it into love. He can take us when we are ready to quit and to retreat from God and duty, and turn us around to face the task and to work in his kingdom and his church. We see in John Mark's life, the perseverance of the saints. A saint restored after a lamentable fall (Canons of Dort V 4,5). 

How do we see the congregation?

By R. Aasman, W.B. Slomp and P. Vanwoudenberg

Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity

This paper was presented to a meeting between the Canadian Reformed Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity and the External Relations Subcommittee of the Free Reformed Church on February 3, 2000. The FRC brothers also presented a paper entitled, "Some Reflections on Experiential Preaching." This paper is also included in this issue of Clarion.

Reason for this topic

At our previous meeting of September 29, 1999, it was suggested by our Free Reformed brothers that we present at the next meeting a short paper on the subject, how do you see the congregation? This question as it stands, like the title above, is rather vague. However it was immediately clarified by our brothers what was meant by this question and topic: is the congregation to be viewed idealistically or realistically? It was further clarified that the concern by the Free Reformed brothers is whether in our churches the preaching to the congregations promotes covenantal automatism. It is in this light that we now address the question: how do we see the congregation? We will try to give a fair representation of the practice within our churches.

Addressing the congregation in the preaching

How do we see the congregation? We may start to answer this question by noting how the congregation is addressed in the preaching. Typically, the congregation is addressed as "brothers and sisters," or, "beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ." In this address to the congregation there is reflected the words of the apostle Paul, who writes, for instance in Ephesians 1:1ff: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and

the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." We also may think of our Belgic Confession which summarizes in article 27: "We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the

The congregation is addressed as "brothers and sisters."

true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by his blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit."

How do we see the congregation? We see them as God's covenant people, as believers and their children, who seek their salvation in Jesus Christ and rejoice in this salvation which is by the grace of God alone. This is why on a Sunday when the congregation is gathered together, there is a sense of heightened joy. Typically the worship service is opened with a votum and salutation where the votum states

The spiritual life of God's covenant people has many ups and downs.

(Psalm 124:8): "Our help is in the name of the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth." To which there is the salutation (1 Corinthians 1:3): "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Then there follows the singing of a Psalm such as Psalm

122: "I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD.' Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem." In all of this the praise and the glory and the thanksgiving is to God. How gracious and merciful He is for gathering, defending and preserving his church. How rich we are to have the gospel and the reality of Jesus Christ as our Saviour. How blessed we are that the Holy Spirit works through the Word and that through the faith which He works in our hearts, we are marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of God's glory.

Are all members mature?

Does this now mean that the congregation is to be seen as a group of mature Christians where all are on a healthy diet of solid food – to use terms from the Letter to the Hebrews? Does this mean that the preaching should not address the reality that there are church members who may be weak in faith, struggling with faith or maybe do not even have faith? Does this mean that there should not be the continual call and challenge to repent from sin, to flee to Christ with his perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness, and to respond with a grateful heart which loves and keeps the commandments of God? The answer in the Canadian Reformed Churches is resounding: absolutely not! The church is the covenant people of God. That means a living relationship or concourse with God where God speaks his promises, demands, warnings and threats. The history of redemption from which we derive many thought-provoking and soul-searching examples demonstrates only too clearly that the spiritual life of God's covenant people has many ups and downs. The congregation must be viewed and is

viewed as a covenant people who sin, struggle, fall, act stubbornly and rebelliously, live in smug complacency, and sometimes just refuse to listen to the Word of God. This also needs to be addressed in the preaching and home visits throughout the congregation. The Form for the Ordination of Ministers in our churches gives the following mandate to ministers:

The task of the minister of the Word can be described as follows: First, he must declare the whole counsel of God to his congregation, proclaiming the Word according to the command of the apostle Paul: I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching. After the example of the apostle he is to perform this duty in public and from house to house. He shall expose all errors and heresies as unfruitful works of darkness, and exhort the membership to walk as children of the light. He shall teach the Word of God to the youth of the Church and to others whom God calls, for the holy Scriptures are able to instruct them for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It is also his duty to visit the members of the congregation and to comfort the sick and sorrowing. Thus comforting and admonishing, he shall call the whole congregation to the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

A minister in our federation is not faithful to his ordination vow if he does not preach the Word of God with words of convincing, rebuking, exhorting, exposing errors and heresies, and exhorting the members to walk as children of light. In other words, the congregation is not viewed in an idealistic or unrealistic sense as if everything were right already. But it is viewed realistically as covenant people who need discriminating and penetrating preaching which addresses the reality of sin and struggle and weakness.

Theological training

At the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, one of the most beloved and often referred to passages of Scripture in the field of homiletics is Ephesians 4:11ff:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

From this it is made clear that the preacher who stands before the congregation must see the congregation as a body which needs to be built up so that it is not tossed back and forth in weaknesses. The following verses

*God's Word is a
hammer and the sword
of the Holy Spirit.*

which carry on into chapter 5 outline in no uncertain terms how the Word of God must address the reality of the congregation's struggles: lying, stealing, bitterness, sexual immorality, foolish talk or coarse talking. This culminates in the words of Ephesians 5: 8ff:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

We could continue with references to Acts 20:28; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; and the Letter to the Hebrews. These are all passages used at our Theological College to train young men to understand

how to fulfill their office as a minister of the Word. This breathes with an aroma that God's Word is a hammer and the sword of the Holy Spirit that addresses the congregation as people who wrestle with sin and weaknesses and possibly no faith at all! Woe to the minister who only speaks in platitudes or only makes doctrinal statements or tells stories. He is a shepherd whom the Lord God will hold culpable for the blood of those who did not receive warning.

Our confessions

In our discussion about how we see the congregation, we see also the rich blessing of our confessions. The Belgic Confession speaks in article 29:

Those who are of the church may be recognized by the marks of Christians. They believe in Jesus Christ the only Saviour, flee from sin and pursue righteousness, love the true God and their neighbour without turning to the right or left, and crucify their flesh and its works. Although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life. They appeal constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ, in whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him.

Clearly our confession makes clear that true Christians have their weaknesses and struggles. They need to appeal to Jesus Christ. They need to struggle against sin. How can that be done apart from faithful preaching – one of the marks of the church – which penetrates to the core of their being, revealing sin, Christ and the way of conversion? Lord's Day 23 speaks about justification in Jesus Christ which we need to appropriate by faith. Again the preaching will have to call the congregation to do exactly that every day of their lives. The Canons of Dort also give us great insight. Chapter I, article 16 says:

Some do not yet clearly discern in themselves a living faith in Christ, an assured confidence of heart, peace of conscience, a zeal for childlike obedience, and a glorying in God through Christ; nevertheless, they use the means through which God has promised to work these things in us. They ought not to be alarmed when reprobation is mentioned, nor to count themselves among the reprobate. Rather, they must diligently continue in the use of these means, fervently desire a time of more abundant grace, and expect it

with reverence and humility. Others seriously desire to be converted to God, to please Him only, and to be delivered from the body of death. Yet they cannot reach that point on the way of godliness and faith which they would like. They should be even less terrified by the doctrine of reprobation, since a merciful God has promised not to quench the smoking flax nor to break the bruised reed. Still others disregard God and the Saviour Jesus Christ and have completely given themselves over to the cares of the world and the lusts of the flesh. For them this doctrine of reprobation is rightly fearsome as long as they do not seriously turn to God.

