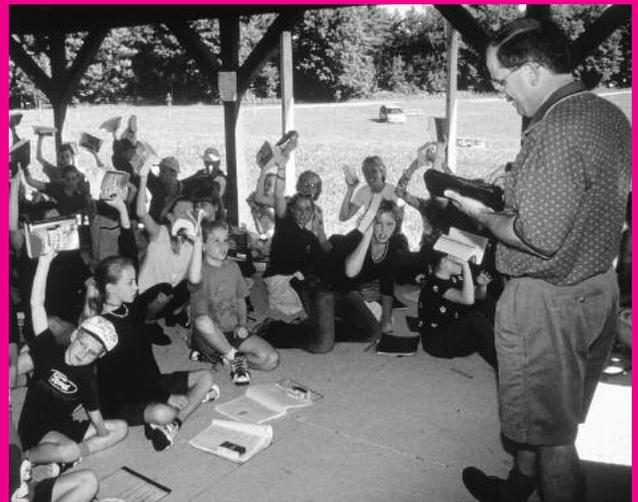


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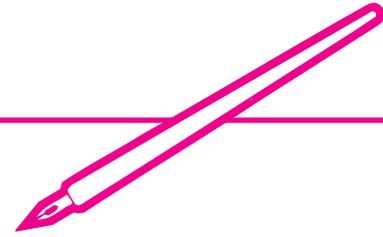


*Campfire!
Summer Bible Camp*

Numbers

10:1-10

By J. Visscher



Synod myths

By the time most of our readers receive this issue of *Clarion*, the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches will just about be starting in Neerlandia, Alberta. Meanwhile, members across the country will be discussing, wondering, and praying for good results.

Yet something else will no doubt also be part of the mix and that has to do with certain myths or distorted ideas as to what synods are all about. Here are some that I have gathered together from various sources over the years.

Myth 1 – Synod is the highest body in the church

We are so used to thinking in terms of higher and lower when it comes to companies, courts and governments that we apply it to the church as well. In the minds of many the local church and its body of elders are at the bottom of the rung and from there the structure rises – classis, regional synod, and general synod. What is going on in Neerlandia is the pinnacle of the pyramid.

Hardly! For when it comes to the church of Jesus Christ we need to revise our thinking. In the church and its assemblies we should never speak in terms of lower and higher. Rather we should speak in terms of local, regional and national. As such a general synod is not the highest body, it is the broadest body. And as for the most basic body, that remains the consistory or the local council of elders.

A general synod is not the highest body, it is the broadest body.

Myth 2 – Synod is a representative body

Closely connected to this, there is another myth which is that synod is made up of representatives from each, or at least most, of the local churches. While this may be true of some Presbyterian and Reformed churches, this is not true of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Our synod is not a representative body but a delegated body.

In practical terms, this means that not every local church is represented. In some cases it may even mean that a whole classis is not represented. Instead what happens is that a local church delegates two of its office bearers to a classis, the classis delegates to a regional synod and a regional synod to a general synod.

Is this the best system? That, of course, is something that could be debated. If we had a representative system whereby every church sent two office bearers to a general synod, the positive element would be that no church could

ever complain about being left out. From a negative perspective, however, it stands to reason that the costs would be much higher and the decision-making body would be much larger and more cumbersome.

Myth 3 – Synod decisions are always hard to read

As this statement reads, it is an over-exaggeration. Most of the decisions made by a general synod and recorded in the *Acts* are not too difficult to grasp. The standard format of “observations, considerations and recommendations” are quite straightforward. Under “observations” every attempt is made to bring together all of the pertinent facts as accurately as possible. Under “considerations” the facts are to be carefully weighed and evaluated. Under “recommendations” the consequences and decisions are to be clearly stated. In a sense, then, this order is logical and easy to grasp.

Are we too busy on too many fronts?

Nevertheless, an argument could be made that while this format works fine for some matters, it complicates and obscures other matters. What do I mean? Well, turn to the *Acts* of 1998 and read Article 130. There are so many, many observations and considerations there that it is extremely doubtful that this decision can really be grasped by most church members. The same criticism can be leveled at many others articles in various *Acts* over the years. They are so long and so involved as to be virtually incomprehensible.

Can something be done about this? Perhaps synods could take a fresh look at this problem and adopt a different format. What about a change in the way that the *Acts* are written whereby first the decision or recommendation is stated and thereafter the grounds for this particular decision are given? Something to think about perhaps?

Myth 4 – Synods are preoccupied with relations with other churches

Although it has to be said that it is an overstatement, it is not too difficult to see where it comes from. Look at any number of recent *Acts* and you will see that numerous decisions have to do with other churches. The last General Synod dealt with ten different federations at home and abroad. Half of the deputies appointed to the various committees are dealing with these federations.

Is this as it should be? Are we too busy on too many

churches looked forward to hosting the event and I am sure that the brothers and sisters in Neerlandia will do a first class job. Nevertheless, the sounds that I hear from near and far indicate that there is a degree of apprehension in the air when a general synod is about to convene. "What will happen this time?" is a statement that can be heard.

Can it be that our synods are somewhat lacking in credibility? Have they given rise to frustration? To be sure, a

What's inside?

Dr. J. Visscher, in his editorial, addresses some of the myths or distorted ideas as to what synods are all about. For instance, one myth that he dispels is the idea that a general synod is the highest body within our churches. Read his editorial for a good explanation of this along with other important aspects of a general synod. This is timely, considering that you are probably reading this just as Synod Neerlandia is about to start.

We are delighted to have an article by Dr. J. Faber. He is a man who has written frequently in *Clarion* in the past. He writes about the relation between questions at baptism and profession of the Christian faith. Perhaps this will be the start of more such insightful articles by our retired professor of dogmatics!

Rev. P.G. Feenstra continues his series of articles on the providence of God. He makes clear what comfort we have in the providence of God in all circumstances of life. Rev. T. Van Raalte begins a two part series of articles on the subject of attestations and admission to the Lord's Supper. Dr. J. De Jong, in his press review, brings us up-to-date on the progress of union talks between the Canadian Reformed Churches and United Reformed Churches. It is heartening to learn that also within the URC there is a voice which calls for a demonstrable unity among true churches of Jesus Christ.

In his Observations column, Rev. G. Ph. van Popta informs us that officially in the Roman Catholic Church formal cooperation in an abortion is an offense punishable by excommunication. When we consider that a number of leading politicians in our country are Roman Catholic, this leads or should lead to definite consequences.

In this issue we also have a meditation by Rev. J.E. Ludwig, a report on Surrey's fiftieth anniversary as a church, and a report on Campfire! Summer Bible Camp.

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case can be made for the fact that when it comes to certain areas the ball has been dropped.

What am I referring to? I am thinking of our dealings with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which has become a long, sorry and embarrassing saga with no end in sight unless some decisive action is taken. If we are really not prepared to embrace this church as a “church in ecclesiastical fellowship,” let us say so and sever the contact. If we really desire to have them as a sister church, let us resolve the Hofford matter, adopt the original Proposed Agreement worked out by both committees and make the matter of f

Synods do matter and they do impact on church life.

has to be admitted that the matter came before synod 1982 rejected the report with its negative conclusion and commissioned a new one. Synod 1983 received a new report with a positive recommendation and then rejected it. The vital question, “is voting an act of government – yes or no?” remains unanswered.

Still, in spite of these and other shortcomings there are many areas wherein synods have done good work and promoted the well being of the churches. One thinks of the Theological College, Bible translations, the *Book of Praise* and the countless appeals that have been handled over the years.

