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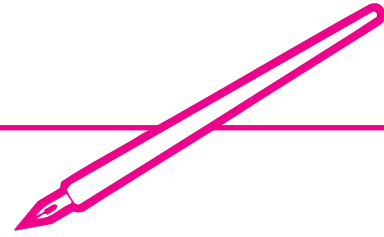
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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*Thanksgiving.
When the crop is gathered in . . .*

Numbers

10:1-10



By J. Visscher



Thankful or Thankless

For those of us who live in the northern hemisphere it is becoming obvious that the seasons are changing. The hours of daylight are receding and the hours of night are on the increase. Certain trees are out in splendid colour. The temperatures are heading downward. Fall is in the air.

Yet that is not all, for along with the appearance of fall, there also comes another holiday, commonly called Thanksgiving Day. Canadians mark it in the month of October, Americans in November. It is that annual time of year when people get together to celebrate, to eat turkey, to try cranberries, to feast on all sorts of delights that have sprung forth from the ground and been prepared in the kitchen. It is that time when fellowship and feasting go hand in hand.

God is the source and fountain of every gift and blessing that we receive.

In addition, it is a time to count blessings. As New Year's Eve is traditionally a time to reflect on the events of a whole year gone by, so Thanksgiving has become that time to consider one's past and present material situation. Food, crops, livestock, salaries, health – all of these things come under the microscope.

Ample reason for thanks

Indeed, I dare say that for most of our readers there is ample reason for giving thanks. We live in countries that know no shortage of food, shelter, clothing and the other necessities of life. We have once again been richly blessed. I realize full well that for some of you the stock market in general and your computer stocks in particular are a source of pain. Others live in areas where there has been drought and a less than abundant crop. Then too there are those who live under the pressure of unemployment or sickness and were not able to work as they desired. Nevertheless, by and large there are still abundant reasons to give thanks.

Only the question does need to be asked, namely, "What is the nature of this thanksgiving? To whom is it directed? What is its character?" Many people see Thanksgiving Day as a day to "thank their lucky stars" or "to boast about their craftiness." What about you?

A proper thanksgiving

For those whose lives are governed by the Holy Scriptures, a proper thanksgiving takes on a certain form. In the

first place, it has to be directed to God. He is the source and fountain of every gift and blessing that we receive. Why, a careful reading of the Psalms reminds us repeatedly that God and material or physical blessings are inseparable.

Psalm 104 is an obvious illustration of this. Who makes the springs pour forth water? Who waters the mountains? Who makes the grass and the plants grow? Who brings fruit forth from the earth? Who makes wine for the heart, oil for the face and bread for the heart? The answer is always God. It all comes from Him and depends on Him. His open hand provides.

In the second place, a proper thanksgiving requires a vocal response from God's human creatures. There needs to be an acknowledgement on our part of God as the gracious giver. Look at the Psalms again. What do they do after enumerating God's gifts? They always break forth in praise – in loud, exuberant, repetitive – praise. Thanksgiving, you see, is a special time of year to pray to God in a praiseful manner and to sing aloud of his goodness. Before you carve up the turkey, praise the Lord in prayer. And after you have feasted together, sing the Psalms and Hymns, such as Psalms 67, 104, 146, 148, and Hymns 59, 60, 62, 63 and 65.

They need to become students of birds and lilies.

Then too, a proper thanksgiving is one which recognizes that Jesus Christ is the key. Were it not for the promise of his coming, the Old Testament psalmists would have been participating in an act of supreme wishful thinking. Where it not for his actual coming and the great redeeming work He did, we today would be celebrating a hollow thanksgiving. For what good does it do to praise God for material things, when they have no purpose? Yes, and without Christ they really have no purpose. He alone restores our life and our work. He alone makes the present meaningful and the future hopeful.

Obstacles to thanksgiving

Still, there are many obstacles to a proper thanksgiving. There is the proud, selfish attitude of our own hearts. From the Old Testament one recalls a Nabal who refused to give of his bounty to David, the Lord's anointed. From the New

Testament there is the parable of the Lord Jesus about the foolish barn builder. This man's soil produced a bumper crop, and what did he think about? Not about God! Oh no, he only thought about how to store it all and how it would pave his way to an easy life (cf. Luke 12:13-21).

Now, these two men just cited are not exceptions. Sadly, they are the norm. Also today, you see it on every side. You meet no end to people who assume that they are the makers of their own fortunes and the reason for their own blessings. They see themselves as ultimate owners and original makers. They caused this wealth to be. It was their smarts, their shrewdness, their cunning, that did it. God had nothing to do with it.

Every day we need to count our blessings, material and spiritual, and we need to give thanks.

Foolish people! They cannot see past their noses. All God has to do is close his hand and the sun becomes a furnace and the earth becomes a barren wilderness. Or else, as the Lord Jesus reminds us, He has only to say "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you" (Luke 12:20). How many people do not presume that they will get to enjoy their wealth; whereas, instead they fall ill and die and it is their heirs, who never worked for it, who merily use it to buy boats, trailers, fancy holidays, and a host of other pleasures?

What's inside?

Soon we will commemorate Thanksgiving. We look over the past year and reflect how once again the Lord has blessed our land with rich harvest. There are parts of the country where the land has not fared so well, and there are those who have had difficulty in their work. We acknowledge that it is all from the Lord: the good and the bad. Moreover, we know that after we have suffered a little while, we will have an eternity of perfect blessings. Not only does our editorial reflect on this, but also a chapel talk by Reuben Bredenhof on the heavenly city of the New Jerusalem reminds us of the Lord's rich blessings.

Rev. P.G. Feenstra continues his article on the means of grace. He demonstrates in a practical fashion the importance of the preaching in our lives.

The American Reformed Church at Denver is geographically distant from many of our churches. Our brothers and sisters remind us that the Denver congregation is flourishing, and that Reformed education is flourishing in Denver. It is good to hear from them.

We have a meditation by Rev. T.G. Van Raalte and our regular columns *Ray of Sunshine* and *Education Matters*. We remember our special children along with our children who have the blessing of attending our own Reformed schools.

RA



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Still, if human pride is one obstacle to thanksgiving, worry is another. Some people are so insecure about their food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities, that they never cultivate a thankful spirit. They may be sitting at a table overflowing with good things, but they are already busy fretting about tomorrow. "What if my husband loses his job next week? What about if we cannot meet the mortgage payments? What about if I get sick?" Their lives are chock-full of "what ifs," "maybes," "mights" and "you never knows."

Sorry people! They so badly need to learn the lessons that Christ teaches in Luke 12. They need to look beyond themselves. They need to become students of birds and lilies. They need to see God behind his creation and they need to see Him as Father. One more thing. They need to remember his promise to give them the kingdom.


So, there is pride and there is worry, but there is also mammon. On more than one occasion our Lord Jesus refers to money as a false and rival god. It has the ability to attract and entice people. It can and does control them. It blinds them. It consumes them. Apparently, that is what it was doing in the lives of both Pharisees and publicans. There is always this pressing need to make another shekel. In the process God, family, friends, church – all are forgotten, neglected, shoved aside, even used.

