

Clarion

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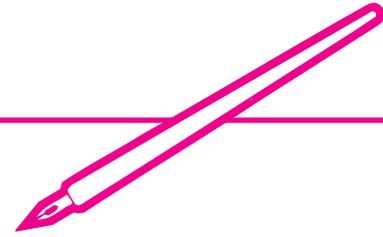


Speeches and TV do not match

Numbers

10:1-10

By N.H. Gootjes



Dumb Images

Speeches on TV

Recently, millions of people all over North America watched the inauguration of George W. Bush as president of the United States. It was a rather simple, straightforward ceremony. We saw him arrive at the Capitol, be sworn in and deliver his inaugural address. From all sides his speech was praised as well crafted, but as a spectacle, the speech was hardly exciting, for not much happened. President Bush hardly looked at the printed version of the speech in front of him. He appeared to look at the people, while reading the text from the Teleprompter. It was mentioned that he had practised this especially for this speech. It was the most important speech he has ever given. He pulled it off, he did not skip lines or stumble over words. Yet, his inaugural speech can hardly be called entertaining.

Speeches and TV do not match.

Something similar happened in the Netherlands, where Queen Beatrix gave her yearly speech to the Dutch nation on Christmas day. She has done this for many years now, but always on the radio. This year for the first time her speech was broadcast on TV. She was shown reading parts of the speech from her paper, but during other parts she looked straight at the viewers. Realizing that the TV has replaced the radio as the most important medium of communication, she addressed the Dutch people from the screen. But a comment I read stated that it was not a riveting program, for not much was happening. It is nice to see the Queen, but simply watching her speak is not attractive for viewers. This is also how I felt after having watched President Bush's inaugural address. Speeches and the TV do not match.

Why do speeches on TV not go over too well? The reason appears to be that the television must keep people entertained in order to compel them to go on watching. In an article about our TV culture, Dr. D.S. Groothuis, a professor in philosophy, spoke of the "entertainment imperative" of television:

Amusement trumps all other values and takes captive every topic. Every subject – whether war, religion, business, law, or education – must be presented in a lively, amusing, or stimulating manner. The best way to receive information interpersonally – through the "talking head" – is the worst way according to television values; it simply fails to entertain (unless a comedy routine is in process). If it fails to entertain, boredom results, and the yawning watcher switches channels to something more captivating.

In our situation, where television is the most important means of communication, communication by the spoken word suffers.

The advantage of television

Dr. Groothuis' attack on the TV can easily be misunderstood as if the TV is altogether useless. But it can readily be demonstrated that the visual presentation of TV has great advantages. It can bring close to us a world that is far away. In a program about Japan, Mount Fuji will not be omitted. There are not too many people who will travel to Japan to explore the beauties of the country. But in a program on Japan, it can be shown how this mountain dominates the landscape, even from far away. We could also read a description of this mountain, of course, but that would not be the same, because our impression would not be sharply defined. The TV can focus in on the mountain, giving the impression that the mountain comes closer and becomes more imposing. It can give a close up of the snow, making you feel as if you are walking on the mountain itself.

To give another example, the TV can show beautiful remnants of Roman culture. While sitting in our living room, we can look at the ruins of the Colosseum in Rome. The camera can give an overall view of what is left of this building and it can give the impression that the viewer walks around it. It can highlight details not visible for the general tourist. On the arc of Titus, there is a picture of Roman people carrying the lamp stand brought from Jerusalem, after the siege in 70 AD. The television picture may be able to bring out the details even clearer than would be visible for someone who stands right in front of this monument.

Speeches want to make people follow the thoughts of the speaker.

The TV is an excellent medium, in as far as the visual aspect of our world is concerned. Its impact can be great. But it fails miserably in other aspects.

The strength of the spoken word

The weakness of TV is that it cannot portray ideas and reasoning. The image of President Bush speaking is not interesting. His address becomes interesting only when you follow his words and let his vision penetrate: "I ask you to be citizens. Citizens, not spectators. Citizens, not subjects. Responsible citizens building communities of service and a nation of character." For people who pay attention to his words and consider his ideas, his speech made sense.

The sermon suffers from the same disadvantage as the speeches of President Bush and Queen Beatrix: it is not visually attractive. In a time where the TV determines what is interesting, sermons are out of favour. Nothing much is happening during a sermon. Someone is speaking for thirty

or forty minutes. There is no change in the scenery, and there is only that one person standing still in front of the congregation. Voices can be heard stating that the services must become more lively, and that the minister should follow the example of the entertainer.

But speeches work on a different level from visual entertainment. Entertainment wants to take people along by showing new and interesting things all the time. There must be movement and action, in order not to lose the viewers. Speeches want to make people follow the thoughts of the speaker. They want people to follow them from the one step to the other. They require the listeners to be busy with the words, internalizing what the words mean. The listeners have to consider the meaning and make the message their own.

The Heidelberg Catechism says that God "wants his people to be taught, not by means of dumb images but by the living preaching of his Word" (Lord's Day 35, answer 98). The preaching is an address to the listeners, requiring their activity of following and considering the words of the minister. They have to open their minds for it, and let the words penetrate. The preaching is not an outdated form of communication, it is required by the revelation of God given in his Word. And it cannot be replaced by a show which pleases the eyes but leaves the mind empty. What is revealed should not be viewed but considered. 

What's inside?

Television has become the most popular medium for communication in the last few decades. It sits at the centre of many homes and can be turned on for several hours every day. One of the problems with the TV is that it requires very little effort on the part of the viewer to follow a program. It does not stimulate the mind to think and to reflect. The effects of this have not been good. That is also true for Christians. For instance, there is an ever increasing demand to make the preaching short, entertaining and visual. Some might say that traditional preaching is an outdated form of communication. This matter is addressed by Dr. N.H. Gootjes in the editorial and by Rev. W.L. Bredenhof in an article that examines the use of a TV character in the preaching.

This issue contains a summary of another report to be presented at Synod Neerlandia. This is the report of the Committee for Contact with the Churches in the Americas. It is a long report and therefore the summary is divided over two issues. This issue presents the report on l'Église Réformée du Québec and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. These are important reports. You may remember that after the previous Synod, there was much discussion also in this magazine about our relationship with the OPC. Hopefully the readers will benefit from learning what is being recommended to Synod in connection with these churches.

Rev. P.G. Feenstra continues his series of articles on financial giving to the Lord. He also is starting a series of articles on God's providence. We appreciate his contributions on these important subjects.

We have our regular column, *Ray of Sunshine*, as well as a letter to the editor, and a report on mission work in the Ukraine.

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Worshipping the Lord through our financial gifts (Part 4)

Motivated by the grace of God

By P.G. Feenstra

Every week you are given the opportunity to give your gifts and offerings for the assistance of those who are in need. This custom is based on 1 Corinthians 16:2, “On the first day of the week, let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.” But do you know why you put money in the collection bag? Would you be able to explain it to your own children or to someone coming to church for the first time? What is the motivation for our giving?

As Reformed Christians we stress that we live each day by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same must be said of our giving. Right after Pentecost we are told great grace was upon the company of those who believed so that there was no needy person among them (Acts 4:33-35).

