

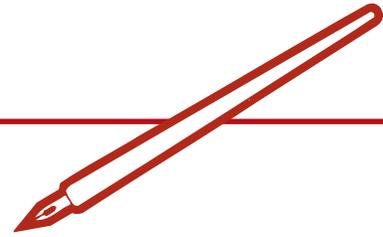
Clarion

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*Offering in the
Church*

INSIDE!



By J. Visscher



The Offering in the Church

While preaching, sacraments, and singing receive a considerable amount of attention when it comes to our worship, the same cannot be said about the offering. It seems to be an almost forgotten aspect of our liturgy. And that is unfortunate for it deserves a proper and honoured place when believers meet with the Lord.

Its liturgical place

But why is it forgotten? Part of the problem may well have to do with the place of the offering in the worship service. In the Canadian Reformed Churches we have two suggested orders of worship that are often called the “A” Liturgy and the “B” Liturgy, or the Middleburg Liturgy and the Kampen Liturgy. Under “A” or Middleburg, the offering takes place almost in the middle of the worship service. Under “B” or Kampen, the offering occurs near the very end of the worship service.

I do not say that the offering is the most important part of the liturgy, but I am convinced that it should be an integral part of our worship.

What is one to say about such positioning? It can be said that both are open to criticism and should receive some careful scrutiny and debate. The “A” order of worship places the offering in a rather odd place by putting it between the reading of the Word and the proclamation of the Word. What is the rationale for that? Indeed, is it even proper to interrupt the reading and proclamation of the Word in this way? Why hinder the flow with the offering? Why place it at such a central point?

The “B” order, on the other hand, takes a different approach in that it places the offering just before the closing song and benediction. In a sense this can be considered an improvement, since prayers for forgiveness, renewal and intercessions, as well as creeds, sacraments and offerings belong after the Word. The flow of worship should be that we first listen to what the Lord has to say to us and thereafter confess our faith, beseech Him to listen to our needs, to bless the use of his sacraments and to consecrate our offerings.

There is, however, still a problem with “B” and that has to do with the fact that it is placed almost last in the worship service. Why, in “B” it appears as if the offering has be-

come an after-thought. It hangs there in somewhat disjointed fashion at the end. The result is that the impression is given that the offering is not all that relevant.

Now, that is something that should be avoided at all costs. I do not say that the offering is the most important part of the liturgy, but I am convinced that it should be an integral part of our worship. In other words, it does not deserve the kind of place it is given either in “A” where it is made too central or in “B” where it comes across as an incidental.

As a result, I would urge that in the “B” Liturgy (“A” is liturgically flawed and cannot be easily altered) the offering be moved up and receive a place after the ministry of the Word, after the responsive song and before the final prayer.

After the offering

Furthermore, I would suggest that some discussion take place on the possibility of introducing a proper congregational response to the offering in the form of either a short song or prayer. This has long been a regular feature in the liturgical practices of several churches of Presbyterian and Reformed persuasion. Does its absence in both “A” and “B” liturgies not undermine the fostering of true Christian stewardship and the work of the deacons in the congregation?

The background for this particular proposal with regard to a congregational response to the offering is two-fold. The first has to do with the fact that as churches we are not doing as much as we can to counteract the materialistic spirit of the age in which we live. As a pastor, I am becoming increasingly concerned about the damage that the power of money is doing to our congregations.

It would appear that many are in danger of forgetting that our life does not consist of the abundance of our possessions.

It would appear that many are in danger of forgetting that our life does not consist of the abundance of our possessions. Some are pursuing occupations, not because they see them as part of their divine calling, but because of the dollar signs attached to them. Others are driven by a compulsive need to shop and to keep up with the latest fashion styles, automobiles and electronic gadgets. Then there are those who

cannot wait for the next cruise or trip. And lest we forget, what about the gambling and lottery craze that is becoming so prevalent in our society and which will surely spill over into the church, if it is not doing so already.

Some insights from Calvin

But, if my first reason for wanting to direct more attention and consideration to this matter has to do with our being assaulted by materialism and consumerism, the second has to do with the biblical view of money. To be honest, I had never given this topic much thought until years ago I came across an excellent study on John Calvin. It was written by a man named Andre Bieler and is called *La Pensee Economique et Sociale de Calvin*. (A very brief digest and translation of this 560 page book was later published under

What's inside?

As everyone in our churches knows, not every congregation sets the deaconal collection at the same place during the worship service. That leads to some questions as to the most suitable place and time for the collections. Dr. J. Visscher looks at the implications of this even more deeply in his editorial. As he writes, "It seems to be an almost forgotten aspect of our liturgy. And that is unfortunate for it deserves a proper and honoured place when believers meet with the Lord."

Recently, Rev. M. VanderWel celebrated forty years in the ministry. Hear from his own lips what it means to be a minister of the Word: "To be engaged in the ministry of reconciliation and to hear the young and old respond in the congregational singing, is a unique experience, which I enjoy time and again. Therefore, I am for the fact that I have been allowed to serve in this special office for so many years."

Dr. R. Faber concludes his two-part article on Calvin and psalm singing. According to Dr. Faber, Calvin defines psalm-singing as the public offering of prayers. He writes, "This definition determines what Calvin perceives to be the purpose of congregational worship in song, namely the glorification of God's name, the edification of the church, and the inculcation of piety."

We have an update from MERF-Canada. Many of us support this work prayerfully and financially. When you read this update, it will make you want to do so even more. We are humbled by the things that some of God's children have to endure, and we stand in awe that the Lord our God gathers, defends and preserves his church from every tribe, tongue and nation.

We have a press review from Dr. J. DeJong, our column, *Education Matters*, and a letter to the editor.

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IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – The Offering in the Church — J. Visscher	402
John Calvin on Psalms and Hymns in Public Worship (2) — R. Faber	405
Press Review – On the Unity and Disunity of Churches (1) — J. De Jong	408
Fortieth Anniversary for Rev. M. VanderWel — W. Pleiter	411
Education Matters	413
News from MERF Canada	414
Our Little Magazine — Aunt Betty.....	415

the title, *The Social Humanism of Calvin*. I still hope that some day the entire work will be made available in English).

In this truly fascinating book Bieler shows how Calvin thought about different social and economic issues. In painstaking fashion he has gone through all of Calvin's commentaries and letters and unearthed a huge amount of information about the reformer's thoughts on these matters. The result is that the reader is left with a sense of amazement as he or she considers how perceptive, generous, advanced, and biblical Calvin was in his views.