Blind people! What they fail to see is that everything material – houses, cars, toys and trinkets – they are all vulnerable! They are here today and gone tomorrow. They fall prey to rust, to theft, to inflation, to stock market crashes. All who build their lives on material things are

building them on sand. How often have I not heard dying people, who chased dollars all their lives, confess that the chase was not worth it. They would have been far better off if they had used money as a tool and not worshipped it as a god.

A better way

So is there a better way? There is indeed. It is, as alluded to already, the way of thanksgiving. But then, it should be the way of daily thanksgiving. It is fine to set one day aside to praise and thank God in a special way, but really we need to do this every day. Every day we need to count our blessings, material and spiritual, and we need to give thanks.

Yet we should do this not just in words but also in deeds. What sorts of deeds? Deeds of stewardship! Do you realize that being a Christian means being a steward? It means realizing that everything you have is a gift from God and that He holds you accountable for its proper recognition and its responsible use. As you receive your pay cheque, as you pay your bills, as you count your savings, as you spend your money, as you make your budgets, remember to say to yourself, "I am a steward. I hold all of this in trust. I am going to have to answer for it." Only say it not with regret and disgust in your voice. No, say it with cheerfulness. Say it with conviction. Say it with purpose. The fountain of all blessings is raining on you, challenging you to show Him and others a thankful spirit and a life of stewardship that praises Him and blesses them. 

Thanksgiving Hymn

Hymn 57

Thank the LORD and come with praise;

Songs of jubilation raise

When the crop is gathered in

Ere the winter storms begin.

God, our Maker, will provide

For our wants to be supplied.

Let His people all confess

His unchanging faithfulness.

Lord, we pray Thee, quickly come;

Bear Thy final harvest home.

Gather Thou Thy people in,

Freed from sorrow, freed from sin.

They, forever purified,

In Thy presence will abide.

Come with all Thy angels, come;

Bear Thy glorious harvest home.

By T.G. Van Raalte

Kingdom Rulers

"Then God said, 'Rule . . .'" (Genesis 1:28)

"Your kingdom come." (Matthew 6:10)

We used to play this game, "I'm the king of the castle and you're the dirty rascal." The higher you stood, the more you ruled. The higher your mountain, the bigger the kingdom in your proud little heart. Such self-assertion starts in childhood. All children have toys that are "mine" and no one else's. That's a normal part of growing up.

As we grow up, we still have things that are "mine" and no one else's. We just try to make our fights less obvious. But we must control a certain number of things and events. Some people are more easily satisfied than others, but everyone controls something.

That childhood game of *King of the Castle* came from somewhere. Our sense of ownership over our toys comes from the inner need we have to rule over something. Everyone needs to control some area of their life or they will go crazy. God made us with the desire to rule. It is there deep inside us. Every person has some things they rule over that no one else may contest. It is because we are created in the image of God.

"God blessed them and said to them, 'Rule . . .'" God made us suited to rule and then He commanded us to do what He made us for. He knew that we would always desire to rule. He only commanded that it be done rightly, that we do it as children who are his image, as rulers on this earth who represent Him.


Our kingdom is this world. We have to rule it for God. But something is wrong. The world is a mess. Instead of ruling in harmony, we fight each other. The water is polluted, the air is

dirty, and the soil is contaminated. Whoever was supposed to rule these things, isn't doing a very good job. The rulers serve themselves.

The Lord himself has taught us that by our fall into sin, we have brought a curse upon creation. Our desire to rule has come to expression in war, manipulation, abuse, torture, and cruelty. Pain upon pain has resulted. The strong oppress the weak. Power is abused so much that some people are even denied control over their own bodies and minds. In terror they fall apart.

In the context of this world, the Lord Jesus has taught us to still seek to do our creation mandate. We still have a calling to rule, but we have to do it rightly. In the petition, "your kingdom come," the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray for God's rule because without it we cannot rule. We want our kingdoms to become part of God's kingdom. We want this whole world to become his kingdom, that is, to be obedient to Him in all respects.

Jesus Christ brought the rule of God into this world. The kingdom is at hand. God's ruling power is readily available. That is why the guidance of the Lord is relevant to our everyday situations. With his rule and his good Word guiding us, we can rightly rule in his name, with the righteousness and holiness that He supplies in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we fail in this, if we don't seek his teachings, our own ruling power remains twisted. We sin. We hurt others. Ultimately we hurt ourselves by trying to be more than we are. We have to realize that we are only creatures. We are not the Creator. Therefore, we have to be ruled to rule. Ultimately only God rules without being ruled. He is the only Ultimate Ruler! He is the only source of authority. Ultimately, He is the only King of the Castle. Let your King rule your heart so that you can rule rightly in all the areas where He has given you that responsibility. 



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Our Heavenly City¹

By Reuben Bredenhof

Jerusalem

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . ." How often have people through the centuries, including our Lord Jesus, cried over this great city. For many centuries it has figured prominently in world history and in the history of various religions. We can also trace a biblical history of Jerusalem, the city of Shalom: from the times of Abraham and his encounter with Melchizedek, the king of Salem, to the times of the war of King David

Today Jews and Arabs fight for this real estate – real estate of a priceless variety.

against this fortress of the Jebusites, from the glory days of Jerusalem, the city of Solomon's grand temple, and later yet, to the times of great anguish and distress when the holy city was sacked by the Assyrians. We read in Scripture of Jerusalem rebuilt, Jerusalem besieged, Jerusalem ravaged, Jerusalem honoured, and Jerusalem destroyed once more. And by the time the last books of the New Testament were written, Jerusalem had been razed for a second time and the temple destroyed again.

Today, though, Jerusalem is rebuilt, and is still the source of much patriotic pride and religious devotion. After the close of biblical history near the end of the first century after Christ, the story of Jerusalem continued. Dominated by the Jews, then by Christians, then seized by the invading Muslims, then taken back by Christian Europe for brief years during the Crusades, now it stands as the product of all those centuries of conflict. We see in the Jerusalem of today a city divided and a city in turmoil. It is a fiercely contested city, for within its ancient walls lies much that many people think worthy of defending and revering. Jerusalem and the land in which it is found have long held political significance, but underlying the riots and protests and peace ac-

cords is an undeniable religious significance. And not one but three religions lay claim to Old Jerusalem, the original centre of the ancient city. Reflecting this discord, the old city is divided in four quarters: the Jewish quarter, the Muslim quarter, and the Armenian Christian and the Arab Christian quarter. To these groups, Jerusalem is a holy place. The Jews revere this site of the original temple of Solomon, and still pray at the Wailing Wall, a remnant from Herod's temple destroyed by the Romans. Christians seek to preserve the Christian history of the city and to venerate the relics and special sites found there – many Christians still make pilgrimages to Jerusalem as acts of devotion, to walk the Via Dolorosa and see where perhaps Christ was crucified. More recently, Muslims joined their history and the prophet Mohammed's life to the contested city too, building an imposing mosque, the Dome of the Rock, on the site from where Mohammed allegedly was taken to heaven.