Paul’s instruction

The apostle Paul expands on the motivation for our giving in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. Note how often he connects grace to the practice of giving for the needs of others. God’s grace manifests itself through the generosity of the saints. For example in 2 Corinthians 8:1 he writes, “Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.” These churches work out what the Lord by his grace is working in them. In verse four the same Greek word for grace is used. Translated literally it says, “begging us with much urgency to show the grace (of God) and the communion of service to the saints.” Verses 6 and 7 continue to relate giving to grace, “So we urged Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also complete this grace in you as well. But as you abound in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence,

and in your love for us – see that you abound in this grace also. The act of giving has its roots in the undeserved favour shown to us in Christ. Thus we read in verse 9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.”

*God’s grace manifests
itself through the generosity
of the saints.*

Every one of us needs to hear, understand, and put into practice what the Holy Spirit teaches us. It should be imprinted on our hearts as adults. It must be impressed upon our young people, by the instruction and example of their parents, so that they do not use their money frivolously on things that serve themselves and their own pleasures. Therefore in this article we will look at the concrete principles for financial giving that are laid down for us in 2 Corinthians 8:1-9.

When Paul arrived in Corinth on his second missionary journey, he preached the gospel, and a number of citizens came to faith in Jesus Christ. The Corinthians were filled with enthusiasm for the Lord which spilled over in a love and devotion for fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord. When they heard from Paul about a need among the brothers and sisters in the church at Jerusalem, they purposed to make a contribution to help the needy church there. With the assistance of Paul and Titus they developed a plan for giving. Paul advised them to make their contributions for the saints on the first day of the week – in the public worship

service. The Corinthians’ zeal and enthusiasm moved other churches to contribute as well.

The proper manner of giving

After Paul left Corinth, however, the relationship between Paul and the church at Corinth went through a severe crisis. The church as a whole bought into the criticism of a few members. They challenged Paul’s authority as an apostle and his ability to preach. Since he was involved in organizing the collection of money for the needy saints in Jerusalem, they stopped contributing. The negativism and harsh criticism of a few became such a destructive force – it poisoned the congregation in its attitude toward an office-bearer of Christ. It also contaminated their outlook on giving. That can happen. When members of a church are not happy they will use their “giving” – or the lack of it – as a form of protest. But that’s a totally wrong approach.

Paul wrote a painful letter in which he expressed his disappointment and sorrow. Happily, the result was a changed attitude. This in turn brought Paul to write what he does in this letter. He reaffirms his office and at the same time he reminds them of their obligation to “come through” on what they promised to give to the saints in Jerusalem. Paul devotes two chapters of his letter to this issue, urging the Corinthians to complete the project they have begun.

The Macedonian example

Paul encourages the Corinthians to follow the example of the Macedonian churches. These churches, which included the church at Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica, were exceptionally generous. Their response was truly amazing and it was not just in reply to



CHURCH NEWS

this specific need. The church at Philippi was known for its generosity. From the very beginning members of this church drew the connection between the grace of God they had received and the kindness and mercy they were to show others. Coming to faith in the Lord Jesus, Lydia opened her home to Paul and his fellow-workers during their stay in Philippi (Acts 16:15). The saints in Philippi showed their deep affection for Paul's ministry even after he departed from them. More than once they sent a gift to provide for the apostle's needs (Phil 4:15,16). And now when another church is in need the Philippians, along with the other Macedonian churches, give generously and liberally.

It is all the more striking that the churches of Macedonia gave freely, willingly and eagerly for the support of the needy in Jerusalem when we consider that they were experiencing financial difficulties of their own. Joining the church of Christ did not put them in good stead with fellow citizens but created hardship and persecution. Paul speaks about a "severe test of affliction" and about their "extreme poverty" – which could have served as excuses for not giving. After all, if times are tough and you cannot afford much how can you be expected to contribute to the needs of others in your own church, let alone elsewhere? Today, we might consider it totally unnecessary that such people should give.

Rather than coming with any excuses the Macedonian churches let their poverty overflow in a wealth of liberality. They didn't just give as much as they could. They gave more than they could and they did it because of their overflowing joy in God. They rejoiced in the Lord who had taken them out of darkness and had given them life. The Lord promised to take care of all their needs, even in the hour of their affliction. They have received an unfading hope and a glorious inheritance. Thus they approached the whole subject of giving with gratitude filling their hearts.

Charged, as it were, with the electricity of joy that came from hearing the gospel of God's grace they had it in their hearts to help others. That's what overflowing joy in God does to children of the Lord. You give yourself completely to those things which honour the Lord and advance His work. Listen to what we read in verse 5, "and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." Roused by the grace of the Lord the Macedonian churches gave

themselves to the Lord; they consecrated their lives to Him, to his service and to the well-being of His church. Having been graciously saved through the death of Jesus Christ – they could not do anything but give themselves to Him and his service. If God so loved the world that He gave his Son to deliver them out of their trouble, how could they refuse to show the love of Christ to others in dire need?

They gave more than they could and they did it because of their overflowing joy in God.

The churches in Macedonia have given themselves to the Lord. As a consequence they seek to help and work along with the office-bearers of Christ in whatever possible way the Lord allows them. They offer themselves to Paul and Titus and the other men in leadership, personally supporting, encouraging and praying for them. Finally, by extension, they gave their money so the people in the church in Jerusalem could benefit as well.

To share the little they have with those who have even less.

Exemplary giving

The manner in which these churches give is exemplary. For not only do they give generously in spite of their circumstances, they give of their own free will. Notice they do not give a tithe but they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. These people face extreme poverty and yet they beg Paul that they be allowed the privilege of giving generously. The Macedonians want to share the little they have with those who have even less. In this way too they may express their spiritual unity with brothers and sisters they have never seen and most likely would never meet.

Paul points the Corinthians to the Macedonians as a standard for their manner of giving. To facilitate this, Paul will send Titus, who has already helped the Corinthians set up a system for giving to the needy in Jerusalem. When Titus returns, the Corinthians are urged to finish up what they have promised to do in making a contribution to the saints. They have excelled in many

Called by the church at Kerwood, Ontario:

Rev. J.G. Slaa

of Elora, Ontario.

• • •

Change of website address for Grace Canadian Reformed Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba:

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• • •

Correct mailing address for the Canadian Reformed Church – Carman West:

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• • •

Bethel Canadian Reformed Church at Toronto has changed the time of its afternoon service to 4:00 p.m. effective March 4, 2001.

ways – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in earnestness and zeal, and in love. Let them now excel in this gracious work of showing charity.

What set the Macedonian churches apart was that they first consecrated their lives to the Lord. Once you do that it will redefine your thinking, your use of time, and the way you use your money. When God's people consecrate themselves to the Lord, they do not live for themselves or for their own pleasure but for the purposes of God. That's when the church of Christ can function in a powerful and effective way. The Macedonian churches demonstrated the sincerity of their love for the Lord by their generosity in helping brothers and sisters in need. The church at Corinth is encouraged to follow suit. Moved by the undeserved favour of the Lord you and I are encouraged to be generous, liberal, joyful, and enthusiastic about our giving for the needs of fellow brothers and sisters. The willing spirit of the Macedonian churches was evidence of God's grace. His grace prompts his people to view giving as a *privilege* – and so they give freely, cheerfully. In the last article of this series we will see how our giving is rooted in the grace our Lord Jesus Christ has shown us in becoming poor for our sake.



Report Synod Neerlandia of the Committee for Contact with the Churches in the Americas (CCCA)

By R. Aasman

The Committee

Synod Fergus formed a new committee, the Committee for Contact with the Churches in the Americas, with this explanation: "this Committee will take over the mandate of the CRCA in as far as it relates to the Americas by establishing and maintaining relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship with churches located in North and South America." Under this umbrella committee there are three subcommittees: Committee for Contact with l'Église Réformée du Québec, Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and Committee for Contact with the Reformed Church in the United States. Here follows a summary of the report of the CCCA to Synod Neerlandia.