Myth 6 – Synods have little bearing on the “common” membership

There is another myth out there which says that it does not really matter what is decided at a synod. Most of the members in the pew find it all rather boring and irrelevant.

Again, I would say that such a perception needs to be challenged. From my perch it seems that most members are interested. They realize that what a synod decides impacts on them and their local church life either directly or indirectly, sooner or later. Decisions relating to the Theological College in Hamilton may not have an immediate impact, but in the long term their effects will be felt. Decisions regarding the *Book of Praise* and Bible translations have more direct fallout. So, whether members realize it or not, synods do matter and they do impact on local church life and on the life of the federation as a whole.

All of this gives us ample reason to pray for the brothers who are meeting in Neerlandia. Pray that they receive the health and strength, the wisdom and insight, the courage and conviction that they need. Pray that the Lord our God will give them a rich measure of his Spirit and that the decisions which they make will be biblically grounded, confessionally sound, and fundamentally just. In this manner the churches will be well served and the honour of our ever gracious God will truly be enhanced. C



Baptism and creed: a liturgical suggestion

By J. Faber

A new book

One of the pleasures in the life of a retired professor at Hamilton is that he is a theological student who can visit an excellent and steadily growing library in a beautiful and functional building. Recently I borrowed there a new book that mainly deals with the relation between the questions at baptism and the creed.¹

Baptism and the profession of the Christian faith almost always went together.

In connection with discussions in our Canadian Reformed Churches, I was specially interested in the second study in this book. It is an essay, written by Wolfram Kinzig, a professor at Bonn in Germany. He describes an aspect of the history of the so-called interrogatory creed at baptism in the Western or Latin speaking church till the time of Luther.

We know that baptism and the profession of the Christian faith almost always went together, certainly already from the second century in the form of baptismal questions. One immediately recognizes the trinitarian pattern of the Apostles' Creed as it grew out of the baptismal formula. This so-called declaratory creed but also earlier interrogatory creeds were connected with the baptism into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

A declaratory creed is a statement of faith and an interrogatory creed takes the form of questions.

In the beginning of the second century the interrogation on faith at baptism in Rome went somewhat like this:

Do you believe in God the Father almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible? I believe.

And in Jesus Christ, his Son? I believe. Who was born from the Holy Spirit, out of the virgin Mary? I believe.

And in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of the body? I believe.²

In an appendix of almost seventy pages Kinzig publishes more than one hundred and thirty documents related to or containing these "Tauffragen" or forms of interrogatory creeds.

It is most interesting to see how Luther maintained this catholic tradition. In 1523 he gave a German translation of the interrogatory creed in the form for baptism in his *Das Taufbuchlein verdeutscht*.

But the Reformed Churches were no less eager to show that they too were catholic congregations of Christ that only wanted to be Reformed and to live according to the Word of God.

Let me give one example. In the order for baptism of the *Genevan Psalter* of 1542 the first vow that the parents make is to instruct the child in Christian doctrine:

Because this is a matter of receiving this child into the company of the Christian Church, do you promise that when he comes to the age of discretion he will be instructed in the teaching which is received by the people of God as it is summa-

rized in the confession of faith, which we all hold?

Hughes Oliphant Old, whose translation I followed, adds: "The vow is expanded by reciting the Apostles' Creed and a short explanation or paraphrase of it."³

Faithful readers of *Clarion* know that I have publicly regretted that Canadian Reformed synods have obscured our catholic character by adding the word "Christian" to the English version of the Apostles' Creed. I also publicly objected against the change of the reference to "the articles of the Christian faith" (second question at infant baptism) or "the articles of the Christian religion" (fourth question at adult baptism) into "the confessions." From Lord's Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism it is clear that "the articles of our Christian faith" meant the Apostles' Creed and that this expression in the forms indicates the catholic character of Christian baptism. This has now become obscure by the abstract term "the confessions."

No general synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches has prescribed an order of worship.

Via the interrogatory creed at baptism and the declaratory Roman Creed there has always been a close connection between the Apostles' Creed and baptism. This connection goes back at least to the beginning of the second century.

Synod Cloverdale 1983 of the Canadian Reformed Churches, however,

took away the reference to the Apostles' Creed and made believers speak in a vague way of "the confessions." It broke a tradition of more than seventeen centuries! It did so without consulting the churches or at least their committee on translation and revision of confessional and liturgical forms.⁴

How can we repair or diminish this damage?

The simplest way would be that one of the churches proposes a return to the old expressions of the articles of our Christian faith. We could choose the expression "the Apostles' Creed," as the committee had suggested and as our Dutch sister churches in the meantime have done. There are good reasons to revisit the issue. When there is a will, there will be an ecclesiastical way.

Another possibility would be to wait until an organic merger with the United Reformed Churches or the Free Reformed Churches (or rather with both!) necessitates us to get rid of Canadian Reformed idiosyncrasies.

Since ecclesiastical mills work slowly, I have thought of a simple and direct solution in the local congregations. As far as I know, no general synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches has prescribed an order of worship. Our *Book of Praise* contains two orders of worship that are "in common use." The choice of an order of worship and the manner in which the points of the service are arranged is a matter of local consistories and congregations. We honour the freedom of the churches.

Both orders that are in common use for the afternoon service mention profession of faith and, eventually, administration of baptism and celebration of the Lord's supper. In congregations where this celebration takes place only in the afternoon, I always combine the profession of faith and the Lord's Supper. Our form even mentions it: "Let us now profess our catholic, undoubted Christian faith (The Apostles' Creed may be recited by the minister, said in unison, or sung by the congregation)."⁵

My simple proposal is: Why should we not use the same combination with baptism?

It is nothing new. We owe our Heidelberg Catechism and many of our liturgical forms to the Church Order of the Palatinate (1563). In the original of

our Form of Baptism we have the same as in our present Form of the Lord's Supper. After the prayer before baptism and before the address to the parents the minister spoke: "Profess now with me the articles of our ancient catholic undoubted Christian faith upon which this child is being baptized." Then followed the recitation of the Apostles' Creed.⁶

Since the old custom of saying the Apostles' Creed in unison has not been recovered in our churches, a minister will now act wisely simply by using the formulation from the Form of the Lord's Supper and thus say: "Let us now confess our catholic, undoubted Christian faith" and then he recites the Apostles' Creed or has the congregation rise and sing Hymn 1A. A church could propose to the following general synod to re-insert the formulation before the address to the parents. But local congregations do not have to wait for a decision by general synod. They rearrange the order A, if that is the order in use.

The centuries old bond between the Apostles' Creed and the administration of Holy Baptism.

This is a very simple solution and a joyful one when we sing Hymn 1A. It combines two points of the orders of worship that are in common use, namely the points 4 and 6 in Order A or 8 and 9 in Order B. Such a combination in the afternoon service is completely within the jurisdiction of a consistory or even a minister, although it would be wise for a minister to consult the consistory and to inform the congregation about the combination of these two points: profession of faith and administration of baptism.

Someone will ask: And what shall we do, when baptism is administered in the morning service? I would say: let the consistory decide to do the same as we do when we celebrate the Lord's Supper in the morning. We profess our faith with the Apostles' Creed at baptism in the morning service and use the Nicene Creed in the afternoon. There is nothing against professing our Christian faith twice on a Lord's Day, especially not when we provide some variety.



Called by the church at Albany, Western Australia:

Rev. R.E. Pot

of Orangeville, Ontario.