Summarizing part of Calvin's views and conclusions, Bieler says the following:

Associated with Christ through faith and restored into his dignity as a child of God, man finds again a right relation to his neighbour. That man receives a new and exact understanding of the role of money. Money is an instrument of God for the support and subsistence of society. That man understands also that money must be mastered in order to be consecrated to God and to one's neighbour. On the personal plane, this rediscovery imposes first a rigorous discipline on man It is also with his money that the Christian renders to God a worship in spirit and in truth. For the Christian, the act of offering is an essential spiritual act, a priming, an act of worship in the highest degree. Indeed by his offering the believer certifies to God that Mammon has been dethroned. By concrete gifts, the Christian expresses to God the real measure of his faith. By these gifts, the man confesses that his Lord is really the acknowledged Master of his entire life – moral, physical, and material. And the church which has understood this cannot be contented in worship with a collection which is not an act of offering, but is, in one way or another, dissimulated behind the singing of a hymn or at the exit of the faithful. The Christian community must certify by an explicit public act that for the church, money has been exorcised by the eternal Christ, that money has been stripped of its evil spiritual power and has recovered its true function as servant.

Calvin's basic view of the offering was that it is the means by which the congregation of Jesus Christ manifests publicly that Mammon has been dethroned. Is that not a deep, beautiful and biblical insight?

At the same time it forces us to admit that we have not always seen the offering in that light. Indeed, while the offering has always been considered an integral part of the worship service, we have not always been able to explain why. Well, here is the reason! Through it God wants his people to acknowledge Him as Source and Giver and to say "No" to Mammon and the forces of materialism.

Why not place these first fruits on the table that many of our churches have in front of the pulpit?

Now, it is out of this perspective that I would plead for the need to direct the attention of the congregation more to the offering. To do this there is nothing that prevents us from saying a brief prayer or from singing Hymn 6 after it has been collected.

In addition, it raises questions too about some of our current practices. Is it really fitting that once the offering has been collected the deacons place it somewhere off to the side, as it does not really matter? Why not place these first fruits on the table that many of our churches have in front of the pulpit?

And what about that strange practice of people being asked to place their voluntary contributions to the church in some box outside the worship hall? Are these contributions not offerings? Do they not deserve a place in the worship service? Are they not supposed to represent "first fruits?" Is there a kind of dualism at work here in that some of our money is put in the offering bag during worship and some of it can be paid like an entrance fee before we enter to worship? I would like someone to tell me why all of the contributions that we make to the Lord, whether it be to support the operations of the church or the work of the deacons, should not be done within the context of our worship on the Lord's day.



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Photo courtesy Cor Lodder

John Calvin on Psalms and Hymns in Public Worship

Part 2: Meaning, Purpose, and Form

By R. Faber

In the first installment of this article we examined the background of Calvin's thought regarding congregational singing. Following a quick sketch of the relevant primary sources, we considered the various influences upon the reformer of Geneva. Repeatedly Calvin appealed to the authority of the Old and New Testament to support his ideas about the role of corporate song in the worship services. This biblical basis was further reinforced by references to the apostolic age and to the writings of the church fathers. Using also the theories of music and song that may be traced to classical antiquity, Calvin developed a consistent understanding of the place which music and song have in the special worship of God by his chosen people. Contemporary influences, such as the liturgical practices in Strassbourg and the reformers' reaction to Roman Catholic customs, also played a role in the development of Calvin's ideas.

In this installment we shall examine some of the fundamental principles Calvin formed about congregational singing. An important starting point is Calvin's definition of psalm-singing as the public offering of prayers. This definition determines what Calvin perceives to be the purpose of congregational worship in song, namely the glorification of God's name, the edification of the church, and the inculcation of piety. Given this meaning and purpose of singing, Calvin readily develops his ideas about the contents and form of the "public prayers," and he is very clear about the manner in which congregational singing should occur. We shall end by relating Calvin's views

about the place of choirs and instruments in the worship service.

4. Definition of psalm-singing

In the articles for the organization of the church Calvin advised that "there be singing of some psalms in the form of public prayers." This phrase is significant for our understanding of Calvin's concept of psalm-singing, for it reveals that he perceives the corporate song to be akin to corporate prayer. The basis for this definition is found in Scripture. Calvin had observed the statement at the conclusion of Psalm 72:20 that "the prayers of David, the son of Jesse are ended." The contents of the Psalms also attest to their nature as prayer, for many consist of addresses to God in meditation. Prayers entail praise of God, request for forgiveness of sin, confession of guilt, and entreaty for the people of God. In the New Testament also prayers and psalm-singing are joined.

Calvin deems the psalms to be the primary source for the song-book of the church; they are a collection of prayers made public.

Calvin links prayer closely to the Psalms also in the introduction to his commentary on the Old Testament book (CO 31, p.16-35). As prayers, many of the psalms deal with the most intimate concerns of the individual human heart. Indeed, Calvin calls the psalms the "anatomy of all the parts of

the soul," for "the Holy Spirit has here drawn to life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men tend be troubled" (CO 31, 16). Therefore, "whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book" (CO 31, 18). For this reason, too, Calvin deems the psalms to be the primary source for the song-book of the church; they are a collection of prayers made public.

There has been some difference of opinion about what Calvin means when he uses the word "psalms" (*pseumes*). Some suggest that he employs it in a general sense of spiritual songs (cantiques); others that he means any song performed in church, so that the term denotes the entire repertoire of psalms available at the time. As readers may know, the phrase "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" in Colossians 3:16 has been debated. In his commentary on this text Calvin merely relates the distinctions commonly made in his time: psalms refers to singing accompanied by music, hymns are songs of praise, and odes (the "spiritual songs") contain an element of exhortation. In his other writings, and especially when treating congregational singing, Calvin appears to use the word "psalm" to refer to the Old Testament psalms as they have been put to rhyme in translation.

For Calvin the Bible was the best source for the psalms of the catholic church. Like the church-fathers, he was convinced that the Book of Psalms contains in a nutshell the entire gospel of salvation; by singing the psalms the believer would better understand the message of



Psalm 25 in the 1539 Aulcuns Pseaulmes et Cantiquesimage

Scripture. In the introduction to the commentary on the Psalms, Calvin writes that in them “we will also find that the free remission of sins, which alone reconciles God towards us, and procures for us settled peace with him, is so set forth and magnified, as that there is nothing wanting which relates to the knowledge of eternal salvation” (CO 31,18). Calvin did not restrict the repertoire to the One Hundred and Fifty Psalms, however. For he knew that from the time of the exodus the people of God were acquainted with songs; witness the Psalm of Moses (Ps 90). Calvin also refers to the songs of the prophets, and included in the psalters the New Testament songs (of Simeon, for example) and the catholic creeds. The main criterion for selection of material was the Word of God: “no-one can sing things worthy of God except what he has received from Him” (CO 6, 172).