A. Committee for Contact with l'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ)

Members of the committee for contact with the ERQ are Rev. P.G. Feenstra, Rev. A.J. Pol, Mr. J. Boot and Mr. W. Oostdyk. General Synod Fergus 1998 gave the following mandate to the committee:

1. To clarify and discuss the points raised in Consideration B in view of the concerns raised by the churches;
2. To keep the churches informed about the ERQ so that they may be able to respond to financial and other needs of the ERQ;
3. To respond if specific requests for assistance and advice are made in matters of confession, church polity, and liturgy;
4. To respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend Synods of the ERQ;
5. To serve Synod 2001 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.

In "Considerations B" the following was stated:

From the observations and concerns expressed by the churches it is evident that the following areas need further clarification and should remain topics of discussion:

1. The nature and status of the deacons and deaconesses;
2. The matter of liturgical forms, order of worship, supervision of the pulpit and Lord's Day observance;
3. The fencing of the Lord's Table and possible different practices among the various congregations;
4. The need of confessional binding for members and office bearers;
5. The differences in the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship of the ERQ and the CanRCs;
6. The question whether federative unity is possible or not.

The nature and status of the deacons and deaconesses.

The committee comes to Synod Neerlandia with the following evaluation on the points mentioned above:

1. The nature and status of the deacons and deaconesses.

The ERQ does not have female deacons, although in its Church Order (the "Order and Discipline of the ERQ," abbreviated as "ODE") it is apparent that women could potentially function as such. However, the ODE of the ERQ stipulates that the deacons do not make up part of the ruling council of the church. To make this principle clear, an inconsistency in the ODE on this point has been eliminated in a recent revision of its ODE made by its Synod. Now that they have made this revision

it is even more clear than before that the ERQ does not wish to have women participate in a position of oversight over the church. The ERQ acknowledges what is written by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." The fact that the CRC has opened the offices to women has even been a reason for the ERQ to terminate the relationship with the CRC.

2. The matter of liturgical forms.

The delegates from the ERQ have stressed that there is principal homogeneity in terms of how things are done in their churches, even though there is diversity in practice. We can explain the importance of using common, adopted liturgical forms in all the churches and encourage their use. However, as long as there is indeed principal homogeneity, the existence of diverse practices should not form an impediment to ecclesiastical fellowship.

3. Order of worship.

The ERQ has no formal synodical decision regarding an order of worship. In comparing this with our situation, we must remember that our *Book of Praise* page 581 gives no prescription by synod either. It simply describes what is commonly used."

During the worship services there is more freedom for input in congregational prayers by members of the ERQ. This is related to the fact that the congregations are still very small. Although it was acknowledged that congregational input could lead to a disorderly situation, this does not seem to be a problem at this point in time.

4. Supervision of the pulpit.

The June 1999 Synod of the ERQ gave the mandate to a Committee of

Ministry to examine the question of “who may preach in our pulpits and under what conditions.” We can only await what is reported and what a future synod of the ERQ may decide on this matter.

5. Lord’s Day observance.

Although there is only one worship service, this is not because of a lack of interest in devoting the day to worship and fellowship. It is clear that the ERQ strives to maintain the Lord’s Day as a special day. As indicated above, in many of the churches there is not only the worship service but there are also hours of further interaction, including much conversation and instruction as well as a meal together.

It is clear that the ERQ strives to maintain the Lord’s Day as a special day.

6. Fencing the Lord’s Table and Confessional membership; and the need for confessional binding for members and office bearers.

It must be remembered that no official position has been adopted regarding these matters. The discussions with the delegates indicate that further interaction is needed. This may help the ERQ to consider the various aspects relating to these matters and to come to an official position.

7. The differences in the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship of the ERQ and the CanRCs.

This matter has been sufficiently dealt with. We should consider honouring the emphasis they put on mission as expressed in their “Rules 1997” by broadening the mandate “to respond if specific requests for assistance and advice are made in matters of confession, church polity, and liturgy” to include mission.

8. The question whether federative unity is possible or not.

The delegates from the ERQ have highlighted the differences of history, language, and culture, as well as the different context in which the ERQ works. They do not see forming one federation with English-speaking churches as a necessity or even as desirable. They wish to remain autonomous. They do, however, value interaction and cooperation with the CanRCs and hope that

it would even be possible for the CanRCs to sponsor mission work in conjunction with the ERQ in Quebec. Your committee is of the opinion that we should accept the desire of the ERQ to function independently and not pursue the matter of federative unity further.

Recommendations

At the heart of the recommendations of the committee to Synod Neerlandia is the advice to continue discussions regarding the matter of confessional membership and fencing of the Lord’s table; to discontinue discussion on the matter of federative unity and differences in the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship; to encourage the churches to continue supporting the ERQ financially when needed.

B. Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

The members of the committee for contact with the OPC are Rev. J. DeGelder, Dr. N.H. Gootjes, Mr. G.J. Nordeman and Mr. G. VanWoudenberg. The committee was instructed to do the following by Synod Fergus:

1. to pass on to the CEIR of the OPC the amended “Proposed Agreement” on Fencing of the Lord’s Table and Confessional Membership for adoption by the General Assembly of the OPC (Acts p 157).
2. to initiate Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC according to the adopted rules, should the General Assembly of the OPC adopt this Agreement (Acts p 158).
3. to make recommendations to the next General Synod, if the General Assembly of the OPC would not adopt the above mentioned Agreement, in which case the General Synod would have to reconsider the present relationship of ecclesiastical contact with the OPC.

The committee was also confronted with the response of Synod Fergus to an appeal of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic of the OPC regarding Rev. B. Hofford’s statement declaring the ministers and elders of the OPC false shepherds, and the impact of this decision on our relationship with the OPC.

Proposed Agreement

The statement which was to be passed on by the committee to the Committee for Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations of the OPC (CEIR) reads as follows:

The churches of the Reformation confess that the Lord’s Supper should not be profaned (1 Cor 11:27, see Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 30, Q&A 82; Westminster Confession, chapter 29,8). This implies that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the church exercises discipline and manifests itself as a true church. This means that a general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient, and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required. This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church, as well as to the guests. The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord’s Supper.

This statement was a change from the original agreement between our committee and CEIR as it was presented to Synod Fergus. Synod had added the words: “This means that a general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient, and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required.”

The committee’s response to this change made by Synod Fergus to the agreement is as follows:

However, the CCOPC is of the opinion that this addition brings in a specific element from earlier discussions between the OPC and the CanRC, which does not suit the character of this general statement. The original statement was based on the Reformed Confessions, mentioned specifically in the text of the Agreement. The amendment inserted by Synod Fergus goes beyond the wording found in the Reformed Confessions. In its reflection of the confession, the original agreement on the Lord’s Supper would provide sufficient opportunity to address specific situations in continued discussions between our churches and the OPC.

They wish to remain autonomous.

As a result, on this matter the committee makes the following recommendations to Synod Neerlandia:

1. To undo the changes made by General Synod Fergus 1998 in the Proposed Agreement with the OPC on the issues of the Fencing of the Lord’s Table and Confessional

Membership, and to return to the original document, presented by the CCOPC to Synod Fergus, as sufficiently reflecting the Reformed Confessions.