• • •

Called by the church at Grand Rapids, Michigan:

Rev. R.J. Eikelboom

of Calgary, Alberta.

The advantage of my simple liturgical proposal is clear: With immediate effect the centuries old bond between the Apostles' Creed and the administration of Holy Baptism is somewhat restored.

¹Wolfram Kinzig, Christoph Marksches, Markus Vinzent, *Tauffragen und Bekenntnis* (Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1999).

²My translation of the Latin text in section 34 on p. 128.

³Hughes Oliphant Old, *The shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1992), 202.

⁴See G. Van Rongen, *Our Reformed Church Service Book* (Neerlandia-Pella: Inheritance Publications 1995), 189f. He shows the illegitimacy of the respective decisions of our general synods of 1980 ("Creeds") and 1983 ("confessions") and correctly writes: "Extending the reference to all the (creeds and) confessions is un-historical and unnecessary."

⁵See for the text and the use of the creed in the Form for Lord's Supper Friedrich Lurz, *Die Feier des Abendmahls nach der Kurpfälzischen Kirchenordnung von 1563* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1998), 321-330.

⁶My translation of the German text in *Bekennnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche*, Wilhelm Niesel ed., (München: Kaiser Verlag 1938), 146.



By J.E. Ludwig

Taking parental responsibility seriously

When your son asks you . . . then you shall say to your son . . . (Deut 6:20, 21)

Answering our children's questions is not the easiest part of our parental calling, but we do well to take their questions seriously. If they ask about the Lord's Supper, "Does the bread taste good, dad?" then parents should seize the moment to fulfill their baptismal promise. They *must* do so! It is their God-given office, and to brush their questions aside with brusque answers is to break our promise before God and his congregation.

You might be thinking, "I don't sit down with my child and talk to them about the Lord per se. I make sure that they can see from my walk of life how they ought to serve the Lord. I teach them by example." That is important, for if you do not live a godly life, you cannot expect it of your children. Instruct them, however, not only by deed, but also by Word. Speak to them!

Some might be inclined to say, "Look, aren't you placing too much emphasis on human efforts? The Spirit has to do it. If my child's heart is not receptive, no amount of talking will change a thing. If the Holy Spirit doesn't engrave God's law on their heart, what can I do?"

That may sound pious, but in reality it is a sign of godlessness. Yes, the Spirit has to do it, but He wants to do it *through us*. He chooses parents to teach his children the way of truth. We have to do this "to the utmost of our ability," as we promised at the baptismal font.

It happens that parents instruct their children faithfully, and still they want nothing to do with the Lord. That is a heavy trial for parents to bear. But do not let it happen that your child chooses the wrong path because you neglected to speak to him or her in love about the doctrine of salvation. What a terrible

thing it would be for parents to admit, "Yes, it was partly my fault. I did not give my child the time of day when he asked, "What are these testimonies which the Lord our God has commanded us?"

In this passage, Moses spoke to Israel as they were about to enter the promised land. There they would have to take seriously their parental duty to pass from generation to generation the glorious facts of God's salvation. To be silent is to curse your children. If, as Jesus says, "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks," then their thankfulness for God's gracious deliverance had to be heard in teaching.

If the church is to continue until the Lord returns, we must pass the knowledge of salvation on to our children.

The Psalmist says:

We will tell the coming generation
How God has dealt with Israel his nation!

The author refers directly to Deuteronomy 6, for he continues:

And to our fathers He the Lord commanded
That all His words from kin to kin be handed
That children yet unborn once might arise
And teach their seed these law so good and wise (*Book of Praise*, Psalm 78).

This task is crucial because the future of the church hinges upon it. If the church is to continue until the Lord returns, we must pass the knowledge of salvation

on to our children. God has placed the future of the church in your hands. Your forefathers in the old covenant disobeyed God's command to sing his praises, therefore, their children neglected the Levites, persecuted the prophets and sang the hymns of Baal. God declared, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

This negligence recurs in the history of the church again and again. Think of the church before the great reformation of the sixteenth century. People were ignorant. Fathers and mothers did not speak to their children about the riches of God's covenant. They gave their duties over to priests and bishops. They were more concerned with position and power, then with God's Word.

Speak to your children. Answer their questions. Fathers and mothers have support for that: Reformed schools, catechism instruction, young people's societies, and the communion of saints. These are gifts from God to help you raise your children to know God's salvation. But no institution can replace your work as parents. At the baptismal font you promised that *you* would instruct your child in this doctrine. Indeed, you promised to "have him instructed therein," but your duty remains primary and foundational. Do not neglect the first part of your promise or switch it with the second. Talk to your children about these things when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise. Do it for your children's salvation. Jesus shed his blood also for the toddlers and teenagers of the covenant. And on the basis of that perfect work our heavenly Father declares, "I will be your God and the God of your children." 

The Gospel of God's Providence (Part 3)

By P.G. Feenstra

Living in a fallen and sinful world, Christians are not exempt from experiencing trials and affliction. In fact, struggles and troubles are never far away. Throughout history many believers have cried out to God, expressing the same kind of sentiment articulated in Psalm 25:16-18, "Turn Yourself to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted. The troubles of my heart have enlarged; bring me out of my distresses! Look on my affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins."

Facing adversity

Life isn't smooth sailing. As someone once wrote, "God promises a safe landing but not a calm passage." Adversity and trials frequently break the pattern of tranquillity and threaten to take away joy and happiness. No child of God escapes trouble and affliction. The apostle Paul speaks about how he was afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, always being given up to death for Christ's sake (2 Cor 4:8-11). Even our Lord Jesus Christ was confronted with many struggles and adversity during his earthly ministry. There were times when his human spirit was greatly troubled.

Adversity can come upon us very quickly. Our whole life can be changed in a matter of seconds. An earthquake, tornado or fire can destroy our homes with lightning speed. It only has to take one trip to the doctor to find out we are dying or suffering of an incurable disease. One controversy in the church has the potential to tear families and friends apart. A car accident can handicap us for the rest of our life, or result in the trauma that follows when a loved one passes away. One phone call can shake up all our securities.

Trials and adversity have various forms (James 1:4). Your adversity may

be a struggle with health problems or financial difficulties. It may be a matter of coming to grips with being single, childless, or with the amount of children God has granted to you. You may struggle with accepting the Lord's will when loved ones stray or do not know the Lord. Adversity can come upon us in the form of disappointments, frustrations, misunderstandings, unfulfilled dreams, unmet expectations, hurtful slander, tremendous loss, loneliness, fear, criticism or conflict. We shouldn't think adversity and trials are totally meaningless and accomplish nothing but hardship. Every time we come through adversity we are established and strengthened in the faith.

"God promises a safe landing but not a calm passage."

Taking comfort in God's providence

Adversity and trials can be excruciatingly difficult and cause us much sorrow and pain. Yet knowledge of God's providence helps us through them. The Belgic Confession contains this beautiful statement in article 13:

This doctrine gives us unspeakable consolation, for we learn thereby that nothing can happen to us by chance, but only by the direction of our gracious heavenly Father. He watches over us with fatherly care, keeping all creatures so under his power that not one hair of our head – for they are all numbered – nor one sparrow can fall to the ground without the will of our Father (Matt 10:29, 30). In this we trust, because we know that He

holds in check the devil and all our enemies so that they cannot hurt us without his permission or will.