5. The purpose of congregational singing

According to Calvin, congregational psalm-singing serves three purposes: 1) to glorify God; 2) to edify members of the church; 3) to meditate upon and foster Christian virtues. In the *Draft Ordinances* Calvin writes that the psalms “can stimulate us to lift our hearts to God and rouse us to a zeal in invoking as well as in exalting with praise the glory of His name” (CO 10, 12). In the 1543 introduction to the psalter Calvin writes much the same: psalm-singing incites the believer to meditate upon God, to raise her heart to God, to console herself, and

to contemplate the divine virtues of excellence, wisdom and justice.

The primary goal of corporate singing is not the expression of one’s response to the faith, or the sharing of one’s feelings, but the praising of God for his mercy and grace. Indeed, writes Calvin, “there is prescribed to us an infallible rule for directing us with respect to the right manner of offering to God the sacrifice of praise” (CO 31, 18).

The primary goal of corporate singing is not the expression of one’s response to the faith, or the sharing of one’s feelings, but the praising of God for his mercy and grace.

The focus of the corporate song is God, not man. After all, it is by singing that the church of the old and new dispensation brings praise to God. This main purpose of psalm-singing should be evident in the manner in which the psalms are sung. The weight of contemporary culture or the aesthetic values of a particular generation should not overburden the text or cause distraction from extolling God.

A second purpose for psalm-singing in the worship service is the edification of the believers. For this reason Calvin stresses the importance of the believer’s conscious exercise of the psalms in the

relationship with God. Psalm-singing helps to take one’s mind off earthly things and to contemplate spiritual matters. By involving the minds and mouths of the believers, congregational singing draws attention to the divine Word. This Word works in the hearts of believers through the powerful combination of text and music. Since this text must be understood easily, it should appear not in Latin but in the common tongue. A French translation of the Hebrew psalms does not indicate a devaluing of Scripture; rather, it increases the meaning of the psalm for those who sing it.

Meditation upon the effects of God’s grace is a third reason for singing psalms. The psalms function as a tool to encourage and strengthen believers in times of doubt or sorrow. They also draw attention to one’s sins, Christ’s atonement, and the necessity of obedience. They point us to those qualities of patience, wisdom and equity that mark the life of the regenerated believer. In short, psalm-singing has a positive influence upon the moral behaviour of the believer. For this reason Calvin states repeatedly that “unless voice and song . . . spring from deep feeling of the heart, neither has value or profit” (CO 1, 88). The desire to appropriate the Word of God and let it affect the soul is an important element in singing psalms.

6. Form: melody and text

Calvin’s ideas about the form of corporate psalm-singing were based on his concept of the relation between melody and text. Simply stated, music should support and promote the text. In the chapter of the *Institutes* (3.20.32) that deals with singing hymns in church, Calvin rejects “such songs as have been composed only for sweetness and delight of the ear” as “unbecoming to the majesty of the church” (CO 2, 659). Elsewhere he discourages the use of lyrics and melodies that are marked by musical ornamentation, for they detract from the majesty of the church and her worship. He writes, “regarding melody, it seemed best that it be moderated in a manner that we have adopted to carry gravity and majesty befitting the subject” (CO 6, 171-172). The “name of God should be praised properly with an articulated voice” (CO 31, 324). Following Augustine, Calvin advises that “we should be

very careful that our ears be not more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meaning of the words" (CO 2, 659).

There has been some debate in the last century about the sources from which Calvin, Marot and Beza drew their music. O. Douen had argued at the end of the nineteenth century that Calvin used three sources: the music of the Strassbourg Psalter, the imagination of the composers, and the popular, worldly songs of the late middle ages. In recent decades, however, it has been shown that while a very few tunes of secular songs were adapted for use in the Genevan psalter, the majority of tunes were not derived from the plain chant that was common at the time. In fact, there is very little evidence for the way in which the Genevan tunes were performed during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Some modern critics have suggested that Calvin wished to develop a special mode of music for use in the worship services. In comparison with Luther, who was not averse to adapting existing tunes and texts to the Reformed faith, Calvin strove to develop a form of "ecclesiastical music" that accorded with the purpose of the worship service. He certainly reacted strongly to the type of music associated with Roman Catholic worship, and in several places advises the readers to avoid listening to "vain" secular music. And so there is some evidence that Calvin wished a sacred style of music to be composed. At any rate, he insisted that the music be "holy and pure, seeing that it is simply

directed to the edification" of the church (CO 6, 169-170).

While music plays a critical role in creating proper effect, it remains secondary to the text. Since human beings are the only creatures endowed with speech, the peculiar gift of understanding words should be used with care.

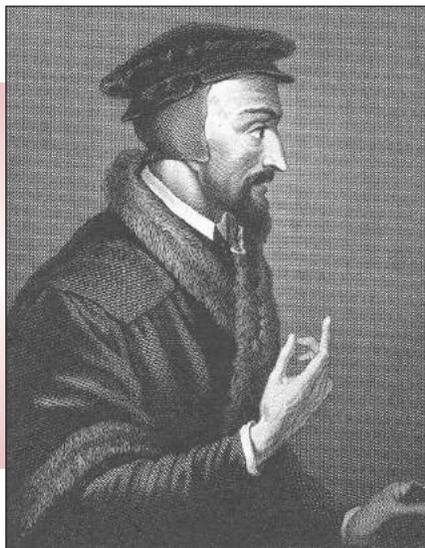
Calvin's ideas about the form of corporate psalm-singing were based on his concept of the relation between melody and text. Simply stated, music should support and promote the text.

Therefore Calvin discourages the use of polyphony, whereby the text may be confused and too much attention drawn to the music. The tune should be a simple means to convey the text. In Calvin's view, chromatics, rhythmic variations, and other complications of the music hinder the impact of the text (CO 31, 324). To be sure, he did not oppose singing in two or more parts, but he did not deem it suitable for congregational worship. For Calvin was not so much concerned with the harmony of the sound, as with the harmony of the heart with God. Singing in unison heightens the effect of the text on the mind and the heart, and expresses the conviction that all worshippers belong to the priesthood of believers.

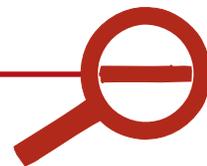
Lastly we shall relate some of Calvin's observations about the use of choirs and instruments in the worship service. Calvin was not inclined to promote the use of choirs for both theological and practical reasons. In reaction to the Romanist view of hierarchy within the church and services, Calvin and the reformers stressed the unity of the people of God. Calvin wished to avoid the idea that the performance of music and song in itself was a sacred act that could effect grace. Furthermore, he was averse to the notion that mortals could please God by entertaining Him, as if they could "make him dance" by their music and song. Given his conviction that the congregational singing is a kind of prayer which has the purpose of glorifying God for his mercy, edifying the believers in the faith, and promoting Christian virtues, Calvin leaves no room to human gratification.