2. To use this agreement as a basis for establishing a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC.

The amendment inserted by Synod Fergus goes beyond the wording found in the Reformed Confessions.

The “False Shepherds” issue

Synod Fergus dealt with the complaint of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic of the OPC concerning Rev. B.R. Hofford, who had declared the ministers and elders of this Presbytery “false shepherds.” Literally he had said: “Because of your mishandling of the Lord’s Supper complaint and your denial of the complaint, I am forced, with great reluctance, to follow Paul’s instructions in Romans 16:17, and Titus 3:10. Further, I am compelled to solemnly declare you ministers and elders of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church false shepherds.” Synod had judged that there was still an open door for discussions and reconciliation between Presbytery and Rev. Hofford. As a result of this decision, the General Assembly of the OPC put its relationship with the CanRC on hold. This also hampered discussions on the “Proposed Agreement” mentioned above.

Our committee looked into this matter and wrote the following to CEIR of the OPC:

In Romans 16:17 Paul speaks of teachers who cause the church people to deviate from the doctrine Paul had taught. They are persons who do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ but their own appetite. In Titus 3:10 he mentions someone who is factious, who is also perverted and sinful. It is unclear how the alleged mishandling and denial of a complaint about the Lord’s Supper can lead to such allegations against all ministers and elders of a Presbytery.

Moreover, the expression “false shepherds” can only be read against the background of what Scripture says about them in Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel 34, and John 10. False shepherds are people who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture (Jer 23), they eat the fat, clothe them-

selves with the wool, slaughter the fatlings, but do not feed the sheep (Ezek 34), they are hirelings and do not care for the sheep (John 10).

In the light of this it is our opinion as committee that this accusation should not have been made and that Rev. Hofford should have withdrawn his charge, independent of the concerns he wanted to present. We can assure you that this disqualification of office bearers in the OPC has never been taken over by a Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches. And we do regret that Synod Fergus 1998 did not clearly reject such labeling, and did not state that this accusation should have been withdrawn. We hope to bring this matter up in our report to the upcoming General Synod in 2001, the Lord willing.

The response of CEIR to this letter was very favourable:

It would be helpful and much appreciated if our next General Synod would declare unambiguously to reject the disqualification of office bearers of the OPC as false shepherds, and to distance itself from such labeling (see also the letter from the CCOPC to the CEIR, dated Feb 11, 2000). This would open the way to jointly move ahead and deal with the situation caused by Synod Fergus’ changes in the Proposed Agreement on the “Fencing of the Lord’s Table” and “Confessional Membership.”

Recommendation

The recommendation of the committee on this matter is the clear advice to remove this stumbling block in our relationship with the OPC:

To reject unambiguously a general disqualification of office bearers in the OPC as “false shepherds,” as in conflict with the fact that our churches have acknowledged the OPC as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Reaction of the CCCA to the CCOPC report

Since the Committee for Contact with the OPC is a subcommittee of the Committee for Contact with the Churches in the Americas, the latter reacted to the recommendations of the CCOPC to Synod Neerlandia. This is appended to the report of the CCOPC by the CCCA:

The majority of the brothers in CCCA do not endorse the recommendation of the CCOPC (or the reasoning that leads up to it) that

Synod 2001 decide “to undo the changes made by General Synod Fergus 1998 in the Proposed Agreement with the OPC on the issues of the Fencing of the Lord’s Table and Confessional Membership, and to return to the original document, presented by the CCOPC to Synod Fergus, as sufficiently reflecting the Reformed Confessions.”

In its treatment of the “amended proposed agreement” the CCOPC Report has basically become an appeal against the decisions of Synod Lincoln 1992, Abbotsford 1995 and Fergus 1998. We believe the CCOPC should have simply stated that they were not able to fulfill their mandate because the decision of the 66th General Assembly re: the “false shepherd” issue.

The CCCA argues its case, saying among other things the following:

This is not to say that an identical practice is required with respect to the supervision of the Lord’s table to come to ecclesiastical fellowship. It should be agreed, however, that a general verbal warning alone is insufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required in the presence of the supervising elders from the guests wishing to attend the Lord’s Supper. Synod Fergus did not introduce a new element by revising the “Proposed Agreement” when it added the sentence: “This means that a general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient, and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required.” Synod Fergus preserved the continuity with the decision of Synod Lincoln and Synod Abbotsford.

To reject ambiguously a general disqualification of office bearers in the OPC as “false shepherds.”

Recommendation of the CCCA

This leads the CCCA to come to the following recommendations:

1. To reject unambiguously a general disqualification of office bearers in the OPC as “false shepherds.”
2. To instruct the CCOPC to as yet fulfill Article 130 recommendations F, G, H, I, J of Synod Fergus 1998. 

The Gospel According to Bart Simpson?

By W.L. Bredenhof

Bart Simpson

“Preaching about Bart Simpson fills pews of Calgary church” – so ran the red hot headline in the *Vancouver Sun*.¹ “What is this?” I wondered as I read the newspaper over breakfast at a restaurant. I first thought to myself that this must be another stunt from the United Church or maybe some liberal-minded Anglicans. They quite often catch the religious media spotlight with these sorts of things. So I was rather surprised to read the opening sentences of the article, “Is Bart Simpson the key to salvation for a new generation of unchurched ‘seekers?’ John Van Sloten of Calgary’s New Hope Christian Reformed Church thinks so” That’s considerably closer to home than the United Church!

For those who don’t know, Bart Simpson is a character on the popular television show *the Simpsons*, a show which has been running for several years. It is renowned for its wit, but also for its relentless sacrilege. However, Pastor Van Sloten seems to think that the show makes good preaching material – he even shows extensive clips of it during New Hope worship services. As it appears in the newspaper article, *the Simpsons* is not simply supplementing Scripture (which would be bad enough), but it is actually *replacing* Scripture.

Van Sloten gives the example of a recent episode on the show. Poor Bart Simpson is in danger of failing Grade 4 unless he passes a critical exam. He prays for a blizzard on the day of the exam and behold, it happens. Bart passes the exam and gives thanks to “God.” So how does Van Sloten preach on this passage of pop culture? “There are at least two interesting lessons about prayer in this

episode The first is, we’re all scoundrels. And just like Bart Simpson, we always try to resolve things ourselves before we’ll turn to God. And second, we’re praying to a God who cares and who has a lot more compassion than any teacher.”

*He prays for a blizzard
on the day of the exam and
behold, it happens.*

What is being said here about prayer in relation to Bart Simpson can certainly be criticized, but it is not my intention to do so here. Rather I want to ask the question of how it came to this. How did it come about that a church which calls itself Reformed

ended up with ministers preaching with television shows as their “text?”

Traditional sermon under attack

The first thing we can note is that this did not start happening yesterday. Already in the years 1968 and 1969 the traditional sermon (based on the Word of God) was coming under attack in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). This happened specifically in the University Hills CRC in Michigan. The pastor, J. Harold Ellens, was quoted as saying, “University Hills Church recognizes that the sermonic form for proclamation is not the best necessarily and certainly not the only mode for the church’s proclamation.”² Pastor Ellens went on to state in a letter, “Whatever medium succeeds is God’s medium of announcing His grace. That is proclamation.”³ In a similar way, Donald H.



Bart Simpson

Postema, a CRC chaplain at the University of Michigan asked, "Is the monological sermon the only way for powerful proclamation? Could not choral reading, poetry, dance, film, dialogue, whatever form of communication that is available, be used to proclaim the message of God?" Remember: this is over thirty years ago.

