

# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE  
VOLUME 49, NO. 22 OCTOBER 27, 2000

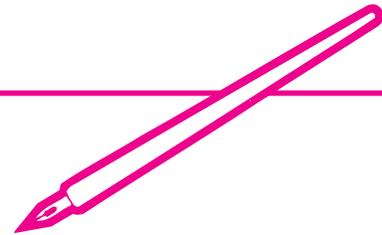


*Remembrance Day*

Numbers

10:1-10

By P. Aasman



## The Sound of War

*“You will hear of wars and rumours of wars” (Matthew 24:6).*



The sound of war is getting louder in our ears. Many of our communities are raising the distant memories of armed conflicts by renaming a familiar road, “Veteran’s Way.” As the number of veterans of the wars of the past century declines, our governments attempt to rekindle interest in and awareness of those conflicts. And so the sound of war gets louder. It becomes even louder in November as we prepare for the moment of silence at the 11th hour of the 11th day.

What kind of feelings does it awaken and what thoughts does it inspire? One must admit that those thoughts and feelings are rather vague. We think of the sacrifices men and women gave in war. We feel thankful for our freedom so dearly purchased. But those conflicts happened so long ago and so far away. The sound of war grows louder, but for the most part, it is vague, undefined and without passion. It does not frighten us.

*Only God can build a lasting city.*

However, people’s thoughts are not entirely empty. We feel distant from those wars not only because they were long ago and far away but also because we are more comfortable that way. We don’t want to be frightened. When we think of the World Wars, we think of the savagery *others* have committed, the evil powers *others* have wielded. Our

remembering is touched by feelings of nobility and nostalgia because “our side” hadn’t committed the crimes against humanity, and we had won. There is a remote sense of superiority connected to our remembrance.

But war is not the fault of someone else. We should not remember by pointing a finger at “the enemy.” Our remembrance should be marked by an acknowledgment of our own potential for barbarism and savagery and for our decision to turn technological abilities to the task of killing our fellow man with industrial efficiency. What we should remember is the ever deepening depravity of our race. We must not disconnect the World Wars from the brutality unleashed in Rwanda and in the former state of Yugoslavia and elsewhere on our globe. We must not be selective when we remember the past wars.

*One day He will bring an end to war.*

It is well that the sound of war becomes louder in our ears. We should remember because Jesus Christ tells us that this is all we can expect from human history. You WILL hear of wars. Our ears will never be free of its din. We are fools when we distance ourselves from the wars so that we can romanticize and even become nostalgic about them.





Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$36.00*	\$60.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$39.00	\$52.00
International	\$60.00	\$90.00

\* Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT  
 Advertisements: \$11.75 per column inch

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Agreement No. 1377531  
 Publications Mail Registration No. 09907  
 ISSN 0383-0438

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We are fools when we choose to remember only distant conflicts and not the fresh memories of recent ones.

Our act of remembrance must lead us to understand that man cannot build a lasting city; he does not have a heart for justice. When man builds his city, he builds on the bones of those he conquers and then continues to brutalize his fellow man to defend and expand his empire. Human relations will always break down and we will hear of wars and rumours of war until Jesus Christ returns.

Remember with shame for what we as a race have done, and proved capable of. Remember so that we might understand that only God can build a lasting city. One day He will bring an end to war. In the quiet of peace, we will forever remember that justice and life are from God alone. 

*What's inside?*

The coeditor who was supposed to write the editorial for this issue of *Clarion* was not able to do so. In his place, Rev. P. Aasman has provided us with a guest editorial in connection with Remembrance Day. The wars of the past and the present are a constant reminder that here we have no lasting city. We await the perfect city whose builder is God.

The second part of Dr. J. De Jong's convocation speech is found in this issue. He demonstrates that those who follow Jesus Christ must be willing to take up the cross. This applies to those who seek to be ministers of the Word, but it also applies to all Christians. This is the heartbeat of the Reformation.

Dr. J. Visscher continues his three-part series on "God's Truth Abideth Still." In this second part he deals with the inspiration and the perfections of God's Word. It is clear that God's Word always leads us to Christ and so it will continue to do under God's grace to the very end of the world.

At Synod Lincoln 1992 there was a request from the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) for sister church relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches. This opened up official discussions between our respective churches. Since that time, our churches have had meaningful contacts with the RCUS. Rev. J. Moesker reports on visits and contacts with the RCUS over the last two years. This will help the members of our churches to gain a clearer picture of these churches.

This issue of *Clarion* includes a report of Rev. A. J. Pol and his family being welcomed by Carman West. We also have the column "Ray of Sunshine," three press releases, and an column entitled, "Education Matters."

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# God's truth abideth still (Part 2)

By J. Visscher

## How the Word comes to us – Inspiration

Now if this Word is “holy and divine” it stands to reason that it is no ordinary book. It has to be special. But how special, and what makes it special? Is it special because it fell straight out of heaven as a complete book? Is it special because God dictated it to man? Is it special because man wrote it as a stroke of genius?

None of these suggestions will do, rather the Reformers insisted that the Word is special because it is the very Word of God. The apostle Paul says that “all Scripture is God-breathed.” (2 Tim 3:16) Thereby he does not mean that God literally breathed into the human writers, neither does he mean that God breathed into their writings. Instead he means that what they wrote represents the very breath of God. It really is God speaking to man through man.

The apostle Peter tells us more about this process when he says, “above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20, 21). Specifically then, it was God the Holy Spirit who moved these men to write what they did, when they did and how they did. He revealed God’s will and glory to them.

So just how involved were these men in this process? That remains a difficult thing to explain. From the literary variety found in the Bible, we know that God used men from all sorts of backgrounds, from all walks of life, and from all levels of education to write his Word. We know too that He used men with all kinds of special burdens, concerns and perspectives. That explains an Isaiah who dwells on God’s sovereignty, an Amos who is concerned about justice, a Hosea who deals in love, a James who has this thing about

works, a Paul who is full of grace and faith, a John who goes on and on about love. Obviously, God through the Holy Spirit did not obliterate human personalities when it came to the writing of his Word. Rather He used, shaped and directed them in harmony with his will. The result was a truly inspired and unified Word.

*Obviously, God through the Holy Spirit did not obliterate human personalities when it came to the writing of his Word.*

## How the Word unfolds before us – Progressively

Yet not only is there unity and diversity in the Word, there is also progression. This means that God did not choose to reveal everything about salvation at one and the same time. Rather He decided to reveal his holy will over a long period of time, in many different places, using a great variety of men. Yes, and as He did so, He revealed more and more of himself, his will and his salvation.

One of the most common examples of this relates to the sacrificial system. Almost immediately after the fall into sin we learn about sacrifices. In the days of the patriarchs we learn more about them. When God establishes the nation of Israel, He even outlined a very elaborate sacrificial system. But then, when we come to the New Testament, we see that this entire system is both fulfilled and abolished in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The progressive nature of God’s revelation can also be seen in the doctrine of the Triune God. In the Old Testament we find this over-riding concern to firmly establish the monotheism of Is-

rael in the face of a world of polytheism. Of course, there are indications that God is more than one, but they are only traces and hints. It is not until we come into the New Testament that we are confronted clearly and repeatedly with a God who is three in one. So it is that God’s revelation in his Word represents a steady and ever fuller unveiling of himself and his will.

## Where the Word leads us – Christology

Yet it also represents something else, it represents a progressive revelation that is going somewhere and is climaxing in someone. A closer look at the words of Hebrews 1:1, 2 describes the process when it says: “in the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe.” Obviously, Jesus Christ is the final revelation and the fullest revelation of God.

This same point is also made by Jesus himself in a very interesting way in John 5:39, 40. There the Lord Jesus is interacting with the Jewish authorities about the Old Testament Scriptures. He says to them, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life.” What He is referring to is the Jewish view that the study of Scripture in and of itself is in some way a saving activity. Such a view drove them to be busy with it everyday, analyzing it, memorizing large parts of it, debating it constantly. All of this was considered “holy exercise” and a sure way to gain access to the hereafter.

Was the Lord Jesus in agreement with such an approach? Hardly! After commenting on their diligent study of Scripture, He says, “these are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” In

other words, in spite of all their diligence and hard work, the scribes and Pharisees were blind. They did not see the forest for the trees. They knew the Word but they refused to acknowledge the climax of the Word.

For that is what our Lord and Saviour is. More than anything else the Old Testament Scriptures testify about Him, but these authorities could not and would not see it. They failed to reckon with the fact that as in Italy all roads lead to Rome, so in the Bible every sacrifice and ceremony, every prophecy and promise, leads to Christ. He is the end of the law. He is the heir and ruler of all things.

John Calvin comments on this by saying, "The Scriptures must be read with this intention, that in them we find Christ. Whoever turns aside from this purpose, even though he torment himself with learning all his life, will never attain to the knowledge of the truth" (Commentary on John 5:39).

### How the Word works in us – Illumination

What we have thus seen is that the Word comes to us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that it comes in a progressively unfolding manner and that it finds its apex and climax in Christ, the Word Incarnate. This in turn brings us to the next point, which is that this Word is written for man. He is its final address. He is its target audience.