The Heidelberg Catechism speaks the same language of faith in Lord's Day 10. Since God upholds his creation by his providence, and so governs the world that nothing happens by chance, we can be patient in adversity. "For all creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they cannot so much as move." All things happen by God's direction, by the providence of our wise and all-knowing God. Nothing befalls us by chance or "just happens." God's providence is at work in events throughout the day, including those circumstances that cause us stress, anxiety, grief and pain. The LORD will cause all things to work together for the good of those who love Him (Rom 8:28).

Patience in adversity

Confessing God's providence we are to be patient in adversity and bide the Lord's time. This is something we need to learn. For it's so ingrained in us to want immediate answers to all our questions.

David expresses beautifully how a trial tested his faith and produced patience. As he proclaims in Psalm 40:1-2, "I waited patiently for the LORD ; and He inclined to me and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps." The Lord tests our faith to produce greater patience for greater service.

Adversity, patience and Job

The Old Testament gives us two beautiful examples of patience in adversity and trust in God's providence. The first is from the book of Job. Job was

blameless and upright. He sought to serve the Lord in everything he did. He was severely tested when his children and his possessions were taken from him. His own wife turned against him and suggested he curse God and die. But Job remained steadfast. In his adversity and sorrow he praised the name of the Lord. He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD " (1:21). Later, as he sat out on the garbage heap, afflicted with sores and totally misunderstood by his friends he was extremely distraught and troubled. Nevertheless, looking beyond the trial he breaks forth and sings of his Redeemer, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job 19:25-27).

Not every word and phrase Job uttered manifested a complete or perfect trust in God's providence. At times Job verbalized his frustration and disputed the Lord's actions. At the end of the book, Job is made aware that he said too much. Through a series of questions the Lord challenges Job to note his providential care and government over all creatures. The Lord rules, upholds and governs his creation by the hand of his providence. God's children must accept this in faith – also when struck by adversity (see Job 38-40).

Adversity and joy

The second example is from the prophecy of Habakkuk. The prophet is troubled by the condition of God's people. He cries out to the Lord in his affliction and confesses, "Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labour of the olive may fail and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls . . ." – and who would not be inclined to panic and become desperate in such a situation – but the prophet continues, "Yet I will rejoice in the LORD , I will joy in the God of my salvation." In his affliction Habakkuk has learned, "The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills" (3:17-19).

The teaching of the New Testament is no different. James as a ser-

vant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ commands us to "count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience"(1:2). Knowing the Lord governs and upholds everything we are under obligation to count it all joy when we fall into various trials and times of adversity. Everyone can look back at a difficulty experienced and rejoice in the support that was received from family, friends and from members in the church. The Holy Spirit wants us to take it a step further. We are to consider and count it all joy – even when there is nothing positive about the entire experience; when you stand all alone, your body is filled with pain and there is no glimmer of earthly hope.

The Lord challenges Job to note his providential care.

Why are we to count it all joy? We can rejoice because in faith we see beyond the trials. We can be patient in adversity because life will not always be the way it is today! James accentuates this with several pointed phrases in the fifth chapter of his letter. At the beginning of verse seven he says, "Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord." And again in verse eight he writes, "You also be patient. Establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord is at hand." Through adversity and trial the Lord is fulfilling his purpose in our lives. How comforting it is to know that our Almighty, sovereign and omnipotent Lord is at the helm, directing every affliction to our eternal benefit.

Our Almighty, sovereign and omnipotent Lord is at the helm.

Better things to come

Adversity and burdens of life pledge better things to come. The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed (Rom 8:18). This joy causes believers to consider it a privilege to have their faith tested – not because the trial is so pleasant but because they know that through the test the Lord is drawing them closer

to Himself. They believe that the Lord indeed works all things for the good of those who fear Him.

Knowing that the Lord, in his providence, will turn to our benefit whatever adversity He sends us in this life of sorrow (Lord's Day 9) makes it possible for children of the Lord to sing psalms while being burned at the stake, tortured or imprisoned. With tears of grief rolling down their cheeks, they can sing praise to the Lord standing at a grave side. With the ache of loneliness, the pain of physical ailments, the strain of stress and anxiety they can still sing and make melody to the Lord in their hearts. The LORD will never allow his children to carry more than they can bear. Those who suffer will never find a trial easy and it may only be later that they become aware of how the Lord was carrying them through their adversity.

The apostle Paul was burdened by a thorn in the flesh – something that he had to bear for the rest of his life. But it did not embitter him! Instead, he exclaimed, "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong " (2 Cor 12:9,10).

Pray that you may never become so overwhelmed or overpowered by afflictions that you lose sight of God's providential care. In all the strife of mortal life steadfastly confess the doctrine of God's providence. Learn to accept adversity in faith, to trust in the Lord and to believe that He, who created you and adopted you, knows what is best for you. "Wait on the LORD ; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD !" (Psalm 27:14). 

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By J. De Jong



Synods in view

The issue concerning the progress of the union talks between our churches and the United Reformed Churches is generating discussion in URC and our own circles: on consistory tables, and at congregational meetings. Regardless of the view one takes, such discussion is a positive sign in the life of the churches, for it shows there is a living interest in the call and mandate of church unity. There should be thorough discussion on all sides!

One of the speakers in favour of union from the side of the URCNA is Rev. R. Stienstra (emeritus, Dunnville), who, in response to a couple of earlier articles on the question, expresses his viewpoint in a recent issue of *Christian Renewal*. As one might expect, Rev. Stienstra argues in favour of the proposal for union; after all, he has served on the ecumenical relations committee of the URCNA for a number of years. However, the remarkable feature of his submission is that he preferred to write not as a member of the Ecumenical Relations Committee, but simply as a retired URC minister who wants to give his personal view on the existing situation. Since he is frank about the Canadian Reformed Churches, readers of *Clarion* may be interested not only to hear him out, but to see how we fare in his assessment. Here follows Rev. Stienstra's view on the matter (with some headings added from my side):

Unity discussions

It's on the minds of many United Reformed and Canadian Reformed church people. The serious discussions at this year's synods related to the relationship between the two federations, that is. In recent articles Al Siebring weighed the situation and found it wanting, at least in terms of the present approach and pursuit by the churches' committees.

Being a retired minister in the URC and knowing something about the reality of the situation and process of the present ecumenical relations, I like to say a few words on the subject. I'm not speaking now as a committee member, though I do serve on the committee, but as a

pastor who has served for over thirty years in the CRC and the URC. I write because I'm deeply concerned and even troubled.

It's not that the Lord won't lead his church. He does, of course! It's that church history has such a powerful impact on later generations. We sometimes lose sight of the biblical directives for church living because of what happened many decades ago, and we tend to become pragmatists no longer moved by a principled approach.

Rev. Stienstra argues in favour of the proposal for union.

A look at history

Let me be explicit and clear. I'm talking about the unfolding of church history in the Netherlands during the 19th and 20th centuries, and how that still directs our church members' thinking in the 21st century in Canada and the United States. Our forefathers left the state church in Holland in the Secession of 1834, after which many of the seceders migrated to America to form the Christian Reformed Church. They left their strong impact on it. Another major secession took place in 1886, in which Abraham Kuyper was a church leader.

Under his guidance and that of Herman Bavinck of the Secession churches, a union of those two churches formed the present Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) in 1892. After half a century of immense blessing, yet growing differences in doctrinal views, another secession took place in 1944, called the Liberation. The Canadian Reformed Churches are the descendants of the Liberation, while most of our parents who now are members in the United Reformed Churches at the time of the "Liberation" stayed in the GKN. They immigrated and most joined the Christian Reformed Church and seceded in the 1990s. The emotions

surrounding the war time secession have carried over Canada, however, even to the present day.