In a sermon on 1 Samuel 18:1-16, Calvin speaks about the tambourines, sitars, and flutes that make an appearance in the public worship there. He notes that these belong to the old dispensation, a dispensation of shadows and imperfect knowledge. "If today we should reinstate them as though necessary, we would return to the ancient shadows, and we would obscure and cover over that light which was revealed in the Son of God" (CO 30, 259). With the coming of Christ also the corporate worship has taken on a new, deeper meaning. Calvin alludes to 1 Corinthians 14:13-19, in which the apostle Paul admonishes the readers to worship God in a clear, understandable way that edifies the believers. For where there is no understanding there can be no edification. He goes on to say that "what was the custom in the time of the law, in no way has a place among us today; we must abstain from those things which are not only superfluous, but without substance. What should be sufficient is the pure and simple melody, one suited to the heart and the mouth of each one of us, of the praises of God. For indeed we know that our Lord God Jesus Christ has appeared, and that at his coming those shadows of the Law have dissipated" (CO 30, 259). C

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John Calvin



On the Unity and Disunity of Churches (Part 1)

Rev. W. G. De Vries held a second speech for the Free Reformed Study Centre in Armadale, Australia on February 5, 2002. His remarks are enlightening, also for American and Canadian readers. Here follows the text of his speech:

One of today's main questions is why the disunity among churches is so easily accepted. It is a well-known fact that a middle-size city in the Netherlands can have up to ten different churches. This situation makes no sense. As a result many people have grown indifferent to the question of church unity and disunity, and seek their answer in one of two solutions.

Two solutions

The first solution says: the truth of the Bible passes through the "prism" of human understanding. The white light of this truth separates into all the colours of the rainbow. And every church represents its own "colour" within that range. After all, one of the characteristics of God's truth is that its greatness cannot be represented by the one church or the group. Each different church has a part of that truth. This multiformity – or pluriformity – of the church is therefore not a disadvantage, but an advantage. This was the teaching of Dr. Abraham Kuyper.

The second solution says: depending on his or her character and conviction, every person joins the church of his or her choice. Here the word "church" is written with the lowercase "c." The true believers who therefore can be found throughout these many churches belong in reality to the invisible Church which rises above all the visible churches. This invisible Church is the Church with an upper-case "C."

It does not matter, therefore, which church you join. You won't be asked that question at the "entrance gate to heaven". . . What matters is whether your faith in Christ was genuine.

Rev. B.J.F. Schoep speaks in this context about the "unity-of-the-body" which cannot be affected by the choice of church a person makes. The theological construction he uses here originates from a philosophical-theological construction developed by some Reformed theologians during the 1930s.

The danger of subjectivism is that the marks of the church are defined in terms of the piety of its members.

Solution two concludes that all the believers belong to "the mystical (invisible) body" of Christ.

Experience or Revelation?

We must reject these answers which make it easy, indeed, too easy, to accept disunity among the churches. Both are based on experience – the first on the observation that there are so many churches, and the second on a philosophical-theological construction that leads to the invisible church.

Experience, however, is not allowed to decide the issue. Only God's revelation is allowed to do that. The plan of the Architect of the church is found in the Bible, and nowhere else. And a philosophical theology is not allowed to rule the consciences.

The fact that there is so little openness among the churches to-

wards each other has something of the behaviour known as a "herd mentality." People are accustomed to the odour of their own "nest," which frequently leads them to an emotional and unmotivated rejection of things they're not familiar with. The Greek notion that "to know" also leads to "to do" is based on the thought that a discussion will lead to the discovery of the truth, which of necessity is then also put into effect.

The ecclesiastical scene has, however, totally discredited that idea. The parties to the dispute may address each other with all kinds of reasoning, even with scriptural proofs, but the emotional choice of the heart often weighs the heaviest.

For example, two church groups somewhere overseas had agreed to establish organizational unity. Everything had been talked out and documented. But the moment the papers were ready for signing the one party said: I don't like you. And the unity was off.

God's Word: only one church

If we are to be "honest before God" we must be willing to have our choice of church tested by what God's Word says about the church. Then it is as clear as daylight that the Bible knows of only one church, visible to man. Though it is made up of many members, they altogether form one body. For indeed, they were all brought into one body by baptism (1 Cor 12:13). Hence the believers are urged to "preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This points to our responsibility in this regard.

It is for that reason that we must pay attention to the scriptural marks of the church, mentioned so clearly in Article 29 of our Belgic

Confession. Reading the summary line from that Article, it says: In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head. And this summary concludes: Hereby the true Church can certainly be known and no one has the right to separate from it.

This does not mean that the true church is a perfectly pure church. The Bible frequently warns the church against all kinds of evils.

Calvin on the church

What Calvin writes in his *Institutes* (IV,8,9) is therefore completely in line with the Bible: Whenever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence, since his promise cannot fail

No one has the right to separate from it, for such is the value which the Lord sets on the communion of his Church, that all who contumaciously alienate themselves from any Christian society, in which the true ministry of his word and sacraments is maintained, he regards as deserters of religion.

Calvin concludes from this that withdrawal from the church is *denial of God and Christ*. He calls it an *iniquitous dissent* – a sinful rebellion.

He is, however, not of the opinion that in this true church no “defects” may creep in. All perfectionism is foreign to him, as is also evident from his struggle against the Anabaptists. We read: The best thing, indeed, is to be perfectly agreed, but seeing there is no man who is not involved in some mist of ignorance, we must either have no church at all or pardon delusion (= misunderstanding) in those things of which one may be ignorant, without violating the substance of Religion and forfeiting salvation.

Some have seized upon this remark to defend a degree of doctrinal liberalism. But that conclusion is unjustified. For Calvin continues

without interruption: Here, however I have no wish to patronize even the minutest errors, as if I thought it right to foster them by flattery or connivance (IV, 1,12).

We can conclude that according to the Bible there is only one church. This church is built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone, Ephesians 2:20. To say it with Calvin, this is therefore the “distinctive” mark of the church. Not the minutest heresy may be allowed. This does not mean that the true church is a perfectly pure church. The Bible frequently warns the church against all kinds of evils. Paul, for example, addresses the church at Corinth as the “church of God” and “saints by calling,” 1 Corinthians 1:2. He warns at the same time against divisions (1:10-17), yes, against envy and strife (3:3).

So the true church is not a perfect church. That’s why Calvin fought with all his strength against the Anabaptists who preached a perfect church with perfect believers. Though he spoke of “errors” that could creep into the doctrine or sacraments, he refused to tolerate a single false doctrine.

Regarding the conduct of the congregation, however, he writes: Our indulgence ought to extend much farther in tolerating imperfection in conduct. He compares the church with a threshing floor in which the collected wheat lies concealed under the chaff (IV,1,13).