And that represents a problem, for man is fallen and sinful, man is blind and his mind is darkened. How can mankind, which is in rebellion against God, receive the Word of God? The answer is that "it cannot." There is no way for man to hear this Word, believe this Word and obey this Word, unless God the Holy Spirit also illumines human minds and hearts.

There has to be this illumination or further revelation of the Spirit, you can say. No doubt the Lord Jesus was referring to this when He said that his Father had hidden certain things from the wise and learned "and revealed them to little children" (Matt 11:25). He refers to it again when He says to Peter, "this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (Matt 16:17).

How did the Father do this? From Ephesians 1:17 we learn that it must have been through "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation." The Belgic Confession too comments on this when it says, "the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God" (Art 5).

### The perfections of Holy Scripture

Having thus considered what the Reformers taught about God's revelation in nature and in the Word, we need to realize that they also believed that there were a number of consequences that flowed from this revelation. These consequences they called "perfections" and there are four of them.

*The Scriptures must be read with this intention, that in them we find Christ.*

#### Authority

The first consequence of revelation that they identified was authority. If the Scriptures come about as the result of the breath of God and these men speak from God, then the natural result has to be that this Word has authority. Because it comes from God, it has to carry weight. It has influence. Because it comes from God, it is also infallible and "we believe without any doubt all things contained in (the books of the Bible)" (BC Art 5).

That was surely the conviction of Martin Luther. When he stood before the Emperor at the Diet of Worms and was requested to reject his writings, he replied, "this touches God and his Word" (Bainton, 183). The next day he elaborated on his sentiments and said, "unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen" (Bainton, 185).

*The Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*

From this answer it is obvious that Luther did not see the church as having authority over the Word. Rather the Word has its own divine authority. Indeed, Luther, as well as the other Reformers, was convinced that it was not the church that created the Word. It was the Word that created the church. The gospel, its preaching and teaching, brought the church into being.

And as for the decisions and documents, the traditions and decrees of the church, they might all be fine and good, but they remain under and subject to the authority of the Word. Only the books of the Bible are received by believers "for the regulation, foundation and confirmation" of their faith (BC Art 5).

#### Necessity

A second perfection also flows from God's revelation in Scripture and it has to do with necessity. If, as we said a moment ago that general or natural revelation is not complete, if only the Holy Scriptures give us the fullest unveiling of the person and will of God, and if we come to know Jesus Christ only through the testimony of the same Scriptures, then the inescapable conclusion is that this Word is necessary. We need it if we are to know ourselves and if we are to know the Saviour. We need it to live a life that is pleasing to God. We need it to be saved. The Psalmist understood this way back in the Old Testament when he called the Word "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105).

#### Clarity

A third perfection defended by the Reformers had to do with clarity or perspicuity. Again, this too flows from what we have said about God's revelation. For if it comes from God, how can it not be clear? How can it be confused or contradictory? How can it be muddled or mixed up? It just is not possible. Of course, Peter admitted that in them "some things (written by Paul) are hard to understand" but the main message is clear.

It was especially the Swiss Reformer Zwingli who elaborated on this point. He stressed that the Word was light and thus possessed its own clarity. Hence it did not need any official interpreters to tell people what it meant. Its true teacher is not doctor, father, pope or council but the Father of Jesus Christ. He is the One who reveals himself by his own Spirit and will enlighten all who seek with humility. As far as Zwingli was concerned only two things were really necessary to understand the Word, and those are a teachable spirit on the one side and the teacher Spirit on the other. (cf. Bromiley, Hist. Theol. 215-217).

#### Sufficiency

The fourth and final perfection of Scripture championed by the Reformers has to do with its sufficiency. Once

more, this too is an extension from the doctrine of revelation and inspiration. If God reveals his Word to man, would he reveal half a Word, an incomplete Word, or an unfinished Word? Would that not be the same as charging Him with error and miscalculation?

Besides, if this Word were in some way still incomplete, it would be grossly unfair for it to contain such stern warnings. Deuteronomy 12:32 tells Israel and us, "do not add to it or take away from it." Revelation 22 says "if anyone adds anything to (the words of this book), God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city" (18,19).

No, this book is complete and this book is sufficient. Another Swiss Reformer Bullinger made this a central tenet of his theology. He considered Scripture to be "absolutely perfect in all points" and added that it "teaches

abundantly all things that belong to true godliness" (Bromiley, 220).

*God preserves his Word.  
Indeed, He will keep it right  
to the end.*

### Permanency

Now, these are the four perfections that are commonly attributed to the Word: authority, necessity, clarity and sufficiency. However, if we go to the title of our speech we might be tempted to add a fifth one called "permanency." After all, Luther asserts that "God's Word Abideth Still."

From examining the context of this line in his hymn we can see that Luther was stressing the fact that God's truth will not be snuffed out like a candle. No, it will continue. It will remain. It will keep on abiding. God will guard

and keep it even in the face of all kinds of attacks.

Yes, and how right he was. Already in his day God had kept and preserved that truth in the face of much unbelief and rebellion in the Old Testament. He had kept it in the face of much persecution in the New Testament and early centuries. He had kept it in the face of the darkness and superstition of the Middle Ages. Why, He had even kept it in the face of the distortions and additions of the Roman Catholic Church.

And what about since the days of Luther and the other Reformers? God has still been keeping his Word. Whether the onslaught came from the so-called Enlightenment Era with its exaltation of human reason, or from the Revolutionary Era with its championing of human freedom, or from the Scientific Era with its worship of human technology, or from the present Secular Era with its pursuit of human pleasure, God preserves his Word. Indeed, He will keep it right to the end. He will keep until his kingdom is all in all. 

## Joy after Sorrow

Cometh sunshine after rain,  
After mourning joy again,  
After heavy, bitter grief  
Dawneth surely sweet relief;  
And my soul, who from her height  
Sank to realms of woe and night,  
Wingeth now to heaven her flight.

He, whom this world dares not face,  
Hath refreshed me with his grace,  
And his mighty hand unbound  
Chains of hell about me wound;  
Quicker, stronger, leaps my blood,  
Since his mercy, like a flood,  
Poured o'er all my heart for good.

Bitter anguish have I borne,  
Keen regret my heart hath torn,  
Sorrow dimmed my weeping eyes,  
Satan blinded me with lies;  
Yet at last am I set free,  
Help, protection, love, to me  
Once more true companions be.

Ne'er was left a helpless prey,  
Ne'er with shame was turned away,  
He who gave himself to God,  
And on him had cast a load.  
Who in God his hope hath placed  
Shall not life in pain outwaste,  
Fullest joy he yet shall taste.

Though to-day may not fulfil  
All thy hopes, have patience still;  
For perchance to-morrow's sun  
Sees thy happier days begun.  
As God willeth march the hours,  
Bringing joy at last in showers,  
And whate'er we asked is ours.

When my heart was vexed with care,  
Filled with fears, wellnigh despair;  
When with watching many a night  
On me fell pale sickness' blight;  
When my courage failed me fast,  
Camest thou, my God, at last  
And my woes were quickly past.

Now as long as here I roam,  
On this earth have house and home,  
Shall this wondrous gleam from thee  
Shine through all my memory.  
To my God I yet will cling,  
All my life the praises sing  
That from thankful hearts outspring.

Every sorrow, every smart,  
That the eternal Father's heart  
Hath appointed me of yore,  
Or hath yet for me in store,  
As my life flows on I'll take  
Calmly, gladly for his sake,  
No more faithless murmurs make.

I will meet distress and pain,  
I will greet e'en death's dark reign,  
I will lay me in the grave,  
With a heart still glad and brave.  
Whom the Strongest doth defend,  
Whom the Highest counts his friend,  
Cannot perish in the end.

*Paul Gerhardt, 1659. Translated by Catherine Winkworth, 1855*



By J. De Jong

## Preachers of the Cross

### The enduring heart of the Reformatory impulse<sup>1,2</sup>

#### The theology of the cross

What did Luther mean with all this? Well, the theology of the cross is essentially marked by being an antithetical theology, that is, a theology marked by the sharp division between right and wrong, between true and false knowledge as it has governed the history of the world since the dawn of time, going right back to the antithesis of Genesis 3:15. For Luther contrasted the theology of cross with the theology of glory. The context makes clear that Luther saw the theology of the cross as the faith perspective of those who did not rely on their own works, but looked to God for mercy and salvation, whereas the theology of glory marked the stand of those who prided themselves on their own achievements and works, hailing them as meritorious deeds before God's judgment seat. For the cursory descriptions in the theses of the Heidelberg Disputation make clear what Luther had in mind with the theology of glory. It extols the power of reason, and posits a positive ascent of man's reason to God in heaven, that is, the ability of human reason to come in its own power to the true knowledge of God. It becomes attached to the things of this world: wealth and riches, honour and power, influence and standing. The theology of the cross, on the other hand, willingly accepts shame and spitting – also for the sake of the cross of Christ. That is God's way! That must be our way as well. That is the heart of Luther's message in 1518.<sup>2</sup>

Behind this message you can discover the line in Luther's spiritual journey. He had tried to rely on works, but he only saw his sins. He also saw the corruption in Rome, the insincerity and lackadaisical attitude of the clergy. Everywhere he looked true religion was

wanting. But then, through the reading of the Scriptures, a door was opened to a new freedom. He felt as if a yoke was lifted from his back! The coaching of his mentor and guide, the Augustinian prior at the monastery in Erfurt, Von Staupitz, began to penetrate his hardened skin. "Look to Jesus and to his cross," Von Staupitz had said, but initially this was not enough for Luther.<sup>3</sup> Only in the process of the deepest temptations, *Anfechtungen*, as he called them, did he come to see the truth of Von Staupitz' words. Christ did it all! You must see in the cross the mercy of God for you! It was the fear of God's wrath that drove him into the monastery, but it was the filial fear of the God of mercy that drove him out!