Soaked with blood

Today Jews and Arabs fight for this real estate – real estate of a priceless variety. Yet Old Jerusalem is soaked with blood, for many lives have been lost in the violence among the factions vying for control of the city and the broader land in which it is found. Jerusalem and Israel have recently endured riots and suicide bombers and standoffs, and figured prominently in world news and discussion. Jerusalem is known the world wide as a volatile time-bomb in the midst of a region torn by differing political causes and warring religious fanatics.

What of Jerusalem? What if someone walked into our church (or chapel, for that matter) in these times of ongoing and unresolved Middle East crisis and heard us singing from Psalm 122, "Prosperity be unto them that love you, O Jerusalem . . . ?" What sort of suppositions would they make about our political ties and ideology? Maybe they're a Dutch Zionist group . . . We would assure them that we're nothing of the sort. But when we do hear of Middle East

violence and another peace summit, we ought to pray for Jerusalem's peace, and for a diplomatic resolution to the arguments. We ought to pray for the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah to conquer the land and for the peace of Christ rule, for the Jews to see the true Christ, and for false religion to be defeated.

The land of Israel does indeed have a special place, and Jerusalem a unique character, for this is the land that Jesus knew and spent the years of his earthly ministry walking. I think most of us dream of going to Israel one day – maybe on a *Clarion*-advertised "Holy Land Tour" – to see the history and fill our mind's eye with what it must have been like there two thousand years ago.

The New Jerusalem

But this is not the Jerusalem of which we sing, the city for which we hope and yearn. We read a small piece from Revelation 21, the glorious things of heaven that John sees. He is reaching the climax of the book, for now he describes the consummation of God's kingdom, the judgement of all, the marvels of the new heaven and earth, and the awesome sight of the New Jerusalem, the bride coming down from heaven for her husband.

We have a citizenship not in Rome or Israel or Canada, but a citizenship in heaven.

A fantastic view opens up to the apostle John in chapter 21: he beholds the new and perfected world. All things are made new. And there is no more sea; the sea, that place of the underworld and the demonic, perennially a formidable barrier – no longer exists (verse 1).

Now comes Jerusalem, the holy city, arriving from heaven from God. This is not the earthly city known by John, not the city whose walls fell to the Romans in the year 70, not the city inhabited by sinful and violent people, but this is the



Wailing Wall in Jerusalem

perfect city of God (verse 2). The old name is retained, but only for its significance as the place where God once dwelled in the temple among his people Israel. Now *everything* is made new, and Jerusalem is no exception – now this is a truly holy city, unmarred by any sin. The inhabitants of this new city are exclusively God’s faithful people from every tribe and nation of earth, those called by his Name, those perfected body and soul.

Homeland for the saints

We can read of this heavenly Jerusalem elsewhere in Scripture, described as God’s dwelling, and the true homeland for the saints. We have a citizenship not in Rome or Israel or Canada, but a citizenship in heaven. The place of our pride and hope is not found on this globe, but is found above (Phil 3:20). The author of Hebrews writes to those in the race of faith, “You have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn . . .” (Heb 12:22-3). Jerusalem today is only an earthly city, like this world is only a temporary place for us. We are looking to our hope in heaven, waiting to take our place in the New Jerusalem among all its blessed citizens – those of the church of Christ through all ages.

John describes the New Jerusalem as a bride adorned for her groom (verse 2). The wedding approaches, the blessed union of Christ and his church. Revelation 19:7 already alluded to this occasion, as the multitude in the heavens sang, “Let us be glad and rejoice and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” In John’s vision, the re-

deemed church wears her fine linen, and she awaits the marriage supper of the lamb. In God’s reckoning, marriage is a close and indissoluble union – and soon the church and Christ will soon be joined as eternally one.

No longer a city of simple stones and bricks, John sees in that which follows verse 8 a city of unimaginable beauty and perfection. The rich language of Revelation paints for us a picture of the city both as bride, and also as an actual city, with foundations and gates and streets, made with amazing elements – a city which only the hand of God could craft.

Fixing our eyes on heaven, we await our Lord and the consummation of his kingdom.

The holy and perfect bride of Christ, the holy city Jerusalem, is contrasted in the book of Revelation with Babylon, the wicked and rebellious city, the total of the world’s evil (Rev 17). The New Jerusalem is sanctified and pure, a beautiful bride dedicated to her groom, but Babylon is seen as a harlot, one who seduces the world and prostitutes herself. What a vivid and telling contrast! Babylon scorns the God of heaven and earth, and instead glorifies herself and the power of human beings and their false gods.

John then hears a voice that announces the full blessed reality of what will happen. Jerusalem will be again be the place where God dwells, for He will “tabernacle” among his people (verse 3). We are reminded of John 1:14 about the Word that dwelt among us, God coming to the fallen world as a man to

accomplish salvation by the way of the cross – only now this special face to face fellowship will be without end, and without sin on our part. “They shall be his people, and God Himself . . . will be their God.” This is the language of the covenant, the covenant of love that finally reaches its perfected and unbroken state at the end of time.

Wipe away tears

On the new heaven and earth, the church of Christ will suffer no longer. No more will there be death or sorrow or tears, for all these things will pass away (verse 4). God will come near to his people and wipe away their last tears. The New Jerusalem will not be torn with wars and violence, nor will the sound of crying go up from her over the deaths of her saints. John writes these sure words, and gives comfort to his suffering readers, both to his readers in the first centuries after Christ and also to us, who still must endure the weaknesses of our flesh and the signs of the end of the age (verse 5). The comfort is that it will soon be finished, that soon the full number of the New Jerusalem’s citizens will be gathered.

God himself proclaims that this all is certain. “It is done,” He declares, for He is from the beginning to the end, the Alpha and the Omega (verse 6). He guarantees the truth of these things, and assures us that He will deliver on his promises, from beginning to end. We who cannot imagine the glory of the New Jerusalem or the blessedness of full, unmarred communion with Jesus Christ, may be encouraged by these words: this is God’s unfailing Word to us!

By the grace and Spirit of God, we must overcome in this life, not giving in to sin or losing our hope or our faith. We who overcome will inherit a place in the New Jerusalem, among the assembly of God’s elect in life eternal (verse 7).

Fixing our eyes on heaven, we await our Lord and the consummation of his kingdom. We know the power of sin well, and see its destructive results in creation, in history, in ongoing world events, and in our own lives. But our perspective must be one of above, knowing that Christ’s return, and his judging and re-creating acts will be soon; knowing that today we must be keeping ourselves pure, striving to overcome, and ever holding to the blessed hope of perfect communion with God in the New Jerusalem.