I did not intend merely to give history lesson. Rather, I wish to say that past history has greatly impacted today's setting. It's clear that the Canadian Reformed Churches have experienced a measure of isolation for the last half century, while the URC members in Canada remember the emotions of 1944, and the perceived disdain we felt from the Canadian Reformed church members when we were in the CRC. It means that in the current setting of talking about recognizing each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus, emotions are apt to play a large role. When that happens, we start with ourselves and not with God's Word.

The current situation

Both federations will have recommendations before their synods this coming summer that spell out the step toward acceptance and moving toward eventual unity. Given our historical background it's not surprising there is considerable opposition and resistance on both sides. Brother Siebring wants us to see elopement in the proposal, even at an irresponsible neck-breaking speed, he asserts. After five consecutive years of official talking together the plan to recognize each other is hardly a head over heels pursuit of ecumenicity, in my view. This is not a breaking of speed limits, but a calm evaluation how best to work out the Scriptural mandate of church unity.

We could chat about the twinning of congregations and about joint Bible studies and young people's activities, of course. We could report more anecdotal visits of friends, but the reality is that the local consistories are already, if they are in tune with the Reformed confessions and with God's Word active in striving to bring about whatever "twinning" effect may be most effective and possible in

the local and regional situation. Synods can only encourage consistories to be faithful. They cannot force them.

Synods can only encourage consistories to be faithful.

The scriptural mandate

However, this brings me to the crux of the matter: Is there a Word from the LORD? The words of the Saviour's prayer are ingrained in our memory, "That they all may be one, as You Father are in Me and I in You; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that You sent Me," John 17:21. The Apostle has Christ's mind as he writes, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith one baptism; one God and Father of all Who is above all and through all and in you all," Ephesians 4:4-6.

The Reformed confessions echo this doctrine of church unity in Lord's Day 21, where we confess that the Son of God gathers, protects, and preserves "in the unity of the true faith" one holy catholic church. Articles 27-29 of the Belgic Confession express the same comprehensive teaching about the church. There is one Body of the Lord.

Changed views

Many of us who grew up in the CRC learned about the pluriformity of Christ's church on earth, and we talked a lot about the invisible church: the people that were saved, but were in an impure church. We may not have known that this view of the church was especially taught by Abraham Kuyper also to further his political objectives. He taught the presumed regeneration as the ground for infant baptism as well.

I no longer hold to Kuyper's teaching at these points. We hold to the uniformity of the church, not its pluriformity. That means that we understand the Word to teach that in the true churches the three marks of preaching, pure administration of the sacraments, and the faithful practice of discipline are found. So we confess in Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession. We baptize on the basis of God's command and covenant

promise, not because we presume our children are born again.

In general the Canadian Reformed and the United Reformed hold these things in common. Each federation is fully convinced that its federation is comprised of true churches. I do not doubt that it is true of both! Yet both do have their weaknesses and shortcomings. Some would say that the Canadian Reformed federation considers itself to be the only true church. That is a false claim. I use strong language, because they don't teach it, nor preach it. There is very little doubt that some Canadian Reformed church members may think so, but it is blatantly untrue to say that about their federation.

The time is here now, I believe, that the two churches recognize each other and work at unity together.

Al Siebring and others do not wish the federation to enter into *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* this summer because it's premature, they say. I say that it's high time to be obedient to our Lord in this matter. Recognition may be seen as engagement, but it is not a wedding. In my understanding full union will not and cannot take place until both synods in succeeding years agree on the details or plan of union. Certainly, the King of the Church decides on the timing of the final integration.

The committees propose the union to take place at the first synods after 2001. However, the complexities and the reality could conceivably make succeeding synods postpone the date. A union of this nature cannot be forced. It will take time. Also, we need to do more "courting!" We have to put some of our old church history prejudices behind us. So why postpone the next step? The time is here now, I believe, that the two churches recognize each other and work at unity together. Let us begin with God's mandate.

As one may expect, also serving on the Unity Committee of the Canadian Reformed churches, that I can heartily endorse the position taken by Rev. Stienstra. Here and there one may ques-

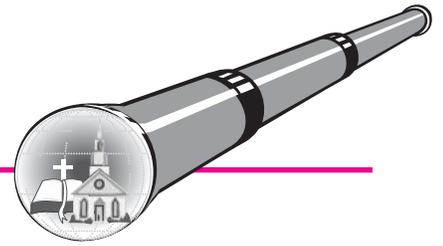
tion certain aspects of his assessment. For example, I don't think we can say that the churches formed through the union of 1892 are the "present GKN." Later history has proven that the spirit and intent of the union of 1892 was carried on in the GKN (Liberated), the lawful continuation of the Reformed church, and that the "present GKN" is a result of a deliberately *hostile* stand against the message of the gospel (Kuitert, Den Heyer!), a living picture of entrenched apostasy. But Rev. Stienstra's formulations here may also have been drafted from the point of view of the readers that he has in mind. In the main, however, we must commend our brother for emphasizing what for us all is a common call: honouring the *norm and will of God*, as taught in Scripture and reflected in the Reformed confessions. Here we have the voice of a common faith! It is at the same time the voice of *brotherly concord!* For here we are led beyond past (or lingering) prejudices or preconceived attitudes to what God is asking of us *together* in his Word.

Without speaking officially, I may perhaps be permitted to point out that from the side of the unity committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches, the proposal to enter Phase 2 includes the provision that the two federations aim for full union at their respective Synods in 2004. In fact, the proposal of the CanRC Committee for Ecclesiastical Unity states that we enter into Phase 2, (Ecclesiastical Fellowship) with the provision that both parties agree to pursue full union at the synods of 2004, leaving a three year period for the churches to present to their respective synods the basic church polity essentials and requirements of functioning together as one federation. Both sides, I think, should be clear about this standpoint.

The question is: will the churches be willing?

Of course, it is always possible to come with postponements, or to suggest an alternative plan that can meet the approval of both parties. But I would be hesitant about postponing things too long. Indeed, perhaps we need to do a little more "courting." On the other hand, let's keep our momentum. Engagement periods should never last too long. And by now the issues are becoming clear. The *call* is there, the Reformed, confessional and historical affinity strikingly obvious. The question is: will the churches *be willing?*





Observations

By G.Ph. van Popta

Canadian politicians in trouble with their church?

According to the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) formal cooperation in an abortion is an offense punishable by excommunication. When the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains what "You shall not murder" means, it also says the following:

Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life. A person who procures a complete abortion incurs excommunication *latae sententiae*, "by the commission of the offense," and subject to the conditions provided by Canon Law. The Church does not thereby intend to restrict the scope of mercy. Rather, she makes clear the gravity of the crime committed, the irreparable harm done to the innocent who is put to death, as well as the parents and the whole of society (2272).

The confessional position of the RCC is quite clear: Any one who cooperates, even only formally, in an abortion is, by that very act, excommunicated. All that remains is for the church to make the fact public.

We ought not to speak ill of the dead, but during the funeral of the Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliot Trudeau the question came to mind: "Why is the Archbishop of Montreal giving Mr. Trudeau a requiem mass in a Roman Catholic cathedral?"

In 1969, one of the first things Mr. Trudeau did (in cooperation with our present Roman Catholic Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Jean Chretien, a cabinet minister then) was legalize abortion. Millions have been legally murdered in the last thirty years. By the RCC's legal code, Messrs. Trudeau and Chretien were excommunicated by the very commission of the offense (*latae sententiae*). According to Roman Catholic doctrine, they ceased to be Roman Catholics,

barred from the sacraments in the RCC, including a funeral mass. This fact was never stated.