The office-bearers are sometimes too tolerant when they should not forget that one of the admonished church members about all kinds of shortcomings. Regrettably, the church can be negligent in observing the commandment to lead a holy life. But Calvin does not allow those failures as grounds for immediate withdrawal even though he admits that there are other situations in which that is necessary.

Objectivism and subjectivism

We should not forget that one of the marks of the church is that the word is sincerely preached *and heard*.

Just suppose that there is a church which has the pure preaching, but there is no response because the congregation is unwilling

to accept God’s Word. The fact that the preaching is faithful does, however, not mean that the true church always *is* there and *remains* there. For there must also be supervision to ensure that the congregation responds to God’s Word by turning away from sin and living in obedience. That’s what church discipline is for – according to the Confession it is also a mark of the church.

Two dangers threaten here – the one being *objectivism* and the other *subjectivism*. Both play a role in today’s discussion about the church. Concerning *objectivism*, the fact that the preaching is good is not sufficient. It is not the purpose of the preaching to recite truisms. The church members must also amend their personal life accordingly, both in respect of doctrine and behaviour. It is the duty of the office-bearers to oversee this. They must watch over the souls as men who have to give account, (Heb 13:17). This is the basis for church discipline. A church which does not practice this kind of discipline objectifies itself, that is: turns itself by its objectivism into “sterile orthodoxy.”

The church members must also amend their personal life accordingly, both in respect of doctrine and behaviour. It is the duty of the office-bearers to oversee this.

The danger of *subjectivism* is that the marks of the church are defined in terms of the piety of its members. With many of the Anabaptist movements the church becomes the sum total of religious individuals. Such movements subjectify (that is: turn themselves by their subjectivism) into a religious I-cultus.

In both cases the Biblical concepts about the church suffer an injustice.

Calvin writes the following against objectivism: Those who trust that churches can long stand without this bond of discipline are mistaken. For that reason he wrote in his first printing of the *Institutes* about the members of the church that they confess the same God and

Christ not only in their public witnessing but also through their example of conduct as well as their participation in the sacraments.

We conclude that a church which does not exercise supervision over the believers' doctrine and conduct is not the true church, not the "vera ecclesia."

We will underscore Calvin's remark against subjectivism: Similar to this, in the present day, is the conduct of the Anabaptists, who, acknowledging no assembly of Christ unless conspicuous in all respects for angelic perfection, under pretense of zeal overthrow everything which tends to edification. For the unity of the church does not come into being through the excellence of its members, but by the one Lord, Jesus Christ.

Writing about the celebration of the Lord's Supper, Bullinger, a supporter of Calvin, asked the question: For whom was the blood of Christ poured out if only pure and holy believers are admitted to the table? Or was it not poured out for sins?

The fact that there are churches that regard sparse attendance at their Holy Supper table as evidence that they're a real church shows that this anabaptist movement is still popular. We do not say this to encourage negligence or laziness. Calvin speaks in this context of our accursed sluggishness (*Institutes* IV, 1,13) which cannot be excused.

For the unity of the church does not come into being through the excellence of its members, but by the one Lord, Jesus Christ.

He maintains, however, that the "holiness" of the church is not perfect but needs daily attention. He does not object to the Anabaptists exercising discipline but that they do it with unyielding severity. Here the rule of Scripture should be observed: Brothers, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are

spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted (Gal 6:1).

Let me use an example to illustrate this. The true church can be compared to a river whose water stream carries along all kinds of dirt. There is a riverbed – God's Word – that supports the flow of water, which is not perfectly clear – there are hypocrites in the church. But the perfectionists, the Anabaptists, resemble a stagnant pool, somewhere next to the flowing river. Although the dirt sinks to the bottom and the water is clear, there is no riverbed and no flow of water. That's true also for all kinds of sects, which sometimes take an aggressive position towards the church.



Dr. J. De Jong is principal and professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario.

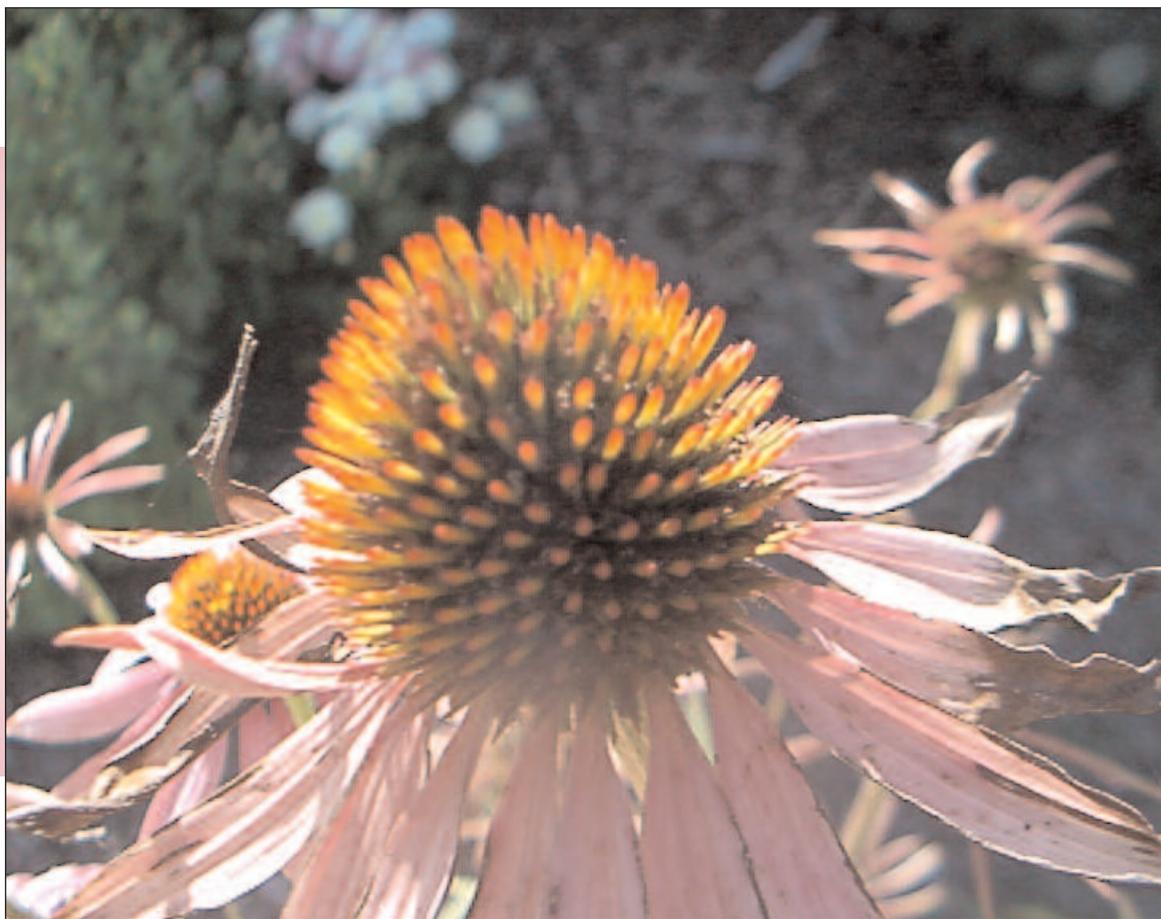
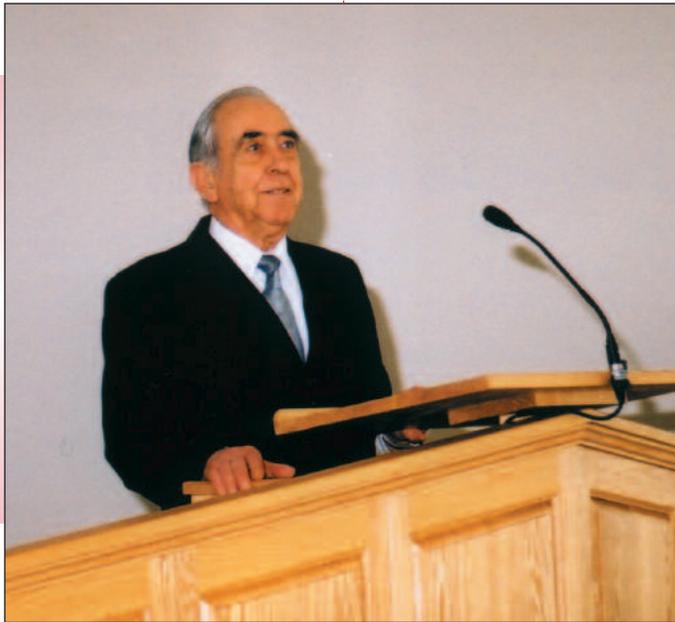