This is the text of a chapel talk conducted by Reuben Bredenhof at the Theological College on Friday, November 17, 2000. The reading for the chapel talk was Revelation 2:1-8. C

The Means of Grace: the Preaching of the Gospel (Part 2)

By P.G. Feenstra

True preaching, as a mark of a faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ, carries with it the authority of the Word of the Lord. What is spoken must not be based upon human opinion but must ground itself firmly in what the Lord has revealed to us in his holy Word. Since the congregation does not assemble to hear the minister's opinion on religious matters, preachers must be careful not to speak in terms of "I think" or "I would suggest." Preaching's primary task, as a means of grace, is to focus on conveying, articulating and declaring what God clearly says to his people. Only when the words that are spoken are faithful to Scripture can you expect to hear the voice of Christ through the preaching.

Preaching as a key of the kingdom

Lord's Day 31 of the Heidelberg Catechism identifies preaching to be a key of the kingdom of heaven. Strikingly, the kingdom of heaven is said to be opened and closed by the preaching of the gospel:

According to the command of Christ, the kingdom of heaven is opened when it is proclaimed and publicly testified to each and every believer that God has really forgiven all their sins for the sake of Christ's merits, as often as they by true faith accept the promise of the gospel. The kingdom of heaven is closed when it is proclaimed and testified to all unbelievers and hypocrites that the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them as long as they do not repent. According to this testimony of the gospel, God will judge both in this life and in the life to come.

Preaching witnesses of the power of Christ who grants lost sinners forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, sanctification and eternal glory.

In his infinite wisdom the Lord is pleased to use the ministry of the Word for the furtherance of his kingdom; in order that his kingdom be opened to some and shut to others. That does

The minister must be convinced, convicted, comforted and exhorted by the very Word he preaches.

not elevate the preacher above the people. The minister must be convinced, convicted, comforted and exhorted by the very Word he preaches. He is human and just as much a sinner as every other person. He too is in need of the sin-forgiving grace of Christ. The preacher must be thoroughly gripped by the Bible's contents, amazed by its riches, and driven to declare its message.

True preaching humbles us and makes us realize that by nature we stand outside the kingdom of heaven. We do not possess the keys, let alone have any right to live in the kingdom of God. Yet by the miraculous grace of the Lord the keys of the kingdom of heaven are handed to the church and we are allowed to enjoy communion, rest, peace and joy in the Lord. The preaching as a key of the kingdom opens to us the precious jewels of the Lord's steadfast love, compassion, and everlasting comfort.

How we speak about the preacher

This also illustrates how we are to speak about the preacher and the sermons he delivers each Lord's Day. The Lord calls us to show honour and respect to those who labour in the gospel because they bear the keys of the kingdom. They are to be honoured because of their work. Therefore, we do wrong to have "roasted preacher" for Sunday lunch or dinner. In the Belgic Confession, Article 31, we confess how we ought to look upon the work of office-bearers in the church, "We declare that everyone must hold the ministers of the Word and the elders of the church in special esteem because of their work, and as much as possible be at peace with them without grumbling or arguing." Those words also apply to our acceptance of the authority of the preaching. It is very much in vogue today to disregard and defy authority. This attitude can easily spill over into the church so that we qualify to what extent we will accept the authority of the preaching. Our sinful hearts are in tune to the individualistic philosophy of our day which suggests, "No one has a right to tell me what to do." Such thinking has devastating consequences.

Proclamation

The preaching of the Word is a *proclamation* of blessing and forgiveness to each and every believer and a *proclamation* of curse and condemnation to unbelievers and hypocrites. The biblical background of the word "proclamation" is the work of a herald. In ancient times a herald was sent to announce the coming of the king.

He would declare, "The king is coming! Be prepared to receive him!" John the Baptist was such a herald who proclaimed Christ's coming.

Every preacher of the Word is a herald of good tidings. As a herald of the King, a preacher announces the good news of forgiveness of sins the King has obtained for us. He proclaims that the King is coming again at which time He will allow us to enjoy in perfection all that He has accomplished for us. Preaching as heralding is a unique activity. "Only Christian preachers claim to be heralds of good news from God, and dare to think of themselves as his ambassadors or representatives who actually utter oracles of God" (John R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, pp. 15-16).

Although we can read the Bible for ourselves there is something special in hearing God's Word proclaimed in a public setting.

Although we can read the Bible for ourselves there is something special in hearing God's Word proclaimed in a public setting. There is a danger of becoming detached from the Word of God in our personal and family Bible reading. We can insulate ourselves from its powerful truth by avoiding certain passages, dodging difficult doctrines and ignoring selected Bible books. But when the whole counsel of the Word of God is preached plainly and without compromise, it is much harder to avoid what the Lord requires.

Public testimony

Preaching is also a public testimony. The words that are spoken in the preaching of the gospel are based on the facts of salvation. These facts have been revealed to us through the testimony of ear and eye witnesses. The foundation of the church and of its preaching ministry is the testimony of prophets and apostles. The prophets are those who heard the Lord speak – ear witnesses. The apostles are those who saw the Lord's works – eye witnesses.

All faithful preaching is based on the testimony of prophets and apostles. We do not follow cleverly devised myths or listen to mere fables.

Preaching can be trusted when it remains firmly planted on the testimony of what is revealed to us by the prophets and apostles of the Old and New Testament. A minister may herald good tidings of great joy in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ when he sticks to the revealed facts – to those things which were recorded for us and our salvation.

Understanding the times

The gospel message is not preached in the abstract. When a minister preaches the gospel he must be aware of contemporary thought and what doctrines and practices of the church are being challenged by worldly influences and false religion. The framework of preaching is different today than it was one hundred years ago and certainly one thousand years ago. Each time period in history has its own ideologies and philosophies that influence the church. Until recently, the predominant view in secular society denied the existence of God and viewed the world as a machine set in motion by chance and evolutionary processes. Scientific investigation and human reasoning were the key methods of understanding the world. This view of the world has been labelled secular humanism or modernism.

Why is it such a struggle to maintain the authority of preaching?

Today there is another view of the world that has taken secular humanism and modernism one step further – post-modernism. The predominant thinking of our times essentially rejects the existence of any absolute truth. Truth is in the eye of the beholder. What may be true for you may not be true for me. The only real "sin" is criticizing someone else's views or moral choices.

Furthermore, the preaching of the Word of God reaches our ears in a climate that encourages the rise of such neo-pagan spiritualities as found in the New Age Movement and Native and Eastern Religions. Our teenagers are confronted with these ideas when they head off to college and university and will also encounter it, for example, in the songs that they hear coming over the air waves and through the videos they watch. The preaching of the

gospel must confront these errors and false teachings. Being born and raised in Christian homes does not protect us against the danger of capitulating to cultural pressures and mixing secular ideas with biblical principles.

The postmodern thinking of our time is not as far away from us as we might think. Why is it such a struggle to maintain the authority of preaching? "Since there are no moral absolutes and truth is relative who are you to tell me what to do!" Ministers often feel their hands are tied because any form of admonition or correction that doesn't go down well with the hearer is quickly relegated to the realm of human opinion – and since it is "your opinion or interpretation, I don't have to listen to you."

The only goal of preaching must be to lead the flock to the green pastures of the Word of God and to the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

The method of preaching

Since preaching is a means of grace whereby the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts we must be wary of all methods of preaching that do not let the text speak for itself. The "narrative approach" is but one example of a wrong method of preaching. Initially it may seem attractive but ultimately it will hollow preaching of its contents.