CRC Synods

These developments in the late 1960s also have a background. Perhaps this background can best be illustrated by taking a brief look at a lengthy report that was adopted by CRC Synod 1968. This report, from the Liturgical Committee appointed by Synod 1964, set the tone for worship in much of the CRC for the next three decades. There is an extensive survey in this report of worship in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Following this survey we find the guiding principle which appears to determine much of CRC worship from this moment onward: "Worship for the people of God has always been a dialogue."⁴ Dialogue is further said to be "the inherent structure of worship. The question of liturgy is the question of how the dialogue is appropriately and effectively articulated."⁵ This principle of dialogue (or in more familiar terms, "covenant") overshadows everything to the extent that the principle of worship found in the Three Forms of Unity is not given any consideration whatsoever.

At later CRC synods we see attempts to take things further, especially in respect to preaching. In 1973 for instance, the Liturgical Committee proposed that there could be services in which "an occasional CRWRC [Christian Reformed World Relief Committee] film could be shown."⁶ To their credit, Synod 1973 rejected such proposals and reminded the churches of Article 54a of the CRC Church Order: "In the worship services the minister of the Word shall officially explain and apply Holy Scripture."⁷ After this one does not read much of note about the Liturgical Committee in the Acts of CRC Synods – that is, until 1985.

CRC Synod 1982 gave the Liturgical Committee the mandate of determining how to implement liturgical dance into the worship service. The report submitted to Synod 1985 comes back to the matter of dialogue and an appeal to 1968: "liturgy and worship shape the meeting between God and

the congregation as a dialogue. The various elements in the worship service constitute this dialogue between God and his people."⁸ With a cursory and rather facile treatment of Scripture, this conclusion is reached: ". . . in the worship service, dance may function in two ways. It may stress the Word of God to man, or it may stress man's response to God."⁹ As a result of significant controversy surrounding this report, CRC Synod 1985 decided to leave the issue to local consistories. The end result was that room was left for further changes.

"Worship for the people of God has always been a dialogue.

The changes in CRC worship over the last three decades were truly astounding. What opened the door for many of these changes was a one-sided emphasis on dialogue as the guiding liturgical principle. There was absolutely no consideration for the teaching of the Reformed confessions about worship, such as we find in Belgic Confession Article 32 and Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 35. This goes hand in hand with the weakening of the authority of the confessions in the CRC in general.

That's what it comes down to: whatever works for people.

Whatever works

So where do Pastor John Van Sloten and the Hope Christian Reformed Church fit into the picture? He could very well justify his using *the Simpsons* as text for his sermons by appealing to the dialogue principle established in 1968. God speaks to the congregation through *the Simpsons* – why limit God to the written Word? Cannot God also speak through a television show? Does not all truth belong to God? I am not saying that Van Sloten would actually argue in this way, but using CRC Synodical decisions he certainly *could* and likely would. At any rate, there will certainly be no church discipline for John Van Sloten.

There is also the added element of using whatever works to get people into the church. This corresponds to the trend in North American evangelicalism to make everything in worship "user-friendly," whether it be the sermon or the songs that are sung (or listened to in many cases). The reporter says about Van Sloten's approach, "It's a formula that – non-traditional as it is – is working for some people at least."

That's what it comes down to: whatever works for people. A man-centered approach to worship that could be justified by appealing to a dialogue principle. God speaks in whatever way we determine He will speak and we will respond in whatever way we please. This is the ultimate result when what the Confessions teach about worship is ignored. There is truth in the notion that worship should be dialogically or covenantally structured, but that must always be tempered by the Reformed principle of worship: we are not "to worship Him in any other manner than He has commanded in his Word." (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 96). For one thing, that means that preaching is *always* proclamation based on the Scriptures. Once the confessions are undermined or ignored in this area, the door is open to further aberrations. The worship principle found in our confessions safeguards the purity of worship. This is something that an emphasis on the covenantal structure of worship cannot accomplish on its own. When we add or take away as we please, even in the name of dialogue or covenant, we are on the road to Rome.

¹"Preaching about Bart Simpson fills pews of Calgary church," Joe Woodard, *Vancouver Sun* (January 24, 2001), page A8.

²*A Handbook of CRC Issues: 1968-1978*, the Association of Christian Reformed Laymen, p.468. This volume presents various old newsletters and press clippings from over this decade. Since it is not possible to trace the origin and publication information of every source, only the page numbers of the volume will be cited.

³*Ibid.*, p.470.

⁴*Acts 1968*, Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, p.137.

⁵*Ibid.*, p.141.

⁶*Acts 1973*, Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, p.511.

⁷*Ibid.*, p.55.

⁸*Agenda for Synod 1985*, Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, p.247.

⁹*Ibid.*



The Gospel of God's Providence (Part 1)

By P.G. Feenstra

We confess that the Lord God almighty, who created the world according to his design, also upholds, sustains and governs what He has made. By his sovereign power, the Lord orders events in such a way that they accomplish his desires. The living God moves and directs the actions of men and the forces in creation so that they fulfill a specific goal. This divine governing, known as God's providence, is taught throughout the Bible. For example:

The Lord is involved in the smallest details of life.

- Psalm 135:6, 7: "Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places. He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of his treasures."
- Daniel 4:35: "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain his hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'"

What our confessions say

Our confessions speak beautiful words about this doctrine. The Belgic Confession says, "We believe that this good God, after He had created all things, did not abandon them or give them up to fortune or chance, but that according to his holy will He so rules and governs them that in this world nothing happens without his direction." The words of Lord's Day 10 have a familiar ring, "God's providence is his almighty and ever present power,

whereby, as with his hand, He still upholds heaven and earth and all creatures, and so governs them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, indeed, all things, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand."

Definition

Providence has to do with the Lord seeing beforehand, anticipating needs, and then allocating resources to meet those needs. The Lord is involved in the smallest details of life. Nothing is outside his control, plan or purpose. Scripture declares that not a single sparrow "falls to the ground apart from your Father's will" and that "even the hairs of your head are all numbered" (Matt 10:29, 30).

We may plan and fill in our agendas for each day's work, we may have our daily routines running like clockwork, yet in all we undertake we must show that we live under the rule and government of the Lord. He rules the world according to his divine counsel and providence. Charles Spurgeon once said in a sermon on the providence of God, "I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes" (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Sermon 3114*). That's a remarkable attestation to the Lord's providence.

No fatalism

Confessing God's providence does not result in fatalism. Believing in fate is to say, "Whatever is, must be." To believe in God's providence is to confess, "Whatever our faithful God has ordained will be accomplished." The Lord has never ordained anything without an objective or purpose. Everything in this world is working to-

wards one great end: to fulfill what God in his wisdom has designed by his eternal plan. The Lord orders all circumstances in such a manner that his children learn to humbly submit their will to the direction and government of the Almighty King of the ages. Even the most difficult situations are intended to achieve God's glory and his people's good. If you are facing trials today, look to the Lord your God for comfort. The exact reason why you suffer may never be revealed to you in the life. Yet you can rest assured you are in good hands.