Unequivocally, the congregation cannot be idealized as if each and every person in the church were at the same level of mature faith. Some are at a point that they fear whether they are elect. Others have complete disregard for God and Christ. Clearly the preaching needs to comfort, challenge, exhort and admonish the congregation in a living way. It might even happen that someone will rebel and leave the church all together. This only goes to show that the preaching is the primary key of the kingdom of heaven which opens and closes the door. Obviously chapter IV of the Canons has much to say about this subject, ending with these words:

For grace is conferred through admonitions, and the more readily we do our duty, the more this favor of God, who works in us, usually manifests itself in its luster, and so His work best proceeds. To God alone, both for the means and for their saving fruit and efficacy, all glory is due throughout eternity. Amen.

Also chapter V makes clear that God works the perseverance of the saints through the seed of regeneration. It demonstrates in article 7:

Further, through His Word and Spirit He certainly and effectually renews them to repentance. As a result they grieve from the heart with a godly sorrow for the sins they have committed; they seek and obtain through faith with a contrite heart forgiveness in the blood of the Mediator; they again experience the favour of a reconciled God and adore His mercies and faithfulness. And from now on they more diligently work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

This underlines what we have already said.

Danger of covenantal automatism

One of the great dangers for the church is covenantal automatism or smug complacency. We learn our lesson from the Scriptures how devastating it is to presume that membership in the church and the covenant guarantee

One of the great dangers for the church is covenantal automatism or smug complacency.

salvation. That not only leads to lukewarmness in one's relationship with the Lord but also the abandoning of oneself to a life of sin. The words of Jeremiah 7 which are referred to by our Lord Jesus Christ ring as a strong warning in our ears and must be reflected in the way the congregation is addressed today:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!"

We recognize that the Free Reformed Churches have alleged that the Canadian Reformed Churches have not been sufficiently cognizant and mindful of the dangers of covenantal automatism.

The congregation must be made to see that they are to appropriate God's promises through a living faith.

We will not try to defend ourselves on that matter. It is entirely possible that there are many examples of weaknesses in this regard. At the same time it is unfair and incorrect to suggest that in all congregations and among all ministers in our churches this is a problem. We think that there is attention for, or possibly growing appreciation for, the need to address the dangers of covenantal au-

tomatism. So long as the grace of God in Jesus Christ and the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit through His Word remains central, there needs to be and there is a penetration by the preaching of the Word to the heart and mind of the individual which challenges him or her to self-examination and a living covenant relationship with God. After a sermon, church members must have the sense that the Word of God has addressed their particular situation, needs and struggles. In this way, the preaching of the gospel will truly be the power of God to salvation. (An example of a sermon is presented to the Free Reformed brothers to demonstrate typical Canadian Reformed preaching).

Promise and demand

On the one hand, the congregation must be shown the rich blessings of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Indeed the congregation should not be left in doubt as to whether the promises of God are also being proclaimed to them. But on the other hand, the congregation must be made to see that they are to appropriate God's promises through a living faith. The congregation must be shown this by clear example and application. This will lead the congregation continually on the path of repenting from their sin, seeking forgiveness in Christ's blood, and being empowered by the Holy Spirit for a life of holiness, thanksgiving and obedience.

Appeal

Brothers, one of the things that we deeply appreciate about the Free Reformed Churches is the living, penetrating way of bringing the Word of God to the congregation. Quite frankly it is one of the reasons that we long to be united with you and so guided by you. At the same time, with respect to our churches, there have been comments from some of your ministers in recent articles which demonstrate appreciation regarding our churches particularly for the exegesis of Scripture and explaining the riches of God's grace to the congregation. This suggests that you would also derive blessing in your fellowship with us. If we are so close to each other because of our unity on the basis of Scripture and the confessions, and if we find ourselves not that far apart on our approach to the congregation, does that not convince us of the need and desire to be one in a very real and demonstrable way?! 

Some reflections on experiential preaching

By Pastor Hans Overduin and Pastor Wim Wullschleger

External Relations Subcommittee of the Free Reformed Church

Reason for this topic

This topic is part of our focus of discussion today for various reasons. One reason is that experiential preaching is often mentioned by FRC ministers and members as that which especially distinguishes us as separate federation among the reformed churches. Indeed, experiential preaching is held high as a treasured distinctive. A quick glance at the *Handbook for the Theological Training Program of the FRCNA* demonstrates this focus on “the experiential.” Another reason for the discussion on this topic is a real desire to understand better what is meant by experiential preaching. In past and present discussions and contacts between the Free Reformed and the Canadian Reformed, while there is so much we have in common, always and again it seems that this component of experiential preaching stands in the way (fairly or unfairly) of a growing and closer bond between us. A third reason for discussing this topic is simply that any serious discussion about the preaching of God’s Word is always wholesome. To focus on this topic as colleagues together who desire to be faithful ambassadors of our Lord Jesus Christ can be beneficial by itself, regardless of the larger setting and hoped for outcomes. “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17).

In this brief essay of reflection we will look at three questions. First, what is experiential preaching? Second, why do we view it as so important repeatedly to insist on it? Third, are there dangers in always emphasizing experiential preaching?

1. What is experiential preaching?

What is experiential preaching? Simply stated, it is preaching the Word

of God in a way that emphasizes the need for and blessedness of first time and ongoing faith, repentance, and obedience before the Triune God our Saviour in and through Jesus Christ. It is proclaiming the gospel in a way that the gospel message and call is pressed home as something essential and wonderful for each one to know personally and increasingly. Experiential preaching is opening the Scriptures “warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col 1:28). Experiential preaching is not only the presentation of the gospel truth but also the application of the gospel truth on the basis of the text.

It is not only the presentation of the gospel truth but also the application of the gospel truth.

It is preaching that aims not only at explanation of the gospel, nor just for imitation of Christ, but calls for participation in Christ. (2 Peter 1:4; Lord’s Day 28) Preaching experientially is not an incidental aspect of preaching, but an essential aspect of preaching.

To clarify

To clarify what is experiential preaching it could be helpful to state what experiential preaching is not, or surely should not be. It is not preaching experience rather than God’s Word. It is not preaching more on the basis of the subjective experience of the Word rather than the objective truth of the

Word. Neither is experiential preaching something that tries to do the work of the Holy Spirit in having the word “hit home.” The best experiential preaching is still utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit to be effectual.

Experiential preaching is preaching that seeks to honour fully God’s Word (always requiring careful exegesis and sound hermeneutics) and leans wholly on the Holy Spirit who is pleased to use the Word as “the seed of regeneration and food of the soul” (Canons of Dort III- IV Article 17). Experiential preaching is what we find in the Bible itself (i.e., Matt 5-7, Acts 7, Hebrews, Jude) and reflected in the Reformed Confessions as well (i.e., Lord’s Day 1 and Q&A 84 and Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 159).

Realistic rather than idealistic

It can be said that experiential preaching is gospel preaching from a *realistic* covenant view rather than an *idealistic* covenant view. To explain what is meant by a realistic covenant view consider these words from Rev. C. Pronk in a pamphlet entitled, “What is Free Reformed?”