Photo courtesy Cor Lodder

Fortieth Anniversary for Rev. M. VanderWel

By W. Pleiter



He walks slowly toward the pulpit and chooses his steps carefully. As he turns the pages of his sermon, his aging hands tremble ever so slightly and his eyesight takes longer to focus. It's been forty years since it all began!

On April 8, 1962, for the first time, Rev. M. VanderWel assumed his place behind the pulpit and proclaimed the Word of the Lord to his congregation of Sneek in Holland. Forty years later, he was blessed to do the same in Yarrow, B.C. While our brother does not have the health and vigor he enjoyed forty years earlier, his passion to boldly proclaim the beautiful gospel of grace is as strong as it ever was. The effects of old age do not suppress his earnest desire to preach.

Having never experienced life as a member in one of Rev. VanderWel's congregations, I spent an evening talking about his forty years in the ministry.

As we began our discussions for the interview, Rev. VanderWel downplayed his ministry within the church federation. Although he played an active role as a member of numerous ecclesiastical assemblies and as secretary of the Board of Governors, he emphasized what he had not achieved. While there were the speeches he had delivered at League Days and his participation in the Voice of the Church, yet he hardly wrote or published anything. As far as that was concerned, there were, according to Rev. VanderWel, other ministers more worthy to be interviewed. However he was keen to speak about his love for preaching and his enjoyment in teaching catechism and interacting with the youth of the church. In all of his work, he had a heart for the people and it was his desire that they would live together in peace and grow in their service to the Lord.

And so Rev. VanderWel has faithfully proclaimed the living Word of the Lord for over forty years. We give thanks to our heavenly Father for the blessing we have received in Rev. VanderWel's ministry of the Word.

An interview with Rev. M. VanderWel

What was it that motivated you to become a minister?

"The beauty of it, yes the beauty of preaching the gospel. As a young boy I would go with my father to the church building on Saturdays. As my father would reserve the seats for the elderly and I took the opportunity to climb the pulpit. Even while I was sat with my family in church on Sunday – or with my father on the elder's bench – I often thought how great it would be to be a preacher. I also liked the idea of teaching."

Why did you enjoy teaching catechism?

"I believe teaching catechism is foremost in the task of the minister. You just have to take time for it. Our youth form the future of the church. I think I had a good understanding with them and working with the youth was not a burden to me."

Who and what were the major influences during your years at the theological college?

"I am really thankful for my education at the theological college in Kampen. It was an exciting time during the years after 1944. The "Vrijmaking" had a large impact on my life. Three of the professors under whom I studied I like to mention by name. First of all, there

was Prof. K. Schilder, whose lectures have had a major influence on my way of thinking. Then there was Prof. B. Holwerda. It was always a treat when he opened up the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He showed us also the way to redemptive historical preaching! Prof. C. Veenhof taught us the art of preaching. Being a talented preacher himself, he was not very merciful in judging the sermon proposals of us students. But we learned a lot!"

What were the expectations of a minister when you started in the ministry and has it changed today?

"Preaching was always central, as well as being involved with the members of the congregation, young and old. Catechism teaching was also very important. But as one elder colleague told me, a minister is supposed to be like a "horse with five legs." There are always extra things expected from him. Things like counseling, for instance, although it took place in the past, it did not have as much emphasis as it seems to have these days."

Have the expectation from a minister changed?

"I don't think that the expectations of church people have really changed. They often differ from one person to the other. Some enjoy the more confessional tone of the sermons but others are not impressed by it. I am disappointed though, that nowadays some say that the confessions and the church order should not have that much emphasis among us. It also seems that with a lot of our people the confession of the church is not that important any more. The confessions have to be a living part of our faith. We are to stand behind them. I also hope that our churches do not follow the path of our sister-churches in Holland, where the way of preaching and the way of worship is really changing. During my last visit, I did not feel at home anymore."

How would you characterize your contribution to the ministry of the Word – what would you think your congregants would remember you?

"I would rather not speculate on what might be a reason for people to remember my service. I leave that up to them. An important part of my pastoral work was "making peace," but



The church at Abbotsford, British Columbia where Rev. VanderWel was minister for 20 years.

never at the cost of the truth. When I retired from the ministry in Abbotsford, I received a box full of broken toys, as part of the farewell evening. In my personal life I was apparently known as a handyman who liked to fix things. Don't replace things, but rather restore them, you know. Well this whole gesture could also be considered as symbolic of my work as a pastor, namely to repair and to heal what was broken and to restore, in people's personal lives as well as in their relationships to others. I am thankful to the Lord for the fact that I never experienced major conflicts in my congregations. If there were tensions or difficulties, it was a matter of wisdom not to make a big issue out of a certain situation, or to let a difference of opinion grow out into a personal vendetta. But rather to pursue things which made for peace."

What are your concerns for the Canadian Reformed Churches over the next forty years?