According to the RCC's teaching, such a phenomenon is impossible. The consequence of Trudeau's sin by formally cooperating in even one, let alone millions of abortions, was immediate excommunication. He died outside of the RCC. Why did the Archbishop say a mass for him?

The funeral with its mass displayed the bankruptcy and hypocrisy of the RCC and its unwillingness to follow through with its own confession.

Recently, however, there has been some suggestion that some elements in the RCC are tiring of the hypocrisy of the church and the politicians. The following was written in the *Calgary Herald*:



Bishop threatens to ban Clark from schools: Catholic Tory leader rebuked for his pro-abortion stance

CALGARY – Calgary's Catholic bishop said yesterday he is prepared to order Calgary Separate School Board officials to ban Joe Clark, the federal Conservative leader, from its schools.

Bishop Frederick Henry told a local radio talk show it is a "scandalous behaviour" for a Roman Catholic politician like Mr. Clark, MP for Calgary Centre, to declare himself pro-abortion.

"Practically speaking, this may mean that Joe Clark is not going to be a welcome personage to speak in Catholic schools in this diocese. And it may well be that should Joe Clark predecease me, he may not have the bishop burying him from the cathedral."



While Bishop Henry stopped short of threatening Mr. Clark with excommunication, he said the religious scandal is “very serious,” and that Mr. Clark’s vocal pro-abortion stance is unacceptable for anyone calling himself a Catholic.

This bishop said he was not going to deny Mr. Clark a Christian burial, but he was going “to call him to account for his statements in public, which I think are scandalous.”

Mr. Clark’s press secretary said the Tory leader “respects a woman’s right to choose.” “He doesn’t have anything to add to that,” said Marie Chantel Lapine. “Of course, the bishop has his own opinion on this matter.”

Bishop Henry said that, rather than defending their professed faith, “sometimes politicians prefer to bury their heads in the sand and thereby expose another part of their anatomies for public viewing.”

Confronted with the possibility of excommunicating Mr. Clark, however, Bishop Henry said “this is the wrong way” to resolve the problem.

Any one who cooperates, even only formally, in an abortion is, by that very act, excommunicated.

“Basically, what we have to do is proclaim the Gospel, call people to conversion . . . remind people that they must serve God first of all,” he said. “One is seeking to get people to convert – to change their minds, and hitting them over the head with a club is not going to do much good.”

The bishop condemned the tendency of Catholic politicians to say, “I’m personally opposed to abortion, but I cannot force my morality on others.” He compared that to someone being “personally opposed to child abuse” but unwilling to defend children.

“We do it” – impose morality – “all the time; it’s a matter of what morality we’re going to impose,” Henry said.

What Bishop Henry stopped short of, Father Alphonse de Valk called for. *The National Post* reported the following:

Catholic magazine wants Church to excommunicate Allan Rock: Minister of Health assailed for stance on abortion

CALGARY – A right-wing Catholic magazine is calling on Canada’s bishops to excommunicate Allan Rock, the federal Minister of Health, because of his position on abortion.

“The Church needs to send a warning to pro-abortion Catholic politicians,” said Father Alphonse de Valk, the editor of *Catholic Insight*. “They just go on and on, and nobody ever calls them to account. All of these bishops have allowed themselves to be caught up in other issues, and they’ve been insensitive to the pro-life cause for a long time.”

Fr. de Valk said in an interview in Toronto that if Canada’s bishops take his suggestion seriously, Mr. Rock will not be the only politician facing excommunication.



During the last federal election campaign, both Jean Chretien, the Prime Minister, and Joe Clark, the Conservative leader, declared they favoured the right of women to choose on the abortion issue, although both are Catholics.

Mr. Clark, however, said he is not worried about the possibility of being cut off from the Church and other Catholics. “This is a group that doesn’t have a lot of following in the Church,” he said by telephone from Montreal. “They’re drawing divisions that don’t need to be drawn.”

Fr. de Valk says his Church considers abortion an “unspeakable crime” and says the Code of Canon Law states anyone participating in abortion is automatically excommunicated.

According to Fr. de Valk, the authority to excommunicate lies with the bishop of an offender’s place of residence . . .

. . . In 1995, Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln, Nebraska, declared a sentence of excommunication upon any Catholics in his diocese supporting the Call to Action pro-abortion lobby.

Often it seems they are more concerned about CO₂ emissions than abortions.

Will the Canadian bishops of the RCC draw a line in the sand like their colleague in Lincoln, Nebraska? Will they uphold their own Catechism and Canon Law? Not likely. If one considers the leftist diatribes that issue forth from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), one would not do well to hold his breath waiting. The six-dozen bishops of the CCCC are wont to issue statements that champion the welfare-state and ill-defined concepts of “social justice.” Often it seems they are more concerned about CO₂ emissions than abortions. But perhaps Canadian Roman Catholic politicians are beginning to feel a wee bit of heat.



Attestations do serve a scriptural purpose (Part 1)

By T. Van Raalte

Attestations discussed

The topic of attestations will likely be discussed at General Synod Neerlandia. The official report to General Synod from the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity shows that the federative committees of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and the United Reformed Churches (URC) have already discussed this matter in connection with admitting guests to the Lord's Supper.

The different practices have been discussed and are described as follows: "The Canadian Reformed practice is to require of guests an acceptable certificate or attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct issued by the elders of their "sister churches." The United Reformed Churches generally accept upon an interview with the guest, his or her signed personal attestation concerning doctrine and conduct thereby assuring the consistory of their church membership by profession of faith and of their godly walk."

URC and CanRC committee agreement

The committees have come to the following agreement: "In receiving guests from elsewhere, the committees have agreed that a travel attestation from a guest's home consistory is a time honoured and effective practice in supervising guests at the Lord's Table." That would describe the position of the CanRC. Then follows, "A personal attestation prepared and administered by the consistory of the church celebrating the Lord's Supper is also an acceptable and Reformed way of supervising attendance at the Lord's Table, *when as much as possible the elders have attempted to secure confirmation of the guest's godly life from appropriate sources.* In the attestation the signatories state that they are communicant

members not under discipline of a faithful church which *fully confesses* the doctrines of the Scriptures. The consistory would send the personal statement to the person's home church." (italics mine – TVR). The latter agreement applies to the URC's practice.

Confirmation of witnesses

The agreement speaks of the need for "confirmation." Confirmation points to the need for witnesses who can give this confirmation. This principle is well known in Scripture.

Witnesses can function for either commendation or condemnation.

For instance, we read about the need for two or three witnesses when bringing grievances against other Christians. Paul prescribed this regarding immorality in Corinth (2 Cor 13:1). Similarly, evidence against office bearers requires two or three witnesses (1 Tim 5:19, based on Deut 19:15). Such a practice fits the command of Christ in Matthew 18:16. The practice of having witnesses to attest to sin is to safeguard the reputation of all members and to provide every right avenue of calling the sinner back before reporting matters to the congregation.

The idea of having witnesses is so common in Scripture that texts could be multiplied. Jesus Christ himself called witnesses to attest to his authenticity as the Christ. The Christ even once declared, "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not valid. There is another who testifies in my favour, and I know that his testimony about me is valid" (John 5:31-32). The Scriptures, the Father, and the works of Christ are all witnesses to the Christ (John 5:36-40).