We strongly maintain the necessity of experiencing what is believed and confessed. We are averse to any kind of idealistic covenant teaching. The covenant of grace is established with the believers and their children. Every covenant child is heir to the blessings of the covenant, yet these blessings are not received automatically, but only in the way of true conversion to God. The baptized member must become personally active with the promises and demands of the covenant in order to come to experience its saving benefits. This means that we do not

assume that everyone who belongs to the visible church is saved, but realizing that there is much chaff among the wheat, we urge everyone to examine himself or herself whether he or she is in the faith. In our preaching, therefore, we tend to look at the congregation realistically, rather than idealistically and aim at a discriminating ministry, applying the Word of God so as to give everyone his proper portion.

Experiential preaching is gospel preaching from a realistic covenant view.

True preaching, we believe, not only expounds the Scriptures, but it also applies the Word of God to the hearts and lives of the hearers, distinguishing between converted and unconverted hearers.

Subsection 8 under the heading, "The Preaching of the Word" in the booklet, *Introducing the Free Reformed Churches of North America* gives added explanation of preaching from a realistic covenant perspective:

In the preaching we must regard the congregation as it is in reality, namely, as covenant congregation of the Lord. The Lord addresses the congregation as "My son, My daughter," "My people," "My sheep," "children of the kingdom," "branches on the vine." The Lord has brought about this relationship through His Word, and He claims the congregation with His promises and demands. The preaching addresses the congregation in this relationship but makes clear that being a member of the covenant of grace is not yet being a believer. The preaching precisely declares that this relationship should not be taken for granted but rather that "except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). The preaching seeks to bring the members of the covenant of grace to realize that we must and may and can be radically renewed in accordance with the covenant. As this preaching is applied to the heart it makes room for Christ as Surety of the covenant. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession

of Faith makes reference to "hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church with the good, yet are not of the Church, though externally in it." It also makes reference to "the marks of Christians; namely, ...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." To be sure, there "remain in them great infirmities, but they fight against them through the Spirit, all the days of their life, continually taking their refuge on the blood, death, passion and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ . . .

In summary, experiential preaching is preaching God's Word as from the heart of God, biblically based, through the heart of man, biblically led, to the heart of man, biblically grounded. Experiential preaching calls for preachers who

When experiential preaching is lacking, then the "cutting edge" of the gospel becomes less sharp.

don't only know and preach the gospel of God Triune but also the Triune God of the gospel.

2. Why insist on experiential preaching?

We move to our second question, why do we view it as so important repeatedly to insist on experiential preaching? The answer to this could be extensive, but consider just the following two points.

For one thing, when experiential preaching is lacking, then the "cutting edge" of the gospel becomes less sharp, and even worse, dull. Where the experiential element of preaching is lacking, sermons tend to become homilies, lectures, true but abstract biblical explanations and lessons rather than "the lively (and life-giving) preaching of the word." More serious, however, where you don't have experiential preaching, what can tend to happen more is the problem of automatism in church life. (Pastor L.W. Bilkes will expand on that topic February 4, 2000 in a speech in the Chilliwack FRC in a meeting called

by the joint consistories of Chilliwack FRC and Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church.) Lack of experiential preaching, preaching that insists on the gospel being experienced, can promote just a form of religion without knowing the power thereof (2 Timothy 3:5). Neglect and failure of experiential preaching can lead to "a whole new generation of Nicodemites!" (Wielenga, cited in Acta Synode CGK 1937, p. 158). That, of course, is a very serious matter, which no faithful preacher would desire to bring about.

Experiential preaching is urgently required for the spiritual health of the church of every age and the continuation of the Christian church from age to age. The preciousness of the covenant of grace and belonging to it is soon lost without experiential preaching. Not that experiential preaching preserves the covenant of grace, rather it constantly points to the Mediator of that covenant in whom and through whom the covenant of grace is extended from generation to generation.

3. Are there dangers?

Our third question is, are there dangers in always emphasizing experiential preaching? The answer is surely not. The real danger, however, (also for the FRC) is that in driving home this important point, it is made the only point about preaching that is stressed. There is much more, however, to be said about preaching and to be aware of in the preaching of God's Word, than just that preaching should be experiential.

Overemphasis of experiential preaching has its dangers.

The measure of a good sermon is not just its experiential element! By "hammering" this point about experiential preaching we need to beware of not squashing other vital aspects about preaching and the Christian faith in general. Overemphasizing experiential preaching will lead to an imbalance in other ways. We always need to emphasize experiential preaching but never only to emphasize it.

The danger for us as Free Reformed Churches is that we make the treasured distinctive of experiential preaching almost an extra creedal conviction and standard of the Christian faith. Too often

our strongest points can become our weakest points when we only always highlight what seems to us our strongest points, and cannot and will not see the strongest points of others.

Another danger with experiential preaching is that it can some times result in or arise from a limited view of the covenant of grace and a negative view of the congregation. Experiential preaching must not undermine the fact that covenant children are children of God in a "sanctified" (consecrated) sense (i.e., 1 Cor 7:14; Ezek16:21 and Hosea 11), and the congregation is the congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ indeed (Rev 2-3)! Preaching experientially to a congregation is not the same as preaching evangelistically to the world. To be sure, the gospel message remains the same – but it is even more pointed and more "warm" and more personal and "close" in the church context than outside the church.

Some additional remarks

Perhaps the best thing to do is to take the work of the Holy Spirit as our starting point, or even broader, the work of the Triune God. For it is the work of a Triune God to save sinners. As ministers we lay the benediction upon the congregation at the close of the worship service: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." This blessing from the Triune God should be more than only a phrase at the close of the service! The work of the Trinity should function in the sermon. After all, our salvation does not depend on *our* decision. It takes the work of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to save sinners. The corruptness of our heart is so great that by nature all we do is resist God's grace offered to us in Jesus Christ. This applies not only to the world, but also to us as covenant people. Think of Nicodemus to whom Jesus said, "Ye must be born again," which means: a total renewal must take place. Here the work of the Holy Spirit comes in the focus. Experiential preaching has everything to do with the work of the Holy Spirit. Experiential preaching is preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit. You can also say, it is preaching under the unction of the Holy Spirit, in an awareness of our complete dependence on the Spirit.

Holy Spirit works sovereignly

We do, however, not have the Holy Spirit at our command. The Holy Spirit

works sovereignly. But we do have the promise that where the Word of God is faithfully preached the Holy Spirit uses that Word as the "seed of regeneration"(1Peter 1:23). He convicts sinners, humbles them before a holy God, casts down their strongholds, shows them their lostness, their utter need of the Saviour. Where the Holy Spirit works, we are "pricked in the heart," as happened on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2: 37). And not only that, we are also brought to faith in Jesus Christ. And next to that, we are admonished to "save ourselves from this untoward generation"(Acts 2:40). Experiential preaching "humbles the sinner, exalts the Saviour, and promotes holiness." To be under the preaching is to be in the "field of force" (or, if you will "the workshop") of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit works sovereignly.

In two directions we can as preachers "hinder" the work of the Holy Spirit. On the one hand we can do so by a preaching which only describes how God's people experience the way of salvation, and then closes with, "I hope that the Holy Spirit may apply this to your heart." Such preaching sounds experiential, but it is not. It circles more around the experience of man than around the saving operations of the Spirit of God! On the other hand, a mere calling to faith, "You must believe" does not do justice to the work of the Holy Spirit either. Perhaps, it is added in the sermon that we are not able to do this of ourselves, and that it is God who works faith in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. But it hardly functions in the sermon. Our congregation notices certain meagerness in our sermons.