"To remain what we are – truly Reformed. When churches approach us, like the URC and the Free Reformed, we must keep an open mind and be ecumenical in the true sense of the word. But we should not drop essential things for the sake of reaching out. In this process of reaching out a remarkable thing is happening. When some churches in the Fraser Valley made quite some progress in their con-

tact with a Free Reformed Church, the warning was heard: 'Don't go ahead of yourselves, let's first see what is happening on the level of the different federations.' In our contact with the URC it is just the other way around. Our latest General Synod has already set a time schedule for getting united, while locally, if I am not mistaken, the churches concerned still have to get acquainted with each other. In my humble opinion we need to exercise more patience in our mutual approach. But time will tell."

What do you have to say about the time you have been in the ministry?

"Someone once asked me whether, if I could start over again, I would still like to be a minister again? My answer was: yes only this I would like to do a better job! But every time I am in church, be it in the pew or on the pulpit, I consider the worship service a wonderful happening. Then I think of the words of Psalm 27:2 which speaks about the temple as the place 'to view the beauty of the LORD my Saviour.' The proclamation of the gospel is then a beautiful thing. To be engaged in the ministry of reconciliation and to hear the young and old respond in the congregational singing, is a unique experience, which I enjoy time and again. Therefore, I am thankful for the fact that I have been allowed to serve in this special office for so many years." 



Press Release: A Progress Report of the Activities of the Reformed Curriculum Development Committee (RCDC) April, 2002

The purpose of this Release is to apprise you of the activities that have transpired on behalf of the RCDC.

Name change

First of all, as you can note from the sub-heading, the title of the Reformed Development Fund has been changed to Committee. It was thought that "Fund" denotes more an idea of a collecting agency, and, since the RCDF is accountable to a larger body, namely, the Combined Boards of the Canadian Reformed Schools of the Fraser Valley, "Committee" would be a better description.

Mandate

It is of merit to refresh your memories as to the mandate of the RCDC. This committee consists of chairmen and principals of the B.C. Canadian Reformed Schools to promote curriculum development for Reformed education. As such, the Committee compensates authors or translators of Reformed educational materials and allocates monies for the development and publishing of curricular projects. The Committee delegates the responsibilities of curriculum review, development, and implementation to a sub-committee, the Curriculum Cooperative Committee. At its March meetings, the RCDC approves curriculum development proposals from individuals and/or the CCC.

Meetings

The RCDC meets twice annually: at the beginning of March and at the end of November. Its financial year, however, is July 1 through June 30. This is to align its monetary matters with the financial years of the supporting schools. An annual financial report to the boards of the supporting schools is submitted by March 31 of each year, at which time the per student assessment is also recommended for approval by the Combined Boards. Initially, the RCDC collected \$5.00 per student (1990), but due to increase in curricu-

lar interest, this levy has seen a few increases so that, for the past two years now, it has been set at \$12.00 per student of each supporting school.

RCDC projects

1. *The Flame of the Word*: Since the early 1990s RCDC has sponsored a Church History project, initiated by Mr. A. Nap, principal of the William of Orange School, Cloverdale. Initially begun as a translation project of a Dutch church history textbook series, it was soon realized that this text did not adequately cover the North American context and culture. With the help of Mr. P. Torenvliet, principal of the John Calvin Christian School, Yarrow, Mr. Nap set out on a grand plan to develop a totally new Church History textbook series, *The Flame of the Word*,

This committee consists of chairmen and principals of the B.C. Canadian Reformed Schools to promote curriculum development for Reformed education.

aimed primarily for the grades 4-6/7 students. Needless to say, this is quite a task and slow, considering that both authors have a full-time principal/teaching task as well. Blessed by narrative talents, extensive knowledge of content and teaching/learning skills, planning and organizational capacities, willing helpers for illustrations and other stories, the first volume appeared, by the grace of God, in the Spring of 2000. Volume 2A has just been published and copies are available for purchase. Accompanying each book is a comprehensive Teacher's Manual, complete with goals, teaching, learning, and evaluation strategies and resources to consult for further study. At this time, the authors are working on

Volume 2B. The last volume for this series is Volume 3.

2. "Go Therefore" is a teaching guide for foreign mission, based on a narrative (story-telling) approach. This guide was developed by Mr. Nap in 1994.
3. "Ears Acquire Eyes When You Listen" is a narrative course for teachers and was developed by A. Nap and P. Torenvliet in 1995 for workshop presentations. Many B.C. teachers have taken this course. As well it has been presented to the Prairie Canadian Reformed Schools, and offered as a Teacher's College course/workshop some summers ago. At its last meeting (April 4, 2002), the RCDC decided to make \$1000 available for start up costs to repeat this workshop, here, as well as elsewhere in the country.
4. *A Visual Arts Framework for Teaching* was developed by Mr. H. VanderHoek (1998). This Art guide provides teachers with ideas and methods to teach Art across the curriculum.
5. CCC coordinated projects: In the summer of 1998, a group of curriculum writers assembled to develop a computer literacy curriculum that would meet the challenges of the informational technological society. The resulting document was the B.C. Canadian Reformed Information Technology Curriculum, K-12. Other projects coordinated by the CCC are:
 - K-7 Physical Education Curriculum (2000)
 - Cross-graded (primary) Units (developed by Primary teachers of Credo Christian Elementary School):
 - *Life in Bible Times* (2000)
 - *Wonderfully Made* (2000)
 - *Celebrate Canada* (2002)
 - *Marine Life on Ocean Shores* (in progress)
 - K-7 Music Curriculum (2001)Last Feb.1, the teachers of the elementary schools in the Valley met to become more familiar and more adept at implementing them in the classroom. Rotating workshops were scheduled for

Visual Arts, Physical Education, and Music. Out of the Music workshop came the suggestion that a song list and more lesson plans be developed to make the Music Curriculum more user accessible to those with little expertise. To that end the CCC submitted a proposal to the RCDC (April 4, 2002) to coordinate a writing team to do just that. The RCDC approved this proposal.

The RCDC is pleased with the many positive comments received for the work done by curriculum developers.

Other provinces

It is noteworthy to report that the writing team of the last curricular project (K-7 Music Curriculum) had members from other provinces on it; one from Alberta and one from Manitoba. Not only did these members provide us

with valuable expertise, but their participation also aroused interest from their respective provinces in our work. Some of their schools have sent us some money to aid us in further development.

The RCDC is pleased with the many positive comments received for the work done by curriculum developers.

The RCDC is naturally encouraged by such enthusiasm and has directed the CCC to take up further contact with these schools as well as other Prairie schools to encourage a more formalized association with the RCDC. At this time,

all these schools have, in principle, committed themselves to supporting us financially for the coming school-year. The RCDC is looking for ideas or suggestions from them to become meaningful and effective participants.