*Luther contrasted the theology of cross with the theology of glory.*

So Luther came to defend the way of self-denial and self-renunciation as the way the believer must walk. As he saw it, this is also the way of God's self-revelation. Therefore the true theologian is the one who clings to the cross, and who repeatedly chooses the cross. Not the way of glory is to be chosen, the way of pleasure and immediate gain, the way of worldly comforts and earthly treasures. Rather he is a true theologian who takes the road of suffering and hardship, who does his work in fear and trembling before the Lord, and who is willing to lose all in order that he may gain all things in Christ.

These last sentences let us know the world in which Luther is moving in 1518, and also underscore that there is a world of scriptural truth behind

this new position. Luther echoes the word of the Master: "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 16:25). Think also of what Paul says about the preaching of Christ in 1 Corinthians 1: "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men. And the weakness of God is stronger than men." Luther was not the first to work with paradoxes! He stood in a noble tradition! He knew the Scriptures, he knew Paul!

#### Beyond Luther

At the same time, when you hear these theses, and when you examine them more closely, you cannot help but wonder at the strange elements in them. We must acknowledge that one no less than Calvin was critical of Luther's occasionally obscure way of expressing himself. He lamented the Reformer's use of the styles and mannerisms of the schoolmen, the so-called *sic et non* method in vogue among the practitioners of the scholastic theology of the day.<sup>4</sup> But could it really be helped? Luther was a medieval man. All his works are sprinkled with paradoxes. It was the cloak with which he expressed himself. Acknowledging his nominalist background, he said "I am of Occam's school!"<sup>5</sup>

There is more in the theses that is open for criticism. Not only did Luther have difficulty to shed fully the cloak of the schoolmen, he also went through the school of mysticism, and this journey too left its stamp on all his later work.<sup>6</sup> One can detect an almost triumphalist note in his polemics as he rails against the theology of glory. He is very absolute, and almost goes overboard in his stress on the preference for suffering, self-renunciation and martyrdom.<sup>7</sup> It

becomes a sort of battle cry. That preference had deep roots in the medieval era, going right back to the fathers of the early church. Crucifixion became a new form of ecstasy, a much sought after ideal. For Luther to extricate himself from such a deeply rooted tradition was not exactly easy! Here, among his fellow monks at Heidelberg, he needs to be judged critically, but also carefully.<sup>8</sup> One can uncover weaknesses in formulation and weaknesses of undue emphasis in his position.<sup>9</sup>

***Christ did it all! You must see in the cross the mercy of God for you!***

We can concur with the friendly but firm critique of Calvin with respect to the excessiveness of Luther's statements. In the Disputation, suffering is something to be sought after and preferred. Calvin said: if suffering is laid upon you, you must accept it readily and cheerfully and with a willing heart. You need not seek it, and you need not even chose it. God calls, and where he calls we are to follow in humble submission. But we must chose to do his will above all earthly pleasures. In that sense Calvin is as much as Luther a theologian of the cross, and carries forward the same theme. Yet one notes that the tone is different. For Calvin the themes of God's sovereignty and Christ's lordship override the triumphalist tones in Luther's theology of the cross. Indeed, one must always choose the way of self-denial. But that is a call to service in a specific context, a context which does not always include persecution, suffering and martyrdom. Luther in 1518 was at the beginning, not at an end point, and so he must be judged.

### **The line of Heidelberg**

On the other hand, it should not escape us that being called to suffering, rather than choosing it, is precisely the distinguishing mark of Luther's theology in opposition to the medieval scholastics in the school of mysticism before him. In the theology of the cross, the cross is not so much an example that we must imitate, as it is something that happens to the believer through faith and obedience.<sup>10</sup> By the power of Christ the old nature is crucified, the new nature comes to life. The

cross of Christ, and the word of the cross is more a seed that is planted in the human heart, rather than an example which is followed. That is the new line of the Reformation!

The line charted here at the dawn of the Reformation was carried through in following generations, and brought to greater precision. Many of Luther's early themes return in the first edition of Calvin's *Institutes*.<sup>11</sup> And then our thoughts take us to the same city, just over forty years later. In 1545 freedom comes to Heidelberg! The streets are filled with the echoes of a new hymn: "Salvation unto us has come, by God's free grace and favour!" And then, less than twenty years later: the publication of the Heidelberg Catechism. One may say that in its own way, the Catechism is an echo of the theses of the Heidelberg Disputation. In the Catechism, the theses of the Heidelberg Disputation are divested of their scholastic and medieval cloak, the central thoughts are reformulated in a question and answer format for young

***Calvin said: if suffering is laid upon you, you must accept it readily and cheerfully and with a willing heart. You need not seek it, and you need not even choose it.***

people. The "Yes and No" method of the Heidelberg Disputation becomes the "question and answer" method of the Heidelberg Catechism. The cloak is different, but the essence is the same, and Luther's bold motto of 1518 echoes through on every page: "the cross, the cross that is our theology!"

Think of those expressions that really dominate the booklet of comfort: "I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil." Again: "[He] will also turn to my good whatever adversity He sends me in this life of sorrow." And again: "In all my sorrow and persecution I lift up my head and eagerly await as judge from heaven the very same person who before has submitted Himself to the judgment of God for my sake and removed all curse from me."

To be sure, some of Luther's excess has been tempered. In the Catechism it is not a matter of choosing the cross, or even boldly asserting it, but fleeing to the cross, confessing the cross, and taking up the cross. It is not a matter of asking for martyrdom, but accepting the martyrdom that comes upon you. But how was Luther to know what would ensue from his words? In fact, you can say that in 1518 the cross that Luther had to take up was already latently present, even though he hardly knew the depths of suffering that it would bring him. But the polemical energy of conviction and certainty was present in such a measure that it was already clear in 1518 that this was a force from which the world could not soon rid itself, a force – the power of the Word alone(!) – that was destined irrevocably to seal its triumph in the world.

### **Luther today**

That is why 500 years later we still live in the afterglow of those first years of Luther's struggle. Here at the Theological College, we can readily adopt Luther's motto. In fact, it is a motto enjoined on our young men as a blueprint for their ministries. Still today our young men need to be trained to endure suffering, to accept the way of shame and spitting. Young women who choose to dedicate their lives to special forms of service associated with ministry need to be trained to count the cost, and be ready to offer. The apostle John says: "This is how we know what love is: that He surrendered his life for us; and we ought to surrender our lives for the brotherhood."<sup>12</sup>

***It is not a matter of asking for martyrdom, but accepting the martyrdom that comes upon you.***

It also applies to us as churches. If we should choose our own isolation in the world, one which is coupled with fleeing from the world's issues and problems, that would be an escape route bringing much grief for us. But if we obediently accept the isolation laid upon us, the isolation given to us and asked of us in Christ, *that* is the way of the cross. If you are relegated to an isolated position without seeking it, and if for Christ's sake you are made out to be sectarians and fundamentalists, then

that is a position that we must accept, and on which we need to follow through in obedience to God. Take up your cross! "The cross, the cross, that is our theology!"

For here you come to the heart of the Heidelberg Disputation, and the key to Luther's discovery only six months after the match had been brought to the fire in 1517: one may not only speak the truth in words, but must also show his faith in deeds. Or as Paul puts it: "it is given to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also to suffer for his sake" (Phil 1:29). Likewise the apostle John says: "Little children, let us not love in word, or speech, but in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18). The first – the right words – Luther received through his inner struggle up to 1518; the second – the road of suffering and deeds – he was to discover even more than he already had through his life-journey which ended in the town of his birth some thirty years later. His last sigh was an echo of the theology of the cross: "We are beggars, that is sure."

**Still today at this  
seminary we need young  
men ready to take up  
the cross.**

### A lasting legacy

The lessons of church history are important markers for true believers today. The dawn of a new millennium brings many challenges for new generations today. How will we pursue ecclesiastical unity? Will it be unity in the truth? Then it must be: unity around the message of the cross. Still today we need to hear the same message: the cross is our only salvation! The cross, the cross that is our theology! And ever new we need generations of young people for whom the words and the call of the catechism of Heidelberg are second nature: "He also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready to live for Him."