Every event and circumstance is guided by the hand of our Father. No detail of our lives is outside of his purpose or control. This thought causes some difficulty for us, doesn't it? If God is in control, why does He allow so many awful things to happen; things that even shake our faith to the roots? Besides, can anything I do really matter if it is all governed by the Lord and determined by Him? When our circumstances are most troubling it may be difficult to see that God is in everything diligently working for the good

No detail of our lives is outside of his purpose or control.

of those who fear Him. Yet this is the truth of Scripture which we need to embrace with all our heart. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

We believe the Lord works in such a manner that even sin will not deter Him from doing what He determined before the foundation of the world. All sin and

wickedness of men will be used “to his own holy ends”(Westminster Confession, Chapter V Article 4). Believing God’s foresight helps us overcome our own shortsightedness and the resentment and bitterness that frequently accompanies it.

Providence and human responsibility

God’s providence does not exclude human responsibility. The Lord is 100 percent sovereign in all his actions but He holds us 100 percent responsible for all our actions as well. Scripture gives us several examples of how this works. One outstanding illustration is the story of God’s hand in the life of Joseph. His brothers had treated him roughly and sold him to merchants travelling to Egypt. He may have wondered at the time, “What is going on? What have I done wrong to deserve such treatment?” Yet years later, as he looked back on what had happened, he said to his penitent brothers, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Gen 50:19). What Joseph’s brothers did hurt deeply. But Joseph has the eyes to see that God was at work, carrying out his plan in the actions of man.

The connection between the plan of God and the actions of man can also be seen in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ encountered opposition, pain, disappointment, and rejection – yet those very things were the means the LORD used to fulfill his perfect plan. Peter brings the two together when he says in his sermon at Pentecost, “Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death . . .” (Acts 2:23). Two things are placed side by side: the reality of men’s evil deeds and the plan of God carried out through those very deeds.

God’s providence does not exclude human responsibility.

God’s government and care of our lives never excludes the use of means. A mother, who trusts food and drink for her children will come from God’s fatherly and providential hand, does not sit idle and wait for God to supply and prepare the food. She uses the means the Lord provides. If we are sick we make use of doctors and hospitals. Yet we are to be cautious that we do not put

too much stock in the means and forget the One who gave it in the first place. Deuteronomy 8:17 warns against an independent attitude which ignores God’s providence and says, “My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.”

Providence and Redemption

The Lord determined in his eternal counsel and wisdom to send into the world his only Son to be our Saviour. The Old Testament is a record of God’s providence. The Lord knew beforehand that in the fullness of time Jesus Christ would be born in Bethlehem. He called Abraham to live in covenant communion with Him, He gave his people the law at Mount Sinai, He promised David that He would establish his house forever because of his redemptive plan in Jesus Christ.

Christ became obedient in all things. Therefore the Lord God also demands of us that we act in a similar way: we are to follow the Lord in every aspect of our life. No matter what happens or how we are treated we must make it visible that we believe all things do not happen by chance but are governed by God’s Almighty hand.

Next time we hope to continue examining the significance of this doctrine. **C**

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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

Dear editor,

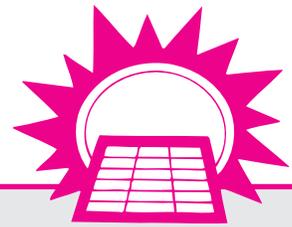
I am reacting to Rev. Cl. Stam’s editorial (January 19, 2001) regarding the CCCA report to Synod. I do find it somewhat unfortunate that Rev. Stam is interacting with a report which the majority of your readers have not read. It would have been better if a press release from the CCCA had been published prior to or alongside the criticism.

It would appear from Rev. Stam’s writing that the eight members of the CCCA who belonged to sub-com-

mittees other than the OPC sub-committee were unhappy with the OPC sub-committee’s work and therefore felt the need to append some critical remarks. In Article 131 of the Acts of Synod 1998, responsibility for contact with the OPC is clearly mandated to the CCCA. If there was serious disagreement amongst the committee members as to the content of the report, the proper avenue would have been to submit majority and minority reports. Since this was not done, I can only conclude that

the OPC sub-committee was content to have its report pass on to Synod with the appended critical remarks. As such there is nothing to complain about and a charge of hierarchy is inappropriate. In any case, I fail to see how the behaviour of any Synodical committee could be construed as hierarchical since the authority to make any binding decisions rests with Synod alone and certainly not with any committee.

*With brotherly greetings,
Richard Buist*



By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

"I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life" (Gen 9:15).

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Spring is around the corner! The end of winter, and the beginning of a new season. A beginning where everything seems to come to life again. This is also a season which can bring lots of showers, and rainy days in order for everything to grow. When it rains for a number of days we may think "will it ever stop raining?" Yes, our thoughts may even go back to the days of Noah. Noah was a man who put his trust in the Lord and did everything just as God commanded him. This event from the Bible is very familiar to us all, and with this article we would like to focus on the promises of God.

After the flood, God spoke to Noah and his family and said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life" (Gen 9:12-15). It is here that God made a promise with Noah and his family. It speaks of a covenant which is a promise. Countless times throughout the Bible we see God showing his love and patience toward mankind. He knows how evil our hearts are. When we continue in sin or fall away from God, we deserve to be destroyed by his judgment. But God has promised here never to again destroy everything on the earth until judgment day when Christ returns to destroy evil forever. Now every change of season is a reminder of his promises. What a joy and comfort to know that God's covenant is established with us!

As we read through the Bible we often can see where God makes a covenant with his people. In Genesis 15 and 17 a covenant is made with Abraham with the promise that his descendants would become a great nation if they obeyed God. At Mount Sinai God promised and made a covenant that Israel would be God's special people, a holy nation. But they too had to keep their part of the covenant, namely obedience to God. In Numbers 25 we can read about Aaron's descendants and the promise that they would be priests forever. David too was promised that salvation would come through his family line, through the birth of the Messiah. So the list could go on. But lastly we should look in the New Testament in Hebrews 8:6-13 where we can read of the new covenant that God made with us his people. We no longer under the old covenant. Christ's death is sufficient to set us free from the sins that were made under the first covenant, as well as for the sins of God's covenant children today. Through the shedding of his blood, we receive complete forgiveness of sins. Therefore, salvation can only be received through believing and having faith in Jesus Christ. He the Lord is our Saviour!

Question and Answer 67 of the catechism also shows us that the Holy Spirit teaches us in his Word, and assures us by the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Supper that our *entire* salvation rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.

Let us therefore be assured that God's promises never fail or break. He holds firm to them forever. Just remember this when you see the next rainbow in the sky, a sign of God's promise which He made with Noah and his family. As with every promise there is also an obligation: that we too must continue our walk and talk in faith to Him alone. Only then will we find comfort and happiness in the covenant that Christ has made with us. Hold fast to these promises, and continue your stand in fulfilling your obligations, giving Him alone all the praise and glory!

*He is the Lord, our God unfailing,
His judgments everywhere prevailing.
He will remember and uphold
His covenant made in days of old.
The steadfast words He did command
A thousand generations stand.*

*Firm stands His Word to Abraham spoken,
His oath to Isaac, never broken.
His everlasting covenant
With Israel God will not recant.
He said, "To you this land I give,
That as My heirs you there may live."*

Psalm 105:3, 4

Birthdays in April:

- 2nd** **Derek Kok** who will turn 31.
464 Domville Street, Box 4
Arthur, ON NOG 1A0
- 19th** **Marinus Foekens** will be 49.
4-290 Forest Street
Chatham, ON N7L 2A9
- 23rd** **Arlene DeWit** who will be 40.
C/O P. DeWit
Barnston Island, Surrey, BC V3T 4W2
- 29th** **Bryce Berends** will be 26.
89 Fieldgate Drive, Orangeville ON L9W 4S2

Congratulations to you all with your birthdays in April. We wish you God's blessing and a year filled with much health and happiness. Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
Mailing Correspondence:
548 Kemp Road East
RR 2 Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
1-905-563-0380

A January Update on Reformed Mission Work in the Ukraine

By Jan Werkman

Missionary for the Dutch Mission – Hattem, the Netherlands

The readers of these newsletters have different interests. Some of you are praying with us, others are working with us. Recently, I decided to write an English newsletter four times a year.