An example

Years ago a member of the Liberated Reformed Church in the Netherlands made a comment to a Free Reformed member living in his hometown: "Those Free Reformed people must first have experienced something before they believe." In a pointed way, this may summarize how many people (not only from the Canadian Reformed Churches) look at the preaching in the Free Reformed Churches. Why not simply preach, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,



Called by the church of Guelph, Ontario:

Rev. J. VanWoudenberg
of Kerwood, Ontario.

* * *

Accepted the call from the church of Smithers, British Columbia for the work of mission among the native people of that area:

Candidate Wes Bredenhof

* * *

Called by the church of Houston, British Columbia:

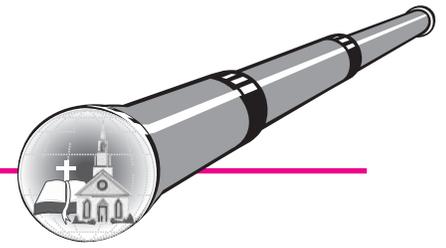
Candidate Dirk Poppe

and you shall be saved?" This is the gospel message, isn't it? Does something extra have to happen? Is it not enough to believe? Do I have to experience something over and above it? Do I have to feel something? Do we have to experience something before we believe?

To answer this question, we have to make a distinction. We are not to jeopardize the freeness of the gospel invitation. We are not to cast up stumbling blocks before the people, telling them that first they must have experienced this or that before they have a right to believe. Such preaching is legalistic. There is a gospel invitation that goes out to every creature: Repent, and believe! Jesus invites sinners to himself, no matter how wretched they are. The more serious the disease is, the higher is the doctor valued who can cure the disease. At the same time, if we do not see the disease of our heart we will not see our need of turning to Jesus for salvation. Part of our duty as a preacher is to show the people their need and the beauty of Christ, to make them hungry and thirsty for salvation, and to lead them to the fountain of salvation, Jesus Christ.

Summary

We can perhaps summarize it by saying that experiential preaching is preaching where we leave room for the Holy Spirit to work. The adjective "experiential" may be useful in defining what we mean, but actually, is the term not superfluous? Is there any good, sound, biblical preaching without being experiential? 



Observation Deck

By G.Ph. van Popta

Focus on the United Church of Canada

Canada's biggest Protestant church turned 75 on June 10, 2000. Seventy-five years ago, three streams of churches entered into an organic union: the Methodist Church, Canada, the Congregational Union of Canada, and 70 per cent of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. This alliance is unique in church history for it was the first union of churches in the world to cross historical denominational lines. It is unique in Canadian history in that the United Church of Canada (UCC) was authorized by His Majesty the King by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and the House of Commons of Canada. The motive for the union was concern for serving the wide-open Canadian West and the desire for more effective overseas missions.

How could Arminian and Calvinist churches unite? The new statement of faith, *The Twenty Articles of the Basis of Union*, adopted at the founding of the UCC, although orthodox in many respects (e.g., on the Trinity and the Deity of Christ), was sufficiently vague on points such as divine election and salvation as to be palatable to all. This vagueness did not make for a strong church. However, it was not until the 1980s that the UCC really ran into trouble.

In 1988, the General Council of the UCC decided to allow ordination to the ministry for homosexuals and lesbians, even though the vast majority of the membership opposed this move.

In the late 80s and early 90s, the church consciously moved away from orthodox theology. Church leaders be-

gan to deny the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. Lethbridge University sociologist Reginald Bibby, at the church's request, produced *Unitrends '94*, a detailed study of the UCC. One startling statistic is that seventy-six per cent of UCC theological professors do not consider important belief in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord (*Christian-week*, May 30, 2000).

In 1997, UCC moderator, the Rev. Bill Phipps, in an interview declared the divinity of Christ irrelevant, denied the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and disavowed the trustworthiness of Scripture.

The UCC is being attacked on all fronts by radical liberalism. The proclamation of the gospel calling all to repent and believe is being replaced with concerns about feminism, the economy, and other social issues. Is it any wonder the UCC buildings are near empty Sunday mornings? As the Rev. Allen Churchill, pastor of Dominion-Chalmers United Church in Ottawa wrote, "Vibrant churches everywhere are commonly those which emphasize ministry and worship based on the Word of God and the Holy Spirit" (*Christian-week*, May 30, 2000).¹

Speech delivered in the House of Commons by the Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen, Thursday, June 26, 1924.

The United Church of Canada / Victoria University Archives <http://vicu.utoronto.ca/archives/Display/75-Display5.html>



Canada's UCC Celebrates 75 Ecumenical Years

Seventy-five years ago, on 10 June 1925, Canada's Congregationalists, Methodists, and Presbyterians merged to become the United Church of Canada (UCC). More than 8,000 members from the three churches took part in the union service at Toronto's Mutual Street Arena.

The three denominations had begun serious consultations in 1899. These were interrupted by the First World War, but resumed in 1921, when the General Council of Local Union churches in Western Canada – representing congregations that had already merged locally in many communities – also joined the talks. A substantial body of Presbyterians reorganized and continue as a distinct body.

– Presbyterian Week

Canadian Rift

Bitter debate is raging in Canada's largest Protestant denomination, the United Church of Canada, over remarks by its moderator, Bill Phipps, one of the UCC's pastors. He said in an October newspaper interview that he did not believe Jesus Christ was God, was bodily resurrected, or was the only way to God. Last month, the UCC's 70-member general council of lay and clergy members voiced unanimous support of him and said his comments fall "well within the spectrum of the United Church." The council also suggested Mr. Phipps's freedom of expression should be "tempered" in accordance with UCC policy. Church sources said hundreds of letters and calls have been pouring into UCC headquarters. Some said they were appalled that someone who questions such basic tenets of the Christian faith can call himself a Christian, much less lead a national Christian church. Mr. Phipps apologized for any pain his comments may have caused members, but reiterated his beliefs.
 – *World Magazine*, Dec. 20, 1997

¹See "The Only Thing that Works," *Clarion* 44:02 (Jan 27, 1995), p 30.

Identity Crisis?

On June 10th, the 75th Anniversary of the United Church of Canada (UCC), a local UCC minister published a sermon he had recently preached to his congregation that began with this joke:

Two women were walking along the street when they saw a frog. "Help me," croaked the frog.

The women were astounded by this talking frog. So they got closer, and the first woman said, "Please repeat what you just said."

The frog answered, "Help me, please. I used to be an United Church minister, but if you kiss me I'll turn back into one again."

The first woman reached down and picked up the frog. She turned her head to see if anyone was looking, stuffed the frog into her purse and walked off. The other woman caught up to her and asked, "Why did you put the frog in your purse? Aren't you going to kiss it?"

"H_____s no," replied the first woman. "A talking frog is much more valuable than a United Church minister." – *Hamilton Spectator*, June 10, 2000

The United Church of Canada: Quick Fact Sheet

The United Church is Canada's largest Protestant denomination, with more than 3 million Canadians who, when asked by Statistics Canada, identified their religion as United Church.

The United Church was formed in 1925 through the union of Canadian Methodists, Congregationalists and 70% of Canadian Presbyterians.