Still today at this seminary we need young men ready to take up the cross. Still today we need to follow through the line from the Heidelberg Disputation to the Heidelberg Catechism, to the church five hundred years later, the church entering the year of our Lord 2000. Give us preachers of the cross,

who take that way themselves! Then we touch the heartbeat of the Reformation, the key to the impulse that made it happen. As our young people go on into a new millennium meeting the challenges of our time, let them continue to carry Luther's banner: the cross, the cross that is our theology. Then they also have the words of the psalmist to guide them:

*Although my heart and flesh may fail  
God is my strength, I shall prevail,  
For he, whose steadfast love is sure,  
Will be my portion evermore.*

(Psalm 73: 8, *Book of Praise*)

<sup>1</sup> Text of an address given at the 26th Convocation of the Theological College, September 8, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Here Luther obviously has in mind the humanistically coloured syncretism of the Roman colossus of his day. He says that the theologian of glory, who learns from Aristotle, says that "the good is worthy to be loved, while the evil, on the other hand, is worthy of hate." But here the "good" means: the comforts, pleasures, and good things of this early life. And the "evil" means: "hardships and persecutions" which the theologian of glory seeks to avoid. For Luther "impositions and obligations of punishments," that is sufferings and persecutions clearly recognizable as of divine origin are "best and most worthy of love" because they are the essential ingredients of the school of Christ, and of the road to the discovery of genuine divine mercy, cf. WA 1 614

<sup>3</sup> H. Oberman says: "Through his counsel Staupitz delivered his fellow Augustinian monk from deep distress, for Luther was close to despair: Am I among the elect? Is my name written in the Book of Life? Had Staupitz not come to his rescue, Luther later confessed, he would either have succumbed to despair or he would have hardened himself against all fear of God in arrogant indifference." see H. A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, translated by Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 182.

<sup>4</sup> W. Van 't Spijker, *De invloed van Luther op Calvinijn blijkens de Institutie*, (Apeldoorn, 1985) 23, 35.

<sup>5</sup> W. Kooiman, *Luther en de Bijbel*, (Baarn: Ten Have, 1977) 16; see also W. Von Loenwich, *Martin Luther*, 48.

<sup>6</sup> See W. Von Loenwich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, (translated by Herbert J. Bouman, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976) 152ff. Von Loenwich argues convincingly in my view that although Luther journeyed through mysticism, the theology of the cross represents a breach with medieval mysticism.

<sup>7</sup> See WA 1, 613; see also Von Loenwich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 20.



Examined by Classis Pacific West on October 5th, 2000 and declared eligible for ordination:

#### Candidate Dirk Poppe

The ordination will take place on October 22, D.V., in Houston, B.C.

\* \* \*

Examined by Classis Pacific West on October 5th, 2000 and declared eligible for ordination:

#### Candidate Wes Bredenhof

The ordination will take place on October 22, D.V., in Smithers, B.C.

<sup>8</sup> K. Schilder points to the weaknesses of nominalism and mysticism characteristic of Luther in this period. Especially the latter predominates in the initial formulations of the theology of the cross. In dealing with the concepts of God's "left hand" and his "right hand" Luther shows strong affinities to Bernard of Clairvaux, cf. K. Schilder, *Heidelbergse Catechismus III*, (Goes: Oosterbaan en Le Cointre, 1950) 340-341. See also Von Loenwich, *Cross*, 132ff.

<sup>9</sup> On the influence of Tauler and the German mystics on Luther, see H.O. Kadai "Luther's Theology of the Cross" in H.O. Kadai, (ed) *Accents in Luther's Theology. Essays in Commemoration of the 450th Anniversary of the Reformation* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967) 257- 260. Kadai argues that while there are some similarities in formulation and expression, there are also radical differences between Luther and late German mysticism.

<sup>10</sup> This is the position of Regin Prenter; see R. Prenter, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 3. However, Prenter overstates his case, and fails to take into account the influences of mysticism that still permeates Luther's work in this period. Similarly, W. Kooiman sees the roots of Luther's theology of the cross and his *conformatas* doctrine in the medieval method of exegesis known as the *quadria*, W. Kooiman, *Luther en de Bijbel*, 91. But the *quadria* itself is permeated with mysticism and especially its tropological and allegorical components have strong links to the *contemplatio* method of medieval monasticism.

<sup>11</sup> So W. Van 't Spijker, 16, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Translation of Stephen S. Smalley (Word Biblical Commentary). 

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# Personal report of visits and contacts with the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) during 1999 and 2000



By J. Moesker

## Brief history of the RCUS

The RCUS presently consists of around forty congregations in four classes located mainly in the central US and California. Total membership is 4,257, which means most churches are small. These churches subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and have a very interesting history.

The Reformed faith flourished in the major German principality of the Palatinate after 1545. Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate protected the Reformed faith and ordered the Heidelberg Catechism written in 1563. However, a number of subsequent wars caused a great upheaval in this principality. The 30 Years War of 1618-1648 pitted Protestant and Roman Catholic against each other and caused much ruin and loss of life. In 1689 the French invaded Germany, including the Palatinate, and reimposed Roman Catholicism on the people. Finally, the War of Spanish Succession swept over western Germany between 1701 and 1714. These wars brought many Germans to look for a better life in the new world, and specifically to Pennsylvania where many Moravian Germans had already emigrated earlier.

Many of the Germans who moved to Pennsylvania were Reformed. They were led by a schoolmaster named John Philip Boehm. Under his leadership a number of Reformed congregations were organized with a church order and subscribing to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. In 1729 Boehm was ordained as minister by the Dutch Reformed Church in New York. This church along with other churches in the new world were part of Classis

Amsterdam in the Netherlands. In 1747 a Classis was formed consisting of fifty-three small churches with approximately 30,000 German Reformed people. The churches then adopted the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort as standards, and the Church Order of Dort. Christian schools were organized.

*In 1747, the churches adopted the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort as standards, and the Church Order of Dort.*

In 1793 the German Reformed Church became independent of the Dutch Reformed Church and organized as a church on its own and had its first synod. At that time it consisted of 178 congregations and approximately 15,000 members. In 1825 these churches started their own theological college in Pennsylvania. This college became a source of the so-called Mercersburg Theology which emphasized the Lord's Supper as a main means of grace. Typical of this movement was that an altar stood in the centre of the church, while the pulpit was situated at the side.

A second "wave" of German Reformed immigration to the US took place in the 1800s. Many German people emigrated to Russia between the 1790s and the early 1800s at the invitation of Empress Catherine II and Czar Alexander I. They settled along the Volga River and in the Black Sea region.

Many were Mennonites, but among them were also people of the Reformed faith. Czar Alexander II revoked many privileges of these German settlers, including exemption from military service for the Russians. Life became difficult for the Mennonites in particular, but also for the Reformed Germans. Between 1849 and 1879 many Germans emigrated to North America. A large contingent of Mennonites ended up in southern Manitoba. Groups of Reformed Germans settled in the Dakotas and Nebraska. There they established churches which soon joined the RCUS. A South Dakota Classis was founded in 1887, and the Eureka Classis was founded in 1911.

In 1930 the RCUS consisted of 1,685 churches in 58 classes with 348,189 members! Liberal influences, however, became strong and by 1900 only the Heidelberg Catechism was left as standard of faith. A 1934 decision to merge with the Evangelical Synod of North America (similar to Evangelische Kirche in Germany, a union of Lutheran and Reformed Churches with Augsburg Confession, Luther's Catechism and Heidelberg Catechism as standards) to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church caused distress among churches in the Midwest. The Eureka Classis of the RCUS did not go along with the merger because of the doctrinal liberty it espoused, and continued with a few churches located in Wisconsin, Nebraska, and California as the RCUS (total approximately twenty churches with less than 300 members). Attempts to heal the break were unsuccessful. In 1957 the Evangelical and Reformed Church merged with Congregationalist Churches to form the United Church of

Christ, which has practically lost all Reformed character.

In the 1980s Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) came into contact with RCUS people in Zaire (Republic of the Congo) where they were doing mission work. This contact led to working together and in 1992, to sister church relations. In 1988 Rev. George Syms of the RCUS visited Carman to investigate the Canadian Reformed Churches, which are sister churches of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated). In 1989 Rev. P. K. A. DeBoer and elder H. Veenendaal visited the RCUS Synod and exploratory talks between Carman church and RCUS took place. At Synod Lincoln 1992 there was a request from RCUS for sister church relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Synod gave the contact with RCUS to the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad. In 1995 the RCUS re-adopted the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort as official confessions of the church. The RCUS maintains official relations with Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Reformed Presbyterian Church, Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated), and is a member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches as well as the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council.

### **Visit Eureka/Herreid, South Dakota – November 1999**

On November of last year, Rev. K. Jonker, br. A. Poppe and I travelled to Eureka, South Dakota to attend some worship services and to interact with people of the Reformed Church in the United States. Along with br. W. Gortemaker, we are the Committee for Contact with the RCUS (Synod 1998, Acts Art 51). This was our first contact with the RCUS as new subcommittee of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad. We chose Eureka to visit, since it is one of the larger churches in the federation, and is located in the heart of "RCUS country."