Influenced by post-modern thought, what has been labelled the "narrative approach" has become an increasingly popular method of preaching. This method places great emphasis on experiencing the event.

Those who adopt the narrative approach to preaching place less and less emphasis on the historicity of Scripture. Human experience becomes the gage of knowing and confirming the truth of the Bible. Divine truth is based on experience. The purpose of preaching is not to declare that God is your Redeemer who through Christ forgives your sins, but a sermon must make you "touch" God and it must make you feel and experience that your sins are forgiven. The narrative approach to preaching has adopted the idea that "Bible story is simply a record of the Old and New Testament believers'

'experience' of God. Whether or not the biblical events really happened is irrelevant. The Bible is 'true' in so far as it speaks to us, in our particular situation. And because this is the only criterion of biblical truth, the hearers and the readers can 'enter' into the story, 'participate' in it, and change it according to their desires." (F.G. Oosterhoff, *Postmodernism* p. 68).

Although the narrative approach may appeal to our human emotions, it has the potential of undermining the authority of preaching. As a listener you accept what the preaching says as long as it doesn't run contrary to your opinion. It is no longer profitable for correction, reproof and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16).

Conclusion

The only goal of preaching must be to lead the flock to the green pastures of the Word of God and to the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Thus, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much


trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

Preaching is a means of grace whereby Christ establishes his rule in the hearts of his people. "Christ has therefore been appointed by the Father, not to rule, after the manner of princes, by the force of arms, and by surrounding himself with other external defences . . . but his whole authority consists in doctrine, in the preaching of which he wishes to be sought and acknowledged; for nowhere else will he be found." (John Calvin, Commentary on Isaiah 49:2).

When the promises of the gospel as preached are met with faith, then the door of the kingdom swings wide open to us. We may live in peace under the government of Jesus Christ. Indeed blessed are the poor in spirit for to them belong the blessings of the kingdom (Matt 5:3). Blessed are those who see themselves as beggars who have nothing but who receive everything in what is proclaimed to them in the gospel of Christ. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled (Matt 5:6). The door of the kingdom is unlocked and



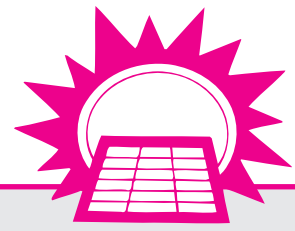
At Classis Ontario South, September 12, 2001, the decision was taken to divide the classical region into two regions as of January 1st, 2002. The classes will initially be called Classis Niagara (consisting of the churches at Attercliffe, Blue Bell, Grassie, Lincoln, Rockway, and Smithville) and Classis Ontario West (consisting of the churches in Ancaster, Chatham, Glanbrook, Grand Rapids, Hamilton, Kerwood, and London).

they may enter and enjoy the blessings of life everlasting. When the gospel is preached and believed the kingdom is opened to us today already. We may partake in the great gifts the Lord grants us in Jesus Christ. Where the preaching is met with faith the Lord Jesus, our eternal King says, "Come in! Yes, the door is always open. Join me in an everlasting feast of glory where you may hear tell of the wonder of my ways." 

Gratitude

For sunlit hours and visions clear,
 For all remembered faces dear;
 For comrades of a single day
 Who sent us stronger on our way;
 For friends who shared the year's long road
 And bore with us the common load;
 For hours that levied heavy tolls,
 But brought us nearer to our goals;
 For insights won through toil and tears –
 We thank the Keeper of our years.

Clyde McGee



By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

For most of us, Thanksgiving is a time of joy and fellowship with family and friends. We take the time to look back on the goodness of the Lord. Farmers reflect on the crops they have harvested. Others may look back on how the Lord has blessed them through such a thing as an increase in pay, or a better job. For some of us it has been a good year, for others not so. The farmers' crops have most likely suffered from lack of rain this summer. We all know that there are good and bad years; fat and lean years as it says in the Old Testament.

We must remember at the time of Thanksgiving that the Lord also demands thankful living. This means that every day we must give thanks to God and show this in how we live before Him. He knows also our difficult times. God is there when there is plenty, but also when we struggle through hard times.

The Israelites in the Old Testament also knew about hardships. They also had the calling to be joyful for their deliverance. They were joyful knowing that God had never abandoned them in the desert. They also had a feast day where they took choice fruits off the trees as well as palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars. They rejoiced before the Lord for seven days. (See Leviticus 23:40). They also lived in booths during these seven days to remind them of how it was in the wilderness where they also lived in booths. The Lord had taken care of them there by providing food, shelter and clothing. Water was also supplied out of a rock. This was all done by his almighty hand.

Just as He provided for his people then, so the Lord continues to provide for his church today. Many of us do have our difficulties in this life. The Lord knows all our thoughts and still cares for us as we read in Psalm 139:17. Only in Christ can we be joyful and give thanks at all times. Lord's Day 10 explains this to us very clearly. It asks the question: What do you understand by the providence of God? "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 not by chance but by his Fatherly hand."

Also in this, the time of Thanksgiving, there is much to be thankful for. Not one day did the Lord forget us. He has given us so many gifts as well. His Son was given to us to die so we may one day be a part of the great harvest, when He calls us home. Our sins are forgiven every day, and his Holy Spirit is given to pour faith and love in our hearts. All these blessings are richer than all the material blessings of this world.

Whether we have been given much, or we struggle with what we have, we know that it all has a purpose in this life. Let us continue to be joyful and give Him thanks. One day Christ will come back and we will inherit the greatest gift, namely eternal life. So we may today already prepare and look forward to the great harvest with joy and thanksgiving!

*O come with thanks, God's goodness praising;
His firm and steadfast love endures.
Let Israel and the house of Aaron
Proclaim His love forever sure.
Let all who come to Him in worship
Be in His steadfast love secure.
Come to the Lord with your thanksgiving;
His everlasting love endures.*

Psalm 118:1

Birthdays in October:

- 6th HENRY VANDER VLIET** will be turning 34.
Anchor Home
361, Thirty Road RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0
- 17th ALAN BREUKELMAN** will be 35.
225-19th Street
Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4
- 22nd NELENA HOF SINK** will be 41.
Bethesda Clearbrook Home
32553 Willingdon Cr.
Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2
- 25th JOHN FEENSTRA** will be turning 43.
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0
- 28th MARY ANN DE WIT** will be 45.
Bethesda
6705 Satchel Road, Box 40
Mount Lehman, BC V0X 1V0

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating your birthday in October. May God bless you all in this new year with much health and happiness. May you celebrate giving thanks to Him alone in all circumstances, for every new day and year that He gives to you. Till the next month,

Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman
Mailing correspondence:
548 Kemp Road East
RR 2 Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
1-905-563-0380

The Challenge of Reformed Education in Denver

By the Denver School Board

Historical background

In the past, articles about the school and church have appeared in Canadian, Dutch, and Australian Reformed church papers. Readers in *Clarion* will by now be familiar with the advertisement requesting donations for the school in Denver that has been appearing regularly in recent issues. Indeed, without the financial support of our brothers and sisters in Canada, the Netherlands, and Australia, it would have been impossible to sustain the school in Denver. We appreciate these gifts very much and thank the Lord for his gracious provisions through these gifts. For those that are and have been supporting our school and for those that are interested to know how these donations are used, we would like to provide you with an overview of the history of the school in Denver, our need for the school, and our plans for its future.