Personal notes

We had a very sad time in December. The father of my wife, Anja, died suddenly on the 30th of November 2000. He was seventy-seven years old. My parents-in-law were with us in October 2000. At that time father's health was fine, although we all knew that his strength was declining. Still, his heart attack and his immediate death came completely unexpected. Because of it, we were in the Netherlands for the first half of December. With our family and surrounded by father's colleagues and friends, we buried him.

Since then, we have restarted our work in Kiev. Except for some colds, our health is fine. The children have been home for three weeks during the Christmas holidays. At present they are back at school. Our little baby is also completely and officially registered. Her name is in our passports and visas. Finally, she is not only our biological but also our legal daughter. This is very important because in December we had some problems getting her on the air plane!

Tavriyske

In the period October-December 2000, the visitors to the church thought about their decision to request membership. At first they agreed with this decision. You can read about that in my last newsletter. But thereafter they gave it some deep thought and said: "It's too early for us to have membership in our congregation. We do not feel spiritually ready; give us some more time." So we restarted the discussions.

We also have to be aware of the season. This means that visitors to the church have free time during the winter. We can have continuous courses of catechism instruction between the end of October till the beginning of March, but in the summer every one has to work in the fields. A new possibility, however, has arisen. We studied Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism and heard a sermon on Jesus' teaching concerning the Sabbath. As a result, the majority of the congregation understands that Sunday is the day of rest and they want to give this day to the Lord. That is a great blessing! Now we can plan our work better. We can give Bible lessons on Sunday, after the worship service.

We can have continuous courses in catechism instruction between the end of October till the beginning of March.

We have also decided that I will come to Tavriyske two times in January and February. I will read sermons on God's providence (Lord's Day 10), on sin (Lord's Day 2-4) and on the significance of the Ten Commandments as a rule of gratitude (Lord's Day 32-33). The catechism lessons will be used to teach the themes of covenant, baptism and holy supper. This should – if the Lord will bless it – complete the series of sermons and lessons that was started by Sandor last year. In March we hope to have our first public professions of faith. This means that official membership will begin. Of course, we should be aware of the important fact that in-

formal membership already started, because these people love the Lord and feel loved by Him!

They also asked me about eldership. They said to me: "We understand that we need it. But nobody knows exactly what an elder should do!" I promised to explain to the congregation how to elect elders (and deacons). When they have officially elected some elders, we will not lay hands on them immediately. First, I will give courses to these elected people and train them for service. I will also train the congregations because they should know what it means to accept the service of these men. After that has been done we will lay hands upon these elders. Everyone feels comfortable with this solution.

It is very interesting to see that once they were confronted with the idea of membership, they began to think about it more deeply. It even resulted in them taking a little step back: "What did we agree to do? And why are we doing it?" The result is that while both the matters of membership and eldership will be postponed, the understanding of these things in their hearts has deepened.

In the period from September – December 2000, Anton became acquainted with his new place. He visited many people. Now he knows them more or less and they know him. As a result, they have to think about their common future. How long will Anton stay in Tavriyske? That is an important question. Anton should find his answer in prayer. The Practical Committee is also praying about it and speaking with Anton about it this month. The Dutch Mission is ready to make a three year contract with Anton. His special gift is his ability to do the basic work: reading sermons and giving lessons to people who recently came to the church. And

that is necessary in the neighbour-village Ridna Ukrainka, where the congregation at Tavriyske started to organize worship services. The work in Tavriyske is going on at more levels. The basic work should be continued, but also the work on membership and eldership should be continued. At the moment it seems wise for us to cooperate. Anton will do the work with the beginners. I will work on the matters of membership and eldership.

Of course we should be aware of the important fact that informal membership already started, because these people love the Lord and feel loved by Him!

The Baptist church of Tchurupinsk, a small city at a distance of about fifty kilometres from Tavriyske, rents a room in Tavriyske to organize worship services. Now this small village (approximately 1500 inhabitants) has two churches. Last year there were also Jehovah's Witnesses, but they have stopped their services in the village. Our small congregation in Kiyv is used to the fact that we have more than 700 churches in the city of Kiyv; whereas, in this village the appearance of a second church is something new!

Kiyv

The congregation welcomed two new members in December. That is a great gift. One of them is now the book-keeper of the church. We are glad to have someone who is able and willing to do that task. The holy supper is celebrated seven times a year in Kiyv. Because we don't have a Ukrainian pastor or missionary in Kiyv, I lead the service in which we celebrate the holy supper. In connection with this, I visit the members the week before.

Every time we celebrate the sacrament it is an important moment for all of us. I praise the Lord because He has brought us all to the confession of our sins. And this confession is alive! We believe in forgiveness of sins in the Name of Jesus Christ. Every time we have the holy supper, I have the wonderful possibility of seeing something of the great work that the Lord is doing in the personal lives of our dear members.

The congregation of Kiyv also has some good workers. They do many things for this small church. But they also have to support the synod and the seminary, and that takes a lot of energy. We all understand that this work has to be done. And – praise the Lord – it is blessed! But the congregation is not growing very fast. So much work needs to be done!

For the time being we have stopped thinking about a second congregation. Recently we had a very interesting contact. Another mission in Kiyv was struggling with a lack of pastors. They had two congregations, but only one pastor. They would like us to take over their smallest congregation. We had several meetings but later on we had to put a stop to these plans. They found a Ukrainian pastor who was able to do the work. So the Kievan congregation has to give some more thought as to how to start a second place in these enormous city. Probably they will be too busy in the near future to deal with such plans right away!

Another mission in Kiyv was struggling with a lack of pastors. They had two congregations, but only one pastor.

Dnipropetrovsk

The congregation of Dnipropetrovsk has some news. They had one member and five visitors. Officially they are organized as a branch of the Kievan congregations. The five visitors all accepted the membership-of-guests. This means that they hope to become full members. Two of them hoped to be received as full members a week ago, but because the other visitors also decided to ask for membership, they postponed it. Now they will all together publicly confess their faith and become full members on the 15th of April. That is Ukrainian Easter.

In the period October-December, Olexander Mitrofanof spoke with a Byelorussian missionary from the city of Minsk. It looked like he might eventually help with the church planting work in Dnipropetrovsk; however, it did not work out. So Olexander continues to look for a helper. As soon as he finds a missionary, he will rent a room for public worship services. For the time being they hold services in a home.

Simferopol

We heard the good news that Frikkie and Sakina Mulder came back from South Africa to Simferopol. They will continue their work for one year, and maybe longer. They hope to plant a Reformed church in Simferopol, and their sending board officially decided that Frikkie will cooperate with us. Frikkie will also work on a Bible translation in the Krimtatare language. He works in an environment which is strongly Muslim. His wife, Sakina, has been educated as a Muslim. She was later called by the Lord Jesus Christ and came to Him. So it is clear that they will direct their energies towards the Muslims! This gives a new twist to the Reformed mission work in the Ukraine!