The United Church is organized into:

- 13 regional Conferences
- 94 district Presbyteries
- 2,394 local Pastoral Charges
- 3,795 individual Congregations

The United Church has:

- 3,901 Ordained Ministers:
 - 2,966 men
 - 935 women
- 259 Diaconal Ministers:
 - 243 women
 - 16 men



Some statistical information on the United Church as of December 31, 1998 (from the 1999 Yearbook and Directory)

Local congregations	3,795
Households served by congregations	540,279
Total membership in local congregations	683,784
Sunday Schools	3,072
Sunday School Membership	151,907
Baptisms.....	17,693
Marriages	17,481
Funerals	27,410
Estimated number of persons under pastoral care	1,782,921
Identifiable Givers to the Church	369,830
Average Weekly Attendance at Church	285,364
Candidates for the Ministry	364
Membership: Other Christian Education Programs	247,810
Membership of Women's Groups, including UCW membership.....	82,732
Total Raised by Congregations	\$328,810,223
Amount Received by National Mission and Service Fund.....	\$29,634,589

Published by the Public Relations and Information Unit,

Division of Communication, The United Church of Canada, October, 1999 <http://www.uccan.org/ucc/QuickFacts.htm>

League Day of the Canadian Reformed Women's Societies

May 31, 2000

By Erna Moedt

Hearty welcome

Even though the day was cloudy and cool, the faces of the women that arrived at the Taber Canadian Reformed Church building for the annual league day on Wednesday, May 31 were bright with anticipation. At 9:00 a.m. the coffee was nearly done and a variety of muffins and cinnamon buns were laid out and ready to welcome all. At 10:00 the last of the ninety-five women were registering as we all took our seats with the program and speech outline in hand.

We began our day with the singing of our national anthem and then our president, Mrs. Jessica Van Bostelen, opened with prayer asking the Lord for a blessing on the day. The ladies were then given "A Right Proper Southern Alberta Welcome" with flowers, candy, buttons and "eggs" being thrown by some of the Taber ladies dressed in country attire complete with cowboy hats. The societies were then introduced, all Alberta societies being represented at this league day as well as one lady from BC.

We sang Psalm 92 stanzas 1, 3 and 6 and read Ephesians 6:10-18. Jessica introduced our speaker for the day, Mrs. Sheila Ypma who entitled her speech "Is Your Family At Risk?" Sheila began her speech with an example of the threat to the natural family due to man's scientific capabilities. A child in California belongs to no one and yet has at least four sets of parents: the couple who originally ordered her, the father who donated the sperm and his wife, the mother who donated the egg and her husband, and the surrogate mother who carried her and her husband. Another couple ultimately adopted her.

Test tube babies

An Italian fertility specialist claims to have produced four babies using



sperm grown in the testes of rodents. Does God see that little child in the test tube as man plays with the source of life? Satan has convinced scientists and society that creation is the result of evolution so use the process of genetic engineering to buy yourself a child as you would a sports car. Man's scientific capabilities include Xenotransplantation – the use of animal species organs in human bodies. When God created animals according to their kind and people according to their kind, did He

Molecular biologists are now completing the complete sequence of the human genome.

intend that animal organs should be put into man? Does God want his people to ignore this field of science and leave it up to secular man for whom

evolution of man is the standard of moral life and for whom God is not the creator of human beings?

Molecular biologists are now completing the complete sequence of the human genome. This genetic blueprint encoded in the chromosomes of an organism represents the instruction needed to transform a fertilized egg into a complete human being. It is alarming that private companies, individuals, scientists and universities are applying for patents on both known and yet to be identified genes. For-profit industry will cash in on all further study of human genes. It means that they can decide on the genetic make-up of all test-tube babies and play god in ways Hitler did not even dream of. When this project is completed, will humans still be allowed to reproduce the way God intended?

Gender war

Another assault on marriage and the family is the gender war. Even though

Sheila Ypma – speaker



“Right Proper Alberta welcome”

Lunchtime entertainment



only 2% of the population is homosexual, they are a very powerful group. As Christians, we already encounter problems at work as Mr. Scott Brockie recently learned. He works in a family-owned printing business and refused to print information for a gay activist. After the gay activist complained to the human rights commission, Mr. Brockie was fined, ordered to apologize, and told he could practice his religion at home but not in the marketplace.

Rights of the child

The family is also being attacked by the UN. The “Convention on the Rights of the Child” (which Canada was the first to sign and ratify) is directly enforceable in every country in the world. This ten-member committee already rendered judgements against many countries such as the United Kingdom for allowing parents reasonable physical chastisement of their children. Similarly judgement was rendered against Belize for not allowing children medical or legal counseling without the consent of parents. Moreover, Norway was told to reconsider its policy on religious education. The goal of this convention is to erase every important precept of parental rights.

A nation supposedly has the right to agree or disagree with treaties or con-

vention platforms of the UN. That will not be the case with the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC). If ratified by sixty nations, it will be binding on every nation and every individual in the whole world. It will have universal jurisdiction and will deal with rights of nations and individuals. It will seek to redefine rights and establish new rights such as freedom from religion instead of freedom of religion. Church leaders who teach biblical truths, i.e., that homosexuality is sin, could be imprisoned. Canada is planning to implement and actively promote global implementation of the ICC. It has signed but not yet ratified it in parliament. If established, our freedom will never be the same.

Church leaders who teach biblical truths, could be imprisoned.

Another agency of the UN, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has identified religion and culture as the primary obstacles to women’s rights.

The UN World Population Foundation (which Canada has funded since 1972) has the aim to reduce the world population from six billion to two billion. Through the power of the International Monetary Fund, financial aid is given only to those countries who supply condoms, support the one-child family and mandate abortion on demand.

Stand our ground

This all paints a dark picture of the scary things going on in the world. We know that God will protect his people but that does not mean no calamities will befall us. We also know that the end times will be a terrible time. Ephesians 6 tells us we cannot sit back and do nothing. We are called to be strong in the Lord (verse 10); we need to take a stand against the devil’s schemes (verse 11) with the full armor of God (verse 13). You only put on the full armor when you go out to fight. We have to stand our ground at the assault of Satan through genetic engineering, abortion, the gender war and the work of the United Nations. But before we can fight, we have to know God’s Word, the belt of truth buckled around your waist (verse 14). We must learn all the time so we can take up the shield of faith (verse 16) and above all pray at all times (verse 18).

Following the speech, time was given to break into small discussion groups. By 12:30 we all left the church building for lunch at Luigi’s Pizza and Steak House. When we had all arrived in the banquet room, we sang the League Day Song and Mrs. Catherine Bareman started the meal with the reading of Psalm 90 and prayer. When we had all been fed, some of the Taber ladies entertained us with a skit. We sang Hymn 41 after which Sheila was then given time to answer the questions that arose from the discussion groups.

Conclusion

A time for general business followed during which Mrs. Gerda Van Den Haak of Edmonton Immanuel read the minutes of League Day 1999 and we were advised that the next League Day in 2001 will be hosted by Edmonton Providence. Representatives of the Women’s Societies thanked Taber for hosting the League Day and Sheila Ypma for the information supplied.

Jessica closed the day with prayer after which we sang the hymn “God Be with You Till We Meet Again.” Everyone left with renewed strength and determination to be strong in the Lord. 