In 1991, soon after the institution of the American Reformed Church in Denver, the parents of children in the congregation got together to discuss ways of coordinating the education of the children in the congregation and to work toward the establishment of a school in Denver. Previously, several families had their children in local public schools, three families had their children in interdenominational Christian schools and two families were home schooling their children.

Emphasis on Reformed education

Through the history of the Reformed Churches worldwide there has always been a strong emphasis on Christian education in accordance with the vows that were made at the baptism of our children. Since we as parents, church, and community, bring up our covenant children in the fear of the Lord, it is often necessary to consider the impor-



Heritage Christian School: The American Reformed Church also uses the building for their worship services.

tance and meaning of Christian education in the lives of God's covenant children and our mutual responsibility in this respect. Christ's command to raise our children in the fear of the Lord covers every aspect of our lives. When God blesses a married couple with a covenant child, He commands them to bring up this child in the love and fear of the Lord according to his word. Yet, they are not alone in this command. The church, as body of Christ, is also subject to this command since these children are a part of the body of Christ. Therefore, parents also entrust their children to the guidance and instruction of the church. Furthermore, children also receive instruction at school. Christ has commanded us to teach our children the fear of the Lord and children receive this instruction from the family, church, and the school. Only in this manner are our children fully surrounded by God's Word and promises and thereby grow in the fear of his

name. At baptism the parents promise to bring up their children in the love and fear of the Lord. As children of God we are commanded and we also desire to provide our children with an education built on God's covenant promises. Our covenant children must be taught that Christ is the fountain of all life and that everything we do on earth is done for his honour and glory.

The children given to us by the Lord are first of all his children. In addition, they are the future generation of the church. It is therefore one of the fundamental Reformed beliefs to conduct the upbringing and education of our children in harmony with the Word of God. The public school system in the USA has become more and more secular during the past several decades to the point where God and his Word are banned from the school premises. Children in the public schools are taught that pleasing self, fulfilling one's own desires, and being applauded by the

world for one's own achievements is most important. As Christians we do not strive to attain personal goals for our own honour, to be great achievers, or to better ourselves or measure up to the standards society has established for our own sake. As Christians, we look to Christ's teachings and recognize that they are central in our lives and that He guides us to honour Him in all we do. Then we strive for excellence in all spheres of life focussed on God's Word and his honour. For this reason it is so important to provide our covenant children with instruction that is in harmony with God's word. The congregation recognizes that just as the Reformed faith structures church life, so it ought to structure school life and education. There are several Christian schools in Denver but they are not Reformed or Presbyterian in character. They often emphasize a more charismatic evangelical approach to education and are often not Christ centered.

Need for a school in Denver

The lack of clear alternative for the education for our children and the incapability of some parents to home school their children has motivated the congregation to explore the possibility of establishing a Reformed school in Denver. The parents came together in March 1992, and decided to establish a Reformed School Association. The parents initially organized a school for the first two grades in the basement of the house of Rev. M. Pollock where three

days a week, Mrs. Monique Moorlag-Wubs, the first teacher, taught grades one and two on a voluntary basis. During these initial years the Association did not operate the school. The parents who had children in grades one and two, organized and operated the school informally. The American Reformed School Association officially came into being in July 1992, and was registered with the State of Colorado as a nonprofit organization. The school later moved to one of the other residences in the congregation. It started with four children and later grew to five. It should be noted that the parents and not the Association took this initial initiative. However, it did spur the activities of the Association to look into the possibility of establishing a formal school in Denver.



Teacher and students in the classroom.



Students on the playground during recess.

In September 1993, however, the informal teaching arrangement for the first two grades was terminated because the teacher moved away from Denver. Nevertheless, the Association continued to actively pursue the establishment of a school. After talks with the consistory of the American Reformed Church in Denver it was decided that the School Association would approach a committee in the Netherlands that supported foreign schools with funds to renovate the historical building that the church used for its worship services and to make it suitable for a school. It is interesting to note that the historical school building around the turn of the 19th to 20th century. In 1993, the Foundation for Support of Reformed Schools Abroad in the Netherlands decided to provide the funding requested for the renovation of the historical building. This historical building does not belong to the church or the school, but belongs to a historical society. The renovations were conducted by members of the congregation in Denver who volunteered their time for the work, which were completed in July 1994, just in time for the opening of the school in August 1994. The Emmanuel American Reformed Church continued using, and is still using, the building for their meetings and Sunday worship services. Because the Association completed the renovation of the building, the agreement with the historical society (owners of the building), was that the Association and Heritage Christian School could use the building rent-free for a period of five years. This period expired in 1999 and the school and church are now renting the building.



Children of the congregation in Denver.

School opening

Heritage Christian School was officially opened on August 27, 1994. A special ceremony accompanied the opening of the school and a report was also published in *Clarion*. The American Reformed School Association has been operating the Heritage Christian School since August 1994 as a full-time primary and secondary school for children from Grades 1 to 12 (see pictures). The school currently has one full-time teacher/principal, Mr. Wayne Chase, and three volunteer part-time teacher's aides, Mrs. Gigi Weckwerth, Mrs. Karen Vandeburgt, and Mrs. Vicky Barten. In addition, parents in the congregation also help with certain school activities. The school does not receive any financial help from either the national, state or local governments. All governmental support goes to the public schools. Private schools in the US do not receive government subsidies and they have to be entirely self-sufficient. When the Heritage Christian School was established, it was known that the Association and community in Denver could not sustain the school without outside financial help. Many Christian schools in the US also conduct major fund-raising activities in and outside their communities. The Lord graciously provided for the school through financial support from our brothers and sisters in Canada, the Netherlands, and Australia for which we are thankful.

The membership of the School Association has remained nearly con-

stant throughout the years and currently counts twelve members. At the moment there are eight children spread over five grades in the school. This number is down from about fourteen at the start in 1994. The decrease occurred because a few children graduated and some families moved away. However, there are currently six families with young children in the church that have children in school, or will have, within the next two years. Three families presently have children attending school. The current projections are that student totals should increase in 2002. In addition, one student, from parents that are not members of the congregation, attends the school. In the past we have on several occasions allowed children to attend school from parents outside the church. Although it is not the policy of the Board to actively recruit children outside the church, the Board may allow children from parents outside the church on an individual basis according to the By-Laws of the Association.


Interest from other churches

It is important to note that recent new contacts between a local United Reformed Church and local OPC churches in the area have indicated that our school is the only Reformed/Presbyterian School in the Denver region. Several families in these other churches have recently shown interest in the school and the Board plans to be more active in advertising the school in the local Reformed/Presbyterian communities.