I had made arrangements with Rev. D. Kingswood of Eureka congregation for our stay there, but he had to fly to British Columbia to be with his father who had heart trouble and was undergoing emergency surgery. We settled into a motel and on Sunday morning we attended the worship services. Rev. Robert Davis led the worship service. A liturgy sheet was provided at the door, much like in our churches. The worship service was reverent and sober in

format, and not all that different from Canadian Reformed worship, except that at one point the small children's choir sang a song from the balcony. A Lord's Day from the Heidelberg Catechism was read and the minister gave a short explanation lasting five minutes or so. The sermon itself was of similar length as in our churches, though less structured than we are used to. It was certainly close to the text (Amos 8) and well-applied (especially in connection with the Sabbath observance). The singing was from the OPC Trinity Hymnal, and I was personally not greatly impressed with the singing. What struck me, however, was that though there are officially 276 members in Eureka congregation, there were only around 100 people in church. Most of these were older people. Eureka is a community to which many people retire, but it was also striking that there were so few children. What is different too, is that there is only one worship service. This apparently has a history: in the past people had to come from very far by horse and buggy or on foot, and it was not feasible to have two worship services. So everything is done close together – Catechism explanation, sermon, and Sunday school.

*The RCUS maintains official relations with Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Reformed Presbyterian Church, Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) . . .*

After the worship service, we made casual acquaintance with a few of the members. Rev. Davis asked us to attend worship in his congregation in Herreid, about fifty km away. The congregation there is much smaller, with eighty-five members. There were about sixty or so people in church, a greater percentage of them children or young people. The liturgy was different from the Eureka liturgy in some points, even closer to our liturgy. Again, the sermon was preceded by an explanation of a Lord's Day of the Catechism. The sermon itself, on Luke 10:38-42 (Which Feast Do You Prefer), was scriptural and was practically applied to the congregation. In the public prayer the glory of God was central and the needs of con-

gregation and community and the world were brought before the Lord. The singing seemed to be more enthusiastic than in Eureka. The people in Herreid were a bit more free in speaking with us as guests. We were invited to Rev. Davis' home, and enjoyed a well-prepared meal there.

We were impressed by this minister's knowledge of and enthusiasm for the Reformed faith. He was raised Baptist, but while studying came to the conclusion on his own that Scripture describes covenant and infant baptism. He and his wife joined the RCUS out of conviction and have deep love for the Reformed faith. As minister he desires to fight against both evangelicalism and dead formalism and to make people aware of how rich the Reformed heritage is.

We were grateful that we could experience something of "everyday life" in the RCUS. We were greatly encouraged that there are people and churches to the south where there is a desire to maintain and grow in the Reformed faith.

### **Meeting Manitowoc, Wisconsin – January 2000**

From January 15 to 18, 2000, the Subcommittee for Relations with the Reformed Church in the US (br. W. Gortemaker, Rev. K. Jonker, br. A. Poppe and myself) went to Manitowoc, Wisconsin (120 km north of Milwaukee) in order to meet with the Interchurch Relations Committee of the RCUS.

We were very hospitably billeted in the homes of members of the Salem/Ebenezer Reformed Church near Manitowoc. Again, it was good to meet with RCUS church members and to interact with them. We discovered that we have a lot of things in common when it comes to practices and customs. For instance, devotions at mealtimes were usually accompanied by Scripture reading and by prayer before and after the meal. The church there had recently had their annual congregational meeting to discuss financial matters, and it was conducted in a very similar manner to our annual financial and budget meetings. What struck us again was the beautiful church building with large kitchen and foyer and lots of meeting space and equipment for instruction. The people take pride in their church buildings.

Before worship on Sunday morning we joined the 8:45 a.m. Bible study groups. I sat in on the Bible study for young people. An interesting discussion took place on the topic

of what Scripture says about dating or courting, led by Rev. Ron Potter. We could hear the children's Bible instruction, accompanied with singing, taking place in another room. There was also an adult Bible study class which was attended by the other brothers of the committee. At 10:00 a.m. the church bells rang to call the congregation to worship. Rev. J. Merica from California spoke to the congregation for a few minutes about the churches in California and the work of home mission there. He is a minister of a recently instituted church there. After his address the worship service started in very similar fashion to our worship. Again, it included a reading of the Heidelberg Catechism, this time all in unison, with a short explanation. Two office-bearers were ordained, and stood at the front of the church as the form was read. The sermon applied to the standards expected of office-bearers and so of all in the church as related in 1 Timothy 3. I found the sermon strong in practical instruction, but somewhat weak in Christology. The singing was still a bit meek compared to what we are used to. The church choir also participated in the worship with one song. A collection was held for the needy.

At 9:00 p.m. there was a monthly Bible study, which we attended. There were around thirty people of various ages. The main topic was the matter of women's voting rights. The discussion centred on 1 Peter 2 and the place of the woman in the church. Women's voting in the election of office-bearers is generally quite strongly rejected in the RCUS. There was a stimulating discussion in which we were also welcome to participate.

We spent Monday morning touring the Manitowoc Marine Museum. In the afternoon we met as committee to establish our approach. After a good supper in the church provided by the ladies aid, the two committees had a preliminary meeting. We continued to meet the following morning. Our purpose was to discuss with the RCUS committee what Synod Fergus 1998 wanted discussed as yet (*Acts* 1998, Art 51 IV and V, p 43, 44):

1. proper supervision of the Lord's Supper
2. Sunday observance
3. the doctrine of the church
4. clarification about the concept of erasure

5. the RCUS's involvement in the National Association of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (which has suspended the Christian Reformed Churches).

*We were greatly encouraged that there are people and churches to the south where there is a desire to maintain and grow in the Reformed faith.*

I will not go into exactly what came out of the discussions. That still needs to be established by the committees when we exchange reports. Let me just pass on the following personal notes concerning each:

1. Though they do not know about attestations, guests are interviewed before they can attend Lord's Supper. They were open to the practice of attestations in their relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches.
2. Sunday observance varies. For instance, with some members eating out at restaurants on Sundays is being done, but there is a desire to resist this and keep the day holy. One worship service has always been the practice, with Sunday Bible study.
3. The concept of invisible and visible church has a history in the RCUS, but there is growing appreciation for what the Belgic Confession says about the church.

4. Erasure is a removal of a member's name from the church roll only if that member refuses to make himself available for church discipline over a long period of time. It is not a replacement for church discipline as such.
5. The RCUS has had a positive influence in NAPARC. It was involved in bringing about the suspension procedure against the Christian Reformed Church due to the decision to open the offices to both sexes. This organization now has as aim also to see if there can be working toward organic union of churches.

The discussions were very frank and amicable. I found the members of the RCUS committee sincere in their desire to be Reformed and also open to listening to our concerns and suggestions. It was an excellent meeting and good contacts were made and literature exchanged. We planned to meet again as committees, the Lord willing, in May around the time of their synod. As they do not have their own theological college, they are also interested in our college in Hamilton, and asked me if I would make a presentation about our college at their synod.

We were quite pleased with the meetings and looked forward to continued discussions. Rev. J. Merica closed our time together with a meditation on Matthew 16:18, where the Lord says, ". . . on this rock I will build my church." He noted that it is the Lord who builds his church. That is a great comfort to know in this world of human fears and failings. C

### SYNOD FERGUS 1998

*wanted discussed as yet:*

1. *proper supervision of the Lord's Supper*
2. *Sunday observance*
3. *the doctrine of the church*
4. *clarification about the concept of erasure*
5. *the RCUS's involvement in the National Association of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (which has suspended the Christian Reformed Churches)*



By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

## Dear Brothers and Sisters:

When reading the Bible, the Lord tells us how we are to live before Him. In this article we like to write about the effects of boasting and therefore the need for us to be humble. When David was writing Psalm 131, it was a confession of humble trust in the Lord. He knew that in himself he had nothing to boast about. Many verses in the Bible speak about being proud as wicked and arrogant. Psalm 12:3 says, "May the Lord cut off all flattering lips and every boastful tongue."

We also know today that we have to be humble and not to boast about ourselves. We are all given different talents and it is so easy to think that we are so good. Let us never forget that it is the Lord who blesses us with these talents. At times it does not take much for us to think, "look how beautiful this is. I made it all by myself." Or we might think, "I have worked hard for everything I have; so it's all for me." It is our pride that puts us against God. We are sometimes so full of ourselves that God does not have any room in our thoughts. Or if there is any room at all, then only when we deem it necessary in our lives. Where would we be if God did not send his Son to save us from our sins? We would not be saved but stand forever under the wrath of God. This means that He would be angry with us forever. God could not forgive us our sins if his Son did not die for us.