Short Report of the Proceedings of the First Classis Manitoba June 27, 2000

Opening

The minister of the convening church of Carman East, Rev. J. Moesker, led in Scripture reading and prayer. After a hymn was sung, a few words were spoken drawing attention to the fact that this was the first Classis Manitoba. Carman West Church was congratulated with the acceptance of the call extended by this church to Rev. A. J. Pol. Redeemer Church in Winnipeg was congratulated with the dedication of its beautiful new church building in June.

Credentials and constitution of Classis

The credentials of the delegates were examined by the delegates of the convening church and found to be in order. The following delegates were present:

Carman East – elder H. Kamminga and Rev. J. Moesker

Carman West – elders A. Poppe and R. Vanderzwaag

Denver – elder W. Chase and Rev. D. VandeBurgt

Winnipeg Grace – Rev. K. Jonker and elder G. J. VanLaar

Winnipeg Redeemer – elder B. Nobel and Rev. T. VanRaalte

Classis was declared constituted.

Appointment of officers

The following moderamen were appointed:

chairman – Rev. K. Jonker

vice-chairman – Rev. J. Moesker

clerk – Rev. D. VandeBurgt.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as proposed.

Approbation of call extended to Rev. Pol by Carman West

The moderamen reviewed the documents and reported them all to be in order. The call extended to Rev. Pol by Carman West congregation was approved. Rev. T. VanRaalte was appointed



Back row: R. Vanderswaag, Rev. T. VanRaalte, Rev. J. Moesker, W. Nobel, A. Poppe, Rev. J. VanRietschoten, G. Van Laar.
Front row: Rev. K. Jonker, Rev. D. VandeBurgt, H. Kamminga, W. Chase.

Photo courtesy G. Van Laar

to represent Classis at the installation of Rev. A.J. Pol in August.

Question period ad. Art 44 Church Order

All the churches responded affirmatively to the first two questions of the Article, and negatively to the third.

Correspondence

A letter was received from Carman East consistory in which it is proposed:

1. that the Regulations of Classis Alberta/Manitoba be provisionally adopted for Classis Manitoba;
2. that a committee of two be appointed to adapt or revise the regulations and present a proposal to the churches at least 6 weeks before the next classis.

This proposal was adopted.

Appointments

1. Treasurer of Classis – br. H. Veldman (Box 1613, Carman, MB R0G 0J0)
2. Church for Inspection of the Books of the Treasurer – Carman West
3. Church in Care of the Archives of Classis Manitoba – Winnipeg Grace
4. Church for Inspection of the Archives – Winnipeg Redeemer

5. Committee for Aid Needy Churches – A. DeWit, H. Slaa (jr), and H. VanDelden (convenor)
6. Committee for Aid Needy Students – E. Harke, R. Leach (convenor), P. Vandermeulen
7. Deputy Contact Provincial Government – Rev. K. Jonker
8. Church Visitors – Rev. K. Jonker, Rev. J. Moesker (convenor), Rev. A.J. Pol, Rev. D. VandeBurgt (alternate)
9. Committee for Examinations of Candidates for the Ministry – Rev. K. Jonker, Rev. T. VanRaalte, Rev. J. Moesker (alternate)
10. Examiners
 - Old Testament – Rev. T. VanRaalte
 - New Testament – Rev. A. J. Pol
 - Knowledge Scripture – Rev. K. Jonker
 - Doctrines and Creeds – Rev. J. Moesker
 - Church History – Rev. D. VandeBurgt
 - Ethics – Rev. J. Moesker
 - Church Polity – Rev. A. J. Pol
 - Diaconology – Rev. D. VandeBurgt
11. Convening Church of the next Classis – Carman West
12. Location and Date – Carman, Monday, Oct 2/00
13. Suggested moderamen of next Classis:
 - Chairman – Rev. A. J. Pol
 - Vice-chairman – Rev. K. Jonker
 - Clerk – Rev. J. Moesker

Committee for Revision of the Regulations – Rev. J. Moesker, Rev. T. VanRaalte.

Personal question period

A brother asked whether the name of Classis could be changed to Classis Central or Classis Midwest. The chairman suggested that this is a matter which one of the churches might take up at a subsequent classis.

Brotherly censure ad Art 44 Church Order

The chairman was thankful that no censure was required and thanked the brothers for their cooperation.

Adoption of the Acts and approval of the Press Release

The acts were read and adopted, and the press release was read and approved.

Closing

After a psalm was sung, the chairman led in prayer of thanks for this first Classis Manitoba. The meeting was then declared closed.

J. Moesker, vice-chairman

Press release of the constituent synod of the Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil (Reformed Churches of Brazil)

On the fifth of July, 2000, the Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil federated to form the federation of Reformed Churches of Brazil, known as Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil (IRB). The constituent synod was held from the 5th to the 8th of July and on the 5th of July all the delegates to the synod signed the “Act of Establishing the Federation of the Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil.” Ten congregations were represented of which 5 are instituted churches and the other 5 are developing and moving towards being instituted in the future.

The council gives thanks to God who gave the possibility for the churches to federate. It is necessary for a better organisation of reformed ecclesiastical life in Brazil. At the last national conference of the IRB in July 1998 in Unaí, it was decided the churches would work towards federating in the year 2000. At that conference 8 churches were represented of which 4 were instituted. With thanks to God, the council acknowledges the growth of participating congregations.

The constituent synod had to treat and take a position on various difficult questions. With regards to the question on baptism, it was decided that re-baptism is not a reformed practise and therefore should not be practised. Several guidelines were also established on the question of participation of visitors at the Lord’s supper. Another important concern of the synod was the necessity for the continuation of the pure preaching of the Word of God. The IRB have a strong desire to establish a Reformed seminary in Brazil. A commission was delegated to prepare this theological seminary. The synod also decided that together the churches must prepare and print its own book of praise as soon as possible. Included in this book will be the psalms, hymns, the confessions, the forms used by the churches and the church order of the IRB.

The constituent synod was conducted in a spirit of unity and brotherly harmony. The result of this meeting will strengthen the churches and, with God’s blessings, they will be edified. All glory to God for this result!

08-07-2000

The National Constituent Council of the IRB, São José da Coroa Grande, Pernambuco, Brazil.



Translated extract from the Act of Establishing the Federation of the Igrejas Reformadas do Brasil, realised on the 5th of July 2000 in São José da Coroa Grande.

The Reformed Churches of Brazil whose names are found below, represented by brothers with credentials and thereby authorised to endorse it, gathered at the national synod of the said churches on the 5th of July 2000 in São José da Coroa Grande (PE) declare that there is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all (Eph 4:5). They are united in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and confess that it is their calling to unite in a federation of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Jn 17:20-23).

Jesus Christ is the supreme Prophet and Master and because of this the IRB accept His Word as the only rule of faith and practise. To show, strengthen and teach this one faith, it adopts the three Ecumenical Creeds, namely the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed; and the three forms of unity, namely the Confession of Faith (known as the Belgic Confession), the Heidelberg Catechism and the 5 articles against the Arminians (known as the Canons of Dort).

Jesus Christ is also the only Priest and so they accept His two true sacraments, Baptism and Holy Supper, which continually remind them of His one sacrifice of His body.

Jesus Christ is the Eternal King. He governs the churches by His Word and Spirit. In accordance to His Word, everything needs to be done decently and in good order (1Cor14:40) and the churches must be governed in accordance to the spiritual order. To establish this good and spiritual order, the IRB adopts a church order to achieve the rule of Christ and a good cooperation between the churches.