As mentioned earlier, only public education is government funded. Thus, Christian institutions must provide their own finances or seek them elsewhere. This, however, has not hindered the desire of the families in Denver to have and support a Reformed school. In the past the Lord has graciously provided for the Heritage Christian School, which has been in existence since 1994. The families in Denver trust and pray for the Lord's continual provisions, financially and spiritually, as we strive to guide our covenant children in the truth of God's Word. Generally, the Reformed/Presbyterian community in the Denver region is small and not very strong financially. The other local churches are very similar in size to the American Reformed Church in Denver. However, the local members of the Association and also in the congregation often generously provide for needs of both church and school. In addition, local fund drives organized by the woman in the congregation ("Heritage Helpers") brings in about ten percent of the total operating budget for the school. Although we anticipate growth in student numbers and tuition in next two years, it is clear that the need for financial support from outside (about forty percent of the total annual budget of the school) of the community in Denver will remain in the foreseeable future.

Need to maintain the school

We, as parents in the congregation in Denver, continue to feel a necessity to maintain the Heritage Christian school where children are taught the ways of the Lord. We do not have other alternatives in terms of Reformed/Presbyterian education. Providing Reformed education in the United States is clearly not without its challenges.

It is against this background that we continue to ask for your support for the Heritage Christian school in Denver; support not only in financial terms, but above all spiritual support through your prayers for the church and school in Denver. We are grateful to the Lord for what He has already provided through our brothers and sisters in Canada, the Netherlands, and Australia and pray that the Lord will continue to provide for all his people around the world. 



What I Teach

By D. Slomp

The second most common response I receive from strangers after I have told them that I am a teacher usually involves a long story about how they had once been so bad in school, or how they had formerly treated their teachers so contemptuously that one of their teachers ended up either: a) running out of the classroom crying, or b) taking half a year's sick leave to recover from a nervous breakdown, or c) forsaking the teaching profession forever to become a used car salesman. This line of conversation usually begins with the statement, "You should be glad that I was never one of your students." It always ends with, "You should be glad I was never one of your teachers."

But in the end, no matter how different from one another they are, I teach covenant children.

The most common response to my stating that I am a teacher is the question, "Really. What do you teach?" My response is almost as automatic as the "hello" one extends to the clerk behind the checkout counter, or as sincere as "I'm fine," proffered in response to the equally insincere question, "How are you today?" (How many of us don't cringe when a person responds in depth – describing his latest bout of gastrointestinal pains, or her latest battle with the sniffles – to our simple, polite query?). I generally answer this question politely with one word: "English." In the lines that follow, however, I go beyond the polite, insincere, one word response and I explore the answer to "What do you teach?"

Primarily, I teach children. Covenant children: Children with a passion for learning, and children as apathetic as sunbathing cats. Some exuding self-confidence, ready to conquer a world

they hardly know; others imprisoned with a self-doubt so profound they may never find the key to their release. Some who are in pain, and some who are unscathed (it seems) by the broken nature of this world. Some who are models of the children I hope to raise. Some who relish life, enjoying the simple innocence of youth; others who relish the thought of being "bad," of pushing the boundaries, of finding the edge between what they know is right and what they hope to justify. Some who learn with a speed I could never hope to emulate, and others who struggle to understand the most simple of concepts. Some who rely on others to do their thinking, some who have learned to analyze the world around them, sensing its flaws and appreciating its inherent goodness. But in the end, no matter how different from one another they are, I teach covenant children. A blessing often in disguise.

I teach "English" as well.

In English, we learn basic grammar such as nouns and verbs, and we learn more complex structures such as phrasal parallelism, copular sentences, and pronoun antecedents; we learn paragraph structure, essay organization, poetic techniques, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary. But these structures in themselves are not important. During English, we learn that effective writing is far more than the structures that underlie it; it is a form of reaching out, of connecting one's experience with another's. We learn that writing is thinking, language is thinking, words are thoughts. Without them . . .

A truth about writing that I try to pass on to my students is that clear writing cannot hide a lie. And so I encourage my students to write clearly. I teach students that writing effectively also requires the ability to think clearly, the ability to express thoughts clearly, logically, and most important of all, honestly and passionately. For what value is there in writing if it isn't clear and honest, and what is it worth if it doesn't exude passion? I teach my students the importance of being honest. Of telling their stories honestly so that they can connect with people, so that people can

read what they have written and say, "Yes, I've thought or felt that too." I try to teach students the importance of first being honest with themselves. Of looking inward to see their own weaknesses, their own flaws, their own biased perspective, so that their writing is not polluted with the dishonesty we so often don't acknowledge. I try to show students how honesty in writing can and should be transferred to honesty in speaking. I try to teach my students that true honesty means not hiding behind masks but that it involves expressing who they are without care for how they are perceived.

In addition to teaching writing, I also teach reading. By the time my students have worked their way up to my classes, they have learned the basics of reading. Yet despite the fact that they have mastered the skills required to recognize symbols and words, their ability to read is only just beginning to develop. When I teach reading, I teach my students to try understand the person who is reaching out to them through the lines laid out before them. Before I begin to explore a literary novel with my students I often quote to them from C.S. Lewis: "We read only to know we are not alone." As students learn to read they learn to "crawl into someone else's skin and walk around

For what value is there in writing if it isn't clear and honest, and what is it worth if it doesn't exude passion?

in it" (Atticus Finch). They learn to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. When my students learn to read, they learn to see connections between their lives and the lives of those who are either writing to them, or who are being written about in the pages before them. They learn to evaluate their own experiences in terms of others.' Often they learn to recognize the benefits and comforts that come with being Christian; they read about characters who struggle through life without a clearly marked map, who

don't recognize their reason for being, who make wrong decisions. Sometimes they see parts of themselves in these characters – the Jew-hating merchant, ostracized Jew, the young criminal, the social outcast, the innocent little girl caught up in a world she doesn't understand – and discovering this, they recognize that they are not alone and that their struggles are not entirely unique. Suddenly literature becomes infinitely more meaningful.

Teaching English, I also teach the importance of passion.

They teach me patience and forgiveness. And so often, they teach me the importance of simple faith.

Most of all, I try to teach my students about passion. Passion for living, for reading, for learning. We study poetry, not to see what point it makes, but to explore the pure emotion it is built upon. Studying poetry, we consider life, love, death, and every shade of human emotion. We study Shakespeare exploring the ways in which passion for life can be expressed in words upon a stage. And we recognize how boring life would be if God had not created us as passionate beings.

I also teach myself. My students often teach me. They teach me about honesty, about repentance, about making mistakes, about owning up to them, and about moving on, learning from them. They teach me about the importance of change and of consensus. They remind me, through both their exuberance and their apathy, of why it is so important to work hard and to take life and its opportunities seriously. They teach me patience and forgiveness. And so often, they teach me the importance of simple faith. Working each day with them, I often am reminded of how they innocently see things in terms of black and white, not yet having found a need to rationalize so many shades of grey.