As Christians we know it so well, that we have to be humble and not proud. But every day we sin against the Lord. When the minister reads the Ten Commandments to us on Sunday morning, it makes it very clear that we are sinners. It is a constant reminder of how we are to live before Him. The world today tells us to "believe in yourself." You are a good person if you want to be and you can do it by yourself. God is nowhere in the picture. In Isaiah 13:11 the Lord tells us, "I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless." The Lord shows us clearly what He wants from us. In Micah 6:8 we can read, "He has showed you O man what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to

love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." We do not own ourselves but we belong to the Lord. If we always remember this in our daily lives, we will soon realize that the only boasting that we may do is in the Lord. Christ had to humble himself by dying for our sins on the cross. This cannot but make us very humble for everything He has done for us. Therefore in our daily lives if we would sometimes need care or help from others, let us be careful that our pride does not take over. Although it can be very difficult to let it go at times, we must always remember our Saviour. Let us be trusting and remain humble in the Lord. He gives us what we need also in difficult moments of our life. For Christ to hang on the cross for our sins gives us the true meaning of humility. He knows how hard it is to humble himself. Let us then be taught by what Christ teaches us in his Word in 1 Peter 5:5b-7: "All of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty Hand that He may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you."

*He on the church of Christ our Lord  
His many sacred gifts outpoured,  
That, without pride or malice, we  
Might one another's members be.*

*Hymn 38:2*

## Birthday in November:

### 3rd Wilma Van Drongelen

306 - 33375 Mayfair Avenue  
Abbotsford, BC V2S 1P4

Willma will be 43 years old. Congratulations with your birthday Wilma. We hope you have an enjoyable day with your family and friends.

Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman

Mailing Correspondence:

548 Kemp Road East

RR 2 Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

Phone: (905) 563-0380



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# Carman West welcomes her first minister

By Peter Veenendaal



The vibrant colours of freshly-cut lilies, zinnias and asters spilling out of the antique coal pail in front of the Carman pulpit was evidence that something special was happening in that prairie town on August 13, 2000. And indeed, the Carman West congregation, along with special guests, was gathered to hear the proclamation of the Word brought by Rev. J. Mulder. Perhaps you are thinking that this story takes place in a different millennium. After all, wasn't Rev. Mulder the pastor in Carman way back in the 50s and 60s? Of course you are correct, but Rev. Mulder was leading this worship service thirty-four years after he moved away from Carman, for a very special reason. In this service, Rev. A. J. Pol, formerly of Guelph, Ontario, became the first minister of the Carman West congregation. After instituting on July 4, 1999, and being vacant for only 405 days, the words of Psalm 33:1 were fitting for the opening of this service: "Rejoice ye in the LORD O righteous and let a new song fill the air." May the

LORD receive all praise for the gifts given on this day.

Even though we sang about a "new song," it was clear in both Rev. Mulder's sermon and, later in Rev. Pol's first sermon as Carman West's minister that the message we would hear from our minister would not be different from what we heard in the past. We must continue to understand the great glory of God's speaking to his people – a greater glory even than when God spoke to the Israelites from Mount Sinai. We must remember the responsibilities we have to hear, listen and obey, and the punishment we may expect if we reject the Word God speaks to us through his servants. We were reminded that the nature of God's testimony for lost sinners continues to be simple, easy for anyone to understand. The apostle Paul did not try to dazzle his hearers with eloquence or a show of physical strength and neither should we try this today. Let the testimony of God bind us together when we focus on the heart of

the Gospel – Jesus Christ crucified! (Hymn 40).

Br. Gerrit Bos brought congratulations on behalf of the congregation and consistory of the Guelph church. Br. Len Lodder of Carman East compared the two Carman congregations to twin sisters who are slowly becoming more independent. Br. Gerrit vanLaar, on behalf of Winnipeg (Grace), expressed the wish that the "POLinating" work of our new minister would result in much fruit in the neighbouring congregations as well. Coming from the hustle and bustle of Winnipeg, and enjoying some peace and quiet in the countryside on this special Lord's Day, Pastor T. VanRaalte, representing Winnipeg (Redeemer), also spoke words of welcome and congratulations on behalf of Classis Manitoba/Denver. He encouraged the congregation not "to suppress or minimize (their) excitement in this time, but enjoy to the fullest all the blessings the LORD gives (them)." His encouragement was well-heeded in the congregation's singing of Psalm 150 at the end of the second service: "Sing his praises! HALLELUJAH!"

Later in the week after the installation of Rev. Pol, the congregation welcomed the Pol family (Rev. and Mrs. and their eight children) to Carman via a potluck supper at King's Park in Carman. Each family/member in the congregation was requested to prepare a page of pictures and information for a special welcome album via which the Pols could more easily learn to know the various members. The result was a beautiful album which was a tribute to the artistic talents of the members of Carman West. Rev. Pol's parents from Ottawa were also able to take part in these special celebrations with their children and grandchildren.

Our prayer is that the LORD will bless the work of our new pastor and teacher in our midst and help him and his family adjust to their new prairie surroundings. 



## Press Release of Classis Ontario-South of September 13, 2000 held in Hamilton, Ontario

### Opening

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. K. A. Kok called the meeting to order. He read Psalm 66 and requested that Psalm 66:1, 2 be sung. In prayer a blessing was asked over the meeting. Rev. Kok welcomed all the delegates.

Rev. K. A. Kok and Rev. J. Ludwig reported that the credentials were in good order. Classis was declared constituted. The officers were as follows:

Rev. J. Ludwig - chairman  
Rev. K. A. Kok - clerk  
Rev. D. G. J. Agema - vice-chairman  
The agenda was adopted.

### Article 44 CO

The chairman asked the questions as stipulated in Art 44 CO. The Church at Ancaster asked advice in a matter of discipline. This was discussed in closed session. The Church at Lincoln asked for information regarding local voting practices. The Church at Grand Rapids requested that a counsellor be appointed. Rev. H. Versteeg was appointed. Grand Rapids also asked for pulpit supply. This was granted.

### Proposals and Requests

The Church at Chatham proposed to be put on the list of meeting places for Classis. This was adopted.

The Church at Kerwood requested that Rev. J. VanWoudenberg be released from his service in Classis Ontario-South as of January 1, 2001. Classis decided to grant Rev. VanWoudenberg release in the most honourable way. Classis also granted Kerwood pulpit supply and appointed Rev. J. Ludwig as counsellor. The Church at Chatham was delegated to represent Classis at the farewell service of Rev. VanWoudenberg. The chairman thanked Rev. VanWoudenberg for his service in this classical district and wished him the Lord's blessing.

### Fund for Needy Churches

Classis received a report from the church administering the Fund for Needy Churches. In answer to a request of Grand Rapids, Classis decided that if this church needs more financial support in connection with calling a minister, it should submit a request to

the church administering the Fund. Classis decided to maintain an assessment of \$15.00 per communicant member for the year 2001. Classis also adopted revised Guidelines for the Fund.

### Appointments

Next Classis: Convening church: Chatham. Date: December 13, 2000.

Place: Kerwood. Proposed officers: Cl. Stam chairman, J. Ludwig clerk, K. A. Kok vice-chairman.

Delegated to Regional Synod East 2000 are:

elders: H. J. Homan, A. R. Kingma, R. J. Oosterhoff. Alternates: G. Bartels, H. DeVries, G. VanWoudenberg (in that order).

ministers: D. G. J. Agema, Cl. Stam, J. P. VanVliet. Alternates: J. E. Ludwig, J. VanWoudenberg, G. Wieske (in that order).

### Question Period and Closing

In the question period, Rev. W. Boessenkool, a delegate from Grand Rapids, spoke words of farewell and wished the churches the blessing of the Lord. The chairman expressed appreciation for the work done by Rev. Boessenkool. The chairman concluded that censure ad Art 34 was not necessary. The Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was read and approved. Classis sang Psalm 68:12. The chairman led in prayer and closed the meeting.

For Classis, D.G.J. Agema,  
vice-chairman

## Press Release of Classis Pacific East, September 21, 2000

On behalf of the convening church of Yarrow, the Rev. C. Vandervelde opened the meeting. He asked the delegates to sing Psalm 1:1,2. He then read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 and led in prayer. He welcomed all delegates and mentioned that Rev. R. Schouten has declined the call to the Church at Smithville. He also informed the brothers that the Church at Yarrow has begun construction on their new church building. The credentials were examined by the delegates of the Church of Vernon and were found to be in good order. Classis was constituted. Moderamen were: Rev. D. Moes (chairman), Rev. M.

H. VanLuik (vice-chairman), and Rev. P. Holtvluwer (clerk). The agenda was adopted.

Correspondence was received from Classis Alberta-Manitoba, informing Classis that Classis Alberta-Manitoba has been divided into two regions.

Correspondence was received from Classis Pacific West, requesting help in giving pulpit supply to two vacant churches. Classis agreed to the request if the need continues to exist. Two appeals were received and declared inadmissible due to the late date at which they were received. An overture was received from the Church at Abbotsford to overture Regional Synod to request Synod for a revision of the *Book of Praise*, making linguistic updates to the Psalms, to give alternate melodies for difficult Psalms and to consider adding a modest number of hymns to cover all areas of God's redemptive work more sufficiently. This overture was accepted in principle and will be passed on to Regional Synod.