The Act of establishing the Federation of Reformed Churches in Brazil was signed by representatives from the instituted churches in Unaí, Grande Recife, Colombo, Maragogi and São José.

Present as witnesses were the representatives from the missionary congregations in Maceió, Ibura (Recife), Barra Grande, Barreiras do Boqueirão and Jardim Euclipto and Pinhais (Curitiba).

Also present were representatives from the BBK from Holland, Com. Rel. Churches Abroad from Canada and the sending Churches at Surrey and Hamilton via its missionaries.

Translated by H. Plug, Maceió, Brazil

An Anniversary Celebration

Guido de Brès Christian High School 1975 - 2000

It was Saturday, June 10th, 2000 and at last everything was ready. The glass front doors shone, the new paved parking lot sported freshly painted lines, the grounds were trimmed and the grass freshly cut. Inside the front lobby, Student Council members and staff stood ready to greet the visitors. Potted plants and flowers added to the festive atmosphere. Programs and complimentary commemorative pins were ready to be handed out and the guest book was waiting to be signed. The coffeepots were perking and punch sparkled in the bowls. The cakes were iced and sliced and the rental chairs were set out row upon row. And that tiny nagging question kept creeping up

Will they come? Will the supporting community come to celebrate 25 years of Christian secondary education here at Guido de Brès? Will they gather together this warm spring day to remember the past? Will we really have a full house? And there they came. Alumni students, current students and future students, board members and staff from the past 25 years, grandparents and infants. They came from Toronto, Brampton, Burlington, Flamborough, Waterdown, Ancaster, Hamilton, Smithville, Attercliffe, Lincoln and Rockway. The gym filled as the refreshments were enjoyed and old friends were greeted again. And by 10:30 a.m. all 700 chairs were filled and we could officially begin the formal celebration of Guido's silver anniversary.

We were welcomed by the Master of Ceremonies, Mr. Lammert Jagt and invited to sing from Psalm 145:1 and 3. These words reflected the theme for the day: ". . . great is Thy faithfulness to all generations." Scripture reading was taken from the same Psalm and followed by prayer. The first speaker of the day was introduced.

Mr. J. Schutten was the first Chairman of the Board. He gave us a quick review of the history of the begin-



*Mr. Jack Schutten,
first board
chairman.*



*Dr. Faber, chairman
of the Education
Committee in 1975.*

*Welcome
sign at the
entrance of
the school.*



nings of the steering committee for a regional Christian High School during the years from 1971 to 1975. A dream was set in motion and with much legwork and prayer, the first regional board with 16 members was elected in February 1974. This board voted for a start date for the school to be set for D.V. September 1975.

The next speaker, Dr. J. Faber, continued to share with us the history of Guido de Brès as he recalled the work of the first Education Committee. As chairman of this committee, many aspects of opening a new school were studied and decisions taken. This resulted in the appointment of Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff as Principal and Dr. W. Helder as Vice Principal. Facilities were found at the old Central High school building in downtown Hamilton. Cur-

riculums were written, staff was hired, and a budget was set. On September 2, 1975, in answer to many prayers, Guido de Brès opened its doors to 6 full time teachers, 3 part time teachers and 104 students.

Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff, the first Principal at Guido, came to the podium to offer congratulations on the occasion of this silver anniversary. Rather than reminiscing about the early days, she remembered the more than 1500 students who have graduated from this school. She also compared the early facilities to the wonderful facility we may use today and brought to mind the various advances in technology that we now enjoy. In celebrating this anniversary, we may celebrate a gift of God's faithfulness as we continue to follow His Word and rely on His promises.



Mr. van Dooren and Dr. Oosterhoff, Guido's two principals during the last 25 years.

The final speaker, His Worship Mr. Bob Morrow, Mayor of the City of Hamilton, also offered his congratulations on behalf of the city.

Appreciation was expressed for the Reformed tradition in Ontario of which Guido de Brès Christian High School is a symbol in this community. The Mayor was pleased to present to the principal, Mr. J.G. VanDooren, a City of Hamilton flag.

After singing from Psalm 127:1, Mr. N. VanderVen, on behalf of the Alumni Association, presented the 25th Anniversary Yearbook. This yearbook contains the photo of every graduate of Guido de Brès since its doors were opened. The chairman of the present board, Mr. J.H. Harsevoort, accepted this beautiful commemorative book. In his address, Mr. Harsevoort reflected on the theme of the day and that through this book we could certainly follow God's faithfulness through all the generations. Though there have been many changes during the past 25 years, God has continued to give dedicated parents, students, and staff. He also thanked the many people who worked tirelessly to plan and organize the celebration we were enjoying.

In recognition of 25 years of continuous service, Dr. W. Helder was presented with a composite of all past and present staff members of Guido de Brès. Ever the teacher, he accepted this gift with a reference to George Herbert's poem *The Elixir* and offered a refresher class to all his former students!

In the final address of the day, the principal, Mr. J.G. VanDooren, reflected on the many symbols that are part of this celebration. Today's student needs to understand the past so that the vision of our founders, 25 years ago, will be sustained today and tomorrow. As we remember the past, we can also

see that no matter how much things change, they stay the same. Above all, the faithfulness of our heavenly Father is the same today as it was yesterday and will remain tomorrow.

After the Guido choir performed two musical numbers, all former members of this school choir were invited on

stage to sing *The Lord is My Light*. About fifty voices joined the choir as they made a beautiful sound of praise. The audience joined in the final rendition of *O Canada* and Rev. Cl. Stam closed the official program in prayer of thanksgiving.

Now there was opportunity to visit old friends and make new acquaintances as we could tour the school, visit the various Alumni Welcome Centres, peruse old Guido magazines and other memorabilia. We could sit together and reminisce about the past as we enjoyed a delicious complimentary lunch. Later a Volleyball Challenge was cheered on between the staff and former Student Council members.

And as the celebration drew to a close the guests returned home, the chairs were stacked away, the garbage gathered, the hallways swept for classes on Monday and once again we knew that we had been blessed beyond what we had even imagined. God is good!
Soli Deo Gloria! C

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

In *Clarion* of June 9, Prof. J. Geertsema mentioned that he recently heard that some of our young people at times worship in other churches. He made some remarks about reasons why this occurred, for instance: they want to be involved in worshipping. I cannot deny that he makes some good remarks about that. But the real issue is this: why is being Canadian Reformed not receiving the right attention? Also, why is the issue of worshipping in other churches not receiving attention?

I will not elaborate on the question why we are Canadian Reformed. That would be forcing an open door. Worshipping so easily somewhere else seems to be characteristic of the postmodern time. The church is not so important anymore as it should be. Definitely a great difference can be noticed with the time after the Liberation of 1944. Often thankfulness has been replaced by a spirit of dissatisfaction. But by means of the Liberation, the Lord set his church free again. In this way the Canadian Reformed Churches could be established. Therefore we are called to worship in the Canadian Reformed Churches and not somewhere else.

If we are free to worship somewhere else, why is it such a struggle to come to unity with other churches? I am convinced that behind taking the freedom to worship somewhere else is the ancient pluriformity idea.