Letters of attest in Scripture

Witnesses can function for either commendation or condemnation. A witness who commends has the joy of witnessing to the work of God in the life of a fellow sinner. Their testimony was often established by way of a letter. Positive letters of attest from such happy witnesses are replete throughout the New Testament. All of the following are written attests:

- (a) The letter to Philemon is a letter of recommendation by Paul to Philemon re. his slave Onesimus
- (b) Acts 18:27a, "When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and *wrote to the disciples there to welcome him.*"
- (c) Romans 16:1, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea."
- (d) The practice was already known among the Jews, for Saul (Paul) was given letters, presumably stating his position at Jerusalem and his calling and authority to carry out persecution (Acts 9:2; cf. Acts 22:5). The Roman Jews also expected that they would have received a letter about Paul from Jerusalem but they had not (Acts 28:21). Therefore Paul himself sent to Jerusalem only those whom the Corinthian elders "approved by letters" to take their gifts of money to the church at Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:3 RSV¹).
- (e) The appearance of imposters made letters of recommendation all the more necessary, though Paul himself was by that time well-known to Corinth and had apostolic authority (2 Cor 3:1-3). The imposters were abusing a well-known system which normally used letters of recommendation!
- (f) Paul gives a good attest about each of the twenty-six people he names

in Romans 16. The Greek verb means, "greet, welcome kindly."² Paul is instructing the Romans to kindly welcome the people he mentions, on the basis of his good word for each of them.

- (g) 3 John 9 and 12, "I wrote to the church . . . Demetrius is well spoken of by everyone – and even by the truth itself. We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true." This very letter of John is an attest about two people: Diotrephes and Demetrius. Diotrephes was attested to be slanderous and authoritarian (verses 9-10). Demetrius' good attest is confirmed by "everyone," by "the truth itself," and by "we." John also acknowledges the attest of others about Gaius – "They have told the church about your love" (verse 6).

Elders interrogating

The URC's practice is to interview guests for Lord's Supper at the place of celebration. Is this the way it would have been done in the New Testament? Brothers from Corinth came to Jerusalem bearing gifts. Paul himself attested by letter to the Jerusalem brothers that these Corinthian men were officially sent and came with the highest recommendations in the Lord from Corinth (1 Cor 16:3). He wrote his attest, based on the approval of the Corinthian elders, not on the basis of interviewing applicants for the task.

There is the expectation in Scripture that those who believe in Christ will joyfully confess this out loud (Matt 10:32; Rom 10:10). Such confessing is done officially at profession of faith and should be done throughout life in all circumstances. But would the Church of Jerusalem require such a confession from those who came from Corinth with letters of introduction (1 Cor 16:3)? Hardly.

When the apostle Paul tells Timothy that new deacons must first be tested, he means that over time their walk of life must be *observed* (1 Tim 3:10). He is not speaking about a one-time interview. This is clear from the context where he speaks about not indulging in much wine or pursuing dishonest gain. Further, the verb for testing is in the present, indicating an ongoing testing.

Interviewing church members is the task of the consistory under whose authority they live. These interviews are performed before public profession

of faith, and at home visits. When someone moves into the area, they can be admitted on the word of other elders from churches with whom the local church is in covenant (federation). If no attest is forthcoming, the elders of the local church will need to observe the life of a new attender until they are satisfied that a godly life is practiced. Doctrine cannot be separated from living a holy life.

The URC's practice is to interview guests for Lord's Supper at the place of celebration.

What an honour!

The recommendation of the elders in one church is accepted by another on the basis of the covenant we have with one another as churches in one federation. Because of our reasonable assurance that all things in our sister churches are done in good order, in agreement with Scriptures, Confessions, and Church Order, we can accept these recommendations. The same is true for other churches with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship. The attestation is not so much "mine" as it is "about me." It is addressed to the office bearers in another location, to assist them in knowing "me." Without the attestation, the office bearers in a location who do not know me would have to interview me to determine my doctrine and then set apart a reasonable length of time such as one to three months in which they can observe my conduct. The written attest of my own elders vouches for both.

The New Testament itself contains letters of attest or recommendation.

By arriving at another congregation with an attest about myself, I am able to participate in Lord's Supper if visiting, and become a full member if moving there. What an honour it is to think that Christ's appointed overseers have given a positive witness to my doctrine and life! Those who bear such an attest from others may rejoice to present it to Christ's appointed overseers

in another local church. How blessed to be approved!

On the other hand, if the attest has remarks about how I need to improve, then the elders in the new location can immediately set to work helping me in that area. An attest is not by definition positive; it is simply a witness to what has been observed.

Conclusion

First, it is clear that the New Testament itself contains letters of attest or recommendation and describes their use in the churches. Second, it is not normal that someone is their own witness or gives their own attest. Confirmation from others is necessary, whether by letter or by word. The need for an outside attest is underlined by the fact that those who attend the Lord's Supper must not only be irreproachable in doctrine, but also in life. Only those who regularly observe and oversee their life can attest to its Christian character.

We must recognize, however, that the Scriptures do not make a clear connection between making an attest and admitting a guest to the Lord's Supper. Such a connection is our conclusion, based on the holiness of the table, the task of the elders, the attestations found in Scripture, and the prescriptions of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11. The attest vouches that the visitor has been tested and observed and is able to meet the prerequisites for table fellowship, namely, to proclaim the death of the Lord, to examine themselves, and to recognize the body of the Lord (1 Cor 11:26, 28, 29). More about that next time.

¹ Note that the NIV interprets Paul to be the author of the attestations while RSV, KJV, and others interpret the Corinthians to be writing these letters to Paul. In my view, the Greek fits the KJV and RSV interpretation better. At any rate, Paul would still be writing letters of introduction to Jerusalem for these gift-bearers, based on Corinth's recommendations. It is fair to assume *the elders* at Corinth had the duty to recommend suitable brothers.

² Greek-English Dictionaries: Liddell-Scott Intermediate, "to welcome kindly, bid welcome, greet." Thayer, "properly: 'to draw to oneself.' Hence, 'to salute one, greet, bid welcome, wish well to.'" Abbott-Smith, "to welcome, greet, salute." 

An anniversary and a farewell

By Janey Van Seters and Sarah Vandergugten

Sunday, December 17 was a day of remembrance and celebration for the Maranatha congregation of Surrey. This special evening had a dual focus: first of all to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the church's institution, and secondly, to say farewell and thank you to our retired missionary couple, Rev. and Mrs. R.F. Boersema. The church was full! What made this program special is that Maranatha has served as a mother church for many, a fact that was reality for most of the delegated speakers from the other Fraser Valley Churches.

The master of ceremonies for the evening was Fred Kleine-Deters, member of the anniversary committee. After prayer and opening remarks, he gave the floor to Rick Baartman, son of E.C. Baartman, one of the first office bearers of the church, who is presently its oldest founding member. Rick shared his father's experiences in the early days of the church, as it held its first meetings as a house congregation at the Baartman residence. Some well-known families present at that time included the Vanegmonds, DeWits, Bosschers, Leyenhorsts, and Vanderhorsts. The first office bearers elected were C. Vandergugten and P. DeWit, with E. Baartman as deacon.

After four unsuccessful calls to ministers in Holland, a fifth call brought positive results. A single-word telegram, reflecting his frugal nature, was received from the Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene: "*Aangenomen*" it read – Accepted. One-third of the congregation's fifty years was spent under his guidance. Rev. Van Oene shared his memories of those early years, beginning with his installation by the Rev. G. Pieffers, through meetings at the Dreamland Hall and the movie-theatre on 12th St., until his departure for Fergus in 1970. A short slide presentation showed the various parsonages, as well as the building of the William of Orange School, a project close to Rev. Van Oene's heart. At the end of his allotted time, (he was



punctual) Rev. Van Oene presented to the Maranatha congregation a beautifully bound version of bulletin notes pertaining to the history of the church.