And so the next time a teacher answers your question "What do you teach?" with the word English, and you see a glitter in his eye and a slight smile upon his face, you know he's merely being polite, there is so much more he really wants to tell you.

David Slomp is an English teacher at Covenant Canadian Reformed School in Neerlandia, AB.

Peregrine Survey

By K. Sikkema

With new vigour and enthusiasm, we could once again start a new school year. While the schools smelled lemon-fresh and retained the vapours of important environment-enhancing summer maintenance, they soon were abuzz with the sounds of teaching and learning in creatively decorated classrooms. But all that is but little when compared to the new strength and joy that flows from the ever-renewing Word and Spirit of God. May we all, families, church communities, and teachers seek and find our strength, unity, and courage in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, rather than in just a new coat of paint or bright and wonderful decorum.

As we work, we don't just "hope for the best", but commit our ways and lives to the LORD.

Some schools have seen a major turnover in staff or board, and efforts will need to be spent in getting the new people familiarized with their environments and expectations. Even if the turn-over was not major, we wish all well who are faced with new responsibilities and challenges. Some also continue to struggle with changing demographics, staffing shortages, or ill health. May you, too, have peace, be encouraged, and find solutions that maintain the quality and identity of Reformed education. As we work, we don't just "hope for the best," but commit our ways and lives to the LORD.

Some of our teachers have not just switched positions, schools, or provinces, but countries as well. A hearty "Welkom!" to those joining us from the Netherlands, and "Selamat bertugas" to the colleague who will join the International School in Nabire, Indonesia. With all things under control and running smoothly by the end of September, the principals have their bi-annual national conference at which they will juggle ideas about postmodernism, the covenant and education, and due process in the context of biblical principles. All this hard labour will bear fruit if it is done in his service, for

his kingdom, for his glory, and with his blessing.

The school in Neerlandia rejoiced in receiving permanent certification from the provincial government of Alberta for four of its teachers. Congratulations, colleagues, and may you continue your task with joy and confidence. The AISCA (Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta) continues its campaign to receive more equitable funding for Alberta's 220 private schools – up from the current 60%. These schools serve 26,500 students, which constitute about 4% of the Alberta student population.

The school uniform issue keeps popping up – lastly in the Fraser Valley, as reported in the May 20 issue of the *Orange Courier* and in the May 18 issue of *Credo Branches*. The Valley schools will make a decision on the matter this Fall.

Ebenezer (Smithers) is scheduled to be evaluated by an external evaluation committee in October. The school received a generous pledge for a donation, and was seeking more at the time of writing, to purchase the *Open Court* reading series for its primary grades. Their education committee had made a strong recommendation to that effect.

The school will work towards a zero-tolerance for smoking and for possession of cigarettes during school hours.

The school rejoices in its strong bond with the community, and is very much encouraged by the support it receives. As you continue to review and renew your curriculum, and to re-implement the upper grades, we wish you the blessings of our heavenly Father.

Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton is working towards a total ban on smoking. Considering the realities of addiction, and yet wanting to eliminate the habit from school premises and from the neighbourhood, it has designated a small smoking area on school property. With the "Smoke Free by 2003" slogan clearly advocating the goal, the school will work towards a zero-tolerance for smoking and for possession of cigarettes during school hours, whether on or off school property, or during school-related events. An active in-school smoking

cessation program has been started, and hooked students are involved in educating up-and-coming Guido students about the physical, social, emotional, and disciplinary implications of smoking.

Remember the plans of ACRES (Attercliffe) to develop a nature trail? The work continues with great enthusiasm, and the wood-chip covered ACRES Nature Trail through the bush is now developing into a Science Trail as well, complete with stations for specific activities. Over fifty species of birds have been observed on the grounds. Now in its seventh year of operation, ACRES is also scheduled to have an external evaluation done in the spring of 2002.

Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College in Hamilton invites suggestions for special interest seminars, such as the ones offered during the last school year. To refresh your memory, they were on *Curriculum Modifica-*

tion for Special Needs Learners, and Reformation and Education. As its desks are again occupied with fifteen eager students in education, we look forward to receiving them in our schools as student-teachers, and upon completion of their one- or three-year programs, as colleagues. We also anticipate hearing more good news from the College and its principal!

Schools in Ontario are also awaiting word from the provincial government about regulations that will be developed in the context of the Equity in Education Tax Credit. If all teachers have to be certified by the College of Teachers, the actual benefit may be disappointing – unless a grandfather clause, or a system-restricted certification can be implemented as has previously happened elsewhere. In this scenario, the existence of our Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College will also be under scrutiny again. If the regula-

tions require a slavish following of provincial curriculum, there will be a real issue about whether or not the schools can accept this infringement on the very identity of Reformed education. Furthermore, treasurers and accountants are undoubtedly anxious to see whether it would be profitable to change the fee-structure of the schools, so as to reap maximum benefit from the credit.

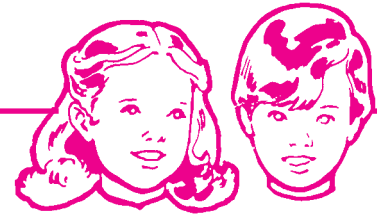
To help me do a better job in this column, I have requested all schools to send me their monthly, bi-monthly, or quarterly publication by e-mail. In case your school did not get my request, please pass it on, and email your regular publication to ksikkema@icom.ca.

Education Matters is a column supported by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association of Ontario. Please send reader responses or articles which you think could benefit the reader to Arthur Kingma at acres@kwic.com or to Clarion.



OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

You are now back at school, and no longer on vacation. Are you enjoying your new class, maybe a new teacher, maybe even a new school? Do you have the same friends, or are you making some new friends? You must have all been very busy during your vacation, because I only received a few letters. My mailbox was very empty.

This *Clarion* is dealing with Thanksgiving Day, which is celebrated on October 8. It is a day on which everyone can be thankful for what has been given them. It is especially to thank God for the harvest of the crops which He has given to the farmers. Without that harvest, there would be a lack of things such as wheat to make bread, cakes and lots of other delicious things. Think about it.

Love from Aunt Betty

September Birthdays

- 2 Jessica Verhelst
- 9 Cheyenne Bergsma
- 16 Ashley Tuininga



October Birthdays

- 10 Nelene Brouwer
- 20 Kathryn Nobel
- 29 Michelle Dekker

Puzzles

Paul's Journeys

In this puzzle, places visited by Paul in his missionary journeys have been given with the consonants represented by dots. Can you identify the places concerned?

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. . E . . A | 11. . A . . O . |
| 2. A . . E . . | 12. . Y . . . A |
| 3. . I . E . U . | 13. . . I . I . . I |
| 4. .. O . I . . . | 14. . E . E A |
| 5. A . . IO . . | 15. . . . IA |
| 6. . . OA . | 16. . A . A . I . |
| 7. . E . . E | 17. . I . . . E . E |
| 8. I . O . IU . | 18. . E EA |
| 9. E . . E . U . | 19. . . O IU . |
| 10. . . E . . A . O . I . A | 20. . A . O A . IA |



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