The Church of Yarrow gave a report on the archives of Classis kept by the Church of Abbotsford. It was noted that a number of documents were missing and attempts to recover them were unsuccessful. Otherwise, the archives were in good order. The Church at Vernon reported that they audited the books of the classical treasurer which were found in good order.

The committee for Needy Churches presented a report recommending Classis give support to a needy church. Classis adopted the recommendation of the committee to assess the churches \$9.12 for the year 2001. The committee also asked Classis to release br. H. Berends from his duty on the committee due to health concerns. Br. Berends has served on the committee for 25 years for which thankfulness was expressed. Classis appointed br. B. Vane to replace br. Berends on the committee and appointed br. K. Louwerse as convener of the committee.

Two church visitation reports were given for visits to the Churches of Chilliwack and Yarrow. Question Period (Art 44, C O) was held. The Church of Chilliwack requested advice for the proper government of the church. Advice was given.

The Church of Abbotsford was appointed as convening church of next Classis to be convened on November 30 at 9:00 A.M. with the alternate date being March 29, 2001. The suggested executive for next Classis are: Rev. M. H. VanLuik (chairman), Rev. P. Holtvluwer (vice-chairman), Rev. R. Schouten (clerk).

Classis appointed the following ministers to Regional Synod: Rev. R. Schouten and Rev. W. Wielenga and as alternates: Rev. C. Vandervelde and Rev. M. H. VanLuik. Classis appointed the following elders to Regional Synod: brothers C. Bylenga and J. Pruijm and as alternates brothers H. Ludwig and E. Kampen.

General Question Period was held. Censure as per Art 34 of the CO was deemed unnecessary. Acts of Classis were adopted and press release approved. The chairman requested the singing of Hymn 4 and closed in prayer. Classis was closed.

For Classis, M. H. VanLuik,  
vice-chairman

## Press Release of Classis Manitoba, Monday October 2, 2000 in the building of the Canadian Reformed Church Carman East, MB.

### 1. Opening

At 9:00 am, on behalf of the convening church at Carman-West, Rev. A.J. Pol calls the meeting to order. He opens the meeting in a Christian manner. He welcomes the delegates. Rev. Pol mentioned that he is present to his first Classis in this region. On Aug. 13, 2000 he was installed as minister of the Church at Carman West. The Church at Carman West, especially its clerk br. Case VanderPol, is thanked for all the preparatory work in convening this Classis.

The delegates of the convening church check the credentials. They are reported to be in good order. All churches are properly represented by their primi delegates. There are no instructions.

### 2. Classis is constituted

The following officers are appointed: Rev. A.J. Pol, chairman; Rev. K. Jonker, vice-chairman; Rev. J. Moesker, clerk. Classis is declared constituted. The agenda is proposed and adopted.

### 3. Reports

a. Classis Treasure Report. The former Classis Treasurer, br. J. Buitenbos, reports of his work of closing the books

of Classis Alberta/Manitoba. Classis takes note of this report. It shows that an amount of \$ 25,234.17 has been sent to our Classis Treasurer. The report is accepted.

- b. Committee Aid to Needy Churches Report. The Committee reports on work done. The church at Denver requests aid. The request is granted.
- c. Hoc Committee re revision of Classis Regulations Report. The report is tabled. Several proposals from the churches regarding Classis regulations are tabled as well. The regulations for Classis Manitoba are established.

### 4. Question Period

According to art 44 C.O. is held. None of the churches need help or advice from Classis.

### 5. Correspondence

A proposal from the Church at Carman West re the Form for Subscription is tabled. They propose that all the ministers in our new classical region be requested to sign a new book. Classis accepts this proposal. This decision is immediately executed. The ministers K. Jonker, J. Moesker, A.J. Pol, D.W. VandeBurgt and T.G. VanRaalte sign the new book, containing the Form of Subscription.

### 6. Appointments

Next Classis: Convening church: Denver CO; date: Monday December 11, 2000 at 9:00 a.m. alternate date: March 12, 2001. Place: in the Carman East church building. The suggested officers are: chairman: Rev. D.W. VandeBurgt, vice-chairman: Rev. A.J. Pol, clerk: Rev. J. Moesker.

The primi and secundi delegates to Regional Synod (to be convened on

Dec.5, 2000 at Langley BC- Willoughby Heights Church) are elected. The two ministers delegates are: Revs. A.J. Pol and T.G. VanRaalte; secundus is Rev. D.W. VandeBurgt. The two elder delegates are: Elders W. Gortemaker and D. Teitsma; secundus is Elder P. DeRuiter.

### 7. Personal Question Period

The Church at Denver thanks Classis for the financial support received. Grace Church at Winnipeg reports about the recent meeting with the Providence Reformed Church at Winnipeg (affiliated with the United Reformed Churches in Northern America. The consistory of the Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church also took part in this meeting, held on Sept. 28, 2000. Two topics were discussed: the guarding of the pulpit and the guarding of the Lord's Table. It was a positive meeting. On further questions some organizational matters are addressed as well.

### 8. Brotherly censure (Article 34 C.O.)

The chairman concludes that censure is not necessary.

### 9. Adoption of Acts and Approval of Press Release

The Acts are read and adopted. The Press Release is read and approved.

### 10. Closing

The chairman speaks some words of thanks and wishes the delegates strength and wisdom for their tasks in the respective congregations. The vice-chairman thanks Rev. A.J. Pol for the pleasant manner in which he has chaired this Classis. Rev. Jonker leads in prayer. The chairman closes Classis.

For Classis Manitoba,  
Rev. K. Jonker, vice-chairman



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## Update: The Trinity Western University Legal Challenge

By Tako Van Popta

This fall, the Supreme Court of Canada will hear arguments in the case of Trinity Western University (TWU) versus the British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT). TWU is a Christian University in British Columbia with about 2,700 students. It offers Bachelor degrees in thirty-four programs including Education. TWU works with Simon Fraser University (SFU) for the professional development year, the fifth and final of the Bachelor of Education program.

### TWU wants to be on its own

Despite this good working relationship, TWU wants to offer the full five years on its own. In 1995, TWU applied to British Columbia's professional governing body for teachers, the BCCT, for full teacher accreditation powers. Going against the advice of its own investigation committee, the BCCT denied accreditation on the basis of "public policy." Their disagreement was not with TWU's professionalism or academic standards, but was with a perceived discrimination against homosexuals. They were troubled by TWU's Community Standards contract signed by all students, prohibiting extra-marital relations, including homosexual practices. They were also concerned that TWU promotes integration of Christian faith and academics, a concept apparently foreign to the BCCT.

TWU challenged this absurd decision to British Columbia's Supreme Court, and won. The BCCT then appealed to British Columbia's Court of Appeal, and lost. Standing firm on political correctness, the BCCT has now appealed to the Supreme Court of Canada, the final court of appeal.

### Two main issues

There are two main issues at stake. The first, and the one on which both the lower courts based their decisions, is that of jurisdiction. Does the legisla-

tion which created the BCCT as a governing and accrediting body, grant the BCCT the power, or jurisdiction, to base decisions on extraneous issues such as the institution's religious basis? Related is the fact that the BCCT didn't even bother to investigate whether any of TWU's many graduates now working in public schools in fact discriminate against homosexual students. Both lower courts said the BCCT stepped beyond its powers and ordered it to grant accreditation.

The second issue is whether the BCCT infringed TWU's rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, namely, freedom of religion, expression and association, and the right to be treated equally under the law. TWU's factum (written arguments) now filed with the Supreme Court of Canada argues:

The BCCT's decision is discriminatory in a substantive sense as it clearly evinces a prejudice against persons with evangelical Christian religious convictions. The BCCT stereotypes them by presuming they are likely to be intolerant.

TWU argues further:

It is no answer that TWU can continue to express its religious beliefs. It must do so in the wilderness if it and its graduates are denied full participation in our diverse society.

The Supreme Court of Canada could uphold the lower courts and decide in favour of TWU on the jurisdictional issue; however, the fact that the Court decided to hear the case at all suggests the nine judges are prepared to deal with the more perplexing Charter issues. This will make TWU versus BCCT a landmark case for religious freedom in Canada.

### The broader issue

The broad question concerns the role of Christians in a post-Christian society. While the world would grant us religious

### THE BACKGROUND:

#### 1985

The 4-year TWU teacher education degree program is launched. An arrangement is reached for students to attend Simon Fraser University for the 5th year of the program to receive required provincial certification.

#### 1987

The British Columbia College of Teachers [BCCT] is set up by the BC government, with a mandate to establish professional standards related to training, certification, discipline and the professional practice of teaching in the province.

#### January 1995

TWU applies to the BCCT to offer the required certification year in its own right.

#### June 1996

The BCCT denies the application based on TWU community standards requiring students to refrain from extramarital sex, including homosexual behavior.

#### May 1997

TWU challenges the BCCT's denial in the BC Supreme Court.

#### September 12, 1997

The British Columbia Supreme Court orders the BCCT to approve TWU's teacher education degree program, saying there is no evidence of intolerance among TWU-trained teachers.