You should also be informed that copies of all our curricular projects have been forwarded to the Teacher's College in Hamilton and to CARE (Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Education) in Ontario. The CCC corresponds on a regular basis with CARE about its activities and CARE does likewise.

We thank our Master Teacher for the wisdom and strength He gives us to do this work and pray that we may continue to be willing instruments in the furtherance of his Kingdom.

*For the RCDC,
J. A. Roukema, secretary*

Middle East Reformed Fellowship

NEWS from MERF-Canada

Algerians' Disenchantment with Islamic Politics Increases Gospel Interest

The number of letters arriving from Algerians in response to the Arabic Gospel broadcasts continues to grow. The trend seems to be especially strong among both men and women between the ages of twenty to forty. A sizeable number of those responding openly indicate they have already abandoned their commitment to their religion, Islam. Some have actually experimented with fundamentalist Islam, including belonging to extreme and violent Islamic groups. Personalized one-to-one follow up efforts are bearing much fruit in discipling those who express lasting interest in belonging to Christ. The recent letter of H.A.D., a twenty-six year old lawyer-trainee says: Issa's (Jesus') teaching on loving enemies which he himself lived changed the views of one of my best friends. . . For seven years, he and I were active members of an underground Islamic cell group. Last year, he stopped coming to our weekly meetings. I thought that perhaps he

was afraid of the government. Later he gave me a handwritten note with quotes from the sayings of Issa about loving the enemy and sacrificing his life for the sake of people. At first I became angry with him. He asked me to allow him to explain. We talked for many hours. . . He told me that he saw the pictures of the seven bodies without heads. They were the mother, sister, wife and four children of a policeman, killed by a Muslim cell group like ours. . . We cried a lot together. . . He kept saying there is a much better way. . . I borrowed the small Christian book from him (NT with Psalms). . . Now even my father is happy when he notices I am listening to the Christian talks on Radio Monte Carlo. . .

Encouraging progress in Jordan

Pastor Younan Shiba and his colleagues continue to be conscious of the Lord's hand of blessing in their work. Over fifteen hundred people, mostly Iraqi refugees, now attend one of the seven weekly worship and evangelistic services which they conduct in the larger Amman area. "The Word

of God is touching many lives. We are seeing conversions not only of individuals but also of whole families. The growth of these meetings is keeping us very busy throughout the week, with Bible study groups and pastoral visitation," says Shiba.

Threats from Saudi Arabian listeners:

Two threatening letters arrived recently from Saudi listeners who had never written before. Both letters accuse our broadcast teams of being anti-Muslim agents of America and Israel. Gentle and loving responses have been made to them. We pray for wisdom in handling such correspondence at this time when emotions are running very high among Muslim fanatics.

Sudan update

The Rev. Tut Wan reports that construction of the MERF ministry centre on Kenya's border with south Sudan is proceeding on schedule. Management staff for this strategic new facility will have to be selected and suitable housing arranged for the families of the Dinka and Nuer broadcasting teams.

Rev. Aieley Kassa Mangasha, Vice-Chairman of MERF's International Council, has recently spent several weeks visiting churches in eastern Sudan. He reports great needs for pastors and trained elders for the growing number of churches in the region. Tens of thousands of South Sudanese have moved to the area. The majority has either become Christian or expressed much openness to the gospel.

News from other countries:

Eritrea – Two more Muslims who attend the Bible Studies in Massawa are being prepared for baptism. John Grotenhuis and Tesfai Samrit give thanks for the Lord's blessing on the outreach in Asmara. They are grateful for the encouragement and support provided in recent months by the visits of pastors and others from New Jersey and Michigan (USA).

Palestine – Pastor Danny Awad continues his work with the churches in Bethlehem, Beit-Jala and other parts of the West Bank, as well as the Bible study group in Gaza.

Syria – Several churches are concerned about a new wave of immigra-

tion to Sweden, Australia and North America from among their members. The economic situation is apparently the main reason for this trend.

Kuwait, Sultanate of Oman, Dubai, Bahrain and United Arab Emirates (UAE) – MERF is seeking to help with the training of elders and young people's leaders. MERF's regional conference for the Gulf churches on "Biblical Principles for Worship and Evangelism" is planned for later this year.

Yemen – Two Bible study groups in the Sana area have been able to get together for worship and fellowship every few months.

Libya – 400 Arabic Bibles could be safely delivered from Egypt to Libya. A growing number of Libyans are expressing interest in reading the Scriptures.

Lebanon – The Lebanon Reformed Fellowship reports that several individuals and couples who have received regular spiritual and pastoral counseling at the ministry centre in Beirut are now attending local churches.

Egypt – The revised Arabic version of *Biblical Christianity*, a simplified version of John Calvin's *Institutes*

of the *Christian Religion*, could be completed.

Farsi Broadcast to Iran, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan – Response from listeners continues to show the relevance of these broadcasts to the lives of many Muslims in these countries. Recently the Iranian broadcasting team visited the John Calvin Centre and managed to record thirty-nine new Farsi broadcasts.

Thank you!

We are deeply appreciative of your faithful financial support, enabling us to continue sending our contributions to MERF in Cyprus. May the Lord bless all efforts to bring a Reformed witness to the Middle East!

If you would like to make a personal donation, please make your cheque payable to MERF-Canada and send it to:

MERF-Canada

1225 Dundas Street, RR 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

Yours in the Lord's service,
Rev. J. Mulder, chairman
Mrs. J. Van Dam, secretary

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty

Dear Busy Beavers



I was on the telephone a few days ago, and it suddenly occurred to me that only about 50 years ago, not many people would have had telephones. Then I thought about it some more and realized that when my parents and grandparents were youngsters, they didn't have telephones.

Does that make you wonder about how they got their messages to their friends? How often do you sit down with the telephone at your ear, chatting with your friends, especially during the holidays?

Just imagine that you didn't have a phone at home. What would you do without it? I guess there would be lots more letter writing going on in your family, don't you think?

Lots of love, Aunt Betty

FROM THE MAILBOX



Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, Leanne Oosterhoff. Do you have a very big quail farm? It sounds very interesting. How did your puppy, Trixie, get hit by a truck? Did she run in front of it? Those were very pretty stickers you put on your letter. Write again, won't you, Leanne.



Jokes

Nick: "How did you break your leg?"

Claire: "See that hole over there?"

Nick: "Yes."

Claire: "Well, I didn't."

What does a dentist say when you knock on his door?
"Gum on in!"

"I've been seeing spots before my eyes lately."

"Have you seen a doctor?"

"No, just spots."

"Doctor, doctor, I've just been bitten on the leg by a werewolf."

"Did you put anything on it?"

"No, he seemed to find it tasty just as it was."

Doctor: "You haven't got a temperature this morning."

Patient: "Of course not. The nurse took it last night."



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