Sure I am convinced that we have to seek unity with all those who have the same faith, based on the Word of God and the confessions. That is to say, not those who have the same confessions as the Canadian Reformed Churches, but with those who confess the same. Why can we go to other churches and not have the real unity at the Lord's table? I know that there are those who have no objections to demonstrate a unity in worshipping or preaching. We better be faithful. If there is something wrong in our churches, then address it at the proper place. But do not show disagreement or dissatisfaction by not worshipping where you belong. Much to my regret, Prof. Geertsema did not address that.

W. DeHaan, Dunnville

Rev. J. Mulder – Minister for 45 years

On July 31, 2000, it was forty-five years ago that Rev. J. Mulder was ordained as minister of the Word of God. The ordination took place in 1955, in the Reformed Church at Gees, a small town in the province of Drenthe, the Netherlands. He was twenty-six years old and just married (for two weeks). Rev. Mulder served the congregation there for a little more than three years.

Why was his time in Gees not more than three years? It was certainly not because the minister and his wife did not like it there anymore or that the church at Gees urged them to leave. Rev. Mulder had received and accepted a call from the congregation at Homewood-Carman, Manitoba. When they arrived, it was November 1958. The older members in our midst can still visualize the prairie winter in November more than forty years ago. The conditions were still quite primitive and the temperature rather cold. The manse had to be protected against the freezing temperature by straw bales. Heaps of dry snow helped insulate the old stone house. And in the spring the mud came. It was truly different in comparison with neat and tidy Gees. It meant quite an adjustment for the Mulders.

Yet, life in and with the congregation on the Canadian prairies was good. There was much to do in and for the church. And Mrs. Mulder, with her training and experience as a teacher, was busy in the Saturday morning school, giving the children of the congregation a Reformed education, since at that time they all went to public school. After they had served in Carman more than seven years, a call to Coaldale was accepted. The congregation was not happy to see them go. That this concerned also the Saturday school teacher is evident from the fact that one brother said: "We cannot miss Mrs. Mulder."

The time in Coaldale was shorter, more in line with Gees. This was not because Coaldale was not a good place. Here, too, the work was done with joy and with a blessing. However, in October 1969, after about three and a half years, the Mulders left for Cloverdale because of the situation there. Not only

had Rev. J. van Popta suddenly been taken away by the Lord, but also there was hardly a minister left in the entire Fraser Valley, from New Westminster to Hope. The church at New Westminster (later Surrey) would soon see its minister, Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene, leave for Fergus, and the church at Abbotsford, including the part that would soon become the church at Chilliwack, was already vacant. For some time, Rev. Mulder was the only minister for all the churches in the Fraser Valley. This meant hard work. It meant preaching mostly more than twice every Sunday,



teaching catechism to large classes in several places for many evenings, every week, and paying as many pastoral visits in Cloverdale and "surroundings." It was good to have the back-up and support of Mrs. Mulder particularly during this time. All the hard work was appreciated. And in spite of this hard labour, it was a good time in Cloverdale and in the Valley. Not only did the entire Canadian Reformed church community in the Valley know their Rev. Mulder, but Rev. (and Mrs.) Mulder knew practically the entire Canadian Reformed church community in the Valley as well. . . and most of the highways and the byways.

After eight years of fruitful labour, the Mulder family left for the East in September 1977. Not everyone was happy. The boys, too, had established roots in the Valley. But so it goes with a minister's family. The capital of Ontario, Toronto, now became the place of work. In 1984

this came to a close when the call to Burlington-West was accepted. Rev. Mulder's ministerial labours came to an end, officially, in September 1991 due to health problems.

So far this brief history of Rev. Mulder has focussed on his office of minister of the Word. Mention must be made also of the work in the federation, for classes, for regional and general synods, not only at those meetings, but also in classical and synodical committees. He served, for instance, as president of the Theological College for a number of years, and on the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Only those who have been involved in the work of the different committees of the churches know how many hours this often takes and how much energy it costs.

In short, the active years from 1955 till 1991 were years spent in the service of a number of local churches and certainly also in the service of the churches together in federation. Why was all this work gladly done? The reason is obvious. It was work done for the Lord of the Church. Paul writes that the mystery, the secret power, of godliness is Christ Jesus (1 Tim 3:16). His love for the Lord, and so for his church, drove Rev. Mulder and his wife beside him. This love for the Lord is itself rooted in the Lord's own love for his Church and its members, as well as for his servants.

This love is the undeserved divine love for lost sinners, among whom Rev. Mulder counts himself as well. The gospel of God's love for sinners is what he preached from Sunday to Sunday, and he continues to do so regularly, thankful that he still is able to. He keeps busy with other church work, too, in particular the work for the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) as its chairman. We thank the Lord for what He has given and still is giving to the churches in Rev. and Mrs. Mulder. And it is our prayer and hope that the LORD will continue to make things well with them and their sons Carl and Paul (and his family) and will grant them life, health, and strength in his service, and in the service of his church, to God's glory.

 J. Geertsema

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers

You must all be very busy, because I have not received any letters in my mail box this week. But no matter, I am sure if you are busy, then you are also having lots of fun. And that's the idea of having a holiday, isn't it.

Have you done lots of fun things during your holiday? Has the weather been just right for you, to enable you to do just what you wanted or needed to do? Helping Mom at home, or even Dad, if he is at home on holidays with you? Just remember, that when you do something really enjoyable, you not only have to thank Dad and Mom for the fun time you have had. You will also need to thank the Lord for his care over you all, that you are able to have everything you need, that you have each other to enjoy things with. There are so many things to be thankful for!

Lots of love,
Aunt Betty

Here's some fun for you to do . . .

Clay Bake Decorations

(Children can make this simple baker's clay with a little help and supervision. The quantities in the recipe must be used exactly as given. They cannot be halved or doubled.

HAVE READY

4 cups flour, unsifted
1 cup salt
1 1/2 cups water
bowl



kitchen utensils:

such as a rolling pin, blunt knife, fork,
toothpicks, hair pins, wire or paper clips
paint and brushes
clear gloss enamel

GET SET

Mix salt and flour in bowl.
Add water, mixing with fingers. If clay is too stiff, add a little more water.
When mixed, take clay out of the bowl and knead for about 4-5 minutes.

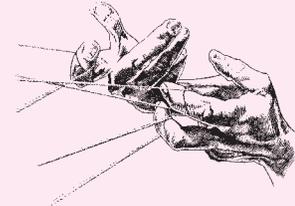
GO

Roll and shape decorations and place on baking trays. Insert hair pins, wire or paper clips into the back of the shape to make hooks.
Bake in a moderate oven at least one hour. Decorations can be coloured with paint or pens and made more durable by painting with clear gloss enamel.

Paper Beads

HAVE READY

Old magazines
Darning needle
Wool or string
Scissors
Glue



GET SET

Cut colour pages of magazines lengthways to make long triangles, about 5 cm wide at the base and 30 cm tall.
Cut cord for necklace and secure to needle.

GO

Starting from the wide end of the triangle, roll paper around the needle.
Put glue on the pointed end of the paper triangle and press down to complete the bead.
Continue making beads on the needle and pushing them along the thread. When there are sufficient beads on the cord, tie the end together securely.

Word Search

by Simon Van Dijk.

You have to unscramble the words and then find them in the search.

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

FIND:

EUJN	RBSTMEEP	MYA
RDMEECBME	AEURRYBF	YJLU
CMHRA	NBREVOEM	UJNRYAA
TOOCERB	IPLAR	SGTUUA