#### September 28, 1997

The BCCT files notice to appeal the ruling to the BC Court of Appeal.

#### June 15 - 17, 1998

The BCCT appeal is heard in Vancouver. Three judges hear submissions from each side, plus two intervening parties in support of TWU.

#### December 30, 1998

British Columbia Court of Appeal rules 2 to 1 in favour of TWU and orders BCCT to approve the University's program.

#### Fall 2000

Supreme Court of Canada will hear oral arguments with their decision likely to be handed down in summer 2001. There are now eight intervening parties.

freedom, they expect us to keep it private; to be dualists, maintaining separate compartments for our work on the one hand, and for our faith on the other. TWU is to be applauded for the having courage to “strive to have a teacher education program that maintains sound academic and professional standards....within the contours of a Christian world view that encompasses an ethos of caring, justice and responsibility.”

About the author: Tako van Popta is a graduate of Trinity Western University with a B.A. in history and has a law degree from the University of British Columbia. He practices in the areas of corporate and commercial law at the law firm of McQuarrie Hunter in Surrey, British Columbia.

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## Christian School Culture

by *O. Bouwman*

Life can return to normal after the excitement of the Olympics. During the past month, the attention of many could focus on the world of sports, from which there is indeed much to learn. Paul taught us almost two millennia ago that the focus and the determination of the athlete is held up as an example to all.

Olympic teams know precisely why they exist. To win. Years of practice, tremendous amounts of money, and gallons of sweat are willingly given up to achieve victory. Athletes have to be team players and have to be sure that everything they do helps to further the cause they so eagerly support. Everything they do and the entire culture they immerse themselves in contributes to their big dream.

There is indeed so much to learn from the Olympic teams. Of course, there is a lot not to learn from them as well, but that is a different matter. This article looks at the need for schools to be as focussed and as goal-oriented as a Olympic athletes.

### Definition

A working definition of school culture can simply be “all the experiences of and influences on the students in the school.” A broad umbrella like this would include everything from school décor, curriculum content, and discipline procedures, to communication between teachers and parents or to student behaviour on the bus. It will include the visible and invisible rituals

involving personal relationships as well as the spoken and unspoken moral code upon which life in the school functions. So school culture includes the seen and the unseen things in the school, the structures and the relationships, the hardware and the software, so to speak.

A culture will develop in every organization. If the supposed leaders don't put one type of culture in place, a different and haphazard one will appear. It's like the farm – if Mr. Farmer doesn't plant a good crop, a fine crop of weeds will most certainly appear. Consequently, it is incumbent that Christian school boards, administrators and teachers create an appropriate school culture. Every school will have a culture; some cultures are just more wholesome than others.

### Mission statement

What type of school culture is desirable for Canadian Reformed schools? Smoothly functioning schools are very likely to have a clear mission statement – a goal statement that charts the course of everybody working in that organization. This statement is a clearly articulated expression of the school's vision. If we compare an effective school's culture with its mission statement, we would see a close corollary.

Canadian Reformed schools in Alberta have adopted the following mission statement: The purpose of our Canadian Reformed schools is to assist parents in educating their children. We strive to develop the students' talents so that they acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for a life of Christian responsible stewardship. From the above statement, a few characteristics guiding school culture should be clear.

### Assisting parents

In the first place, our schools exist to assist parents. Parents are the divinely appointed agents responsible for their children. Whatever authority teachers have in the schools is given to them by parents. Most parents recognize that pooling their resources and sharing talents through schools is the most effective way in which they can responsibly fulfill their God-given tasks. A good school will show in many ways that it functions under the authority of the parents. First of all, parents will be very much involved in establishing the direction of the school – parents will form the majority of members of school

boards and committees. Secondly, parents will be visible in the school and will feel needed and welcomed there. They will also perceive that they are well-informed by the school of their child(ren)'s progress. Larger schools will face larger hurdles, perhaps, to smoothly involve the parents in the weekly routines in the school, but nonetheless, schools which take seriously the role of parents will make their parents realize that parents have an important place in schools.

### Students acquire

The goal for the school is that the students acquire desirable attributes. The verb acquire is noteworthy. A culture must be created or an atmosphere must be developed in the school which is conducive to the students taking something and making it their own. Students need to grab onto, develop a love for, make personally true for themselves, and take ownership of certain things. They must be involved in their own education. In a nutshell, students must want to be at school to get something. To expect students to acquire certain skills and attitudes against their wishes is comparable to trying to force a horse to drink – that particular exercise usually ends up being a frustrating endeavour and a predictable waste of time. A good school is one where students want to be.

What should the students acquire? Appropriate knowledge, helpful skills, and godly attitudes. Not all knowledge is appropriate for every age group. Some skills are not helpful in life. And clearly, not all attitudes are as godly as others. The school – hand in hand with the parents, of course – will have to identify a particular subset of knowledge, skills, and attitudes which are conducive to leading a life of Christian responsible stewardship, as the Alberta mission statement articulates.

### Consistency

Does the school's culture – everything in the school – undergird and support the acquisition of desirable knowledge, skills, and attitudes? For example, does the school's drama program foster the development of healthy attitudes? Does the school's sports program or music program dovetail with or compete against the cultivation of the Christian mind? Does the student's dress reflect a desire to gain knowledge, skills and attitudes which conform with

a Christian world view, or does student dress take its cues from the competition such as the local theatre?

Establishing and continuing to operate a Christian school is a big challenge, but to be involved in Christian education is also an exciting opportunity. Examining the structures in place and comparing a

school's culture to its mission statement can be a rewarding endeavour. Leaders can use the correlations they find to celebrate the good things happening in their school community. And where there are discrepancies, the school community can act together to put things back in line. Reflection and discussion of how closely

our school's culture matches our school's mission statement is certainly a worthwhile activity. Is the correlation between theory and practice as close as that of the Olympic athletes?

*This column is supported by the CRTA-East. Reader responses or articles can be sent to [abkingma@kwic.com](mailto:abkingma@kwic.com) or Clarion.* 

## OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



### Dear Busy Beavers,

Do you know what Remembrance Day stands for? Did you know that many of our parents or grandparents fought in wars which covered the whole world? And because of the fighting that they had to do, we are now able to live in a free country; where we can go to Church without being persecuted; we can have our own schools; we have everything that we need and more.

That is what Remembrance Day is for – it is to remember those who fought and died in the wars over the last century or so.

I think that many of you could possibly ask Grandpa or Opa what happened during the war and they will be able to tell you lots of stories about it. Maybe you could ask Grandpa or Opa and write to me about their experiences.

Lots of love, Aunt Betty

### November Birthdays

4	Kaitlin Hordyk	24	Rhonda Wiersma
8	Yolanda Boeve	27	Amber Aasman
12	Kayla VanderHorst	27	Jodi Hordyk
16	Ainsley VanVeen	30	Dorothy Gunnink
22	Amanda Vanderhoeven	30	Natasha Oosterhoff

### Belongings

Match each of the following people with his or her belongings.

1	Joseph, Gen 44:2	A	Spikenard
2	Jesus, John 19:23	B	Silver cup
3	Mary, John 12:3	C	Seamless coat
4	Abraham, Gen 22:6	D	Ring
5	Prodigal son, Luke 15:22	E	Knife
6	Solomon, 1 Kings 10:21	F	Gold drinking vessel
7	Jonathan, 1 Sam 18:4	G	Handmade coats
8	David, 1 Sam 21:8-9	H	Cloak, books and parchment
9	Paul, 2 Tim 4:13	I	Sword, bow and girdle
10	Dorcas, Acts 9:39	J	Goliath's sword

### CODE BREAKER

by Busy Beaver *Lyndsay Schouten*

List 1 consists of names of kings, List 2 of lands. The problem is to pair them off correctly. Which king was of which land?

#### List 1

- 1 Ahab
- 2 Sennacherib
- 3 Hiram
- 4 Nebuchadnessar
- 5 Hezekiah
- 6 Darius
- 7 Agrippa
- 8 Pharaoh
- 9 Balak
- 10 Og
- 11 Ben-hadad
- 12 Jabin

#### List 2

- A Syria
- B Persia
- C Judea
- D Canaan
- E Moab
- F Israel
- G Tyre
- H Assyria
- I Babylon
- J Judah
- K Egypt
- L Bashan

### Name the culprit

1. Daughter of Ahab and Jezebel who nearly succeeded in slaying all the members of the royal family of Judah.
2. This thief, by his suicidal death, made possible the purchase of a burial place for strangers.
3. This evil one offered money to acquire spiritual power.
4. This heartless and cruel one caused many tears to be shed in Bethlehem.
5. This adulterer mocked Jesus and made sport of Him.
6. This evil-minded one murdered an apostle of the Lord Jesus.
7. This Jew-baiter sought the destruction of all Jews in the kingdom.
8. This evil king hired a prophet to curse Israel.
9. This wealthy glutton feasted like a king and was smitten by the Lord and died.
10. This deceiver and his wife met their doom in the presence of a godly man.