Sister churches throughout Western Canada sent many messages of congratulation. Via letters or personal emissaries, they left no doubt that many rejoiced with us in the Lord's goodness throughout the past fifty years. Rev. J. Huijgen of Cloverdale, one of the last ministers to immigrate, reminded us that the year of Jubilee should be one of reflection on the works of God among his people. Rev. R. Schouten of Abbotsford reminisced on a happy youth spent in the Maranatha congregation. He also remembered being enriched by Rev. Boersema's sermons, some of which he can summarize even now.

Maranatha's current pastor, Rev C. Van Spronsen spoke briefly about the growth of the mission work in Brazil, a work that has been spear-headed by the Maranatha Church for many years. He shared some slides about the early days in San Jose, and commented on the changes he saw during his recent visit there in the fall.

Gerry Vandeburgt, emissary from Langley but also project manager for the construction of Maranatha's present

building, showed slides which highlighted the unique challenges that had to be surmounted. He recounted that the beams were exactly 59 feet 11 3/4 inches long! In spite of inclement weather and a difficult design, the help of many eager volunteers aided in the completion of a beautiful and functional sanctuary. Some of these "eager volunteers" were present in the audience, now twenty-plus years older and wiser. No doubt, they were wondering how they'd had the nerve to scale the incredibly steep incline in order to deck the roof. Thankfully, there had not been any serious mishaps.

It's hard to think about Maranatha church without visualizing the numerous pipes of its 1913 Casavant organ. (Rev. Schouten will certainly not be the only one to remember counting and recounting the pipes as a youngster's way of "sitting still" during a lengthy church service). After we heard a brief history of the organ, the longstanding church organist, Sander Vanderploeg demonstrated its fine sound by playing his variations on "A Great and Mighty Wonder." Music to the glory of the Lord of the church.

Many visitors and delegates recounted personal memories of their

sojourns in the early Maranatha congregation. Henk Berends brought greetings from Lynden, and added his account of the haircuts received at the hands of Rev. Van Oene – the shepherd shearing his sheep. All proceeds went to the school. Ron Dykstra, delegate from Willoughby Heights, wondered where a church was headed when its history included a move from a dance hall to a theatre. Adrian Krabbendam, another native son, noted that the ties between Maranatha and its daughter churches remain strong. Just the previous day, a Maranatha son had married a Chilliwack daughter. Maranatha has also forged and maintained strong ties with our theological college in Hamilton. Three of its current professors hail from Maranatha – two as former pas-

tors, C. Van Dam and J. Geertsema, and J. DeJong as a bred-in-the-bone Maranathian.

Throughout the evening, but especially towards the end, thanks and appreciation were expressed for the work of Rev. Boersema and family on the mission field in Brazil. Len Stam spoke on behalf of the Mission Board, and presented a Robert Bateman print as a token of appreciation for the many years of faithful service which Rev. Boersema has given on behalf of the sending churches. Next, Rev. Boersema spoke words of thanks for the support he and his family received during their stay in Brazil. He gave a special, heartfelt thank you to his wife Lucille, for the tremendous love and support she has faithfully provided from the very outset

to the present. He reminded us that the total membership of the Brazilian congregations is still under 400, and that they need our continued prayerful support if they are to grow spiritually and numerically. He briefly spoke about the Internet seminary training that he has undertaken, with a view to aiding those Brazilian young men who desire to become pastors.

The evening was closed by the Rev. Van Spronsen, after which there was an opportunity to renew many old acquaintances over a cup of coffee in the church basement. Truly, God has been good during the past fifty years, and we may count on his continued faithfulness as we look forward to our Saviour's return. "Come, Lord Jesus, Maranatha!" C

Campfire! Summer Bible Camp

By Allan Buist

As March roars into Ontario "like a lion," plans and preparations for this summer's Campfire! program are shaking themselves out of hibernation. Unfortunately, we were not able to deliver a report on last summer's camp before the winter freeze set in, so we are taking this opportunity to attach some photo highlights from our 2000 camp program. We hope that they will give you a taste of the warm memories we have of the five action-filled weeks many of us spent at Campfire! during July and August of last year. These are but a few of the more than 300 faces, young, old and young-at-heart, who brightened our days through our three Children's Discovery Camps, our Teen Leadership and Teen Wilderness Camps, and our Sprouts mini-camp (for our youngest participants).

I recently had the privilege of sitting in on a meeting of our Fund-raising Committee. As the discussion

Devotions on the water.



J. Ruggi



Rev. Visscher leading devotions.

J. Hart

turned to the matter of recognizing sponsors in a concert program, a committee member directed our attention to the apostle Paul's example of not thanking people directly for the good work they were doing, but rather of thanking God for the good work He was accomplishing through their lives. And so, in true Pauline fashion, we would like to take this opportunity to thank God for all of the staff members, counselors, counselors-in-training, cooks, nurses, lifeguards, campers, bus drivers, committee members, donors, advisors, encouragers and everybody else who helped to make last year's camp a great success.

Each of our seven planning committees (Executive, Staff, Camper, Program, Chapel, Fund-raising and Public Relations) has begun the flurry of activity required to prepare for Campfire! 2001. As a result of ever-growing demand, we have decided to expand our summer program to seven weeks, as follows:

Contact Information:

Camper registration:

Alice Buist (905) 524-5071
campers@campfirebiblecamp.ca

Counsellor applications:

Elissa Faber (905) 527-1648
counsellors@campfirebiblecamp.ca

**Volunteer opportunities/
general information:**

Deanna Ruggi (905) 383-7441
info@campfirebiblecamp.ca

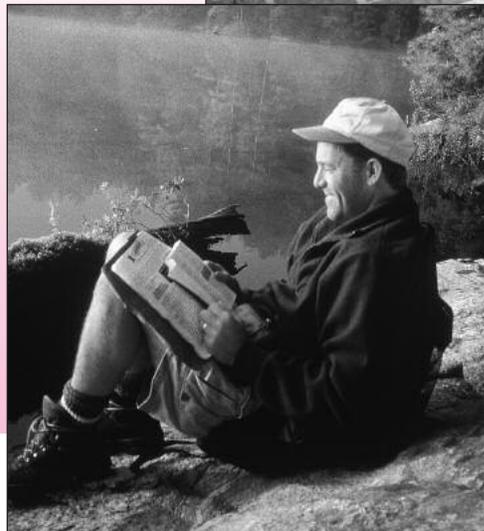
Or visit our new website at
www.campfirebiblecamp.ca!



J. Hart

*Devotions
twice a day.*

*Games of all
different shapes,
sizes and styles
are done
throughout the
weeks of
Campfire!*



J. Hart

One of the counsellors.

J. Hart

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| July 9 - 14 | - Teen Leadership Camp (ages 13-16) |
| July 16 - 21 | - Discovery Camp (ages 7-12) |
| July 23 - 28 | - Discovery Camp (ages 7-12) |
| July 30 - August 4 | - Teen Wilderness Camp (ages 13-16) |
| July 31 - August 2 | - Sprouts Mini-Camp (ages 5-7) |
| August 6 - 11 | - Discovery Camp (ages 7-12) |
| August 13 - 18 | - Discovery Camp (ages 7-12) |
| August 20 - 25 | - Teen Leadership Camp (ages 13-16) |

Please pray that God will use our camp again in the coming season for the glory of his kingdom.