Literature

The work of producing literature continues. It takes a lot of time, but it is worth doing. We now have ten brochures ready on the following themes:

- Lord's Day 20: The Holy Spirit.
 - Lord's Day 21: The church, preaching and membership
 - Lord's Day 23-24: Justification by faith
 - Lord's Day 25: The covenant of grace
 - Lord's Day 26-27: Baptism
 - Lord's Day 31: Church discipline
 - Lord's Day 38: Fourth commandment: Sabbath and Sunday
 - Lord's Day 41: Seventh commandment: marriage and divorce
 - Lord's Day 42: Eighth commandment: The Christian attitude towards money and goods
 - Lord's Day 45: Prayer
- In the coming months we hope to make the following brochures:
- Lord's Day 2-4: Sin and fall
 - Lord's Day 10: God's providence
 - Lord's Day 28-30: Holy Supper
 - Lord's Day 32-33: The role of the Ten Commandments as a rule of gratitude.

At this moment the courses of Greek language are being given.

All these materials are bundled in small packages. Each package contains some different sermons on the theme to be read in the worship services. Next, there are ten similar brochures to be used during various lessons. In addition, a package contains a manual for the teacher. It is all in Ukrainian. We have also started with Russian translations

because we have more contacts now, and some of them know Russian better than Ukrainian. At the moment, however, we do not have enough manpower for this translation work. My priority is to continue the work of developing new brochures.

The seminary

At this moment courses in the Greek language are being given. We are preparing for the next board meeting. I looked at all of the items that will be discussed at the board meeting and, thankfully, I can tell you that the daily work is going very well. There is only one problem to tell you about and that is the financial problem. At this moment the American and Dutch Missions are responsible for financing the seminary, each taking care of half the costs. Formally, however, the Ukrainian churches are responsible. Next year they will try to take care of one percent of the costs. The following year two percent, and so on. For now the Missions must find the money. I heard from the Dutch treasurer that he received 41,000 guilders! That is great, but not enough! He is trying to find more sponsors. The next board meeting will discuss the financial needs of the seminary. As president of the board, I foresee that the financial needs will not be met. I promised our treasurer, Klaas de Jong, that I would send this newsletter also to him. If you have any fund raising suggestions for him, please take up contact with him via the Ukrainian Committee in Hattem, the Netherlands (address below).

Library in Hamilton

In the summer of 1999 I was in the USA and Canada looking for literature. Mrs. Borovsky and Rev. Fesenko offered

the Ukrainian churches a great number of theological books. It was incredible! These books belonged to the Ukrainian Reformed-Presbyterian tradition and are in use now at the seminary. During that trip I found – under the guidance of Victor Borovsky – a lot of Ukrainian theological books and archives. They are stored in several places: the National Archives of Ottawa, the archives of the Presbyterian Churches in Canada, the University of Princeton, etc. And, of course, the members of the former Ukrainian churches have photographs at home and in their personal archives.

I asked the senate of the Theological College in Hamilton to offer us a place in their library.

With the families Borovsky and Fesenko, I decided only to take the most necessary material to the Ukraine: necessary for the students at the seminary. The other materials should stay in North America. Once the political situation in the Ukraine has stabilized and the Ukrainian Reformed and Presbyterian churches experience more growth, we can transport these historic materials to the Ukraine.

This means that we needed a good place to store those materials. Therefore, I asked the senate of the Theological College in Hamilton to offer us a place in their library. They have built a new library building, and have agreed to give some shelf space to the Ukrainian churches. All materials will be kept in good condition. They will be property of the Ukrainian Reformed churches. Access to these materials is

possible with their permission and (for the time being) with my permission. The final steps still need to be taken. A contract between our mission and the Theological College in Hamilton is being drafted. This means that in the near future you can send your materials concerning the Ukrainian Reformed or Presbyterian tradition to Hamilton. Please do that.

I will give more information in my future newsletters. I would like to ask you to hand this newsletter to your friends, especially if they are members of the churches of the Ukrainian diaspora in North America. These members are a blessed age now. Several have already died and their children may be in possession of valuable archives. Try to contact them. If possible – give me their mailing address.

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If you have friends interested in the Ukrainian Reformed Churches, please tell them to write a letter or a post card to Rev. Jan Werkman and we will be glad to send them the next issue. 



OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

Are you enjoying your days at school? Does your teacher give you lots of fun things to do, or always make you work very hard? Most teachers are able to put lots of fun in the work that you have to do, don't you think. I think they are very clever, being able to do that. After all, how fun could something such as mathematics be, unless you can have some fun with it? Especially in the younger classes, where you are just learning, the teacher will give you little activities to do with your maths. That way, you also learn better too, don't you?

Do you try your best at your activities and subjects at school? I hope so. After all, your teacher puts so much effort into making it fun for you, then you really have to try hard. Not only for the teacher, but it would also make your mom and dad very proud to get good marks. Please try very hard, because the Lord also loves it when you try your very hardest to do the best you can.

Lots of love, Aunt Betty

Puzzles

Who Am I?

By Busy Beaver *Jolene Breukelman*

1. The Minister reads from me every Sunday. You read me during the week. What am I?
2. I died for your sins on the cross. Who am I?
3. I denied Jesus three times. Who am I?
4. I lived in the garden of Eden. I was the first one on earth. Who am I?
5. I talked to Jesus at night. Who am I?
6. I was on the island of Patmos. I wrote Revelation. Who am I?
7. I am the Alpha and the Omega. Who am I?

Surprises!

1. They were surprised to hear themselves speaking in strange tongues.
2. They were surprised in a crowded house by an act of Jesus.
3. They were surprised at night on the Sea of Galilee.
4. They were surprised by a 12-year old lad.
5. These women were surprised early one morning.
6. He was surprised by an angle with a drawn sword.
7. She was surprised by a serpent.
8. They received a great surprise while watching sheep.
9. He was surprised to see Philip perform such great signs.
10. These three men received a great surprise on a mountain top.

March Birthdays

21 Lydia Jongsma 28 Carolyn Vanleeuwen
23 David Smeding

Books of the Old Testament

by Busy Beaver *Adrienne Teitsma*

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

FIND: Genesis Exodus Numbers Joshua
Judges Ruth Samuel Kings Ezra
Esther Job Jonah Micah



FROM THE MAILBOX

Thank you, *Nadine Barendregt*, for your very long and colourful letter. It was very nice to know that you read my comment about not getting many letters. How old is your brother Leighton now? And it must be fun having a "sled-dog" at home. After all, that is what a lot

of people did in the olden days, before cars were invented. People would use horses, but sometime also used dogs because they were smaller. Even now, you can watch dog-sledding in competitions in Canada, in some places. That would be lots of fun, I think. Bye for now, Nadine. I'll wait for your next letter.

I apologize to *Jolene Breukelman* for never writing back to you. Your letter was dated 18 October and I have only just found it. I guess it got lost somewhere. It sounded like you had a lot of fun at your teacher's birthday party last year, at the Niagara Escarpment. And I hope by now your dad's tooth feels much better. Thanks also for your puzzles. You will write again, Jolene, won't you, even though I took so long to reply to your last one?

Thank you also to *Jennifer Harink* for your letter. It has taken me a long time to reply to your letter, too, hasn't it. Sorry. It sounds like you are never bored at home. Well, at least you always have something to do, so you can't complain to your mom that you are bored. Thank you for your puzzle. I will include it in a "Our Little Magazine" at some stage. Till next time.